

Contesting Communalism(s): Preliminary Reflections on Pasmanda Muslim Narratives from North India

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***Abstract:** The purpose of this study is not to contribute directly to questions of why, how or what of communalism but rather to employ the extant body of knowledge to represent and interpret the articulations advanced by activists associated with the Pasmanda¹ movement—a movement of subordinated caste Muslims in India. The movement aspires to organize various subordinated Muslim castes,² which form about eighty percent of India’s largest Muslim minority, in order to challenge the hegemony of the high caste *ashrāf* or *sharīf* Muslims. The Pasmanda movement has complicated the politics around Islam and Muslim (minority) identity, which has been seen as monolithic in public discourse. The movement, claiming to represent the concerns of Bahujan Muslims drawn mostly from artisan or working-class background, has challenged the fascination of old Muslim elite with cultural and symbolic issues. In marked contrast, the Pasmanda activists have foregrounded organic social issues related to everyday struggles for survival thereby creating a new counterhegemonic discursive space.*



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¹ Pasmanda, a Persian term meaning ‘those who have been left behind’ refers to Backward-Shudra, Dalit-Atishudra and Adivasi (tribal or forest-dwelling) Muslim communities. In Arabic terminology, these sections among Muslims are pejoratively referred to as *ajlāf* (base or mean) and *arzāl* (degraded) in contrast to higher caste *ashrāf* or *sharīf* (honourable) Muslims.

² Indian Muslims comprise of about 705 *biradaris* (castes) according to the ASIs ‘People of India’ project (Jairath, 2011, p. 20).

Introduction

When Bashir cheats Ahmad, Ahmad thinks Bashir is a cheat. When Moti Lal cheats Ahmad, Ahmad thinks Hindus are cheats. Similarly, when the (Muslim) Bengal Government prohibits cow-killing in many places, as a preventive measure against riots, protests are feeble and anti-government; when a Congress government takes similar steps, protests are strident and anti-Hindu, and the cry is raised (and believed) that Islam is being emasculated and down-trodden (Smith, 1943, p. 208).

The epigraph from Wilfred Cantwell Smith's classic *Modern Islam in India*, written in the crucible of the anti-colonial struggle in the 1940s, sets the tone for this discussion. Smith clearly indicates how similar events of conflict are interpreted variously when the religious location of the performers is considered. So, an episode of deception in the interpersonal domain where the protagonists belong to the same religious community is treated differently when compared to one where they belong to a different one. The same logic applies to a bureaucratic move where the government is perceived to be managed by a political party supposedly representing the interests of the adversarial community. The epigraph clearly indicates the deep-seated suspicion between 'Hindus' and 'Muslims' and provides a glimpse into what could be said to constitute the field of 'communalism' in India. An early attempt by Smith to define communalism holds it as "that ideology which emphasizes as the social, political, and economic unit the group of adherents of each religion, and emphasizes the distinction, even the antagonism, between such groups; the words 'adherent' and 'religion' being taken in the most nominal sense" (p. 185). A relatively recent review (Upadhyay & Robinson, 2012) posits that 'communalism has been commonly understood in the literature as conflicts over secular issues between religious communities, particularly between Hindus and Muslims' and that most 'deliberations around communalism' link it with 'the colonial period' such that 'the concept has acquired a *definite* and *definitive* association' (p. 35; emphasis in original). While acknowledging the empirical evidence of inter-religious conflicts in the precolonial period, they propose that those instances 'cannot be said to have taken the form of full-blown communalism' (p. 35). However, as the definitions above suggest, communalism is variously presented as a concept ('ideology'), phenomenon (violence/riots/pogroms) or even as an attribute ('full-blown communalism'), each with porous borders that witness frequent sliding of meaning from one element to another.³

³ Pathan quips at the "peculiarities of scholarship on 'communalism'": 'Communalism' seems to suffer from contradictory characteristics: It is a modern phenomenon which is the result of colonialism or one which can be dated back to age-old conflicts between the Hindus and Muslims since the medieval era. It is a product of modernity versus a remnant of 'primitivism' in modern India. It has been considered the nemesis of secularism or the means to achieve secularism; a lack of secularism as well as an excess of it. 'Communalism' is the result of the failure of education or the regrettable success of Western education. It is majoritarianism, but politics of a similar characteristic have been expressed by minorities as well (2014, p. 1).

Another work (Berenschot, 2011, pp. 19-38) catalogues six approaches employed to explain communalism in India: namely, the primordialist, ideological, instrumentalist, social-constructivist, social-psychological and relational. The ‘primordialist approach’ concentrates on the force of ethnicity to form one’s world-view and enable social action. This is by and large an essentialist view as it construes primordial attachments to be an intrinsic part of human nature unamenable to alteration. It foregrounds a thick conception of cultural difference and argues that solidarities necessarily forge around these cultural markers and the process of Othering is a natural state of affairs. Hence, present day riots are explained by relating them to past conflicts between religious groups. One may note that this is also the classic colonial position and is often invoked by religious nationalists, both Hindu and Muslim alike (Gaborieau, 1985; Robinson, 2000, 2008). The ‘ideological approach’ explains the recurrent incidence of communal violence to the pervasiveness of communal ideology in the public sphere. In the contemporary period the proponents of Hindutva and Islamism represent this approach. Those building their politics on communal ideology concentrate on ‘organisation’ and ‘propaganda’ to serve their ends (Ahmad, 2010; Chandra, 1984). The ‘instrumentalist approach’ articulates communal violence as a political strategy that serves the interest of powerful elites. Paul Brass, who has noted the presence of ‘institutionalised riot systems’ in major towns where communal violence has been endemic stresses ‘the functional utility of the persistence of Hindu-Muslim riots in India for a wide variety of interests, groups, institutions, and organizations, including ultimately the Indian state’ (2003, p. 24). The close relation between elections and the occurrence of communal violence has also been emphasized (Wilkinson, 2004). The proponents of ‘social-constructivist approach’ argue that communal identities are social constructs. In their reading communal antagonism is not a ‘given’ reality but has formed over time through a complex interaction between state policies (colonial and post-colonial), political manoeuvrings and wider socio-economic developments. The constructivists have especially foregrounded the role of discursive frameworks (cultural interpretative systems) in making sense of communal violence (Hansen, 1999; Pandey, 1990). The ‘social-psychological approach’ privileges the actor’s point of view and focuses on the motivations and drives of those who participate in violence. In short, riots occur because they serve various psychological needs (Kakar, 2000). The last one, the ‘relational approach’ underscores the shifting patterns of social interaction between and within conflicting communities and locates violence in the network of relations that produce solidarity and fragmentation in society. This approach encompasses economic, civil society and institutional arguments (Basu, 2015; Engineer, 1995; Varshney, 2002).

Clearly, explaining communalism has been a prolific academic enterprise⁴ and one could tend to concur with the suggestion that ‘no single causal explanation of Hindu-Muslim riots and anti-Muslim pogroms will suffice to explain all or even most instances of such collective violence in India’ (Brass, 2003, p. 22). While most of the literature on communalism has been ‘centrally

⁴ See Heehs, 1997 and Upadhyay & Robinson, 2012 for useful reviews.

concerned with causes' (*why?*) (Pandey, 1990, p. 12), Brass and Pathan focus on the production of riots (*how?*) (2003, p. 16) and the conceptualization of communalism (*what?*) (2009, p. 2) respectively. Here, the attempt is to explore through the Pasmada narratives how the issue of communalism is discussed in the *margins* of the Muslim social space and the conceptual problems—role of orientalism in knowledge production on South Asian Islam/Muslims, the questions of subaltern solidarity and agency, the process of community reform and democratisation—that are posed for the Pasmada movement in particular and social-scientific knowledge generally.

