Culture among Pinjara Muslims

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Abstract: The Pinjara Muslims form a distinctive community of Indian Muslims primarily concentrated in the western state of Maharashtra, particularly in Mumbai. Renowned for their traditional involvement in textile weaving, their name, "Pinjara," derived from Marathi, translates to "cage," a reference to the enclosures once used for their weaving equipment. This community boasts a diverse cultural heritage shaped by influences from their Islamic faith, Marathi language and culture, as well as their unique history and traditions.

Religion plays a pivotal role in the lives of Pinjara Muslims, predominantly adhering to Sunni Islam. They faithfully observe the five pillars of Islam, engaging in prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, charitable giving, and the declaration of faith. Celebrating Islamic festivals such as Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, and Muharram, their cultural practices are deeply intertwined with their religious beliefs.

The Pinjara Muslims exhibit a strong connection to Marathi language and culture, utilizing a distinct dialect and showcasing unique styles in clothing, cuisine, music, and dance. Traditional attire consists of a lungi or dhoti, kurta, and a cap, while their cuisine blends Marathi and Muslim culinary styles, featuring popular dishes like biryani, kebabs, and bhakri.

Music and dance hold special significance in Pinjara Muslim culture, with folk songs and dance forms like Lavani and Koli dance accompanying religious celebrations and festivals. Beyond cultural expressions, the community has actively contributed to education, literature, and politics. Establishing educational institutions, producing notable scholars and writers, and actively engaging in local politics and civic issues, the Pinjara Muslim community stands as a testament to a rich and vibrant culture rooted in their distinct history and identity as Indian Muslims with strong ties to the Marathi language and culture.

Caste Practices:

Caste, a long-standing social and cultural system in India, has traditionally been linked with the Hindu religion, categorizing individuals based on birth, occupation, and social standing. Despite Islam's teachings promoting equality and justice, caste-based disparities persist within the Muslim community in India.

Islamic principles disapprove of the caste system and discrimination based on birth or social status. However, the prevalence of caste among Indian Muslims can be traced back to pre-Islamic traditions and the existing caste system predating Islam's introduction in the region.

Muslims in India are segregated into various castes and sub-castes, each associated with specific occupations or trades. The Ashrafs, often claiming Arab descent or lineage with Prophet Muhammad, occupy higher-caste positions, engaging in influential roles in religious, educational, and leadership capacities. Conversely, the Ajlafs, the lower castes, find themselves in menial jobs, facing discrimination and social exclusion within the Muslim community, limiting their access to education and opportunities.

Caste-based discrimination extends to Muslim marriages, where individuals typically prefer marrying within their own caste. This issue is mirrored in India's reservation system, offering preferential treatment in education and employment to individuals from lower castes.

Efforts to address caste-based discrimination within the Muslim community are underway. Scholars and activists advocate for the rejection of the caste system, emphasizing the core Islamic principles of equality and justice.

In conclusion, the persistence of caste among Muslims in India is a multifaceted issue deeply embedded in the country's social and cultural history. While Islam inherently opposes the concept of caste, the continued practice among Indian Muslims reflects the enduring influence of pre-Islamic traditions and the historical caste system. Ongoing initiatives aim to confront and rectify these disparities, promoting greater equality and justice within the Muslim community.

The primary data for the present research has been collected from six districts of North Karnatka, where 670 samples have responded to the questionnaire. The outcome of the data can be noted bellow;

Cultural Practice of Islam

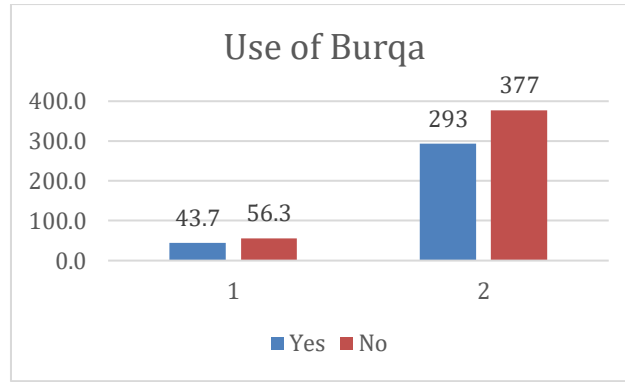| Table.No.1			
Do your family women wear Burqa	Percentage	Respondents	Total
Yes	43.7	293	670
No	56.3	377	670

Table No.1 reveals the prevalence of wearing Burqa among the family women of the surveyed respondents. The data indicates that 43.7% of participants reported that their family women wear Burqa, while 56.3% stated that they do not. This information suggests a diversity in clothing choices and practices within the community, with a substantial portion of family women opting for the Burqa as part of their attire. The majority not wearing Burqa may indicate varying cultural or personal preferences regarding traditional clothing within the surveyed population. Understanding the factors influencing these choices can provide insights into cultural practices, religious observances, and individual preferences within the community.

