

FRONTLINE

DECEMBER 15, 2006

WWW.FRONTLINE.IN

INDIA'S NATIONAL MAGAZINE

RS.15

DIPLOMACY HU JINTAO VISIT

For lasting friendship **40**

INDIA & PAKISTAN NEW FORMULA

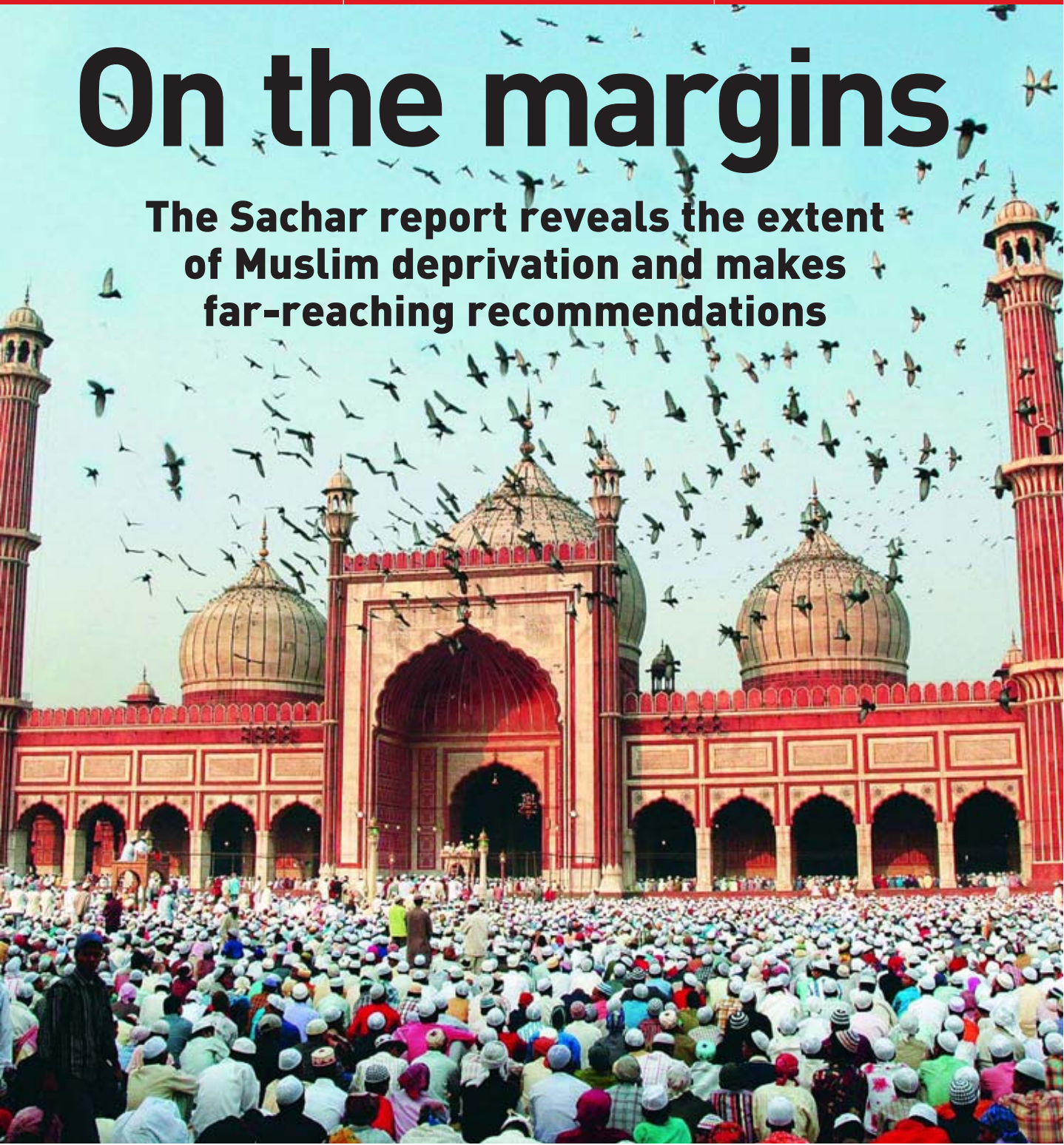
Closer to consensus **46**

SPECIAL FEATURE SIKKIM

A vision for growth **105**

On the margins

The Sachar report reveals the extent of Muslim deprivation and makes far-reaching recommendations



Community on

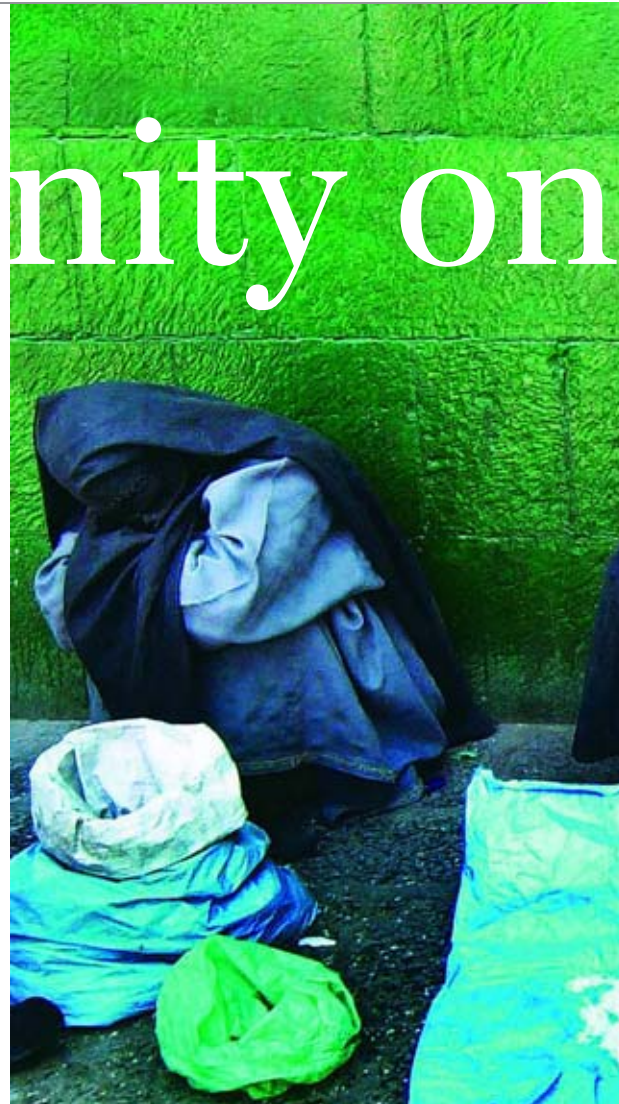
The Rajinder Sachar Committee finds that the Muslim community in India is deprived and neglected, and makes far-reaching recommendations.

BY VENKITESH RAMAKRISHNAN

The Sachar report is comprehensive and its content has been approved by all political groups except the Hindutva parties. Now the question is whether it will meet with the same fate as earlier reports of its kind.

ISSUES relating to the social, economic and political status of India's Muslim minority community have been a matter of debate for several decades; quite a few governments have initiated studies on the community and evolved administrative measures on their basis. As early as the 19th century, Monstuart Elphinstone, the legendary British administrator, put it on record that special measures were required to uplift the backward sections of the Muslim community. Studies conducted by the British administration led to the passage of a government Act in 1935 offering Dalit Muslims reservation facilities along with Dalit Hindus. Nearly two and a half decades ago, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi constituted a 10-member high-power panel on Minorities, Scheduled Castes (S.C.s) and Scheduled Tribes (S.T.s) and other weaker sections, headed by Dr. Gopal Singh. In its report submitted on June 14, 1983, the Dr. Gopal Singh Committee maintained that there was a "sense of discrimination prevailing among the minorities" and that it "must be eliminated, root and branch, if we want the minorities to form an effective part of the mainstream".

The examination of the social, economic and educational status of the Muslim community by the seven-member high-level committee headed by Justice Rajinder Sachar, constituted by the Manmohan



Singh government, and the publication of its report in November represents, on the face of it, a continuation of the debate on the community. Even so, on account of a variety of factors, the work of the Sachar Committee and its report have greater significance and relevance than earlier initiatives.

To start with, it is the first systematic study of the Muslim community in independent India. Earlier commissions, including the Dr. Gopal Singh Committee, looked into issues relating to the Muslim community along with those relating to other segments of society, such as the S.Cs, S.Ts and other weaker sections. Obviously, the Sachar Committee was expected to have an enhanced focus on the Muslim community and this is reflected in its frame of reference and examination processes.

The processes of the committee were essentially based on three types of issues relating to identity, security and equity, with special emphasis on issues of equity. Within this broad perspective, a wide range of specifics were covered by the committee,

the margins



HOMELESS MUSLIM WOMEN sleep on the pavement in Srinagar. Incidence of poverty is high amongst the community, especially in urban areas.

MUKHTAR KHAN/AFP

such as perceptions about Muslims; the size and distribution of the community's population; indices of the community's income, employment, health, education, poverty, consumption, and standards of living; and the community's access to social and physical infrastructure. The committee also made a meticulous study of the perpetuation of the caste system in the Muslim community.

The committee collated data from across the country and received detailed oral and written presentations from 13 States that have significant Muslim populations. It also collected data from the Indian Air Force and the Navy on the number of Muslims in these services but did not include the same in the report on a specific request from the Defence Ministry .

The marshalling of such substantial data was in marked contrast to the processes of earlier commissions. The report of the Dr. Gopal Singh Committee stated that data were not available in any public office about the benefits accruing to the religious minorities. As such the committee had formulated its observations with data from only 80 districts.

The context in which the Sachar Committee undertook its work is significant. The sustained campaign of the Hindutva-oriented Sangh Parivar and its political arm, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), accusing secular parties of promoting a policy of "Muslim appeasement" and insinuating that the Muslim community was politically and socially "anti-national" provides this. The Hindutva campaign devel-

oped steadily from the mid-1980s, when the Sangh Parivar advanced its Ayodhya Ram Mandir agitation, and has reached a stage today where leaders such as Pravin Togadia of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) castigate all Muslims as global terrorists. Madrasas run by the community were portrayed as "terrorist manufacturing units" as part of this castigation. The very formation of the Sachar Committee, in March 2005, was characterised by these forces as yet another act of Muslim appeasement.

The committee report has taken note of this context. It points out that Muslims "carry a double burden of being labelled 'anti-national' and as being appeased at the same time". The report further states, "While Muslims need to prove on a daily basis that they

Sachar report – highlights

- Set up an Equal Opportunity Commission to address concerns of deprived minority groups.
- Create a national data bank on various socio-religious categories.
- Designate Arzal Muslims as S.Cs or Most Backward Castes and evolve affirmative action measures.
- Institute a nomination procedure for participation of minorities in public bodies.
- Initiate steps to increase the employment share of Muslims.
- Provide legal mechanisms to address complaints of discrimination.
- Establish a delimitation procedure that rules out reserving constituencies with high minority population for S.Cs.
- Promote religious tolerance by initiating a process to evaluate textbooks for appropriate social values.
- Evaluate the extent of development benefits for different socio-religious categories.
- Evolve a University Grants Commission and link financial allocation to diversity in student population.
- Evolve criteria to facilitate admissions to the most backward socio-religious categories in universities.
- Provide financial and other support to initiatives built around occupations where Muslims are concentrated and that have growth potential.
- Work out mechanisms to link madrassas to higher secondary schools and recognise madrasa degrees for eligibility in defence, civil and banking examinations.
- Devise teacher-training components that highlight diversity and sensitise teachers to the aspirations of Muslims.
- Set up a national Wakf Development Corporation with a revolving corpus fund of Rs.500 crores.

Religious differentials in child mortality according to 2001 Census

Region	Measure	Religion				
		All	Hindu	Muslim	Christian	Sikh
India	IMR	72	73	72	77	*
	U5MR	98	99	95	77	82
Rural	IMR	77	77	78	*	*
	U5MR	107	108	106	85	84
Urban	IMR	58	58	57	*	*
	U5MR	69	70	70	57	63

IMR: Infant Mortality Rate, U5MR: Under-Five Mortality Rate
 * For some communities, the series was too erratic and the IMR is not shown.

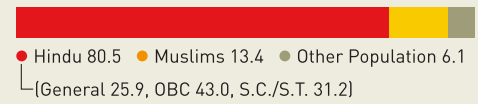
Muslim employment in government sectors

	(in per cent)
Total	4.9
PSUs	7.2
IAS, IFS and IPS	3.2
Railways	4.5
Judiciary	7.8
Health	4.4
Transport	6.5
Home Affairs	7.3
Education	6.5

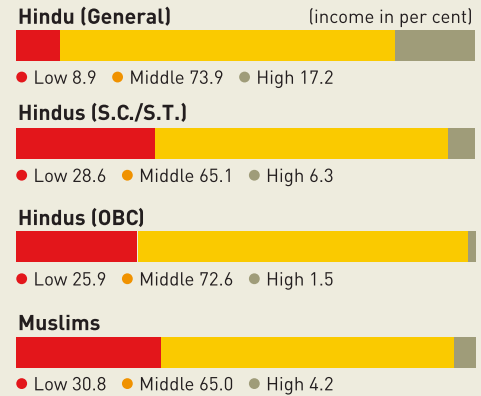
Graduates as proportion of population in 2004-05

	(in per cent)
Hindus (General)	15.3
OBC	4.4
S.C./S.T.	2.2
Muslims	3.4
Other communities	8.9

Distribution of population according to socio-religious categories



Distribution of socio-religious categories by income groups



are not anti-national and terrorists, it is not recognised that the alleged appeasement has not resulted in the desired level of socio-economic development of the community." The single most important result of the committee's detailed exploration is the assertion of the latter fact. On the contrary, the report points out that "the community exhibits deficits and deprivation in practically all dimensions of development". The report adds that "by and large, Muslims rank somewhat above S.Cs/S.Ts but below Hindu OBCs [Other Backward Classes], Other Minorities and Hindu General [mostly upper castes] in almost all indicators considered."

DEVELOPMENT DEFICIT

One of the major contentions of the report is that almost 60 years after Independence the country has failed to ensure participation in governance for its largest minority group. The report begins its study on "Government Employment and Programmes" with the observation that "in a pluralistic society, a reasonable representation of various communities in government sector employment is necessary to enhance participatory governance". However, the data presented and analysed by the report show that the country is far from attaining such a goal. Though Muslims have a share of 13.4 per cent in the country's population, their representation in government jobs is a mere 4.9 per cent.

In the elite civil services, comprised of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), the Indian Foreign Service (IFS) and the Indian Police Service (IPS), Muslim representation is as low as 3.2 per cent. Members of the community constitute a mere 4.5 per cent of the employees of the Railways and 98.7 per cent of them are positioned at the lower levels. Under-representation is acute in States in which Muslims constitute large minorities. In West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Assam, where Muslims form 25.2 per cent, 18.5 per cent and 30.9 per cent of the population respectively, the representation of the community in govern-

ment jobs is as low as 4.7 per cent, 7.5 per cent and 10.9 per cent respectively.

