



Public Perceptions and Perspectives

1. The Context

The Committee went through an interactive process of compiling information on various dimensions of its mandate. Visits were made to all major states and meetings with different stakeholders were organized. Consultations were also held with invited people on different issues. In addition, people were encouraged to send representations requested through newspaper advertisements in different languages and other communication channels. The response was overwhelming.¹ Put together, the interactions and the representations provide very rich qualitative insights on the perceptions of people regarding the problems faced by Muslims in India. Given the heterogeneity within the Community, it was expected that different segments of the Community would face different problems and their perceptions about how these problems could be resolved would also be different. The Committee was nonetheless struck by the variety of views expressed though there was consensus on a number of them.

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The Committee is aware that not all perceptions are correct but they are also not built in a vacuum. An understanding of the context in which perceptions are formed and perspectives built is essential to analyse them. While it is difficult to venture into this terrain, the Committee felt that sharing these perceptions and perspectives would be useful as they provide an insight into what people think

1. Apart from receiving a large number of representations, the Committee interacted with several people during its visit to 13 states across the country. The states visited were: Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Jammu & Kashmir, Assam, West Bengal, Delhi, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Bihar and Maharashtra. During the visits the Committee met elected & other representatives from districts, youth, women, people from the business community, NGO representatives, religious organizations, activists and academics, as well as, the Chief Ministers and their colleagues, politicians of different affiliations, senior bureaucrats & police officials and chairpersons and members of Boards and Corporations dealing with programmes for minorities/Muslims. In some states the Committee also had a chance to visit a few localities with a considerable Muslim presence. The Committee also benefited from its interactions with select Non-Governmental and multilateral organizations about the Muslim community on issues of education, identity, gender and development. While such interactions and representations may not necessarily be 'representative' of the public opinion in the technical sense, the Committee is reasonably satisfied with the wide cross-section of views that have been received.



about issues relating to Muslims. This chapter is an effort to summarize the perceptions and perspectives of people *as they were reported to us without taking a view on them*. In the subsequent chapters, we have taken up some of these issues for a more elaborate analysis. Although our analysis does not cover all the issues listed here it is also not restricted to them. The views of the people do provide a background to our analysis and enhance the vision of our report.

It needs to be emphasized that the perceptions and perspectives discussed here co-exist with provisions in the Indian Constitution that provide Indian Muslims their due right as citizens of India. Muslims have as equal an opportunity as is available to other Indian citizens with regard to leading a life of dignity and equality and observance of their religious practices (See Box 2.1).

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Box 2.1 The Constitution of India: Equal Opportunity and Rights for All Citizens — Major Provisions

Article 14:	Ensures equality before the law and equal protection by the law
Article 15:	Prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex and place of birth.
Article 21:	No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except through the procedure established by law.
Article 25:	Ensures freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practice and propagate religion.
Article 26:	Ensures right to manage religious institutions, religious affairs, subject to public order, morality and health.
Article 29:	Protects minorities' right to conserve their language, script or culture.
Article 30:	Provides for the protection of the interests of minorities by giving them a right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice. The State is directed not to discriminate against minorities' institutions in granting aid.
Article 350A:	Directs the State to provide facilities for instruction in the mother tongue at the primary stage of education.

Besides the Constitutional provisions, there are number of other directives that safeguard the religious and cultural practices of Muslims. Freedom to practice their faith on a daily basis and to celebrate their religious festivals are some of the facilities Muslims enjoy along with their counterparts of other religions.

Interestingly, despite the overwhelming participation of people in meetings and through representations, there was much trepidation and skepticism regarding the setting up of this Committee. While many welcomed and appreciated this initiative there were others who were skeptical and saw it as another political ploy. There was a sense of despair and suspicion as well. “Tired of presenting memorandums”, many “wanted results”. The “non-implementation” of recommendations of several earlier Commissions and Committees has made the Muslim community wary of any new initiative. While not everybody has lost hope, many feel that any change in



the attitude of the State requires “commitment and a change in the mindset” observed some. Another common refrain was that the Muslim situation should be looked upon not as a problem of a minority, but as a national concern. It is in this broad context that the rest of this chapter should be viewed.

It was noted in the last chapter that the problems faced by a minority broadly relate to issues of identity, security and equity. The summary presented in this chapter is also organized around these issues, although the rest of the report largely focuses on equity. The discussion brings out very sharply that identity, security and equity related issues overlap and feed into each other in myriad ways. The rest of the chapter is divided into four sections. A section each is devoted to identity, security and equity related concerns. The focus is on capturing the range of feelings and issues that were flagged without necessarily taking into account the frequency with which they were raised in our interactions. The final section provides some concluding observations.

Appendix Table 2.1 provides a frequency distribution of issues raised in the representations received by the Committee. Most representations dealt with equity and security related issues.² Interestingly, the topic of education was raised most frequently in the representations, followed by reservation, employment and security related issues. While the frequency of occurrence does not necessarily provide appropriate estimates of the relative importance given to an issue, it certainly reflects that education is one of the most serious concerns for the Muslim community in India. In what follows, an effort is made to summarize the content of the representations as well as other interactions that the Committee had during its tenure.

