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## **The Muslim Minority in the Perspective of Hindu Nationalism**

### **Socio-Economic Condition of the Muslims in India**

India is a country of considerable religious diversity. M. Sabbir and G. Mian noted that Indian society is divided into 6 main ethnic groups, 52 tribes, 6 principle religions, 6400 castes and sub-castes<sup>1</sup>. The majority of people believe in Hinduism, which comprises four major castes: Brahmins (the priest), the Kshatriya (the warrior), the Vysya (the business) and the Sudra (labor caste). Below this (caste system) there are the “Outcastes” or “Dalits”. Considered to be “untouchables” of the Hindu community, they are not allowed to study or read the religious scriptures. And nobody can violate this system because it is punishable in the society.

Historically it is proved that the caste system is one of the main reasons for the Dalits and Sudras to convert to other religions. The lower castes who embrace Christianity or Islam have different social status than those who convert to Buddhism or Sikhism. It is notable that Muslim Dalits are excluded from the legal category of scheduled caste. Therefore, they are outside of quotas of reserved places in public sector education and employment, which is known as ‘reservation’. While Sikhs, in 1956, and Buddhists, in 1990, have been given reservation by amending the Constitution, Muslims and Christians Dalits are deprived from this.

Compared with other minorities, the socio-economic level of Muslims is even lower than Dalit Hindus, though they constitute 14.2% of the total population. This is a country which has more than 100 million of the world’s Muslims (the third largest Muslim population). Apparently, their destitution in the society commenced at the end of the Mughal Empire and the emergence of the British colony. The British took power from Muslims and changed the official language from Persian to English, which brought discontent among them. Therefore, they avoided learning English, acquiring modern education and, due to political reasons fell behind, Hindus up to this point. Additionally, a report by the Prime Minister’s Office of India reveals that Muslims feel disenfranchised,

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<sup>1</sup> M. Shabbir, G. Mian, *State of Indian minorities: Impact on domestic politics and the country’s standing abroad*, 2015, [www.ndu.edu.pk/issra/issra\\_pub/articles/margalla-paper/Margalla-Papers-SE-2015/06-State-of-Indian-Minorities-Mr-Shabbir-&-Gulandam-Mian.pdf](http://www.ndu.edu.pk/issra/issra_pub/articles/margalla-paper/Margalla-Papers-SE-2015/06-State-of-Indian-Minorities-Mr-Shabbir-&-Gulandam-Mian.pdf), retrieved 10.08.2018.

due to different factors (marginalized from the allocation of governmental job position, public facilities and so on)<sup>2</sup>.

To know more about the condition of Muslims in India a survey was conducted in 2005 by the Sachar Committee, which found that one third of the Muslim-majority villages had no schools. In towns 60% of them were not in educational institutions, their presence in higher education was 6.35% and overall 59.9% were illiterate. As well as in education, the survey revealed that they were also deprived in health services, since almost 405 Muslim-owned villages had no hospital. Their access is only 7.9% in the job sectors (governmental, organizations and companies), in defense 3.2%, in the university 4.7%, and in civil services 3.2%. The participation of Muslims in the army, the airforce, and the judiciary was not disclosed by the government. The report identified Muslims as a poorer community than the Dalits (36.6%) in India. However, in some places, though they have a good property:

- 80% of them were considered as labor workers;
- 60% of Muslims in villages don't have their own lands;
- 49.9% live below the poverty line;
- Only 17% of people live in the cities;
- Only 0.4% are in respectable professions<sup>3</sup>.

The committee submitted reports in 2006, and 72 recommendations were approved by the cabinet. Since 2007, 43 decisions (including education, skills development, access to credit, social development, measures for affirmative action, and prevention of communal violence etc.) were taken to carry out the committee's recommendations<sup>4</sup>. But it is noted by many scholars that these decisions were inadequate in proportion to their requirements. As a result, the condition for Muslims remains essentially unchanged: a survey conducted in West Bengal in 2014 (which included 325 villages and 73 urban wards) revealed that there have been no marked changes in the Muslim community seven years after the Sachar committee report<sup>5</sup>.