Despite the definitional ambiguities associated with 'communalism,' one may note that historically the term underwent a change in the emphasis on meaning—from the earlier colonial references to sectional demands by religious communities to the later references to episodes of Hindu-Muslim violence⁵ (Pandey, 1990, pp. 6-9). In this space, the usage of the term 'communalism' broadly implies the latter meaning. In terms of philosophical and methodological assumptions, the study may be construed as a constructivist and situated work.⁶ In this sense, it would be useful to revisit Foucault's relationality between power and knowledge '[such] that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations' (cited in Howarth, 2002). In 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' Foucault marks a distinction between 'traditional' and 'effective' history with the latter 'being without constants' (1984, p. 87). If the practitioner of effective history or the genealogist "refuses to extend his faith in metaphysics, if he listens to history, he finds that there is 'something altogether different' behind things: not a timeless and essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms" (p. 78). Once the supra-historical and objectivist pretensions of traditional history are done away with, the genealogist is left with the task of exploring the historical emergence and formation of discourses, categories, social formations and so on. But since all discourses are constituted within the play of domination and power a genealogist also has to show 'possibilities excluded by the dominant logics of historical development. In this way, the genealogist discloses new possibilities foreclosed by existing interpretations' (Howarth, 2002, pp. 72-73). In this sense, the 'final trait of effective history is its affirmation of knowledge as perspective' (Foucault, 1984, p. 90). It is to the Pasmada perspectives on communalism that I will now turn.

⁵ 'We know from etymological reconstruction that the term 'communalism' comes into being in the 1920's. Before this, the term 'communal' is used to refer to a type of reservations and a type of representation' (Pathan, 2014, p. 4).

⁶ I come from the Muslim julāha (weaver) caste and see my role as a situated interlocutor for the movement.

I Pasmanda Discourse and the Question of Communalism.⁷

Most contemporary social pathologies, including communalism, can be traced back to the encounter of the Indian subcontinent with British colonialism and particularly the developments in the nineteenth century. That does not mean that the pre-colonial period was devoid of social divisions or conflicts (Bayly, 1985) but that the colonial-orientalist knowledge/pedagogical project—particularly aided by the technologies of decennial census/enumeration/classification and ethnography—reconfigured social knowledge and consequently social relations with radical novelty (Cohn, 2004; Dirks, 2001). In comparison with earlier regimes, three particular features marked out the efforts of colonial governmentality. First, the emergence of the importance of numbers (Appadurai, 1993), sharpening of cultural boundaries and the construction of an all India ‘Hindu’ or ‘Muslim’ community by the end of nineteenth century. As Peter van der Veer remarks ‘The odd effect of the census was that it simultaneously cut the society up into infinitesimal units and yet created a huge Hindu majority, together with several minorities, of which the most significant was the Muslim. Political elites, who had to respond to the new facts of life, tried both to enlarge the communities they represented and to define their boundaries more clearly’ (1994, p. 26). Two, the installation of a remarkably centralized and interventionist state which was “more self-consciously ‘neutral’—standing *above* society, and not really part of it—than any previous state” (Pandey, 1990, p. 16). In this sense, the colonial self-image was that of an impartial evaluator of claims advanced by various communities based on religion, caste, gender, language, region, and so on. And, three, the treatment of communalism as ‘a subcontinental version of nationalism’ by colonial historiography was undergirded with the assumption that ‘nationalism, nation-ness, was a Western attribute, unlikely to be found or easily replicated in the East’ (Pandey, 1990, p. 1). Obviously, the caricaturing of subcontinental populations as traditional, passionate or communitarian in contrast to modern, rationalist or individualist imagination of colonial power was an important element in the legitimacy building exercise of the regime. However, even when the nationalist historiography protested against the colonial assumption of communalism being a natural state of affairs by pointing at the British divide-and-rule policy or colonialism as a smokescreen for materialist interests it shared a common assumption with colonial historiography: the givenness of communalism as a tangible phenomenon with readily identifiable causes and its Others—rationalism, liberalism, secularism or nationalism (pp. 12-13). It is within the colonial discursive-political matrix—the emphasis on numbers and privileging of religion as the overarching identity, the contest of claims and counterclaims for recognition between various communities, and the portrayal of natives as incapable of modernity—that the socio-political struggles of the marginalized communities may be located.

In terms of the Muslim social space in northern India, the *julāhās* (or weavers) were probably the first among the disenfranchised Muslim castes to organize themselves from at least the early

⁷ For brief overviews of the Pasmanda movement see Ansari, 2013, 2018.

twentieth century onward. Considered socially inferior by the higher caste *ashrāf* Muslims⁸ and economically marginalized due to colonial policies, they sought incessantly a course of action where they could fight for their social dignity and political empowerment. In a situation overdetermined by ‘the emerging nationalist political environment, the late colonial state and the rising tide of communal politics’ (Rai, 2012, p. 61) the Muslim weavers named themselves ‘Momin’ or ‘Ansaris’ and formed the All India Momin Conference (AIMC) in 1926. The AIMC functioned as a pressure group to negotiate reform and politics. One may suggest that Momin politics (1920-1947) (or the ‘first wave’ of Pasmanda movement) suffers from a few paradoxical trajectories. At the level of the social, the quotidian humiliation confronted by the Muslim weavers was sought to be transcended through Islamization (or *ashrafization*),⁹ that is the imitation of *sharīf* culture as a sign of social respect and status advancement. The process of Islamization, it is suggested, launched the Momins into the field of exclusivist religious identity and posed a concern in terms of their claims to contest communalism which fed on such religious symbolisms (Rai, 2012, p. 61). In contrast, at the level of politics the AIMC strived to forge a ‘*razil* collective’ manifested in their efforts to forge the solidarity of all subordinated Muslim castes,¹⁰ in order to contest the separatist *ashrāf* politics. In this respect, particularly from the provincial elections in 1937 onwards, the AIMC increasingly challenged the ‘two-nation’ theory—which construed Hindus and Muslims as two nations having irreconcilable interests—and the politics of Pakistan advanced by the Muslim League (ML). The AIMC framed the ML as an outfit representing the interests of the higher Muslim castes/classes and interrogated the legitimacy of their claim to represent the subordinated Muslim castes, particularly Momins, which formed the majority within the Muslim population—the *aksariyat* (majority) within the *aqalliyat* (minority) (Ghosh, 2010, p.

⁸ ‘Muslims of weaver descent were regarded as among the lowest of the *biradaris* and in many areas forced labour was taken from them freely. The zamindars of Gaya and Shahabad, for example, employed them as customary porters. An illegal tax, *kathiari*, was exacted on their handlooms by zamindars, and a royalty was levied on the net profit of a loom per month, called *masarfa*. In many villages zamindars claimed an illegal house tax known as *ghar-dwari*. The stories and proverbs that circulated both in Urdu and colloquial dialects at the expense of Julahas were common to U. P., Bengal and Bihar, and were widely perceived as confirmation of their oppression by the *sharīf*’ (Ghosh, 2010, p. 90).

⁹ ‘... ‘*Ashrāfization*’ however, is more than just gaining social status and prestige. It is a means of moral and religious improvement that involves living a more devout Muslim life... On the economic level, a family aspiring for status in the modern context must keep women in seclusion, demonstrating that they earn enough money that the women do not have to work... On the village level, *ashrāfization* often involves Muslims abandoning what are interpreted to be so-called ‘Hindu customs’ In contemporary post-partition Indo-Pakistan, there are more and more Muslims who are differentiating themselves from their non-Muslim neighbors. The *ashrāfization* process... involving low-status Muslims (*juḷāhās*) changing their names to *Anṣārīs* is a way to consolidate the minority Muslim community and distance it from the Hindu majority.’ (Buehler, 2012, p. 241).

