

# The Identity of Language and the Language of Erasure: Urdu and the Racialized-Decastification of the “Backward Musalmaan” in India

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## Abstract

The decline of Urdu in post-colonial Uttar Pradesh has often been studied alongside the fall of Muslim representation in public services and the ‘job market’ in independent India. However, there remains a severe dearth in scholarship that intertwines the tropes surrounding Urdu as ‘foreign’ to India and the role that the racialization of the language played in insidiously collaborating with post-colonial governmentality which problematically ‘decastified’ and therefore circumscribed the production of ‘Muslim minority’ citizen identity. I argue that since the 1950s the polemics of Urdu and reasons cited for its lack of institutional recognition as a regional/linguistic minority language in Uttar Pradesh (until 1994) significantly informed the constitutional construction of ‘the casteless Muslim’ in the same stage setting era of the 1950s. These seemingly disparate sites of language and caste worked together to systematically deprive some of the most marginalised lower caste and Dalit Muslims access to affirmative action as their cultural-political economies witnessed a drastic fall in the early decades after Partition. This article addresses the connections between the production of Muslims as ‘foreign’ and the simultaneous relegation of Muslim ‘indigenous’ histories of conversion (from Dalit and lower caste backgrounds) to the periphery under ahistoric, demeaning, and monolith stereotypes of the ‘backward Musalmaan.’ Furthermore, this article contends that the north Indian ‘Hindi-Hindu-Hindustan’ hegemony as espoused by Hindu traditionalist Congress and Jan Sangh leaders during the 1950s determined the contours of “Indian Muslim identity” within and outside the diverse Muslim community, despite significant fractures between the Ashraf and non-Ashraf (Specifically Pasmanda) Muslim leadership over the years.

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## Keywords

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## Introduction

The long decade of the 1950s set an important precedence for the many ‘contradictions’ that came to stereotype Muslims in India, with dangerous consequences for the community institutionally, normatively, and in their gradual racialization as ‘Indian Muslims,’ despite fractions and diversity within the community. The structure of India’s new liberal democratic order only allowed for elite minority interests to be represented, and competing or contesting interests within the Muslim community (particularly along the lines of class, caste, and gender) were often undermined in the problematic structures of representational politics (Hasan, 2009 p 165). Both nativist Hindu leadership of the Congress, whom Christopher Jaffrelot refers to as ‘Hindu traditionalists,’ and openly right wing Hindus from the Jan Sangh played a pivotal role during the 1950s in defining the characteristics of Muslim identity and citizenship which would dominate the community’s national representation in India. These contours of Muslim identity and minoritization in India were further amplified by Ashraf Muslim leadership in North India that laid exclusive claim towards representing the community’s ‘voice,’ despite being challenged from Pasmanda Muslim leaders.<sup>1</sup> Subsequently there were very real material consequences that accompanied the lack of representation for marginalised Muslims in mainstream politics. Against this background, I contend that the decline of Urdu must be studied in this context of post-colonial governmentality and normative tropes that came to surround the Muslim populace of India in this era. Much of the scholarship on Urdu has centred around Urdu literature as a site of ‘Muslim self-fashioning’ ranging from aristocratic Muslims mourning their declining privilege and/or bourgeois aspirations of Muslims under colonialism (Naqvi, 2008; Joshi, 2001), to the systematic attempts to end the language in post-colonial India (Farouqui, 1994; Pai, 2002; Sajjad, 2014). Other significant scholarly interventions have highlighted Urdu as a language of nationalist contestations and competing ‘secular’ visions (Datla, 2013), which framed minority identities in complex ways under late colonialism. Innovative works have also demonstrated the problems of characterising Urdu as a strictly Islamic language (due to the ignorance of regional histories of belonging, culture, and religion).<sup>2</sup> Departing from this scholarship, this article contends that the decline of Urdu must be studied in the context of a post-colonial governmentality that systematically erased caste from Muslim identity and normalised tropes of ‘foreign (casteless) and backward Musalmaans’ in the immediate aftermath of Partition. I argue that these seemingly disparate processes of language and caste constituted the terms for ‘social reference’ of Muslim minority citizenship along racialized lines.

The fall of Urdu in Uttar Pradesh, specifically in Lucknow which some Urdu writers claim was the birthplace of the language, had consequences not just for representational politics within Lucknow or Uttar Pradesh, but beyond the city and the language in terms of Muslim representation in India at large. By focusing on the construction of the Muslim as a foreigner, as casteless, and as backward in official and

public discourses, this article argues that the politics of Urdu and constitutional erasure of caste among Muslims helped constitute the Muslim community as a minority in India through restrictive parameters that systematically targeted socio-economic prospects of the community while ahistoricising their presence in India through otherising racialized tropes. These developments on questions of language and caste recognition took place simultaneously during the 1950s and informed each other, subsequently impacting the diverse Muslim community's collective self-perception and socio-economic status as minority citizens in the decades to come.

Perhaps it is best to summarize what this article is *not* about, and then highlight what it seeks to do instead, finally surmising those strands together cohesively. This article is not on Urdu as a medium for self-fashioning elite Ashraf Muslims who lamented the 'death of the city' in *shahr-i-adab* (the city of high culture and noble manners) kind of literatures; instead it is about how Ashrafs came to be routinely portrayed by prominent leaders of the Congress in Uttar Pradesh as 'foreigners' since medieval times. This article is not about caste politics per se, rather how the trope of the foreigner was used as a way to otherize and prevent some of the most downtrodden Muslims from availing affirmative action policies, including the complex histories of how some lower caste and Dalit Muslim groups themselves tried to find liberation away from their stigmatized caste histories - unfortunately without success as conversion did not eclipse casteist tropes against them. This article is not just about the institutional history of the fall of Urdu in Uttar Pradesh, but it focuses on how Urdu was used to shape the minority citizen status of Muslims, and how it impacted their political economy and caste histories in Lucknow. The article deploys both written materials documenting these issues and oral history testimonies of Ashraf and Pasmanda Muslims in Lucknow. In the process, this article traces the contours that defined the production of Muslim minoritism in India, externally by post-colonial governmentality of the 1950s, and internally by Muslims themselves led by Ashraf leadership despite political and social fractures within the community. Lastly, this article dwells on how the popular trope of the 'backward Musalman' continues to ignore the histories and systematic oppression of Muslim marginalisation in India, whilst racializing a diverse community that has gradually self-homogenized in the face of demeaning stereotypes and increasing popularity of Hindu nationalist conceptions of their 'un-belonging.'

## Making Muslims Foreigners

As Saadia Toor has observed, the declaration of Urdu as the national language of Pakistan stemmed from Muslim concerns almost half a century prior to the Partition when the Hindi movement in undivided India took off under the patronage of Hindu leaders, often from the Congress. Notes Toor, "For Muslim Nationalists in Pakistan, Urdu's fate in India also represented the precarious status of Indian Muslims in Independent India, retroactively justifying their fears of living under a Hindu majority, and solidifying the idea that Pakistan was Urdu's "home," where it could be protected and preserved as a repository of Indo-Muslim culture and history."

White borders were drawn and confusion prevailed on how to regulate them following the 1947 creation of Pakistan with notable contestations over Kashmiri lands between India and Pakistan,<sup>3</sup> many Muslims and non-Muslims were alarmed at the rushed attempts to strike off Urdu as a medium of instruction in schools around

Uttar Pradesh (Dayal, 1998).<sup>4</sup> In his detailed report on the decline of Urdu, Salauddin Usman, an English writing anti-colonial 'freedom fighter' wrote:

In 1947, the U.P government had declared Hindi as the medium of instruction for high school and intermediate classes; and was in such a hurry to enforce it that it had not allowed the Urdu speaking students of classes X and XII to reply (answer) in Urdu in their examinations.... consequently whenever a demand was made for facilities for Urdu-speaking people, those demands were branded as (those by) 'communalists' and even as demands by 'Pakistani agents' within India, by one or the other spokesmen of Hindi.

(Salahuddin Usman, 1992)

Yet, lovers of the Urdu language like Pandit Anand Narain Mulla pointed out that it was the duty of the State to safeguard Urdu because the Constitution had given these *guarantees to all linguistic and cultural minorities* [italics mine] in the country.<sup>5</sup>

Unfortunately for Urdu advocates across religion like Usman and Pandit Mulla, the strong association of the language with Pakistan (despite many non-Muslims being well versed in it given its prior history as one the official court and government languages) worked against their efforts to advocate for the language. When Muslims protested this measure of removing Urdu as a language medium for important school exams, in a speech in 1949 at Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh's Congress leader and member of the *Hindi Sahitya Sammelan* (a national organisation for the advocacy of sanskritised Hindi), Purshottam Das Tandon forcefully argued as follows.

