

DOI: 10.53555/ks.v10i1.3285

Dalits Among Muslims Of India: A Sociological Review

Hazrath Saheb Nadaf^{1*}, Florin Shelomith Soans²

^{1*} Research Scholar, Department of Studies and Research in Sociology, Tumkur University, Tumakuru- 572103

²Assistant Professor Department of Economics, St. Aloysius College (Autonomous) Mangalore-575003

Abstract:

India, renowned for its extraordinary religious and ethnic diversity, is a secular nation with a significant Hindu majority and a substantial Muslim population. This research article delves into the complexities of caste-based discrimination among Indian Muslims, particularly focusing on the marginalized Arzal community. Despite Islam's rejection of caste distinctions, the influence of the Hindu caste system has permeated Indian Muslim society, perpetuating social stratification. The Arzals, often relegated to menial occupations, face severe discrimination and social exclusion. This study explores the socio-economic and cultural context of Muslims in Karnataka, tracing the historical impact of Muslim dynasties and contemporary issues such as educational progress and socio-political challenges. Through various theoretical lenses, including functionalist, Marxist, Weberian, Ambedkarite, and postcolonial approaches, the article aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of caste dynamics among Indian Muslims and the broader implications for social justice and equality.

Keywords: Muslims, Dalit Muslims, Pinjara, Caste among Muslims

Introduction:

India stands out as one of the most religiously and ethnically diverse nations globally, with deeply rooted religious societies and cultures playing a pivotal role in the lives of many of its citizens. Despite being a secular country with a Hindu majority, India has a significant Muslim population. Indian culture is among the oldest on the planet, with a rich diversity that includes various distinct communities, each preserving its own traditions and customs. This unique blend of civilizations makes India a distinctive and beautiful country. Renowned for its extraordinary religious and ethnic diversity, India is characterized by deeply ingrained religious societies and cultures. This secular nation, with its Hindu majority, also has a substantial Muslim population. The interplay of diverse civilizations and India's ancient cultural heritage contributes to its unique identity. Within this multifaceted landscape, Dalits, historically known as "Untouchables," continue to face discrimination, even within the Muslim community. This research article explores the complexities of caste-based discrimination among Indian Muslims, focusing on the marginalized Arzal community. It also examines the broader socio-economic and cultural context of Muslims in Karnataka.

Dalits, also known as "Untouchables," are a group of people who have historically faced severe social discrimination in India. Although the term "Dalit" is most commonly associated with the Hindu caste system, there are also Dalits among the Muslim community in India.

Within the Indian Muslim community, Dalits are referred to as "Arzal," which means "untouchable" in Urdu. The Arzal Muslims, like other Dalits, face discrimination and marginalization in many aspects of life, including education, employment, and social interactions.

The issue of caste-based discrimination among Indian Muslims is a complex one. While Islam rejects caste-based distinctions, many Indian Muslims have been influenced by the Hindu caste system and continue to practice caste-based discrimination. In addition, some Muslim scholars have argued that Islam does not recognize caste as a legitimate social hierarchy, and that caste-based discrimination is un-Islamic. Overall, the situation of Dalits among Muslims in India is a complex and multifaceted issue that requires further examination and attention.

However, within the Muslim community in India, there are also groups that are considered to be socially and economically marginalized, including groups that are often referred to as Dalits among Muslims.

These groups are not considered to be part of the caste system, as it is a Hindu social hierarchy. Instead, they are often referred to as "Arzals," which means "broken people" or "outcastes" in Urdu. Arzals are considered to be at the bottom of the social and economic ladder within the Muslim community in India.

Arzals are often found in occupations such as leather work, cleaning, and other forms of manual labor that are considered to be "impure" by other Muslims. They have also historically faced discrimination and segregation within Muslim society.

In recent years, there have been efforts to address this discrimination and promote the inclusion of Arzals within the larger Muslim community. However, there is still a long way to go to achieve true equality and social justice for these marginalized groups.

Historical and Cultural Context

Religious and Ethnic Diversity in India

India's cultural heritage dates back thousands of years, making it one of the oldest civilizations on Earth. The country's cultural diversity is manifested through its numerous distinct communities, each preserving their unique traditions and customs. India's ability to harmonize these diverse cultures creates a rich tapestry that sets it apart as a unique nation.

