

**Demands from Political Leaders for inclusion in their
Manifesto for 2024
By
Young Secular Muslim Women's Collective**

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At the end of the final reading of India's constitution on 25 November 1949, Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar, said the following – “On the 26th of January 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality. In politics we will be recognising the principle of one man one vote and one vote one value. In our social and economic life, we shall, by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of one man one value. How long shall we continue to live this life of contradictions? How long shall we continue to deny equality in our social and economic life? If we continue to deny it for long, we will do so only by putting our political democracy in peril. We must remove this contradiction at the earliest possible moment or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy which this Assembly has so laboriously built up.

Youth in India today, are facing a host of challenges pertaining to access to higher education, options for skill development, high rates of unemployment, rising mental health concerns and isolation. In recent years, apart from rising unemployment, Muslim youth face a growing sense of isolation and alienation due to rising Islamophobia – in educational institutes, workplaces, markets and society at large – which sometimes even results in violence against them. Muslim women face a dual burden and are confronted not just with Islamophobia but also gender discrimination within the community and in society at large. Those of us working with Muslim women face an uphill task in raising the issue of rights in a gender-just / constitutional framework. Islamophobia is a concern with dangerous consequences for Muslims in India. However, there are also other concerns of the community that need to be addressed – such as poor access to health care, ghettoisation, poverty, quality of education and economic distress owing to lack of jobs or discrimination in hiring. Like any community under attack, the Muslim community too is getting increasingly conservative, and a sense of victimhood keeps the community ghettoized and inward-looking.

In this context, as we approach the 2024 General Election, we – a collective of Young Muslim Women – see an opportunity as equal citizens of this country to demand from our political leaders the realization of the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution to its citizens. We are a group of young Muslim women, from across the country, who have come together in a series of meetings in the last one year, shared our experiences and collectively compiled these demands for political parties contesting the 2024 election. **We would like to emphasize that the Muslim community comprises not just of Muslim men and it is time political parties lend a ear to the secular, liberal feminist voices in the community.**

The Sachar Commission Report as also The Post Sachar Evaluation Report by the Kundu Committee, Report of the Committee on the Establishment of Educational Institutions for Educationally Backward Minorities by the Ministry of Minority Affairs reveal a steady decline in the socio-economic status of Muslims in India. In order to address the same, we have the following demands.

Educational status of Muslims as stated in the Sachar Committee Report

- Drop-out rate from schools among Muslims is the highest at the level of Primary, Middle and Higher Secondary compared to all the Socio Religious Communities (SRCs)
- Only 17% Muslims above the age of 17 years have completed matriculation as compared to 26% for all SRCs as against national average at 26%.
- Only 50% of Muslims who complete middle school are likely to complete secondary education, compared to 62% at the national level’.
- In the premier colleges in the country, only one out of the 25 Under-Graduate students (4%) and one out of 50 post-Graduate students (2%) was a Muslim.

Muslims are among the poorest socio religious communities. Free education under the right to education has ensured comparable enrolment rates of Muslim children in school. However, children who have not had the privilege of attending nursery and kindergarten are unable to read the prescribed textbooks of the 1st std. This lack of reading and arithmetic with a no detention policy has meant that children get to the 4th std and oftentimes to the 7th std without being able to read or write and then drop out of school.

Our Recommendations

Nationalization of Education

Every citizen of the country should have equal opportunity to quality education irrespective of their ability to pay. Quality education through International schools, ICSE schools. is affordable only to the rich while those from socially disadvantaged groups receive education in schools with poor quality infrastructure, vacancy of teachers, students from across standards taught in the same room at the same time by a single teacher. This situation is further strengthening the foundations of an already unequal society.

The Right to Education Act needs to be extended to ensure that children from economically vulnerable families too have access to a strong foundation through Balwadis, nursery and kindergarten education. As such, we recommend extending the RTE Act to cover children in the age 3-6 years and beyond to ensure free education up to post graduation.

We strongly oppose the recent move by the Government of Maharashtra to dilute the RTE by excluding those schools from the RTE that are within a distance of 1 km from a government or government aided school¹.

