The Pasmanda Muslims

Why in news?

Prime Minister Narendra Modi was reported to have asked the BJP national executive in Hyderabad to reach out to deprived and downtrodden groups such as Pasmanda Muslims in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

Who are the 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 the founder, Pasmandas include Dalits as of now, but all Pasmandas are not Dalits.

What is the history of the Pasmanda Movement?

- 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.
- The movement actually began in 1910 onwards. These were reformist in nature, but also acted like pressure groups led by upwardly mobile lower caste communities.

Are Muslims divided along caste lines in India?

- Muslim society in India consists of several status groups or biradaris that are broadly sorted in three categories:

1. The Ashrafs (the 'noble' elite or the 'honorable ones'),
2. The Ajlafs (backward Muslims), and
3. The Arzals (Dalit Muslims).

- **Ashrafs** – They 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** – They are middle-caste converts, who were into ritually "clean" occupations.
- The momins (weavers), darzi or idiris (tailors), rayeens or kunjaras (vegetable sellers) fall in the Ajlaf bracket.
- **Arzals** – They are from the lowest, "untouchable" castes like halalkhors, helas, lalbegis or bhangis (scavengers), dhobis (washer-men), nais or hajjams (barbers), chiks (butchers), and faqirs (beggars).
- They were first recorded in the 1901 census.

While Islam does not mandate the creation of such groups, these caste categories are a lived reality for Muslims across the country

What is Rajinder Sachar Committee Report?

- It was formed in 2005 to study social, economic and educational condition of Indian Muslims.
- According to his report, one can discern three groups among Muslims:

1. Those without any social disabilities, the Ashrafs;
2. Those equivalent to Hindu OBCs, the Ajlafs, and
3. Those equivalent to Hindu SCs, the Arzals.

- Those who are referred to as Muslim OBCs combine Ajlafs and Arzals.

What is the Constitutional status of those muslims?

- The Constitution (Scheduled Caste) Order, 1950, had restricted Scheduled Caste (SC) status to Hindus, keeping Dalit 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.

How they are demographically distributed?

- 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.
- They claimed that pasmandas' 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.

What are the demands of the 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 organizations.
- 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, craftsperson, and agricultural laborers, who are among the most impoverished groups in the community.
- They 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, according to the Sachar committee was placed in that category.

- Haryana, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and UP — these five states have **Meo Muslims** who need to be included in the ST category.

Reference

1. https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-who-are-pasmanda-muslims-bjp-pm-modi-8017276/

