



Department of Journalism and Mass Communication

Aliah University

(A UGC approved autonomous Institution under the Department of Minority Affairs and Madrasah Education, Govt. of West of Bengal)

Park Circus Campus, 17, Gorachand Road, Kolkata- 700014

CALL FOR PAPER

Two Day Conference on **‘Bengali Muslims at the Crossroads: Possibilities and Challenges’**

Jointly Organized By:

Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Aliah University
&
Bengali Academia for Social Empowerment (BASE)

Date: 16-17 November 2019 (Saturday-Sunday)
Venue: Aliah University, Kolkata (Park Circus Campus)

Concept Note:

Muslims constitute the single largest religious minority comprising 27.2 percent of the total population in the India’s state of West Bengal. Geographically, the Muslim population is thickly concentrated in rural Bengal and sociologically an overwhelming majority of them are Bengali speaking marginalised (*non-Ashraf*) Muslims, mostly engaged in agricultural activities. Historian Richard Eaton rightly argued that Islam in Bengal is the ‘Religion of the Plough’.

In the post-reforms era (1990s onwards) due to agrarian distress a sizeable section of rural Muslims in West Bengal have been migrating to other Indian cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, Surat, Bangalore, Calicut and so on to work in various unorganized sectors as construction workers, goldsmiths, embroidery workers, garments workers, domestic helpers etc. Noted labour historian Jan Breman called this kind of labour migration as ‘footloose labour’. The Bengali Muslim migrant labour force faces multiple socio-political challenges, very often they are categorized and stigmatized as ‘illegal Bangladeshi’.

The Sachar Committee Report (Prime Minister High Level Committee) in 2006 has categorically documented the social, educational and economic backwardness of Muslim minority in India. In comparison to other Indian states, West Bengal’s Muslims are in many respects excluded from both the developmental and political process in spite of the so called ‘secular’ political parties including the three and half decades of Left-front government between 1977-2011. The post-Left Bengal is also not an exception; though some policy initiatives are being taken for the development of the minorities, the Bengali Muslims continue to face various political and socio-economic challenges. The Association SNAP and Pratichi Institute’s recent report on “The Living Reality of Muslims in West Bengal” (2016) has established the continued socio-economic exclusion of Bengali Muslim community, even a decade after the Sachar Committee Report (SCR).

SCR not only publicly documented the everyday process of Muslim marginalization and exclusion related to identity, security and equity but also rebut the myth of ‘Muslim appeasement’ propounded by the rightwing forces. As noted social scientists Zoya Hasan and Mushirul Hasan argued the biggest gain of SCR was its reconstruction of the Muslim community as ‘developmental

subjects' of the state rather than primarily a cultural and religious community. The SCR has helped to develop the new language for social justice, inclusive development, citizenship and substantial equality towards approaching the Muslim question in post-colonial India.

In the last one and half decades, a tiny Bengali Muslim 'middle class' has emerged consisting of the small scale entrepreneurs, salaried class: mostly teachers and professionals. This has been possible mainly due to various community initiatives including residential mission school phenomenon, joint entrance coaching initiatives for engineering and medicine, and the growing educational consciousness among the rural Bengali Muslims. The public initiatives like OBC reservation for backward castes Muslims (though very late and also proportionally low as per the population ratio) and different scholarships programmes have also benefited in the formation of the tiny 'Muslim middle class' group with upward mobility.

At the same time, Bengali Muslim Women face the double whammy of marginalization in the largely patriarchal setup. Recent studies have, however, shown considerable improvement in the enrolment of Muslim girls in schools, and in fact, the dropout in high schools in some districts is higher among boys. This phenomenon, however, points to another problem: many of the school going boys leave their studies and migrate in search of livelihood.

The recent political developments of India in general and West Bengal in particular have raised multiple issues, concern and challenges not only in terms of inclusive growth, social justice, constitutional democracy and economic empowerment for marginalized communities but also in relation to the fundamental question of physical security (right to life). There are many instances where the lives of Muslims have been threatened by the fanatic forces in different parts of the country including West Bengal.