¹ <https://www.freepressjournal.in/education/controversy-over-states-new-rte-rules-private-schools-express-support-critics-fear-social-divide>

Fill the gaps of Higher Education - Set up Schools up to the Xth Standard

In Maharashtra, the Municipal Corporation is responsible for free schooling for children up to the age of 14 which is till the 8th std. The 9th and 10th std are funded by the State government. Often the public schools provide education only till the 8th std as required by the RTE. In the absence of an adequate number of Government schools till the 10th std, poor children who cannot afford private education are forced to drop out of the education system. The absence of a school in the neighborhood results in girls dropping out as parents are concerned about their safety and do not want to send them to schools located in a different neighbourhood. The Government needs to step in to provide educational services in all the underserved areas with a 25% and higher Muslim population.

Unburden teachers from non teaching activities; Invest in Quality Education in Public Schools

Muslim areas don't need investment in Haj house and other religious establishments. They can manage their devotion without State funding. These grants should be used to set up schools in Muslim majority areas. The State should invest in quality public education, monitor quality of education at these institutions and invest in public libraries. Teachers should not be responsible for teaching and polling duties, census duties and such non-teaching duties should not be expected of them. Rigorous training and accountability mechanisms should be in place to facilitate processes such that teachers are able to ensure that children learn.

Residential Schools in Minority Concentrated Districts

The Sachar Report states that 4% of Muslims are enrolled in Madrasas for education. The students in these madrasas are often orphans or from homes where parents are unable to provide even food for the child. We request opening up of residential schools along the lines of Kendriya Vidyalayas for minorities, which take care of education from Kindergarten to Post Graduation. This will reduce instances of students dropping out on account of the seamless passage from one class to the next and ensure a secular education to minority students from poor economic backgrounds. The management of the hostels should be the responsibility of the Government and not be outsourced to NGOs. Girls-only residential schools are required for the Muslim community as well as co-ed education so that Muslim girls too benefit from secular and free education.

Invest in Public Libraries

The administrative wards of each city and every Block in rural areas should have a public library with access to educational material, including college textbooks and other reference material that the poor cannot afford to buy. These spaces should also help prepare for competitive exams and conduct training for interview readiness. An excellent example of such an intervention is the M Power Library by the Brihan Mumbai Mahanagar Palika in M East Ward managed by the Deemed University, Tata Institute of Social Sciences.

Address bias and encourage Scientific Temperament through education

Take action to address discrimination against Muslim students in school, including for example, policing of dress, stereotypical remarks and abuse. These are significant barriers to education for Muslim youth, and all efforts must be made to resist them.

Set up a committee to review curriculum to address the stereotyping and demonising of communities, including Muslims in our school textbooks. Bring back historical facts on Muslim contribution to the country, deleted by the current regime.

Schools should encourage learning and curiosity rather than focussing on marks and passing exams.

Invest in Sports Education

Sports, especially team games, builds team spirit and the confidence of students. We recommend investment in sports facilities in every school towards a holistic development of children. This is even more important for girls and young women. Sports in schools with the participation of girls will normalize sports as an equally important developmental requirement as education and will encourage them to access and assert their presence in public spaces.

We recommend that every city makes provisions for young women to access their right to play through reservation of playgrounds for women and girls.

Scholarships

The need for scholarships is on account of the unaffordable fees charged by private educational institutions. Our Preamble states that India is Socialist and yet the disparity in the quality of education and the access to educational institutions on account of the fees creates a social divide among the population.

We recommend a committee to study the fee structure of private educational institutions and set a cap on the fees charged.

We recommend free education to Post Graduate levels as education is an investment in the future of the country. This will do away with the need for scholarships as well as reservations.

In the meantime, the financial allocation for minority educational scholarship schemes needs to be enhanced. These schemes need to be publicized in regional language newspapers and Urdu language newspapers.

Even as the Constitution provides for the Right to free movement across the country, these scholarships require a domicile certificate of the State to avail of the benefit. This certificate requires the student to prove residence in the State for a period of 10 years as the scholarship amount is shared between the Centre and the State. We recommend doing away with the criteria of domicile. We recommend that the Centre provides

each State, based on the minority population of the State, its share of the scholarship amount which can be disbursed by the State to its minority students.

We also recommend reviewing the income criteria for availing the scholarship. Since the last ten years, in spite of inflation, the annual family income criteria to avail scholarship is 1,00,000/- We seek enhancement of this criteria to Rs.3,00,000/- and an annual review of the income criteria to factor inflation.

