PASMANDA MOVEMENT TESTS POLITICAL WILL

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As the Pasmanda Muslim movement gains traction, the community's leaders have urged Opposition parties to step forward to support their demand for Dalit Muslims to be given the status of Scheduled Caste, and the benefits of reservation similar to those Dalit Hindus enjoy.

They also seek a caste census for all, including Muslims. "This will reveal the exact percentage of the Pasmanda community. So far, the Ashrafs have a strong grip on the resources of the community," a Pasmanda leader said in New Delhi.

In a letter addressed to leading Opposition parties, including the Congress, the Trinamool Congress, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, Samajwadi Party, the Bahujan Samaj Party, the Rashtriya Janata Dal, the Nationalist Congress Party, and the Janata Dal(U), the Pasmanda leadership has asked the parties to clearly state their stand on the issue of Scheduled Caste status for Dalit Muslims.

"The parties, which claim to be secular and get the Muslim vote in huge numbers, are not ready to state their stand on Pasmanda Muslims. The Muslim community in general is poor and backward. Accordingly, Pasmanda Muslims are the worst off. Yet, we don't hear any political party from the Opposition speaking for them," a Pasmanda leader said on the eve of a day-long meet in New Delhi.

Engaging Opposition parties via the letter is an initiative of noted Pasmanda leader Ali Anwar Ansari, president of the All India Pasmanda Muslim Mahaz.

"Dalit Muslims have suffered like their Hindu counterparts. They need to be given Scheduled Caste status. It will help them gain economic and educational mobility," a Pasmanda leader stated. "Our slogan for more than 20 years has been, 'Dalit *pichhda ek saman* , Hindu *ho ya* Musalman' (Dalits, Backwards are the same, whether Hindus or Muslims)."

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