2. Identity Related Concerns

Apparently, the social, cultural and public interactive spaces in India can be very daunting for the Indian Muslims. The general sense of unease among Muslims can be seen on a number of fronts — in the relationships that exist between the Muslims and other Socio- Religious Communities (SRCs), as well as, in the variations in understanding and interpreting them. One aspect of this understanding relates to patriotism. They carry a double burden of being labeled as “anti-national” and as being “appeased” at the same time. While Muslims need to prove on a daily basis that they are not “anti-national” and “terrorists”, it is not recognized that the alleged “appeasement” has not resulted in the desired level of socio-economic development of the Community. In general, Muslims complained that they are constantly looked upon with a great degree of suspicion not only by certain sections of society but also by public institutions and governance structures. This has a depressing effect on their psyche. Many also felt that the

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2. The representations were first classified according to the category of concerns raised by them. Often within each category several issues were raised and for each broad issue, sub-issues were identified. Our summarization and classification has taken account of all this. For example, on the subject of education a representation refers to non-availability of schools in the vicinity as well as the problem of Urdu teaching and specific problems of girls' education. In such a situation, the representation was seen as raising three issues with respect to education. (See notes to Appendix Table 2.1).



Markers of Muslim Identity while adding to the distinctiveness of Indian Muslims have been a cause of concern for them in the public realm

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media tends to perpetuate this stereotypical image of the Muslims.

2.1 Identity — Visibility in Public Spaces

One of the major issues around the question of identity for Indian Muslims is about being identified as 'a Muslim' in public spaces. Being identified as a Muslim is considered to be problematic for many. Markers of Muslim Identity — the *burqa*, the *purdah*, the beard and the *topi* — while adding to the distinctiveness of Indian Muslims have been a cause of concern for them in the public realm. These markers have very often been a target for ridiculing the community as well as of looking upon them with suspicion. Muslim men donning a beard and a *topi* are often picked up for interrogation from public spaces like parks, railway stations and markets. Some women who interacted with the Committee informed how in the corporate offices *hijab* wearing Muslim women were finding it increasingly difficult to find jobs. Muslim women in *burqa* complain of impolite treatment in the market, in hospitals, in schools, in accessing public facilities such as public transport and so on.

2.2 Identity — Housing and Education

Muslim identity affects everyday living in a variety of ways that ranges from being unable to rent/buy a house to accessing good schools for their children. Buying or renting property in localities of one's choice is becoming increasingly difficult for Muslims. Apart from the reluctance of owners to rent/sell property to Muslims, several housing societies in "non-Muslim" localities 'dissuade' Muslims from locating there.

Muslim identity also comes in the way of admitting their children to good educational institutions.³ This has given rise to a number of Muslim denominational schools, which according to some, are the only source of good education for Muslims today. A large majority of Muslims would apparently prefer to send their children to 'regular mainstream' schools. It was argued that while setting up of denominational institutions is a right of minorities under the Constitution, it was not meant to become their only option.

2.3 Identity and Gender

Many suggested that gender issues in the Community are also given a Muslim slant. To the exclusion of all other aspects of a Muslim woman's life (income, jobs, education, security and even caloric intake), the rules of marriage, right to divorce and maintenance have become the benchmarks of a gender-just existence. The obsessive focus on select cases of Muslim women passionately discussed in the media results in identifying the Muslim religion as the sole locus of gender-injustice in the Community. Consequently, the civil society and the State locate Muslim women's deprivation not in terms of the 'objective' reality of societal

3. Muslim parents often face overt discrimination from school authorities when trying to get admission or availing of scholarship schemes for their children. Small acts such as lack of civility in behavior, rude questioning, and an atmosphere which treats them and their children as 'second class' citizens - all these combine to create a powerful deterrent, distancing the Muslim community from the school system. Parents are less likely to send girls (than boys) into such a hostile environment.



discrimination and faulty development policies, but in the religious-community space. This allows the State to shift the blame to the Community and to absolve itself of neglect.

Women in general are the torchbearers of community identity. So, when community identity is seen to be under siege, it naturally affects women in dramatic ways. Women, sometimes of their own volition, sometimes because of community pressure, adopt visible markers of community identity on their person and in their behaviour. Their lives, morality, and movement in public spaces are under constant scrutiny and control. A gender-based fear of the 'public', experienced to some degree by all women, is magnified manifold in the case of Muslim women. The lines between 'safe' and 'unsafe spaces' become rigid. The community and its women withdraw into the safety of familiar orthodoxies, reluctant to participate in the project of modernity, which threatens to blur community boundaries. It was said that for large number of Muslim women in India today, the only 'safe' space (both in terms of physical protection and in terms of protection of identity) is within the boundaries of home and community. Everything beyond the walls of the ghetto is seen as unsafe and hostile — markets, roads, lanes and public transport, schools and hospitals, police stations and government offices. Interestingly though, in many meetings women participants emphasized that given appropriate opportunities to work and get educated, they would 'manage' all these issues.

The 'identity crisis' combined with the apparent lack of commitment on the part of the Government often results in a perverse response even to well intended programmes. The fear of the Community with respect to accessing health programmes of the State is a case in point. The poor rate of success of the polio vaccination drive in Muslim majority areas is one such response arising out of the fear of an alleged plot to reduce the Muslim birth rate.

3. Security Related Concerns

Lack of a sense of security and a discriminatory attitude towards Muslims is felt widely. However, there is considerable variation in the gravity, intensity and magnitude of such a feeling across various states. Communal tension or any untoward incident in any part of the country is enough to make Muslims fear for their safety and security. The lackadaisical attitude of the government and the political mileage sought whenever communal riots occur has been very painful for the Community. The governmental inaction in bringing to book the perpetrators of communal violence has been a sore point. On the other hand, the police, along with the media, overplay the involvement of Muslims in violent activities and underplay the involvement of other groups or organizations. There is an underlying feeling of injustice in the context of compensation to riot victims. It was also suggested that the amount of compensation fixed by the government post riots has been discriminatory against the Muslims. Besides, there is also delay in giving compensation to the victims, especially when they happen to be Muslims.

