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AZAAD आवाज़

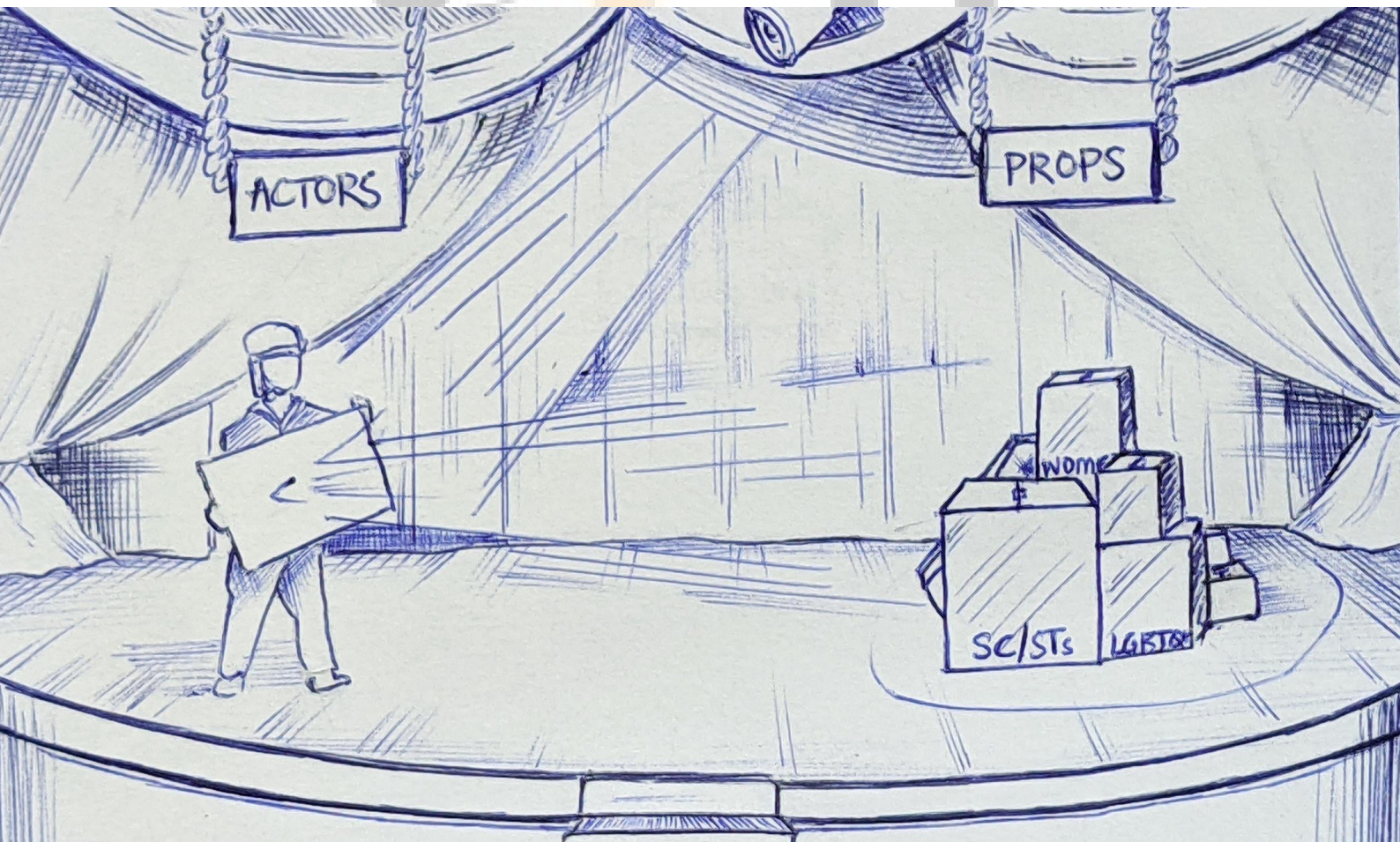
Patrika...



