

Rise of Muslim Political Parties

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Political parties created of, by and for Muslims in India has all the potential to become the defining trend of the current decade. The politics of the last 30 years was defined by the creation of caste-based parties comprising various strands of OBCs and Dalits – which branched out from mainstream political parties in many states. The 21st century may see Muslim parties seeking to discover their own power of agency.

The all Muslim political party isn't a new idea. Indian subcontinent partitioned on the same plank. The Jinnah led Muslim League wanted separate nation for Muslims and they had it. After independence, the Muslim League was renamed as the **Indian Union Muslim League**. Its objective of becoming an all India party never received country-wide acceptance and it managed to exist only in the state of Kerala. In 1989, politician Syed Shahabuddin attempted to form the Insaf Party with the same aims. His idea was to mobilise Muslims, other religious minorities, SCs, STs and the backward classes under one overarching umbrella. But it ended in failure.

Post 2000, there is strong debate in the community about the political formations for Muslims. A section of Muslim elites favoured a formation of political party catering to 'Muslim cause' at the regional level. This is contrary to earlier attempts to have such formation at a pan-national level. Others section is still sceptical about such ventures. It is of the opinion that Muslims need not form any political party for their "own", as regional parties are pushing their case.

Amidst such political churning in the community, some political formation took birth at regional level. Assam, Uttar Pradesh witnessed a phenomenal rise of Muslim regional parties. Other Muslim formations, like AIMIM, are expanding their base to new grounds.

The recent **Uttar Pradesh** election saw the rise of the **Peace Party of India** (which won four seats), **Ulema Council & Quami Ekta Dal**. The last two **Assam** assembly elections saw the rise of the **All-India United Democratic Front (AUDF)**, which won 18 assembly seats. In **Tamil Nadu** there is the **Manithaneyya Makkal Katchi**, a political front of the activist Tamil Nadu Muslim Munnetra Kazhagam (TMMK), which won two assembly seats in alliance with the AIADMK in the 2011 assembly elections. In **Andhra Pradesh**, the **Majlis Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM)** won 8 seats in 2009 Assembly election, it also has 1 MP. Its stunned many by its performance in Nanded Municipal Corporation, **Maharashtra**, where it stood at 3rd position. **Maharashtra** also witnessed formation of **Awami Vikas Party (AVP)**.

Here is brief about these political parties with their performance in recent elections:

Regional Muslim Political Parties

Welfare Party of India (WPI)

- Launched in April 2011 with backing of the **Jamaat-e-Islami Hind**.
- The party talks about morality and ethical values in politics, establishment of welfare state, commitments towards the true spirit of democracy, the concept of federalism that covers the **cultural federalism** along with geographic and linguistic federalism.
- The party is putting conscious effort to distance itself from the Jamaat.
- The party wants to position itself as one which has the **welfare of all marginalised and backward sections** as its main agenda.
- But at its launching function, the dominant theme was the plight of the Muslims.

Social Democratic Party of India (SDPI)

- Founded on July 29, 2009
- The Social Democratic Party of India is the culmination of the efforts of the erstwhile Popular Front of India's National Political Conference on February 2009 held in Calicut. In the National Political conference there are 11 sessions made which are mainly focused on Political Empowerment of downtrodden and marginalized people from India.
- One SDPI Candidate Won in BBMP election held in Karnataka. The party won 14 seats in four municipalities in the 2010 local body election in Kerala. Also, it had won 62 seats in the Local body election-2011 in TN

Peace Party (PP)

- The party was founded by in February 2008 by Mohd Ayub, a surgeon and philanthropist.
- It claims to 'represents people who are striving for betterment of downtrodden people of India through political awareness and participation in governance.'
- PP approach seems to be secular & inclusive.
- PP claims that it is a forum for the most backward classes and not just Muslims.
- Among Muslims, PP's main focus on the Muslims of the OBCs, but states objective is to unite all Muslims.
- Founder leader, Mohd Ayub uses expression "social oppressed" for Muslim voters.

- An important difference between the PP and other Muslim outfits is that the make-up of its leadership is totally different. It represents the modern Muslims and does not represent or is supported by the Muslim clergy.

