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RESEARCH PAPER

## MUSLIM OTHERIZATION AND ISLAMOPHOBIA IN INDIA



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# **Muslim Otherization and Islamophobia in India**

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*Disclaimer: Due to the current political and security situation in India, IICR used pseudonym for the author of this Research Paper. The author lives in India, and, following his/her request, IICR decided to conceal any identifiers that could directly or indirectly compromise his/her safety and well-being.*

## **Abstract**

Secularism and Democracy are seen as two major distinctive attributes employed to define the multi-religious postcolonial republic of India and the question of secular politics has developed in tandem (and in tension) with that of religion. If explored, the concept of majoritarian nationalism in India evinces a politics essentially to be clubbed with religion, religiosity, and religiousness. While much of the recent scholarship on the genealogy of Muslim Otherization and Islamophobia in India is often attributed to the recent rise of right-wing BJP in power. We also witness a much deeper historical antagonization against the Muslim rule (Mughal Rule 1526-1858) later shifted towards the Otherization of Muslim population in post 1947 republic of India especially after the creation of Pakistan. Tracing the genealogy of the trans-historical 'Muslim Other', this paper will unpack the rationale behind the sudden rise of organized hate-crimes against Muslims in past few years and help us trace the genealogy of Hindu political theology of early twentieth century and false promise of *areligious* Indian secularism. To rethink these questions, this paper aims to critically trace the ideological and practical inconsistencies of Indian secularism, rise of communalism, and emergence of Hindu nationalism vis-à-vis the ontological Otherization of Muslims and state-sponsored Islamophobia. This article argues that the successive electoral victories in 2014 and 2019 by Hindu nationalist party, the Bhartiya Janata Party, has further precipitated political events, generated policies, and passed new laws that has eroded the presumed cover of India's secular and democratic culture through systemic discrimination of its largest religious minority. This paper will throw some light on the new developments to counter to Islamophobia especially after Pakistan Prime Minister continuous pursuit against Islamophobia and UN decision to designate on March 15. This paper will also include some policy recommendations to counter Islamophobia in the western and the Muslim world.

## **1.0 Introduction:**

Since the beginning of human species, there has been a perennial grading of social stratification on the basis of religious, political or ideological principles in the human societies. The formation of human groups is determined by attraction and repulsion of all these phenomena, which may be said to be produced by fields of religion and politics. Since the identity of interests of all types of social groups has not been achieved, the majority–minority dichotomy is greatly contested. It is most useful to think of majority–minority relations as an ongoing social function, characterized by varying degrees of repressive measures underlined by overt and covert hostilities. The objects of competition may range from political power and opportunities for education to economic power. Therefore, there is an inevitable conflict of interests in consequence. This sets in the process of conflict seeking rewards by the demand for eliminating or weakening the competitors; attention shifts from the contest itself to an effort to eliminate rivals. In this regard, examples of Red Indians and Negroes in the USA, the Protestants in Spain and Latin America, the French in Canada, the Japanese in Brazil and the Muslims in India can be cited as some of the classic examples of minority groups. Due to the psychology of ethnocentrism, people in such places are harassed in varying degrees from complete social isolation to compromise or persecution.<sup>1</sup>

The general effects of a minority position<sup>2</sup> is that the minority groups are held in lower esteem and are objects of contempt, ridicule and violence; they are specially segregated and socially isolated; they are victims of unequal access to education, employment and professions; they may suffer from restricted property rights; they may be deprived of the right to suffrage and public office; Generally speaking, a minority is “a group of people differentiated from others in the same society by race, nationality, religion and language—who think of themselves as a differentiated group and are thought of by others as a differentiated group with negative connotations.<sup>3</sup> It is a distinct ethnic group or community with certain characteristics, ethnic, linguistic, cultural or religious, living together, within an alien civilization and are objects of collective discrimination. There are mainly five functional characteristics in a minority position as comprehensively defined and attempted by UNESCO conference: A minority is subordinate segment of the population with special physical and cultural traits and possessed of self-consciousness bound by some special traits and disabilities whose membership is compulsorily transmitted by a rule of descent.<sup>4</sup>

In India, although its constitution proclaims the state to be secular, yet an insight into the genealogy of last one century manifests that Indian secularism, works invariably in favour of the Hindu majority.<sup>5</sup> The Muslims are looked upon with suspicion and hostility. Culturally, and historically, like Gowarkar's assertion and Hindutva's political demands, it is expected from Muslims to be assimilated into the general Hindu milieu. To rethink these questions, this paper aims to critically trace the rise of communalism, and emergence of Hindutva and Hindu nationalism vis-à-vis the Otherization of Muslims and Islamophobia. This article argues that the successive electoral victories in 2014 and 2019 by Hindu nationalist party, the Bhartiya Janata Party, has further precipitated political events, generated policies, and passed new laws that has eroded the presumed cover of

India's secular and democratic culture through systemic discrimination of its largest religious minority. This paper will throw some light on the new developments to counter to Islamophobia especially after former Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan continuously pursued the case of Islamophobia in UN and the subsequent decision of UN to designate March 15 as Islamophobia Day. This paper will also include some policy recommendations to counter Islamophobia in the western and the Muslim world.