How many times have we come across someone suffering or being harassed, felt bad for them, considered helping them, but then looked the other way and moved on. This behaviour, termed as the 'bystander effect', is a psycho-social phenomenon where humans tend to help people less based on the assumption that someone else would step in. This behavioural tendency is exacerbated when the information we consume regularly depends on commercial capital generation and changes daily to keep the viewership interested and intact.

Our initiative Azaad आवाज़ aims to tackle an erosion of empathy in our society. This monthly magazine (Patrika) aims to focus on the marginalized sections whose voices are often muted in the cacophony of flashy mainstream media discourse. When referring to the marginalization, this platform does not aim to restrict itself to the traditional focus on social aggregates like caste and race alone but aspires to include a discussion on class, gender, sexual orientation etc.

*Azaad आवाज़ sculpted as a digital media station focuses on issues that debilitate the "deliberately silenced", drawing no boundaries and aspires to evolve and voice the needs of those silenced. The main theme focused for this monthly edition is : **"The Hidden Implications of Rising Unemployment Across India"**. This edition provides an in-depth perspective on the underlying issues and helps us understand the voices of those affected.*





The Heterogeneity of the Indian Labour Market

Access the Podcast:



Vichaar is Azaad Awaaz and PAIGAMs podcast series that aims at engaging with experts and professionals to further the conversation on social issues in context to marginalisation of communities. In the spirit of inculcating a habit of asking questions, Vichaar offers valuable insights from experts across industries and fields on contemporary issues through interviews. Bringing the conversation on the socio-political climate to another platform, presenting Vichaar, the podcast series.

In a podcast about the Heterogeneities of the Indian Labour market, Ms. Sabina Dewan, Founder and Executive Director of JustJobs Network, offers insight on female labour force participation, the relation between technology and gender, and the state of Indian education and skill development programs. She is a senior visiting fellow at the Centre for Policy Research and has previously worked with institutions like the World Bank, International Labour Organisation, the European Commission and more.



*Ms. Sabina Dewan,
founder of JustJobs Network.*

"Women are not only relegated to some of the lowest value-added activities in our economy, but also bear the disproportionate burden of household work and other forms of care work, and do not receive equal protections in terms of payments of wages and are subject to all other kinds of exploitation as well"

In the podcast, Ms. Dewan explains why the female labour force in the organised sector is at a historic low, which social factors have contributed to women being left out of the digital economy and the reasons for the deep fragmentation in the Indian labour market. Additionally, she analyses the gaps between employment and education, its effects on sectoral mobility and flexibility and the role of the skill development program.

"There is a lack of demand from female-friendly industries such as apparel and footwear. And continuing social disapproval of women being in the labour market, their concerns from the safety of transport to actual safety in the workplace. Other culprits include migration, nuclearisation of families where there are fewer women in the household to contribute to domestic work."

Power, Identity and Unemployment: The Case of Bihar



In this conversation with Mr. Ranjay Bihari, who is President of *Bihar Mange Rozgar*-a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) with the aim of bringing grassroot level changes in and across the state of Bihar, he argues that there exists a connotation between the ‘Bihari’ identity with the underdeveloped socio-economic condition of the state. This misunderstood notion of the ‘Bihari’ identity, according to him, projects all ‘Biharis’ and those residing in Bihar in a negative light.

Ranjay starts by posing the question: “*Why should we (Biharis) feel ashamed of our identity?*”.

He goes on to highlight the pertinence of a rich amalgamation of culture and history that enshrines the topography and socio-cultural landscape of Bihar from hundreds of years (and even today). From housing the significant landmarks of Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism, to being the birthplace of Sita, Bihar cradles a rich history of religious significance.