¹⁰ ‘The attempt of the Momin Conference was to enlist the support of other backward Muslim communities. The idea was to build a solidarity to dislodge the ‘capitalist’ leadership of the Muslim League... The Momin movement, then aimed at the uplift of not only Muslims but also of Raen (vegetable sellers and growers), Mansoor (cotton carders), Idrisi (tailors) and Quraish (butcher) communities’ (Ghosh, 2010, p. 103).

109). Interestingly, while the Momin ideologues critiqued the caste/class composition of the Muslim League leadership, they were arguably willing to overlook the higher caste/class composition of the Congress Party¹¹ (Ansari, 2011, p. 26). The Momin Conference was put in a tight spot when from the late 1930s onwards the role of Congress functionaries, particularly at the lower level, in fomenting communal riots against Muslims—the overwhelming number of victims being Momin themselves—was becoming clear (Rai, 2012, p. 64). In this sense, there were demands within the AIMC to maintain a distance from both the ML and Congress politics and the movement witnessed splits and internal rifts during this turbulent period (Ghosh, 2010, p. 61-64). In fact, two important Momin leaders Abdul Jalil and Asim Bihari joined the Muslim League in 1944 (Ghosh, 2010, p. 64).

However, Abdul Qaiyum Ansari (1905-1973), one of the most prominent leaders of the Momin movement, held on to an anti-ML position till the very end. Ansari, in his articulation on communalism, makes a distinction between ‘communalism’ and ‘communal riots.’ In his view while communalism is ‘a way of thought and continuous operation’, the communal riot ‘is the logical result of this operation’ (Azizi, 2004, p. 75). Communalism is that ‘preparatory period that is wrongly regarded as the peaceful times’ and when ‘power-hungry communalist leaders cunningly remain engaged in amassing the heap of gunpowder at another place...through writings, speeches, reports and rumours and await proper time to set fire’ (p. 75). Marking a broad distinction between communalism as ideology and communalism as event, Ansari asserts that ‘the ignominious and accursed riots cannot be prevented without demolition of the castle of communalism’ (p. 75). In Ansari’s view the ‘origin of the communal bias, massacre and plunder starts from the Britishers’ two-nation theory and consequently the birth of Pakistan’ (p. 76). While emphasizing the centrality of communalism in his own political struggle Ansari says:

I have always fought against communalism in the field. I have greatly sacrificed for this...On one side, I had to face the oppression of the British government just after entry into the political life. On the other, I set my face against Mr. Jinnah’s two-nation theory as well as League’s communalism. Mr. Jinnah had claimed that with the establishment of Pakistan, all the Muslim problems would be solved. Communalism won, and Pakistan was

¹¹ There could be two probable reasons for this. One, the ashraf class which led the ML was perceived as the immediate oppressor by the AIMC and therefore the sharpest critique was reserved for it. In a similar vein, one may point out that while Dr B. R. Ambedkar was critical of both the Congress and ML his critique of the former was particularly strong as it was manned by the Hindu higher castes/classes whom the Dalits construed as the immediate oppressors. Secondly, as Brass puts it ‘the Muslim League dominated by elite Muslim leaders, had no appeal to the momins whereas the Congress, with its Gandhian symbol of the spinning wheels with its pledges of support to the indigenous handicrafts appealed to the economic interest of the Muslim handloom weavers’ (quoted in Ansari, 1989, p. 89). However, Rai disagrees: ‘But more than the Gandhian programmes, the Congress promise, at least at face value, of engaging all classes by eliminating elite dominance proved more attractive for the Momins as well. In fact, the internalisation of discrimination generation after generation and attribution of inferior status would have been more decisive than proximity to the Gandhian programme in deciding the community’s political affiliation’ (2012, p. 64).

founded in course of time. But the question is: were the total problems of Muslims cured and solved? Not to speak of the solutions to all the problems, even a single problem has not been solved as yet (p. 79).

In another place Ansari opines:

If we have to put an end to communalism, the idea of two-nation theory should be buried. RSS and Jana Sangh are the largest banner bearers of Jinnah's two-nation theory in this country. So, I have been emphasizing on the matter that all parties functioning on communal ground, should be legally banned whether these are RSS, Jana Sangh, Jamaat-e-Islami or Muslim League. But I do not think that mere legal ban on communal parties will solve the problem... Today we see that there is no department of life fully free from communalism. Therefore, on the national level, a countrywide movement is needed along with ban on communal parties (p. 83-84).

Ansari, a champion of composite nationalism (*muttahida qawmiyat*), positioned himself against the forces of religious nationalisms and saw the Momins as simultaneously inhabiting 'Indian Brotherhood' and 'Islamic Brotherhood': 'Our position here is threefold: firstly we are Indians, then we are Muslims and again we are Momin Ansars' (Ansari, 1989, pp. 20-21). While seeing the 'communal issue' as 'basically the problem of law and order' to be handled by the administration, he brings to relief the role of 'known professional communalists' in the majority community for fomenting riots and inciting violence against Muslims. However, he stresses that 'it cannot be denied that there are also professional communalists among Muslims whose motto of life is to endanger and damage the nation' (Azizi, 2004, p. 87). For Ansari 'Communalism had to be fought on all fronts, be it of the minority community or of the majority community' (Ansari, 1989, p. 31).

In 1942 the *Hindustan Standard* carried a report of third Champaran Momin Conference where Ansari 'laid much stress on the Hindu-Muslim unity and asked the poor, whether Muslims or Hindus, to unite against their exploiters, the rich, be they Hindus or Muslims, who were united in protecting their own interests by oppressing the poor to whichever community they belonged' (Azizi, 2004, p. 40). Ansari also offered a vibrant critique of the 'educational system, another legacy of the Britishers' for 'a number of text-books tended to create a feeling of hatred among one community against another.' In his view 'the educational system itself should be thoroughly reoriented to foster the spirit of nationalism among every Indian' (Ansari, 1989, p. 22). In another space he says 'some people simply raise the question: what is communalism? My clear-cut answer is that everything that comes in the way of being a nation is communalism. Our basic trouble is that trifle loyalties dominate over us' (Azizi, 2004, p. 74). Overall, he advocated strong administrative measures, mass movements and pedagogical interventions to offset communalism.

The second wave of the Pasmada movement¹² (1990s onwards) continued with most of the themes already introduced by the AIMC but with a few shifts. One, the term ‘Pasmada’ has replaced ‘Momin’ to refer to disenfranchised Muslim castes.¹³ Two, there is a marked influence of Bahujan discourse (Rodrigues, 2008) in the vocabulary of the movement. For instance, as opposed to the ashrafized tendencies to fictitiously connect to Arabic historical figures and surnames, there is more emphasis on the indigenous roots (*moolniwāsi*) in the present phase of Pasmada identity formation. In the context of communalism Ali Anwar says:

We see that the politics of communalism, fuelled by both Hindu and Muslim elites, is aimed at dividing us, making us fight among ourselves, so that the elites continue to rule over us as they have been doing for centuries. This is why we in the Mahaz have been seeking to steer our people from emotional politics to politics centred on issues of survival and daily existence and social justice, and for this we have been working with non-Muslim Dalit and Backward Caste movements and groups to struggle jointly for our rights and to oppose the politics of communalism fuelled by Hindu and Muslim 'upper' caste elites (Anwar & Sikand, 2005).

