

Equality Masquerading Inequality: A Case of Pasmanda Muslims

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Abstract

The term Pasmanda has suddenly become a buzz-word in media and politics as Prime Minister Narendra Modi, speaking at the party's two-day national executive meet in Hyderabad on the 2nd and 3rd of July, 2022, asked BJP leaders to extend a hand of "affection" towards the community' (Tripathi, 2022). Although not for the first time, this incident brought out the plight and the unequal status of Pasmanda Muslims in the national discourse. This paper aims to understand the social stratification system among Muslims, the debates surrounding the existence of caste, inequalities faced due to inequality within the community and the way such inequalities translate themselves into a larger socio-political arena, the historical inequality faced by the Pasmanda community, their strife for equality through a long-prolonged movement, and their politics of building horizontal solidarities with communities who have faced and continue facing similar inequalities and the recent displacement of the Pasmanda discourse.

Keywords: *Pasmanda, Caste, Community, Inequality, Pasmanda-Bahujan Davedari.*

Introduction

What exactly is Pasmanda? Pasmanda is a Persian word that is used to refer to people who are oppressed, depressed, and left behind. Why

are these people in such a situation? The answer to this question lies in their social position and the fact that benefits have been unequally accrued by some others, specifically the “Ashrafs”. The term Pasmanda is used to refer to the low and backward caste communities within the Muslims. Caste among Muslims has been a matter of great controversy and debate. There are divisions among scholars when they try to understand the social stratification of Muslims. One of the most central aspects of Indian society is that it is marked by inequalities of various kinds and no religion, whatsoever be its claims of equality, fraternity, and justice have been fully devoid of them. Therefore, to claim that social stratification does not exist in the Muslim community is not just false, but such a claim also gives an incomplete understanding of the community, their political stands, aspirations, and larger politics. The Pasmanda movement has a long history. The backward caste Muslims had started mobilizing themselves even before this word was used for them. “The Dalit and backward caste Indian Muslims who constitute, according to most estimates, 85% of the Muslim population and about 10% of India’s population” (Ansari, 2009). The community has often been neglected by the larger, mainstream politics of the country. Their unequal status hasn’t been duly recognized because they were considered to belong to a community theoretically based on the concepts of equality. This paper begins by pointing out the sociological paradigms of inequality and placing the inequalities faced by the Pasmanda community in it. The paper goes on to evaluate the often argued “promise of equality” among the Muslim community, their caste structures, and the ways and areas in which the Pasmanda community has suffered inequalities generationally and continues to do so. Further, it tries to understand the reasons for the unequal status of Pasmanda Muslims in a social justice-driven state. The paper also tries to understand the development of the Pasmanda consciousness as a political discourse and the recent displacement of the project.

Sociological paradigms of inequality

A paradigm refers to the way one understands society and its structures in a theoretical way. “A paradigm is a description of the world of human behavior; it is a description of society. A paradigm is a description of the interactions of human beings within any society. Paradigms are broad viewpoints or perspectives that permit social scientists to have a wide range of tools to describe society, and then to build hypotheses and theories” (Dunn n.d.). There are three such paradigms that describe society, social structures, inequalities, and several other aspects present in society, they are; the functionalist paradigm, conflict paradigm, and symbolic interactionist paradigm.

According to the functionalist paradigm, society is best when it is stable. The social structures are responsible for their stability and instability. The structures and mechanisms of society maintain social equilibrium among all the components of society. The social structure of society exists objectively and externally, it creates consensus and the members of society find it to be legitimate. Accordingly, inequalities in a society are less widespread and functional as it allows competition and an attempt for people to rise up to the top. However, inequalities also become dysfunctional for some other population groups as it prevents them to compete for the goods of society.

According to the conflict paradigm, inequalities exist in all societies and are largely based on the aspect of master status. Analyzing society from the conflict paradigm refers to understanding the structures of wealth, power, and status which maintain the social, economic, political, and coercive powers. The structures are based on the relations of exploitation which protects and maintains the elite. There is no consensus among the members of the society but a conflict over power, wealth, resources, and status. The powerful exploits everyone to develop a false consciousness, to believe that

non-elites have the potential to compete, and become rich and powerful.

According to the symbolic-interactionist paradigm, society is based upon small groups and individuals who interact and relate to one another because of their shared cultural symbols. This paradigm finds social structures to exist only in the minds of individuals. It has no objective reality, but is rather subjective, abstract, and changing. Inequality according to this paradigm is just an individual reaction to their own subjective perceptions about the structure.

