



State of Educational Empowerment for Religious Minorities in India

For Prelims: Constitutional Provisions Related to Religious Minorities, Sachar Committee report, Naya Savera, Nai Udaan.

For Mains: Major Challenges Related to [Religious Minorities](#), Welfare Schemes for Educational Empowerment of Minorities

Source: [TH](#)

Why in News?

Recently, the **status of educational empowerment schemes for religious minorities** in India has come under scrutiny.

- These programs were initially designed to bridge the educational gap and promote inclusivity among different religious communities in the country.
- However, there have been **significant changes and controversies** surrounding these schemes, leading to concerns about their impact on minority communities.

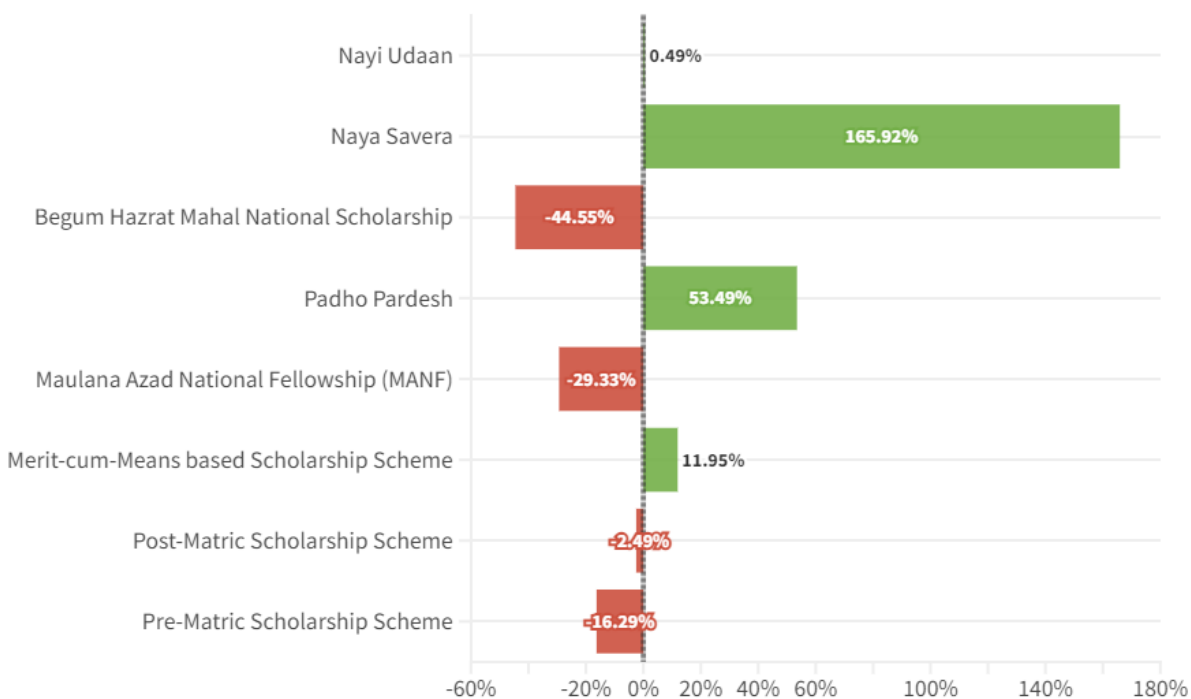
What is the Status of Educational Empowerment Schemes for Religious Minorities in India?

- **About:**
 - **Religious minorities in India**, including **Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, and Zoroastrians**, constitute a substantial portion of the population, making up approximately **20%**.
 - The **Sachar Committee's report in 2006** highlighted these disparities, placing Muslims behind several other groups in development indicators.
 - To address the disparities, the government established the **Ministry of Minority Affairs in 2006**, focusing on **educational empowerment, economic development, infrastructure improvement**, and special needs of religious minorities.
 - **Scholarships for minority students** became a pivotal component of this initiative, aimed at providing financial assistance and access to quality education.
- **Current Status of Welfare Schemes for Educational Empowerment of Minorities:**
 - **Pre-Matric Scholarship Scheme:** Initially awarded to minority students from class 1 to 10. Later, discontinued for classes 1 to 8, only covering class 9 and 10 in its revised form.
 - While discontinuing the scholarship, the government said the **Right to Education Act (RTE Act)** covered compulsory education up to **class 8** for all students.
 - **Post-Matric Scholarship Scheme: For students of class 11 and above (till Ph.D.). Funds increased from Rs 515 crore to Rs 1,065 crore in 2023-24.**
 - **Merit-cum-Means based Scholarship Scheme:** Targeted professional and technical courses at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. However, it faced a significant

reduction in funds in 2023-24.

