



Article Type: Research Article

Article Ref. No.: 21082500716CR

<https://doi.org/10.37948/ensemble-2021-CSI1-a002>



CONSOCIATIONAL DEMOCRACY: A CASE STUDY OF MUSLIM AND CHRISTIAN MINORITIES IN PUNJAB

Joginder Singh¹✉, Javeed Ahmad Bhat²

Abstract:

A democracy can be called as a consociational democracy if all the sections of society are able to have a share in the representative political institutions. A majoritarian democracy is not a consociational democracy. The consociational democracy flourishes in a society based on the principles of harmony and peaceful coexistence. In such a society every community is able to find a place in the democratic institutions. But, in the societies lacking such qualities, artificial mechanical instruments have to be applied to ensure the presence of poor and minority communities. India, as a land of diversities and social gradations, have adopted the tool of reservations for the weaker sections. Such tools have remained successful in ensuring representation of such communities in the local, state, and national level political institutions. But the minorities have been deprived of such a protection. It has led to the poor representation of the minorities in the political institutions. Until the establishment of a harmonious and tolerant society, the artificial and mechanical methods of ensuring the proper representation to the minorities should be provided. Because a majority dominated democracy is nothing, but a form of majority imperialism. This article has tried to analyse the representation of Muslim and Christian minorities in the intermediate level of rural local government bodies, i.e. the Block Samities.

Article History: Submitted on 25 Aug 2021 | Accepted on 20 Sep 2021 | Published online on 25 Sep 2021

Keywords: Consociational democracy, minority representation, reservation, Punjab minorities representation

1.0 Introduction:

Democracy has had emerged as a reaction to the dictatorship of one or of few persons. It stands for the governance according to the will of the people, and not according to the will of a group of the people. "Democracy is both the system and the concept of living together, of peaceful co-existence and of protection of rights of the individuals (Khan, 2020, p. 54)". Democracy, being a system of numbers, is prone to fall prey to majoritarianism, but such a system of governance cannot be called as a true democracy. Defining the true nature of a real democracy, J. S. Mill, the great supporter of democracy and liberty has said:

1 [Author] ✉ [Corresponding Author] Research Scholar, Department of Social Sciences and Languages, Lovely Professional University Phagwara- 144411, INDIA. E-mail: khatrajs@rediffmail.com

2 [Author] Associate Professor, Department of Social Sciences and Languages, Lovely Professional University, Phagwara-144411, INDIA

This article was presented in the International Conference on 'Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity: Issues, Concerns and Challenges' on 25th September, 2021 (via Virtual mode), organized by the School of Education, LPU, Punjab, INDIA in collaboration with the Department of Education, Dr. Meghnad Saha College, West Bengal, INDIA.

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“In a really equal democracy, every or any section would be represented, not disproportionately, but proportionately. A majority of the electors would always have a majority of the representatives; but a minority of the electors would always have a minority of the representatives”. (1861, p. 133)

Diversity and democracy are said to be antagonistic to each other, the belief, supported by a number of examples, i.e. the secession of Bangladesh from Pakistan (Khan, 2020). Diversity is not necessarily the competitor of unity. A diversified society can be unified by the bonds of mutual harmony and co-existence and the allocation of a fixed quota to the minorities and weaker sections. Among these techniques the former is the socio-psychological technique and the latter is the mechanical technique.

Representation of all the sections of society is necessary for the establishment of a peaceful and stable democracy. Because a “seat at the table” provides an opportunity to the communities to raise their concerns in the legislatures (Singer, 2012). It helps to provide stability to the system.

Democracies with fragmented political cultures have a higher tendency of instability. But there are the examples of democracies having a high degree of stability in spite of a fragmented political culture. Such democracies are called as the *consociational democracies*. This characteristic depends upon the attitude of the political elites. If the political elites of a fragmented political culture have learned that the mutual competition can be replaced with the mutual cooperation, it promotes the stability of the political system, and helps to make it a *consociational democracy*. Switzerland is one of the towering examples of such a democracy (Lijphart, 1969). Majoritarian democracy does not stand the test of turbulent times, as is seen in case of partition of Pakistan in 1971. In the absence of consociational approach on the part of political elites, some mechanical techniques like reservations etc. should be adopted to secure justice for all the sections of society and to provide a long term stability to democracy in a fragmented society.

2.0 Research methodology:

Historical documents and reports have been analysed to understand the division of Indian society into several sections, mainly on the basis of religion and caste. History of reservations in representative institutions has been analysed from historical documents. Ability of the weaker sections and minorities to get adequate representation without reservations, and the impact of reservations on the representation of such sections have been analysed on the basis of data of members of Block Samities (middle tier bodies of rural local government bodies) constituted on two different periods, i.e. 2013 and 2018 in the State of Punjab. During this period reservation in favour of women was increased from one-third to one-half of the seats. Two districts of the State have been selected, having highest concentration of minorities. Muslim minority has its highest concentration in Sangrur district, while the Christian minority has its highest concentration in the Gurdaspur district.