- As Pinjara women engage themselves in daily cores at home and in the field for their daily earning, Pinjara women have less practice of using Burqa in their daily life.
- The Pinjara women who have been to Madarasa and who keep themselves away from community presence and stay at home they have tendency of using burqa outside their family
- Even though Pinjaras are identified as Muslims Burqua has not been integral part of Pinjaras

Preference to visit Temple

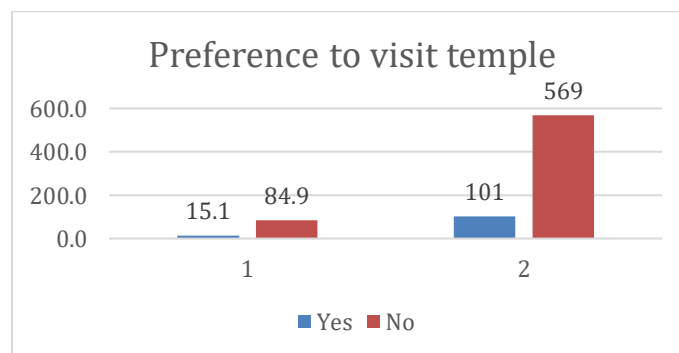| Table.No.2			
Do you prefer to go to temple	Percentage	Respondents	Total
Yes	15.1	101	670
No	84.9	569	670

Table No. 2 reveals that a minority of the surveyed respondents, constituting 15.1%, expressed a preference for visiting temples, while the substantial majority, 84.9%, reported not having such a preference. This data indicates a relatively lower inclination towards temple visits within the surveyed community, suggesting that a significant portion may not engage in Hindu religious practices. The preference for or against temple visits can reflect the religious and cultural diversity within the community, with a potential dominance of Islamic practices. Understanding the reasons behind these preferences can provide insights into the religious dynamics and cultural practices within the community.

- Among the Pinjara Community we can notice that they do follow certain temples and the gods of Hindu community and this is among the rural part.
- Along with generations people have changes their belief system as they got merged with Islamic practices.
- The people who have told that they visit temples are above the age of 50 years. It is understood that changes have taken place in their religious practices when they got complete exposure to Islam and Madrasa

Previous Visits to Temple

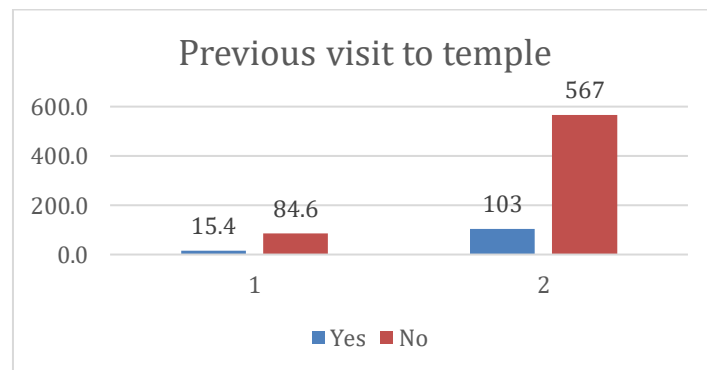| Table.No.3			
Have you ever visited temple	Percentage	Respondents	Total
Yes	15.4	103	670
No	84.6	567	670

Table No. 3 indicates the frequency of temple visits among the surveyed respondents. The data reveals that 15.4% of participants reported having visited a temple at some point, while the majority, comprising 84.6%, stated that they have never visited a temple. This data suggests a relatively low incidence of temple visits within the surveyed community, potentially reflecting the dominant religious practices and cultural preferences prevalent among the respondents. The relatively higher percentage of individuals who have visited temples may indicate a degree of religious diversity or cultural exchange within the community, despite the predominant Muslim identity reported in previous tables. Understanding the motivations behind temple

visits and the reasons for non-attendance can provide valuable insights into the religious dynamics and cultural practices within the community.