According to P.T. Dinesha that the deprivation of community has been a result of their exclusion from important spheres of socio-economic decision

<sup>2</sup> S. Bhalotra, I. Clots-Figueras, L. Iyer, *Politician Identity and Religious Conflict in India*, March 2012, [editorialexpress.com/cgi-bin/conference/download.cgi?db\\_name=FEMES12&paper\\_id=518](http://editorialexpress.com/cgi-bin/conference/download.cgi?db_name=FEMES12&paper_id=518), retrieved 10.08.2018.

<sup>3</sup> Summary of Sachar Committee Report, 2005, [www.prsindia.org/administrator/uploads/general/1242304423~~Summary%20of%20Sachar%20Committee%20Report.pdf](http://www.prsindia.org/administrator/uploads/general/1242304423~~Summary%20of%20Sachar%20Committee%20Report.pdf), retrieved 10.08.2018.

<sup>4</sup> Implementation of Sachar Committee, [www.minorityaffairs.gov.in/sites/default/files/Sachar%20Committee%20Status\\_1.pdf](http://www.minorityaffairs.gov.in/sites/default/files/Sachar%20Committee%20Status_1.pdf), retrieved 10.08.2018.

<sup>5</sup> Z. Haque, *Seven years after Sachar Report, no change in condition of Muslims in WB: New study*, June 1, 2014, [twocircles.net/2014jun01/seven\\_years\\_after\\_sachar\\_report\\_no\\_change\\_condition\\_muslims\\_wb\\_new\\_study.html](http://twocircles.net/2014jun01/seven_years_after_sachar_report_no_change_condition_muslims_wb_new_study.html), retrieved 10.08.2018.

making, lack of political empowerment, discrimination, frequent occurrence of communal violence etc.<sup>6</sup> Besides these, in the last few years Hindu nationalism has become the most important factor which has pushed the Muslim minorities to the periphery of society.

### **Background of Hindu Nationalism in India**

Hindu nationalism originated from the movements of religious revival in the 19th century that responded to colonialism, Christianity and Islam. In order to create a Hindu community invoking hostility to those of other faiths, some organizations emerged. They disseminated the Hindu culture and nationhood which exhibited an explicit anti-Muslim slant.

One of these organizations was “Hindu Mahasabha” formed in 1923. It articulated the concept of “Hindutva” which encompassed the entire gamut of cultural, social, political and linguistic aspects of Hindu life. The pioneer of this organization (Savarkar) wrote in his book *Hindutva* that India should belong only to those whose forefathers were born in India and believe in India-originated religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism). He added that only their adherents were eligible to be called Hindus<sup>7</sup>.

Another organization named “The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh” was founded by Dr. Keshav Hedgewar in 1925. Since 1940 it was headed by M.S. Golwalkar who defined nation as a compound of five unities: Geographical (country), Racial (Race), Religious (Religion), Cultural (Culture) and Linguistic (language)<sup>8</sup>.

It is noticed that after the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, these Hindu Nationalists transformed their social movement into a political force. Hence the, most orthodox Hindu Party (Ram Rajya Parishad) was formed in 1948. The party aimed to return to the glorious days of the Hindu God Rama’s rule, where everybody was contented, prosperous and religious. The party was against any reform of the caste-ridden society and soon vanished.

Moreover, in 1951 another nationalist party (Bhartiya Jana Sangh) was founded by S.P. Mookerji (former president of Hindu mahasabha). Standing for Indian culture, the party stated its fundamentals as “one country, one nation, one culture and the rule of law”. According to their ideology, Indian Nationalism and Hindu Nationalism were both the same. For the first time, Nationalism became fused with the religious and communal identity of the

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<sup>6</sup>P.T. Dinesha, *Socio-economic status of Dalit Muslims in India: An overview*, “International Journal of Social and Economic Research” 2016, Vol. 6, Issue 2 (March–June), [www.researchgate.net/publication/306351665\\_Socio\\_Economic\\_Status\\_of\\_Dalit\\_Muslims\\_in\\_India\\_An\\_Overview](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/306351665_Socio_Economic_Status_of_Dalit_Muslims_in_India_An_Overview), retrieved 10.08.2018.