However, today Bihar accounts for one of the poorest states in India, lagging on all developmental indicators. “*Today it (the socio-economic position) is bad but tomorrow things will turn out to be better.*” Ranjay highlights how lack of education and employment opportunities available in Bihar often force people to migrate to states of Delhi, Gujarat, Punjab and Maharashtra amongst others. And many of these host states practice a sense of regional discrimination against the migrants from Bihar. “*Because of being forced into migration seeking greener pastures, people feel ashamed of their own Bihari identity.*”

Ranjay here refers to the Article 19 of the Indian Constitution which grants one the right to travel, work and live in any part of the country, “*this should be seen as a ‘right’ and not as a ‘responsibility’. Our responsibility is to work and develop our own State first.*”

He blames the current State government for encouraging their own citizens to work in other states for the betterment of those states. “*Why are we not focusing on improving the situation within our own state? We must do our work properly and thus demand respect for the hard labor put in.*”

Speaking on the state of private investment in Bihar, Ranjay talks about the case of Carlsberg Group, a Danish brewery company which invested in 2012. The Group was about to start production in 2015, but was met with a state liquor ban introduced by the government. Due to this they faced severe losses and called for monetary settlement which amounted to a huge loss for the government. Ranjay argues that this made other foreign investors cautious of investing in Bihar. This is an example on how the environment for upliftment is lacking in Bihar, one which has not been resolved by those in power.

In taking our conversation forward, he goes on to speak about his own journey of starting *Bihar Mange Rozgar*. He speaks about how he had created a Facebook page under the same name, which slowly started gaining momentum and finally conceptualised into a registered NGO which now aims at amplifying the voices of people who demand better livelihood and employment.

His organisation advocates for “Rozgar” (jobs) to be one of the main agendas that political parties should have. “*I am proud to say that nearly all political parties in Bihar have taken a strong note on the progressive need for better employment.*” Ranjay concludes by requesting those in power to thoroughly prioritize “Rozgar”, and focus on the means and policies needed to bring about such opportunities within the region.

Bihar Mange Rozgar Page:



The Crumbling of India's Economy with Prof. Maitreesh Ghatak



Dr. Maitreesh Ghatak is a Professor of Economics at the London School of Economics and fellow of the British Academy. He previously taught at the University of Chicago. Presently, he is a research fellow at the Centre for Economic Policy and Research. He studied in Presidency College, Kolkata, Delhi University and received his Ph.D. from Harvard University in 1996. He is the co-editor of *Economica* and has also served as the Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Development Economics*. His work focuses on development economics, public economics, and economics of organisations.

In this conversation with Professor Deepanshu Mohan, Director of the Centre for New Economics Studies, Professor Ghatak talks about India's growth rate projection during the time of the pandemic. He explicitly points out India's economic growth has seen a downward trend since 2014-15 and predicts a further contraction of around 5%. He astutely observes that, *"the economically sheltered minority, because of restrictions imposed in consumption possibilities, their savings have gone up, whereas for the rest of the population who do not have this income guarantee or assets to fall back on, essentially they are going to fall into a debt."*

Professor Ghatak stresses on the importance of the informal sector and the recent unemployment crisis in his talk. He explains that the organised sector of the Indian economy which makes up only about 3% of the population provides them access to regular, monthly income. But the remaining 97% of the population is still left out from such a structure which adds to the rising inequality, especially during the lockdown period. Dr. Maitreesh Ghatak brilliantly euphemisms this to the 'built-in depressor' concept; in which if a whole fraction of the population is essentially debt ridden, even after if the economy recovers, the majority of the population will bear the burden of paying off existing debts. This hinders their ability to get back to their normal economic levels.

"The government needs to have incentives for people to behave in a way which they may not in a socially desirable environment. Only a coercive state uses punishments or sticks only, you need to have a combination of both the carrots and the sticks."

He provides insight on the policies and response of the government to the pandemic. Although Professor Ghatak was quite understanding of the rather uncharted territory that the policy makers are navigating through during the pandemic, he professes *"As economists, we know that you cannot just have sticks, you need carrots."* Professor Ghatak highlights India's problematic rudimentary welfare safety net in the economic packages announced by the government which was not optimal in protecting its citizens against the ills of economic severity. In his view, the government also fell short in its implementation leading to unintended and unplanned consequences.

