The New Untouchables: Re-defining the Identity of the Dalit Muslim with Special Reference to the Bengali Muslims

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ABSTRACT

Who is a Dalit Muslim? Is there any form of untouchability, marginality or discrimination that a section of Muslim population is subjected to? This article addresses these questions and attempts a comprehensive study on the Indian Muslims to find an answer. Indian Muslims are not a homogeneous community, rather, diverse cultural variations can be observed among Muslims in the context of space, culture, economic resources and political participations. The purpose of the article is to re-examine and re-investigate the identity of the Indian Dalit Muslim, with special focus on Bengali Muslims and issues such as caste politics, religious identity and the structural setting of society. The roles of several non-political organizations to generate Dalit Muslim consciousness are also addressed. This is a qualitative and analytical piece of work, and the primary sources of this article are reports, newspaper articles and other relevant documents.

KEYWORDS: *Dalit Muslim, caste, backwardness, identity, untouchability*

Introduction

Who are the Dalit Muslims? Is there any form of untouchability, marginality or discrimination that a section of Muslim population is subjected to? In this paper, we conduct a comprehensive study on Indian Muslims to find an answer to this question. The purpose of the article is to re-examine and re-investigate the identity of Indian Dalit

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Muslim, with a special focus on issues such as caste politics, religious identity and the structural setting of society. Indian Muslims are not a homogeneous community, rather, diverse cultural variations can be observed among them in terms of their location, culture, economic resources and political participations. The identity of the Bengali Muslims of contemporary West Bengal needs to be seen in a historical context. Richard M. Eaton in "Who are the Bengal Muslims? Conversion and Islamization in Bengal" examines the evolution of the Bengal Muslims between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. He mentions two categories of the Bengal Muslims – ashraf and non-ashraf. He defines the ashraf in the Bengalis context thus:

> In the Bengali context, the ashraf generally included those Muslims claiming descent from immigrants from beyond the Khyber, or at least from beyond Bengal, who cultivated a high Perso-Islamic civilization and its associated literatures in Arabic, Persian, and Urdu. Soon after the Turkish conquest of the delta in 1204, Muslim immigrants from points west settled in cities like Gaur, Pandua, Satgaon, Sonargaon, and Chittagong, principally as long-distance traders, administrators, soldiers, and literati. From 1342 to 1574, however, under the rule of a succession of independent Muslim dynasties, Bengal became isolated from north India and immigration from points west was largely curtailed. In the wake of the Mughal conquest of 1574, however, Muslim immigrants from north India once again settled in the delta in such numbers that their understanding of Islam came to define ashraf religious sensibilities in modern Bengali history. (Eaton 26-27)

The ashraf Muslims historically occupied privileged position in terms of social, cultural, religion and political standings. Non-ashraf Muslims historically remained a marginal section due to the nature of their occupations, resources, cultural capital and education. Salman Khurshid observes this ashraf and non-ashraf binary in the context of the Independent India, in these terms:

> Generally, Muslims fall within two main social categories—ashrafs and ajlafs. Ashrafs in traditional society are seen as having a superior status. Ajlafs are divided into a number of occupational castes that overlap with Hindu social groups. It is thus that the concept of caste got introduced

into the conceptually egalitarian religion and became part of the Other

Backward Classes (OBCs), entitled to reservations. (13)

