

Pasmanda and Dalit Muslims: A Discussion on Reservation and Representation

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In recent times, discussions about Pasmanda Muslims have become prominent. Thus, it is necessary to present a study about Pasmanda Muslims, their socio-political status, and their demands for reservation. Various studies suggest that Muslim society is divided into three sections based on caste lines. The three sections are Ashraf, Ajlaf, and Arzal. The Ajlaf and Arzal castes are collectively called Pasmanda and Dalit Muslims. Pasmanda and Dalit Muslims are vulnerable, marginalised, uneducated section of Indian society. Pasmanda and Dalit Muslims are facing a deficit because of the dominance of Ashraf Muslims. Pasmanda and Dalit Muslims are socially marginalised and politically underrepresented. They are on the receiving end, facing discrimination and political negligence. This paper primarily discusses Pasmanda Muslims' demand for separate space in the broad OBC category and Dalit Muslims' exclusion from the reservation in the Scheduled Castes category. This paper's conceptual standpoint is to justify Dalit Muslims' inclusion in the Scheduled Caste Reservation, which is unanimously a prerequisite for social justice. Though the current reservation system (OBC) covers Pasmanda Muslims and Dalit Muslims within its ambit, it has never proved to be an emancipator in ensuring socio-economic mobility and political representation. Hence, a necessary exploration is needed.

Keywords: Caste, Pasmanda, Dalit Muslims, Ashraf, Ajlaf, Representation, Scheduled Castes.

Whenever caste is mentioned in India, the Hindu caste system is used as an example, ignoring that Muslim society also suffers from the same. However, many publications, investigations, and survey reports have pointed out how the caste system functions in the Indian Muslim community in the socio-economic and political arenas. Caste stratification among Muslims was investigated in various studies by Barthe (1952), Ghurye (1957), Ansari (1960), Dumont (1970), Ahmad (1973), Srinivas (1982) and others. According to these studies, there is no such thing as a Varna system in Indian Muslim society, but there are multiple caste groupings, each further divided into many sub-castes. It does not, however, have any religious backing. The dominant view of caste predominance in Muslim society is that it results from Hindu society's influence (Ansari, 1960, p. 35). While some argue that the Muslim caste/*Biradari* system is not descended from the Hindu caste system, it has always been a component of Muslim culture (Anwar, 2001; Falahi, 2007; Ansari, 2007). For example, it is said that the three exclusive terms *Ashraf*, *Ajlaf*, and *Arzal*, which are used to divide Muslim society into different categories, are Arabic words rather than Hindi or Sanskrit (Indian) terms. "Where did these terms originate if the caste/

Biradari was not in Muslim culture?” asks Ali Anwar Ansari, the pioneer of the Pasmanda movement (Anwar, 2001). *Ashraf* comes from the Arabic word *Shareef*, which implies nobility or descent. It comprises those castes whose origin is outside of India.

Similarly, *Ajlaf* is derived from the Arabic word *Jalf*, which means ‘low’ or ‘degraded’. It primarily includes castes who are engaged in clean traditional occupations. *Ajlaf* Muslims are OBCs or middle-caste Muslims. The third word, *Arzal*, is derived from the Arabic word *Razl*, which means ‘abominable’ or ‘abject’. This caste category comprises the castes that are involved in unclean occupations. These are also known as Dalit Muslims, equivalent to their Hindu Dalit counterparts (SCR, 2006, p. 193). However, wherever there is a reference to Muslim OBCs, it means both the caste categories of *Ajlaf* and *Arzal*.

Pasmanda and Dalit Muslim discourse, which emerged as a movement after 1990, pointed to the nature of caste stratification, exploitation, and discrimination among Muslims. It also highlighted the issues relevant to academic discourse and the need for intense discourse in academia, politics, and media within Muslim society. There was also an indication that it should be made a public issue and there should be a thorough investigation into it. However, the Pasmanda and Dalit Muslim movement triggered a debate on social justice outside Hindu society for the first time. Although the work on caste in the Muslim community was done much before the Mandal Commission implementation, it was not accepted as a social and existential reality until the commission’s recommendations were implemented, which included 82 Pasmanda and Dalit Muslim castes within the OBC category. In 2006, the Sachar Committee Report (SCR) explained the backwardness of the Muslim community, and the caste dimension further cleared the cloud on caste backwardness as a lived reality of Indian Muslims.

Like Hindu society, Muslim society also practices a direct caste division into an upper and lower caste. Moreover, the concept of high and low and the notion of *Khandan* (family, kinship) and *Ku’fu* (theory of possible marriage among Muslims within the same caste) work immensely in the daily life of ordinary Muslims. In addition, there is also a precise classification of high and low caste in Muslim society, be it *Ashraf* or *Ajlaf*, which heavily practices endogamy to maintain the social order based on hierarchy.