The report also points towards the fundamental social condition that has created this situation. Muslims across the country have less access than other religious groups to educational facilities, particularly in higher education. Consequently, only 3.4 per cent of the Muslim population has completed graduation where as the corresponding figure for non-OBC, non-S.C./S.T. Hindus is 15.3 per cent. Literacy levels are also similarly low. Only 59.1 per cent of the community has literacy while the national average is 64.8 per cent. The literacy level for non-S.C./S.T. Hindus is 65.1 per cent.

The report shows that only 80 per cent of urban Muslim boys are enrolled in schools, compared to 90 per cent in S.C./S.T. communities and 95 per cent among others. Just 68 per cent of Muslim girls go to school, compared to 72 per cent of Dalit girls and 80 per cent of girls from other groups. The report also explodes the myth that Muslims prefer to send their children to *madrassas*. The data collected from different parts of the country affirms that only 3 to 4 per cent of Muslim children go to *madrassas*. It emphasises that Muslim parents, as a rule, like to send their children to regular schools but are unable to do so on account of lack of access to general educational institutions.

The community, with such large deficits in education and employment, naturally figures high in terms of incidence of poverty. The report's analysis is that incidence of poverty among Muslims has a Head Count Ratio (HCR) of 31 per cent, which is second only to the S.C./S.T. HCR of 35 per cent. Significantly, in urban areas Muslims have a higher HCR of 38.4 per cent as compared to 36.4 per cent for S.C./S.T. The report points out that though comprehensive community-wise figures about land ownership are not available, it is more or less clear that the percentage of landowners among Muslims is much lower than in other socio-religious categories.

In the background to all this, the

community's access to social and physical infrastructure is also abysmal. The committee used the figures of the 2001 Census and data from the NSSO (61st Round) to evaluate access to social and physical infrastructure. The evaluation shows that the proportion of Muslim households living in properly constructed houses is lower than that of the total population. The report also points out that electric lights are used less in the Muslim community when compared to the all-India average with "the share of villages with no electricity increasing substantially" as the size of the Muslim population rises. The story is no different in terms of piped potable water. Only 25 per cent of rural households have piped water and less than 10 per cent of Muslim households have access to this facility.

On the positive side, the Sachar Committee notes that in spite of widespread poverty and under-development, the community has an increasingly better sex ratio than other socio-religious categories. Child mortality rates are also low in the community. The national Infant Mortality Rate stood at 73 in 1998-99 while it was only 59 in the Muslim community. The figure was 77 among Hindus and 49 among Christians. Another positive point the committee has recorded is the better housing conditions; Muslims are on a par with other communities in this and toilet facilities are even better. Despite these pluses, however, the overall condition is one of 'development deficit'.

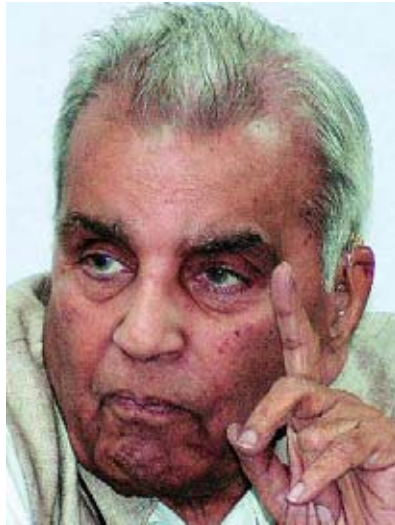
The Committee also points out that the problem of 'development deficit' is exacerbated by the widespread perception among Muslims that they are discriminated against and excluded. The colossal shortfall in terms of political representation has contributed in a big way to the growth and expansion of this perception. The report points out that of the 543 Lok Sabha members, only 33 are Muslim, and warns that the low participation of Muslims in nearly all political spaces could have an adverse impact on Indian society and polity in the long run. "Given the power of numbers in a dem-

ocratic polity, based on universal franchise, minorities in India lack effective agency and political importance,” the report said. Minorities, it added, “do not have the necessary influence or the opportunity to either change or even influence events which enable their meaningful and active participation in development process.”

A specific study of the committee on electoral constituencies has brought out several anomalies that militate against the Muslim community. The study shows that several constituencies reserved for S.Cs have Muslim populations. The study also showed that many constituencies with more than 50 per cent S.C. population are in the unreserved category. Taking this into consideration, the committee has recommended the elimination of the anomalies in electoral delimitation schemes: “A more rational delimitation procedure that does not reserve constituencies with high minority population shares for S.C.s will improve the opportunity for minorities, especially Muslims, to contest and get elected to Parliament and State Assemblies.”

On the strength of its comprehensive research and analysis the report also highlights the fact that some sections of Muslim society are more unequal than others. It draws attention to “the presence of descent-based social stratification” on the lines of the Hindu caste system among Indian Muslims and identified three social segments – Ashrafs, Ajlafas and Arzals. The traditional occupation of Arzals is similar to that of S.C.s; most of them work as butchers, washer men, barbers and scavengers. Ajlafas are engaged in occupations similar to that of the Hindu OBCs, and a sizable section of them are also landowners. Ashrafs have suffered no social deprivation as they are converts from the Hindu upper-castes or have “foreign blood”.

The report said that Arzals are essentially converts from ‘untouchable’ Hindu communities and that the “change in religion did not bring about any change in their social or economic status”. The report also points out that



R. SHIVAJI RAO

JUSTICE RAJINDER SACHAR, who headed the committee.

Arzals have been clubbed with ‘Ajlafas, and that while the three groups require different types of affirmative action, the Arzals require multifarious measures, including reservation. The committee maintains that Arzals are “cumulatively oppressed”. As such it would be “most appropriate” to absorb them among the S.Cs or at least in a separate category, Most Backward Classes, carved out of the OBCs. The (Scheduled Caste) Order of 1950 has kept Muslim and Christian converts from among Hindu Dalits out of its purview, denying them reservation.

A crucial recommendation of the Sachar Committee is the constitution of an “Equal Opportunity Commission” to look into the grievances of deprived groups. The report also says that an example of such a policy tool is the British Race Relations Act, 1976, and notes: “Such a measure, while providing a redressal mechanism for different types of discrimination, will give a further reassurance to minorities that any unfair action against them will invite the vigilance of the law.” The committee also points out that “mere material change will not bring about the true empowerment of the minorities; they need to acquire and be given the required collective agency.” It suggests that a carefully conceived nomination procedure could be worked out to increase the participation of minorities at grassroots and in public bodies.

Reaction to the report has been on predictable lines. All parties bar-

ring the BJP and the Shiv Sena have welcomed it as a step in the right direction. The Congress and the Left parties pointed out that the committee’s study had proved the hollowness of the Sangh Parivar’s “Muslim appeasement” contention. The BJP asserted that the recommendations would not improve the lot of Muslims as they reflected a pseudo-vision, full of biases and prejudices. Talking to *Frontline*, Professor T.K. Oommen, well-known sociologist and a member of the Sachar Committee, maintained that the real questions raised by the report need to be addressed and concrete action taken at the earliest. As the report pointed out, “non-implementation of recommendations of several earlier commissions and committees has made the Muslim community wary of any new initiative,” he said.

Though the Sachar Committee did not specifically mention it, the summation of the Dr. Gopal Singh Committee must have been considered in this comment. In June 1983, the Dr. Gopal Singh Committee stated that two things were absolutely necessary to root out the sense of discrimination among Muslims: “Wherever the government has to make appointments through nominations, as in the case of governing bodies of banks and other public undertakings, utmost care should be taken to have a fair number of the minorities representatives, especially at the decision-making levels. Similarly, every recruiting agency or services commission must have an adequate number of their representatives, so that the sense of discrimination now prevailing may end.” Twenty-three years after the submission of that report there is no record to suggest that these recommendations have been implemented.

What fate awaits the comprehensive report and recommendations of the Sachar Committee? The answer lies squarely with our political class, especially those who commissioned the Sachar panel – Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and his United Progressive Alliance government. □

A turning point

The Sachar report has the potential to affect all facets of Indian politics as the **Mandal and Masjid issues did.** BY JAVEED ALAM

If quotas are given without a thorough debate, the BJP and other Hindutva forces will mount a shrill **campaign, which may strengthen** the chauvinist currents in politics. So Muslim leaders need to be careful in formulating their demands.

INDIA is entering a phase in which Muslim communities once again face the prospect of widespread social churning and protracted political contestations. The Rajinder Sachar Committee report is going to, at the level of mass politics, give rise to something akin to the upsurges the country saw in the wake of the Mandal and Masjid controversies. It is quite clear from the report that the socio-economic condition of Muslim communities is abysmal. Their socio-economic status is just above that of the Dalits and may be worse than that of the Other Backward Classes (OBCs). Not that this is a startling revelation. Many of us who have been using the survey data of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) on class formation within different communities have written on lines quite similar to what the Sachar Committee has done now. What puts its findings on an altogether different footing is not just its thoroughness but also the official stamp it carries. And the government is in no position to reject its findings given the disastrous political consequences the Congress party may have to face.

This precisely is the many-sided significance of the document. All facets of our politics – democratic currents and communal-fascist backlash in particular – are going to be deeply affected by it. Muslims, since the vandalism of the upper castes in the wake of the Mandal report and the hooliganism and blood-letting indulged in by the Hindutva forces leading to the demolition of the Babri Masjid, have become politically assertive and are now part of the disad-



ASADUDDIN OW AISI, PRESIDENT of the Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen, with a sword presented at a function to felicitate him after the Andhra Pradesh government decided to provide 5 per cent reservation for Muslims in education and employment.

vantaged with democratic aspirations like never before. There are bound to be widespread demands for “affirmative action” from within the Muslim community, which are going to be supported and opposed by different political forces and articulate sections in society.

What will make this process complicated and charged is the history of affirmative action in India



ALL INDIA UNITED Muslim Morcha members at a demonstration in New Delhi demanding inclusion of Dalit Muslims in the Schedule Caste category.

and the kind of association it gives rise to. Oppressed people across social divides have come to look on affirmative action as necessarily involving reservations and quotas. And quotas are viewed as empowerment. This has been the case since the days of the struggle against colonialism. The colonial administration started the practice of giving reservations in jobs and in the emerging representative bodies to those who fought for these on the grounds of having been left behind. This practice was given a constitutional standing in the Government of India Act of 1935. It is this association of affirmative action, quotas and empowerment that has put a discursive limit on how to surmount social backwardness. Muslims are not going to look at the matter any differently.

Given this background of political practice, we must first be very clear what makes Muslims so different from other oppressed and socially disadvantaged classes. Little doubt remains that an overwhelming majority of Muslims are socially and economically backward. They are worse off than the

OBCs in whose case social and political backwardness does not necessarily overlap; in fact, some of the OBCs have sizeable landholdings, which also is the source of the political clout they enjoy in rural areas. This is why some of these communities have done so well in terms of their representation in elected bodies, however under-represented they may be in the services. In this, they are quite unlike Muslim communities. This is one side of the picture, which is one of the severities of their underprivileged status.

But there is the other side that is not any less important and which, unlike the first, is more visible in their social life. There is no other community in India, or perhaps elsewhere, that is backward on such a large scale and which also has such a large stratum of people with pronouncedly high levels of accomplishment as the Muslims of India. In the creative fields of art, literature, music and culture, they are second to none in the world; in the world of science and humanities, they stand in equal measure to any other community in India; in the professional world

of doctors, lawyers and so on, they have done rather well. Same is the case in the field of sports and the list can be extended. Suffice it to note here that Muslims are a highly accomplished and successful people. In this they are equal to every other section of people in India and enjoy as much respect as others do.

How did this come about? The reason may be a complex intersection of many factors. Among these factors, two need to be noted. One, historically, the Muslim gentry and their representatives in the then ruling classes never treated Muslim masses any better or differently than the other subjects under them. All people were equally beasts of burden under them and unworthy of respect or dignity. It is important to remember the limits to the brotherhood of faith in conditions of feudal rule. The rabble-rousers among Muslims and Hindutva chauvinists need to be reminded of this again and again. Hindutva chauvinists are being utterly dishonest in harping on the theme that ordinary Muslims are a favoured community. Feudal self-aggrandisement deprives all sections of peoples, Muslims being no exception.

Secondly, in the period following Independence, Muslim masses were the victims of benign neglect and various degrees and modes of discrimination. Intermittently, they have also been the victims of violence and sometimes of gruesome communal killings; in a way, this sets them apart from any other community. But this in itself does not entirely explain their backwardness. We have got to keep their historical inheritance in mind as an important component of their backwardness. It is only then that we can blame successive governments in India of not doing anything to alleviate the abjectness of the socio-economic conditions of Muslims. Much could have been done by way of proactive policies and targeted affirmative action to make their living conditions much better than what they are now.

But to understand the dilemma of Muslims, it is equally important to perceive the fault lines that create in-

MOHAMMED YOUSUF



IIPM, CHENNAI

ADMISSIONS : 2007-09

DELHI • MUMBAI • BANGALORE • CHENNAI • PUNE • HYDERABAD • AHMEDABAD



“Academically far superior. Globally best networked. Leaders in industry consulting & economic research. IIPM. World-Class.”

Arindam Chaudhuri,

Noted Economist, Management Guru & Author of all time best sellers "Count Your Chickens Before They Hatch" & "The Great Indian Dream"

RESULTS FOR IIPM, NEW DELHI IN THE 2006

BUSINESS TODAY - ACNielsen ORG-MARG Study of

INDIA'S BEST B-SCHOOLS!!

(Refer July 16th 2006 issue of India's No.1 Business Magazine, Business Today)

Ranked 5th Best B-School in India by MBA Students
➤ (Ahead of 3 IIMs) ⚡

Ranked 7th First Favourite B-School in India
➤ (Ahead of 2 IIMs & Jointly with IIM-Lucknow) ⚡

Ranked 8th Most Recommended B-School by Recruiters, Executives, Functional Heads, MBA Wannabes and current MBAs
➤ (Ahead of 3 IIMs) ⚡

Ranked 11th Best B-School Overall
➤ (Ahead of 1 IIM) ⚡

WORLD-CLASS IN INDIA

Across Countries, Across Cultures

IIPM WORLD PLACEMENTS

World - Class Companies that recruit from IIPM include : Oracle, Dell, Reliance Infocomm, ABN-Amro, CITIBANK, ICICI Prudential, Standard Chartered, American Express, Pipal, ICICI Bank, LG, Berger, E-value serve.com, Asian Paints, String Info. Services, E-Serve International, Pepsi, CITI Group, Café Coffee Day, Sharp, GE Consumer Finance, UTI Bank, Centurian Bank, DLF Universal, R K Swami BBDO, Satyam Infoway, Pentair Water, Fortis Securities, Bajaj Allianz, AFL Logistics, Capital IQ, Sahara India, QAI, Havells, ESYS, Matrix Cellular, India Bulls, Rercershe, Bombay Dyeing, Kotak Group, HSBC, Penzoil, L&T Infotech, Research International, First Leasing... and many more...