Ali Anwar’s articulation clearly construes communalism as an epiphenomenon that masks the machinations of ruling caste elite across religions to maintain their hegemony. In order to challenge that he emphasizes on a ‘politics centred on issues of survival and daily existence and social justice’ and forging a counter-hegemonic solidarity of subordinated castes across religions. The Pasmada slogan ‘*Dalit-Pichda ek Saman, Hindu Ho ya Musalman*’ (All Dalit-Backwards are alike, whether they be Hindu or Muslim) captures this radical notion of horizontal solidarity succinctly (Ansari, 2013). In conversations with other Pasmada activists I discovered that such readings of communalism were shared quite widely by most activists in the Mahaz.¹⁴

Hashim Pasmada,¹⁵ a power-loom worker from Mau (Uttar Pradesh) and associated with the Mahaz since 2004, says that ‘when we were very young, about ten years back, we used to feel that

¹² The caste movement among Indian Muslims is now consolidating with various organizations springing up in various jurisdictions (For instance: All India Pasmada Muslim Mahaz (AIPMM) and All India United Muslim Morcha (AIUMM) in Bihar; Pasmada Front in Uttar Pradesh; *Uttar Bango Anagrasar Muslim Sangram Samiti* in West Bengal; and All India Muslim OBC Organization (AIMOBCO) in Maharashtra). Moreover, some of these organizations have branches in Jharkhand, Karnataka, and Madhya Pradesh and so on (Vora, 2008, pp. 45-46). While many Backward and Adivasi Muslims have been recognized as OBCs and STs, the Dalit Muslims owing to Clause 3 of Presidential Order 1950 have been kept out of the SC list.

¹³ The term ‘Pasmada’ was coined by Ali Anwar, the founder of the All India Pasmada Muslim Mahaz in 1998.

¹⁴ All interviews were conducted in Hindustani and the translations into English are mine.

¹⁵ Personal interview in Mau (Uttar Pradesh), May 29, 2013.

these are Hindu-Muslim riots.’ But the Mau riots (2005), which Hashim experienced first-hand, altered his views dramatically. He discovered that the victims of the riots were all Pasmanda Muslims and ‘none of the Syeds were killed, not even one Pathan was killed.’ Holding the local Muslim mafia-don and politician Mukhtar Ansari¹⁶ as equally responsible for riots he says, ‘the riot happened because of him (Mukhtar Ansari) and also because of *savarna* (high castes) from the other (Hindu) community...*jo dono taraf ka ashrafiya tabka hai unhi ki milibhagat se ye sab dange ho rahe hain*’ (The riots are happening because of the collusion of higher castes from both the communities). Hashim sees a more sinister plan at work and feels that the riots are being deliberately manufactured to damage the solidarity of lower castes across religions since the Mandal moment. He feels it is not in the interest of the higher caste Muslims if the Pasmanda sections become aware that they are now entitled to reservations in the government jobs along with Hindu OBCs. Hence, the emotional riot discourse comes handy for the elites in obliterating the issues of empowerment. ‘Brother, whether it is Shankaracharya (Brahmin) or Imam Bukhari (Syed)...they decide sitting in the same room what each has to say...and then they come and give speeches, and the riots start. Afterwards, they have tea together.’

I met Mukhtar Ahmad,¹⁷ an activist with the Mahaz and from the *Julaha* caste, just a week after Khalid Mujahid¹⁸ was buried. Mukhtar looked extremely saddened with what he thought was a cold-blooded custodial murder of Mujahid. Khalid Mujahid, Mukhtar informed me, was from a neighbourhood of lower caste Muslim *Dafalis* (tambourine players) in Madiakon town and belonged to the Muslim *Halalkhor* (sweeper) caste. Citing another murder of DCP Zia-ul-Haque,¹⁹ who belonged to the *Saeen/Faqeer* (mendicant) caste, Mukhtar complained of the lackadaisical response from the Muslim politicians, mostly higher castes, to these tragedies. ‘*Agar aaj humari biradari Dalit quota men shamil hoti to poore Hindustan mein bhoochal mach gaya hota* (Had our community been included in the SC quota today, the entire country would have felt the tremors).’ Mukhtar here indicates at the possibility of an increase in representation of Dalit Muslims had legislative seats been reserved for them just like Hindu, Sikh and Buddhist Dalits. Mukhtar suggests that with the increase in cases where Muslim youth have been picked up by intelligence/security agencies on alleged charges of terrorism, Muslim organisations headed by ashraf sections, like the Ulema Council, have got a fresh lease of life. ‘*Yeh hamare mein RSS hain*’

¹⁶ Hashim quickly adds that despite using the surname ‘Ansari’ mostly used by subordinated weaver caste Mukhtar Ansari was actually a higher caste Muslim Sheikh.

¹⁷ Personal interview in Mau (Uttar Pradesh), May 30, 2013.

¹⁸ Khalid Mujahid was an under-trial who was arrested in 2007 in connection with bomb blasts in UP earlier that year. Mujahid died on 19 May 2013 when he was being escorted by a team of the Uttar Pradesh state police from a court in Faizabad to Lucknow jail. His death while under police escort was seen as a clear case of custodial killing (Chishti, 2013; PUDR, 2013; TNN, 2013).

¹⁹ DSP Zia-ul-Haque was shot dead on March 2, 2013 in the constituency of mafia-don turned politician Raja Bhaiya. Senior police officer Haque had prepared a list of cases against the MLA. Raja Bhaiya, whose real name is Raghuraj Pratap Singh, was accused of conspiring in the murder of Zia-ul-Haque (Chaturvedi, 2013; Khan, 2013).

(These organizations like Ulema Council are just like RSS amongst us). They are the ones that benefit. See whenever they unite the Muslims, the Hindus get united too. And these organizations profiteer from that while it is we (the Pasmānda) who face the brunt.’ Mukhtar recalls:

When Yogi Adityanath visited Azamgarh a person from the (Muslim) butcher community (*chikwa*) was killed. On that issue none of the (Muslim) higher castes launched a movement, neither did they agitate...His (Yogi Adityanath’s) bodyguard had fired at him. This occurred about three years back. Nothing happened. Now take the example of the Ulema Council...this happened day before yesterday. They went on a rampage (*tod-phod*) in *Rani ki Sarai* (a neighbourhood). But the cases were filed against us (the Pasmānda). Another instance is that of the ‘truck episode.’ Here in Mau. I am an eyewitness to that tragedy. A truck which came from Hajipur had entered the city. It ran over four youths and they died. After that the local people got furious and went berserk. The police fired and an additional four youths got killed. Cases were subsequently filed. In one of the cases even the DM and SP were accused. The local (Muslim) elite however worked closely with the government to save the skin of the big officers. But our young people (Pasmānda) are still accused. Whenever an incident happens these people (the higher caste Muslims) make a hue and cry over relief for a few days but after that our people are left to fend for themselves. This is what I have been experiencing from the beginning...Our *ulema* (ashraf religious leaders) just keep us involved in emotional issues and we pay the price...

