

NOTE

Who is Responsible?

Asghar Ali Engineer writes :

Indian Muslims, according to the Sachar Committee Report are slipping below Dalits in their economic and educational status and the Committee has supported this with hard data. This is acknowledged by everyone including the Government of India. But who is responsible for this state of affairs? The Muslim themselves or the government? This is a big debate within the community.

There are different views and various controversies. A section of Muslim intelligentsia feels that Muslim leaders have developed a habit of complaining rather than being active in drawing up strategies for development, change and spread of education. Breast beating would hardly help in the long run. Community has to be pro-active in its own interest. It must mobilize its own intellectual and material resources for development.

The other section feels it is duty of the Government in a democratic country to help a substantial minority to stand on its own legs. After all Muslims belong to weaker sections like OBCs, dalits and tribals (SCs and STs). There is woeful lack of education and paucity of resources due to extreme poverty in the community. Muslims by themselves cannot mop up enough resources for the purpose.

There is grain of truth in both the arguments. Muslims have to find a middle path. Both government as well as Muslim leaders and intelligentsia must put governmental as well as community resources together to help the weaker sections in the community. The Government should realize that more than 15 crore Muslims (150 million) will remain a drag on economic development of India. India cannot go forward leaving them behind.

The community leaders have to realize that in the era of globalization and liberalization—and there is hardly any possibility of going back from it—dependence on the government has its own limits. The whole dynamics of liberalization banks upon private initiative and merit. The community will have to generate internal resources for development and spread of quality education.

When it comes to mobilizing internal resources, it is necessary to point out one significant difference between Dalits and Muslims. Dalits have hardly much internal resource to mobilize. They have been underdogs right from the beginning of history. Even then Ambedkar, from pre-independence days, worked hard to establish some educational institutions to educate them so that they could benefit from reservations in government jobs. Thus Ambedkar did it single handedly for lack of other leaders.

The Muslim situation has been very different in a way. All Muslims were never underdogs. Various Muslim dynasties ruled over India for more than 800 years and created a feudal class with considerable land holdings. These dynastic rulers as well as the feudal class (Zamindars) donated from their resources and created Wakf properties which, in terms of today's ruling prices, are huge running into thousands of crores.

It is true that a large number of Zamindars, especially from the north, migrated to Pakistan along with the middle class which came into existence in pre-independence era from feudal class, creating a great vacuum. However, even then a class of prosperous Muslims were left behind however, small it was. Then a new class of small

entrepreneurs came into existence from amongst the artisans in post-independence era. Also, there are business communities in Gujarat among Muslims some of whom have also taken to middle status industries.

Also, Muslims have traditional educational institutions either run by income from Wakf properties or many from donations received from the oil rich Arab countries. The Dalits have no such sources. In drawing up any strategy for development of Muslims these resources can play an important role. What is needed is a vision and spirit. Muslims produced Sir Syed in the British era as then what was needed was modern education among the scions of this Zamindar class to have influential and high status jobs in the government.

Now in post-independence India what Muslims need is an Ambedkar who can provide a dynamic lead to Muslim underdogs as partition has deprived them of the better off classes as they migrated to Pakistan. A new middle class is being born from amongst the have-nots. This middle class is slow in growth as there are very limited avenues for growth for lack of resources.

Thus it will be seen that if the community leaders are determined to help the community there are three types of resources which already exist in the community :

- (1) Wakf properties ; (2) Zakat fund from a better off sections of Muslims and (3) The existing institutions of madrasas which can be modernized and used as dynamic vehicles for spreading education. However, there are massive challenges to transform these existing institutions into useful tools for development of Muslim community.

It is unfortunate that everywhere initiative is given to ulama who have no understanding of the modern economy and go only by traditional interpretations. They are too narrow in their outlook and, what is worse, have their sectarian interests which prevent any attempt to bring about unity transcending sectarian barriers. It is very difficult to overcome these massive challenges.

These ulama are not allowing even modernizing of madrasas which can also become another important vehicle for spreading modern education along with religious education. There is hardly any taker for modernizing of madrasas among the traditional ulama. Thus all the valuable resources of the community stand blocked. □□□