The paper examines the Pasmanda and Dalit Muslim communities and their positions on the distinct OBC quota that the Sachar Committee (2006), Ranganath Mishra Commission (2007), and Kundu Committee (2014) all advocated. The paper also examines the demand for the inclusion of Dalit Muslims into the Scheduled Castes category by various backward Muslim organisations. This paper will also analyse how Dalit Muslims qualify to be counted in the Scheduled Caste category (SC) concerning their socio-economic, political, and sociological context. It will also highlight the problems and challenges concerning the non-inclusion of Dalit Muslims on the SC list. The paper engages the qualitative and explanatory method based on secondary literature on the caste system and Muslim castes, including research articles, government reports, and newspaper articles related to the debate.

Pasmanda and Dalit Muslims: Definition and Meaning

There are almost 750 Muslim tribes, castes, and communities globally, of which

246 are in India (Khan, 2001, p. 01). Of these, ninety are found in the northern part of the country, seventy-three in the west, thirty-five in the east, twenty in the central region, twenty in the south, and eight in the northeast (Khan, 2001, p.01). The Anthropological Survey of India, in its report *The People of India* project (1985-1992), is another essential effort to record India's castes and communities belonging to different religious groups, including Muslims. This project has counted almost 4599 separate communities across India, of which 584 communities were identified as Muslims (Singh, Gopal & Jha, 2008).

However, caste groups among Muslims were first categorised by the census in 1901. The census listed 133 castes that were wholly or partially Muslim (SCR, 2006, p. 192). It also classified Muslim society for the first time under two caste groups- the *Ashraf* and the *Ajlaf*. In addition, *Arzal*- the third category was also identified in the census report, which included very low-caste people such as *Halalkhor*, *Lalbegi*, *Abdal*, *Abdal* and *Bediya* (SCR, 2006, p.192). The 1911 census report classified and listed 94 castes in Indian Muslim society. In Uttar Pradesh alone, 102 castes were identified, of which 97 were non-*Ashrafs*. In the last caste census, 1931, stratifications among Muslims were widely recognised on the pan-India level (SCR, 2006, p.192). The SC list 1936 included some Muslim *Arzal* castes, such as *Halalkhor*, *Dhobi* and others but was debarred from availing benefits (SCR, 2006, pp. 201-202). However, after independence, those *Arzal* Muslims did not benefit from the quota under the presidential order of 1950 because of being non-Hindu, Sikh, or Buddhist.

In post-independent India, the first backward class commission of 1955 (Kaka Kalelkar Commission) and the second backward class commission of 1980 (Mandal Commission) recognised numerous backward castes in Muslim society. By the time the Sachar Committee Report, 2006 came out, the caste among Muslims had gained the utmost importance for locating reasons and positions for the backwardness of Muslim society. The report also highlighted the same traditional three distinct caste groups in Muslim society in a hierarchical order. As mentioned earlier, the first group was identified and called *Ashraf*, meaning the 'nobles'. It constitutes four upper-caste Muslims, i.e. *Syed*, *Sheikh*, *Mughal*, and *Pathan*. They are all descendants of Arabs¹, Central Asia², Afghanistan, and other subcontinents outside India (Sikand, 2003). Likewise, the second caste group is termed *Ajlaf*, which means lowly, degraded, or unholy, consisting of clean occupational castes like *Momin/Ansari* (weavers), *Idrisi* (tailors), *Dhuniya/Mansoori* (carder), *Saifi* (carpenter and blacksmith), *Kassab* or *Qureshi* (Butchers), *Rayeen* or *Kunjada* (vegetable sellers) and many more. They are also regarded as OBC Muslims or middle-caste Muslims. This group consists of the most significant chunk of Muslim society. The third Caste group, known as *Arzal*, literally means 'excluded' and consists of castes like *Dhobi* (washermen), *Hajjam* (barbers) and *Halalkhor* (scavengers). (Falahi, 2007, p. 04). They are also called Dalit Muslims and are counterparts of Hindu, Sikh, or Buddhist Dalits categorised in the Scheduled Caste List (SC).

¹ Mainly the Syeds and Sheikhs find their origin from Arab. Syed claims to be the descendant of Hazrat Fatima (RA) and Hazrat Ali (RA), the Sheikhs, which means the Chief (Sardar) finds their origin from the companions (Sahaaba) of prophet Muhammad (PBUH). There are more than 30 sub-caste groups among the Sheikhs all over India.

² Mughals, the ruling class, now have been stratified as caste itself, finding traces from central Asia.

'Pasmanda' is a Persian term that means 'those who have fallen behind' (Alam, 2003). Ali Anwar, the pioneer of the Pasmanda movement and the founder of *All India Pasmanda Muslim Mahaz*, coined the term in 1998. He believes Pasmanda Muslims should be seen in class rather than caste terms (Alam, 2009, p. 172). However, Ali Anwar uses the terms Pasmanda and Dalit Muslims interchangeably (Ahmad, 2020, p. 100). According to him, Pasmanda includes Dalit Muslims, but all Pasmandas are not Dalit Muslims. Constitutionally speaking, we are in one category, OBC.³ Pasmanda categorically consists of *Ajlaf* and *Arzal* Muslims. It means especially those with lower status in every social, economic, or political aspect.

