Indian Multiculturalism and Rights of the Muslim Minority: Recognising Cultural Distinctiveness along with Integration

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Abstract: Various religions, cultures, faiths, languages and social milieu of India reflect a very fine aspect of Indian multiculturalism. The Indian multiculturalism is not defined by any particular, community, religion or region rather it is a matrix of different values, traditions, cultures, languages, religions, sects etc. The historical reality of India and the civilizational contours of Indian nation state are quite different from the Western forms of multicultural society. The idea of nation has emerged out of the conflict in the whole of the modern world whereas; it has emerged as a result of pressure exerted by the social reality of India. This is a synergy of its diverse cultures, religions, traditions, languages, societies etc. The present study tries to explore, how the claims made by the Muslim minority in India are best accommodated by the Indian nation state. The spontaneous cultural intermixing of the Muslim community has not been facilitated, aroused and encouraged by the overall polity. The more articulate, dominant and visible sections of society and state in India have consciously refrained from such kind of inter-community fusion. In fact, the process of ‘othering’ has always at work whenever the issue of Muslim minority is raised. This paper portrays the salience of Indian multiculturalism and issues of marginalisation of the Muslim minority in the liberal democratic polity. The objective of this study is to enquire into the accommodation of the Muslim minority rights in public sphere by the Indian democracy. It will elaborate the essential features of the current politics of Muslim identity.

Keywords: Multiculturalism, Muslim Minority, Minority Rights, Social Spontaneity

I. INTRODUCTION

Indian society presents an outstanding case of different cultures living together amicably. It is one of the most diverse societies in the world which is inhabited by various cultural, religious, linguistic and ethnic groups. Historically, all major religions in the world – Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi – reside in this country. At the time of independence, it was argued that the vast cultural, religious and linguistic diversity will impede the formation and development of India as a liberal democratic nation. However, the visionary leadership and the cherished heritage of living together negate these apprehensions. Our Constituent Assembly carefully accommodates this vast plurality and diversity accordingly making ample provisions with the Constitution to preserve this magnificent multiplicity. The Constitution granted recognition to different minority and cultural communities and provided group differentiated rights with the liberal democratic framework. In this sense, the idea of unity in diversity and diversity in unity has remained the principle feature of the Indian democracy to nurture its vast cultural, religious and ethnic plurality.

Significance of the study

The significance of this research is to undertake a study of the approaches to accommodate the cultural and religious diversity in contemporary India. The thesis will reflect in what ways Indian nation state negotiates and accommodates the religious identity of its minorities, particularly, the Muslims, in the public space. For this, focus on the state behaviour is very important to understand the process of political integration as it shapes and structure the relationship between individual citizen, communities and the state. The research paper will show how Muslim identity interacts with other social factors such as personal laws and gender equality and shapes the state policies in India.

Constitutional Perspectives of the Indian Multiculturalism

The political insight and vision of the founding father of the independent India realised the existence of different communities and cultures, and also the apprehensions of minority groups especially after tragic partition based on the communal lines. The Constituent Assembly discussed elaborately towards the social justice, equality and safety of the minority groups. It was committed to bestow due recognition and protection to all cultural communities majority as well minority. “The Constituent Assembly debated at length the issue of cultural majoritarianism and it also incorporated a framework of minority rights to safeguard religious and cultural minorities” (Mahajan 2002, 16). Further, it devised a twofold policy, on the one hand, it tried to ensure that no community is excluded or systematically disadvantaged in the public arena, on the other it provided autonomy to each religious community to pursue with an own way of life in the private sphere (Mahajan 1998, 4). A unique balance was struck between public and private domains, accommodating diversity in the public

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sphere without interfering in the private domain of the various groups. Wide range of cultural and minority rights were incorporated within the Constitution to preserve the minority communities from the process of assimilation into the majority culture. The Constitution was founded on the principles of multiculturalism and secularism which amalgamates liberal democratic values with group differentiated rights. This fusion entrusts a sense of inclusiveness, equality, recognition to the minority communities.

The provisions for preservation and protection of group rights of cultural communities are provided as fundamental rights in the Constitution. The constitution has three main measures by which minorities can preserve their distinct culture and identity. First, it provides the fundamental right to protect and conserve distinct culture and language of a community. Second, it gives the right to establish and administer minority institutions. Third, it provides freedom to the religious minority to have their own personal laws.

