

Hon'ble Prime Minister
Government of India
New Delhi

Sub: Pasmanda Muslims

Dear Sir,

It was a pleasant surprise to hear you talk about 'Pasmanda', but the Pasmanda Muslims want 'sam-maan' (equality and dignity), not 'sneh' (affection). The term 'sneh' has a specific connotation: That the Pasmanda Muslims need 'sneh' denotes that they are an inferior lot requiring patronage from the ones who are superior.

How can any party or government be superior to the people of the country? As early as 22 years ago, I authored a book titled 'Masawat ki Jung', which means 'struggle for equality'. We are not fighting to achieve 'dominance' of any kind over any other group or groups inside or outside the Muslim society. Our fight is for equality.

Has the sudden move to take out 'Sneh Yatra' for Pasmanda society something to do with vote-bank politics? Isn't it aimed at pitting Muslims against one another? Pasmanda Muslims do not support any party blindly. No party should take them 'for granted'.

Our fight is not against any caste, creed or community; we are demanding our due that is commensurate with our population from the government and the political elite so that we can stand on an equal footing with non-Pasmanda people. Our fight is peaceful and within the constitutional framework. It's not that we, as Pasmanda Muslims, are asking for something special separately; rather we, as Muslims, are demanding that the discrimination against us by the government be stopped forthwith. The same demand is also for our Christian Dalits. They are also being punished for being Christians.

We have been of the firm belief since the very beginning that the Pasmanda Muslims alone cannot win this battle. We can succeed only with the help of Pasmanda-Dalits of all religions and other progressive and justice-loving people.

In 1998, we formed a social organization called Pasmanda Muslim Mahaz because the term 'Pasmanda' is religion and caste neutral. There is no caste or religion by the name of Pasmanda. All the communities -- Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist and others -- have people from Pasmanda, Dalit and Adivasi sections. Not only do we have a relationship of pain with these sections, but our DNA is also same. We have put the word 'Pasmanda' before the word 'Muslim' in our organization's nomenclature. For, historically we are Pasmanda first, Muslims later. We have converted to Islam for 'masawat' (equality). We, Pasmanda

Muslims, are the original inhabitants of our country, India. Hardly one or two per cent of Muslims have come to India from Arabia, Iran and Iraq. We are not the people of 'Aqliyat' (minority); we are 'Aksariyat' (bahujans).

'Pasmanda' is an Urdu-Persian word which means people left behind or oppressed. We don't want to continue as 'Pasmanda'; we aspire to become 'Peshmanda' (the one who leads from the front).

Mr. Prime Minister, you have asked your partymen to take out 'Sneh Yatra' for the Pasmanda Muslims. This will prove effective only when communal harmony is maintained in the society. What's the point in taking out a 'Sneh Yatra' if hate statements and bulldozers also go on? Pasmanda Muslims have been the worst hit of all the campaigns of mob lynching in the name of cow protection, ghar-wapsi, love jihad, Tablighi jihad in the time of Corona pandemic or any temple-mosque conflict that have been going on since 2014. Those killed, burnt, maimed, framed in police cases and jailed due to such incidents were mostly Pasmanda Muslims.

Even if we leave alone the BJP MPs and MLAs, don't your ministers and chief ministers say on record that Muslims should be 'buried alive' or 'sent to Pakistan'? Didn't Home Minister Amit Shah ji call upon the people, at the time of Delhi Assembly elections when a peaceful movement of Muslim women against NRC and CAA was also going on, to 'press the button in such a way that Shaheen Bagh gets electric shock'? Mr. Prime Minister, does it suit a person of as high a stature as you to say that you recognize people by their sartorial preferences?

When Muslims did not come under provocation, aren't their prayers now being disrupted, aren't their mosques being attacked and isn't blasphemy against their Prophet being committed? Even as our country's image continued to be tarnished all over the world because of this, you have not spoken a single word against it till date. On the contrary, the Muslims, intellectuals, journalists and civil society activists, who raise their voice against it, are being put behind bars.