## **2.0 Social marginalization of Muslims**

According to 2011 Census, Muslims constitute about 14.2 percent of India's total population. The biggest Muslim concentration of about 47% to the India's total Muslim population reside in three states viz. West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar comprising 25%, 18.5% and 16.5% respectively and in the states like Assam (31%), West Bengal (25%) and Kerala (24.7%), high concentrations of Muslims reside. Beside the Muslims, many other religious minorities e.g. Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Zoroastrians, Jews, Animists and Others whose religion has not been stated have been living in coincidence in various parts in varied proportion of this subcontinent. Again among those people Muslims are the largest and principal minority group who bears the traits of Islamic great tradition as well as local little tradition playing an important role in the development of Indian society and civilization.

According to Mondal, Muslims in India do not form a community in sociological terms; they belong to different groups and subgroups based on ethnic, social and cultural grounds.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, marginalization of the Muslim community binds them into one ethnic group.<sup>7</sup> Besides their marginalization, Muslim community is facing various atrocities. Hate crimes are increasing day by day against Muslims which in result increase their social marginalization. Due to these problems, Muslim ethnic groups have started the struggle for increasing their empowerment and self-development. However, the struggle for self-development and empowerment is not viewed positively by both the Indian government and majority of the Hindus.<sup>8</sup> Muslims are about 12% of the total population in India. They have consensus in terms of their monolithic religious ideology. Muslim monolithic religious ideology is totally different from the religious ideology of the majority Hindus.<sup>9</sup> In addition, the struggle for power has been the central point in terms of Muslim-Hindu antagonism which turned them into hostile groups towards each other. Historical struggle and differences in religious ideologies gave birth to Islamophobia in sub-continent after partition.<sup>10</sup> In addition, Muslims struggle for empowerment added fuel to the fire and the majority of Hindus started systematic tactics to suppress minority Muslim community. On the other side, it has been argued that the Muslims represent a single community which is monolithic and homogeneous not only politically but socially too. Historically speaking, hate crimes and Islamophobia increased in India after the struggle of the Muslim community for their separate homeland based on their belief system which clearly differentiates Muslims and Hindus as two nations.<sup>11</sup>

### **3.0 The Hindutva Movement:**

The scholarship on the emergence and political theology of Hindutva ideology is vast and interdisciplinary. Scholars have been studying the origins of Hindutva ideology, its role in the emergence of India, and its steady rise since India's independence.<sup>12</sup> For roughly 500 years before British rule became direct in 1857, the Asian Subcontinent had been dominated by Muslims politically. Many Hindu nationalists, along with some historians, assert that Hindu traditions and institutions were suppressed during this period. As the Indian independence movement grew in the early twentieth century, some were energized to "correct" this historic trend. Secularism became a more-or-less enshrined value for the independent Indian state, although its conception in both theory and practice varies widely. The hatred for Muslims because of Mughal Rule in India and the assassination of the founder of the Indian nation, Mahatma Gandhi, later brought special attention to the Hindu nationalist movement and the ideologues who shaped its vision and ideas.<sup>13</sup> With the growth of the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS, National Volunteer Organization)—a religio-political revivalist movement that seeks to make Hinduism the dominant and exclusive source of Indian culture and identity—Hindutva ideology has received more attention from scholars who study contemporary India.

There has been a plethora of scholarship since devoted to the rise of Hindu nationalism.<sup>14</sup> Muslims, who are about two hundred million of India's population (15%), constitute the biggest barrier to the Hinduization of India, and hence any and every study of Hindu nationalism inevitably explores the status of Indian Muslims and their future. Behind the recent development of Hindu militant chauvinism, which has manifested itself in the demolition of the historical Babri Masjid in Ayodhya and the Muslim genocide in Gujarat, is the "Hindutva" movement promoted by RSS; its militant wing, VHP; and its political arm, BJP. It can be called a religio-political movement that aims to establish Hindu Rashtra (Hindu State) in India. The term "Hindutva" has a historical and philosophical meaning and its strong exponents were Vir Savarkar and M. S. Golwalkar.<sup>15</sup> Savarkar, in his pamphlet entitled "*Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?*" (1923), argues that "Hindutva" is different from Hinduism. Hindutva embraces all aspects of life and thought, including the political aspect. Hindutva also emphasizes the superiority of the Hindu race. Savarkar believes that all Hindus have the blood of a superior race. By Hindu race, he actually means Aryan race. A "Hindu" for him is one who follows a definite religion, Hinduism, and who regards the land of Bharatvarsha from Indus to the seas not only as a fatherland but also a holy land.<sup>16</sup> For this reason, followers of Hindutva look at Muslims, Christians and others as ideological and political enemies of Hindus.