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Social boycott of Muslims in certain parts of the country has forced them to migrate from places where they lived for centuries

3.1 Attitude of the Police and Law Enforcing Agencies

Concern was expressed over police highhandedness in dealing with Muslims. Muslims live with an inferiority complex as “every bearded man is considered an ISI agent”; “whenever any incident occurs Muslim boys are picked up by the police” and fake encounters are common. In fact, people argued that police presence in Muslim localities is more common than the presence of schools, industry, public hospitals and banks. Security personnel enter Muslim houses on the slightest pretext. The plight of Muslims living in border areas is even worse as they are treated as ‘foreigners’ and are subjected to harassment by the police and administration.

Violent communal conflicts, especially like some recent ones in a state, in which there is large-scale targeted sexual violence against Muslim women has a spread affect even in regions of the country not directly affected by the violence. There is immense fear, a feeling of vulnerability, and consequently a visible impact on mobility and education, especially of girls. The lack of adequate Muslim presence in the police force accentuates this problem in almost all Indian states as it heightens the perceived sense of insecurity, especially in a communally sensitive situation.

3.2 Ghettoisation and Shrinking of Common Spaces

Fearing for their security, Muslims are increasingly resorting to living in ghettos across the country. This is more pronounced in communally sensitive towns and cities. However, while living in ghettos seems to be giving them a sense of security because of their numerical strength, it has not been to the advantage of the Community. It was suggested that Muslims living together in concentrated pockets (both because of historical reasons and a deepening sense of insecurity) has made them easy targets for neglect by municipal and government authorities. Water, sanitation, electricity, schools, public health facilities, banking facilities, anganwadis, ration shops, roads, and transport facilities — are all in short supply in these areas. In the context of increasing ghettoisation, the absence of these services impacts Muslim women the most because they are reluctant to venture beyond the confines of ‘safe’ neighborhoods to access these facilities from elsewhere. Increasing ghettoisation of the Community implies a shrinking space for it in the public sphere; an unhealthy trend that is gaining ground. Social boycott of Muslims in certain parts of the country has forced Muslims to migrate from places where they lived for centuries; this has affected their employability and means of earning a livelihood. Ghettoisation, therefore, has multiple adverse effects: inadequacy of infrastructural facilities, shrinking common spaces where different SRCs can interact and reduction in livelihood options.

The processes of ghettoisation have resulted in another somewhat unusual side effect or an externality in states that have seen severe communal conflicts. ‘Insecure’ Muslims typically wish to move to Muslim concentration areas. A significant increase in demand for property in these areas has led to more than average rise in property prices. ‘Distress’ sales mean that the ‘migrating’ Muslims do not get the full value of their old properties but have to pay higher prices for new ones. It was suggested that often restrictions on property transfers in the ‘disturbed



areas', instead of restricting 'distress or forced' sales, has created opportunities for illegal transfers.

4. Equity Related Issues

The feeling of being a victim of discriminatory attitudes is high amongst Muslims, particularly amongst the youth. From poor civic amenities in Muslim localities, non representation in positions of political power and the bureaucracy, to police atrocities committed against them — the perception of being discriminated against is overpowering amongst a wide cross section of Muslims. Besides, there is a perception that the socio-cultural diversity of India is often not articulated in school textbooks. This sense of discrimination combined with issues of identity and insecurity has led to an acute sense of inferiority in the Community which comes in the way of its full participation in the public arena and results in collective alienation.

4.1 Low Levels of Education

As mentioned earlier, education is an area of grave concern for the Muslim Community. The popular perception that religious conservatism among Muslims is a major factor for not accessing education is incorrect. The recognition of their educational backwardness is quite acute amongst a large section of Indian Muslims and they wish to rectify it urgently. There is a significant internal debate about how this should be done. Private minority institutions and Madarasas are seen as the only option available to the community for improving the educational status of the Muslim community. However, others find these to be questionable alternatives pursued by the State neglecting its own responsibility. Relying predominantly on Madarsa and denominational institutions for improving the educational status of Muslims was also seen by some as violating the spirit of the Constitution.

Poverty — the Main Cause of Low levels of Education

High dropout rates among Muslim students are worrisome. As with many Indians, the main reason for educational backwardness of Muslims is abject poverty due to which children are forced to drop out after the first few classes. This is particularly true for Muslim girls. Little children are expected to provide for their families by working in karkhanas (small workshops), as domestic help or by looking after their siblings while their mothers go to work. It was felt that the incidence of child labour was much higher among Muslims as compared to other SRCs. Poor and illiterate parents cannot afford tuition for their children; nor can they provide the necessary support system at home which has become so essential a part of today's educational system. The opportunity costs involved in sending children to school is also too high, making it difficult for parents to do so.

Low Perceived Returns from Education

Moreover, a community-specific factor for low educational achievement is that Muslims do not see education as necessarily translating into formal employment. The low representation of Muslims in public or private sector employment and the perception of discrimination in securing salaried jobs make them attach less

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importance to formal ‘secular’ education in comparison to other SRCs. At the same time the Community, especially the educated Muslim middle class, finds itself frustrated and alienated because of the lack of presence and opportunities in administrative, policy and political spaces.