Quami Ekta Dal (QED)

- Founded in 2012, QED is a regional party with huge influence in eastern UP and one of the allies of Third Front along with Peace Party.
- Its declared mission is 'Bring justice to the most oppressed classes initially from eastern Uttar Pradesh years of misrule and disappropriate allocation of resources to this belt.'
- Its focus area is Eastern UP and it supported separate Purvanchal State.

Rashtriya Ulema Council (RUC)

- Rashtriya Ulema Council (RUC) came into existence on 4th October 2008 and was called Ulama Council. It was the initiative of Maulana Aamir Rashadi Madni.
- The immediate reason for establishment of Ulama Council was to provide a protective shield to the natives of eastern Uttar Pradesh specially Azamgarh who were going through severe mental trauma after the Batla House Encounter.
- Ulama Council was transformed into Rashtriya Ulama Council, a full-fledged political party.

All India United Democratic Front (AUDF)

- It was founded before 2006 Assembly Election by businessman Badruddin Ajmal.
- The immediate reason was repeal of IMDT Act by the SC.

Recent Performance of Regional Muslim Political Parties



Uttar Pradesh Assembly Election Muslim Party Performance 2012						
S.No	Name	Contested	won	Votes	%	Vote % in Seat Contested
1	Quami Ekta Dal	43	2	417552	0.55%	5.32
2	Peace Party	208	4	1784258	2.35%	4.54
3	Ittehad-E-Millait Council	18	1	190052	0.25%	5.61
4	Rashtriya Ulama Council	64	0	155527	0.21%	1.34
Assam Assembly Election Muslim Party Performance 2011						
1	All India United Democratic Front	78	18	1737415	12.57%	19.87
2	All India Minorities front	6	0	3870	0.03%	0.5
Jangipur Loksabha By-election 2012						
1	Welfare Party of India	1	0	41620	4.90%	4.9
2	Social Democratic Party of India	1	0	24654	2.91%	2.91
Nanded (Maharashtra) Municipal Corporation 2012						
1	All India Majlis-E-Ittehadul Muslimeen	30	11	51144		

Observations:

1. In last 30 years or so, India has witness emergence of large number of identity based parties. The caste, region are the most prominent identities for political mobilisation.
2. Among religions, Akali Dal is the only prominent political formation formed on the basis of identity.
3. Muslims are the only social group in India who are still to discover their power. What is surprising is that Muslims took so long to realise that none of the political parties really gives them the kind of real representation and share of power despite their huge share of the national population (around 14 percent).
4. Muslims have not prospered in any state run by a "secular" party, whether it is UP, Bihar or even Communist West Bengal.
5. The need to keep BJP out of power has consciously avoided the formation of Muslim party that could aid the BJP's agenda of 'Hindu vote'.
6. The 2006 State of the Nation survey by CSDS-Lokniti on India's Muslims found that a majority of Muslims strongly support the view that Muslims must have some kind of reservation in educational institutions (72 per cent) as well as in Parliament and State Assemblies (82 per cent).
7. **In Uttar Pradesh**, with the relatively poor performance of the BJP since the early 2000s, the Muslims have been organised and mobilised by outfits like the Peace Party (PP) and the Ulema Council (UC).

8. **In Assam**, a simmering discontent among the Muslim community in Assam has been tapped by the Asom United Democratic Front (AUDF). It has captured the attention of political analysts following the electoral successes it has achieved in the state recently.

AUDF VOTE SHARE		
ASSEMBLY ELECTION 2006	LOSABHA ELECTION 2009	ASSEMBLY ELECTION 2011
9%	16.10%	12%

In the assembly elections held in 2011, the AUDF had contested 75 seats managed to win 18, putting it at second position. It needs to be noted that in other 17 seats it had secured the second position.

9. **In Jangipur** by-elections, Muslim political formations WPI and SDPI almost spoiled Congress' nominee. The winning margin of Congress candidate is only 2536 votes, and combined tally of WPI-SDPI is 66,274 votes. Experts observed that the local issue of Aligarh Muslim University campus in Murshidabad led to polarization on communal lines in Jangipur. The emerging trend of Jangipur Constituency is as follows:

