

The Paint of Muslim Society: Population, Politics, and Reservation

-Tausif Ahmad

Abstract

The Muslim society has always been seen as a homogenous entity in which their internal divisions and stratification were ignored. This homomorphism has transcended the debate of Muslim issues and politics in such a way that it harmed the largest chunk of Muslim society. Sects, sub-sects, languages, geographies, and other factors separate Muslim society. Besides all these divisions Muslim society is highly stratified on caste basis in which the upper caste elite- Ashraf Muslims have captured the socio-economic and political space in Muslim society. In this paper, the main discourse is about misconceptions widened in society, media, and academia, and in the political arena about the Muslim society. This paper would argue that there are no Muslims but “Muslims” and the biggest chunk is of backward Muslims known as Pasmanda Muslims. Furthermore, it would move to the politics of Muslims that has been revolving around the symbolic issues and at the last the debate of reservations for the Muslim society.

Keywords: Muslims, Caste, Population, OBC, Representation, Ashrafisation, Sheikhsation.

Introduction

The members of Muslim society in India are popularly recognized by its basic features like Muslim women wearing *Hijab*, Muslim men having a beard with trimmed moustache, the religious symbolism like the mosques, shrines, *pir-faqirs*, etc. However, when someone will go deep into these basic tenets of Muslims, they would find differences. One will find that the Muslims of India are neither a cultural community nor a compact ethnic population. (Hasnain 2007). The Muslim society is divided religiously and socially into various stages at horizontally and vertically levels. The Muslim society is not homogenous in terms of religion too, that division is based on sects, sub-sects, institutional associations, followers, etc. According to the prophecy of Prophet Mohammad , his followers (*Ummah*) will be divided at least into 73 sects. As of now, there have been 132 sects recorded thus far. In India, there is a major division of Shia and Sunni Muslims in which both sects consider each other un-Islamic or less Islamic. The Shia community itself is divided into several sub-sects like *Akhabris*, *Dawoodi Bohras*, *Ismailis*, *Khojas*, *Mustalians*, *Nizaris*, *Twelvers*, *Usulis*, and *Zaidis*, etc. The Sunni, the largest chunk of Muslim society is also divided into several segments. There are four main schools of thought i.e. *Hanafi*, *Shafai*, *Maliki*, and *Hanbali*. The largest chunk in India follows *Hanafi* School. Within the Sunni Muslims, the *Deobandi-Barelvi-Ahl I Hadith* division is more visible in public space. Various further divisions exist between them.

Tausif Ahmad, Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Political Science, School of Social Science, Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), New Delhi.

Email ID: tausifahmad12@gmail.com

On a sociological basis, Muslims are divided on caste or caste-like features. (Ahmad 1978). The endogamy and hierarchy are maintained by all the castes who come under the purview of Islam. The upper caste elite Muslims are known as *Ashraf*, *Shareef*, or *Khas* Muslims (means Noble or decent). In the category of *Ashraf* there is also a hierarchy. At the apex, the caste 'Syed' (meaning lord or truthful) comes. They call themselves *Aal-e-Rasool*, which means children of the Prophet Muhammad's.¹ The second category from the *Ashraf* Muslims is Sheikh/Shaiikh/Shekh, which means chief, an elder, or a learned divine or *Sardar*. (Mishra1985:137) They claim to be the descendants of *Sahaba* (companions of Prophet Muhammad). That is why their suffix denotes different *Sahaba*. The upper most strata *Sheikhs* are *Siddiqui* (related to Hazrat Abu-Bakr Siddique 1st Caliph), *Faruqi* (Hazrat Umar Farooque 2nd Caliph), *Usmani* (Usman Ghani 3rd Caliph), *Alvi* (Hazrat Ali 4th Caliph), etc. There are almost 30 sub-categories in Sheikh. Later *Ashrafs* are *Mughals* and *Pathans*, mostly related to the ruling and warrior class of Muslims. Whereas the former two belong to the Arab lineage, the latter two are of Central Asian and Afghan origin. (George and Adiga 2017)

The largest chunk of the Muslims comprises those of the lower caste Hindus who converted to Islam throughout the centuries. (Faridi and Siddiqui 1992) They mostly comprise of the clean occupational and unclean occupational castes. *Ajlaf* refers to the Muslim society's clean vocational castes (means lowly). In this category, the weavers, tailors, vegetable sellers, carders, oil pressures, blacksmiths, carpenters come. (Hasnain 2007: 34, Khanam 2013:126) This also comprises the largest chunk of Muslim society. The third and the lowest are *Arzal* or *Razeel* means *Kamin* or excluded. It includes castes like, washermen, barbers, sweepers, and others come. (Hasnain 2007: 34) The *Ajlaf* and *Arzal* caste groups come under *Pasmanda* Muslims. However, there is a different name for the *Arzal* Muslims and that is *Dalit* Muslims, a term coined by Dr. Ejaz Ali founder of '*All India Backward Muslim Morcha*'. But *Pasmanda* is a larger term denoting all the *Shudra* and *Ati-Shudra* Muslims. Nonetheless, the main focus of the paper is to discuss the lies that have been established in the larger society, media, and even academia too that there is "Muslim" (in homogenous terms) ignoring the sociological fact of heterogeneity of the society. The paper will argue that there is no 'Muslim' but are many. The less talked truth of caste and its population and the ratio of upper and lower caste Muslims will be discussed. And thus will follow a discussion on politics based on religious identity and the demand of reservation at last.