<sup>7</sup>P.S. Ghosh, *The Congress and the BJP: Struggle for the Heartland*, [in:] *Political Parties and Party Systems*, eds A.K. Mehra, D.D. Khanna, G.W. Kueck, New Delhi 2003, p. 226.

<sup>8</sup>H. Hartman, *Political Parties in India*, Meerut 1984, p. 112.

majority community. However, in 1980 this party and RSS reorganized as the Baratiya Janata Party (BJP) and then gradually Hindu Nationalism was able to take its place in politics.

As we observe in the Lok Sabha (the lower house) of the Indian parliament, the BJP had just two seats in that time (1984). And then in 1989, it won 85 seats. By 1991, it had managed to gain 119 seats. Finally, in 1999 the steady rise in support culminated in 182 seats<sup>9</sup>. However, that figure was still a minority in comparison to the overall 543 seats in the house, and it was inadequate for the BJP, so they formed a coalition with National Democratic Alliance that ruled India until 2004.

Since 2014 Hindu nationalism has become one of the crucial political issues. The BJP government (2014–2018) intended to create a great India based on Hindu cultural nationalism. It states that those who do not subscribe to Hinduism do not belong to this nationalism<sup>10</sup>. Therefore, numerous factors (cow protection, Hindu identity etc., which are connected with religious sentiments) are being used politically to differentiate the Hindu culture from the Muslims. Though secularism is one of the principles of the constitution, uncertainty and tension among the Muslim minorities are growing in India.

In the constitution there is no differentiation among the citizens on the bases of their religious beliefs. According to the constitution, all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practice and propagate religion, subject to public order, morality and health<sup>11</sup>.

However, recently, the secular character of the State has come under threat from the practitioners of religion-based politics. Secularism and Hindu nationalism are the realities of India and these two ways of life are in conflict with one another. As a result, besides the other minorities, Muslims are acutely being affected.

### Effect of Hindu Nationalism on the Muslims Minority

Due to the effect of Hindu nationalism, the country experienced many incidents of hatred and violence between the two religious groups (Hindus and Muslims). The statistical report shows that, during 1984–1998, almost 15,224 (30% in Gujarat and 26% in Maharashtra), in 2002 about 2000 people were killed in Gujarat. Continuously, from 2010–2013 in each one million 143 in Karnataka province and in 2017 overall 111 people had lost their lives and property (damaging and burning houses, religious institutions and so on)<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> A. Sen, *The Argumentative Indian*, New York 2005.

<sup>10</sup> Ch. Shah, *Fundamentalism in India: Ideology, Strategies and the experience of Gujarat*, [www.wluml.org/sites/wluml.org/files/import/english/pubs/pdf/wsf/07.pdf](http://www.wluml.org/sites/wluml.org/files/import/english/pubs/pdf/wsf/07.pdf), retrieved 10.08.2018.

<sup>11</sup> India Constitution, art. 25 § 1, [lawmin.nic.in/coi/contents.htm](http://lawmin.nic.in/coi/contents.htm), retrieved 10.08.2018.

<sup>12</sup> Genocide Gujarat 2002, *Communalism Combat*, No. 77–78, March–April 2002, USIRF, International Religious Freedom Report for 2016 (Section II), 15 August 2017, [www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2016religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2016&dlid=268930#wrapper](http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2016religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2016&dlid=268930#wrapper), retrieved

Further, for last few years India has been witnessing an unmistakable push towards Hindutva, the cow protection slogan. In Hinduism the cow is a sacred animal; therefore, cow-killing is taboo and even considered to be an offence. Article 48 of the Indian constitution prohibits cow slaughtering in some states<sup>13</sup>. Consequently, 24 states have imposed laws and penalties (imprisonment of two to 10 years or a fine of \$15 to \$151) which depend on whether the animal is a cow, calf, bull or ox<sup>14</sup>.

