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## SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITION OF NEPALESE AND INDIAN MUSLIMS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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### Abstract:

*Socio-economic condition is an important indicator to measure the development level of any community and a nation as well. This paper compares the socio-economic condition of Nepalese and Indian Muslims. Muslims are one of the highly disadvantaged, marginalized and excluded minority groups with distinct religious and cultural identities both in Nepal and India. They have been excluded in terms of social, economic, educational and political institutions as well as other decision-making levels of the state. Historically, they have been ignored by the state and excluded from the mainstream development processes due to their origin, religious minority status and territorial/regional identities in both countries of Nepal and India.*

### KEYWORDS:

Social, Economic, Muslim, Education, Participation, Representation, Exclusion, Inclusion, identity, Minority, Institution, Disadvantaged groups, Marginalization.

### INTRODUCTION:

Nepal is a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi religious, democratic, landlocked country with diverse bio-diversity, ecosystem, geographical landscape and cultural heritages. Geographically, the country has been categorized into three regions such as the Mountain, Hill and the Terai region. The mountain region contains 35 percent land with 7.3 percent of the nation's population. The hill region contains 42 percent of the land with 44.3 percent of the total population, and the Terai region covers 23 percent of the land with 48.4 percent of the population of the country.

Culturally, Nepal is a mosaic of many different cultures, languages and religions. There are more than 101 castes/ethnic groups, 59 indigenous nationalities, 8 religious groups and 92 language groups with the total population of 23,151,423 (CBS, 2001).

Muslims are one of the highly marginalized and excluded minority groups in both countries of Nepal and India. Muslims constitute 4.3 percent of the national population in Nepal and 13.4 percent of the total population in India (Census, 2001). Muslims are spread over almost all the 72 districts of Nepal. Yet, more than 95 percent of the total Muslim population of Nepal is living in only 19 districts of Terai (CBS, 2001)

In Nepal, the Muslims have long been ignored by the state. Historically, Muslims are one of the economically highly marginalized and socio-politically excluded groups in Nepal. Various factors have been contributed to place the Muslims as a disadvantaged group. The nature of centralized state governance structures, the government's melting pot policy and other discriminatory practices such as the caste system and non-recognition of Madrasa education in the country has contributed to the exclusion of these communities in the past.

Nepal has remained a Hindu state for the last decades and has been ruled by the high caste, Brahmins. In the past, the state has imposed one religion, one language and a one culture policy in Nepal. Nepali has long been the only national and official language and mode of education in Nepal. Of course,

Urdu is the mode of education in Madrasas throughout Nepal and Urdu is a lingua Franca majority of Muslims residing in different linguistic zones. Linguistically, the Muslims are a minority group and it has its own disadvantage in facing an adverse situation in education, employment and administration.

In India, Muslims are the largest minority community in the country. They are not only the largest minority community, but their presence is visible in all the states and union territories. Nonetheless, discrimination, social stagnation, and educational marginalization have cumulatively resulted in growing economic backwardness of the Muslims in large parts of the country (Sikand, 2006, cited in Mainuddin, 2011:124). This largest minority community has been relegated to the lowest socio-economic stratum amongst all religious minorities in the post-independent India. Muslims had been the victims of a process of invidious discrimination. As considerable evidence exists, a process of marginalization of minority communities exists in almost all societies and there is nothing to warrant that the same is not true of Muslims in India to a greater or a lesser degree (Ahmad, 2007). The socio-economic condition of Muslims has not improved much before and after the independence. Among all the religious communities, Muslims are economically marginalized and politically under-represented community in Indian society (GOI, 2006).

The Muslims of Nepal and India have largely been excluded from the decision-making levels of the state. Therefore, they have been deprived of the opportunity to articulate their needs and priorities through forming government policy in their favor. Thus, due to their exclusion from decision-making and policy making frameworks, they have remained poor, illiterate and exploited in both countries. The adverse effects of unequal opportunities and a political power, on development, or even more damaging because the educational, economic, social and political disadvantages are reinforced repeatedly across generations. In this backdrop, this research paper examines the social exclusion and their present socio-economic situation of Muslims in Nepal and India.

#### RESEARCH METHODS AND TOOLS

This research paper is a part of a larger study on the Role of Education in Social Inclusion Muslims in Nepal. This study was carried out in Banke district of Nepal and Bahraich district of Uttar Pradesh (UP), India in 2011.

