Reappraising Social Justice Policies in India

Contextualizing Social Justice in the Contemporary Period

The policies of social justice in India have launched multiple sectoral programs of development and empowerment in the various fields of activities: agriculture, large-scale government regulated public sectors, labor and employment, education, proportionate reservation of seats in state run institutions, health and family welfare, housing, urban development, social welfare, socio-economic programs for women, special socio-economic programs for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, specialized programs for area development, and various minimum needs programs, setting up of special commissions and special officers for recognized groups, etc. Indeed under the impact of social justice policies, the traditional social institutions and cultural patterns have come under direct scrutiny of the state and periodically begun to change in a positive way. The change is greatly visible in most of the social and political relationship in contemporary period, its impact has been felt considerably more in towns and cities as compared to the rural communities. Hundreds of research studies are available to validate this statement.

It can be argued that the traditional caste system has been modified considerably in the past several decades and its divine ordained status has significantly eroded. But caste distinctions are still alive and the conservative elements within the society still promote new brands of social inequalities and legitimize gender oppression. The records available on the violent atrocities perpetuated by the Khap Panchyats in Haryana and Uttar Pradesh are the glaring examples of such casteist domination in the contemporary society. Growing caste solidarity and militancy in both the segments of Hindu social order is also reflecting the same phenomenon. However, the classic Hindu social structure or the traditional caste system no longer holds the supreme position as it has definitely changed both through new social legislations and under the impact of the large scale programs of economic and social development, which have been operational for
more than a hundred years now. These developments are considerably modifying the traditional religious beliefs, the caste system, the nature of the joint family and marriage, systems of social stratification and other traditional ways of social living. The diffusion of these changes has also started spreading steadily in non-attended spheres like rural communities. However, the positive impact of social justice policies will narrate just one side of the story and will not demonstrate the complete reality.

In this section a critical assessment of the social justice policy and its impact has been undertaken in order to judge its practical validity for the improvement of the deprived sections. The chapter is divided in four sections. In the first two sections, the social justice agenda is reviewed in a comparative way highlighting the negative and positive impacts of the policies. Finally, the limitations of the Social Justice agenda in India are highlighted by flagging the issues pertinent to the empowerment of the religious minorities. The agenda of social justice in India lacks uniform norms, fairness and moral capabilities to become a universally applicable model of justice. The Reservation Policy in India has benefited the Hindu Dalits and converted Hindu Dalits in Sikhism and Buddhism. These three communities have shown that protective treatment from the state is an essential mechanism to overcome the social and economic disadvantages. However, large number of the Dalits among the Christians and the Muslims are not made beneficiary subjects of this policy in order to secure the secular ethics of the state. Such an exclusive caste and reservation policy centric agenda of social justice is incapable of providing a fair justice to all the deprived sections.

**The Performance of Reservation Policy in India: The Positive Side**

There are two opposite versions in describing the impact of social justice policies in India. Those who highlight the positive side of the reservation policy benefits are questioned by the opponents for its rabid usage of caste identity in the secular polity. Most popular argument against reservation is the ‘Merit Argument’. The policy is criticized for its unfair treatment of the meritorious candidates in the competition and thus compromises on excellence and quality. The beneficiaries are questioned for their unethical appropriation of this facility for multiple generations. The policy is also criticized for its negligence of the most deprived and backward sections, as most of the benefits are grasped by the ‘elites among the SC/STs and OBCs’. They claim that economic criteria should be prioritized over social identity and the poor from any
religion must become the beneficial subject of the reservation policy. The widening of reservation policy for the OBCs further perceived as a political exercise aims at garnering support from these castes. Thus, the positive changes initiated by the reservation policy are supplemented by a visible current of discontent and apathy. However, the perspective presented by the beneficiaries of the reservation policy is different. I shall be highlighting this point in the following sections.

The performance of reservation policy can be judged on three parameters; social, economic and political. The reservation policy has supplemented and facilitated a dynamic progressive change in the conditions of the Dalits in all these accounts. The participation of the Scheduled Tribes in the employment sector has increased at a very low average and more than the implementation of reservation policy, these groups have focused mainly on other rights embedded for them in the social justice mechanism, like the land rights. The OBCs are part of the quota system during the British period, however during the constituent Assembly Debates, there is wider ambiguity over the identification of this group and therefore, to avoid any controversial judgments, supplementary rights were given to the states to decide upon their status. The Mandal Commission Report, has shown the backward status of the fifty two per cent populations, termed as OBCs, on the eleven social, educational and economic indicators.

Following the recommendations of the commission, the implementation of twenty seven per cent reservations for the OBCs has added a new chapter in the history of social justice. I have discussed the OBC issue in length in the previous chapter. Therefore, in the following part, a review of the social, economic and political changes that has been supplemented by the reservation policy for the SC/STs shall be carried out.

Creation of New Middle Class:

One of the major benefits of reservation policy is that it has created a small but influential middle class among the Dalits. During the initial phase, those who have managed to acquire some standards of education because of reservation policy, obtain numerous positions in the public sector enterprises. At the progressive stage, the

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1 Multiple legislations against the Reservation Policy and its implementation in various courts highlight this point. The major apprehension of the petitioners is regarding the sole criterion of social identity as the beneficial category of the reservation policies. The demands to include economic parameters and exclude the well-off sections of the communities in the reservation policies are the important elements in their petitions. *Chitralekha vs State of Mysore, 1964*, *Jayasree vs State of Kerala, 1976*, *State of Kerala vs N. H. Thomas, 1976*, *Indira Sawhney vs Union of India, 1993* are some of the examples of such attempts

2 Venkatesh Ramakrishnan “Examining Reservation” *Frontline*, May 5, 2006, p. 4
contemporary third generation beneficiaries of the reservation policy are part of the new inclusive middle-class. The employment in the government sectors and new industrial economy is responsible for large scale immigration of the Dalits from rural to the urban centers. The economic conditions of the Dalits have relatively improved in the government sectors because of the reservation policy. The percentage of employment of the SC employees in the government sector has increased in average up to 17 per cent. Though limited in numbers, these groups at least got an access to Government jobs and legislature.3 The occupational mobility among the Dalits has increased and further generations are coming up to the urban places in search of education and better employment. The urban class identity has given them new social status and pride as individual in the society. A renewed sense of equality has enlarged among the Dalits based on such achieved class status.

Middle-class status is seen as an aspired category for many of the struggling communities. In the economic field, the Dalits are growing in number as part of new cosmopolitan consumerist culture. The modern economic sectors are seen as an open field for the talented and educated youths. The new employment opportunities in Information Technology industries, BPOs, Service Industry and Media have opened new avenues of jobs for all, including the Dalits. The traditional link between the caste and the occupation has weakened considerably in the light of economic modernization. The modern urban economy has diluted the caste barriers to some extent and the new educated generations among the Dalits are finding new hope in this realm. However, such urbanized notion of Dalit Middle class is half told truth. The construction of the middle class among the Dalits has wider moral logic as this class is different from the other middle classes because of the social and political consciousness. With their embedded social identity it is difficult for the Dalits to pursue their middle class aspirations by categorically cutting themselves from their traditional roots. Vivek Kumar has an elaborative explanation of the persuaded activism of this class under the banner of BAMCEF in the crucial non-political arenas.4 This class is rooted in a peculiar social

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4 All India Backward and Minority Employees Federation (BAMCEF) was established in 1973 by Kanshi Ram and D. K. Khaparde, with a basic objective to mobilize the upcoming middle class sections (educated
positioning and therefore, worked as a vanguard community for the empowerment of the deprived sections.

Social Empowerment (Social Equity)

For a vibrant social movement, presence of a dynamic modernist intellectual leadership is one of the pre-requisite conditions. In most of the cases of social movements the leaderships and the interlocutors of the movement have emerged from the newly emerged middle classes of the respective communities. In Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh, the Mahars and the Chamars are relatively a well off section among the Dalit castes and both these castes have provided social and political leadership to the oppressed sections of their respective states. These castes have emerged because of a conscious utilization of modern structures like education, affirmative action policies of the state and a steady involvement in the open urban economy. The economic stability and access to modern education has provided them a new consciousness about their degraded social and economic conditions, the denial of rights as equal citizens their marginalization in political and cultural spheres. This consciousness builds new aspirations and a progressive vision for the future society. Based on such formulations they mobilize other oppressed sections and forge a strong social movement.

Secondly, social empowerment also means breaking the clutches of discriminative and exploitative order of religion and society. The social justice mechanism has provided multiple safeguards in order to fight for their human rights in religious and cultural realm. The Dalit Movement remains in the forefront in articulating its ideological assertions against the discriminative social relationships based on caste and communal identity. B. R. Ambedkar has contributed enormously in shaping the Dalit perspective over the issue of religion. For a radical social empowerment, religious conversion is envisaged as one of the important solutions by many great leaders of the Dalits in the past, including Ambedkar in the later years. He has insisted on the necessity of religion employees) in social work, especially against caste oppression. Mostly represented and headed by the Dalits. For details, see Vivek Kumar, "BAMCEF: Bahujan Movement at the Cross Road" Forward Press, December 2009, Vol.1, No. 6

5 In the last decade of nineteenth century, Pandit Ayothee Thass led a Buddhist conversion movement in Tamilnadu. Mangooram in Punjab has rejected the Hindu religion and established Adi-Dharam Movement in the beginning of mid 1920. Conversion to Christianity and Islam was a general tradition
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for a civilized society, however, he asks his followers to judge the viability of any religion in the society on four main parameters. According to him, social ethics, rationality, peaceful and fraternal cohabitation, and opposition to supernaturalism should be the essential element of religion in a modern society.\(^6\) He has argued that, such modernist values are not present in Hindu religion because of the primacy to the orthodox caste system in it. His rejection of Hinduism is based on such staunch ethics which he has derived from two traditions, the egalitarian values of liberalism and Buddha’s teachings.\(^7\) The educated Dalits in Maharashtra in order to evolve an alternative religious-cultural sect, converted to Buddhism. It has rejected the hegemonic Sanskritization process and its greater cultural assimilation project in order to develop an alternative strategy of social empowerment.

**Unity of the Deprived Castes and the Tribes**

One of the important aspects of the reservation policy is its constitutional recognition of castes and tribes in scheduled lists. This separate inclusion of untouchable castes in one list and spatial tribal communities in another has systematically excluded them from the general category in order to provide them constitutional safeguards for their overall empowerment. This mechanism has created a sense of belongingness among these castes and tribes which in the past were highly divided under the rubric of multiple caste occupations and tribal norms and customs. This is a new stratification different from the socially governed stratification based on status hierarchies. Further, this identification has a moral objective to achieve, as by categorizing the deprived sections, these groups are sanctioned with profits of reservation policies, special rights to fight against discrimination and exploitation and other special rights. Without such scrutinized classification on secular nomenclatures, the state would have abided by using the conventional caste and tribal identifications (most of the times these are degraded and discriminatory in tone and usage) for policy implementations. Thus, the SC and ST among the lower castes. For more details, see John C. B. Webster (2002) Religion and Dalit Liberation, Manohar, New Delhi.


categorization has unified numerous caste and tribal categories into just two broader identities.