The Population of the 'Muslims'

The Muslim population in India according to the census of India, 2011 is 14.23 percent almost 172 million in numbers. The population of 'Muslims' means here is to discuss

¹ The Syeds claims to be descendants of the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) daughter Hazrat Fatimah (R.A). However, there is no mention of Syed's in any religious text.

and empirically show the ratio of backward and forward Muslims. According to some studies, the ratio of Pasmada and *Ashraf* Muslims is 85:15 which is out of 172 million Muslim population 146.5 million are Pasmada Muslims.² When we talk about the Pasmada Muslims it means those people who are socially, economically, and educationally backward and politically under-represented. Backward in Muslim society was first identified in the census of 1901 in which about 133 castes were identified. (SCR 2006:192) The first classification of the Muslim society in caste groups was also done in this census. According to this, there are mainly two caste groups in Muslim society *Ashraf* and *Ajlaf*. Apart from this, a third class was also identified, this was *Arzal*. This includes very low strata people such as *Halalkhor*, *Lalbegi*, *Abdal*, *Bediya*, etc. (Ibid). The census of India of 1911 listed 102 castes from the Muslim society in Uttar Pradesh in which 97 out of the 102 castes were from the non-*Ashraf* category.³ The population figure given by the Mandal Commission, based on the last caste census of India, census, 1931 that in India there is 12 percent are Muslims, of which 8 percent of the Muslim population belongs to backward Muslims. (Ansari 2007:270) This was the last caste census published. The 1941 census also collect data based on caste but it did not get published by the authority. However, after independence, no data on caste was collected. If we go through the last caste census of 1931, it means that two-thirds of the total population is backward. The pieces of literature related to Pasmada discourse also cite from different sources that, the forward-backward ratio in Muslim society is 15:85. There are almost 170 groups of Muslim marginalised castes.⁴ The Sachar Committee report has cited some data collected by NSSO. The different NSSO data find different OBC populations in Muslim society. See the table (Table 1)

The committee cited this data by NSSO 61st Round Survey. However, this data seem to be wrong. NSSO itself claims that the NSSO data was not for the headcount of different caste or class populations, therefore, cannot be relied upon to challenge any policy of reservation under consideration by the central government.⁵

Thus, it is clear that the number of lower caste people is unknown. Inasmuch, the census based on caste did not happen after 1931; it would be irrelevant to gather the information based on a sample survey. According to the Mandal Commission Report (1980) out of 54 percent of the total OBCs Muslim OBCs share is approximately 6 percent. In 27

² Manoharan, V., and Khair, N., (2021), *Voices from the Margins: Concerns for Christian-Muslim Dialogue in India*, Salaam vol. 42, No. 1 New Delhi: Islamic Studies foundation. Pp. 18-28.

³ Patnaik, Pratik. (2020, 2 December), Caste among Indian Muslims is a real Issue. So why deny them reservation, *The wire*. Retrieved on 29th March, 2021 from <https://thewire.in/caste/caste-among-indian-muslims-real-why-deny-reservation>

⁴ Mondal, S. R., (2003). Social Structure, OBCs and Muslims, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 38(46), 4892–4897. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4414284>

⁵ Ashfaq Husain Ansari, Govt, has rightly come to the conclusion about the authenticity of the national sample survey: this was made clear by Govt's reply in the civil writ petition (No. 265 of 2006). Relevant extracts from the counter affidavit filed on behalf of Govt. are reproduced. In Ansari, A. H., (2007) *Basic Problems of OBC & Dalit Muslims*, New Delhi: Serials Publications, P. 133

percent of OBC reservations, Muslims' reservation share is approximately 4 percent. Here is the second list from Sachar committee Report, which supports this argument. The differences in the OBC population come between the 55th rounds, 61st rounds, and 67th rounds of NSSO. (Table 2)

The data of backward and forward Muslims given in the Sachar Committee is based on two data of NSSO, first 55 (1999-2004) and second 61 (2004-05) and the third data is provided in the Post-Sachar Evaluation Committee (PSEC) 2014 headed by Amitabh Kundu. There is a difference in the figures related to Muslim society in these three figures. In these surveys, for the first time, the data on OBCs in Indian society was collected and it is completely based on the information given by the concerned individuals themselves. Now let's look at the figures. In the 55th NSSO survey, OBCs constituted 31.7 percent of the total population of Muslim society, and 68.3 percent terms them as of general caste population. Whereas in the 61st survey, the OBC population was 40.7 percent, and the general caste population was 59.3 percent. In the 67th round of the survey, the populations of Muslim OBCs go up to more than 50 percent. The discrepancies in the data can be seen here. Now the question is how can it happen that in just 5 years the population of OBC can increase by 9 percent and in just 12 years it got increased by almost 20 percent that of general population decreases. The same is the case with the states. For example, the Muslim OBC population in Bihar alone showed an increase of about 22.8 percent between the two figures. Where it was 40.6 percent in the 55th round of the survey, it increased to 63.4 percent in the 61st round. (See, SCR 2006) The academicians (Ansari 1960, Ali 2009), as well as journalists and activists (Anwar 2001, Ansari 2007), claim that the share of the population of Pasmanda Muslims is 85 percent and *Ashraf* Muslims is 15 percent. The Mandal Commission (1980) report also treated 90% of the Muslim population in the country as OBCs and proposed reservations.⁶

But when we see the data and survey (see table) the discrepancies come in front of us. The data says that the backward Muslims account for about 50 percent including OBC and Dalit Muslims. So, the question is where did the rest backward population go?