Considering categorization of Muslims by both Eaton and Khurshid, it can be said that the Muslims in India are categorized as ashraf, ajlaf and arzal. Ajlaf and arzal are non-ashraf Muslims. Ajlaf Muslims are those who had converted from other religions, largely from Hinduism, after foreign Muslim invaders had set foot in India. They are recognised as middle class Muslims and their social position is better than the arzals but worse than the ashrafs. Arzal Muslims are Dalit Muslims who had converted from the untouchable communities and they are still engaged in their traditional occupations like dhobi, shoemaker, fisherman, weaver and other menial works. Some sub-castes or communities of arzal Muslims are Hajjam, Chowduli, Nikari, Mahaldar, Dhukre, Basni/ Bosni, Abdal, Kan, Tutia, Gayen, Beldar, Khotta, Sardar, Kalandar, Laskar, Jamadar, Chutor Mistri, Dafadar, Mal, Majhi/ Patni, Muchi/ Chamar, Nehariya, Haldar, Sanpui/ Sapui, Biswas, Mali, Ghosi, Darji /Ostagar/ Idrishi, Rajmistri, Bhatiyara, Molla, Dhali, Piyada, Barujibi/ Barui, Penchi and many other sub-castes. On 17 February 2014, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, India, passed a resolution and included them in the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) list. Arzal Muslims primarily live in rural surroundings and their conventional occupation is agriculture. In 2016, Association SNAP and Guidance Guild, in association with Pratichi Institute, published a report titled "Living Reality of Muslims in West Bengal: A Report" which showed an objective picture of the condition of Muslims in West Bengal. The Report states:

Among the Muslims in rural West Bengal about 47 per cent of all who

work belong to the category of either agricultural worker or 'daily workers'

in non-agriculture. They are at the bottom of the economic ladder.

Importantly, in this category, the percentage of daily wage workers in

non-farm work is uniformly much higher than that of agricultural workers

in all the districts (Living Reality of Muslims in West Bengal 8).

Almost a half of the Muslim population in rural setting engage in either agricultural work or work as daily labour. This article traces the identity of the lower class/caste Muslims in the contemporary time and examines how the majoritarian hegemony subjugates cultural capital, political participation and religious manifestations of the Dalit Muslims.

The New Untouchable

Caste system shapes the social, cultural, economic and political reality in India, more specifically in South Asia. Every community, irrespective of their religious identity, is hegemonised by the caste ideology. In this context, Haque and Pant very appropriately argue:

> Since the caste system is a predominant part of Indian society, its influence is apparent in every community in India — including Muslims. The caste system among Muslims looks very complicated, primarily because its origin cannot be traced to religious texts or doctrine. But the lived reality of individuals is different. Like other communities in India, Muslims too are divided on caste lines ("India's Dalit Muslims…").

This article addresses the question of Dalit Muslims in the Indian context, and hence, it is essential to understand the conceptions of Dalit Muslims in larger social framework.

The 'Dalit Muslims': Who Are They?

Historically, it is documented that the untouchable and lower caste Hindu population converted to Islam to escape caste oppression. Those converts are regarded as 'ajlaf' and 'arzal' in Muslim society and live at the bottom of social hierarchy. Yoginder Sikand opines, "despite their conversion to Islam, the social and economic conditions of the mass of the ajlaf Muslims hardly changed, and they remained tied down to their traditional occupations as artisans, peasants and labourers" (Sikand 288). In 2006, the Sachar Committee report, a landmark document on the status of the Muslim community in India noted that the "Arzals… [have] similar traditional occupations as their Hindu counterparts in the list of Scheduled Castes. And it is widely believed that these communities are converts from [Hindu] untouchables. Change in religion did not bring any change in their social or economic status" (Haque and Pant). In 2007, Rangnath Mishra Commission fully accepted "the presence of Dalits among Christian and Muslim communities":

> Caste is in fact a social phenomenon shared by almost all Indian communities irrespective of their religious persuasions. The general constitution prohibits all forms of discrimination between the citizens on the basis of religion. The commission came to the conclusion that caste

system should be recognized as a social characteristic of the Indian society as a whole, without questioning whether the philosophy and teachings of any particular religion recognize it or not. The commission fully accepted the presence of Dalits among Christian and Muslim communities and recommended the deletion of para 3 of the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950 by appropriate action so as to completely de-link the SC status from religion. (Rahman 56)

