

An Analysis of the First Global Minority Report



Lekshmi Parameswaran



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भारत नीति प्रतिष्ठान
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India Policy Foundation

D-51, Hauz Khas,

New Delhi -110016 (India)

Tele: 011-26524018

Email: info@ipf.org.in, indiapolicy@gmail.com

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Introduction

The issue of minority rights has often been viewed from the perspective of the West. Such a view has ignored many factors that are intrinsic to the culture and traditions of a nation. Due to this, there has never been an accurate picture of how minorities fare in different parts of the world. The Patna-based Centre for Policy Analysis in an attempt to bridge this gap has come out with the first edition of Global Minority Report (GMR), a comprehensive study of the rights of minorities in 110 countries. Authored by Durga Nand Jha, the GMR has explored the issue of minority rights and freedom from all aspects. It has also covered those issues that have failed to make it to the international news coverage because those do not suit a particular narrative. It is divided into three sections where the first part looks at ideation and policy issues, second part details a few case studies and the third part include indexing of countries, technical note and recommendations. It is an inclusive work that needs to be discussed and debated for its important findings as well as the recommendations it has given to ensure the peaceful co-existence of all religions.

Ideation and Policy Issues

The rights given to a nation's minorities are an important determinant of the values and ideals of a nation-state. From a policy perspective, it can indicate how free or how closed a nation is despite what it claims to be on paper. As has been the practice for long, minority rights have remained a topic that the West has claimed expertise on and all the studies and surveys done so far on this have emanated from the West. In all such publications, the West's narrow approach to other cultures have been evident and the views presented were essentially one-sided. So, the publication of the Global Minority Report is significant because it brings forth an Asian perspective to the concept of minority rights and views this issue not through isolated incidents but through the policies that nation-states have on minorities. The constitutional provisions, laws of the land, the approach of a State towards minority religionists, public policy,

and availability of opportunities for religious minorities for the highest office in the country were among the factors that were considered. The policies of 110 nations were analysed on these parameters and it was found that India is the most inclusive nation for religious minorities.

The findings are significant in the face of a rampant campaign to spread a false narrative that there is “religious intolerance” in India and minorities are denied their rights. The study brings to light that it is in fact contrary to the facts as minorities are given more rights than majority in India and there is complete inclusivity. And this conclusion has been reached based on detailed study, drawn on multiple frameworks and models. It has used statistical and analytical data to make some pertinent observations that compel nations to rethink the concept of minorities.

Conceptually, the criteria for getting categorised as a ‘minority’ is the state of belonging to a numerically lower denomination of a group of people related to religion, language, culture, colour and ethnicity. They can be divided into five categories – religious; ethnic; linguistic; cultural and sectarian. However, the UN does not recognise the last category. The findings of the GMR are a testament to the fact the concept of minorities go beyond the issues of ideation and are linked to varied factors that eventually shape a nation.

As mentioned earlier, the study has focussed on the larger trends that it argues are an apt pointer to determine the condition of religious minorities in a country. It found that South Korea, Japan, USA and France figure after India, in the top of the rankings, in giving religious minorities equal status while Maldives, Afghanistan and Somalia figure at the bottom. It was also found that the plight of unrecognised religious minorities is worse when compared to the status of recognised religious minorities as they do not have any legal or statutory protection.

Another important aspect that the report focused on was how the nature of regimes affect the rights of minorities. In a rights survey conducted by Patna-based CPA, it was found that a country which is secular (non-theocratic and neutral in religious

matters) and democratic, tends to take up more pro-people policies and confers more rights to its citizens, in comparison with those countries which are theocratic and undemocratic.

An interesting fact that emerged from the study was that on an average, citizens of the Muslim dominated countries, are more deprived from the perspective of rights, in comparison with other religion dominated countries. Besides, there are many non-Islamic countries too, where the state of civil and political rights is not good, such as China, Myanmar, North Korea, to name just a few. As far as the areas and the nature of their deprivation is concerned, it is mostly in the arena of political and civil rights. According to the findings of the report, the main factor responsible for this is that most Islamic countries are either under aristocratic rule or under dictatorships.

The Global Minority Report unlike the reports of the past from the West analyses the important role that religion plays in building a society that is based on ethics and values. It dwells on issues that have so far not formed part of the public domain and have thrown light on how exactly religion influences the actions of its practitioners or followers. Such an approach is a stark break from the practice where religion is analysed without looking at its complexities and how intrinsically it is related to culture. This report argues that the link between religion and culture is so strong that it may even lead to cultural colonisation.

Another commendable aspect of the GMR is that it touches upon issues that have so far been considered outside the purview of such studies and have raised many pertinent questions to which there are no easy answers. It points to many inherent contradictions in a religion and how certain tenets have never been questioned.

It asks how certain religions insist on not using images and forms when every idea from the ancient time to the present modern era has been expressed through images, forms and symbols. Another pertinent question raised by the report is; Why is the narration of the message of God in third person in Quran? It also argues that it is not clear from the book who is preaching the message to whom. The third question that was raised is, if it

is the message of God, why does every chapter begin with ‘In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful’? If they are His own words, should he not be speaking in the first person? Unfortunately, none of these questions will have answers as the Abrahamic religions are a ‘set of beliefs.’ Beliefs are situated in the core of human hearts and minds, where the entry of reason and doubts is generally prohibited.

Further, the report argues that the root cause of acrimonious relationships among various religionists, lie somewhere in religious precepts of religion. It points out many fundamental differences between the Abrahamic religions and the eastern religions. Among the most significant difference is that that the Abrahamic religions are revealed ones while the eastern belief systems do not believe in the theory of revelation. They believe that truths are discovered or realised directly by the discoverer, or by the seekers of the truth.

The second difference is that Abrahamic religions are God-centric whereas the eastern religions are conduct oriented. The third difference is that the messages expounded by the eastern religions are for everyone and they do not demarcate people on the basis of their followership which de-communalises them. Lastly, they do not oppose any other version of truth by affirming that only theirs is the right version. They believe in establishing harmony among various versions of the truth.

Another fact that needs to be noted is that Sanatan Dharma is an open-ended religion. It does not subscribe to the idea of ‘exclusivity of religion’ and ‘finality of truth’. It recognises the importance of questions for the seekers of the truth. Even the concepts of Creation and God can be questioned which is in stark contrast to the Abrahamic religions where any questions raised on the religious texts or precepts is considered blasphemy. This predominantly emanates from the fact that Abrahamic religions are instructive and not indicative. By going in to the intricacies of the two sets of religion, the report stays away from falling into the trap of the narrative that have been set around religious intolerance and brings out the true picture of the status of minorities in the nations analysed. There are also many

contradictions that have emerged that question whether the West is indeed committed to the goals of equality.

Framework for studying minorities

The report divides the religions into groups. The first group of religions are Eastern Religions which mainly consist of Sanatan Dharma, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Shintoism, etc. The second group of religions are Abrahamic ones, which consist of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. As per available data on the religious demography of various religionists, more than 3/4th of the world's population belongs to both groups of religions.

A commendable aspect of the report is that it has tried to give a framework through which minorities across the world can be studied. It has concentrated on important models by which minorities can be classified. The first is the Assimilative Model where a country tries to assimilate its minorities into its mainstream culture, behaviour, system, etc., irrespective of the willingness of the community. In this model, there is little space for differentiation and it doesn't leave any room for reluctance or disobedience of mainstream, national cultural, or other practices.

This category is further subdivided into three – a) Repressive Assimilation where the adoption of national or mainstream culture is mandatory for everyone. For example, China b) Selective Assimilation in which assimilation is not sought in all areas but only in a few selective areas. For example, imposition of Urdu in East Pakistan. c) Persuasive Assimilation in which nothing is imposed but a circumstance is created in which one finds assimilation within mainstream cultural and other practices either lucrative or finds the indirect costs of remaining unassimilated high. For example, USA.