Regional analysis reveals significant inter-state differences. In 14, out of the 20 states for which data are presented, the share of Muslim OBCs has risen in the 61st round as compared to the previous round of the survey. The increase is the highest in Rajasthan (32 percentage points), followed by Bihar (23 percentage points) and Uttar Pradesh (18 percentage points). A fall in their share is observed in West Bengal, Assam, Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka, Delhi, and Himachal Pradesh. While the change is extremely high in Delhi (24 percentage points), it is marginal in West Bengal. (SCR, 2006, p. 203) In the total OBC population of the country, Muslim-OBCs have a share of 15.7%. (Ibid: 204-05) OBCs

⁶ Nayak, R. K. (2013), The Pasmanda Muslim Discourse in Post-1947 Bihar, *Proceedings of Indian History Congress*, Vol. 74, pp. 961-971.

share in population is based on the census of 1931. The 52 percent figure of OBC has been arrived at based on their population in the 1931 census which has been disputed by the OBCs as well as by higher castes. (Rahman 2019: 145) However, after the long decades of censuses, in 2011 the demand for caste-based censuses has risen by OBC leaders like Lalu Prasad, Sharad Pawar, etc. the UPA government decided to conduct socio-economic and caste census (SECC) in rural and urban areas of all states. (Ibid: 146). The survey was completed by December 2011 but the government deliberately withheld the data. Many political parties criticized the government for not releasing the data. On 13 July 2015, Lalu Prasad organised a march in Patna and demanded the central government release the findings. Abdur Rahman finds this critical for Muslims for two reasons. (Rahman 2019)

“First: some Hindu castes which have socio-economic and educational conditions at par with Muslims may have population growth equal to or greater than Muslims. This will demolish the propaganda of high population growth in Muslims and at the same time prove direct relation between socio-economic condition and population growth of caste and give a big blow to parties and organisations which want to propagate and exploit the issue of Muslims growth. Second: 80 percent of Muslim castes are included in the OBC list. If the caste-related data is released and there is the increased quantum of reservation for OBCs, Muslims’ share of reservation would also go up.”(Ibid)

Ashfaq Husain Ansari (Ex-MP) writes about the Muslim population's caste-wise ratio that, *Ashraf* Muslims is 15 to 25 percent, whereas the bulk of Muslim population that is 75 to 85 percent is of the *Ajlaf-Arzal* Muslims, who are included in the OBC list. (Ansari, 2007). If we go by the state, we can find that the largest chunk is of backward Muslims. For example, In Kerala, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh all Muslim groups, except *Mughal, Irani, Bohara/Bohra, Kutchi Memon, Jamayat, and Navayat* are under OBC with further sub-categories. (Fazal 2010) In Tamil Nadu, almost 95 percent of Muslims come under the OBC category. In Bihar lower castes Muslims have been categorised as Extreme Backward Classes (EBC, Annexure I) and Backward Classes (BC, Annexure-II).

In Madhya Pradesh, For example, there are 37 communities designated as Islamic groups in the state list, but only 27 are located in the Central list. There are 17 OBC groups in Bihar that have not been included in the central list following the recent amendment of the list. Six of them are Muslim only: (i) *Faqir/Diwan*, (ii) *Julaha/Ansari* (the synonym Momin appears in the Central List), (iii) *Itrfarosh/Gadheri/Ibrahimi*, (iv) *Jat*, (v) *Gadaria*, and (vi) *Surajpuri*. Two Muslim groups in Uttar Pradesh, *Mirshikar* and *Nanbai*, were not included on the Central List. *Jilaya, Tariya-Tai, Mansuri, Arab, Sumra, Tarak, Kalal, and Bahvaiya* are Muslim groups in Gujarat who are included on the State's backward list but not on the Central list. Many Muslim communities in Maharashtra, including the *Mansooris, Pan*

Faroshis, Ataar, Sanpagarudi, Muslim Madari, Muslim Gawli, Darwesi, Hashmi, and Nalband, have not been included on the Central List. (SCR 2006: 201)

There are a few Muslim castes that have been included in the Central list but have yet to be added to the State listings. Such Muslim groups include the *Kalwars* of Bihar, the *Mansooris* of Rajasthan, the *Atishbazs* of Uttar Pradesh, and the *Rayeens, Kalwars, Rangwas, and Churihars* of West Bengal. (Ibid) There are still a few Muslim groups that haven't been added to either the State or the Central lists. The information gathered by the Anthropological Survey of India under its People of India Project can be used to identify these groupings. In Gujarat, for example, the Project discovered 85 Muslim groups, at least 76 of which are non-*Ashraf*. Only 22 of them have been accepted onto the Central list, while only 27 Muslim castes have been accepted into the State list. According to the Project, there are 37 non-*Ashraf* castes/communities in Bihar; however, only 23 are included on the Central List. The Project lists 67 Muslim communities in Uttar Pradesh, 61 of which are occupational groupings. There are just 32 OBCs on both the State and Central lists. (Ibid)

The inclusion of more castes in the central and state OBC lists did increase the share of Muslim OBCs as a political group. When the Mandal Commission was established in 1990, only 82 Muslim castes were included on the OBC list; however, the list today includes 494 Muslim castes from all over the country which stands at 18.98 percent of the total OBC. (Jafri 2021: 445) As a result, the percentage of OBCs and Muslims, in general, should be considered in the legal and constitutional framework.

According to an ADRI assessment on socio-economic and educational backwardness among Muslims in Bihar, there are 43 castes. According to the poll, Muslims from the higher and lower castes make up 40.9 percent and 50.1 percent of Muslims in urban and rural areas, respectively. (ADRI 2004: I, 17, 18) This survey, on the other hand, computed the number of Muslims in the middle and lower castes, of which only four are *Ashraf*. (Table 3)

Still, there are many backward castes among Muslims who do not identify themselves as backward but as *Sheikh, Syed, or Pathan*. Why that is so, is being discussed below.