FREE LAPTOPS FOR ALL IIPM STUDENTS

All students studying at IIPM also get a FREE Laptop for a state-of-the-art world class learning environment.

SUPERIOR EDUCATION

Terrific Placements



APPLICATIONS ARE INVITED FOR THE SPRING-SUMMER ADMISSIONS TO IIPM'S UNIQUE COURSE IN PLANNING AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP



All students who do IIPM's Entrepreneurship Programme receive an additional International MBA/BBA Degree from INTERNATIONAL MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE (IMI), EUROPE

FREE STUDY TOUR TO EUROPE ETC. FOR 21 DAYS

100% of students studying in IIPM will be taken for a **FREE study tour of Europe/America**/other developed nations for 21 days as a compulsory part of IIPM's programme making IIPM the institute with the maximum number of students going for global orientation programmes in the world. During this programme, students are taken to leading International organizations like UNO, WTO, ILO, Nestle, Credit Suisse, IMD Lausanne etc. for a first hand exposure to how these leading organizations operate.

WORLD-CLASS FACULTY FROM TOP 20 GLOBAL B-SCHOOLS LIKE COLUMBIA, YALE, WHARTON

IIPM is visited by professors from maximum number of top B-Schools from across the globe during any given course period. IIPM students get exposed to professors from 15 leading B-Schools and universities like Harvard, Columbia, YALE, Wharton, LSE, Oxford, Cambridge, IMD, INSEAD, Stanford, Kellogg, GSB-Chicago, NYU-Stern etc.

Last date of registration : 30-12-2006

COLLECT YOUR FREE PROSPECTUS (IN PERSON OR BY POST) FROM IIPM OFFICE TODAY ITSELF.

THE INDIAN INSTITUTE OF PLANNING & MANAGEMENT

IIPM Tower, 145, Marshall's Road, Egmore, Chennai. IIPM Tower, B-27, Qutab Institutional Area, New Delhi - 110016; E-mail : info@iipm.edu ; www.iipm.edu

WHAT WE TEACH TODAY OTHERS ADOPT TOMORROW

*Post Graduate Degree in Management. IIPM conducts it's own programmes in Planning & Entrepreneurship (a non professional, non Technical course) and does not teach any foreign institute's courses. International Management Institute, Europe awards its globally renowned degrees in recognition of excellence of IIPM's programme. The Degrees are conferred by IMI, Europe and is internationally renowned and does not come under the purview of AICTE, UGC or other state acts.

sensitivities and cruelties in Indian society. Dalits have also been the victims of hostile neglect, violence and sporadic killings. It is because of reservations over an extended period that a stream of middle classes has emerged from among Dalits, and this in turn has provided a reserve of energy for protracted struggles. And yet Dalits remain at the bottom of the heap in Indian society. Caste-based society produces a consciousness that has deep contempt for those who are down in the hierarchy. It does not cause one pain if they remain the way they are. That is why much of what goes in the name of affirmative action has failed to take off the ground. Actually, administrative negligence or failure has its roots in this deep-rooted contempt for people.

The combination of these two factors makes the Muslim situation unique in India. This specificity ought to be recognised by the democratic movement in India so that it can take the right political positions, with all their nuances, as the debates and struggles begin in response to the Sachar report. It is going to be one of the most delicate tussles for democratic forces since Independence. The communal chauvinists led by the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh-Bharatiya Janata Party are going to make a big issue of the minorityism of the secular forces, especially the “pampering” of Muslims by the Congress.

Their main contention will centre around, as it has whenever an issue of positive discrimination for Muslims comes up, the theme of threat to the unity and oneness of India as quotas for Muslims will lead to separatism. According to them, the Muslim elite has always had a separatist mentality (whatever separatism implies in today's context).

Here an issue of quite some significance is involved and needs to be carefully sorted out. It has to do with the difference between Muslim political demands today and those in the days before Independence, starting with the intervention of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan in the aftermath of the 1857 rebellion. Much of Muslim political de-

mands in the last few decades has to do with issues of citizenship and, therefore, with egalitarianism and rights.

SHIFT IN POLITICS

Muslim politics, since the trauma and dislocation of Partition, is chiefly centred on fear and, therefore, on the question of security. And the only way Muslims could deal with it, however incompletely, was by assuring support to their elites (belonging to the accomplished strata) so that the latter could work out deals for them with the Congress government. The entire community, barring small groups here and there, learnt to lean on the Congress for security and small relief and in turn assured electoral support for the party in an enduring fashion. The Congress party was assured of what rather loosely has been referred to in Indian political idiom as the “vote bank”.

Muslim politics since the trauma of Partition is chiefly centred on fear.

This started breaking down somewhat after the Emergency, and the election results of 1977 were a portent of that. This trend took a decisive and, what looks until now, an irreversible turn after the V.P. Singh government announced in 1989 its decision to implement the Mandal report and the reaction to it best epitomised by L.K. Advani's Rath Yatra campaign for the construction of a Ram temple on the site where the Babri Masjid stood before its demolition in 1992.

Advani was a silent spectator to this act of destruction as well to the mayhem and bloodletting that followed it. By the time the situation somewhat settled down, Muslims had decisively broken off from the politics

of leaning on the Congress.

NEW ALLIES ON THE GROUND

With this break, another vital shift occurred in Muslim politics. There took place a breach between the Muslim masses and the elites who had hitherto led them. The masses turned their faces away from those among them who were accomplished. Instead, they turned to communities that were adjacent to them in terms of social standing and status and were similar to them in terms of work and leisure. These were the OBC communities. This was a critical change. Enduring alliances and articulated understandings emerged between ordinary Muslims and the OBCs and their leadership – a new mass base for strengthening secular politics. The popularity of Lalu Prasad or Mulayam Singh Yadav is symptomatic of this trend. Muslims had dumped their elites who could become Governors but were no longer capable of getting elected to legislative bodies.

Muslims, in other words, had opted for the politics of empowerment, egalitarianism and deepening of democracy – the politics of citizenship rights. Not that other trends – such as political Islam or terrorist activity – do not exist in Muslim politics, but the trend has a decisive edge, as can be seen in the valuable data generated by CSDS electoral surveys.

This, as should be obvious, is radically different from the pre-Independence trends of Muslim politics. Whatever the major differences in the politics of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and Mohammed Ali Jinnah and the implications of these differences, one feature runs as a common theme. This had to do with the extent of the mental energies that went into showing that Muslims were different and their politics had nothing to do with that of the emerging freedom movement; in other words, the effort was to demarcate Muslim communities as allies of the British and to demand not only a share in power but a weighted reservation, something more than their proportion in the population. The British encour-



V. SUDERSHAN

BJP ACTIVISTS AT a demonstration in New Delhi against 50 per cent reservation for Muslims in the Aligarh Muslim University.

aged it by conveying to Muslims that their demands were essentially economic and could easily be conceded, whereas the Congress' demands were basically political and therefore difficult to negotiate. This was the crux of divide-and-rule politics; the British did not create the divide, but when it showed itself they used it to the hilt.

The change by now is quite evident and rather drastic. Except at the surface level, that is, asking for reservations and quotas, there is nothing in common between the politics then and now. Surface similarities are always misleading. Therefore, careful attention to the details of what will be demanded is required. The BJP and the Hindutva forces are going to make a hell out of any move to grant reservations for Muslims. It is here that care-

ful thought is required.

There are two sides to the quota question. If it is conceded without a thorough debate, then BJP will mount a shrill campaign, which may give strength to the chauvinist currents in politics. Whatever strengthens chauvinism weakens democracy. And the weakening of democracy is not in the interests of ordinary people, including Muslims. So the leaders of Muslim communities need to be careful how they formulate their demands. But if the demand for reservations becomes insistent among Muslims because everyone else has it, taking a strong position against it will strengthen the reactionary rabble-rousers among Muslims.

I have attended four meetings of Muslim gatherings where the situa-

tion of Muslims in the context of the Sachar report was being discussed. The most strident noises for reservations as the only solution to Muslim backwardness was being raised by the most reactionary of Muslim leaders. And the sad fact is the inability of the Left and the democratic leadership to guide Muslims out of this difficult situation.

Given this, what is required is a trade-off between affirmative action and the demand for reservation as the only way out. A principled solution does not seem to be possible. What then is the nature of the trade-off? The Left has to be on its toes. □

Javeed Alam is Professor (retd.), Centre for European Studies, Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages, Hyderabad

Behind their plight

Muslim organisations see the Sachar report as reiterating their own concerns and providing legitimacy to some of their demands. BY YOGINDER SIKAND

Yet their response is also characterised by a certain apathy and lack of enthusiasm because it is possible that the state will do precious little, no matter what Sachar and his team might suggest.

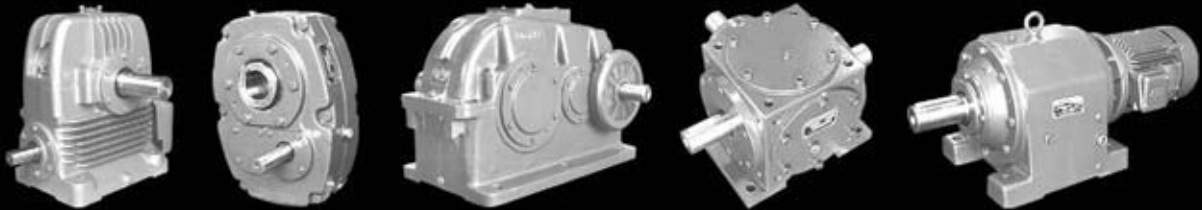
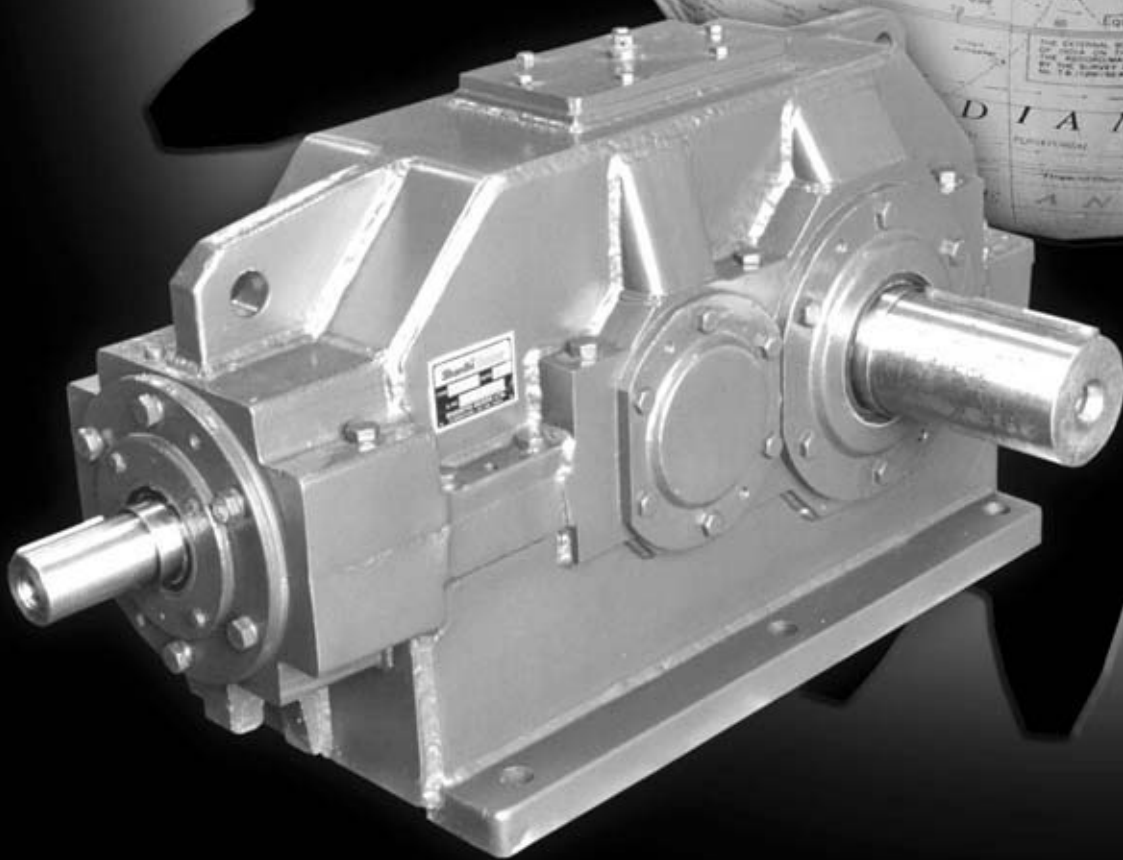
JUDGING by the sheer volume of representations that the Rajinder Sachar Committee is said to have received, there seems to be a sort of general consensus among Muslims throughout the country that they are economically and socially “backward” compared with the general population. The fact that by and large Muslims are indeed economically marginalised is well known, a point the Sachar Committee report reiterates. Yet, it is surprising how this fact is rarely mentioned in media reporting on Muslims, which tends to focus almost wholly on negative, sensational stories involving some controversy or the other in which Muslims are alleged to be involved.

The relative “backwardness” of Muslims, particularly compared with “upper-caste” Hindus, has multiple causes. Some reasons are to do with history. The bulk of Indian Muslims belong to groups traditionally considered low in the caste hierarchy. Conversion to Islam, theoretically an egalitarian religion, was a means for them to escape the cruelties of the Brahminical religion that sanctifies caste. Yet, despite their conversion, their overall economic condition did not improve much. Hence, by and large, these communities continue to live in conditions of pathetic poverty comparable to that of Dalits and Adivasis. Indeed, their condition may even be worse since, unlike Dalits, they do not have Scheduled Caste (S.C.) status and are therefore bereft of, owing to a patently discriminatory and anti-secular legal provision, the limited state provision for non-Muslim and non-Christian Dalits. Instead, they are considered as belonging to Other Backward Classes (OBCs). Being thus lumped together with much

more resourceful Hindu castes, they have hardly benefited from the state provision for OBCs. Studies have shown that these communities, many of which are artisans, are witnessing a rapid decline in their living conditions in the face of the current wave of “liberalisation” and privatisation and as a consequence of urbanisation and industrialisation. Yet, the state, as numerous Muslim organisations have argued, has done almost nothing to address the communities’ mounting plight.

Partition in 1947 witnessed a considerable depletion in the ranks of middle-class Muslims, who migrated to Pakistan. This left Muslims, particularly in the north, a largely impoverished community, and bereft of a substantial middle class that could have otherwise played an important role in promoting modern education among its members. The overall political and economic influence of Muslims in the north was further depleted because of land reforms, which hit the Muslim feudal class particularly badly. The abolition of feudal estates had an adverse impact on large numbers of Muslims, including poor families, who were dependent on feudal patronage in different ways.