Banke district of Nepal, which has a high percentage of Muslim population, was purposively selected for this in-depth field study. Furthermore, the study areas in the respective districts were selected based on the high concentration of Muslim population. Thus, Jaispur, Puraini Village Development Committees (VDCs), and the Nepalgunj Municipality from Banke district were selected. Additionally, 4 wards from Jaispur, 2 wards from Puraini and 2 wards from Nepalgunj municipality were selected. Similarly, Saijana Panchayat, Laharpurwa from Baharaich district of India was also selected for the study.

For the household survey, out of the total households of the sampled VDCs, 30 percent or 350 households were selected from Banke district of Nepal and 50 households were selected from the Laharpurwa village of Bahraich district of India. The key informants, focus group participants and individuals for case studies were selected through a snowball-sampling method.

Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were applied in this study. The quantitative information on socio-economic and political condition of Muslims was collected through household surveys with the help of a structured questionnaire. The qualitative information was collected through focus group discussions, key informant interview, case studies to supplement the individual household, and community level data. The field methods were designed to obtain information from the perspective of excluded households and groups.

#### SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITION

Socioeconomic status is an assessment of a person's education, occupation and income position within a particular social system (Eshleman and Cashion, 1985). Likewise, socio-economic status attainment refers to the achievement of persons' relative position of education, occupation and income within that particular social system. This paper focuses on a comparison of socioeconomic and educational condition between the Nepalese and Indian Muslims. For this, only the main indicators such as socio-demographic (age and sex composition, religion, mother tongue, marital status), economy (occupation, land holding, income and expenditure) and educational (literacy rate, educational attainment, flow of children in the different education system and access to educational institutions are presented and discussed.

Muslims constitute a sizable number of national populations (13.4 percent) in India and of which 22 percent is in Uttar Pradesh, which is the highest Muslim populated state in India. The Muslim population

in Nepal is lower in number in comparison to India. The total Muslim population of Nepal is only 4.2 percent of the total population of which 21 percent is in Banke district, the highest Muslim populated district of the country. The Muslims in Nepal and India reside across the country, and yet their concentration varies substantially.

During the study period, the majority of the respondents were Males in both countries due to their religious and cultural constraints and sensitivity. In the study area of Nepal, 40 percent represents the population below 14 years age group or known otherwise as dependent age group, 4.6 percent comprise a population of 60 or above years of age, and 55.6percent represents the economically active population, which is lower than the national average of 60.3percent. Likewise, in the similar age category, the Indian Muslim population is 45.4percent, 6.8percent, and 38.6percent respectively. School going age children between 5-14 years population is 31.1percent in Nepal and 29percent in India.

Among the Muslims, a proportion of the Muslim elderly population is lower than the national average, which shows that their life expectancy is lower than the national average due to their low level of education, low income, low paid occupation and lack of health awareness and facilities in the study areas and accumulated stresses.

It is also found that an average household size among the Muslims in the study area is higher than the national average in both countries due to the restriction of family planning, early marriage and polygyny (the last one indicator being however negligible). Early marriage is common among the Muslims and family planning is completely prohibited by religion among Muslims.

Mother tongue and religion reflects not only the cultural identity of groups of people but also the politics of language and the concept of a secular state. Both Muslim groups from Nepal and India are followers of Islam and are Urdu and Awadhi language speakers. Urdu is the mode of education in Madrasa throughout Nepal and India. However, Nepali Muslims have adopted the dominant language of respective regions as well as is the practice of Indian Muslims also. For instance, Muslims residing in eastern Terai from Sarlahi district use Maithili language; for those living in the central Terai (Bara, Parsa and Rautahat) Bhojpuri is their mother tongue. Besides their mother tongue, Nepali Muslims speak Nepali, the national language and Urdu, communication language among Muslims. However, the majority of the Muslims still cannot speak Nepali properly. Similarly, Indian Muslims speak Hindi, the national language of India, and Urdu for daily communication, which is the medium of instruction in the Madrasas in both countries.

Marriage is one of the main institutions of the society. The marriage system varies in different communities in the society dictated mostly by religion, occupation, culture, education and national laws. Although child marriage is not allowed legally, early marriage is found common among Muslims in both countries. Married population is higher in India than in Nepal. In India, out of the total Muslim population, 67 percent are married, while 52 percent out of the total Muslim population are married in Nepal. Among the married population, female ratio is higher than the male in both countries, which shows that early marriage is higher among females in comparison to males.

