

*Urbanisation of Muslims in India?*

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The percentage Muslims residing in urban areas is as high as 40 per cent (urban Muslims in relation to total Muslims) , against the national urbanization level of less than 32 per cent in 2011, as per the Population Census. The corresponding figures for Hindu Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Hindu Scheduled Tribes (STs) are 21.1 per cent and 10 per cent respectively, constituting the vulnerable sections of Indian population. Clearly, much larger segment of Muslim population lives in urban areas than the SCs and STs. The urban share of other non-Hindu religious groups, such as Sikhs and Christians, is just below that of Muslims. The only group having an edge over the Muslims in this regard is the upper caste Hindus (UCH, Hindus excluding the SC and ST population, recording percentage figure of 42.8.

A higher percentage of Muslim population residing in towns and cities, compared to total Indian population, suggests that the former enjoys greater urban facilities, including employment opportunities, than the average Indian. This can be attributed to the history of the Sultanate and Mogul Empire, resulting in concentration of Muslims in the seats of governance during those periods. Understandably, there were religious conversions that too account for a part of the high Muslim population share in urban areas.

There are, however, several caveats to the deduction that Muslims enjoy greater urban opportunities simply because larger number among them live in urban areas. This would depend on the category of towns they live in, since the urban facilities vary widely across size class of urban centres. Also, location of the Muslims in low income areas within the urban centres, their non affordability of many of the amenities provided through market etc. will be important in this regard. Despite these caveats one can prima facie hypothesize that, other things remaining the same, a Muslim is in an advantageous position than an SC, ST or average urbanite in accessing urban opportunities and basic services.

Given this perspective, an increase in the share in urban population would be viewed as a

positive phenomenon for any socio-religious group in India, since the country is characterized by a high degree of rural-urban inequality in most socio-economic spheres. Interestingly, as per the Population Census, India's population living in urban areas has increased from 23.7 per cent in 1981 to 31.2 per cent in 2011. The percentage share of Muslim population in urban areas to the total Muslim population has, however, gone up much slowly - from 34.0 to 39.9. While the increase in case of the general population is as high as 7.50 percentage points, for the Muslims it is only 5.9 points. This conclusion emerges more sharply if we consider the period from 1981 to 2001 where in urban share of Muslims increased by 1.7 point against the national increase of 4.1 point. The slower *pace* of urbanization of Muslims, despite their higher *level* of urbanization, compared to other religious groups during the past several decades, suggests a strong process of exclusion, coming in the way of this disadvantaged minority benefiting from urban development.

The higher level and slower rate of urbanization for Muslims when compared to the SC, ST or general population is confirmed by the data from the National Sample Survey, during the period from 2004-05 to 2011-12. The the 68th round of the Sample Survey identifies 35.1 per cent of the Muslim population as urban against the figure of 28.6 per cent for the overall population in 2011-12. The percentage of Muslims living in urban areas has gone up by 2.3 percentage points only, against the increase of 3.3 percentage points for the general population. The corresponding increases for the Hindu STs and Hindu SCs are even less: 2.2 and 1.4 only, the highest figure being 3.8 for the UCH population. One can, therefore, argue, using both the data from Census and NSS, that the percentages of not only the Muslims, but also that of SC and ST populations in urban areas have increased at a slower pace than the general population. This is a matter of concern, given the growing socio-economic disparities between rural and urban areas.

It must be pointed out that the pattern was somewhat reversed during 2001-11 for the Muslims. The increase in the percentage urban Muslims has been higher (4.2 percentage point) than that for the total urban population (3.4 points) in the country. The sharp increase in the share of urban Muslims can be explained in terms of inclusion of a large number of new Census towns in West Bengal and Kerala that have high incidence of Muslim population. Since the percentage of Muslims engaged in non-agricultural activities is larger than the general population in rural areas, the probability of the settlements with substantial Muslim population, being classified as urban is high. However, when we consider only the urban centres of 2001 (excluding the new towns of 2021), the percentage of *Muslims to total urban population* goes down from 25.4 to 23.6 in Kerala and from 12.8 to 12.7 in West Bengal during 2001-11. This is despite Muslim fertility rate being higher than those of other communities. This suggests a low rate rural urban migration of Muslims. Furthermore, the availability of basic

infrastructure in these new towns with high incidence of Muslims is very low. The data from Population Census suggest that the percentage of households having access to electricity, sanitation and improved drinking water facility decline significantly as we move from class I to class VI towns. Much higher percentage of Muslims live in lower order towns, recording very high level of deprivation in terms of these amenities. Besides, the people in these towns have to travel great distances to access these.

Importantly, Population Census in 2001 had not collected data on slum situation from lower order towns having population below 20,000. In 2011, however, towns in all size categories were covered except the non statutory towns where the provisioning of civic amenities to people by the local boduies is highly unsatisfactory. The Registrar General of Census had explained not covering these towns for slum statistics, arguing that the entire town can be considered as a slum. Concentration of Muslims in the small towns and the new non statutory towns raise serious concern about their quality of life due to deficiencies in basic services. It would, therefore, be erroneous to believe that the faster pace of urbanization among the Muslims would improve their well-being, if this is owing to addition of new towns..