● It is found that they had a habit of visiting temples in the past, but the younger generations have restricted the older generations from following Hindu temples as the younger generations have inculcated Islamic way of life.
● Thos have responded that they have visited the temple are above the age of 50.

Practice of Use of Haldi and Mehandi

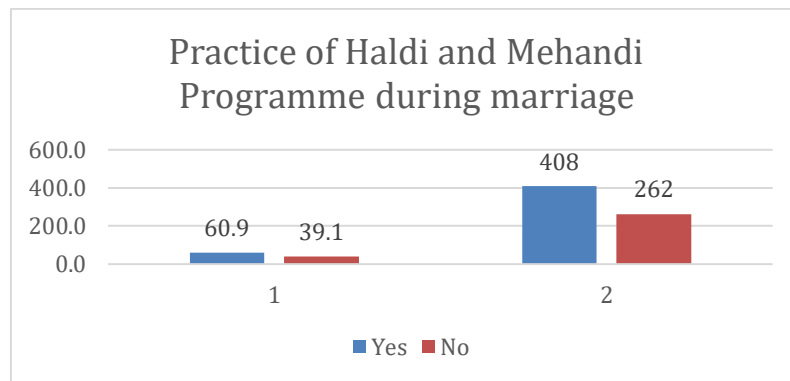| Table.No.4			
Do you have Haldi and Mehendi programme during marriage	Percentage	Respondents	Total
Yes	60.9	408	670
No	39.1	262	670

Table No. 4 provides insights into the cultural practice of incorporating Haldi and Mehendi programs during marriage ceremonies among the surveyed respondents. The data indicates that 60.9% of participants reported having Haldi and Mehendi programs, while 39.1% stated that they do not. This information reflects a cultural tradition within the community, where a significant portion embraces these elements as integral parts of their marriage celebrations. The presence of Haldi and Mehendi programs may signify cultural richness, social festivities, and traditional customs associated with marriage ceremonies. The minority not having these programs may have various reasons, such as personal choices or variations in cultural practices within the community. Understanding the motivations behind the inclusion or exclusion of Haldi and Mehendi programs can provide insights into cultural traditions, ceremonial customs, and the diversity of practices within the surveyed population.

● Haldi Mehandi programme in Hindu communities are considered mandatory customs, but in Islamic practices it is not considered as part of the religious practice. Indian Muslims have tendency to practice certain customs which are followed among Hindus which shows their nativity.

Practice of Marital Customs and Games

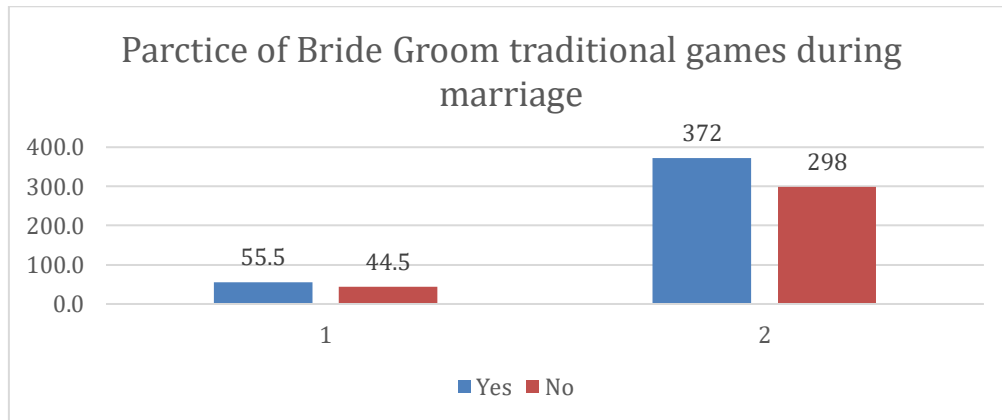| Table.No.5			
Do you have practice of games for Groom and the Bride during marriage	Percentage	Respondents	Total
Yes	55.5	372	670
No	44.5	298	670

Table No.5 provides insights into the cultural practice of incorporating games for the groom and bride during marriage ceremonies among the surveyed respondents. The data indicates that 55.5% of participants reported having such practices, while 44.5% stated that they do not. This information reflects a cultural tradition within the community, where a significant portion includes playful and entertaining activities as part of the marriage festivities. The presence of games for the groom and bride may add a joyful and interactive element to the wedding celebrations, enhancing the overall experience for the couple and the community. The minority not having these practices may have various reasons, such as cultural variations or personal preferences within the community. Understanding the motivations behind the inclusion or exclusion of games during marriages can provide insights into cultural traditions, ceremonial customs, and the diverse practices within the surveyed population.