Assuming Tall: Ashrafisation and Sheikhsation among Muslim Lower Castes

There are probably two reasons for this increase and difference. First, when the OBC reservation was implemented in 1991, only 82 castes were included. Gradually, consciousness was raised in the rest of the castes as well and they started fighting for it by forming an organisation and from time to time made their place in OBC. The second and most important reason is that the lower castes of Muslim society fall for 'Ashrafisation' and 'Sheikhsation', due to which they hide their true identity and due to which many castes are out of the purview of OBC reservation only because of this. The Pasmada literature claims that the population of Pasmada Muslims constitutes the two categories *Ajlaf* and *Arzal*. The most population of Muslims in terms of caste comes under this category. Ashraf constitutes

of four castes i.e. *Syeds, Sheikhs, Mughals, and Pathan*. Where these four castes find their lineage from outside of India the rest are from the local converts. Syed claims to be a descendant of Hazrat Ali and Fatimah, which means they are very few in numbers. They do maintain lineage (family tree). Nonetheless, their claims are suspicious as various Syed families married out of their caste/Ku'fu. The most prominent caste is *Sheikh* because *Sheikh* is not a homogenous caste category. More than 30 subcategories were found among the *Sheikh* castes. The rest two are *Mughal* and *Pathan* is found verily in Northern India. The most important point here is that among Muslims there are two phenomena' that exist. One is Ashrafisation,⁷ which is similar to Sanskritisation argued by M N Srinivas. Ashrafisation also leads Muslims to hide their original caste. It has a long history, written by many scholars, authors in different books. (See Ahmad 1978)

But here another problem is the "Sheikhisation." I used the term Sheikhisation here because in most of the cases the name was used by the lower caste Muslim was the name of Sheikh Sub-castes. There is a difference between Ashrafisation and Sheikhisation. Ashrafisation among Muslims occurred in the same pattern as Sanskritisation among the lower castes of Hindus. While Hinduism involves the process of going from the sacred thread (*Janeu*) to becoming a vegetarian, (Kumar, 2021: 343) Muslims include the use of *Purdah*, the choice of *Urdu* as a language, the influence of the *Ashraf* castes in the way of life. (Momin, 1978) The basic difference between Ashrafisation and Sheikhisation is that while Ashrafisation is a value-related issue, Sheikhisation is a unique way of elevating oneself in which the lower castes establish themselves as a sub-caste of the *Sheikh*. Since *Sheikh* is not a caste itself but it has many sub-categories also. Even Sheikh is fuzzy and fluid castes too.⁸ For example, Ali Anwar writes, even before independence, the Muslim league emulating the Hindu Mahasabha campaigned not to mention the word caste with its name at the time of the census.' (Anwar, 2001, p. 26) In the report of 1931 census, in Bihar many occupational Muslim castes like *Ansari* (weavers), *Mansuri* (carders), *Idrisi* (tailors) and others wished to be entered as Sheikhs and called themselves *Sheikh Ansari, Sheikh Mansuri* and *Sheikh Idrisi* and so on. Again it was appealed before the census of 1941. He writes,

"In Gaya Census Report, 1891, it is known that most of the present Muslims here are converts and most originate from mixed castes. There are only a few descendants of the early Muslims who settled in India. Further information is found from the report that Mullick, who claims to be a separate sect, is completely classified as Sheikh (Ibid, p.98)

⁷ Vreede-de-Steurs, Cora., (1969). Prada: A study of North Indian Muslim Women, New York: Humanities Press. P. 56. Cited in Momin A. R., (1978). Muslim Caste in an Industrial township of Maharashtra, in `Ahmad, I., (1978). *Caste and Social stratification among Muslims in India*, New Delhi: Manohar. pp.117-140. Ashrafization is the process of social mobility by which people at lower positions in the hierarchy imitate upper castes in way of lifestyle, customs, appearance, etc., so that they are placed in the upper caste category.

⁸ Alam, A., (July – December 2007), New Directions in Indian Muslim Politics The Agenda of All India Pasmanda Muslim Mahaz, Contemporary Perspectives Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 130–143

He further writes that

“Weavers are prominent among the Muslims of the lower line. Most of them demand that wrongful rights be included in the Sheikh caste. In the same book, he further writes, “in 1911, the census officer of Bihar, referring to the flood of records in this regard, wrote that the weight of the applications seeking to be graded among the upper castes in the weight of their castes was increased. This aggressive entry was seen not only among Hindus but also among Muslims. In the same report, it was said that between 1901 and 1911, Muslim Rajput suddenly started calling themselves Pathan; 'Khan' replaced 'Singh'. On the other hand, all the lower caste Muslims, weavers (Momin/Ansari/Julaha), washer man (Dhobi/Hawari), Barbers (Hajjams /Nai), oil pressures (Telis), etc. started aspiring for the status of Sheikh themselves.” (Ibid, P.99)

Census of India 1911 states,

“There are also extraordinary variations in the figure for Musalmans. This is due to the late government of eastern Bengal and Assam allowing Jolahas to return themselves as Sheikhs, Pathans, etc. it is on this account that the Jolahas have decreased by 10 percent; while the Sheikhs have added 14 percent and the Pathans 18 percent to their numbers. The Ajlaf again has a loss of over two-thirds, which is due to the term has lost popularity. It is a designation for those miscellaneous groups which do not belong either to the functional or racial classes of Musalmans. It is now rejected by the low Musalman classes whose aspiration is to be called Sheikhs. At the last census, nearly 285,000 persons were returned as Ajlaf in Khulna; the number is now reduced to 445. There is a corresponding rise in the number of Sheikhs.”⁹

There are various other examples of Sheikhisation among Muslims (See, Misra, 1985, Ansari, 1960, Rayeen, 2013a, 2018b) where lower-caste Muslims themselves claimed to be a Sheikh and losses their original identity. For this act, many of them are still unable to get OBC status. Since no caste census was conducted after independence we do not know whether this trend continued or stopped. The Mandal Commission report also was based on the data of the 1931 census. However, the increased number of Muslim OBC castes in the list indicated that the phenomenon of Ashrafisation and Sheikhisation might be reversed into De-Ashrafisation/De-Sheikhisation or at least stopped.