The Muslim *must stop talking* [italics mine] about a culture and civilization *foreign to our culture* [italics mine] and genius. They should accept Indian culture. One culture and one language will pave the way for real unity. Urdu symbolises a foreign culture.

(National Herald, 1948)

Tandon's rhetoric of Urdu and its 'place' in new India challenged Lucknow Muslim perceptions of their belonging to a diverse Indian body politic. Barely two years after the Partition, Urdu, a language that had flourished if not originated in Lucknow, was declared as 'foreign' by prominent leaders of the Congress. Furthermore, the discourse advocated (and eventually accepted) by Hindi Sahitya Samelan leaders in the Constituent Assembly sought to define *what it meant to be a good Indian citizen* [italics mine] and demanded from Muslims in India to 'stop talking' about their concerns for a language largely spoken by them if they were to accept the said vision of *Indian culture*; viewed as racially and culturally different from allegedly 'foreign' Muslim civilization(s) and centuries of syncretic interaction in local spheres between people of various faiths in the South Asian subcontinent.<sup>6</sup> Thus, Muslims in India were imaginatively constituted as 'foreign' to India while their local notions of land, belonging, and culture rendered as distinct from 'Indian culture.' Notably, Hindi Sahitya Samelan leaders like K.M Munshi and Purshottam Das Tandon were also opposed to the conversion of people from one faith to another, as they sought to racialise Muslim culture in India along ahistorical and statist conceptions as the country's 'foreign' other. For these 'Hindi advocates,' Urdu came to be understood not just as the official language of Pakistan, but notoriously as the language that did not

belong to India (Gould, 2002). Indeed, this bordering of Urdu replicated the ‘outsider’ and ‘insider’ precarity of Indian Muslim citizenship.<sup>7</sup> What was at stake was not just a language, but the association of Hindi with Hindu culture and subsequently, the normalisation of hegemonic upper caste ‘Hindi-Hindu-Hindustan’ governmentality in newly independent India.

In 1954, the State Reorganization Commission recommended that minority languages should be allowed as mediums of instruction where it was feasible, not just in letter but also in the wider spirit of protecting and preserving the interests of linguistic minorities.<sup>8</sup> But the Uttar Pradesh government persisted in not implementing Urdu as a medium of instruction in schools despite it being a highly feasible option because Congressmen like Chief Ministers G.B Pant followed by Sarvarsari Sampuranand in the years just after independence were at the forefront of advocating sanskritised Hindi - conscientiously at the expense of Urdu in Uttar Pradesh. In 1951 under Uttar Pradesh’s first Chief Minister, G.B Pant, Hindi was declared the official language of the state, with no guarantees for Urdu speakers.<sup>9</sup> Pant’s successor, Sampuranand actively curbed instructions from the Union government to assign Urdu the status of a minority language between 1954 and 1958.

Sampuranand was a former member of the Hindu Mahasabha who had at a later stage joined the Congress. He had published several works claiming that upper caste Hindus were ‘the original Aryans’ whereas Muslims in India were ‘foreign invaders’ who had allegiances ‘outside India’ as detailed by historian William Gould (2002). Indeed, any study of the decline of Urdu in Uttar Pradesh cannot be divorced from tropes that declare Muslims as ‘invaders’ or ‘outsiders’ to India. Sampuranand also maintained a strategy of what can be termed as ‘dichotomous contradictory discourses’ that were built upon to further subordinate Muslim concerns through different, albeit often contradictory, tropes. Writing to the Ministry of Home Affairs, Sampuranand categorically stated that, ‘We have no linguistic minorities in this State in the sense that Bengalis are linguistic minorities in Assam and Bihar, or Telugu speaking people in Andhra.’ The letter further goes on to contentiously claim the following.

Perhaps the intention of the Government of India is to get figures in respect of Muslims in this State who claim to have Urdu as their language. Urdu and Hindi are not two distinct languages. Urdu is only a variant of the State language, Hindi, its peculiarity lies in (the) adoption of its Persian and Arabic words.

(U.P. State Archives, Lucknow).

Thus, Sampuranand deployed dualistic tropes in manipulative ways. On the one hand, as previously noted, Muslim culture and civilization was declared as that of a ‘foreign invader’ by Hindu traditionalist Congress leaders. Simultaneously, Urdu was characterised as unfit to be assigned the status of a minority language because it was apparently a variant of Hindi according to Hindi advocates, thereby implicitly acknowledging the roots of the language in India. In the process, Urdu was simultaneously rendered as ‘foreign’ because it incorporated some words from Arabic and Persian, but it also had ‘indigenous’ roots in Hindi/Hindu culture as it significantly incorporated words from Hindi, Purbi, and Panjabi. This led Sampuranand to claim that Hindi and Urdu ‘were not distinct languages’ while being acutely aware that the

question was concerned with maintaining the cultural rights of Muslims who in his words, questionably 'claimed' to have Urdu as their language.

The politics of refusing to grant Urdu the status of a 'linguistic minority' language or a 'second regional language' was embedded in the construction of Muslim identity in Uttar Pradesh with far reaching national implications.<sup>10</sup> Uttar Pradesh had the highest number of representatives in the Parliament in Delhi, whereby issues politicised in the demographically largest province in India acquired the status of national attention. Congress elected Chief Ministers of Uttar Pradesh such as G.B Pant, Sampuranand, C.B. Gupta, Sucheta Kripalani, and K. Tripathi in the early decades after Partition were men and women who upheld the belief that Muslims were 'medieval foreigners' to India and singularly blamed the community for the Partition.<sup>11</sup> By 1967, merely twenty years after the Partition, the Congress manifesto for elections in Uttar Pradesh did not even mention Urdu or Muslims in their political agenda, whereas the Jan Sangh, supposedly on the other end of the political spectrum with their openly espoused right-wing ideologies, explicitly refused to give Urdu the status of a second official language in Uttar Pradesh (Brass, 1974, p 257). Gyan Prakash has astutely observed (2007) that the 'crisis of secularism' in India since its inception was not a 'quarrel with secularism such as church-state separation,' but that the discourse centred on 'toleration of minority citizens,' especially Muslims. The discourse of "toleration" is problematic because it implies a polite distance at best and lack of wilful acceptance at worst for marginalized citizens. It privileges some groups as the norm, while rendering other groups as secondary to the national imagination. This discourse on how to 'tolerate' minority citizens would become the ground upon which Congress and the Hindu right of Jan Sangh/Bhartiya Janata Party would come to differ in their uncontested vision of the Hindu nation, even if India was not a theocratic nation-state (Brass, 1974). In sum, according to Hindu traditionalist Congress leaders and the Jan Sangh, India unquestionably belonged to the upper caste Hindus who had the power and privilege to define the new post-colonial political order. The space of minority Muslim citizens was dependent on this order's benevolence and acceptance, even if constitutionally all were apparently upheld as equal citizens.<sup>12</sup>

In response, Ashraf Muslims actively contested such anti-Muslim discourses via the advocacy of Urdu since the Partition and the assertion of their undeniable *Indianness*. Notably, prominent Muslim leaders as well as some sympathetic Hindu leaders advocated the cause of Urdu and rallied against Sampuranand's claims regarding Urdu, insisted that Uttar Pradesh was the regional birthplace of the language. Against this background, Anjumman-e-Tariqqi-e-Urdu in Lucknow emerged as a prominent organisation campaigning for the cause of protecting Urdu. Although Anjumman Taraqqi-e-Urdu was formed in 1903, after Partition the organisation split in two parts in India and Pakistan, with the Indian centre of the organization focusing on promoting Urdu and popularizing its simpler and widely spoken form, *Hindustani*. In 1954, the organisation submitted a petition to then President of India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, with over four million signatures and submitted a memorandum to Maulana Azad, the then Minister of Education, for the official recognition of Urdu as a language of the substantial percentage of the population.<sup>13</sup>

Linguistic historian Jyotirindra Das Gupta (1970) and political scientist Paul Brass have noted that the mostly Muslim petitioners of Anjuman-Taraqqi-e-Urdu who wanted to safeguard the Urdu language expressed their disagreement with Hindi enthusiasts on primarily three grounds.<sup>14</sup> First, they highlighted the origins of the

language in India. Secondly, they refused to view it as simply a 'hybrid' of Hindi and Farsi. Lastly, they contested Hindi enthusiasts' claims that the language was 'alien' to India or 'an imposition from tyrannical Muslim rulers' on Hindus. These tactics would eventually lead Anjuman members to adopt pacifist policies instead of directly challenging the anti-Muslim rhetoric of Hindi enthusiasts, as they wanted to separate their concerns for the language from its association with Muslims. While it was true that many Hindus also spoke and wrote in Urdu, the demands for its continuation and preservation of the language overwhelmingly came from Muslims in Uttar Pradesh as they strongly linked it to their culture. But the Anjuman constantly asserted the role of Urdu in bringing communities across faith together and festering a syncretic and harmonious culture, or *Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb* in cities like Lucknow, Delhi, Aligarh, Varanasi, and Allahabad.