Dalits and the Caste System

Dalits, or "Untouchables," have historically faced severe social discrimination in India. While the term "Dalit" is primarily associated with the Hindu caste system, there are also Dalits among the Muslim community. Within the Indian Muslim community, Dalits are referred to as "Arzal," which translates to "untouchable" in Urdu. Despite Islam's rejection of caste-based distinctions, many Indian Muslims have adopted practices influenced by the Hindu caste system, perpetuating caste-based discrimination within their community.

Caste-Based Discrimination Among Indian Muslims

The Arzal Community

Arzals, considered to be at the bottom of the social and economic hierarchy within the Muslim community, often engage in occupations such as leather work and manual labor, which are deemed "impure" by other Muslims. This marginalized group faces significant discrimination and segregation within Muslim society.

The Influence of the Hindu Caste System

The persistence of caste-like hierarchies among Indian Muslims can be attributed to the shared economic and political environment with Hindus. Despite religious differences, both communities have inherited characteristics from the Hindu caste system. This complex issue requires a deeper examination to understand the nuances of caste-based discrimination among Indian Muslims.

Efforts to Address Discrimination

Recent years have witnessed efforts to address discrimination against Arzals and promote their inclusion within the larger Muslim community. However, achieving true equality and social justice for these marginalized groups remains a formidable challenge.

Socio-Economic and Cultural Context of Muslims in Karnataka

Islam in Karnataka has a long and significant history, with its roots tracing back to the arrival of Arab merchants on the west coast of India. Muslim dynasties such as the Bahmani Sultanate and the Adil Shahi Dynasty played a crucial role in shaping the Islamic culture and history of Karnataka. The contributions of Hyder Ali, Tippu Sultan, and the Nizams of Hyderabad further enriched the region's Islamic heritage.

Demographic and Linguistic Diversity

Muslims constitute approximately 12.19% of Karnataka's population. They are dispersed across all districts, with significant concentrations in Gulbarga, Bidar, Bijapur, Raichur, and Dharwad. The linguistic diversity among Muslims in Karnataka includes Urdu, Kannada, Telugu, and Sindhi, with Dakhini Urdu being a notable dialect.

Education and Economic Progress

Muslims in Karnataka have shown modestly higher levels of educational and economic progress compared to their counterparts in North India. This can be attributed to better opportunities and access to education in the southern states.

Contemporary Issues

Despite these advancements, Muslims in Karnataka face contemporary challenges, such as the hijab row and bans on Muslim traders in Hindu religious fairs. These issues highlight the ongoing socio-political tensions and the need for further efforts to promote inclusivity and social justice.

India shares its national boundary with Pakistan, China, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Bhutan, and Nepal. The nation is divided into twenty-nine states and nine union territories and is located on the Asian continent, surrounded by the Arabian Sea, the Indian Ocean, and the Bay of Bengal. Each state in the country is home to a diverse group of people who live in peace with one another while conserving and upholding their own unique culture and traditions. The area is blessed with spectacular scenic beauty from Delhi, India's capital, to Tamil Nadu, the country's southernmost state.

According to the census reports of Indian Census 2011, the population of India is 1,210,854,977 with 623,724,248 males and 586,469,174 females. The total literacy rate in the country at present is 74.04%. The density of population is 382 persons/sq.km. In regards to sex ratio, at present there are 940 females on average on per 1000 males and the child sex ratio is 914 females per 1000 males.

As per details from Census 2011, Karnataka has population of 6.11 Crores, an increase from figure of 5.29 Crores in 2001 census. Total population of Karnataka as per 2011 census is 61,095,297 of which male and female are 30,966,657 and 30,128,640 respectively. In 2001, total population was 52,850,562 in which males were 26,898,918 while females were 25,951,644. The total population growth in this decade was 15.60 percent while in previous decade it was 17.25 percent. As per latest census, Hindu are majority in Karnataka state. Hinduism constitutes 84.00% of Karnataka population. In all Hindu form majority religion in 30 out of 30 districts of Karnataka state. The data for 2022 & 2023 is under process and will be updated in few weeks. Muslim Population in Karnataka is 78.93 Lakhs (12.92 percent) of total 6.11 Crore. Christian Population in Karnataka is 11.43 Lakhs (1.87 percent) of total 6.11 Crore. The population of Karnataka forms 5.05 percent of India in 2011. In 2001, the figure was 5.14 percent. (Census, 2011)

Many of the characteristics of Hindu castes are shared by Muslim social groups, but not all. The majority of these characteristics were inherited from Hindus, and it has been feasible to sustain a Muslim society of caste-like hierarchy in India, despite religious differences, because both populations have shared the same economic and political environment.