We recommend that the Kothari Commission recommendation to allocate a minimum of 6% GDP to education be the mandate of your party which will enable the implementation of the suggested recommendations.

Health

The Right to Live with Dignity which requires that every citizen has the right to quality health care irrespective of ability to pay.

- The Sachar Committee report showed that the availability of medical facilities in the village (a health sub-centre, dispensary or primary health centre) reduced with a rise in the proportion of Muslims, particularly among larger villages. As per the report, of all the villages without medical facilities, 16% are located in Muslim concentration areas.
- Access to basic sanitation, safe housing and living conditions in Muslim neighbourhoods is extremely poor, increasing the vulnerability of the community in the area of health as well. The Sachar Committee report showed that Muslim and SC/ST villages are the least electrified and Muslims have the least access to potable water among all socio-religious communities.
- There is evidence from studies to show that Muslims are treated by healthcare providers using discriminatory language, especially in the labour ward and for women wearing burkhas². During the pandemic there were also cases of Muslims being turned away from health facilities, and healthcare providers speaking of Muslims in derogatory terms³.
- Mental health among the Muslim community is impacted by everyday assaults based on their identity. A recent population-level study using data from the World Health Organisation's Survey of Global Ageing and Adult Health (WHO-SAGE), found that Muslims have about 1.7 times the proportional odds of reporting depression, and 1.9 times the proportional odds of reporting anxiety, when compared to higher caste Hindus.

²

<https://www.cehat.org/uploads/files/Exploring%20Religious%20Discrimination%20Toward%20women%20in%20Public%20Health%20Facilities%20in%20Mumbai.pdf>

³ <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/coronavirus-on-camera-up-doctors-hate-rant-against-islamic-sect-members-2238882/amp/1>

<https://thewire.in/communalism/bihar-pregnant-woman-government-hospitals-treatment>

Our Recommendations

- Universalisation of Health Care services.
 - Ensure reach of health care services in areas inhabited by socially disadvantaged communities.
 - Ensure affordable health care
 - Ensure health care of quality to all irrespective of ability to pay
- Socialisation of Health Care Services (No further privatisation)
- Budgetary allocation of 3% to health care provisioning
- A policy for training for employment in the health sector of youth from socially disadvantaged communities (adivasi, NT DNT, Muslim, SC, OBC, especially women)
- Health services are a major area of employment which are currently understaffed. A policy for preferential employment of youth from socially disadvantaged communities (adivasi, NT DNT, Muslim, SC, OBC, especially women) to ensure sensitivity to the health care needs of these communities.
- End the privatisation of health education. The fees charged by private medical colleges ensure the exclusion of adivasis, students from the NT DNT community and other socially backward communities. These fees along with the management quota are a reservation for the rich to take advantage of health education.
- Better servicing of Muslim neighbourhoods with health facilities and more outreach of health programs is required. This must be monitored by the state regularly. This includes mental health counseling services.
- Urgent attention needs to be paid to availability of safe drinking water, safer housing and sanitation in Muslim neighbourhoods, and this must be monitored by the state.
- Biases/prejudices among health care providers must be addressed through sensitization, right from medical and nursing educational institutions.
- Grievance redressal mechanisms must be set up at health facilities to report discrimination of any kind (based on gender, caste, religion etc) and strict action must be taken against erring health professionals.

Livelihood status of Muslims as stated in the Sachar Committee Report

- 18 % of the educated urban Muslim youth report unemployment.
- Less than 8% of Muslim workers in urban areas were employed in the formal sector as compared to the national average of 21 %
- Muslims are disproportionately concentrated in the casual labor market and small-scale entrepreneurial ventures along the lines of their traditional occupations of handicraft making, embroidery.

A study by Thorat and Atwell (2007) documented the discrimination in hiring Muslims and Dalits by companies.

Our recommendations

Expand Affirmative Action programs

In 2007, the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) in response to a call by the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh set up a Task Force resulting in 100 companies drawing up an Affirmative Action Agenda for SC/ST youth⁴. The affirmative action programs are limited to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and need to be expanded to other marginalized groups including Muslims.

