

**A Report on
National Convention**

***Musalman Aurton ki Awaaz:
Sadak se Sansad tak***

Bebaak Collective (Voices of the Fearless)

27-28 February, 2016

Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti

New Delhi

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Bebaak Collective (Voices of the fearless) in association with Aawaaz-e-Niswaan

Address: C/o Hasina Khan,

Ganapati Complex, A/201, Plot 105, Sector 27, Nerul East, Opposite Fire Brigade, Navi

Mumbai: 400706, Maharashtra, India.

Email: bebaakcollective@gmail.com

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Report written by: Geeta Thatra & Hasina Khan

Hindi translation by: Nidhi Agarwal & Seema Gupta

Edited by: Roshni Chattopadhyay & Meet D

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I. Introduction

The National Convention—*Musalman Aurton ki Awaaz: Sadak se Sansad tak*—was organised in the capital city of Delhi on 27th and 28th February 2016 to demand the fundamental rights to life, dignity, equality and non-discrimination, for freedom of religion and expression for Muslim women. It was an effort to bring together the visions and struggles of women’s movements, people’s movements, democratic and civil rights movements to participate in a national-level convention and rally in Delhi, and to demand an equitable and just society for *all* the citizens of this country. Invitation for this Convention was extended by Bebaak Collective and other women’s organisations to like-minded individuals, writers, researchers, activists, students, professionals, non-governmental organisations and autonomous collectives to join the on-going struggle of Muslim women.

This Convention of Muslim Women was a collective journey of many women’s groups and organisations in states like Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and West Bengal that began in October 2015. These groups met for the last three years and shared their experiences of working with Muslim women. Their attempt was to develop a deeper understanding of the issues faced at the grassroot level and evolve collective strategies to address them. This process was enriched with the contribution of a few members who have actively participated in the women’s movements over the last two-three decades. Formation of Bebaak Collective was part of this collective process and it aims to question the hegemonic and exclusionary ideas of nation, ideal womanhood, development, religious and sexual difference. This Convention was in a way coming together of state-level networks and scaling-up of various local initiatives. It was a platform at the national-level to share experiences so as to make collective demands to further the rights of Muslim women and strengthen Muslim women’s leadership.

There have been various conventions in the past, mostly organised by religious organisations, speaking on behalf of Muslim women and claiming to be the “authentic” voice representing the community. This Convention was the first of its kind in the country. It was an effort to make an autonomous representation of Muslim women so as to challenge the hegemony of religious organisations and foreground the voices of Muslim women. It also attempted to mobilise the media to disseminate the issues and questions raised by Muslim women widely in the society. The key objective was to challenge the stereotypical images of Muslim women

as merely vulnerable victims of personal laws and issues of conjugality. It focused on concerns of livelihood, social security, equal citizenship rights and other quotidian issues of Muslim women.

1. Background of the National Convention

During the reign of the previous government *viz.*, United Progressive Alliance (UPA), the Central government made a lot of promises and formulated many policies to improve the socio-economic conditions of Muslim communities, including the appointment of Rajinder Sachar Committee in 2005. The report prepared by this Committee was hailed as the first of its kind to highlight the “backwardness” of Indian Muslims; and their condition was compared to be lower than Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in India. This report not only demonstrated the socio-economic and educational impediments faced by Muslims denying them equal rights but also made crucial recommendations to improve the conditions of this marginalised community. There were several shortcomings in the implementation of these recommendations by the UPA government, including lack of transparency in the budget allocations. Hence, it is difficult to state whether there was any substantial improvements and several issues continue to persist.

The present environment of intolerance, stigma and discrimination has deepened the malaise. In fact, Narendra Modi in November 2013, then the chief minister of Gujarat, had challenged the formation of Rajinder Sachar Committee by the then PMO, headed by Manmohan Singh, and contended before the Supreme Court that it was “unconstitutional” since it targeted only Muslims and ignored other minorities. Within a week of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government coming to power in the Centre in May 2014, similar views were echoed by the Minister of Minority Affairs stating that Muslims were not a minority in this country. Even after 21 months in power, the BJP government has not taken any serious steps to implement the Sachar Committee recommendations. With such predisposition of the Central government and the current socio-political atmosphere of the country, this Convention was crucially timed.

Muslim communities are witnessing endemic and overt communal riots, ban on consuming beef and their livelihood, hate speeches targeting them, various forms of discrimination in their everyday lives, and an overall trend towards saffronisation of education that particularly constructs resentment against Muslims and fuels Islamophobia. There have also been covert

and systemic forms of violence through the rhetoric of *love jihad* and *ghar wapsi*. The inundating surveillance of the state in the everyday lives of citizens, and specifically of marginalised communities like Muslims, has heightened the insecurity among citizens in rural and urban areas. These instances, along with many other quotidian forms of discrimination and violence against Muslims and other marginalised communities, have fostered an atmosphere of intolerance and fear in the country.

With the rising communal hatred towards Muslims, it is well known that women become the bearers of “honour” of the community and are subjected to strict forms of surveillance and moral policing by members of their own family and community, albeit using the rhetoric of “security” and “protection”. Education, employment and mobility of Muslim women are major causalities under such circumstances. It is thus obvious that the current situation in our country deserved immediate attention and much needed deliberation relating to the lived realities of Muslim women.

In this context, Bebaak collective organised a National Convention of Muslim Women to reclaim our democratic rights and demand equal opportunities for all. Visionaries and outspoken personalities were invited to address various concerns of Muslim women in the plenary on Day-1, and representatives of political parties, Ministries and Commissions of the Government shared their views on Day-2 of the Convention.

Broad themes of the two-day deliberations were:

Sachar Committee Recommendations

The Sachar Committee Report of 2006 had many policy-level recommendations for the Muslim community, which is an educationally, socially and economically weaker group in our country. This report was supposed to be implemented by the central and state governments. However, the previous UPA government did not successfully implement the recommendations; and as of now, we cannot see if the current BJP government has taken serious steps to implement them. It has become imperative for women’s groups and human rights groups, working with the Muslim community, to campaign and build pressure on this government so as to ensure their accountability. In the contemporary milieu of growing suspicion and intolerance against Muslims in our country, implementation of these recommendations will instil confidence in the community that they are not second-class citizens.

Right to Equality and Non-Discrimination

Bebaak Collective seeks to work towards equal opportunities for Muslim women. They must have equal access to education, livelihood, infrastructure, housing and all other resources which will in turn help them to improve their marginalised position. It is known that the women's standing in any vulnerable community is even worse as they are doubly oppressed. Muslim women's issues in India span a wide range including social security, economic autonomy, equal citizenship, civil and political rights. The role of the state in improving the well-being of Muslim women is crucial and requires the promotion of several affirmative policies. For this, Article 14 (Equality before law) and Article 15 (Prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth) of the Indian Constitution needs to be read together to secure equal citizenship and substantive rights of Muslim women.

Social Security

It is well-known that women have lesser social security and this Convention stands by the larger demand from the state to ensure social security of *all* marginalised communities and individuals. We also recognise that none of the personal laws are gender-just, including the Muslim Personal Laws that discriminate against Muslim women. The attempt was to discuss the issues related to social security of Muslim women who are survivors of any form of violence and/or discrimination. We believe that it is the responsibility of the state to create support systems for Muslim women outside the realm of the family and community as they face violence within these spaces as well. However, the nebulous location of Muslim women amidst their community and the state is getting further complicated in the current socio-political context, where the plot of extremism and intolerance are seen to thicken with each passing day. These issues and complexities become all the more important for deliberation as we witness increased violations of human rights, denial of equity and (c) overt forms of discrimination and violence, which necessitated a coming together of this sort to build voices that assert and re-invoke the constitutional morality within our democratic ethos.

2. Objectives

- To deliberate on the issues, challenges and constraints faced by Muslim women based on their lived experiences that have hitherto remained marginal in the discourses about the

marginalisation of Muslims and to articulate the concerns of the community from the perspective of Muslim women.

- To specifically focus on issues of education, livelihood, health, housing, social security, political leadership and quotidian forms of violence and discrimination faced by Muslim girls and women.
- To make recommendations to the central and state governments to initiate new policies/legislations and implement the existing ones for Muslim women so as to ensure socio-economic equality and further Muslim women's political leadership.

3. Schedule

Day I: 27 February 2016, Saturday

Time	Sessions
10:00 am	Welcome
10:45 am	Introduction to the National Convention
11:00 am to 1:00 pm	Plenary Session
1:00 pm to 2:00 pm	Lunch
2:30 pm to 6:00 pm	Focussed Group Discussions (FGD)
6:00 pm to 6:30 pm	Tea break
6:30 pm to 7:30 pm	Documentary Screening – <i>Tiryaaq</i>
7:30 pm to 8:00 pm	Discussion about the documentary
8:30 pm to 9:30 pm	Dinner
9:30 pm to 10:30 pm	Open space for all sorts of discussions

Day II: 28 February 2016, Sunday

Time	Sessions
10:00 am to 11:00 am	Sharing the findings and demands of FGD
11:00am to 11:30 am	Testimony of challenging the practice of female genital cutting in Bohra community
11:30 am to 12:30 pm	Open Space and discussion with participants

12:30 pm to 2:00 pm	Space for members of different political parties, Ministries and Commissions to share their thoughts
2:00 pm to 3:00 pm	Lunch
3:00 pm onwards	Rally to Jantar Mantar

4. Outline of the procedure adopted for the conduct of the Convention

The National Convention was planned as a two-day programme preceded by a press conference organised on 25 February 2016 at the Indian Women's Press Corps, New Delhi from 3 pm to 5 pm. This press conference apprised the Hindi, Urdu and English media about the significance of this Convention, issues that would be focussed upon and the emergence of Muslim women's voices at the national-level to claim their equal citizenship rights and social security. It was addressed by Kamla Bhasin (an active feminist critic whose work encompasses issues of gender, education, violence, and human development); Hasina Khan (a grassroots level activist from Mumbai working on Muslim women's issues and a strong propagator of secular feminist ethos); and Reshma Vohra (member of Sahiyar, a women's organisation based in Baroda).

The two-day National Convention—*Musalman Aurton ki Awaaz: Sadak se Sansad tak*—was held on 27–28 February 2016 at Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti, near Rajghat, New Delhi. 27 February 2016, started with a plenary session addressed by Justice Rajinder Sachar, Dr. Syeda Hameed, Prof. Zoya Hasan, Prof. Uma Chakravarti and Adv. Vrinda Grover. This was followed by Focussed Group Discussions (FGD) with Muslim women who had gathered from various states to participate in the Convention. Day-1 ended with the first screening of Bebaak Collective's documentary, *Tiryaaq*.*

**Tiryaaq*, or antidote, is that which dilutes poison. *Tiryaaq*, the film, documents journeys. Journeys of marginalisations, of struggles, of political understandings and of political organising/collectivisation led by Muslim women from different parts of India. These journeys help to unravel the insidious functionings of caste patriarchy and religious fundamentalism, as well as the countless struggles of Muslim women bound within the contours of nation, community and family. Journeys that are, struggles that form, and understandings that frame antidotes to resurgent fascism.