He concludes with a discussion on the idea of economic growth which is to improve the living of ordinary people by boosting their income. In the process, he briefly comments on the recent labour law reforms that were undertaken in various states during the pandemic. For Professor Ghatak, flexible labour laws goes a long way in creating a conducive environment equipped with greater hiring and better social safety nets.

Interpreting the Gendered Impact of Recent Economic Shocks



Dr. Ashwini Deshpande is Professor of Economics and Founding Director of Centre for Economic Data and Analysis (CEDA) at Ashoka University. Her Ph.D. and early publications have been on the international debt crisis of the 1980s. Subsequently, she has been working on the economics of discrimination and affirmative action, with a focus on caste and gender in India. Her analysis, which is often backed by reliably sourced statistical data, sets her research apart and gives a conclusive and convincing nature to her arguments. Her area of specialization helps us understand the crisis from a different perspective.

Professor Deshpande in her opening statement employs statistics to comment on the severity of the lockdown imposed in the month of April. She refers to the data sent out by the Blavatnik School of Government at the University of Oxford. According to the data, the stringency index places India's lockdown measures to be most stringent in the world. Using this, she talks about the impact of stringency on jobs in India and the gendered aspects of this impact.

Professor Deshpande, in this interaction, presents a high-frequency data set from the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) which has been observing unemployment rates from January 2016. Prof Deshpande carefully analyses the information particularly pertinent to April 2020, when the impact of the lockdown was harsh.

“Women have been more vulnerable to lose their jobs than men.”

To analyse these spiking unemployment rates, she uses a gendered lens and compares the job losses of women to men in the Indian context. She specifically exclaims that in absolute terms, “many more men lost jobs in the first month of lockdown than women” but in relative terms, more women lost jobs to men in 2020.

“Over the time where women's labour force participation is falling, women's education attainment has been rising continuously”

In another set of data she analyses the time spent in household work by men and women which has completely changed since April 2020. She highlights that working patterns have changed because of the normalisation of work-from-home. This is mainly because women thought that they have to discharge their domestic duties which they were primarily responsible for and would often ask their employers to work from home or to be afforded flexible timings.

Previously, this was looked down upon by employers as it hinted towards a lack of commitment towards their work. Now, with the normalisation of work-from-home patterns, the stigma attached to working from home would definitely shift radically.

She also sheds some light on the ASHA workers who have acted as the frontline workers during the pandemic. This group formed exclusively of women have acted as a response team during the pandemic. They, however, have been poorly paid, mistreated and have faced the imminent threat of getting infected from the virus.

In Conversation with Dr. Sehar Iqbal from Jammu and Kashmir.

Q. “A preliminary assessment conducted by the Kashmir Chamber of Commerce (KCCI) estimates that Kashmir’s economy has incurred losses up to \$5.32bn and more than 100,000 people have become unemployed since India scrapped Article 370 and the state of Kashmir of its special status”. In what ways has the decision of scrapping Article 370 by New Delhi affected the state’s socio-economic landscape?

Since August 5, 2019, the frequent curfew and other restrictions on assembly and movement imposed by the government, cordon and search operations by armed forces as well as public strikes & street protests have hit the economy of Jammu and Kashmir very badly. Apart from the loss to the losses to the private sector that you mentioned, the scale of unemployment has gone up massively. I would put the figure higher than 100,000 because daily wage labourers, transporters, small handicrafts dealers, artisans, shikarawalas, taxi drivers, tourist guides and other people related to the informal sectors of the economy have had no work since then. Again, women have been hit the hardest, with women artisans and owners of boutiques, creches and schools reporting bankruptcy on an alarming rate.

The government has done nothing to provide the private sector players in the region with access to easy-term loans or extensions of lines of credit (in the case of women-owned business access to credit is especially needed because women typically find it harder to get loans and rely on selling jewellery to start businesses- so their losses are harder to cover). It has also done nothing to provide relief to labourers who are out of work. Instead even during the COVID-induced lockdown, the government is bringing labourers from outside the state to work on its construction sites in buses from Bihar. This is reflective of the government’s anti-people mindset.