The second category is the Discriminative Model in which assimilation of minorities is not sought in the mainstream and high accent is placed on the separate identity of a minority. This is further subdivided into the Hard Discriminatory Model followed by countries like Pakistan, Iran and Saudi Arabia and Soft Discriminatory Model followed by Indonesia and

Bangladesh. It has also mentioned three kinds of situations which determine the approach to minorities. The first is the majoritarian perspective. The second is the minority perspective. And the third is the national interest perspective.

The report states that in heterogeneous societies generally, three kinds of situations emerge in respect of the relationships between the majority and minority communities: a respectful acceptance of the differences; tolerance of differences; and an uncomfortable coexistence — a condition in which differences take the shape of distrust between the majority and minority communities. Peace based on tolerance may not be durable since there is an element of compulsion in it.

It further argues that the world view of a religion is a serious issue and it cannot be seen as a mere theological construct as it has implications for the other religionists and the world. It states that religions can be divided into two world views – an ‘Intrusive World View’ and a ‘Cohesive World View’. A religion with an ‘Intrusive World View’ harbours an ambition to bring everyone under its religious umbrella whereas a religion with a ‘Cohesive World View’ embraces all with their differences. The Abrahamic religion predominantly fall under the first category whereas the East Asian religions fall under the second.

To substantiate its point, the report has quoted data of the Pew Research Centre which states that roughly 56 percent of the world population is associated with the Intrusive World View, of which 31.1 per cent (Christianity) of the world population have one kind of World View, and 24.9 percent (Muslim) of the world population have a second type of Intrusive World View. Out of the remaining 44 percent, 15.56 percent is Hindu and have a Cohesive World View.

Additionally, the report makes a pertinent point that while freedom is important for all beings, rights are the essential guarantor of that freedom. It focusses on the relevance of regime in the endowment of rights to citizens. For example, a democratic regime by virtue of its nature is more people oriented than the other regimes, as it draws its legitimacy directly from

the people. A quasi-democratic regime is selective and restrictive in conferring citizenship rights to their people. An autocratic government is much more restrictive in the matter of conferring rights to its citizens. The report has also analysed how nature of relationships between State and religion can impact the rights of the citizens as a secular state confers rights to its citizens without any discrimination but a theocratic state discriminates based on the religious affiliation of its citizens.

The report emphasises that the State consists of a legal and administrative framework; but a nation is formed when culture combines with it. The State gives persons its citizenship, but it is culture of the country that gives them nationality. It is important for every citizen to identify with this culture. However, once the separateness of identity gets solidified, it has multiple implications. Such cultural dissociations can lead to ‘clash of identity’ leading to conflicts within and outside the country.

In an interesting perspective, the report points out that rights and duties are inseparable. It argues that if rights protect the dignity of human beings, duties are important for creating a situation in which rights are enjoyed by everyone. It also explains the difference between the Eastern and Western perspectives here. While in western societies, rights are the starting point for building a good and modern society, in eastern societies, this starts with the concept of duties. Especially in the Indian context, the independent existence of rights has not been accepted by the Indian thinkers.

Important Findings of the GMR

The report has looked at the policies of 110 nations and the religious complexities involved to reach inferences. An important finding of the report is that it becomes difficult for people of other religions and faiths to coexist peacefully whenever a religion becomes more structured and it starts controlling the minds of the people. This may even lead to persecution of other religions and is in fact the most effective way to carry out the Intrusive World View. Such a situation can also be said to be the reason behind religious conversions where

a religion is in need of a large number of followers to give veracity to its religious affirmations. It also needs to be understood that religious conversion is a form of religious intolerance, which in turn is an expression of the non-acceptance of other religions.

It cites the examples of most of the old religions of North and South America, Africa, and of many Asian countries that became homogenising mission of Abrahamic religions. Prior to this, Buddhism was the biggest expansionist religion in the Eastern Bloc of Religions which was organisationally well-structured till Islam and Christianity started expanding and developed their own institutional structures. Here, the report emphasises that a religion on an expanding spree cannot act without an organisational structure and acts in the same way as multinational corporations tend to expand their operations — that is, ‘end the competition by annihilating the competitor’.

The various incidents of large-scale conversions that are seen across the developing countries which have completely erased many native cultures prove that the findings are accurate and conversions do have many hidden agendas. The report has specifically called out how in some Asian countries, the religious freedom given to citizens is used as a mask for religious conversion. Terming this practice as ‘cultural genocide,’ the report has stated that this needs to be stopped immediately.

Altogether, there are 48 countries in the world where Muslims are above 50 per cent of the population. Out of 48, in 32 countries, the Muslim population is more than 90 percent; in 5 countries, the population is more than 80 percent; in 5 countries, it is more than 70 percent, and in 6 countries the Muslim population is more than 50 percent.

Focussing on the hypothesis that regimes can have a significant impact on the way religion affects a society, the report looked at the big Islamic countries where elections are held such as Indonesia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Malaysia, Turkey and Iran. It was found that due to the theocratic orientation of the government, the state of civil and political rights continues to remain inferior. In most of these countries, democratic

institutions are weak and democratic norms are frequently flouted.

The report also analysed the rights situation from the gender perspective and found that due to the rampant patriarchal bias in Islamic societies, women are in a worse position when compared to other countries. In Muslim dominated countries, to be more specific, the right to elect a government, the right to form associations, and the right to speak against the government are either totally missing or are available in restricted forms in most Muslim majority countries because of absence of democracy.

Perhaps, the finding that leads one to question where Muslim majority nations are as open as they seem in paper is that the right to change religions is generally prohibited - implicitly or explicitly- in almost all of these countries. It calls out the double standards practiced by many Islamic nations where the conversion from Islam to other religions is either legally banned or when it isn't, it becomes practically impossible for a Muslim to convert to any other religion. It has also focussed on how the blasphemy law, which is prevalent in most Islamic countries is used as the most potent legal instrument against minorities and is also used against other sects of the Islam — such as, against Baha'i, Ahmadiya, and also against the Shia in Sunni dominated countries.

In some countries such as Pakistan, there is the provision of the death sentence for blasphemy and in a constitutionally secular country like Turkey, there is no inclusiveness when it comes to minorities. With societies that are so deeply entrenched in religion and religious laws, it raises the question whether the minorities in these nations actually have equal civil and political rights. The findings of the study indicate that religious freedom is only available in restricted form even for the Muslim population of these countries.

The report also pointed out that institutional structures have a direct impact on the civil and political rights of a nation. None of the theocratic countries had met the three important conditions vital for ensuring strong citizenship rights: an independent judiciary, an independent press, and the separation of power.

These important guarantors of citizen rights are in weakened conditions in even those Islamic nations that have embraced democracy. This is evident in the fact that a non-Muslim can never become the head of the state, or head of the government. There are many kinds of implicit and explicit restrictions of varying degrees in religious matters in these countries.

On the contrary, in countries where there is secularism - —the separation of power between the State and religious authorities — in association with democracy — the situation was found to be conducive for a friendly atmosphere for civil and political rights. Though secularism is essentially a European construct, the important take away from this finding is that separation of power is important in ensuring a just and equal society.

When it comes to other religions, there are 35 Christian majority countries, which have more than 90 percent Christian population; This means that, altogether in 118 countries, the Christian population is in the majority. Out of 118 countries, 21 Christian dominated countries have a national church. This means that although they have not declared Christianity as their national religion, they are, nevertheless officially affiliated to it. All these nations have democratic form of government and the restrictions imposed on the population are mainly in the private sphere in areas like abortion. Many of these nations have strict laws on abortion which deprive women of their agencies and the way the societies function has several elements of patriarchy in it.

As far as Buddhist countries are concerned, there are eight countries which have a theocratic orientation. In most countries, there are some apprehensions regarding religious minorities in countries such as Sri Lanka as well as Thailand, Recently, the Myanmar government took strong military actions against the Rohingya Muslims of Myanmar, which forced most of them to flee from Myanmar. According to the findings of the report, apart from Myanmar, in all the other countries the status of human rights and minority rights is satisfactory.

It was found that in the three Hindu dominated countries – Nepal, India and Mauritius, the status of human minority rights

is comparatively better because of their liberal religious culture. In non-Islamic countries where the state of civil and political rights is not very good, it is because they are ruled by autocratic governments.