On 28 February 2016, the representatives of Bebaak Collective—Hameeda Khatoon, Rubina Patel, Shiva Sharma and Nazma Iqbal—presented the realities, challenges and demands of Muslim women from across the country based on the FGDs. The idea of FGD was to listen to diverse experiences and perspectives of Muslim women who had gathered in Delhi in such large numbers and across age groups. FGD is a crucial tool to understand and communicate the experiences of the participants. In this Convention, women had come together and there were in-depth discussions about the broader themes outlined earlier. This created the possibility to actively engage with the commonalities and differences emerging across states, regions, rural and urban areas. FGD was also to recognise the emerging leadership of Muslim women at the grassroot level and to bring their understanding to the forefront rather than merely treat them as recipients of wisdom from above.

5. Details of plenary speakers and facilitators

Justice Rajinder Sachar is renowned for his luminous contribution in drafting the Sachar Report (2006). This report unequivocally says that Muslims are living in abominable conditions in our country and they require immediate policy-level interventions from the government to better their socio-economic conditions.

Dr. Syeda Hameed has been a member of the national Planning Commission. She has been a visionary for women of the Muslim community and has also written profusely about them.

Prof. Zoya Hasan teaches in Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Her academic scholarship focuses on education and livelihood issues of Muslim women.

Prof. Uma Chakravarti is a retired faculty of History from Delhi University. She is a leading scholar of feminist history-writing and associated with the women's movement and the movement for democratic rights.

Adv. Vrinda Grover is a women's rights and human rights activist. Her research and litigation focuses on the impunity of the state in relation to human rights violations, role of law in the subordination of women, and the failure of criminal justice system during communal and targeted violence.

Focussed Group Discussions were jointly facilitated by two feminists/women's rights activists. All these resource persons have sustained experience and political commitment of working with the marginalised communities. The list of 10 groups is as follows:

Sl. No.	Facilitators
1	Renu Mishra (Lucknow) and Rubina Patel (Nagpur)
2	Meena Gopal (Mumbai) and Sameena (Ahmadabad)
3	Nandini Manjrekar (Mumbai) and Shaina Sheikh (Nagpur)
4	Sandhya Gokhale (Mumbai) and Shiva Sharma (Lucknow)
5	Sabah Khan (Mumbai) and Shadab (Muzaffarnagar)
6	Kavita Srivastava (Jaipur) and Hameeda Khatoon (Lucknow)
7	Sadhna Arya (Delhi) and Azma Aziz (Farukkabad)
8	Kalyani Menon (Delhi) and Reshma Vohra (Baroda)
9	Jaya Sagade (Pune), Nazma Iqbal (Saharanpur) and Shabina Sheikh (Bandha)
10	Deepti Sharma (Delhi) and Khairun Nishad Pathan (Ahmadabad)

Members from various political parties, Ministries and Commissions of the government were also present and discussed their views on Day-2 of the Convention, including Shubashini Ali of CPI(M); Farida Khan, Member of National Commission for Minorities; and Hussain Dalwai, Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha. There was also a sharing of testimony by Masooma Ranalvi about the prevailing practice of Female Genital Cutting among Bohra Muslims and women's opposition to such violent practices from within the community.

II. Proceedings

1. Inaugural programme

The National Convention got off to a rousing start with songs, slogans and calls for women to lead the struggle for rights and equality for all. Organised by Bebaak Collective, to strengthen Muslim women's leadership and bring them into the political space for collective struggle, the Convention called for women to stand together against communal violence and patriarchal forces that threaten women's solidarity.

Khairun Nisha, working with Parvaaz in Ahmadabad, welcomed the participants to the National Convention of Muslim Women who had travelled long distances to reach Delhi in spite of various last minute train cancellations and road blocks due to the ongoing agitation and violence of Jats claiming for reservation. This Convention was significant where around 400 women had gathered to address the issues concerning Muslim women from 14 states across India (Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Uttarakhand, Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh). It showed the strength of the Collective and courage of Muslim women to fight against all odds so as to make their voices heard in their struggle for claiming equal rights.

Hameeda Khatoon, working with Sanatkada Sadbhavna Trust based in Lucknow, delivered the opening remarks and spoke about the process of initiating Bebaak Collective and its journey from 2013 onwards. She introduced the participants to their local struggles and collective processes of learning about grassroot experiences across four states of Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Gujarat. As the Collective met regularly for the last 3 years, the members felt the need to come together, along with Muslim women in other states of the country, feminist and human rights activists, at a National platform to deliberate and reflect on the challenges faced by the Muslim community through secular and feminist perspectives.

Hasina Khan, the founder and moving spirit of Bebaak Collective, shared the process of political education of Muslim women as they collected, translated and compiled feminist scholarly writings, films, documentaries, editorial pieces on various issues. This Convention was a first of its kind not only for mobilising such large numbers of Muslim women from

various states but also for collectively presenting the voices of Muslim women beyond religious or statist representations. It was stated at the outset that Muslim women challenge both religious fundamentalism(s) and state violence as women are the target of assault from these forces; and such a platform was of utmost significance to gain socio-economic and political equality, which was not possible without confronting these forces. Education, employment and mobility of Muslim women were seen as major casualties under such circumstances and thus it was obvious that the current situation in our country deserved immediate attention and deliberation regarding the lived realities of Muslim women.

Muslim women's issues in India span a wide range including social security, economic autonomy, equal citizenship, civil and political rights. The role of the state in improving the well-being of Muslim women is crucial and requires the promotion of several affirmative policies. This Convention aims to highlight both the errors of commission as well as omission of various governments, to report on the marginalisation of Muslim women and to implement the necessary programmes to improve their living and working conditions. For instance, the previous UPA government set-up the Justice Rajinder Sachar Committee but failed to implement its recommendations, the present BJP government has not even initiated these minimal efforts.

The contemporary situation is also worsening with the present government subscribing to an aggressive and exclusive notion of nationalism and patriotism that continues to push all the non-Hindus, including Dalits, to the margins. We have witnessed various attacks on the secular and democratic ethos of our country in recent times: the death of Rohith Vemula in HCU, sedition charges against students of JNU, lynching of Akhlaque Khan in Dadri, persecution of young couples using the rhetoric of *love jihad*. They are all grim examples of persisting structural inequalities and rising intolerance towards co-existence of diverse ways of living. The varied expressions of love, dietary practices, forms of livelihood, and modes of dissent have been at the heart of these attacks perpetrated by the Hindutva forces masquerading as "nationalism". Such nationalism is dangerous and particularly for Muslim women. It propagates the twin myths of Muslim women as "reckless breeders" that needs to be controlled and as "victims" of patriarchal violence within their community who need to be saved. Both these stereotypical images do not reflect the material conditions of Muslim women's lives and lead to neglect, discrimination and violence. Speaking on behalf of the

organizers, Hasina Khan stated that “Bebaak Collective opposes religious fundamentalisms of all kinds and we refuse any kind of control on our thoughts, bodies and voices”.

Highlighting the broad themes of the National Convention—implementation of Sachar Committee recommendations, promotion of social security, ensuring substantive equality for Muslim women and challenging the rising religious fundamentalism—Hasina Khan set the tone for the deliberations of next two days. With her concluding sentence, “*Izhar par pabandi nahin, awaaz par pabandi nahin*” [No restriction on expressions, no restriction on voices], Hasina introduced and invited the panellists to collectively envision the transformation in the lives of Muslim women.

2. Keynote address and plenary presentations

Speakers at the opening plenary on 27th February included Justice Rajinder Sachar, Prof. Zoya Hasan, Dr. Syeda Hameed, Prof. Uma Chakravarti and Adv. Vrinda Grover. The speakers emphasised the need for solidarity at a time when the basic fundamentals of the Constitution are coming under systematic attack and called for alliances among all those who are being marginalised and excluded by the politics of hate and Hindu cultural chauvinism. Each of the panellists commended on the large gathering of Muslim women to raise their concerns, including the idea of fearless voices that are making their way towards the parliament in their struggle for justice. Justice Sachar said that he was energised and humbled by the gathering of dedicated and knowledgeable persons. He also said that a platform like this had the potential of becoming more than a voice (*awaaz*), which would challenge the state and all the political parties that women cannot be taken for granted any longer. He called it “*Musalman Aurton ki Lalkaar*” (the defiance of Muslim women).

Justice Rajinder Sachar

Justice Rajinder Sachar reflected on the challenges that the Committee headed by him faced in drafting the report and the questions raised by women’s rights scholars and activists like Prof. Zoya Hasan who pointed out that there was not a single woman on this Committee. He explained that many women’s groups contributed a lot to organise meetings in various states and it was through these discussions that the invisibility of Muslim women’s labour surfaced. A lot more could have been done in this Report, especially analysing the specificities of Muslim women’s issues, he acknowledged.

It is important to note that funds allocated for the development of Muslims remains inadequate and the budget analysis also shows that the funds earmarked for Minorities are diverted or drained away. The state has committed under various international treaties, including United Nations resolutions, to ensure substantive opportunities and equal rights to the minorities through special programmes and affirmative action but no government has acted on this. In this regard, it is worth mentioning that the delimitation of parliamentary constituencies is done in such a way that it invisibilises the minorities and the data presented in the Report was based on Census of India since the elected representatives refused to provide it.

Justice Sachar insisted that Muslim women's struggle could ensure the passing of much delayed Women's Reservation Bill and improve the long-awaited representation of women in the parliament. Equally important is that the idea of India, as reflected by Maulana Azad and other leaders of the nationalist movement, that belongs not to Hindus alone but all the communities and significantly to the Minorities.

Adv. Vrinda Grover

Adv. Vrinda Grover applauded that such a gathering of Muslim women gave hope and courage in these difficult times and was inspiring to see how women's movements kept the flame of struggle for rights alive and refused to back down in the face of opposition. As a lawyer, she spoke about the false cases of sedition against the students of JNU with the complicity between the state and the media. She also questioned the selective concerns of the government and courts in espousing the rights of Muslim women and demanding the Uniform Civil Code, while communal violence and its link with the electoral politics go unchallenged. For instance, the politics of hate and riots in Muzaffarnagar have created a permanent division and ghettoisation in rural North India. More than 1 lakh Muslims were displaced from their homes and villages. Women from Muzaffarnagar have also filed cases in the court against the assailants of sexual violence and we are often told "let the law take its own course", which is a fraught one. It is a misconception that once the cases have been filed in the court, it's only a matter of time and justice will be done. More often than not, that's where the struggle begins.

There is another difficult and poignant case of Ishrat Jahan, whose name is brought up every now and then. In June 2004, a 19-year-old woman was killed by the Gujarat police outside

Ahmadabad. In August 2004, her mother filed a writ petition in the High court. It took years for the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to clear Ishrat's name, and till then the family was ostracised. This case might seem like an isolated case of a family, the suffering of just two women, but we should not be mistaken. Even if it is a particular case, why should any Muslim in this country suffer? Feminist activists have been repeatedly challenged and asked as to why they are speaking for Muslim women. This meeting is symbolic that Muslim women can speak for themselves, and we in the women's movements come together to raise our concerns on the streets as well as in the parliament.