⁹ Census of India, 1911, volume V. Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and Sikkim, chapter XI-caste. P. 508. Sub-heading: Caste Restrictions. Cited in Ali Anwar, Masawat ki Jung (2001) P.120

Politics of “Muslims”: the unfair Share

The Muslim politics in India after the independence was shaped by the partition and the resultant trauma. Muslims of India are still subjected to partition backlash.¹⁰ However, those who had accepted the partition and moved to Pakistan mostly were Ashrafs. (Rajkishore 2012: 131) The fact is that the majority of the Muslim society who are Pasmandas had opposed the partition through their forums, organisations, and parties like the Momin Conference, Rayeen Conference, Azad Conference, etc. Nonetheless, after independence, the rest of the *Ashraf* who stayed in India captured the space of Muslim politics, representation, and issues. Since, independence to date, most of the leaders came from *Ashraf* elite sections of the society. Thus, after independence, the politics of “Muslim” meant to be the politics of *Ashraf* Muslims. The leadership, power share in the government and governmental bodies like NHRC, NMC, etc. have been in the hands of *Ashraf* Muslims. Not only the government bodies but the institutions established in the name of Muslim welfare like, *Imarat E Shariah*, *Idhara E Shariah*, *All Indian Majlis E Masawarat*, *All Indian Muslim Personal Law Board*, and *Sunni Waqf Board*, etc. have been captured mostly by the *Ashraf* Muslims.¹¹ The disadvantage of this leadership is that it never looked after the concern of the masses of Muslim society nor they have raised the issue of educational needs, economic betterment, and the fair share of political participation between the communities. Muslim politics has always been on the issues of fear, security, *Urdu* language, etc. The symbolic issues have been the part of the secular parties and their Muslim (*Ashraf*) leaders. The leadership in the name of the whole community has been in the hands of *Ashraf* Muslims only. Table 4 that shows the Muslims' representation in the Lok Sabha.

If we look at the table (Table 4) we can find that the leadership from the Muslim society as a whole has been very abysmal. But among these representations also the representation of the Pasmanda Muslims has been the lowest. As per one analysis of the 7,500 elected representatives from the first to the fourteenth Lok Sabha, 400 were Muslims of which 340 were from the *Ashraf* (upper caste) community. Only 60 Muslims from the Pasmanda background have been elected in fourteen Lok Sabha. (Ansari 2007: 195). As per the 2011 Census, Muslims constitute about 14.2 percent of India's population. This means that *Ashrafs* would have a 2.1 percent share of the country's population. But their representation in the Lok Sabha was around 4.5 percent. On the other hand, Pasmandas' share in the population was around 11.4 percent and still, they had a mere 0.8 percent representation in Parliament. In the latest Lok Sabha election, the same pattern followed. The representation of Pasmanda Muslims in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections is the lowest among all the social groups. Out of the total elected MPs which is 27, a total of 18 upper-caste elite

¹⁰ Manoharan, V., and Khair, N. (2021) *Voices from the Margins: Concerns for Christian-Muslim Dialogue in India, Salaam*, Vol. 42, No. 1 New Delhi: Islamic Studies foundation. Pp. 18-28.

¹¹ See, Anwar, Ali, (2001), *Masawat ki Jung*, (in Hindi), New Delhi: Vaani Prakashan. In this book, he has given details about the Muslim religious institutions and its leaderships..

Ashraf got elected, whereas only 6 OBC Muslims and one ST Muslim candidate got elected.¹² The trend is followed by each Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha election because still the caste among Muslims got no space in the debate of social justice in the larger democratic space of the country. Hence, the socio-economic and political exclusion of the Pasmada Muslims is not an issue either for the political elite among Muslims nor for others.

But from within the Pasmada community, the political awakening is going on since 1990. Since they have been included in the OBC list they have realised the importance of political power and socio-economic development for their communities. The rise of the Pasmada movement is part of a greater backward caste awakening. Many Pasmada Muslim leaders from various parts of the country have taken the initiative to gather backward class Muslims in opposition to the community's traditional *Ashraf* leaders, challenging their elitist political worldview.¹³ Rather than emotional, theological, cultural, or symbolic issues, their movement is based on socio-economic backwardness. Their demand is for the empowerment of the Pasmada and Dalit Muslims. In this respect in every election, they do try to mobilise the backward among Muslims and try to bargain with the political parties.

The Issue of Reservation: the Cost of Ignorance

Within Muslim society, the demand for reservation is made at three different levels. The first of those demands is to include all Muslims irrespective of caste in the purview of reservation related to the present OBC reservation. The second demand is for separate Muslim OBC reservations in the present OBC reservation. When the OBC reservation was implemented in 1990, only 82 Muslim castes were included. Gradually the demands started coming from other castes and the Backward Commission continued to include those demands. Now as of 2016 there are about 494 Muslim backward castes across the country included in different states' central OBC list. (Jafri 2021: 451) The third demand is to include those castes of Muslims in the list of Scheduled Castes which are equal to Hindu Dalits.