However, the term Dalit Muslims is coined by Ejaz Ali, the pioneer of the Dalit Muslim movement and the founder of *All India Backward Muslim Morcha* (Sikand, 2003). However, there is no such official categorisation. Besides the unanimity of socio-economic conditions of the Hindu and Dalit Muslims and the same nomenclature, the *Arzal* Muslims were not included in the SC category because of being non-Hindu. The Scheduled caste order 1950 (the Presidential Order) includes only those "who professed to be Hindu." However, in 1956, the 'Mazhabi Sikhs' from the Sikh religion, and in 1990, the 'Neo-Buddhist' were listed.

Nevertheless, as far as Muslim society is concerned, Dalit Muslims (*Arzal*) and Christian Dalits were kept out of the purview of the SC reservation. After 1990, from the implementation of the OBC reservation, the demand for Dalit Muslims' inclusion in the SC category gained momentum. Nevertheless, it has not been established as a fact of the matter. The following section will examine who Dalits are and why Dalits among Muslims need their space in Scheduled Castes reservations.

The Scheduled Castes and the Exclusion of Dalit Muslims

The term Dalit came into use in the early 20th century. Swami Achhotanand first used the word in 1910 (Dube, 2012, pp. 100-105). However, the term 'Dalit' was preponderantly used in journalistic writings (named Dalit Bandhu) in 1930 to refer to the Untouchables.⁴ Earlier, names such as *Anatyjya*, *Pancham*, *Chaandal*, *Achhoot*, *Purv-Achhoot*, deprived class, outcaste and *Harijan* were also used to denote Dalits. (Rayeen, 2018, p. 15).

Dalit means 'broken' or 'depressed' and was used extensively by Ati-*Shudras* intellectual and social reformer Jyotirao Phule (Mendelsohn & Vicziany, 1998, p. 04). However, the term was later popularised by Dr Ambedkar in the 1930s, countering the term *Harijan* given by Gandhi (Ray, 1996). Later, in the late 20th century, *Dalit Panther* popularised the term widely and accepted this term as a dignified identity. With the advent of the *Dalit Panther Movement* and the Dalit Manifesto in 1972, the word eventually became a symbol of honour, hope, and struggle for oppressed and marginalised classes throughout South Asia (Omvedt, 1995, p. 72). Dalit Panther's manifesto defines Dalits as "members of scheduled caste or tribes, the Neo-Bhuddists, the working people, the landless and poor peasants, oppressed women and all those who are being exploited politically, economically and in the name of religion"

³ Explain Desk. (2022). How to understand the BJP's focus on Pasmanda Muslims. *Indian Express*, October, 17. <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-politics/how-to-understand-the-bjps-focus-on-pasmanda-muslims-8213374/>

⁴ Michael, S. M. (1999). (Ed.), *Dalits in modern India: Vision and values*. New Delhi: Vistaar. p. 15

(Bharati, 2002, pp. 02-05). However, the point is that both terms (Dalit and *Harijan*) acquire different meanings. Dalit is a Sanskrit word meaning deprived, depressed section of society.

In contrast, the term '*Harijan*' means the people of *Hari* (God). Both terms, in their core meaning, are antagonistic. A Dalit term is exclusive and sees the people as other than Hindus; it distances itself from the larger Hindu society. It wants to establish its identity and participate in every realm of society and state. Ambedkar rejects the notion that Hinduism can cure the sickness of caste. He believed that caste hierarchies were inseparably ingrained in Hindu Dharma. His pledge not to die as a Hindu and his public conversion to Buddhism in 1956, alongside thousands of his followers, is symbols of his disdain for Hinduism. On the other hand, Gandhi believed that caste hierarchies were a distortion of Hinduism that could be eradicated. The solution was to reform Hindu society.

'*Harijan*' is an inclusive term in that it denotes them as a part of a larger Hindu society and should not be separated in any realm of the society. Gandhi also accepted the doctrine of rebirth and the law of karma, which made each individual's occupation conform to their actual ability (Dirks, 2002, p. 23). The organisation established by Gandhi never aimed to abolish the caste system.⁵ Dr Ramnath criticised the term '*Harijan*'. He writes that "Gandhi opposed every demand and rights of the untouchables, but still claimed that he was the true saviour of the untouchables. Gandhi considers everyone equal in God's eyes but not in man's eyes. *Gandhivada* (Gandhism) wants *Sarvodaya* (upliftment of all), i.e. the rise of both sheep and wolves so that the distance between the two is always maintained." (Ramnath, 2020). He further writes that "Gandhism is a supporter of the Varna system. Gandhi made his untouchability immortal by naming the untouchables as *Harijans*. *Harijan* also means Devadasi, i.e. Child of the prostitute" (Ramnath, 2020).

The Dalits and *Harijans* are constitutionally called Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The British first categorised it in the late 19th century by the census. Scheduled Castes comprise those castes that were outcasts and suffered from untouchability. It was first recognised by the Government of India Act 1935, in which the scheduled caste list was prepared for the first time.⁶ When the Act was implemented in 1937, the special reservation began almost immediately. Unfortunately, they only had this benefit for two years, until 1939. From that time until 1946, the Act was suspended, and Scheduled Castes could not enjoy the benefits granted to them by the 1935 Act.