In my field visits Saroj, the resident of Lohra Taqiya (near Azamgarh) and belonging to the Muslim *Jogi* (mendicant) caste, narrated a revealing story.²⁰ The locality where he lives has about hundred huts belonging to the jogi families and it is contrasted by the locality of high caste *Pathans* that live in *pucca* (bricked) houses at some distance. The *Pathans*, according to Saroj, do not intermix with the jogis and view them as inferiors (*‘hum ko sahi nazar se nahin dekhte hain’*) and only fit to work as labourers for them. He recounts the horror of the night when the village was looted by the neighbouring Hindus (*‘Chamar, Yadav, Khatik’*) in the early 1990s. The tension started with the sacrifice of a buffalo by the pathan community on the occasion of Eid-ul-Zuha. The religious sensibilities of the local Hindu community were hurt (they probably thought that the holy cow was slaughtered) and they attacked the jogi locality. On asked why the jogi locality and not the pathan locality was attacked, Saroj said ‘They (pathans) are powerful (*dabang*). We are weak. Everything was looted. The door, utensils, cows, buffaloes...’ On top of that the pathans, Saroj believes, actually approached the government and other donors in Saudi Arabia seeking compensation on behalf of Muslims. According to Saroj none of the funds received were ever shared with the jogis, the actual victims, and all the compensation was cornered by the pathans. ‘They (the pathans) said to the government that our village was looted and made houses for themselves (from the money received)...*jogiyon ka gaon lut gaya hai kah ke saara rupya daba ke baith gaye.*’

²⁰ Personal interview in Azamgarh (Uttar Pradesh), June 1 2013.

Ali Anwar, in one of his recent lectures, urged the Pasmada sections to be cautious from Muslim communalists. ‘Someone plans from the old Hyderabad city...someone utters an irresponsible statement from Dilli 6...someone uses the sermons from the religious pulpit (*mimbar*) irresponsibly. All this is counterproductive. There is a reaction.’²¹ Noor Hasan Azad, a senior activist from the Muslim *Pamadia* (folk singers) caste says that while ‘Babri Masjid may have been an issue of all Muslims’ but ‘the politics that happened over it is actually Muslim upper caste politics. They use mosques, especially Friday sermons, for their politics. This is a real threat to Islam’ (Azad & Ansari, 2011). Waqar Hawari, an activist from the *Dhobi* (launderers) caste also says: ‘While Muslim politicians like Imam Bukhari and Syed Shahabuddin add the *jodan* (starter yoghurt), it is left to the Hindu fundamentalists to prepare the yoghurt of communalism. Both of them are responsible. We oppose the politics of both Hindu and Muslim fanaticism.’²² In another recent interview Ali Anwar opined:

Muslims are being specially targeted for a purpose...and those who are being killed are Pasmada Muslims. You can see for yourself...those who were lynched in Jharkhand they were Pasmada Muslims, those who were killed in Mewat were Pasmada Muslims, Najeeb who was abducted from JNU is a Pasmada...Look at the history of violence. Those who live in protected localities, those in possession of licensed weapons, or those who live in posh colonies...they are very rarely victims. Those who sleep in the footpaths, those who walk back from the railway station or the bus stand...they are the ones who are attacked (Maududi & Ansari, 2017).

Tanvir Alam,²³ a Patna based activist from *julāhā* caste, feels that most of the riots are engineered in those locations where the Pasmada sections are doing well economically. He goes on at length to describe the Bhagalpur riots (1989) and says that ‘All the *Marwaris* (Hindu merchants) have taken over the business. Those who were entrepreneurs earlier (the Pasmada) have been reduced to the labouring class now.’ He opines that previously one used to witness ‘communal riots’ where ‘there used to be riots between two communities (*samaj*)’ but increasingly we are witnessing what could be dubbed as ‘people versus administration (*prashasan-public danga*) riot.’ In this new form of violence, he feels that the police (*khaki vardi*) are now killing Muslims with impunity. Irshad Ahmad,²⁴ a journalist from the *Mansoori* (cotton carder) caste and on the editorial board of the journal *Pasmada Awaaz*, argues that the fear of communalism will not cease until the Muslims are treated as a consolidated vote-bank by secular parties. According to him when various Muslim

²¹ Ali Anwar’s lecture ‘Political Perspective of Country and Role of Opposition,’ Organized by Jamaat-e-Islami Hind, Conference Hall Markaz Jamaat-e-Islami Hind, New Delhi, August 5, 2017.

²² Personal interview in Azamgarh (Uttar Pradesh), June 1, 2013.

²³ Personal interview in Patna (Bihar), May 25, 2013.

²⁴ Personal interview in Patna (Bihar), May 27, 2013.

castes start voting for different political parties ‘that will be a perfect and secure day for Muslims.’ Ahmad feels that a community is democratically underdeveloped if it votes any particular party as ‘a chunk’. So, ‘when Pasmanda movement will become strong, secularism will also get strengthened. The fear of communalism will also be minimized.’

If one were to delineate the key issues flagged in the Pasmanda discursive space with respect to communalism then the following could be suggested: communalism as an antidote to the values of nationalism/secularism/rationalism, communalism as an ideology and event, the role of elite hand and riot specialists, communalism as a law and order concern, the symbiotic relation between Hindu and Muslim communalisms, the economic dimension behind riots and so on. Also, the spheres of national, faith and caste communities are sought to be reconciled at one level, and at another a counterhegemonic solidarity of subordinated castes across religions is advanced as a strategy. Such disparate elements clearly indicate the complex reality and negotiations that the subaltern sections like the Pasmanda confront and engage with. Drawing from the Pasmanda narratives and the social-scientific knowledge on communalism, there are three issues that probably require further reflection: a) The relationship between orientalism, caste and ‘Muslim communalism’; b) The question of the equivalence between competing Hindu and Muslim communalisms; c) The question of elite restorative violence, low caste foot soldiers and their agency.

II Three key issues

A. Deorientalizing the Caste-Communal Debate

Menon connects the ‘pursuit of that obscure object of desire—modernity’ with the simultaneous ‘repression of the persistence of the primordial’ in modern India’s story (2007, p. 60). In his view it is the exigent need to construct the ‘secular self’ in the context of the postcolonial ‘national project’ that may be responsible for ‘a reluctance to engage with what is arguably an intimate relation between the discourses of caste, secularism and communalism’ (p. 61). The following hypothesis is offered to explain communalism:

That Hinduism is a hierarchical, inegalitarian structure is largely accepted, but what has gone unacknowledged in academic discourse is the casual brutality and organized violence that it practices towards its subordinate sections. What we need to explore is Hindu-Hindu violence as much as Hindu-Muslim violence; and acknowledge that the former is historically prior. The question needs to be: how has the employment of violence against an internal Other, that is, the lower caste, been transformed into one of aggression against an external Other, that is, the Muslim (the question being both relational as well as historical). *Is communalism a deflection of the central, unaddressed issue of violence and inegalitarianism within the Hindu religion? Is communalism the highest stage of casteism?* (p. 61; emphasis in original)

Bringing in historical evidence Menon suggests that ‘in the period from 1850–1947, communal violence has always followed periods of lower caste mobility and assertion’ (p. 65). The crux of his argument is that the internal challenge of upwardly mobile subordinated Hindu caste groups to higher caste Hindus from the mid-nineteenth century onwards was resolved by the closing of ranks on symbolic issues like cow protection and deflecting this resistance towards the Muslims (p. 65). Patel too concurs with this view and while reflecting on the postcolonial Indian context posits: ‘The emergence of communalism as a substantial political force is a direct consequence of ruling groups (i.e. upper castes controlling social, cultural, and economic power), and especially the bureaucracy, desirous, in an attempt to perpetuate their dominance, to ride two horses—i.e. to *mobilize* the lower castes and at the same time *control* their political aspirations’ (1996, pp. 171-172). In a sense, both Menon and Patel indicate how the internal democratic challenge to high caste hegemony is contingently resolved by suborning the lower castes into a homogeneous communal discourse and associated violence. As Ambedkar noted ‘A caste has no feeling that it is affiliated to other castes except when there is a Hindu-Muslim riot. On all other occasions each caste endeavours to segregate itself and to distinguish itself from other castes’ (2002, p. 267).

