

# Social Caste Structure and its Impact on Muslim Backwardness (*Pasmandgi*) in South Asia

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# Background

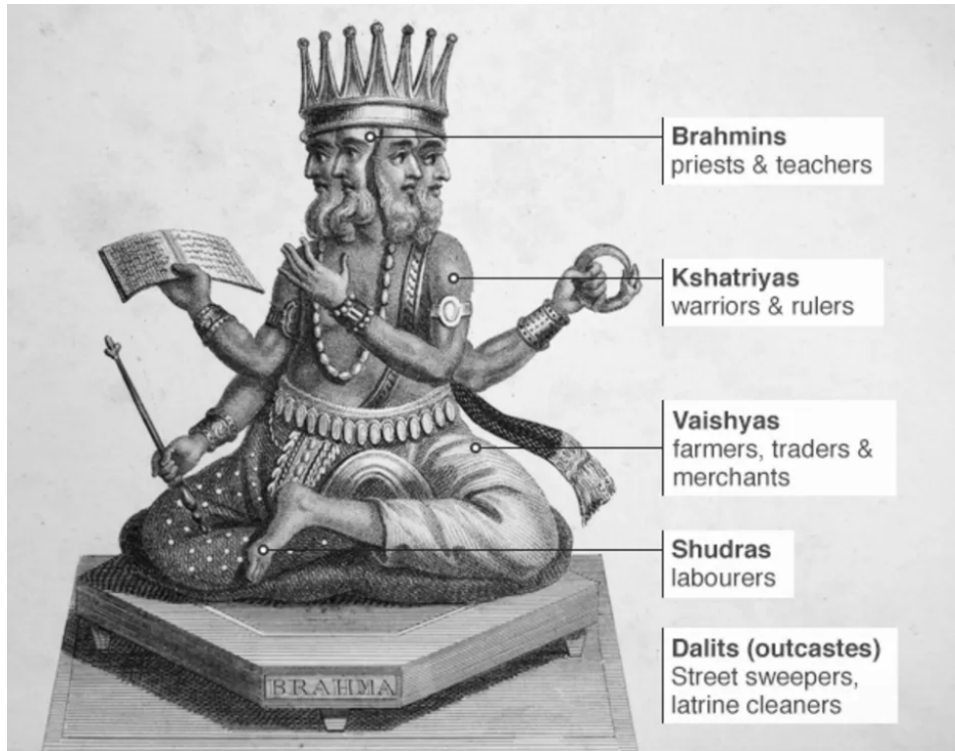


Figure: The Hindu Varna System

Source: BBC

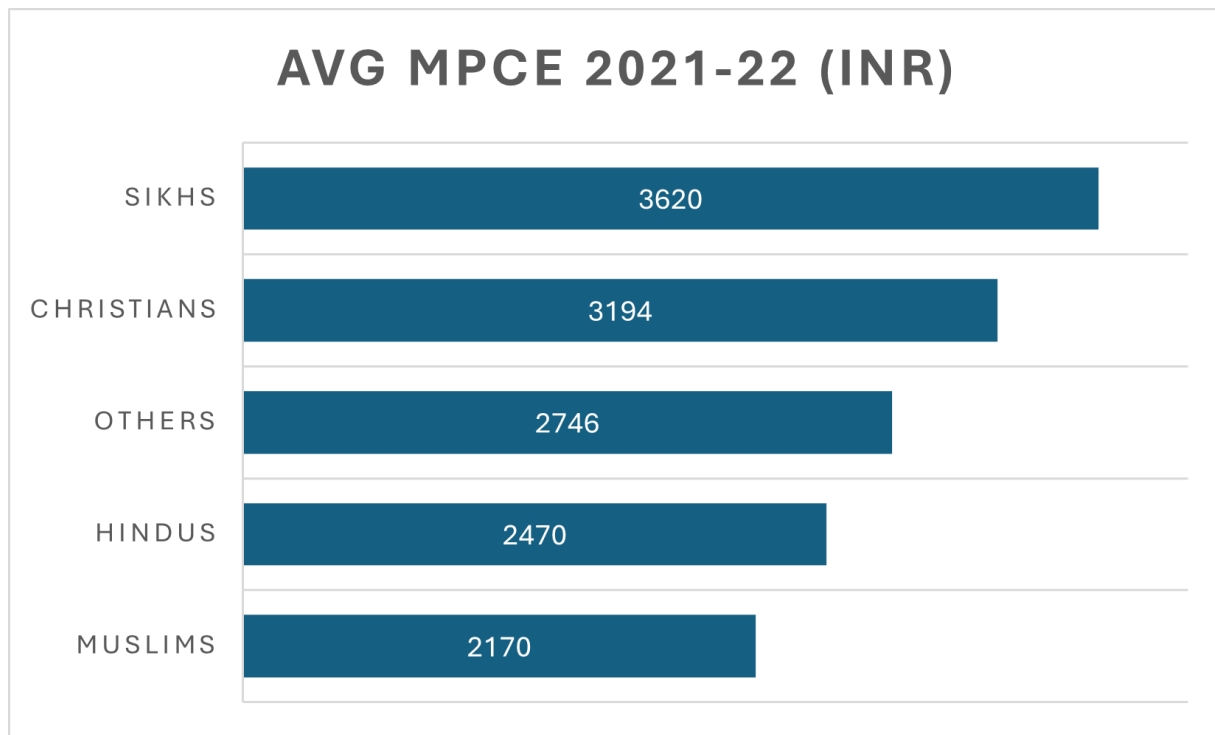
# Motivation & Research Question

- While much is written on the socio-economic impact of the Hindu caste or *jati* system on low-caste Hindus, there is a conspicuous dearth of literature analyzing the same on non-Hindu populations of South Asia.
- This study fills in the gap by analyzing the impact of the Hindu *jati* system on socio-economic backwardness or *pasmandgi* of South Asian Muslims.
- **Methodology:** Primary Sources (British Indian Census 1871-1931, PLFS, AIDIS, HCES); Secondary Sources (Commission Reports, Research Papers, News Articles, Policy Briefs and so on).

# Muslim *Pasmandgi* in Indian Context

- Why does this research matter? Because Muslims are the most *pasmanda* group in India.