Women across communities and regions in Jammu and Kashmir have found it near impossible to access healthcare facilities. The past year was particularly hard for women needing medical treatment because of the restrictions on vehicle movement and the mobile phone ban that came into place after the abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019. For pregnant women and women requiring dialysis, chemotherapy and other emergency surgeries ‘due to unavailability of transport, ambulance services, shortage of medical staff, and dwindling supplies of life-saving medications’ the situation became life-threatening. The lack of access to medicine in Kashmir valley was also alarming in a population with 1.6 million cases of chronic ailments that require daily medication.

The burden fell heaviest on rural women living in hard to reach areas with no access to public or private vehicles. Cases of stillbirths due to pregnant women having to walk long distances and miscarriages due to lack of timely communications with gynaecologists were recorded at Lad Ded Hospital, the main maternity hospital in Srinagar.



Dr. Sehar Iqbal is an expert in the area of gender and development studies and is currently the Executive Director of the Sajid Iqbal Foundation (Jammu and Kashmir).

According to activists, due to job losses after the clampdown, many pregnant women whose husbands were laid off or unable to find work, suffered from malnutrition during pregnancy which damaged their health and that of their babies. All this points to a serious disruption in women’s ability to access timely and adequate healthcare- leading to a corresponding threat to their security.

Q. Following-up from our last question, to what extent, in your view, has the social and political topography of Jammu and Kashmir changed in the last year or so?

As you know separatist leaders in Kashmir have been raising the bogey of Israel-like settlements and demographic change in the region for a long time. Most people in the state did not take them seriously till August 5 last year when the GOI started a process that will give outsiders access to land and employment resources in Jammu and Kashmir. People at large feel like their worst fears have come true. There is an extremely dangerous level of support for separatist of all shades- the more extreme the leaders’ views, the more people are following them. This is the first negative consequence. Mainstream political leaders who held up the Indian Constitution as a safety for the rights of the people have been publicly ignored, imprisoned and derided by their one-time political allies. They have lost all legitimacy and are only seen as objects of public scorn and derision. This is the second negative effect.

There is no let-up in militancy, despite tall official claims and violence that was contained within the borders of the erstwhile state till August 5 has now appeared at the Line of Control with China as well. Because of de-operationalizing Article 370 what the Government of India has effectively done is to delegitimize

the legality of Jammu and Kashmir's accession to India and internationally China and countries aligned to it have seized the opportunity to seize territory. The Indian armed forces are now fighting on two fronts instead of one. This is the third and most long lasting negative effect of August 5, one that will hurt the country more than any other.

Q. In the current social and economic profile of Jammu and Kashmir, the increasing rate of unemployment amongst the youth and the breakdown in the education system (because of the frequent shutdowns seen since August 5th) pose a grave challenge to the development and well-being of the people of Jammu and Kashmir? What, in your understanding, needs to be urgently prioritized to allow one to enhance her/his capabilities?

What differs between J&K and other regions is that it is an environmentally sensitive region, in terms of the difference in ecosystem and climate. It is a region in which the developmental model should be based on the service-based industry rather than the heavy industry, with the latter being the current focus of the government. Instead of the mass use of machinery within the snow-abundant climate of J&K, the sectors which thrive in such an environment should see further investment, such as horticulture, floriculture, tissue-culture and such. Increased investments in such sectors could also lead to J&K witnessing a second Horticultural revolution, leading to increased employment of youth and income generation. This would be one way of ensuring employment and development within J&K.

With regards to education, the COVID-19 pandemic is not the only factor which hinders education, instead, education in J&K was badly hit, even prior to the revocation of article 370. Instead, education was disrupted post-2008, due to the protests and violence. Unfortunately, at the moment it is tough for many to access education, despite the provision of free primary, secondary, and tertiary education within J&K. Access to education is incredibly limited, nearly non-existent, given that there is no stable network and internet bans are placed within the region. Those who fall under the bracket of economically-well off families would have been able to continue schooling with the shift to the virtual realm, yet cannot do so due to the internet ban. With regards to those who are economically weaker, such as labourers and semi-skilled workers, there seems to be no effort made by the government. Instead, workers are being brought out from outside. The government should remove the internet ban immediately and indefinitely, so that education is not halted.