Unfortunately, Urdu advocates lost their cause when the Secretariat collaborated with the polemical claims of the *Upar Sachivalva* (or upper house of the State Legislature or Legislative Council), asserting that 'no Linguistic Minority Officer was required' in Uttar Pradesh, despite the Union government's recommendation. The Uttar Pradesh government argued that, 'Persons who write in Persian script cannot be said to have a different mother tongue than those who write in Devnagri character because the spoken language of both is the same (UP State Archives).' What was fascinating about arguing the similarity of the two languages was that the Indian State refused to accept 'Hindustani' as the official new language of India, which would have incorporated words from Hindi, Urdu, and Punjabi and could be easily comprehended by the thickly populated region of North India. Instead, the Indian Parliament rejected Hindustani as a feasible option, choosing to formalize sanskritised Hindi while relegating Urdu to the periphery in Uttar Pradesh where it was most widely spoken (Pai, 2002). Several 'anti communal' Congress leaders, including India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, were critical of the Hindu traditionalist dominance in the Constituent Assembly, who had endeavoured to advocate for Hindi by stigmatizing Urdu. In a passionate speech where Nehru made his disagreements with Hindu traditionalist Congress leaders of Uttar Pradesh clear, he presciently commented about the dangers of 'majority communalism' and the equation of Urdu and Muslims as foreign to India, saying:

...the communalism of the majority is far more dangerous than the communalism of the minority because it wears the garb of nationalism... the communal and caste weaknesses of the people had been deprecated repeatedly in numerous resolutions of the Congress Working Committee and the AICC. These resolutions were against these caste and communal tendencies. Yet, in our daily lives, we do not understand them fully.

(The Times of India, 1958; Noorani 2003)

Nehru was aware of the schisms within democracy including faulty equation of the will of the majority being necessarily an ethical will of the masses. In his critique of ideologies stoked by leaders like Purshottam Das Tandon, C.B Gupta, and Sampuranand against Muslim minorities the Prime Minister further observed in the same speech,

It is said, and I don't know why, that Urdu is the language of Muslims. I do not know what kind of brain and intelligence it is from which this idea stems. Was Urdu born with Islam? (laugther). Urdu is the language of India...Indian

Muslims are Indians. They have lived here for generations, for thousands of years. Only a handful of Muslims could be said to have come from outside long long ago. But they also became a part of Indian life. If anyone were to say that Muslims are outsiders now, he only betrays his utter primitiveness of thought.

(Quote taken from Noorani, 2003)

It is indicative of the politics of Nehru's time (1947-1964) that the first Prime Minister of India had to explain to the 'majority community' that Muslims had lived in the subcontinent for 'thousands of years.' Despite Nehru's well-intentioned liberal critique against stigmatizing Urdu and Muslims as 'outsiders to India,' the Constituent Assembly declared Hindi to be the national language of India in 1951, at the behest of Hindi enthusiasts (primarily Hindi Sahitya Sammelan' members) within the Congress. The pleas of Muslim members and Nehru to the Constituent Assembly to accommodate both Hindi and Urdu scripts under the ambit of Hindustani did not materialise, nor was Urdu recognised as one of the regional languages of Uttar Pradesh.<sup>15</sup> Whilst Nehru after the Partition may have been critical of the myopic historical distortions surrounding Muslims in India but the Congress was emerging as a national party that was comfortable adhering to the beliefs of Hindu traditionalist members as equivalent to 'nationalism' since it had professed to speak for all Indians since colonialism (B.D Graham, 1973). Although the Anjuman endeavoured to emphasize that Urdu was not a language that was exclusive to Muslims, and several Hindu writers and poets also wrote in the language, the language's association with Muslims was hardwired in mainstream imagination due to the colonial legacy of Hindi-Urdu controversies and associated communal politics. The Muslim League associated the language with the Muslim gentry and Hindu nationalists encouraged Hindus in Uttar Pradesh to dissociate from it as separate from Hindu cultural identity (Christopher King, 1994). Consequently in India during the 1950s, the anti-Muslim and anti-Urdu rhetoric of Jan Sangh and Hindu traditionalists within the Congress had begun to materialize institutionally in Uttar Pradesh.

Thus, Urdu was consistently denied the status of a linguistic minority language or regional language in Uttar Pradesh (until 1994) on heavily contested grounds that deemed 'Muslim culture' as either foreign to Indian culture, or Urdu as a language that was similar to Hindi even though Hindustani was rejected as the official language of the country by prominent Hindu traditionalist Congress leaders in U.P. This was not a new development, given that the racialization of Muslims as ethnically and culturally 'foreign' had been entrenched by the right-wing members of the Hindu Mahasabha since the 1920s under colonialism and several Congress leaders had also adopted that anti-Muslim racist stance.<sup>16</sup> Since Urdu became the official national language of Pakistan, it was reason enough for Hindu traditionalist Congress leaders in Uttar Pradesh to not accord it with any recognition in the province—to punish Muslims for their perceived wrongs of the Partition. Notably, alongside these developments of otherising all Muslims as 'medieval foreign invaders' in distorted historical narratives and using Urdu as a political site for leveraging that racialization of the community, the Indian State also deliberately obfuscated caste histories within the Muslim community in the same era of the 1950s. In the next section I point out that although most U.P. Muslims, especially from poor backgrounds did not migrate to Pakistan, the consequences to diminish the power of Urdu by the Uttar Pradesh government

were manifold and layered in other intersecting processes, most notably the erasure of marginalised caste histories among Muslims through legislative measures in the 1950s which significantly came to define the contours of Muslim identity and minoritism in India.

## The 'De-Castifaction' of Muslims

Much like the dualistic tropes discussed in the previous section of the Muslim as a 'foreigner' and Urdu relegated as 'Hindi with a Persian script,' the erasure of caste recognition among Muslim communities was another seemingly contradictory project of constituting the Muslim as an 'outsider' to India normatively, while also institutionally denying lower caste and Dalit Muslims their 'indigenous' long durée histories of caste oppression, marginalisation and urban poverty. Critically, caste had been categorically restricted to Hindus through Article 341 of the constitution as the Constitutional Scheduled Caste Order in 1950 laid down four key clauses, in which Clause Three of the Scheduled Caste Order categorically went on to state, 'No person who professes a religion different from the Hindu religion shall be deemed to be a member of a Scheduled Caste' (GOI, 1950).

Hence Clause 3 of Article 341 of the Indian Constitution explicitly removed any provisions of 'positive discrimination' for historical and cultural contingencies of injustice of non-Hindu Dalit and lower caste groups. Clause 3 highlighted how the national elites and liberal thinkers of the constitution were willing to engage in contextualised frameworks of historical injustices faced by certain groups, so long as they were Hindus. This was a departure from colonial understandings of caste for a Constitutional Order that continued with colonial conceptions of representation and affirmative policies in many senses. Colonial administrators had recognised 'lower caste' and 'untouchability' as broad categories with distinct practices in different regions of India, but largely as a phenomenon of minoritism for groups that failed to find political representation due to extreme socio-economic marginalisation. In his work on 'depressed castes' of Uttar Pradesh, a term that was replaced by the term 'Scheduled Castes' by the 1950s, Galanter (1984) noted that 'educational backwardness' contributed to the social (and spatial) segregation of lower caste and Dalit groups irrespective of their conversion to non-Hindu faiths. Yet the Constituent Assembly upheld 'lower caste' and 'untouchable' identity as not existing within the purview of religious conversion to Islam or Christianity wherein these groups were ritualistically liberated from *Brahminical* (the highest caste, associated with priests and scholars) ideas of 'polluted' or 'unclean' identity. This process of removing caste based affirmative action for Other Backward Caste/*Ajlaf*<sup>17</sup> and Dalit or '*Arjal*' Muslims<sup>18</sup> collectively known as *Pasmanda* (oppressed) *Muslims*<sup>19</sup> is a project of governmentality which I refer to as the 'decastification of Muslims.'<sup>20</sup>

Caste hierarchization and discrimination among the Muslim community was less rigid and stratified than Hindus as several scholars (Sabherwal, 2010; Lidholm, 2001) have demonstrated in their works.<sup>21</sup> However it remained a defining feature of intergenerational poverty and subsequent constraints on the mobility for lower caste Muslims too. Despite this the Government Order of 1950 relegated caste to be defined as a framework as applicable only in Hindu contexts. When Christians such as Professor P.J. Kurien challenged this categorisation by pointing out to caste discrimination within South Indian Christian communities, he failed to garner support for his cause

notably from Christians with Brahmin backgrounds (Fazal, 2017). Significantly, even Hinduised Dalit leaders in the Constituent Assembly such as P.R. Thakur, Muniswamy Pillai and most vocally, H.J. Khandekar opposed converts to non-Hindu religions from Dalit backgrounds from demanding the expansion of the scope of 'Scheduled caste.'