Violating the secular character of the state, Hindu nationalists have killed and tortured cattle transporters, and attacked people on suspicion of consuming beef. In particular, Muslims are the target community of violence as they slaughter animals, including cows, for the Islamic festival Eid-ul-Adha (an essential practice in Islam). For killing or selling cows they are beaten, attacked and punished. The USCIRF report of February 2017 stated: Cow slaughter in India has remained a perpetual source of tensions between Hindu and Muslim and Dalit communities. The ban on cow slaughter is often termed as “food fascism” by the religious minorities’ activists. Beef is a critical source of nutrition for various minority communities, including Dalits, Christians, and Muslims. Members of these communities work in the cattle transportation and beef industries<sup>15</sup>.

Despite being one of the chief exporters of beef in the world, on May 26 in 2017 the ministry of environment of the Indian central government led by the Bharatiya Janata party (BJP) imposed a ban on the sale and purchase of cattle for slaughter at animal markets across India, under prevention of cruelty to animal statutes<sup>16</sup>. Though later the Supreme court of India suspended the ban on the sale of cattle in its judgment in July 2017<sup>17</sup>. However, it is reported that in 2017 several deaths were linked to the so-called cow protection. Actually, Hindu nationalists seek to impose a vegetarian culture and deprive Muslims of access to meat, a staple of their diets, including through more outright bans<sup>18</sup>.

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10.08.2018; A. Mitra, D. Ray, *Implications of an Economic Theory of Conflict: Hindu-Muslim Violence in India*, “Journal of Political Economy” 2014, Vol. 122, No. 4, pp. 719–765; *Indian Ministry of Home Affairs Annual Reports*, mha.gov.in/documents/annual-reports, retrieved 10.08.2018.

<sup>13</sup>The Constitution of India (article 48, page 23), as of 9 November 2015, [www.india.gov.in/my-government/constitution-india/constitution-india-full-text](http://www.india.gov.in/my-government/constitution-india/constitution-india-full-text), retrieved 10.08.2018.

<sup>14</sup>Genocide Gujarat 2002...

<sup>15</sup>USCIRF, *Constitutional and Legal Challenges*, February 2017, [www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Constitutional%20and%20Legal%20Challenges%20Faced%20by%20Religious%20Minorities%20in%20India.pdf](http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Constitutional%20and%20Legal%20Challenges%20Faced%20by%20Religious%20Minorities%20in%20India.pdf), p. 7, retrieved 10.08.2018.

<sup>16</sup>Ch. Chauhan, *Centre bans sale of cows for slaughter at animal markets, restricts cattle trade*, “Hindustan Times”, New Delhi, 19 July 2017, [www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/centre-bans-cow-slaughter-across-india-cows-can-be-sold-only-to-farmers/story-8sFXJxiNmZ8eD6NXDgb-vnL.html](http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/centre-bans-cow-slaughter-across-india-cows-can-be-sold-only-to-farmers/story-8sFXJxiNmZ8eD6NXDgb-vnL.html), retrieved 10.08.2018.

<sup>17</sup>*India Supreme Court suspends cattle slaughter ban*, BBC News, 11 July 2017, [www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-40565457](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-40565457), retrieved 10.08.2018.

<sup>18</sup>K.A. Kronstadt, *India: Religious Freedom Issues*, 30 August 2018, Congressional Research Service, [fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R45303.pdf](https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R45303.pdf), retrieved 10.08.2018.

Besides the above mentioned situations, Muslims are also under threat of conversion to Hinduism. The nationalist group RSS claims that the ancestors of the Indian Muslims and Christians were Hindus, therefore they should come back to their original religion, which has termed as “Ghar wapsi”, meaning home coming.

This idea has been implemented by the different Hindu extremist groups for a long time. A VHP(The Vishwa Hindu Parishad) nationalist leader claimed the RSS had converted more than six million Muslims and Christians into Hinduism since 1966. In its annual report presented in 2015, this organization has converted nearly 34,000 people to Hinduism over a year and “prevented” nearly 49,000 Hindus from converting to other religions<sup>19</sup>. These conversions and “preventions” were carried out in the states of Odisha, Gujarat Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Assam. These organizations are raising funds to convert Muslims and Christians to Hinduism. They distributed pamphlets for a fund raising drive where the cost of converting a Muslim was fixed at Rs. 500,000 (\$7,500) and of converting a Christian at Rs. 200,000 (\$3,000). The BJP member of parliament Satish Gautam welcomed the announcement<sup>20</sup>.