However, the first list of scheduled castes prepared in 1936 included some Muslim *Arzal* castes like *Halalkhor*; nevertheless, the reservation benefits were denied (SCR,

⁵ Gandhi established All India Anti-untouchability League in which Ambedkar was also a member. Later it renamed as Harijan Sevak Sangh (Associations to the servants of the Harijans). See more in Jaffrelot, C. (2003). *India's silent revolution: The rise of the lower castes in North India*. New York: Columbia University Press.

⁶ The outcasts or untouchables were referred to as the "depressed classes" by the British. On September 24, 1932, the Government of India sent a letter to the Secretary of State urging that the term "Scheduled Castes" be used. The Scheduled Castes are a word that has no clear meaning in terms of their actual social status. The aforementioned advice regarding the name "Scheduled Castes" was incorporated in the Government of India Act, 1935, and later in the Indian Constitution. The phrase Scheduled Classes simply refers to "the castes placed on the schedule." See more in, Thorat, S. (2009). *Dalits in India: Search for a common destiny*. SAGE Publications India, Pvt Ltd.

2006, pp. 201-202). The notion articulated by the British administration that Scheduled Castes were solely a component of the Hindu religion. Moreover, it persists even after seventy-five years of independence, as represented in President's Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order No. 19 of 1950. Using the authority granted to him by Article 341 (1) of the Indian Constitution, this Presidential order was issued to enlist castes recognised under the Schedule of Castes. Clause (3) of this ruling stated unequivocally that "no person who professes a religion other than the Hindu religion shall be deemed to be a member of the scheduled caste." Thus, this is discriminatory; it is against the very soul of the Constitution, which refuses any unequal behaviour. It also restricts the caste system's debate in other communities, like Muslims in the Indian subcontinent (Deshpande, 2008 & Samrendra, 2016, p. 38-48).

Many castes from Muslim society have the same name, social status, social capital, and even fewer economic resources than Hindu Dalits but have been categorised differently. The list shows the similarity between the Muslim and Hindu castes but explicates the dissimilarities in reservation categories.

TABLE 1: Similar Castes in Hindu and Muslim society and their place in the reservation

Serial No.	Muslim Castes, which are included in OBC	Similar Hindu castes	Included in categories
1.	Banjara	Banjara	SC/ST
2.	Badhai (Carpenter)	Badhai (Carpenter)	OBC
3.	Bhaant	Bhaantar	SC
4.	Shershahabadi (Bhatiya)	Bhatiya	ST
5.	Rajjaki/faruqi	Kotegar/Kotwala	SC
6.	Bhishti	Kahar	OBC in Most states, in some states, SC
7.	Chik	Khattik	SC
8.	Chudihara/Lehri/Manihara	Bhata/Lehri	SC
9.	Dafali	Dafali	SC
10.	Dhobi/Hawari	Dhobi	SC
11.	Dhuniya/Turk Pasi	Dhuniya/PAsi	SC
12.	Darji	Damai	SC
13.	Fakeer	Maang/Jogi	SC
14.	Gaddi/Ghoshi	Gaddi	OBC, in some states, SC
15.	Gulgulia	Nat	SC
16.	Hajjam	Nai	OBC
17.	Julaha/Momin/Ansari	Julaha	OBC, in six state SC
18.	Kalal	Kalwar	OBC
19.	Kalandar/Madari/Baazigar	Madari/Baazigar	SC

20.	Kumhar	Kumhar	OBC, in some state SC
21.	Lohar	Lohar	SC
22.	Halalkhor/Halkhor	Dom	SC
23.	Miriyasin/Mirasi	Horakia	SC
24.	Mirshikaar	Chidimaar/Baheliya	SC
25.	Mochi	Mochi	SC
26.	Mukeri	Mukri	OBC, In three states, SC
27.	Pamariya	Pamariya and Other 17 Castes	SC
28.	Pods	Pods	SC
29.	Rangrez	Many castes do the same occupations	All are included in SC
30.	Teli/Mullick	Teli	OBC/SC
31.	Mewa	Meena	ST
32.	Bhangi	Mehtar	SC
33.	Lalbegi	Lalbegi	SC

Source: Rayeen, M. A. (2013). *Bharat Ke Dalit Musalman* (in Hindi) (part I). Mumbai: Heritage Publications. Pp. 6-8. Computed by Author

The above list (Table 1), 33 Muslim castes are listed. In this list, we can see that 22 castes among the Hindu society, which are the same as the Muslims, are categorised in the SC list but exclude Muslims because of religious differentiation. At the same time, six castes are included in OBC and different states in SC lists. Nevertheless, the Muslim caste having the same socio-economic background and same nomenclature could not be listed because of religious barriers. The demand for the inclusion of Dalit Muslims rose after 1990. However, Para 3rd of Article 341 of the Constitution of India does not allow the inclusion of those Dalits who do not “profess to be Hindu” (later included Sikh and Neo Buddhist) if the SC category could be a genuinely secular one, in that case, these above-listed Dalit Muslims could have been placed in the Scheduled Castes category.