Prof. Zoya Hasan

Prof. Zoya Hasan made an important observation that the Sachar Committee Report tried to shift the discourse on Muslims from identity to development, which was an attempt of this Convention as well. While the UPA government lost the historic opportunity to transform the situation, it did initiate a few good steps like scholarship for Muslim girls, infrastructure development in Muslim areas, etc. It is important to note that the work force participation of Muslims is lowest (32 per cent) in the country, in comparison to Christians (41 per cent) and Hindus (42 per cent) across all sectors, as per the latest data from NSSO. This was pointed out by the Sachar Committee Report also 10 years ago. Several important recommendations of this Report, like the Equal Opportunity Commission and Workforce Equality have been ignored and there are serious gaps in implementation, which were reiterated by the Kundu Committee. It is significant for Bebaak Collective to oppose distinctions between marginalised groups (e.g., Dalits, OBCs or Muslims) and demand for affirmative action for Muslims, said Prof. Zoya Hasan.

With respect to Personal law reform Prof. Zoya Hassan suggested that Muslim women should go beyond the ban on triple *talaaq*; and the demand for reform has to come from within the community. Insisting that "Islam gives rights" has not advanced the issue and we need to accept that no religion gives equal rights for women. We cannot focus only on inter-community discrimination. Even Muslim male leadership has not done anything for Muslim women, and they have mostly opposed equal rights. Invisibility of Muslim women in the Parliament is also a huge barrier. Muslim women, thus, not only have to wrest leadership from men but also support the Women's Reservation Bill. The women's movements have not been able to achieve this for the last two decades as it is argued that it will lead to under-representation of Dalits and OBCs. Prof. Zoya Hasan concluded that the present political

scenario is one of threats to the very basic ideas of citizenship, secularism, freedom, and nationalism. The rallying slogans for Bebaak Collective are thus—“Educate and Agitate”, “Mobilise and Organise”, “Reform and Modernise”.

Dr. Syeda Hameed

Dr. Syeda Hameed began her address by remembering and marking this historic date—27 February 2002—of the Gujarat carnage 15 years ago that heralded a long spell of communal violence and hatred in the country. She spoke of her years of struggle to bring Muslim women’s issues into mainstream spaces and government institutions, since the Muslim women’s hearing organised by the National Commission for Women in 1997, but could not succeed. She called for Muslim women to claim their right to define their own identity, their own beliefs and their own agenda.

While Dr. Syeda Hameed reiterated the non-implementation of Sachar recommendations and the continued marginalisation of Muslims, she differed from the secular position of feminists and earlier panellists. She said that Islam is liberal and pluralistic by definition, and was the first religion to give women equal share in property, opposed female foeticide and challenged the violent society of those times. Being a practicing Muslim, she urged the Muslim women to define Islam and interpret the religious texts based on their own critical thinking.

Prof. Uma Chakravarti

Feminist historian Prof. Uma Chakravarti reflected on the women’s movement and said that the governments turn to identity politics when they fail in their duties and responsibilities. For instance, the Shah Bano case and introduction of Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986 was a turning point. She raised an important question: If the state had provided social security to all, then would women like Shah Bano have to fight against their own communities to claim miserable scraps or go to the court for a dole of Rs. 125 as “benefits”? If women had been stronger economically, would they not have taken a different approach to the issue?

Prof. Uma Chakaravarthi pointed to the new alliances that are emerging today from the struggles around us and said that Dalits, feminists and Muslims are coming together to

transcend identity politics. The BJP government is aware of this and trying to divert attention from issues that build solidarity.

There were diverse set of views expressed by eminent speakers in the plenary session and there was a broad agreement on various issues that need urgent attention to improve the socio-economic and political position of Muslims in general and Muslim women in particular. Hasina Khan concluded the plenary session by reiterating the point that there was hardly any representation of Muslim women in the Parliament, and this Convention aiming to raise the demands of Muslim from the streets to the parliament—*sadak se sansad tak*—was timely and received valuable support from various quarters.

3. Summary of deliberations

Day-2 of the National Convention saw an equally energetic and enthusiastic audience keen on interacting with the representatives of political parties, Ministries and Commissions of the government. Rehana Adeeb (working with Astitva in Saharanpur and Muzaffarnagar) welcomed the guests of this day and thanked the panellists of the previous day as their views and solidarity strengthened the voices of Muslim women. Rehana reiterated that Muslim women came from different states, cities and villages to Delhi and demonstrated that they will lead their struggle for rights and do not require mediators from their own community or tokenistic representation of the state. While Muslim women were going out to rally on the streets on this day demanding for equal rights and freedom from patriarchal violence and discrimination, their spirit was undoubtedly marching towards the parliament. A summary of presentations made by Hameeda Khaton, Rubina Patel, Shiva Sharma and Nazma Iqbal, activists working with Muslim women, based on interactions and findings that emerged from the Focussed Group Discussions (FGD) is discussed below. The broad themes of this section include: (i) Sachar Committee Recommendations (with respect to education, health, access to basic amenities, livelihood), and (ii) Right to Equality and Non-discrimination (divided under housing, insecurity, Muslim Personal Laws, and targeted violence).

Sachar Committee Recommendations

All the speakers who presented their findings based on FGD, Subhashini Ali of CPI(M) and Prof. Fareeda Khan, Member of National Commission for Minorities, spoke at length about the non-implementation of Sachar Committee Recommendations and cited various examples to show the continued deprivation of Muslim community and how it impacted Muslim

women. While these recommendations were not gender-specific, they would go a long way in empowering Muslim women as well. Hence, every participant urged that there be no further delay in allocating funds for various schemes, increasing the budget for Minorities, and initiating various recommendations that were not undertaken by the UPA government. In the contemporary milieu of growing suspicion and intolerance of Muslims in the country, implementation of these recommendations will also instil confidence in the Muslim community that they are not second-class citizens, said Subhashini Ali. More specific points with respect to these recommendations include the following:

- The Multi-sectoral Development Programme (MsDP) for minority community, conceived as a special initiative of follow-up action on the Sachar Committee recommendations, remains inadequate and there is lack of transparency. This programme is also not reaching the Muslim-majority areas.
- Under the Prime Minister's 15-Point Programme for minorities, which was launched by the UPA-I government in 2005, no additional funds have been earmarked by the current government and there are issues of corruption in the implementation of various schemes.
- It is important to reduce the unit for implementing programmes in the Muslim-majority districts to the village and block level, rather than district-level, since there are several instances of these schemes not reaching Muslims and the benefits being siphoned off towards non-Muslim areas. Lack of sensitivity of bureaucratic officials at various levels and non-representation of Muslims in the bureaucratic institutions has only furthered these biases in implementation.
- Subhashini Ali spoke strongly in favour of gender budgeting and minority budgeting right from the village and block levels and demanded for greater transparency and accountability measures to reduce diversion of funds to majoritarian communities in the districts.
- Reiterating the suggestion of reducing the fund allocation and spending at the block and village level in Muslim-majority districts, Prof. Fareeda Khan suggested that the District Monitoring Committee needs to go beyond the methods of bureaucratic documentation and interact with the Muslim community, local organisations and civil society groups working in these areas to get a more nuanced picture of grassroot level implementation

of various programmes. Sharing from her recent experiences of working with the Minorities Commission, she pointed out that more often than not there was clarity on paper about the programmes and financial allocations but the picture got murky when the Commission conducted field visits, interacted with the intended beneficiaries or civil society organisations. Widening the source of information for monitoring has to be incorporated within the structure and procedures of these Committees.

- Prof. Fareeda Khan also urged that the National Commission for Minorities and the governments need to be more participatory and democratic in their approach in the process of formulating, implementing and monitoring various schemes and programmes by involving women's rights groups, community based groups, and civil society organisations, which is critical for the government to make assessments at the local level and incorporate suggestions and gaps into the programmes.

(i) Education

Areas that have dense Muslim population are often marked by a serious lack of state-run schools. The few existing schools suffer from a lack of proper infrastructure and qualified teachers. Most of them offer only primary education. As a result, most students drop-out of school except a select few from a certain class who can afford private schooling. We urge the government to recognise this as a serious concern that deters Muslims from pursuing education and to ensure access to a suitable number and quality of educational institutions. These institutions should be opened in accordance with each area's population and must be located well within Muslim neighbourhoods both in rural and urban areas.

With respect to young Muslim girls/women, access to education is severely threatened in the age group of 15-25 when the drop-out rates are high. There are several reasons for this: lack of affordable schools/colleges in the vicinity of Muslim neighbourhoods, burden of increased cost of accommodation in faraway places and restricted access to the same, lack of hostels and short-stay facilities, limited and inaccessible scholarships, restrictions imposed by family and/or community on higher education of girls, etc. Several young Muslim women participants, from this age group, in the Convention shared their aspiration to pursue higher education and subsequently take up gainful employment. They urged the women's groups, Muslim families and community, and the state to promote their education and provide the necessary support systems in their pursuit of education and financial autonomy.

Apart from physical constraints of accessing education, discrimination against Muslim children in schools both by their peers and teachers emerged as a major issue during the discussions. This was an experience across various kinds of schools—elite, government and private schools—although the particular practices of prejudice varied. It must be noted that Muslim children are facing blatant forms of discrimination while availing the mid-day meals scheme. The relevance and advantages of mid-day meals scheme to improve attendance rate among poor children is well-known to be reiterated here. However, discrimination against Muslim children in availing this scheme will not only have an adverse impact on their drop-out rate but also leave a psychological scar on the children's impressionable minds.

There are also recent experiences of tiffin boxes being checked by the school authorities/teachers to prohibit children from minority communities from bringing non-vegetarian food. Women shared that their children were not even willing to take eggs to school due to the fear of insult and rebuke. It is significant that school authorities not only respect diverse food practices but also consider the cheaper supply of nutrients for children through non-vegetarian food. It is an urgent need to initiate penal action against school authorities found to be discriminating on the grounds of caste, gender, class or religion. It is also utmost crucial to organise sensitisation programmes for school teachers and introduce changes in the curriculum of B.Ed. training to respect differences among children and promote egalitarian learning environment.

Madrastas are an important institution for Muslim children who have no access to other forms of schooling. However, many of these madrasas lack very basic facilities like adequate space for classrooms, playgrounds, toilets, and basic infrastructure. There is also no mid-day meals facility in these institutions. It is important to improve these madrasas for promoting quality education. This Convention upheld that education is the right of every child and it is the state's responsibility to provide quality schools in Muslim neighbourhoods. Having said this, it was also suggested that "modernising madrasas" as recommended by the Sachar Committee Report was equally important and it is critical to improve the facilities in existing madrasas without thrusting majoritarian biases on their curriculum.

Many activists working with the Muslim community and educationists who were present at the Convention discussed elaborately about how the syllabus of History textbooks were rampantly changed and the Muslim rulers were mostly shown as destructive and violent. We all know that History has always been a fraught terrain as there are competing and contesting

narratives of the past, which are mobilised by different groups and political parties in support of their political agenda. History is often called into service by the dominant groups and the ruling class to legitimise their authority and control. This Convention strongly condemned the divisive politics of Hindu fundamentalism that has altered the syllabus and content of textbooks, particularly of History, which neglects the secular promise of our Constitution and threatens communal harmony. Governments must make sure that such practices are controlled and the vibrant history of Hindu–Muslim co-existence, which is also well-known, be brought out in the syllabus.