Rangnath Mishra Commission Report has made bold and path-breaking recommendations. Recently, the Post Sachar Evaluation Committee, headed by Professor Kundu, also known as Kundu Committee Report, was set up in August 2013 to examine the socio-economic and educational status of Muslims after the Sachar report showed their terrible conditions. The Kundu Committee report reveals "Muslims continue to be left out of both government jobs and the urbanisation wave" (Ghosh). However, if recommendations of these reports are implemented, the situation of Muslims in India must progress. Muslims' socio-economic situation in the immediate aftermath of the Mutiny is succinctly summed up by Maulana Altaf Hussain Hali, whose words still ring true today:

Na ahl-i-hukumat ke hamraz hain ham

Na darbarion main sarfaraz hain ham

Na ilmon main shayan-i izzat hain ham ham

Na sanat main hirfat main mumtaz hain

Na rakhte hain kuch manzilat naukri main

Na hissa hamara hai saudagari main

[We are not trusted by the government,

Nor are we among the prominent courtiers of the ruler

Neither are we among the educated elite

We have no share in trade or the industry

Nor do you find us in the civil services

Or in the business.] (qtd. in Rahman 46)

Several Dalit movements happened in pre-Independence and post-Independence India which aim to build a collective consciousness of Dalits and assert their social, cultural

and political identities. The Dalit Panthers, a radical political organization, was founded in Bombay, India, in April 1972 by Namdeo Dhasal, Raja Dhale, and Arun Kamble. The Dalit Panthers' Manifesto defines the Dalits as "Members of scheduled castes and tribes, neo Buddhists, the working people, the landless and poor peasants, women and all those who are being exploited politically, economically and in the name of religion" (Omvedt 74). Dalit movement generates a wider sense of identity and "this wider Dalit identity does not seek to deny individual jati identities. Rather, it takes them into account but seeks to subsume them within the wider collective Dalit identity, based on a common history of suffering as well as common racial origins as indigenous people" (Sikand 288). Dalit atrocity and caste discrimination get some attention in main-stream discourse which campaigns #DalitLivesMatter for solidarity. But caste discrimination of the Dalit Muslims, a sub section of Dalits, is rarely spoken of. It is a fact that "their identity of being 'Muslim' and 'Dalit' makes their position even more fragile and vulnerable in Indian society. Even politicians don't care enough to talk about them" (Haque and Pant). The All-India Backward Muslim Morcha coined the term 'Dalit Muslim' and through this political identity, the AIBMM tries to "bring all the 'lower' caste Muslims under one umbrella, defined by their common identity as Muslim as well as Dalit (Sikand 288).

Role of Organizations to build Dalit Muslim Consciousness

All India Muslim Other Backward Classes Organisation

All India Muslim Other Backward Classes Organisation (AIMOBCO) has been working for the development of backward class Muslims in Maharashtra since 1978 thought it was officially registered in 1998. This organization has given tremendous effort to include backward class Muslims in OBCs list and finally on 7 December, 1994 Government of Maharashtra issued a Government Order to include the socially and educationally Backward Muslims in the list of OBCs. In the recent times, Shabbir Ahmed Ansari, the president of AIMOBCO demanded a caste-based census because a scientific headcount of OBC Muslims would help roll out targeted welfare measures for them. Ansari further observes:

> In the absence of rational estimations about their numbers, OBC Muslims
>
> have suffered neglect… Around 90% of Muslims in Maharashtra, and

almost all Muslims in rural areas are backwards, with upper-castes forming a miniscule section. Upper-caste Muslims have better access to education and resources and have hijacked the share of benefits meant for their backward brethren. Like upper-caste Hindus, these upper-caste Muslims have restricted upward mobility for others. (Kulkarni)

The primary objective of AIMOBCO is "to build public opinion in favour of extending the existing provision of reservation for other backward classes to their Muslim counterpart" (Ahmad 4887). It fights against the social exclusion of the backward class Muslims and aims to bring them on a common platform. Drawing attention to the backwardness and marginalization of the Muslims, it helps to pressurize the state government to take some affirmative initiatives for the socio-economic and educational development of marginalized sections.