Demands of Reservation for Pasmanda Muslims

There are three kinds of demands when we talk about reservations for Muslims. The first kind of demand is related to Total Muslim reservation (TMR). In this demand, the main focus is to declare the whole Muslim community ‘backwards’. The demand for TMR comes from the *Ashraf* section of Muslim society. Two prominent, educated *Ashraf* leaders, Syed Hamid and Syed Shahabuddin, pioneered this demand.⁷ The

⁷ Syed Shahabuddin was the editor of Muslim India and an outspoken advocate for ‘Muslim causes.’ He has been involved in issues ranging from the Shah Bano case to the destruction of the Babri Masjid. In 1991, he was also a member of the Lok Sabha Lok Sabha seat of Kishanganj. See, Levesque, J. (2020). Muslim politics and the 2020 Bihar Election. *The India Forum: A Journal-Magazine on Contemporary Issues*. December, 04.

Ashraf leaders argue that the entire Muslim society is backward and is suffering from socio-economic, educational, and political backwardness.⁸ On the other hand, the leaders from Pasmanda and Dalit backgrounds and the academia claim that the natural backwardness is not the whole community but 85 per cent of the community belonging to the *Ajlaf* and *Arzal* caste groups (Alam, 2007). The Sachar committee also pointed out that the lower strata Muslim castes are the real victims. In the political realm, as we can see below, the whole leadership has been in the hands of *Ashraf* Muslims.

The Ranganath Mishra Commission report has also recommended giving reservations to religious communities in which it has said that 15 per cent reservation should be given to all the minorities of the country, of which 10 per cent for Muslims and other religious minorities should be included in the remaining 5 per cent (RMCR, 2007). Since this study is focused on the demands of Pasmanda and Dalit Muslims' reservations, it will not go much into the debate of TMR (Total Muslim Reservation).

The second kind of demand is of two types. The first one concerns including castes in the OBC list that still have not been on the list. Since the Mandal Commission was implemented in 1991, only 82 of the Muslim backward castes were categorised as OBC. However, the struggle for inclusion in the OBC list started after that. After surveys and investigations by NCBC, many more backward Muslim castes/communities were included in the list. Now, 494 Muslim castes are in the central OBC list and different States' OBC/BC/EBC/MBC lists according to the proportion (Simhadri & Ramagoud, 2021, p. 445). Many of them are still struggling for inclusion. Many backward Muslim castes are not included in the list yet, such as the *Surjapuri* Muslims, *Jat* Muslims, and *Kalwars* from Bihar are still not on the central OBC list. They are included in the Bihar BC (Annexure II) list.

The second kind of demand is a separate quota for the already included OBC list. Some data and studies show that the benefit of the OBC quota is not getting by the Muslim OBCs.⁹ Hence, the demand for a separate OBC category is under discussion. Various data on the socio-economic conditions of Indian Muslims reveal that the benefit of the quota of OBC does not reach these marginalised sections because they are not able to get those benefits. Available data indicate that the OBC Muslims do not benefit because of their profound backwardness in every aspect.¹⁰ As the Mandal Commission explains, Muslim OBCs constitute 8.44 per cent of the 52 per cent of total OBCs. On this basis, *All India Backward Muslim Morcha* and *All India Pasmanda Muslim Mahaz*, both organisations related to the backward Muslims, raised the demand during the *Aarkshan Bachao Rally* in 1998 at Delhi that an 8.44 per cent quota should be earmarked for Muslim backward castes under the 27 per cent of OBC quota (Sajjad, 2014, p. 276). It may be noted that a separate quota of Muslim OBCs

⁸ For details discussion see Wright, Th. P. (1997). A New Demand for Muslim Reservation in India. *Asian Survey*, 37(9), 852-8. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2645702>

⁹ For detailed discussion see, ADRI. (2017). *Status of Muslim Youth in Bihar: Quantitative and Qualitative Statement*. Patna: Asian Development Research Institute. Sinha, A. (2010). *Dalit Muslims Double Exclusion: A Study on Dalit Muslims in Selected States of India*. Published by Indian social Institute, New Delhi. Also, Anwar, A. (2001). *Masawat ki Jung* (in Hindi). New Delhi: Vaani Prakashan. And Rohini Commission, 2017.

¹⁰ For details, see SCR, 2006, Ali, 2010, Sinha, 2010.

under the total OBC reservation of 27 per cent was also recommended by the Ranganath Mishra Commission report in 2007. It recommended

“Alternatively, we have recommended that according to the Mandal Commission report, the minority OBCs constitute 8.4 per cent of the total population. Of this 27 per cent OBC quota, 8.4 per cent sub-quota should be earmarked for minorities, with 6 per cent for Muslims (corresponding to their 73 per cent share of the total minority population at the national level) and 2.4 per cent for other minorities. This should be done with minor adjustments among different states and union territories according to the population of different minorities” (RMCR, 2007, p. 153).