(ii) Health

Similar to lack of schools, several instances were shared by women about limited numbers of Primary Health Centres (PHC) or government hospitals in the vicinity of Muslim neighbourhoods. It was also pointed out that when Muslim women went to some of these PHCs, more often than not, they were given paracetamol tablets for any ailment. Another disturbing experience shared by Muslim women from Juhapura (a Muslim-majority area) in Ahmadabad was that they could go to the government hospital in the nearby area but the auto rickshaws would refuse to ply them back to their homes after treatment. This situation exacerbates in the cases of emergency and at times has turned out to be fatal. Many Muslim women echoed these sentiments of multiple layers of inaccessibility that they had to encounter even to avail the most basic services.

Sound physical, mental and emotional health is one of the most basic requirements of a healthy individual, community and society. Provisions for affordable and reliable health care are therefore an important state responsibility, especially for communities where questions of access to health care are compounded by difficult economic conditions. It was therefore recommended that there need to be government hospitals with proper facilities, well-connected to Muslim localities and in accordance with their population. There needs to be a priority at the village/block level in rural areas and in the pre-dominant Muslim neighbourhoods or slums in urban areas.

Like all women, Muslim women are also entitled to decision-making with respect to their bodies. It is crucial to make various contraception and family planning methods available to women and respect their choice with regard to the same. It is also crucial that they are provided with safe and conducive medical care in exercising their choice. While we support

family planning that promotes women's decisions and bodies, we condemn forced sterilisation (like what we have seen recently in Chhattisgarh) and the rhetoric of Muslim women as "reckless breeders" that is deployed in the demographic calculus of majoritarian Hindutva politics.

(iii) Lack of access to basic amenities and social infrastructure

It was reiterated by most participants from various states that predominant Muslim areas suffered from severe lack of basic amenities and social infrastructure (like water, electricity, toilets, waste disposal, library, reading rooms, parks, playgrounds, etc). This was the case in rural areas, small towns as well as in big cities. There seems to be a systematic denial of services to Muslim areas and the local representatives paid no heed to requests and demands to provide these services.

It is important to note that basic amenities are not only inadequately provided in Muslim neighbourhoods but also remain inaccessible for Muslims. For instance, if there are Muslim and non-Muslim localities adjacent to each other, more often than not the latter areas are provided with similar facilities and it is deplorable that they cannot be accessed by Muslims due to discrimination or overt forms of denial. It was a recurring demand in this Convention that direct benefits to Muslim households and predominant Muslim localities should be provided to bridge the gap in access to basic amenities and entitlements.

The absence of state provision of basic services and the larger trend towards their privatisation has only accentuated the developmental concerns of Muslims. For instance, the privatisation of water in several cities and the 24*7 water supply project of Nagpur, touted as the role model, has resulted in increased cost of water supply in the city as well as heightened the gap of access among the poor and Muslims, particularly worsening the situation of poor Muslims. Class background, along with religious identity, is an important consideration in improving the provision of basic facilities. Many neighbourhoods of the poor also suffer from systematic lack and inaccessibility to various amenities, but the neighbourhoods of the poor Muslims are worse off.

It was woefully shared by women from various states that the government schemes targeting Muslims remain mostly inaccessible due to lengthy procedures and several documents that need to be appended with the application forms. This predicament of Muslims is a shared concern among the poor and migrant workers of this country as well where the sheer number

of identity/address proofs and documentation work required for a single application form mars the spirit of securing entitlements for weaker sections of society. The cost of application might be minimal, including the “benefit” to be received under a particular scheme/programme, but the amount of money that is spent for procuring these documentary evidences through agents or in government offices severely restricts the schemes from reaching the intended “beneficiaries”. This does not mean that a unique identification number such as the Aadhar card has eased off any of these procedures, which has merely become an additional document daunting the world of entitlements.

(iv) Livelihood

Every speaker, including the political representatives, spoke about the low workforce participation and representation of Muslims in both government and private sector jobs. Setting up the Equal Opportunity Commission, computation of Diversity Index, Reservation for Muslims, which are long-standing demands of the community and implementing the recommendations of Sachar Committee were emphasised by them all. Affirmative action and separate reservations for Muslim women were discussed and considered as utmost important for their empowerment.

One of the sensitive issues that were brought up by women in this Convention was that of restrictions imposed on the food practices of not only Muslims but also of many other poor communities and tribal groups. However, the targeted violence against Muslims makes the community feel singled out and has intensified the fear and vulnerability of the community. Women, apart from poignantly sharing the economic constraints of buying other kinds of meat and loss of livelihood of their family members, also said that the government was interfering in their kitchen and decision-making related to food. It was urged that such threatening, terrorising and targeting of a particular community should be stopped immediately and the government had to come out in support of diverse food and consumption practices and uphold the constitutional Right to livelihood [under Article 19(1)(g)] of Muslims involved in meat production and processing activities.

Equal Citizenship and Non-discrimination

Discrimination against Muslims in the areas of education, health, livelihood and access to basic amenities were discussed at length by several speakers in the Convention. Below is a discussion about the experiences of discrimination shared by Muslim women with respect to

housing and the vulnerability they feel in their everyday lives. This is followed by a discussion on Muslim Personal Laws and targeted violence against Muslims. Article 14 (Equality before law) and Article 15 (Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth) of the Indian Constitution are to be read together to secure equal citizenship and substantive rights of marginalised communities. However, the prevailing discriminatory practices and social insecurity are indicative of a severe fissure in the social contract between the state and its citizens.

(i) Housing

Discrimination against Muslims in rental and sale housing has become a widespread phenomenon. This is an across class experience of Muslims who are discriminated on the basis of their religious identity. Several newspapers have also reported that the Co-operative Housing Societies are perpetrating discriminatory practices and this need to be condemned and penalised.

Muslim women from rural areas also shared that their access to schemes such as Indira Awas Yojana is negligible in comparison to other communities. They demanded an equitable share in this rural housing scheme for Muslims, and particularly for women-headed households and single Muslim women.

Poor Muslim women from urban areas also shared that there have been massive displacements—of the poor, Dalits and Muslims to the outskirts of city—in the name of development. The infrastructural facilities that must be provided to every citizen are denied to them. Such mass scale displacement, and lack of access to housing by Muslim women and families, is not only leading to ubiquitous discrimination but also ghettoisation and spatial segregation of Muslims. The government must ensure that the communities are not invisibilised in the process of urban planning and there should be no segregation among Hindus, Dalits and Muslims in the resettlement colonies.

(ii) Insecurity

Surveillance of Muslim men in public places, randomly picking them up without arrest warrants and then detaining them for days, months or years on trumped up charges are concerns that Muslim women shared of their community. Further, disproportionate policing of Muslim neighbourhoods, under the guise of “preventing communal violence”, severely

impacted the women. “Mini Pakistan” is not an uncommon epithet for Muslim-majority areas in this country especially those infamous for communal violence. Muslim women challenged such surveillance and blatant forms of discrimination against Muslims.

Insecurity was the defining theme of many experiences of Muslim women. The actual and/or potential threat of harm has become so ubiquitous that Muslims have internalised it leading to fear and vulnerability in their everyday lives. Muslim women are not only fearful when they are travelling in public places but also within their homes. They fear for the safety of their family members, demolition or displacement from their houses, and the recent incidents of lynching and violence over “beef” eating have only escalated and deepened their insecurity.

This Convention challenged the media in propagating stereotypes about Muslims. While the reporting of acts of terror, along with the media trial (particularly by the electronic media) of the accused, abetted the prevalent Islamophobia in society, the local and regional news coverage (particularly by the print media) about incidents of riots added more flare to the local situations and aggravated the extent of communal hatred and violence on the ground. Several experiences from Muzaffarnagar were shared to show the deplorable role of media.

The reporting of this very Convention by the media was also discussed at length by the members of Bebaak Collective as they sat around to brainstorm the future plan of action. One of the news reports by DNA was good in terms of its content but the image of Muslim women was appalling. (See DNA, “Muslim women demand rights as granted by the Constitution”, dated 28 February 2016.) The conventional and hackneyed image of Muslim women clad in *burqa* seems to be the only “authentic” representation, which is far removed from the realities of many Muslim women who are challenging communal violence and patriarchal forces. This Convention was a demonstration of such emerging leadership of Muslim women and the media failed to use this opportunity to bring about a shift in its discourse.

(iii) Muslim Personal Laws

With respect to Muslim Personal Laws, there was a consensus that Muslim women were against the practices of unilateral triple *talaq*, *halala*, *iddat* but they were for the rights of Muslim women with respect to *nikha nama*, maintenance, property and child custody. There was also an agreement that both Hindu and Muslim fundamentalist thoughts were severe constraints for Muslim women. This National Convention challenged the state, along with the

Hindu chauvinist organisations, which were perpetuating intolerance and discrimination against Muslims. The male leadership of Muslim community was also questioned as they have not heeded to the gender-just demands for reforms in the Muslim Personal Laws.

It was also pointed out that the police often do not register cases of Muslim women with respect to domestic violence or sexual violence, and reproach them to settle the matter within their community or pursue their case under their personal laws. It is important to note that secular laws like the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 are interpreted through a communal frame much to the disadvantage of Muslim women.

With regard to Muslim women's empowerment, Uniform Civil Code (UCC) emerges as an all encompassing issue. In this Convention, many women shared their experiences of discriminatory practices rooted in Muslim Personal Laws. At the same time, the participants were also uncertain about the notion of uniformity embedded within the UCC considering the Indian state's endemic—legislative, bureaucratic and penal—partisanship against Muslims of this country.

One of the strongest demands that emerged was ensuring economic rights and social security, which is otherwise much neglected when it comes to Muslim women. It is also significant to recognise the diverse family forms and alternative living arrangements within Muslim communities. The debate on UCC has to go beyond religion and reflect on the possibilities of accommodating diverse forms of relationships, alternative family and support systems, which is the lived reality of many Muslim women.

(iv) Targeted violence

Muslims are becoming more vulnerable with each passing day due to the strategies adopted by Hindutva forces in their chauvinistic and electoral politics. The manufacturing of communal violence to gain electoral success was evident with Muzaffarnagar riots in 2013. Less obvious are the attempts at communalising the electorate by using examples of alleged violence against the Hindu communities or supposed "*love jihad*". Muslim women from the villages of Araria district in north-eastern Bihar (one of the most backward districts of the state and standing at the bottom of 90 minority concentrated districts in the country) also shared that the plight of poor Hindus and Muslims was not very different but communal tensions were on the rise mainly as the local politicians used distant incidents of communal violence (perhaps fabricated too) so as to garner votes.

