

## **Aspiring to Rise: Agitation of Muslim ‘Other Backward Classes’ in Uttar Pradesh**

*Abdul Waheed  
Sheikh Idrees Mujtaba*

### **Abstract**

*This paper attempts to highlight triumph and tribulation of Muslim Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in their struggle for empowerment. Having been unable to avail the benefits of reservation extended to them by the reservation policy, they have consistently been demanding fair share, in proportion to their population, in education and employment. They formed organizations, mobilized public opinion and occasionally succeeded in compelling political outfits to accept their demand. However, they have not yet succeeded in achieving their goal.*

*Muslim OBCs encountered many challenges in their struggle to rise. Some of these challenges emanate from the propagation and perception of Muslims as homogeneous community bound together by Islamic creed and emotion, relative backwardness of Muslims on all indicators of development and recommendation of 10% reservation to Muslims by National Commission of Religious and Linguistic Minorities. It is because of these factors that many Muslim leaders demand reservation for Muslim community as a whole and not only for Muslim OBCs, while the other challenges are rooted in the organizations and struggle of Muslim OBCs.*

*Their organizations are feeble, and their mobilizations sporadic. They have not succeeded in educating and mobilizing many impoverished, deprived and excluded Muslim social groups as a result of which many of them are unaware about their administrative/legal ‘backward status’. The focus of this paper is on Uttar Pradesh, in which nearly a quarter of Indian Muslims reside.*

---

**Abdul Waheed** is Professor, Department of Sociology, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh.

**Email ID:** waheed\_so@yahoo.com

**Sheikh Idrees Mujtaba** is Research Scholar, Department of Sociology, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh.

---

*About 70% Muslim population of the state is comprised of OBCs. The paper is based on the Government statistics, findings of individual researches and personal observations. We do hope that it would generate a meaningful debate on the issue.*

### **Introduction:**

It is common knowledge that Muslims with about 15% population of India are second largest religious group, highly noticeable in the entire length and breadth of the country. They evolved through the processes of migration and conversion and composed of many 'Communities' based on descent, lineage, occupation, language and region. Every community of Muslims is distinct from the other in terms of social capital and organizations, social status and identity, customary practices and life styles, rites and rituals, occupation and economy etc. Indeed, heterogeneity is marked characteristic of Indian Muslims like that of any other religious group of the country. Muslim 'Other Backward Classes' (OBCs), an administrative category, are comprised of various hierarchically ranked endogamous and occupational groups called *Zat*, *Qom* and *baradaries* in different context, classified by sociologists and social anthropologists into two broad categories i.e. *Ajlaf and Arzal* who occupied lower and lowest position respectively in the social structure of Muslims and eked out their livelihood through artisanal, manual, service providing and menial occupation. These marginalized and excluded Muslims began to assert their identity and demand for their rights from pre-independence days which accelerated in the last two and a half decades, mainly after the implementation of 'Mandal Commission' recommendations.

Muslim OBCs encountered many challenges in their struggle to rise. Three of these challenges are noteworthy. First is the propagation of 'emotional unity' of Muslims in terms of Islamic values of egalitarianism which undermine existential social divisions and inequality among them on the one hand, on the other hand create false consciousness among many illiterate, impoverished and socially excluded Muslims. Second, the relative backwardness of Indian Muslims on all indicators of human development, recommendation of 10% reservation to all Muslims by National Commission on Religious and Linguistic

Minorities(NCRLM) and growing communal violence against them are used as pretexts by political parties and upper caste Muslim leaders to project them as a homogenous community for various entitlements. Third, lack of coordination among various organizations of Muslim OBCs and Dalits in different parts of the country, despite some efforts to bring them at one platform, is an obstacle in their struggle. Nonetheless, they are struggling by forming associations, mobilizing people and organizing protests. They succeeded in making socially excluded Muslims conscious about their identity and rights, creating a political discourse of reservation to them and pressurizing political parties to accept their demands. But all of their demands are not translated into reality. Political parties are eluding their demands. One of the major factors of Government's indifference towards the cause of Muslim OBCs appears to be their weak organization and sporadic mobilization.

The focus of this paper is on Muslim OBCs of Uttar Pradesh(UP), the most populous state of India, in which nearly a quarter of Indian Muslim population reside. About 75% Muslims of UP belong to various communities of *Ajlaf* and *Arzal* categories but all of them are not classified as OBCs. Moreover a large number of Muslims belonging to communities classified as OBCs are not aware about their administrative status. Therefore, their population is reported below to their actual population by government agencies. These problems are not seriously taken up by Muslim OBCs' leadership which demand for reservation but without concerted effort at ground level to make people aware about their legal status and mobilize them into a strong political force. Sociologists and social anthropologists have virtually ignored Muslims and therefore, very few studies of excluded Muslim communities are available. Perhaps no serious attempt is made to enquire into the nature of agitation of Muslim OBCs in UP. This paper attempts to present a generalized picture of Muslim OBCs and their agitation. It is based on the data of Government agencies, empirical studies and personal observations. We do hope that it would generate a meaningful debate on the issue.

