

# **MINORITIES IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE MUSLIM AND CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES**

## **Author**

**Sebastian Joseph Vempeny SJ**

## **Supervisor**

**Prof. Aktarul Wassey**

Department of Islamic  
Studies

Jamia Millia Islamia

The thesis is divided into seven chapters, the first chapter traces the history of Christian-Muslim minorities in India. Muslims had come to India as traders in the seventh century and then as political rulers. By 13th century Muslim rule and the religion of Islam was established in India. Now India has the second largest Muslim population in the world.

Prior to Islam, the followers of the Christian religion were found in India, in its southern parts. St. Thomas, one among the twelve apostles of Jesus is believed to have come to the present state of Kerala and founded a community of Christian believers there around 52 A.D. Later on with the coming of the colonial powers, and during the same time there were several missionary institutions coming to India to preach the message of the Gospel of Christ.

In the second chapter, the study deals with the population, occupation, education and institutions of Muslims and Christians in India. It is known that by the year 2001, the country's population crossed the 1.02 billion mark.

Then Muslim community is the largest minority community in India. Most Muslims are economically and educationally still backward and hence face many problems in their daily living. And most Muslims especially Muslim women still do not receive adequate school education.

The Christian situation is also not much different than the Muslims, but in regard to education the community as a whole have made some progress, though still they too are much behind the expected standards of education and living. The occupational and employment level of both urban and rural Christians is low like those among the Muslim community.

Chapter three of the thesis deals with social stratification among Muslims and Christians in India. The oneness and equality in Muslim community as well as Christian community attracted many Indians, to these faiths, many of whom were discriminated and excluded on the basis of ascribed pollution. They adopted Islamic and Christian faiths, and in becoming Muslims or Christians they could pray in the same mosque or the church at the same time together with other faithfuls. However in social, economic and political spheres both Muslims and Christians are stratified on the basis of power, function, knowledge and status and at times face discrimination within their own respective

communities.

Chapter 4 deals with the position of Christian–Muslim minorities in India. In this section the general status of minorities in India, taking into account the fact that India is a secular democratic republic, is discussed. The constitution of India has various provisions for the safety and protection of minorities in India. Yet today at the dawn of the third millennium Muslims and Christians in India are being attacked and their identity and patriotism is challenged by the rise of the militant Hindu religious and cultural nationalist's attempts to introduce a one nation, one religion, one culture and one people concept of nationhood where the status minorities will be secondary.

The fifth chapter describes the contribution of Muslims and Christians in India. As inhabitants of India, patriotic to their motherland and true to their religious beliefs, Christians and Muslims of India have lived, worked, died and continue to live in this land sharing their lives with the rest of India.

Chapter 6 of the study brings out the impact of communalism on Christian–Muslim minorities. There is a kind of sectarian and divisive ideology currently operative in India based on a communal interpretation of history that denies the cultural diversity and religious pluralism that are the characteristic to India. Such communal ideologies in India believe that the people of different religions of the land—Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, or Christians—form distinct communities for religious as well as for other socio-economic and political purposes, and therefore are mutually antagonistic to each other.

Chapter 7 recommends promotion of inter-faith understanding through dialogue for national harmony and minority welfare. Islam, Christianity, Hinduism and all other religions are expressions of human longing for the transcendence. Inter-faith dialogue for the purpose of removing communal antagonism, generating good will and establishing mutual trust is a must and should occur at all levels, including at the level of individuals, faith groups, large communities and nationally. Finally the study says that Indian society can be united and progressing in tune with modernity only on the basis of a value system, which all its members can share and such a value system can only emanate from the secular, democratic, multi-religious, and humanistic tradition of this country.