Pasmanda Muslim Mahaz

Pasmanda Muslim Mahaz or Marginalised Muslim Front is a non-political organization which works for the emancipation of the Dalit Muslims and other marginalized sections of society. In 1989, Ali Anwar, who belongs to other backward class/caste in Bihar, founded Pasmanda Muslim Mahaz. This organization critically examines the existing caste system within Muslim society and addresses the domination of the upper caste/class Ashraf Muslims. This front critiques the term 'Backward-class Muslims' and highlights the systematic and organised exclusion of the Dalit Muslims in the larger social spectrum. It also opposes the religion-based reservation and, instead, advocates reservation based on socio-economic condition. Pasmanda Muslim Mahaz protests against the separation of graveyards for Dalit Muslims and strongly advocates the rights of Dalit Muslim to bury their dead body in the conventional graveyards.

The All-India Backward Muslim Morcha

The AIBMM was founded in 1994 by Ejaz Ali, a young Muslim medical doctor from the Kunjra (vegetable-seller caste) community in Patna, the capital of Bihar. Ali, national convenor of The AIBMM assembled over 40 Backward Caste Muslim organisations in a single platform to fight against denial and deprivation of Dalit Muslims. In an interview with Yoginder Sikand, Ali clearly points out the objectives of this organization:

> We have, at present, a one-point agenda—to undo the injustice that is being done to the Dalit Muslims by the unfair laws that have been promulgated denying them their rights. As the law stands today, Dalit Muslims are denied reservation rights as Scheduled Castes although their conditions are the same as the Hindu Dalits. Under the Government of India Act of 1935, a list or schedule was drawn up of castes which were recognised as extremely backward...In 1956, Article 341 was amended to extend the same benefits that Hindu Dalits enjoy to Sikh Dalits, and in 1990 this was extended to the neo-Buddhists. If these communities can enjoy Scheduled Caste status despite belonging to theoretically egalitarian religions, then why not Dalit Muslims and Dalit Christians? (Yoginder, "Dalit Muslims")

Ali questioned the reservation policy and pointed out how Dalit Muslims and Dalit Christians are deprived of it. He says, "Under the law as it stands today, if a Dalit Christian or Muslim converts to Hinduism he is automatically entitled to special benefits, but if a Dalit Hindu changes his religion and accepts Christianity or Islam, he loses such benefits at once" (Yoginder, "Dalit Muslims"). The politics of reservation is strongly influenced by the ideology of Hinduism.

Bengali Academia for Social Empowerment

Bengali Academia for Social Empowerment (BASE) is an organization in West Bengal which is founded by a group of academicians, scholars who work for community and social development. Initially, this organization was a virtual network on Facebook and later on, it was officially registered on 12 November 2018. Dr. Abu Saleh was elected its General Secretary and Dr. Saifulla became the President. About 23 academicians became a part of the executive committee of BASE. BASE aims to develop the downtrodden sections of the society. It generates a sense of re-awakening and confidence among them to fight against inequality and discrimination. Focusing of socio-economic status of the Dalit Muslims, this organization regularly holds several lectures, reading, discussions, and debates.

First Annual Conference of BASE

A Two Day Conference on "Bengali Muslims at the Crossroads: Possibilities and Challenges" was organised by BASE in association with the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Aliah University, Park Circus, Kolkata, on 16-17 November 2019. Amitabh Kundu, chairperson of the Post-Sachar Evaluation Committee, delivered a keynote address on "Concerns in Formulating an Inclusive Development Strategy: Focus on Bengali Muslims". Sabir Ahamed talked on "Un(employment) among the Muslims in West Bengal: A Post-Sachar Status"; Anasua Chatterjee spoke on "Identities and Exclusions: The Muslims of Kolkta"; Afzal Hussain on "Rethinking the Self: Bengali Muslims of West Bengal in the Early Decades of 21st Century" and Mosarrap Hossain Khan on "Emergent Muslim Middle Class, Islam and the Construction of Muslim Identity in the Late 19th Century". More than 53 academicians and scholars presented their research at this conference.