These three different paradigms enable us to look at the issue of inequality in different ways. While the phenomenon of social structure is important for both the functionalist and conflict theories, the symbolic-interactionist paradigm does not consider it to be important. The functionalist theory in the urge for stability does not realize the oppressive nature of the societal structures and goes on to put the onus on the deprived sections. Therefore, the conflict paradigm becomes relevant when it comes to explaining racism, sexism, ageism, and socio-economic inequalities.

This paper shall try to understand the inequalities faced by the Pasmanda Muslim community through the conflict paradigm. It shall look at the ways that caste structure within the community is maintained through a false consciousness of equality. Further, it shall understand their unequal position at the larger levels by looking at how they have suffered socio-economic inequalities generationally as even the meager opportunities available to the community have been accrued by the Ashrafs or the so-called elite-upper caste Muslims.

The notion of equality: How true is it?

The Muslim community is often seen as a homogenous entity without the existence of any internal differentiations and stratification. There

is a tendency to not accept the existence of caste structures and practices that exists in the Muslim community. Further, distinctions are made between the actual caste system, as it exists in the Hindu fold, and caste labels or biradaris that can exist in the Muslim community. Several scholars have argued that such a view regarding the community is inadequate to understand the lived realities. Imtiaz Ahmad tries to understand the anxieties faced by the scholars working around the social stratification system among Muslims. He marks that scholars who believe that caste does not exist or exists in more diluted forms among the Muslim community, do so either because they find that theoretical Islam promises equality and the absence of any form of stratification or because their acceptance of caste would project the Muslims as mere converted Hindus. This anxiety brings us to the popular conception that the Muslim community is based on the principles of equality, fraternity, and universal brotherhood. Ahmad argues that there must be a broader understanding of Islam's position on social stratification and social equality (Ahmad, 2015). He raises three questions about the notion of equality in Islam:

1. Is Islam opposed to social stratification or just social inequality?
2. What was Islam's attitude toward social inequality that existed in the society where it developed?
3. Whether the emphasis on egalitarianism was about a society that already existed or an ideal. Something that should be achieved by humankind.

Societies always have some form of social stratification and it is rare to find any such society where all members could be equal. Ahmad marks that even the simplest reading of the text on which equality is premised shows that Islam's orientation is hierarchal. This hierarchy could be traced between believers and non-believers, between God

and followers, between master and slaves, and even between husbands and wives. All these relationships are viewed in hierarchical terms. Moreover, the society in which Islam developed consisted of people who had different material possessions. Islam could not simply overlook such divisions and therefore it accepted and recognized them while providing appropriate behavior for people belonging to different classes. Ahmad argues that the people who claim that Islam doesn't have any form of social stratification look at it by ignoring the fact that it accepts the differences that existed in the society it emerged, precisely to argue that it stands for absolute egalitarianism. The proclamation of egalitarianism can be explained in another way. It can be argued that it is about equality as an ideal, a society that would in the future become equal and not about the existing situations.

Caste among Muslims in India

The existence of social stratification among Muslims in the form of caste is a known fact. Muslims are not a monolithic category premised on absolute equality among them. "Empirical studies which initially took the form of decennial census adduced considerable evidence that castes (or caste-like groupings, which is a much later categorization) existed among Muslims" (Ahmad, 2015). The concept of theoretical equality as promised in the holy book has caused a lot of debates around this phenomenon. Some people outrightly reject the existence of caste in the Muslim community, arguing that such a stance creates division in the community and is a threat to their unity. However, we must ask, whom does this unity cater to? Who benefits from the unity that is achieved by the marginalization and backwardness of the Pasmanda Muslims? Scholars have varied positions on this matter. On the one hand, certain scholars argue that even within the Muslim community there exist caste structures that "could be identified through a hierarchy of

status orders that had several significant attributes: source of descent so that those claiming to be the descendants of the Prophet or one of his Companions enjoyed precedence over local converts and association with an occupation leading to each caste confining marriages to its members” (Ahmad, 2015). On the other hand, some opine that the stratification which exists in Muslim societies cannot be directly equated to the one that exists in the Hindu counterpart. They mark that the social structures in Muslims could be treated as ethnic groups or ‘biradaris’.

