

Handout 2

Minorities and Marginalisation

The Constitution provides safeguards to religious and linguistic minorities as part of our Fundamental Rights.

The minority refers to communities that are numerically small in relation to the rest of the population. This concept goes well beyond numbers encompassing issues of power, access to resources with social and cultural dimensions.

Culture of majority influencing the way in which society and government express themselves-

size is a disadvantage and result in the marginalisation of the relatively smaller communities- hence, safeguards protect minority communities against being culturally dominated by the majority-also protect them against any discrimination and disadvantage-Communities that are small in number relative to the rest of society may feel insecure about their lives, assets and well-being, which may get accentuated if the relations between the minority and majority communities are fraught-

The Constitution provides these safeguards because it is committed to protecting India's cultural diversity and promoting equality as well as justice-the judiciary plays a crucial role in upholding the law and enforcing Fundamental Rights-every citizen of India can approach the courts if they believe that their Fundamental Rights have been violated.

Muslims and Marginalisation

14.2% of Indian Population (2011 Census)-Muslims are considered as a marginalised community as they have been deprived of the benefits of the socio-economic development over the years.

Muslims were lagging behind in terms of various development indicators- so the government set up a high-level committee in 2005- chaired by Justice Rajindar Sachar-The committee examined the social, economic and educational status of the Muslim community in India- The report discusses in detail the marginalisation of this community-suggests that on a range of social, economic and educational indicators the situation of the Muslim community is comparable to that of other marginalised communities like Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

Economic and social marginalisation experienced by Muslims has other dimensions-Like other minorities, distinct Muslim customs and practices apart from what is seen as the mainstream. Some may wear a burqa, sport a long beard, wear a fez, leading for ways to identify all Muslims- they tend to be identified differently and some people think they are not like the 'rest of us'-thus causing them to be treated unfairly and discriminated against -This social marginalisation of Muslims has led to them migrating from places where they have lived, often leading to the ghettoisation of the community-Sometimes, this prejudice leads to hatred and violence.

Marginalisation, a complex phenomenon requires a variety of strategies, measures and safeguards to redress this situation. All of us have a stake in protecting the rights defined in the Constitution and the Laws and Policies framed to realise these rights. Without these, we will never be able to protect the diversity that makes our country unique nor realise the State's commitment to promoting equality for all.