Second and Third Annual Conference of BASE

On 26 & 27 December 2020, BASE organized its second annual conference on "Crisis and After: Society, Culture and Politics" in the virtual mode. BASE organized its third annual conference on "Belonging and Homelessness", in collaboration with the Ambedkar Centre for Social and Cultural Studies of Gour Mahavidyalaya under University of Gour Banga and the Department of English of Dr. B R Ambedkar College under the University of Kalyani on 17, 18, 19 December 2021. Zoya Hasan gave the keynote address on "Majoritarian Politics in Contemporary India" and Tanweer Fazal talked on "At the Crossroads: Muslims, Law, and State in India".

Through these conferences, and lectures, BASE investigated the status of backward class/caste Muslims. It created a new consciousness among the educated Bengali Muslims both in rural and urban spaces. It followed Ambedkar's words "educate, agitate, organize" to reflect on how to achieve equality and empowerment. It is concerned about reservation policy and raises voice against any type of discrimination and deprivation in the educational institutions and the government job sectors. To build up cultural capital of the backward Bengali Muslims, it annually organizes literary festival and mother language day and through these annual programmes, BASE has successfully created a unique space for marginal literary figures, languages and culture.

There are a few similar organizations in West Bengal and like BASE, they are very vocal about the constitutional rights of the Dalit/ Backward class/ caste Muslims.

Discrimination is Reality

Manoranjan Byapari in his memoir *Interrogation My Chandal Life: An Autobiography of a Dalit* very aptly exhibits the reality of the respect and value of the Muslims to a Brahmin family. After the partition, an unnamed doctor, after migrating from East Pakistan to West Bengal to "keep good relations with the influential members of the Muslim community", invited some Muslims. He adopted a cleaver strategy that "if in the near future, a riot did break out", this mutual relation would help him out. But the doctor's wife hated 'those cow-eating Muslims' and after they left, she ordered the narrator to "wash the utensils they had eaten upon, to sprinkle dung-water all around the courtyard they had stepped upon, granting me a position more acceptable than that of the Muslims" (Byapari 44). Byapari portrays one symbolic incident which indicates the position, respect and values of Muslim to Upper castes. An untouchable is more acceptable to them than a Dalit Muslim. In this casteist and Islamophobic mind, Dalit Muslim is regarded as more untouchable, unacceptable, unapproachable, unsuitable, unspeakable and unlistenable.

Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan: A Dalit Life* and Sharankumar Limbale's *The Outcaste* both depicted in great detail the difficulties Dalits face in obtaining rented housing in urban areas that are overwhelmingly occupied by the Hindus of the upper castes. People from Dalit backgrounds face discrimination because of their caste identity, and Muslims face discrimination because of their religious identity. This is not a new phenomenon, but it has become more prevalent since India gained its independence. Shabina Akhtar demonstrates the nature of such discrimination:

> Muslims facing discrimination while renting a flat in most of the Indian cities no longer takes anyone by surprise. Even metro cities like Mumbai and Delhi have had cases where Muslims have alleged that they have been denied accommodation simply because of their religious identity. A number of cases have even been reported across India.
>
> Kolkata too had been witnessing this kind of a trend, where people were refusing to rent out their apartments or flats to Muslim youths. Call it

> prejudice or an increasing trend of intolerance, a phenomenon now-so-
> common across India, was slowly beginning to grip the cosmopolitan,
> progressive bhodro Bengali culture. (Akhtar)

Urban spaces are predominantly hierarchically structured where Muslims occupy a position at the periphery of the hierarchy. They are 'the others', and as a result, their physical presence is controlled, suppressed and excluded. Gopal Guru expresses his views on upper castes' deep sense of casteist mentality as well as their attitude toward Dalits in the following way:

> The urban upper-caste bodies, with their minds stuffed with a deep sense
> of untouchability, did not offer the untouchables any moral advantage
> that would make them feel that there is more to the 'walking dirt' and that
> there is more to the body that exceeded beyond these static spaces. (Guru
> 91)