International Treaties

The international treaties that have been analysed in the report are the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the UN's Declaration on Minority Rights (UDMR).

The declaration of the charter of human rights is considered a big step for ensuring that individual rights are protected and human beings can lead a life of dignity in all circumstances. The West counts this amongst the biggest of its achievements and uses this often to interfere in the internal matters of a nation. However, this report exposes the double standards of the western nations in championing this cause and calls them out for their vested interests.

The CPA report states that countries like the UK and France which had an important role in the framing of the Declaration, were the biggest colonizers of the world and were repressing freedom movements in their colonies. It records how Eleanor Roosevelt (wife of President Roosevelt of the USA), Chairman of the Group on Human Rights, refused to include the 'blacks' as an America's national minority (ethnic minority), even though the blacks in America were facing massive discrimination at all levels of public life during that period. Many of the signatories had also kept their colonies intact despite signing the UDHR. The political and strategic interests of the powerful countries were prioritised at that time and over time, it became a powerful tool for the developed world to deny the ambitions of the developing countries. It rightly argues that such an approach has damaged the moral base of the UDHR.

The report has stated that the rights-based approach by the United Nations have a number of lacunae. It does not acknowledge that all countries are not educationally, economically, politically, and culturally homogeneous. Many of these nations were colonies of European powers until some

decades ago cannot be compared by that faced by the Western nations. In another observation, the report states that the Right to Religious Freedom in Article 18 of the UDHR is seriously flawed, as it does not give any kind of protection to non-proselytising religions from the universalising mission of Abrahamic religions. In fact, it implicitly validates cultural and religious annihilation of non-proselytising religions.

The report that also called out theocratic states that expresses concerns over the persecution of minorities in other countries. For example, Iran which represses its religious minorities expresses concerns over the plight of the Shia minority in other West Asian countries and government of Pakistan is silent regarding the persecution of Muslims in the Xinjiang province of China.

Suggestions

The report gives some pertinent suggestions which if implemented can ensure that religious minorities are not discriminated against any grounds. It has suggested that UDMR should be divided into two categories where the first category should include a minimum and mandatory list of rights; and the second category should include a desirable list of rights. Once a country implements most of the mandatory provisions of the UDMR in its own country, then the UN may issue a certificate to such a country which says, a 'UDMR Compliant Country'. In addition to this, the report has suggested that the UN may make a provision that only a UDMR compliant country would have the right to raise questions regarding the rights status of a minority of other countries.

The report brings to light the loopholes in the present covenant of the UN on the minorities which it has found to be impractical and unbalanced as it ignores some important issues relating to the minorities. Most importantly, the report states that the UN should proscribe its member countries from forming organizations on religious lines as it will pave the way for the regimentation of countries on religious lines. It has also suggested that the declarations of the UN should not be used as

strategic tools against strategic adversaries in order to exploit the vulnerabilities of other countries. This makes a mockery out of the concept of minority rights which does not benefit an international organisation like the UN.

In a scathing attack, the report argues that the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) does not have the moral or legal right to comment on issues relating to India's religious minorities as it is a communal organisation fully dedicated to protecting the interests of Muslims globally and also because it does not follow the UN Convention on minority rights.

As an important suggestion, it states that those religions which are working on the agenda of homogenising/universalising missions, need to be restrained through legislative and administrative measures as they intend to annihilate religious diversity in the world. It added that homogeneity culturally devastates affected societies.

The religious minorities of various countries were advised that they should not become 'others' in their own homeland by culturally and socially disassociating themselves from the cultural environment of their surroundings. But perhaps the most important suggestion given by the report was to view the issue of minorities not simply through the prism of rights but also duties. It is an important criterion to give the minorities a sense of belonging to a nation which will help become active and willing participants in the nation-building process.

The report has further suggested that in Muslim dominated nations, a special campaign is required to sensitise them towards the rights of religious minorities. It further observed that non-recognition of minorities is a big issue and needs to be addressed. It has suggested that a criterion should be determined at the international level to qualify for minority status in a country. It has said that the state should take action only in instances where there is a challenge to territorial integrity of a nation due to activities like insurgency.

Case Studies – Excerpts from the report

India

India is a nation of complex identities and has the presence of many minority religions. The country has six recognised religious minorities amongst which Muslims and Christians form the majority. In India, there are around 172.2 million Muslims — that is, more than ten percent of the total world population of Muslims — and around 27.8 million Christians. The report pointed to the fact that in India, the proportion of the minority population has increased continuously (percentagewise), while in the neighbouring nations of Pakistan and Bangladesh, there has been a continuous decline.

The huge and diverse number of religious minorities present in the country not only makes it unique but can give valuable insights to other countries and international organisations while framing policies for minorities. The report argues that India is a test case for the study of how minorities superimpose their custom, language, and culture over the majority community when in a dominant position, and how the majority community reacts to it, when it regains a dominant position.

The findings of the report that India is the most inclusive when it comes to religious minorities is substantiated with in-depth research of policies on minorities. All factors are analysed that ensure the rights of minorities in the country which on many occasions undermine the rights given to the majority community.

The report first analyses the articles in the Constitution of India like Article 14 which gives right to equality; Article 15 that forbids discrimination on the grounds of caste, religion, ethnicity, sex and colour; Article 29 that guarantees the protection of distinct language, script, and culture of the linguistic and religious minorities and Article 30 that gives the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice — that is, institutions for religious education. Further, the legal framework recognises the personal laws of religious minorities and makes special provisions of non-interference in

the matters of marriage, divorce, and the inheritance rights of religious minorities.

The report states that the provision of equality in the Constitution, with special concessions to religious minorities to follow respective religious laws, makes India's 'minority policy model' special. It stresses on the fact that such provisions do not exist in the legal and constitutional framework of any other country. They are in fact given more rights than the majority community. The rights given to minorities are not just restricted to the legal sphere, special provisions have been made in the social, educational, and cultural development of the minorities.

India allows a parallel education system for the religious education of the Muslims governed by the 'Madrasa Board' and there is a separate organisation to take care of the interests of the minorities, called 'the Commission for Minority Educational Institutions'. In addition to this, there is also a 'Minority Commission' which is a quasi-judicial body to hear the complaints of the minorities; and the 'Minority Finance Corporation' is also in place to support entrepreneurship of the minorities by financing it. Above all, there is a separate ministry as well as departments in most states of India with multi-sectoral programs and schemes for the religious minorities.

What makes the Indian situation unique is that in the "politics of appeasement" that has been followed by parties in power, the majority community was systematically denied its rights. Even within the minority community, the view that secularism is about non-interference in the affairs of any religious community has paved the way for gender discrimination and widespread patriarchy that is evident in religious practices that triple talaq and polygamy. It was only as late as 2017 that the Indian government outlawed the practice of triple talaq. But there still exists various practices that put women in an inferior position.

However, the biggest parameter which determines how the rights of majority have been undermined in the country is evident in Article 25 of the Constitution which grants the 'freedom of conscience and the free profession, practice, and propagation of religion'. The report argues that the propagation of religion is

“actually a euphemism for the right to convert. This provision in the Constitution converts what should remain an individual right to a group right and creates an opportunity that is in favour of those religion having an expansionist worldview. It essentially compromises the neutrality of the Indian State vis-à-vis religion and leans the Constitution towards organised religions.

However, when the West looks at India, this factor is never taken into consideration and neither it is compared to the situation in theocratic nations where there is no scope for conversions.

In fact, the report has brought to light, how institutions have played a role in legitimising conversions. In 1954, in the matter of *Ratilal Panachand Gandhi vs. the State of Bombay*, constitutional consent was given to organise religious conversions. However, in 1977, in the *Stanislaus vs. State of M. P.*, it was clarified by the Supreme Court of India that the right to propagate one’s religion does not grant the right to convert another person to one’s own religion, but to transmit or spread one’s religion by the ‘exposition of its tenets’. Here, the report stresses on the point that exposition of tenets of a religion would not serve any purpose and, therefore, religious conversion was bound to be its ultimate result.