What explains such outright denial or anxieties about the existence of caste? One probable answer could be that accepting caste could provide evidence to the Hindutva claim that all Muslims are erstwhile Hindus and mere converts and must relapse back into Hinduism through the slogan of ‘ghar wapsi’. They want to maintain their distinctiveness from the Hindu community by projecting their Islamic tenets. ‘The harsh behavioral reality of the existence of caste among the Muslims cannot be denied’ (Ahmad, 2015). One of the earliest scholars who worked around the existence of caste structure among Muslims was Ghaus Ansari. In his pioneering work “Muslim Caste in Uttar Pradesh: A Study of Culture Contact”, he points out that Muslims are classified into three broad categories: Ashraf, Ajlaf, and Arjal. The Ashrafs are the high-caste Muslims, who claim their descendants from the Prophet or his companions. These include castes like Sayyid, Sheikh, Pathan, and Khan to name a few. The Ajlaf category consists of the backward caste Muslims who have remained marginalized over the years and belong to a lower ritual-social rank. This category comprises castes that mostly come under the artisanal-trader occupation fold; such as Ansaris (weavers), Kalaals (liquor sellers), Raeens (vegetable sellers), and Quraishis (meat sellers) to name a few. The Arjal is the lowest rung of the Muslim social hierarchy and these castes are considered unclean not just by the Ashrafs but even by the Ajlafs. These castes include;

lalbhegis (scavengers), dafalis (drum makers), hawaris (cleaners), dhobis (washerman), bhatiara (innkeepers), gorkan (gravediggers), bhako and nut (street performers) to name a few. This last category of Muslims is often considered Dalit Muslims by several scholars and demands have been raised in a similar vein. The Pasmanda community comprises the Ajlaf and the Arjal Muslims.

Historical inequalities faced by the Pasmanda community

The Pasmanda community consists of the majority of the Muslim population in the overall minority. It has often been seen that it is this population that is represented far less than the so-called upper castes, both Hindus and Muslims. While it can be argued that these communities cannot compete adequately with people from better conditions in governmental, educational, and occupational opportunities because of their ‘left-behind’ status. This status is the result of resources being utilized by the upper-caste Muslims in particular. Moreover, even within the Muslim community, the Pasmandas are not adequately represented either in the Madrasa Boards or as Qazis, or Law or Waqf Board members, let alone being the heads of these institutions. A very high population of these communities does not get the necessities of their life.

“The literacy rate among Muslims in 2001 was 59.1 %. This is far below the national average (65.1 %). Only one out of the 25 Under-Graduate students and one out of the 50 post-Graduate students are Muslim in premier colleges” (Rajindar Sachar 2006). Similarly, there are substantially low numbers of Muslims being associated with employment opportunities. “The Census of India, 1901 listed 133 social groups wholly or partially Muslim, which reflects the social stratification within the community. Since the Presidential Order (1950), restricts the SC status only to Hindu groups having ‘unclean’ occupations, their non-Hindu equivalents have been bracketed with the middle caste converts and declared OBC” (Sachar,2006). The

Sachar committee report explains the historical backwardness of the Muslim community as a whole. Most of the Muslim population as argued earlier belongs to the “picchda” category.

Inequalities faced within the community

Within the Muslim community, there is an apparent divide between the highly placed Ashrafiya and the lowly Pasmandas. The Ashrafiyas claim their lineage from the Prophet or his companions and treat the Pasmandas as an unclean indigenous population. They have treated this community as not being proper Muslims and have forced processes of Islamization or Ashrafization over their folk practices. The Meos of Mewar is a tribal community that follows Islam but has its specific cultural norms. The hegemonic Ashraf community who claims to be the holders of actual Islam in India denies the specificities of other cultural groups who are largely Backward, Dalit, or Tribal Muslims. Continuous stress that such communities are the “other” even when it comes to their religion creates an inferiority complex that gets passed on generationally. There is an overt pressure to become “Muslims”. The discrimination does not end here, it goes on to become the humiliation of their daily lives. Casteist slurs are used to refer to the people of the community.

While there is no doubt that the Muslim population has got a far less share of resources in the country. The Sachar committee report explains vividly the areas where Muslims have been inadequately represented. The Pasmanda leaders who brought forth the issues of discrimination and inequality in the Muslim community argue that even the meager resources are snatched by the upper caste, Ashrafiya Muslims. The Pasmandas remain backward in education, employment, politics, and so on. Their issues were taken up by several leaders since the pre-independence times. The Pasmanda movement emerged which mobilized this community against their systematic suppression. It also defined their politics which was different from the politics of the Ashraf classes.