For political parties such as the BJP and its antecedents, Hinduism as a concept is almost always concurrent with nationalism, the core belief being that India is an inherently Hindu nation, even if establishment of a strictly Hindu state is not a goal. In this regard, it is the proselytizing religions—Islam and Christianity, in particular—that can be characterized as representing a threat to the "Hindu nation."<sup>17</sup> In simple terms, the key tenets of the Hindutva ideology are three: (1) Hindus are the rightful rulers of India, which is a Hindu nation; (2) the Christian and, especially, Muslim

minorities are viewed with ambivalence because their religious allegiances are not indigenous to India (in a way that those of Sikhs, Buddhists, and Jains are); and (3) caste divisions undermine Hindu unity. Golwalkar further elaborated the ideas of Savarkar. He asserts that the Hindu race is the only race worthy of being dominant in the world. The culture of the Hindu race is the noblest culture in the world.<sup>18</sup> After the emergence of the Bhartiya Janata party, which has close ties to RSS and is seen as its political wing, as a dominant political force with electoral victories in 2014 and 2019 national elections, the possibility of India becoming a Hindu Rashtra (Hindu state) has become real.

The literature on the electoral success of BJP records how, after gaining power, it normalized bigotry and violence against the Muslim minority by encouraging and even protecting Hindu extremists and vigilantes who indulge in violence against Muslims.<sup>19</sup> The BJP makes India more Islamophobic with its Hindu nationalist agenda. It considers Muslims as “the other” of Indian society and uses a narrative that paints Muslims as a security threat to the country.<sup>20</sup> Hindutva ideologues suggest that only the Hindu people of the country are authentic Indians and are presenting Hindu scriptures as history and not mythology.<sup>21</sup> They consider the pre-Muslim domination period as the golden era of Hindu civilization. The Hindutva narrative suggests that there were a series of historical wars between “indigenous Hindus and barbaric foreign Muslims”.<sup>22</sup> This narrative portrays Muslim rule in India as a foreign invasion. The ideologues argue that since Muslim rulers were barbaric, Islam can only extend through barbarism. This narrative clearly posits Muslims as the opposition or enemies of Hindus. These views about Muslims have fostered growing intolerance and discriminatory practices against Muslims.<sup>23</sup> Some of the controversial actions taken by the BJP government include supporting cow vigilantism, stripping the semi-autonomous status of Jammu and Kashmir, imposing a lockdown on Jammu and Kashmir, imposing the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), introducing the National Register of Citizen (NRC), adopting anti-conversion laws, and promoting a Hindu temple on the land where the Babri Mosque stood until it was destroyed by Hindu extremists.<sup>24</sup> These policies have caused Muslims to experience alienation in society and discrimination in the private and government job sectors.

#### **4.0 Indian Communalism and the Receptive Muslim**

To understand communal violence in India, one must understand the basic foundation of a community in India. Communities can be viewed as a “relational” concept made possible through “a series of mediated relationships”.<sup>25</sup> People in a community have a common goal which binds them together and this distinguishes them from other communities. However, it is not necessary that members of a community always share the same goals and values. This creates room for discrimination—an emotion described as “being in a boundary within which members [of a community] are supposed to act”.<sup>26</sup> This creates a consciousness among members who work towards living within those boundaries. Through construction of symbols to communicate, members of a community are able to relay messages and thoughts to each other.<sup>27</sup> Islamophobia is arguably also the biggest factor at play in communal violence and rise of Hindutva in India. The persecution of

Muslims in India has been on a steady rise over the last few decades.<sup>28</sup> The creation of Pakistan as an Islamic Republic has posed severe problems to Indian Muslims. While the partition reduced the number of Muslims in India from 25% to 10%, the aftermath has resulted in Hindu nationalists portraying Muslims as anti-national and traitors.<sup>29</sup> The rise of Islamophobia occurred simultaneously with a rise in Hindu nationalism. Hindu nationalism began substituting liberal values, and policies by the government began targeting minorities. For instance, a majority of Indians who underwent forced sterilization during the Emergency followed Islam.

The Hindu–Muslim communal views of their respective history, its interpretation and its appropriation for sharpening the edges of communalism, were mostly developed during the course of pre-colonial rule in India. This reconstruction of colonial history is employed as a powerful instrument for creating communal solidarity and hatred at the same time. Prior to independence, the Congress–Muslim league quest for freedom essentially represented the economic, political and cultural aspirations of both Muslims and Hindus. The major cause of communal conflict, before the advent of free India, was thus the struggle between the Hindus and the Muslim and their respective elite for political power and control of economic resources. Needless to say, the Muslims of the sub-continent, despairing of a fair deal, sought their salvation in a separate homeland. In the post-partition period, the Indian Muslim masses left behind in India found them in an awkward situation and were unable to react meaningfully to the hostile and dominating politico-economic attitude of their rival Hindu citizens. The partition riots continued up to 1948 and occasional skirmishes here and there took place till 1950.<sup>30</sup> In the decade between 1950 and 1960, the events of communal violence were marginal. However, after the frenzy of 1947-48, the communal bloodbath was again witnessed in 1961 in Jabalpur in the state of Madhya Pradesh. The riots in Aligarh, Ahmedabad and Moradabad turned into a clash between Muslims and the predominantly Hindu police force, with latter mercilessly beating up the Muslims and indulging in violence.<sup>31</sup> By 1970, the number of districts affected by the communal virus rose to 216 representing 70 percent of the Indian basic administrative set-up. Out of the total of 525 serious communal riots in 1986, 96 were reported in Gujarat, 65 in Bihar, 61 in West Bengal, 51 in Maharashtra, 48 in Karnataka, 45 in Andhra Pradesh, 41 in Uttar Pradesh, 31 in Madhya Pradesh, 24 in Rajasthan, 21 in Kerala, 14 in Tamil Nadu, 10 in Orissa, 8 in the Indian-held Kashmir, 7 in Assam and 3 in Delhi.<sup>32</sup> The ugliest incident of Hindu fanaticism since 1947 took place on 6, December 1992 when the historic Babri mosque in Ayodhya was razed to the ground. Hindu communalism, drawing its sustenance from hate, prejudice and bigotry towards the Muslim minority and its cynical refusal to accept the pluralistic nature of Indian society, blackened its own face by destroying the mosque in the name of Ram.<sup>33</sup>