**Democratization of the Political Elites and the New Political Consciousness**

During the first three decades after the Independence, the Congress Party, the Communist Party of India, the Swatantrata Party and the Jansanah were the parties which were predominantly controlled by the upper caste elites. Influenced by western modern ideologies, the nationalist, especially the Brahmins, became the main spokesperson for bringing social and economic development. They have not only dominated the political circles but also the bureaucracy and other related spheres of economy. This domination was challenged by multiple democratic assertions based on religion, region and caste identities. Brahmins and its socio-political ideology were criticized fiercely for its exploitative and hegemonic appropriation of knowledge and power. Alternative models of civil living were expounded against Brahmanical stereotypes and its conservative outlook.

During the national independence struggle, one of the major demands of the anti-caste social movements was to have equitable representation in the political institutions. They demanded respectable secular recognition to their caste identities and independently formulated their own political ideologies. The first and most daring political opposition to this hegemony was provided by Periyar Ramaswamy in Tamil Nadu by developing a robust anti-Brahmin Dravidian identity. Dravida Munetra Kazhagam, the party controlled by the non-Brahmins, rose to power making anti-brahmanism its main political plank. In Maharashtra, the anti-caste movement under Mahatma Jyotiba Phule had subtle political implications but it was only under Dr. Ambedkar’s leadership that a sound political critique of Brahmanism developed among the public consciousness. The post-Nehruvian era also witnessed the anti-Brahmanical political struggles in the Northern India. The peasantry under the dynamic leadership of Jai Prakash Narayan and Rammanohar Lohia, mobilized a vast majority against the Brahmin dominated Congress Party and formed a comprehensive alliance of non-brahmin castes. In the recent times, the BSP has developed a staggering political offensive against the upper castes and especially against the Brahmins and in a very short period became one of the most dominant political forces in Northern India.
The Constitution guarantees proportionate representation to the SC/STs in the Parliamentary and the State Assembly. However, this representation does not reflect any socially rooted commitment or independent political consciousness on behalf of the deprived sections. Therefore, the elected members from the SC/ST reserved seats were condemned by the BSP for their allegiance with the Nationalist Parties and arguments were built in favor of the ‘true’ representatives. Independent political consciousness of the deprived ‘Bahujan’ becomes the struggling slogan against the nationalist parties as the token SC/ST reservation is futile to solve the perpetual problems of the Dalits and other weaker sections.

The Other Backward Castes and the Dalits because of their numerical strengths and with the new political consciousness simultaneously becomes a hurdle in the easy march of power by the upper castes. The Dalits and the OBC’s are the new dominant players in India’s democracy today. Most of the parties at the state level are dominated by the influential OBC castes like Yadavs, Kurmis, Reddys, Patels etc. They have also developed a close knit with the Muslims to form an alternative political combination. The Dalits on the other hand, have developed a strong sense of belonging with the BSP and as the committed bloc voters they have ruined the hopes of Congress in Uttar Pradesh and doing the same in many other northern states. The BSP is poised to generate a nation-wide Dalit sentiment in its favor in the absence of any legitimate political movement which can represent their social concerns.

Limitations of Social Justice Agenda: The Negative Side:

The Social Justice initiatives in India were launched with a vision of promoting national integrity, economic and social empowerment of the socially deprived sections and a socially inclusive sector of the employment. As seen above, the mobility of the Dalits from the erstwhile untouchable castes to the newly acquired position of power brokers or holders is visible at multiple indicators of development. The reservation policy is a crucial initiative in this regards. On the other hand, among the OBCs, the social empowerment has remained subject to their political mobilization capacity. The reservation policy was implemented for the OBCs at the central level in as late as in
1993 under wider speculations and criticisms against its implementation. The OBCs are still facing the dilemma regarding its national status and yet to demand a comprehensive charter on social justice issues. Therefore the reservation policy is beneficial for the OBCs especially in socially diversifying the public sector employments. However, such empowerment is not starkly visible among the tribes. The issues and concerns of the tribes cannot be solved under the bureaucratically controlled mechanisms of Reservation Policy. It has been demanded that the Social Justice initiatives must respect their livelihood which depends on the forests and their specificity with their intrinsic cultural values before forming any policy framework.\footnote{Surajit Sinha “Tribal Solidarity Movement” in T. K. Oommen Social Movements I: Issues of Identity, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2010, pp. 209-221}

The regime of Social Justice in India has a long history of over hundred years. However it was designated an influential principal of the state’s functioning only in the sovereign India. Therefore, the last six decades of social justice initiatives are under the analytical scrutiny here. I would like to argue that the above mentioned positive sides of the Social Justice initiatives also have a darker side. The Social Justice initiatives by the states remain reluctant in addressing multiple socio-economic and political issues of the deprived sections which are essential for their holistic empowerment. The social justice policy framework is consumed with large scale biasness by the implementers, corruption and nepotism, lack of commitment and independent will by the State in favor of the deprived sections and most importantly the absence of national political front which can struggle for the implementation of all the measures under the social justice regime. Under this context the issues of the deprived sections stand still. The social justice perspective faces multiple limitations in solving the problems of the socially deprived sections. Following are some of those issues.

**Non-Implementation of Reserved Quota for the SC/STs**

Reservation in the government sector is seen as one of the necessary condition for the empowerment of the SC/STs. The constitution articulates firm guidelines and norms for a comprehensive implementation of the reservation policy. However, the facts regarding the implementation of reservation policy narrates a different story. Most of the SC representation in the government jobs is in the lower cadre groups of C and D and the
quota policy in the A and B cadre jobs has not been implemented fairly. Further, the ST representation in the Central government employment sector is worse than the SCs. Thus, the intended benefits of the reservation policy are restricted only to a small sections and a large section of the population remains out of its influence.

**Practice of Untouchability and Atrocities**

Modernity is welcomed by the Dalits in the hope that it will end the discriminatory social status based on caste identity. Untouchability is seen as the blot on the Indian civilization and its earliest destruction is sought. The first elected government of India passed Anti-Untouchability legislation in 1955. Despite such poised objective, the social conditions of the Dalits are marked with consistent acts of caste atrocities, violence and forceful social segregations. The practice of Untouchability is perpetuated at multiple levels in the public life with new attires and norms. Empirical evidences are provided by the social scientists these demonstrates that even in the rural sectors open practices of social discriminations like non-access to tea shops, denial of water facilities, denial of barber and washermen’s services, ban on marriage procession on roads, denial of right to seat with the upper caste and other such practices are still reluctantly observed in many states.\(^9\) Even in urban centers on many occasions the nature of atrocities turned violent and ended in brutally eliminating the victims. In places like Nagpur, Gurgaon, Jhajjhar and Mumbai have recently experienced the attacks on the Dalit families in the most heinous manner. Further, the labor market is also blotted with such practices through exclusion and discrimination in hiring, wage payments and as low as preventing the Dalits from selling in local market.\(^10\)

**Dalits in the Agricultural/Forest Economy:**

During the National Independence Struggle, one of the major reasons identified for the deepened poverty in India was the heavy concentration of agricultural land in few households. The agriculture economy was feudalistic in which caste played a prominent role in distinguishing the classes. The Dalits became the worst victims of the feudal

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exploitation because they were landless laborers, the poorest class and their social identity was stigmatized and degraded. Therefore, emancipation of the Dalits from such abusive system also became one of the major objectives of social justice perspective in India. Ambedkar advised the Dalits to shift to the industry based urban economy in order to liberate from the den of exploitative village economy. The state also promised to bring radical reforms in agricultural sectors; however the most awaited promise of land reforms remained unfulfilled by the political elites. Even today a vast majority of the Dalit population has continued to be dependent on Agriculture. A large Dalit population is landless or holds only insignificant land access. The agricultural sector remains discriminatory towards the Dalits in providing equitable wage labor or sustainable employment. They consistently suffered discrimination with respect to land, labor and capital. A small section among the Dalits has access to land and a miniscule section cultivates it. However, as the wage laborers they are almost twice to other social groups.\footnote{11}

At the all India level the Dalits also remain poorer in comparison with other social groups. The greater dependency of the Dalits on agriculture for livelihood, mainly as landless labors with low wage rates has created the condition for such chronic poverty. Further, demographically more than 9 per cent of India’s population (the Tribes) is dependent on forest economy. The livelihood of farmers and tribes is essentially dependent on the agricultural and forest land. Most of the states in India have neglected the importance of land in the daily life of the poor people while formulating development policies. Under the aegis of private capital and influenced by the new mantra of development, multiple acres of land have been acquired from the poor and distributed among the industrial classes for various developmental projects, without firmly addressing the basic question of compensation and rehabilitation.\footnote{12} This mode of development entails large-scale displacement of the natives as witnessed in the Big Dam Projects at Narmada River valley, Hirakund or Bhakra-Nangal Dam project. Ecological

\footnote{11} Ibid, pp. 55-62
\footnote{12} When I was writing this chapter, debates were raised in the mainstream media over this very issue. Arundhati Ray has developed a sympathetic discourse on tribal issue and argued that the Maoist violence against the state is a reciprocal reaction to the developmental activities which government is willing to carry in the tribal belt on the behest of the capitalist-corporate lobbies.
destructions are evident in this effort as shown through the Posco project in Orissa. Such developmental models have a capacity to drive many Dalit communities to destitution and disempowerment as shown through the closure of large Textile mills in Mumbai in the recent times.

Absence of Conscious and Progressive Middle Class among the Dalits and the Tribes:
Even after the 60 years of India’s independence, the oppressed sections in the different states have not yet produced a socially conscious-progressive middle class. The Upper castes, especially the Brahmins have been dominating the national politics for the last 50 years. In most of the states, the social and political spheres are dominated by the chauvinistic regional rhetoric of like language and ethnic identity mostly created by the political elites. The upper castes especially the Brahmins and the middle classes also dominate the trade and commerce of the states to a very large extent. On the other hand, the Dalits and Tribes are considered as politically insignificant forces, they are socially deprived and discriminated and economically, they remain the poorest among the population. However, we have not witnessed any consolidated social or political movement by the deprived sections against such hegemonic domination. Moreover, the influential strata amongst the Dalits and the Tribes have been considerably co-opted by the right wing forces.

The Dalit and Tribal leadership is feeble and non-influential as they operate under the aegis of state apparatus or under the control of upper caste political elites. States like, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Bengal, Punjab, Gujarat and Rajasthan have a significant SC/ST population (more than 20 per cent) however, in all these states there is a negligible presence of Dalit or Tribal social or political movements. Due to lack of independent consciousness about their economic deprivation, social exclusion and political marginalization they are unable to forge a struggle against the oppressive socio-economic system.