The various specific provisions in our Constitution which guarantee religious and cultural minorities to preserve and develop their cultures are:

- Article 25 gives to all individuals the right of freedom of conscience and free profession, practice, and propagation of religion.
- Article 26 provides freedom to manage religious affairs, subject to public order morality, and health.
- Article 29(1) says that any section of the citizens of India having a distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the fundamental right to conserve the same. It gives full protection to a cultural minority group to preserve its own language and culture from the majority culture. Also religious and linguistic minorities are being protected by this provision.
- Apart from a guarantee of protection of minority interests, the Constitution seeks to ensure that individuals belonging to minorities do not suffer from discrimination.
- Similarly, discrimination is banned as regards access to or used of public places (Art. 15(2)); admission into any educational institution maintained or aided by the state (Art. 29(2)), where a religious community is in the minority, the Constitution goes further to enable it to preserve its culture and religious interests by providing that such community shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of its choice (Art. 30).
- Article 350 A directs the state to provide facilities for primary education in their mother tongue to children belonging to linguistic minorities.

II. CULTURAL AND CIVILIZATIONAL PERSPECTIVES OF THE INDIAN MULTICULTURALISM

The Indian multiculturalism is not defined by any particular, community, religion or region rather it is a matrix of different values, traditions, customs and languages of its heterogeneous cultures, religions, sects etc. Various religions, cultures, faiths, languages and social milieu of India reflect a very fine aspect of Indian multiculturalism. The historical reality of India and the civilizational contours of Indian nation state are quite different from the Western forms of multicultural society. The idea of nation has emerged out of the conflict in the whole of the modern world whereas in India it has emerged as a result of pressure exerted by the socio-cultural reality of the society. This is a synergy of its diverse cultures, religions, traditions, languages, societies etc. The continuity and heterogeneity of Indian civilization and its composite and syncretic culture make it a unique and distinct from the rest of the world. Therefore, the idea of multiculturalism in the case of India is well synchronised with its historical-social evolution of the idea of nation.

The case of Indian multiculturalism is comprehensible at two levels – structural and socio-political discourse. The social composition of India is structurally multicultural. It has been a fact of social life of India for centuries. More significantly, the idea of multiculturalism finds strong articulation in social-political discourses of India during and after independence. The chequered history of India has entailed the process of heated debates on the issue of secularism and the protection of religious rights of its citizens. The Western society discovered the idea of secularism through the long and sustained struggle between the sword and the cross. Unlike them, India came to terms with this idea in consonance with its existing social reality along with emphatic need to ensure equality, justice and freedom to its plural and multicultural society. The political aspect of multiculturalism was worked out at the time of the formation of the Constituent Assembly and subsequently by the Constitution after its promulgation. The multiple diversity of India was well recognised and cultural-political rights of the various constitutive groups were constitutionally incorporated. Debates in the Constituent Assembly forcefully pleaded the case of incorporation of minority rights. Over centuries India has developed a long shared collective tradition of inter-community livings and showed its remarkable resilience. Mutual respect, tolerance, peaceful resolution of differences, equality of human worth, racial and gender equality, individual liberty and free speech – such values always guides our common laws and values and affirm integration and social inclusiveness in a democratic state.
III. INDIAN MODEL OF SECULARISM: VALUING DIVERSITY

Rajeev Bhargava (2010) argues that Indian secularism is a complex and multi-value doctrine. It rules out theocracy and the establishment of religion. Indian model of secularism is quite different from the Western model of secularism. India is a very religious country and religion has its intrusion in every aspect of life. Indian model of secularism is greatly influenced by the relationship between two major religions - Hinduism and Islam, over the centuries. After independence, Indian state did not embrace any religion as its state religion.

The principle of non-establishment is followed in the Indian constitution by various Articles. These principles make Indian secularism closer to the Western model. The Constitution provides religious freedom to its citizens in the Article 25(1) as ‘all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practice and propagate religion’. Under Article 27, ‘no person is compelled to pay any taxes, the proceeds of which are specifically appropriated in payment of expenses for the promotion or maintenance of any particular religion or religious denomination.’ In Article 28(1), ‘no religious instruction is to be provided in any educational institution wholly maintained out of state funds.’ According to Article 28(3), ‘no person attending any educational institution ... shall be required to take part in any religious instruction or to attend any religious worship that may be conducted in such institution.’ These provisions clearly manifested the principal of non-establishment and give free hand to the people to follow any religion of their choice and state has nothing to do in this matter.

