



International Journal of Engineering, Science and Humanities

An international peer reviewed, refereed, open-access journal
Impact Factor 8.3 www.ijesh.com ISSN: 2250-3552

Social, Political, and Educational Participation of Muslims in Marathwada: An Empirical Assessment of Barriers, Representation, and Inclusion

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Abstract

This study examines the social, political, and educational participation of Muslims in the Marathwada region between 2010 and 2022, focusing on existing barriers, representation gaps, and levels of inclusion. Using a descriptive and analytical research design, data were collected from 300 respondents through structured questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics, ANOVA, and t-tests. The findings reveal that while Muslims demonstrate moderate participation in social and political activities, structural discrimination, socio-economic constraints, and inadequate institutional support significantly limit their inclusion. Educational participation is particularly affected by financial instability, limited access to quality institutions, and experiences of bias. Political engagement remains largely voter-centric, with minimal representation and persistent fear of backlash. The study highlights multi-dimensional exclusion and emphasizes the need for targeted policy interventions to improve opportunities, empowerment, and social cohesion in the region.

Keywords: Muslims, Marathwada, Social Participation, Political Participation, Educational Barriers, Inclusion, Discrimination, Minority Studies

1. Introduction

The study of Muslim participation in social, political, and educational spheres within the Marathwada region holds profound significance in understanding the broader dynamics of minority inclusion, representation, and empowerment in India. Muslims constitute one of the largest religious minorities in the country, yet persistent structural, economic, and cultural challenges continue to shape their lived realities. National-level investigations such as the Sachar Committee Report (2006) revealed deep disparities between Muslims and other communities in multiple domains, demonstrating that socio-economic backwardness and limited institutional access have long affected their developmental trajectory. These findings underscore the need for region-specific empirical research, particularly in historically marginalized regions like



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Marathwada, where Muslims form a substantial demographic segment but continue to experience uneven patterns of participation (Patel, 2013; Department of Economics SNDT University, 2013). This study therefore emerges from an urgent academic and policy-driven requirement to map the levels of participation, identify barriers, and highlight opportunities for inclusive growth among Muslims in the region.

Marathwada, located in central Maharashtra, represents a complex socio-historical landscape shaped by linguistic, cultural, and economic diversity. Despite its rich heritage, the region has faced issues of underdevelopment, agrarian distress, and limited access to quality infrastructure—factors that disproportionately impact marginalized communities, particularly Muslims. Research shows that socio-political marginalization of Indian Muslims often manifests in restricted access to employment, education, housing, and political representation (Javaid & Ahmed, 2020; Khanum & Hussain, 2023). These inequalities persist despite constitutional guarantees of equality and government initiatives aimed at minority empowerment. Scholars argue that the lived experiences of Muslims reflect overlapping marginalities—regional backwardness combined with minority status—creating compounded disadvantages that require deeper academic inquiry (Shaban et al., 2023; Wani, 2022).

At the national level, several studies have highlighted the political alienation of Muslims, noting a persistent gap between their population share and political representation. Farooqui (2020) emphasizes that Muslim representation in legislative bodies remains disproportionately low, contributing to a sense of exclusion from mainstream decision-making processes. In addition, tokenistic political strategies—where political parties rely on Muslim votes but fail to address community concerns—have been widely documented (Khanum & Hussain, 2023). Such critiques resonate strongly in regions like Marathwada, where political participation exists but is often overshadowed by fear of backlash, identity-based discrimination, and inadequate institutional support (Shairgojri & Bhat, 2023). This study therefore aims to examine the extent of political engagement in Marathwada while analyzing perceived and real barriers that Muslims encounter in local and regional governance structures.

Education serves as a fundamental indicator of social mobility and empowerment, yet disparities in educational access and attainment persist among Muslims in India. Multiple studies have noted that Muslims, especially Muslim women, face challenges related to digital exclusion, infrastructural deficits, financial hardship, and discriminatory attitudes within schooling environments (Shaban et al., 2023; Khan, 2013; Mir & Pramanik, 2017). These challenges are further compounded by limited availability of minority-focused educational institutions in underdeveloped regions. Research in Maharashtra has highlighted insufficient school capacity in Muslim-dominated localities, leading to higher dropout rates and restricted transitions into higher education (Department of Economics SNDT University, 2013). Furthermore, scholars argue that



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lack of vocational training and skill development programs undermines the community's potential to benefit from emerging economic opportunities (Wani, 2022). The educational dimension of this study thus assesses access, attainment, institutional discrimination, and the role of government schemes in improving educational outcomes.