After Partition, since separate political mobilisation of Muslims was no longer considered feasible, the leadership of the community was sought to be assumed by the ulemma as well as by politicians associated with a range of political parties, whose primary loyalties lay with their parties rather than with the community. This meant that the politicians were unable and sometimes unwilling to take up seriously the cause of the community, particularly that of the Muslim poor. This continues to be the case even today, and Muslims routinely decry the “puppet” Muslim leaders, whom they accuse of being as responsible for their plight as a range of what are described as anti-Islamic forces. The ulemma, for their part, are praised for keeping alive the tradition of Islamic learning and Islamic identity, but the role that they seek to assume, of representing the community at the political level, is routinely critiqued by many, who see their thinking as being too focussed on identity-related issues (such as Muslim Personal Law, Urdu, making the birthday of the Prophet Mu-



Shanthi Gears LIMITED

304-A, Shanthi Gears Road, Singanallur, Coimbatore - 641 005, Tamilnadu, India.

Ph : 91 - 422 - 2273722 to 34 Telefax : 91 - 422 - 2273884 / 85 E-mail : info@shanthigears.com Internet : www.shanthigears.com

**GEARS, GEAR BOXES, GEARED MOTORS, GEAR COUPLINGS AND GEAR ASSEMBLIES -
STANDARD & CUSTOM BUILT - FOR ANY INDUSTRY**

sasiads.com

hammad a public holiday, and so on) and ignoring the deep-rooted economic and social problems. It is commonly alleged that many Muslim “leaders” aligned with a range of parties actually thrive on keeping their community “backward” for that is the only way to obtain votes. Hence, rather than seeking to address the serious economic concerns of the Muslim poor, they prefer to rake up emotional or controversial issues. This is seen as a nexus in which Hindu chauvinists and the state are also key actors, all conspiring to keep Muslims “backward”.

PAINFUL REALITY

Muslim marginalisation is also attributed to pervasive anti-Muslim discrimination. Muslim organisations and the Muslim-owned media routinely highlight instances of such prejudice, which the “mainstream” press, predictably enough, by and large ignores. Yet it is a painful reality that many Muslims live with the mounting wave of what is termed Islamophobia. Anti-Muslim discrimination takes various forms and works to further disempower the community. Anti-Muslim pogroms launched by Hindu chauvinist groups have devastated Muslim-owned businesses in large parts of the country.

The state, for its part, has done precious little to rein in Hindutva forces and provide justice to Muslims, which obviously makes for a loss of faith in the system.

The selective targeting of Muslims by the state and riots, often state sponsored, reinforces the feeling among Muslims that they are being actively discriminated against. This further drives Muslims into ghettos, where they are often confined against their will.

Denial of accommodation to Muslims in Hindu-dominated localities is a widespread phenomenon and so too is refusal to employ Muslims in Hindu-owned concerns. Muslims are thus increasingly forced to seek employment and accommodation in their own ghettos, which, by and large, are neglected by the state in terms of basic

educational and infrastructural provisions.

Numerous state policies have had a deleterious impact on the Muslim social and economic condition over the years. The most glaring instance is the state’s policy on Urdu, which has resulted in its utter decimation, especially in Uttar Pradesh, considered to be the cradle of the language. This and the marked Hinduisation in large parts of India of the ethos of and the syllabus used in state schools have seriously impacted on the enthusiasm of Muslim families for educating their children through the state system, forcing many to send their children to *madrassas* instead.

Anti-Muslim discrimination takes various forms and works to disempower the community.

Numerous surveys have highlighted the institutional discrimination operating in state investment in Muslim-dominated localities and areas in such matters as hospitals, roads, schools, loans, grants, and development schemes.

Muslim organisations have consistently demanded state spending on infrastructural development in Muslim areas in proportion to the Muslim population.

Instead of actively seeking to engage in the economic and educational empowerment of Muslims, political parties and governments as well as Muslim political “leaders” seek to win Muslim votes through sops, such as building Haj Houses or providing Haj subsidies. A lively debate continues in the Muslim-owned press as to precisely what the state and Muslim politic-

ians should be doing for the Muslim cause.

In recent years there has been an identifiable trend among a range of Muslim organisations, both established and new ones, to focus on Muslim economic and educational empowerment. These efforts, in the form of Muslim-run non-governmental organisations, are, however, scattered and inadequate to address the problems of the community in the absence of active state intervention.

Muslim organisations have now increasingly started demanding proportionate representation for Muslims in government jobs. They have pointed to the fact that in almost all States the level of Muslim representation is far below their proportion in the population. The demand for proper Muslim representation will have to contend with widespread bias against Muslims, which is not the sole preserve of Hindutva organisations. Many Muslim organisations demanding reservation for Muslims in all government services are headed almost exclusively by “upper-caste” Muslims.

This demand is critiqued by a range of newly emerging “low-caste” Muslim organisations, which see it as a subtle means for “upper-caste” Muslims to reinforce their hegemony within the community at the expense of the “low-caste” majority.

Instead, they demand separate reservation for “low-caste” Muslims and inclusion of some of these castes in the S.C. list, which seems to be more feasible.

Overall, Muslim organisations, as the Muslim-owned media suggest, see the Sachar Committee’s report as probably reiterating their own concerns and as providing further legitimacy to some of their demands. Yet, this is also accompanied by a certain apathy and lack of enthusiasm because, going by the record of such committees, it is possible that the state will do precious little, no matter what Sachar and his team might suggest. □
The author is associated with the Centre for Jawaharlal Nehru Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi.

‘Seclusion inflicted by insecurity’

Interview with Subhashini Ali, president, All India Democratic Women’s Association. BY T.K. RAJALAKSHMI IN NEW DELHI

“All personal laws are discriminatory. There is a need for reform of all personal laws regarding inheritance, property rights, matrimonial rights, divorce and custody over children.”

THE All India Democratic Women’s Association (AIDWA) had sent a representation to the Sachar Committee highlighting the organisation’s experience of working among Muslim women and the issues that emerged thereafter. AIDWA had held a series of State-level conventions to debate and understand the specific problems faced by Muslim women. The conventions revealed that though the problems were similar to those faced by poor women from other communities they were accentuated in the case of Muslim women and children. In this interview to *Frontline*, Subhashini Ali, president of AIDWA, spoke extensively about the myriad issues confronting the Muslim community, women in particular, and cautioned against offering simplistic solutions to their problems. Excerpts:

A slew of reports, including the one by the Sachar Committee, have exploded the myth of Muslim appeasement. There is now a strong call from some sections for affirmative action in favour of Muslims. Given this situation, what kind of a role do you expect from policy-makers in the government?

The answer to this question has to be divided into several parts. When we are discussing affirmative action, those Muslims who are listed in the OBC list in the Mandal Commission report, are, theoretically,



S. SUBRAMANIAM

SUBHASHINI ALI, former MP, is a veteran trade unionist and a Central Committee member of the Communist Party of India (Marxist).

entitled to reservation under the OBC quota. But a problem arises in the context of discrimination on religious grounds; this affects them badly as even if they are entitled to reservations as OBCs and compete with Hindu OBCs, they suffer a disadvantage because of their religion. This question has to be addressed. The government and various organisations will have to be questioned on how many Muslims have got jobs under the OBC quota. This is a very important question and the details have to be unearthed. If they are not accessing jobs at all under the OBC quota, then something has to be done. If, as some Muslim organisations argue, Muslims constitute 8 per cent of the OBCs, then they should also be given 8 to 10 per cent of the jobs reserved for the OBCs.

There are also Dalit Muslim communities who are very far behind. They also belong to the same professions as the Hindu Dalits. They are sweepers, leather workers, barbers, laundry persons and also performers like Nats. They have not had the advantage of reservation at all. There is a very strong case for giving the benefits of reservation to the Scheduled Caste Muslims as in the case of the neo-Buddhists in Maharashtra and Christian Dalits. In fact, there is a bigger rationale for giving them these benefits because they have been deprived for 50 years. For instance, there was a case in a government hospital in Kanpur where a Muslim sweeper died but his son did not get the job on compassionate grounds as he was not a Dalit. The employees went on strike and finally the boy was given the job but under a special dispensation.

Certain sections argue that the entire Muslim community be given reservations but that is not advisable and not permissible under the Constitution. It may create more problems and you may find that the Ashraf Muslims, who are the upper-caste Muslims, will garner most of the benefits. But at the same time it is necessary that the government make allocations – sectional allocations and monitor them as well.

The other thing is that that women

in any category are found at the bottom of the heap. So whenever there is talk of positive discrimination, women have to be factored in at the very start. There is no point thinking about it ten years later. The government has to make a special component for Muslim women as they should for Dalit women.

There is a theory that Muslims' social backwardness may be one of the root causes of their exclusion from the mainstream. Is the community's backwardness a result of its economic backwardness or is it the other way round?

A community becomes backward for several reasons and one of the primary reasons is government neglect. This is certainly the case here in India where successive governments have made noises about doing things for the minorities, creating an erroneous sense of appeasement. For the vast numbers of the community, nothing has been done. In fact, Muslims are a community who has been discriminated against at every level, facing violent and passive forms of discrimination. The Muslims as a community not only suffer prejudice but do not have much of a voice anyway. That becomes a reason for their social backwardness but there are other historical reasons also. For instance, the battle for modern education for Muslims and the resistance by the clergy is well documented. But it is not as if because Muslims are Muslims, they are socially backward. Their backwardness is not independent of their state of being citizens of India. I will give you an example. I know of Muslim businessmen who do not employ Muslims. They discriminate against their own community but there is a reason, which has to do with prejudice. They say that it is easier to employ Hindus to deal with banks and government departments.

Whenever there is a discussion on social backwardness and Muslim women, there is a clamour for a uniform civil code. Do you think having a uniform civil code will

address the deeper issue of patriarchy in the Muslim community and other communities.

The clamour for a uniform civil code is like many other simplistic solutions that are offered. It doesn't have much of a meaning. Unfortunately, the Sangh Parivar has used the issue as a stick to beat the Muslims with. After the Shah Bano controversy, we went into this question very seriously. In the early 1990s, we organised a convention in Delhi on "Equal rights, Equal laws". The first thing we demanded was equality between all sexes and not between members of different religions. All personal laws are discriminatory against women. There is a need for reform of all personal laws regarding inheritance, property rights, matrimonial rights, divorce and custody over children. There should be gender-equal laws governing all communities. We have pushed for strengthening secular laws that help women in their fight against injustice and violence. On both these fronts, there has been some movement forward. Some personal laws have been amended. The Supreme Court of late has pronounced several judgments in favour of the rights of Muslim women, which have not been contested by anybody. The law against domestic violence that applies to all communities was passed without much of an opposition. The Protection Against Sexual Harassment of Women Bill, 2005, is also under discussion. We are also preparing a Bill on sexual assault. There is a parallel process. We have also tried to further the cause of reform within society as well as that of laws affecting Muslim women. We held a series of Muslim women's conventions in almost all the major States of India. These are platforms where women from all classes participated. Women talked about the complete lack of civic amenities, lack of employment and access to education. They also talked about conservative elements in their society who disapproved of them going out to work. They also expressed a great desire to improve the quality of their lives. They also talked about discrimi-



A.M. FARUQUI

AT A CONVENTION on 'Model Nikahnaama', organised by the All India Muslim Personal Law Board in Bhopal. A file photograph.

natory laws that allowed polygamy and the triple *talaq*. These laws may not be exercised but are used as a threat against them. We have had dialogues with organisations like the All India Muslim Personal Law Board. Our discussions helped Muslim women become aware of many of their rights they enjoyed under their own religion like the delegated right to divorce and right to Mehr and property. The AIMPLB came up with their model Nikahnaama. Their draft fell short of expectations. But what happened as a consequence was that there was a sense that there was no unanimity among people who were interpreting Islam and therefore there was space for questions. This was an important development. A Shia Muslim Personal

Law Board and a Muslim Women Personal Law Board emerged. The Shia Muslim Personal Law Board has come up with its own Nikahnaama – we have only read about it in the papers – but many of its reported features are an improvement over the AMIPLB's Nikahnaama. For instance, the woman is also given the right to initiate divorce proceedings and it can be on several grounds. The man has to reveal his economic status at the time of marriage and if any of it is proved to be false, she can initiate divorce. If a man divorces his wife, she is entitled to maintenance until she becomes economically independent. This is quite a big step forward from Shah Bano. We have also drafted our own Nikahnaama, which is not in conflict with Islam-

ic tenets but has many more rights for women. We have started a signature campaign among Muslim women and men that calls for the abolition of triple *talaq*, polygamy and equal custodial rights of children for women. We have got a good response from both men and women and that is much more important and effective than mouthing empty slogans like UCC. What does it mean?

Given your organisation's experience of working amongst all communities, what would you say are the reasons for the ghettoisation of Muslims. Has it something to do with the increasing insecurity faced by the community in recent times?

The biggest problem that Muslims face today – which upper middle class Muslims did not face earlier – is a feeling of deep-seated fear and insecurity. All this talk of mainstreaming is really nonsense. After Gujarat and Babri Masjid, a strong feeling emerged that justice was not done. Today the bomb blasts are making headlines and people ought to be punished, but nobody remembers that the blasts came after the Bombay riots. Nothing has been done about the Srikrishna Commission and its recommendations. The same thing happened in the case of the Madan Commission (Bhiwandi riots) and the Mathur Commission (Kanpur riots, after Babri Masjid demolition). No action has been taken by any government, whether it was run by the Samajwadi Party, the Bharatiya Janata Party or the Congress. This is totally unacceptable and casts a painful blot on us as a country. All this basically means that it is okay to kill Muslims. This creates a great sense of injustice and it also creates an atmosphere where other things get justified.

Ghettoisation is a direct result of communal riots. People scamper to the areas where they feel physically safe. This means that many people who had got into mixed housing and sent children to mixed schools have withdrawn. Now not only have they got isolated from other communities but other communities have also got

isolated from them. We have a situation now where people do not have any social interaction with Muslims except coming in touch with the odd mechanic perhaps.

The portrayal of Muslims as terrorists in the international media has created a very unfortunate situation of alienation and discrimination. It has given a handle to fundamentalist orthodox elements who become more important in the community. Important issues like reforms, rights of women get pushed to the back burner and this gets justified in the name of insecurity. It is a terrible situation for everybody. The state has a responsibility to change it. Justice is very important and no government has the right to exist if it does not guarantee that. At the same time, we have to allow people to have access to equal laws and equal opportunities. In the last West Bengal elections, the Election Commission struck off from the voters' list the names of several Muslims, including the wife of one of our Members of Parliament. I don't think these things happen to other communities. Then in Mumbai, after the train blasts, the Police Commissioner issued an order that all Muslims returning from abroad had to report to their local *thanas*. This was shocking.

Data show that in some indicators like work participation, usage of amenities like the Public Distribution System, water supply, Muslims are worse off than Dalits. Is this a consequence of their deliberate exclusion by state policy. It has been pointed out that the representation of Muslims in government posts in West Bengal and Kerala is not very satisfactory.