### **Who are Muslim OBCs?**

Caste system is organically linked institution of Indian society, existing since times immemorial. Having its origin in *Verna* scheme (All India cultural model of classifying

Hindus into four social groups i.e. *Brahmans*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishyas*, and *Shudras* ) and legitimized by Hindu doctrines of *karma*, *dharma*, rebirth, purity, pollution and so on, the caste system has evolved over a period of time as a complex, rigid and closed system of stratification. Being a ‘Unique Institution’ of wider social ramifications, it has been fascinating scholars of both India and abroad for a long period of time and, therefore, innumerable studies about multiple dimensions of caste system have been made. Sociologists and social anthropologists explained caste as a micro structure, consisting of hundreds of regional endogamous groups, characterized by

- (a) Hereditary, membership of caste is ascriptive and not achieved. However mobility from one caste to another, mainly from lower to higher caste through the process of *sanskritization*, and consequently adoption of higher caste name have been recorded by scholars which is not theoretically permissible.
- (b) Hierarchy, ordering castes higher and lower with one another on the scale of social status.
- (c) Endogamy, the most enduring feature of the caste system which enjoins a person to marry within his/her caste.
- (d) Association with an occupation, Occupations are hierarchically classified and, therefore, are normatively assigned to different castes according to their social status. Empirical evidences, however, exhibit that castes entered into the terrain of other caste’s occupations except those of Brahmins and untouchables.
- (e) Purity and Pollution, a cultural and ideological characteristic, permanently divides castes into pure and polluted. This is originator of social distancing and untouchability practice which differs from region to region. Thus, caste system has both cultural features like purity and pollution and structural features such as hierarchy institutionalized inequalities of status and power and restriction on marriage and occupation. Structural features, if not cultural features, of caste system are also found

among followers of those religions like Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, and Buddhism which are principally against institutionalized system of inequalities. Hence caste system is an all India institution, existing across religious communities.

Muslim *Baradaries*, like castes, are hereditary and hierarchical endogamous groups, having traditional association with distinctive occupations. They are, indeed, status groups, a major source of internal social distinction and unequal distribution of social status and power among Muslims. E.A.Mann in her study of Muslims of Aligarh city writes, “A word of Persian origin literally meaning ‘brotherhood’, a *Baradari* possesses an internalised sense of solidarity extended to its members, but denied to those outside its limit. It is imbued with a sense of honour (*izzat*), on the basis of which it is ranked higher or lower in relation to other *Baradaries*. Its meaning, therefore, largely conforms to Weber’s description of a status group. The term has currency not only among Muslims of west UP, but also among Hindus, and has been used interchangeably by both scholars of Hindu and Muslim society.” (1992 : 44). *Zat* is another word which is frequently used interchangeably with the word *Baradari*. However, it has wider and diffused meaning; indeed a status category rather than a status group. “It normally refers to the higher status categories of Saiyyid, Sheikh, Pathan and Mughal. Within the *Zat* are also *Baradaries*, endogamous sub-units of the wider unit, whose principal criterion of membership is marriage” (Ibid: 47). She writes that “In Aligarh, the meaning of *Baradari* is understood to be a named, endogamous status group associated with a specific occupation are lineage, from which it often, but not always, derives its name. Now a days the correlation between occupation and *Baradari* is not as systematic as in the past, but ancestral occupation perceives the individual when defining status in relation to other Muslims, and hence in relation to marriage and work prospects. While the internal structure of a *Baradari* is regulated by marriage, external boundaries consolidated by residential locality, by an ascribed social identity, by restrictions on social intercourse and commensality, and by strongly held beliefs that certain forms of behaviour are associated with *Baradari* identity” (Ibid: 44-53).

Thus, *Baradaries* have almost all structural characteristics of Hindu caste system. This has been, much before the work of E.A. Mann, noted and explained by Ghaus Ansari (1960), Imtiaz Ahmad (1973) and other sociological studies on Muslims social structure. Reports of Government Committees such as ‘Prime Minister’s High Level Committee on Muslims’ 2006 (PHLCM) and NCRLM, 2007 also recognized presence of castes or descent based social stratification among Muslims. PHLCM reports that:

“The Census of India, 1901 listed 133 social groups wholly or partially Muslim. The present day Muslim Society in India is divided into four major groups: (i) the *Ashrafs* who trace their origins to foreign lands such as Arabia, Persia, Turkistan or Afghanistan, (ii) the upper caste Hindus who converted to Islam, (iii) the middle caste converts whose occupations are ritually clean, (iv) the converts from the erstwhile untouchable castes, *Bhangi* (scavenger), *Mehtar* (sweeper), *Chamar* (tanner), *Dom* and so on. These four groups are usually placed into two broad categories, namely, ‘*Ashraf*’ and ‘*Ajlaf*’. The former, meaning noble, includes all Muslims of foreign blood and converts from higher castes. While ‘*Ajlaf*’ meaning degraded or unholy, embraces the ritually clean occupational groups and low ranking converts. In Bihar, U.P and Bengal, Sayyads, Sheikhs, Moghuls and Pathans constitute the ‘*Ashrafs*’. The ‘*Ajlaf*’, are carpenters, artisans, painters, graziers, tanners, milkmen etc. According to the Census of 1901, the *Ajlaf* category includes ‘the various classes of converts who are known as Neo Muslim in Bihar and *Nasya* in North Bengal. It also includes various functional groups such as that of the *Jolaha* or weaver, *Dhunia* or cotton-carder, *Kulu* or oil-presser, *Kunjra* or vegetable-seller, *Hajjam* or barber, *Darzi* or tailor, and the like.’ The 1901 Census also recorded the presence of a third category called *Arzal*: ‘It consists of the very lowest castes, such as the *Halalkhor*, *Lalbegi*, *Abdal*, and *Bediya*...’. Similar Pattern of descent based social stratification is discernible in other regions (like Kerala, Andhra Pradesh ) as well” (2006: 192-193).

Muslim OBCs are generally comprised of *Ajlaf* and *Arzal* categories as the later category was excluded from the list of Schedule Caste by Presidential Order of 1950 and

therefore bracketed with the category of *Ajlaf* and listed in OBCs. However, all communities of *Ajlaf* and *Arzal* categories are not listed either in Union or State List of OBCs.