The first one is for all Muslims irrespective of caste division. This aspect argues that since all Muslims are socio-economically and politically marginalised it should be categorised as backward. Several organisations, politicians, and activists demand total Muslim Reservation (TMR). Reservation for all Indian Muslims is demanded by the '*Association for Promoting Education and Employment of Muslims*' (APEEM). Syed Hamid, the Association's president, claimed that the entire Muslim population in India is depressed and discriminated against and that the government must take meaningful action. Demanding affirmative action for all Muslims, Syed Sahabuddin, a politician and veteran Muslim leader,

¹² Ansari, K. A., (2020, 24 November), Owaisi represents only the Ashraf Elitist Muslims, and Not the Entire Community, Outlook. <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/opinion-if-muslims-join-owaisi-the-bjp-wins/365216>

¹³ Mondal, S. R., (2003). Social Structure, OBCs and Muslims, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 38(46), 4892–4897. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4414284>

suggested a single quota based on the country's total Muslim population.¹⁴ He claims that the policy of classifying Muslims as OBCs is harmful to Muslim society. The '*Islamic Council of India*' (ICI) and the '*All-India Muslim Milli Council*' (AIMMC) are lobbying the government to declare the whole Muslim community to be economically disadvantaged and award it a reservation.¹⁵ According to the constitutional provisions religion-based reservation is prohibited, although some Muslims have been projecting themselves as disadvantaged and marginalised, and, therefore, demanding for the reservation. (Alam 2016)

Though the constitutionality of using religion as a criterion for identifying backward classes has not been directly challenged, the government and courts have rejected its use in practice; as a result, minority groups were not identified as backward for special protections for the disadvantaged.¹⁶ Three key arguments have been advanced: (i) It was incompatible with secularism; (ii) there was no overt social discrimination suffered by Muslims to necessitate special measures; and (iii) it would jeopardize national unity in the absence of a caste system.¹⁷ The demand for Muslim reservation was stated at a Convention on Reservation in New Delhi in 1994, where this section of Muslims asked (i) for the entire community to be declared a backward class countrywide; and (ii) for the benefits of reservations to accrue first by priority to Muslims notified as OBCs, with candidates from other Muslim sub-communities (for example, *Ashraf*) admitted to those benefits only if the Muslim notified as OBCs.¹⁸ They argued for a distinct quota for Muslims, emphasising the importance of 'cutting the cake' not only horizontally by class and caste, but also vertically by faith to share chances equally. This was because 'the whole Muslim community in the country forms a backward class,' according to them.¹⁹

In the First Backward Classes Commission, Kaka Kalelkar (1955), Muslim organisations demanded that the Muslim community as a whole should be treated as backward. While the Commission did not treat religious communities (minority religions) as a whole as a backward class, it recognised some groups/sub-groups among them as 'backward classes. (Alam 2016) stated,

"It would not be fair or just to list all Muslims as socially and educationally backward. Officially, Muslims do not recognise any caste. It must be said to the credit of Islam it did not compromise its position in the matter of untouchables. There are certain professions, however, that are regarded as

¹⁴ Mondal, S. R., (2003). Social Structure, OBCs and Muslims, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 38(46), 4892–4897. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4414284>

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Marc Galanter, *Competing Equalities: Law and the Backward Classes in India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1984.

¹⁷ Hasan, Zoya, *Reservations for Muslims*, <https://www.india-seminar.com/2005/549/549%20zoya%20hassan.htm>

¹⁸ Theodore Wright Jr., 'A New Demand for Muslim Reservations in India', *Asian Survey*, vol. 37, no. 9, September 1997.

¹⁹ Hasan, Zoya, *Reservations for Muslims*, <https://www.india-seminar.com/2005/549/549%20zoya%20hassan.htm>

inferior even by Muslims. The sense of high and low has gradually permeated Muslim society and several communities amongst them are suffering from social inferiority and consequent educational backwardness. We have recognised this deterioration that has overcome Muslim society today and added the names of such backward communities found among them in the list of Other Backward Classes.” (Ibid)

The second Backward Classes Commission 1980 known as Mandal Commission did not recognise religious groups as a whole as ‘backward class’. Rather, it identified some groups among non-Hindus as socially and educationally backward classes.²⁰

The essence of the reservation is that it should be made available to those communities, groups, castes, and classes that have historically been socially, educationally, and economically backward. Those who take the meaning of reservation only with economic progress, are taking its meaning wrong. Surprisingly, the government also supports it. The recent EWS reservation is clear proof of this. On the other hand, the most important thing is that even if it is assumed that all Muslims should be brought under the purview of reservation, even then Muslims will remain at a disadvantage. Now the question arises how. The answer is that it will increase communalism. Since there is no such provision in the constitution that which religion should be given the benefit of reservation. Even at the political level, this does not seem possible. Now we know that Congress-BJP is like two sides of the same coin. Congress has done nothing like this in the regime so far, so now that there is a hard Hindutva government, there is no hope. As I have written earlier, this is both legally and morally wrong. However, the Ranganath Mishra Commission has said in its recommendation that the reservation of 15% should be given to all the minorities of the country, in which 10% only Muslims and other religious minorities should be included in the remaining 5%. Similar efforts were also made by the Government of Andhra Pradesh in 2004, which were quashed by the High Court there. Similar efforts were made not only in 2004 but earlier also in 1968 and 1982. But every time the government there failed. Finally, in 2007, a committee was formed under the chairmanship of P. S. Krishnan, on whose recommendation 4 percent reservation was given to socially and educationally backward Muslims (OBC Muslims) in 2008. Even if the entire community gets reservation, we know that it will benefit some section of the Muslims, but we know that this reservation will be available only to the upper class and creamy layered people of the Muslim society, while the Pasmandas and Dalits chances of change in the status of Muslims will be minimal. In such a situation, the Ashraf Muslims must accept this reality and if they want to see the development of equality and their entire community, then they should insist on the reservation of Pasmanda and Dalit Muslims.