In West Bengal and Kerala, there are two things to be considered. Everyone recognises that security of Muslims is an assured fact. Nobody denies that. Secondly, in both the States, Muslims have been the beneficiaries of land reforms in a very big way. In Kerala, they have been the beneficiaries of an excellent system of universal education. Having said that, it is also true

that if governments do not take steps to positively discriminate in favour of minorities, what happens is that the general level of prejudice gets reflected in low recruitment at all levels. In Tripura, I found the Left Front government had taken special steps for the development of minority-dominated villages. Children from minority communities were encouraged to join school and scholarships were given for books and uniforms. I attended a Muslim women's convention in Sonamura. There were many women who had won the local elections. They could hardly contain their shock when they were told about what had happened in Gujarat. While the majority suffered from poverty, they did not have to face insecurity as compared to their sisters elsewhere. I found that quality of schools in a backward district like Dhalai was also astounding. Apparently almost all government schools had pucca buildings and the student-teacher ratio was 1:30. The Infant Mortality Rate and Maternal Mortality Rate were also lower than the national averages.

Are the needs and priorities of Muslim women any different from those of other women. In your experience, how easy or difficult has it been to mobilise them on common livelihood issues.

The status of Muslim women is not very different from that of Hindu women. But obviously, if there is a situation of insecurity, it is Muslim women who get affected more. It is not only seclusion by the *burqa* that should be highlighted; it is a seclusion inflicted by insecurity and that lack of basic amenities like safe public transport. After the Metro started in Delhi, I was pleasantly surprised to see so many *burqa*-clad women from Chawri Bazaar having a nice time in Connaught Place. It is only a five-minute ride. It is not that Muslim parents don't want to educate their children. But obviously they won't send their girls to schools that are far off. There are no schools in their areas.

A curriculum that demonises Mus-

lims and teachers who discriminate against these children discourage parents from sending their children to so-called mainstream schools. There are so many examples of teachers who speak irresponsibly and encourage other children to speak disparagingly to Muslim children.

Madrassa reform is also important and West Bengal has shown the way. There are a lot of non-Muslim children studying in these schools as well. The results have also been rather good. As for mobilising Muslim women, one has to first win their trust with a complete understanding of their problems. In Gujarat, though organisationally we are weak, we, amid great hostility, were able to mobilise Muslim women on issues of ration cards and kerosene. We have to get them to take positions of responsibility as leaders.

It is a strange paradox. One of the indicators of a healthy society is its sex ratio. Skewed sex ratios have been reported from the more prosperous States and the well-off sections. The sex ratios show that there is less discrimination against the girl child within the Muslim community as compared to other religious denominations. At the same time, there have been increasing cases of dowry being reported from within the community, a trend unheard of in the past. What does this reflect?

The sex ratio among Muslims is also going down. As a general trend, poorer people have a better sex ratio than better off people. This applies to Muslims even when they are the poorest. But the other aspect is that of access to sex determination technology. As this technology is becoming more and more accessible, the sex ratio is deteriorating even amongst those communities that had a good sex ratio. The Muslim community is no exception. Dowry demands are rampant in all communities in India and as expenses of marriage increase in an exponential fashion, sex ratios are bound to worsen. The sex ratio amongst Muslims is deteriorating now. □

Lesser citizens

In every State Muslims constitute disadvantaged communities; only the extent and nature of the disadvantage vary.

In Gujarat and Assam they are **gripped by insecurity**; in Bihar large sections of them are treated as outcasts; in Maharashtra they are pushed to crime. In Kerala Muslims are moving forward, but slowly.

OUTCASTS

Venkitesh Ramakrishnan in Patna

TO the residents of Yarpur *basti* (an urban settlement) in the heart of Patna, there is nothing extraordinary in the friendship between Mohammed Jaleel and Ganesh Ram Bara. Both of them, in their mid-sixties, had worked together for many decades in the Patna Municipal Corporation as sanitation workers.

They spent much of their lives in Yarpur, locally called *dom basti* or *bhangi basti* in a disparaging reference to the caste of the sanitation workers. Their work involved a variety of tasks, such as sweeping the roads, unclogging gutters, cleaning toilets, carrying filth and disposing of waste, aimed at keeping Bihar's capital city clean. Because of the nature of their job both Jaleel and Bara faced the same kind of societal exclusion.

"No Brahmin or Rajput would come to my house or drink a glass of water from my hands. No Pathan or Sayed or Mallik would go to Jaleel's house or have a glass of water from his hands," says Bara. "All our social gatherings are essentially among sanitation workers, both Hindu and Muslim," Jaleel says.

Obviously, Jaleel and Bara have led strikingly similar lives. Their day-to-day social experiences too are similar. Yet, in the eyes of the government, Jaleel is more privileged than Bara. Throughout his service, Bara had enjoyed some benefits because the Hindu *safai karmachari* community was absorbed in the



MUNICIPAL CORPORATION SWEEPERS M.D. Jaleel and Ganesh Ram sit before their houses at Ambedkar Colony in Patna.

RANJEET KUMAR

Scheduled Castes (S.C.) list. Jaleel never got the same benefit because he is a Muslim. "We tried to enlist ourselves as beneficiaries of various government schemes, including education schemes, which our Hindu brethren enjoy, but we were rejected each time on the grounds that we were Muslims," Jaleel's daughter, Najma Khatun, told *Frontline*.

But this is not the story of one Jaleel and his family. Dalit Muslims across Bihar and other parts of North India who belong to castes such as Jolaha, Nutt, Bakkho, Bhatiyara, Kunjra, Dhunia, Kalal, Dafali, Dhobi, Lalbegi, Gorkan, Meershikar, Cheek and Rangrez, have the same low social ranking and are deprived of the benefit others enjoy. In many parts of North India, many of these communities have separate mosques and bury their dead in separate graveyards.

According to Mohammed Usman Halal Khor, general secretary of the All India Pasmanda Muslim Mahaj (AIPMM), a Bihar-based organisation of Dalits and Most Backward Caste (MBC) Muslims, the socially and educationally backward communities among Muslims "are not accepted or treated as equals by elite Muslim communities and even by sections of the clergy. They are subject to the same social discrimination faced by Dalit Hindus. Yet, Dalit Muslims are deemed ineligible for the government benefits given to Dalit Hindus."

A significant aspect of Justice Rajendra Sachar Committee's report on the status of Indian Muslims is that it has highlighted the plight of Dalit Muslims. According to Ali Anwar, president of the AIPMM and a Janata Dal (United) Rajya Sabha member, the report clearly underscores the need for evolving special programmes to uplift the various Dalit Muslim communities from social and educational backwardness. "If at all reservation in jobs and educational institutions [for Muslims] are introduced on account of the Sachar Committee report, it is these [Dalit] communities that deserve it and not the Muslim elite," he said. A major demand made by the

AIPMM before the Sachar Committee was for a census based on caste to evaluate the social and educational backwardness among different religious groups. The AIPMM has demanded S.C. status for Dalit Muslims.

Although the Sachar Committee report has suggested that it would be appropriate to include low-caste Muslims, mostly working as butchers, barbers and scavengers, in the S.C. list or in a separate category, its actual implementation would prove difficult. To start with, there is considerable opposition from some prominent S.C. leaders and organisations to the inclusion of Dalit Muslims in the S.C. category.

In many parts of North India low-caste Muslims have separate mosques.

Former Union Minister and Congress leader Yogendra Makwana told *Frontline* that mere study reports were not enough to include new communities in the S.C. list. "Caste-based analysis stopped with the 1931 round table meet of Census Commissioners and as of now we have no system to make new evaluations of castes and their social and educational backwardness. Moreover, Dalits who converted to Islam or Christianity no longer suffer from untouchability, which is the primary consideration for according S.C. status to any social group," he said.

According to P.S. Krishnan, former Secretary to the Government of India and one of the foremost authorities on the condition of socially and educationally backward communities, the demand for including certain Dalit Muslims in the S.C. category indeed needs to be considered but only after a thorough anthropological study. He pointed out that the social effect cre-

ated by conversion to Islam from Dalit and Backward Caste communities were dissimilar in different parts of the country. "Studies have shown that a significant number of the Dalit communities who converted to Islam in South India have registered a distinct rise in social scale, while the same cannot be said of those in North India. The communities that have acquired better social mobility by conversion and those that have failed to do so need to be identified and categorised so that new initiatives of affirmative action can be taken," he added.

A number of social activists working among Dalit communities pointed out that a hidden reason for the opposition from S.C. leaders and organisations to include Dalit Muslims in the S.C. category is the fear of losing the opportunities currently available. "Inclusion of Dalit Muslims in the S.C. category would naturally lead to the inclusion of Dalit Christians too, and there is a perception that Dalit Christians as a whole have access to better educational facilities than other Dalit communities. Consequently, there is also a fear that Dalit Christians would get the best of positions in any competition under the S.C. quota," an activist based in Uttar Pradesh, another State with a large Dalit Muslim population, said.

Another argument proffered against including Dalit Muslim in the S.C. category is that the majority of them are already part of the OBC or MBC list in various States. According to informal estimates, 75 to 80 per cent of Muslims across the country are in the OBC or MBC list, and hence it is argued that there is no need to include them in the S.C. category. But, evidently, such rationalisation would not stand the test of objective social and legal scrutiny because fundamentally there can be no justification for including a person with the social and educational status of an S.C. in the OBC or MBC category. Dalit Muslims have been categorised along with the dominant OBC castes at the Central level and in States such as Uttar Pradesh. "It is because of this situation

that we are demanding a revision of the present OBC and MBC list," said Mohammed Usman.

According to the AIPMM, globalisation and economic liberalisation is inflicting hardships on Dalit Muslim groups, known as *arzals*, mostly working as weavers, artisans, carpet-makers, cultivators, tailors, washermen and butchers. "Opportunities for these communities are becoming more and more limited in the emerging situation," Ali Anwar said. The AIPMM leader wants all States to take a positive look at the Bihar Legislature's initiative of 2000, recommending reservation for Dalit Muslims.

Anwar does not blame the governments and their agencies for being ignorant of the plight of Dalit Muslims. In his book *Masawat Ki Jung*, Anwar has held that the Muslim *ulemmas*, have failed to initiate moves to improve the social and economic lot of Dalit Muslims.

PUSHED TO CRIME

Anupama Katakam in Mumbai

SHABNAM SHEIKH knew it was only a matter of time before she received that dreaded knock at midnight. It happened in June 2004. The police arrived at her doorstep at 1 a.m. and told her that her son Mohammed Ahmed Sheikh, 21, was under arrest in connection with a money-laundering racket.

Shabnam was helpless. She had no means to fight her son's case. Her husband was killed and their house was burnt during the 1992-93 Mumbai riots. She worked as a domestic help and managed to educate her son and two daughters. In spite of qualifying in basic computer usage, her son was unable to land a job.

Living in one of Mumbai's many ghettoes, which are quite often domains of underworld gangs, young Mohammed got involved in petty crime and gang work. Shabnam says he was angry, disillusioned and frustrated with the discrimination and lack of opportunities for youth like



VIVEK BENDRE

MEMBERS OF THE Patriotic Front of India protest against what they describe as the Maharashtra government's atrocities against the minority community after the Mumbai and Malegaon bomb blasts.

him. "He saw his father's burnt body at a young age. He could have become like so many other boys of the *basti* who turned to crime at a very young age." The trip to jail to see her son is valuable time off, but she makes it because she feels her son is a good boy who just did not get a chance to do honest work.

Shabnam Sheikh's faith in her son may easily be dismissed as a mother's devotion to her offspring. But her story is no different from thousands of other such disillusioned Muslims in Maharashtra.

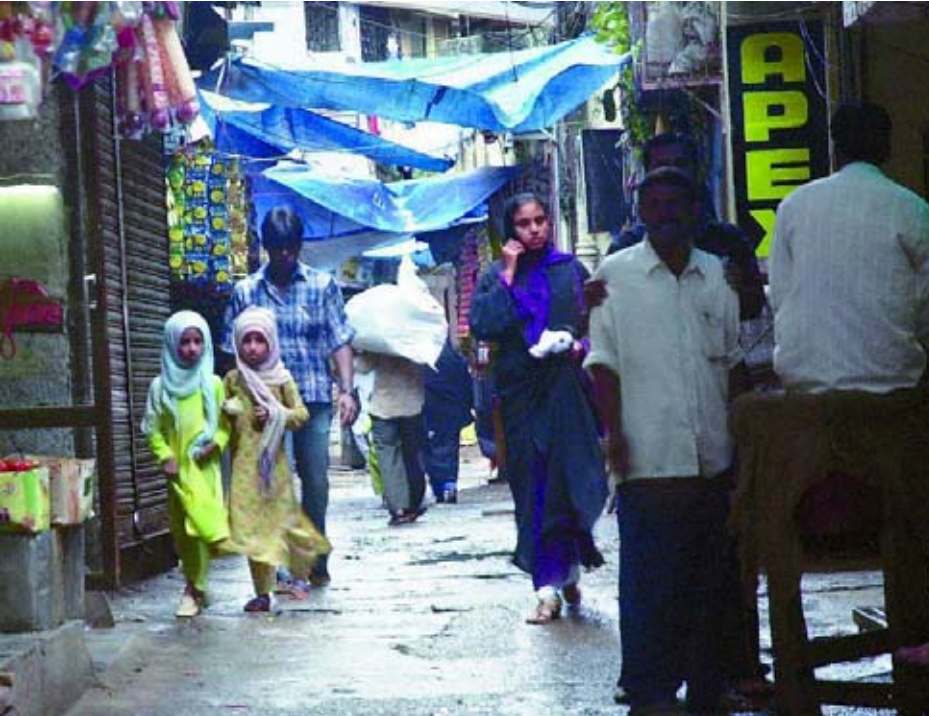
A police officer said the majority of the people who visited the Arthur Road jail daily were *burqa*-clad. There are several hundreds of men like Mohammed who are awaiting trial. Since they do not have access to good lawyers many of them languish in jail for years. Torture and other forms of human rights violations to extract information and confessions are part of their miser-

able existence.

The Justice Rajinder Sachar Committee report points out that Muslims, who account for 10.6 per cent of the population of Maharashtra, constitute 32.4 per cent of the total number of prisoners in the State. Muslims also comprise 40.6 per cent of prisoners in the State who have been in prison for less than a year. The disproportion in numbers is disconcerting, says a senior State police officer.

Criminal activities could mean anything from regular robberies to underworld operations such as counterfeiting, extortion and drug peddling. Ever since 1993 and owing to the more recent terror attacks, terrorism is a big battle the State has been fighting. "Whatever the crime the disturbing fact is that Muslims are the majority perpetrators in every type of crime. We need to understand why this is happening," says the officer.

Unlike other States, says the offi-



VIVEK BENDRE

IN BEHRAMPADA, ONE of the many Muslim localities in Mumbai.

cer, Maharashtra has Mumbai. "It is like a crime capital. So the numbers will be high." The megapolis has a history of underworld operations and, more recently, anti-national activities. As per the National Crime Records Bureau, 2005, Mumbai accounted for 10 per cent of the total crimes reported from 35 mega cities in the country. Mumbai has attracted Muslim immigrants from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar for decades. This adds to the numbers, says the officer.

