

Employment Trends among Religious Communities of India

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Looking at the National Sample Survey Office data on employment and unemployment by major religious groups, this article finds that the Muslim community remains worse-off compared to all other religious groups on almost all indicators. It is argued that to reap the “demographic dividend”, Indian policymakers and administrators will have to proactively implement at least existing social welfare programmes, particularly those that are related to school education.

The views expressed are personal.

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Availability of decent jobs is an entry to the inclusive growth process. In India the spread of decent jobs across regions, sectors, gender, socio-economic and other communities appears skewed. The labour market in the past decade has undergone change particularly in terms of decreased participation of rural females in the labour force as well as workforce (Table 1).

In this article the demographic characteristics of the major religious groups which have direct and indirect impact on the major trends in the labour market indicators, viz, labour force participation rate (LFPR), worker population ratio (WPR), unemployment rate (UR) by usual principal and subsidiary status (UPSS) and a strategy for enhancing the employability of the population are discussed.

The data source is the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) *Report on Employment and Unemployment Situation among Major Religious Groups in India*. In the 66th round of the NSSO employment-unemployment survey, information on the religion followed by the sample households was collected.

The religion of the head of the household is taken as the religion of the

household. The NSSO collects data on seven major religions followed in India, viz, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Jainism, Buddhism and Zoroastrianism. Of these, detailed analysis has been done for the four major religious groups, viz: Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and Sikhism, which account for about 98.7% of the population while the other religions have been classified in the “Others” category. The sampling is based on stratified multistage sampling. A total of 4,59,784 persons were surveyed, which is less than 1% of the total population.

Education Levels

Any analysis of employment and unemployment trends without discussing the educational level of the labour force would be incomplete as it reflects the quality of the labour force. The literacy rate among the working age population (15-59 years) was the highest for Christians, for both sexes in both rural and urban areas. Muslims had the lowest literacy

Table 1: Labour Force (in millions)

		1999-2000	2004-05	2009-10	2011-12
Rural	Male	202	222.5	235.7	238.8
	Female	106.7	126.2	106.2	103.6
Urban	Male	78.9	93.9	102.7	112.5
	Female	19.2	26.4	24.2	28.8
Total		406.8	469	468.8	483.7
Workforce					
Rural	Male	198.6	218.9	231.9	234.6
	Female	105.7	124	104.5	101.8
Urban	Male	75.4	90.4	99.8	109.2
	Female	18.2	24.6	22.8	27.3
Total		397.9	457.9	459	472.9

Source: NSSO various reports.

levels: 31% and 53% for rural Muslim males and females, respectively, and 19% and 35% for urban Muslim males and females, respectively, were not literate. The proportion of persons aged 15 years and above with educational level secondary and above, was the highest for Christians, followed by Sikhs.

The age distribution of different religious categories provides an insight into the labour market. As per NSSO 2009-10, 30% of the population is in the age group of 0-14 years, i.e., the demographic dividend of the coming years. The Muslims account for the largest proportion of this age group, nearly 35%, followed by Hindus with 30%, Christians and Sikhs with 26% each.

Trends in Labour Market

LFPFR – Supply Side: The LFPFR is an indicator of the number of persons entering the labour market. The LFPFR for males was much higher than those for females for all religious groups – the differentials being greater in urban areas where the LFPFR of females was very low. The LFPFR among Christians is higher as compared to other religious groups, probably due to higher literacy levels in the community. The decline in female LFPFR was mainly among the Hindus and Muslims in the rural areas while the decline was more among Christian females in the urban areas (Table 2).

WPR – Demand Side: The WPR was highest among the Christians for all categories except for urban males where the same was higher for Hindus. In rural areas only the WPR among Muslims witnessed an increase during the period 1999-2000 to 2009-10. In urban areas the WPR increased across all religious groups for males and declined for females in 2009-10 as compared to 1999-2000 except for urban female Sikhs whose WPR saw an increase (Table 3).

Unemployment Rate: The portion of labour force seeking work but not employed is reflected by the UR. At the all-India level unemployment rate was around 2% in 2009-10 and the unemployment in urban areas (3.4%) was higher than that in the rural areas (1.6%).

Among the religious communities in rural areas, during 2009-10, unemployment was the highest for Christians at 3.9% and in urban areas was the highest for Sikhs at 6%. Unemployment among urban females was higher than urban and rural males and females (Table 4).

Quality of Employment

The status of employment, in terms of self-employment, regular or casual, indicates the quality of employment. Self-employment was the main occupation in the rural areas among both males and females while in the urban areas self-employment and regular employment was almost on par.

Among regular employees Christians accounted for a higher proportion as compared to other religious communities in both rural and urban areas. This is

probably due to their high literacy levels (Table 5).