²⁰ Ibid

The second argument regarding reservation is with the OBCs. When the OBC reservation was implemented, it included only 82 Muslim backward castes. As of today, it includes 494 OBCs among Muslims across the country. (Jafri 2021: 451) The data shows that the benefits of the OBC reservation did not go well to the Muslim backward castes. (See Rohini Commission, 2019) Thus it needs to revisit the provision. The Sachar committee also observed that by combining the *Arzal* and *Ajlaf* among Muslims in all-encompassing OBC category the Mandal Commission overlooked the disparity like deprivations that they faced. The Sachar committee suggested that the *Arzals* should be treated separately as SCs most appropriately or MBCs at least. (Jafri 2021: 452)

The third question regards the inclusion of Dalit Muslims into the SC category. Dalit Muslims are excluded because of their religion as Para 3 of Article 341 states that, it shall include only those who profess to be Hindu. However, there were times when non-Hindus were included. First, in 1956 when Dalits from Sikh religion and second, in 1990 when Dalits from Buddhist religion got included. The irony is this was the time when Muslims got first of its kind of reservation. However, after 1990, the demand for inclusion of Dalit Muslims into the SC category started in 1994 when Dr. Ejaz Ali established an organisation called '*All India Backward Muslim Morcha*'. Apart from this the '*All-India Muslim OBC Sangathan*' is also committed to the demand of Dalit Muslims. Dalit Muslim reservation has been recommended by the Sachar Committee (2006), Ranganath Mishra Commission (2007), and Kundu Committee (2013). But till today no steps have been taken in this matter. In a recent answer to the question of inclusion of the Christian and Muslim Dalits into the SC category, the then law minister Ravi Shankar Prasad has answered that the government has no plan to include them.²¹

Conclusion

An attempt has been made to understand the division within Muslim society and the politics related to it, and the issue related to reservation. Indeed, Muslims are not a single and monolithic society but are stratified. On the one hand, they are divided into sects, languages, regions, and on the other into castes. The caste in Islamic society has been ignored since the beginning citing the egalitarian principle of Islam. Many people argue that since the identity 'Muslim' is being problematic and hence the people of Islam should not be bothered about the caste. It is true that the entire society today is experiencing harassment and fear at the religious level and is being deprived of the right to life. On one hand, there is communal violence, lynching and on the other side, there is discrimination on the part of the government, political parties, and administration. But it is also true that most of the Muslim society is Pasmanda, which is very backward and suppressed. The Sachar Committee has

²¹ 'Dalit converts to Christianity, Islam won't get quota' *The Times of India*. Retrieved on 8th October, 2021 from <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/dalit-converts-to-christianity-islam-wont-get-quota/articleshow/80871535.cms>

rightly written that they are victims of two-way discrimination. They have the twin burden of being labelled “anti-national” while also being “appeased.” While Muslims must demonstrate daily that they are neither “anti-national” nor “terrorists,” the purported “appeasement” has not resulted in the Community’s desired degree of socio-economic progress. (SCR 2006: 11) the sections of the Muslims in the political space which is constituted by mostly Ashraf castes must think about the plight of the largest chunk of the community. Otherwise, the community will remain deprived and impoverished. John Rawls has rightly said that the strongest chain cannot become stronger than its weakest part.

Table 1

**Caste wise distribution of population of Muslims
prepared by Sachar Committee report**

Religion	SC	ST	OBC	Others	Total
Muslims	0.8	0.5	39.2	59.5	100

Source: Sachar Committee Report, 2006 p. Distribution obtained from a merged sample of Schedule 1 and Schedule 10 of NSSO 61st Round Survey.

Table 2

Muslim OBC population

Total Population (13.4%)	55 th survey of NSSO	61 st survey of NSSO	67 th Survey of NSSO ²²
Muslim OBC	31.7%	40.7%	50.7%
Muslim general	68.3%	59.3%	49.3%

Source: Sachar Committee Report, 2006 p. Based on NSSO 55th Round (Schedule 10) and 61st Round (Schedule 10) data and Kundu Committee report (2014) 67th round.

Table 3

Caste divisions among Muslims

Caste groups	Castes
Upper castes (Ashrafs)	1. Syed 2. Sheikh 3. Pathan 4. Malik 5. Mughal
Middle castes/Annexure II	5. Gaddi 6. Gadheri 7. Kalal (Araqi) 8. Kulhaiya 9. Moghal 10. Mukri (Mukeri) 11. Nalband 12. Rangrez 13. Teli 14. Saifi 15. Suryapuri 16. Abdal

²² This particular data is excerpts from Post Sachar Evaluation Committee (PSEC) 2014, p. 17

