

Pasmanda Community

July 9, 2022

In news— BJP is trying to reach out to the socially backward pasmanda Muslim community in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

About Pasmanda Muslims-

- **A Persian word, 'Pasmanda', means the 'ones left behind', and is used to describe depressed classes among the Muslims**, while underlining their deliberate or conscious exclusion.
- **Pasmanda has become an umbrella identity used by backward, Dalit, and tribal Muslims** to push back against caste-based discrimination against them within the community.
- **The term 'Pasmanda Muslims' was first used in 1998 by Ali Anwar Ansari** when he founded the Pasmanda Muslim Mahaz
- According to Ali Anwar, Pasmandas include Dalits as of now, but all Pasmandas are not Dalits.
- In the absence of a caste census, a clear estimate of the present-day numbers and demographic distribution of Pasmanda Muslims is not available. **The Sachar Committee in its report put the number of OBC and SC/ST Muslims at 40% (all India 2004-05).**
- Pasmanda activists and scholars do not agree with this figure. Those shepherding the fight for the rights of Pasmandas say that they make up 80-85% of the total Muslim population in India.
- This broadly tallies with the **1871 census that said only 19% of Muslims in India were upper caste, while 81% were made up of the lower castes.**

Demands of Pasmanda Muslims-

- **Pasmanda Muslims say that despite their overwhelming numerical strength within the community, they are under-**

represented in jobs, legislatures and government-run minority institutions, as well as community-run Muslim organisations.

- **The Pasmanda versus Ashraf divide stems from a feeling of being deliberately ignored** amid the ruling elites' focus on **"Muslimness"**.
- **Pasmandas are also opposed to the demand for giving religion-based reservation** to the entire Muslim population, arguing that it ignores unequal access to state resources within the community.
- **The major Pasmanda demands include conducting a caste census, restructuring of the existing reservation categories**, and state support for artisans, craftspersons, and agricultural labourers, who are among the most impoverished groups in the community.
- **In a resolution passed by several Pasmanda outfits in the run-up to the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, it was demanded that Dalit Muslims be included in the SC list and the OBC quota be redesigned to create an Extremely Backward Castes (EBCs) category at the Centre and the state level** to include the most backward Muslims along with Hindu EBCs.
- **As an example, the Pasmandas hold up the Bihar model, where a separate MBC category was carved out within the OBC list and most backward Muslim castes, 27 according to the Sachar committee – placed in that category.**

Are Muslims divided along caste lines?

- **Muslim society in India consists of several status groups or biradaris that are broadly sorted in three categories:**
 - The Ashrafs (the 'noble' elite or the 'honourable ones'),
 - The Ajlafs (backward Muslims), and
 - The Arzals (Dalit Muslims).
- **Ashrafs in India are Muslims who either claim to have a**

- foreign pedigree** – descendants of Muslims from Arabia, Persia, Turkey, Afghanistan (Syeds, Sheikhs, Mughals and Pathans,) – or who are upper-caste converts from Hinduism (Rajput, Gaur, Tyagi Muslims among others).
- **Ajlafs are middle-caste converts**, who were into ritually “clean” occupations, while the Arzals – who were first recorded in the 1901 census – are from the lowest, “untouchable” castes like halalkhors, helas, lalbegis or bhangis (scavengers), dhobis (washermen), nais or hajjams (barbers), chiks (butchers), and faqirs (beggars).
 - **The momins or julahas (weavers), darzi or idiris (tailors),** rayeens or kunjaras (vegetable sellers) **fall in the Ajlaf bracket.**
 - While **Islam does not mandate the creation of such groups**, these caste categories are a lived reality for Muslims across the country.
 - **However, The Constitution (Scheduled Caste) Order, 1950, had restricted SC status to Hindus**, keeping Dalits from other religions out of its ambit. **The order was later amended** (in 1956 and 1990) to include Sikhs and Buddhists.
 - **The implementation of the report of the Mandal Commission brought the non-Ashrafs – Ajlafs and Arzals under the OBC category.**
 - The National Commission for Religious and Linguistic Minorities, known as the **Justice Ranganath Mishra Commission**, which submitted its report in May 2007, **acknowledged that the caste system impacted all religious communities in India, including Muslims.**

History of the Pasmanda movement-

- While the movement to **ensure social justice for Pasmandas**, and the recurrent **use of the term, gathered pace in the post-Mandal era**, its best known **flag-bearers**

in the period before Independence were Abdul Qayyum Ansari and Maulana Ali Hussain Asim Bihari, both of whom belonged to the julaha (weaver) community.

- **Both these leaders opposed the communal politics being propagated at the time by the Muslim League,** and challenged the League's claim to represent all Muslims.
- Their other contemporaries fighting a similar fight were Maulana Atiqur Rehman Arvi (of the mansoori community), and Mian Abdul Malik Tanapuri (of the rayeen community).
- **In the 1980s, the All India Muslim OBC Organisation (AIMOBCO) from Maharashtra** started spearheading the fight for the rights of Pasmandas, and went on to enlist the unwavering support of Bollywood thespian Dilip Kumar, a Pathan.
- **The 1990s saw the rise of two outfits:** the All-India Backward Muslim Morcha (AIBMM) set up by Dr Ejaz Ali, and the Pasmanda Muslim Mahaz founded by Ali Anwar.
- This marked the phase of getting small caste-based outfits among Muslims to close ranks. Several other outfits started to work for the uplift of Pasmanda Muslims across states.