

ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC INDICATORS, MUSLIM YOUTH FARE WORSE THAN SCs AND OBCs

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The 2019 Lok Sabha elections have reconfirmed the political marginalisation of Muslims — MPs from the community are very few in Parliament's lower house. This process is converging with the equally pronounced socio-economic marginalisation of the community. Muslims have been losing out to Dalits and Hindu OBCs since the Sachar committee submitted its report in 2005.

Using the recent "suppressed" NSSO report (PLFS-2018) and the NSS-EUS (2011-12), examine the socioeconomic status of Muslim youth vis-à-vis other social groups in India. We use the same set of 13 states covering 89 per cent of the 170 million Muslims enumerated in 2011. We use three variables: Percentage of Muslim educated youth (21-29 age) who have completed graduation, percentage of the community's youth (15 to 24 age) in educational institutions and the percentage of Muslim youth who are in the NEET category (not in employment, education or training). These variables together reflect pathways of educational mobility for the country's youth.

The proportion of the youth who have completed graduation — we call this, "educational attainment" — among Muslims in 2017-18 is 14 per cent as against 18 per cent among the Dalits, 25 per cent among the Hindu OBCs, and 37 per cent among the Hindu upper castes. The gap between the SCs and Muslims is 4 percentage points (ppt) in 2017-18. Six years earlier (2011-12), the SC youth were just one ppt above Muslims in educational attainment. The gap between the Muslims and Hindu OBCs was 7 ppt in 2011-12 and has gone up to 11 ppt now. The gap between all Hindus and Muslims widened from 9 ppt in 2011-12 to 11 ppt in 2017-18.

Muslim youth in the Hindi heartland fare the worst. Their educational attainment is the lowest in Haryana, 3 per cent in 2017-18; in Rajasthan, this figure is 7 per cent; it is 11 per cent in Uttar Pradesh. Madhya Pradesh is the only north Indian state where the Muslims are doing relatively better in education — their educational attainment is 17 per cent. In all these states, except MP, SCs fare better than Muslims. The gap between SCs and Muslims with respect to educational attainment is 12 ppt Haryana and Rajasthan and 7 ppt in UP. In 2011-12, in all these states, SCs were slightly above the Muslims on this parameter.

In eastern India, the educational attainment among the Muslim youth in Bihar is 8 per cent, as against 7 per cent among SCs, in West Bengal it is 8 per cent, as against 9 per cent for SCs, and in Assam it is 7 per cent as against 8 per cent for SCs. While the gap between Muslims and SCs has narrowed in the last six years, the latter still fare better.

In western India, the educational attainment figures for Muslims are better compared to 2011-12.

But they do not necessarily reflect a significant educational improvement when compared to the SCs and Hindu-OBCs. In Gujarat, the gap in educational attainment between the Muslims and SCs is 14 ppt in 2017-18; six years ago, it was just 8 ppt. In Maharashtra, the Muslims were marginally — by 2 ppt — better off than SCs in 2011-12, they have now not only lost to SCs but the latter has now overtaken them by 8 ppt.

With 36 per cent graduate Muslim youth, Tamil Nadu tops the educational attainment parameter with respect to the community in the country. In Kerala, this figure is 28 per cent, in Andhra Pradesh, it is 21 per cent and in Karnataka, 18 per cent of the Muslim youth are graduate. While the community is giving a close competition to SCs in Tamil Nadu and AP, it is losing out in Kerala. The developments in South India have more to do with the relatively faster mobility of SCs than the marginalisation of Muslims. The community's achievements also have to be seen in the context of positive discrimination Muslims enjoy in these states — Dalit and OBC Muslims are given reservations under the OBC quota.

The marginalisation of Muslims on socio-economic indicators becomes clear when we evaluate the statistics related to youth currently in educational institutions. The percentage of youth who are currently enrolled in educational institutions is the lowest among Muslims. Only 39 per cent of the community in the age group of 15-24 are in educational institution as against 44 per cent for SCs, 51 per cent for Hindu OBCs and 59 per cent for Hindu upper castes.

A sizable proportion of Muslim youth are leaving the formal education system and moving into the NEET category. Thirty-one per cent of youth from the community fall in this category — the highest from any community in the country — followed by 26 per cent among the SCs, 23 per cent among the Hindu OBCs, and 17 per cent among the Hindu upper castes. This trend is more pronounced in the Hindi belt — 38 per cent of Muslims youth fall under NEET in Rajasthan, in UP and Haryana, this figure is 37 per cent and in MP, it is 35 per cent. In South India, the proportion of Muslims outside the formal education system is relatively low — 17 per cent in Telangana, 19 per cent in Kerala, 24 per cent in Tamil Nadu and 27 per cent in AP.

While the marginalisation of Muslims began several years ago, the phenomenon seems to have gathered pace in recent years. As Sam Asher et al point out in their recent study, 'Intergenerational Mobility in India: Estimates from New Methods and Administrative Data', "Muslims are being left out from educational mobility in India while the SCs are getting integrated into it". More studies are needed to link this disturbing process to the political marginalisation of Muslims. The activities of vigilante groups could possibly have led young Muslims to withdraw in to their shell.

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