The liberal notion of equal citizenship is also being provided by the Indian Constitution through its various Articles. Article 15(1) states that the state shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth, or any of them. Article 16(1) & (2) provide an equal opportunity for all its citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment in any office under the state and no citizen, on grounds of religion or race will be eligible for or discriminate against in respect of any employment or office under the state. Article 29(2) states that no citizen shall be denied admission into any educational institution maintained by the state on grounds only of religion, race, etc. These articles of the Constitution make Indian model of secularism a replica of the western model. It completely separates religion and state from their domains. Articles 15, 16 25, 29(2) support the idea of disestablishment while Article 27 and 28(1) keep strict separation.

However, there are some Articles which deviate Indian secularism from the Western model. Article 30(1) provides the rights to religious minorities which is a community based right. Article 30(2) commits the state to give aid to educational institutions established and administered by religious communities. These are significant departures from the ‘wall of separation’ view of the secular state. Some Articles also direct the state to interfere in religious affairs of different communities. Article 25(2)(b) states that ‘nothing in Article 25(1) prevents the state from making a law providing for social welfare and reform or the throwing open of Hindu religious institutions of public character to all classes and sections of Hindus.’ Article 17 directly interferes in Hindu religious affairs by abolishing untouchability and making it a punishable offence (ibid. 84).

These characteristics of the Indian secularism deviates it from the western model in two ways. First, it enables the state to interfere in religious affairs and second, by intervening in the affairs of one religion which is against the norm of equidistance of state from all religions and non-preferential treatment. In this manner, some Articles of the Indian Constitution supports individualistic liberal ideas while others community specific. Some support the complete separation between state and religion while some interfere in religious matters. This unique characteristic is due to its cultural and social background. Bhargava mentioned four features of Indian socio-cultural tradition which are responsible for such deviation of its secularism. First, India has profound religious diversity which results in both cooperation and conflicts between different religions. Second, in India, there is more emphasis on the practice of religion than belief. Third, there are many oppressive practices present in different religions which result in intra-religious dominance. Finally, the main religion of India does not have an organised institution like the Church. For these reasons, an independent and powerful institution like state is required which has authoritative power to curb intra-religious domination and remove disparity presents among members of the religious community (ibid. 85). The role of the state becomes very important in such context to remove hierarchical and communal conceptions present in the society to transform these religious practices. For this reason, it becomes the duty of the state to intervene and reform oppressive practices of the religion. The Indian state thus devises a unique solution by providing religious liberty to individuals and necessary intervention in religious affairs for an egalitarian society.

IV. COMPATIBILITY OF SECULARISM IN INDIA

Indian secularism has been subjected to fierce criticism. Right from the independence it has remained a subject of contestation and debate among various scholars. The focus of the debate basically rests on its ideology which is considered to be imported from Western concept of secularism. Is this Western concept compatible for multi-religious society like India? Some critics of Indian secularism called it in ‘crisis’ as it is inappropriately applied to Indian society. According to them, this imported ideology of secularism should be
abandoned because it gives rise to sectarian and religious strife in the society. It is a modernist rational concept which is not compatible with Indian political and social culture.

T.N. Madan and Ashis Nandy criticised secularism on the basis of its consequential effects on Indian society. Nandy focused on the effects of the practice of secularism and modernization on traditional societies like India. He argued that the process of secularization pushed aside the traditional and religious concepts which resulted in the alienation of major part of the population. Secularism is a product of modernity and rationality which side-lines moral ethos and values present in a society. It provides no alternative for moral values or the good life. In this way, it encourages religious fundamentalism and ethnic revivalism. Ashutosh Varshney argued that the Indian model of secularism was based on the principle of equidistance from all religions but it has consequently transformed into equal proximity model. He further explained, “if it is alleged that the state is moving towards one particular religion, the state, to equalising step may be aimed at soothing the religious communities. But the state gets more embroiled in religion. An unstable equilibrium results, breeding distrust all around” (Varshney 1993). For him, secularism should be syncretised with the pluralistic idea of India’s past culture and mobilise people on such understanding.

