

**5** CPI(M)  
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# In Defence of Rights of Minorities



Religious minorities constitute 18.4 per cent of India's population. They include Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Zoroastrians (Parsis). The Muslim minorities constitute the largest minority of our country, comprising 13.4 per cent of our country's population. The condition and well being of the minorities is a critical measure of the functioning of our democracy.

The last general elections in 2004 were held in the backdrop of intensified attacks on the minorities by the communal forces. Safeguarding the unity and integrity of our country, ensuring the security of religious minorities, adopting pro-people economic measures and protecting our secular ethos were issues of vital importance. In 2004, the Left parties gave a call to defeat the BJP-led NDA, form a secular government at the Centre and strengthen the Left in the parliament. In the context of the aggressive Hindutva agenda and the hijacking of the Indian constitution by the Hindutva forces under the BJP led rule, the Left parties had to ensure that they could not utilize the fractured mandate of the 2004 elections to grab power. Thus the Left parties decided to extend support to the Congress led-UPA government provided that they could commit themselves to a programme to defend secularism, bring relief to the people through policies for food and job security, and protection of livelihoods. Under pressure from the Left the Congress-led government had to prepare a Common Minimum Programme which formed the basis for the support of the Left parties.

As we move towards elections to the 15<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha, the CPI (M) reiterates that the fight against the BJP and Hindutva communalism and the defence of minorities remains a cornerstone of its national policies. The Muslim community continues to be the target of Hindu communalists led by the RSS. The spate of attacks on Christians in Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa demonstrates the further spread of the BJP-RSS's hate campaign. Attempts to communalize the fight against terrorism and the recent incidents in Karnataka exemplify the BJP's continued agenda of the politics of hate. The double standards of the BJP on terrorism stand fully exposed. While it has no compunction in ascribing all terrorist activities to the Muslim community, it has sought to protect the Hindutva extremists accused in the Malegaon blasts case by branding the ATS investigation as prosecution of "Hindu religious figures".

The oncoming general elections are a time for the people of our country

to once again reaffirm our resolve against the communal BJP. However, this is also a time to hold the Congress Party to task for its hesitant and wavering approach towards the task of protecting the rights of the minorities and ensuring their socio-economic development.

## NEGLECT OF ITS COMMON MINIMUM PROGRAMME BY THE UPA

*The CMP of the UPA promised “to preserve, protect and promote social harmony and to enforce the law without fear or favour to deal with all obscurantist and fundamentalist elements who seek to disturb social amity and peace”. It also promised to “enact a model comprehensive law to deal with communal violence and encourage each state to adopt that law to generate faith and confidence in minority communities”. However:*

~ Despite a Supreme Court directive to hold CBI enquiry into the communal violence in Gujarat in 2002, the UPA has failed to initiate concrete steps in this regard. Even today the guilty are free. What prevented the Congress-led government from taking strong action? Why this complete lack of political will?

~ Be it the question of implementing the Sri Krishna Commission Report or taking decisive action against the Bajrang Dal, the Congress-led government has displayed a distinct lack of political resolve against communalists. It banned SIMI on the basis of evidence, which is correct. But was there any lack of evidence against the Bajrang Dal and other Hindutva outfits? Why were they not banned?

~ In spite of repeated demands by the Left parties the government refused to change its highly flawed draft legislation against communal violence. Ultimately the government put the entire issue into cold storage.

~ The scrapping of the draconian POTA which was widely misused against minorities and political opponents was done under pressure from the Left parties. But shamefully, the Congress-led government has brought back draconian provisions like detention without bail for 180 days, three years imprisonment for withholding information, etc., within the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). The CPI(M) and Left parties were the only parties in Parliament to oppose

such measures.

~ The instances of indiscriminate rounding up of innocent Muslim youth, detaining and torturing them after instances of terrorist violence have continued to occur under UPA rule. The case of 21 Muslim youth who were awarded compensation for wrongful detainment and torture after the Hyderabad bomb-blasts is just a case in point. The Batla House encounter raised serious issues. Even the National Human Rights Commission guidelines for a magisterial enquiry into such cases was ignored by the Congress-led government.