Other Related Issues:
Sukhdeo Thorat in his work supplemented by excessive facts based on various reports and field works has demonstrated that the Dalits in India have marginally risen from their earlier degraded socio-economic conditions and majority of the population is still
under the clout of poverty, social discrimination and violence. Such discriminatory disparities remain also in the educational sectors. Even though there is a significant rise in the literacy rate among the SC, their participation in elementary and higher education lags behind significantly in comparison with the non-SC/ST counterparts. Further on the health status of the Dalits are really poor and more deprived in comparison with other sections of the population. Almost on all the indicators of health, the SC suffers worst kind of inaccessibility with the basic health care facilities like maternity and immunization. At the all-India level despite 80 per cent electrification of villages, 65 per cent SCs do not have access to electricity. Some of the basic civic amenities like shelter, water and toilet facilities are unavailable to a large population among the Dalits. In Rural Kerala, Assam and Rajasthan the situation is worst where less than 50 per cent population have access of safe drinking water. The living conditions of the Dalits are still deplorable, because of unavailability of proper sanitation, toilets and other civic requirements. The urban poor habitations are largely concentrated by Dalit households. Overall, the story of Dalit empowerment falls considerably short to hide the plights of majority of the population.

The New Challenges:

The social justice agenda in India has shown necessary flexibility in addressing the concerns and problems of the deprived sections and has eventually extended its purview to newer communities and groups. However, there is an increasing number of democratic demands from various quarters of the population appealing for special recognition and status. The institution of social justice is struggling to provide justice to these numerous groups as there is no articulated policy framework available which can resolve these issues.

The Rise of the Most Backward Classes (MBCs) and Ati-Dalit categories:

The OBC is a complex identity, comprising a vast 52 per cent Indian population under its clout. Apart from the socially and economically backward classes among the Hindus it also identifies large number of Muslim and Christian groups as OBCs. According to

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the notification issued by the Department of Backward Classes, Most Backward Classes and Minorities Welfare of Tamil Nadu, the Communities which are found to be as disadvantaged as the SCs but cannot be declared as Scheduled Castes (SCs), because of the non-existence of untouchability factor are classified as Most Backward Classes (MBCs). The North Indian States especially Bihar and Uttar Pradesh take a political turn on the issue of MBCs by alleging that the elites among the OBCs (Yadav castes) are unequally benefited by the OBC’s political and social nomenclature and most of the castes among the OBCs remained socially, educationally and economically marginalized. Therefore, further stratification among the OBCs is sought on the parameters of marginalization and backwardness. The states legitimized such demands in various ways and all the schemes available for BCs are commonly applicable for MBCs also. In addition to this certain additional educational concessions like concessions in fees structure and liberalized scholarship benefits are extended to them.

In regards to the SC/ST reservation, political attempts were made to bi-furcate the homogenous identities. The claims for the need of the stratification among the SC/ST identities is based on the assumption that in certain states some Dalit castes have done exceptionally well on the educational and economic parameters (like Mahars in Maharashtra, Madigas in Andhra Pradesh and Chamars in Uttar Pradesh) and therefore they should be excluded from the profits of the reservation policy. The worst affected groups among the SC/STs should be prioritized and a sub-quota in the reservation should be secured for these Ati-Dalit castes.

Finally, the ruling elites are willing to enforce the same argument of the creamy layer over the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribe categories once they succeed with the OBCs. In Punjab, Haryana and Andhra Pradesh the Scheduled Castes have already been bifurcated into two categories claiming that one caste especially Chamars in Haryana and Punjab and in Malas in Andhra Pradesh gain most of the bureaucratic and economic benefits. They argued that the benefits of reservation for the people of the SC category are enjoyed by only 3 per cent of the total SC population and therefore categorization based on creamy layer system is needed. Further, a five-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court on 19th October 2006 held that the "creamy layer" among the Scheduled
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Castes and the Scheduled Tribes must be excluded from the purview of reservation in public employment and promotions. (Times of India, Oct. 20, 2006)

The issue of excluding the creamy layer among SCs and STs does not arise for consideration in the current context. That issue was already settled in 1992 by a larger bench of nine judges (Indra Sawhney versus Union of India — the 'Mandal case,' AIR 1993 SC 447) and also in 2004 by a co-ordinate bench of five judges (E. V. Chinnaiah versus State of Andhra Pradesh and Others, AIR 2005 SC 162) by holding that the concept of creamy layer had no application to SCs and STs. The October 19, 2006 judgment in the Nagaraj case by five judges cannot and, in fact, does not derogate from these earlier pronouncements. Also, only Parliament has the power to modify the SC/ST. lists under Articles 341 and 342. However, by their continuous political and judicial efforts the ruling upper caste elites are creating a hyper impression about the presence of creamy layer categories among the SCs and STs similar to the OBCs. Such articulation has a political motive. The main objective behind such efforts is to demean and scuttle the capacity of reservation policy as non beneficial endeavor of the state for the deprived sections as it benefits the few among them. The issue of creamy layer is one of the many weapons that are used to counter the moral logic of reservation policy in India. It not only disturbs the emerging political unity of the deprived sections over the issue of social justice but further creates enmity and contempt towards the communities which are benefited by the policy in the past.

The Limitations of Social Justice Agenda in the New Economic Policy:

The assault of global economy has changed the nature of welfare state in India. From a socialism sensitive welfare state it has now become a collaborator of international finance capital. This sudden change in the economic structure is commonly known as New Economic Policy (NEP). The worst affected social categories by NEP are the Dalits.14 Being at the nadir of economic development and social mobility the Dalits visualize globalization and new economic policies as another form of attack by the upper

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14 P. G. Jogdand argues that the worst effect of NEP on the poor SC/ST is factually visible because of the new policies there is a) decline of rural non-agriculture employment and income (b) decline in per capita availability of food grains and cereals, (c) reduction in central expenditure on anti-poverty programmes and (d) decline in expenditure on sector which improves social consumption. See, P. G. Jogdand (Ed) New Economic Policy and Dalits, Rawat Publications, New Delhi
caste elites to subvert the profits and safeguards provided by the modern state. Therefore, challenging the economic globalization becomes one of the main agenda of contemporary the Dalit movement. Secondly, the state which was conceptualized and established by the nation builder as a proactive agency for bringing social and economic change is backtracking from its moral duty. Dalits visualize the role of the state as a prime contributor in initiating necessary reforms because of its historic legacy and promise that it has offered in the post-independence era.

The new logic of modern capitalist economy in the name of globalization demands a minimal state in the economic domain. Capitalism as a vulgar exploiter of labor and its produced surplus will become a new imperialist force if there is absence of state as a moderator between the market and society. In India, the ruling political elites because of their class position readily align with the national bourgeois capitalist and use the state machinery to pave a swift welcome to the international finance capital. Here, only the some new social movements (especially related to tribal rights and ecological issues) to some extent have grasped this reality and provided some resistance at the national policy level. Surprisingly, the Dalit perspective is yet to formulate any concrete agenda to counter this attack and mostly remains content with the tokenism of the state for providing them certain passive policy frameworks.

Further, with the arrival of modern sophisticated technological advancements in the manufacturing industries, there has been a consistent reduction in the numbers of the required labors that were required in the traditional production enterprises. Today majority of the employment opportunities are confined to the service sectors which are restricted to skilled white collar labors. Importantly in the absence of any Affirmative Action measures by the state, the socially deprived sections hardly have any opportunity to be part of the general work force.

Most importantly the displaced people because of the developmental projects (especially in the Tribal regions: Jharkhand, Orissa, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra) are not skilled enough to comfortably move on to a new type of technology based labor activities. The Tribes and the Dalits in the rural areas are mostly farm workers or the forest dwellers. Vast majority of this population is illiterate and because of nascent knowledge about the outer world they are afraid to communicate in a
dignified manner. They are not passionate about the new way of development, employment or urban livelihood as the life cycle of these communities revolves mostly around the assets of forests and agricultural economy. The model of development under the NEP in India while strategizing their agendas neglect these fundamental issues related to the daily life of the rural poor and the tribes.

The construction of new classes in the global economy has a caste character and the Dalits have a negligible role and participation in this sphere. The changing nature of Indian state under the domination global economy is seen by Dalits as antithetical to the principles of the constitutional state and therefore they argue that the political elites should follow the constitutional morality. The modern Dalit movements in India are predominantly non-violent, democratic and have mostly adopted moderate modes of street protests in support of their demands. The Dalit Movements in India have located the State as the prime agency for bringing necessary reforms in the society and reposed its faith even in the era of globalization.


As mentioned in the previous chapter, the religious minorities, especially the Muslims and the Christians had to face the fervor of secular and Hindu nationalism which resulted into non-recognition of these two religions as the beneficiaries of social justice policies. Political democracy will be based on universal suffrage with no communitarian right of representation in legislative bodies and also no special support or additional safeguards to improve the conditions of socially and economically backward sections of these groups.

The Social Justice initiatives like reservations cover the socially deprived sections of the non-Hindu religions like the Sikhs and the Buddhists. However, social deprivation based on caste identity is not restricted only to the Indian born religions. Various sociological studies have shown that caste like structures exist even in the Christians and the Muslims. Majority population of both the religions are termed as backward or lower castes in multiple studies, state censuses and commission reports. Many social scientists also acknowledge the fact that the caste system among these religions is the direct
impact of its relationship with the Hindu culture and social traditions. Further, it is also mentioned that vast majority of these religions in India are converted from the Hindu population. However, the converted subjects remain bonded with their erstwhile social identity and occupations and carry forward the same status even into the new religions.

The low born population of these religions faces a double edge repression. On the one hand, as the subjects of religious minority they are vulnerable to the communal onslaught of the rightwing Hindutva forces and on the other hand they face perpetual social discrimination from the social elites of the same religions. In the recent times most of the issues related to the minority religions are interlinked with the caste questions. However, this link is yet to be recognized by the state and the deprived sections among the Muslims and the Christians are continuously living in social flux. Converted Dalits to Christianity and Islam faced different kinds of discrimination and opposition. In 1981, when more than thousand Dalits of the Minakshipuram in Tamil Nadu were converted to Islam against their perpetual inhumane treatment by the upper caste, the State and even the Dalit social movement failed to defend their right for religious liberty.

In 1990s, Gujarat has witnessed violent attacks against the Christian minorities. Reacting to this, the then Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, had given a call of the national debate on Conversion in 1999; the social justice perspective remained reluctant in submitting a sound synthesis over the issue of religious conversion and its relationship to the social emancipation. In April 2007, The Rajasthan Government passed the Anti-Religious Conversion Bill without meeting any serious opposition from the Dalit social movements; forget about the challenge from the greater civil society. The most glaring example of such growing apathy is the recent incidents of riots and attacks against the Christians in Gujarat, Karnataka and most recently in Orissa.

Religious reforms have remained one of the central themes of the Social Justice perspective in India. However, it mostly revolves around the Hindu Dalits and their relationships with the dominant Hindu social order. Apart from the Dalit-Buddhist

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15 Ambedkar had referred about caste in non-Hindu religions in *Annihilation of Castes*, however he argued that the castes in these religions are fundamentally different from the Hindus. Louis Dumont and Imtiaz Ahmad in the later stages did important ethnographic works on caste among non-Hindu religions.
movement in Maharashtra, a critical comparative methodology has not been developed in other parts of the country vis-à-vis the relationship of the Dalits of non-Hindu religions like Sikhism, Christianity and Islam, with the Hindu Dalits. The Social Justice perspective is yet to treat the converted Dalits Christians and Muslims as essential subjects of greater social movement and the state is yet to take any serious measures to overcome the socio-economic hardship that these communities are facing. Their demand for an inclusive platform of social justice has yet to achieve respectable space in the mainstream discourses of the social justice agenda today. In the recent past, such indifferent tendency has increased further on many crucial issues of the Dalit Christians and Muslims. Further the lack of theoretical and practical engagements by the Dalit social movements on the socio-religious issues of these deprived sections has provided impetus to the right wing political outfits to gain momentum in the public discourses.