Poor Access to Schools

Many complained that only a few good quality schools, especially Government schools, are found in Muslim areas. The teacher pupil ratio is also high in these schools. This forces Muslim children to go to private schools, if they can afford to, or else to drop out. Schools beyond the primary level are few in Muslim localities. Exclusive girls’ schools are fewer, and are usually at a distance from Muslim localities. This has its repercussions because after any incident of communal violence parents pull out their girls from school fearing their security. Lack of hostel facilities is another limiting factor, especially for girls. This problem gets compounded by the fact that people are unwilling to give rooms on rent to Muslim students. In any case, spending on separate residential facilities, in the absence of hostels, is a great financial burden on Muslim families as rents for accommodation are very high.

School-based Factors

Government schools that do exist in Muslim neighbourhoods are merely centres of low quality education for the poor and marginalized. The poor quality of teaching, learning, absentee teachers, in turn, necessitate high cost inputs like private tuitions, particularly in the case of first generation learners from the Muslim community. This has a negative impact on retention and school completion. Thus, poverty again has a causal link with access to education among Muslims.

The “communal” content of school textbooks, as well as, the school ethos has been a major cause for concern for Muslims in some states. This is disconcerting for the school going Muslim child who finds a complete absence of any representation of her Community in the school text. Moreover, many schools are culturally hostile and Muslim students experience an atmosphere of marginalization and discrimination. Subtle deterrents to school admissions have already been mentioned. A growing communal mindset among large number of school teachers adds to the ‘hostile’ school atmosphere. The distrust levels can be gauged from the fact that people actually believe that schools in some states have been given instructions to not let Muslim students pass in examinations. It is also alleged that it is not easy for Muslims to get jobs as teachers. Besides, Muslim teachers are often treated badly. The transfer of Muslim teachers to schools at a great distance is not uncommon. Discriminatory stoppage of salaries of Muslim teachers has also been alleged. It has been reported that in some locations, Hindu parents refuse to let their children go to schools where there are Muslim teachers.⁴

4. There are allegations about obstacles that are placed in setting up of teacher training institutions and colleges by the Muslim community. The non-recognition and denial of permission in a State to set up teacher training colleges are seen as part of a larger plan. Since teachers can be an effective tool in the ideological propaganda of the state, the desire to control the background of teachers is strong. It has been said that by not allowing Muslims to set up teacher training colleges, the state governments wanted to ensure that, over a number of years, no Muslims would be able to qualify as teachers!



Issues Relating to Madarsa Education

Madarsas, through which the Community ensures that its future generations acquire knowledge of Islam, have become a symbol of Muslim identity in India. Often they are looked upon with suspicion by the wider society, despite the fact that they are involved in providing religious education to the Muslim community. Labeling of Madarsas as a den for terrorists is extremely worrisome for the Muslim community. Even though there has been no evidence to suggest that Madarsas are producing terrorists they are constantly under scrutiny. This exercise, even as it is insulting to the Community, has a detrimental and traumatic impact on the children studying in the Madarsas. It has been pointed out that the existence of Madarsas (though not as a substitute for regular schools) is necessary for Muslims as, apart from providing basic education, they serve as an important instrument of identity maintenance for the Community. Many a time Madarsas are the only educational option available to Muslim children, especially in areas where no schools have reached the Muslim masses. Very often children go to the Madarsas not out of choice but due to non-availability and inaccessibility of other schools, and a near absence of education in their mother tongue. Madarsas, where they operate are rendering useful service as far as literacy is concerned. However, there is an urgent need to recognize that a very small percentage of Muslim children actually attend Madarsa education.

There has been a growing demand for greater flexibility in allowing Madarsa students to move across to regular mainstream education in a variety of subject areas. A need to work out a mechanism whereby Dini Madaris can be linked with a higher secondary board so that students wanting to shift to regular/mainstream education can do so even after having passed from a Madarsa is increasingly being stressed upon. The provision of 'equivalence' to Madarsa certificates/degrees for subsequent admissions has been emphasized. The recognition given to these courses by some universities has contributed in a large measure towards students of these courses accessing higher education.

Modernizing Madarsas by the government has been a very contentious issue with many differing viewpoints amongst the Community. While there is a general acceptance of an urgent need for the modernization of Madarsas, the modernization scheme of the government have not really provided much relief to the community as far as quality education is concerned. Promises made with regard to modernization have proved inadequate as nothing much has been done. Science and Mathematics teachers appointed under this scheme have not been paid their salaries regularly. Besides, the salaries fixed are too low. It is widely believed that the help given to Madarsas is "on paper alone". Giving computers to Madarsas has not been perceived to be of great help to the Community. Rather, it was suggested, provision should be made for teaching science, mathematics and English. Provision of a recurring grant for Madarsas would help. However, Madarsa 'modernisation' does not mean only having science/mathematics teachers and installing computers. As mentioned earlier Madarsas need to be affiliated to/recognized by regular education boards. Employability is often not provided by

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the Madarsas, and they would become 'modern' only when that issue is taken care of. The need for mainstream schools to provide free and compulsory education (which is the responsibility of the State) cannot be overlooked. 'Reform' of Madarsas and providing education through mainstream schools are not substitute strategies.