### **How Many They Are?**

The Constitution of India uses the terms ‘Socially and Educationally Backward Classes’ (Art.15 clause 4), ‘Weaker Sections’ (Art. 46) and ‘Other Backward Classes’ (Art. 338 clause 10), but it does not define any term. It is because of the undefined features of the terms in the constitution, both the union and the state governments get scope to schedule communities to their convenience in their lists. So we do not find a uniform pattern in scheduling communities. In order to identify backward classes and formulate programmes for their welfare, the first Backward Classes Commission under the chairmanship of *Kaka Kalelkar* was set up by the government on January 29, 1953. As the recommendations of the Commission were not accepted by the Government, it appointed the second Backward Classes Commission under the chairmanship of B.P.Mandal on January 1, 1979. The commission submitted its report in December 1980. As the figures of caste-wise population were not available beyond 1931, the commission used the 1931 Census data to calculate the number of OBCs. Relying on the data provided by the 1931 Census, the Mandal Commission estimated the population of the backward classes in the country to be 52% and the share of non-Hindu OBCs is 8.40%. It identified 82 castes of Muslim as backward. The methodology and the data used by the Commission to identify backward classes have been questioned by many scholars and government committees. The report of PHLCM states that “Given the fact that the 1931 base is itself contentious, this estimate needs to be further examined. The Mandal estimate is also unreliable because a large number of castes/communities that were included in the Mandal list have not yet found place in the Central list of OBCs”. (203) “The list of OBCs prepared by the state governments have also missed many under privileged castes and communities. There are few groups among Muslims that have found place in the Central list but have not found a place in the State list.” (Ibid:201) There are still a number of Muslim groups that have neither been included in the State list nor in the Central list. It is because of unscientific and unsystematic listing of castes

and non availability of caste-wise data in decennial census of Post-independent India it is difficult to estimate the exact population of Muslim OBCs. Therefore, the PHLCM estimated the population of Muslim OBCs from the data of 61<sup>st</sup> round survey of National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO). It reports that OBCs constitute 40.7% population of Indian Muslims. But the committee made it very clear that, “At the outset, it must be noted that the NSSO data is self reporting and, particularly so in the case of OBCs, it is contingent on the awareness of the respondents of his/her social status”(Ibid: 189). In fact, large number of Muslims, being illiterate and poor do not know administrative status of their castes and, therefore, not report themselves as OBCs.

### **Muslim OBCs of UP:**

Muslims constitute about 20% population of UP and are unevenly distributed in different districts of the State. They comprised about 50% to 25% population of 21 districts whereas in other districts their population ranges from 5% to below 25%. As per the information provided by ‘Peoples of India Project’, a mega anthropological survey of post-independent period conducted by Anthropological Survey of India, there were a total of 237 communities in present day UP. Of these communities, 69 were Muslims. Some of them were distinctively Muslims, while others were common to both Hindus and Muslims. They have unequal social status (Singh, K.S., 2005). It is important to underscore that the Anthropological survey did not identify and study 19 communities of Muslims listed in the Census of 1931. Their names were as follows: *Barahai, Chippi, Churihar, Gandhi, Goriya, Hurkia, Kumhar, Mali, Nalband, Patwa, Neo-Muslim, Qalaigar, Rain, Raj, Rangsz, Saiqalgar, Tarkihar, Tawaiif, and Turk*. On the contrary, some of the communities identified and studied by Anthropological survey did not figure in Census of India, 1931. These were as follows *Ahmadiya, Bawarchi, Bangali/Bengali, Dhari, Dilliwal Shaikh, Garha, Ghassal, Ghosi, Hijra, Irani, Jogi Faqir, Kamangar, Kamboj, Kankali Kanmaila, Kasgar, Kingharia, Lal Begi, Madari, Mian, Mujavir, Muker, Muslim Banbati/ Bandhmati, Muslim Dhagi, Nanbai, Putliwale, Sai, and Shekhzade*. Most of these communities belonged to the categories of *Ajlaf* and *Arzal*. (For their status and occupation see Waheed, Abdul:



2011) This unsystematic identification of Muslim communities raise questions against the reliability of both Census of India, 1931 and Anthropological Survey. Not only Muslim communities were unsystematically identified but they were also unsystematically listed in OBC category. There were 46 communities listed in Central List of OBCs where as their numbers were 41 in the list of State. (For detail of discrepancies in listing Muslim Communities in the Central and State list of OBCs see *ibid.* 2011). Therefore, it is difficult to estimate the population of Muslim OBCs in UP. However, a study of 2500 Muslim Households in tehsil Koel of district Aligarh may provide some idea about population of Muslim OBCs in UP. (Waheed, Abdul: 2011) The report of the survey mentioned names of Muslim *baradaris* and their population provided by Census of 1931 and compared them with the findings of the survey. Following table no.1 shows number of Muslim *baradaris* and their population in district Aligarh in 1931.