The act of demolition of the historic mosque was carried out in the presence of the top Brass of BJP-VHP-RSS combine and contrary to the assurances of the state government given to the Supreme Court of India. Since 1992, the tragic happenings during the communal contentions have deepened the sense of horror and misery of the Muslim minority. The Indian Muslims are punished for not merging their religious, cultural and philosophical entity into a “uniform secular nation” which is actually the creed of Sangh Parivar. Although communalism is a means to gain political power and

assert a community's place in society, one cannot discount the role religion plays in directing the discourse. The 1980s witnessed the worst degree of communal violence in India. The "Minakshi Puram conversion" incident—a mass religious conversion which occurred in Tamil Nadu—was exploited by the then-government to mobilize upper and middle-class Hindu to support their religion and stay in power. This resulted in escalation of communal tensions which culminated in communal riots in Hyderabad, Bhiwandi, Meerut and Bhagalpur. Of these four, Meerut and Bhagalpur are considered precursors to the Babri Masjid demolition.<sup>34</sup>

The United Progressive Alliance—a coalition headed by INC which formed the Central government in 2004—saw some of the worst riots of century. Some of these communal riots include Aligarh riots (2006), Dhule riots (2008), Deganga riots (2010), Bharatpur riots (2011), Assam riots (2012) and Muzaffarnagar riots (2013). Between the six riots, an average of 26 people were killed, most of whom were Muslims or other minorities.<sup>35</sup> Historical data has also proved that minorities are worst affected. According to Paul Brass, Home Ministry data recorded 3949 incidents of communal violence between 1968 and 1980. Within this period, 530 Hindus, 1598 Muslims, 159 others and police personnel were murdered during the riots.<sup>36</sup> Even after the rise of BJP in power in 2014, Communal violence under the Modi regime has seen an increase in number of cases by 17%.<sup>37</sup> In 2015, communal incidents were 751 incidents were recorded. Two years later, the NDA government recorded a 28% hike in 2017. However, this is still short of UPA's decadal high which stood at 943 in 2008.<sup>38</sup> BJP has prided itself saying no major riots were caused under its regime, but data reflects smaller skirmishes have made up for big riots. In 2017, 2384 people were injured in communal conflicts. This is the second highest since 2009 where 2461 people were injured.<sup>39</sup>

## 5.0 Hindutva as Governance Policy

In the general elections of 2014, the Hindu nationalist party came to power, and it heralded the beginning of an era of state-sponsored Islamophobia in India.<sup>40</sup> Hindutva is an ideology that equates Indianness with being exclusively Hindu. It seeks to subvert the secular and pluralistic aspirations of India and is trying to set it on a path that will eventually make it a Hindu state with the Hindu ethos as the dominant feature of the national culture. Hindu nationalists have a relatively short, but long-standing list of political goals. Many of these are found in the BJP's 2014 election manifesto.<sup>41</sup> RSS leaders were mostly disappointed by the BJP-led government that ruled India from 1999 to 2004, in large part because then-Prime Minister Vajpayee and his lieutenants were not seen to be taking up core RSS issues. While out of power in the latter half of the 2000s, the RSS and BJP suffered a degree of mutual alienation; at one point in 2010 the then-RSS chief suggested that the BJP be dissolved and replaced by a new party. Yet the organization's leaders appeared to view the BJP victory in 2014 as crucial to the very existence of the RSS. Its leaders thus threw the full weight of their organization behind Modi's campaign while enjoying a correlate spike in participation in 2014.<sup>42</sup> Islam is the second largest religion of India with over 200 million adherents, and Muslim culture has deep historical roots and is profusely embedded in India's heritage. Its existence remains a barrier to the Hinduization of India, and the *Sangh Parivar* (family or cluster of *Hindutva*-

advocating organizations, movements, and parties) are determined to erase or at least marginalize Islam. After gaining majority in the parliament in the 2014 elections, the political branch of the *Hindutva* family, the BJP, began an accelerated process of alienating Muslims and adopted three strategies to this end: (1) undermining the legal framework that protects Muslims, (2) encouraging non-state actors to use violence against Muslims, and (3) pushing forward an agenda of cultural erasure.