There is a segment of the Muslim population that is against the modernization programme. This is primarily due to an underlying fear that in the name of modernization executed through state intervention, Madarsa autonomy will be compromised. This is also a reason why many Madarsas have stayed away from opting for this scheme. Cumbersome forms and a higher registration fee have also been an obstacle and kept many away from getting registered with the Madarsa Board wherever it exists. Despite apprehensions of government intervention many were receptive to the idea of modern pedagogical approaches being included in Madarsas. The training of Madarsa teachers in pedagogy and management has been a welcome idea. In fact, inclusion of modern subjects in the syllabus without excluding religious subjects is acceptable to many.

Urdu — A Marker of Identity or a Tool of Education?

While Urdu was never exclusively a Muslim language, it is said to have suffered because of its identification with the Muslim community. The communal divide that has emerged over the issue of Hindi and Urdu has been the major factor contributing to the decline of Urdu since Partition. Overnight the knowledge of Urdu has become more a liability than an asset. This was brought into sharper focus by a constitutional provision (article 351) which prescribed that Hindi should draw increasingly upon Sanskrit for its vocabulary. This Sanskritisation of Hindi and the perversion of the three language formula in many Hindi speaking states (providing for only Hindi, Sanskrit and English) has practically put an end to Urdu instruction in most government schools, thereby affecting the education of a whole generation of Muslims.

The identification of Urdu as a language of Muslims in independent India and its politicisation has ensured that its development is relegated to the background. An important area where this neglect of Urdu is visible is in schooling and education. Urdu medium schools are in a dismal state. School Board examination results of Urdu medium schools bear this out. Lack of Urdu medium schools, the poor quality of teaching in them, vacancies for teachers unfilled for several years and the recruitment of Hindi teachers in place of Urdu teachers are some of the problems afflicting the teaching of Urdu.

Students of Urdu medium schools have to join regular schools without going through a pre-school education experience because of the lack of anganwadis using Urdu. This affects their preparedness for schooling. Pre-school education, meant to be a facilitative process for children, is thus absent for the Muslim child who opts for the Urdu medium. Students completing primary education in the Urdu medium are faced with a problem in pursuing higher education as there are only a few secondary and higher secondary schools in the Urdu medium. This



means that any child who wishes to continue his/her education beyond class five has to access the Hindi/ English/ regional medium school. Not being well conversant in the new language of the school the performance of the student is adversely affected. This makes it difficult for many to continue in school. Those who do continue have to face repeated failure and the likelihood of their dropping out becomes higher.

The three language formula, too, has not been implemented properly. Students have to opt for Sanskrit as there is no provision for teaching other languages in many schools, despite the fact that Urdu has been declared a second language in some states. This, in effect, makes Sanskrit a compulsory subject, especially in the Hindi belt. The lack of interest in studying Sanskrit makes Muslim students perform badly thus pulling down their grades. Students are also unable to take their higher secondary examination in Urdu as there is no provision for it and they are forced to take their exams in Hindi.

In view of these problems, many felt that the future of Urdu medium instruction at the secondary level and beyond may be counter-productive. Absence of good books and the low employability of students studying through the Urdu medium would create more problems than it would solve. Indeed, some argued that there is a need for the State to fulfill its commitment of providing primary education in the mother tongue of the students. But there is no need to carry the burden of the language to higher education. Urdu is as Indian as any other language and for its survival and growth other mechanisms have to be thought of.

Minority Educational Institutions

The resistance to recognise minority educational institutions has been a matter of serious concern with the Community in several states. This is also a clear violation of Article 30 of the Indian Constitution. Several people alleged that they face severe difficulties in setting up minority educational institutions. These difficulties include large amounts of (non-refundable) fees charged at the time of application which increases the financial burden enormously which the Community cannot afford. At times, recognition is given on a year to year basis. Often it becomes difficult to get clearance for new courses. There were also cases where discrimination with respect to minority institutions was brought to the notice of the Committee. In the absence of minority institutions, some argued, the options available to the Muslim community to get educated reduce drastically.⁵

Women's Education

A wide variety of problems associated with the education of Muslim women were raised. These problems result in low enrolment and retention. In this dismal scenario there is one big ray of hope; while the education system appears to have given up on Muslim girls, the girls themselves have not given up on education. There is a strong desire and enthusiasm for education among Muslim women and

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5. Some also felt that imposition of government quotas in minority institutions reduces the opportunities for Muslims drastically.



Perceptions of public security — partly associated with increasing incidents of communal violence — prevent parents from sending daughters to schools

The recommendations of the 15 point programme which made it mandatory for selection committees to have representation from the minority community have not been followed

girls across the board. This was one of the most striking pieces of information the Committee gathered in its interactions in the different states.

Given the generally low access to schools in the vicinity, parents are left with the unaffordable options of private schooling or Madarsa education. In the context of overall societal gender-bias (true of all SRCs), this has had a particularly deleterious effect on the education of Muslim girls with poor Muslim parents often opting to send only sons to private schools. Thus, it was argued that, contrary to popular perception that religious conservatism among Muslims somehow militates against educating girls, current research indicates that poverty and financial constraints are the major causes that prevent Muslim girls from accessing 'modern'/'secular' education. Muslim women often face overt discrimination from school authorities while trying to get admission or in availing of scholarships for their children.