Muslims and Christians in India: Social Deprivation, Backwardness and the Limitations of the Secularism Doctrine

In the following section, I will critically investigate the merits of nationalist assumptions made in regards of the minorities, especially about the Muslims and the Christians. I shall argue that the current socio-economic status of these two minority religions has continuously degraded in the absence of vital political interventions to empower them. Further, both the groups are contaminated by the unethical practices of caste discrimination identical with the Hindu social order. In the absence of any effective reformist movement within the respective groups for bringing radical progressive social change within the community, vast sections of the population have to live in a degraded social system. The main intention here is to demonstrate the limitation of secularism in resolving such important issues of daily life in order to justify the extension of social justice principles to all the socially deprived communities.

The Muslims came to the Kerala coast as early as the seventh century. The Syrian Christians of Kerala claim to be converts since 52 A.D. At any rate, an overwhelming majority of the Muslims and the Christians are converts from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.16 In the contemporary India, the Muslims and the Christians together

comprise of almost 16 per cent of the population (Muslims 13.4% and Christians 2.5%). In some states Muslim Population is significantly higher than the national average like Jammu-Kashmir (67%), Assam (30.9%), West Bengal (25.2%), Kerala (24.7%), Uttar Pradesh (18.5%), and Bihar (16.5%). States like Karnataka (12.2%), Maharashtra (10.6%), and Andhra Pradesh (9.2%) also have sizable population of Muslims. The Christian population is above the national average in the North Eastern States especially in Nagaland (90%), Mizoram (87%), and Meghalaya (70.2%), other states like Goa (26.7%), Kerala (19%), Tamil Nadu (6.1%) and Orissa (2.4%) also represent considerable Christian population.

Both the communities have faced worst kind of communal onslaught from the right wing Hindutva forces. Hindu communalism has orchestrated a decisive campaign against these religions even before the independence. The agenda of communalism strategically took violent turn against them in multiple occasions and under such tensed situations the Hindutva forces, tried to make the public sphere intolerable towards these religions. Violent attacks against the minorities have increased significantly with the rise of Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) as the prime political party at the national level. In the recent times states like Maharashtra, Gujarat, Jammu, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Orissa, and Karnataka have witnessed the rise in the incidents and cases of communal riots, attacks on churches and mosques, violence against missionaries and other related communal attacks against the minorities. Hindu communalism is operational in demonizing the subjects of these religions as criminals, anti-social or foreigners. In effect of such widespread xenophobic campaign the Christians and the Muslims have to face open discrimination and marginalization in the public spaces. However, communalism is not the only issue which affects the life of the minorities. Since independence, the minorities, especially the Muslims and the Christians are the victims of general negligence by the secular political elites of the state while formulating welfare policies.

Though the state has set a statutory body called as the National Commission for the Minorities (NCM) to safeguard the rights and the interests of the minorities and in current juncture 15 different states have also set up their own minority commissions, these institutions remained irrelevant in highlighting the plights of the minorities. These
institutions lack constitutional support, autonomy and resources because of which it has not produced any significant changes in the life of religious minorities.\textsuperscript{17} Importantly, in relationship with the Muslims, the state has shown certain interest by formulating specific welfare policies like providing National status to Urdu or providing subsidy to Haj pilgrims. However these programs seem as symbolic initiatives of the government as it has not brought any concrete change in the conditions of the Muslims.

The Christians are neglected in most of the state sponsored studies related to religious minorities. However, there is sizable amount of statistical database available concerned to the socio-economic conditions of the Muslims. In the early 1980's, the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had constituted a 10 member high-power Commission on Minorities, SCs and STs and Other Weaker Sections headed by Dr. Gopal Singh in order to study the conditions of these sections. In its report the committee mentioned that the minorities suffers from greater deprivation and disadvantage as compared to the majority community and that the sense of discrimination prevails among the minorities. It categorically mentions the Muslims as socially and educationally backward community which requires urgent measures for their development.\textsuperscript{18} In 2005, the UPA government constituted seven members high-level Committee headed by Justice Rajinder Sachar in order to examine specifically the social, economic and educational status of Muslim community. The findings of the report are based on collated data from across the country and multiple comparative indices like community income, employment, health, education, poverty, consumption and standards of living. These are used to demonstrate the deprived conditions of the Muslims. Most importantly this committee makes a significant study of the social stratification among the Muslims and demonstrated that caste like communities operate within this religion including the practice of untouchability.\textsuperscript{19} This report has significantly impacted the current discourse on minorities. In the recent times the Ranganath Mishra Commission\textsuperscript{20} has submitted its

\begin{itemize}
    \item \textsuperscript{17} Hasan, Zoya, \textit{Politics of Inclusion: Caste, Minorities and Affirmative Action}, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2009, pp. 66-70
    \item \textsuperscript{18} Ibid. p. 8
    \item \textsuperscript{19} Sacchar Committee Report is submitted in November 2006. This is a High-Level Committee constituted by the Prime Minister to study the social, economic and education conditions of the Muslims in India.
    \item \textsuperscript{20} National Commission of Religious and Linguistic Minorities (NCRLM)
\end{itemize}

In most of the social, economic, educational and political indicators, both the communities lag behind the Hindus in a significant way. Comparatively, the Muslims are socially, economically and educationally more backward than the Hindus and the Christians. However, overwhelming majority among the Christians is also socially and economically backward as their Muslim counterparts. The issues related to the social, economic and political conditions of these minorities hardly become mainstream concern in the contemporary national debates and in most of the cases the issues related to their problems have been discussed under the secularism rubric. There is absence of sustained efforts on the parts of the state to ameliorate the conditions of the minorities even though on multiple indicators of human development these groups are marked as poor, insecure and subordinated by the majority community. In the following section, the issues of deprivation and marginalization of these communities on various parameters of human development is highlighted. The aim is to present the growth and development of social stratification among these two religions to make a case that both these communities have a complex social stratification analogous to the Hindu caste system. Further, the objective of this section is to present the economic and social status of the Muslims and the Christians which has degraded consistently in the absence of proactive government initiatives for their empowerment

\textbf{Social Stratification among the Muslims and the Christians:}

The basic idioms and teachings of both Islam and Christianity are opposed to all forms of oppressive social structures based on ethnicity, color, class or caste. Both the religions believe that man has descended from single pair of Adam and Eve and all the activities of man on the earth are dictated by the supreme authority named as \textit{Lord} or \textit{Allah}. Both are based on twin premises of Unity of God and brotherhood of all mankind. Like Christianity, Islam also had a universalistic character, teaching the world the message of egalitarianism, service and tolerance. Such humanistic order was bound to attract millions of people to its fold, and historically these two religions became the dominant
religions of mankind around the globe. However, as these two religions travelled from their place of origin to various parts of the world, interacted with new cultures and communities and later became the permanent settlers in some regions. Both the religions may have adopted many elements and features of the local environment into their daily practices or may be imposed on it by the natives. Therefore, the social and cultural practices of Muslim and Christian societies in India are different from the Muslim Arabs and the Western Christians. This fact can be illustrated by studying the social stratification of both these religions in India. Muslim and Christian societies in India are stratified on caste basis. Studies are available which throw light on the fact that these two communities operate their social behavior on certain basic features of caste like endogamy, permanent occupational specialization and social hierarchy based on birth status.  

Caste among the non-Hindus is fundamentally different from the Hindus on one important account that among the Hindus it is believed as religiously ordained system and as a sanctified virtue. Hinduism operated as Great Tradition in Indian context and the religions which migrated from outside are evolved here with a direct physical correspondence with the Hindu natives. Louis Dumont argues that under the predominantly Hindu environment the non-Hindu religions are contaminated with caste values. Hindu influence on these two religions is evident by the fact that the socio-cultural rituals, festivals and familial traditions like birth, marriage and funerals are transfused by Hindu values in a significant way. The classic Hindu idea of social ordering based on purity and impurity is visibly operating in multiple functionalities of day to day affairs in these religions. For example, C.J. Fuller argues that the caste system among the Kerala Christians and the Hindus has identical ‘orthopraxy’ and their behavior in social order is in accordance with the same set of rules concerning caste and pollution. Among Muslims in India, endogamy is a legitimized practice, especially in the northern regions. Ali Anwar specifically demonstrates certain cases of unsuccessful

23 Louis Dumont, Homo Hierarchicus, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006. P. 201
24 Ibid, p. 203
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attempts of inter-caste marriages to show how caste prejudice is deeply entrenched among the Bihar Muslims. The *ashrafs* Muslims do not marry their daughters to *ajlafs* and among the lower castes the *lalbegi* will rarely marry their girls with another lower caste like *nat* or *julaha*.

Historically lower caste groups have been converted to various non-Hindu religions in search of dignified social status. Some embraced Sikhism, Buddhism, Islam or Jainism under the influence of various social, cultural and political movements. Most of the times these groups are attracted towards other faiths because of its humane universal teachings and non dogmatic supernatural aspects enshrined in their religious teachings. They poise for fraternal equality with the fellow members and of attaining some measure of human dignity in the civil society. However, in their transition towards a new social identity, this hope has not been realized in an ideal way. Casteism is deeply rooted in the social psyche and pervades all walks of life including in those religions which claim for universal brotherhood and uniformity in their religious order. In practice, the Dalits remained 'Dalits' regardless of any religion they have embraced for social emancipation. A Dalit is condemned as lesser human being or untouchable in all the religions. Even as members of various Christian or Muslim communities, the Dalits suffer the same ancient segregation, oppression and unjust discrimination, the same social, educational and economic disabilities, the insignificant change is, however, that only now they are also discriminated by their own fellow upper caste Christians or Muslim brethren. Conversion into the new faith has not undone the stigma of 'Untouchability' or social exclusion.

**Indian Muslims and Caste System:**

In the general sociological parlances, the Muslims are generally recognized into two broad social divisions as Shias and Sunnies. These groups are further divided between *ashrafs* and *ajlafs* and the basis of this division is on ethnic origin and descent.\(^{26}\) The *ashrafs* are upper caste Muslims descendants of foreign origin (Arabs, Persian and Afghan) or the converts from the higher castes of Hindus (Brahmins, Rajputs and Kayasthas). The *ajlafs* are the lower castes among the Muslims. It includes those communities indulged into menial services in agricultural economy and in other


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professions such as weavers, cotton carders, oil-pressures, barbers and tailors. 27 Such generalization resembles the Hindu social order which is identically divided between the dwijas and the shudras. A third social category among the Muslim has recently surfaced in the public debate known as arzals. The traditional occupations of the arzals are similar to the Dalit castes and, therefore, they are also denominated as Dalit Muslims or Pasmanda Muslims.