- **Maulana Azad National Fellowship (MANF):** Provided financial assistance to research scholars pursuing M.Phil and Ph.D. However, it was **discontinued in 2022**.
- **Padho Pardesh:** Provided an **interest subsidy on education loans** for overseas studies. However, it was **discontinued from 2022-23**.
- **Begum Hazrat Mahal National Scholarship:** Scholarship for meritorious girls for higher secondary education. However, no funds have been allocated in 2023-24.
- **Naya Savera:** Provided free coaching to minority students for competitive exams. However, it was **discontinued in 2023-24**.
- **Nai Udaan:** Supported minority students preparing for various examinations. However, no funds have been allocated in 2023-24.
- **Scheme for Providing Education to Madrasas and Minorities (SPEMM):** Aimed at modernizing madrasa education. Allocation reduced in 2023-24.

Change in sanctioned amount (2019-20 to 2021-22)



// Source: Press Information Bureau, Parliament reply documents • The Hindu Graphics

Note: The budget allocation for the **Ministry of Minority Affairs** saw a drastic reduction, with a **38% decrease for the fiscal year 2023-24 compared to the 2022-23**. This cut in funding has had a direct impact on the implementation of various programs, with underutilization of funds being a common trend.

What are the Constitutional Provisions Related to Religious Minorities?

- **Article 25:** It guarantees **freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation** of religion to all persons.
- **Article 26:** It grants every religious denomination or section thereof the **right to establish and maintain institutions for religious and charitable purposes**, and to manage its own affairs in matters of religion.
- **Article 29:** It provides that any section of the citizens residing in any part of India having a **distinct language, script or culture of its own**, shall have the right to conserve the same.
- **Article 30:** Under the article, **all minorities shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions** of their choice.

Note: The term "**minority**" is not defined in the [Indian Constitution](#). However, the Constitution recognizes only religious and linguistic minorities.

What are the Other Major Challenges Related to Religious Minorities?

- **Communal Violence:** One significant challenge is the occurrence of [communal violence](#), where conflicts erupt along religious lines.
 - These incidents result in loss of life, property damage, and displacement of minority communities.
 - This challenge is rooted in factors like political manipulation, [economic disparities](#), and historical tensions that need careful examination.
- **Intersectional Discrimination:** Beyond religious discrimination, religious minorities, especially **women**, may **face intersectional discrimination**.
- **Social Isolation:** Religious ghettoization, where minority communities cluster in **specific neighborhoods**, impacts their **social integration and economic opportunities**.
- **Cyberbullying and Online Harassment:** The rise of **cyberbullying and online harassment to target religious minority individuals or groups**, is impacting their **online safety and mental well-being**.

Way Forward

- **Leverage Public-Private Partnerships:** Foster collaborations between the government, private sector, and non-profit organizations to supplement funding and resources for minority education initiatives.
 - This can help **offset budget cuts** and ensure **sustained support for these schemes**.
- **Digital Literacy Programs:** Implement [digital literacy programs tailored for religious minority communities](#) to ensure they are not left behind in the digital age. This can enhance access to information and opportunities.
- **Local Level Initiatives:** Empower **local communities to take the lead in promoting interfaith dialogue and cooperation**. Grassroots initiatives can have a significant impact in building trust and social cohesion.
 - There is a need to **establish community-based conflict resolution centers** that specialize in addressing interfaith and inter-community disputes.
 - These centers can provide [mediation and counseling services](#).
- **Traditional Knowledge Preservation:** Recognize and preserve traditional knowledge systems and practices of religious minority communities. This can be done through **digital documentation and funding for cultural preservation projects**.
- **Social Impact Assessment and Investment:** There is a need to conduct **time bound social impact assessment** and encourage **social impact investment in religious minority-owned businesses** and startups. This can help create **economic independence and reduce disparities**.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims

Q. In India, if a religious sect/community is given the status of a national minority, what special advantages it is entitled to? (2011)

1. It can establish and administer exclusive educational institutions.
2. The President of India automatically nominates a representative of the community to Lok Sabha.
3. It can derive benefits from the Prime Minister's 15-Point Programme.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 only

(b) 2 and 3 only

(c) 1 and 3 only

(d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: c

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