

People's Manifesto

General Election 2024



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Released by:



The general Election of 2024 is perhaps going to be the most crucial election in the history of independent India. We are literally standing at the crossroads of history, where after ten long years of the utter misrule by the Bharatiya Janata Party led government in the centre, the democracy and constitution both are in grave danger. The repeated assault on constitutionally protected values like secularism, socialism, federalism and scientific temper and with constant misuse of executive organs of the state against the people and voices of opposition, the democracy of India today stands sabotaged and compromised. The country today is riling under one of the worst economic crises, but instead of addressing that and improving the situations, the incumbent regime and its various hydra-headed organisations keep peddling hate against the people, particularly targeting religious minorities like Muslims, Christians and Sikhs. The life, limb and security of the minorities particularly the Muslims have been severely assaulted in the past one decade.

From killing Muslims in broad daylight by lynching them on the streets, attacking their homes and shops in riots and pogroms, bulldozing their houses by the authorities flouting all legal protocols, demolishing their places of worship, depriving their girl-students from education by imposing ban on hijab, incarcerating them for prolonged times by implicating them in false cases, by peddling vicious and totally fake narratives about them in mainstream media, the Muslim minorities have possibly faced the worst wrath of the regime in the past one decade. They have also been very systematically left out of the development paradigm, by subtly denying them institutional benefits. Such multifarious attacks have also been launched on Christian and Sikh minorities.

The BJP is known for its outright hatred for religious minorities,

particularly the Muslims, and their entire politics is pegged on constantly breathing venom against them. The secular opposition parties, on the other hand, are not always vocal about the relentless attack on Muslims and other religious minorities and often refrain from raising the issues related to oppression on Muslims and their overall deprivation, in the pretext that it will lead into religious polarisation. The BJP has successfully established the fake narrative of 'Muslim appeasement' by opposition parties. If any one takes a closer look at facts, this fake narrative falls flat and data rather reveals institutional bigotry, deprivation and assault on basic rights of the minorities, especially Muslims.

A democracy can only function, when its minority are protected and secured. Otherwise a democracy liquidates into majoritarian tyranny, like the one we are facing in India right now. This Manifesto compiled by the SPECT Foundation is a reminder about the rights of the minorities, particularly Muslims that were denied en masse in the last ten years. We also call upon the political parties to take up the issues listed in this people's manifesto and indicate in their manifestos how they will fulfil these demands.

If we have to retrieve democracy from the clutches of the communal fascists, we need to voice out the attack on minorities and talk concretely about remedying the situation.

Only then our democracy as it stands bruised and battered today, can be healed.

1. Development related Issues

Among the 76 recommendations made by Sachar Committee Report (2006) to ameliorate the conditions of Muslims, was a multi-sectoral development programme to provide basic amenities, and improve opportunities for employment in identified backward districts with minority concentration. In the 11th Five Year Plan, 2008-09, out of 136 districts which had a Minority population above 25 per cent, 90

Minority Concentration Districts (MCDs) were identified covering 34 per cent of the minority population in the country.

However, the conversation around the socio-economic backwardness of the Muslim community, as well as the systemic underdevelopment of Minority Concentration Districts (MCDs) have largely disappeared from the public domain in the country in the last 10 years. After the shocking revelations of the Sachar Committee Report, further findings by the Amitabh Kundu Committee (2014), necessitated a targeted and programmatic approach to address the socio-economic underdevelopment of the Muslim community of the country. But the current ruling dispensation, owing to its inherent anti-Muslim bias has turned the narrative on its head and has only touted a rather baseless chronicle of “Muslim appeasement” and has tried to criminalize the community in various ways.

According to the United National Development Programme and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI)’s global multidimensional poverty index, every second person belonging to the Scheduled Tribes and every third person belonging to the Scheduled Castes remains poor. Similarly, every third Muslim is multidimensionally poor. According to the National Sample Survey of India, Muslim religion is the poorest religious group in India. Muslims’ average per capita spending a day is Rs. 32.66, while it is Rs. 37.50 for Hindus, Rs. 51.43 for Christians and Rs. 55.30 for Sikhs.