Although there are several socio-economic reasons for the disturbing statistics, human rights activists and representatives of the Muslim community say that investigating agencies armed with their biases and draconian laws have been largely responsible for the increasing number of arrests of members of this community.

For instance, post-1993 serial blasts more than 200 people – mainly Muslims – were arrested under the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act. The trial, which is in its final stages, has led to the conviction of close to 100 of the 138 accused. TADA lapsed in 1995 to give place to the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), which was repealed in 2004. Police records put the total number of persons arrested under POTA at 69. All bearing Muslim names. Human rights organisations, however, say that thousands of innocent people were

persecuted under this law.

The problem with POTA is that suspects can be kept in custody for a period of 180 days without being charged, and custodial confessions are admissible in court. The Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act, 1999, is a current weapon using which the police can make arbitrary arrests. All three laws have been blatantly misused, these groups say.

A typical case of misuse of POTA is that of a group of boys arrested from Padgah village near Mumbai for planting a bomb in Mulund in 2003. One of the boys, Atif Mulla spent 33 months in jail before he was acquitted. "Every time there is a terror attack, the police pick up our boys," says local resident Nasir Mulla. The reason Padgah is targeted is because Saquib Nachen, general secretary of the banned Student Islamic Movement of India (SIMI), belongs to this village. "At one time almost 300 people from our village were charged with something or the other," says Mulla.

Ambujwadi, a slum in Mumbai, provides another example of persecution. Following the July 11 train blasts, 350 people were picked up for suspected involvement in the crime. Ambujwadi is one of those wretched places in the city with no electricity or water. Allegations that it is a haven of criminal activities are met with this response by residents: "Muslims are

poor and make easy targets."

A senior police official argues that there are "absolutely no biases" within the force. That is far from the truth, says Ram Punyani, an activist working on communal issues. At a workshop conducted for lower-ranking policemen, Punyani said it was found that all of them read *Saamna* (a daily published by the Shiv Sena, a fundamentalist political party). One of the policemen said, "If they can eat the cow, they can do anything."

Furthermore, there is a strong feeling of alienation within the community, says Punyani. "The police were so quick in arresting people after blasts, but no such speed was shown in arresting people after the riots." More recently, the government swept under the carpet the case of bombs found in a Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh worker's house in Nanded. But the police are quick to pick up Muslim youth after any bomb blast.

In fact, in Muslim-dominated Behrampada in Mumbai, youth who had helped carry victims of the train blasts were later hauled off to the police station during a combing operation. "Will these youth not be angry? And if it happens over and over again, they will want justice. If they don't get it through the normal route, they will look for others ways," said a local leader.

While there is no justification for the crimes committed, the reason why so many from this minority community add up to the crime statistics has to be analysed, says noted Muslim scholar Asghar Ali Engineer. "Muslims are pushed to these extreme situations. The system has never absorbed them. There are no government jobs, no police jobs and due to blatant discrimination, nothing in the private sector. Poverty in the community is only on the rise."

"Eventually you and your family have to eat. In a city like Mumbai, which has many illegal activities, it is not difficult to get in to something anti-social," says Engineer. Besides being discriminated against for their entire lives, many men have been victims of

Discover the PREMIERE way to fly to London.



4-course meal



180° lie-flat beds



On-demand entertainment

Now fly non-stop daily between Delhi & London and twice daily between Mumbai & London.

The world of PREMIERE - experience unmatched luxury and comfort • Comfortable, absolutely flat beds • Spacious, electronically adjustable seats • Gourmet Indian and International cuisine • 'Meal on demand' option • Fine wines from around the world • Audio-video entertainment on personal LCD screens • Choice of over 60 Hollywood and Bollywood blockbusters, 7 audio channels, 60 audio CDs, single/multi-player interactive games • iXplor™, the moving-map-display that presents a highly accurate summary of the aircraft's position, altitude and speed. Come, have a journey where everything revolves around you.

DAILY NON-STOP TO LONDON:

Mumbai – London: Dep: 0220* Arr: 0700* (Daily) | Dep: 1320* Arr: 1755* (Mon, Tue, Wed, Thu, Sat & Sun) | Dep: 1305* Arr: 1740* (Fri)

London – Mumbai: Dep: 0955* Arr: 0025* (Daily) | Dep: 2105* Arr: 1135* (Daily)

Delhi – London: Dep: 1255* Arr: 1705* (Daily) | **London – Delhi:** Dep: 2045* Arr: 1050* (Mon, Tue, Wed, Fri, Sat & Sun) | Dep: 2015* Arr: 1015* (Thu)

For bookings, call: Mumbai 022 3989 3333, Delhi 011 3984 1111 or our toll-free No. 1-800-225522* or contact your travel agent. For further details, log on to www.jetairways.com

communal violence. Much of the anger and frustration stems from witnessing horrific violence on one's own family or community. Taking advantage of this, terror agencies or even the underworld brainwash the men by showing video clippings of heinous acts committed on the community. They are then initiated into their world. Since there is money as well, this option works, says Engineer.

The case of Mohammed Aamir, who was caught transporting a huge cache of arms near Aurangabad earlier this year, is a typical example of a poor unemployed man entering the world of crime. Aamir, a school dropout, used to run a foodstall, which had to shut down owing to the bird flu epidemic. Like hundreds of other Muslim boys, he was a member of SIMI. In recent years he was a regular at the meetings of a socio-religious organisation. These organisations apparently provide a lot of support. The police believe these groups are hotbeds of recruitment to *jehadi* groups.

A *maulana* in Aurangabad says since Muslims find themselves marginalised in education and in socio-economic areas, a parallel set-up now exists in most of the Muslim ghettos in cities and towns. For instance, in Aurangabad, he says, you will find organisations such as the Markhez-e-Majlishe-e-Shoora, which deals with divorce issues, and the Darsh-e-Chikha, which deals with family and property issues. Similarly, in Behrampada, at every corner there is a "social work" organisation. Nobody is quite sure what they do. But the impression is that the community has little faith in mainstream law and so has decided to settle matters among themselves. Another clear indication of the increasing alienation.

GUJARAT GHETTOS

Dionne Bunsha in Ahmedabad and Sabarkantha

"ALL Gujarat's garbage arrives here," says Noorbanu Sayyed. "No one will come to live here. There's nothing

but mountains of garbage." Yet Noorbanu has made this her home, a small 10x10 feet room on the edge of mounds of burning trash in a no-man's land in Ahmedabad city.

To get to Noorbanu's house you have to drive through a dusty trail lined with small industrial units and scrap yards. At the far end of the plot, just before the dumping yard begins, is a row of houses. This is 'Citizen Nagar'. Ironically, its residents are not treated like citizens.

"There's no municipal water supply, no drainage, no street lights. Nothing but junk. The water from the borewell is polluted. People get stomach ache and have kidney stones. The gutters are choked," says Noorbanu. There are no municipal services, but yet, the residents have been slapped with house tax. It is more than a half-hour walk to the nearest private school or dispensary. When it rains, the place gets flooded and it is difficult to get out.

So why would anyone live here? "We had no choice. Since our homes in Naroda Patiya were burned in the riots, we are too scared to go back there. The relief committee gave us a house here, so we stayed. At least it is safe. No one will come here to attack," she says.

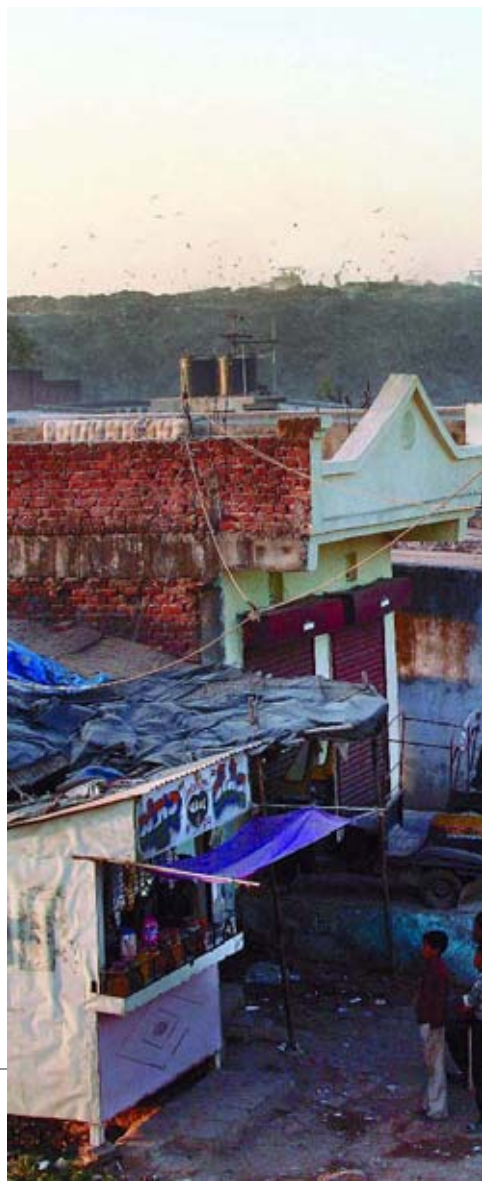
Riot victims are not the only ones moving in here. Several new row houses are under construction. It is a ghetto in the making. Until now, Ahmedabad's big Muslim ghettos were in Shah Alam and Juhapura, on the city's outskirts. Now, new ghettos like Citizen Nagar have emerged.

"Muslims are moving in because there is no fear here. There is no 'border' nearby so there is no chance of any fights breaking out or of curfew," says Mehmood Pathan, a builder who is constructing the row houses. "Most people buying houses here are those chased away from their villages or those living in border areas or families who want bigger houses in a cheap area."

Most Muslim localities, whether old or new, are deprived of civic facilities. "I have been living at Millat Nagar in Maninagar, Chief Minister

Narendra Modi's constituency, since 1969. We have been paying municipal tax for decades, but do not have even the basic facilities like water or drainage. No politician bothers to visit this place. They tell us they do not need Muslim votes," Mehmood Pathan said.

The process of segregation in Ahmedabad started after the 1969 riots. Every subsequent riot, particularly those in the 1980s, further divided the city on communal lines. After the 2002 carnage, polarisation has been complete in big cities. "Muslims are too scared to live in Hindu-dominated areas. And even if they want to, no one will sell a house to them," Pathan explains. The segregation has spread to small towns. Refugees who faced social boycotts in their villages have set-



tled at the edge of nearby towns; living life in limbo, wondering about the condition of their houses and farmland back home, but too scared to return.

In Modasa, a small town in Sabarkantha district, relief committees have built five small settlements providing housing for 550-odd families from 60 villages. Here too, the refugees pay taxes but do not get basic amenities. "We pay Rs.30 a month to a local contractor for water. We are 12 people crammed in this tiny room. If a guest comes visiting, there is no place to make him or her sit," Najmaben Lohar said.

"Last year, I tried to go back to my home in Vada village. But some people there told me, 'you ran away. Why do you come back? We will burn your

THE TINY HOUSES of Citizen Nagar at the edge of Ahmedabad's garbage dump. Muslim families sought safety in this isolated, polluted place.



house again'. So I had to return," Mumtazben Sheikh, a widow, said. "There are no gutters, no place to wash clothes, so fights break out often. But at least we are safe."

It is shocking to find some people still living in tents, just as in the relief camp four years ago. They are waiting for their houses to be built. "There is no electric light. We light the lamps at night," says Mehdi Husain Vanjara from Kau-Amlai village. "My three daughters wash dishes and earn Rs.200 each a month. That is how we survive."

"As the nearest school is located far, half the children have dropped out of school. The dirt road was flooded during the monsoon and two children drowned when they were returning from school," Mohammed Yusuf Tadhah, a relief organiser, said. A team from the National Minority Commission visited Modasa to study the plight of the 'internally displaced'. Across Gujarat there are 47 rehabilitation sites where around 5,000 families have sought refuge. These families are living in the most pathetic conditions.

Recently, the Central government announced a compensation of Rs.7 lakhs for each of the 5,000-odd families affected by the post-Godhra riots. While it is badly needed for their survival, compensation will not bridge the divide. And, it is not only those who lost their homes that are affected. In a State that is considered the Sangh Parivar's 'Hindutva laboratory', every Muslim is affected by the hate culture. Every Muslim faces prejudice every day.

Modasa town itself is divided along communal lines. "Modasa's population is 45 per cent Muslim, and a market road divides the two sides. Hindus and Muslims have good personal relations but we have separate schools and banks. The college, run by a Hindu trust, is in a Muslim area, but has never faced any threat. At one time it had a Muslim principal, but over the years they have stopped employing Muslims," Mehmood Pathan said.

Religious organisations are trying to fill the development void in the



A BOARD IN Ahmedabad saying "Jai Shree Ram, Jai Somnath, Jai Hindu Rashtra. Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal welcomes you to Hindu Rashtra's Naroda region. Proudly say we are Hindus".

Muslim areas. "Madrassas have become more academically oriented. The *dariwalas* [bearded orthodox] want to build proper schools and hospitals. But with this slow segregation, we may have no common institutions," says Pathan.

"We cannot live together. We have to live separately," says Harshad Joshi, a retired insurance officer in Modasa who lives in the 'border area'. "We are all friends but because of different religions and cultures, we have to live apart. I would be safe living in a Muslim area, but who would my wife talk to? Which temple would she go to? If I try to sell my house to a Muslim, my neighbour will stop me because the price of his house will go down."

In Ahmedabad too, there are very few buildings outside the ghetto where even well-off Muslims can find accommodation. Over the years, judges, police officers, lawyers and doctors have had to move to the ghetto in Juhapura, often unwillingly. "Hindus have a choice. We have no choice. No one will sell property to us. We have been pushed to a corner," said Sophia Khan, a women's activist.

Until 2002, Sophia had her office in Navrangpura, a middle-class Hindu area and her home in Shahpur, a mixed area. "My house was attacked but we were saved. After the violence, people in the office building became hostile and asked us to move out in two days. That is when I was forced to move both home and office to Juhap-

ura,” says Sophia. “Even earlier, I was always warned not to reveal my identity. My broker made me put the name of a Hindu trustee of my organisation on the lease agreement.”

Although Juhapura has a population of over three lakhs, it is still viewed as a ‘dangerous’, ‘illegal’ ‘mini-Pakistan’. Even though there are so many big buildings and several high-profile residents, the government has not provided even basic services, not even electricity. Two months ago, Juhapura was brought within the city limits. Until then, it was governed by a panchayat.

“My office is on the main road, but I can’t get a BSNL phone or a broadband connection. There’s no bank or public dispensary. No State transport bus passes through here because it’s considered ‘dangerous’. We can’t get a loan because it is demarcated a negative zone,” says Sophia. “When we moved to Juhapura, one of my Hindu staff members quit because her family would not allow her to travel here. Without reason, the prejudice keeps getting perpetuated.” There is not a single government school in the area. “People have no choice but to send their children to Muslim-run schools. If people are left to fend for themselves, they have no option but to go to these religious trusts,” she explains.

Economically too, Muslims have been sidelined. “My business has collapsed. It is only 10 per cent of what it once was,” says a builder. “After 2002, we are not sold land anywhere except in Muslim areas. The Disturbed Areas Act, a law framed to curb ghettoisation after riots, is now being misused to prevent Muslims from buying land outside the ghettos.