The link between communal violence and electoral politics cannot be missed, a point that was persuasively made even by Adv. Vrinda Grover and Prof. Uma Chakravarty during the plenary session; and Muslim women are worse targets in such high politics. Sexual violence against women in this context is too well-known to be repeated. Important to state here is the restrictions and control imposed on girls and women by the Muslim community. Mobility, education and employment are the great casualties for Muslim women, apart from the havoc and vulnerability caused in their everyday lives. Marriage of young Muslim girls comes to be seen as a “rehabilitation” measure after the communal violence by both the Muslim community and the state.

The issue of rehabilitation in the case of targeted violence against Muslims is a significant one and needs to be thought about in a preventive and long-term sense.

- First, the state administration has to take responsibility for situations of rioting, spatial segregation and other violent forms of discrimination on the basis of religion and gender. The principle of “breach of command responsibility” is of utmost salience in this context.
- Second, rehabilitation of targeted groups and individuals is the responsibility of the state and not of religious or charitable organisations.
- Third, rehabilitation does not mean merely providing relief camps and minimal compensation for those deceased or victims of sexual violence.
- Fourth, sharing the example of demographic and spatial changes in the aftermath of communal violence in Muzaffarnagar in 2013 as reported by the District Magistrate, Prof. Fareeda Khan recommended that there is an urgent need to reallocate funds within the district and the Ministry of Minority Affairs needs to play a proactive role in this regard.
- Fifth, along with re-allocation of funds within affected districts, efforts must be made to re-build the houses of survivors and displaced persons, improve accessibility to schools, ICDS centres, PHCs and other basic amenities and entitlements without necessarily relying on documentary evidences that are most often lost during communal violence.

- Sixth, living together in the same/adjacent villages/neighbourhood in the aftermath of communal violence is difficult for the targeted community, and it becomes the responsibility of the state to ensure protection and social security of the community not by heavy policing. Muslim women, who were the survivors of recent riots in Muzaffarnagar, shared that the ballot was cast under heavy presence of police and Muslims were scared to come out and exercise their basic political right to vote.
- Seventh, socio-economic, legal and medical support to the victims of sexual violence, along with witness protection and speedy trials should become the norm for addressing the cases of sexual violence in the instance of communal and targeted violence.

III. Rally at Jantar Mantar

The two-day National Convention of Muslim Women in Delhi culminated in a huge protest rally at Jantar Mantar, where around 400 Muslim women from 14 states, marched to the slogans of “*azadi*” from patriarchal violence and religious fundamentalism. They demanded that the Sachar Committee recommendations be implemented in letter and spirit by every state without any further delay. A detailed note of demands and recommendations of this National Convention are presented in the section V of this report.

This National Convention achieved its strength from many groups that are part of Bebaak Collective and played a significant role in mobilising Muslim women and working with them at the grassroots level. The organisers of this National Convention also take this opportunity to express gratitude and acknowledge the contribution of various women’s groups and human rights organisations that have immensely supported the struggle of Muslim women. Thanks also to Delhi-based groups and feminists for their presence and local organising support.

IV. Observations

“*Bebaak bol, bindaas bol*” was a rousing slogan at the outset of this Convention. It reiterated that this platform would respect diverse experiences, voices and perspectives of Muslim women, and simultaneously challenge the homogenous, divisive and patriarchal representation of Hindutva cultural nationalism. It was a keen observation as the organisers enthusiastically asked the participants to look around the jam-packed hall of women, who were colourfully dressed and vibrant in their spirit, which challenged the stereotypical image of Muslim women clad in *burqa* and claimed to be weak, docile and submissive.

Given the current socio-political atmosphere of the country, this Convention was crucially timed. Muslim communities have witnessed endemic and overt communal riots, beef ban, hate speeches targeting them and saffronisation of education. There have also been covert and systemic forms of violence through the rhetoric of *love jihad* and *ghar wapsi*. These instances, along with many other quotidian forms of discrimination and violence against Muslims and other marginalised communities, have fostered an atmosphere of intolerance and fear in the country.

More than 400 Muslim women, from 14 states of Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Bihar, Himachal Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, and others, came together to participate in this National Convention and Rally in Delhi. The participants were mostly Muslim women from remote villages, small towns and big cities. Most of them were survivors of not only different forms of violence within the family but also discrimination based on religious faith, gender, narrow identity politics, and fundamentalism in our society. This enormous participation of Muslim women was across age groups, and in fact there were many young girls and women who enriched this Convention by sharing their experiences, struggles and aspirations. There were also representatives from various community based organisations, women’s movements, people’s movements, democratic and civil rights movements, who have been working on the rights of Muslim women with a sustained political commitment. There was a remarkable participation of feminist-activists, academicians, independent researchers, film-makers who expressed their solidarity in the struggle of Muslim women.

This Convention was an important gathering, which attempted to discuss and debate various issues pertaining to the lives of Muslim women such as education, employment, religious extremism, discrimination, violence and the fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution

of India. It was the first of its kind as it aimed to reiterate not only the ever impending questions of conjugality and personal laws but also focus on livelihood issues, social security, equal citizenship rights and other quotidian issues of Muslim women. Speakers condemned the failure of the state in implementing the recommendations of Sachar Committee, which represented a significant shift in the national discourse on minorities, from identity to development.

It was reiterated by several participants in the Convention that predominant Muslim areas suffered from severe lack of basic amenities (like water, electricity, toilets, sanitation facilities, etc). This was the case in rural areas, small towns as well as in big cities. There seems to be a systematic denial of services to Muslim areas and the local representatives paid no heed to requests and demands to provide these services. It must also be noted that inaccessibility to basic facilities perpetuates the stereotypes about Muslims; and many women shared how they have been stigmatised due to this. For instance, young girls shared that they were frequently taunted for living in “*gandi basti*” (dirty locality) and hence referred as “*gande log*” (dirty people). Even the food practices of the community have been picked upon to ascribe prejudiced notions to the locality. For instance, Muslim neighbourhoods itself are considered to be dirty or unclean since they consume meat. These reciprocal and biased notions of place and its people have only deepened the malaise. Hence, basic amenities that have so far been inadequately provided in Muslim neighbourhoods should be granted on a priority basis. Government officers and service providers also need to be sensitised about these covert forms of discrimination, which not only lead to inaccessibility of basic amenities but also goes against the Constitutional right to life with dignity.

Muslim women also shared the limited and almost absence of social infrastructure and entitlements, like schools, PHCs, ration shops, ICDS centres, parks, playgrounds, libraries and reading rooms, in Muslim neighbourhoods in cities and Muslim localities in the villages. As their neighbouring areas had access to better facilities that remain inaccessible to Muslims, they condemned the discrimination against them. While these areas are under serviced with basic amenities of survival, they are disproportionately policed; and men from Muslim community are randomly picked and detained for days or months together without any arrest warrant on trumped up charges. The experience of discrimination, lack of amenities and heavy presence of police in their localities had a particularly severe impact on

women, and this was shared by many who had come from across the country during the Focused Group Discussions. The current socio-political climate, with growing Hindutva fundamentalism and its pet projects such as the “*love jihad*” bogey and the “*ghar wapasi*” project, is only worsening the situation on the ground.

One of the sensitive issues that were brought up by women was that of restrictions imposed on the food practices of not only Muslims but also many other poor communities and tribal groups. However, the violence against a Muslim family in Dadri makes them feel singled out and has intensified the fear and susceptibility of the community. Women, apart from poignantly sharing the economic constraints of buying other kinds of meat and loss of livelihood of their family members, also said that the government was interfering in their kitchen and decision-making related to food.

Keeping the current situation of our country in mind, the contentious debate has been what constitutes the ‘nation’ and who are the nationalists? Does the Muslim community not come under the purview of the ‘nation’? If so, then why do they face multiple forms of marginalisation because of religious faith? This Convention raised these questions from the very liminal space of identity politics and secular politics. Members of Bebaak Collective presented that there is a constant sense of insecurity within the community due to rising intolerance, Hindu fundamentalism and Islamophobia that even the government and police seem to be apathetic to. This is felt in the community’s everyday life: on the streets and in public transportation, in accessing government entitlements, getting admission in schools and colleges, seeking jobs and housing. There’s even a fear to mention your own name loudly in public or to read Urdu books in case you be discriminated against. Women also shared that there is always an added burden on Muslims to prove their *desh-bhakti* (patriotism) and now it’s only getting worse.

Further, it is also important to be sensitive to the naming of welfare schemes for girls and women as some of them, like Kanyadaan scheme, not only carry Hindu and patriarchal undertone but also are symbolic violence against Minority communities. Apart from sensitive names, it was a strong recommendation that education and employment of young women, and Muslim women in particular, needed more emphasis rather than their marriage. Many young women participants of the Convention shared their aspiration to pursue higher education and become economically independent. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the

state, community, family and women's groups to create support structures for women to pursue their dreams.

Social security is of utmost importance for women in times of crisis. It is the responsibility of the state to create support structures for women so that they are not tossed between marital and natal families. Opening of hostels and shelter homes for single, widowed, divorced women will go a long way in ensuring the security of women. State support, accessibility and simplified procedures are crucial to engender social security. It is significant that both the Muslim community and the state invest their energy and resources to enhance the social security by encouraging education and employment of Muslim women even in the aftermath of targeted violence. Marriage must not be seen as an alternative and we condemn the encouragement and support provided for mass marriages in this context.

V. Recommendations

1. Education

- 1.1 Areas that have a dense Muslim population are often marked by a serious lack of state-run schools. The few existing schools suffer from a lack of proper infrastructure and qualified teachers. Most of them offer only primary education. As a result, most students drop-out of school except a select few from a certain class who can afford private schooling. We urge the government to recognise this as a serious concern that deters Muslims from pursuing education and to ensure access to a suitable number and quality of educational institutions. These institutions should be opened in accordance with the area's population and must be located well within Muslim localities both in rural and urban areas.
- 1.2 Under the Prime Minister's 15-Point Programme for minorities, which was launched by the UPA-I government in 2005, no additional funds have been earmarked by the current government. We demand that the government allocates more scholarships in professional courses keeping in mind the exorbitant fee that professional colleges and courses charge. We strongly demand that 100 per cent fee be reimbursed in government schools, as it is rightfully done in the case of SC and ST students. Not only do we demand that there should be at least 40 per cent reservation for Muslim girls, we feel that there also needs to be better dissemination of these schemes among Muslim girls and efforts (*melas*, posters, advertisements) need to be undertaken to spread awareness among the people who the schemes attempt to target.
- 1.3 It is imperative that hostels and short-stay homes be provided to Muslim students, especially female Muslim students, who battle various kinds of familial and social pressures to be able to study while at the same time they grapple with economic hardships, pressure to earn, etc. While new hostels for female minority students are being constructed in a few states like Maharashtra, they often go unused and therefore are eventually occupied by Hindu girls. This is mainly because a fee of INR 2500 per term (6 months) is charged for Muslim girls, despite their poor economic condition and the fact that very few girls are able to access higher education in the first place. We demand that free hostel accommodation and short-stay homes be provided to

female Muslim students at the village and block level to reduce drop-out rates and promote higher education among Muslim girls.