The Government of Andhra Pradesh made the first of its kind efforts in 2004, which were quashed by the High Court there. Similar efforts were made earlier, also in 1968 and 1982. However, every time, the government failed to implement it. Finally, in 2007, a committee was formed under the chairmanship of P. S. Krishnan, on whose recommendation 4 per cent reservation was given to socially and educationally backward Muslims (OBC Muslims) in 2008. It calls for a special Muslim OBC quota in addition to the overall OBC quota (Hasan, 2009). Some states, Kerala (reservation for Muslim OBCs is 12 per cent of the 40 per cent reservation for OBCs) and Karnataka (backward Muslims have 4 per cent reservation within the overall OBC reservation), have successfully assured a separate Muslim OBC share in the overall OBC quota. In contrast, other states, such as Tamil Nadu (almost 95 per cent of Muslims have been included within the fold of backward classes) and, more recently, West Bengal (49 Muslims out of 56 ‘more backward’ communities; the state has claimed 10 per cent reservation for ‘more backward’ communities) have endeavoured to ensure Muslim representation by adequately include Muslim backward castes/classes on backward class lists (Shaban, 2012, pp. 15-16). The table below shows different types of reservations among Muslims and their organisations.

TABLE 2: Demands of Reservation in Muslim Society

Caste groups	Demand of reservation	Organisations
Ashraf	1. Total Muslim Reservation (TMR)	APEEM, AIMMM, AIMC
Ajlaf (mostly clean occupational castes)	2. Inclusion of more backward castes into the present OBC quota 3. The separate quota for Muslim OBCs out of the 27 per cent of all OBC quota	AIPMM, AIUMM,
Arzal (unclean occupational castes)	4. Inclusion as an MBC category 5. Inclusion of Dalit Muslims into the SC category.	AIMPMM, AIUMM

Source: Author

The most crucial criticism of TMR is that if the entire community gets a reservation, it will only benefit upper elite sections of the Muslims. At the same time, the Pasmandas’ and Dalit Muslims’ chances of change in their socio-economic status will be minimal. In such a situation, the *Ashraf* Muslims must accept this reality and leave the demand of TMR. If they want to see the development of an entire community, then they

should insist on the reservation of Pasmanda and Dalit Muslims. The Ranganath Mishra Commission has also recommended Dalit Muslim reservation.

We have to understand that reservation is not a poverty alleviation system. It is neither a scheme nor a government favour. Reservation of Dalit Muslims is his right from which he was forcibly thrown out. Reservation for Dalit Muslims is necessary because it will formulate policies for those sections as it is for Hindu Dalits; whatever special provisions have gone for Dalits of Hindu, Buddhist, and religious Sikhs today, all those provisions have been made for Muslim Dalits. This will increase their mobility in society. People coming from that part of society will get employment benefits. Moreover, the most important advantage will be political.

Inclusion in SC Category: Representation at Stake

The third demand for reservation concerns the Dalit Muslim's inclusion in the Scheduled Castes category. Another question arises: Why is SC reservation essential for Dalit Muslims? It is imperative to look at the root of the Dalit question in Muslim politics to answer these questions. A marginalised section of society in terms of education, employment, socio-economic, and political aspects, Dalits needed positive discrimination to uplift them. Thus, in 1950, the Dalit (Hindu Dalit) benefited from quotas in education, employment, and legislative and parliamentary seats by the presidential order.

Furthermore, various policies for upliftment were implemented, and the SC-ST commission was also established. There are constitutional provisions for the protection of their rights. Special laws have been enforced to control the exploitation of the Dalit. They have their representation in state assemblies and parliament. Political representation is a tool for socio-economic change. After 70 years, the Dalits have emerged in socio-political aspects. Since Dalit Muslims share the same line of socio-economic positions as Dalits of Hindu, Sikh, and Buddhist religions, it is necessary to look into the discriminatory stand of the Presidential Order 1950. Many petitions have been filed; many studies have been done to justify the inclusion. The Sachar Committee and the Ranganath Mishra Commission recommended that Dalit Muslims and Dalit Christians should be categorised in the SC list (Rahman, 2019, p. 56). SC reservation is about employment, educational advantages, and political representation.

Besides the above arguments, many more arguments come from the political aspect. The most marginalised political section is Muslim. They have a minuscule representation in any representative bodies, whether legislative assemblies or parliament (for a detailed study, see Iqbal, 2006; SCR, 2006). Here is the list of all Parliament members from the Muslim community from across the country elected to date:

TABLE 3: Muslims' Representation in the Lok Sabha (1952-2019)

S. No.	Election Year	Total Elected Members in the Lok Sabha	Muslim MP Elected	Percentile
1.	1 st (1952)	489	21	4.29%
2.	2 nd (1957)	494	24	4.86%
3.	3 rd (1962)	494	23	4.66%

4.	4 th (1967)	520	29	5.58%
5.	5 th (1971)	518	30	5.79%
6.	6 th (1977)	542	34**	6.27%
7.	7 th (1980)	529	49**	9.29%
8.	8 th (1984)	542	46**	8.49%
9.	9 th (1989)	529	33	6.24%
10.	10 th (1991)	534	28	5.25%
11.	11 th (1996)	543	28	5.15%
12.	12 th (1998)	543	29	5.34%
13.	13 th (1999)	543	32	5.89%
14.	14 th (2004)	543	36	6.62%
15.	15 th (2009)*	543	30	5.52%
16.	16 th (2014)	543	23	4.23%
17.	17 th (2019)	542	25	4.60%

