CHAPTER VI

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Since the Islamic advent in India, the Indian Muslims have proved both an asset and liability to the country. They proved an asset in so far as they broadened and enriched the Indian culture and civilisation, and in general, played a considerable role in the development of Indian society as a whole. On the other hand, the Muslim ruling groups turned the Muslim masses into a liability by their sustained preoccupation with holding power and safeguarding their own interests. Sometimes they showed willingness to enter into compromise with invaders, other ruling groups and colonialists. All these generated an inbuilt suspicion about the non acceptance of the 'Indianness' of the Muslims among the majority of the population—the Hindus. These were the two contradictory trends running through the entire range of developments during the last twelve hundred and fifty years or so, encompassing both Muslims and non-Muslims.¹

The Muslim community in India today stands at the cross roads with growing tension generated by Communal

conflicts, the modernization and social change process taking place in India and the avowed ideals of the concept of secularism as adopted by the Indian constitution. The Muslims face many challenges and try to respond to them.

In this context of the Indian scene, the Muslims of Anantapur also are placed in the same situation. Living in the midst of centuries-old backwardness, educational and economic conservatism, lack of leadership and initiative, the local Muslims too face challenges and their response is essentially painful and slow.

Tension of Modernity:

The first challenge to the Muslim community in general is produced by the tension of modernity. The modern secular constitution of India which accords equal rights to all the citizens of the country irrespective of religion, caste, or creed or sex is bound to create tensions. It is commonly believed that the Indian Muslims are slow to accept the process of modernization and change. It is often assumed that the Muslims in general and those of India in particular are highly conservative and doggedly refuse to creatively respond to the changing reality.2 Some scholars maintain that Muslims

are inherently conservative and doctrinaire and reject anything that deviates from their religious doctrines. It is also partially ascribed to the lack of education among the Muslims.

Islam is undoubtedly highly doctrinaire, but it does not automatically follow from this that its followers too would exhibit doctrinal rigidity in complete disregard of their actual circumstances. Muslims feel that any change or modernisation to be acceptable to the people must be in accordance with the socially felt needs. Social backwardness is often mistaken for religious or theological dogmatism. Religion for an illiterate person from a rural area or an urban slum is nothing more than certain superstitions prevalent in his or her social milieu. In India, as far as the Muslims are concerned, the problem is further complicated by their being a minority. Thus in the concrete Indian situation it is a backwardness-minority syndrome.

**Backwardness and Minority Status**

More backward a community is more it tends to resist change, especially if change pertains to tradition held to be sacred. Muslims in India and particularly in the area under study, are relatively more backward than the Hindus,
Persia, Sikhs and Christians. It is also true that comparatively speaking the Muslims are more backward.\(^3\) Their attitude towards religion, therefore, is likely to be conservative. Their backwardness makes them more resistant to change and modernity.

Indian Muslims exhibit several symptoms of a religious minority group in India. They suffer from a sense of insecurity and they are obsessed with the feeling of threat to their identity and consequently some issues become the centre of their emotional upsurge. The sense of insecurity is heightened by frequent occurrence of communal riots in the country. These riots are a grim warning to all those who cherish secular values and care for nation building.\(^4\) According to some analysts Muslim fundamentalism is so much in the news these days that it has added a new dimension to the cause of communal riots. Whoever stands to share the blame, the fact remains that in this game innocent and poor Muslims suffer, both by way of life and property. It is to be understood that modernization and secularization can come about only by the process of social transformation and economic base. The base

\(^3\)Ibid., p. 262.

has to be changed before the pace of change is forced.

**Economic problem:**

The Muslims are much more backward economically and educationally. Some sections of the Muslims from South especially Kerala and Madras are engaged in commerce. But they constitute a small fraction of the entire Muslim population. Again, they cannot go beyond small business and could not develop an industrial or financial bourgeoisie.

In post-independent India an overwhelming majority of Muslims are either rural or urban poor. From among the Muslim masses, due to their very poor economic conditions, only a few could go in for higher education so as to qualify for new jobs and professions being created by the developmental process under way in Independent India.⁵

Thus it could be seen that Indian Muslims being economically more backward, comparatively speaking, are also educationally lagging behind as compared to other communities. Apart from the rural areas where most of the Muslims are now landless or poor peasants with little chance of taking advantages of the new agricultural technology, there are urban

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poor living in the most deplorable conditions. It can be safely assumed that as against the national average, greater percentage of Muslims live below the poverty line. In the urban areas the poor constitute around 80 per cent of Muslim population. These are mostly artisans, petty traders, hawkers, mechanics, coolies, rickshaw pullers, butchers, masons, weavers, carders and so on.