***The CMP promised that “The UPA will establish a National Commission to see how best the welfare of socially and economically backward sections among religious and linguistic minorities, including reservations in education and employment, is enhanced.”***

The government set up two Committees in this regard. However, its follow up on the recommendations of these committees is dismal.

~ Sachar Committee on the socio-economic and educational condition of the Muslim community of India: Amidst continuous demand from the CPI(M) and the Left, it took the government nine months to present an Action Taken Report on the recommendations of the Sachar Committee in Parliament. Lack of time-bound targets, inadequate financial allocation and insufficient policy initiatives has been the hallmark of the Congress-led government’s approach to the findings of the Sachar Committee. No discussion in this regard has been held in the Parliament since August 2007.

~ Ranganath Mishra Commission on the question of reservations for minorities: The Commission submitted its reports to the government in May 2007. Despite the positive recommendation of the Ranganath Commission on the question of granting scheduled caste status to dalit Christians and dalit Muslims, the government has failed to table the report in Parliament. It has also ignored the strong recommendation made by the National Commission for Minorities to include dalit Muslims and dalit Christians within the scheduled castes category. It has taken no initiative to undertake the long pending revision of OBC Muslim’s list. Thus even the recommendations of its own commissions have been ignored and buried by the Congress-led

government.

***The CMP assured that the UPA will “strive for recognition and promotion of Urdu language under Article 345 and 347 of the Constitution”.***

~ Steps in this regard could have helped the over 5 crore Urdu-speaking population of India in gaining both education and employment. However, nothing has been initiated by the Congress-led government in this regard.

***The CMP promised that the “government will pursue an independent foreign policy keeping in mind its past traditions. This policy will seek to promote multi-polarity in world relations and oppose all attempts at unilateralism”.***

~ The Congress-led government has worked overtime to build a strategic alliance with the United States of America in complete violation of the CMP. It has signed a military collaboration agreement with the US to join its imperialist wars. It has signed the nuclear deal with the US with humiliating conditions, which subvert our national interests and aligns our foreign policy to American interests. In the process of sealing this deal, Manmohan Singh has gone to the extent of calling George Bush – who aggressively pursued the doctrine of ‘clash of civilizations’ and promoted Islamophobia around the world – as the “best friend of India”. The government has also pursued the US-Israel-India axis, an idea mooted by the BJP-led government.

## **SACHAR COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS: CAUGHT BETWEEN BJP’S OPPOSITION AND UPA’S TOKENISM**

The report of the Justice Rajinder Sachar Committee on the socio-economic and educational status of Muslims has revealed the deplorable social and economic status of Muslims in our country. The Committee has made a strong case for boosting the community’s share in jobs and educational institutions. It has exposed the divisive and completely false but widely disseminated propaganda of the BJP and Sangh Parivar that the Muslims have been ‘appeased’ by various central and state governments. It is also an exposure of the neglect by successive governments towards the genuine needs and grievances of the community.

The Sachar Committee report has its own weaknesses. For example, it totally ignored the important issues facing rural Muslims, that is the right to land both agricultural and homestead. Landlessness among Muslims in rural India is high and therefore the issue of land reforms and distribution of land to Muslims should have been included in the Sachar report. The Muslim peasantry has been discriminated against in terms of credit facilities. The report does not pay adequate attention to the needs of Muslim women. But in spite of these drawbacks the report does underscore the need for concrete, time-bound programmes backed with adequate financial allocation aimed at advancing the condition of the Muslim community.