Lower castes Annexure I	16. Abdal 17. Bakkho 18. Bhat 19. Bhatiara 20. Kuraishi (Chik) 21. Churihar 22. Dafali 23. Mansuri (Dhunia) 24. Dhobi 25. Idrisi 26. Kalandar 27. Kasab (Kasai) 28. Mehtar (Lalbegi, Halalkhor) 29. Madari 30. Meershikar 31. Miriasin 32. Momin (Ansari) 33. Nai (Salmani) 34. Nut 35. Pamaria 36. Rayeen (Kunjra) 37. Sayeen (Fakir, Shah) 38. Shekhara 39. Sikalgar (Saikalgar) 40. Shershahbadi 41. Thakurai 42. Kamangar (Mali) 43. Turk Pasi
----------------------------	---

Source: ADRI report, 2004, Patna, pp. 17-18

Table 4
Muslim Representation in Lok Sabha

S. No.	Election Year	Total Elected Member of Lower House	Muslim MP Elected	Percentile	Muslim populations accordingly
1.	1 st (1952)	489	21	4.29%	9.91%
2.	2 nd (1957)	494	24	4.86%	9.91%
3.	3 rd (1962)	494	23	4.66%	10.69%
4.	4 th (1967)	520	29	5.58%	10.69%
5.	5 th (1971)	518	30	5.79%	11.21%
6.	6 th (1977)	542	34**	6.27%	11.21%
7.	7th (1980)	529	49**	9.29%	11.21%
8.	8 th (1984)	542	46**	8.49%	11.35%
9.	9 th (1989)	529	33	6.24%	11.35%
10.	10 th (1991)	534	28	5.25%	12.12%
11.	11 th (1996)	543	28	5.15%	12.12%
12.	12 th (1998)	543	29	5.34%	12.12%
13.	13 th (1999)	543	32	5.89%	12.12%
14.	14 th (2004)	543	36	6.62%	12.12%
15.	15 th (2009)*	543	30	5.52%	13.4%
16.	16th (2014)	543	23	4.23%	14.2%
17.	17 th (2019)	542	25	4.60%	14.2%

** including Muslims elected in bye-election

* Table prepared by the Author

Source: Ansari A. Iqbal. (2006). Political representation of Muslims of India: 1952-2004: New Delhi: Manak.

Reference

- Ahmad, I., (1978). (ed). *Caste and social stratification among Muslims in India* New Delhi: Manohar.
- Alam, M.S. (2016). Affirmative Action's for Minorities in India: Constrains and Possibilities. *Social and Education History*, 5(3), pp. 246- 272. Doi:10.17583/hse.2016.2245
- Ansari, G (1960). *Muslim Caste in Uttar Pradesh: A Study of Culture Contact*. Lucknow: Ethnographic and Folk Culture Society.
- Anwar, A., (2001), *Masawat ki Jung* (in Hindi) New Delhi: Vaani Prakashan
- Ansari, A. H., (2007). Importance of Reservation for Muslim Backward Classes, in Ashfaq Husain Ansari, (ed.), *Basic Problems of OBC & Dalit Muslims*, New Delhi: Serials Publication. P. 270
- Fazal, T (2010). Between Identity and Equity: An Agenda for Affirmative Action for Muslims. In Mahajan, G and Jodhka, S. S., (eds.), *Religion, Community and Development: Changing Contours of Politics and Policies in India*. New Delhi: Routledge, pp 228-47.
- Farīd, Ibn-I, Faridi, F. R. (1992), *The Social structure of Indian Muslims*. New Delhi: Institute of Objective Studies.
- Government of India, (1955). Backward classes commission report, the commission chaired by kaka kalelkar, (known as kalelkar commission). New Delhi: Government of India.
- _____ (1980). Backward classes commission report, the commission chaired by B.P. Mandal (popularly known as Mandal commission). New Delhi: Government of India.
- _____ (2006). Report of the national commission on minorities, commission chaired by Justice Rajinder Sachar. New Delhi: Ministry of Minority Affairs.
- _____ (2007). Report of the national commission for religious and linguistic minorities, commission chaired by Justice Ranganath Mishra. New Delhi: Ministry of Minority Affairs.
- George, Sobin & Adiga, Shrinidhi. (2017). 'Caste' Among Muslims: Ethnographic Account from a Karnataka Village Working Paper Series Editor: Marchang Reimeingam *'Caste among Muslims: Ethnographic Account from A Karnataka Village*.
- Hasnain, Nadeem (2007). Muslims in India: Caste Affinity and Social Boundaries of Backwardness, in Ansari, A. H. (2007). *Basic Problems of OBC & Dalit Muslims*, New Delhi: Serials Publications. Pp.32-45
- Jafri, S. A., (2021). The Status of Muslim OBCs in India: Inclusion/Exclusion of Muslim OBCs in the Process of Modernisation and Development, in Simhadri, S. and Ramagoud, A., (2021). *The Routledge Handbook of the Other Backward Classes in India*, Routledge: India. Pp. 444-478
- Khanam, A., (2013). *Muslim Backward Classes: A Sociological Perspective*. New Delhi: Sage.

- Kumar, S. (2021). Understanding Backward Caste Movement in Contemporary Bihar, in Simhadri, S. and Ramagoud, A., (2021). *The Routledge Handbook of the Other Backward Classes in India*, Routledge: India. Pp. 342-354
- Momin A. R., (1978). Muslim Caste in an Industrial township of Maharashtra, in `Ahmad, I., (1978). *Caste and Social stratification among Muslims in India*, New Delhi: Manohar. Pp.117-140
- Rahman, A., (2019). *Denial and Deprivation: Indian Muslims after the Sachar Committee and Rangnath Mishra Commission reports*, New Delhi: Manohar.
- Rajkishore. (2012). (ed.), *Bhartiya Musalman Mithak aur Yatharth*, (in Hindi) New Delhi: Vaani Prakashan.