Ashraf claimed to represent the entire Muslim population in the political arena. During the freedom struggle, they demanded a separate Muslim country. The backward caste Muslims were against such a demand because they felt that communal agendas were employed to sideline their actual concerns of equality within and outside the community. Over the years Pasmada politics has differed from the Ashrafiya identity politics. While the Ashrafs have focused on emotive and cultural aspects of the community, the Pasmada politics have focused on the concerns of their unequal positions. They have spoken vehemently against communalism and the need to perpetuate secularism in the country. They have tried to create horizontal solidarities between people belonging to various backward communities across religions.

Inequalities perpetuated by the State

The Indian constitution had pledged to improve the conditions of the people who have hitherto belonged to marginalized groups and faced historical inequalities. This aim of the constitution is far from being achieved. While fundamental rights ensure that people must not be discriminated against based on caste, class, race, religion, or gender; directive principles put the responsibility on the state to ensure that it makes policies in such a way that the specific concerns of such groups are fulfilled. Time and again the judiciary has intervened to mark that the Directive Principles are equally important as the Fundamental rights and the state must always keep them in their mind while making policies. The Pasmada Movement has argued that the state has not done enough. Rather, it has even perpetuated inequalities by not recognizing the various disadvantages of these backward groups.

The country since its independence has upheld the responsibility of undoing the social injustices faced by various communities. For this

purpose, it has undertaken various affirmative action policies, reservations being one such action. Consequent governments have tried to carry forward such responsibilities of the state. However, when it comes to the issues faced by Muslims and the Pasmanda community it can be argued that most governments could not go beyond mere vote bank appeasement. The Congress party's stance regarding the differentiation in the Muslim community became apparent when in the Shah Bano case the Rajiv Gandhi government passed the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act. This act diluted the Supreme Court judgment and restricted the right to alimony from former husbands to only ninety days after divorce. Such a position by the ruling party showed that it was not ready to cater to the specific problems of the marginalized within the community. Further, the party showed affinity to the Muslim clerics usually the upper castes in lieu of those who are suppressed by them. The Congress party so to say did not want to anger its vote bank by siding with Muslim women. Similarly, over the many years that Congress has been the ruling party, it did not undertake any substantial measures to uplift the Pasmanda community. On the other hand, it viewed Muslims as a homogenous group, unwilling to respond and cater to specific marginalizations.

The Pasmanda leaders have demanded the SC status for Muslim Dalits. Some communities perform the same jobs that a Hindu Dalit is supposed to perform. They are also considered unclean and forms of untouchability can be found to exist. The leaders have argued that if their oppression has been similar, why shouldn't they get they receive the SC status from the state? The President of All India Pasmanda Muslim Mahaz and former Rajya Sabha M.P. Ali Anwar marked that "A Hindu Dhobi (washerman) gets the SC status but a Muslim Dhobi doesn't". Isn't this discrimination based on religion? The leaders have marked time and again that the initial constitution did not make any difference between the Dalits based on religion. It was in the Presidential Order of 1950 that these people belonging to

minority religions were debarred from the SC status. It was later that the Buddhists and Sikhs were included in the fold of SC status. 'These organizations have claimed that keeping the Christian and Muslim Dalits outside the ambit of the SC category and denying them their long due is essentially anti-secular (Ali, Politics of 'Pasmanda' Muslims: A Case Study of Bihar 2010).

The issue of reservations remains an important part of their politics. The central government filed an affidavit before the Supreme Court in November 2022 against allowing the SC status to Dalits who converted to Islam or Christianity. The act of granting SC status to Buddhists cannot be taken precedence in this case. The center argued that there is no proper documentation or evidence available to establish the social conditions and disabilities faced by people belonging to castes that claim themselves to be Dalits are similar to that of people who already have the SC status. Further, Pasmanda's politics does not support the idea of reservations for the entire Muslim community. They believe that reservation in the name of religion is unsecular and can lead to communal polarizations but more than that such a reservation would allow benefits to be accrued by the upper castes. In 1998, several organizations like the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board, All India Muslim Majlis-e-Masshawwarat, Jamat-e-Islami Hind, All India Milli Council, and Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind came forward with "Muslim Agenda 99", arguing that all the Muslims in India are socially, educationally and economically backward and therefore they demanded quotas for all Muslims. In response to this, the Mahaz brought out "Pasmanda Agenda 99" and questioned the motives of such an alliance. It argued that some communities are already the beneficiaries of the Mandal Commission's recommendations, so such an agenda is simply trying to incorporate the upper castes into the fold of reservations. While it accepts the Sachar Committee's findings and recommendations, it also marks that the specific concerns of the Dalit, Adivasi, and

Pichda Muslims must be looked at.