However, while the role of caste in the construction of Hindu communalism has received scholarly attention, the play of caste and Muslim-Muslim violence in the construction of ‘Muslim communalism’ is left unaddressed in most discussions. How is the challenge that the assertive subordinated Muslim castes posed to high caste ashraf hegemony in British India, for instance through the Momin Movement, related to the construction of Muslim communalism? Is Muslim communalism also connected to Muslim-Muslim violence, in the sense that internal inegalitarianism or violence within Indian Islam—for instance, against subordinated castes, women, and dissenters—was sought to be managed by the ashraf elite through the *othering* of Hindus?²⁵ In fact, the role of caste, and Muslim caste in particular, in the construction of competing

²⁵ There is some evidence that Muslim higher castes have resorted to spectacular violence against subordinated Muslim castes in both the British period and the post-1947 phase. One work indicates how the members of Momin Conference clashed with the Muslim League after 1937 election results: ‘In places like Kanpur, relations between the Muslim League and the Momin Conference were becoming worse. In a 4 September meeting of Jamait-ul-Mominin, the Muslim League was severely criticised. The very next day, a clash occurred between some Momins and “Muslims” resulting in the death of one Momin, three days later. It was alleged that the Mohammedan *gundas* of the Muslim League were responsible for that’ (Rai, 2012, p. 65). My fieldwork in Naugawan Sadat town in district Jotiba Phule Nagar (Amroha), Uttar Pradesh too revealed clashes between the subordinated caste Muslims with landed Shia Syeds during the provincial elections held in 1946. Interestingly, the Syeds employed the ‘Hindu’ Dalits from valmiki (sanitation workers) caste as foot soldiers in the attacks on Muslim julahas (weavers), qassabs (butchers) and lohars (carpenters and ironsmiths). I must add that the status of valmiki and the Muslim subordinated castes mentioned above were just like ryots and they offered their services or labour to the Syed landlords in exploitative terms. For a relatively recent case of intra-Muslim caste violence in Allahpur (Bihar) see (Ansari, 2009) and for another interesting story on a high caste Muslim Pathan led feudal private army, the *Sunlight Sena*, active in Bihar in the 1980s see Ghose, 2015 (I am thankful to Shahnawaz Ansari for pointing this out to me.). For other revealing episodes of Muslim-Muslim caste and gender clashes in Bihar see Anwar, 2001. The southern state of Tamil Nadu also witnessed the murder of Muslim turned atheist H. Farooq by the Islamists in 2017 (See Janardhanan, 2017). Based on my own engagement with the Muslim social space for over a decade now I am tempted to point out that while the media professionals or academics are trained to record Hindu-Hindu caste clashes or Hindu-Muslim violence as ‘caste atrocity’ or ‘religious

communalisms and eventual restructuring of the region into India, Pakistan and Bangladesh merits more academic attention than it has so far.²⁶

Interestingly, most Dalit-Bahujan engagements with communalism also seem to share the reluctance to employ caste *inter alia* in understanding ‘Muslim communalism’ (Ilaiyah, 2004; Rajshekar, 2007; Teltumbde, 2005). One could speculate that this overlooking of the caste question in understanding Muslim communalism emerges from the grip of orientalist assumptions in the production of knowledge about subcontinental Islam and Muslims. Gottschalk makes an interesting distinction between ‘*routes* religious groups...travel’ and ‘the *roots* they establish’ when discussing South Asian Muslims (2004, p. 4; emphasis in original). As a result, “academicians steadfastly connect religions primarily with their places of origin no matter how transnational the traditions may be. For instance, scholarship too often fastens upon the Middle East as the ‘natural’ context of Islam. This seems particularly odd in the face of the fact that more than half of the world’s Muslims live East of Afghanistan. Although Indonesia, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh are home to the world’s largest Muslim populations, the academic study of religion has commonly labelled these as ‘Muslims on the periphery’ or ‘Islam from the edge’” (p. 9). If routes are privileged then Islam and Muslims must consequently be framed as outsiders and ‘Hindu, then becomes the only indigenous religious category, encompassing almost all religions that originate in South Asia, such as Jainism and Sikhism, while people of other religions are tacitly excluded from the national category by associating them with a foreign religious category’ (p. 12). If the hegemonic grip of the notion of ‘India = Hinduism’ and ‘Islam = Middle East’ in the sociological production of South Asia is conceded, then it will not be difficult to appreciate why caste becomes a suspect category in studying South Asian Islam. If caste is Indian, and therefore by default Hindu, it can only be posed as a regrettable variation. It is only when knowledge production about subcontinental Islam/Muslims is deorientalized that caste could emerge as a structural mode of exclusion and disciplining—central to the distribution of wealth, desire and power—which applies not only to Hindus but to all sections of the subcontinent, including Muslims (even when there are differences in legitimating vocabularies used for caste in different faith traditions). Also, for the most part studies on Islam have overemphasized its normative-egalitarian dimensions and the play of hierarchy in Muslim intellectual-social space, other than probably gender inequality one would suggest, has received little attention (see El-Zein, 1977; Kazuo, 2004; Marlow, 1997; Kazuo, 2012; Falahi, 2007 for useful discussions). One may hope that the sharpening of the Pasmada contestations in the public sphere will push the discussions in new directions and parochialize the domination of the normative-theological with more grounded historical-sociological investigations of subcontinental Muslims, particularly caste (for a

riots,’ the cases of Muslim-Muslim caste violence are usually treated as a quotidian law and order problem and brushed aside.

²⁶ For rare historical enquiries that record Muslim caste in the discussions on Partition see Ghosh, 2007, 2008, 2010; Sajjad, 2014.

pioneering attempt see Ahmad & Reifeld, 2004; Ahmad, 1973). Once this is accomplished the connection of caste to Muslim communalism could be posed with more confidence.

B. Competing Communalisms: The Equivalence Argument

How should one talk of ‘Muslim communalism’ in a setting where Hindu right wing, particularly since the 1990s, is clearly ascendant? In the face of the escalating incidents of communal violence against Muslims organized by the right-wing Hindu sections should the liberal-left and Dalit-Bahujan groups consider communal Muslim (or Islamist) organizations as potential allies? To address this question, it will be useful to contrast the career of Muslim communalism in the British period with that of the post-1947 phase because historical memory often animates the contemporary in convoluted ways. In the early 1940s Smith had remarked that ‘Muslim communalists’ were ‘highly conscious of the Muslims within India as a supposedly single, cohesive community, to which they devote their loyalty’ and it matters little ‘whether the individuals included are religiously ardent, tepid or cold; orthodox, liberal or atheist; righteous or vicious; or to whether they are landlord or peasant, prince or proletarian’ (1943, p. 185).