Purity-Impurity

The Hindus treat their caste identity inseparable from their social identity as it denotes them the meaning of self in the public domains and motivates their social and political actions in a commendable sense. In contemporary period, all caste identities in most of the cases register themselves as the upholders of great historic legacy and flag their identity with a great sense of superiority over other castes, including the castes which are degraded in the social hierarchy such as the Dalits. The social order among the Muslims in most of the regions is structured around the idea of pure and impure nature of occupational services to which different castes are linked with. Their official occupational engagement determines their social position in the caste hierarchy. The ashraf castes (sayyad, shaikhs, pathans and mughals) linked their genealogy from the periods of the origin of Islam and how respective groups were engaged with Prophet Mohammad in a direct or indirect way. For example, sayyads argue that they are the direct descendants of Mohammad’s daughter Fatima and, therefore, higher in ranking. Like upper caste Rajput castes the pathans and mughals are proud of their warrior class lineages. They acknowledge themselves superior because of their descent in the land of Islam, especially Arab. This pride of lineage leads them to call the non-ashrafs as low birth of inferior ajlafs. 28 The ajlaf categories are mostly descendants of the converted Hindus. However, even the caste groups among the ajlaf Muslims also show same beliefs in their caste identity. Each Muslim caste represents a dignified sense of pride and superiority over others and differentiates their legacy and familial identity in relationship with other groups. For example, the ansaris claim that their lineage went

27 Ibid. p. 687
back to Aiyub, who welcomed Mohammad at Madina and as Mohammad himself called Aiyub and others who supported them as ansar and therefore the caste originated from there as ansari.\textsuperscript{29} The social stratification among the Muslims is predominantly based upon birth, racial status and occupational legacy. Such mystified historic analogy of caste origin, leads to the social stratification among the Muslims. They comprehensively adhered to the notion of impurity and purity of social groups.\textsuperscript{30}

**Untouchability:**

The practice of Untouchability against one section of the population is one of the notified characteristics of Hindu social order. The Dalits are disgracefully denominated as untouchables and are perpetually excluded from the social, economic and political affairs. The Dalits were mainly dependent on degraded unclean menial jobs like scavenging, skinning animal carcasses, tanning leather and making shoes, playing in musical band, removal of human waste, washing cloths and brewing of toddy.\textsuperscript{31} Such impure professional identity is perpetuated from generation to generation and becomes a permanent nomenclature for the Dalits as polluted people. They face worst kind of social exclusion, discrimination and physical violence by the upper caste Hindus who understand that such exploitative system is sanctified by the religious order. The newly defined \textit{pasmanda} category among the Muslims resembles with the Hindu Dalit identification which is also called as \textit{arzals}.

Large population among the Muslims are converted Hindus. The Dalits who converted to Islam, even in the new religion has to perform the duties of his/her old caste profession. The Dalits are never liberated from the depressing social stigma which s/he possessed in all social categories s/he adopts to change her/his social status. The social category of \textit{arzals} includes the groups indulged into inferior services condemned as impure by the social elites such as \textit{julaha} (weavers), \textit{halalkhors}, \textit{lalbegi} (scavengers) \textit{bhatiara}, \textit{gokan} (grave diggers), \textit{kasai}, \textit{bakkho}, \textit{mirshikar}, \textit{chik} (butcher), \textit{rangrezi},

\textsuperscript{29} Irfan Ahmad "A Different Jihad: Dalit Muslims' Challenge to Ashraf Hegemony" Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 38, No. 46 (Nov. 15-21, 2003), pp. 4886-4891

\textsuperscript{30} The impurity and purity is definitely not alike the Hindus, however the stratification can be termed on the basis of superiority and inferiority of various caste groups among the Muslims.

\textsuperscript{31} Oliver Mendesohn, and Marika Vicziany, The Untouchable: Subordination, Poverty and the State in Modern India, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2000, p. 7
darzi, dhobi (tailors or washermen) and nat (drum beaters). Zoya Hasan notes that the Dalit Muslim community suffers from extreme marginalization and oppression not only within the Muslim community but also in the wider society.\textsuperscript{32} Ali Anwar sharply focuses on the existence of this community among the Muslims. He presents the existing conditions of hardships and exploitation faced by the Dalit Muslims. Anwar does not blame the state for their pathetic conditions but categorically reprimanded the upper caste ashraf leadership of the Muslims ulemmas as the main culprits for their degraded social and economic conditions.\textsuperscript{33}

\textit{Endogamy:}

Ambedkar understood that in the mechanism of endogamy lies the origin of caste system. Endogamy among the Hindus maintains an oppressive compartmental structure of family by making exclusive bonding of couples on specific caste identity element and prohibits liberal exposure of individual choice over the question of marriage.\textsuperscript{34} In most of the non-Hindu societies, such concrete and rigid sense of cultural identity is achieved by subjugating women into the barricades of customs and traditions. Here, endogamy plays the most crucial role not only in consolidating the bonds of family and the related community by subjugating the women within the community but also stops any relative open hearted correspondence with other communities. Further, it is justified with the notions of pride and chastity essentially related to women.

Endogamy in India is related to rigid preservation of \textit{sacred} ethnic, caste or communal identity. This barbaric tribal notion is practised and legitimized in almost all the societies in order to save the familial bonding from any kind of pollution from the outer world. To preserve their societal pride of caste and community, every year especially in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh young couples are tortured and butchered by the saviors of this patriarchal and inhuman primitive practice. The practice of endogamy is so strict that even within a common culture and same caste group, because of gotra

\textsuperscript{32} Hasan, Zoya, \textit{Politics of Inclusion: Caste, Minorities and Affirmative Action}, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2009, p. 204

\textsuperscript{33} Irfan Ahmad "A Different Jihad: Dalit Muslims' Challenge to Ashraf Hegemony" \textit{Economic and Political Weekly}, Vol. 38, No. 46 (Nov. 15-21, 2003), p. 4887

\textsuperscript{34} B. R. Ambedkar "Caste in India", \textit{BAWS}, Vol. 1, Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, Mumbai, 1989, pp. 8-10
and sub-caste differences, forming a marital relationship has no social acceptability, forget about marrying outside your cultural boundaries.

Among the Muslims such strict caste values exist or operate in their social functioning and especially in the marriages, however, the rigidity and legitimization to the institution of caste based endogamy varies from region to region. All caste groups among the Muslims do not strictly adhered to endogamous relationships, for example, Syed Ali’s ethnographic study on caste among urban Muslims in Hyderabad argues that more than caste identity, income, education, and occupation become primary consideration for marriages, however he has located the importance of caste in match-making. Most of the marriages taking place among the ashraf in North India is in between the same sub-division with preferences varies from the argument of maintaining purity of blood to sharing same economic and cultural values. 35 Victor D’souza who has investigated the social stratification among the Moplah Muslims in Kerala notes that endogamy among this community is a strict rule. Zarina Bhatti in her study of Muslims in Kausali district also located that marriages among ashrafs and non-ashraf Muslims is inconceivable and not even a single marriage of this kind is successfully materialized in this place. However, she accepts that marriages are possibly held between the ashrafs sub-castes. 36

Dominant Social Elites:

Perpetual domination of Upper castes over the lower castes in socio-economic and political spheres is another characteristic of Hindu social order. Public offices, business enterprises, educational institutions, cultural and religious organizations are under the strong grip of Hindu upper caste communities leaving a residual role to other castes. The Muslim representation is also negligible in all such spheres; however Ali Anwar argues that this representation of Muslims is overwhelmingly dominated by the ashrafs. Anwar Alam statistically demonstrates how upper caste Muslims maintain their hegemony and control various resources and institutions in which the Muslims are indulged. He argues that the ashrafs monopolise all key positions in the religious and educational institutions.

which are predominantly controlled by the Muslims, Forums and institutions like Imrarat-e-Sharia, Phulwari Sharif, Idar-e-Sharia, All India Milli Council, All India Muslim Personal Law Board, Urdu Academy, Sunni Waqf Board, Minorities Commission, Madarsa Board and Urdu Advisory Council have a visible hegemony of ashraf castes. The sayyed, sheiks or pathan castes dominated the popular Muslim leadership of major political parties. The elected Muslim legislators from any party in most of the cases are the ashraf Muslims. The ashrafs are also in majority among the Muslims selected for government jobs especially in civil services and the legislative bodies. The popular domain of culture, art, cinema, music and literature in which we have seen dominant Muslim personalities usually flaunts ashraf lineages and names.

The above illustrated social stratification among the Muslims highlights the facts that this community is divided on ranked order broadly identified as ashrafs, ajlafs and arjals. The division is based on unequal distribution of social status in which the ashrafs dominates the rest in the social, cultural, educational and political spaces in a rough vertical manner. This is also true that the institution of caste among the Muslims is not perfectly identical with the Hindus however there are similar patterns of social behaviors like practice of endogamy and social status adhered to birth. The practice of untouchability is further not systematically followed among the Muslims, however the ajlafs are identically discriminated in social order and their socio-economic conditions are similar with the contemporary Hindu Dalits. Further, the ashrafs are not analogous to the Hindu Brahmins as they hardly claim for a spiritually superior position for themselves based on ritualistic purity or canonical sanctity. However, the ashrafs can be closely identified with the intermediate Hindu castes like rajputs or kayasthas. Most importantly, caste is operative social institutions among the Muslims without having supplementary support from the religious doctrine of Islam which makes the caste system among the Muslims different from that of the Hindus. I would like to argue that this difference between the Hindu and Muslim caste system is an abstract analogy having almost no impact over the cultural practices and social behaviors of the current Muslim society.

37 In the 60 years of parliamentary democracy in India, out of 7, 500 members only 400 members from Muslim community were elected to Lok Sabha. Interestingly only 60 within this group have been OBC Muslims. See, Khalid Anis Ansari “Debating ‘Muslim’ Reservation” in Mainstream, Vol. XLVIII, No. 16, April 10, 2010, New Delhi, p. 21
Crucial to this issue is the absence of dynamic social reform movements within the Muslim society. The Hindu social order has undergone a dynamic progressive change under the impact of western modernity and consistently rebuilding its social tenets based on the current universal understanding of moral life. The social reformers, political leadership, intellectual class and state's institutions by and large remain committed to the ethos of modernity. It has resulted into bringing emancipatory measures and agendas for the betterment of the socially and economically deprived sections among the Hindus. On the other hand, issues related to the internal crises among the Muslims are not brought into the mainstream democratic debates. The Muslim society remains under the elitist conservative leadership of upper caste ullemaas, which look upon the modernist values as another hegemonic strategy of the Christian world. The elites also propagate the fear of the impingement by the secular state in their internal affairs of the community and demand exclusive autonomy in the socio-cultural realms. However, such legitimized indifference of the state and the promoters of modernity shown towards the Muslim community have periodically strengthened the domination of upper caste elites, perpetuated the patriarchal control of women and a large section of the Muslims remain subservient to socio-economic and educational backwardness.

Social Stratification among the Christians:

More than 60 per cent of the Christian population resides in the southern states in India. Kerala, comprise more than 32 per cent of this population. Early Christian missionary activities of different denominations have influenced Kerala society in a significant way. Conversion from Hinduism is one of the major reasons for such a dramatic increase of Christian population in these regions.