This is a real challenge to the Muslim leadership in the town. Quite a few Muslims are aware of the indifferent character of Muslim leadership. The leaders of the local community are practically doing nothing to improve the situation. Neither they exert themselves to bring about much needed reforms in various age-old practices and certain provisions of Muslim personal law, which are abused by many Muslim husbands in a male-dominated society, nor do they permit any other agency to do so. The leadership is guilty of neglecting the real problem of the Muslim masses.

**Problem of Illiteracy:**

The socio-economic backwardness of the Muslim community in Amantapur is closely connected with the problem of literacy. This is another challenge facing the local commu-

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6 Ibid., p. 315.
Concerted efforts on the part of the community is lacking to provide the proper incentive to the children and youth to reap the benefits from education. There is evidence to show that among the local Muslim women there is no formal education. Only a few Muslims are literate in Urdu. Most children are attending local Government or private schools. This indicates a desire on the part of the parents to conform to the general educational pattern. The number of children in schools is encouraging.

Because of the lack of education among Muslim women, no changes in their status have taken place since Independence. Very few women belong to women's organizations. The number of women doing social work is very low. Secular women's organizations have begun to raise levels of awareness and means to increase the welfare of women elsewhere. Interactions between communities is confined to the youth, career women and housewives of the middle class who have the leisure for it.

The Government does not feel that it should interfere in Muslim personal law for historical reasons best known. It has repeatedly assured the Muslims that it will not force any

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changes upon them, thus placing the onus of change upon the community itself. This has forced the community to shoulder the responsibility of bringing about the desired changes. For this an intellectual leadership which could sanction such changes is an urgent need. The importance of this cannot be discounted in the present context. Since women are custodians of tradition, their response to modernisation and change can come only if they have the minimum of education. The community has to respond to this challenge in a more positive way. The elite section of the Muslim community, particularly the Muslim intelligentsia, can substantially contribute towards reversing the isolationist trend of Muslim female education.8

Identity and Integration:

Politically, the Muslim problem remained quite intractable even after the partition of India. The reality of communalism very much remains with us. The divisible tendencies in Indian society in post-independent period too were aggravated by communal riots. Secular and Universal statehood was nothing but a statement of an ideal to be

8Gargi Chakravarthy, 'Muslim Female Education' in Mainstream, dated Feb 9, 1985, p. 32.
achieved in future. In this context one wonders whether we are near the goal of achieving full national integration. There are communal organisations among the Hindus like R.S.S. the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the Shiva Sena, the Aman Marga and similar groups with a strong anti-Muslim bias. At the same time we cannot ignore the role played by the communal organisations within the minority community like Jamat-e-Islami. As a result communal poison is injected into the minds of the people by these organisations.

The only effective way of counteracting parochial or communal forces is concerted efforts to solve common people's problems with their effective participation. The Muslim masses are an integral part of the community's mainstream. Confidence building is a different task and requires sustained efforts in which the general public has a vital role to play. India is a multi-religious, multi-lingual and multi-ethnic country. It is officially a secular democracy. Every citizen has the same social, economic and political rights. Hence all matters pertaining to education

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social life and politics have to be decided as a non-religious, rational and impersonal basis. Every one should be brought into the national mainstream. This is a challenge to which the response of Anantapur Muslim is encouraging and positive.

At the same time the identity of the minority community also should be preserved. The culture of the Muslims of India is a definite identity. But one should not assume that the culture of the Indian Muslim is wholly different and entirely separable from the culture of the Hindus. It follows that the Muslims in India are Indians first and Muslim afterwards. But their being Muslim is as much a reality as their being Indian. The two need not be irreconcilable. Despite common elements, both historical and cultural, there are some important differences between the two groups of people in some aspects of their ways of life. Nevertheless, mutual relations between the Hindus and the Muslims must be understood on the analogy of the relations between the various branches with the same roots. 11

What the Muslims need is some kind of readjustment and reassessment of their attitudes towards other communities.

especially the majority community because of the unhappy developments from 1940 onwards. Towards the realisation of this goal, the mutual responsibility of both Hindus and Muslims must be stressed. Great responsibility, nevertheless, lies on the majority community to have to allay the fears and sense of insecurity among the Muslims. Between the Hindus and Muslims there is identity and also differences. The differences are mainly in religious attitudes and partly in culture. But they do not necessarily create conflicts between the two. They should be reciprocally and mutually regarded and respected. On the other hand, in culture the two communities can supplement each other in order to enrich and foster our national culture. Identity can be achieved through socio-economic and political activity, sense of participation in nation-building, modern and scientific education and above all by complete secularisation of the Government as well as politics.¹²

As far as the town of Anantapur is concerned a remarkable atmosphere of mutual appreciation and harmony among all the communities is prevailing. This is a rare phenomenon.

¹²Ibid., p. 199.
There is lot of scope for both the communities to come together and evolve a common programme of action in the socio-economic, educational and civic fields. The cultural and social synthesis already achieved should take the citizens to other fields too, so that progress of all should be the motive.