3.0 India: A land of diversities:

India is one of the most diversified states in the world. Its people belong to different racial groups, different colours, different creeds, and different customs (Hutton, 1951, p. 1). It has a little experience of modern democratic institutions. Before the beginning of the representative institutions in India, Lord Dufferin and Lord Lansdowne had opined that, if any representative institution is to be created in the country, the best method was to be the representation of interests and communities (Montagu-Chelmsford Report, 1918, p. 147). When the British have thought of introduction of representative institutions in the country, an apprehension was made by the

largest minority of the country, i.e. the Muslim community that they will not be able to get an adequate representation without some legal safeguards (Minto, 1934, p. 47). The demand was considered generously, and the community was given separate quota of seats in the legislatures under the Indian Councils Act, 1909, and the Regulations made thereunder in November 1909. There was a provision for the representation of 6 Muslims, 6 Landholders, and 2 businessmen from the Calcutta and Bombay Chambers of Commerce (Illbert, 1916, p. 429). The growth of political consciousness had aroused the similar demands from other communities also.

Sikhs were conferred the reservations under the Government of India Act, 1919. Few seats were reserved for the Depressed Classes under the rules made in pursuance of Government of India Act, 1919 (Mitra, 1921, pp. 186, 200, 211, 219, 234, & 238; SCR, Vol. 2, p. 64). Representation of communities was also the most challenging task before the Simon Commission. Most of the minority bodies have given representations to the Commission for continuance of reservations or extension of reservations to their communities. The Commission has recommended the continuance of reservations with separate electorates to the Muslims and the Sikhs (SCR, Vol. 2, pp. 57-64). Simon Commission had observed that the representation of the Depressed Classes was very low than the proportion of their population. A number of associations have given representation to the Commission for the extension of the separate electorates to the community. But the Commission has recommended the reservation of seats for the Depressed Classes out of the non-Muslim seats (SCR, Vol. 2, pp. 64-66). The Government of India Act, 1935 has provided for the reservations to different communities in the Council of States, the Federal Assembly (Schedule 1), and in the Provincial Legislative Assemblies (Schedule 5).

4.0 Independence of India and reservations:

India got its Independence from the foreign rule in 1947. The Constituent Assembly was constituted in 1946. It had started functioning in December 1946. It had constituted the Advisory Committee on Minorities and Fundamental Rights. The Advisory Committee had recommended to abolish the separate electorates for all the communities, but to ensure the representation of minorities through reservations (CAD, 2014, Vol. 5, pp. 243-51). The Constituent Assembly has accepted the recommendations and the "Draft Constitution" has provided for the reservations in favour of Muslim, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and the Indian Christians (Draft Constitution, 1948, Art. 292). Case of Sikh community was yet to be considered due to communal violence and a large scale migration. But in the course of time, the Advisory Committee has taken a "U" turn on the demand of "a group of people of highly nationalistic tendencies led by Dr. Mookerjee [sic] (CAD, 2014, Vol. 5, pp. 269)". Addressing the Assembly, Dr. Mookerjee had held that religious minorities can not be recognised in a secular state (ibid, p. 298). The resolution was opposed by Sikh and Muslim members of the Assembly but, was supported by almost all of the other members; hence, got adopted by the Assembly with a thumping majority (ibid, pp. 269-255).

Views of *highly nationalistic* members, and members of majority community on the necessity of minority reservations:

- Dr. Mookherjee (an Indian Christian, also the Vice President of the Constituent Assembly), the Vice President of the Assembly had opined on the basis of his experience, that the majority community was very generous and the minorities should trust it (CAD, Vol 8, 2014, p. 299).
- Begum Aizaz Rasul (a Muslim member) had held, that the Muslims does not want any special privileges, neither they want any discrimination against themselves (ibid, p. 302).
- Mr. Z. H. Lari (a Muslim member) had proposed an amendment for the elections through *cumulative votes in multi member constituencies*, to ensure the representation of minorities.
- Rev. Jerome D'Souza (a Christian), has expressed full faith in the promise of the majority

community, and had also expressed a hope and prayed that the same spirit “will continue to animate the political leaders and the majority organisations and the public” (ibid, pp. 307-8).

- Members from the majority community, like Prof. Shibban Lal Saksena, Shri L. S. Bhatkar, Shri Rohini Kumar Chaudhari, Shri Mahavir Tyagi etc. have appraised the proposal to withdraw the reservations from minorities (ibid, pp. 319-45).
- Speaking on the issue of withdrawal of reservations from minorities, Jawaharlal Nehru had held that the abolition of reservations was "an act of faith, an act of faith for all of us, and act of faith above all for the majority community because they will have to show after this that they can behave to others in a generous, fair and just way (ibid, p. 332).