- 1.4 Poignant experiences were shared by women from many states that Muslim children were discriminated in schools while availing the mid-day meals. The relevance and advantages of the mid-day meals scheme to improve attendance and reduce drop-out rate among poor children is well-known to be reiterated here. However, discrimination against Muslim children to avail this scheme will not only have adverse impact on their drop-out rate but also leave a psychological scar on the children's impressionable minds. It is therefore a demand of this Convention to ensure there are guidelines to schools to promote egalitarian environment for education of children and initiate penal action against school authorities found to be discriminating on the grounds of caste, gender, class or religion. The mid-day meals scheme would go a long way in ensuring the rights of non-discrimination and equality of students and in society at large by promoting the employment of Muslim and Dalit cooks as well.
- 1.5 Many women who participated in this Convention shared how their children face discriminatory environment inside schools. Many schools do not allow children of minority communities to bring non-vegetarian food, like egg, chicken, mutton, inside the school premises; and if children do, then they are not allowed to open their tiffin box. These practices are unofficially validated; and more often than not the 'rules and regulations' of the schools have strong communal overtones. Such discriminatory behaviour defeats the aim of our education system to inculcate communal harmony and secular values in children. There should be monitoring systems mandated by the government to prevent such practices inside schools (in both state-run and private schools).
- 1.6 Madrasa schools have proliferated in areas lacking government schools and *anganwadis*. The suggestion of modernising Madrasa has come from Sachar Recommendations, which has not been properly evaluated and implemented by the governments. We recommend that there must be an introduction of science education, language courses, and the syllabus must be updated in Madrasa schools. It is utmost important that modernising Madrasa must not be seen as an opportunity to impose majoritarian biases and impinge on the rights of Minorities.

2. Basic amenities and social infrastructure

- 2.1 The Multi-sectoral Development Programme (MsDP) for minority community, which was conceived as a special initiative of the follow-up action on the Sachar Committee recommendations, aims to provide better infrastructure for education, skill development, health, sanitation, *pucca* housing, roads, drinking water, besides schemes for creating income generating opportunities. While the scheme is indeed promising, we feel that special focus must be given to Muslims dominated and poor areas along with creating more awareness about these schemes among the beneficiaries. There is a need to set-up monitoring and evaluation committee that has members of civil society organisations or women's rights groups to ensure that there is no diversion of funds but improved transparency and accessibility. This inaccessibility affects Muslim women the most, and therefore, governments must be prompt in addressing them.
- 2.2 It is important to sensitise government officers and service providers to not perpetuate the denial of basic amenities to Muslim neighbourhoods as they merely serve to propagate stereotypes against the Muslim community. Besides, in places that lack facilities provided by the government, private organisations proliferate giving the same services at higher prices. Hence, basic amenities like water, electricity, housing, toilets, which have so far been inadequately provided in Muslim neighbourhoods, should be provided on a priority basis so to guarantee our Constitutional Right to life with dignity.
- 2.3 Similar to the predicament of poor citizens and migrant workers of this country, Muslims are also struggling to avail many of the schemes designed for them due to lengthy, time-consuming procedures as well as several documents that need to be attached. This goes much against the spirit of securing entitlements for weaker sections of the society. Hence, it is demanded that single-window clearance and user-friendly procedures be put in place for availing government schemes and entitlements, including the making of identity cards, health services, education, livelihoods, ration, pensions, etc.

3. Livelihood and skill development

- 3.1 The Minority Cyber Gram Scheme, which was launched by the UPA government in February 2014 as a pilot project in Chandauli village in Alwar, Rajasthan was discontinued after the BJP government came to power. The scheme was introduced by providing 60 laptops at Atal Seva Kendra in the Meo Muslim dominated village in partnership with Digital Empowerment Foundation; and the Centre ran special training programmes like providing basic skills in operating computers and using internet. A Times of India report dated 4 October 2015, and the Impact Assessment Report by the Ministry of Minority Affairs confirmed that school children and women were benefitting particularly from the scheme with access to basic computer and internet skills and information regarding self-help groups, scholarships, banking, loans, MGNREGA and livestock. Keeping in mind the potentialities and the evidence of benefit, we appeal to the government to revive and make the Minority Cyber Gram a national-level scheme.
- 3.2 It was discussed in the Convention that specific government schemes, which were born out of the recommendations of the Sachar Committee, do not stay true to the spirit in which they were imagined. One example is the Nai Roshni Scheme for leadership development of Muslim women. The real, practical working of the scheme, however, enables only a certain kind of organisations to participate and associate with the scheme. Very often, these are ‘well-established’, commercial organisations, equipped with enough resources of all kinds, including financial and human. According to the scheme, it is mandatory that NGOs with a turnover of at least INR 1 crore can apply. As a result, many NGOs that may be ‘smaller’ or ‘resource deficient’ but are deeply aware of realities at the grassroots level and have years of experience working on the ground never make it to the eligibility bracket, despite their nuanced perspective and skills. Another hurdle in the same scheme is the process of selection that relies on a “first come, first serve” principle and has to pass through several levels of State leadership in a manner that is not transparent and leaves space for unscrupulous activities. In this context, we demand that the selection criteria of organisations be changed, the turnover clause entirely scrapped, and encouragement given to Muslim women’s leadership at the grassroot level and women’s groups in the area to be included for the same.

- 3.3 As part of government schemes, there are many self-help groups (SHGs) for women or *Mahila Bachat Gaths* from minority communities that have received institutional support. However, it has been observed that many of these SHGs are blacklisted on the grounds of not making repayments. We feel that the inability to make repayments must be investigated and explored than be dismissed or penalised. Its connection with the history of denial of financial autonomy to women, and their tendency to therefore spend on their family when in possession of any financial resources at all, is an important factor that needs to be understood and the inability to make repayments must be seen in this context.
- 3.4 Opportunities for skill development of Muslim youth, especially Muslim girls and women need to be created. Additionally, special technical training should be made available in government recognised classes, shelter homes and all polytechnic institutions as required in the job market. Even today, the technical training provided to women is in areas, like stitching, sewing, mehendi, candle or chalk making. It is important that these stereotypical, gendered expectations and norms be challenged; and women in general and Muslim women in particular be provided with skills that are essential in the job market and promotes their economic independence and stability. It must be noted that even though skill development is a genuine requirement for the Muslim community, especially keeping in mind their poor economic situation and increasing disparities, a distinction needs to be made between ‘education’ and ‘skill’ and the latter must not be seen as a substitute for the former.
- 3.5 Equal Opportunity Commission, recommended by the Sachar Report, was never implemented by the UPA government. Over a period of time, it is seen that Muslims and other vulnerable sections of society are always discriminated against: they are denied jobs, housing or admission in schools based on the religion, caste, gender or sexual orientation. We strongly demand the formation and proper implementation of Equal Opportunity Commission, which can ensure the fundamental rights of non-discrimination and equal citizenship.
- 3.6 We demand that the Diversity Index recommended by Sachar Committee Report be implemented. In this Convention, Justice Sachar was present and shared his vision of how to go forward with this recommendation. We know that Muslims are socially and economically marginalised in our country and only affirmative action could help the

community to empower themselves. The Diversity Index will actually monitor the representation of socially and economically marginalised sections in various government, private and non-government job sectors, and we demand its implementation.

- 3.7 We strongly demand that the government provides reservation for Muslim community, which is long-awaited and very crucial. In recent years, there have been demands for reservation by Jats in Haryana and Marathas in Maharashtra. Though these communities are not socially or economically marginal, their demands are addressed by the governments unlike that of Muslims who are clearly weaker section of this country. The latest NSS report shows the Muslim work participation rate is very low in the country as compared to others. We strongly demand that these statistics be taken into consideration and reservation for Muslims be implemented with a special focus on the women of the community.

4. Health

- 4.1 Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) aims at the overall physical, psychological and social development of children, by providing services such as better supplementary nutrition, immunisation, health check-ups, recommendation services, pre-school non-formal education. This scheme is supposed to be particularly beneficial to the socially and economically marginalised communities. However, various experiences shared in the Convention revealed that the reach of this scheme is limited and the ICDS centres (or *anganwadis*) are not prevalent in Muslim localities. Apart from the demand of opening more ICDS centres in Muslim areas, we demand that there be re-introducing of eggs in *anganwadis*, which is banned in certain states like Madhya Pradesh.
- 4.2 It is our experience that health is one of the most important but neglected aspect of living. Good health is a marker of an empowered community; and this is very much linked to state support and interventions in the economy. Owing to government's decision to ban beef as a food, it has not only affected the livelihood of Muslim communities but also denied cheap protein to economically weaker sections of our country. We strongly demand that government look into its decision of banning beef,

which is directly related to both the economy and health of marginalised communities.

- 4.3 Muslim women and social workers from Muzaffarnagar shared that they were observing increased malnutrition among riot-affected Muslim children, stillbirths and miscarriages of Muslim women. One of the urgent demands is to ensure the opening of ICDS centres in the rehabilitation colonies of victims of targeted violence. Further, we also demand that there needs to be study done to establish the relation between communal riots, trauma and impact on women's health.

5. Housing

- 5.1 Muslim women shared that there are important schemes in general to improve the living standards of the socially and economically weaker sections, like the Indira Awas Yojana where the government provides support for housing. With regard to provision of housing facilities under MsDP, there is no data available at the national level on minorities who have benefited from the Indira Awas Yojana. They also shared that very few Muslim families or Muslim women have access to such schemes and their numbers are negligible in comparison to other communities in most of the states. We demand that there needs to be an equitable share and earmarking of certain percentage for Muslims in this rural housing scheme.
- 5.2 In the Convention, one of the demands that came up was that single women (unmarried/ divorced/ widowed/ single mothers) are highly discriminated while availing rental housing or buying property. We strongly demand that government issues guidelines to ensure that single women are priority and not discriminated against while availing houses in both rural and urban areas.
- 5.3 Many women shared that there have been massive displacements—of the poor, Dalits and Muslims to the outskirts of city—in the name of development. The infrastructural facilities that must be given to every citizen are denied to them. Such mass-scale displacement and lack of access to housing to Muslim women and families, is not only leading to ubiquitous discrimination but also ghettoisation and spatial segregation of Muslims. We demand that the communities are not invisibilised in the process of urban planning and there should be no segregation among Hindus, Dalits and Muslims in the resettlement colonies.

6. Social Security

- 6.1 In a deeply patriarchal society that dictates ‘normal’ ways of being and living for women, marriage is upheld as the standard of ‘good womanhood’. Increasingly, however, one is witnessing that young Muslim women and girls are expressing their desire to not get married early, or to not get married at all, and to seek other options and ways of living. In these instances, women are not just denied support from the society at large but are rejected, punished and even violated at their own homes. It therefore becomes important to recognise the need to build support structures and safe spaces outside the house and feminist institutions that provide support and aid so that women are ensured the right to live their lives with dignity and exercise their freedom of expression.
- 6.2 It is imperative that the state provides support to women in general and Muslim women in particular to live outside their natal/matrimonial house to take-up higher education or gainful employment. It is thus required that the state provides short-stay homes, working women’s hostels, hostels for women with children, preferential allotment in housing schemes for Muslim or single women at subsidised rates.
- 6.3 The need to sensitise the police personnel on gender and minority issues was also recommended because women suffer when secular laws, like the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 are interpreted through a communal frame much to the disadvantage of Muslim women.
- 6.4 While the Muslim localities are devoid or under serviced with basic amenities of survival, they are disproportionately policed; and men from Muslim community are randomly picked and detained for days or months together without any arrest warrant on trumped up charges. The experience of discrimination, lack of amenities and heavy presence of police in their localities has a particularly severe impact on women, and this was shared by many who had come from across the country in the Focused Group Discussions during the Convention.