The usage of the word caste to characterise Muslim social categories offends Orthodox Muslims. Although it is debatable whether the term caste may be used in this manner, I feel that the concept of caste can be useful in analysing social stratification among Muslims.

In many ways, Ashraf Muslims (i.e., Muslims who claim foreign ancestry) are similar to Hindu castes. The Ashraf society is socially stratified; it consists of endogamous groups with limited mobility; there is a prohibition on eating and drinking; and the groups are organised on a hierarchical basis. In terms of stratification and social mobility the difference between Hindu castes and Muslim social groups is one of degree and not of kind.

(Zarina Ahmad, 1962, Muslim Caste in Uttar Pradesh) Muslim Caste-Ranking Orthodox Muslims resent the word caste being used for the Muslim social groups. It can be disputed whether the term caste can be so used, but it is believed that the concept of caste can be used with advantage to analyse social stratification among the Muslims. A comparison of Hindu caste usages and practices with the practices among the Muslim social groups may throw some light on the character of these groups. Muslim social groups share many of the attributes of the Hindu caste system although not all. Most of these attributes, were acquired from the Hindus, and, although contrary to the spirit of Islam, it has been possible to maintain a Muslim society of caste-like ranking in India because, in spite of the differences of faith, both the communities share the same economic and political environment. Let us consider a few definitions of caste. Senart defines caste as a "Corporate group exclusively and in theory at least rigorously hereditary".

(B.C.Dadapeer, 1993, Pinjara Samskriti) as it is mentioned in the book, the major information related to the Pinjaras can be noted from the work of Edger Thurston's Caste and Tribes of Southern India. The Pinjaras or the Nadafs of Karnataka they are called as Dudekulas in the Andhra Pradesh Region. As it is rightly mentioned in the book these Muslims have faced subjugation in the pre independence India as well as in the post independent India. The people who belong to Pinjara or the Dudekula follow both the preachings of Islam and Hinduism. The people belonging to Pinjara or the dudekulas take part in Hindu festivals and they celebrate them to. Through this we can understand that the Pinjars of India are the converted Muslims and it can be understood that these have converted from the lower strata of the Hindu community in order to escape social discrimination and to achieve social mobility.

(R.K. Pruthi, 2011, Indian Caste System) Indian civilization and culture is not only ancient but it is also extensive and varied. Many races and peoples have contributed and enriched it. Its key note is synthesis on the basis of eternal values. Thus the foundations of the two great ideals of Indian civilization- synthesis of cultures and spiritual regeneration of man have been truly laid, on which future structure of India's culture and civilization has been raised.

(D. Pulla Rao, 2012, Development of Scheduled Castes in India) in the edited book under the heading of Emancipation of Outcastes and atrocities on Dalits in India, M. Ramajanyulu mentions that, the caste system is based on a social condition of a religion of the upper class masters and lower class servants. This is the Indian version of racism on birth and colour... the caste system imposes blind and superstitious belief and goes against progressive human evaluation.

(R.A Sing, 2014, Dalit and Social Equality) the book gives picture of dalit in India. Dalit is a designation for a group of people traditionally regarded as untouchable. Dalits are a mixed population consisting of numerous social groups from all over South Asia; they speak a variety of languages and practice a multitude of religions. The book covers various aspects of Dalit oppression movements across India.

Caste is a complex social institution that has been the subject of study by various theoretical approaches. Some of the main theoretical approaches to caste studies are:

Functionalist approach: This approach views caste as a necessary and functional institution in society. According to this view, caste provides a sense of social order and stability by assigning individuals to fixed social roles based on their birth. It also facilitates the division of labor and ensures social harmony by maintaining social distance between different castes.

Marxist approach: This approach views caste as a product of economic exploitation and inequality. According to this view, the caste system serves the interests of the ruling classes by dividing the working class and preventing them from uniting to challenge the dominant power structures. Thus, the caste system is seen as a tool of oppression and exploitation.