A Quest for equality: Political mobilizations of the Pasmanda community

The backward and the oppressed Muslims have organized themselves historically and created sustained movements. Such movements put forward the contestation that the Muslim community is not monolithic as often portrayed in national politics. The Pasmanda movement activists and leaders have often marked that the Ashrafiya leaders who have claimed to represent Muslim politics and demands in the national arena have restricted it to symbolic, emotive, and identity concerns like that of romanticization of Urdu language, Babri Masjid, the uniform civil code, Aligarh Muslim University, etc. The Pasmanda movement has not disregarded these concerns but approached them in ways different from the Ashraf politics. Most of these issues according to Pasmanda politics are not just about Muslim identity and concerns but rather these are national issues. These are issues about secularism, equality, constitutionalism, and its decline henceforth, it is about the integrity of people as well as the nation. The differential outlook of the Pasmanda movement gives it a progressive outlook and separates it from narrow identitarian politics.

The backward and lower Muslims started mobilizing themselves in the modern period in the early years of the twentieth century. The All-India Momin Conference (AIMC) was a political party/ pressure group that was formed against the politics of the Muslim league. Its towering leaders like Abdul Qaiyum Ansari inspire the activists fighting for the cause of oppressed Muslims even today. The AIMC was against the two-nation theory propagated by Mr. Jinnah and his allies, including the RSS. A landmark moment in the politics of AIMC was the massive rally held in Delhi, in 1941 by the backward and lower-caste Muslims against the partition politics of the Muslim League. They considered communalism to be a huge problem whose

adverse effects are faced by the lower and the backward castes. The so-called upper castes and the Ashrafiyas will decide and make peace between themselves and leave the rest to fight, kill and die. The movement could not stop partition from happening. Moreover, 'the AIMC tried to address the humiliation, and low social and ritual status of the backward castes by promoting "ashrafiya" practices among them' (K. A. Ansari 2018). They responded to the casteist slurs by asking people to project more of their Islamic identity. This in a way defeats the purpose for which they were standing and fighting against. The AIMC functioned as a torchbearer of the backward caste movement since the pre-independence times.

The Pasmada movement developed significantly during the 1990s, Mandal era. It is during this time that a large population of backward and lower-caste Muslims would get recognition and state support through reservations to mend their problems. The huge anti-Mandal agitation and mobilization led to the consolidation of not just Hindu OBCs but also the Pasmada Muslims. It was during this time that a greater emphasis was placed on the Pasmada-Bahujan-Dalit solidarity. It was felt that greater understanding and cohesion between these oppressed, systematically deprived, and neglected communities can turn the way politics has been functioning at a larger level. It was during this time that certain important organizations emerged in different states which tried to bring forward the specific concerns of the Dalit-Pichda Muslims. The All India Muslim OBC Organization in Maharashtra under the leadership of Shabbir Ahmad Ansari, the All-India Pasmada Muslim Mahaz under the leadership of Ali Anwar, and the All India Backward Muslim Morcha under Eijaz Ali emerged in Bihar. 'These were the few organizations that attempted to steer and consolidate the masses that were scattered and subjugated over the years and transformed them into a class for itself' (Ali, Politics of 'Pasmada' Muslims: A Case Study of Bihar 2010).

The politics of these organizations mark an interesting phase in the trajectory of the Pasmanda Movement. The Mandal Commission report includes reservation provisions for certain castes in this category. These organizations have, however, demanded that the Dalits in the Muslim community be recognized and get the benefits of SC reservations because their conditions are like their Hindu counterparts. The era of the 1990s saw the rise of Hindutva sentiments and the political party which mobilized around it. The Hindu-Muslim hatred culminated in several forms of violence like the Babri Masjid demolition, riots following the incident, Gujrat riots, Muzaffarnagar riots, and several such incidences. In the atmosphere of extreme polarization, organizations like the Mahaz agreed that such acts of violence were targeted toward the minority community on the whole but it is the most backward and lowly who suffer the fatalities more than anyone else. They marked that when the violence subsumes, the upper castes in both communities come together to negotiate and redefine the power distributions while it is the people who are always oppressed who remain mere fodders to their violence. Therefore, backward caste organizations like the Mahaz have stood strong for secular politics. They view communal agendas as a way to get away from the actual material needs of the toiling masses and use emotions and sentiments to keep the people busy from asking questions of actual concern. This is not to say that they do not consider the growth and development of hatred-based, hyper-Hindutva politics to be a problem. Such politics is problematic not just because it demonizes one community and perpetuates violence against it but also because such politics reduces our capacities of being humans and a nation based on integrity and equality and respect.