When expansionist religion gets implicit constitutional legitimacy to the idea of conversion, it is the various sects of the Sanatan Dharma that bear the brunt as they are not conversion friendly and believe in the concept of embracing everyone and accepting differences. In a way, conversion stands for religious intolerance and it is indeed surprising that a country like India has given the legal nod for it.

Another point that the report raises is how can in a multi-religious society like India, constitutional provisions like Articles 29 and 30 that calls for non-discriminatory allocation of funds to minority educational institutions which impart pure religious education be considered a commendable act? This is an important point that needs to be pondered over and widely debated. The report calls for strict norms where the government takes an undertaking/affidavit from grantee institutions that they

will not teach anything that violates the dignity of any religion or religious practices.

It also stresses that the doubling of minority benefits should be avoided. In its survey, it found that a person gets categorised as a religious minority as well as a linguistic minority. This is especially true for the Muslim community as three languages associated with it - Arabic, Farsi and Urdu comes under the category of linguistic minority. Considering that hundreds of languages are spoken in India, it is easy to create the category of minorities on spurious grounds.

Also, it needs to be noted that Arabic and Farsi are essentially foreign languages and the report adds that Urdu's distinction from Hindi is spurious. To put an end to this practice, the report has made an important suggestion that the government should rationalise its definition of 'linguistic minorities and the status should be given only to those languages which are on the verge of extinction.

Apart from the constitutional rights, there are many exclusive programs and schemes for India's religious minorities. When it comes to affirmative action, the country follows a two-tier system. The first is general programs and schemes which cover all eligible people of India, irrespective of castes and religious affiliations. The second targets groups which are identity based, which include Scheduled Castes, Schedule Tribes, Other Backward Castes, and Six Religious Minority Religionists.

In addition to this, the government has a dedicated department to take care of the welfare of minorities, the Ministry of Minority Affairs. If the allocation of funds to this ministry is taken into consideration, then as per budgetary allocation for financial year 2021-22, it supersedes 34 Ministries/Departments in this respect. This is one of the important visible parameters that prove the government's approach towards minorities. Fact like this either go unnoticed or are deliberately hidden whenever attempts are made to spread the false narrative that India is a nation where minorities face discrimination.

The report has gone a step further to analyse how minorities fare when it comes to education. It was found that at the pre-matriculation level, if two groups of students are compared, per student support to school going (day scholars) SC students is Rs. 3,000, and to the hostel dweller, it is to the tune of Rs. 6,500, annually; a school going students (day scholar) of a minority community gets Rs. 3,500, and hostel dwellers get Rs. 10,000 annually.

In addition to this, the backward section of the minority communities also gets the benefits of the OBC reservation, under which 27 percent seats are reserved in government jobs as well as in admissions in educational institutions for the people belonging to the castes notified for inclusion in this group, irrespective of their religious affiliations. Besides, there is a 'National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions' (NCMEI) to take care of the institutional needs of the minority educational institutions, exclusively. If any action of the government affects the interests of these institutions, they can appeal to it as it is a quasi-judicial body. Till March 31, 2021, 13,579 educational institutions imparting educations at various levels have been accorded the status of 'Minority Educational Institutions' by the NCMEI.

It is important to note here that there is no such mechanism in place for the majority educational institutions. Minority institutions are given preferential treatment and the report rightly states that this will not serve the purpose of integrating India's religious minorities within its mainstream. In fact, this approach can breed a sense of victimhood in the majority community which can harm the secular polity of the country. The report has suggested that there is an urgent need for a policy that balances the interests of all religious communities of India. It has also pointed to the danger of the development of separatist tendencies when religious minorities get the upper hand. Right from the time of independence, India has been facing religion inspired insurgency as well as ideology inspired insurgency.

The rising discontent in the majority community is visible and they are slowly demanding that there be a relook at India's

flawed minority policy that is threatening the position of the majority community. A cause of growing apprehension is the activities of the Christian Missionaries that are engaging in widespread conversions to increase their numbers. Muslims are accused of for increasing their numbers by breeding more children, and through the facilitation of the migration of Muslims from other countries. Also, both these religions have international connections and international support.

The report has added that there is a rising fear that if this trend continues, India may become a battleground for the clash between Christianity and Islam because of the expansive character of both religions.

The report further states that at present, the sense of being in a disadvantageous position in their own country is acute in the minds of the majority community, which is being reflected in their political and electoral behaviour. This calls for immediate remedial measures as it is important to build a cohesive society. The declining trend in the percentage of the Hindu in the total population of India is also a cause for concern.

Another important issue that the report has brought to light is the conceptual ambiguity in defining secularism. In India, this word has been overused for political purposes and has become synonymous with blatant favouritism for religious minorities in the country's public policy discourse. The report draws several instances from history to question India's minority policy. An example is when Prime Minister of India, Jawahar Lal Nehru asserted in a meeting of the All India Congress Committee on 11 May 1958 that the 'communalism of the majority is far more dangerous than the communalism of the minority'.

Terming this an intrinsically faulty approach, the report asks how can one community's communalism be less or more dangerous than another community's communalism? It states that communalism in any form, practised by another religion is wrong. Such duality of approach will result in a never-ending cycle where the powerful community will always try to oppress the weaker ones. This historic baggage of India will have to be addressed if the current situation is to change.

What makes the situation worse, according to the report is that while most of the important religious trusts of the Hindus are under government control, the government follows the policy of no interference in minority religious trusts and organisations. However, the Muslim and Christian communities in India feel that the government is becoming intrusive on their internal issues with its incursion into Muslim personal laws and putting a control on the proselytising activities of missionaries and by tightening of the noose on FCRA. This makes it clear that India needs to rebalance its interests of all religious communities without aggrieving any community. The report calls for a reimagining of secularism so that it becomes morally more appealing.

The report also mentioned the protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) which was passed to give citizenship to the non-Muslim minorities of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh in an expedited manner. It says that the protests by the Muslim community was not only against CAA but was a manifestation

of accumulated anger starting from the enactment on ‘instant divorce’ (Triple Talaq), the ‘Scrapping of Special Status of J&K’, and the ‘Court’s Verdict on the Ayodhya Issue’. It reminds every one of the fact that the CAA in no way affected the interests of the Indian Muslims and was in fact India’s acknowledgement of its responsibility towards the religious minorities of the Indian subcontinent facing religious discrimination and persecution.

Further, the report analyses whether India has been able to establish an inclusive and amicable situation in the country; or, has it generated an acrimonious environment in the country when it comes to minority rights. It states that the experience of India shows that the compartmentalised approach (a religion cum social group specific policy) is making society less cohesive, thereby creating the ground for the clash identities.

Secondly, personal laws in general, and those of the Muslims in particular, because of their extensive application, have had a counter-productive impact on the social and educational

development of the community. This is because they cripple the freedom of Muslim women, and also ensure patriarchy in society. What aggravates this situation is that due to the Muslim Personal law, judiciary does not have the intervening power in a number of issues and the presence of a large number of religious educational institutions (Madrasas) deepens the undue influence of the clergy over Muslim society.

Despite the negatives, it can be affirmed that India's Constitutional and legal approach to its religious minorities is affirmative and inclusive. India's minority policy provides equality, policy of exceptions in matters of religion related issues and promotive measures. An example that the report cited which proves the status Muslims in the country is the enactment of CAA and the resulting demonstrations calling for the inclusion of Muslims too in that list.

Also, in India, persons belonging to religious minorities have been elevated to almost all important positions, from time to time, which is not the case in theocratic countries. In addition to this, the report has cautioned against the trend of many groups of the majority community trying to acquire the minority status. It states that if any tag becomes unnecessarily lucrative without serving any rational purpose, it only shows the lack of purposefulness and vision in policy formulation.

China

The government of China defines four categories of religious groups: officially sanctioned religions; unregistered groups; cults; and feudal superstitions. Five major religions are recognised nationally: Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Roman Catholicism, and Protestantism. Among these religions, religious practice is legal only in registered venues, and personnel and religious organisations must also be registered. As far as the religious demographic profile of China is concerned, it is as follows: Buddhist 18.2 percent; Christian 5.1 percent; Muslim 1.8 percent; Folk Religion (Confucianism, Taoism, etc.) 21.9 percent; Unaffiliated 52.2 Percent; and rest are others.