However, the Congress-led government's approach towards implementing the Sachar Committee recommendations has been half-hearted, partial and cosmetic at best. Most of the wide-ranging recommendations of the Sachar Committee have been ignored, like ensuring urgent delimitation of seats to ensure better representation of Muslims in all legislatures, promoting education in Urdu, building new vocational training institutes, polytechnics, ITIs in minority-concentrated areas, granting equivalence to Madarsa certificates and degrees for subsequent admission to higher education institutions, improving the functioning of Wakf Boards, having more centrally sponsored and centrally planned schemes for Muslims, including minorities in selection boards, setting time-bound targets for improving employment share of minorities and correcting anomalies in OBC lists.

The CPI(M) held a National Convention on the Recommendations of the Sachar Committee followed by state level conventions across India. The Party adopted a 'Charter for Advancement of Muslim Community' and submitted it to the Prime Minister on April 5, 2007. The Party mainly demanded a 15% budgetary sub-plan for the Muslim minorities in addition to other wide-ranging demands. The CPI(M) has consistently demanded setting up of time-bound targets, increased financial allocation and transparency in the implementation of schemes for the advancement of the Muslim minorities. However, the piecemeal approach of the Congress-led UPA betrays a gesture of tokenism towards the Muslim minorities. Only a few recommendations of the Sachar Committee have been identified for follow-up. Even they are being implemented in partial measure along with the half-hearted implementation of PM's 15-Point Programme for Minorities.

## **15% BUDGETARY SUB-PLAN FOR THE MINORITIES**

The Chief Ministers of Left-ruled states demanded a 15% budgetary sub-plan for the minorities in the NDC meeting held for finalization of the 11<sup>th</sup> Plan in order to ensure all-round targeted spending on the advancement of the Muslim community over the next five years. The National Minorities Commission also recommended a budgetary sub-plan for the minorities in view of the findings of the Sachar committee. However, the Congress-led government has rejected this demand in favour of allocating inadequate amount to schemes in only select areas for the advancement of Muslims.

## **MINISTRY OF MINORITY AFFAIRS**

The Ministry of Minority Affairs, which overlooks the implementation of programmes for the welfare of the minorities, has been tentatively allocated Rs 7,000 crore in the 11<sup>th</sup> Plan. However, its budgetary allocation for the second year of the plan, i.e., 2009-10 is only Rs 1,016.50 crore. The MMA's budgetary allocation in 2008-09 was Rs. 1,013.83 crore, but it failed to utilize Rs. 349 crore of this allocation last year, exposing the government's lack of seriousness towards improving the condition of the minorities.

## **DEVELOPMENT OF MUSLIM CONCENTRATED AREAS**

The concept of Multi-Sectoral Development Plan for minority-concentrated districts has been under discussion for the last ten years to address development deficits especially in education, skill development, employment, sanitation, housing, drinking water and electricity supply. While the CPI(M) believes that Blocks should be the unit for implementation for such a Plan in order to ensure that the benefit actually reaches the minorities living in a district, the government has ignored this argument to finally adopt a Multi-Sectoral Development Programme for 90 minority concentration districts in March 2008. The plan envisages a meager allocation of Rs 42 crore per district. However, as of 31<sup>st</sup> December 2008, a sum of only Rs 195.82 crore has been released for 37 districts, i.e., only Rs. 5.29 crore per district. This plan has not even been launched in 53 of the proposed 90 districts.

## EDUCATION

A High-level Committee under MOS HRD Shri M.A.A. Fatmi prepared an Action Plan on matters concerning education. It proposed a financial allocation of Rs. 5,434.40 crores for this purpose over the 11<sup>th</sup> Plan period (2007-2012). However, ignoring its proposal the UPA has made meager allocations targeted at educational advancement of the Muslim community. The total outlay for scholarships for minorities in the 11<sup>th</sup> Plan is Rs. 100 crore only. Out of the 11<sup>th</sup> Plan target of awarding 41 lakh scholarships to minority students, only 2,66,644 (6.5% of plan target) have been disbursed in the second year of the Plan period. The fate of much publicized schemes of the UPA is as follows:

~ Post-Matric Scholarship for minority students: The 11<sup>th</sup> Plan target for the scholarships is 15 lakh. The target for 2008-09 was set at a meager 2.5-lakh scholarships. Only 58,955 (23.58%) scholarships have been awarded this year till 15<sup>th</sup> Jan 2009.