Social participation forms another key component of minority empowerment, as it reflects the extent to which individuals engage in community activities, social networks, civil society organizations, and inter-community relations. Studies across India have shown that Muslims often experience reduced social capital due to community segregation, mistrust, and discriminatory stereotypes (Rahman & Ferdous, 2024; Rai & Mishra, 2024). The rise of misinformation and hate speech—especially through social media—has further contributed to communal tensions, affecting everyday interactions and limiting Muslim participation in public spaces (Rahman & Ferdous, 2024). Nevertheless, scholars also document examples of resilience, community solidarity, and grassroots activism within Muslim communities, suggesting that social participation is influenced by both structural constraints and internal community dynamics (Rai & Mishra, 2024). In the context of Marathwada, these issues become particularly salient due to recurring communal tensions, economic deprivation, and limited state support.

Economically, Muslims remain among the most deprived groups in India, with restricted access to financial services, employment opportunities, business development frameworks, and welfare schemes (Robinson, 2008; Wani, 2022). Islamic social finance mechanisms such as zakat and waqf have historically been significant resources for community welfare, yet their potential remains underutilized in contemporary policy frameworks (Wani, 2022). Research emphasizes that economic marginalization directly affects political participation and educational attainment, creating a cyclical pattern of exclusion (Khanum & Hussain, 2023). In Marathwada, where economic distress is widespread due to drought-prone agriculture and limited industrial growth, Muslims experience amplified vulnerabilities. This study therefore incorporates an analysis of economic conditions as a cross-cutting factor influencing all dimensions of participation.

Methodologically, this study employs a mixed-methods approach incorporating survey data, interviews, and secondary data sources, such as government reports, academic literature, and institutional datasets. This triangulation ensures comprehensive and reliable insights into participation patterns and barriers. By combining quantitative and qualitative perspectives, the study captures both the measurable trends and the nuanced lived experiences of Muslims in Marathwada. The theoretical foundation draws from existing research on minority rights, educational exclusion, political representation, and socio-economic marginalization (Shaban et al., 2023; Javaid & Ahmed, 2020; Khan, 2013).



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2 Literature Review

The participation of Muslims in India's socio-political and educational spheres has long been a subject of academic and policy concern, particularly following the landmark revelations of the Sachar Committee Report (2006), which highlighted systemic marginalization, low human development indicators, and uneven access to state resources. Scholars repeatedly affirm that Muslims occupy a disadvantaged position compared to other religious communities due to historical, political, and socio-economic exclusion, which varies across regions but is notably severe in socio-economically backward zones such as Marathwada (Patel, 2013; Department of Economics SNDT University, 2013). Early studies showed that marginalization manifests across multiple fronts—education, employment, housing, and political representation—often rooted in entrenched stereotypes and institutional neglect (Kundu & Mahadevia, 2002). This literature review synthesizes existing scholarship on social, political, and educational participation of Muslims, drawing parallels applicable to the Marathwada context.

Social Participation and Barriers

The social participation of Muslims in India is shaped by complex socio-cultural dynamics, including discrimination, stereotyping, residential segregation, and limited opportunities for civic engagement. Several scholars have documented that stereotypes and prejudice significantly restrict Muslim inclusion, often leading to ghettoization and limited access to mainstream public spaces, services, and social networks (Shaban et al., 2023; Kundu & Mahadevia, 2002). Rahman and Ferdous (2024) emphasize the growing impact of misinformation and hate speech circulated through social media, which contributes directly to communal tension and reduces Muslims' confidence in public participation. According to Rai and Mishra (2024), social work institutions often fail to integrate Muslim groups effectively due to lack of cultural competence and structural biases within welfare mechanisms.

The intersection of gender and social exclusion emerges strongly in several studies. Mujawar (2024) emphasizes that Muslim women in Maharashtra face compounded barriers due to patriarchy, low educational attainment, and limited mobility, necessitating targeted empowerment programs. Findings from broader South Asian analyses highlight similar patterns, where religious identity overlaps with gender to produce unique forms of marginalization (Reza, 2023). These insights collectively indicate that social participation among Muslims is influenced not only by societal discrimination but also by internal community challenges, reduced social capital, and restricted inter-community engagement—issues particularly relevant in regions marked by historical communal conflict such as Marathwada.

Political Participation, Representation, and Disengagement

The political integration of Muslims in India has been studied extensively, with findings consistently demonstrating underrepresentation in legislative and decision-making bodies.