T.N. Madan in his article entitled, ‘Secularism in its place’ states that secularism in India is an idea of modernity and is an alien concept which does not suit religious societies like India. He maintained that secularism in South Asia as a doctrine of shared of life is impossible because the great majority of the people here are active adherents of some religious faith. It is also impracticable as a basis for state action because the standpoint of religious neutrality is difficult to maintain since religious minorities do not share the majority’s view of what this entails for the state (ibid. 748). He argued that for the minority community secularism is a social myth which draws a cover over the failure of its members to separate politics from religion in the society. He further state that secularism is a Christian gift to India and such transfer of secularism in traditional societies will lead to conversion and the loss of one’s culture and soul. The transferability of the idea of secularism is beset with many difficulties and should not be taken for granted and in multi-religious societies like India, it should be realised that secularism may not be restricted to rationalism and should be compatible with faith. He concludes that secularism is an alien ideology and has failed to make the desirable headway in India and it has increased religious fundamentalism (ibid. 757).

Partha Chatterjee argues that the Indian secularism has three main deviations from the concept of western secularism which results in its uniqueness. First, the Constitution provides the right to freedom of religion to every citizen who includes the right to profess, practice and propagate religion but it also enables the state to regulate any economic, financial, political or other secular activity which may be associated with religious practice. Second, the right to equality prohibits the state from discrimination against any citizen on the basis of religion but special quotas are given to schedule caste and in order to qualify as a member of schedule caste, a person must profess either Hindu or Sikh religion. And third, there shall be no official state religion, no religious instruction in state schools, and no taxes to support any particular religion. But the state has been intervened into the matter of religion that also not equally with all religions. The Indian secular state should favour all religions equally without any discrimination (Chatterjee 1997, 241-248).

In a similar way, Ashish Nandy raises some fundamental questions about the suitability of secularism in India. He states that ‘much of the fanaticism and violence associated with religion today comes from the sense of defeat of the believers, from their feeling of impotency, and from their free-floating anger and self-hatred while facing the world which is increasingly secular and desacralized’ (Nandy 1998: 332). Nandy claims that with the advent of modernisation in India, religious tolerance has decreased and communal violence has increased. Nandy categorised religion in two forms, religion-as-faith and religion-as-ideology. Religion as a faith is ‘a way of life, a tradition which is definitionally non-monolithic and operationally plural’ religion as an ideology it is a ‘sub-national, national or cross-national identifier of populations contesting for or protecting non-religious usually political or socio-economic, interests’ (Nandy 1998: 321-344). Nandy argues that secularism is a concept of modernism which is associated with the ideology of modern statecraft. He observes that ‘India’s westernized intellectuals have consciously opted for the abolition of religion from the public sphere…it is from non-modern India, from the traditions and principles of religious tolerance encoded in the everyday life associated with different faiths of India, that one will have to seek clues to the renewal of Indian political culture…cosmopolitan intellectuals have failed to be too respectful to the traditions of tolerance in Indian society’ (ibid). This modern, scientific concept of secularism is incompatible with such societies where religion has a presence in every aspect of life. So religion finds out back door entry into the public life and creates communalisation of politics, mobilisation on the basis of religion. It deepens the feeling of alienation among believers and generates conflicts between religious communities. Nandy advocates for an alternative mode of secularism for India which should be more accommodative and compatible with its situation.

Some scholars argue that there is some intrinsic incompleteness in the Indian secularism. Amartya Sen elaborates various arguments levelled against Indian secularism. First, the non-existence critique, in which western scholars denies the presence of secularism in India due to its large cultural complexities. Second, there are charges of favouritism and minority appeasement on Indian secularism. Third, various scholars consider...
Hinduism as a source of cultural cohesion and Indian secularism does not give it due importance. Fourth, the claiming of the cultural unity of India is false as Muslims do not identify themselves with this unity. Fifthly, many critiques term secularism as a modern and alien concept which is against the interests of tradition societies like India. Lastly, Hinduism is the essence of the Indian society and Indian secularism ignores its importance. Sen counters all these criticism with historical and factual data and argues that all these opposition of Indian secularism are indeed non-logical. He argues that Indian state needs to be a secular state in the political sense (Sen 1996).