#### **EDUCATIONAL CONDITIONS OF MUSLIMS**

The role of education in facilitating social and economic progress is well accepted today. Education plays a significant role in the dissemination of modern attitudes, values, approach and rational outlook. Educational attainment is a basic criterion not only to acquire social status in the family but also in the wider community. But, the literacy rate among Muslim communities is very low in comparison to the national literacy rate in both Nepal and India. The interim constitution of Nepal, 2007, under fundamental rights, clearly states that every citizen shall have the right to receive free education from the State up to secondary level as provided for in the law. Likewise, at the time of adopting the Constitution, the Indian state had committed itself to provide elementary education under article 45 of the Directive Principles of the state policy. Subsequently, in 2002 education as a fundamental right was endorsed through the 86th amendment to the Constitution, which was already modified in Article 45. However, despite these commitments, the number of children out of school in this age group is alarmingly large in both countries.

NESAC (2009) mentioned that there is a huge gap between male and female literacy rate in Nepal. National male literacy rate is 81.0 percent whereas the female literacy rate is only 54.5 percent. The Muslim female literacy rate is only 26.5percent whereas among Dalits, the lowest caste groups, female literacy rate is 34.8 percent. There are many factors that restrict Muslim girls' and women's access to education e.g. The lack of Muslim female teachers in schools either in public or in private sector, lack of participation of Muslim women in the school management committee, lack of Muslim friendly environment in schools, lack of Muslim cultural considerations in schools and lack of incentives and scholarships for Muslims.

In India, the literacy rate of Muslims is higher than the Nepali Muslims. The central government of India has taken initiatives to educate minority children. There are no targeted programs for Muslims;

however, because of their minority status in the community, they have benefited from those programs. The government has initiated a Mid Day Meal (MDM) scheme, which has proved to be an effective means to check high dropout rates of children from economically weaker sections, while also addressing their nutritional needs.

According to Saihjee Aarti (2003), in recent surveys, almost all schools (95percent) in Tamil Nadu reported that the noon meal program has helped in increasing enrollment and retention of girls. Kameshwari's (2003) study reflects that mid day meal has brought a sharp increase in school enrollment and attendance rates across all the states and more importantly narrowing the gender gaps in school attendance rates.

In India, the Minority Affairs provides three types of scholarships for minority group students including Muslims. According to UP, Bihar figures from 2011-12, the distribution of Post-Matric scholarships in Bihar, Muslim target was 38,011 and achievement was 42,672, Christian was 157 but received only 33, Sikh 53 achieved 46, Buddhist 53 achieved 14, Parsi two achieved nil. In UP, Muslim students received scholarship around 85, 181 against a target of 1, 34,293.

Another notable program, Antyodaya Anna Yojana, is popular in the study area. This is an important milestone in providing food grains for the poor families at highly subsidized rates. The Muslims of the study area have been benefitted from the program, encouraging them to send their children to school. To Some extent, these kinds of programs have encouraged and helped the Muslims to send their children to school. But, such types of schemes and programs for Muslims are grossly lacking in Nepal.

On the other hand, the overall level of education, particularly in the secondary and higher level is very low in both the countries. However, there is a big difference in the level of education between males and females among Nepali Muslims in comparison to Indian Muslims where the dropout rate among Muslim communities is very high in comparison to other caste /ethnic groups. There are several factors and causes for the dropout rate of Muslim children from the schools. The common factors between both countries are poverty, lack of awareness and low literacy rate among Muslim parents, lack of mother tongue education, lack of job opportunity, and lack of scholarships for higher education, lack of accommodating syllabus, textual material on cultural aspects of the Muslims in schools and early marriage among Muslims.

