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No. 12018/4/2005-SCD (R.L.Cell)
Government of India
Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment

Muslim groups currently bracketed under the category 'OBC' come essentially from the non-ashraf section of the Muslim population. They are the converts from the middle and lower caste Hindus and are identified with their traditional occupation. A study of a village in Uttar Pradesh could identify eighteen such groups, for example, Julahas (weavers), Mirasis (singers), Darzis (tailors), Halwais (sweetmakers), manihars (banglemakers) and so on.¹³ The 1911 Census listed some 102 caste groups among Muslims in Uttar Pradesh, at least 97 of them came from the non-ashraf category. Many such groups such as the Rajputs, Kayasthas, Koeris, Koris, Kumhars, Kurmis, Malis, Mochis were common among both Hindus and Muslims.

Since the Constitutional (Scheduled Caste) Order, 1950, popularly known as the Presidential Order (1950), restricts the SC status only to Hindu groups having 'unclean' occupations'. Their non-Hindu equivalents have been bracketed with the middle caste converts and declared OBC. Thus, the OBCs among Muslims constitute two broad categories. The halalkhors, helas, lalbegis or bhangis (scavengers), dhobis (washermen), nais or hajjams (barbers), chiks (butchers), faqirs (beggars) etc belonging to the 'Arzals' are the 'untouchable converts' to Islam that have found their way in the OBC list. The momins or julahas (weavers), darzi or idiris (tailors), rayeens or kunjara (vegetable sellers) are Ajlafas or converts from 'clean' occupational castes. Thus, one can discern three groups among Muslims: (1) those without any social disabilities, the ashrafis; (2) those equivalent to Hindu OBCs, the ajlafas, and (3) those equivalent to Hindu SCs, the arzals. Those who are referred to as Muslim OBCs combine (2) and (3).

Recommendation

"By clubbing the arzals and ajlafas among Muslims in an all encompassing OBC category, the Mandal Commission overlooked the disparity in the nature of deprivations that they faced. Being at the bottom of the social hierarchy, the arzals are the worst off and need to be handled separately. It would be most appropriate if they were absorbed in the SC list, or at least in a separate category, Most Backward Classes (MBCs) carved out of the OBCs."

"The third group, those with similar traditional occupation as that of SCs, may be designated as Most Backward Classes (MBCs) as they need multifarious measures, including reservation, as they are 'cumulatively oppressed'."

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