Khandekar was a Marathi Dalit leader, and strongly against the conversion of Dalits to other faiths, unlike Dalit head of Constitutional Drafting Committee Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. Before joining the Congress, Khandekar was the Secretary of the *Tarun Mahar Sangh* which had famously 'reverted' 25 Mahar Dalit girls who had converted to Islam (Paswan and Jaideva, 2004). He strongly believed in the consolidation of the Hindu community, and emotionally appealed to the upper caste Hindus in the Constituent Assembly to extend affirmative action policies for Dalit Hindus for more than ten years as it was the patriotic duty of upper caste Hindus to raise the 'civilization of independent India' (Constitution of India, 1949). Although a friend of Ambedkar (Dalit Chairman of the Constitution Committee who had converted to Buddhism), Khandekar reprimanded Sardar Bhopinder Singh Mann and Sardar Hukam Singh who were pitching for affirmative action of lower caste Sikhs claiming that Dalits converted to 'casteless religions' for emancipation and did not require more provisions (ibid). Even the handful of Muslim parliamentarians such as Mohammed Ismail Sahib failed in demanding affirmative action provisions for Muslims and Christians from backward communities alongside Scheduled castes, despite noting that

As a matter of fact, there are backward people amongst the non-majority people as well. The Christians are backward. As a matter of fact, they are not adequately represented in the services of the provinces. So are the Muslims, and also the Scheduled Castes. If any provision is made, it has to be made for all such really [sic] backward people.

(Constituent Assembly Debates, 1948)

Ismail Sahib's appeals for extending affirmative action policies to the 'backward' Muslims and Christians, and the attempts to deny generations of caste induced marginalisation among non-Hindus persisted in the Constituent Assembly throughout the democratic set up years of the 1950s: even when there was evidence to the contrary. In 1955, the First Backward Classes Commission led by Chair Kaka Kalekar submitted its report to the Constituent Assembly, officially recognising the presence of 'backward communities' among Muslims. Despite Kalekar's observation that lower caste and Dalit Muslims were 'twice discriminated' by the community and the State, the Commission upheld that the absence of caste as a religious category in Islam meant that Muslims were not in need of reservations (Dasgupta, 2009). These developments were also telling of how India's post-colonial governmentality was premised on a Hindu public sphere with a nod for emancipation of discriminated Hindu and Hinduised lower caste and Dalit groups. This recognition arguably stemmed from the recognition of historical wrongs committed against those groups, especially by 'upper caste' Hindus. Yet Muslims who had the highest demography of lower caste and Dalit converts to the faith were not similarly categorised as they tried to escape the Hindu caste system.<sup>22</sup> Notably, Article 341 was later expanded, albeit with some contestations, to incorporate 'depressed castes' among Sikhs in 1956, and Buddhists in 1990 as the two faiths were seen as falling under the 'Hindu Law' constitutionally. But depressed castes among Muslims and Christians could not be incorporated as the case

was made that these faiths did not fall within the ambit of Hindu Law – thus making it evident that the Indian State was trying to bring all ‘Indic’ religions like Sikhism, Jainism, and Buddhism under its ambit unlike faiths that originated outside India such as Islam or Christianity. Tanweer Fazal (2017) notes that the Supreme Court of India upheld that if Muslims and Christians were to ‘revert’ to Hinduism, their marginalised caste status would be accepted by the government.<sup>23</sup> In short, consistent efforts were made to ensure the caste based affirmative actions were made tenable only for Hindus or those who fell under the ambit of Hindu Law, to the exclusion of Christians and Muslims unless they reverted to Hinduism to avail those benefits.

By constitutionally erasing caste among Muslims and Christians, faiths that Hindu nationalists have constantly defined as ‘foreign to the Indian soil’ since the British Raj (Islam, 2019), policies of emancipation and affirmative action for equity were denied to Muslims and Christians politically and economically. This rendered the most vulnerable Muslims and Christians even more precarious in post colonial India. Predictably, such a measure impacted lower caste and Dalit Muslims in Lucknow as the city transitioned economically in the years after the Partition. ‘Traditional professions’ that lower caste Muslims had practised in the *qasbas* (market oriented towns of the gentry/Nawabs) of Lucknow such as rickshaw pullers, *tongawallas* (carriage drivers), *ghasals* (those who bathe dead bodies), *gorkuns* (undertakers) *pheriwalaas* (roaming vendors), brass band players, *kaanmailiya* (ear wax fixers), *malishiya* (massagers), weavers in traditional *zardozi* and *chikankari* handicrafts, leather tanners and even *hijras* (hermaphrodites/eunuchs) witnessed an accelerated decline in their professions as they lost their patronage as protected and recognised groups working for elite Muslim local cultural economies when the country transitioned from a colonial to a post-colonial economy (Hasnain, 2016). As noted, the constitution of post colonial India did not guarantee the increasingly marginalised urban poor Muslim groups avenues for protection and emancipation, while Lucknow’s economy gradually changed to accommodate new business classes venturing into the city especially from the Hindu *baniya* (traders) community and Sikh refugee business classes (ibid). These transformations were similarly felt in everyday *mohalla* (locality) living too. The Town and Urban Planning Report (1951-1961) for the city of Lucknow consistently described Old Lucknow *mohallas* as ‘filthy,’ ‘dull’ and ‘not good in appearance’ and this process was casually explained as one that ‘naturally leads well-to-do-families to move out’ of these areas of old Lucknow.<sup>24</sup> This neglect of urban areas corresponded with growing urban poverty of Muslims too, including Muslims who had earlier had access to reservations in government jobs. Mohammed Arif, a Muslim man from the lower caste *Bishti* (water carrier) caste, recalled:

Earlier my father and grandfather were able to get jobs as water carriers and gardeners in government sector. But with the removal of caste provisions for Muslims, people such as myself, my relatives and my children can no longer avail these opportunities as they go to only Hindu Bishtis.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, many lower caste Muslims such as *Bishtis* who previously sought working class and service sector government jobs despite converting to Islam lost their right to ‘positive discrimination’ due to post colonial governmentality’s restrictive parameters on caste. In addition to economic sustenance, for some lower caste Muslims, particularly

women, there was pride in practising traditional arts and crafts for their elite patrons. Rabia Bano, an elderly woman from the Shia *julaha* (weaver) caste recalled:

Prior to independence, *our elite* [italics mine] employed us in their households. My great grandmother, grandmother and mother worked in peace in their mansions. But after the Act, they [elite Muslims] were no longer as rich as before, and with that, people like me had to look for jobs elsewhere. I became a *chikankari worker* [local Lucknow intricate embroidery] for an exploitative Rastogi businesswoman, which was more hard work and less pay than what my mother received.<sup>26</sup>

Rabia Bano's testament was common among several women of the *julaha* community who had traditionally worked in the *qasbas* of Nawabs whom she referred to as 'our elites.' The extreme exploitation of Lucknow's overwhelmingly Muslim female weavers due to 'middle men (and women)' became a subject of attention in several transnational studies on exploitation in unorganised labour sectors.<sup>27</sup> Connected to these histories of growing poverty and economic exploitation was also a sentimentally invested cultural affiliation of Muslims across caste and sect in Lucknow. Muslims took pride in presenting themselves as practitioners of the city's 'cosmopolitan high culture,' known for its textiles, mannerisms, food, handicrafts, dance, music and Urdu.<sup>28</sup> Although urban and economic transformations were necessary in some cases as India paved the road towards becoming an independent colony by the 1950s, the impact of these transitions were far from equally felt, especially for the poor non-Hindu urban minority groups and their traditional sources of livelihoods, with their often accompanying histories of lower caste or Dalit convert backgrounds. The erasure of caste among Muslims did not end casteism among Muslims. However, many formerly elite and increasingly middle-class Ashraf Muslims sought to downplay that aspect on theological grounds of Islamic egalitarianism. Mohammed Shahabuddin Querishi, a resident of the severely neglected Ballochpura mohalla in Lucknow, populated by mostly Dalit-Muslims remembered:

Unlike elite Muslims, the Partition was never an incentive for us to migrate to Pakistan as our local business [as butchers] was here, and we did not want the stigma of *muhajirs*<sup>29</sup> in addition to being lower caste Muslims there. Although we are a self-sustaining community of butchers, during my childhood, Ashrafs would treat us with disgust and not even touch our hands even though we are the ones who provided them meat. If we wanted to take money from them, we would have to cover our hands in cloth and lower our palms before them, as if we were begging.<sup>30</sup>