**Table 1.1 Literacy rate and level of education of Muslims by sex (age 5 years and above)**

Education Attainment	Nepal			India		
	Male	Female	Mean	Male	Female	Mean
Illiterate	32.2	46.9	38.5	28.4	30.8	29.5
Literate	15.8	18.3	16.9	12.2	12.8	12.5
Primary	23.4	19.4	21.7	27.7	32.3	29.9
Secondary	16.8	9.2	13.6	14.8	13.5	14.2
Intermediate	4.3	2.2	3.4	10.2	6.8	8.5
Graduates and above	3.0	1.0	2.1	6.7	3.8	5.3
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source Field survey, 2011

In Nepal, Gender parity in education stands now at 0.98 at both basic and secondary levels and the increase in overall enrollment is accompanied by a reduction of gender and caste/ethnic disparities. However, gender inequalities, together with low enrollment rates at the primary and secondary level remain very high in Dalit and Muslim communities. The GON has attempted to bring all girls and boys from disadvantaged and marginalized populations into mainstream education by providing free tuition, free textbooks and scholarships. Nevertheless, the enrollment rate across girls and boys from Muslims, poor families and those with disabilities remain low (CBS, 2004).

From the gender perspective, higher-level education attainment situation of Muslim women in both countries is found very low in comparison to their male counterparts and other community groups.

The main reasons of low literacy rate and higher-level dropout rates of girls in the schools are the prevalence of poverty, early marriage, orthodoxy, purdah system and customary law of the Muslim society. Unlike Hindu women, Muslim women are far behind in education, social mobility and status in the society. There are many social taboos of the Muslim society. Prohibition for family planning further contributes to the poverty and health of Muslim women. Prohibition for social mobility to Muslim women leads to confining themselves in the household. The class status has some positive impact in this regard. Muslim women from rich families are more restricted by burka and have less mobility outside the household

whereas those belonging to poorer families in rural area could not afford to obey this custom because poverty demands them to work outside, particularly in farming. Because of purdah and burka system, Muslim women's representation and participation in the public domain is negligible in comparison to women of other communities and particularly Hindu women of both countries.

#### FLOW OF MUSLIM CHILDREN TO DIFFERENT SCHOOLING SYSTEMS

The table 4.33 shows that out of total school going age children of Muslims, 79.6 percent from Nepal and 77.8 percent from India were studied in one or other type of school at the time of this study and the remaining were not studying in any educational institutions at all.

**Table 1.2 Different educational institutions going children by age and sex**

	Age group	Nepal			India		
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Government school going	5-9	38	26	64	14	13	27
	10-15	74	67	141	11	8	19
	Total	112	93	205	25	21	46
	Percent	54.6	45.4	41.3	54.3	45.7	51.1
Private school going	5-9	7	3	10	3	1	4
	10-15	13	6	19	5	2	7
	Total	20	9	29	8	3	11
	Percent	69.0	31.0	5.9	72.7	27.3	12.2
Madrasa going	5-9	38	18	56	4	5	9
	10-15	37	68	105	1	3	4
	Total	75	86	161	5	8	13
	Percent	46.6	53.4	32.5	38.5	61.5	14.4
Not going	5-9	22	19	41	2	3	5
	10-15	34	26	60	7	8	15
	Total	56	45	101	9	11	20
	Percent	55.5	44.5	20.4	45	55	22.2

Source: Field survey, 2011

Both in Nepal and India, a majority of the Muslim children are studying in the government schools rather than other educational institutions. The total number of students in this category is higher in India than in Nepal because of Central government of India's schemes for minority groups such as scholarships, reservation in government services, Mid Day meal in schools and Antyodaya Anna Yojana etc. These programs have definitely played a significant role in increasing the literacy rate among the minority groups. However, the educational situation among Muslims is still far below the national average because of their poverty, lack of awareness/ education and religious orthodoxy.

The Government of Nepal has not introduced and implemented this kind of scheme/programs for Muslims except girl's scholarship, provided to all the girls' students in the government schools.

It is also found that Madrasa education is prevalent among poor and orthodox Muslims in Nepal and India as well. However, there is a big difference in number of students in this category between two countries. In Nepal, out of total, 32.5 percent children receive education from the Madrasas while in India; only 14.4 percent receive education from Madrasa. In this category, female percentage is higher than the males in both countries.

During the field survey, the respondents of Nepali Muslims said that economically poor families send their children to Madrasa only but majority of the middle class family send their children to government schools as well as Madrasas. During the early morning hours, children go to Madrasa for religious education and in the daytime, they go to the government schools for secular education. A few economically well-off and educated families send their children to English medium private schools as well. This percentage in this category is higher in India than Nepal. After the registration of Madrasas at district education office (DEO) and the introduction of mainstream subjects like English, mathematics and science in Madrasas, the enrollment rate of Muslim children has increased in significant number. However, in India, no such provision was found during the field visit.