Leading Hindutva and widely-held RSS aspirations include scaling back laws and government programs designed to benefit the religious minorities, Muslims in particular; and establishing a Uniform Civil Code (to replace current personal law based on religious customs and thus standardizing all national laws regarding such topics as marriage, divorce, and inheritance). Repealing Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, which grants limited autonomy to the state of Jammu and Kashmir (a step that would, if implemented, allow citizens from other states to buy property in Jammu and Kashmir, see “The Kashmir Dispute,” below), Redrafting public school textbooks to remove what are alleged to be insults to Hindu gods and excessive praise of the subcontinent’s past Muslim rulers; constructing a Ram temple on the Ayodhya site of the Babri Mosque that was razed in 1992; and preventing cow slaughter through legislation (cows are revered animals in Hinduism).<sup>43</sup>

## **6.0 Citizenship Amendment Act and anti-Muslim Hatred**

The decision of Indian state which sent shivers across the Muslim community in India came in the form a law to undermine the status of Indian Muslims in the form of Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). The Indian state came immediately under the spotlight for its religious based discriminatory actions that are disproportionately affecting Muslims. One such action is the passing of the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019. The passage of this Act has again put India’s secular claims under fire as the country questions what true Indian identity constitutes. The ruling party of India, the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) has endorsed the Citizenship Amendment Act as a response to the ever narrowing Indian identity debate.<sup>44</sup> This amendment is seen as the first legal provision that makes India a homeland for Hindus.<sup>45</sup> Ever since the birth of India, a Hindu nationalistic movement is on the rise. The BJP manifests itself to be a right-wing group that does not hesitate to take actions against the minority Muslim community in India.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, the passage of the Citizenship Amendment Act is seen as acutely detrimental to the religious freedom and secular values of India. The law basically provides a pathway to refugees from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan who are not Muslim; by prioritizing non-Muslims, it discriminates against Muslims on religious grounds. The lawmakers argue that the said countries are Muslim nations with a record of discrimination against their non-Muslim minorities, and hence, India should provide refuge to them, especially the Hindu refugees. Yet these countries also violate the rights of Muslim groups. The case of discrimination against Ahmadiyya Muslims in Pakistan is well known.<sup>47</sup> While on face value, it appears that this law only discriminates against Muslims of neighbouring nations, experts have argued and journalists have documented that, in fact, the CAA in combination with the National

Register of Citizenship (NRC) would render millions of Indian Muslims stateless.<sup>48</sup> In Northeast India where the NRC has been applied, 2 million people have been left stateless. So, when the CAA is applied in conjunction with the NRC, all the people unable to prove citizenship will be declared stateless and everyone—except Muslims—would be given a pathway to citizenship as refugees. This move has been seen as a major assault on India's Muslims and it triggered sustained nationwide protests. As can be seen from the above, the first six months of the second term of Narendra Modi's government was one assault after another on Indian Muslims' constitutional status and heritage.

### **6.1 'Love jihad' and Islamophobia**

The 'love jihad' conspiracy argues that Muslim men are waging Jihad in India by luring Hindu women into marriages through trickery, in order to convert them to Islam.<sup>49</sup> Proponents of 'love jihad' claim that these young men are waging war the capture of innocent Hindu women's hearts, referred to as 'Love Romeos'. This vicious crusade against interfaith marriage, and demonization of Muslim men has further intensified the marginalization of Muslims in India and exacerbated a hostile, anti-Muslim political and social climate. Right-wing nationalists in particular, construct 'love jihad' as a strategy employed by Muslim fundamentalists to boost population numbers in a supposed ongoing demographic war to outnumber Hindus in India. Hindutva groups and forces have consistently expressed a "fear" that Hindu women are being converted to Islam in the name of "false love".<sup>50</sup> The first public appearance of the term 'love jihad' can be traced to around 2009, mainly in the southern states of Kerala and Karnataka. Its formulation, while originating in the early twentieth century, combines contemporary anxieties around loss of identity and conversion with stereotypes linking Muslims with terrorism and extremism. Gupta summarizes that "love jihad", which is actually a jihad against love, is a 'delicious' political fantasy, a lethal mobilisation strategy, a vicious crusade, and an emotive mythical campaign. It is an attempt by Hindutva forces for political and communal mobilisation in the name of women."<sup>51</sup>

'Love jihad' utilizes exclusionary principles for political and communal mobilization through the creation of a common "enemy other" in the name of 'protecting' Hindu women. Far-right Hindu nationalists have constructed 'love jihad' as an organized conspiracy, whereby Muslim men are aggressively converting vulnerable Hindu women to Islam through trickery and marriage. In actual practice, however, there is a lack of evidence supporting the legitimacy of 'love jihad'. Propaganda against 'love jihad' has thus been a mere lethal mobilization strategy against love, for political gains in elections.<sup>52</sup> First appearing in 2009 in political and public discourse, the term 'love jihad' has gained more momentum since 2014, to the advantage of far right-wing nationalists. As exemplified in the previous paragraphs of this section, 'love jihad' has built traction by exacerbating the ongoing fears of 'breeding Muslims' set to overtake Hindu population in India. This is complimented by a highly patriarchal nationhood of violence against women, that simultaneously constructs reproductive women's bodies a site of communal anxiety about the future of the Hindu race, in a demographic war against other minorities.<sup>53</sup> This ultra-Hindu nationalism and emphasis on the dominance of a Hindu population is also inseparable to anti-conversion laws and the *ghar vāpasī*