** including Muslims elected in bye-election

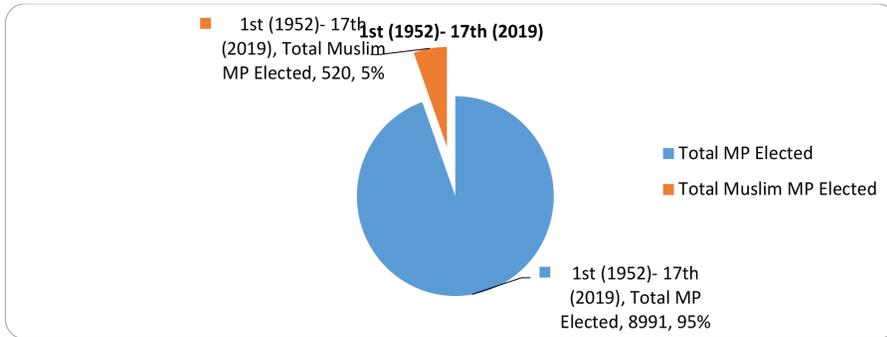
Source: Ansari A. Iqbal. (2006). *Political representation of Muslims of India: 1952-2004*, New Delhi: Manak.

The table above gives a clear picture of the deprivation of Muslim political representatives in the national-level decision-making body. We can argue that since independence till now, the representation of the Muslims in Lok Sabha has never been according to their population. Nevertheless, there have certainly been occasions when attempts have been made to equalise the ratio of representation and population, but these have remained few. There are 46 Lok Sabha constituencies, with over 30 per cent of the Muslim population. However, we can see discrepancies in the proportion of population and representation. The highest number of MP was elected in 1980 (49 MP), while the lowest was in 2014 (23 MP) election. The Muslim MP's average representation turns out to be 6 per cent.

In comparison, the Muslim population has always been more than 10 per cent since India's partition.¹¹ NCRWC commission, which Justice Former Chief Justice Manepalli Narayana Rao Venkatachaliah headed, has commented about the representation of Muslims, "At present, the political representation of minorities, especially Muslims in legislatures and parliament, has fallen much below the proportion of their population. The proportion of OBCs among them is next to nil" (Ansari, 2007, p. 197). From 1952 to 2019, out of 17 general elections, 8991 MPs across the country were elected, of which Muslim MPs constitute only 520, which accounts for a five per cent point of the scent per cent. According to the 1951 census, the Muslim population was 9.91 per cent¹², which has now increased to 14.23 per

¹¹ Kramwe, S. (2021). Religious Composition of India. *Pew research Centre*, September 21. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/09/21/religious-composition-of-india/> on February, 20, 2024.

¹² Ansari, A. Iqbal. (2006). *Political representation of Muslims of India: 1952-2004*. New Delhi: Manak. P. 40

Figure 1

Source: Author

cent. See the figure below.

If we analyse it based on caste basis, i.e. *Ashraf* versus *Pasmanda*'s share, the result would be astonishing. These two backward groups are at the most disadvantageous position even out of whatever small numbers of Muslims are represented. According to Ali Anwar,

“If we go through the parliament members from the 1st to 14th general election, it appears that 400 out of 7500 members were from the Muslim community. According to the 2001 census, Muslims constitute 13.4 per cent. *Ashraf* constitutes nearly 15 per cent of the total Muslim population. It tells that 2.01 per cent are *Ashraf* Muslims, and their representation in Lok Sabha is 4.5 per cent. It is more than double their population. Whereas *Pasmanda* Muslims constitute 11.3 per cent, their representation in Lok Sabha is only 0.8 per cent.”¹³

Likewise, in the country's 15th general election in 2009, 28 Muslim MPs were elected (see Table 3), with 23 from the *Ashraf* castes (*Syed*, *Sheikh*, and *Pathan*), one ST candidate from Lakshadweep, and only four OBCs. In the 16th general election in 2014, only 23 Muslim MPs were elected, the lowest number in the country's electoral history. Among the 23 Muslim MPs elected, 18 were *Ashrafs*, 1 ST, and 4 OBCs. In the most recent Lok Sabha election (17th) of 2019, 18 Muslim candidates were from the *Ashraf* caste. At the same time, seven people are OBC/ST.¹⁴ One MP is from the ST Muslim community; six are from the OBC Muslim community; each is from UP, West

¹³ This is a translated version from the updated pamphlet of All India Pasmanda Muslim Mahaz. Cited in Alam, S. (2019). Mapping Pasmanda Politics in India: Demands and Challenges. *Mainstream*, Vol. LVII, No. 27, June 22. See also, Ansari, A. H. Backward Muslims are not Responsible for Division, in Ansari, A. H. (2007). *Basic Problems of OBC & Dalit Muslims*. New Delhi: Serials Publications. P. 195

¹⁴ Two candidates, counting as Muslims, are from Arambagh, West Bengal Ms. Aparupa Poddar (Afrin Ali) from the Trinamool congress contested from the SC reserved seat. Technically she cannot be counted as Muslim MP. Another one is from Faridkot seat from Punjab name Mohammad Sadique. He also contested from SC reserved seat. And he claims to be Sikh. For further study, see, Samrendra, P. (2016). Religion and Scheduled Caste Status. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 51(31), 13–16. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44004559>

Bengal, Tamil Nadu, three from Kerala, and one from Lakshadweep (Ansari, 2020). As a result, the pattern of upper caste Muslim leadership and Pasmandas and Dalit Muslim leadership can be decoded. The *Ashrafs* are over-represented in the Muslim community, whereas Pasmanda and Dalit Muslims are under-represented.