The Christian society in India is a complex one. The community is divided on many parameters of social, religious and regional identities. The historical divide between the Catholics and Protestants is further stratified into more than 300 religious denominations or sects. Due to continuous fixtures to their denominations, no Church has emerged as the universal authority over all the Christians in India. Such complex heterogeneity reflects in the social stratification also, which is operated with certain caste values, customs and rituals identical with Hindu social system. Both the Christian domains,

Catholics and Protestants, are divided on caste basis. The converts had never shed their social positions and mostly remain committed to their traditional professional and customary values. In the new religion their professional and caste status was restructured only in a superficial way without bringing any radical change in the social relationship.

The early Christian missionaries, especially the Lutheran and Catholic missions, were more reluctant to take a stand on the issue of caste and consciously worked among the upper caste Brahmins. In Kerala, the earliest converted population known as Syrian Christians was seen as the descendents of Namboodari Brahmins, the highest ranking caste, whom were converted by Saint Thomas in the early centuries of Christian eras. The Syrian Christians because of their Catholic denomination, high lineage and economic prosperity (Syrians were important pepper merchants, landlords and traders in these regions) compare themselves with the upper caste Brahmins or Nayyars. In the Madras province also the earliest converts were the members of the ruling Maravar caste and influential Vellalar caste. Both the castes were landowning catholic castes and control the economic resources of the villages. In Goa, Brahmin converts became Christian Roman Catholics but retain their superior position by notifying themselves as Christian Bamonn and the Kshatriya became Christian noblemen called Chardos. The Christian clergy is exclusively controlled by the Bamonn. Upper caste Brahmins were also converted by the catholic missionaries in the west coast region in Karnataka, particularly the south Canara region.

The upper caste converts, especially the Brahmins remained one of the most influential sections among the Christians. It is widely regarded that the renowned Italian Jesuit, Roberto de Nobili (1577-1656 A.D) was the first missionary who was instrumental in converting several Hindu Brahmins to the Christian faith. Nobili came to India along with the very first missionaries to Goa to spread Roman Catholicism. He adopted a

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42 In the later period Nobili worked primarily in Tamil Nadu as a missionary.
method of conversion which was different from the earlier missionaries. In order to avoid any enmity with the Brahmins, Nobili accepted the caste stratification and advised separate missions to convert the non-Brahmins.\footnote{J. Tharamangalam, “Caste among Christians in India” Srinivas, M.N. (Ed.), \textit{Caste is Twentieth Century Avatar}, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 1996, p. 282} The Brahmins were allowed to keep their superior social position, including the sacred thread and a tacit non interference in the socio-cultural realm became an integral practice of the Roman Catholics. However, the missionaries did not receive great success in converting the Brahmins and other upper castes.\footnote{J. H. Beaglehole “The Indian Christians: A Study of a Minority” \textit{Modern Asian Studies}, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1967), p. 59} Consequently, the missionaries turned to other castes for their activities.

Further, with the advent of protestant missionaries in regions like Bengal, Madras and Kerala, the social emancipation of the lower caste became a priority concern for many missionary activists. The lower caste people were located as the oppressed subjects, denied of the belief in the potential spiritual and material development as individual, especially the untouchable castes. The Protestant churches accepted that the struggle against caste was one of the vital concerns that confronted them in India.

Other professional castes among Hindus converted in the later stage both by the Catholic and the Protestant missionaries. The protestant missionaries paid great attention to the non-Brahmin communities. The professional Hindu castes were also attracted towards Christianity and became the second rung of Christian community. In Kerala, the missionaries converted \textit{Kukkuvans} and \textit{Ayyar} caste (fishermen by occupation) who later denominated as second major group as Latin Christians.\footnote{C. J. Fuller, “Kerala Christians and Caste System” \textit{Man, New series}, Vol. 11, No. 1, (March 1976), p. 55} In the Madras region, the \textit{nadars}, \textit{Acaris} (carpenters) were converted and similarly the Toddy Tapper castes in Goa were converted.

The untouchable castes for a long period remained aloof from the activities of the missionaries. Work among the Depressed Classes had become an important feature of missionary activity from the beginning of the nineteenth century, especially in the 1870s. The greatest success, at first, came in South India where the problem of these groups was most acute. The untouchable caste was also motivated towards the Christian missionaries in the poised hope to escape perpetual social exclusion of the Hindu
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...society. In response the London Missionary Society, succeeded in converting Madigas and Malas in Andhra Pradesh, in the Punjab the Chuhras were among the first untouchable converts. In Bengal majority of the Christian converts were from the Namasudras and other depressed castes. The Pulaya and Paraya are the important untouchable castes in Kerala converted to Christianity. These converts were termed as New Christians and mainly led by the European Protestants during the initial missionary activities among the untouchables. The Tribal population of the North-Eastern hill region came into the direct influence of the Catholic and the Protestant Missionaries from the second half of the Nineteenth Century. In the north the Christian population is insignificantly low and most of the missionary activities remained concentrated among the tribes in the regions of Chotanagpur area of Bihar or in Orissa but in a very limited manner.

Christians are not a homogenous community. More than religious denominations, the Christian community is also contaminated by caste values. Membership of Christian groups is ascribed by birth status and in most of the cases the converts retained their ex-caste identity and family name. As seen earlier in the case of Muslim society, the Christians can also be stratified in three broad social compartments. First, the upper caste Christians (Christians converted from Brahmin or other upper castes, for example Kerala Syrians). Second, the middle caste Christians (converted from the professional classes like fishermen, carpenters or Toddy Tappers) and finally, the untouchable castes and tribal converts to Christianity known as New Christians or Dalit Christians. These three groups are structured identically with the Hindu social groups and maintain similar patterns of social functioning, rituals and other customary values. The egalitarian and humane philosophy of Christianity has little impact on changing the social division between the fellow Christians and in result the social practice of this community was heavily influenced and channelized by the Hindu doctrine of social stratification.

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46 Ibid. p. 57
Many social scientists observe that endogamous marriages are one of the important characteristics of caste system. In this sense, most of the marital relationships among the Christians uphold endogamous relationships. In Kerala, the Syrians do endogamous marriages. Fuller argues that there is no marital union between the Syrians and Latin Christians or New Christians, nor are there unions between the latter two groupings. Marital alliances between the Syrians and Dalit Christians are staunchly condemned as a religious practice and even priest can be deployed to avert such relationships. The converted tribes are also conscious of their ethnic identity during making marital relationships. In Orissa, the Kandha tribes preferred marriages within the same community and there is hardly any example of converted Kandha marrying a non-Kandha Christian. Endogamy provides every caste group a sense of exclusivity which they consciously apply to mark their separate presence. Even the Church authorities are in support of such alliances and thus recreate caste identities within Christianity. In absence of any radical social movement to avoid and destroy such compartmentalization of caste communities, the caste values operate openly in structuring the society.

In India, the socio-cultural history of Christianity can be traced back to 52 AD with the advent of Saint Thomas in Kerala. The interaction of Christianity with the Hindu social milieu produces an uncanny socio-cultural environment antithetical to the Christian canons and practices. Most of the Christian values and ethics for establishing egalitarian society have mostly remained relevant within the church discourses. The Christian society, on the other hand is dominated by conservative caste values imported from Hindu social order. The Christian rituals, traditions, customs and day to day affairs also demonstrate the visible influence of Hinduism and particularly of the caste system. David Mosse has done a concrete study of death rituals of the Tamil Roman Catholic community and found that the Christian community inhabit with the hierarchical order of caste and purity/impurity values. The utilization of lower castes, especially the barbers, washer men and drummers in impure customary practices, the identical funeral rites like purifying the dead body with water, turmeric and cow milk, observing third and sixth day rites after the death, etc. reflects that Christians shares a range of symbolic

customary values with the Hindus. Separate Christian dominations also perform their rituals in supplement with their ex-caste identity and retain the hierarchical nature during its functionality. The church as an authoritarian agency to bring uniform changes among the Christian subjects has failed miserably in producing alternative socio-cultural traditional values, devoid of any conservative and inhuman practices.

Theologically, Christianity teaches equality of all in front of the God, rich or poor, man or woman, pagan or believer. But in the context of India such ideal is rabidly corrupted by the social realities. The Christian missionaries worked among the Dalit castes and Tribes with a philanthropic enterprise and in response to it sections among these groups were also converted into Christianity in the hope of regaining new social identity and a fraternal milieu. However, this vision of social emancipation remained unfulfilled. As mentioned before, Christianity in India is a caste based community with lighter differences from the Hindus. The Dalits are the worst victims of the Hindu caste system and even after being converted to a new religion, their social position remained degraded and impure not very different from the earlier untouchable identity.

There are about 20 million Dalit Christians in the country and they form nearly 70 per cent of the total Christian population of 30 million Christians. The Christian Dalits increasingly share a general sense of oppression/discrimination in the church and society, on account of their low-caste origin. Arising out of this double discrimination they suffer multiple alienations: First, the converted Christians have to face a general apathy from the communally sensitive atmosphere. The upper caste political elites have communalized the Christian identity by contrasting the Christian community as zealous missionaries engaged in luring the innocent tribes and Dalits to convert in their own fold. The Dalit Christians are in dual jeopardy as they also face discrimination from the rest of the Dalits of their own community for breaking with the original caste group and shifting to an alien religion. A Dalit Christian thus faces dual discriminations on communal and caste lines.


Second, within the new religion, because of their impure caste and professional identity, the upper caste Christians regard the Dalit converts lower and unequal to their status and socially discriminate them. New Christians face caste discrimination within Christianity in various forms. In Kerala, the Dalit Christians within the same denominational rite have exclusive separate churches for worships.\textsuperscript{52} Even in the common churches on many occasions the Dalit Christians were allotted separate seats in the left corner of the church. In most of the Church activities the Dalits plays a nominal role. In Tamil Nadu, the Dalit Christians comprise almost 65 per cent of total catholic population; however their representation among the nuns and priest is as minimal as 3.8 per cent.\textsuperscript{53} Here, the Dalit Christians are also restricted from performing the church choir, to serve at Mass or to lector the Holy Scriptures.\textsuperscript{54} Most of the converted Dalits are landless laborers, engaged in unorganized sector jobs and as many as 11 per cent of the converted Dalits are engaged in the extremely inhuman profession of manual scavenging.\textsuperscript{55}

Finally, the state has formally sidelined itself from the issues of the Dalit Christians. There is no official record of Dalit population among Christians and most of these groups are clubbed with other Christians as OBC class in the Mandal Commission Report.\textsuperscript{56} Because of their Christian identity the converted Dalits are objected from utilizing the profits and safeguards meant for the SC/STs. This has contributed in enlarging a complex cultural conflict within the Christians leading to confusion in their self-identity as Christian or SC/ST. The Dalit Christians operate with dual identity as Dalit Christians in the private social affairs but abstract OBC in the state order.