Perceptions of public security — partly associated with increasing incidents of communal violence — prevent parents from sending daughters to schools located at a distance where they would have to use public transport. This is particularly the case when they reach upper primary and middle school and leads to high drop out rates among Muslim girls in this age group. Systematic discriminatory policies against Urdu are also counted among the reasons parents do not send girls to Government schools. Since Urdu is no longer taught in most state schools some parents prefer to send their daughters to Madarasas. This is also in keeping with girls/women being seen more as repositories of tradition and less as wage earners or aspirants to salaried jobs. Urdu education is thus seen by some as more 'culturally appropriate' and the preferred choice for girls. Besides, since mainstream education in any case does not usually lead to jobs, it is seen as an unproductive investment. Others argued that since the Urdu language today has little organic connection with employment or the economy, Urdu-medium students are really on the path to nowhere. Further, science courses are limited in Urdu medium schools. Many women argued in favour of regular English medium schools for Muslim girls.

4.2 Employment Opportunities and Labour Market Imperfections

The poor representation of Muslims in the employment market was highlighted over and over again across all states. Despite obtaining degrees and certificates Muslims were unable to get employment, especially in the Government and organized sector. The Committee's attention was drawn to the lack of Muslim representation in positions of power. The lack of Muslims in public employment — in the bureaucracy, police and the judiciary, and so on — has been a matter of great concern. Discriminatory practices, especially at the time of the interview, were cited as reasons for poor Muslim representation even at the Class IV level or in Grade D employment where high educational qualifications are not required. The recommendations of the 15 point programme which made it mandatory for selection committees to have representation from the minority community have not been followed. Concerns about the poor representation of Muslims in the



police force were repeatedly expressed in various meetings. While Muslim representation at the highest level was miniscule, even at the level of the constabulary Muslim representation was reported to be very low. Complaints regarding discriminatory procedures adopted for recruitment in the police force were voiced. In some states the qualifying test required a sound knowledge of local language and at times that of the Hindu religion. This put Urdu speaking Muslims at a disadvantage. Repeated incidents of this kind have made Muslim youth diffident and they shy away from participating in competitive examinations for fear of being rejected. Because the political participation of Muslims also was limited there are very few to raise a voice in their favour.

Muslim presence in the private sector was found to be even more dismal. It was felt that the private sector needed to be sensitized to this issue so that it would include Muslims in their recruitment through positive discrimination and affirmative action. Mention was made of the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) sector, where interestingly, a large number of Muslims seem to find employment. It was pointed out that proficiency in English was the only criterion for gaining employment in this sector. Sheer market forces were determining recruitment here rather than affiliations of any kind. However, while this may partially be true for some of the larger companies, small or medium scale companies that dominate the private sector have not extended a level playing field to Muslims.

Economic Liberalization and Livelihoods

Displacement from traditional occupations has contributed to Muslims being deprived of their means of livelihood and has led to economic backwardness. Despite the economic boom being talked about in India today one finds that Muslims in India have had to bear the brunt of the so called “competitive” forces unleashed by liberalization. Internal and external liberalization has brought with it considerable costs in terms of unemployment and displacement of workers who have lost their jobs to competitive companies that import products. Muslims, by and large, are engaged in the unorganized sector of the economy which rarely enjoys protection of any kind and therefore the adverse impact of liberalization has been more acute for them. The traditional occupations of Muslims in industries such as silk and sericulture, hand and power looms, the leather industry, automobile repairing, garment making have borne the brunt of liberalization. The import of silk from China and its debilitating impact on the silk industry was mentioned in this regard. The emergence of the ready-made garment industry has thrown a lot of tailors, mostly Muslims, out of business. In principle, these workers could have been part of the new production chains provided they had appropriate equipment (mere provision of ordinary sewing machines under government schemes was useless) and skills. The artisans that survive have to face problems related to infrastructure (e.g., expensive power), expensive raw materials (due to lack of subsidies), and non-availability of credit and absence of marketing support. In the absence of these facilities, the artisans get exploited by middlemen. The wages given for ‘job’ work by the middlemen are usually very low. A rehabilitation package for innovative re-skilling and for upgrading the

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Muslim women are unable to bargain for better work conditions because much of the work they do is sub-contracted

many banks have designated a number of Muslim concentration areas as 'negative or red zones', where they do not give loans

occupational structure in the wake of liberalization is seen as an urgent need. Diversification of training should facilitate entry into new industries. Technical training, even for those who are not matriculates, is desirable. Credit and appropriate marketing support are other critical needs. Vocational education was emphasized in this context. Such education could provide new opportunities for children of artisans.

Issues Relating to Women's Employment

Muslim women are overwhelmingly self-employed (engaged in home-based work). Sewing, embroidery, *zari* work, *chikan* work, readymade garments, *agarbatti* rolling, *beedi* rolling are some of the occupations in which Muslim women workers are concentrated. Their work conditions are characterized by low income, poor work conditions, absence of toilet and crèche facilities, lack of social security benefits like health insurance and the absence of bargaining power. In several states home-based industry has virtually collapsed leaving poor Muslim women spiraling downwards to penury.

The distinct pattern of Muslim women's employment in home-based work is in part due to discrimination in formal employment. In part, it is due to the vicious cycle of poverty, lack of education and technical skills, leading to low-skilled, low-income work, and back again to poverty. Muslim women are unable to bargain for better work conditions because much of the work they do is sub-contracted. This restriction of mobility (based on social and cultural factors) restricts their employment opportunities and wages. They do not have independent access to credit facilities, opportunities for skill up-gradation, or access to markets. There is active discrimination in giving Muslim women credit facilities it was pointed out. The increasing ghettoisation of poor Muslims leads to the seclusion of home-based female workers, cutting them off from channels of communication and hindering their ability to organize into collectives. Many home-based workers are so low down in the assembly line of production that they operate entirely through middlemen and do not even know who their employer is. Muslim women have minimal participation in Government micro-finance programmes such as Self Help Groups (SHGs), Watershed Programmes and Panchayati Raj. Efforts to increase their participation are necessary. It was also felt that the government should directly give contract to Muslim women for jobs like making school uniforms etc. This might reduce their reliance on middlemen.