Dr B. R. Ambedkar, one of the most astute observers of political developments in the British period,²⁷ compiles a number of cases of murders of Hindus by Muslim fanatics for having offended the latter’s religious sensibilities.²⁸ Of these the controversy over the pamphlet *Rangila Rasul* (The Colourful Prophet) is particularly instructive. *Rangila Rasul* was written by Prashaad Prataab (under the pen name of Pandit Chamupati Lal) in response, as Ambedkar informs us, to the inflammatory pamphlet *Sitaka Chinala* ‘written by a Muslim alleging that Sita, wife of Rama, the hero of Ramayana, was a prostitute’ (2014, p. 169). The pamphlet which takes pot-shots at the intimate life of Prophet Muhammad, was published by Rajpal in 1923 under the condition that he would not reveal the identity of the author. It understandably incensed Muslim public opinion and

²⁷ ‘However, these nationalist *ulama* as well as the most ardent supporters of Pakistan were greatly indebted to someone, who more than anybody during the 1940s shaped the debate on Pakistan imparting it with coherence, discipline and stability. This was the other constitutional lawyer from Bombay, B. R. Ambedkar. His enormously influential *Thoughts on Pakistan* was quoted by both Gandhi and Jinnah as the authoritative treatise on Pakistan when they met for their famous series of meetings in Bombay in 1944’ (Dhulipala, 2015, p. 18).

²⁸ ‘It is a notorious fact that many prominent Hindus who had offended the religious susceptibilities of the Muslims either by their writings or by their part in the Shudhi movement have been murdered by some fanatic Musalmans. First to suffer was Swami Shradhanand, who was shot by Abdul Rashid on 23rd December 1926 when he was lying in his sick bed. This was followed by the murder of Lala Nanakchand, a prominent Arya Samajist of Delhi. Rajpal, the author of the Rangila Rasool, was stabbed by Ilamdin on 6th April 1929 while he was sitting in his shop. Nathuramal Sharma was murdered by Abdul Qayum in September 1934. It was an act of great daring. For Sharma was stabbed to death in the Court of the Judicial Commissioner of Sind where he was seated awaiting the hearing of his appeal against his conviction under Section 195, I. P. C, for the publication of a pamphlet on the history of Islam. Khanna, the Secretary of the Hindu Sabha, was severely assaulted in 1938 by the Mahomedans after the Session of the Hindu Maha Sabha held in Ahmedabad and very narrowly escaped death’ (Ambedkar, 2014, p. 156).

the matter was taken to the courts. After a long drawn legal battle Rajpal was able to escape a sentence by the Lahore High Court. There were huge protests by the Muslim community and in a retaliatory move Rajpal was eventually stabbed by Ilm Din, an unlettered carpenter, on April 6, 1929. Ilm Din's case was fought by Mohammad Ali Jinnah, apparently the only case which Jinnah lost, and he was eventually executed. While placing Ilm Din's body in the grave with teary eyes, Allama Iqbal, the highly esteemed Muslim poet is supposed to have proclaimed: “*Asi wekhde reh gaye, aye, Tarkhaana da munda baazi le gaya*” (We kept sitting idle while this carpenter's son took the lead) (Ali, 2015). Interestingly, ‘Ilamdin grew into a folk hero of sorts’ in Pakistan, ‘inspiring popular accounts of his exploits in many formats: film, poetry, prose and what can only be described as fan fiction. In the 1970s, an unabashedly hagiographic biopic titled *Ghazi Ilamdin Shaheed* hit cinemas, directed by Rasheed Dogar whose later credits would include the salaciously titled *Pyasa Badan, Husn Parast* and *Madam X*’ (Kohari, 2017). Raza Rumi recently noted that ‘Ghazi Ilmudin Shaheed, who killed a Hindu writer for blasphemy in the early twentieth century, is a national hero of Pakistan's collective memory’ (2014). Ambedkar notes that ‘the leading Moslems, however, never condemned these criminals. On the contrary, they were hailed as religious martyrs and agitation was carried on for clemency being shown to them’ (2014, p. 157). The Muslim response to such controversies as *Rangila Rasool* is instructive because it blurs the conceptual distinction between ‘communal’ and ‘nationalist’ Muslims and apparently demonstrates the operation of a social class with common interests.²⁹ While reflecting on the incidence of communal rioting from 1920s onward Ambedkar complains of

[t]he adoption by the Muslims of the gangster's method in politics. The riots are a sufficient indication that gangsterism has become a settled part of their strategy in politics... So long as the Muslims were the aggressors, the Hindus were passive, and in the conflict, they suffered more than the Muslims did.³⁰ But this is no longer true. The Hindus have learned

²⁹ An interesting take from a slightly simplistic liberal-modernist viewpoint is offered by Hamid Dalwai in the section ‘Muslims: The so-called Nationalists and the Communalists’ in *Muslim Politics in India* (1968, pp. 63-78). Dalwai makes the following remark: ‘For in an undivided India a specially privileged Muslim community would have vigorously continued a movement for the Islamicization of India. In such a situation, it is most likely that the Muslim League and the so-called ‘Nationalist Muslims’ would have joined forces... What was the difference between Jinnah [the communalist Muslim] and the nationalist Muslims? While Jinnah wanted a separate state, the nationalist Muslims wanted the whole of India’ (pp. 70-71).

³⁰ Also: ‘These acts of barbarism against women, committed without remorse, without shame and without condemnation by their fellow brethren show the depth of the antagonism which divided the two communities. The tempers on each side were the tempers of two warring nations. There was carnage, pillage, sacrilege and outrage of every species, perpetrated by Hindus against Musalmans and by Musalmans against Hindus—*more perhaps by Musalmans against Hindus than by Hindus against Musalmans*... What is astonishing is that these cold and deliberate acts of rank, cruelty were not regarded as atrocities to be condemned but were treated as legitimate acts of warfare for which no apology was necessary’ (Ambedkar, 2014, p. 186; emphasis added)

‘Even a superficial observer cannot fail to notice that a spirit of aggression underlies the Hindu attitude towards the Muslim and the Muslim attitude towards the Hindu. *The Hindu's spirit of aggression is a new phase which he has just*

to retaliate and no longer feel any compunction in knifing a Musalman. This spirit of retaliation bids fair to produce the ugly spectacle of gangsterism against gangsterism (p. 269).

Ambedkar indicates at the competitive nature of communalisms when he opines that: ‘The Muslims are howling against the Hindu Maha Sabha and its slogan of Hindudom and Hindu Raj. But who is responsible for this? Hindu Maha Sabha and Hindu Raj are the inescapable nemesis which the Musalmans have brought upon themselves by having a Muslim League. It is action and counter-action. One gives rise to the other’ (p. 359). The preceding assessment of ‘Muslim communalism’ in the colonial phase presents the historical context to evaluate the operation of the category at present. While the Muslim communalists appear to be a vigorous force before 1947, it has been pointed that ‘partition sent a disproportionate segment of the North Indian *Aśrāf* elite including Syeds to East and West Pakistan’ with the consequence that the ‘Indian Muslim community was effectively decapitated for a generation although this is less true of South India where...Thangals remained in Kerala and Syeds among the Urdu-speaking population of Madras, Bangalore and even Bombay’ (Wright Jr., 1999, p. 655). It is within such a shift that one can infer ‘that just as before 1947 the main damage to national unity was inflicted by Muslim communalism, so after 1947 it is Hindu communalism which poses the main threat to India’s unity and democracy’³¹ (Chandra, 2004, p. 38).

Obviously, Hindu and Muslim communalisms cannot be considered *equivalent* (Mannathukkaren, 2016), as right-wing Hindu groups are prone to insist, for two reasons. One, the impact of Muslim communalism is largely on its internal others—subordinated castes, women and dissenters.³² Two, Muslim communalism is not in a position to take over the State. However, what the Pasmanda narratives point towards is that Muslim communal speech and action often provide a legitimating vocabulary to the Right-wing Hindu groups. In this context, the alliance of a few left/liberal/secularist or Dalit-Bahujan groups with Muslim communal groups often feeds into the charges of Muslim appeasement and strengthens Hindutva further. Ambedkar had remarked in the context of murders of Hindus by Muslim fanatics: ‘What is not understandable is the attitude of Mr. Gandhi. Mr. Gandhi has been very punctilious in the matter of condemning any and every act of violence and has forced the Congress, much against its will to condemn it. But Mr. Gandhi has

begun to cultivate. The Muslim’s spirit of aggression is his native endowment and is ancient as compared with that of the Hindu. It is not that the Hindu, if given time, will not pick up and overtake the Muslim. But as matters stand today, the Muslim in this exhibition of the spirit of aggression leaves the Hindu far behind’ (Ambedkar, 2014, p. 249; emphasis added).