PLFS (Periodic Labour Force Survey) The data shows a decrease in the unemployment rate in rural areas from 5.3% in 2017-18 to 2.4% in 2022-23, and in urban areas from 7.7% to 5.4%. Moreover, the data highlights that, among all religious groups, it is the Muslims who are experiencing the decline in their Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) and worker population ratio (WPR).

The socio-economic marginalisation of Muslims is part of the larger process of persecution of the community. It is also against the basic ethos of democracy if a community is systemically left underdeveloped

and affirmative actions for its social welfare are intentionally and vindictively neglected. The abject state of the Muslim community in the country is therefore not an isolated problem for a single community alone. It reflects poorly on the overall developmental indices of the country. For the sake of the overall development of democracy, concrete steps must be taken to ameliorate the overall underdevelopment of these areas with substantial Muslim population.

Development Related Demands:

The Central government and Niti Ayog should do fresh surveys to assess the conditions of the minority population, to understand the change/improvement/degeneration of their conditions since the Sachar Committee Report.

Implement the recommendations of the Ranganath Mishra Commission and Amitabh Kundu Committee

Spatial approach recommended by the Sachar Committee for targeted reach of minorities needs to be implemented at the block and village level too, because within districts itself resources are distributed unevenly and developmental deficits exist at multiple levels.

Health Facilities and basic resources should be ensured.

2. Education

Almost two decades after the Sachar Committee highlighted the issue, a report from the National Statistical Office reveals that Muslims are on various yardsticks of academic marginalisation as bad or even worse than SCs and STs. The report shows that among the various social groups, the literacy rate for those aged 7 years or more was the highest for 'others' at 91% for men and 81% for women. The literacy rate of 80.6% among Muslim men was equivalent to that for Dalits and marginally higher than the rate among tribals. The literacy rate for Muslim women (69%) was higher than Dalit or tribal women, but lower than for women of any other religious group.

According to PLFS data, only about 19 per cent Muslims are currently attending higher education institutions, as against 21 percent among Adivasis, 26 percent among Dalits, 34 per cent Hindu OBCs and 45 percent Hindu upper castes. Enrolment in higher education among Muslim students in the age group of 18-23 dropped by more than 8.5% in 2020-21, according to the Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) and the All India Survey of Higher Education (AISHE). While 21 lakh Muslim students had enrolled for higher education in 2019-20, the number fell to 19.21 lakh in 2020-21. The percentage of Muslim students enrolled in higher education relative to the total number of students enrolled also saw a slight decrease, falling from 4.87 in 2016-17 to 4.64 in 2020-21, while the Muslim population in India is roughly 14 percent. The report says that a significant trend that is observed across all States and Union Territories is that the enrolment percentage of Muslim students in Class 11 and 12 is lower than that in the previous classes. The representation of Muslim students starts declining gradually from Class 6 and is the lowest in Class 11 and 12. "While Muslims make up around 14.42% of total enrolment of 6.67 crore [students] at the upper primary level [Class 6-8], it slightly decreases to 12.62% at the secondary level [Class 9-10] and declines to 10.76% at the higher secondary level [Class 11-12]," the report states. The report says that 18.64% of Muslim students enrolled in the secondary level drop out of schools, which is higher than the 12.6% dropout rate for all students. Implementing targeted support and inclusive policies can help bridge this gap and provide equal educational opportunities for all," the report says.

Many Muslim students come from low-income families and struggle to afford the cost of higher education. "To address this issue, it is essential to provide financial assistance and support to deserving students who face financial constraints. Enhancing and increasing the number of scholarships, grants, and financial aid opportunities targeted explicitly at Muslim students can significantly alleviate the financial

burden and help more deserving students access higher education," the report recommends.

The gross attendance ratio was the lowest for Muslims among various social and religious groups at all levels of education except higher secondary, where it was between the rates for Dalits and tribals.