Q. In your understanding, how difficult has it become for social organisations and civil society groups to work in the valley after August 5th, 2019? Has the new state administration made any efforts to improve the day-to-day lives and livelihoods of the citizenry?

The administration of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir consists mostly of entry and mid-level bureaucrats from outside the state, who know little or nothing of the communities living in the state and its particularities. They have proved ineffective in public



Photographed: The Sajid Iqbal self help group in Panzgam, Pulwama.

service delivery on every front, whether it is providing security to Panchayati Raj functionaries, ensuring re-opening of schools and businesses or even setting up basic SOPs to prevent COVID 19 infections in the state. The case of pregnant women not being able to reach hospitals across the state till the courts intervened is a case in point. Another example is the lack of implementation of standard quarantining protocol in the government maternity hospital in Anantnag where COVID infected pregnant women were kept with healthy expectant mothers in the same ward, leading to multiple infections and deaths amongst pregnant women in the district.

Despite its own failures the government, through the police and armed forces continued to detain, harass and obstruct the working of NGO staff working to deliver food packets, medicines and other essentials to families in-need during the pandemic. In two cases, NGO staff were beaten in Jammu region. Nevertheless civil society groups have come together very effectively to delineate areas of exclusive operation, identify & use opportunities for collaboration and share information in real time, especially in Kashmir valley.

Q. Can you please elaborate on the work and community outreach efforts undertaken by the Sajid Iqbal Foundation over the last year? How has the Foundation collaborated with other civil society groups and social organisations to address the widespread challenges facing the people of Kashmir?

The Sajid Iqbal Foundation has been providing food aid and medicines to 408 families and direct income support to 86 families in Anantnag, Budgam, Pulwama, Srinagar, Baramulla and Kulgam since the pandemic began. We have also supplied doctors running COVID clinics across the valley with more than 200 sets of WHO-compliant PPE kits. We have donated oxygen concentrators, nebuliser sets, oxygen cylinders and masks to hospitals across the valley. This is in addition to our shelter program for abandoned women (3 two-room houses built since August last year) and livelihoods program (52 beneficiaries covered since August last year) as well as our Lifeline program (that supports surgery costs for individuals living in poverty and provides wheelchairs to the differently-abled). We have also been at the forefront of donation portals like Food for All, a real time donor-beneficiary linking portal and coordination efforts with civil society on the ground.

Unemployment and Under-representation: Muslims in Uttar Pradesh

"UP serves as the centre stage of oppression of the largest religious minority in the country."

Uttar Pradesh (U.P.), the most populous state in India, has been a melting pot of Muslim and Hindu identities for millennia. Famous for its legacy of Nawabs and Awadhi culture, the diverse demography of Uttar Pradesh is clearly visible in its culture, history and politics as the state houses the largest Muslim population in the country. The popular image of UP today however, does not coincide with its grand history of splendour and riches.

In the past 7 years, since the infamous Muzzaffarnagar riots broke out one has seen a highly consistent stream of images and stories of almost a post-apocalyptic UP, plagued with violence and communalism, so much so that entire Hindu vote banks have been swayed by the polarised sentiment in the area and have become key to the success of the ruling party in the state, winning by an overwhelming majority. UP thus serves as the centre stage of oppression of the largest religious minority in the country.

Although oppression of the Muslim community is a multifaceted issue, one of the most integral components retarding the progress of this community is unemployment. This goes beyond hindering financial capability and security, but one that on the whole restricts any sort of economic progress. It also leaves the community comparatively more vulnerable to illiteracy, disease, crime and various other socio-economic problems. Most methods provided by the government are rendered ineffective due to another key problem, underrepresentation. The overwhelming majority of the NDA government in the state had not a single Muslim representative as a member.