**Table No.1: Muslims Baradaris in Aligarh District in 1931**

S. No.	Baradari	Male	Female	Total
1	Ahir	739	-	7
2	Barhai	39	46	85
3	Bhangi	2	1	3
4	Bharbhunja	622	536	1158
5	Bhat	50	28	78
6	Bahishti ( <i>Bhisti</i> )	7661	6868	14529
7	Chamar	-	6	6
8	Darzi	76	58	134
9	Dhobi	964	873	1837
10	Dhunja	100	74	174
11	Dome	35	44	79
12	Fakir	7669	6854	14523
13	Gadariya	8	-	8
14	Gaddi	778	667	1445
15	Halwai	39	23	62
16	Julaha	2281	1846	4127
17	Kalwar	4	13	17
18	Kumhar	90	66	156
19	Kunjra	782	583	1365
20	Lohar	2307	1895	4202
21	Manihar	1673	1209	2882
22	Meo	22	16	38

23	<b>Mughal</b>	507	350	857
24	<b>Nai</b>	659	604	1263
25	<b>Nat</b>	88	83	171
26	<b>Nau-Muslim</b>	1827	1686	3513
27	<b>Pathan</b>	12011	9602	21613
28	<b>Qassab</b>	2733	2127	4860
29	<b>Rajput</b>	5505	4811	10316
30	<b>Saiyyid</b>	3833	2898	6731
31	<b>Sheikh</b>	19360	15291	34651
32	<b>Sonar</b>	8	8	16
33	<b>Tamboli</b>	9	5	14
34	<b>Teli</b>	5923	4966	10889
35	<b>Turk</b>	3	3	6
36	<b>Others</b>	6602	5567	12169
37	<b>Not specified</b>	251	231	482
<b>Total</b>		<b>84528</b>	<b>69938</b>	<b>154466</b>

**Source:** Census of India 1931, United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, Vol. XVIII, Part-II, By A.C. Turner (Allahabad; 1933), Quoted from E.A. Mann 1992: 52

It is evident from the above table that 35 *baradaris* as well as categories of ‘Others’ and ‘Not Specified’ constituted about 1,54,466 population of district Aligarh in 1931. These *baradaris* belong to sociological categories of ‘*Ashraf*’ such as *Saiyyid*, *Mughal*, *Pathan*, etc., ‘*Ajlaf*’ such as *Julaha*, *Qassab*, *Dhunia* etc., and ‘*Arzal*’ such as *Bhangi*, *Nat*, *Chamar*, *Dome* etc. Having the population of 34,651 Sheikh were the largest *baradari* of *Ashraf* Category followed by *Pathans* (21,613) and *Saiyyids* (6,731) whereas *Bhistsis*, numbering 14,529, were the largest *baradari* of *Ajlaf* category followed by *Fakir* (14,523), *Teli* (1088). Highest proportion of *Sheikhs* and *Pathans* in Muslim population might be due to the process of *Ashrafization* or reporting title of *Sheikh* and *Pathans* to Census enumerators by lower castes. Indeed, reporting titles of higher castes by lower castes was a general trend, existing across religious communities in colonial India. *Sheikhs* and *Pathans* were the titles which were adopted by many households of *Ajlaf baradaris*. Pattern of mobility from a *baradari* of lower status to that of higher status reflected in a Persian proverb, widely quoted locally, meaning “Yesterday our work was butchery (*Qassab*), then we became *Sheikhs*; having acquired a taste for that, tomorrow if the harvest is good, we shall with the grace of God become *Saiyyids*”.

If we classify above mentioned *baradarries* into present day administrative categories i.e. Muslim General and OBCs, we find Mughals, Pathans, Rajput, Saiyyids, Sheikhs and Turk as well as Others and Not Specified constituted 56 % population of Muslims and the remaining 44 % population was composed of *baradarries* listed in the administrative category of OBCs.

On the contrary 70 % of 2500 respondents of the survey reported the names of their *baradarries* which fall under the categories of *Ajlaf/Arzal*. Respondents reported different names of their *baradarries* which appeared either the sub groups of a larger *Zat* or recently adopted title of higher social status. The names of their *Zat/Baradarries* is alphabetically listed in column I of the following Table No.2 where as column II of the table shows their reported names or titles.

**Table No.2: Baradarries of Surveyed Households**

S.No.	Names of Zat/Baradarries	Reported names of Baradarries	Total
1	<b>Banjara</b>	Banjara Muslim	3
2	<b>Bawarchi</b>	Sheikh Bawarchi	1
3	<b>Bhisti</b>	Saqqe, Abbasi, Abbasi Khan, Sheikh Abbasi, Saqqe Bhisti, Panihare (Ajmeri Pathan)	377
4	<b>Bhurji</b>	Bharbhunja, Muniri, Bhurji Pathan	32
5	<b>Chunpat</b>	Chunpat, Chunnewale, Alvi Chunpati, Chipat	3
6	<b>Darzi</b>	Idrisi	9
7	<b>Dhobi</b>	Dhobi Qassar, Qasar, Qasa, Muslim Dhobi,	35
8	<b>Dhuna</b>	Mansoori, Naddaf	6
9	<b>Fakir</b>	Alvi Syed, Mian Saheb, Syed Fakir, Miyan Fakir, Saifi Fakir, Sheikh Abbasi (Fakir)	296
10	<b>Farooqui</b>	Farooqui	1
11	<b>Gaddi</b>	Ghazi, Gaddi	7
12	<b>Ghosi</b>	Dhodheye, Ghosi Pathan, Ghosi	7
13	<b>Jhoja</b>	Jhoja Pathan	18
14	<b>Kumhar</b>	Muslim Kumhar	3
15	<b>Lohar</b>	Saifi, Saifi Lohar, Khan Saifi	175
16	<b>Mahigir</b>	Fisherman, Machhliwale, Sheikh Mahigir	6
17	<b>Manihar</b>	Manihar Siddiqui, Churihar, Sheeshgar	130
18	<b>Mewati</b>	Meo, Mewati, Mewati Bhagolia	265
19	<b>Momin Ansar</b>	Ansari, Weaver, Julaha, Momin Ansar	105
20	<b>Mughal</b>	Mirza, Beg, Mughal Pathan, Pathan Mughal	30