7. Schemes and Budget related

7.1 Budget allocation and timely fund release to the Ministry of Minority Affairs (MoMA)

The budgetary allocation or releases to the MoMA have been slow to address the huge developmental deficits being faced by the religious minorities, particularly Muslims. The details of expenditure/allocation under MoMA since 2012-13 (first four years of the 12th FYP) shows that the total allocation during the first four years amounts to Rs. 12,018.25 crore, which is 69 per cent of the total proposed allocation of Rs. 17,323 crore in the 12th FYP. In the first two quarters of financial 2015-16, only 30 per cent of the total allocation was released to the implementing agencies by MoMA.

7.2 Greater transparency in the financial and physical progress of schemes under the Multi-sectoral Development Programme (MsDP) and PM's 15-Point Programme (15 PPP)

The MoMA collates scheme-wise information on MsDP and 15 PPP. However, for a number of important schemes, like SSA, ICDS, and SGSY (renamed as *Ajeevika*), only the data on physical achievements is reported without information on their financial performance. Hence, the Union Budget should introduce a statement on fund allocations for the welfare of minorities in all programmes and schemes covered in the 15 PPP, as it is being done for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes through Statements 21 and 21 A, Expenditure Budget, Volume I. Further, the concerned ministries should be urged to report their achievements, both physical and financial, under their respective schemes for the benefit of minorities. The same needs to be reported on a regular basis to the MoMA, which has been maintaining this information.

7.3 Allocating budget for creation and maintenance of a National Data Bank for Minorities

We demand the creation and maintenance of a national data bank for minorities with religious break-up for documenting socio-economic, educational and employment status of Minorities for informed policy formulation and effective development interventions. We strongly feel that a resource such as this is important as a record of minorities in the country.

7.4 Village and Block level developmental initiatives rather than at the District level

There are instances where funds meant for minorities get diverted to non-minority areas due to lack of clarity in the guidelines of MsDP and 15 PPP. Village and block level developmental initiatives are required in Minority districts and not at the district level. Governments also need to be more participatory and democratic in their approach in the process of formulation, implementation and monitoring of various schemes and programmes by involving women's rights groups and other civil society organisations. Widening the source of information for monitoring has to be incorporated within the bureaucratic structure and procedures of these Committees so as to get a more nuanced picture of grassroot level reach and accessibility of various programmes.

7.5 Minorities Special Component Plan or Minorities Sub-Plan

Sachar Committee Report and many other research studies have provided enough evidence that show the development gaps faced by Muslims. This Convention has seen a reiteration of these challenges faced by the community and how Muslim women are adversely impacted. Considering that the workforce participation of Muslims is still very low, along with widespread social insecurity, low levels of literacy, lack of access to basic requirements for human survival (water supply, sanitation facilities, housing, etc.), very low political representation, it is recommended that there is an initiation of Minorities Special Component Plan (similar to Tribal Sub-Plan and Scheduled Caste Sub-Plan), so as to reserve funds and resources across Ministries and Departments of the Central and State governments as per the proportion of Muslim population, according to the latest Census data, at the national and state level respectively.

7.6 Dissemination of information

We demand that there must be proper dissemination of information about policies and schemes. There are a number of schemes for Minorities, which the Muslim community is not familiar with. Efforts should be made to spread awareness and disseminate information in comprehensible format, in Urdu and other vernacular languages, and in local and regional newspapers. Besides, there is also a need to provide training sessions and re-introduction of Minority Cyber Gram Scheme considering that basic and computer literacy levels are low among Muslims and most scheme related applications now have to be filled online.

8. Promotion of Equality and Non-discrimination

8.1 Anti-Discrimination Law

Due to the prevalence of various forms of discrimination in this country on the basis of gender, religion, caste, class, sexuality etc., Muslim women in this Convention raised a very strong collective demand for the introduction of an Anti-Discrimination Law, which should be drafted through a consultative process with human rights groups, civil society organisations, and women's, Dalit, minority rights groups. This law needs to be drafted taking into account the prevailing unequal social relations that violate the fundamental Right to Equality of marginalised groups.

8.2 State accountability and Prevention of Communal and Targeted Violence Bill

It is important to note that while every citizen is equal before law and there is political equality in this country, the existing social and economic inequality does not allow the realisation of equal citizenship rights and perpetuates an inegalitarian ethos. As the state guarantees equality before law, it also needs to strive towards equality in society and take responsibility in the case of targeted violence or discrimination by the dominant groups against weaker, vulnerable and marginalised sections of society. Hence, in the case of communal riots or any form of targeted violence, it is imperative for the state to assume "breach of command responsibility". Muslim women of this Convention demand for a consultation on the Prevention of Communal and Targeted Violence (Access to Justice and Reparations) Bill and want to see it passed as a law at the earliest.

8.3 Relief and Rehabilitation

In the case of targeted violence, the state's responsibility is not only of providing immediate relief and camps but also making long-term efforts to support the rebuilding of lives of the displaced and/or violated community through education, trauma counselling, health care, livelihood and housing support. It is crucial that compensation is provided not only to those who have been injured, killed or violated but also those who have been displaced and uprooted from their homes. It is imperative to recognise that fear in the case of mob violence is rampant and efforts are made by targeted persons to protect themselves and their families. In this context, it is crucial to broaden the definition of 'surviour' of targeted or communal violence.

8.4 Prevention of sexual violence and re-building the lives of Muslim women

Women's bodies and dignity are constantly violated in the case of targeted violence against a particular group. It is first of all imperative to acknowledge and recognise that women are not the bearer of any community's honour and any form of sexual violence against women is a gruesome crime perpetrated on their bodily integrity. Second, if there are cases of sexual violence during riots or conflict, it must be made mandatory to ensure speedy trials and provide witness protection. It is also required that women are provided with trauma counselling, legal aid and medical support to testify against the violence committed against them.

8.5 Encourage education and employment of Muslim women in the process of rehabilitation

Marriage must not be seen as an alternative and we condemn the encouragement and support provided for mass marriages in the aftermath of targeted violence. Marriage of Muslim women cannot be seen as a measure of rehabilitation. They need to be strengthened through education, livelihood support and social security.

Annexure

List of Participants

Participants includes various organisations, individuals, intellectuals, social activists, students and political party allies

Aawaaz-E-Niswaan
47/1, Sarabai Hasan Ali Roopwala
Moreshwar Patankar Marg (Pipe Road),
Near Kings Bakery, Above S A Medical,
Kurla (W), Mumbai 70
Ph: 26523402 / 26521825
niswaan@gmail.com
Email: saharagulbarg@gmail.com

Sahiyar (Stree Sanghathan)
G-3, Shivanjali Flats, Near Navjeevan,
Ajawa Road, Vadodara - 390 019, Gujarat
Phone: + 91-265-2513482/ 91-265-2417092
Email: sahiyar@gmail.com

PRADAN
Bahadurganj (Kishanganj) Bihar
(North East Bihar Development
Cluster Simanchal)
9661698243 / 06456-241023 / 01140407707
Email: illora@pradan.net

VANANGANA
Purani Bazar, Karwi,
Dist.Chitrakoot - 210205, Uttar Pradesh
Mobile: 9454002780 / 8756632137
Email: vanangana.chitrakoot@gmail.com

SAHARA
Gulbarga, Karnataka
Mobile: 09844067193

Zehen Collective
Mumbai
Tel.: 09022773491
Email: zehencollective@gmail.com

Pehchan Samajik Sanstha
Gool Ghar, Paovatta Road, Gram Dhakrani,
Zilla Dehradun Uttarakhand
Mobile: 09719225516
Email: udaam83@yahoo.com

Madhuban Sewa Samiti
145, Nappihatahariharganj
Fatehpur, Uttar Pradesh
Mobile: 08953445390 / 07499616228
Email: mss.org@gmail.com

Kibra Educational And Welfare Society
20-3-522, Jala Kucha,
Shahganj, Hussaini
Alam, Hyderabad - 500064
Email: rehanasrwas@gmail.com

Association for Advocacy and Legal
Initiatives (AALI)
305, Civil Lines,
Azamgarh Email:
Mobile: 8005491463 / 9452812712

Email: ei@aalilegal.org

Association for Advocacy and Legal Initiatives (AALI), Lucknow

Tel.: 0522-2782060 / 9044534414

Email: aali@aalilegal.org

Muslim Mahila Manch

Darbar Road,

Bada Tajbag, Nagpur 440 024

Mobile: 9923162337/9021087254

Email: rubinaptl@gmail.com;

muslimmahilamanch@gmail.com

Social Uplift Through Rural Action (SUTRA)

P.O. Jagjit Nagar Via: Jubbar,

District Solan, Himachal Pradesh

173 225 Tel: +91 1792 283725 |

+91 1792 283772 | +91 1792 | 283716

Fax: +91 1792 283734

E-mail: sutrahp@gmail.com

VIMOCHANA

33/1-9, Thyagraj Layout,

Jaibharath Nagar,

Bangalore 560033

Phone: +91-80-25492781 / 25494266 /

25496934. Telefax: +91-80-25492782

Email: vimochana79@gmail.com

UMEED FAMILY COUNSELING

Bangalore, Karnataka

Email: tanzeem.bj@gmail.com

CORO INDIA

Training and Resource Centre,

Opp. Bezzolo Complex, Near

Container Yard Sion-Trombay

Road, Suman Nagar, Chembur,

Mumbai - 400 71

Ph - 91 22 25295002 / 91 22 25295103

Email - info@coroindia.org

NARI SHAKTI MANCH

Plot No.1, Rao Maichand Complex,

Jwala Mill Old Delhi-Gurgaon Road,

Gurgaon -122015, Haryana

Contact: 9560352313 / 7042390533

Email: narishaktimanach2011@gmail.com,

elizabeth.khumallambam@sldindia.net

Forum Against Oppression of Women

29, Bhatia Bhuvan, Babrekar

Marg, Gokhale Road, Dadar

(West) Bombay -4000 28

faowindia@yahoo.co.in

SAMA- Resource Group for Women and Health

B-45, 2nd Floor, Main Road

Shivalik, Malviya Nagar,

New Delhi-110017

Ph: 011-65637632/26692730

NIRANTAR RESOURCE CENTRE FOR GENDER & EDUCATION

B-64 (2nd Floor), Sarvodaya

Enclave New Delhi 110017.