~ Pre-Matric Scholarship for minority students: The 11<sup>th</sup> Plan target for this scholarship is 25 lakh. The target for 2008-09 is a meager 6 lakh scholarships. Only 195,637 (32.61%) scholarships have been awarded this year till 31<sup>st</sup> December 2008.

~ 20,000 Merit-cum-Means Scholarships for minorities every year: Out of a target of 40,000 scholarships for 2008-09, only 12,052 (30.13%) were actually awarded.

~ Scheme for Providing Quality Education in Madrassas (SPQEM): The Fatmi Committee proposed an allocation of Rs. 625 crore for this purpose. The government gave an allocation of Rs. 325 crore in the 11<sup>th</sup> Plan allocation. However its budgetary allocation for this scheme in 2007-08 was merely Rs. 4.5 crore and in 2008-09 it was increased to Rs. 45.45 crore, thereby totaling only 15.37% after two years. The government has provided no record of actual expenditure in this regard.

~ Only 4147 students have been coached under PM's Free Coaching and Allied Schemes since July 2007.

~ The corpus for Maulana Azad Education Foundation has been increased from Rs. 100 crore to only Rs. 250 crore. The actual expenditure by the MAEF is only a fraction of this amount.

## **EMPLOYMENT**

Since a very large section of the Muslim community is self-employed, ensuring access to credit at low rates of interest is vital to improving their conditions of livelihood.

The National Minorities Development Finance Commission extends loans at concessional rates to enable economically weaker minorities to take up income generating activities. The demand for increasing the authorized capital for the National Minorities Development and Finance Corporation to 1,500 crores has not been realised. As on 15<sup>th</sup> Jan 2009, the authorized share capital of the NMDFC has been increased from its 10<sup>th</sup> Plan share of Rs. 650 crore to Rs. 750 crore.

The Prime Minister's 15-Point Programme set a target of increasing Priority Sector Lending to the minorities to 15% over a period of three years, i.e., by 2010. Loans to minority communities as a percentage of total priority sector loans had decreased from 9.87 % in March 2003 to 9.35 % in March 2006. After the launch of the PM's much-publicized programme, the government could take the total share to only 9.67% from 2007 to 2008, which is still lower than the 2003 amount. The target for 2008-09 was set at 13%. No figures of actual implementation are available yet; however, it is clear that the government is nowhere close to meeting its target.

## **SUPPORTING COMMUNITY INITIATIVES**

Over three-and-a-half decades, between September 1974 to March 2008, the Central Government has released a meagre total grant-in-aid amounting to Rs. 33.16 crores to the Central Wakf Council. The government has not increased this allocation despite persistent demands. This allocation assists various Wakf Institutions in the country to take up economically viable buildings on the Wakf land such as commercial complex, marriage halls, hospitals, cold storage etc, which in turn finance schemes like scholarships, assistance to the needy, etc. Large numbers of Wakf properties are embroiled in litigations with the government. Special measures must be taken to resolve these long pending litigations so that the community's resources can be better utilized for its development.

## STEPS UNDERTAKEN IN LEFT-RULED STATES FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF MUSLIM MINORITIES

The socio-economic and educational status of the Muslim community is extremely deplorable all over India. In the Left-ruled states the CPI(M) is doing its utmost to remove the gaps that exist. The poor representation of Muslims in government services in West Bengal has been taken seriously by the CPI(M). However it is to be noted that the Sachar Committee's figures on this are not entirely correct as it did not include the number of Muslims in the teaching community. Unlike the Congress-led government, which has been reluctant in adopting measures commensurate with the magnitude of backwardness of the Muslim community in the country, the Left Front governments in different states have taken concrete steps and measures for the advancement of the Muslim community:

- ~ The government of West Bengal has already put in place a 15% state level budgetary sub-plan for the advancement of minorities in the state since 2007. This step will ensure a targeted spending for Muslim minorities in all aspects of governmental expenditure. In addition, in all welfare schemes specific attention for minority communities has paid dividends. For example among all self-help groups with access to institutional credit, 21.8 per cent are groups with Muslim members (formed on the basis of same residential area). Among 17,512 ICDS projects in the State, 6,431 are working in Muslim areas employing anganwadi workers and assistants from the minority community.
- ~ The government of Kerala has adopted state-specific schemes in addition to existing schemes on the basis of the recommendations of a state level committee set up to understand the specific condition of Muslims in the state.
- ~ In the state of Tripura a component of targeted gender budgeting has been adopted to ensure that the benefit of all schemes for the welfare of the Muslim minorities reaches Muslim women.

It also needs to be underscored that ownership of land and education are two of the most important components that determine occupational patterns of any community. According to land records, among the states

with a sizeable rural Muslim population (above 10% of total rural households), Kerala and West Bengal have the best record in terms of access to land by Muslims. 30.9% of the rural households in West Bengal are Muslim households having access to 25.6% of the total cultivated land in the state. This is the highest in the country. Much of this land was distributed to Muslims as part of the land reform programme of the Left Front Government. In Kerala, the Muslim households comprise 20% of the total rural household having access of 16.7% of the total cultivated land. This shows the better record of Left-front governments in ensuring equity to Muslims through land reforms.

### **CPI (M)'S AGENDA FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF MUSLIM MINORITIES**

The CPI(M) believes that urgent measures are required to ensure that the deplorable condition of the Muslim minorities is redressed at the earliest which include:

- ~ Forming an Equal Opportunity Commission with adequate powers to redress discrimination against minorities.
- ~ Formulating a sub-plan for the Muslim minorities on the lines of the tribal sub-plan in order to implement Sachar Committee recommendations; special initiatives in the sphere of employment, education and health to be undertaken targeting districts where the Muslim population is concentrated.
- ~ Making public the Ranganath Mishra Commission report and ensuring full public debate; as an immediate measure all OBC Muslims which form the vast majority of the Muslim community to be included in the OBC quota with specific state-wise allocations.
- ~ Earmarking 15% of priority sector lending by banks for the Muslims; subsidised credit to be ensured for the self-employed Muslim youth.
- ~ Special emphasis to be laid on the education of Muslim girls; scholarships and hostel facilities should be substantially increased for Muslim girl students.
- ~ Promoting the teaching of Urdu in schools; publishing good quality textbooks in Urdu and filling vacancies of Urdu teaching posts.

## CONCLUSION

The Muslims of our country are overwhelmingly poor and socially and economically deprived. Lack of access to education and employment is a major source of frustration for the Muslim youth. The destruction of traditional crafts and industries has hit their livelihood further. Muslim women are the most exploited and as working women they have no protection whatsoever. Secular democracy, under the Constitution, provides equal opportunities and fundamental rights for all irrespective of race, religion or creed as citizens of the country. A democratic system is evaluated by how it treats its minorities – whether religious, ethnic or linguistic. For fostering national unity, for strengthening democracy and secularism, it is essential that the Muslim minorities be provided equal opportunities to access the benefits of development and the fundamental rights given in the Constitution.

While the BJP stands opposed to all steps to improve the plight of the Muslim community and has continued with its communal targeting of the minorities, the hallmark of the Congress's approach on this question is its tokenism towards the Muslim minorities.

The need of the hour is to elect a secular alternative that will undertake the task of ensuring equality to the Muslim minorities.

**Vote CPI(M)**

**Strengthen the Left and Democratic Forces to  
Ensure an Alternative Secular Government  
at the Centre.**

# Vote CPI(M)



Strengthen  
Left and Democratic Forces  
for an  
Alternative Secular Government

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