

## **Marginalization of Muslim Minority in India**

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### **Abstract**

*India's highly religious – ridden atmosphere, filled with communal antagonism, inflammatory speeches, crimes against minorities and the agenda of Hindutva has been drifting away the Muslim minority from the mainstream of the national life of India. The Indian Muslims who form approximately 16 percent of the total population, have been subjected to continuous pressure and have been decimated from positions of importance in all walks of life. Concerted efforts have been made to deprive them from their basic human rights. The Indian Muslims live a life of complete insecurity and are being denied their Indian citizenship in different ways. Despite making countless contributions to India in almost all spheres of life, the Muslims of India find themselves increasingly vulnerable and pessimistic about the possibilities of an economic, socio-cultural and political uplift in the communal Indian society. This study would try to examine the objective conditions that spark communal cleansing in the Indian socio-political context. The study will also concentrate on the thesis that Indian state-engineered activities through its defense organs presenting to the world, the Indian Muslim's political consciousness about their fair existence, as a manifestation of Islamic extremism or "terrorism against Indian federation" so as to justify Indian state repression and communal violence against the down-trodden innocent Indian Muslims.*

**Key Words:** Hindutva, Sangh Parivar, Communal Riots, Strife-Ridden, Sub-Continent

### **I. Minority Phenomenon and the Indian Muslims**

Ever since the beginning of human society, there has been a constant grading in the social spectrum of human society. 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 force. Since the identity of interests of all types of social groups has not been achieved, the majority – minority relation is greatly heightened. 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 hostility. The objects of competition may range from political power and opportunities for education to economic power and employment. 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 are harassed in varying degrees

from complete social isolation to compromise or persecution. (Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, 1992, p. 139)

Therefore, the following are the general effects of a minority position (Hamilton, 1993, p. 7):

- i. Minority groups are held in lower esteem and are objects of contempt, ridicule and violence.
- ii. They are specially segregated and socially isolated.
- iii. They are victims of unequal access to education, employment and professions.
- iv. They may suffer from restricted property rights.
- v. They may be deprived of the right to suffrage and public office.
- vi. 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 (Wagley and Harris, 1958, p. 16).

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. Differentiation is not an inevitable or natural process – it has to be culturally set before being defined as such. There are mainly five functional characteristics in a minority position as comprehensively defined and attempted by UNESCO conference (Ashworth, 1968, p. 13): A minority is a

- i. Subordinate segment of the population
- ii. With special physical and cultural traits
- iii. Possessed of self consciousness bound by some special traits and disabilities
- iv. Whose membership is compulsorily transmitted by a rule of descent
- v. Marriage is confined within the group by choice or necessity.

In India, although its constitution proclaims the state to be secular, yet an insight at the last six decades shows that Indian secularism, works invariably in favour of the Hindu (Majority) (Aurora, 1999, p. 172-173). The Muslims are looked upon with suspicion and hostility. They find it difficult to get into government service. Trade and industry do not employ them. Economically they have been ruined and the deterioration gets more severe every day. Culturally it is expected of them to be assimilated into the general Hindu milieu. They are a community with no present, no future and no hope. With charges of terrorism and extremism on them, their social existence seems to be in a great danger. Every day the Indian Muslims suffer from communal wave of persecution and genocide.

## **II. Indian Communalism Rousing Chauvinism against Muslim Minority**

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 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 (Bhagwant, 2001, p. 5). 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 (Quoted in Shakir, 1989, p. 92).

Later rioting erupted in various parts of East-India like Calcutta, Jamshedpur, Rourkela and Ranchi. In 1968-69 communal aggressions caused a chain reaction in the Southern part of India as the state of Gujarat saw intensive and widespread killing incidents (Gupta, 1970, p. 102-104). In Ahmadabad also, massacre, arson, looting and slaughter of thousands of Muslims continued for a week. The communal violence in Ahmadabad had its repercussions elsewhere, in Baroda, Bharuch, Nadiad Anand, Jamnagar, Bhuj, Veravel, Junagarh, etc. 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 (Sadiq, 1988, p. 51).

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 Orisa, 8 in the Indian-held Kashmir, 7 in Assam and 3 in Delhi (Chaudhry, 1989, p. 333). 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 (William, 1998, p. 200). The uncivilized 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 ( Ganga, 1996, p. 6).

Since 1992, the tragic happenings during the communal contentions have deepened the sense of horror and misery of the Muslim minority. In the recent past, Narindar Modi's state of Gujarat broke the previous records of Anti-Muslim atrocities, when stray cases of assault, murder, stabbing and rape went on unabated and unchecked for a week. The overall picture is that the loss of lives, injured or disabled, loss of moveable or immovable properties, missing persons and honor is incalculable. Indian governments whether the "so-called progressive" or conservatives have evidently failed to protect the Muslim minority from an organized vandalism. 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 (Gulzar, 1999, p. 6).