JANGIPUR CONSTITUENCY: TRENDS					
Parties	2009 LS vote	2011 VS Vote	2012 By-Poll	G/L from '09	G/L from '11
Cong.	54.24%	47%	39.01%	-15.23%	-7.99%
CPI(M)	40.52%	41.32%	38.78%	-1.74%	-2.54%
BJP	2.40%	4.40%	10.60%	8.20%	6.20%
WPI	-----	-----	4.90%	4.90%	4.90%
SDPI	-----	-----	2.91%	2.91%	2.91%
Ind. (4)	N/A	N/A	3.90%	-----	-----

Key: LS=Lok Sabha; VS=Vidhan Sabha; G=Gain; L=Loss

10. In Nanded Municipal Election (Maharashtra), Hyderabad based All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) stunned political circles by stopping the Congress from total sweep. This is the same party which supported the Razakar movement during independence, which led to mass killings in Marathwada. AIMIM campaigned against the picking up of Muslim youth from Marathwada for allegedly having links with terrorists, and against the violence in Assam.
11. The surge of Regional Political Parties of Muslim reflects a new-found confidence in the minority community in organising politically with the community's interests in mind.

12. One unique characteristic about these newly formed parties is attempt of social engineering. The parties like PP or AIUDF calls their agenda as secular and inclusive. They attempt to build a coalition of 'oppressed', 'backward' people. This approach is very similar to that of Mayawati's social engineering in 2007 assembly election.

Conclusion:

1. Indian politics over the next decade will thus evolve to take one or two forms: coalitions of caste- and religion-based parties both at the centre and states, or much higher representations for communities in the mainstream political parties. The BJP victory in Goa was largely the result of the latter idea.
2. Politics in the country will thus have to follow the **Kerala model** (where each community – Muslims, Christians, Ezhavas, Nairs – has its own party), or
3. **BJP's Goa Model:** The BJP fielded five Catholics candidates as part of their social engineering. Out of the 21 BJP MLAs who won from their seats, five are Catholics whereas two Independent Catholics won largely due to BJP support. The BJP managed to get 9% of the votes of the catholic community
4. A Hindu party aligned with Muslim and Dalit parties could be a potential winner since it would not then be seen as communal.
5. **Assam:** The way the Muslim voters assembled under the AUUDF umbrella was really surprising. It may lead to counter communal polarisation, as happened in 2009 Loksabha election, it could turn out to be more disadvantageous to the Muslims.



AUDF Impact on Outcome: 2009 Loksabha Election

	Winning Party	Victory Margine	AUDF Votes
Guwahati	BJP	11,855	73,316
Silchar	BJP	41,470	2,02,062
Mangaldoi	BJP	45,849	1,80,430
Tezpur	AGP	30,153	46,255
Nowgong	BJP	44,380	2,45,155

6. It opens up an old question: *Is having an exclusivist political party of a minority is the right political option for the community?*
7. **Assam:** AUDF had given 40% tickets to non-Muslims candidates in assembly election 2011. Among the winners in Assembly election 2011, there were 16 Muslims, two non-Muslims from SC and ST backgrounds and one female candidate. Thus, a social engineering with backward communities is yielding good results for Muslim political party.
8. **Uttar Pradesh:** Muslims might feel more inclined to vote for their own political party and this would have far-reaching consequences for politics in UP. The rise of the PP could present a credible alternative to Muslim voters in future electoral battles in the state. Such a scenario might be possible, because PP is an inclusive political party where the leadership is in Muslim hands, but it seeks to attract support from all marginalised sections of the society. This inclusive character of the PP makes it different from other Muslim political outfits which are exclusive in nature, like the UC.
9. But, the chances of growth and acceptability of such Muslim outfits are limited by their very nature & ideology; this is more true about outfits like UC or AIMIM.
10. It is expected that in the initial phase of the re-discovery of identity politics as a tool of social and economic empowerment, Muslim parties may be more regional than national in character. The reason being divided Muslim society along caste, language, sectarian line.
11. For BJP, a separate Muslim based political formation at regional level is advantageous. This is evident in 2009 Loksabha election in Assam and also in Jangipur By-election 2012. Such parties will drag Muslim votes under their umbrella, benefitting BJP.
12. In long term though, this could turn out be dangerous precedence.

The impact of the Muslim parties is strongest in states of Kerala and Assam, where they dominate states' politics. In other places, they are slowly emerging as important players. As of now, none of them may add up

to great political strength. It may take a decade for them to build their political strength, but it is more than likely to happen.