In fact, conversion to Hinduism by the nationalists is a process to make India a Hindu country. It is often connected with violence and mental pressure which creates panic among the Muslims who have to leave their place. Though these extremists are violating the Human rights of the minorities, the ruling BJP party failed to take appropriate steps to control them.

Further, Hindu nationalists have become concerned with love Jihad. This is a concept in which a Muslim man marries a Hindu woman through love in order to change her faith. Throughout 2016 and 2017, due to this issue, many Muslims couples were humiliated, tortured and even treated to killing by Hindu extremists. Apparently, police investigations reported that they did not find any evidence of an organized love Jihad. In most cases they found that a Hindu girl willingly married a Muslim boy against their parents will as they were in love. Therefore these cases are considered as love marriage not love jihad<sup>21</sup>.

Besides the discussed situations, the BJP government has also taken an initiative NRC (National Register of the Citizens) to find illegal immigrants, it has created a threat for Muslims of becoming refugees in some states. Through this process the government intended to identify illegal immigrants from neighboring Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan. According to BJP, among the migrant

<sup>19</sup> VHP Claims Huge Success in “Ghar Wapsi” Campaign, “World Hindu News”, 8 July 2015, [worldhindunews.com/2015/07/08/45454/vhp-claims-huge-success-in-ghar-wapsi-campaign](http://worldhindunews.com/2015/07/08/45454/vhp-claims-huge-success-in-ghar-wapsi-campaign), retrieved 10.08.2018.

<sup>20</sup> *Minority rights violations in India. A Report by Alliance for Justice and Accountability, Endorsed by Indian American Muslim*, 23 May 2017, Washington, D.C., p. 42.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 41.

people Muslims are classified as Illegal immigrants while Hindus are defined as refugees. The government has declared that it will welcome Hindu refugees and deport Muslim migrants. As a part of this effort in Assam (a 30% Muslim-populated province) 4,07,007 people (a large number of them are Muslims) were reported to be excluded from this NRC, claiming as Bangladeshi immigrants<sup>22</sup>.

Thus, India is going to create a refugee crisis in the country. Therefore, the human rights organizations and the opposition parties are concerned by this decision which is creating homelessness for Muslim minorities. Many scholars claim that, through the above mentioned activities of the nationalist groups and BJP, governments intended to separate the Muslims from the Hindus to gain political support from the majority.

## **Conclusion**

Due to religious animosity between Hindus and Muslims, the Indian sub-continent was divided into two parts based on religion. During the partition this conflict became intensified and the country experienced communal genocide throughout India and Pakistan. This antagonism gradually got boosted in the independent period due to the emergence of Hindu nationalism as a political force. Following the concept of Hindutva, this nationalism included only those whose forefathers were Hindus. Further, it was connected with Hindu culture and religion which excluded Muslims and Christians. At the beginning of the 80th decade these political forces and different Hindu nationalist groups organized as a Varatiya janata party, BJP, and gradually acquired a strong political position. This party came to power in 2014. Though the party appeared to follow the “soft” Hindutva philosophy, at the same time they supported the violent activities of their extremist nationalist partners, RSS, against minorities. Moreover, the Hindus believe that these minority religions undermine their social caste system. Therefore, despite India being a secular country, minorities are being persecuted and discriminated against. In response to this circumstance, the risk of Muslim terrorist activities is increasing in India. In order to control Islamic and Hindu terrorism, it is high time for India to bring the minorities into the fold by allowing them to maintain their distinct identities rather than following soft or hard Hindu nationalism.

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<sup>22</sup> T. Chakrabarti, *The crisis of the citizenship in Assam: No final list before the election*, “Prothom Alo. Bengali Newspaper”, 30 August 2018, [www.prothomalo.com/opinion/article/1555-581](http://www.prothomalo.com/opinion/article/1555-581), retrieved 10.08.2018.