### ECONOMIC CONDITION

The Muslim community is one of the highly marginalized and excluded groups in terms of social, cultural, educational, economic and political spheres in Nepal and India. Economically Muslims are very poor- 41 percent Nepali Muslims live below poverty line against the national average of 31 percent. Likewise, 31 percent Indian Muslims live below poverty line (NCAER, 2004-5), which is 6 percent higher than the national average of 25 percent (CIA World Fact books, 2011).

Economically backward status of Muslims in both countries is clearly reflected in the findings of the study. Almost all surveyed Muslim families have their own house but in terms of construction materials, number of stories and conditions of house, Indian Muslims are in better position than Nepali Muslims.

Out of total households, about 68.6 percent of Nepali Muslims and 58 percent Indian Muslims are landless. The difference in land holding between Nepali and Indian Muslims is only 10 percent. The Majority of the households from both groups have marginal land, less than one Bigha. However, the proportion of more than five bigha land is higher among the Indian Muslims in comparison to Nepal (Table 1.3). This data clearly indicates that very few Muslims in both countries have sufficient agricultural land for their livelihood.

**Table 1.3 Average land and house holding among Muslims of Nepal and India**

	Average holding	Nepal		India	
		No of Families	Percent		
Agricultural land holding	Landless	240	68.6	29	58
	0-1 Bigha	44	12.6	8	16
	1-5 Bigha	39	11.1	6	12
	5-10 Bigha	16	4.6	4	8
	10+	11	3.1	3	6
	Total	350	100	50	100
Houses	Yes	345	98.6	50	100
	No	5	1.2	-	-
	Total	350	100	50	100
Types of houses	Cemented	55	15.7	30	60
	Wooden	33	9.4	7	14
	Tin	45	12.9	5	10
	Mud and Hay	217	62.0	8	16
	Total	350	100	50	100
No of stories	One storied	299	85.4	24	48
	Two Storied	36	10.3	19	38
	Three Storied	15	4.3	7	14
	Total	350	100	50	100
House Ownership	Self	335	95.7	50	100
	Other family members	10	2.9	-	-
	Rented	5	1.4		
	Total	350	100		

Source Field survey, 2011

### OCCUPATION

The table 1.4 presents data on occupational status of Muslims in both countries. Family occupation is the main indicator of the economic condition, living standard and social status in the society. Child education is directly determined by parent's occupation, income and education. The literacy rate and educational attainment level among Muslims children is lower than other groups in both countries due to their involvement in low paid jobs and low income of the parents.

In the study area, wage labor is the main occupation of Muslims. Majority of the Muslims are landless, therefore, they are involved in wage labor and other occupations, mainly in road and building constructions as well as in agricultural sector in their villages and in Nepalgunj municipality, Banke. They are working as mason, carpenter, plumber and laborer in this sector. The Indian Muslims from Rupediya also work as construction labors in Nepalgunj. There is no restriction for them to enter Nepal because of the

open boarder Trade/business is the second profession among Muslims of Nepal and India. Muslims of both countries are involved in trans-boarder business such as rice, onion, potato, sugar, cloths and cooking utensils and cycles. Rupediya is considered a cheapest shopping market for Nepalese. In the daytime, Indian Muslims come to Nepalgunj to sell tomato, potato, onion, sugar and cloths. Besides this, a few Muslims run small teashops, mobile repairing centers, fruits shops, meat shops and cloths shops in Nepalgunj municipality, Nepal and Rupediya, India.

**Table 1.4 Distribution of respondents by occupation (15 years of age and above)**

Occupation	Nepal		India	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Student	3	0.9	-	0
Agriculture	31	8.9	8	16
Trade/Business	71	20.3	11	22
Wage labor	108	30.9	16	32
Rickshaw/Tanga puller	65	18.6	5	10
Gov.Job	5	1.4	4	8
Butcher	35	10.0	-	-
Domestic chores	27	7.7	2	4
Dependent/no occupation	5	1.4	4	8
Total	350	100	50	100

Source Field survey, 2011

Overall, the distribution pattern by main occupation is not very different. The main difference lies in the proportions of students, agriculture and government jobs. Those engaged in agriculture are lower among Nepali Muslims than Indian Muslims. However, the engagement in the government job is negligible in both countries.

#### AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION AND FOOD SUFFICIENCY

Muslims of both countries produce paddy, maize, wheat, millet, pulse, potato, and oil seeds mainly for their consumption. Only few Muslim households earn profit from the agricultural production. In the study area, the majority of the Muslims are small farmers, having less than three Bigha land, have insufficient food from their production.

**Table 1.5 Food production sufficiency**

	Sufficiency Months	Nepal		India	
		No.	Percent	No	Percent
Food Sufficiency	3 months or less	41	37.3	3	14.3
	3- 6 months	36	32.7	5	23.8
	6-9 months	19	17.3	7	33.3
	Whole year	14	12.7	6	28.6
	Total	110	100	21	100

Source Field survey, 2011

Food sufficiency status between the both Muslim groups of Nepal and India is very poor. Among the Nepali Muslims, only 12.7 percent household's produce sufficient food for the whole year but in India 28.6 percent has sufficient food production for their family. 37.3 percent respondents said that the production is sufficient only for 3 months but among the Indian Muslims only 14.3 percent families are found in this category.

According to the survey, the average total food sufficiency month among Muslims is between six to seven months only. Borrowing, obtaining help from relatives, buying food from non-farm income are the main livelihood strategies to make up for the food deficit in both communities.

#### Interrelationship between Social, Economic and Educational Status Attainment

Social institutions are equally important in the society to maintain social solidarity, unity and prosperity among the individuals, groups and communities. Education is one of the important social institutions in the society, which helps to socialize children, transfer culture and knowledge from generation to generation and strengthen competency for a quality of life. However, there is an interrelationship between family, marriage, religion, education, economic and political institutions. Therefore, Child Education is determined by their religion, culture, and economy, which is more prevalent among the Muslims. Similarly, parent's education, occupation and income are the main determinants for their child education.

My study data show that the literacy rate among Muslims is lower than the national average from the perspective of government and mainstream education. If we count Madrasa education as an education category then the Muslim literacy rate will be higher but the governments of Nepal and India never considered Madrasa education as an educational attainment. Therefore, the situation has not changed much among the Muslims. In Nepal, Muslims are more rigid to their religion. Therefore, they prefer to send their children to Madrasa than government schools to fulfill their religious and cultural needs. However, the situation of Indian Muslims is in a better position in comparison to Nepalese Muslims. In India, Majority Muslims send their children to government schools than Madrasas.

My study establishes that majority of the rich and educated parents prefer to send their children to government schools and private schools as well. They teach Islamic education at home by appointing maulana/Maulvies as tutors.

#### EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AND ITS RELATION TO EMPLOYMENT AND OTHER SECTORS

Muslims are considered one of the highly marginalized groups in Nepal and India. Their educational level is below the National average due to educational disparity in the country and their low access to education. The economic marginalization of Muslims in Nepal and India has had a direct bearing on the educational downfall, which, in turn, has marginalized Muslims in terms of qualification for government jobs and other sectors. In Nepal, because of low education, the Muslims have been excluded from the government jobs, health services, politics and other decision-making institutions.

The education system in Nepal is characterized by large disparities in primary and secondary school attendance. School attendance rates are higher among boys, residents of urban areas, children from wealthier families and higher caste groups. Disparities are also closely linked to the Hindu caste system that divides the population into different hierarchical hereditary groups.

In Nepal, mainly the economic marginalization and social exclusion of Muslims was started after the unification of Nepal in 1768 and the introduction of Muluki Ain (country code) in 1954. The Country Code classified Muslims as "impure but touchable" and placed them in the Hindu hierarchical caste system (Hofer, 2004). Muslims were discriminated by virtue of belonging to a religious minority in a Hindu state and ranked above Dalits but below other groups. Before 1940, Muslims were not allowed to attend any schools, only After the 1940s, Muslims were allowed to attend secondary schools and colleges and the Rana government eventually opened a Muslim primary school. With the declaration of free primary education up to class 5 for all Nepalese children, the number of Muslims attending schools has steadily increased (Ansari, 1981). Still today, the educational condition of Nepalese Muslims is far behind than the high caste and other groups. They have low access over state resources and low representation in government services and other decision-making positions due to their low educational attainment and lack of inclusive policy of the state.