“Several professionals have already left the State, now businessmen are also trying to wind up and move. The hate culture that has pervaded leaves us with no choice. They want to get us out,” the builder said. “My grandchildren’s classmates tell them to go back to Pakistan.”

All over Gujarat you are constantly reminded that you are in Hindutva country. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad

has put up boards in every neighbourhood which reads: “Welcome to the Hindu Rashtra”. But not many are welcome.

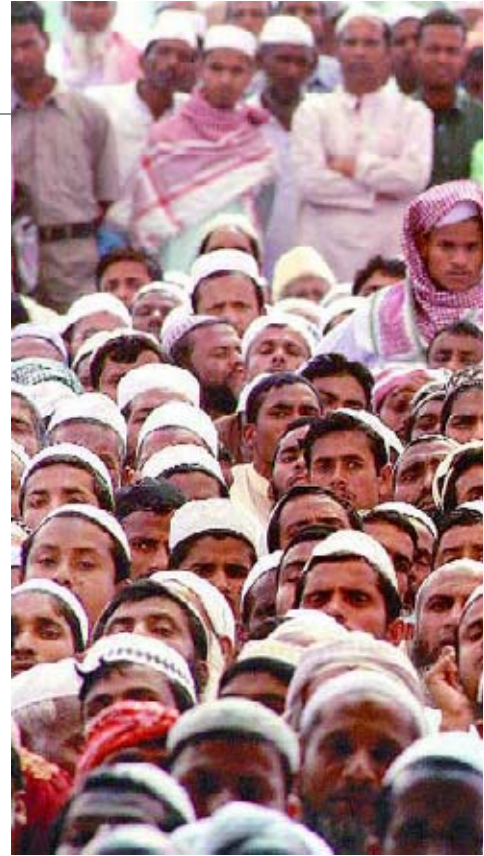
INSECURE

By Sushanta Talukdar in Guwahati

UNLIKE other States in India, the Muslim population in Assam is not homogeneous. The community is divided into different categories based on the history of migration and settlement: indigenous Assamese-speaking Muslims whose forefathers came as Mughal warriors and settled in different parts of the State, Indigenous Bengali-speaking Muslims from East Bengal who settled in Assam during pre-Partition days, Bengali-speaking Muslims who migrated from erstwhile East Pakistan in different streams, and Bengali-speaking illegal migrants from Bangladesh after its creation in 1971 who crossed over through the porous India-Bangladesh border.

The problems for Muslims in the State are rooted in the different historical backgrounds of their settlement and migration and are thus complex. Although Assamese-speaking Muslims can be distinguished culturally and linguistically from other Muslims, it is difficult, on the face of it to make out differences between the other groups.

It was not until the 1920s that the immigration of Bengali-speaking Muslims from Mymensingh district of erstwhile East Bengal and their settlement on Chars (a highly fertile sand isle formed by alluvial silt deposition) of the Brahmaputra was perceived as a threat to Assamese identity. Until that point Assamese leaders and local landlords had benefited from the cheap labour of these settlers. However, their apprehension grew when the Bengali-speaking Muslim population recorded a sharp growth during 1921-31 and 1931-41. Assamese leaders soon started voicing the opinion that unchecked migration might threaten the existence of the Assamese people. This resulted in communal violence in the old



undivided Goalpara district and other parts on the northern bank of the Brahmaputra in 1950, during which a large number of Muslim settlers fled for safety to erstwhile East Pakistan.

The leaders of the Bengali-speaking immigrant settlers, however, devised a new strategy: they reported Assamese as their mother tongue in the Census and they pursued their education in the Assamese medium. This pleased Assamese leaders because their community earned the majority status, but it could not remove the “foreigner” label from the immigrant settlers.

The issue of detection and deportation of foreigners, which dominates Assam’s minority politics, today has been part of the State’s politics since the early 1960s. At that time an aggressive campaign was launched by the then Assam Chief Minister Bimala Prasad Chaliha, who was heading a Congress government, to deport all those who had come to Assam since January 1, 1951. The stay of pre-1951 immigrant settlers from erstwhile East Pakistan was validated by the Nehru-Liaquat Pact of April 1950. The Chaliha government deported more than two lakh immigrant settlers to erstwhile East Pakistan under the Prevention of Infiltration from Pakistan (PIP)



RITU RAJ KONWAR

AT A SESSION of the Jamiat Ulema in Guwahati on April 3, 2005. Until the problem of illegal immigration is solved, Bengali-speaking Muslim settlers will remain unable to address their socio-economic deprivation.

scheme. It is alleged that immigrant settlers were picked up by the police irrespective of whether they were pre-1951 or post-1951 migrants, taken to the border and pushed across into East Pakistan. However, since the border was open and unmanned the majority of them returned to Assam.

Assam witnessed some of the worst communal violence in 1983 when over 1,800 men, women and children were massacred on a single night in Nellie in the present Morigaon district in an anti-foreigners agitation spearheaded by the All Assam Students' Union (AASU). Blood was shed despite the fact that many Muslims belonged to the category of pre-Partition settlers and had reported their mother tongue as Assamese during the Census.

The Nellie massacre and the indiscriminate deportation efforts of the Chaliha government provided both Bengali Hindu and Bengali Muslim minority leaders with the opportunity to campaign in favour of the controversial Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) (IMDT) Act, 1985. This Act was designed to halt the harassment of the Bengali communities

and ensure that proof of citizenship through a judicial process was first ascertained before deportation. For their part, AASU and the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) saw the IMDT Act as a stumbling block in the detection and deportation of post-1971 illegal Bangladeshi immigrants and disenfranchisement of immigrants who had entered Assam during 1961-1971 as incorporated in the Assam Accord.

Hindu-Bengali and Muslim migrants saw the Assam Accord signed by the Rajiv Gandhi government and the AASU and the All Asom Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) as anti-minority. In response they formed the United Minorities Front (UMF).

The new party took centre stage in the State's electoral politics; in 1985 it won 17 seats when the AGP rode to power. The emergence of the UMF gave a new dimension to minority politics as it was the strongest votary of the IMDT Act. In 1990, the Congress, however, managed to woo all 19 UMF legislators to its fold by voicing opposition to the AASU/AGP demand to repeal the Act. This stand of the Congress on the IMDT Act helped it to

regain Muslim support, which it retained until the Act was struck down by the Supreme Court.

However, in the wake of the Supreme Court order Muslim leaders turned the table on the Congress and accused the party of not doing enough to win the legal battle. This led to the emergence of the Assam United Democratic Front (AUDF), led by the president of the Assam State Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind, Badaruddin Ajmal, to champion the cause of the minority community. The AUDF wrested 10 Muslim-dominated Assembly seats from the Congress in the 2006 Assembly elections, but that did not stop the Congress from coming back to power for a second term with the support of Bodo legislators.

As the immigrant Muslim settlers continue to devise different strategies to secure their political rights, their socio-economic condition remains poor. For example, the Char areas of lower Assam, which have a large population of legal and illegal immigrants, are characterised by poverty and under-development. Nearly three lakh families out of around 4.35 lakh families residing Char live below the poverty line. The literacy rate in these areas is only 19.3 per cent against the Assamese average of 64 per cent. There are only 52 public health centres to serve a population of 25 lakhs. Soil erosion is a severe problem and has forced a large number of immigrant settlers to move to Guwahati or urban areas of the State in search of employment. Those immigrant settlers who remained have demanded land settlement, but the government is yet to undertake a survey of all the Char areas.

The absence of governance in the Char areas has provided fertile ground for various activities of Islamic fundamentalist groups. A recent conference of police chiefs of northeastern States raised the alarm bell over activities of *jehadi* groups and the export of Muslim fundamentalism and terrorism in Assam to other States of the region. Assam Director-General of Police D.N. Dutt asserted that the Bangla-

desh-based *jehadi* outfit Jamaat-ul Mujahideen had taken over the control of all Islamic fundamentalist groups active in Assam and other northeastern States. He went on to say that the outfit sent *jehadis* trained in Afghanistan to destabilise the region by striking at soft human targets and vital economic installations. Assam Inspector-General of Police (Special Branch) Khagen Sharma said that altogether 198 men linked with *jehadi* groups had been arrested in the State and 56 had surrendered to the police since 2001.

Lt Gen R.K. Chabra, General Officer Commander of 4 Corps of the Army, said that Pakistan's Inter Service Intelligence (ISI) and the Directorate-General of Field Intelligence (DGFI) of Bangladesh had " sleeper agents " in the migrant population of Assam. He said that many who took up instructions from the ISI were in the businesses of gun running, fake currency distribution, and drugs trafficking in the State.

Until the vexed problem of illegal migrants is solved, Assam's Bengali-speaking Muslim settlers will remain insecure and will not be able to address their socio-economic deprivation.

FORWARD, SLOWLY

By R.Krishnakumar in
Thiruvananthapuram

MUSLIMS of Kerala are an odd lot in unequal India. They are separated by geography, history, language and culture from Muslims in other parts of the country. Also, they share a common language but differ from other communities in Kerala in several respects, for example, in "food, dress, manners, mental outlook and philosophy of life", to quote a popular list.

But what makes them truly different from their brethren elsewhere in the country is their early rejection of traditional Muslim mistrust of and fears about secular education (and, later, communism) and the "dangers" it posed for the faith.

In all regions of what is now Ker-

ala, the south and central parts ruled earlier by the Maharajas of Travancore and Cochin and the north administered by the British as part of the Madras Presidency, government policies had identified "secular education on the Western pattern" as a unifying factor, especially with regard to the integration of 'minority' Muslims (a sizable section of the population) with other communities.

Muslims of Kerala are recorded to have lived in cultural harmony with Hindus in the region for the first eight centuries of their history. But early descriptions of the community at the turn of the 19th century are not in glorious terms but as 'backward', 'moribund', 'medieval', 'beaten', 'conservative' and 'defensive', to name a few.

By the latter part of the 19th century, most of these adjectives became unacceptable following targeted government policies and the slow realisation among newly educated community members about the impractical situation they would be in *vis-à-vis* other communities (significantly Hindus and Christians) if they continued to nurture their traditional opposition to higher 'secular' education.

Thus, even though elements opposing education other than rote learning of the Koran, education outside *madrassas* and education of girls remained dominant, and the literacy rate among Muslims remained a mere 5 per cent, there were 1,497 elementary schools for Muslims in British-ruled 'Malabar' by 1931, with a total of 104,000 students (a mere 4 per cent of them were girls), according to researchers. The opportunities for education of Muslims in Travancore and Cochin were much better and came early as a result of the enlightened policies of the rulers and the rumblings of a revolutionary social change already in evidence there by then.

By 1960, nearly three decades after newly educated Muslim leaders began to remark openly that "it was indifference to secular education that was responsible for Muslim inequality with other communities" and that it had



"blocked their progress, retarded the community economically, and created a public image and private mentality of backwardness", an estimated 47.3 per cent of Muslim children of school-going age in Kerala were attending schools along with those from all other communities. And, by 1972, the progressive environment in the State had found almost all eligible Muslim children being admitted in elementary schools.

Scholars have described this as the early "definite turn on a new road" for Muslims in Kerala, the widespread involvement in education producing a remarkable change, "its most important characteristic being the thirst for more", even though higher education, especially secular college education and education of girls of older age, continued to be a provocative red rag for a large section of community leaders.

In fact, a well-known study on the community by the Canadian Islamic scholar Roland E. Miller says it took nearly a decade after the first Muslim student from the Muslim heartland, Kozhikode district, received a bachelor's degree in 1939 for a group of progressive Muslims to establish a "Muslim college", which would be acceptable to (though not all) conservative leaders – with a mosque at the



FRAMESH KURUP

IN A CENTRAL SCHOOL in Tirur, Malappuram district. The slow but lasting embrace of secular education has transformed social life and leadership roles among Kerala Muslims.

centre of the campus and compulsory religious instruction for all Muslim students – even though its approach was proclaimed to be “cosmopolitan”, and aim was “all-round development of every student” through “liberal education” offering courses in Arabic, Islamic History and Urdu along with English, mathematics, science and commerce and with the faculty being drawn “from the Muslim community whenever possible”.

The Farook College in Kozhikode soon spawned throughout Kerala similar Muslim institutions for education and other progressive social and philanthropic organisations aimed at the social, cultural and educational advancement of Muslims. Its leaders goaded the community “to use their own strength”, “to learn from the example of other communities” “even while maintaining cordial relations with them” and “not to continue blaming their past for their present condition”. Most importantly, it launched a new tradition of challenge within the community to the forces that drew it backwards, compromised its progress for the sake of power, and hindered its development and integration with the

secular ethos of the State.

That was not all. Following their slow but lasting embrace of secular education that transformed social life, leadership roles and faith among Kerala Muslims, a cocktail of enticing forces began to beckon, as they had for other communities in Kerala earlier. Among these forces, importantly, were the opportunity that opened before them, following Partition, to participate forcefully in governance in a small State through their own political party and which gave them a sense of power over their destiny; the simultaneous promise that communism brought before them, “of relief from poverty, of social justice, equity, redistribution of land, jobs and higher salaries and living standards”; and later, the seemingly permanent salvation that migration to oil-rich West Asia offered to a lot of them from the pervasive problems of unemployment and insufficient income in modern Kerala.

Of these, the most significant result of early, targeted and secular mass education was the popular realisation among Muslims that the welfare of the community depended on the intelligent utilisation of opportunities for

sharing power with others, especially if they could use their vote bank clout as a committed weapon for community advancement. Coalition-ruled Kerala has seen the Muslim League as a ruling partner in many a government. Even though it brought a sense of power and much-needed attention to many of the community’s pressing daily needs, it also gradually led to disenchantment between the League and its usual alliance partner, the Congress, and opened the doors for rival Muslim organisations and the amazing spread of the communist ideology among the Muslim masses.

But as many researchers have pointed out, the solution to the economic disabilities of Muslims of Kerala, some of which they shared historically with their counterparts in North India, “could only be solved partially through politics”. Political power, for example, could help monitor employment policy (not such a novelty in a State where even erstwhile princely states classified Muslims as a “backward community” and introduced communal reservation for them along with others as early as the 1930s) or aid in targeting development activity to areas where a majority of Muslims lived (even unjustly at times at the expense of other regions).

But most of their problems were products of a certain religious inertia and their resultant slow movement from an agrarian, feudal context to a rapidly modernising one, where they found themselves being under-educated, inadequately skilled and ill-equipped for an increasingly competitive job market where the other major communities, Hindus and Christians, already had a lead and were ever moving forward. Moreover, the numerical growth of Muslims in Kerala had continued to be much higher than the growth rate of other communities, adding to their problem of finding education and employment for all.