It is worth bearing in mind that officially China is an atheist state, it promotes Confucian thought. The report observed that China's insistence on nationalising all religions which are not considered by the Chinese establishment as indigenous have been drawing wide-spread criticism. Preserving their culture is so important to China that it has a provision in its Constitution, Article 36 which prohibits foreign domination of religion. Islam and Christianity are particularly affected by this as it bars especially the latter from carrying out its proselytising activities.

In addition to this, there is a provision that while constructing religious places, Chinese architectural style should be followed and all religious symbols with foreign connotations have to be indigenised. Such a policy comes under the 'Repressive Assimilation' model, the aim of which is to integrate religious minorities and its success and failure can provide lasting lessons to other Asian countries that are faced with the threat of cultural colonisation.

The report argues that even though the aim of China is to integrate its religious minorities into their mainstream, the Chinese model lacks the sophistication of Western countries. When the responses of religious minorities to these policy measures were studied, drastic differences emerged. The religious minorities of Shanghai and Beijing did not feel as much discrimination as do the religious minorities of Xinjiang province. Uyghur Muslims of the Xinjiang province are heavily repressed by the administration. Citing that they are involved in insurgencies, they are kept in special detention camps, separated from their family members.

However, what is interesting to note here is the stark contrast between China's official policy and their actions. China's Constitution states that none can be forced to follow a particular religion. Yet their model of treating religious minorities is guided more by security and strategic concerns and the repressive approach that the country has adopted goes against the very tenets of its Constitution. It is diametrically opposite to India's policy and the long-term consequences of this approach needs to further consideration.

Turkey

Turkey is among the most important countries of the Islamic world. The report discusses in detail the deep relation between religious intolerance and the rise of Turkish nationalism. It traces the nation's history beginning with the 1915 carnage of Armenian Christians by the Ottoman empire in which 1.5 million were massacred on allegations of not being loyal to the Ottoman empire. Since then, the status of minorities has remained a sensitive issue in Turkey. For those belonging to Islam, the concept of 'Ummah' — which means 'all the followers of Islam are united with each other in brotherly bonding' — have kept the Muslim population together.

In Ottoman empire, only religious minorities were recognised. The minority policy of that time was known as Millet system. This system had two broad categories of Millets: Muslims who were the ruling people (Millet-i Haque, 'those who hand down decisions'); and non-Muslims who made up the secondary group (Millet-I Mahkume, 'those about whom decisions are made'). The latter group were the minorities and had enjoyed considerable autonomy.

In contrast, when the Republic of Turkey was formed, it had embraced secularism and nationalism. There are many kinds of ethnic and religious minorities in Turkey, like: Alevism, Armenian, Assyrian, Greek (Rum) Christianity, (Sunni) Islam, and Judaism. Around 99 per cent of the population is Muslim, 80 per cent of whom are Sunni. The nation accepts only three non-Muslim groups as minorities: Armenians, Rum Orthodox Christians (Greeks), and Jews. They were also recognised by the Ottoman system. This means that other non-Muslim groups and ethnic minorities are not recognised.

Tukey follows the French model of secularism known as *laiklik*, in which State and Religion was strictly separated from each other. The Constitution of Turkey ensures that the secular character of the nation is maintained through Articles 14 and 24. While Article 24 protects the secular order of the Republic, Article 24 states that everyone has the freedom of conscience, religious belief and conviction and none shall be completed to

worship, take part in religious ceremonies or reveal his religious beliefs and convictions.

The report points out that this is an important provision with regard to Islamic nations as predominantly Islamic countries do not include this in their Constitution. However, there is a clause in the same Article that questions the secular credentials of Turkey as it states that ‘instruction in religious culture and morals shall be one of the compulsory lessons in the curricula of primary and secondary schools.’

In addition to the Constitution, minority rights are also protected by Articles 37–45 of the Treaty of 1923 - it was signed by representatives of Turkey on one side and by Britain, France and other countries on the other side. According to this, only non-Muslim communities are recognised as minorities and are granted the right to use their own language, the right of political and civic equality, the right to establish religious, educational, and social welfare institutions, and the right to freedom of religion, travel, and migration.

This treaty is often cited to limit the constitutional guarantee to only three minority groups: The Armenian Orthodox Christians, the Greek Orthodox Christians, and the Jews but even they do not have sufficient safeguards available to them and are often subjected to security issues and destruction of minority identity. As far as Muslim minorities like Alevism which is related to Shia Islam are concerned, they are forced to assimilate into the mainstream.

The report argues that this non-recognition of minorities is also the biggest lacuna of the country’s minority policy. Despite being a constitutionally secular country, its governing philosophy is guided by the Sunni philosophy of Islam. Such non-recognition of minorities and discrimination against them for being different makes for repressive assimilation. This contradiction is also seen in the legislation regulating the operation of religious minorities and mounts a serious challenge to religious freedom and religious intolerance in the country.

The report states that in practice, non-Muslim minorities enjoy restricted property rights, face interference in the management of their ‘foundation’ and a ban on training their own clergy. In Turkey, all religious institutions are subject to the formal Law on Foundations. The Law on Foundations reserves differential treatment to non-Muslim ‘community foundations’ and to Muslim ‘foundations.’

Again, when it comes to language rights, both recognised and non-recognised minorities face serious problems with respect to the right to education in their own language as instruction of minority languages is legal only in private educational institutions, and under strict conditions. They also have restrictions in obtaining broadcasting rights in minority languages.

Though Turkey was initially seen as a model state amongst the Islamic nations for adopting secularism and modern democratic values, this is no longer the case. They ate many contradictions in its polity and society that is affecting the rights of its minority population. In recent years, the country has started losing its secular credentials and is on a path to fulfilling its tacit goal of being a leader of the Islamic world. The report has warned that such a trend points towards further repression of minorities in Turkey.

EU countries

History has been a strong influencing factor in the way religion is perceived in Europe. The dissociation of politics and religion began with the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) and also ushered in a new era in the religious histories of Europe. The report states that post-2015, after the adoption of Sustainable Development Goals, policy formulation and evaluation embedded in an economic framework has enabled Europe to minimize the unintended consequences of religious policies and stands that national governments and other stakeholders take in policy implementation. The countries of the European Union (EU) have largely succeeded in keeping a distance from religious favouritism in constitutional and policy terms.

When the policies of the EU are analysed, then it becomes clear that there are multiple provisions to safeguard the rights of minorities. For instance, it ensures education of minorities in their own language, close monitoring of discrimination, funding for their betterment and engagement, promoting minority-friendly sensitisation, building up of social capital in societies, and policies for their constructive integration.

It also abides by international laws on religion or belief rooted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) as interpreted by the UN Human Rights Committee. The EU also recognises the freedom to not choose a religion and also adheres to the principle of non-discrimination. In addition to this, the EU also funds the promotion of this right outside the EU through various projects involving civil society actors.

Despite having a liberal policy that favours minorities on paper, various surveys conducted have made a few startling revelations. 48 per cent people in the EU (2018) felt that discrimination on religious grounds was a reality. 69 per cent people feel comfortable with an individual from a minority religion occupying the highest political office. However, this number drastically reduces if the colleague is a Muslim. Denmark and Belgium have higher than average number of people comfortable with Muslim colleagues as compared to the average, the Czech Republic (35 per cent), Hungary (37 per cent), and Lithuania (47 per cent), all of which seem most problematic.

The number of people comfortable with their children having a relationship with a Muslim is the lowest. Even though 11 countries have more than half of the population comfortable with such a relationship, 17 countries have less than half of the population comfortable with the same. The Czech Republic, Lithuania, Cyprus, Hungary, Slovakia, Latvia, and Greece have most problematic results, with 30 per cent or less population comfortable with the same. People are most comfortable in UK in this regard (Kantar, 2019, p. 96).

Since 2015, the trust towards Muslims in this regard has increased in 15 countries, overall, in the EU, Germany, Slovakia

and Slovenia. The situation has worsened in Portugal, Greece, and Hungary (Kantar, 2019, p. 100).