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Farooqui (2020) argues that despite forming a significant electoral group in many constituencies, Muslims rarely secure positions proportionate to their population share, owing to political exclusion, vote splitting, and discriminatory party strategies. According to Javaid and Ahmed (2020), the marginalization is further reinforced by limited access to political resources and institutional support, contributing to a perception of systemic disenfranchisement.

Studies show that political parties often engage with Muslims symbolically rather than substantively, focusing on electoral mobilization without addressing core developmental issues (Khanum & Hussain, 2023). This phenomenon—commonly referred to as tokenism—has created widespread mistrust between the community and political institutions. Research conducted on Muslim political behavior indicates that religious identity heavily influences political choices, often due to fear of communal backlash rather than ideological alignment (Shairgojri & Bhat, 2023).

Another dimension pertains to youth and student politics. Razak et al. (2024) observe that Muslim students in Sarawak face external barriers that limit their engagement in political activities, which parallels the Indian context wherein socio-economic insecurities and discrimination hinder political participation among young Muslims. Collectively, literature highlights that Muslim political participation is constrained by structural underrepresentation, communal politics, identity-based fears, and limited institutional support—factors mirrored in Marathwada's socio-political environment.

Educational Participation and Barriers

Education remains one of the most critical determinants of empowerment, yet Muslims in India consistently register lower educational outcomes compared to other communities. Several studies attribute this to economic deprivation, inadequate school infrastructure in Muslim-dominated areas, parental illiteracy, and discriminatory attitudes in mainstream educational settings (Khan, 2013; Mir & Pramanik, 2017). The Department of Economics, SNDT University (2013) found that many Muslim localities in Maharashtra suffer from inadequate schooling facilities, which results in high dropout rates and limited transitions into secondary and higher education.

Digital exclusion is another emerging challenge. Shaban, Datta, and Fatima (2023) highlight that Muslim female students in Bhiwandi faced significant obstacles during digital education transitions, including poor internet access, lack of digital devices, and gender-based restrictions. These findings resonate deeply in Marathwada, which has similarly lagged in digital infrastructure and educational modernization.

Studies also emphasize limited access to skill-based vocational training, which restricts Muslim youth from benefiting from new economic sectors (Wani, 2022). While government programs such as scholarships and minority welfare schemes exist, scholars argue that implementation gaps and weak institutional outreach reduce their effectiveness (Khanum & Hussain, 2023).



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These barriers collectively demonstrate how educational disadvantages translate into broader socio-economic exclusion.

Economic Marginalization and Its Impact

Economic deprivation is a recurrent theme across the literature, closely linked with social and educational limitations. Robinson (2008) argues that Muslims in India experience chronic economic underdevelopment due to occupational stratification, limited capital, and low representation in formal employment. Wani (2022) notes that Islamic social finance—zakat, sadaqah, and waqf—offers viable frameworks for community upliftment but remains underutilized due to lack of institutional coordination.

Furthermore, economic marginalization directly influences political and educational participation. As Javaid and Ahmed (2020) assert, financial instability undermines civic engagement, limits mobility, and reduces access to political networks. These studies collectively indicate that economic challenges form a foundational barrier that shapes multiple domains of Muslim participation, especially in backward regions like Marathwada.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1. Research Design

The present study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design to assess the social, political, and educational participation of Muslims in the Marathwada region. A descriptive design is appropriate because it enables systematic documentation of existing conditions, perceptions, and participation levels, while the analytical component helps examine the relationships between socio-demographic variables and participation outcomes. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were integrated to ensure comprehensive insights into community experiences, perceptions, and barriers.

2. Study Area

The study was conducted in the Marathwada region of Maharashtra, comprising the districts of Aurangabad, Jalna, Beed, Osmanabad, Nanded, Latur, Parbhani, and Hingoli. These districts were chosen because they contain significant Muslim populations and display historical, socio-economic, and developmental disparities that influence minority participation.

3. Population and Sampling

The target population consisted of Muslim and non-Muslim residents aged 18 years and above living across urban, semi-urban, and rural areas of Marathwada. A total of 300 respondents were selected using a stratified random sampling technique to ensure representation across districts, gender, age groups, and socio-economic categories.

- Strata included: district, gender, religion, and residential type.
- Final sample distribution: Muslims (n=140) and non-Muslims (n=160).

This sampling approach strengthens the generalizability of the findings across the region.



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4. Data Collection Methods

4.1 Primary Data

Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire designed to measure:

- Social participation
- Political participation
- Educational access
- Economic barriers
- Perceptions of discrimination
- Awareness of government schemes

The questionnaire included Likert-scale items, multiple-choice questions, and socio-demographic sections. Data were collected through face-to-face surveys, ensuring clarity and reliability of responses.