Both these issues have been concurrent and consistent in the state for a large part of the past decade. One important correlation between underrepresentation and unemployment within the Muslim community in the state is that they have been largely aggravated and intensified by the wave of communalism that swept the state in 2013.

UP has had a long history of decreased employment opportunities, and this affects the minorities more than the average population, especially ones vulnerable to discrimination and bias. The Sachar Committee report (2006) shows that Muslim employees working in the government sector constitute less than 23% lower than any other minority group.



Source: [The Business Standard](#), "Who did Muslims vote for in UP?"

This is lower than the SC/ST group which constitutes about 39.4% of the government jobs. In the 14 years since the report was published, most Muslim communities have shown little to no progress, even steadily declining in states like Uttar Pradesh.

Employability is increasingly dismal in the public/private sector with just 6% of the populations still holding paid jobs. Unemployment hit record highs in 2014 after communal violence peaked the previous year. From 2018 to 2019, there was an increase of 9.95% in unemployment among Muslims in Uttar Pradesh, this was significantly higher than the national average of 7.23%, according to the [Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy](#) data. This economic handicap further alienates the community from the rest of the population.

One can see consistently decreasing numbers of children from the community attending school and even lower of Muslims pursuing higher education. A slow ghettoization of the community, with very poor living conditions in most of these areas can be observed. These ghettos are the least politically active areas, with polling booths standing almost empty in such areas like [Chamanganj in Kanpur](#) which recorded the lowest turnout in the 2014 and 2019 elections. These elections were vital in demonstrating the communal polarisation and Islamophobic sentiment, as for the first time since Independence, Muslim candidates were entirely obliterated from the Lok Sabha in the state.

With majoritarian politics in play to sway vote banks in their favour, one is witnessing an erasure of Muslim culture and history in the state. Renaming of cities like Allahabad, now Prayagraj which was founded by the Mughal Emperor Akbar, are very revealing of the current government's polarising politics and a spread of communal sentiment to solidify their power in the state. The Muslim community, once central and intricately interwoven within the rich tapestry of Uttar Pradesh is now being forced to live on the fringes of society.

MP Farmer Suicide Bid: CM Orders Removal of Guna SP, Collector.

On 14th July, a farmer couple belonging to the Paridhi Tribe in Guna city, tried to commit suicide in the presence of their children and the police. This was done in retaliation to a forceful eviction by the police from their agricultural land which was technically government property. There are reportedly plans to build a Model College on this land. The couple was immediately taken to the nearest hospital and given medical care.

Online videos of the police brutally thrashing the couple and the locals (which included women and children) gathered at the scene have sparked outrage among many. The police allegedly claim that the videos were cropped to incite outrage as the only reason violence was used was to disperse the crowd in the area who were trying to stop the police from taking the unconscious couple to the hospital after they attempted suicide.

MP FARMER SUICIDE BID: CM ORDERS REMOVAL OF GUNA SP, COLLECTOR

17 July 2020

MIGRANT WORKERS, FREELANCERS MUST BE UNDER SOCIAL SECURITY NET

30 July 2020

Migrant workers, freelancers must be under social security net, Parliamentary panel suggests.

The Code on Social Security which was referred to the standing committee on labour headed by senior Biju Janata Dal (BJD) leader Bhartruhari Mahtab was introduced in the Lok Sabha in December 2019. The Code on Social Security, 2019 will be replacing the nine social security laws already in place, such as the Maternity Benefit Act, Employees' Provident Fund Act and Employees' Pension Scheme etc. The code will cover workers from both organised and unorganised sectors.

The parliamentary Standing Committee in its draft report reviewed the Code and stated that employers have to register and contribute to the social security of their household help. The draft report recommended the universalisation of the social security coverage, including domestic workers, migrant workers, gig workers (freelancers), platform workers (people working for companies such as Uber and Ola) and agricultural workers.

Facebook to ban content related to LGBTQ 'conversion therapy' from its social media platforms.