In India, Muslims are in a better position in comparison to Nepalese Muslims in the field of government education, jobs, politics and other decision making level. In the past, in the North Western Provinces and Oudh, Muslims enjoyed a greater percentage of the judicial and executive jobs than their numbers warranted. In 1882, Muslims held nearly 35percent of all government posts. In 1886, Muslims held 45.1 percent of the total number of posts in the judicial and executive services of the North Western Provinces and Oudh. In contrast, Hindus held only 50.2 percent of these posts, even though they constituted 86.2 percent of the total population (Misra, 1961: 329, 388).

One of the issues that must be considered is that the Muslim service class and the gentry had held aloof from modern education, for reasons of pride as self-perceived former rulers, religious taboos, fear of identity loss and the like. After an initial reluctance, Muslims did take to modern education, spurred by the efforts of Sayyid Ahmad Khan and his colleagues in the Aligarh movement (Mann, 1992:145-171). By the late 1860s, the proportion of Muslims in the government primary and secondary schools was as large as their percentage in the population and their percentage in higher education rose similarly by 1890s

(Maqbool, 1969: 5-6).

The downturn in education began with a bureaucratic reform initiated by U.P. Lieutenant Governor Anthony MacDonnell, a reform that resulted in adverse consequences for the Muslim elite.

There are huge differences between Muslims and others in higher education. The disparity in graduation attainment levels has been widening between Muslims and all others in both rural and urban areas since the 1970s. In the initial phases of planning, Muslims had a higher Graduate Attainment Rate than SCs and STs. That has now changed and the latter has overtaken the Muslims. Muslim disadvantage must be related to a number of factors including, of course, their economic status and generally low educational levels. But, the latter may be in part also due to the lack of employment opportunities. This is partially supported by the data, which shows that the unemployment rate among Muslim graduates is the highest among socio-religious communities, both poor and not poor. It must also be read in light of the fact that Muslims do not see education as necessarily translating into formal employment. They are poorly represented in formal employment and there is a perception that they will be discriminated against, as Muslims, in securing salaried jobs. Thus, the low perceived returns from education do not help the cause of retention of Muslims in the education system.

### CONCLUSION

Muslims are one of the most marginalized communities in Nepal and India in terms of social, economic, political and educational indices. The economic situation of Muslims in both of the countries is almost similar. However, the educational condition and degree of awareness is higher among Indian Muslims compared to Nepalese Muslims.

The literacy rate and educational status of Muslims is far below the national average and this gap is wider for women. There is a significant disparity between the educational status of Muslims and that of other hill Brahmans and other caste or ethnic groups. Both mean years of schooling and attendance levels among Muslims are low in absolute numbers.

In higher education, the differences between Muslims and others stand out even more sharply. The disparity in graduation attainment levels has been widening between Muslims and other groups. The reasons behind their low literacy and low educational attainment in higher level are poverty, lack of awareness, lack of scholarships, lack of Islamic courses in government schools, lack of Muslim teachers in schools, misconception about girls' education and lack of employment opportunities for the educated Muslims. The fact is supported by my empirical data, which shows that the higher-level educational attainment is negligible and the unemployment rate is the highest among Muslims in comparison to the national average and other socio-religious communities. It must also be read in light of the fact that Muslims do not see education as necessarily translating into formal employment. Due to their low representation in government jobs, they have a feeling of alienation and discrimination from the state. Thus, the low perceived returns from education do not help the cause of retention of Muslims in the education system.

However, Madrasas have been playing a crucial role to educate the Muslim children. Madrasa is the main educational institution among the Muslim community, which has historical, religious, educational and economic importance in Nepal. Traditionally, the Madrasas are established to provide Islamic education as well as the education about other necessary areas to the children and community as a whole. However, the Madrasas of Nepal, these days, have initiated providing both the Islamic and secular education that could meet the present-day needs.

The Muslim leaders, Maulvies and concerned communities have felt the need of modern education to go with Islamic education. Hence, they have selected and with known reservations introduced the modern formal educational contents into the Madrasa curriculum. The Madrasas have managed to get subject teachers for formal education, using their own resources, which are of course limited. The concerned people have understood the need to impart the modern education to Madrasa students and thus pave the way to achieve the goals of EFA.