		(kabuli)	
21	<b>Nai</b>	Sulemani, Salmani, Hajjam	12
22	<b>Pathan</b>	Khan, Khan Siddiqi, Pathan Syed, Pathan Baraich, Khan Saheb, Afghani, Ghauri, Yusufzai, Ghauri Pathan, Bhoori Pathan, Khan Sherwani, Sherwani Pathan	265
23	<b>Qassab</b>	Qureshi, Bade Qasai, Sheikh Qureshi	131
24	<b>Rajput</b>	Muslim Rajput, Adbharia, Chauhan, Jadon, Bargujar Thakur, Rathore Pathan, Yadav Thakur, Jadon Thakur, Chaudhari, Janhare, Pawar, Rajput Pathan, Tomar Neo-Muslims, Pundhir, Mirza Rajput, Mirza Jadon, Khan Rajput,	290
25	<b>Rangrez</b>	Rangrez	7
26	<b>Rayeen</b>	Sabzi Farosh, Kunjra	19
27	<b>Sangtarash</b>	Naqqashi or Naqqash	1
28	<b>Shamshi</b>	Shamshi	4
29	<b>Sheikh</b>	Sheikh Zuberi, Sheikh Faridi, Sheikh Shia, Sheikh Farooqui, Sheikh Siddiqui, Qureshi, Sheikh Pathan, Sheikh Syed,	82
30	<b>Syed</b>	Syed Shia, Syed Sunni, Syed Naqvi, Syed Zaidi, Syed Qazi, Syed Jafari, Arabi Syed, Syed Baghdadi, Israili Syed, Shamshi Syed	53
31	<b>Teli</b>	Malik, Rogangar, Rogan Malik, Usmani, Shahbani	106
32	<b>Warsi</b>	Warsi	1
33	<b>Not Specified</b>		20
<b>Total</b>			<b>2500</b>

Except 20 respondents which are classified as ‘Not Specified’ in the above table, all have reported names of their *baradari*. Six of ‘Not Specified’ category reported themselves as ‘Muslims’. They argued Islam does not recognise *baradari* system while remaining 14 did not disclose their *baradari* name. They were poor migrants, living in *Jhopris* in Aligarh city. In this way 2480 households reported their 32 *baradaris* out of which 24 namely *Banjara, Bawarchi, Bhisti, Bhurji, Chunpat, Darzi, Dhobi, Dhuna, Fakir, Gaddi, Ghosi, Jhoja, Kumhar, Lohar, Mahigir, Manihar, Mewati, Momin Ansari, Nai, Qassab, Rangrez, Rayeen, Sangtarash*, and *Teli* figure either in both Central and State Lists of OBCs or any one of them. Hence remaining 8 *baradaris* belong to the category of General. In this way 1758 (70.32%) of surveyed households belong to the category of OBCs. The survey also explored awareness of respondents about the administrative classification of *caste/baradaris* into

General and OBCs as well as the administrative status of their caste. It is important to note that 1472 respondents did not know classification of castes/*baradaris* into General and OBCs and those remaining who knew about this classification had misconception about the legal status of their *baradaris*. Indeed, many respondents of *baradaris* (listed as General) reported themselves as OBCs whereas many respondents of *baradaris* (included in OBCs) reported themselves to be of General category. Thus if one estimates the population of Muslim OBCs on the basis of “self reporting” it would be less than the actual population of Muslim OBCs which according to the survey was 72 %.

### **Deprivation**

*Ajlaf* and *Arzals* have been suffering from multiple socio-economic and educational disabilities. Their conversion into Islam, an egalitarian religion emphasised upon unity of believers, did not change their identity and existential condition. For, Muslim society was largely characterised by feudal ethos and notion of blood and lineage purity called *hasb-o-nasb*. The principle of blood and lineage purity was the basis of classifying groups of people into hierarchical status groups. Those who were rulers, military men, administrators, theologians and priests called themselves with proud *ahle-e-saif* and *ahle-e-qalam* (men of sword and pen). They looked down upon and segregated those who were converted into Islam and associated with service providing and menial occupations. They were pejoratively called by the names of their occupations like *julaha*, *kanjar*, *madari*, *kunjra*, etc. These newly converted unemployed, labourer, artisans and peasants Muslims were placed at the periphery of social structure and accorded lower and lowest social status. They were not merely poor and their labour was exploited by those who were in power but also they were illiterate and uneducated therefore, *Ajlaf* and *Arzals* inherited social capital of degraded status, impoverished condition, unflowered intellect and multiple disabilities. Their condition has not changed in post-independent India as they were not provided any protection by the Government as they are available to their Hindu counter parts. Commenting on their condition of marginality NCRLM states that “Even though Christianity and Islam do not recognise caste system or untouchability, the ground reality in India is different. Persons of

Scheduled Caste origin converted to Christianity/Islam are continued to be subjected to disabilities, including untouchability associated with caste and occupation, as they continue to be part and parcel of the Indian society. It is not only the society that discriminates against persons of Scheduled Caste origin converted to Christianity/Islam (inasmuch as such converts are not treated by other members of their own religion or by members of other religions as their equals), they are being discriminated against even by their own religious institutions like church or the mosque; the manifestation of discriminations being separate churches/mosques or separate prayer halls or prayer timings in the same church/mosque for them and earmarked areas for the burial of their dead. Denial of Scheduled Castes status to them despite untouchability related practices being enforced against them or atrocities committed against them deprives them of the protection of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989. Despite no visible change in their social or economic status as a result of conversion, the converts are deprived of the benefits of reservation, support and development schemes formulated for their counterparts in Hindu, Sikh and Buddhist religions. This amounts to discrimination by the state on the ground of religion.”

