

INDIAN MUSLIMS AND THE CHALLENGE OF CHANGE: DR. MJ KHAN



Indian Muslims are at the cross roads, facing a plethora of challenges from low share in education, jobs and businesses to increasing social, political and economic marginalisation and the issues of image and perceptions to cultural identity and physical safety and security, and access to basic amenities and social welfare programs. Any positive change in the condition of the community, which constitutes the single largest Muslim population @ 200 million in the world, is possible only by initiating internal reforms, adopting modern outlook, and doing community service on one hand and building favorable social and political environment, and enabling access to educational and economic opportunities on the other hand.

We also need to align our strategy and development plans with the global trends and dynamics and emerging socio-economic and technological realities. The world has become increasingly inter-dependant in the last four decades, especially after GATT and with the operationalisation of WTO, making the world trade grow many folds more in the last 50 years than what it traded in absolute terms in the past 500 years. The pace of technological developments, especially the telecommunication and the internet has made the world a tiny village, where the news of one small place could go global in no time. The social sector development priorities of the UN and global bodies and funding organisations is today dominated by the philosophy of “inclusion, equity and diversity”.

During this period the growth of Indian economy has been meteoric, almost ten times, from \$266 billion in 1990-91 to \$2.6 trillion in 2019-20. This period also saw many important developments in geopolitics, from the disintegration of USSR into 15 independent countries to the new alliances and realignment of countries, formation of EU, rise of Asia and first black president in the US to name a few on global front. In the global economy of \$90 trillion, the NA, EU and Asia, minus China, account for almost equal approximately \$24 trillion each.

The rapid rise of knowledge economy and services sector during the last four decades has marked significant change, which has brought the importance of education to the centre stage, and the recognition of social diversity and multiculturalism as big assets for any country. India has gained tremendously in the new age

economy, especially the software businesses, riding the strength of its huge social diversity, which creates the human resource best suited to perform in software coding, services and knowledge businesses.

The dawn of globalisation, starting nineties, further expanded the global opportunities, and the emergence of e-commerce, further reduced the physical distances on one hand and locational disadvantages on the other hand. While India gained rapidly in knowledge businesses and software products and services, which today alone account for over \$60 billion exports, and overall services sector accounting for \$1.5 trillion of India's \$2.6 trillion economy, and further unleashing the huge potential of this sector. But, the Muslim community in India, and practically the world over missed the opportunity of making big, where education was imperative to success and not the investment.

While the country has grown rapidly since the onset of economic reforms in 1990-91, and every section of the Indian population gained in income and quality of life, the story of Indian Muslims continued to be one of the lost opportunities. While Muslim community missed the bus during the first four decades of the Licensing Raj, after independence, for historical and cultural reasons, it missed the bus again during the liberalisation period, when new age economy required higher education, especially technical and professional, to either ride the ladder of careers in the corporate sector or to start a successful business venture. The community is set to yet again miss the bus of startups wave for the same very reasons.

However, one interesting recent development is that for the first time in the history, since William Hunter Commission report in 1882, that Muslims are accessing the share in the Government schemes and welfare programs more than their share in the population. In Uttar Pradesh in certain schemes the share has gone to 27% against its population of 19.5%, and compared to 7% or less it used to be during the earlier times. This is the truth, which suits none to highlight. Government of the day may risk reaction by its core voter constituency, the traditional vote contractors may fear shift in the community's voting pattern and the community itself may risk reversal of the situation.

Now the question arises, what has gone wrong about the Indian Muslims? From Justice Hunter in 1882 to Justice Sachhar report in 2006 and from Rang Vilas Mishra in 1970 to Justice Rang Nath Mishra Commission report in 2008, the condition of the community continued to remain grim. So is it about the colour of the Government or the external factors that are responsible or our own attitude and the internal factors? The slide in the community's share in jobs, education, businesses and economic activities and welfare programs continued during the entire period till its reversal from 2015-16 onwards. However, in political representation opposite has happened. From the peak of 49 MPs in 1980 to 23 seats in 2014 and 27 seats in 2019, the share of Muslims in Lok Sabha is approximately one third of its proportional share of 76.

There is urgent need for honest introspection in the community. The time has come that we must find out our real issues and real enemies. Our real heroes and role models. The workable solutions and practical approaches. For very long period of time our refusal to learn from the life of visionaries such as Sir Syed Ahmed Khan to adjust to the needs of the hour and adopt the workable solutions, resulted into our continuing peril. We admired them but refused to learn from them. The community allowed itself to be exploited by the self-centred leaders, who trapped the community emotionally on non-issues and used it to serving their personal political interests.

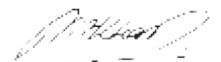
The real challenge today for the community is the low image and perception, negative attitude and regressive thinking, and poor conduct and low contribution in almost all spheres of human activities. And instead of understanding the essence of Islam and practicing it, we believed more in demonstrating the symbols of Muslim identity. The concept of serving the society has been missing in our approach, which we can today learn from the Sikhs and the Christians. IMPAR has tried to launch sanitation drive and feeding the poor programs and got its various state and district units to also emulate and encourage the community to adopt. While we need to introspect and correct our course, we also need to monitor the media and political and policy developments, and ignoring that will be quite costly.

Certain policy decisions such as the Presidential Order 1950, promulgated on August 10, 1950, adding Clause 2 under Article 341 has adversely affected the community so much that everything else put together may not equal the losses suffered on this count. Similarly, recently passed CAA/NRC Act is perceived to posing existential crisis for the community. The role of partisan media and its overdrive that we saw during the lockdown period in April 2020 created so difficult situation for the community. IMPAR was a creation of that crisis, and it successfully handled the challenge and brought about the change. Unfortunately the approach of the ruling parties for decades has been to place members of 200 elite Muslim families as end of their responsibilities, as if empowering 200 families is synonymous to empowerment of 200 million Muslims.

Widening the educational and economic opportunities in a cost-effective manner for its citizens is a national priority for India. The barriers to access and equity faced by Muslims require a better understanding by the Government, media, thought leaders, and political class for which a research, monitoring, dialogue, and policy advocacy forum was needed to be created by the community. IMPAR is the result of this over-riding concern, felt for a long time. Promoted by 500 plus Muslims from different walks of life such as politics, bureaucracy, education, business, science, media, law, art, and films etc., IMPAR looks forward to making a meaningful difference to the community's engagement with the society and the nation.

Indian Muslims are blessed to be born in hugely diverse and multicultural nation, and enjoy the dividends of democracy and diversity. When the world is becoming increasingly inter-dependant, requiring to deal with diverse cultures, Indian Muslims can show way to the world Muslims. Of late, I am observing a new found confidence, greater focus and increased resilience in the youths and the community women. The results are showing up. They need little guidance to channelize their energy for positive and productive purposes. The community needs more programs that could work for masses than the placement of few chosen in the Parliament or Assemblies, Cabinet and Committees or Commissions. We need positivity and optimism in our thinking and working. India is rapidly growing country and opportunities are galore.

We must look for new paths to progress. Treading the beaten paths yet again and expecting different results will be dishonesty. The well placed among us must rise to the occasion and resolve their commitments to contribute to the cause of the community. IMPAR is hope of millions. And we believe it can deliver for millions.



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