- There is a practice of organizing games for the newly married couple among Pinjaras which is also observed among the Hindu communities in the North Karnataka Region

Exposure to use Kunkum/Haldi/Ghanda

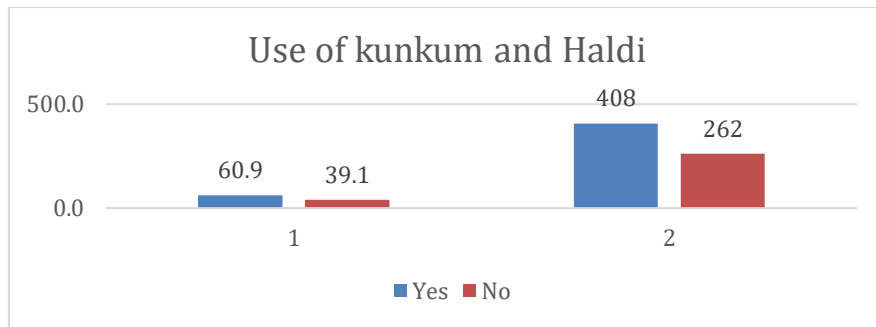| Table.No.6			
Do you use Kunkum/Haldi/Ghandha in any of the functions	Percentage	Respondents	Total
Yes	60.9	408	670
No	39.1	262	670

Use of kunkum and Haldi

Table No.6 indicates the prevalence of using Kunkum, Haldi, and Ghandha (vermilion, turmeric, and sandalwood paste) in any of the functions among the surveyed respondents. The data reveals that 60.9% of participants reported incorporating these substances in their functions, while 39.1% stated that they do not. This information reflects a cultural tradition within the community, where a significant portion embraces the use of Kunkum, Haldi, and Ghandha for various ceremonial and festive purposes. The presence of these elements in functions may signify cultural richness, religious significance, and traditional customs. The minority not using these substances may have various reasons, such as personal preferences or variations in cultural practices within the community. Understanding the motivations behind the use or non-use of Kunkum, Haldi, and Ghandha can provide insights into cultural traditions, ceremonial customs, and the diversity of practices within the surveyed population.

- It is customary practice to use Kunkum and Haldi in all the relegioustic events among Hindus, Haldi and Kunkum is considered as sacred. Meanwhile Pinjaras have customary habit of using Ghandha at their home and in Dargas.
- In Islamic practice Kunkum, Haldi or Ghanda is not entertained or used.

Practice of Lighting oil lamps

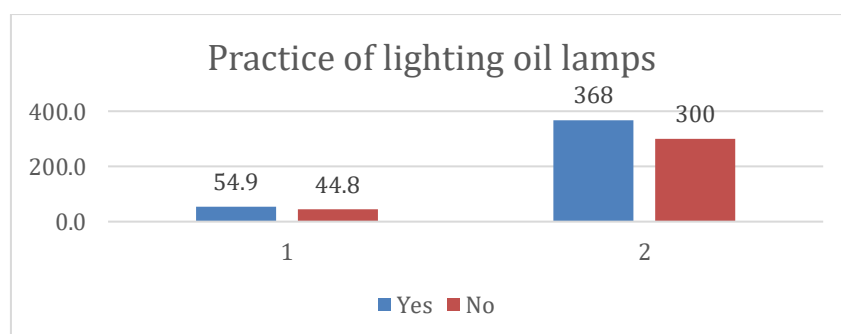| Table.No.7			
Do you have practice of burning Oil lamps Infront of your god photos or statues	Percentage	Respondents	Total
Yes	54.9	368	670
No	44.8	300	670

Table No.7 provides insights into the cultural practice of burning oil lamps in front of god photos or statues among the surveyed respondents. The data indicates that 54.9% of participants reported having this practice, while 44.8% stated that they do not. This information reflects a religious tradition within the community, where a significant portion incorporates the ritual of burning oil lamps as a form of worship or reverence to their deities. The presence of this practice may signify spiritual devotion, cultural richness, and traditional customs associated with religious observances. The minority not having this practice may have various reasons, such as personal preferences or variations in religious practices within the community. Understanding the motivations behind the adoption or non-adoption of burning oil lamps can provide insights into religious traditions, cultural customs, and the diversity of practices within the surveyed population.