Two issues are usually raised in the case of Muslim representation, although issues ranging from party politics to the winning factor have also been significant. In the two issues mentioned above, the first allegation is that the delimitation commission in India made a discriminatory distribution of Muslim majority seats so that the Muslim society became politically indecisive and weak. Allegations of this have been made by Syed Shahabuddin (1998), Iqbal Ansari (2006), and Sachar Committee report (2006). These studies and reports have also provided the Lok Sabha and the Vidhan Sabha data.¹⁵

The second issue is related to the Scheduled Castes reservation. Scheduled Castes have been represented in a particular proportion because seats were reserved for them. At the same time, Muslim society continues to suffer from a lack of reservation. Ever since the BJP government came to power again at the centre, the figures show that the BJP did not give a ticket to a single Muslim in its election. In this way, we can see that the party doing politics based on an anti-Muslim agenda has decided to weaken Muslims politically. It is also a fact that SC reservation alone will not improve the representation of Muslims, but for this, many other steps will need to be taken. However, this will be an important step among many others.

The whole of the problem lies with the politics and leadership. After independence, Dalit leaders like Ambedkar, Periyar, and Kanshiram started fighting for it. Due to their efforts, a system of Scheduled Castes reservation was established to uplift Dalits in the post-independence period. However, the same could not be established for Pasmanda and Dalit Muslims. According to this, up to 85 per cent are Dalits and Pasmandas, whose condition is worse than other communities in the country.¹⁶ Nevertheless, it is missing from all the debates in the country. No political party, government, and other civil societies except those of Pasmanda Muslim organisations raise their voice. Mostly, political parties and the government of India ignore the demands of Pasmanda Muslims. Furthermore, the most miserable part is the *Ashraf* section of Muslim society because, on the one hand, they consider the matter of caste within Muslims to be unimportant and un-Islamic. On the other hand, they advocate reservation on religious grounds.

Conclusion

When Dalit Muslims get a place in the Scheduled Castes reservation, new debates will be born on political representation, socio-economic issues instead of symbolic, cultural, or religious will become prominent in the electoral politics of India. In lieu, communal politics and hatred towards other communities will slowly diminish. Moreover, the discourse of social justice will be strengthened. A slogan like *Dalit-Pichhda Ek Samaan, Hindu Ho Ya Musalman* (Dalit-Backwards are Equal, Hindu or Muslims) will be successful. The government will be able to focus on the progress and

¹⁵ For details study of delimitation of legislative assembly seats see, SCR, 2006. P. 269

¹⁶ Nayak, R. K. (2013). The Pasmanda Muslim Discourse in Post-1947 Bihar. *Proceedings of Indian History Congress*, Vol. 74, pp. 961-971.

development of the all the sections including Pasmanda and Dalit Muslims, which they have not achieved so far.

The backward sections of Muslim society suffer from a lack of socio-economic and political choices. It is also true that there will be no empowerment unless the backward section of society gets its due representation in the legislative bodies. Under the SC quota, the Dalits get their fixed representation, i.e., 84 candidates, and the STs get 44 candidates. If we look at the representation of Muslims in state assemblies or parliament, there is a minor representation of the Pasmanda Muslims. From the first general election to the 17th, Muslims' representation remains around 6 per cent except for some cases like the 1980 general election. In which the highest number of Muslim candidates were elected (Almost 10 per cent (See Table 2). The recent 16th and 17th general elections were at least among all the elections. Only 23 and 25, respectively, Muslim candidates got elected from all over the country's constituencies. Regarding the population ratio, at least 77 candidates should be selected in parliamentary election.

Nonetheless, Muslims are the most significant minority in the country and have a population share of 14.2 per cent. The country's diverge demography and the first-past-the-post system could not get Muslim representation according to their population ratio. There is only one way to have proportional representation: Dalit Muslims should get the SC reservation to ensure equitable representation in policy-making. Dalit Muslims are a counterpart of the Hindu Dalits. However, there is a difference when we talk about caste practice. The social, economic, and political exclusion should be the basis for their inclusion in the Scheduled Caste list. Moreover, there is no doubt that wherever they are in the social hierarchy today, it is because of their caste, because caste decides socio-economic and political positions. Thus only caste should be the basis for their inclusion in the SC reservation category not religion.

Every community has specific problems and complications, which the people from the same society best understand. Like in the Hindu Dalit society, leaders like Phule, Ambedkar, Periyar, and Kanshiram came from the same society because they could best articulate and highlight the problems faced by their community. The persons belonging to a specific community may have the best knowledge and understanding better than others about the community's social and economic conditions and thus can better advocate for it. That is why Muslims of all sections of *Ashraf-Pasmanda-Dalit* Muslims must come together to form an opinion on the backwardness and issue of reservation, by applying political and constitutional pressure to amend the provisions of Presidential Order 1950 to include Dalit Muslims.

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