It is very often argued that Muslim community, as a whole, has lagged behind even Schedule Castes on the indicators of Human Development and therefore all the Muslims should be treated at par for Government benefits like that of reservation. While this is true, the condition of *Ajlafs* and *Arzals* among Muslims is worst than those who inherited social capital of education and administration. It is very well find out by PHLCM which states that “The Muslim community as a whole is lagging behind Hindu OBCs. However, over all, the condition of Muslim OBCs are worst of those of Muslim General. The abysmally low representation of Muslim OBCs suggest that the benefit of entitlement meant for the backward classes are yet to reach them. To explore the differential across the SRCs further, an exploratory exercise was undertaken to assess if the proportion Muslim OBCs, Muslim general and Hindu OBCs differs significantly in high and low income groups. It is note worthy that, as compared to others SRC the share of Muslim OBCs and Muslim general population is significantly higher in low income groups. Within the Muslim community, a

larger percentage of Muslim OBCs fall in low income category as compare to Muslim general. In contrast much smaller share of Muslim persons belong to higher income category. Interestingly, a larger share of SC and ST belong to higher income group as compared to Muslims. Within Muslim OBCs are slightly lagging behind the Muslim general in the high income group.” (214)

### **Mobilization and Protest:**

Afflicted with long standing and persisting sufferings, deprivations and disabilities, Muslim downtroddens have been mobilizing and protesting against their exploitation and for asserting their identity and rights in this ‘Age of Empowerment’. The nature and form of their struggle vary in time and space. In some parts of the country they succeeded in mobilizing large number of people, promoting their horizontal unity and creating macro organizations. While in other areas their organizations are local, enthused with vertical unity of a *baradri* in local society and politics. Macro organization of Muslim OBCs and Dalits are somewhat known to people because of their significance in national and state politics and, therefore, their social and political actions are reported in national media. Since the focus of local organizations is on identity issue in local social structure and power in village panchayat and local bodies, their significance is known in the region. Everywhere Muslim downtroddens are aspiring to rise. They are publishing leaflets, magazines, journals and newspapers as well as organizing meetings, rallies and *dharnas* to mobilize people for asserting their identity and rights.

The history of first macro organization of Muslim OBCs goes back to the second decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century when Muslim weavers formed their organization. It was called ‘Momin Conference’. Ashfaq Hussain Ansari’s richly documented history of the Conference entitled *Momin Conference ki Dastavezi Tarikh* (2000, in Urdu), shows that “some leaders founded, informally, in 1912 in Calcutta, a forum that was largely welfare-oriented organization. The first convention of ‘Momin Conference’ was formally held in Calcutta in 1928 and from this year onward the ‘Momin Conference’ gained an all-India stature and

became the representative organization of 3-4 crore Momins of undivided India” (Hasnain,Nadeem: 2010:39). The driving force behind the formation of ‘Momin Conference’ appeared to be anti-weavers policies of colonial rulers which did not merely impoverish them but also threaten their very existence. “So social humiliation and struggle for existence seems to be the prime motivating force behind this pioneering movement. It mobilized not only Momins but also other Muslim artisan castes. It used to hold an all India convention every year in major cities of India and for the first time, perhaps, Muslim weavers along with some other artisan castes started looking to the future with hope and motivation for empowerment”.(ibid: 39-40) The Conference was primarily concerned to promote consciousness, identity and welfare of downtrodden Muslims, mainly weavers upto 1937. Subsequently it assumed political overtones when it began to oppose the ideology and demand of Muslim League, a political outfit of Muslim feudal lords and *Ashrafs*. Ali Anwar (2001) thinks that ‘Momin Conference’, from its very inception, “was convinced about the caste/class character of the Muslim League and its leaders and it had no doubt the League and its demand were promoting the feudal and elitist vested interest and the lower strata of Muslims were only being harnessed as cannon fodder. The feudal lords, capitalists, *nawabs* and *jagirdare* felt threatened by the mass upsurge of Indian masses and they knew that the Congress Party had not much in its socio-economic and political agenda for these vested interests”.(ibid: 40) The Conference, according to him, viewed emotive issue like ‘Ayodhya’ as a corollary of Muslim League’s politics in the post-independent India, aiming to divert attention of downtrodden Muslims from issues of their empowerment.

The ‘Momin Conference’ forged an alliance with *Jamat-e-Ulema-e-Hind*( a political body of theologians associated with Islamic seminary of Deoband, known for its fight against colonial rule and freedom of the country) and the Congress Party to oppose British rule, Muslim League and partition of the country. Though the alliance may be made with good intention and with the purpose of asserting identity of backward Muslims viz-a-viz upper caste Muslims, it proved to be catastrophic for the independent identity of ‘Momin Conference’ which remained associated with or assimilated into the Congress Party, leading



to its decline in the struggle of backward Muslims. However, contributions of the ‘Momin Conference’ to the cause of backward Muslims are of great value as it remains a source of motivation for many Muslim backward castes in the states of Bengal, Bihar and UP much after independence.

The second phase of social mobilization and protest of Muslim downtrodden began from 1980s. Influenced by the ideology of Lohia, Karpuri Thakur and other leaders of Hindu backwards and Dalits, their growing strength in politics and implementation of Mandal Commission recommendations, Muslim backwards started forming associations in every village and town of the country for mobilizing people to assert their identity and rights. The dominant issue of their struggle has been demand of reservation. A frontline organization was formed in Bihar in 1998. It was The ‘Pasmanda Muslim Mahaz’(hereafter the Mahaz), founded by an Ansari journalist named Ali Anwar and other like minded persons of Muslim lower castes. Arshad Alam’s account of the Mahaz shows that it was conceived as an umbrella organization of various Muslim lower castes. “The term *pasmanda*, as translated by the Mahaz, is a combination of two words, *pase* and *manda* which when joined together means those who have been left behind. The *pasmanda* therefore, are the depressed, the downtrodden and the marginal sections of Indian Muslim society”. Initially it was a regional organization, operating in Bihar.

