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Dilemma of the Minority Communities in India – A Vicious Circle of Exclusion

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Abstract

The strategy of the twelfth Five Year Plan seeks to achieve inclusive and sustainable growth in India. In order to operationalize the concept of inclusive growth it is necessary to have information relating to various vulnerable groups which have not benefitted from the growth of the economy. Among those groups that have missed the opportunities of sharing the benefits of growth, minorities are a prominent group. The study explains the concept of exclusion of minorities and gives the statistical data on the profile of minority in India. The study also examines the problems faced by minorities and concludes. The paper titled “Dilemma of the Minority Communities in India – A Vicious Circle of Exclusion” is based on the secondary data. The needed secondary data could be accessed from the official documents like Census of India. The main objective of the study is to explore the exclusion and problems faced by Minority communities in India. Though there is paucity of literature and data about these communities, it is an attempt to gather the data from various sources and put together in a systematic fashion and analyzed.

Keywords: Minorities, Exclusion

Introduction

The strategy of the twelfth FYP seeks to achieve inclusive and sustainable growth in India. The states governments have also formulated their own strategies for implementing programmes and policies aligning with the national goal. In order to operationalize the concept of inclusive growth it is necessary to have information relating to various vulnerable groups which have not benefitted from the growth of the economy. Among those groups that have missed the opportunities of sharing the benefits of growth, minorities are a prominent group. The concept of a minority may be associated with an economic, social or political disadvantage that a group may feel or actually face. In a narrow sense, any group that does not represent a majority population may consider itself a minority. In the context of India, anyone who is not a Hindu (that is, over 80 per cent of the population) may be considered a minority. The study explains the concept of exclusion of minorities and gives the statistical data on the profile of minority in India. The study also examines the problems faced by minorities and concludes. The study is based on the secondary data. The needed secondary data could be accessed from the official documents like Socio-economic Caste census and Census of India. The main objective of the investigation is to explore the exclusion and problems faced by Minority communities in India. Though there is paucity of literature and data about these communities, it is an attempt to gather the data from various sources and put together in a systematic fashion and analyzed.

Review of literature

Several studies in academics and official committees have brought out this picture (S. Seshiah, 1980, G. Thimmaiah, 1983, Abdul Aziz, 1984 & 1989, Goodwala Commission, 1985, Rahman Khan committee, 1995) to review the socio-economic conditions of the minorities. The main points of concern that emerge as to the plights of minorities relates to their concentration in coastal areas where civic amenities are not available, discrimination in providing benefits of government programs and inadequate access by minorities to employment in government sector and bank credit.

There is a poor space shared by minorities in politics (Honurali, 2009) as there is poor representation in Legislature and Parliament that has affected their interests. The state minority commissions have recorded complaints of discrimination regarding discrimination of minorities in government benefits and government

jobs. All the more shocking is that even private sector is practicing discrimination against Dalits and Muslims and Christians for providing employment (Thorat et al., 2009).

From the existing survey available literature it appears that the minorities are economically a deprived class having low per capita income and a higher incidence of poverty. They are largely concentrated in urban areas, but living a segregated life in slums and coastal areas with no civic amenities, educationally backward having low literacy rates and low educational levels, deprived of health and nutrition, subject to communal discrimination and violence, politically weak having low representation in Legislature and Parliament. In other words, minorities are an excluded lot – excluded from income generating resources, educational opportunities and political space.

The State in the past have made attempts to improve the socio-economic conditions of the citizens in general by formulating a series of development programs for poverty alleviation and education development targeted to the poor and down trodden and minorities have a sizeable number of poor among them, they have also an opportunity to benefit from these programs in general. Some programs also specially targeted to reach benefits to the minorities have been launched such as 15 point program (Sachar Committee, 2006), Establishment of Urdu and Tamil medium schools in Muslim and SC converted Christian children dominated areas, 4 percent reservation of seats in higher educational institutions and jobs in government to Muslims under the OBC II B category, capital assistance provided by the government to encourage minority community traders and businessmen, permission to minorities to start schools, colleges and professional educational institutions such as ITI, engineering, pharmacy, teaching training and medical colleges, provision of scholarships to school going children of minorities to incentivize them to enrol and continue education, modernization of traditional madrasa education system by introducing modern education and remedial coaching.