Our organization has always campaigned among the Pasmanda Muslims to follow the path of peace and harmony, act wisely and look forward. Do not become aggressive under any circumstances. Do not take the law in your hands. Barring a few exceptions, our people have generally displayed patience and tolerance. We have always been against all forms of communalism and religious mobilization. Our forefathers like Abdul Quyyum Ansari and Maulana Ali Hussain Asim Bihari along with forty thousand people gathered under the banner of the Momin Conference at the India Gate in Delhi in 1940, opposing Jinnah's and Savarkar's two-nation theory and 'Hindu Rashtra' concept. The same path was followed by Maulana Atiqur Rahman Mansoori, Mian Abdul Malik Raini and others. These all were leaders of Pasmamanda community, weren't they?

A journalist and writer from Champaran, Pir Mohammad Moonis had written many articles and reports in Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi's newspaper 'Pratap' and informed Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi about the exploitation and atrocities of the 'Nilah' landlords in Champaran. When Gandhi came to Champaran and an attempt was made to kill him by poisoning his food and water, it was Mr. Batak Mian who saved his life. We are not the killers, but the savers of Gandhi. Jharkhand's revolutionary warrior Sheikh Bhikhari was caught and instantly hanged in 1857. He was considered by the Tommies so dangerous to the British rule that they did not think it wise to waste time on his trial and straightaway prosecuted him. All the above-mentioned three persons were also Pasmanda Muslims.

When Pakistan attacked India with a US patent tank in 1965, the Hawaldar, Abdul Hamid who destroyed the tank and was awarded the Param Vir Chakra posthumously, was also a Pasmanda Muslim. Bharat Ratna awardee Shehnai maestro Ustad Bismillah Khan and legendary cine-actor Dilip Kumar alias Yusuf Khan were also from Pasmanda community. The nation has been proud of them.

Even in the present times, our organization has always been raising voice against communal polarization effected by the BJP-RSS or the likes of AIMIM's Asaduddin Owaisi. Both these types of people work to strengthen each other. One's ideology is 'Manuwadi', the other's is 'Ibliswadi'. We believe that the cure for all the diseases arising out of such religious mobilizations lies in the Pasmanda movement.

Mr. Prime Minister, even if the BJP is extending a friendly hand towards Pasmandas for their votes, could you at least take these few steps immediately: There are about a dozen castes within the Pasmanda Muslims such as Halalkhor (scavenger, Bhangi), Muslim washerman, Muslim cobbler, Bhatiyara, Gadhedi etc for whom the Sachar Committee and the Ranganath Mishra Commission have recommended Scheduled Caste status. Has your government, in response to a query of the Supreme Court last year, replied that it will not accept this recommendation. Will you end this religion-based discrimination by increasing the quota of Schedule Caste? Will the nomadic tribes like Mewati, Van Gujjar, Sapera, Madari etc, who were called criminal tribes during the British period, be included in the 'Scheduled Tribe'? If not, then nothing fruitful is going to come out of the drum-beating by some greedy people.

Will you stop the hate campaign that has been going on unchecked against Muslims? Will you help the artisan castes who were devastated by your edicts like demonetisation, GST and complete lockdown during Corona period? Will you help them revive their business by procuring their produce and providing them cheap electricity and raw materials? Will some immediate steps be taken to give relief to the lives being devastated by the increasing inflation? Will a countrywide census be conducted to know the exact population and socio-economic status of the Pasmandas and Dalits of all religions? Your present government has increasingly made reservation redundant by handing over the public sector institutions to private players. Will you implement the quota system in private sector also? If not, then how and why should Pasmandas trust 'aapki sarkar'?

Muslims in general and Pasmanda Muslims in particular have been politically boycotted insofar as their representation in the Parliament and the Legislative Assemblies is concerned. The process of their economic boycott has also begun. Will you like to reverse these processes? What is going to change if one or two 'fards' (persons) from the BJP background are made ministers or governors? Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, Syed Shahnawaz Hussain, M.J. Akbar, Najma Heptullah and Arif Mohammad Khan have been seen supporting many controversial policies and decisions of the current government -- arguably more than other BJP leaders. However, there is a big difference between being a Muslim and being a leader of Muslims who can empathize with them.

It is hoped that you would like to take a call on our above-mentioned demands and suggestions soon.

(Ali Anwar Ansari)

Founder President of All India Pasmanda Muslim Mahaz and former MP (Rajya Sabha)

July 15, 2022