V. ISSUES OF MARGINALISATION OF THE MUSLIM MINORITY

The constitution acknowledges the various communities present with diverse attributes in the country and provides specific fundamental rights and concept of secularism to safeguard their interests. These rights are provided to individuals through their community membership. However, this political imagination was focused on the presumption of monolithic and homogenous attributes of the Muslim minority thereby ignoring its internal differentiation. Marginalisation has several social, economic and cultural roots apart from its political dimensions. Socio-economic condition of Muslims is still very bad and they are also under-represented in political decision-making bodies. Moreover, Muslims are negatively stereotyped in different ways and a general perception of anti-nationalist is attached with Muslims youths. Fostering and empowering marginal communities is very crucial for proper functioning of a democratic nation-state. For this purpose, Indian Constitution provides the right to minorities to flourish and protect their cultural distinctness. Despite these protections, the Muslim community is marginalised and has a very low representation in public space. Notwithstanding the internal differentiation and heterogeneity of the Muslims as a community they are seen as a collective monolithic entity. The whole community is in a state of abject marginality and under-represented in every aspect of social and economic dimensions. Therefore, it becomes necessary to assess the exact cause of their marginalisation and exclusion.

The Sachar Committee puts forward a new approach of analysing the situation of the religious community in India. It furnishes a very valuable empirical and concrete data on a diverse aspect of the representation of the Muslim minority in public sphere viz. public services, employment, health care, education, housing etc. This insightful data may be used by the administration for implementing specific policies and strategies for uplifting and improving the situation of the minorities. The report identifies several constant issues of development as well as the marginalisation of the Muslims minority. Considering that Mahajan said: “Availability of opportunities and the presence of necessary infrastructure are important prerequisites but the ability to access what is available depends upon a range of other factors, such as, the priorities of the individual, past history and self-understanding of the community, and relationship with the state and other groups” (Mahajan 2010, 21). These particular contexts are certainly crucial in determining the discourse of development and access to a number of opportunities and resources by the underprivileged communities.

The Sachar Committee analyse in a systematic and quantitative way to find out the discrimination and disadvantages faced by the Muslim community in India. The main argument is that the inequalities and disparities present within the Muslim minority are mainly economic and material in nature rather being only cultural. However, multiculturalism principally focuses on cultural and identity-related aspects of minorities and provides protection against majoritarian hegemony. It helps in providing due recognition and prevents the assimilative threats. Yet the economic and material needs of the minorities remained unattended in this conceptual framework as is evident from marginality of the Muslim community in almost all public services, housing, education etc. It, therefore, becomes pertinent to transcend multicultural framework from merely cultural equality and shifts its focus more on economic and material equality which will provide more substantive transformation towards an egalitarian society.

The Muslim minority as a whole faces a development deficit and lags behind in almost all parameters of economic growth and basic amenities. Borrowing Mahajan words, ‘the available data relating to development is extremely complex and tells us a far more complicated story that what is often painted using a broad brush’ (Mahajan: 2010: 26). Their current status as a marginalized section largely neglected by the state, and the possibility of the globalized Indian state failing to alleviate their all-round deprivation in a short period, should be handled by Muslims with a greater sense of maturity, sensibility, sensitivity, and responsibility. Though difficult, they should deliberately counter any feelings of alienation from the system. For, the remedy of their problem lies within the system; there is no way other than strengthening the democratization process in India. The very fact that India’s Muslims are, by and large, missing from the social development process calls for serious consideration by the state and civil society. Affirmative actions are very necessary for providing them a level playing field and equal opportunities so that they get their due share in the social development. It will help in fulfilling the course of realising their creative potential and thus, initiate the process of their liberation individually as well as collectively, simultaneously generating a sizeable human resource for making a meaningful contribution to India’s social development. India under globalization is a more attached to capitalism and there is no willingness to initiate specific policies for the well-being of minorities. Neo-liberal...
policies in India have already been showing their negative distributional consequences and have awful implications for the marginalised sections. However, in view of the far-reaching ramifications of Muslim marginalization, the state on its part needs to prioritize its agenda.