4.3 Credit Market Imperfections

Perceived discrimination by both public and private sector banks in providing bank credit is widespread and the issue was raised in most of the states. It was alleged in some states that many banks have designated Muslim concentration areas as 'negative or red zones', where they do not give loans. Moreover, Muslims also find it extremely difficult to get a guarantee from a government official (which is the stipulated requirement laid down by the banks) as they do not have easy access to government officials either because there are not enough Muslims in the government or because the non-Muslim government officials are not willing to give



them guarantees. This affects the poor Muslims the most.

Even nationalized banks it was said, hesitate to sanction loans under government sponsored schemes to Muslims. The Government never assesses the functioning of these schemes with respect to benefits that have flowed to Muslims and other Minorities. This needs to be done regularly and action should be initiated against defaulters. These 'imperfections' in the credit markets get further accentuated by the absence of nationalized, private and cooperative banks in Muslim populated areas.

Some felt that it was desirable to create separate financial institutions for Muslim entrepreneurs. Others argued that the existing minority financial institutions have been a failure and a decentralized micro-credit schemes through self help groups (SHGs) is the most viable option. Some existing SHGs for Muslim women entrepreneurs that have been successful were cited as examples that could be emulated.

4.4 Access to and Use of Infrastructure and Government Programmes

The absence of proper civic amenities and infrastructure facilities was another major complaint voiced by the Muslim community across the states. Poor roads and lack of proper transport, sanitation, water, electricity and public health facilities pervade Muslim concentration localities. These generally are said not to have *anganwadis*, ration shops and government schools. While officials denied any discrimination in the provision of these services in Muslim areas, the residents of these areas were convinced of it. Some attributed it to historical reasons and referred to it as the usual 'developmental lag'; others felt that the low participation of Muslims in local self-government bodies resulted in developmental benefits failing to reach areas of Muslim concentration.

Another complaint was of the lack of infrastructure, especially roads and electricity. This has an adverse impact on the livelihood of Muslims particularly artisans and craftsmen as it deters buyers, especially the international ones, who tend to move to places where good approach roads ensure that the products are supplied on time. This problem becomes more acute for Muslim entrepreneurs because district industrial estates, where decent facilities are available, are not located in Muslim areas. Muslims were not ready to buy plots in areas where industrial estates were located because of a feeling of insecurity.

The health of Muslims, especially women, is directly linked to poverty and the absence of basic services like clean drinking water and sanitation - leading to malnutrition, anemia, a variety of diseases and poor life expectancy.⁶ In conflict-prone areas there is alarming evidence of a host of psychosocial problems,

...absence of proper civic amenities and infrastructure facilities in Muslim concentration area

The health of Muslims, especially women, is directly linked to poverty and the absence of basic services like clean drinking water and sanitation

6. In some areas, higher than average incidence of TB was reported amongst Muslim women. This was partly due to the nature of their work but largely owing to poor sanitation. TB amongst Muslim women affects the entire family as there is no awareness amongst them regarding the disease. Measures for prevention are taken rarely.



Population control programmes and knowledge of contraceptive practices do not reach Muslim women effectively

It is common to find names of Muslims missing in the voter lists of a number of states

including stress, depression, and post-traumatic disorders among women. Health services for women living in Muslim concentration areas are much worse than for women from other SRCs. Even primary health facilities are available only at long distances. Unacceptable behavior that many Muslim women encounter at public health centres discourages them from going there. They prefer local health care providers from their own community, particularly for gynecological problems, even though they may not be as qualified. This hesitation on the part of the Muslim women to access public health facilities often leads to their exploitation by private doctors. The few health care centres staffed by women doctors are concentrated in urban areas, forcing rural populations to survive with virtually no public health care. The poor quality of drinking water and sanitation in areas of Muslim concentration is another concern expressed.

Population control programmes and knowledge of contraceptive practices do not reach Muslim women effectively, many felt. High rates of fertility among Muslims are partly due to lack of information and the non-availability of affordable health care facilities. Besides, women often do not go to health centres which lack lady doctors.

Muslims, especially women, have virtually no access to government development schemes. They experience discrimination in getting loans from the Jawahar Rozgaar Yojana for Below Poverty Line (BPL) beneficiaries, in getting loans for housing, in procuring widow pensions etc. Muslims are often not able to avail of the reservation benefits available to OBCs as the officials do not issue the requisite caste certificates. It was also alleged that many eligible Muslim OBCs were not included in the official list which results in denial of several benefits to the Community. Many Muslim women experience ill-treatment at the hands of authorities when they apply for new ration cards. So deep is their alienation from state services that a large number of poor Muslims do not even have BPL cards. They are unable to avail of free uniforms in schools, or college scholarships for want of appropriate caste and income certificates. In the context of increasing ghettoisation, the absence of social services (health, schooling, ration, municipal/government offices) impacts women the most because they are reluctant to venture beyond the confines of 'safe' neighborhoods to access these facilities elsewhere. Muslim women have almost no presence in decision-making positions — from gram panchayats to the parliament. They even fail to find a place in minority welfare institutions set up by the Government.