On the other hand, the governments especially in states like Uttar Pradesh and Assam, the recent government decisions have derecognized madrasas, demolished drives and declared illegal and 'anti-national'. This is against the spirit of the constitution and violates the fundamental rights of the minorities under article 29 and 30. This must be stopped immediately.

Education related Demands:

- Recognize Madrassa degrees equal to degree qualification for defence, civil and banking exams.
- Evaluation of the content of the school textbooks to eliminate religious and other discrimination.
- Implement the Ranganath Mishra Committee Recommendations that suggested at least 15 percent of seats in all non-minority educational institutions should be earmarked by law for the minorities, as with 10 percent for the Muslims and the remaining 5 percent for the other minorities.
- Restore Maulana Azad Fellowship
- Minority status of Aligarh and jamia
- Secure the rights of the Madrasas and women students who want to wear hijab to their places of education.

3. Repeal Draconian laws

A plethora of draconian laws like UAPA, NSA, MCOCA are being used regularly in the last ten years, particularly targeting minorities and other marginalised sections. These laws are used vindictively to keep

people from the marginalised communities in prisons for long years without trial or bail. The conviction rate in these laws are abysmally low and they are against the spirit of democracy and fair trial. Because these laws are deliberately being used against marginalised sections particularly targeting Minorities and to silence voices of dissent and criticism, these draconian laws must be repealed.

Demand: Repeal laws like UAPA, NSA, MCOCA. Expedite trials against all political prisoners detained under such laws.

4. Illegal Bulldozer Justice

In the last few years, there has been consistent use of bulldozers to demolish houses, shops, crops and other properties, mostly belonging to minority communities. This has taken place in states like Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana, and Uttarakhand where BJP governments were present. Even in Delhi, where the police are controlled by the Central Government, the demolitions by bulldozers were witnessed. The fact that maximum victims of bulldozer demolition are from minority communities, is not by exception but sheer design. Instantly using bulldozers on any properties, without due process of law reflects severe apathy towards not just the victims and utter disregard to legal processes.

Demand: Immediately stop arbitrary use of Bulldozers. Penalise the officers that sanctioned such vindictive illegal methods so far. Adequately compensate the victims of the Bulldozer vigilantism.

5. Police Reforms

In the last ten years, there has been alarming instances of institutional bigotry shown by the police force against Muslims in particular. During the anti-CAA protests in UP and Delhi or during the Delhi riots, the prejudiced role of the police has repeatedly come under scrutiny. The pliant role of police in not doing fair investigation in cases of mob lynching, right wing attack, riots etc on one hand, and excessive, unjust

and often illegal force used in custodial torture, encounter, extra judicial killing targeting muslim minorities have become normalised in the last ten years. This must stop in order to restore democracy and stop the country from turning into a police state. The accountability of Police forces must be ensured and the impunity with which they have been targeting minorities must stop.

The presence of Muslims in the Indian police force is also abysmal. In 2010, it was found that sans Jammu and Kashmir, only 64805 Muslim individuals were a part of the police force, which formed a mere 4.31% of the total police force. The Muslim representation in Indian police has "remained consistently low" at 3 to 4 percent ever since. Moreover, Since 2013, the National Crimes Records Bureau annual report has ceased reporting the level of Muslim representation in the police.

Demands: There should be reservation in the Police forces for minorities in order to make the Police force diverse and ensure representatives from marginalised communities.

There should be regular sensitisation of the Police Force at all levels, to ensure they protect the values of the constitution.

The Police force should be held accountable and punitive actions must be taken against police officers who execute extra judicial actions like custodial torture or encounters.

The departments of Investigation and Law and order should be separated and the recruitment in the police force should be increased, ensuring diverse representation.