One of the most important interventions by the organizations working for the upliftment of the Pasmanda community is questioning the organizations which claim to represent the Muslim community. ‘Such

organizations like the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board, various Waqf Boards, Masjid Boards, and Political Parties have leaders and representatives only from the upper caste' (Alam, 2009). If people belonging to the Pasmanda community are not able to compete in educational and employment opportunities because they have been constantly left behind, why are they not represented in the matters of their community? The only viable answer is the prevalence of the entrenched caste system, which has accrued benefits only to the upper castes over the years. Therefore, the Pasmanda politics is against the Ashrafiya leaders and their minority identitarian politics. It was during this time that the mobilization led to the internal democratization of the community. The development of caste consciousness and its ability to affect the political arena made this community visible in electoral politics. In Bihar, where most of the organizations worked actively it was apparent that no party can secure victory without considering and appealing to this community.

The displacement of the Pasmanda discourse

On 2nd and 3rd July 2022, the Prime Minister of India in the National Executive Conference of his party held in Hyderabad marked that the party must treat the people belonging to backward and low castes in the Muslim community with affection. This was the first time that Prime Minister, Narendra Modi talked about the Pasmanda community and the need to incorporate them. Soon after the party became acutely active in this community. On 25th July, a training camp was organized for the minority morcha of the party which devised the plan for reaching out to the Pasmanda Muslims in different states. The BJP is also trying to win the Pasmanda Muslims by giving them tickets to fight elections, like in Uttar Pradesh which has a substantial population of people belonging to such castes. More recently, on October 16th, BJP held a conference titled "Pasmanda Buddhijeevi Sammelan" in Lucknow, UP. In the event, the only

Muslim and also a Pasmada Minister in the Yogi Government, Danish Ansari spoke that other parties have merely used the Pasmada Muslims as a vote bank without improving their conditions. It is the BJP that is trying to improve the daily living conditions of the Pasmada Muslims by bringing them to the forefront of politics. BJP's shift has caused a lot of questions as to why the Hindutva-based party who has always demonized the other community is trying to appease them now. Similarly, how true are its claims to uplift the community if all this while it is arguing against giving the Dalits among the Muslims the status of SCs? What does the displacement of the Pasmada discourse from leaders like Ali Anwar to BJP mean to the actual concern of the community? The displacement of the Pasmada concern from leaders like Ali Anwar to other stakeholders means that the issue can now be reduced to nothing more than rhetoric.

Limitations of the Pasmada movement and organizations

The organizations that have led the cause of the Pasmada Muslims have largely focused on specific states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, and Maharashtra. There is a need for these organizations to bring the Pasmada concern to the national level. There was a decline in the support of Ali Anwar when he accepted the JDU seat in Rajya Sabha. People did not like his association with the party which has been allied with BJP. Further, the All India Backward Muslim Morcha faced a legitimacy crisis when it argued for quotas for Muslims which would include upper castes as well. There have been instances where the movement lost its vigor. The Pasmada Movement must manage both the political and social concerns related to the community. While its leaders remain active in replying to and critiquing any narrative created by the government, it has lacked in going deep into the Muslim community and initiating certain social reforms that the society requires. During the Mandal

era, there was sure democratization of the Muslim community in political/electoral terms, but the community also needs to become democratic from within.

Conclusion

The Muslim community is a deeply divided and hierarchical one. As fascinating as they may look, the notions of equality and brotherhood are only theoretical. The prevalence and persistence of caste structures and caste-based inequalities have affected the majority of the population that lags behind immensely. Their situation also makes them vulnerable to become mere grounds of politics, while no substantial change happens. The apathy of the national political discourse and the so-called upholders of Islam in India have caused such a neglected position of the Pasmada population. The Pasmada movement did try to look into the specific concerns of the backward and lower-caste Muslims and mobilize them politically. During the Mandal era, some form of politicization and community consciousness developed amongst them. Anti-Mandal agitation brought the backward caste communities of both religions together, to demand their rightful share in the resources. The shift in the Pasmada discourse has certainly been because of the ways the ruling parties work around it. The focus of leaders of the movement must now be to mobilize the community in ways where they can represent themselves. There is a need to turn the various organizations into a mass-based party of Pasmada Muslims, based on Bahujan-Pasmada-Dalit solidarity to put forward its demands for equality from various institutions like the state.

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