Facebook has initiated a ban on all the content related to conversion therapy, CNN reported. It is a pseudo science practice that professes people to change their sexuality from the ones deemed non mainstream. The company has been said to review its policies from time to time in order to maintain the dignity of the LGBTQ community. Any more recommendations related to the conversion therapy will not be posted on both Facebook and Instagram from now on.

This action is a result of demands by LGBTQ activists to ban the advertisements of conversion therapy on its platform. Similar steps have been taken by countries like Germany and the US. In May, Germany became the first country to outlaw the pseudo scientific practice for the minors while a total of the 14 states in US have banned the conversion therapy altogether.

FACEBOOK TO BAN CONTENT RELATED TO LGBTQ+ 'CONVERSION THERAPY'

13 July 2020

Batch of 2020: Responses to Post-COVID Education Prospects and Employment Conditions

In terms of further studies, I luckily haven't had to alter my plans drastically since I had already planned to take a little break. Most of the post graduate courses for psychology in India are in January, so i had planned to take a 6 month break to study and explore my field a little more so that I could make a more informed decision about my post-graduate plans. I had planned to intern in these six months and even though I'm lucky to still have the internship, working online really takes away a large chunk of experience that I would have normally gained from this internship.

I think in my batch universally there is also a sense of loss, in that a vital part of our college experience was taken from us, our last semester, our graduation, goodbyes. I have many friends who had jobs promised to them which have now been withdrawn. What makes it worse is that some of them also needed these jobs to provide for their families. Many of us had admissions in universities, in India and abroad, which we have no guarantee will be a possibility now. One thing that this pandemic has taught me is to have plans, and back up plans, because life can throw anything your way, and you have to be prepared to tackle it. It also shows us that most of the time, nothing actually goes according to plan, anything can happen anytime, so we should really live in the moment and enjoy each day we get to do the things we want. It's a paradox, but maybe that's the lesson- balance is key.



Ishita Choubey, Psychology Major, Jindal School of Liberal Arts and Humanities, Batch of 2020.

For our batch, we just graduated overnight. When the dust settled, we found ourselves unemployed and directionless. Students have to wait from three months to a whole year to actually start their further education. Navigating the employment scene, post COVID-19, was and still continues to be a strenuous experience so far in my academic career. Employment has been scarce, and has been a very stressful experience.

Furthermore, I have seen an increased amount of unpaid internships. I have actually started receiving remote job offers, so the situation seems hopeful in the coming months and I hope that the employment situation betters in the coming months for students like us. The new perspective I gained was that every trend, no matter how prevalent or how old, or how repetitive it has been; it can reverse itself.

Don't put all your eggs in one basket- don't go after that one particular option that employment in this sector, be in investment banking or the commerce sector, do not rely on that alone. You need to diversify yourself, your skill set- you can't rely on a single skill set. I am a student of accounting and finance but I also have a fair idea about graphic designing and also about the stock market and the marketing principles. That gave me a real edge in such desperate times.

Maahir Tuli, Finance and Accounting, International Business Major, Symbiosis School of Management, Batch of 2020.

The situation is pretty stressful with uncertainty looming over our heads. Specially on the academic front where everything is so indecisive, it becomes confusing on which areas to focus. There is no clarity about the final semester exams which in turn does not let us divert our focus totally towards the professional prospects. Personally, I was fortunate enough to receive a placement offer in the month of January itself. It's a company working in the industry of ad-tech and thus my position was retained. However, in a few other cases, placement offers of my friends which they received earlier were revoked. This leaves their future uncertain and vague.

Although the pandemic has brought a lot of hardships in our lives, we cannot ignore the fact that it also has given us a new perspective. We have become all the more concerned about cleanliness and hygiene. This is a learning which needs to be carried beyond the pandemic. Technology did play a vital role during the whole time. In today's times, adaptability is the new constant. We need to adopt a fluid approach. We need to accept the fact that this is the new normal. Our lives have changed, our ways of working have changed but COVID-19 is here to stay and we need to learn to navigate through it both wisely and fruitfully.



Shruti Gupta, Economics Major, Lady Shri Ram College, Batch of 2020.



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