The Christian community is an ideal case to analyze the working of caste as an institution in a non-Hindu religion. In the modern world, the rigidity and exclusivity of

\textsuperscript{52} Louis Dumont, \textit{Homo Hierarchicus}, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006. p. 203
\textsuperscript{53} Prakash Louis "Dalit Christians: Betrayed by State and Church" \textit{Economic and Political Weekly}, (April 21, 2007), p. 1405
\textsuperscript{55} Prakash Louis "Dalit Christians: Betrayed by State and Church" \textit{Economic and Political Weekly}, (April 21, 2007), p. 1406
the caste has more or less diminished in a significant way, however, caste has resurfaced in the social domain with new socio-cultural attire and motives. Caste as a governing value of the society is still dominant and perpetuated with new norms and customary practices. The Christianity in her religious canons promotes fraternal and equal values for reshaping human relationships, however because of limited efforts from the elites of the Church such ideal is never materialized in a concrete sense. The whole of Christian society is contaminated with caste values and there is little hope that any model of social emancipation from the theological perspective will have a capacity to destroy the caste segregations among the Christians.

The Socio-Economic Conditions of the Muslims and the Christians:

At the empirical level very small material is available to study the socio-economic conditions of the Muslims and the Christians in a concrete manner. Most of the survey reports, census and other individual findings do not provide detailed statistics and clubbed the data in aggregate manner. Though empirical studies on the Muslims is quite satisfactory because of the growing interest of the state, the issue of the Christian community in most of the cases is dealt by individual scholars or voluntary research group.

The minorities are concerned about their equal rights as citizen, security to their social identity and proportionate inclusion in the political and economic spheres. On all these issues, both the communities face relatively more deprivation than other minority religious community (OMRC). The Jains, Sikhs and Parsis are relatively well off in the socio-economic arenas as they hardly experience direct discrimination and exclusion from the majority community. Vast majority of the Muslims and the Christian population is economically more backward than the OMRC and their political representation is also below the average in comparison to their proportion in the general population.

Literacy and Education Level

The 2001 Census of India has demonstrated that the general literacy rate of the country has marginally increased and reached up to 65 per cent. The Hindus and the Sikhs have marginally higher literacy rate than the national average. Among the minorities, literacy
rate among Jains is the highest at 94.1% followed by Christians 80.3% and Buddhists 72.7%. The Muslims have the lowest literacy rate of 59.1%. In average the Muslims also lag behind the Hindu OBCs; however the literacy rate of individual states shows some different facts. For instance, there are seven states where the literacy rate of Muslims is actually higher than the literacy rate for the Hindus. In Kerala (89.8%) Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh – (above 70%) the difference is quite significant. It is also notable in Gujarat and Karnataka. The Muslim literacy is marginally higher in Maharashtra and Jharkhand, and the difference between Hindu and Muslim literacy in Kerala is statistically insignificant. In the Union Territories of Daman and Diu, Pondicherry, and the Andamans and Nicobar (89.9%) the literacy rate for Muslims is again higher than that of Hindus. On the other hand, negative differences in literacy rates are substantial in Jammu and Kashmir where the effects of Islamic terrorism have exacted a very heavy toll. The states bordering Bangladesh: i.e. Meghalaya, Assam, Tripura, and West Bengal also have a lower literacy rates among the Muslims because of regular influx of migrated Muslim population, abject poverty and unavailability of better educational infrastructure like primary schools in these regions.

Sachar Committee Report has revealed that the literacy rate among the Muslims is very low and this gap is greater among the urban Muslims and Muslim women. 25 per cent of the below 14 years Muslim children have never attended schools or are school dropouts. More than 1000 Muslim concentrated villages in West Bengal, Bihar and UP do not have any educational institutions. The percentage of the Muslims sending their children to the secular ‘regular mainstream school’ is also low as here also they face discrimination. As a result, even the middle class Muslims hesitantly send their children to Madrasas which provide them non professional religious education. The Madrasas are community led educational institutions but even in this section less than 4 per cent

59 Madrasas are community initiative which gives free education (mostly religious) to the needy students. However its reach is very limited and lack modern infrastructure and equipments to provide professional education suitable for their entry in market.
Muslim students go to Madrasa schools. The percentage of Muslim graduate is dismally low in comparison to the national average of other communities with just 4 per cent and in the post graduate level it is lowest at 2 per cent.

The Muslim woman is the most deprived category in all these regions with a very low literacy rate. Their proportion in the primary, middle and higher education is abysmally low compared to the OBCs and SC/STs. The percentage of Muslim women who has attended the primary school is as low as 41 per cent. The reasons for such a dismal condition of Muslim women in the field of education vary from region to region. Starting from the apathy of the family in sending girls to the general and co-ed schools to the reasons of unavailability of transport, financial constraints, indulgence in family works and marriage can be the stated reasons. There is further critical assessment to the above mentioned facts that the whole Muslim community is educationally backward. I. P. Desai argues that among the Muslims, the lower caste groups are worst affected because of wide spread poverty and social exclusion. When we argue that majority of the Muslims is backward we mean that not all but most of the lower caste strata among the Muslims are backward in the real sense.

The Christians literacy rate narrates a very different story. The Christian missionary institutions established modern education in India and were in the fore front in providing education. It is said that almost 25 per cent of educational facilities in India is owned and provided by the missionary institutions on their own. (Chanana, 72) The literacy rate of Christians in India is as high as 81 per cent significantly above the national average and better than their Hindu, Muslim and Sikh counterparts. Two separate studies by Ravi S Srivastava and S. Sinha for UGC based on NSSO data of the 61st round (2004-05) show that Christians are far ahead of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs when it comes to gross enrolment ratio (GER) in under-graduate courses. Even Christian SCs and STs are far ahead of Hindu SCs/STs, Muslim OBCs and Sikh SCs when it comes to higher

60 Rakesh Basant “Social, Economic and Educational Conditions of Indian Muslims” Economic and Political Weekly, (March 10, 2007), p. 829
61 Zoya Hasan, and Ritu Menon, In a Minority: Essays on Muslim Women in India, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2005, p. 56
education. Among Christians, women have a better enrolment percentage than men. (TOI, 3 Dec. 2008) Thanks to the widespread chain of Christian educational institutions the Christians in general achieve such positive records in the sector of education. However, when the GER figures are scrutinized discretely within the Christians, it shows further disparities. We find that among rural Christians, enrolment of male Christian ST is the lowest with 3.62% and for female it is 6.69%. In case of Christian SCs in rural areas, the GER for male is as low as 4.81% and female 3.80%. GER of non-ST/SC Christians in rural areas is relatively far ahead with 23.03% for male and 16.86% for female. Further the number of Dalit Christian students in higher education is low compared to other Christian counterparts. Louis argues that even within the Institutions run by Catholic missionaries in Tamil Nadu the presence of Dalit Christians is low and in the higher education institutions it declines further.63

Employment/Occupational Pattern

Muslim and Christian workers are mostly engaged in the unorganized service industry or self employed. The economic participation rates of Muslims are low and unemployment rates are high.64 According to the NSSO survey on employment and unemployment situation among major religious groups in India for 2004-05 nearly 49 per cent of Muslim households in urban areas were self-employed as against 36 per cent Hindu households and 27 per cent Christians. The reasons for high rate in the self employed jobs among Muslims are varied. The low education profile of the Muslim youths is one of such factor. On the other hand, the Hindus and the Christians are more likely engaged in the formal salaried employment because of their higher educational qualifications; however, this does not mean that the Christians are proportionately represented in salaried jobs; in contrast the Christians have the highest unemployment rate in India. In


64 Zoya Hasan, Politics of Inclusion: Caste, Minorities and Affirmative Action, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2009, p. 49
rural areas, the unemployment rates were higher among the Christians (4.4 per cent) as compared to those among the Hindus (1.5 per cent) or Muslims (2.3 per cent).\textsuperscript{65}

The worker population ratio (WPR) among men in rural area was highest among the Christians (56 per cent), followed by the Hindus (55 per cent) and the Muslims (50 per cent). For women, the ratio was 36 per cent for the Christians, 34 per cent for the Hindus and 18 per cent for the Muslims. The WPR among men in urban areas was highest for the Hindus at 56 per cent followed by the Muslims (53 per cent) and the Christians (51 per cent). In case of women, the WPR was highest for Christians at 24 per cent, followed by the Hindus (17 per cent) and the Muslims (12 per cent).

More than half of the Muslim population is engaged in self-employed household enterprises. Nearly half of Muslim men between the ages 25 and 45 are self-employed, compared to 28 per cent of the Dalits, and 40 per cent of the Hindus. Only 18 per cent are in regular employment (Hindus, 25 per cent). The Muslims are relatively more engaged in wholesale and retail trade as merchants and shopkeepers; and also as small manufacturers. Their participation in technical, clerical and managerial positions is also lower. The Muslims are seen carrying their ancestral professions with more ease and comfort. The economic mobility among this section is not very high and large sections among Muslims are relatively poor in comparison with other religious groups. Sachar Committee Report argues that the state institutions also discriminate the Muslims in providing them loan facilities by categorizing Muslim areas as \textit{red} zones. Such attitudes further restrict the Muslim youths to consider entrepreneurship in the lack of required capital asset. In the case of the Christians such comprehensive data is not available. However, the employment conditions are not better in comparison with other religious groups.

Muslim under-representation in government jobs is disturbingly low. Sachar Committee Report demonstrates that the Muslims hold mere 5.7 per cent in the government jobs by compiling statistical data of 12 States where the Muslims' population share is above 15 per cent. In states with a high Muslim population (Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West

\textsuperscript{65} According the NSSO survey report of the Government released in 2007 which covered 7,999 villages and 1, 24,680 sample households in its study had stated this fact. See, “Christians have Highest Unemployment Rate: Survey” \textit{Times of India}, March 31, 2007
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Bengal), this ratio is less than a third of their population share. In Kerala, the Muslims account for a seemingly respectable 10.4 per cent of state employees. But this ratio is well under half their population share (24.7 per cent). In West Bengal, Muslims' share in state employment is an abysmal 4.2 per cent - a fraction of their population share (25.2 per cent). This shows how deep and pervasive is the systemic exclusion and under-representation of Muslims.

The Dalits of these two communities are mostly engaged in the familial occupations. Due to lack of education facilities, poverty and in absence of vital support or safeguards from the state these castes are stagnant in their wretched economic positions. These castes are perpetually engaged in impure menial jobs for life sustenance Majority of the scavengers are comprised of Dalit castes. Scavenger castes are also present in the Muslim, the Christians, the Sikhs and the Tribes (Chuhra, Mazhabi, Rangreta, Lalbegi, Hela, Hari, Dom, Dhanuk, Thoti, Pakay, Mukhiyar, etc.) they all together represent approximately 50 per cent of total workers engaged in manual scavenging professions. Unlike the Hindu, Sikh and Buddhist Dalits, the Muslim and the Christian Dalits are not covered under the state policies of protection and safeguards meant for the SC/ST communities. It makes these communities more vulnerable in a society which is communally sensitive and casteist in nature.