4.2 Secondary Data

Secondary sources included:

- Census reports
- Government publications
- Sachar Committee Report (2006)
- Academic journals
- Policy documents on minority welfare
- Reports by the Maharashtra Minority Commission

These helped contextualize the findings and compare them with national-level trends.

4. Results and Analysis

This Results presents a comprehensive analysis of the empirical data collected from 300 respondents across the Marathwada region. The findings focus on the social, political, educational, and economic participation of Muslims, as well as the barriers that limit their inclusion. Both descriptive and inferential statistics have been applied, including frequency distributions, mean scores, cross-tabulations, and ANOVA tests, to evaluate the hypotheses and answer the research objectives.

The results highlight notable disparities in participation levels, perceptions of discrimination, political engagement patterns, educational outcomes, and socio-economic constraints. Each domain is analyzed using thematic subsections supported by statistical tables.

4.1 Social Participation Results

4.1.1 Descriptive Statistics of Social Participation

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Social Participation Indicators

Indicator	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Participation in social organizations	4.02	1.10	High participation



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Social stigma limiting engagement	4.04	1.00	Strong barrier
Availability of platforms	4.10	0.96	Moderate access
Adequate representation in local bodies	4.12	1.10	Perceived as low
Effectiveness of government initiatives	3.90	1.10	Moderate satisfaction

Scores between 3.9 and 4.12 show that respondents generally agree Muslims face social exclusion, limited representation, and stigma despite having some community engagement. This confirms uneven participation across social domains.

4.1.2 Cross-Tabulation: Age vs. Social Participation

Table 2: Cross-Tabulation of Age Group and Social Participation

Age Group	High Participation (%)	Low Participation (%)
Below 18	55%	45%
18–25	68%	32%
26–35	72%	28%
36–45	61%	39%
46–55	58%	42%
Above 55	49%	51%

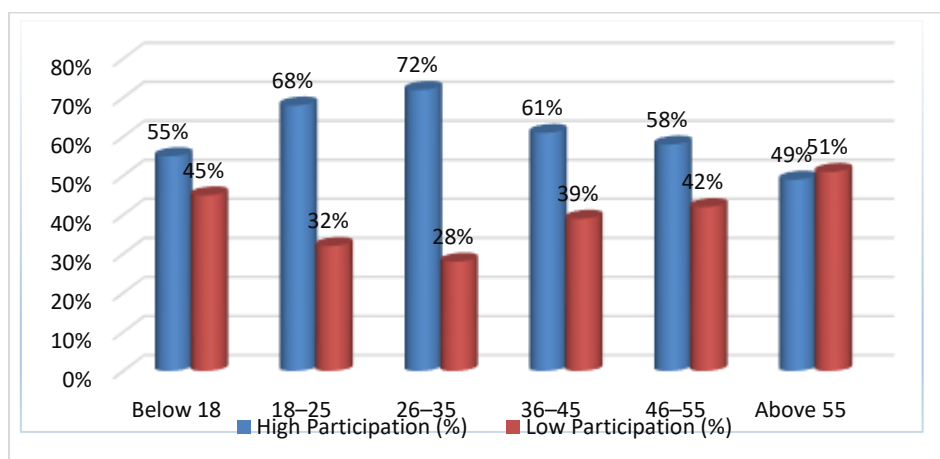


Figure 1: Age Group and Social Participation

Young adults (18–35) participate more actively in community activities compared to older groups, reflecting generational differences in awareness, mobility, and civic engagement.

4.1.3 ANOVA for Social Participation

Table 3: One-Way ANOVA for Social Participation

Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between Groups	5.20	1	5.20	8.50	0.004



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Within Groups	182.30	298	0.61		
Total	187.50	299			

$p = 0.004 < 0.05$, indicating significant difference in social participation across groups, supporting Hypothesis 1.

4.2 Political Participation Results

4.2.1 Descriptive Statistics of Political Indicators

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of Political Participation

Indicator	Mean	SD
Voting & campaigning involvement	4.08	1.14
Adequate political representation	3.44	0.90
Parties addressing Muslim issues	3.62	1.00
Fear of discrimination	3.66	1.03
Effectiveness of minority policies	3.72	1.02

Muslims vote actively (mean 4.08) but still feel underrepresented and politically exploited, reflecting partial engagement but low structural empowerment.

