

# Muslim Indians

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**Struggle for Inclusion**

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# Conclusion

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## Conclusion

**M**uslim Indians see themselves as those who, at the time of partition, stayed and threw in their lot with secular India rather than Islamic Pakistan. They see the creation of Pakistan as a tragedy that divided and weakened them. Indeed, given the integral role of Islam in Indian history and culture, and the distribution of Muslims throughout India, they are unified not by language or culture but rather by their Indian identity. They are thus bewildered by the insidious questioning by non-Muslims of their place in Indian national life and puzzled by the calumny that they are anti-national and disloyal. They have no other option but India. They are, as they say, “part of the fabric of India.”

Any attempt to eradicate Muslim identity or diminish it is to tear that national fabric. Because of their pervasive presence and numbers, India has no option but to deal with its Muslim citizens and their concerns. The practical dangers of such a large population losing faith in the state’s sense of justice and evenhandedness are self-evident.

There is recognition among Muslims that the state is capable of recognizing grievances. Commissions such as Gopal Singh, Srikrishna, Liberhan, Mishra, and Sachar attest to this. Yet there is also a sense that, by themselves, these types of processes have not led and will not lead to substantive reform. Thus the overriding question for Muslims is to what extent to rely on them, and to what extent and exactly how to use them. For example, what will it take to see action on the issues identified by the Sachar Commission? Some also note that Muslim leaders and institutions have been disorganized in the face of the findings of the Sachar report, and have wasted the opportunity provided by it to advance their long-standing demands.

Economic and educational welfare are the predominant concerns of Muslim Indians, closely followed by a sense of popular prejudice and hostility, state lawlessness and injustice, and physical insecurity. These concerns are closely related: economic vulnerability and educational backwardness diminish the ability to stand up for one’s rights in the broader political context, and insecurity and injustice diminish the capacity to establish and develop economic sources of strength. For example, each instance of mob violence leads to the destruction of Muslim enterprises and institutions, and each instance of displacement means a separation from community institutions and sources of economic activity.

To the extent that the taint of “terrorism” is wildly attached to all Muslims, the effect on their employment and housing opportunity is most damaging, as non-Muslims recoil from associating with them.

It is clearly and widely recognized that Muslim Indians share an economic and educational predicament with their vulnerable non-Muslim fellow citizens. Nonetheless, the growth in economic inequality and other aspects of economic “liberalization” and globalization that generally afflict the Indian population as a whole are of particular concern for Muslims because the Muslim population is disproportionately poor, and because Muslims are disproportionately represented among the poor or among those occupations most vulnerable to the rapid economic changes taking place in India.

Traditional Muslim occupations and economic sectors, which once provided bases for Muslim prosperity and empowerment, and relied more on apprenticeship than formal education, have been particularly hard hit by global competition from factory-made products. Examples include the weavers of Mubarakpur, Gorakhpur, and Benares, and the lock-makers of Aligarh. With respect to such broad-ranging economic processes and changes, there is less a sense that the state discriminates against Muslims in policy, and more a high degree of skepticism about the extent to which the state has any interest in intervening. Indeed, the assumption is that the state is the handmaid of such economic changes.

A pervasive ideological and cultural climate of increasing Hindu religiosity, political militancy, and hateful anti-Muslim rhetoric has been accompanied by the deliberate *Hindutva* infiltration and indoctrination of the state bureaucracies. These trends have gained traction from recent terrorism by professed or alleged Islamist groups. The result has been state discrimination, both at the policymaking level and at the level of individual bureaucrats. This discrimination is seen in matters as varied—and as essential to the equal enjoyment of citizenship—as voter registration; access to government grants and services, including health services; police protection; and equal justice.

While the low proportion of Muslims in government jobs has a bearing on the larger question of the social and economic status of Muslims, it is of particular relevance to the practice of state discrimination against them. More Muslims in public services, particularly at the more senior levels, would act as a safeguard against the worst prejudice.

It is widely believed among Muslims that they are not alone in suffering neglect, lawlessness, extortion, and violence at the hands of the police. They understand this as a reflection of a generalized culture of police lawlessness that afflicts all Indians, particularly the poor and socially vulnerable. However, there is a sense that the problem is especially acute for Muslims. The police individually and institutionally are empowered and emboldened by

a culture of anti-Muslim sentiment. Either through fear or indifference, non-Muslims are less likely to express solidarity with Muslims or to unite with them to resist such behavior.

Most significantly, the taint of terrorism has become a pretext for a perceived “reign of terror” against Muslim youth, in the form of arbitrary detention of alleged terrorist suspects, often on the basis of no evidence. Because such detention is believed to disproportionately affect educated Muslim youth, there is the added grievance that this disempowers Muslim families and communities by attacking their livelihoods and economic security. It also seems to some to be a disincentive against educating youth.

The physical insecurity of Muslims has led them to acquiesce in increasing physical and cultural separation from non-Muslims, and the term “apartheid” is sometimes used to describe this situation. Muslim localities suffer from very poor or nonexistent water, sanitation, public transport links, and banking services; this situation is particularly acute in the 93 Indian districts with Muslim majorities. Rural Muslims who had hitherto enjoyed relative security and relatively cordial relations with Hindus now find themselves increasingly subject to the effects of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and other *Hindutva* organizations expanding their reach into villages.

All of this leads to alienation from the government and society, and a sense of second-class citizenship despite the fact that the Indian constitution guarantees all citizens equal rights. Indeed, the phrase “contested citizenship” is often used by Muslims to describe their perception of how the mainstream and majority discourse treats them.