It is in this context that their early acceptance of communism as a friendly, progressive force becomes the most important and, perhaps, integrating result of secular education among the

Muslims of Kerala. Communism appealed to a lot of educated Muslims, as it would brook no discrimination in terms of religion or caste, and especially after it demonstrated a visible commitment to the poor and the minorities (even while it opposed communal parties) by introducing revolutionary land reform and labour laws and welfare policies that offered relief to the poor and the unemployed, irrespective of caste or religion, and by organising successful campaigns for total literacy, decentralisation of State power and on issues of health, population, environment and sanitation.

The response to these State-wide programmes were the most encouraging in north Kerala, especially in Malappuram, which a communist-led State government had carved out in 1969 as a Muslim-majority district and a source of constant political and psychological satisfaction for Kerala's Muslims. Malappuram was one among the first totally literate districts and recently also became the first totally e-literate district in Kerala. And, throughout the State, as in Malappuram, Muslims are today less wary of the messages on family planning, raising the age of marriage for girls and on the need for utilising the services of health and family planning centres.

Interestingly, Muslims once again felt the need for faster educational progress of their community when the initial rush for jobs and money to the Gulf began to include only well-educated Christian and Hindu engineers, doctors, accountants and managers from Kerala. Later, of course, by the early 1970s when the West Asian oil boom required labourers too in large numbers, even if they were semi-skilled or unskilled, the community benefited and began to catch up, with Gulf remittances boosting family incomes and prospects, including educational opportunities.

No doubt the Gulf boom involved all communities and changed Kerala, launching it into the mode of a high-spending consumer State with low employment potential and fewer avenues for economic growth and welfare or

development programmes. As "Gulf mansions" mushroomed and land value went up, a strong middle class arose on the one hand and those who were left out fell further into despair and poverty. There emerged pockets of extreme poverty. At the time of the Gulf war alone did concern arise, especially in the Muslim community, whether the remittances that flowed in, in many cases irrespective of the educational attainments of a large section of job-holders, were indeed put to good use for sustained economic or educational benefit of the community.

Muslims have long enjoyed 12 per cent reservation in Kerala.

The answer, in many cases, was 'no', a worrying one in a State where it was obvious that governments (even those with sizable Muslim representation in it) could no longer be a large-scale job provider, and where, according to a recent study by the Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP), 15 per cent of the total population are 'those below the poverty line', 35 per cent are 'poor' and 41 per cent belong to the 'lower middle class' and only a thin upper crust of 10 per cent of people consisting of the 'immensely rich' and the 'upper middle class' have benefited from "the rising incomes" reported since the 1990s.

Certainly, Kerala's evolved political, social and human development context will not allow any sort of discrimination in terms of religion, as any Muslim leader would vouch for today. Such non-discrimination is evident in all walks of life in the State, including in opportunities available for education and government jobs (where Muslims have long enjoyed 12 per cent reservation as one of the eight major backward class communities).

Yet the Rajinder Sachar Committee members who visited the State before finalising their report expressed surprise that a commission (appointed by a communist-led government in 2000) to "study the adequacy or otherwise of representation of the Backward Classes" in public services had found that Muslims (who make up 24.70 per cent of the State's total population) have got only 10.54 per cent representation in the State departments, the judiciary, public sector enterprises and universities and other autonomous institutions.

The three-member K.K. Narendran Commission found that Muslim representation in public services was in almost all cases below the reservation quota, the difference being between 0.3 per cent and about 6 per cent in the four categories. However, it makes a significant observation about Muslims, after pointing out that Ezhavas, the most socially and educationally advanced among the Backward Classes in the State, have, in contrast, universally got better representation, by securing posts in the merit quota too over and above the reservation quota. The commission said the main reason why Muslims as well as other Backward Class communities have not fared well is "nothing but educational backwardness" and that they can emulate the example of Ezhavas "if they pay more attention to the education of their children".

Data from the KSSP study published in September 2006 are revealing in this context: of the total Muslim youth in the 18 to 25 age group in Kerala, a mere 8.1 per cent are in college (Hindus: 18.7 per cent; Christians: 20.5 per cent), 6.2 per cent alone are engaged in other studies (Hindus: 9.9; Christians 14.9); 30.5 per cent are employed (Hindus: 32.3; Christians 32.7) and 55.2 per cent are unemployed (Hindus: 39.1 per cent; Christians 31.9 per cent).

Muslims have clicked 'Pause' on education only to their disadvantage even in a progressive society that has nurtured their interests throughout history. □

Bias and the police

Will more Muslims in India's police forces help combat communal violence?

BY PRAVEEN SWAMI IN NEW DELHI

Representative policing is a seductive slogan, offering a one-pill solution to an infinitely complex and **apparently incurable malaise**. At best, however, it is a placebo – not a prescription for building professional police forces.

“SEGREGATED lives,” wrote the scholar Ramesh Thakur in 2002, “lead to ghastly violence.”

Much of the public debate on the Justice Rajendra Sachar's enquiry into the conditions of Muslims in India has so far focussed on the degrading economic backwardness of India's largest religious minority and the systematic denial of opportunity to its members. Tucked away among its findings is a comprehensive examination of communal violence: the terrorism used by Hindu fundamentalists to create the apartheid structures that perpetuate these inequalities.

Data on Muslim representation in India's police forces, along with those of members of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, have long been in the public domain. Published each year by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) in its authoritative annual report *Crime in India*, the figures make for depressing reading.

In all but one State of India, including Muslim-majority Jammu and Kashmir, Muslims are under-represented in the police. And in all but one State for which data have so far become available, they constitute a larger-than-

proportional share of prisoners.

The Sachar Committee's findings have added weight to what campaigners have long said: that the under-representation of Muslims in police forces across the country has contributed to institutional communalism and a persistent failure to defend the community's basic human rights.

Based on evidence that emerged from a cluster of large-scale communal riots in the late 1970s and early 1980s, many have argued that police biases are central to the problem. More representative force structures, the argument goes, are necessary to ensure that the police defend all communities during riots rather than act as the self-appointed sword arm of sectarian interests.

Case closed? In fact, not quite.

REPRESENTATION AND RIOTS


Dispassionate analysis of the data does not, in fact, demonstrate a correlation between the under-representation of Muslims in police forces and the scale or intensity of communal violence.

Consider, for example, the case of Tamil Nadu. In

2004, the NCRB reported that just 99 of the Tamil Nadu Police's 88,524 personnel were Muslims – the lowest number of any major State. Muslims, who make up 5.56 per cent of Tamil Nadu's population, are clearly under-represented in its police force. Yet, bar the 1997 Coimbatore riots that claimed 18 lives – a modest figure by India's horrific standards – Tamil Nadu has seen no major anti-Muslim violence.

Moreover, while Muslims are significantly over-represented in the Tamil Nadu prison population, the State's record is better than several States which have better representation for the community among their police forces, such as Maharash-

Muslims and the police (in per cent)



	Muslims in total population	Muslims in police force
Andhra Pradesh	9.17	13.25
Assam	30.92	10.55
Bihar	16.53	5.94
Gujarat	9.06	5.94
Jammu & Kashmir	66.97	56.36
Karnataka	12.23	6.71
Kerala	24.70	12.96
Maharashtra	10.60	4.71
Tamil Nadu	5.56	0.11
Tripura	7.95	2.01
Uttar Pradesh	18.50	4.24
West Bengal	25.25	7.32
Delhi	11.72	2.26

Source: National Crime Records Bureau, 2004
Census 2001

tra, Delhi and Gujarat. Clearly, the relatively low presence of Muslims in the Tamil Nadu Police has not, in itself, made it less able to defend Muslims against potential perpetrators of communal violence, or more inclined to punish members of the community for real or imagined crimes.

Interestingly, two of the States with the best record of containing communal violence in the post-Independence period – West Bengal and Kerala – have a poor record on ensuring adequate representation of Mus-

and Kerala than in Gujarat and Maharashtra. This hammers home the fact that more representative police forces are not necessarily less partisan.

By way of contrast, Andhra Pradesh has succeeded in ensuring more-than-adequate representation for Muslims in the police, but not in containing communal violence or bias. Of the Andhra Pradesh Police's 77,850 personnel, 10,312 are Muslims, making it the only State where the community has a greater representation in service than the population as a whole.

only a little over 10 per cent of its police force is drawn from the community. At first glance, this would seem to validate the representation-riots connection, since Assam has witnessed horrific communal violence and Hindu-Muslim antagonisms are at the core of the State's political life. But the data do not bear out the contention that the non-representative Assam Police acts in a partisan manner. Muslims actually form a slightly smaller share of the State's prison population than the general population, in stark contrast to the record in progressive States such as Kerala.

What lessons ought to be drawn from these data? Perhaps the most important one is that some of the discourse on the role of the police in communal violence suffers from the same biases it sets out to critique. There is no evidence to suggest that police forces necessarily advocate the interests of their co-religionists. The largely Sikh Punjab Police ferociously put down Khalistan terrorist groups in Punjab and, contrary to popular myth, the Muslim-majority Jammu and Kashmir Police has long been at the cutting-edge of counter-terrorist operations targeting Pakistan-backed Islamist groups. Similarly, Hindu-majority police forces have often demonstrated their skill at preventing or rapidly terminating communal violence, witness the case of Kerala or West Bengal.



THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY

RAPID ACTION FORCE deployed in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, during the communal clashes in December 1997. Muslims have very low representation in the Tamil Nadu Police, but the State is comparatively free from violence against that community.

lims in the police. While a little over a quarter of the population of West Bengal is Muslim, the third highest figure after Jammu and Kashmir and Assam, just over 7 per cent of its police force is drawn from the Muslim community. Kerala, where almost 13 per cent of the police force is Muslim, does somewhat better – but this figure still falls well short of proportional representation. Indeed, the percentage-point gap between Muslim representation in the police force and among the general population is worse in West Bengal

Yet, the city of Hyderabad has seen some of the worst and most sustained urban communal violence in India, and the police in Andhra Pradesh have often faced allegations of bias. Despite the high representation of Muslims in the Andhra Pradesh Police, Muslim political organisations have sometimes charged the force with using concern over terrorism as a means to harass the community as a whole.

Similar insights can be drawn from the case of Assam. While almost a third of the State's population is Muslim,

AGAINST THE GRAIN

If nothing else, the questions thrown up by these data point to a black hole in the research on communal violence: our knowledge of precisely how police forces operate at times of communal crisis and the decision-making processes that abet or terminate riots and pogroms. Much of the debate has rested on the facile assumption that attracting more Muslims into the police would help create a force more resistant to biases of the kind that are thought to underpin the persistence and scale of communal violence.

Underpinning these ideas is the durable notion that communal biases



JAMMU AND KASHMIR Police personnel celebrate the birth anniversary of the Prophet Muhammad in Srinagar on April 22, 2005. The force is predominantly Muslim but is at the cutting edge in operations targeting Pakistan-backed Islamist groups.

determine the character of police responses to riots. Writing in 1999, Vibhuti Narain Rai, a police officer, attributed biased policing to “the same predetermined beliefs and misconceptions that influence the mind of an average Hindu”. “Not unlike his average co-religionist, an average Hindu policeman too believes that Muslims by nature are generally cruel and violent,” Rai argued.

Rai found the police “held the view that apart from being cruel and violent, Muslims were untrustworthy, anti-national, easily influenced by a fanatical leadership, and capable of rioting at the slightest provocation. Further, most policemen believed that riots are initiated by the Muslims. Even when confronted with evidence that it was not in the interest of Muslims to start a riot, the arguments rarely changed.”

When they first appeared in the 1990s, Rai’s arguments appeared to help explain why police forces had failed to contain decades of anti-Muslim violence. According to material distributed to students of the premier Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration, which trains Indian Administrative Services Officers, 1,598 Muslims were killed in communal violence between 1968 and 1980, against 530 Hindus. Recent scholarly work – notably Mumbai-based activist and researcher Asghar Ali Engineer’s meticulous monitoring of riots – has shown that the same patterns persisted until at least 2005.

However, post-riot police action was always overwhelmingly directed against Muslims. Judicial investigations of riots as diverse as those of 1982 in Meerut, 1978 in Aligarh or 1970 in Bhiwandi showed systematic anti-Muslim biases in everything from the use of lethal force, patterns of arrests and the treatment of prisoners.

As the Lal Bahadur Shastri Academy’s notes point out, the murder of Hindus provokes considerably more police interest than the killings of Muslims. During 1980, 89 Hindus and 275 Muslims died in communal violence. The police arrested 5,457

TAUSEEF MUSTAFA/AFP



OM CHAUHAN/AP

ARMED POLICE IN curfew-bound Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh. It has been observed that after communal incidents the police arrest a disproportionately large number of Muslims.

Hindus and 5,743 Muslims for their alleged role in the rioting. “This shows,” the notes pithily point out, “that for each Hindu who was killed in the riots, 5743/89 = 64 Muslims were arrested, whereas for each Muslim casualty [sic; fatality] 5457/275 = 20 Hindus were arrested.”

To attribute these actions only to police bias, though, fails to explain why some States have done so much better than others in containing communal violence. There is, after all, no *a priori* reason to believe that an “average Hindu” constable in Delhi is less hostage to communal biases than his “average Hindu” counterparts in Ahmedabad or Mumbai – and yet, India’s capital has seen no anti-Muslim pogrom of significance since 1947.

Similarly, there is no evidence that the police forces of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh have been subject to ideological transformation since the rise of Laloo Prasad Yadav or Mulayam Singh Yadav. Although both States have seen episodic communal violence in recent years, the police have succeeded in ensuring that the clashes did not escalate into the generalised pogroms that these States witnessed regularly two decades ago.

Political action, not police attitudes, then, could prove the key to explaining what determines police responses to communal violence – and to policy interventions that will help to ensure that the coercive resources of the State are used without bias.

Ashutosh Varshney, Professor of Political Science and Director of the Centre for South Asian Studies, University of Michigan, is the author of several books on ethnic conflict, including *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India*. He has demonstrated that communal riots are not the outcome of free-floating, generalised Hindu-Muslim antagonism; they are, in fact, highly localised responses to specific political and economic circumstances. Using data for riots from 1950 to 1995, Varshney showed that the violence was concentrated in four States, and, moreover, that 96 per cent of fatalities took place in urban areas.

Violence of this kind is linked inextricably to political power and administrative authority – not just the composition of police forces. Despite the large representation of Sikhs in the Delhi Police, for example, there is no evidence to show that their presence

tempered the force’s criminal conduct in any way during the pogrom of 1984. On the contrary, even during the Gujarat pogrom of 2002, the police in the Bhuj area were able to ensure that communal violence was significantly contained.

Does this mean that Muslim representation in the police is an irrelevant issue? Far from it. Fuller representation for Muslims in State police forces is one among several instruments needed to build public confidence in the institution and foster dialogue and cooperation between communities and the State’s coercive apparatus.

It is, however, important to be aware of the limitations of the politics of representation. Self-conscious efforts to recruit more members of minority ethnic groups or races into police forces in the United Kingdom and the United States have had mixed results; notably, the eradication of institutional racism has not been an inevitable outcome.

Representative policing is a seductive slogan, offering a one-pill solution to an infinitely complex and apparently incurable malaise. At best, however, it is a placebo – not a prescription for building professional police forces. □