Many such accounts of discrimination against Pasmanda Muslims have been recorded by historians like Masood Alam Falahi, observing that Ashraf Muslims not only hid their casteist biases against poor and lower caste Muslims on the grounds of class (2007) but also dehumanised Dalit and lower caste Muslims, loosely calling them *Ajlafs* (commoners) and *Arzals* (despicable). Others like Mohammed Umar wrote prolifically in Urdu to raise the issue of casteism among Muslims, blaming Indian Hindu influences for it and beckoning Ashraf Muslims to supersede their casteism on Islamic grounds of equality of all races and by extension, caste (Umar, 1975; Ansari, 1960). Clearly, the logic of caste, which was the stratification of society along

hierarchical lines, was not exclusive to upper caste Hindus. Muslims who perceived their lineages to be 'superior,' ascribed to foreign ancestries often adapting similar casteist attitudes socially, similar to Brahmins who theologically believed the *varna* system to be a hierarchy based on so-called ritual purity (Falahi, 2007). Historians and Urdu writers such as Masood Alam Falahi have also pointed out the condescension of Ashraf Muslims towards lower caste and Dalit Muslims often masqueraded under conceptions of class and '*khandaani*' (family line) values among Muslims in Uttar Pradesh, besides the fact that had Indian Muslims been more vocal against casteism, an even larger percentage of Dalits might have converted to Islam (Ahmed, 1978). Furthermore, lower caste Muslims like Ilyas Mansuri of the *Pasmanda Muslim Samaj* activist organization in Lucknow maintained that the Ashraf *ulema* (clergy) had actively benefited from not educating Muslims about 'true Islam – one where we are all equal, and don't need them in the first place to play mediators between us and God.'<sup>31</sup> Mansuri's critique of the clergy as 'mediators' can also be attributed to the *ulema's* (historical) investment in maintaining their status as influential power wielders in the Muslim community. Although in Islam clergies are not a class or group sanctioned by the organised faith, caste ideas of continuing with their father's professions pervaded into the religiosity of Indian Islam too according to Falahi (2007).

Shia Muslims particularly were often accused by Sunni Muslims for upholding casteist ideas of genealogies in their claims to being 'Syed' or those who traced their genealogy to Prophet Muhammad.<sup>32</sup> This is perhaps not an exaggerated claim, given the dominance of the surname 'Syed' and Persianized heritage of Shias in Lucknow. But many Sunnis too identified with 'powerful' lineages, although most Muslims who converted to Islam (from lower caste and Dalit backgrounds) through Sufi mystics usually belonged to the Sunni sect.<sup>33</sup> However, irrespective of sectarian differences, tracing these 'foreign' lineages was not exclusive to elite or upper middle-class Ashraf Muslims. As Pasmanda Muslim leader Ilyas Mansuri also acknowledged:

Constructing genealogies that were not rooted in indigenous Indian histories was also a way that many Pasmanda Muslims had sought freedom from the stigma of being 'lower' caste or casteless/Dalit.<sup>34</sup>

Much like Ramnarayan Rawat's important work on how Dalit *chamars* in Lucknow produced their own genealogies which paved a resistance path for minorities to empower themselves beyond the gaze of the State, lower caste Muslims produced their own claims to trajectories that had nothing to do with stigmatised caste origins of Hindus. Significantly, Rawat (2011) has demonstrated that *Chamars* or Dalits in Lucknow were not just tied to leather-based occupations, and often produced their own genealogies for social mobility. Similarly, lower caste Muslims who converted to find liberation in what Charles Lindholm (2001) terms as Islam's 'radical theological equality before God' also sought to construct their genealogies in an Islamic time-space continuum that did not relegate their histories to stigma and servitude under upper caste people. It also remains equally important to assert, as Satish Saberwal notes, the stigma of caste within Muslims is notably less overtly discriminatory than within the Hindu community (2010). Saberwal has also pointed out that even lower caste scholars from prominent Muslim seminaries have histories of producing their own genealogies in an Islamic world history than a Hindu caste history.<sup>35</sup> Even Falahi has noted in his critique of Ashraf Muslims that theologically, Islam provided some

progressive clerics space to challenge casteism, a feature ironically also observed in the Constituent Assembly by those who contested against assigning caste based affirmative actions for marginalised Muslims due to theological grounds of equality of all castes and races in Islam - as noted with regards to the objections of Dalit leaders like H.J. Khandekar. However most significantly, the erasure of caste from the taxonomy of Muslims enabled the evasion of any responsibility for equity in parameters of caste set by the Indian State. And with a State that was unwilling to recognise Muslim histories of oppressed caste backgrounds for upliftment from stigma and poverty, lower caste Muslims, and Dalit Muslims often went on to produce their own genealogies to affirm a theology and history that sought agency and empowerment beyond the gaze of the Hindu dominated State and its language of caste.

Spurned by the State, with little avenues for institutional recognition of their continuing histories of oppression and extreme poverty (including the largely indifferent base of Ashraf Muslims), the weavers and artisans eventually took it upon themselves to construct their own genealogies, and eclipse caste as they had hoped for when they converted to Islam in Uttar Pradesh. Many Muslims from the *Julaha* or weaver caste began to identify themselves as ‘Ansaris,’ the butchers as ‘Quereshis’ and the sanitation and *bishti* caste Muslims as ‘Sheikhs’ – a bid to construct lineages that were perpetually Islamic across time-space continuum. Even colonial census collection of caste was not free from constraints. Observes religion studies scholar Remy Delage (2014) on the problems of governmentality, ‘Since many Hindus who converted to Islam took on the name Shaikh when they were required to register with colonial census officials, the entire community was dragged further down the social ladder, which shows the disjunction that sometimes exists between a group’s theoretical level in the caste hierarchy and its social status.’ Furthermore, even Muslims who knew their Dalit backgrounds sought to distance themselves from it for ‘strategies of symbolic advancement.’ Shabnam from the Dalit and Dalit-Muslim concentrated Lal Beg mohalla in Lucknow said:

Nobody wants to be associated with untouchability. It brings shame and ridicule from *the arrogant ones* [italics mine] ..... and arrogance does not have a religion.<sup>36</sup>

Shabnam’s explanation of constructing false or mythical genealogies despite her awareness of her caste history shows an imaginative leap where marginalised Muslims tried to emancipate their identities from stigma in conceptions of shared power and prestige with Ashraf Muslims. Complex as these ‘constructed genealogies’ surrounding caste may be among lower caste and Dalit Muslims, it nonetheless provided a sense of comfort, and even resilience to many Pasmanda Muslims. As noted by Kamran Bashir and Margo Wilson (2017):

“Despite enduring discourses about social hierarchy and socio-political activism, and a generalised have-not versus elite rhetoric that underlies assertions of community coherence and demands for amelioration, no established, homogeneous group appropriate for either scholarly investigation or policy planning can be identified. Rather, diversity, status ambiguity, and ongoing change processes provide the most cogent characterisation of Dalit Muslim communities in India today.”<sup>37</sup> However, the casteist bias against Dalit Muslims and other Muslims in demonised caste occupations such as butchers, manual scavengers, and sanitation workers, has persisted despite their

efforts to distance themselves theologically from the stigma of casteism. This is due to the widespread prevalence of Brahmin ideas of cleanliness, purity, and vegetarianism in North Indian society. Afzal Qureshi, a butcher from the severely underdeveloped and neglected Kasaibadagh mohalla in the heart of Old Lucknow pointedly observed:

When upper caste Hindus call butchers unhygienic, when they call us *janwar se bhi batar* (worse than animals), they are historicising us based on Brahmin notions of vegetarianism and social hygiene without outright calling us Dalits. But the language has strong undertones of caste.<sup>38</sup>

Unlike the Constituent Assembly's belief that conversion to Islam eclipsed the stigma of casteism, the oral history testimonies and material lived realities of Pasmada Muslims presents another picture. Until 1993, no OBC or Dalit Muslims were given access to 'reservations' in jobs and education (Singh, 1996). When a small number of these disadvantaged Muslims were finally given recognition by the implementation of the B.P Mandal Commission, they had to compete with Hindu OBCs and Dalits in an already anti-Muslim atmosphere. Many Dalit Muslims complained that they were clubbed together with OBC Muslims despite the different needs of the community (Moinuddin, 2003). Others noted that several OBC Muslim groups were missing from the Mandal Commission list with no explanation (Ibid). In addition, often there were discrepancies between the central government's shorter list of recognised OBC Muslims compared to provincial government lists of OBC Muslims.<sup>39</sup>

Complicating these legacies of representation and misrepresentation lay the project of Muslim self-identification. Unlike Hinduised Dalits who tried to associate themselves with Hindu *Kshatriya* or warrior/ruling castes in their genealogical constructions of the Self (Rawat, 2011),<sup>40</sup> Muslim convert efforts to produce histories of genealogies outside India also had tragic implications as it played into Hindu Right narratives of casting all Muslims as 'outsiders.' In addition, historians such as Peter van der Veer (2004) and Christopher Jaffrelot (1993) have pointed out that upper caste Hindu notions of being 'Aryans' was not purely biological in Hindu Right discourses since they politically also strived to integrate 'Dravidian' Dalits into their conceptions of the varna dharma as a 'syncretic strategy' - so long as Dalits and Hindus were a unified front against the uniformly racialized Muslim Other.