Various events from the department of Justice and Consumers under the European Commission to combat anti-Muslim hatred show that religious intolerance against the Muslims is a reality in Europe. The same events and funding by the European Union for the European Islamophobia Report, however, also show the political willingness of the EU to address this challenge in a constructive and engaging manner rather than use the strategy of disengagement and the persecution of Muslims followed by many countries, especially outside EU. It must be noted the EU does not have any control regarding how the EU countries treat their minorities.

Greece

The major minority in Greece is Muslim, which include 1) Muslims of Turkish origin (50 per cent); 2) Pomaks or Slavic-speaking (35 per cent); and 3) Roma (15 per cent). Apart from that, Albanians and Macedonians live in Greece but they have not been conferred the minority status implying the existence of systematic discrimination against minorities. The predominant reason why Greece refuses to recognise any minorities other than Muslims is due to its efforts to keep the Greece state intact and away from the influence of communities that have allegiance towards the neighbouring Republic of Northern Macedonia.

The report has cited that between 1959 and 2019, 15 cases of discrimination were reported to the European Commission of Human Rights from Greece, the second highest after Austria. Despite the fact that the Constitution of Greece puts no restriction on the election of a person belonging to any religion, half of the population is not comfortable with the fact that someone from the minority community occupies the highest elected political position in the country.

There have been instances of attacks by the majority community against minorities in recent years (post-2015). Despite this, there has been no instance of migration or even decline in the percentage of minorities due to religious persecution.

Greece has been reluctant to ratify the EU convention: The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) or signed the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, which it signed in 2018. This shows that, despite laws, the political will in Greece is not necessarily protective of minorities as expected by the EU and practiced by many other EU countries.

France

France is a nation that has suffered a lot due to religious fundamentalism. Ever since Macron returned to power, the focus has been on ensuring economic change in the country and policies have been streamlined in favour of the logic of inclusion of human resource and the cost of excluding people from contributing to the economy. However, the government does not show any sympathy to activities of religious extremism.

After 2015, Muslims in France had to bear the consequences of the incidents of Islamic terrorism. It has been claimed that Muslims need to apply twice as much as Christians to gain employment because of severe discrimination in terms of economic opportunities. However, the French government has time and again expressed its belief that discrimination promotes radicalisation which in turn leads to more extremism.

Therefore, in order to maintain peace and promote sustainable economic growth, there should be no discrimination so that everyone can contribute to the optimum. Thus, the government's anti-discrimination approach is economic rather than religious. The report found that 87 per cent of the French people are totally comfortable to work with Muslim colleagues and 5 per cent are moderately comfortable. Only 5 per cent find it uncomfortable to work with Muslim colleagues which is low as compared to many other EU countries.

It is worth noting that even before this approach was adopted, the French values of individualism were not considered to be in harmony with collectivist values of other religions, especially Islam, which not only believe in practicing but rather in imposing the collectivist culture on everyone. This has posed a

major challenge to the French constitution which bans all “signs and behaviour” that reveal a religious faith of an individual explicitly in order to save the country from getting divided into diverse groups on antagonistic faith and ethnicity-based groups. The country does not collect data on the basis of religion presuming that doing so would imply discrimination and claiming individual benefits on the basis of religious faith would mean artificial equality.

In 2019, about 42 per cent Muslims in general and 60 per cent women wearing head scarves in France claim to be discriminated. On the other hand, 44 per cent women without head scarves reported discrimination too. Dealing with police, employment and renting or buying accommodations are the most common areas where anti-Muslim behaviour is observed the most.

Young Muslims (between 30 to 40 years of age) and women (46 per cent) more than men (38 per cent) have been experiencing anti-Muslim discrimination the most. Apart from this, discrimination towards other religions and races (based on skin colour) has also been reported in France, but considerably less as compared to discrimination against Muslims. 69 per cent of the French believe that religious discrimination is widespread in France whereas 27 per cent say it is not.

The report argues that the French problem with Islam appears to be the intolerance in Islam towards others rather than French intolerance towards it. The fact the wearing of hijab in public by Muslim women and the building of mosques became contentious issue indicate this. According to French notions, the effort of Muslims to integrate into the French society in their manner has posed a unique threat to the country’s idea of individual freedom and goes against its basic tenets.

Germany

Germany has been a leader in Europe in accepting immigrants and people from different religious groups in the last decade. However, the German state recognises only four minorities officially including: Danes, Frisians, German Sinti and Roma

and Sorbs. The German Constitution (1949) treats all people equal before law and prohibits any discrimination or spreading of hatred on the basis of religion. Judiciary is based on secular principles and there is no room any kind of religious law.

The official national minorities receive special protection and funding from the German state and are allowed to use their language in law, administration and education wherever they have been living traditionally (specifically mentioned by law at respective places) in Germany. In addition to this, like many countries of the EU, Germany also does not register, review or contest” any specific data about minorities. Religion remains strictly in the private sphere and everyone has a right to choose their religion at the age of fourteen years.

As per the Eurobarometer Report, 2019, a majority (52 per cent) of the people in Germany believe that religious discrimination is rare whereas a considerable number (43 per cent) believe the opposite. Majority of people, i.e., 64 per cent find it comfortable to have a person from a religious minority as an elected head of the country; 68 per cent find it comfortable to work with a Muslim colleague; and 51 per cent find it fine if their children are in a relationship with a Muslim person.

However, there are certain practices which point to how deeply entrenched Christianity is in the German society. Sunday is a holiday with even supermarkets closed, flowing from the past Christian tradition. Similarly, despite the fact that the German constitution mentions equal status to all religions, there are limited provisions for funding religious institutions as there is no official tax to fund their independent functioning unlike the Church Tax which ensures free functioning of the Church.

Religious minorities, especially Islam face problems in gaining benefits under the PLC provisions. In cases of conflict, German traditions which flows from Christianity automatically prevails. All these indicate that the equality policy and non-discrimination in Germany, especially when Islam is concerned is largely symbolic.

The report argues that in effect, Germany does not leave space for unnecessary appeasement of religious minorities which might lead to problems for the integration of German state in the long run. The German approach shows how religious practices become a part of common culture gradually.

Poland

Poland which has the title of “Rome’s most faithful daughter” has a dark history of persecution of Jews by Nazi Germany and death and flight of non-Catholics, especially Germans, during and after the World War-II. Even though Poland has no state religion, it is probably the most religious country in Europe (WIN/Gallup International polls 2015) with about 125 registered faith groups and religions by 2018 (Polish Statistical Office).

The Roman Catholic Church predominates the religious landscape with about 92.9 per cent Poles (2015 Census). Apart from that, Eastern Orthodox Church and Protestant Church are other major religious denominations. Since Poland is pretty homogenous in terms of religion, the minorities in the country are defined on the basis of ethnicity and not necessarily religion. But religious discrimination prevails in the country.

Muslims and Jews are the two most targeted religious minorities in Poland. Out of the 15 religious groups in the country, marriages performed by 11 are accepted without registration at the civil office but the marriage performed under Mariavite and the Old Eastern Orthodox Churches, Muslim and Karaim faiths need registration at a civil office. Registration of religious groups makes them eligible for holding bank accounts and property. The Polish Constitution gives the freedom to practice and profess (including in schools) one’s own religion in private or public and limits this only when it is a threat against the public law and order situation. All religious institutions have equal rights.

The Church has an expanding influence that covers almost all aspects of political and social lives of the Polish. Few years ago, a new curriculum in schools was targeted and changed under the influence of the Polish Church as the content was not completely in accordance to the Roman Catholic faith. The issue was related

to LGBTI. During the refugee crisis too, Poland denied to accept, any refugees (especially Muslims) other than Roman Catholics in order to maintain the homogeneity in the population. The report further states that the Polish state uses the media to cover specific anti-Muslim news. In several instances, the police inactivity was alleged to support anti-Muslim sentiments in the country.