Weberian approach: This approach views caste as a form of social stratification based on status and prestige. According to this view, caste is not solely determined by birth but also by achieved status and education. The Weberian approach emphasizes the role of cultural and religious factors in shaping caste hierarchies.

Ambedkarite approach: This approach is based on the ideas of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, a social reformer and activist who worked to eradicate caste-based discrimination and inequality. The Ambedkarite approach views caste as a social institution that is based on the exploitation and oppression of the lower castes by the upper castes. It emphasizes the need for social and political action to eradicate caste-based discrimination and create a more egalitarian society.

Postcolonial approach: This approach views caste as a legacy of colonialism and imperialism. According to this view, the British colonial rulers reinforced and perpetuated the caste system in India, using it to maintain their power and control. The

postcolonial approach emphasizes the need to challenge and subvert dominant power structures and narratives in order to create a more just and equal society.

In conclusion, these different theoretical approaches provide different perspectives on the nature and role of caste in Indian society. Each approach highlights different aspects of the caste system and its impact on society, and offers different solutions for addressing caste-based discrimination and inequality.

It is a well-established fact that Islam in Karnataka has a long history in the south India and Islam has arrived here before it was brought by Muslim rulers in the north India. Arrival of Muslims in west coast of India reached Karnataka very early. Islamic culture and history in Karnataka like other southern states of the country owes much to the Muslim dynasties like Bahmani Sultanate and Adil Shahi Dynasty. The Muslims in Karnataka are descendants of Arab merchants and the local converts. The Muslims introduced coffee and paper industry to the local economy. Bahmani Sultanate ruled this area from 1347 to 1510 and the reign of Adil Shahi Dynasty spans the period from 1490 to 1686. Islam in Karnataka continued its legacy as Mughal rule from 17th century and the achievements and significance of Hyder Ali and his son Tippu Sultan are well known. The rule of Nizams of Hyderabad over the large parts of Karnataka lasted until about the fifth decade of the 20th century and Islam in Karnataka has a significance presence still now.

Muslims in Karnataka form about 12.19% of the population of the state. Muslims are found in all districts of Karnataka but the districts, Gulbarga, Bidar, Bijapur, Raichur and Dharward have significance percentage of Muslims. The districts bordering Kerala and cities of Bangalore, Mysore and Mangalore are to be mentioned as regards Muslim in Kerala. One important characteristic of Muslims in Kerala is that they speak a dialect of Urdu known as Dakhini but they also speak Kannada, Telugu and Sindhi. There are a large number of Muslim run educational institutions in Karnataka. Muslims also have modestly higher levels of progress in terms of education and wealth in Karnataka (as in the rest of South India) than in states of North India, as they have more opportunities than their North Indian counterparts. Recently, there have arisen a number of issues pertaining to Muslim communities in Karnataka like Hijab row and ban on Muslim Traders in Hindu religious fairs.

Conclusion

India's religious and ethnic diversity, coupled with its ancient cultural heritage, creates a unique and vibrant society. However, the persistence of caste-based discrimination, even among Indian Muslims, underscores the complexities of social stratification in the country. The marginalized Arzal community faces significant challenges, requiring continued efforts to promote inclusivity and social justice. In Karnataka, the historical and cultural context of Muslims, along with contemporary issues, further highlights the need for a comprehensive understanding of caste dynamics and their impact on society. Through various theoretical approaches, this research article aims to shed light on the multifaceted nature of caste-based discrimination and the path towards a more egalitarian India.

References:

1. Beteille, Andre. 2003. *Caste, Class and Power: Changing Patterns of Stratification in a Tanjore Village*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
2. Desai, Sonalde, and Amaresh Dubey. 2012. "Caste in 21st Century India: Competing Narratives." *Economic and Political Weekly* 47(6): 47-55.
3. Shah, Ghanshyam. 2014. "Caste and Labor Market Outcomes: Evidence from Indian Railways." *Journal of Labor Economics and Development* 1(1): 1-22.
4. Menon, Sangeeta. 2017. "Dismantling the Brahminical Hegemony: A Study of the Dalit Movements in Kerala." *Sociological Bulletin* 66(1): 36-50.
5. Sheikh, Mohammad Gulzar. 2019. "Caste and Social Inequality in India: A Sociological Analysis." *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology* 7(2): 21-31.