Politically however, elite and middle-class Ashraf Muslims remained at the forefront of representation, often with the support of poor and lower caste Muslims given the former's access to social capital relative to them. The North Indian Muslim representation in politics was either led by a small fraction of leftist Muslims with Marxist persuasions (often journalists or 'progressive' writers from the intelligentsia) who had little support among the masses, or socially conservative Ashraf Muslims with a wider following - many of whom by the 1980s became members of the ulema leadership.<sup>41</sup> Pasmada Muslims, with their own complicated self-identification histories and constructed genealogies often followed Ashraf leaders and ulema en masse in major cities including Lucknow. Subsequently in the 1990s, the handful of largely politically disempowered Pasmada Muslim leaders who demanded affirmative action policies for 'backward' Muslims failed in harnessing popular opinion either among Muslims or lower caste and Dalit Hindus.<sup>42</sup>

The voices of Pasmada Muslim leadership fell short both on the government ears and Ashraf leaders who would go on to demand reservations for Muslims

irrespective of caste but based on class. In 1994, Dr. Ejaz Ali, one of the founders of the *Pasmanda Muslim Mahaz* which began in the same year, from the adjacent province of Bihar launched the 'All India Backward Muslim Morcha (Protest),' noting the unique histories of Dalit and other backward caste Muslims and their need for affirmative action supports for the upliftment of the community. Dr. Ali slammed Ashraf Muslims for what he viewed as a singularly focus on the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992 by Hindu militants (Sikand, 2002). Yet, it was a weaver caste Pasmanda Muslim gentleman from a humble background, Hashim Ansari, who had launched the first public interest litigation against the Hindu nationalist project of building a Ram Mandir on the premises of the historic Babri mosque.<sup>43</sup> Evidently, anti-Muslim racialization had impacted the wider Muslim community in India given the difficulties and ambiguities of tracing caste histories, and the systematic collective socio-economic deterioration of the community. Despite casteism within the Muslim community, many Pasmanda Muslims view their identities as overlapping with both caste and religion. On introspection, even Dr. Ejaz Ali conceded that despite he continuing existence of caste and casteism among Muslims, Islam was an important aspect of identification for most converttee indigenous Muslims as it provided them 'self respect and equality' (Sikand, 2002).

Hindu caste stratifications of ritual purity and hierarchization cannot be simplistically implanted on to Indic-Islamic identities, despite the widespread prevalence of casteist attitudes among so-called Ashraf Muslims. Complexities of memory, social constructions of genealogies, and the Indian State's attempts to deny caste and by extension, affirmative action for Muslims, has produced unique trajectories of lower caste and Dalit Muslim disfranchisement. Nonetheless, it is imperative to note that Ashraf hegemony in Indian Muslim politics focused on Hindu Nationalism, rather than prioritizing policy making and issues impacting poor and/or lower-caste and Dalit Muslims explicitly due to their class, caste and historical marginalization.<sup>44</sup> By the mid 1990s, the politics of affirmative action became even more complicated for the Muslim community, with class intersecting with caste and religious identity. Against the background of socio-economic deterioration within the Muslim community that began in 1947 with the systematic attack against Urdu in Uttar Pradesh, the once proud Ashraf Muslims too had to institutional discrimination in public services/government jobs and confront notions that were previously used exclusively for Dalits or poor Muslims as the community collectively faced demonisation, homogenization and caste loaded derogatory stereotypes. Noted veteran anti-communal activist of Lucknow, Professor Roop Rekha Verma observed:

Tropes such as backward, dirty, unhygienic and *melch* (meat eaters) – that were once derogatorily used by Brahmins and other elites towards exclusively Dalits – increasingly got used for the Muslim community in Lucknow by the 1980s.<sup>45</sup>

Verma's reflection of how casteist terms came to be unanimously applied to Muslims over time is of importance to note in scholarship, especially in terms of recognising how anti-Dalit tropes informs and constitutes Islamophobia in India. Tellingly, the institutional marginalisation of Muslims, including the material implications of the cultural genocide of Urdu in Uttar Pradesh was minimised in Hindu Right political discourses and Muslims often blamed Muslims for their own 'backwardness' – as if

it was a malicious symptom of the community by virtue of being Muslims and not due to concerted systematic efforts that were leveraged against them. In sum, external racialising impositions on the community were ignored, and internally for Muslims, it contributed to their growing self-homogenization as a vulnerable ‘minority citizen’ community with their language, rights, and caste histories denied. When regional Dalit and Other Backward Castes (OBC) political parties like Bahujan Samajwadi Party and Samajwadi Party in the 1990s tried to show solidarity with Muslims or address some of their concerns (mostly indentarian), they would almost immediately be accused of ‘minority appeasement’ by the Hindu Right even though clearly the community was barely availing any socio-economic benefits as minorities.<sup>46</sup>

In 1995 prominent Muslim public figure, Syed Shahabuddin, started the first ‘Conference for the Reservation of Muslims.’ Shahabuddin asserted that any demands for reservations had to be made for Muslims based on class disadvantaged positionalities rather than caste.<sup>47</sup> As scholars such as Malvika Kasturi have also demonstrated, some Muslims with Mughal heritage may have had Central Asian or Persian ancestry centuries ago and access to socio-economic power at some points in history, however in colonial and today’s post colonial India even former Muslim rulers witnessed a drastic decline in their wealth and status (2012). Some were even reduced to penury and several popular news articles have alleged that one of the direct descendants of the last Mughal Emperor is a washerwoman today.<sup>48</sup> The claims by Syed Shahabuddin on the overall marginalisation of Muslims are corroborated by the findings of the Sachar Committee Report that investigated the status of Muslims from 1947- 2005, noting that OBC Hindus in India had more political and governmental representation than Muslims, and the overall economical capital of the OBC Hindu community exceeded that of Muslims in India.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, many OBC and Dalit Muslim activists had noted in the All India Backward Muslim Morcha conference that it was difficult for them to compete with other Dalit and OBC Hindus with limited reservations given the general anti-Muslim sentiment in the country, which often led them to also face bureaucratic hurdles in getting caste certificates (Moinuddin, 2003). Thus, the resistance to prevent Pasmanda Muslims from identifying with their caste due to both anti-Muslim and casteist bias of the Indian State, in addition to Ashraf Muslim demands for reservations of all Muslims facing economic marginalisation irrespective of caste histories, restricted the activist demands of Pasmanda Muslims such as Anwar Ali.<sup>50</sup> Yet, Pasmanda Muslim leaders resiliently struggle against caste based Islamophobia from savarna Hindus, and continue to challenge the hegemony of Ashraf Muslims as spokespersons for the entire Muslim community in India. It is vital to not silence caste marginalised histories of Muslims in India because as Ritty A. Lukose (2009) aptly observes “the production of caste and the production of religion by the Indian State,” must be viewed as “intersecting if not analogous processes.”

## **Conclusion**

Because Urdu is the language of ‘contestations’ in post colonial India, it is also the site at which caste and religion overlap and demonstrates the complexity of Muslim identity in India; both in terms of diversity within the Muslim community and the consequences of their collective racialization due to the governmentality of the Indian State. The engineered decline of the Urdu language alienated the Muslim community from its roots; culturally and economically their prospects for growth were hampered

almost immediately after the Partition, with devastating consequences within decades after India's independence. It is also imperative to emphasize that none of these implications for the Muslim community - whether Ashraf, Ajlaf or Arjal - could have transpired without the impact of the constitutional erasure of caste among Muslims in the 1950s. Tanweer Fazal (2017) has persuasively argued in his important work on the 'debate' around caste in the Constituent Assembly in the 1950s and its outcome as espoused in Article 341 that, "The complicity of the Christian and Muslim elite and their discomfort with the idea of caste, the anxieties of the conservative nationalists regarding large-scale conversion out of the Hindu fold and the fear of inviting displeasure of existing [OBC and Dalit] beneficiaries [were] plausible reasons for the denial of entitlement to the low-caste followers of Islam and Christianity." In essence, Article 341 led to a denial of equity policies to uplift the marginalised of the Muslim community in public representation, jobs, development projects and educational-facilities with far reaching consequences that have lasted till today.

