



RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN INDIA

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Introduction:

- “The promotion and protection of the rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities contribute to the political and social stability of states in which they live.” UN
- Almost all the states have one or more minority groups within their national territories
- Harmonious relations among minorities and between minorities and majorities and respect for each groups identity is a great asset to the nation.
- Ensuring the rights of persons belonging to minorities maintains the dignity and equality of all individuals which will bring about peace and stability within the state.
- Meeting the aspirations of these groups requires a study of their problems and claims.

Religious Minority groups in India:

- India is a multi-religious, multi-cultural and a multi-linguistic state.
- In India, Hinduism is the dominant and majority religious group with its various castes and sub groups.
- We have religious minority groups like Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Judaism, Zoroostrianism, etc.
- Hindus and Muslims are spread throughout the country but Muslims are in majority in the state of J & K.
- Christian concentrations are found in the north-eastern states as well as in southern states like Kerala, Tamilnadu and Goa. The 3 small states which have large Christian majorities are Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya.
- Sikhs are a majority in the state of Punjab.

Who are Minorities?

- Minority is a group of people who number less than another group of people.
- According to the UN, “minority is a group numerically inferior to the rest of the population of the state, in a non-dominant position, whose members – being nationals of the state – possess ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics differing from those of the rest of the population, and show, a sense of solidarity directed towards preserving their culture, traditions, religion or language.”

Features of Minorities:

- Some important features of minority groups are as follows –
 1. The members of the minority groups suffer various disadvantages at the hands of another group.
 2. A minority group is identified by group characteristics that are socially visible.
 3. A minority is a self-conscious group with a strong sense of oneness.
 4. People usually do not become members of a minority group voluntarily they are born into it.
 5. By choice or necessity, members of a minority group tend to marry within the group.

Problems of Muslim Minorities in India:

- The problems faced by the Muslim minorities in India are as follows –
 1. Poverty,
 2. Illiteracy,
 3. Difficulty in preserving its identity & culture,
 4. Absence of Entrepreneurship,
 5. Religious mentors hindering the progress of the community,
 6. Impact of globalization,
 7. Problem of discrimination,
 8. Resentment and anger of the majority,
 9. Increase in communalism,
 10. Discriminations in recruitment and central services,
 11. Absence of reservation, etc.

I. Poverty:

- Approximately one fifth of the Indians are extremely poor and about half of them are Muslims.
- Poor can hardly be expected to stand up to tyrannical rule or to contribute meaningfully to civil society.
- No wonder children born to perpetual poverty soon develop a grudge towards society which is the first step to criminality.

2. Illiteracy:

- Poverty leads to illiteracy
- Illiteracy in 21st century means so many disadvantages and it is very difficult for an illiterate person to lead a successful life.
- According to a Human Development Report, 1995 almost 50% of adult citizens in India are illiterate.
- Muslim illiteracy may be slightly higher than the national average.

3. Difficulty in preserving its identity and culture:

- In India there are a variety of ethnic, linguistic and cultural groups and every group will have to mobilize its own resources to preserve its identity and promote its culture.
- People in a group may have all the resources but may not have the commitment to promote their identity and culture. Such a group will surely disintegrate.
- So the Muslim community needs individuals with money to spare so that the community can do all that is needed to preserve its identity, promote its culture and safeguard its interests.

4. Absence of Entrepreneurship:

- Only a small number of scattered groups among the Muslims in India bear entrepreneurial qualities.
- There is a need to project the role models, so that the younger generation of Indian Muslims may emulate them.
- There is a need to make the Muslims less dependent on public funded educational and health facilities or on the public sector for the job.
- They should be equipped with the knowledge and skill which will have a wide market in the private and booming economy of India.

5. Religious mentors hindering the Progress of the community:

- Most of the Muslim activist in India do not understand the value of economic strength for the survival and progress of Muslims and Islam in India.
- The religiously oriented do not accept the priority of poverty alleviation, removal of illiteracy or any economic programmes as they think that priority must attach to moral and spiritual matters.
- The Muslim leadership has not helped the Muslims as they are self serving and short sighted. They tend to fight for backward looking causes rather than taking the community forward into modern Indian life.

6. Impact of Globalization:

- Present age is the age of Globalization and a lot of revolutionary changes are taking place in the field of information and communication.
- It is possible to today to live a free and culturally satisfying life.
- The role of the state in taking care of the people has decreased.
- And those who need care will have to do more and more for themselves, both individually and collectively.
- So, the Muslims need to develop their own resources to meet the demands of globalization.

7. Problem of Discrimination:

- Wherever Muslims live as minorities, they increasingly face the problem of discrimination.
- These are partly due to historical and political factors and the media which has depicted them as violent, unreliable and prone to anarchy.
- Moreover, some Islamic ideas like Jihad (the struggle to fight for a just and correct order) place Muslims in confrontation with the non-Muslims in the society.

8. Resentment and anger of the Majority:

- The stereotype of the minority creates a sense of contempt and anger in the majority.
- Many a time, the majority had the feeling of lack of integration of minorities in the mainstream .
- Muslims are viewed with suspicion and considered as anti-Indian by the majority community which is a problem for the Muslims.

9. Increase in Communalism:

- The increase in communal riots makes the minorities to live in fear and insecurity.
- The Muslims and other minorities face this problem in India.
- There is a feeling of insecurity to their rights, religious interests and identity.

10. Discrimination in Recruitment and Central Services:

- There is no special consideration to minorities in the recruitment to the government services.
- There is no special consideration given to them in the Railways, nationalized banks, central or state services.
- Muslims and other minorities are not provided any reservation benefits in matters of public employment.