6. Law to prevent hate speeches

There had been a spike in hate speeches in India, particularly targeting Muslim and other minorities. India Hate Lab documented 668 hate speech incidents targeting Muslims in 2023, 255 of which occurred in the first half of the year while 413 took place in the last six months of 2023. Similar numbers of hate speeches were observed in previous

years too, with the numbers soaring particularly around elections. The vilification of minority communities has regularly taken place in order to polarise voters. Vilification, demonisation of minority communities have taken place in mainstream media too that tantamounts to hate speech. **A law must be brought to prevent hate speech that propagates prejudice about communities, demeaning them or instigating violence against them.**

7. Abrogation of 'love Jihad' laws that are violative of the Indian constitution.

In the last ten years many state governments run by the BJP have made laws to criminalise interfaith marriages under the rubric of love jihad law. 7 Indian states ruled by the BJP party including Jharkhand (2017), Uttarakhand (2018), Himachal Pradesh (2019), Uttar Pradesh (2021), Karnataka (2022) and Haryana (2022) enacted anti-conversion laws which has invariably targeted Muslim men with the bogey of love Jihad. **We demand that these laws must be taken back by these respective governments.**

8. NO Uniform Civil Code

Article 44 of the India constitution says 'The State shall endeavour to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India'. UCC is an imposition of majoritarian practices on Muslims in the name of uniformity. There are Special Marriage Act and Succession Act. Anyone who does not want to get governed by religious laws, that couple can get married under the Special Marriage Act. Religious personal law will not be applicable on that particular couple. They will be governed by secular law. When such options are available to the public, there is no point of interference in religious laws by any extraneous body.

9. NO CAA/ NRC

The Citizenship Amendment Act in the garb of giving citizenship to persecuted minorities from neighbouring countries, is actually an attempt to introduce religious discrimination in bestowing citizenship. While the CAA claims that it will give quick citizenship to persecuted minorities who are Hindu, Sikh, Christian, Buddhist, Jain and Parsis from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan, it doesn't explain why it leaves out Muslims from that purview, when there are ample evidences of persecution of Shias, Sufis, Ahmedis etc in these countries. It also does not clarify why it doesn't include other neighbouring countries like Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Nepal or China, which are not Muslim majority and where Muslims are regularly persecuted. Most importantly, CAA inserts religious conditions in bestowing citizenship, which is against the ethos of equality enshrined all through the constitution.

The CAA- coupled with the disastrous National Register of Citizen is nothing but a concerted effort to render Muslims as second class citizens of the country. It is also a brazen attempt to change the fundamental character of the Indian constitution that ensures Equality in the eyes of law to each and every citizen. **CAA must be repealed and NRC must not be implemented.**

10. No Encroachment in burial grounds and Waqf Properties

The waqf properties are historically managed by the trustees of the Muslim community and encroachment in them and in the communally owned burial grounds must be resisted. The government's recent claims that waqf property belongs to them due to legal misinterpretation of laws. 123 waqf property in Delhi was claimed by the government that it belongs to them, similar incidents in Uttrakhand, Uttar Pradesh also took place. **Such attempts must be stopped and Waqf properties should be protected.**

11. Demand for the recognition of Dalit Muslims and Christians under the SC category

Prime Minister Modi was recently vocal about the issue of pasmanda Muslims. However, it is nothing more than just a political gimmick to divide Muslim votes. In reality, in the court, the central government categorically opposed the recognition of Dalit Christians and Muslims under the SC category. We believe that the exclusion of socially backward sections of Muslims and Christians from the right to reservation is discriminatory and we demand that article 341 must be amended to include the backward and marginalised sections of Christians and Muslims under the SC category.

12. Political representation for Muslims

While India's 220 million Muslims make up a little under a fifth of its 1.4 billion population, Muslim representatives in parliament have almost halved to less than five percent since the 1970s. There were just 27 Muslim MPs in the 543-seat lower house in parliament -- and none of them were among the BJP's 310 lawmakers. We demand that the political parties must take positive steps to ensure that Muslim representation in the parliament increases to the proportion of their population.

13. Ensure representation of Muslims in government jobs and positions of power

While Muslims are 14.2 per cent of the Indian population, their proportion of the public sector employment has stagnated at below 7 per cent (from 6.75 to 6.87 per cent) between 2009-12 and 2018-2020. We demand that the political parties must include this in their agenda to ensure that Muslims get representation in the public sector in proportion to their population.



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