(returning home) program which restricts the ability for Hindus to convert to other religions, while simultaneously advancing and encouraging the conversion, often forced conversions of other religious groups, to Hinduism. As emphasized by Gupta, “a common thread that links both ‘love jihad’ and *ghar vāpasī* is the obsession with the numerical strength of Hindus. The numbers game, and constructed fears around it, has been central to the modern politics of Hindutva”.<sup>54</sup> More deeply, Gupta brings attention to the inextricable link between ‘love jihad’, *ghar vāpasī* and rising Hindu Nationalism in India, ultimately reflecting the national “shift in electoral politics to the right.”<sup>55</sup>

Indeed, ‘love jihad’ is predicated on exclusionary principles, and reproduces historical references to the aggressive and libidinal energies of the Muslim male, thus creating a common “enemy other.” ‘Love jihad’ has not only resulted in hostile communal tensions but also results in experiences of structural, as well as everyday discrimination among Muslims in their neighbourhoods and daily life. The ultra-nationalist right-wing Hindutva war against supposed ‘love jihad’ has led to the displacement of some Muslim communities, built fear and insecurity and led to the intensified and increased securitization, policing and community vigilantism against Muslims in India.

## 6.2 Muslims as the Antagonistic Other

The Indian society is highly infested with a caste system (based on a particular theological construct) that places the religious clergy (Brahmins) at the top and renders millions outside the caste system as untouchables. This intra-Hindu set up, known as the *Varna* system, grades people according to the hierarchy they enjoy by the fate of their birth. Thus high caste people have more rights and privileges than those belonging to lower castes. The inter-community relationship was much more about practicing apartheid on religious grounds. The untouchables (Dalits) embraced Islam to escape the persecution from brutal repressive caste system, thus to Brahmins the Muslims were *Mlechhas* (impure untouchables) too. The proselytization process was subsequently followed by Muslim rule. During the Muslim rule caste rigidity was eased to a large extent and an alternative social system did threaten the social and religious status of upper caste Hindus.<sup>56</sup> Hence the Brahminic construction of the Muslim history and contribution to Indian civilization is rife with references to desecration of Hindu temples hurting their religious sentiments because of dietary habits particularly eating beef.<sup>57</sup> The history and politics of beef eating in India is contested and variegated. According to some historians the origins of cow slaughter can be traced back to British colonizers while others hold that beef eating in India was prevalent in India before the advent of Islam.<sup>58</sup> The invocation of Muslim rulers as invaders and plunderers, including the drawing the analogy of Muslim rule being synonymous with Hindu persecution helped in the construction of Muslim image as the ‘other’.<sup>59</sup>

Hindutva imaginary frames Muslims as antagonistic to Hindu India in a number of ways. As has been mentioned briefly, the period of Muslim predominance (Mughal Era) is viewed as a foreign invasion. Hindutva narrations of historical wars that occurred between different kingdoms tend to

be amputated from their spatio-temporal contexts and become reframed as an Orientalist tropes between heroic indigenous Hindus and barbaric foreign Muslims. It has been noted that Hindutva regards the period preceding Muslim predominance as the golden era of Hindu civilization. In the context of Hindutva, colonial definitions of "Hindu" and "Muslim" became and remain foundational to an ethno-nationalist vision of a distinctly Hindu India. Hindutva actors have appropriated the problematic notion that Ancient India was a coherent and cohesive Hindu civilization to argue that Hindu predominance over the region coincided with India's golden era—as global leaders in political innovation, economic development, and the creative arts.<sup>60</sup> The golden era came to an end after what is deemed to be the Muslim invasion of Hindu India. The BJP's outline of a Hindutva vision of India characterizes the decline of the country with the arrival of the "Islamic sword," and indeed, refers to the "era of Islamic invasions" as "the bloodiest period in the history of mankind" (Bharatiya Janata Party n.d.) Hindus were thus deemed to have been trapped in a state of "enslavement" since the commencement of Muslim rule.<sup>61</sup> By labelling Muslims as invaders—thus, fundamentally foreign to the region—Hindutva actors (1) assume the historical people and polities of South Asia to have been held together by a collective consciousness of shared Hinduness,<sup>62</sup> (2) imagine the contemporary nation-state of India as possessing an essential relationship with those polities (Sharma 2011), and thus (3) characterize contemporary Hindus as the natural "inheritors of the past and claimants to dominance in the present" because, to them, India has *always* been Hindu.<sup>63</sup>