The fact of the matter is that the political system has failed to respond to the deprivation of several sections in the country. Many of such sections are already in a struggle mode. The Indian Muslims too need to intensify their hitherto faint struggle for minority rights and make it more meaningful by forging an alliance with other minorities fighting for their rights. A larger movement for rights of the minorities may be more fruitful than smaller struggles here and there as all minority groups can lend support to each other’s cause. Unfortunately, there is a dearth of genuine Muslim leadership in all walks of life. In politics too, where Muslim leadership is relatively more visible, it is unable to play any meaningful role for the liberation of the community. All such leaders acquire their positions in their political parties or in government by the grace of their respective party bosses. They have the freedom to move or speak; but only to the extent allowed by their self-perception regarding their political survival. Their instinct for political survival has undermined their ability to lead Muslims in their struggle against marginalisation. This shows the need of a churning process amongst Muslims. They have to face the current reality about their place in social development. They have to realise that many of the elements of Indian democracy have guaranteed them a certain level of autonomy. However, at the same time, their social, economic, educational, and political status, their powerlessness, seems to have clipped their wings. This peculiar situation may lead to a gradual building up of a movement amongst Muslims, an all-round movement directed at demanding and getting minority rights from the state within the framework of democratic policies and simultaneously, initiating internal reforms to tackle intra-community issues.

As argued earlier, the state should grant Muslims their rightful share in the system. This is expected to promote various interests: of Muslims, of the process of social development, and of India. The sooner the state takes such policy, the better. However, when it comes to Muslims, there is almost always a sudden explosion of wisdom that starts seeing the pros and cons of any policy initiative much more closely than it is done in the context of schemes for other sections. There is a case for praxis: the unity of thought and action. Instead of waiting for an ideal policy initiative, the state should implement its policy initiatives and regularly review and revise them in light of practical experience. In fact, the proposed Muslim movement for Muslims’ all round liberation and the proposed movement of the alliance of all marginalized sections should follow suit. Unity of thought and action should be a guide to the initiatives of the state as also of the movement. The case of India’s missing Muslims indicates that missing minorities from the social development process call for an urgent attention by the state and civil society as well as by such minorities themselves. As the state is a key actor in granting minority rights, politics for minority rights becomes central to the theme.

VI. SOCIAL SPONTANEITY: SOCIAL INTEGRATION ALONG WITH DISTINCTIVENESS

Fostering a sense of belongingness among various cultures is an essential factor for a stable and successful multicultural society. The feeling of belongingness entrusts confidence and accomplishes the goal of social inclusion of minority cultures in public sphere. The idea of social spontaneity has a close link with the social whole. Both the concept of social spontaneity and social whole are all encompassing and non-discriminatory. Social spontaneity is the recognition of cultural rights together with the process of spontaneous social integration. In fact, it is a non-coercive social integration between different communities. The concept also takes care of the intra-community challenges present within a community. The interactive social practices like education, employment, political mobilisation, dwelling and other material needs of the communities must reflect all the constitutive social components of the social whole. Such democratic social practices are the prerequisite of a truly multicultural society. The idea and sense of social justice are also based on the concept of equal opportunity which would ensure strong social bond among various communities.

The dichotomy between ‘self’ and ‘other’ which was constructed during the colonial period continued even after the independence. The ‘others’ remained as unequal and subordinated within the public sphere. The privileging of majority-minority framework appears to build an unbridgeable gap between the inclusive self and the hostile other. The Indian multiculturalism is seen as a whole not a dichotomous segregation of its religious communities. Despite the bitter experience of partition on the lines of religious separatism, the Indian polity is able to sustain its social fabric based on toleration and accommodation of multiple identities hinged on the dynamic cultural realm. This blending of the moral ethos of diversified religious identities presents a unique aspect of Indian multicultural society that is committed for equal civil, political and economic rights for the majority as well as minority communities. The Muslim community should be an integral part of the multicultural fabric of the Indian society. The process of ‘othering’ and its resultant alienation in the community can only be overcome by creating a strong cultural space of fusion of the Muslim community with the rest of society. It is believed that economic and material equality of the community would gradually create an integrative religio-cultural space among different religious groups. Such space would not only ensure economic equality but also guarantee social justice to the minority community. However, so far, all the ameliorative measures have remained lackadaisical or at best have been used as merely an instrument to woo the consent of
the Muslim minority. The Muslim minority in India has remained an inseparable part of the social whole like any other community. The traditional perception of Muslim minority emerging out of the unfortunate partition of India must be countered. It is possible only when the multiple entitlements of the Muslim community is articulated, recognised and fulfilled The recommendations of the Sachar Committee must be discussed, debated and accepted in its entirety, so that Muslim community’s cultural diversity finds adequate representations in different walks of social, cultural, political and economic life. Such ameliorative measures are possible when social pressures of both the community and wider society are exerted on the political system and the state. The seeming indifference of the political class and the system towards the community is probably the result of the lack of active political response of the Muslims. They have to struggle along with other minorities and deprived sections of the society to realise their democratic rights. The community must politically assert its democratic rights. Such assertions are required to realise the constitutional goals of minority rights in reality. Again, they have to demand the timely and speedy implementation of the Sachar Committee Report. The success of this demand critically depends on their political participation at multiple levels along with forging an alliance with other marginalised sections of the society. It is my considered view that there is convergence rather than divergence in both the issues of Muslim minority and the issue of social cohesion. Any split in both these issues would be a conscious ploy to weaken the democratic ethos of the society.