“From time to time it had published articles in regional newspapers about the need for lower caste Muslims to unite under a common platform. The group had also participated in the ‘save reservation rally’ held in Delhi, December, 1998. It was perhaps the under the name of Pasmanda Muslim Mahaz, Bihar, as the Mahaz was known at that happenings in far away Delhi that strengthened their resolve to have an organization of their own. The event in question was the joint publication of “Muslim Agenda 99”, by a group of Muslim organizations including 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. The “Muslim Agenda 99” claimed that the Indian Muslims were socially, economically and educationally backward because they were discriminated against. They demanded all India

reservations or quotas for Muslims by declaring them to be backward as a “community” and hence in need of state support. The “Muslim Agenda 99” seems to have acted as a catalyst for the Mahaz which perhaps for the first time published its own booklet titled “Pasmanda Agenda 99”. It was brought out on 15 August 1999. It categorically rejected the “Muslim Agenda 99”, questioning the motives behind the grand alliance. It argued that since the majority of the Muslims are already beneficiaries of reservation through Mandal Commission recommendation, the real purpose of “Muslim Agenda 99” seems to be to bring the upper caste Muslims within the fold of reservations. It argued that such a move would be doubly dangerous. For it will not only make the upper castes more dominant by cornering all the benefits of reservation, but by giving fodder to the Hindu rightwing parties, it will also lead to an unprecedented communal polarization of society”.(Alam,Arshad: 2009:171-172 )

The Mahaz organized a big rally in Patna, the capital of Bihar in July, 2004 which led to its transformation from a regional voice into an All India platform. “The leaflet circulated on the occasion was issued in the name of All India Pasmanda Muslim Mahaz. Recognizing that there are different caste groups fighting for their rights in different parts of the country, the Mahaz declared that from now on it would become the umbrella organization for all these caste associations and would seek to coordinate their activities. As such the different organizations need not be dissolved but would maintain their separate identities connected to the All India Mahaz. The leaflet introduces the Mahaz as a social organization which works for justice for lower caste Muslims in the country. But it minced no words in saying that if need be, it will not shy away from active politics, even in the form of having an independent political party of the lower caste Muslims” (ibid: 172). The political agenda of the Mahaz focus on separate quota within OBCs category for Muslim OBCs and deletion of Presidential Order of 1950, deprive *Arzals* from the category of SCs. It underscores caste divisions among Muslims and, therefore, opposes any move to project Muslims as homogenous community. It vehemently criticizes emotive identity symbol politics of both Muslim and non Muslim leadership. Though radical in its socio-political vision and mission, the credibility and appeal of the Mahaz declined when its founder Ali Anwar joined Janta Dal United

(JDU), a political party having an alliance with Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP), known for its casteist and communal politics, in Bihar and became member of 'Rajya Sabha', the Upper House of the Indian Parliament.

Another frontline organization was formed in Maharashtra. It was called 'All India Muslim OBCs Sangathan' which held its first national convention in New Delhi on August 29, 1996. Drawing in delegates from various lower castes of different states, it was attended by leaders of different political parties like Sharad Pawar, Sharad Yadav, Balwant Singh Ramoowalia, Mrinal Gore, etc. The Convention's demands include extension of Mandal Commission recommendations to all Muslim OBCs, more scholarships, land reform, funding for small entrepreneurs, and restoration of concessions to Muslim SCs. The Muslim OBCs activism gathered strength "under the intellectual impetus provided by the Muslim Marathi Sahitya Parishad, first organized in 1990 and held four times so far. A key factor here is the influence of progressive Muslims writing in Marathi repudiating the false, imputed link with Urdu as their "natural " language) such as Y.M. Pathan- incidentally an authority on the (Hindu) Bhakti saint-poets of Maharashtra and Fakhruddin Bennur. The Maharashtra organizers borrowed heavily from the Bahujan Samaj social reform legacy of Shahu Maharaj and Phule, and the modernist views of Ambedkar. Their activity acquired a qualitatively new dimension in 1992 with the Supreme Court's Mandal judgment and a December 1994 Maharashtra order on OBC reservations." (Bidwai, Praful: 1996) The Sangathan surveyed and identified 115 backward castes, constituting over 90% Muslim population in Maharashtra. It organized over three thousand meetings in virtually all districts, talukas and villages of Maharashtra and attracted the support of the Left and centrist-secular parties. "The Sangathan takes the stand that secular social structures and class/caste hierarchies transcends and come prior to the religious identities".(ibid) Therefore, its struggle focus on uniting lower castes across religions for their empowerment and opposing all forms of communal and identity symbol politics of both Hindus and Muslims.

Unlike Maharashtra, Bihar and some other states, no macro organization was formed by Muslim lower castes of UP. The 'Momin Conference', remained active much after

independence mostly in parts of eastern UP and produced leaders like Ashfaq Hussain Ansari and Zia-ur-Rahman Ansari, did not disentangle from the politics of Congress Party which perhaps made it ineffective in uniting Muslim lower castes and providing them an independent and strong political platform. Nevertheless, leaders of the Conference attempted to raise the voice of downtrodden Muslims. For example, Ashfaq Husain Ansari, who had been president of the Conference, elected member of various local bodies and a member of 7<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha from the Maharajganj, advocated politically and intellectually the cause of backward Muslims. In 2010, a book entitled Basic Problems of OBCs and Dalit Muslims was published with his name by his son Tanveer Saleem. The book is the outcome of a seminar and contains 40 articles of scholars, politicians, activists and journalists on issues of reservation and empowerment of backward and Dalit Muslims.