Furthermore, as I have illustrated, there was a direct relationship between the decline of Urdu and its impact on the sustainable livelihoods of Pasmanda Muslims in Lucknow. As noted, many lower caste professions depended on Urdu for their economic sustenance or the maintenance of Lucknow's cultural legacy (which was closely intertwined with Urdu) as a city of old Muslim arts and textiles. The polemics surrounding Urdu, especially framing it as "foreign" to India and its association with Pakistan led to the language's controversial systematic decline in Uttar Pradesh in the era almost immediately after the Partition, impacting the decastification of Muslims in significant ways too through multiple ways and at multiple sites. The politics of language, caste, belonging, and racialization of Muslims in the democratic stage setting era of the 1950s enabled the Indian State to precipitate seemingly confusing tropes of universalizing Muslims, their culture, religion, and language. The legislative framing of the Muslim minority citizen was one that essentially upheld the stereotype of 'medieval foreign invader,' who imposed language and culture on Hindus. Urdu became a critical site for Hindu extremists and Hinduized Dalit leaders like Khandeka to subordinate Muslim interests immediately after the Partition and enforce historically inaccurate (if not contradictory) discourses that racialized Muslim citizens as the 'other' in India. That some Sanskritised Hindi advocates of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan such as Purshottam Das Tandon were also constitutionally demanding that conversion from Hindu to non-Hindu faiths should be outlawed, significantly highlights that for such actors the project of racializing the Urdu language and decastifying Muslims was embedded and mutually informed by one another.

Ultimately, the processes (and events) of shaping, omitting, defining, and asserting some features over others to mark the contours of a 'Muslim minority citizenship' was a project defined by post Partition borders of racializing exclusions and animosity towards Muslims who had come to embody the border internally within India. Therefore both casteism and Islamophobia have informed the intersectional and oppressed everyday realities of being Muslim in India, despite the heterogeneous community striving to resist otherizing tropes. Multiple and entangling processes of systematic discrimination and ahistoric racialization of the vast minority Muslim community have gradually facilitated the stereotypical conception of the casteless and foreign 'backward Musalman.'

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## Endnotes

1. I use the term Ashraf in this article to connote not just the formerly aristocratic and ruling Muslims classes of pre-colonial India, but also bourgeois "middle class" Muslims who emerged by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century under British colonialism.
2. Centering the crisis of Urdu's status in India had implications for downplaying the cultural, linguistic and regional diversities of Muslims in India, including other dialects of Urdu such as Dakhani Urdu. As Afsar Mohammed has noted in his work on Dakhani Urdu and Telgu, local and regional languages have historically played a formidable role in forming Islamic identities in the Indian subcontinent, even though the politics of Urdu has been used to racialize Muslims at a national level as this article explores. See lecture (May 2013) entitled, "Urdu beyond Manto" at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DtL\\_trhFyCQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DtL_trhFyCQ)
3. Mona Bhan aptly observed in the Annual South Asian Studies Conference at Wisconsin Madison in 2018 that "border frameworks" do not apply to Kashmir where "lines are contested." Kashmiri histories of identity and culture are often problematically limited to merely South Asia (specifically India and Pakistan) to the exclusion Central Asian historical influences over the disputed territories.
4. Dayal, Rajeshwar. *A Life of Our Times*, Orient Longman, 1998, pp. 95-96. Also see conference organized by non-Muslim advocates of Urdu entitled, 'Yadgar Jarida All India Ghayr Muslim Urdu Musanifin Conference' that took place in Lucknow in 1973.
5. Usman, Salauddin, *Urdu in Uttar Pradesh Report (from 1947 to 1991)*, Part 1, pg 11. Please note that Usman's Report was published in "Mainstream," a self-proclaimed leftist magazine. However archival records of printed editions have been hard to locate despite contacting the present editor for a copy. I use a private collection of Usman's detailed report which was procured from his daughter in Lucknow.
6. As noted by Laura Brace, the idea of a "good citizen" is grounded in not merely legal status or should be simplistically viewed as equivalent to self-possession, but that it is "inextricably bound up with expectations and notions of dependence and

- independence that inform our understanding of ‘belonging.’” See: Brace, Laura. ‘Reflections on the Good Citizen,’ in Bridget Anderson and Vanessa Hughes (eds) *Citizenship and its Others*, Palgrave Macmillan Publications: London, 2015.
7. In his upcoming book, *Dalits and the Making of Modern India* (Oxford University Press), Dalit scholar Chinniah Jangam observes that “contradiction” was a vital political tool in Post Colonial representative politics, noting, “Caste Hindu elites imagined a nation founded on contradictory ideals, an unequal society with inherited caste privileges intact alongside a liberal representative democracy.”
  8. Report of the Commissioner for Linguistic Minority Affairs, First Report, 1959. See: [https://archive.org/stream/in.ernet.dli.2015.104817/2015.104817.Report-Of-The-Commissioner-For-Linguistic-Minorities-First-Report\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/in.ernet.dli.2015.104817/2015.104817.Report-Of-The-Commissioner-For-Linguistic-Minorities-First-Report_djvu.txt)
  9. Usman, Salauddin, *Urdu in Uttar Pradesh Report (from 1947 to 1991)*.
  10. Unlike states such as Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra that had granted Urdu the status of a linguistic minority despite the percentage of Urdu speakers in these states being smaller than Uttar Pradesh. Another odd feature about Urdu getting recognized regionally is that in Jammu and Kashmir Urdu was accorded the status of a provincial official language, even though majority of Kashmiris (governed separately from the rest of India until recent times under Article 370) are not Urdu speakers.
  11. Paul Brass’s comprehensive work on language, religion and politics in North India details how Urdu was used to stigmatize Muslim minorities whilst not granting it regional recognition, along what I contend were clearly racialising lines.
  12. See: Gauba, K.L. *Passive Voices: A Penetrating Study of Muslims in India*, Sterling Publications: New Delhi, 1973. In 1985, socialist advocate Ahmed Rafiq Sherwani from Lucknow compiled statistics on the drastic decline of Muslims in civil services from 3 percent in 1971 to a shocking 1 percent in 1981 - based on earlier calculations done by K.L Gauba and his own gathering of statistical information from government records. His findings were further validated by the research finds of Lucknow University and Aligarh Muslim University professors on Muslim representation in public services in 1986. See: ‘Sarkaari Mulaazamato Main Aqileeyaton Ki Nomandagi Mein Khatarnaak Kaam’i (Alarming Drop in Minority Representation in Government Services), *Quami Awaaz*, 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1986.
  13. ‘Anjuman Taraqqi-e-Urdu (Hind) Submits Memorandum to the President Seeking Due Recognition for Urdu,’ *pamphlet published and circulated by Anjuman Taraqqi-e-Urdu*, 1954. This memorandum is also available in A.G Noorani’s collection of primary source materials and documents pertaining to the study of Muslims in India in *The Muslims of India: A Documentary Record*, Oxford University Press: New Delhi, 2003, pg. 304.
  14. See: Das Gupta, Jyotirindra. *Language, Conflict and National Development*, University of California Press: Berkeley, 1970, pp. 127-196. Curiously enough, Das Gupta does not mention the controversy surrounding the census “data” collection of Urdu in Uttar Pradesh despite many Muslim advocates noting that census enumerators marked ‘Hindi’ as the mother tongue of many Urdu native speakers.
  15. The signatories of advocating for Hindustani and/or the recognition of Urdu as the regional language of Uttar Pradesh included Nawab Ismail Khan, Nazi Ahmad, B. Pocker Sahib, A.H Ghaznavi and Z.H Lari. See Primary Source: *The Times of India*, 20<sup>th</sup> August 1949 for the public petition in the Constituent Assembly.