Beyond the political, economic, and cultural achievements of Hindu kingdoms, it appears that Hindutva conceives of Hindu civilization as glorious because of the absence of a significant number of Muslims in the region. Consequently, the numerical growth of Muslims is regarded with suspicion. Since Muslim rulers were regarded as barbaric and wicked, the implication was that Islam could only spread through barbarism and wickedness. Thus, Hindutva rationalizes the numerical growth of Islam and Muslims to be a function of conversions enforced *en masse* by ruthless Muslim rulers—though this too is an ahistorical account.<sup>64</sup> It has been empirically demonstrated that Islam spread gradually, over a period of some 400 years, because of geological changes (e.g. the way rivers flow) and the resultant economic contingencies (e.g. implications for irrigation and agriculture),<sup>65</sup> rather than in a sudden massive wave that Hindutva actors claim. Nonetheless, the origins of the 500 million or so Muslims in South Asia today (India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh) are treated to be a product of a vicious Medieval Muslim policy: convert or die. The logic of Hindutva dictates that (1) Muslims only became Muslims out of fear, (2) all Muslims in the region were originally Hindu, and thus (3) Muslims today can and should be reconverted to Hinduism since their Hindu ancestors only became Muslim as the alternative was death.<sup>66</sup>

Hindutva also characterizes Muslims as bandits for having (1) stolen land and dividing Hindustan into India and Pakistan, and (2) robbing India of secularism and religious equality. While Pakistan's founder Muhammad Ali Jinnah arguably intended for the country to be a secular Muslim-majority state,<sup>67</sup> Pakistan has often been subsumed by polarizing and repressive Islamist influences—perhaps most notably under the dictatorship of General Zia-ul-Haq.<sup>68</sup> The prevalence of Islamism,

as well as the fact that Pakistan has lagged behind India considerably on most development indicators,<sup>69</sup> has arguably provided the factual and logical foundation necessary for Hindutva to characterize Pakistan as a poorly governed territory. That it was nonetheless carved out for Muslims at the expense of a unified India, the birth-right of the Hindus as it were, only exasperates the frustration Hindutva articulates toward the very existence of Pakistan. As such, Pakistan embodies both the failure of contemporary Muslim-majority rule and the detrimental effect of losing land to them—because an India free of Muslim-majoritarianisms outranks Pakistan in terms of political maturity and economic development. Within India, the fact that Muslims maintain religious laws to govern personal affairs (e.g. marriage, divorce, inheritance) is perceived as a violation of the secular foundations of the Indian Constitution.<sup>70</sup> The establishment of a separate Muslim Personal Law is perceived as an unfair concession to Muslims—a peculiar accusation given that Hindus too have a set of personal laws under the Hindu Code Bill.<sup>71</sup>

That said, the notoriety of the 1985 Shah Bano Case, the debate over the constitutionality of triple *talaq*, and the concomitant demand for the government to stay out of issues concerning Muslim Personal Law by (extremely) vocal conservative clerics who managed to mobilize popular support in favour of their anti-government stand has arguably rendered Muslim Personal Law more visible than any other religious laws in Indian media discourse. This has made it easy to gloss over the fact that religious laws in India are not exclusive to Muslims—which would render *all* religious groups in technical violation of Hindutva's apparent desire for secularism. In this context, Muslims are framed not only as barbaric, wicked, and demonic, but as bandits for having stolen land and secularism. Hindus occupy the role of the courageous, righteous, and Godly victims of Muslim thievery. Islamophobia is thus a function of Hindu–Muslim antagonisms in India, and indeed, operate through the racial hierarchy which mandates that Muslims be subordinate to Hindus in a plethora of ways. As shall be demonstrated, Modi's narratives resemble these antagonisms and hierarchies, albeit more subtly.

## **7.0 Recognizing Islamophobia:**

Reports from international and civil society organisations and recent surveys point to persistent intolerance and racism against Muslims across territorial boundaries, as well as to structural forms of discrimination (e.g. in access to employment or education) directed against individuals, women in particular, with a Muslim background. To combat Islamophobia, Muslims throughout the world, argued and rallied that both on social and legal turf, discriminatory legislation and political discourse play in fanning the flames of hate and anti-Muslim hatred.

As we know Islamophobia is far more than simply hate speech. It is most dangerous when embedded in civil and judicial structures that unfairly stigmatize Muslims in the name of national security. Fear of terrorism has been used as a political device to justify flagrant violations of civil and human rights. In a 2011 meeting, the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, as well as the League of Arab States, a key partner, identified Islamophobia as an important area of concern. Gallup

developed a specific set of analyses, based on measurement of public opinions of majority and minority groups in multiple countries, to guide policymakers in their efforts to address the global issue of Islamophobia. The continuous perusal of Islamophobia and its effects in enlarging the gulf between Muslims and other faith traditions have remained a key concern for Muslim political leadership apart from academics and activists. Former Prime Minister Imran Khan equally pursued this case with a contextual framework and remained instrumental in recognizing Islamophobia as a structural problem and a tool of discrimination against Muslims. In a speech at the 74th session of the United Nation's General Assembly, the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan, gave serious attention to the phenomenon which has caused much pain and suffering. His speech aimed to present his side of the story to establish the fact that there is no radical Islam, countering the perception of Islam as a radical religion, and in its stead, positing the West as culpable for creating a schism between itself and the Muslims.