- As part of devotion Hindus burl lamps in front of their beloved Gods, Pinjaras do practice lighting lamps in front of the Peer or Babas photos at home and Darga.
- Burning lamps is strictly prohibited in Islam, yet Pinjaras have tendency to follow certain practices of Hinduism.

Marital identification and Customs

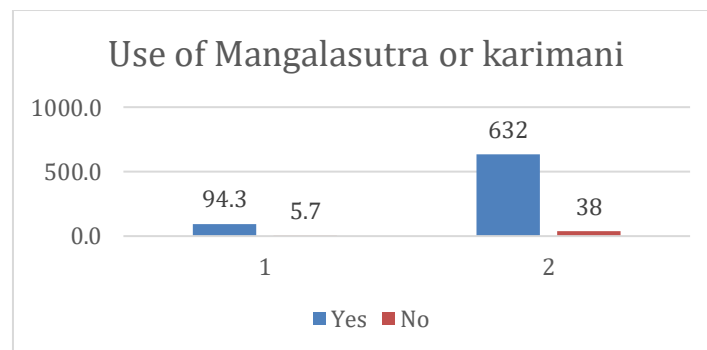| Table.No.8			
Do the married women at your home wear Mangalsutra or Thali	Percentage	Respondents	Total
Yes	94.3	632	670
No	5.7	38	670

Table No.8 provides insights into the cultural practice of married women wearing Mangalsutra or Thali among the surveyed respondents. The data indicates that a significant majority, comprising 94.3% of participants, reported that married women in their homes wear Mangalsutra or Thali, while 5.7% stated that they do not. This information highlights a prevalent cultural tradition within the community, where the majority adheres to the practice of married women wearing symbolic jewelry to signify their marital status. The minority not following this practice may have various reasons, such as personal preferences or cultural variations within the community. Understanding the motivations behind the adoption or non-

adoption of Mangalsutra or Thali can provide insights into cultural practices, traditions, and the diversity of customs within the surveyed population.

- Pinjaras do use Thali or Karimani in their pattern having a star and half-moon in the pendant.
- Karimani or Mangalsutra is not custom or ceremonial part of Ashrafs.
- Karimani or Mangalsutra represents marital status of women among Hindu community which is compulsory among Hindu customs and it is followed among Pinjara community

Compulsion on Marital Customs use of Karimani or Mangalasutra

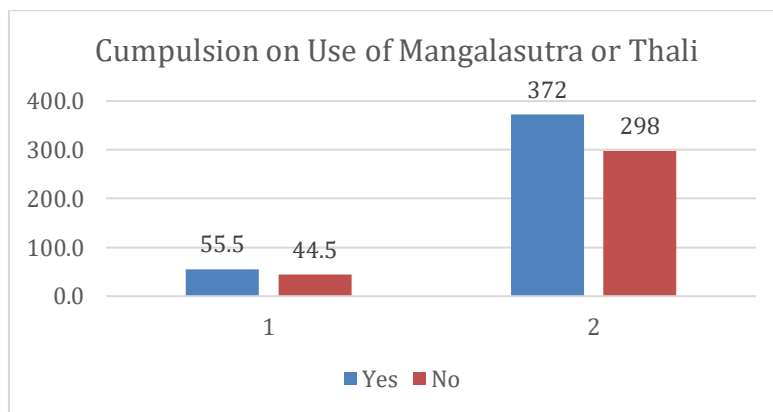| Table.No.9			
Is thali compulsory for the married women to wear	Percentage	Respondents	Total
Yes	55.5	372	670
No	44.5	298	670

Table No. 9 reveals insights into the perceived compulsion of wearing Thali (mangalsutra) for married women among the surveyed respondents. The data indicates that 55.5% of participants reported considering Thali as compulsory for married women to wear, while 44.5% stated that it is not mandatory. This information suggests a diversity of opinions and beliefs within the community regarding the obligatory nature of wearing Thali, a symbolic piece of jewelry associated with marital status. The varying perspectives may reflect cultural nuances, personal beliefs, or evolving attitudes towards traditional customs within the surveyed population. Understanding the factors influencing the perception of Thali as compulsory or optional can provide insights into the cultural and social dynamics shaping individual viewpoints within the community.