Enhancing Employability

It emerges that the LFPFR and WPR vary across religious groups irrespective of region and gender. However, the Muslim community is behind other religious communities in terms of educational attainment, labour force participation, workforce participation and this lag is more so in the case of Muslim females. In education, there appears to be some improvement after the implementation of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan scheme. For instance, at the all-India level enrolment of Muslim students at the primary level (I-V) has increased from 13% in 2010-11 to 14.2% in 2012-13.¹ At the upper-primary level (VI-VIII), the enrolment increased from 11.25% in 2010-11

Table 2: Labour Force Participation Rate as Per UPSS of Major Religious Groups in 2009-10 over 1999-2000 (per 1,000)

		Hinduism		Islam		Christianity		Sikhism		All	
		1999-2000	2009-10	1999-2000	2009-10	1999-2000	2009-10	1999-2000	2009-10	1999-2000	2009-10
Rural	Male	546	560	489	526	583	573	557	550	540	556
	Female	317	279	164	146	342	346	274	268	300	265
	Persons	434	423	327	344	461	459	422	415	423	414
Urban	Male	549	563	520	536	522	540	532	568	543	559
	Female	154	151	104	101	252	226	104	167	147	146
	Person	361	368	322	327	386	382	329	380	354	362

Source: ibid.

Table 3: Worker Population Ratio as Per UPSS of Major Religious Groups in 2009-10 over 1999-2000 (per 1,000)

		Hinduism		Islam		Christianity		Sikhism		All	
		1999-2000	2009-10	1999-2000	2009-10	1999-2000	2009-10	1999-2000	2009-10	1999-2000	2009-10
Rural	Male	537	551	478	517	567	558	547	535	531	547
	Female	314	275	162	143	322	326	273	263	297	261
	Persons	428	417	321	337	443	441	416	405	417	408
Urban	Male	525	547	496	523	486	528	514	536	518	543
	Female	145	142	98	94	232	215	99	153	139	138
	Person	344	355	306	317	358	371	317	356	324	373

Source: ibid.

Table 4: Estimated Persons Unemployed (%) as Per UPSS in 2009-10 over 1999-2000

		Hinduism		Islam		Christianity		Sikhism		All	
		1999-2000	2009-10	1999-2000	2009-10	1999-2000	2009-10	1999-2000	2009-10	1999-2000	2009-10
Rural	Male	1.6	1.5	2.2	1.9	2.7	2.6	2.0	2.7	1.8	1.6
	Female	0.9	1.4	1.8	2.0	5.8	6.0	0.4	1.7	1.1	1.6
	Persons	1.4	1.5	2.1	1.9	3.9	3.9	1.4	2.4	1.5	1.6
Urban	Male	4.6	2.9	4.6	2.5	6.9	2.2	3.4	5.6	5.1	1.9
	Female	5.2	5.8	6.7	6.8	7.9	4.6	4.8	8.3	4.4	0.9
	Person	4.7	3.4	5.0	3.2	7.3	2.9	3.6	6.1	4.8	3.4

Source: ibid.

Table 5: Per 1,000 Distribution of Usually Employed by Status during 2009-10

	Rural Male			Rural Female			Urban Male			Urban Female		
	SE	R	C	SE	R	C	SE	R	C	SE	R	C
Hinduism	537	83	379	547	41	411	397	441	161	393	404	203
Islam	528	79	393	649	39	312	496	298	205	597	216	187
Christianity	500	168	332	554	114	332	294	450	256	284	607	109
Sikhism	545	123	333	789	86	125	444	352	204	515	367	118
All	535	85	380	557	44	399	411	419	170	411	393	196

SE-Self employed, R-Regular, C-Casual.

to 12.11% in 2012-13. The positive development is that share of Muslim girls in enrolment increased to 49% at the primary level and 51.48% at the upper-primary level² during 2012-13.

The age distribution of the population suggests that among the children in the age group of 5-14 years the attendance rates for the major religious communities was around 80% in rural areas. But for the age group of 15-19 years, as children move to the secondary level and higher there is a general decline among all religious communities, especially rural

Hindu and Muslim females. This decline could be due to socio-economic factors such as distance from the residence, absence of scholarships, involvement in household chores, meagre resources, etc. Similarly, among rural males also there is a decline in attendance rates after the age of 14 years, which is an indicator of the quality of the labour force in the future. Both in the rural and urban areas the decline is more among the Hindus and the Muslims. Low income levels and lack of institutional support from the respective religious communities could

be the reason for low attendance levels among the Hindus and Muslims.

In addition to the above, it may be pointed out that not only is the general education level low but also the percentage of people joining the labour force with vocational education/training. This affects the employability of the labour force across all religious communities.

NOTES

- 1 District Information System for Education-DISE Flash Statistics 2012-13 (p 34).
- 2 Ibid.