³¹ See the resignation letter of Jogendra Nath Mandal, a Dalit and Pakistan’s first law minister, to get a glimpse of how riot technology was employed in Pakistan against the Hindu minorities, mostly Dalits (Mandal, 1950).

³² See note 25 above.

never protested such murders. Not only have the Muslims not condemned these outrages but even Mr. Gandhi has never called upon the leading Muslims to condemn them' (2014, p. 157). Hamid Dalwai, a humanist Muslim reformist voice from Maharashtra, too lambasted the uncritical engagement of secular groups with Muslims: 'It appears that all so-called secular political parties in India are agreed upon keeping Indian Muslims in their mediaeval state' (1968, p. 76). Speaking of the left Dalwai says that 'Muslim communalists in India and Indian communists have always remained strange, but inseparable, bedfellows' (p. 79). While the silence of a significant section of the secularists/liberals/leftists/bahujans when it comes to Muslim communal groups requires an analysis of class/caste content of the leadership of these groups, it is important to underscore that the Pasmada voices have in principle urged maintaining a distance from both contending communalisms. When the Pasmada groups challenge both Muslim and Hindu communalism they are not in principle establishing a relation of equivalence between the two for the power differentials are too obvious. What the Pasmada critique points towards is the symbiotic and co-constitutive nature of competing communalisms and the strategic and self-defeating blunder of tackling majoritarianism without also simultaneously taking on minorityism.

C. Muslim Communalism: Elite Politics and Subaltern Foot Soldiers

The Pasmada narratives stress that in instances of communal violence it is the Pasmada sections who have been the key victims (Pasmada, 2013, p. 11). It is only recently that the caste location of victims of communal violence has received some academic/media attention. At least two papers on Muzaffarnagar riots (2013) have employed the caste category in their analysis. For instance, Ahmad says 'The questions of Muslim caste-diversity and public presence are equally important aspects to understand the victimhood of Muslims in these riots (though this point has been almost entirely ignored in most of the discussions)...As per an unofficial estimate, most of those Muslims who died in the present violence were backwards' (2013, p. 11). And, Singh: 'The victims of the riot by and large belong to the poorer class of Pasmada Muslims, generally engaged in non-agricultural occupations' (2016, p. 94). Also, in some recent communal episodes in Dadri, Bijnor, Jharkhand and elsewhere some commentators have emphasized on the lower caste location of Muslim victims (Sajjad, 2016; Naqvi, 2016). Even if one concedes that during episodes of communal violence the perpetrators may have only religion of the Muslim targets in mind, the *ascriptive* aspect of the violence could be complicated by the *spatial/class distribution of vulnerability*. Is it not the case that in episodes of communal violence it is mostly the poor individuals/families, neighbourhoods, slums, or villages that are attacked?³³ If so then in the light of the close correlation between caste and class (Vaid, 2012) one may ask which Muslim caste groups inhabit these spaces. Another work urges us to 'look at the demographic and geographical features of various groups and their differential participation, involvement and victimisation in

³³ According to Pandey '...when riots have occurred in any urban concentration anywhere in the world, the densely-populated, ill-serviced and poorer localities of the lower classes have generally burned most fiercely' (1990, pp. 70-71).

communal riots' (Jairath, 2014, p. 395). Interestingly, a scholar-activist from Kashmir has recently employed the caste category to make sense of violence in the insurgency-infected state:

To this day the Syeds dominate the bureaucracy and the invisible apartheid continues. The Islamic revivalist movements that spread their network in Kashmir, including Jamaat-e-Islami, too were dominated by the Syeds as they had the privilege and legacy of Islamic teachings...At one point, the resistance movement against India too was dominated by the Syeds though the insurgency was started by the non-Syeds and they continue to offer sacrifices and become cannon fodder, with the Syeds ruling the roost and enjoying the leadership privilege. Few Syeds and Khojas lost their lives or took part in the insurgency, but both United Jihad Council and Hurriyat Conference are dominated by Syeds, who want the sacrifices from the non-Syeds and luxurious lives for their wards and extended family. *They have used every mechanism to keep the masses occupied with the conflict so that they don't engage with the larger questions associated with it, including caste and privileges* (Sikander, 2017; emphasis added).

What the above observations in the context of the extreme situation of Kashmir and the Pasmada narratives indicate is *the probable distance between the actual victims and the beneficiaries of the politics of Muslim victimhood* at one level and the *displacement of social justice issues through violence* at another. Quaiser employs the term 'elite Muslim restorational politics' (2011, p. 52) to capture this and speculates if the high caste Muslims are 'really concerned with communal riots or general backwardness of Shudra Muslims? Hasn't the aggressive Hindutva communalism provided them with an opportunity to make their presence felt more prominently and make assertions to recover some of the lost *location* in whatever forms possible?' (p. 53; emphasis in original).

However, the emphasis on elite machinations still does not adequately explain the suborning of subordinated castes as foot soldiers in communal violence. What explains the recruitment of someone like Ilm Din, the carpenter in communal violence when the beneficiaries theoretically are the ashraf classes? While I intend to discuss this question in greater detail elsewhere, one could tentatively indicate three directions to pursue for better explanations. Firstly, one needs to make a distinction between the 'structural positions'—the positions of an individual within hierarchical social, cultural, political and economic systems by forces and institutions that are prior to her will and which shape the individual's life chances—and the 'subject positions' (or identities) through which she lives out her structural positions (Smith, 1998, p. 56). While the essentialist argument holds 'authentic' interests to be flowing directly from structural positions and explains the failure of the subject to see this as an instance of false consciousness, the constructivist argument would emphasise the mediation of various competing political discourses, interpretative frameworks, desire and even personal accidents in subject formation (pp. 58-59). Secondly, on the question of identity formation, so far, the Pasmada thinkers have focused more on the role of state and politics. But Peter van der Veer rightly asks us 'to escape from the hegemony of the discourse on state hegemony' and realise that 'community formation has a variety of sources, but in the case of religious nationalism we have to focus more than we often do on religious movements and

institutions, as well as on the disciplinary practices connected to them' (1994, p. 201). In this sense, one needs to explore what bearing the process of Islamization/ashrāfization or piety (Mahmood, 2005) have on the questions of empowerment/agency of subordinated castes and women within the Muslim social space in India? What impact does it have on communalism? And, thirdly, one needs to explore the impact on the leadership content of Islamic institutions in the face of the significant migration of north Indian Muslim elite, particularly the Syeds who dominated the religious institutions, to Pakistan or their shift to more secular professions (Wright Jr., 1999)? Has there been a challenge from upwardly mobile Pasmanda sections to ashraf domination within Islamic institutions like the *madrasas* (Alam, 2009)? What potential do these probable shifts hold for democratization of the Muslim social space and curricula reform in madrasas? How will these potential ruptures affect the conceptualization of identity and solidarity in the Muslim sphere in India? I believe these questions require substantive engagement by those reflecting on the Pasmanda movement as activists or researchers.

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