# MPCE as a proxy for Income



**Figure:** Average Monthly Per-Capita Consumption Expenditure

*Source:* Hindustan Times, PLFS, AIDIS

# Avg HH Assets: A Measure of Wealth

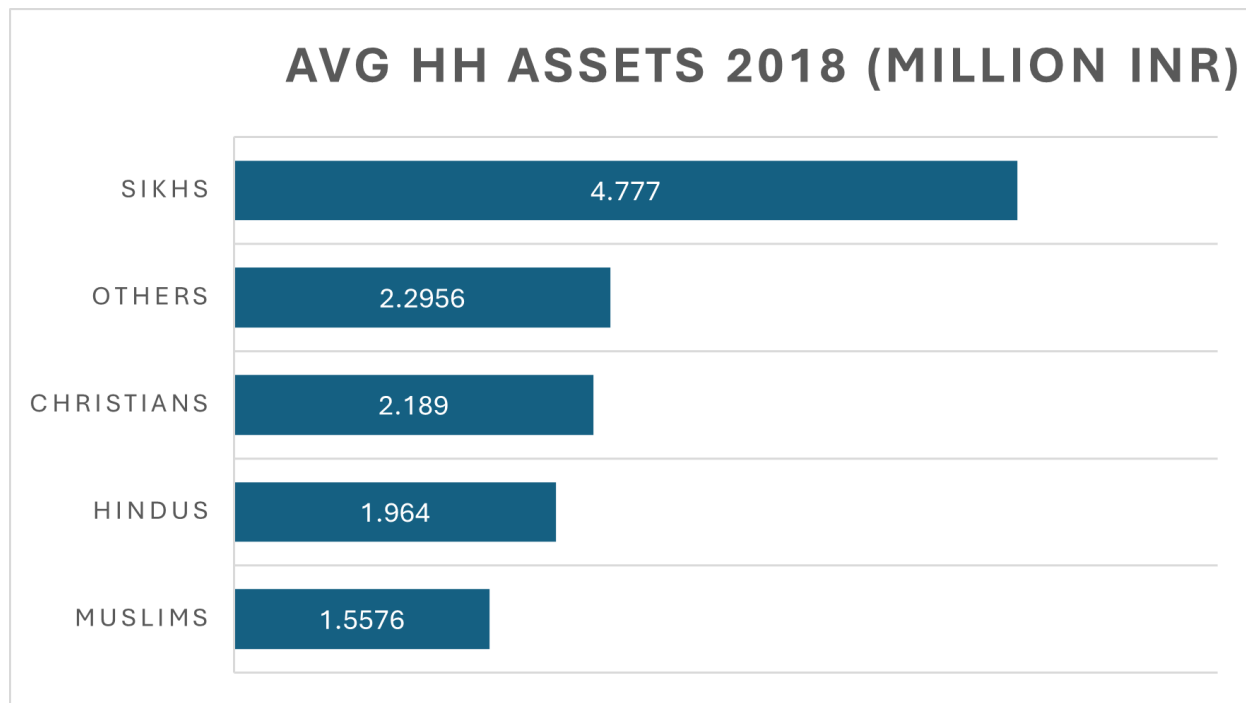


Figure: Average Household Assets

*Source: ibid*

# Employment & Educational Comparison

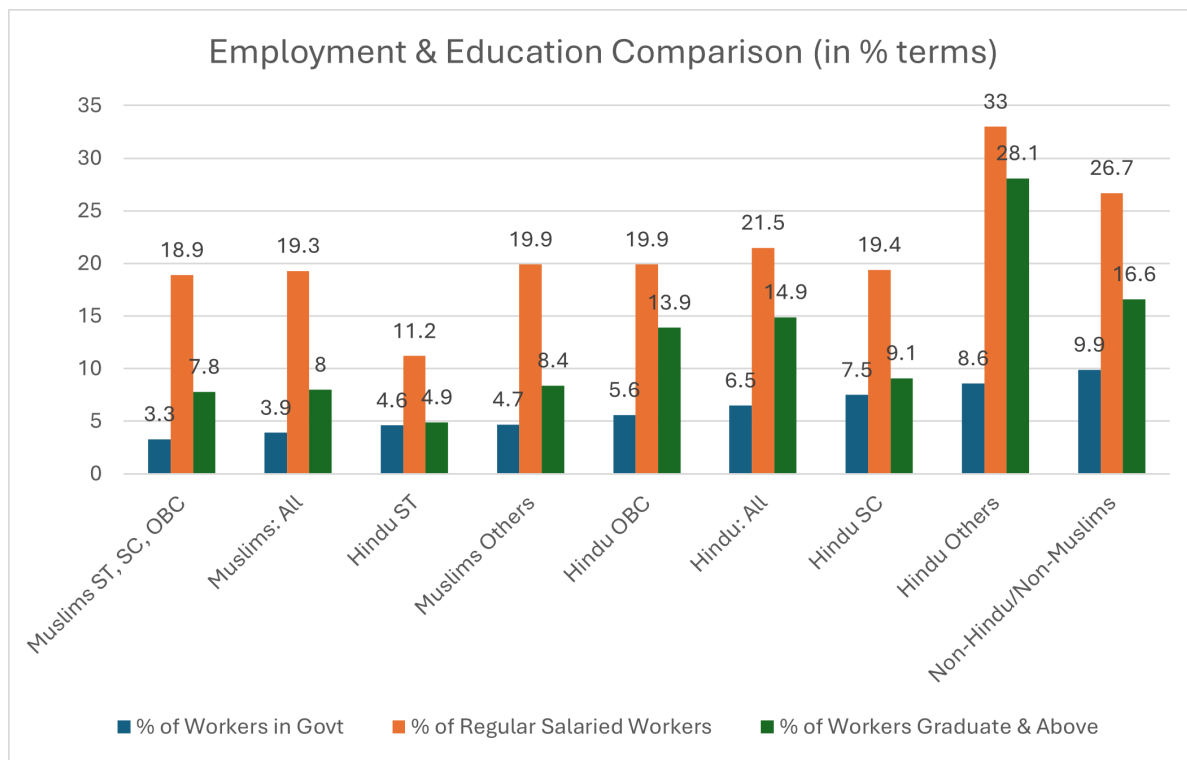


Figure: Employment & Educational Outcomes

Source: ibid