Besides *Ansaris* (weavers), other lower castes of Muslims like *Qureshis* (butchers and meat sellers), *Mansooris* (cotton cardinors), *Idrisis* (tailors), *Abbasis* (water carriers), *Salmanis* (barbers), *Saifis* (iron smith), *Halalkhors* (scavengers), *Samanis* (oil pressers), *Meos*, *Banjaras* and so on have their *baradari* organizations. Most of these organizations are informal or unstructured in nature and operate within a local region. Their activities are a) to bring social reform in the community and to mobilize resources for assisting its needy members and establishing social and religious institutions like mosques, madarsas and in some instances, schools and colleges and, b) to mobilize *baradari* members for social and political action. Asserting identity of the community in local society and polity seems to be driving force behind the formation of many *baradari* organizations. These organizations become active in a situation of dispute or conflict with other *baradari*, for mobilizing resources to establish *baradari* mosque or madarsa and on occasion of elections. Indeed, decentralization of political power and reservation for OBCs in panchayats and local bodies make these organizations politically more conscious and active, leading to their increasing mobilization and participation in democratic processes. Today organizations of Muslim and non Muslim lower castes do not merely play their role in elections to panchayat and local bodies but also to state Assembly and national Parliament.

It is difficult to estimate number of backward Muslims elected to state assembly and the Parliament as caste-wise figures are not available. However, the general impression is that proportion of Muslim backwards in the total representation of Muslims in the assembly and parliament increased over a period of time. A sizeable number of 68 elected Muslim members of present state assembly belong to lower castes. Mobilization of their *baradari* played an important role in their success to election. For example, Mr. Ata-ur-Rahman and Haji Riaz Ahmad elected from assembly constituencies of districts Bareilly and Pilibhit respectively due to large mobilization of their *banjara baradari*. The former is general secretary of Samajvadi Party and the latter is a minister in UP government.

Though important for political mobilization and socialization of people, organizations of Muslim lower castes are independent in their activities and articulation of issues. They have less cooperation and more competition with one another in the struggle for political power. Yet their cause is common. All of them suffer with multiple deprivation and aspire to be empowered. All of them demand reservation for which they pressurize their community leaders and political parties by publishing leaflets, magazines and journals as well as by organizing meetings, rallies and dharnas. Separate quota for Muslim OBCs in the category of OBCs is the demand of *Ajlaf*. While *Arzals* are struggling to be included in the category of SCs. Yet few others are demanding to be included in the category of Scheduled Tribes (STs). Muslim *Banjaras*, known as *Makranis* or *Mukeris* in some parts of UP, are demanding ST status for them because *Banjaras* are listed as ST in Maharashtra and in other states. These *Banjaras* had been trading nomads and were categorized by colonial rulers as ‘Criminal Tribe’. Most of them inhabit in the districts of northern UP. Similarly *Meos* of UP, Rajasthan and Haryana are up in the arms for their demand to be categorized as ST because their ethnography and social capital is similar to *Meenas*, a tribal community of Rajasthan.

Consistently increasing mobilization and protest of Muslim lower castes force political parties to publicly accept their demand of reservation. The United Progressive Alliance(UPA) government issued a notification in December, 2011 for separate quota of 4.5% reservation for Minorities OBCs in employment and education within the category of

OBCs. However, the notification was stayed by the Supreme Court of the country on some technical grounds. The Samajvadi Party promised 18% reservation to Muslims in UP, legally an untenable promise, in order to get Muslim vote. It also recommended for listing of *Banjaras* in STs. Neither UPA government did anything to vacate the stay of the court nor the Samajvadi Party implement its promise. This is probably due to their disparate organization and sporadic mobilization. Their struggle is mere agitation which needs to be transformed into a movement, an ideologically driven collective, conscious and concerted struggle for their empowerment.

### References

- Ahmad, Imtiaz. (1973). *Caste and Social Stratification Among Muslims in India*, New Delhi: Manohar
- Alam, Arshad (2009), Challenging the Ashrafs: The Politics of Pasmada Muslim
- Mahaz , *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 29:2, 171-181.
- Ansari, Ghous. (1960). *Muslim Caste in Uttar Pradesh: A study of cultural contact*. Lucknow: The Ethnographic and Folk Cultural Society.
- Anwar, Ali (2001), *Masawaat ki jang: Bihar ke Pasmada Musalman* (Struggle for Equality: Backward Muslims of Bihar) New Delhi, Vaani Prakashan.
- Bidwai, Parful (1996), “*Age of Empowerment: Muslim OBCs Discover Mandal*”, Times of India, 11 October.
- GOI, (2006). *Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community of India- A Report*. New Delhi: Prime Minister’s High Level Committee, Cabinet Secretariat, Government of India.
- GOI (2007), *The National Commission for Religious and Linguistic Minorities – A Report*. New Delhi, Government of India.
- Mann, E.A. (1992). *Boundaries and Identities: Muslim Work and Status in Aligarh*. New Delhi: Sage Publishers India Pvt. Ltd.
- Hasnain, Nadeem. (2010) Muslims in India: Caste Affinity and Social Boundaries of Backwardness in *Basic Problems of OBC & Dalit Muslims*, New Delhi: Serials
- Singh, K.S. (2005). *People of India: Uttar Pradesh*. Vol.XLII, Part I, II and III, New Delhi: Manohar
- Waheed, Abdul. (2011). *Muslim Baradaries, Occupations and Education*, New Delhi: Serials.

\*\*\*\*\*