This speech touched upon the precarious condition of Muslims across the globe as a result of Islamophobia and, more significantly, the hypocrisy of the West towards tackling and curbing Islamophobia. This address is critical because it not only foregrounds the normative Western perceptions of Islam and Muslims but also sheds light on the condition of Muslim leaders themselves. However, it is significant that, just like Islamophobia does, Khan too uses religion as the primary means of differentiation. He contends that the West fails to understand Muslim sentiments regarding religion and their prophet (P.B.U.H.) because the way that they perceive religion is altogether different from how Muslims perceive and practice it. He also uses the strategy of implication and contends that whenever the West will malign prophet (P.B.U.H.) there will be reactions from Muslims. Imran Khan has also drawn a comparison between the Muslims and the West, and argues that the West does not see religion with respect as Muslims do. Here, he has highlighted the positive attributes of Muslims as his in-group and the negative attributes of the out-group.

The resolution, adopted in consensus by the 193-member world body of UN and co-sponsored by 55 mainly Muslim countries, emphasizing the right to freedom of religion and belief and recalls a 1981 resolution calling for "the elimination of all forms of intolerance and of discrimination based on religion or belief".<sup>72</sup> The resolution was introduced by Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

### **Conclusion:**

As we discussed in this paper, Otherization of Muslims in India is part of a larger unfolding of Hindu theological genealogy. According to the above empirical data and case studies, it is evident that issues of discrimination, exclusion and marginalization of Muslims is complex but a serious matter of concern. Islamophobia is not only institutionalized, but also spatialized through communal violence, attacks and contestations over the right for Muslim neighbourhoods and places of worship to exist in the Indian national space. Historically, India has suffered various outbreaks of large-scale

politically-stoked violence against religious minorities, particularly against Muslims that remain unresolved years later. In documenting cases from 2017 onwards, it is exemplified that the BJP victory and subsequent implementation ultra-right-wing nationalist discourse and policies have intensified such attacks against Muslim sites, neighbourhoods and places of worship. Most concerning, is the direct impact of such violence on patterns of segregation and the ghettoization of Muslims, further limiting their socio-economic opportunities for growth out of dire situations of poverty. This paper has critically examined the impacts of communal violence on Muslim displacement, and subsequent patterns of ghettoization and segregation sustained through discriminatory policies that further restrict the social and spatial mobility of Muslims in India. While imparting education to all Muslims is very much required, the causes and consequences of spatial marginality reflects the negative image of the society, which needs to be assessed and examined. It all leads to their severely stigmatized and extremely excluded conditions. Since Otherization is an integral part of the development of strategies for exclusivist politics, it is important to seek effective measures to improve the conditions of Muslims. Marginalization and peripheralization foster a relational approach to inequalities among marginalized groups. Therefore, an effective and inclusive policy is urgently needed to open up various platforms for absorbing religiously marginalized minority communities to develop a more democratic and secular India. Since it is clearly visible that Muslim Indians share an economic and educational predicament with their vulnerable non-Muslim fellow citizens, therefore, economic and educational welfare are the predominant concerns in the process of democratization of Muslims. However we should look at the growing consciousness, democratization, assertiveness and political mobilization of Muslims in order to examine the politics, programmes and broader agendas that advocates of this new identity seek to put forward on behalf of a large section of India's Muslim population. It is essential to understand the changing dynamics of Muslim politics discourse and how the 'politics of inclusion' is at play in the arena of this dynamics. As such there is no sufficient work is done on untouchability among Muslims but different forms of discrimination, stigma, social distance and structure of domination faced by lower caste Muslims depicts the harsh reality.

## **Policy Recommendations:**

- (1) Islamophobia needs to be properly understood and recorded to assess the scope and nature of the phenomenon, and the narratives and flawed logic used in Islamophobic attacks must be effectively deconstructed and challenged. Where misinformed narratives concerning Islam and Muslims circulate these must be broken down.
- (2) A reconstruction of mainstream ideas surrounding Islam and Muslims is needed, one that is closer to the realities of the faith and its practice. This means that dominant ideas about Muslims and Islam that circulate in popular culture should reflect the diverse everyday experiences of Muslims and their faith.
- (3) Each level of government especially in the Muslim world should engage with western countries and have exchange programs sending over Muslim scholars to clear misconceptions about Islam which can ultimately lead to eradicating anti-Islam sentiments in these countries. Each level of government must actively participate in the discussion, and implementation of laws that puts a full stop on anti-Muslim hatred in the non-Muslim majority countries.
- (4) Due to the ongoing violence and Islamophobia in the world especially India, Muslim countries and their representational bodies like OIC must build political pressure against Indian state and make them accountable for the undergoing high-scale anti-Muslim hatred and violence.

All this amounts can be summed up in four-step approach: first defining, and second documenting Islamophobia, next deconstructing its narratives, and then reconstructing new positive and realistic narratives around Muslims. Such an approach moves away from misinformed and often reactionary counter-Islamophobia strategies, such as the way Muslims repeatedly condemn terror attacks and seek to dissociate such acts from Islam. The ultimate goal in countering Islamophobia should be to create a fair and just society for all, one that values and safeguards the citizenship of its members.

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