# Employment Outcomes

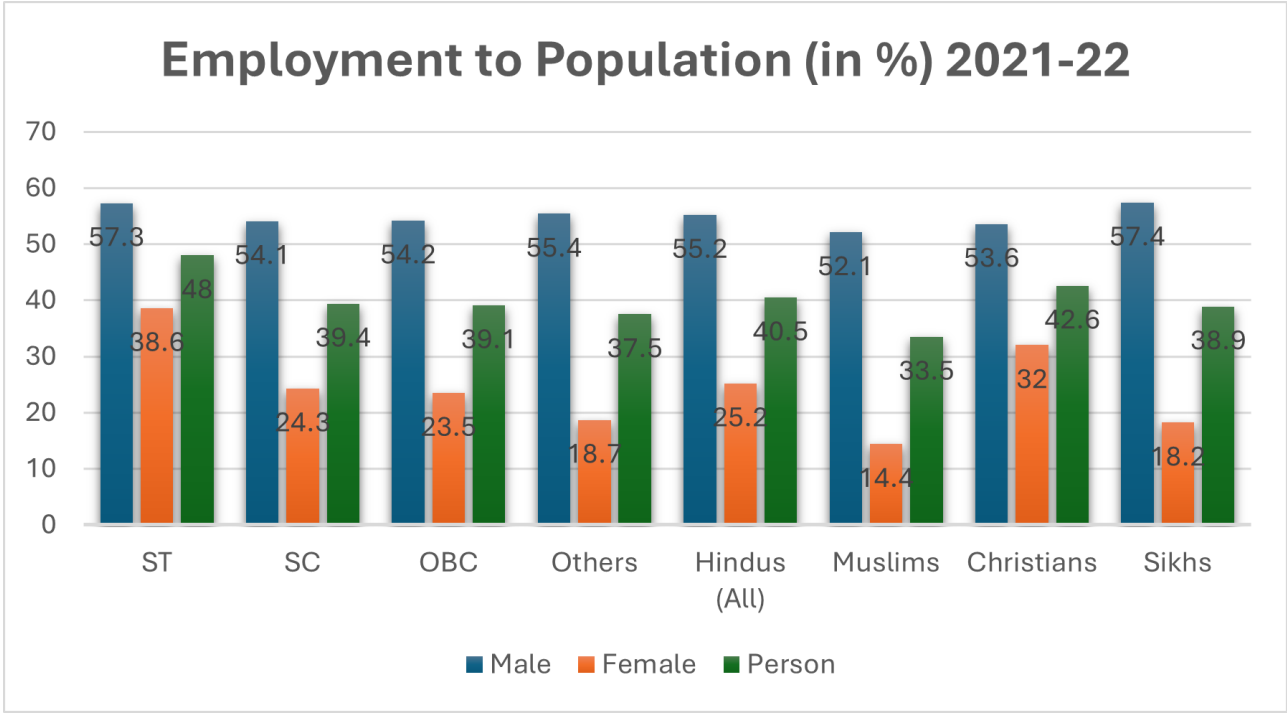


Figure: Work to Population Ratio

Source: PLFS 2023



# Is Islam Responsible for Muslim *Pasmandagi*?

- Many scholars have made sense of Muslim *pasmandagi* via a cultural explanation: there are elements within Islamic philosophy & jurisprudence and general Muslim culture (e.g., excessive religiosity or institutions) that hinder their progress.