16. Significantly, scholar Remy Delaje (2014) has noted that even the colonial census on caste among Muslims was not free from problems as often lower caste and Dalit Muslims recorded themselves as Ashrafs.
17. The term *Ajlaf* was often used by elite Muslim aristocrats for “commoners” irrespective of caste heritage, but today it is often used to describe Muslims from ‘Other Backward Castes’ (OBC) backgrounds.
18. *Arjal* is a polemical term which derogatorily implies someone who is despicable.
19. The term “Pasmanda” has had a resurgence since the early 2000s to include within its ambit the historical ambiguities surrounding the memory of caste for Muslims from marginalized caste convert backgrounds.
20. Surprisingly, there is no reference to the ‘decastification’ of Muslims in dominant literature, unlike the use of the term for ‘Christian decastification.’ See for example: Thottupuram (1981), Jebmalai (1999) and, Chatterjee, A. P.(2004).
21. For examples see: Saberwal, Satish. ‘On the Making of Muslims in India Historically,’ in Basant Rakesh and Shariff Abusaleh (eds) *Handbook of Muslims in India*, Oxford University Press: New Delhi, 2010. AND Lidholm, Charles, ‘Caste in Islam and the Problem of Deviant Systems: A Critique of Recent Theory,’ in T.N Madan (ed) *Muslim Communities of South Asia: Culture, Society and Power*, Manohar Publications: New Delhi, 2001
22. Activists Ali Anwar and Ejaz Ali claim that some 75 per cent of Muslims are from Dalits and OBC backgrounds. Several historians have written about the conversions of Muslims from marginalised caste backgrounds since medieval times.(See, Ali, 2009; Eaton,1993).
23. Tanweer Fazal cites the case of *S. Rajagopal v. Arumnugam* where the Supreme Court held that the caste system prevailed only among Hindus or possibly in some religions closely allied to the Hindu religion like Sikhism. See: Fazal, Tanweer (2017)
24. Lucknow Town and Urban Planning Report (1951 -1995), pg 63-65.
25. Interview taken on 4<sup>th</sup> November 2015, Nakhaas, Old Lucknow.
26. Interview taken 4<sup>th</sup> October 2016, Nakhaas, Old Lucknow.
27. See for example: Papola, T.S, (1982). *Women workers in an urban labour market [microform]: A Study of Segregation and Discrimination in Employment in Lucknow (India)*, sponsored by International Labour Organisation, 1982. For recent works on the structural barriers faced by needle-workers in Lucknow, see Mohammed Usman’s Conference Paper, *The Constraints in Accessing Micro-Credit and the Development of Women’s Entrepreneurship: A study of the Work Dynamics of the Artisans of the Chikan Embroidery Industry of Lucknow*, at Istanbul University, 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2019.
28. Paul Brass has noted that weaver caste Muslims, from what was dubbed as “julaha” caste in Bihar led by the Mommin movement were also invested in the preservation of Urdu in their state although they were critical of Ashraf leadership. See: Brass, Paul. *Language, Religion and Politics in North India*, Cambridge University Press: London, 1974, pp. 245-247.
29. A term with discriminatory implications, espoused by Punjabi Pakistanis for U.P and Bihari so-called “migrants” to Pakistan after the partition.
30. Interview taken on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2016, Ballochpura Mohalla.
31. Interview taken in Pasmanda Muslim Samaj Office in Hazratganj (Lucknow), 28<sup>th</sup> February 2018. As per the booklet of the organization, “Mansuri Samaj ka Paigaam: Pasmanda Jagao-Desh Bacchao” (The Message of Mansuris: Save

- Backward Muslims, Save the Country), the Pasmanda Muslim Samaj, (Society for Backward/Marginalized Muslims) was founded in 2011, an extension of earlier efforts to consolidate Muslims under the 'All India Mansuri Samaj.'
32. "Syeds" claim to descend from the tribe of Quraysh which Prophet Muhammed belonged to, and often Shia aristocratic families claim to trace their ancestry to the Prophet's nephew, Imam Ali. However, this phenomenon is not exclusive to Shias, with Sunnis also often "tracing" their lineage from the Quraysh tribe as well. This includes Dalit and lower caste Muslims who, as this article has highlighted, have complex histories of claiming different genealogies. [For reasons of maintaining Sunni-Shia peace between neighbours often living side-by-side in Muslim dominant Old Lucknow mohallas, the author has not cited the names or alluded to any references of those who held perspectives and accusations about casteism among certain sects.]
  33. For an excellent historiography and academic discussions on the role played by Sufis in converting lower caste Hindus and Dalits to Islam, see: Aquil, Raziuddin (ed.) *Sufism and Society in Medieval India*, Oxford University Press: New Delhi, 2010. For the transition of formerly aristocratic "Ashrafs" to bourgeois Muslims in the nineteenth century, see: Pernau, Margrit. *Ashraf into Middle Classes: Muslim in Nineteenth Century Delhi*, Oxford University Press: New Delhi, 2013.
  34. Interview taken on 28<sup>th</sup> February 2018, Pasmanda Muslim Samaj office, Hazratgani, Lucknow.
  35. Most notably the weaver caste founders of the famous Darul Uloom Deoband Islamic seminary in Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh.
  36. Interview taken on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2016. See Joel Lee's article on the Dalit history of Lal Bagh mohalla entitled, "The Feast of Lal Beg: Dalit Religion 'Underground'" in Nadeem Husnain's, *The Other Lucknow: An Ethnographic Portrait of a City of Undying Memories and Nostalgia*, Vani Prakashan Publications, 2016.
  37. Sujatha Gidla's poignant memoir of growing up in 1960s India is a telling example of how conversion doesn't necessarily eclipse caste, although it provided Dalit Christians like Gidla and her family options for education in sought-after "English medium" Christian missionary schools. See: Gidla, Sujatha. *Ants among Elephants: An Untouchable Family and the Making of Modern India*, Farrar, Strous and Giroux: New York, 2017.F
  38. Interview taken on 3<sup>rd</sup> November, 2016, Kasaibadagh Mohalla, Old Lucknow.
  39. Ibid. Interestingly, the year after the Mandal Commission recognized certain oppressed and backward caste groups among "indigenous" Muslims, Urdu was implemented as a regional language in Uttar Pradesh in 1994 under OBC Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, Mulayam Singh Yadav. Yadav famously called Urdu, "the language of Uttar Pradesh."
  40. As Rawat has demonstrated in his work about the close ties between *Adi Samaaj* run by Dalits and *Arya Samaj* dominated by upper caste Hindus in Lucknow. See: Rawat, Ramnarayan S. *Chamars and Dalit History in North India*, Indiana University Press: Blooming and Indianapolis, 2011, pg 37.
  41. This issue of bourgeois Muslims (especially from Lucknow) representing the community's "needs" also stood true when it came to the status of Urdu. See: Brass, Paul. *Language, Religion and Politics in North India*, Cambridge University Press: New York, 1974, pp.235-236.'

42. Despite scholar Irfan Ahmad's (2003) hopes that "the very grammar of Muslims politics in India" could veer for a "progressive agenda" with the rallying call of Pasmanda Muslim leaders.
43. Building upon Khalid Anis Ansari's important article entitled, 'A Tale of Two Mosques,' published in *Himal South Asia* (2016), it is important to observe that caste cannot be examined as the only lens to investigate Muslim representational politics without accounting for the role of anti-Muslim racialization that has impacted lower caste and Dalit Muslims too, even as so-called Ashraf Muslims try to stake their (controversial and often incompetent) claims as community leaders.
44. Arshad Alam (2009) notes that Pasmanda Muslim leaders have failed to challenge the religious articulations of Ashraf ulema members.
45. Interview taken in *Sanjhi Duniya* NGO headquarters, 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2016.
46. The language of "minority appeasement" has often been deployed by the Hindu Right since the 1970s with regards to a range of issues from much needed educational and development facilities for the Muslim community to controversial laws that have upheld patriarchal personal laws among Muslims – making no distinction between what is required for the upliftment of the community and what actually subjugates some of its most marginalized members including women. Some scholars such as Kameshwar Choudhary have claimed that in development policies the Indian State should not follow a policy of communal development, particularly for Muslim minorities, lest they be accused by the Hindu Right of "minority appeasement." Others like Yamini Ayer contend that "secularism" itself has come to signify "Muslim minority appeasement" in Hindu Nationalist discourses and the two are understood as synonyms in common parlance. See: Choudhary, Kameshwar. Dilemma of secularism: State policy towards education of Muslims in India after independence, in J. B. G. Tilak (ed.) *Education, society and development: National and International Perspectives*, NIEPA: New Delhi, 2003, pp. 173-181. And Yamini Iyer and Meeto Malik, Minority rights, secularism and civil society, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol 39, Issue No. 43, 2009, pp. 4707-4711.
47. See: Syed Shahabuddin, 'Reservation for Muslims is Constitutional and Socially Necessary in National Context', *Milli Gazette*, 1-15 October 2004.
48. See: 'Mughal bahu languishes in a slum,' *Times of India*, 11<sup>th</sup> December 2005. In 2009, *The Hindustan Times* ran a story entitled, 'Mughal Emperor's poverty struck descendent to get a job,' 1<sup>st</sup> July 2009. In 2013 (updated 2016), *The Daily Mail* reported that Sultana Begum, the wife of the great grandson of the Last Mughal Emperor, received a pension of Rs. 6000/month (110 CAD) for the upkeep of her six children and herself. 'The slumdog princess: how the descendant of the Indian Mughal rulers who built the Taj Mahal now lives in desperate poverty,' 18<sup>th</sup> September 2013, *The Daily Mail*.
49. *Sachar Committee Report – Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community of India*, Prime Minister's High-Level Committee Cabinet Secretariat, Government of India, November 2006, pp. 91-97.
50. Co-founder of Pasmanda Muslim Mahaj along with Dr. Ejaz Ali. Also see his book: Anwar, Ali. *Masawat ki Jung* ('The Struggle for Equality,' translated from Hindi to English by Mohammad Imran Ali and Zakia Jowher), Indian Social Institute: New Delhi, 2005.