It is true that the State is trying to reach benefits to the commoners and deprived sections among minorities. However, the impact of such interventions does not appear to be effective. Incidence of poverty continues to be high among Muslims and among rural Christians, Jains and Buddhists. The so-called Dalit Muslims and

Christians, the single parent women headed families, the slum dwellers, the landless workers and the disabled are more vulnerable sections that need assistance.

Literacy rate continues to be low among minorities; their school enrolment rate is low and dropout rate high among Muslim and other minority group children especially among the female children. Those of the Muslim children who have opted for Madrasa stream of education are deprived of modern education and hence miss the opportunity of getting employment in the organized sector including government service. With the adoption of the new economic policy (LPG), it is feared that minorities have been further excluded.

Research issues

Based on the above background, we need to identify a few sets of issues and examine them in the light of following research questions. What has been the pattern of the growth of minority population? Do their regional, social, gender disparities need special attention by the policy maker? What is their asset base and income level related to other groups in the State? How far the levels of their income and expenditure have changed vis-à-vis other sections of the society? What is their relative share in public and private employment? There has been a focus in the development planning towards enhancement of human well-being and reduction in inequality along with growth of per capital income. Human well-being would encompass individual attainments in the areas of education, health and amenities like electricity, water supply, sanitation, housing etc. What has been the level of literacy, education and skill, health and how far they have improved their situation in this respect over the years? To what extent, reservation provided to the minorities has reached the minority communities? How far they have been able to be politically empowered through the system of Panchayat Raj Institutions and decentralized governance?

Religion-wise Demographic Profile of minorities

Christians are the only community (among major religions) in India that has more women members than men. The ratio of men to women actually improved from 1,009 females for 1,000 males in 2001, to 1,023:1,000 in 2011. However, this 1.4 percent increase of females per male is not even the biggest one over the past decade. The Muslim community saw a 1.5 percent increase in the ratio of females to males (from 936:1,000 in 2001 to

951:1,000 in 2011), and the overall Indian average was a 1% improvement in sex ratio. Meanwhile, the Hindu community saw the lowest increase (from 931:1,000 to 939:1,000) at only 0.8 percent.

The total 72.89 crore Indians have been listed as non-workers — 60.20% of the total population of 121.08 crore. Non-workers are defined as those who do not participate in any economic activity — paid or unpaid, household duties, or cultivation. Following Muslims in the list of communities with the largest share of non-workers are Jains. There are 0.29 crore nonworking Jains, who make up 64.47% of the total Jain population. After them are Sikhs (63.76%), Hindus (58.95%), Christians (58.09%), Buddhists (56.85%) and others (51.50%).

Muslims have the highest percentage of illiterates at 42.7 per cent, while Jains, at 86.4 per cent, have the highest percentage of literates, according to Census 2011 data on education level by religious community. According to the data, the percentage of illiterates is 36.4 for Hindus, 32.5 for Sikhs, 28.2 for Buddhists and 25.6 for Christians. The overall percentage of illiterates is 36.9 for all communities. The Christian community has 74.3 per cent literacy, followed by Buddhists (71.8 per cent), Sikhs (67.5 per cent), Hindus (63.6 per cent) and Muslims (57.3 per cent). For religious communities as a whole, only 5.63 per cent have attained education levels of graduation and above. Of people who have studied up to graduation or above, 61.6 per cent are men and 38.4 per cent women.

In 7-16 years age group for all religious communities as a whole, 11.7 per cent are illiterate, 1.46 per cent are literate without education, 36.67 per cent are educated below primary, 28.62 per cent have studied primary level; 15.56 per cent till middle school, and 5.69 per cent till matriculation. In the 17-18 age groups for all religious communities, 11.73 per cent are illiterate, 2.62 per cent are literate without education, and 4.62 per cent are educated till below primary, 14.35 per cent till primary, 18.59 per cent till middle school, 31.97 per cent till matriculation and 14.99 per cent till higher secondary level.