# Guiso, Sapienza, and Zingales (2003)

- Religious beliefs and practices have a significant impact on both individuals and institutions.
- However, the intensity of religiosity determines the strength of this effect.
- Among all religious groups, Muslims are the most influenced by their religious beliefs and practices.
- Individuals with an Islamic upbringing tend to have greater trust in government, courts, and other authority institutions but lower general trust.
- Christianity is the most conducive faith to economic growth and development, whereas Islam views competition unfavorably and is the most anti-free market.

- Now, why does trust matter?
- According to David C. Rose in his book *Why Culture Matters* *Most* general trust—which an Islamic upbringing lowers— reduces the possibility of cooperation, increases the transaction costs, and hence makes economic growth & development less likely (pg 7, 20).

Barro & McCleary (2003, 2006); Durlauf, Kourtellos, and Tan (2012)

- Both studies find a significant and **negative** effect of Muslim population share on economic growth.

# Kuran (2012)

- Book: *The Long Divergence: How Islamic Law Held Back the Middle East*
- There is nothing inherently wrong with the Islamic belief system or cultural practices that hinder the progress of Islamic nations or make them incompatible with modern-day capitalism.
- Rather, what happened was that beginning 10th century CE, the Islamic institutions that had hitherto served well began to act as a drag on economic progress by stifling the growth of large-scale production, banking system, corporations, impersonal exchange, and general capital accumulation.

## Kuran & Singh (2013)

- Differences in inheritance laws of Hindus and Muslims.
- While Hindu law allows for collective ownership after the death of a patriarch, Islamic law calls for the partitioning of assets since it solely recognizes individual ownership.
- The result is that assets owned by Muslims are subject to greater fragmentation than Hindus.
- This was especially true during colonial times when the British started interpreting laws strictly according to each community's scripture.

## Aziz (1967); Hay (1992); Masselos (1996); Wasti (1993)

- Long history of 'Muslim' rule in the Indian subcontinent from the Slave Dynasty (1206-1290) to the Mughal Empire (1526-1857).
- Supplantation by the British was a political, economic, cultural, and psychological shock for Muslims, even for the ordinary ones.
- Hindus, on the other hand, were used to foreign rule. For them, it was just a change of guard.
- Hindus adapted much better to British rule by learning English, getting a British education, and joining the civil service.
- British penchant of Hindus over Muslims: the passage of Permanent Land Settlement Act (1793) created a class of Hindu *zamindars* or *gomashtas* & Muslim peasantry.

# Stratification Among Muslims

- The British Census of India (1901) identified 133 Muslim caste groups in total.
- In the 1911 British Census, the state of Uttar Pradesh had 102 Muslim caste groups out of which 97 were low castes.
- It is estimated that 85% to 90% of Indian Muslims belong to low or *pasmānda* castes (Mondal 2003; Ansari 2019).
- **Question:** How is Muslim stratification linked with the Hindu *jāti* system?