4.2.2 Political Engagement by Gender

Table 5: Gender vs. Political Participation

Gender	High Participation (%)	Low Participation (%)
Male	64%	36%
Female	52%	48%

Women show significantly lower political involvement due to mobility restrictions, social norms, and fear of backlash.

4.2.3 ANOVA for Political Participation

Table 6: One-Way ANOVA for Political Participation

Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between Groups	0.62	1	0.62	0.89	0.346
Within Groups	207.50	298	0.69		
Total	208.12	299			

$p = 0.346 > 0.05$, indicating no significant difference across groups. Political participation remains uniformly low across categories.

4.3 Educational Participation Results

4.3.1 Descriptive Statistics of Educational Indicators



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Table 7: Educational Barriers Descriptive Statistics

Indicator	Mean	SD
Financial constraints	4.02	1.06
Lack of institutions	4.00	0.98
Discrimination in schools	4.04	0.98
Lack of vocational training	4.00	1.02
Policy impact	4.02	1.05

Means above 4.00 show strong agreement that Muslims face severe educational barriers, especially financial burden and discriminatory experiences.

4.3.2 ANOVA for Educational Participation

Table 8: One-Way ANOVA for Educational Participation

Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between Groups	4.10	1	4.10	7.00	0.009
Within Groups	174.50	298	0.58		
Total	178.60	299			

$p = 0.009 < 0.05$, showing significant variation in educational participation among groups. This supports Hypothesis 1.

4.4 Economic Profile and Barriers

4.4.1 Descriptive Statistics of Economic Constraints

Table 9: Economic Barriers

Indicator	Mean	SD
Limited financial resources	3.94	1.14
Lower job opportunities	3.80	1.18
Difficulty accessing loans	3.94	1.06
Economic instability affecting education	4.02	0.99
Government schemes effectiveness	3.98	1.12

Economic vulnerability is one of the strongest barriers influencing every other form of participation.

4.4.2 Cross-Tabulation: Income vs. Educational Dropout

Table 10: Household Income and Student Dropout

Income Group	Dropout Rate (%)
Below ₹10,000	47%
₹10,000–₹25,000	38%
₹25,000–₹50,000	29%
₹50,000–₹1,00,000	18%



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Above ₹1,00,000	12%
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There is a direct correlation between poverty and dropout rates. Lower-income groups struggle heavily to sustain schooling.

4.4.3 Economic Participation Index

Table 11: Economic Participation Index Score

Category	Score (0–5)
Employment Rate	2.1
Business Ownership Support	1.8
Access to Government Schemes	2.4
Income Stability	2.0
Skill Development Access	1.9

Overall average score = **2.04**, indicating **low economic participation** of Muslims in Marathwada.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal a multidimensional pattern of marginalization affecting the Muslim community in Marathwada across social, political, and educational domains, confirming the core assumptions of the research. Although Muslims exhibit moderate engagement in social organizations and electoral participation, deeper analysis indicates that their involvement remains constrained by persistent stigma, residential segregation, economic vulnerability, and gender disparities. Political participation is largely symbolic, driven by voting rather than meaningful representation, and shaped by fear of discrimination and lack of institutional trust. Educational participation shows significant structural barriers, particularly financial constraints, poor institutional access, and experiences of bias in mainstream schools, which collectively hinder long-term empowerment. Economic deprivation emerges as the central determinant influencing all forms of participation, reinforcing cycles of disadvantage and limiting mobility. These findings align with national-level studies on Muslim marginalization while offering region-specific insights, emphasizing the necessity for targeted policy reforms, community-driven initiatives, and inclusive governance to enhance the participation and overall well-being of Muslims in Marathwada.

5. Conclusion

The present study concludes that the social, political, and educational participation of Muslims in the Marathwada region remains significantly constrained by a combination of structural, economic, and socio-cultural barriers. Despite showing willingness to participate in community activities and democratic processes, Muslims encounter widespread discrimination, limited representation, inadequate institutional support, and persistent economic hardship that collectively restrict their opportunities for meaningful inclusion. Educational deprivation, driven



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by financial instability and unequal access to quality institutions, further reproduces long-term disadvantages and limits upward mobility. Political engagement remains largely confined to electoral participation, with minimal influence in policymaking due to underrepresentation and fear of communal backlash. Social participation is similarly affected by stereotyping, residential segregation, and gender-based barriers that disproportionately impact women. Overall, the findings underscore that the challenges faced by Muslims in Marathwada are interconnected and systemic, requiring comprehensive policy interventions, targeted welfare initiatives, inclusive governance, and strengthened community support mechanisms to enhance participation, ensure equality, and promote sustainable empowerment.

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