5.0 Representation of minorities after withdrawal of reservations: a study of Muslim and Christian communities in Block Samities in Punjab:

Muslims and Christians, both are microscopic minorities in the State of Punjab. As per the 2011 Census, Muslims constitute 1.93 per cent, and the Christians constitute 1.24 per cent of the total population of the State. This article has analysed the question raised during the debate on the abolition of reservations for minorities. A hope was expressed that the minorities will not face any discrimination and deprivation from participation in the policy making. The members from minority communities will have similar chances of being elected to representative bodies. For this analysis, this article has explored the data of Block Samitis¹ in two districts of the State, i.e. Sangrur and Gurdaspur, because these districts contains maximum concentration of Muslim and Christian populations respectively. The population to representation ratio of minorities has been compared with the population to representation ratio of women. Women also constitute a backward and weaker section of the society. But the Punjab Panchayati Raj Act (PPRA), 1994 has provided for the reservations in favour of women (§. 102). This reservation was initially one third of the total seats, and was increased to 50 per cent of seats in 2017 (Punjab Panchayati Raj [Amendment] Act, 2017, §. 4).

Table -1: Muslim and Women population and representation in rural areas of Sangrur District of Punjab:

Year of constitution	Muslim population % age	Muslim representation % age	Women Population % age	Women representation % age
2013	6.55	1.66	46.92	32.59
2018	6.55	1.55	46.92	48.70

Source: Calculated from Census of India, 2011 reports, Directory of Local Governments data, and Ministry of Jal Shakti data.

Table -2: Christian and Women population and representation in rural areas of Gurdaspur District of Punjab:

Year of constitution	Christian population % age	Christian representation % age	Women Population % age	Women representation % age
2013	9.18	1.49	47.79	35.82
2018	9.18	1.41	47.79	50.70

Source: Calculated from Census of India, 2011 reports, Directory of Local Governments data, and Ministry of Jal Shakti data.

6.0 Discussion:

Both of these tables have shown the data about two categories; women and Muslim minority in Sangrur district, and women and Christian minority in Gurdaspur district. As for as women are concerned, they have been given reservation under the PPRA, 1994. Until the 2018 elections of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), the quantum of reservations was fixed at one-third of total seats in every Block Samiti. They have had a right to contest from the open seats. According to Census figures of 2011, there was nearly 47 per cent female population in rural Sangrur. But due to their



weaker position, they were restricted only to such number of seats, which was reserved for them. In the Sangrur district they have won 59 seats out of 181 (35.82%) seats. In the year 2017 reservation for women was increased to one-half of the seats (PPRA[A], 2017, §. 4). When the elections were conducted in 2018, women were able to win 94 seats out of 193 (48.70%). Similarly, in Gurdaspur district women constitutes the 47.79 per cent of total rural population, but they could win only 72 (35.8%) seats in the elections held in 2013, when one-third seats were reserved in their favour. When the reservation was increased to one-half of the seats, 108 (50.7%) seats were won by the women.

The above analysis shows that in a male dominated society like rural Punjab, the women are always restricted to the statutory minimum number of seats reserved for them. In such a society, there is hardly any possibility of representation of minorities in the absence of statutory provisions. In the rural areas of Sangrur district, out of total population of 11,39,204 persons, 74,657 (6.66%) persons belong to Muslim community. After Independence there is no provision for reservation in favour of minorities. Without the provision of reservations, out of total 181 seats of Block Samities in the district, the Muslims were able to get only 3 (1.66%) seats in 2013 elections. Again, in the present Block Samities, the Muslim candidates have won only 3 seats, which is only 1.55 per cent of total 193 seats. Similarly, in the Gurdaspur district, out of a total of 201 Block Samiti seats, the Christians were able to get only 3 (1.49%) seats in the elections held in 2013, which is far below their population proportion in the district. In the present Block Samities constituted in 2018, again, there are only 3 Christian members out of a total of 213 members, constituting only 1.41 per cent of representation.

7.0 Conclusion:

Presence of all the sections of society in the representative bodies and decision making bodies is must for a true democracy. In a society based on equality and harmony, persons belonging to all shades of opinions have equal chances of becoming members in such bodies. But in a society, where different groups of people are not only divided, but also graded in hierarchical order, there is little possibility of getting due share by the weaker sections like the women and minorities. In such societies the minorities should not be left at the mercy of majorities; the weaker should not be left at the mercy of the stronger. In India the hopes expressed by some of the Constituent Assembly members like Begum Aizaz, H. C. Mookherjee, Jerome D'Souza, and Jawaharlal Nehru have not come to be true. Minorities are unable to get the seats even in proportion to their population. Until the equality is established in society, it should be established in political institutions by mechanical measures, i.e. reservations of seats or nominations of members of minorities.

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