9891640033

Phone: 91-11- 26966334, 26517726 (telefax)

PARWAAZ

A/2, Ammar Bungalows, Near Al-Niyaaz Park, Vishaala Circle, Dena Bank Road, Juhapura, Sarkej Road, Ahmedabad
9998022282
parwaaj@gmail.com

NYAYIKA

Bhopal, M.P.
Email: roshansaroliya999@gmail.com

Kavita Krishna

ALL INDIA PROGRESSIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION
New Delhi
Email: kavitakrish73@gmail.com

THE YP FOUNDATION

N 204, Greater Kailash, Part 1, New Delhi - 110048.
T.:+91.11.46792243
M.: +91.9711010281
Email: reena@theypfoundation.org

Kavita Srivastav

People's Union Civil Liberties (PUCL)
76, Shanti Niketan Colony, Kisan Marg, Jaipur 302015, Rajasthan
Tel.: 0141 - 2206139
Email: puclnat@gmail.com

Utthan Sanstha

36, Chitrakoot Terminal, (Quevin Bungalow), Vastrapur, Ahmedabad

HDRC

Xavier College Campus, Navrangpura, Ahmedabad

Anita Kapoor

Shehri Mahila Kaamgaar Union
Delhi
09810787686

Disha Social Organization

Sultanpur-Chilkana
Saharanpur - 247 231
Uttar Pradesh, India
Tel.: 0132-2696224, 2696424
Email: post@dishain.org

Ummul Fayiza

ummulfayizapp@gmail.com

Azra Razzack

JAMIA MILIA ISLAMIA
09818671054

Nasiruddin Haider

Writer and Journalist
nasiruddinhk@gmail .Com

Maimoona Mollah and Subhashni Ali
All India Democratic Women's Association
Email: maimoona.mollah@gmail.com

Masooma Ranalvi

Speak Out Female Genital Mutilation
formasooma@gmail.com

Nishan Welfare Society

Fatehpur

07408106545

Smriti Nevatia

LABIA - A Queer Feminist LBT Collective

Tel.: 9833278171

Email: labialist@yahoo.com

NAZARIYA: A Queer Feminist Resource
Group

New Delhi

Phone: +91- 7291012585

nazariyaffrg@gmail.com

Sadbhavana Sanatkada Trust

Lucknow

9956614680

0522-4077697

Email: sadbhavana.lucknow@gmail.com

Dr. Muniza Khan

Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh

Mobile: 09415301073

Email: Munizak@hotmail.com

Women Against Sexual Violence And State
Repression (WSS)

Email: againstsexualviolence@gmail.com

Shama Dalwai

Samajwadi Mahila Sabha

Mumbai

Email: shamad52@gmail.Com

Sandhya Mhatre

Azghar Ali Engineer Memorial Foundation

603, New Silver Star, Near Railway Bridge,

Prabhat Colony Road, Santacruz (E),

Mumbai -400055. Tel.: 022-26149668

Mobile: 9869462833 / 9820553173

E-mail: forirf@gmail.com

irfanengi@gmail.com; csss@mtnl.net.in

Astitva Samajik Sanstha

Dist. Shahrampur, Uttar Pradesh

09456293246

Email: astitwaup@gmail.com

Naheed Aqueel

PRAYATNA FOUNDATION

Lucknow

Uttar Pradesh

Mobile: 09838783837

UDAAN SOCIETY

Aligarh District

Uttar Pradesh

Shivani Taneja

Muskan

LIG 174, Harshwardhan Nagar, Mata Mandir

Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh

Mobile: 09303349400

Email: shivanitan@gmail.com;

muskaan.office@gmail.com

Afsar Jahan and Shah Jahan

Chatrapur Mahila Jagruti Manch

Jhansi, Madhya Pradesh

Mobile: 09826987094 / 09926294270

Email: qureshi2011@gmail.com

NAZ SAMAJ SEVA SANSTHA

Madhya Pradesh

0992294270

Renu and Rekha

Feminist Approach to Technology

#134, 3rd Floor, Vinobhapuri,

Lajpat Nagar II, New Delhi 110024

Tel.: 011 - 41004951 / 41320391

Email: info@fatnet.org

Heena

KHABAR LAHAIYA DISHA SOCIAL
ORGANISATION

Saharanpur and Dehradun 07500054758

KRANTIYOTI

2-A, Parnakuti Housing Society, Near Dr.

Babasaheb Ambedkar Housing Society,

Golf Club Road, Yerawada,

Pune - 411 006, Maharashtra

Tel.: 08888823463 / 020-6540 6540

Email: krantijyoti@yahoo.com

Kalyani Kandar

Prerana Bharati / Samarth Mahila Sangathan

At Neemtalla Bherwa, Post Madhupur,

District Deoghar, Pin Code 815 353.

Jharkhand

Email: kiransarwar@gmail.com

Email: kkandar5@gmail.com

Stree Mukti Sangathana

31, Ailment Shramik , Salve Royal Crest, 1st

Floor, Lokamanya Tilak Vasahat Road No.

3,

Dadar (East), Mumbai – 400 014,

Maharashtra

Tele-Fax: +91 22 24174381

Email: smsmum@gmail.com;

sms@streemuktisanghatana.org;

smsdadar@gmail.com

Gauri Chaudhary

Action India

#5/27-AJangpura, Delhi - 110014

Tel.: 011 24314785 / 24312432 / 24317470

Email: action@nda.vsnl.net.in

SWAYAM

9/2B Deodar Street

Kolkata 700019, West Bengal

Tel.: 033 2486 3367/3368/3357

Email: swayam@cal.vsnl.net.in

Shalini Singh

CREA

7, Mathura Road, 2nd Floor,

Jungpura B, New Delhi 110 014

Tel.: 011 - 24377707 / 24378700 /24378701

Email: crea@creaworld.org

Jagori

B-114, Shivalik Malviya Nagar

New Delhi 110 017, India

Phone: +91 11 2669 1219, +91 11 2669 1220

Fax: +91 11 2669 1221

Email: jagori@jagori.org

Society for Labour and Development
C-23, (1st Floor, Rear Portion),
Hauz Khas, New Delhi - 110016
Tel.: 91 11 46179959
Email: info@sidindia.net

Jan Jagran Shakti Sangathan
A-5, Siddharth Apartments, Jadeo Path,
Patna 800014. Bihar
Mobile: +919771950248, 9973363664
Email: sohini.virg@gmail.com

ANHAD
C-5, Basement, Nizamuddin, Delhi - 110013
Tel: 011-41670722
Email: anhad.delhi@gmail.com

Maharashtra Mahila Parishad
Mumbra, Maharashtra
Mobile: 09869259199
Email: bhartisharma61@gmail.com

Streemukti Sangthan
E-4, IITA Jhalwa 211 012
Uttar Pradesh
Email: padmasingh@gmail.com

GREEN WORLD FOUNDATION
Faizabad District, Uttar Pradesh

Kranti
Mumbai
07506057664

Tahmina Laskar
Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative

4th floor, 55A, Siddhartha Chambers, Kalu
Sarai
New Delhi- 110016
Mobile: 8800349400
Tel +91 11 43180210
Email: tahmina@humanrightsinitiative.org

Centre for Social Justice
C-106, Royal Chinmay, Opposite IOC Pump
Off Judges Bungalow Road, Bodakdev
Ahmedabad, Gujarat 380054
Phone: + 91-79-26854248
Email: socjust@gmail.com;
themecsj@gmail.com

SANGRAM
Aarohan, Ghanshyamnagar
Madhav Nagar Road, Sangli 416 416
Maharashtra
Tel.: 0233-2312191
Email: info@sangram.org;
shantilalkale@gmail.com

Seema Baquer
8, Eco Options, Block A2,
Mandir Marg, Aya Nagar Colony, Phase -V,
New Delhi - 110 047
Mobile: 98997 46545
Skype: seema.baquer

Pamela Phililpose
Email: pamelaphililpose@gmail.com

Khaiana Seth Journalist
PARTIKA
Faizabad, Uttar Pradesh

All India Democratic Women's Association
2253-E, Shadi Khampur, New Ranjit Nagar,
New Delhi - 110008
Tel.: 011-25700476
Email: sehba_taban@yahoo.co.in;
aidwacec@gmail.com

YUVA

Datir Building, Plot No. 23, New Amar
Nagar, Chikhali Road, Manewada Ring
Road,
Nagpur – 440034
Tel: 9372856678 / 0712-2743972 / 2743986
Email: yuva.ngp@yuvaindia.org

Akhila Sivasdas

Centre For Advocacy And Research
H - 2B, First Floor, Kalkaji,
New Delhi - 110019
Tel.: 011-26418846
Email: akhilasivasdas1@gmail.com

Mary E. John

Centre for Women's Development Studies
(CWDS)

25 Bhai Vir Singh Marg, Gole Market
New Delhi - 110001, India.

Ph.:91-11-23345530, 23365541

Email: maryejohn1@gmail.com

Jaya Sagade

Pune

Email: jsagade@yahoo.com

Sajeeda

Utthan Trust

Charity in Ahmedabad

36, Chitrakut Twin, Nehru Park,
Vastrapur, Ahmedabad – 380015

Gujarat

Phone: 079 2675 1023

Nurjaha

Human Development and Research Centre
(Behaviour Science Centre)

St. Xavier's Non-Formal Education Society

St. Xavier's College Campus, Navarangpura,
Ahmedabad - 380 009

Gujarat

Telephone: 079-26304928, 26303577

Email: hdrc@sxnfes.org /

contact@sxnfes.org

Statement of accounts for the National Convention

Sl. No.	Particulars	Amount (INR)
1	Receipts from organisations, individuals and others	159,800
2	Receipts from National Commission for Women	218,600
3	Receipts from registrations and others	97,650
	Total Receipts	476,050
	Expenses incurred pre- and post- Convention	
1	Travel expenditure for resource persons and participants	83,334
2	Boarding and lodging expenses	45,912
3	Expenditure on food during the Convention	129,412
4	Preparation of background material	21,741
5	Translation of documents and report writing charges	12,200
6	Hindi translation of the report	17,000
7	Printing charges of Hindi and English reports	51,664
8	Follow-up expenditure: Meeting with government officials in New Delhi to discuss the recommendations of this Convention in April 2016	94,894
9	Telephone and internet charges	8,443
10	Utilisation charges	11,450
	Total Expenditure	476,050

Bebaak Collective: Our Concerns, Our Visions

Bebaak Collective is a platform for women's groups and individuals striving to further the rights of Muslim women. The Collective aims to create an alliance and space for Muslim women and people working with the community. These groups and individuals come from various states and mainly from Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Maharashtra.

The Collective began working from 2013 with the objective of bringing together various Muslim women's groups into a network that actively share experiences and concerns of women with the hope that it will help us articulate a deeper understanding of our issues and work towards collective strategies for addressing them. This collective process attempted to nurture the activists and strengthen the dialogue within and across organisations. It sought to bridge the links between grassroots mobilisation and state-level advocacy. Bebaak Collective felt the need to create a national platform to engage with the state, community and the family by collectivising the struggles led by Muslim women from different parts of the country.

Bebaak Collective thanks the women who made difficult journey to reach this National Convention of Muslim Women in Delhi. Sincere gratitude is expressed to the panellists, women's groups, human rights groups, researchers, activists, and students who participated in this Convention and extended their solidarity to strengthen the voices of Muslim women. Acknowledgements are also due to National Commission for Women and Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti for providing financial and accommodation support respectively.