My research data shows that the majority of Muslim workers is engaged in self-employment activities? mainly, street vending, small trades and enterprises, legal and illegal border trade, construction and agricultural laborer, particularly in urban areas. The fragility of Muslim participation in the economy and the low level of asset accumulation in general further impacts on attaining education for the children.

Muslims are poorly represented in government jobs, defense and security related activities. This is a matter of some concern because it is crucially linked to the sense of well-being felt by the community. According to 2001 data, the share of Muslims in Gazette third class officers is only 0.5 percent, which is very low in comparison to their population in the country of Nepal. Representation of Muslims in the civil service and army force was nil in the study area. However, the situation is gradually changing after the

restoration of democracy in Nepal.

The Muslim tradition in Nepal, is found to be discriminatory against girl education and exploitative against women for the mobility. There is a misconception regarding girl education and employment. They do not allow women for any kind of jobs outside the homes, which is common among Nepali Muslims. Polygamy, purdah and religious prohibition against family planning are typical problems that Muslim women face. The Muslim women are far behind in education, social mobility and status in society as compared to Hindu women, which further excludes Muslim women since mobility gained through educational attainment and exposure to modernization has a direct bearing with acquisition of political power.

Muslims of both countries suffer from stigma and social exclusion due to their status in the society. Such groups experience cumulative disabilities. The GOI (2006) report of India also shows the situation of marginalization and backwardness of Muslims and recommends that these groups be treated as Most Backward Classes and several measures including reservation be made available to them. Muslims are among the most deprived of India's social groups. Marginalization, violence and discrimination are implicated in producing and sustaining these low levels of attainment and in depressing Muslim aspirations and pushing down levels of achievement.

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<sup>1</sup> .Article 45 stated that the state shall endeavor to provide within a period of ten years from the commencement of this constitution, free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years

<sup>2</sup> .Article 21-A states that "The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age six to fourteen years in such a way as the State may, by law, determine." The 86th Amendment also modified Article 45, which now reads, as "The state shall endeavor to provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete the age of 6 years".

<sup>3</sup> .On the basis of the philosophy that "when children have to sit in class with empty stomachs, they cannot focus on learning". The scheme is important for improving enrolment, attendance and retention of primary school children, while simultaneously improving their nutritional status.

<sup>4</sup> . (I) Pre-Matric (ii) Post-Matric (iii) Merit & Means. The first is for students from Classes 1 – 10, the second from Class XI right up to Ph D, and the third for vocational or professional studies. Only those who have obtained more than 50percent marks in the previous final exam are eligible for the scholarships. For Pre-Matric the total annual family income should not exceed Rupees One Lakh; for Post-Matric it should be below Rupees Two Lakhs, and for Merit & Means it should be below Rupees Two Lakhs Fifty Thousand.

<sup>5</sup> .Pre-Matric scholars will be paid Rs 1000/- p.a. directly into their bank accounts by way of maintenance. School fees will be paid into the school account, with specific criteria for admission fees and monthly tuition fees. Hostellers will get an additional payment.

<sup>6</sup> For Post-Matric the maintenance allowance increases from Rs 1400/- p.a. to Rs 3300/-. The cap for fees for Classes XI and XII is Rs 7000/-, while for XI and XII vocational classes it is Rs 10,000/-, and for college studies it is Rs 3000/-. The Merit & Means is the most attractive. Out of 60,000 such scholarships 7620 (13percent) are for Christians with

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Kerala being allotted the maximum of 1917, followed by Tamilnadu with 1197. Here the maintenance is Rs 5000/- p.a. and course fee is reimbursable up to Rs 20,000/-.

<sup>7</sup> Antyodaya Anna Yojana has been launched by the Honorable Prime Minister of India on the 25th December, 2000 to ensure food security for all, create a hunger free India in the next five years and to reform and improve the Public Distribution System so as to serve the poorest of the poor in rural and urban areas where only 20 percent of boys and girls are enrolled in primary education and six percent of them in secondary education, whereas among indigenous nationalities the ratio is 39 percent and 38 percent, respectively ( Doe, Flash Report 1, 2010-11)

<sup>8</sup> At the top of the social order are members of the Brahman class of priests and scholars, followed by the Chhetri (rulers and warriors), the Vaishya (merchants), and the Sudra (peasants and manual laborers). The lowest position in the social order is occupied by the Dalits, also referred to as "untouchables."

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