- Among married women of Pinjara community even though wearing Karimani is not compulsory they follow the customs and tradition from the past.
- All the married women are expected to wear Karimani

Compulsion on Marital customs use of Feet Finger Ring

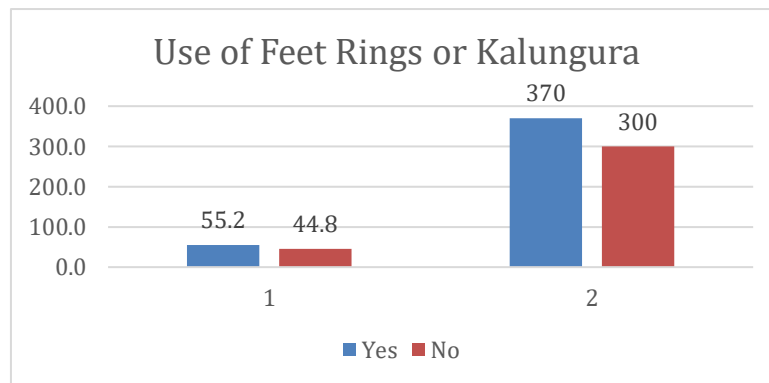| Table.No.10			
Do your married women wear Feet finger Rings/Kalungura	Percentage	Respondents	Total
Yes	55.2	370	670
No	44.8	300	670

Table No. 10 provides insights into the cultural practice of married women wearing feet finger rings (Kalungura) among the surveyed respondents. The data indicates that 55.2% of participants reported that their married women wear feet finger rings, while 44.8% stated that they do not. This information reflects a cultural tradition within the community, where a significant portion embraces the practice of adorning feet with rings as part of marital customs. The minority not following this practice may have various reasons, such as personal preferences or variations in cultural practices within the community. Understanding the motivations behind the adoption or non-adoption of feet finger rings can provide insights into cultural traditions, individual choices, and the diversity of customs within the surveyed population.

- Among married women of Pinjara community even though wearing Kalungura is not compulsory they follow the customs and tradition from the past.
- All the married women are expected to wear Kalungura

Food Habits of Pinjara Community:

When it comes to food habits, Pinjara Muslims have a rich culinary heritage that reflects the diverse influences of their history and culture. Their cuisine is a blend of Marathi and Muslim cooking styles and incorporates a range of spices and flavors that are unique to the region.

One of the staple foods in Pinjara Muslim cuisine is Bhakri, which is a type of bread made from millet flour. It is often served with vegetables, lentils, or meat dishes such as chicken curry or mutton biryani. Another popular dish is kebabs, which are made from minced meat, spices, and herbs and are typically served with chutney.

Fish is also a popular food item among Pinjara Muslims, particularly in coastal areas of Maharashtra. Pomfret, Surmai, and Bangda are some of the common varieties of fish that are consumed in the community.

Sweets and desserts also hold a special place in Pinjara Muslim cuisine. They have a range of traditional sweets such as Phirni, Sheer Khurma, and Ladoo, which are often served during festivals and special occasions.

In terms of dietary restrictions, Pinjara Muslims follow the Islamic dietary laws, which prohibit the consumption of pork and alcohol. They also observe fasting during the month of Ramadan, where they abstain from food and drink from dawn to dusk.

Overall, the food habits of Pinjara Muslims reflect the unique blend of Marathi and Muslim cultures that is characteristic of the region. Their cuisine is diverse and flavorful, with a range of dishes that are influenced by their history, religion, and occupation.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the presence of caste-based distinctions within the Muslim community in India represents a complex challenge rooted in historical social structures and traditions. While Islam advocates for equality and justice, the persistence of caste among Indian Muslims highlights the enduring impact of pre-Islamic societal norms. The delineation into various castes and the associated disparities, particularly in education, employment, and social standing, underscore the need for concerted efforts to dismantle these ingrained practices.

Despite the deeply entrenched nature of caste within the community, there are positive signs of change. Scholars and activists are actively advocating for the rejection of the caste system, urging a return to the foundational principles of Islam that emphasize equality. Initiatives aimed at fostering inclusivity, dismantling discriminatory practices, and promoting greater unity are gaining traction.

The ongoing endeavors to address caste-based discrimination within the Muslim community reflect a commitment to align with the egalitarian ideals of Islam. As these efforts progress, there is hope for a more just and equitable future, where individuals are valued not based on their caste but on their inherent worth and contributions to society. Ultimately, the journey towards eliminating caste distinctions among Muslims in India is a testament to the resilience of the human spirit and the universal pursuit of equality and justice.

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