

31% Muslims Live Below Poverty Line: NCAER Survey

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Nearly one third of Muslims in the nation survive on less than Rs 550 a month, economic think tank NCAER said, amid the ongoing debate on reservations in jobs and educational institutions for those belonging to the community.

A survey by the National Council for Applied Economic Research (NCAER) said that three out of every 10 Muslims were below poverty line and lived on less than Rs 550 a month in the year 2004-05.

Even among the poor, urban Muslims were better off compared to those in villages, who survived on Rs 338 a month during the year under review, NCAER said last week.

The survey comes around the time when Supreme Court, in an interim order, has upheld the validity of four per cent job and educational reservation provided to backward members of Muslim community in Andhra Pradesh.

Also, the report of Ranganath Mishra Commission, which has suggested reservation for Muslims and other minorities, and has sought scheduled caste status for dalits who adopted Islam and Christianity, is awaiting action by the government.

"The Adivasis are the most vulnerable group with nearly 50 per cent below the poverty line...(followed by) the Dalits and Muslims with poverty rates of 32 per cent and 31 per cent," said the Indian Human Development survey conducted by the NCAER and University of Maryland of the US.

The survey took the poverty line at Rs 356 per person per month in rural areas and at Rs 538 in urban areas for 2004-05.

Besides, the survey said Muslims are at the bottom in terms of rural household income.

However, in the country, Muslim households are slightly better off than dalits and adivasis as a whole.

"Adivasi and dalit households have the lowest annual income at Rs 20,000 and Rs 22,800, respectively. The other backward classes and Muslim households are slightly better off, with incomes of Rs 26,091 and Rs 28,500," the report said.

As per the 2001 census, there were 13.8 crore Muslims, accounting for 13.4 per cent of the total population of India.

The survey said Muslims are most likely to generate income from small family businesses, partly because of educational differences across the community. It said social group differences in enrollment are striking.

Dalit, adivasi and Muslim children are far less likely to enrol in schools and are slightly more likely to drop out than others, the survey said.

"Consequently, while 94 per cent children from the forward castes, and 96 per cent from other religious groups were enrolled at the time of interview, the figures were 83 per cent for dalit children, 77 per cent for adivasi children and 76 per cent for muslim children," the survey said.

Overall, more than one-fourth of Indians lives below poverty line.

"About 25.7 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line," said the survey, which is based on feedback of 41,000 households. The survey estimates rural poverty at 26.5 per cent and urban poverty at 23.7 per cent.

The incidence of poverty is highest in Chhattisgarh at 63.3 per cent, followed by Jharkhand (49 per cent), Madhya Pradesh (45.5 per cent) and Orissa (41.3 per cent).

On the other hand, only 3.4 per cent population in Jammu & Kashmir lives below the poverty line, followed by 4.3 per cent in Himachal Pradesh and 4.9 per cent in Punjab.

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