The Indian Muslims strongly believe in cultural assimilation but do not want to lose centuries old traditions of their own and the doctrines of religious diversity as well as their faith. The persistence of communal violence is usually sought to be explained by continuing Hindu-Muslim religious rivalry. A majority of analysts hold religion as mainly responsible for communal confrontation, and certainly religious symbols, mythology and terminologies are frequently employed in various communal frenzies. Undoubtedly, communal propaganda is a subtle and lethal weapon in the speeches, writings and dealings of the Hindu communalists. However, some scholars hold the economic factors responsible for the eruption of communal aggression and they argue that:

In the communal – ridden society of India, most of the employers, industrialists and middlemen are Hindus, whereas the majority of employees, workers and artisans, are Muslims (Singh, 1989, p. 3).

Thus in such a set-up, communal riots are a distorted version of the class conflict. Furthermore, there is a competitive conflict of interests within the middle class and among the self-employed people over access to given opportunities like government jobs, export contracts, market shares, etc. The prevailing group identities clash on communal lines.

Going by the foregoing analysis of Hindu-Muslim communal strife, it seems that political factors also play the role of bread and butter in this conflict. The Muslims in India are considered to be politically deprived group. Their frustration increases when Liberal parties like Congress pursue the same communal lines as the BJP, Sangh Parivar and other anti-Muslim political factions espouse and romanticize Hindu quest for permanent dominance over the Muslims. Following the above aspects of communalism, these systematically designed riots can be viewed as the clandestine handiwork of Hindu militant and fanatic organizations who seek to achieve their parochial objectives through rioting. RSS, Shiv Sena and Bajrang Dal do not accord the status of the Muslims as equal citizens (Kirmani, 2001, p. 6-7). By trying to achieve their objective of purging India of Muslims, they resort to rioting, thus depriving them from privileges and preferential treatment. Resultantly, when Hindus appraise the Muslims, negatively on religious / political grounds, the Muslims develop antipathy towards the Hindus, and this leads to communal tension and hostility.

Attempt to curtail Indian Muslims’ fair existence has been articulated by numerous Hindu circles with such a vision whose appeal will ultimately demolish Gandhi’s dream of a secular and democratic India. In pre-partition India and even during Nehru’s regime, the influence of individual Muslims found prominence through their active participation in the congress policies, but due to dual attitude of congress leadership, it lost nationalist resilience which provided opportunity to Hindu right wingers to flourish the glorification of Hindutva rather than secularism. Although Article 17 of the Indian constitution “abolished” the concept of untouchability and its practice in any form, yet, the victimization of the Indian Muslim community reflects systematic brutality with the complicity of Hindu extremists and exposes the pitiable situation in a representative secular democracy (Gail, 2003, p. 2).

Under these circumstances, the energy and enthusiasm of the Indian Muslims to participate in the national life of Indian society seems to be weakening day by day. Last but not least, the possession of fear and inferiority complex and narrow, ad-hoc self-interests has doomed the future of Muslims in India. The answer to this problem lies in the identification of Indian Muslim minority as equal citizens. Indians will have to contain the explosive blending of Hindu revivalism with governmental machinations, which is clearly fundamentalist. Following this statement, it is further suggested that Hindus should not attempt to co-opt or incorporate all distinct communities, including the Indian Muslims, into the Hindu fold and must refrain from accomplishing the mission of Hindutva. India with its old ideal of secularist anti-fundamentalism will not only prevent its society from communal pollution but will also create political tranquility and regional cohesion with Pakistan.

### **III. Conclusion**

Both the Muslims and the Hindus have developed, over the decades, stereotyped opinions, images and particular perceptions of each other. Such concepts tend to dominate the mindset of orthodox and conservative sections of the rival communities, in particular, the Hindus. There are weighty reasons to believe that the Hindu communal elements have made much space into intelligence organs, police, paramilitary forces and policy making institutions to sabotage all peaceful measures of civil society organizations and all the secular elements, apart from encouraging and promoting communal activities. In almost all the communal riots, prejudiced actions on the part of law enforcing agencies are noticed by the world print and electronic media and are reported. The repeated occurrence of communal violence and the failure of the law and order machinery to protect the life, property and honor of the Muslim minority is the outcome of a sustained hatred, garbled versions of Indian history, traditions and prejudices against the Muslim minority.

Undoubtedly, at the root of communal conflicts and hostilities against the Muslim minority in India, both a cause and an effect of tension, is the confrontation with Pakistan on a number of issues. As the relations with Pakistan worsen, the Muslims in India are automatically suspected of being a fifth column for Pakistan. The depth of religious feeling in India today is mirrored by the Hindu attitude towards global war against terrorism. The Indian media and even commoners seem to be very delighted by the Muslim's discomforts in different war theaters of world. The Indian-Israeli nexus has grown powerful which instills provocational fascism in the Indian youth. It is a settled phenomenon that the Indian Muslims are too large and too poor ever to be able to leave India but Hindu revivalism is reinforcing disenchantment among the Muslims with Indian secularism. So far the response of Hindu communalists has been unrelenting. The choice lies with the Indians. Do they want to emerge as a modern secular state which protects the fundamental rights of its citizens of whatsoever creed, color or religion, guaranteed under their secular constitution or do they want to lark back to the dark ages of Hindi religionism. In case they choose the latter, they are bound to BALKANIZE.

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