Taking Guru's point of view into consideration, it can be argued that the upper castes and bhadrok people are always concerned with their material interests, and by excluding Muslims, some of them demonstrate that their minds are completely filled with religious bigotry and Islamophobia. Salman Khurshid in *Visible Muslim Invisible Citizen: Understanding Islam in Indian Democracy* makes clear the visible identity of Muslims in public spaces. He argues, "The identity of the Muslim in our public space is often of a bearded man with a skullcap, or of a burqa-clad woman, greeting each other with 'asslam-u-alaikum' (peace be upon you) and bidding goodbye with 'khuda hafiz' (God be with you) or, more recently, the Arabized version of 'Allah hafiz'. But not all Muslims look like that, just as all Hindus do not dress in saffron or sport a bodi (hair tied at the back of the head in a ponytail)" (Khurshid 11-12). Muslims are seen as a homogeneous group, a single identity. The religious and cultural variations of them are exclusively overlooked. The report, "Living Reality of Muslims in West Bengal" clarifies some misconceptions regarding the identity of the Muslims:

> Firstly, Muslims are not part of a homogeneous group; the socio-
> economic characteristics of the Muslims of India follow more of a
> geographical pattern than a religion-cultural trajectory. Secondly, and
> relatedly, it appears that it is the region and State-specific socio-economic
> and political conditions that enable Muslims to avail of the social

opportunities in some areas but disable them from doing so elsewhere.

(Living Reality of Muslims in West Bengal 2)

The report focuses more on rural spaces. Urban spaces are more complex phenomena because of the way they are culturally and politically constructed. Gopal Guru argues, "Structuring and restructuring of a given space is the result of a specific action carried out by a historically dominant social group, which achieves its hegemonic purposes through a regulated exercise of civilizational violence against those social groups that are victims of this kind of violence" (82). The partition of India has shaped urban spaces differently. Because most of the middle class Muslims have migrated to Pakistan, therefore, a vacuum has been created. This vacuum spaces are occupied by the upper caste Hindus and rest of the lower class Muslims remain in some 'pocket' areas such as Rajabazar, Kidderpore, Metiaburz, Park Circus and similar locations in Kolkata. Apart from these 'pocket' areas, rest of the urban spaces are predominated controlled, structured and restructured by the majority community where entrance of minority community especially Muslims are restricted, controlled and forbidden. This is invisible hierarchy of spaces and it is experienced by each minority consciousness. Mohammad Reyaz argues,

> Before Partition, the cityscape was divided on the basis of class and not faith. Then there was a shift towards ghettoisation. [Rajabazar, Kidderpore, Park Circus, Metiabruz are some of the Muslim-dominated areas of the city.] Muslims who are educated, have studied in universities, do not want to live in ghettoes any more. But they have no choice, as Hindus do not want to let out their houses to them. (qtd. in Moumita Chaudhuri).

Manual Scavenging

A section of Dalit Muslims is destined to engage in manual scavenging labour. The number of this section is unknown. With the news of the deaths of Dalit Muslim scavengers, the grim reality of the scenario is exposed. On May 2021, two Muslim manual scavengers died during working at a site for the union government's Namami Gange project, in Patna's Beur locality (Ray). On 25 February 2021, four Muslim sanitation workers suffocated to death in a manhole near Kudghat in Kolkata (Ganguly). The

Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment reveals "As many as 282 people have died while cleaning sewers an pgd septic tanks in the country between 2016 and November 2019" (Singh). On 25 August 2014, Human Rights Watch has published a report titled "Cleaning Human Waste: 'Manual Scavenging,' Caste, and Discrimination in India" which highlights the Dalit manual scavengers:

> Within the caste structure, Dalits who work as manual scavengers are usually from the Hindu Valmiki sub-caste, which is further subdivided into regionally named groups such as Chuhada, Rokhi, Mehatar, Malkana, Halalkhor, and Lalbegi, or the Muslim Hela sub-caste. These communities are held at the bottom of the social hierarchy and, accordingly, face discrimination even from within the Dalit community. ("Cleaning Human Waste")

