

## National Resources and Muslims: In the Mirror of Sachar Committee Report

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During the election season, there is a debate going on between the BJP and the Congress as to who has the first right on the country's resources. However, it's an ugly debate for which mainly the BJP is responsible. Nowadays, Narendra Modi is the BJP. And he is constantly and blatantly dividing the citizens on the communal lines while reducing the level of electoral debate to the lowest of low. Quoting the statements of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, he blames that the Congress wants to give all the resources of the country to Muslims. Even the *mangal-sutras* (auspicious threads) of the Hindu women! Congress denies the allegation by saying neither Manmohan Singh had said anything like this, nor has Congress ever said this. This ongoing debate between the two big parties can be seen in the light of a forgotten document i.e. the Justice Sachar Committee report.

Of the two statements of Manmohan Singh in discussion, the first is from December 2006, and the second is from April 2009. That means both these statements were given by him after the submission of the Sachar Committee report. The 7-member High-Level Committee of the Prime Minister was constituted on 5 March 2005 under the chairmanship of Justice Sachar by the then Prime Minister of India Dr. Manmohan Singh with the aim to prepare a report about social, economic and educational status of the Muslim community in the country. The Committee's 403-page report was submitted in November 2006 and presented in the Lok Sabha on 30 November 2006.

The report was prepared on the basis of data received from diverse sources from the Central and State Governments. The report said that minorities, especially Muslims, have been ignored under the rule of all the central governments. The report drew attention for the first time to the ever-increasing economic inequality and social insecurity and alienation of Muslims in India since independence. Based on official data, it was found that the Muslim population is under-represented in the civil services, police, army and even politics. Muslims are more likely than other Indians to be poor, uneducated, unhealthy, and to be in trouble with the law.

The findings and recommendations of the report immediately became a topic of sharp debate in political, social and intellectual circles of the country, and even

abroad. Consequently, it received praise from a large part of intelligentsia as well as from political parties. The report was considered to be a mirror which showed the true picture of the Muslim community throughout India. With the report, the myth of 'Muslim appeasement' which had been going on since independence was dashed in one fell swoop. One of the findings of the report that the condition of Muslims in the country is worse than that of Dalits had surprised many people. Moreover, the worst condition of Muslims is in West Bengal, which was ruled by the CPM-led Left Front government for a long time.

There were also some dissenting voices regarding the report's findings, recommendations and methodology. But they were of technical nature. Most people appreciated the report in intellectual and political circles. The BJP strongly opposed the report; And there and then it was alleged by it that the Congress wants to give all the resources of the country to Muslims.

It may also be noted that there was a race among all the secular political parties to promise in their manifestos to implement the recommendations of the Sachar Committee report. But all such parties including the Congress stopped even mentioning the Sachar Committee report while surrendering to Narendra Modi's weapon of majoritarianism. The Sachar Committee report was not mentioned in the manifesto of even a single political party in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. Nor perhaps in this election. Even in the current controversy, the Congress has not yet justified Manmohan Singh's statement by citing the predicament of Muslims as presented in the Sachar Committee report.

Manmohan Singh's first statement was clearly about the need for empowerment of the deprived and vulnerable groups of the society – Dalits, tribals, backward classes, women, poor Muslims and children. The BJP took this inclusive and comprehensive statement out of context and at the same time blatantly accused the Prime Minister and the Congress that they were going to give all the resources of the country to Muslims. The clarification issued from the Prime Minister's Office had no effect on the BJP's protest. In the second statement, which was given just before the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, he talked about giving priority to the poor Muslims.

As the Prime Minister of the country, Dr. Manmohan Singh's advocacy for the country's most vulnerable community would be considered a praiseworthy and necessary act. Along with this, Manmohan Singh, the father of the New Economic Policies, must have understood very well that the worst impact of the privatization-liberalization policies in the country will be on the already deprived

and weaker sections, among whom, according to the Sachar Committee report, the poor Muslims will be the most affected who are situated at the bottom.

This is what happened. On the tenth anniversary of the Sachar Committee report, PUCL, Socialist Yuvjan Sabha (SYS) and Khudai Khidmatgar had organized a one-day symposium in Delhi. Justice Sachar himself was present in that program as an audience. Syed Mahmood Zafar, who was OSD on behalf of the government in the committee, explained in detail that even after 10 years, there has been negligible implementation of the recommendations of the report. Here is the Prime Minister who is provoking the majority that if the Congress wins, it will give all the resources to Muslims!

The strategy behind Manmohan Singh's statement to regain the old vote bank of the Congress cannot be denied. This is the time when Rahul Gandhi had started visiting the homes of Dalits, and eat food with them, with the aim of bringing them into the Congress fold. Angered by the attack on her vote bank, Mayawati used to take a dig at Rahul Gandhi.

But in Narendra Modi's BJP, it becomes a crime for any leader, intellectual or citizen to take the name of Muslims. Perhaps this is the fear that in support of Manmohan Singh's statement, neither the Congress, nor any other so-called secular political party, nor any intellectual is mentioning the Sachar Committee report and the reality of Muslim life described in it. This is a matter of deep concern for a constitutional nation and civilized society. The Sachar Committee report not only presents statistics, but also gives a direction as to how India should be built as a civil society in the present modern world.

Finally, in this entire episode, both Manmohan Singh and Narendra Modi can be asked that when you, by pursuing neoliberal policies, are handing over the first rights of the country's resources, assets and public sector enterprises to the corporate houses, then why are you running this fake debate?

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