4.5 Political Participation, Governance and Equity

As has been indicated earlier in the chapter, many persons the Committee interacted with, felt that lack of adequate "Muslim voice" in the government, even in local self government bodies and similar other grassroots institutions has resulted in a situation that Muslims have lagged behind. In their view, political participation and representation in governance structures are essential to achieve equity. It was alleged by many that participation is denied to Muslims through a variety of mechanisms. Two specific instances were cited in this context:



- **Non- Inclusion of Muslims in the Voter Lists:** It was pointed out that many names of Muslims were missing in the voter lists of a number of states. Not only does this dis-empower them, it also makes them ineligible as beneficiaries of government schemes.
- **Notification of Reserved Constituencies:** Attention of the Committee was drawn to the issue of Muslim concentration assembly constituencies being declared as 'reserved' constituencies where only SC candidates can contest elections. By this move, it was argued that Muslims are being systematically denied political participation.

While the Committee could not look into the issue of voter lists, an effort was made to ascertain the facts on the issue of reserved constituencies. Our analysis relating to the reserved constituencies for the SC candidates in three states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal(see Appendix 2.1) suggests that there is truth in the allegation above⁷.

5. In lieu of a Conclusion

Many of the problems enumerated in the earlier sections are not specific to Muslims; all the disadvantaged SRCs face them. The sense of insecurity and the crisis of identity makes Muslims perceive these problems as community-specific and they need to be attended to. The diversity of views within the Community has already been noted. Significant regional differences regarding the relative importance of identity, security and equity were however, evident across states.

Just as there was diversity in the understanding of problems, views about how these problems could be redressed were also varied. There was a widespread demand for affirmative action, especially in the form of reservations. Some argued that policies that promote equality must aim at a substantive equal outcome, not merely formal equal or identical treatment. Reservations or a separate quota for Muslims in employment and educational institutions was viewed as a means to achieve this. Others felt that reservations could become a thorny issue and have negative repercussions. Still others argued that good educational facilities combined with non-discriminatory practices are adequate for Muslims to compete.

Those who argued for reservation policies often differed on who should be their beneficiary. Some argued that this facility should only be available to 'dalit' Muslims, while others suggested that the entire Community should benefit from it. For some an economic criterion was an ideal basis for reservations as Muslims

A number of Muslim concentration assembly constituencies have been declared as 'reserved' by the Delimitation Commission

There was a widespread demand for affirmative action, especially in the form of reservations

7. Data relating to the reserved constituencies for the SC candidates in three states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal was analysed by the Committee (Appendix Table 2.2). These states have a relatively large share of the Muslim population in India. The data shows that constituencies which have been declared reserved for SCs by the Delimitation Commission in these three states are by and large those constituencies where Muslims live in greater numbers often more than 50 per cent as well as their proportion in the population is higher than that of SCs. On the other hand, there are quite a large number of other constituencies within the respective states, where the share of SCs is large, often closer to or even more than one half but these are declared as 'un-reserved'. Arguably, this can be seen as discriminatory and certainly reduces the opportunities that Muslims have to get elected to democratic institutions.



The non-availability of the SC quota for Muslims while it was available for Mazhabi Sikhs and Neo-Buddhists was a matter of concern

near consensus among the Muslims about the need to generate data to evaluate and address issues of Muslim backwardness

are largely economically deprived. For others, this criterion would fail to address the problem arising out of social discrimination. Many suggested that a more appropriate mechanism of reservations for Muslims was to secure access to employment and economic advancement through the OBC quota rather than through reservation based on religion. Therefore, Muslims, it was maintained should make maximum use of the prevailing 'caste' categories as the unit for quotas. Besides being constitutionally tenable it has also achieved a certain amount of legitimacy. Finally, there were voices that questioned the non-availability of the SC quota for Muslims while it was available for Mazhabi Sikhs and Neo-Buddhists.

There was near consensus among the Muslims about the need to generate data to evaluate and address issues of Muslim backwardness. The need for data was undisputed as that alone would indicate whether backwardness amongst Muslims was a result of discrimination or not. That this bias is more often than not denied is a clear indicator of the necessity of data collection in this regard. Regular reviews and active monitoring on the basis of detailed data were seen as important mechanisms to enhance the reach of state programmes amongst the Muslim population.

Several people felt that some of the problems could be solved through the reduction of information failures. The concern was that information on jobs, government schemes and programmes does not reach the community in any effective manner. Efforts should be made to make this information widely available through media, especially in the language understood by them, e.g., Urdu. It was also suggested that there was a need to set up counseling centers to ensure that the people are aware of the schemes meant for them and can access them. Due to lack of information governmental funds meant for Muslims remain under-utilized.

The responsibility of a democratic state to ensure that none of its citizens remain backward due to discrimination was emphasized. If factors other than discrimination are contributing to the backwardness of any community then too it is the responsibility of the state for removing such backwardness. At the same time many felt that self-help would go a long way in redressing these problems. Better utilization of Waqf properties, productive utilization of monies available through traditional systems of charity like Zakaat for education and health and more active participation in democratic processes would help the Community in a significant manner.

The perceptions and perspectives, including those relating to policy instruments, presented in this chapter, provide a larger context for the rest of the Report. The remaining chapters largely focus on equity related issues and rely on quantitative data. Many of these perceptions and several other issues are addressed in these chapters.