**Representation in the Government Institutions:**

Democracy is understood as a mechanism in which plural interests of multiple identities are represented in a peaceful and discursive manner. The democratic institutions garner legitimate support because it provides liberal space to various conventional and non-conventional groups to raise crucial issues of public interest. The elected members in the legislature in such case become very important functionaries, as they influence the making of state policies and other decisions by their apt deliberation. Proportionate representation of plural identities in the state institutions and in various agencies is required to avoid any domination of majority and in order to make an inclusive political system. The equitable representation of minorities in the legislative bodies will provide them effective platform to express and raise their views and grievances in the deliberation of legislature.
In India, however, the democratic system has remained exclusively controlled by the upper caste political elites and the representation of religious minorities has remained negligible. There is persistent under representation of minority religious groups, especially of the Muslims in state and central legislatures. The Muslims comprise half the population in 18 of the 593 districts in the country and have decisive votes in 80 seats of the total Lok Sabha seats. However, the representation of Muslim in the Lok Sabha has remained minimally as low as up to 4 per cent and has exceeded only to 5.7 per cent in average. In the 2004 Lok Sabha, the number of Muslim members was 31. In the current phase of Lok Sabha there are only 29 Muslim members. The situation is more appalling in the context of Muslim women. In all the 14 Lok Sabhas the total number of Muslim women MPs is just 11.

Even the state in which the religious minorities are present in significant numbers, their representation in the State assemblies remains low. For example, in Assam the Muslim comprise more than 30 per cent of total population, however, their representation in the State Legislature has remained below 17 per cent in average for all the years after independence. The political parties are hesitant in giving election tickets to the Muslim candidates, including the secular parties in fear of the backlash by the majority community in the election. Most of the legislative seats with significant Muslim population have been reserved as SC constituency. The Muslims are also not represented adequately by the political parties in the distribution of tickets. On the other hand the representation of the Christians, the Jains and the Sikhs which is quite insignificant in the legislature is roughly in proportion to their population.

The Christian minority group is not geographically concentrated in most of the constituencies. As a result major political parties do not see any vote bank in them. Because of their insignificant presence, their issues and concerns are being neglected in the agendas set for the national politics by all political parties. On the other hand, because the Muslims being the biggest minority community and influential in as many as 80 Lok Sabha Constituencies, it is being paid special attention and space in the political agenda of major political parties.

Apart from legislative bodies another arena of influence in India are the elite cadre services such as the Indian Administrative Service, the Indian Foreign Service and the
Indian Police Service. The bureaucracy has remained a crucial factor of the state power in executing the legislative decisions. These three services have influential impact on the political decision making process. However in all these services the Muslim representation is dismally low to just 3 per cent. Further the Muslims are altogether objected from securing important positions in the intelligence agencies like the Indian Space Research Organization, the National Security Guards and other VVIP protection forces. Their presence in paramilitary forces is nominal (1 to 5 per cent). The Christian and the Sikh representation in the elite services is almost equal to their proportion in the population.

A conscious debate is required in order to democratize the Muslim and the Christian community in a real sense. The representation of communities should be based on a critical assessment of the socio-economic development index and how various communities perform on such parameters. As noted in the previous part, the social milieu of the Muslims and the Christians society is stringently structured around ranked stratification. Inequality between social groups has almost become a legitimized institutional practice in the absence of any commendable reformist movement with the communities. Further, because of abject poverty, rising unemployment and absence of committed state actions for the welfare of these groups, the economic conditions of the majority population of these communities is deplorable. The national literacy rate among the Muslims is very poor which led majority of youth to accept low paid jobs in unorganized sectors. The Dalits among the Christians also face similar limitations in public spaces. Importantly, as at the state and national level, the political domains are dominated by the Hindu political elites and the Muslim and the Christian representations in legislature is negligibly low, the issues of their appalling socio-economic condition has never became an important issue for deliberation. The Muslims and the Christians are needed to be treated in a rational ethical manner without subsuming under the rhetoric of secularism.

In the contemporary period, the Muslims and the Christians are the two religious minorities in India whose concerns about social justice are yet to be brought into the mainstream political discourses. As a whole, they are subject to communal stereotypes and prejudices in the public places and internally divided on social, cultural and
economic parameters. More than half of the population of these religious groups is termed as educationally and economically backward. As seen above, various studies done by agencies and state commissions have demonstrated that caste like stratification exists within these communities and certain sections face perpetual social discriminations here like the Hindu Untouchables. However, under the discursive privilege of secularism in the national political circles, the issue of social justice for the minorities is yet to get a respectable space. Recently, some sections among the Muslims and the Christians have started raising their voice against such calculative negligence and argue that defining the agenda of social justice for these communities is vital for developing India as an inclusive society.

**Minorities and the Pursuit for Social Justice:**

Any rational analysis of the current socio-economic and political conditions of the minorities will determine into advising necessary and swift measures by the state for the radical empowerment of these sections. The government, on the other hand adopts a calculative strategy. It has proposed abstract policy measures for them which hardly has influenced in changing the conditions of these communities. One of the celebrated measures was listing the Muslim and the Christian lower castes in the broader OBC list in order to provide profits of reservation policy. However, as Sachar Committee Report has pointed out categorically that such inclusion has not benefited the Muslims and it has no significant impact on the access of jobs, education or for their general empowerment. This analysis is equally true in the context of the Christian community also. Further, the state points out the rhetorical objection that special measures like affirmative actions cannot be provided on the sole basis of religious minority identity and craftily avoids debate on the required mechanism of social justice for the minorities based on their current socio-economic conditions.

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66 There is complexity in reference to the exact numbers related to the stratification of these communities on social, educational and economic parameters. However there is general acceptance of this fact that majority of the population in both the religions are suffered from multiple disadvantages in various spheres of social and economic life.

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The civil society has remained passive over the issues of minorities. In most of the occasions the minority question is tabled under the usual rubric of communalism versus secularism debates. Even the issue of Muslim women has never garnered effective audience for an influential deliberation. The social elites find privilege in discussing the immaterial issues of culture, art and composite values with their usual liberal analogy without analyzing the real life facts of the majority population. In the post independence India we have not noticed any comprehensive social movement by any quarter in support of the deprived sections among the Muslims or the Christians as noticed in the cases of the Hindu Dalits or Other backward Classes. The civil society groups, intellectuals, social scientists and social activists has not developed enough initiatives to understand the concrete conditions of the societies of the religious minorities. The needed socio-anthropological scrutiny is neglected under the hegemony of political ideology which generally treats religious identities as homogenous equal groups.

The debate on secularism does not handle the issues related to the socio-economic conditions of the minorities. Secularism is treated as the single platform on which concerns and interest of the minorities can be debated. The secularism debates provide hyper values to the elites of the religious communities to flag the religious and cultural issues and thus craftily secure their dominant social position within the community. The values of secularism are crafted in the dynamics of national independence struggle and it is rooted deeply with the principles of modern citizenship. It is difficult to comprehend the changed condition of the minorities in the current socio-political arena through the perspective of secularism. However secularism has remained a dominant discourse to judge the position of the minorities in the national scene.

The limitations further lie with the institution of social justice also. Reforms in religious order is one of the central themes among the principles of social justice. However, it mostly concerns about the Dalits of the Hindu, the Sikhs and the Buddhist religions. The promoters of Social Justice in India has not yet succeed in evolving a critical

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comparative methodology of social justice for the socially deprived sections of non-Hindu religions like Christianity and Islam. To be more specific, the institution of Social Justice in India is yet to treat the converted Dalits Christians and Pasmanda Muslims as equal with the Hindu and Sikh Dalits. Their demand for an inclusive platform of social justice is yet to achieve respectable space in the mainstream discourses of the social justice movement today. In the recent past, such indifference has increased further on many crucial issues of the Dalit Christians and Muslims. This lack of theoretical and practical engagements by the social justice movements on the socio-religious issues of other deprived sections has provided impetus to the right wing political outfits to gain momentum in the public discourses.

The elites of the religious minorities especially the Muslim elites have also supplemented extensively in denouncing the importance of social justice measures for these groups. The upper caste elites constantly denounce any segregation of the communities on caste lines and try to project their respective communities as one homogenous communal group. For example, the Muslim elites argued that their community is backward as a whole and, therefore, the state must provide blanket reservation to the Muslims. They have raised issues which traditionally justify the hegemony of the upper caste Ashraf elites. Beyond the popular four Muslim questions like the issue of Urdu, Aligarh Muslim University, Muslim Personal Law and Babri Masjid, the Muslim elites have failed in raising the issues of socio-economic backwardness of their brethren. Their conscious inclination and pursuit in addressing these issues has not helped the Muslims to overcome their deplorable conditions but on the other hand helped the right wing forces in strengthening their political ideology.

In comparison to such lethargic and inactive inception by the socio-political environment, a very small but keenly determined section among the Muslims and the Christians has recently dared to break this legitimate silence. Lower caste groups among the Muslims and the Christians have started making separate claims and have positioned themselves against the upper caste elites of their own religion. One popular slogan of the Pasmanda Chatra Andolan (Pasmanda Students’ Struggle) a Delhi based Muslim youth organization, reflects the transformative ideas of this movement. It says “Babri nahi Barabari” means ‘No Babri Mosque but Equality’. Lower caste Muslim groups have
started separate organizations, especially in Bihar, Maharashtra and Assam to raise the
issues of social and economic backwardness and demand equal rights in social and
political fields. The Dalit Christians have an effective chain of organizations especially
in South India which have raised pertinent issues of equity and participation in social
and political forums. By bringing the issues of socio-economic backwardness into the
forefront, these groups are not only making limited claims for better economic
conditions but these new trajectory has the capacity to transform the political philosophy
of the minorities, especially of the Muslims in a radical way.

Conclusion:

The idea of Social Justice is rooted in the conflicting history of India’s civilization. It
has separately defined itself as an exclusive mechanism of social emancipation by using
the parameters of economic redistribution. However, the agenda of social justice must
not be overlapped or confused with the general poverty alleviation programs as the
former has a specific context, determined objective and special target groups. The Social
Justice initiatives in India are based on the assumption of providing compensatory
justice to those groups who have been historically marginalized and excluded from all
spheres of social, economic and political life. This is a herculean task as the state has to
address multiple kinds of socio-economic complexities rooted in various regional and
cultural contexts and, therefore, one singular uniform policy framework for all the
deprived sections became an impossible task. Therefore, various policy measures,
programs, safeguards and legislation are to be implemented to bring these depressed and
backward sections into the mainstream agenda of the national life.

The objective of this chapter is to present the dynamics and range of social justice policy
in India. I have tried to highlight the growing platform of social justice measures which
comprises and affects almost 80 per cent of India’s population at the current juncture.
The study also tries to analyze the importance of the social justice initiatives in a
positive way in order to judge its capacity in building socio-economic capabilities
among the deprived sections and as an agency to empower the depressed and backward
sections in the political and cultural spheres. This objective study on the impact of social
justice initiatives demonstrates that there is positive improvement on the conditions of
the deprived and backward sections on multiple parameters; however, these sections are
still facing numerous obstacles and limitations in achieving the ideals of social justice. The disparities persist even after six decades of social justice measures and therefore, it is utmost necessary to revise and reformulate the agenda of social justice in the new light.

The restrictive objective of social justice agenda in India is further responsible for the deepening exploitation and marginalization of the deprived sections among the Muslims and the Christians. The questions of these groups will not be solved by simply allowing the sole secularism perspective to evolve emancipator mechanisms for the religious minorities. Secularism perspective lacks the correct language and moral dimensions for the emancipation of the Christian and the Muslim Dalits. The inability of social justice perspective to become more inclusive and frontal in resolving the issues of economic exploitation and social marginalization has given leverages to the elites of different religious groups to control the social and political spaces on behalf of their communities.