Discrimination against the Jews is another major issue in Poland. Radio Marijya, a dedicated radio channel telecasts news and information filled with hatred against the Jews in the country. The insistence on religious homogeneity and a congruent Polish cultural identity is so strong in Poland that anti-EU sentiments in Poland often gain ground when EU guidelines fall against the Roman Catholic faith in Poland.

Spain

Spain is the 16th most religious country of Europe. The rise of anti-Muslim sentiments has become a cause of concern. The Spanish Ministry of Interior (2019) claimed a 120 per cent increase in hate crimes including religious crimes in 2017 as compared to 2016. Out of these religious crimes, more than 95 per cent were related to Anti-Muslim sentiments, primarily fuelled by the far right and the neo-nazis. Catalonia is the most explosive region in relation to such crimes where the majority of Muslim population in Spain resides.

The report found that it is not only social media that is flooded with hate against Muslims but Spanish media programmes and articles have overwhelming components with an anti-Muslim tinge. There has been systematic denial of the Islamic legacy in Spain. Spanish elections and the anti-Spanish sentiments in Catalonia are considered as the major reasons behind it. In fact, during recent elections in 2019, promises were made by the far right to ensure the re-conquest of Spain from rising number of Muslim population and rise of Islam, reiterating the victory of Christian rulers in 1492 over more than 700 years of Islamic rule in Spain.

Though the Spanish Constitution gives equal rights and religious freedom to all, 40 per cent Spaniards believe that religious discrimination is widespread in the country whereas 58 per cent believe that it is not. 83 per cent are comfortable with an elected head from a minority community whereas only 3 per cent are uncomfortable with the same. 81 per cent are comfortable to work with Muslim colleagues, only 5 per cent are uncomfortable. 16 per cent are uncomfortable if their children are engaged in a relationship with a Muslim person whereas 62 per cent are comfortable and 13 per cent are moderately comfortable.

This reveals that there are two dominant trends in relation to religion – one section which mainly consists of the elderly have strong anti-Muslim sentiments, the young population appears to think in a post-religious framework.

Sweden

Freedom of religion was enshrined in the Swedish Constitution since 1951 but religious communities in Sweden have not been treated equally by law till 2000 as the Lutheran Church of Sweden has been the state religion till then. The situation began to change only after Sweden joined the EU in 1995 and was bound by the treaty to end all kinds of discrimination.

In the year 2000, the Church of Sweden and the Swedish State got dissociated, thus putting a stop on the necessary Church membership of every Swede by birth. All religious communities can collect contributions through the tax system by paying a certain fee but the Church of Sweden is exempt for the same since it does not receive any extra support from the state, unlike others, who might apply for state funding based on their membership and necessities.

The report states that Sweden today, is one of the most non-religious countries in the world. Despite the fact that about 56 per cent of the Swedes consider discrimination on the basis of religion or beliefs to be widespread and 42 per cent consider it to be rare, only 19 per cent people claim to be religious. Sweden stands fourth in the World and second in Europe after Estonia

which tops the list of non-religious countries in Europe (WIN/Gallup International polls 2015).

The Church of Sweden has also adopted a liberal and inclusive approach towards social change and issues like the right to abortion or having children without marriage are rarely discussed. In 2009, same-sex marriages were legalised by law in Sweden and the Church of Sweden followed the suit by allowing such marriages to take place in the church, just like all other marriages. While religious education is compulsory in schools, it is not limited to the teachings of one religion only.

About 87 per cent of the Swedes are comfortable with the colleagues from Muslim faith at work while only 5 per cent are not. It is therefore clear that the most people in the Sweden do not think in a religious framework and religion is just one small alternative personal freedom that should left at the individual's discretion. Despite the fact that about 66 per cent of the Swedes are comfortable with their children engaging in a relationship with a Muslim and only 16 per cent are not comfortable, Islam has been identified as a regressive religion in Sweden. Issues like the oppressed condition of women, the barriers created by Muslim schools against integration of Muslims in the Swedish society are relevant in this.

The Swedish state has been protecting minorities in different ways, for instance by facilitating revenue collection for them and granted asylum to Chinese Uighur Muslims against the persecution they faced in China. The Prime Minister has been publicly vocal against religious persecution and any form of discrimination and the government has been funding religious groups.

The minorities can practice their religion in private or with others and therefore, the Swedish approach can be considered liberal. The Ombudsman is vigilant about the cases of discrimination and such discriminations are taken seriously. The National Minorities and Minorities Languages Act, 2010 gives minorities, right to information, protection of language and culture, and right to participate and influence.

Comments

The attempt by CPA in bringing out an inclusive Global Minority Report is commendable as it has exposed many nations that often take a high moral ground in criticising nations by overlooking the complexities of different religions and cultures. Many of these nations of the West that fault the Asian nations for “religious intolerance” do not have a single leader from any of their minority communities and the oath of allegiance that the leaders take often have a majoritarian religious connotation to it. The report has also rightly pointed out that banning of any sects is the against the very idea of secularism that the western nations have been propounding for so long.

Here, it is important to consider another report that was released by the U.S. Commission for International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) just two weeks after the release of the Global Minority Report. In its six-page report, it has recommended that the U. S. Department of State designate India as a “country of particular concern” for engaging in or tolerating systematic, ongoing, and egregious religious freedom violations, as set forth by the International Religious Freedom Act. It has further claimed that the Indian government continues to enforce policies targeting the minorities and continues to suppress critical voices. It has also referred to the anti-CAA protests to substantiate its point that minorities in India are not given a voice to raise their concerns.

What is interesting in such exercises by the West is that they seem to forget their history as well as their present. The severe crushing of the Black Lives Matter movement has claimed at least 25 lives in 2020¹, whereas in India, a peaceful protest was allowed to take place and a platform was given to the minorities to voice their concerns. The West often ignores the ground realities, possibly to suit a particular narrative that they want to spread. By calling India, an “intolerant nation,” it not only exposes its lack of understanding of the multiple layers involved

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/31/americans-killed-protests-political-unrest-acled>

in India's minority policy but also exposes the clear biases that it has against countries which have stood the test of time despite the religious heterogeneity.

As the report rightly states, India has topped the list of inclusiveness due to two major reasons – (i) only in the Constitution of India are there special and exclusive provisions for the cultural and educational promotion of religious minorities; (ii) India is the country where there is no ban on any sects of any religions, unlike in many other countries.

In fact, as stated in the report, India's minority model essentially focusses on the promotion of diversity and what is needed is in fact a rationalisation of the current policies to ensure that both the majority and minority have equal rights. Yet when the West analyses the condition of religious minorities in India, these facts are conveniently overlooked and they have no qualms in coming out with a report based on superficial claims and isolated incidents. Due to this, the various factors analysed in the report are an eye opener to the way facts are often twisted to portray many Asian countries in a negative light.

In this regard, the various suggestions put forth in the report should be viewed with utmost seriousness as they will help eliminate many biases when it comes to religious communities across the world. The gap between what is on paper and the actions of countries need to be eliminated if true equality should prevail. However, having said this, the differences will be truly erased only if religion strictly remains as a private affair of the citizens. The ideal world is where religions stop holding an expansionist view and the state does not interfere in the private realm.

This report is a welcome start that has flagged many issues and has suggested ways to address them. But there needs to be a wider debate and more countries should come out with their own perspectives to make the world a truly inclusive place for all religions. More countries should be made stakeholders in this initiative to gain a wider perspective and offer more solutions to policy concerns.

Annexure

In this report, a discussion of 110 countries has been included. The main criterion of selection of the countries is they should have a minimum population of one million. Some countries, which should have been included because of the population criteria, have been removed from this report because available data for these countries was either not credible, or not sufficiently available. However, in the list of 110 countries, Maldives has been included as an exception, even though it does not fulfil the population criteria of the report.

The indices used to determine the condition of the minorities are the following:

I. The State Religion Neutrality Index

This is being prepared to assess the neutrality level of a State on the issues relating to religious minorities. The performance of a country is assessed on a scale of 1 to 100. The more a State favours the majority community of a country, the lesser is it likely to get a good indexing value; the more a country favours its religious minority, the higher the value it gets on the indexing scale.