Kanthi Swaroop exposes the harsh truth of manual cleaning and argues that the Dalit people from Hindu, Muslim and Christian are doomed to their cultural occupations:

> Even today, the very existence of manual cleaning of sewers, septic tanks and manholes in our country, along with the alarming death rate among these workers, is an open secret. Across India, manual scavenging and its allied forms — the manual cleaning of dry latrines, sewers, manholes and septic tanks, removal of debris from sewage canals and any interaction with excreta — are openly prevalent, defined as a "cultural occupation" attached to a few so-called lower castes — Hindu Dalits, a few Dalit Muslims and some converted Dalit Christians (Swaroop).

Ahana Ganguly examines condition of Dalit Muslims in West Bengal and explains how the deaths of Dalit Muslims are systematically normalized and silenced:

> Dalit Muslims are predominantly engaged in the occupation of manual scavenging in Bengal. The "sociology of absences" systematically represses the particular experience of the Muslims, converted from untouchable Hindu sub-castes, and gradually normalises this organized silence. Bengal observes no exception; all the workers who died… from Dalit populated districts of Malda and Birbhum respectively. The influence of caste on the division of labor among the Muslim community is more complex. It cannot be traced to any religious sanctity, nevertheless making a

difference in the lived reality. Additionally, the prolonged delay of a fruitful resolution to the issue of rising unemployment in Bengal and financial scams down to the Panchayat level further jeopardised the status of the marginalised people of the state (Ganguly).

Amartya Sen, a Nobel laureate while releasing "Living reality of Muslims in West Bengal" states "Muslims constitute a very large proportion of the poor. The fact that Muslims in West Bengal are disproportionately poorer and more deprived in terms of living conditions is an empirical recognition..." (qtd. in Haque). Both the central and the state Government perform a strategic silence regarding issues of Muslims. In recent years, the political dynamic has shifted, and the present ruling government in India, which adheres to Hindutva ideology, has pushed for even greater exclusion of Muslims.

Conclusion

Dalit Muslims are just like Hindu Dalits in terms of their social position, economical condition and political participation. The BJP government, which is backed by Hindutva ideology, came to power in 2014, further marginalising Muslims, particularly Dalit Muslims. They are easily identified based on their clothing, religious affiliation, and social rank. They are lynched in broad daylight for suspicions of transporting beef and other items. An atmosphere of terror and hatred is created by Hindutva fanatics to confine the Muslim to the lowest social hierarchal position in terms of social, financial and political standings. Observing recent political development and treatment of Muslims in India, Christophe Jaffrelot argues, "India is gradually moving away from multiculturalism toward a type of 'ethnic democracy', exemplified by Israel and Sri Lanka, where minorities are treated as second-class citizens. As a result, India may well lose one of the key pillars of its soft power, the quality of its multiculturalism-and more alarmingly, perhaps also its adherence to the rule of law" (qtd. in Khurshid 51). Asghar Ali Engineer examines the Indian way of life in the context of secularism and religious pluralism:

> The Indian way of life is less individualistic and more communitarian. It is this communitarian way of life which creates serious problems for Indian secularism and religious pluralism. Every Indian citizen, though enjoying constitutional rights as an individual, behaves as a member of

some caste or community socially and politically. No major social or
political decision can be taken by individuals as individuals but only as
members of some caste, community or collectivity (Engineer 259).

Caste, jati, community, class, religion and ethnicity are basic collective identity of Indian
people. Inter-caste, inter-community or inter-religion identities, conflicts and
negotiations are equally prominent. In terms of backwardness and lack of cultural
capital, Dalit Muslims are in a vulnerable social position within the Muslim community
because of their lower caste/class Dalit background and their Muslim identity. They are
regarded as 'the other' within the Muslim social spectrum because of their
socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. However, there is no uniformity report in
India that exhibits the condition of the Dalit Muslims who are similarly vulnerable in
each of the states in India. The diversity and commonness of their conditions is the
subject matter for further research.

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