Apart from the general discourse associated with the Bengali Muslims of West Bengal there is a large section of Bengali speaking Muslims residing in the North Eastern states of Assam and Tripura who rarely find any mention. They face all the scorn from the other communities residing in the hilly regions for being non tribals as well as Bengali speaking as they are tagged as 'illegal Bangladeshi'. The trajectories and debates in the creation of the National Register for Citizens (NRC) in Assam and its possible subsequent application in other parts of India calls for an immediate attention on part of all Bengali speaking Muslims residing in the Indian sub-continent. There is a great diversity amongst the Muslims residing in the Assam who claim to be indigenous people such as the Gorias, Marias and the Assamese Muslims. But other than them there are lakhs of Bengali speaking Muslims who have been residing from time immemorial in the three districts (Dhubri, Sylhet and Cachhar) which were merged with other five districts during colonial period to form what is now Assam. NRC has jeopardized their lives and existence. Meanwhile, Muslims in lower Assam who have origin in East-Bengal (present Bangladesh) but have chosen to consciously speak and learn Assamese language face unique crisis of identity, integration and fundamental rights as neither Bengali Muslims of Barak valley consider them Bengali enough nor is the larger Assamese society willing to accept them as their own. Consequently they continue to face the worst kinds of discriminations and persecution.

In this rapidly changing socio-political context, the Bengali Academia for Social Empowerment (BASE) is organizing its first annual conference in 2019 to academically engage with the larger questions of constitutional democracy, substantial equality, social, political and economic justice as enshrined in the Constitution of India.

The objectives of the conference is to promote critical thinking on the broader question of Bengali Muslims and their sociology of marginalization and to develop a new language for democratic engagements.

The sub-theme of the Conference are follows but not limited to:

Bengali Muslims: Literary and Cultural Productions
Bengali Muslims: Partition, History, Memory & Diaspora
Bengali Muslims: Contributions in Science & Technology
Bengali Muslims: Political Marginalization and Way Ahead
Bengali Muslims: Social Justice, Women and Gender Questions
Bengali Muslims: Educational Opportunities: Issues and Concerns
Bengali Muslims: State, Law and the Muslim Minority of West Bengal
Bengali Muslims: Globalization, Economic Opportunities and Challenges
Bengali Muslims: Higher Education and Upward Mobility: Major Concerns
Bengali Muslims: Socio-political Exclusion and Institutional Marginalization
Bengali Muslims: Otherisation Process and Politics of Representation in Media
Bengali Muslims: The Use of Science & Technology in Community Empowerment
Bengali Muslims: Mapping new Muslim 'middle class': Possibilities and Challenges
Bengali Muslims: Stereotypes, Prejudices, Social Exclusion, Identity Formation, NRC

Guidelines for Paper Submission:

Original papers are invited from scholars/social scientist/faculty members/students/policy makers/civil society organizations/educational entrepreneurs and independent scholars and so on. Please submit an abstract (250-300 words, Font: Times New Roman 12, Space: 1.5) along with a short bio to the conveners at baseconference2019@gmail.com or hod.mjmc@aliah.ac.in by 22 October 2019.

Important Dates:

Deadline for Submission of Abstract: 23 October 2019
Announcement of Shortlisted Abstracts: 25 October 2019
Deadline for Submission of Full Papers: 5 November 2019
Last Date of Registration: 08 November 2019
Announcement of Final Schedule: 10 November 2019
Dates of Conference: 16-17 November 2019

Registration Details:

Research Scholars: Rs 300/-
Faculties/Working Professionals: Rs. 500/-
Registration fees include conference kit, working lunch for two days and two refreshments.
If accommodation needed, the organisers may support the willing participants finding affordable places but they need to pay for their own accommodation.

Publication: After the conference, selected papers will be published in an edited volume or Special Issue of a Journal.

For Further Queries:

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Organising Committee**Chairperson:**

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3. Dr. Abu Saleh, Assistant Professor, Raja Peary Mohan College, University of Calcutta

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