In the 19-24 age group for all religious communities, 16.25 per cent are illiterate, 4.20 per cent are literate without education, 5.73 per cent are educated till below primary, 14.93 per cent till primary, 19.66 per cent till middle, 11.58 till matriculation, 16.84 per cent till higher secondary, 0.20 per cent have a nontechnical diploma, 1.56 per cent have a technical diploma, and 10.91 per cent are graduates and above. Among Jains,

25.65 per cent are graduates or have studied further. Of them, 44.8 per cent are women. The corresponding figure is 8.84 per cent for Christians (49.8 per cent women), 6.39 per cent for Sikhs (49.9 per cent women), 6.17 per cent for Buddhists (38.15 per cent women), 5.98 for Hindus (37.5 per cent women) and 2.75 per cent for Muslims, of whom 36.65 per cent are women.

Problems of Minorities

Minorities among themselves have social divisions. Muslims are divided into Sunnis and Shias. The former are found all over India and latter are found in Bangalore, Mysore and Bijapur. Among the Muslims there are two social groups, The educated elite groups and the group which are engaged in low caste occupations who may be described as Dalit Muslims. Similarly Christians have two groups one being the elite Christians who are also incidentally rich. But the so-called Dalit Christians whose members are large are converted Christians from low Hindu castes are concentrated in the southern belt of Karnataka bordering Tamilnadu and Andhra Pradesh. Among Jains also there are two groups Swetambar and Digambar Jains. Since the Parsis have their origin from Persia and since Buddhists are entirely converts from Hindu-Dalit castes, fortunately they do not appear to have any divisions among them.

The minority groups face two sets of problems, one is common to all of them and the other is specific to a particular minority. The common problems are high incidence of poverty, unemployment, discrimination in the society and in Government offices where they seek government benefits; another common problem is low level of and inadequate access to education, health, housing and municipal services.

Coming to the specific problem, Muslims are targeted with tag of terrorism and earn epithet of *deshadrohi*. Their *Dargah* flag is similar to Pakistan flag and their mother tongue is Urdu, their food habits, dress worn by men and women cause them to be socially excluded. The social policing by Hindu right wing outfits in the coastal Karnataka not to allow interacting with Hindu girls is another example of social exclusion. Their separate residential areas consequent to social exclusion are easily identifiable and are subject to discrimination by authorities in matter of providing municipal amenities.

The Christian communities too face similar problems. Dalit Christians are excluded not only by other communities but also by the elite Christians. They live in separate areas which are nothing short of ghettos where municipal amenities are sparsely available. More recently there have been attacks on priests on suspicion that they are converting Hindus into Christians; there have been attacks on churches particularly in south Canara as reported in Newspapers. The outwardly appearance of Sikh males betrays their identity and some kind of prejudice is created in the mind of Hindu community. Sikhs were attacked in person and in their Gurudwaras. Buddhists and Jains are offshoot of Hinduism, they exhibit similar features of rituals. But they constitute separate religious groups. They are in a sense socially excluded because they are primarily members of erstwhile Dalits. Obviously Hindu community treats them as Dalits even today notwithstanding the social and cultural change.

Some minority communities, especially Muslims and Christians, due to their specific socio-cultural background, their food habits differ from rest of the citizens of the country, the reference should be made to the beef eating habit of the two communities. Some Muslims are engaged in cow slaughter and sale of beef. Since the member of the majority community respect and worship cow, they look down upon them as criminal and undesirable persons. As a matter of fact in some states cow slaughter is totally prohibited as in Maharashtra. In Karnataka it is regulated. Since beef is a source of high protein and also price-wise low compared to mutton this is a convenient way of ensuring portentous food to poor people who cannot afford mutton. Since some members of Muslim community is engaged in the business of animal slaughter and sale of beef, any move towards banning cow-slaughter and sale of beef would throw these persons out of business.

Conclusion

The study was an attempt to explain the concept of exclusion of minorities and to provide statistical data on the profile of minorities in India. The study also examined the problems faced by minorities. Based on the study, there is a need to extract minorities from vicious circle of exclusion and to mainstream them into inclusive growth path. As a follow up, the state is expected to play a proactive role in this direction by coming out with a series of programs to resolve their problems such as high incidence of poverty, low quality of life,

lower educational attainment, low political participation and attacks on life and property. While retaining their identities, the minorities having been put on the general developmental trajectory, their members would now tend to live with and by reasons of which interact with members of majority community in their day-to-day business of life.

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