Implementing the Diversity Index

The Sachar Committee recommended the formulation of a Diversity Index. The Committee proposed that institutions that provide more diversity will be rewarded, along with disincentives to counter lack of efforts to promote diversity. This was believed to be more effective than the system of reservations in jobs and educational institutions. The Kundu Committee in 2008 presented the Report on the Diversity Index,⁵ that would be the basis for providing incentives for better representation in educational institutions, workplaces and housing situations. These included larger grants to educational institutions and tax breaks to industries and housing societies.

We believe this is a much-needed initiative to encourage diversity in workplaces and educational institutions.

National Data Bank

An important recommendation of the Sachar Committee was the setting up of the National Data Bank (NDB) where all relevant data pertaining to the socio-economic and educational status of different Socio-Religious Communities is maintained. The NDB was to be a repository of data on different beneficiary-oriented government programmes undertaken at the national and the state levels along with the details of beneficiaries drawn from different SRCs. The Committee recommended the setting up of an autonomous Assessment and Monitoring Authority (AMA) to evaluate the extent of development benefits which accrue to different SRCs through various programmes.

This Data Bank should also compile information on Wakf Properties, including details of their management and revenue and their valuation.

The importance of setting up the NDB cannot be adequately stressed.

⁴ <https://cii.in/WebCMS/Upload/report-affirmative-action.pdf>

⁵ http://www.minorityaffairs.gov.in/sites/upload_files/moma/files/pdfs/di_expgrp.pdf

Mapping Diversity

Apart from the NDB, a policy by the State Governments requiring companies (public, private, Non Government Organizations) to maintain and publish employee profiles on their website is recommended. The data should be broken down to reflect employee profiles (religion, caste, gender, disability) across hierarchies at the company.

Such data will provide an insight into diversity at the workplace. Workplaces which reflect diversity can be rewarded with tax breaks as recommended by the Kundu Committee.

Addressing Communal Violence and Ghettoisation

Communal violence has been responsible for the increased ghettoization of the Muslim community. The impact on young women is that they bear the brunt of maintaining the community identity, being 'good' Muslim women who are 'properly' veiled. These ghettos are underserved by the district administration, lacking in infrastructure and basic service provisioning. When Muslims seek housing in other neighbourhoods, they are denied and hence forced to go back to Muslim-majority neighbourhoods.

A persistent denial of citizenship rights has young people attracted to hate mongering politicians claiming to be representative of the Muslims. These right-wing Muslim parties exploit the fear and aspirations of Muslim youth.

Our Recommendations

- A law to address Communal Violence which includes Command Responsibility to address the sense of fear and alienation of the community.
- Incentivize Housing Societies which promote diversity of tenants in their complex as suggested in the Diversity Index Report mentioned earlier.
- Invest in the bettering of infrastructure and service provision in Minority Concentrated Districts and cities.
- Programs for reaching out to Muslim youth to understand their fears and aspirations including programs which allow for interaction and exchange between secular youth of different religions.
- Encouraging participation of Muslim youth in the party.
- Implementation and monitoring of the Prime Minister's 15 point program. (WHAT IS THIS?)

Stigmatization and Incarceration

In a Secular country which guarantees its citizens the Right to Equality and the Right to Constitutional Remedies amongst others, hate crimes against Muslims are on the rise. Muslim victims of communal violence await justice decades after having lost members of their family, homes and livelihoods. 75 years after Independence, Muslims continue to be blamed for the Partition of the Country and their nationalism is held suspect.

After every incident of terror, combing operations are conducted in Muslim ghettos with all adolescent youth rounded up and taken to the police station with some held on suspicion without charges for days on end to be released after 10, 11, 20 years for lack of evidence.

The current regime has also begun arresting activists raising their voice against unconstitutional laws with charges that are under non-bailable offenses. The arrests of Kafeel Khan, Kappan Siddiqui, the ongoing incarceration of youth leaders Umar Khalid, Gulfisha, are only a few of the several examples. Such stigmatization and the unchecked incarceration of Muslim youth is pushing them towards fundamentalism and an assertion of a conservative identity politics.

