

DO NOT CALL US “MINORITIES”

C J Shahjahan

Forty years back, the word ‘Dalit’ was not in popular usage. It was Mahatma Gandhi who named the suppressed society as Harijans (Children of God) and founded Harijan Sevak Sangh in 1932. He even started a weekly in the name of Harijan. While conversing the merits of reservation policy with my dalit BHEL colleague, I casually mentioned the word “Harijan” and immediately my friend retorted back furiously with a hurt feeling – If we are the children of Hari, who are the other people? Don’t call us harijans and isolate us from the society. It is demeaning.” My indomitable respect for Mahatma did not allow me to appreciate his hurt feelings three decades ago.

But, today, when every political leader and the mass media use the phrases - Minority appeasement, Minority uplift, Minority vote bank, Minority reservations, Minority quota, I feel the same anguish and anger of my BHEL dalit friend. Why are we Muslims being branded as minorities? How am I different from my friends like Ramanathan and Raghuvir Sharma?

Am I not the same Indian who salutes the national flag and stand in attention for the national anthem? Then why this seal of segregation as a minority? When addressed as minority one undergoes subtle psychological depression with a lurking fear of being bullied by the majority. This fear and insecurity create an offensive mechanism in an individual and some of the political groups try to mobilize such vulnerable individuals for combat and communal frenzy.

The United Nations study group defines ‘Minority’ as a culturally, ethnically or racially distinct group that coexists with but is subordinate to a more dominant group, because they are socially separated or segregated from the dominant forces of a society, members of a minority group are usually cut off from a full involvement in the workings of the society and from an equal share in the society’s welfare.

There are three distinct forms of majority- minority existence in a society. In the most rarest form, a minority may disappear from a society via assimilation, a process through which a minority group replaces its traditions with those of dominant culture. The other extreme form is the forceful elimination of a minority by mob violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide. These forms of oppression devastate the economic, political and mental health of both the minority and majority population. The intermediate form is the pluralistic society

where the dominate group accepts the co-existence of a minority and opt for amity and tolerance for its own political, moral and economical gains. Indian Muslims all along experienced the benefits of this pluralistic patronage and it is unfortunate that today certain divisive forces from both the groups try to destroy this pluralism.

The real objective of offering social justice to the Muslims after independence has in due course drawn a dividing line between Indian Muslims and the rest of the religious groups. It has done more harm to the Muslim psyche as well as the national integration. The psychological feeling of being a minority instils insecurity and inferiority. The major Indian Muslim political parties exploit this insecurity to widen their support base.

While the plethora of minority groups and political parties cry for more percentage of reservations for Muslims, the Hindutva parties highlight the fallacy of minority appeasement at the cost of majority. This process of pull and pressure has widened the chasm between Muslims and Hindus during the past decade especially after the post Babri masjid demolition. The communal harmony and the national integration are the twin casualties in this process.

Constitutional and Political Concerns:

The constitution of India does not define the term “Minorities “anywhere and it also does not guarantee any special privileges to the minority groups. But as a welfare state, the governments both at the centre and at the state level, extend the welfare programmes to the minorities as and when it suits their vote bank priorities.

The constitutionally guaranteed reservations for the scheduled castes and tribes might have improved marginally the economic indicators over the past 60 years but till date the dalits and the most backward groups could not be integrated emotionally and psychologically with the mainstream of our social strata. Our political leaders have destroyed the fabric of Indian society by wooing only the votes and not the hearts of the dalits.

The same results can be inferred if the Muslim groups succeed in getting even the 10 percent reservations in government jobs and in educational institutions. The reservations may throw up some more lucrative jobs for the handful of Muslim youth in defence, police , IAS & IFS cadres but the society will still live in isolation and backwardness . Muslim families will be denied housing for rent in metros, their innocent youth will continue to languish in jails with uncertain future and any minor altercation will still provoke a full

blown communal flame that would consume thousands of young men, women and children on both the sides.

Is this our goal of minority welfare?

Justice Rajindar Sachar committee report clearly highlighted the cause of Muslim backwardness in the social and educational front and stated that Muslims are the most backward community despite rich cultural heritage.

While madrasa education may uplift the souls but it is only the modern education that can uplift the society. Muslim leaders should realize that both the madrasa and the modern educational systems are not contradictory but complimentary. Science and its inventions when studied objectively reemphasize the religion and the faith. Muslim scholars and ulema should now recognize the fact that modern education and undistorted Islamic values are the only twin tools of Muslim emancipation in this country.

Islam, as a religion, preaches egalitarianism with an equitable mix of capitalism and socialism. It not only ordains Zakath (PoorTax) on every eligible Muslim who has to partake a portion of his wealth to the needy and the poor but also prohibits all kinds of interest which destroy the poor families.

It is reported that the registered waqf properties currently generate 163 crores of income annually and if properly monitored and developed the total waqf assets alone can contribute Rs 12000 crores every year. Most of the waqf properties are in prime urban locations and presently controlled by unprofessional and selfish Muslim trustees.

It has been estimated that if only rich Muslims pay proper zakath every year and Muslims could harness the annual income of 12000 crores from waqf properties, the community need not beg for reservation and agitate to implement the recommendation of Ranganath Misra commission report.

The population of Indian Muslims exceeds 170 million, third largest Muslim majority in the world, next only to Indonesia and Pakistan. The community of Indian Muslims is 10 times larger than Malaysia, 6 times larger than Saudi Arabia and twice that of Egypt. If one has to go by sheer numbers, Indian Muslims are in majority compared to their religious counterparts of other nations.

Why then a community of 170 million is branded as a minority? I wish to live in an India where I feel as an Indian on par with my neighbours. Hence, please, do not call us minorities anymore.

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