# Hindu Varna System & Muslim Castes

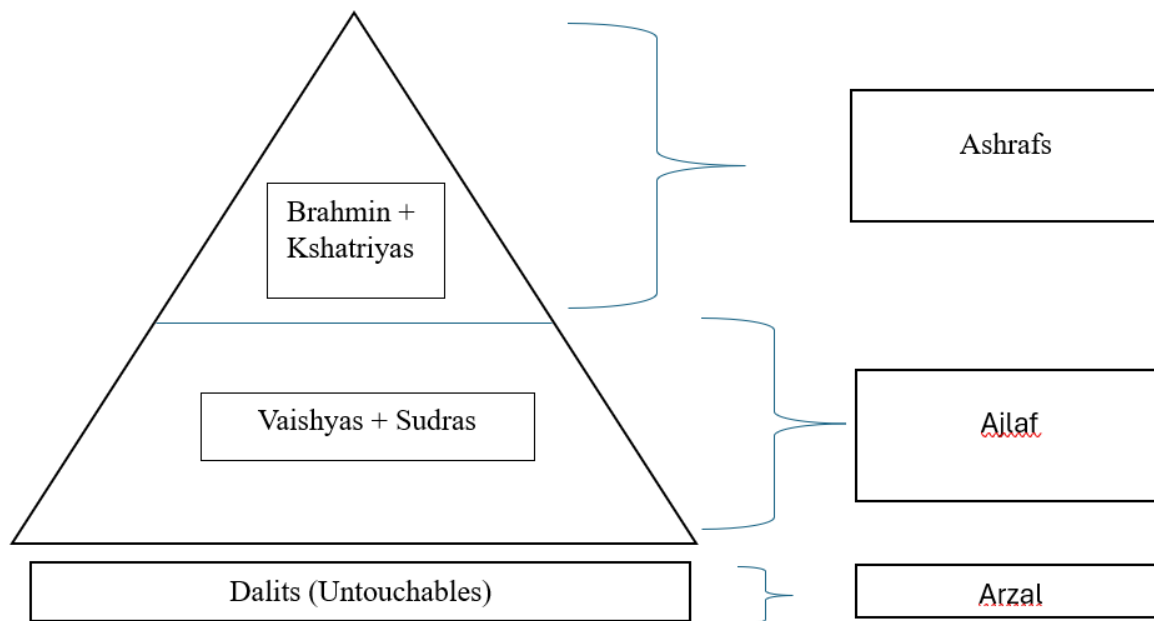


Figure: Parallels b/w Hindu & Muslim *Jati* System

Source: Author's Own Figure based on various sources

# What Genetic Studies Show?

- Muslims of South Asia are mainly Hindu converts.
- The spread of Islam in South Asia was primarily an endogenous cultural phenomenon and not an exogenous genetic one (Terreros et al. (2007); Eaaswarkhanth et al. (2009)).

# Framework of Stratification Economics

- Stratification Economics 'low relative position' as an explanation of Muslim *pasmandgi*.
- While they converted from low Hindu castes, they couldn't escape the social structural barriers that kept them *pasmanda* in the first place.
- Thus, their *pasmandgi* kept reproducing generations after generations.
- A Parallel: Black Population of the US.

# Marxist Intervention in Stratification Economics

- A new dialectical explanation that does not completely reject the cultural explanation like Stratification Economics.

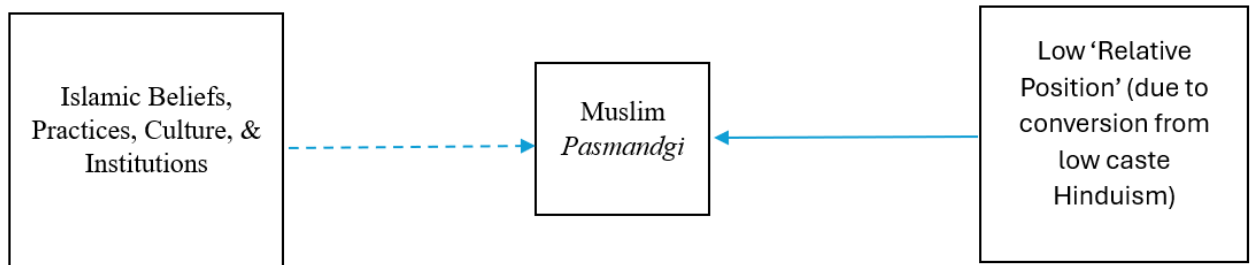


Figure: A dialectical explanation of Muslim *Pasmandgi*

Source: Author's Own Theorization