Our Recommendations

Repeal the following Laws

- UAPA and all laws that are repressive to the extent that they have been consistently used to repress dissent and disagreement vis a vis the State. The Congress has also done this in the past but it needs to give a serious thought to this today.
- Anti-Conversion Law
- Sedition Law
- CAA

Bring in Laws

- Equal Opportunities Act
- Hate Crimes Act
- For implementation of the Diversity Index as proposed by Sachar Commission
- Prevention of Atrocity against Muslims Act
- Law to Compensate Wrongful Incarceration of Minorities and hold accountable authorities for the same.
- Communal Violence Act

Promote the ideal of Secularism enshrined in the Constitution

The State has no religion and hence public institutions should have no display of religion by way of idols of Gods or puja or prayers with the use of taxpayers money. Government institutions should rather display the Preamble in their premises.

Reservation to ensure Political Participation of Minority women

Bring in reservation for women with reservation for minorities and marginalized women. Political parties should conduct training and capacity building of women in their parties to enable them to execute their responsibilities.

Gender Just Laws

The Muslim Personal Law, like any other personal law, is not entirely good or entirely evil. The UCC in a secular country cannot be the imposition of the existing Hindu laws on the rest of the population. Much like the Indian Constitution that drew from the constitutions of countries around the world, we need to draw from laws or the good practices of other countries and religious communities.

We need the abolishing of the Triple Talaq but we seek abolishing the criminalisation of Muslim men for pronouncing triple talaq.

Divorce: The unilateral triple talaq has been used as a tool by the right wing to demonise the Muslim community. However, Muslims have a number of options for divorce and the religion recognises that marriages can break down for lack of compatibility or for no fault of either spouse. This recognition of a no-fault divorce or the irretrievable breakdown of marriage does not currently exist in secular law. We recommend a law which simplifies divorce including a no fault divorce on irretrievable breakdown of marriage.

Polygamy/Bigamy: An aspect of the Muslim Personal Law that has been used to demonise the community is the permission for men to have four wives. A government survey of 1974 found that 5.6% of Muslim men and 5.8% of upper-caste Hindus were in polygamous or bigamous relationships. The numbers have since then fallen to 1.9% for Muslims and 1.3% for Hindus, according to the National Health and Family Survey (NHFS) data of 2001. Polygamy is highest among the tribal communities. The second wife of a Hindu man, at present, is penalised for being in a bigamous marriage, which is not recognised by the law. A UCC that outlaws polygamy will leave women in these marriages without any rights.

When outlawing polygamy for all men, the law must consider the rights of the second wife (Hindu or Muslim or of any other religion) in a bigamous marriage, which is now guaranteed in Muslim law. Women should not be penalised for the actions of men.

Property rights: Much before the Hindu Code Bill granting Hindu women the right to property, Islam provided a share in property for women. As the law stands today, however, women only get an unequal share in inheritance. Not all Hindus are also willing to give their sisters an equal share of property in spite of the law as seen by the many property disputes in courts today. An equal share in property that is formalised by the law will benefit all Muslim women. The Muslim Personal Law disallows willing away of the entire property, which might keep women out of inheritance. Such a provision of disallowing the willing away of the entire property is required to protect the rights of women across all communities.

Among the many changes required in the Special Marriage Act is revoking the requirement of a notice period, which has been known to endanger the lives of couples in inter-religious relationships.

Muslim women seek equal rights to custody and to guardianship, and also the right to adopt (not just for themselves but for all women in the country). They also demand that social security be provided for women and the elderly.

Lastly, we recommend that the **Budget document** reflect all allocations towards the development of Minorities across various ministries in one document much like the SC ST Sub Plan which gives an overview of all allocations for SC-ST populations thus making it easy to monitor and review. We propose a **Minority Sub Plan** which similarly puts together all such allocations.

Endorsed by

- **Aashana Shakila Welfare Foundation, Bihar**
- **Aawaaz-e-Niswaan, Mumbai**
- **Anhad, Delhi**
- **Bagawat Babes, Nagpur**
- **Eva Foundation, Bihar**
- **Housing and Livelihood Welfare Association, Mumbai**
- **Izad, Bihar**
- **Make a New Dream Foundation, Bihar**
- **Muskaan, Bhopal**
- **National Youth Equity Forum, Bihar**
- **Parcham, Thane**
- **Rubi Social Welfare Society, Nagpur**
- **Samvada, Bangalore**
- **Savitri Bai Fule Fatima Shekh Group, Bhopal**
- **Savitri Fatima Foundation for Inclusive Development, Mumbai**
- **Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action, Mumbai**