VII. CONCLUSION AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The judicious allocation of multiple entitlements to all communities remains a big challenge for the democratic success of a polity. In India, due to its phenomenal diversity, it becomes imperative for the state to devise systematic constitutional and institutional mechanisms for social cohesion among various cultures. Secularism is an indispensable component of any multicultural political system. In this sense, Indian secularism provides a strong democratic foundation to its multicultural society. Moreover, it attaches a great significance to the idea of social justice ensuring just treatment and protection of cultural differences. It is based on principles of neutrality and tolerance with a vision of cohesive society. It adopted a non-majoritarian multicultural perspective which recognizes the cultural specific needs of different communities.

Alienation and stigmatization of any community within a large national framework produce damaging effects on the social development process and impede the formation of collective and shared living among both the communities. Therefore, to accomplish the goals of nation-building and substantive social justice to all, it is imperative to provide equal opportunities to all and take cognizance of the pluralistic notion of Indian culture. For the Muslim community in India, both recognition and equal opportunity within the public sphere are keenly desired notions that tend to mobilise them politically and religiously. The Muslims are educationally underachievers and economically are among the poorest. Over half of them living in those areas which lack housing conditions, live in poverty and need state’s support. These socio-economic disadvantages are compounded by the experience of discrimination and marginalisation. All these result into a profound sense of alienation within the community. Consequently, Muslims still experience the sense of ‘other’ in the Indian society which is evident in their day to day life in the public sphere.

The spontaneous cultural intermixing of the Muslim community has not been adequately facilitated, aroused and encouraged by the overall polity. The more articulate, dominant and visible sections of society and the state in India have consciously refrained from such kind of inter-community fusion. In fact, the process of ‘othering’ has always at work whenever the issue of the Muslim minority is raised. The way they are wooed and promised welfare for the community at the time of hustings remarkably shows that they are something that is not the part of country’s cultural heritage. This kind of cultural indifference towards the Muslims has strengthened the process of their identity as a distinct ‘other’. But this was not the intent of the Indian Constitution. Contrary to the process of ‘othering’, the Constitution emphasised the need for encouraging composite dialogue. Accordingly it developed elaborate programmes, policies and operational institutional networks of promoting the interests of minorities and also of integrating them. Precisely this was the arrangement that the constitution has made for India’s minorities. However, the imperatives of practical politics have not fully incorporated these significant normative constitutional values in the case of the Muslim minority. The dominant political voices more often treat the community as an instrument to be used and not to be integrated. Apparently, the so-called ghettoization of the Muslim community politically suits the dominant socio-political sections of the Indian society.

Instead of creating a kind of binary between the Muslim community and other, we should have used a new language of socio-cultural amelioration of the community highlighting a spontaneous fusion of the communities. Possibly, this would simultaneously serve two purposes – identifying the cultural distinctiveness of the community as well as visualising a social whole where all communities voluntarily merge from their respective vantage points. It will assure minorities that they need not fear aggressive cultural assimilation. It will also lead to greater cultural sensitivity that will improve the language of public discourse. We should learn to have respect for minorities and cultures settled in our midst and become sensitive to other customs and traditions. In this globalising multicultural world, our cultural interactions not only have affected our traditions,
arts and literature but also have elevated moral attitudes. Such multiculturalism involves balancing diversity and commonality, such diversity facilitates integration and comes to be cherished as our collective moral and cultural capital.

Limitations of the Study

- The study is expository and devoid of quantitative analysis.
- Sources of Funding of the Study: The funding for this study is self-financed.

VIII. REFERENCES