Of the 110 countries analysed, 54 countries come under very high range — which means the Constitution, the laws, and the State policies of these countries are either fully neutral, or are negligibly biased against religious minorities, or there are a few biases which do not affect them adversely. However, in the 29 countries which fall under the high range, the State has some preference for majority religionists, but this has either no, or only negligible, impact on the religious minorities. 13 countries fall in the medium category, which means that the leaning of the State is not only favourable to the religious majority in these countries but it also imposes some sort of restrictions on the religious minorities.

As far as the low category is concerned, there are 14 countries where religious minorities have to face several restrictions. In some of these, they also face severe persecution. In these countries, opportunities for religious minorities are restricted,

particularly in the political field. Even though there is a democratic system of governance, a person belonging to a religious minority cannot become Head of State. This is ensured by inserting implicit provisions in the laws and the Constitution which makes it almost impossible for other religionists to become Head of State.

II. The State Inclusive Index

The purpose of assessing the ‘State Inclusive Index’ is to assess the level of inclusiveness of religious minorities in a country. This also has been measured on a scale of 1 to 100. The more a country is inclusive towards its religious minorities, the more indexing values it gets; the less it is inclusive towards religious minorities, the less index value it is supposed to get on the indexing scale.

The inclusiveness levels of 110 countries have been assessed on the basis of 8 variables. As is natural, on the State Minority Inclusiveness scale, the performance of 110 countries has been different. Altogether, there are 36 countries which fall in a very high range category; this means that, on an average, they are highly inclusive of religious minorities. 44 countries, out of 110 countries, fall in the high category of countries, which means that they are reasonably inclusive. However, the religious minorities of these countries are not inclusive in at least two respects. 24 countries fall in the medium category of inclusiveness, and 6 countries fall in the lowest category of inclusiveness.

III. The State Discrimination Index

The State Discrimination Index has been prepared to assess how discriminatory the Constitution, the laws, and policy of the State is towards its religious minorities. This is also measured on a scale of 1 to 100. The more a State is discriminatory towards its religious community, the more indexing value it gets, it shows higher level of discrimination by a State, which mean a State is more negatively biased against its religious minorities. Lower indexing values indicate a lower level of discrimination towards religious minorities.

The assessment of discrimination levels against religious minorities in 110 countries has been done on the basis of 10 variables. Of 110 countries, 68 countries have low levels of discrimination while some countries pursue a highly discriminatory policy against their religious minorities, although their reasons for doing so are not always religious. There are many instances when discrimination against religious minorities takes place because of non-theocratic reasons, as is the case of China at present.

However, there are large number of countries in which discrimination takes place because of religious reasons, such as Afghanistan, Maldives, Iraq, Egypt, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Ivory Coast, Morocco, Sudan, Libya, Nigeria, Iran, besides many others. As far as the nature and extent of discrimination is concerned, it is varied and is practiced variously.

IV. The Global Minority Index

The Global Minority Index is the composite index, which is the geometric mean of the indexing values of ‘State Religion Neutrality Index’, and the ‘State Inclusiveness Index’. On the basis of the combined values of both, the ‘Global Minority Index’ has been prepared, and ranking of 110 countries has been done.

Of the 110 countries, religious minorities in 41 countries do not face lack of inclusiveness, and the governments of these countries are, by and large, either neutral, or do not discriminate against religious minorities. Those countries which fall in this category have certain Constitutional provisions, or have State policies that are only discriminatory in political matters, but are otherwise either fully inclusive, or State policies give some small favours to majority religionists but are otherwise fully inclusive in matters of economic opportunity.

They also grant reasonable levels of religious freedom. Such countries belong in the high category. Altogether, 42 countries fall in this category. Those countries whose performance is in the medium range are because their religious minorities have to face restrictions and discrimination not only in political but also in

religious matters. They can also face certain kinds of persecution. Of 110 countries, 17 countries fall in the medium range.

The last category is of those countries where religious minorities have to face many kinds of discrimination, and the level of inclusiveness is very low. These are countries which are generally theocratic and, because of theocratic reasons, religious minorities of these countries have to face discrimination in multiple areas; their religious freedom is restricted, and they have to face many kinds of persecution because of their religious affiliations. Altogether, eight such countries have been identified in this report, belonging to the low category.

As far as the reliability of the data (on the basis of which the indexing of the countries has been done) is concerned, Cronbach's Alpha coefficient (α) is 0.91, and proves that the data used is reliable. Correlation coefficient value 0.80 between the State Religion Neutrality Index and the State Inclusive Index shows a direct and positive relation.

G20 Countries

The G20 is one of the most important groups of countries which came into being in 1999. It includes the top twenty economies of the world. Since G20 countries include almost all big countries in terms of economy and population, it is important to know how they treat their religious minorities. Barring China and Saudi Arabia, almost all G20 countries are either fully functional, or reasonably democratic, and roughly two-third of the world's population lives in these countries.

The majority of these countries are secular, and they have an independent judiciary. But two countries — Italy and China — fall in the medium category of countries in the State Religion Neutrality Index. This is because Italy tilts towards the Catholic sect of Christianity, although it gives religious freedom to its religious minorities. Non-Catholic Christians cannot become the Head of State in Italy. In China, its judiciary is neither independent nor a powerful part of the system of governance.

Thus, it is in no position to provide any kind of succour to its religious minorities from State persecution.

As far as Saudi Arabia is concerned, it is an autocratic and theocratic country. The combination of both creates the most hostile situation for civil and political rights. Being an Islamic State, religious freedom is severely restricted for non-Islamic religionists. As a result, whether it is the religious neutrality index or the inclusiveness index, its performance is the lowest among all the G20 countries.

As far as the overall performance of the countries is concerned, the performance of 11 countries on the Composite Indexing Scale (SRNI+ SII) is in the very high range, although even within this category, there are differences in the actual performance of the countries. However, they are by and large inclusive, and they adopt a neutral policy towards their respective religious minorities. Six countries fall in the high range, which means that they do not follow any highly discriminatory policies against their religious minorities. One category falls in the medium range, and one in the low range, which means that the religious minorities of these countries are either being discriminated against or face some kinds of persecution by the State.

Among all the G20 countries, India stands first in the State Inclusiveness Index as well as in the State Religion Neutrality Index. South Korea stands second in SRNI as well as in the State Inclusiveness Index. In this category, Japan also joins India and Korea. In the overall indexing of the G-20 countries, Japan stands third, and the USA is in the 4th position. However, in the inclusiveness index, the USA is in the second position.

Countries like South Korea and India are highly religiously neutral countries as the judiciary is secular in nature. The Constitution advocates a separation between the State and religion, and States do not favour any religion in particular, and adopt an equal yardstick for all. There is no religious restriction for the top posts of the States. Saudi Arabia is a comparatively low religiously neutral country in which spreading religion is illegal.

The highly inclusive countries among the G20 nations are India, Japan, South Korea, USA, Canada, Germany, UK, France, Brazil, Argentina, Indonesia, South Africa, and Australia. The reasons behind this are that even after having gone through so much struggle in the past, these countries have ended up with an inclusive kind of environment, and the law and order are unbiased for everyone. This makes it possible for people of various ethnicities to live in harmony. Among all G20 countries, India is the only country where distress migration of the majority community has taken place from a part of India (Jammu & Kashmir).

A comparative analysis of the State Discrimination Index among G20 countries, shows that Saudi Arabia and China are more discriminating when compared to other G20 countries. In Saudi Arabia, the government does not validate religious minority status to any community. In China, the difference between constitutional provisions and the actual laws of the land is huge: while the Constitution advocates freedom of religion, the Chinese government has been systematically intimidating different religious groups and their activities.

Lekshmi Parameswaran is a Research Associate at India Policy Foundation. An alumna of Jawaharlal Nehru University, she has been writing on policy issues in South Asia for more than a decade.



भारत नीति प्रतिष्ठान
India Policy Foundation

D-51, Hauz Khas, New Delhi-110016 (India)

Tele : +91-11-26524018

E-mail : info@ipf.org.in, indiapolicy@gmail.com

Website: www.ipf.org.in