# ISLAMOPHOBIA IN INDIA

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The Indian Muslims are numerically largest among the South Asian nations. They constitute the largest minority in India. Since the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 that ended British colonialism and resulted in freedom of India and creation of Pakistan, those Muslims that remained in India have been suffering immensely at the hands of Indian State, save for a minority of elites who have 'progressed.' This paper explores systematic Islamophobia in India against Kashmiris and Indian Muslims and how it impacts Muslims across the country despite diversity in the community. A historical analysis is first offered, tracing the long history of Islamophobia in India to British rule which acted as a catalyst in furthering the divide, animosity and hatred among the two communities. Through an analysis of Hindu communal organizations, the role of media and politics, the paper deliberates on the relationship between Islamophobia and communal riots in India, with case studies about the lived realities of Indian Muslims, who are legally entitled to be equal citizens of free India.

A lot of writing and research has been conducted on the phenomenon of communalism in India (Chandra, 1996; Puniyani, 2018), while very little attention has been paid to Islamophobia in India. There are more than 160 million Muslims living in India, who account for the largest number of Muslims after Indonesia in the world. Indian Muslims though constitute the largest minority in India but they are among the most marginalized minority in India.[1] The relationship of Islam with the Indian subcontinent goes back to the eighth century (Ahmad, A., 1969) and Muslim rule over India continued over a thousand years (Poole, 1970). The roots of Islamophobia in Europe go back to the ethnic cleansing of Muslims in Spain (Carr, 2017). The onset of Industrial revolution led to the subsequent colonization of weaker nations including India. The British colonization led to the disintegration of Mughal empire and the end of Muslim rule, in the Indian subcontinent. The British colonizers considered Muslims as their real enemies as they had snatched power from the Muslims, who despite being a minority ruled India (Fuerst, 2017). The Muslims were at the receiving end throughout the British rule because the British always suspected Muslims to be a threat to their rule over India (Hunter 1969). The British adopted a policy of divide and rule, that made the

Hindu majority antagonistic towards the Muslim minority. Other factors including history, religion and politics reinforced this antagonism that ultimately led to the partition of the subcontinent and the subsequent end of British colonialism (Lapierre & Collins, 2011). A huge section of the Muslim minority in India felt discriminated by the Hindu majority during the British colonialism and demanded separate electorates, representation in legislative and executive bodies. Later on, these differences became irreconcilable that ultimately led to the partition of India subcontinent (Spunner, 2017).The Muslims were faced with new realities in a divided free India, where they faced discrimination on the basis of being Muslims. This discrimination needs to be understood at multiple levels in order to analyze the phenomenon of Islamophobia in India.

## THE CONSTRUCTION OF MUSLIM AS THE OTHER IN INDIA

The Indian society is highly infested with a caste system that places the religious clergy (Brahmins) at the top and renders millions outside the caste system as untouchables (Ambedkar, 2014). 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 *melchhas* (impure untouchables) too. The proselytization process (Troll, 1982) 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. Hence the Brahmanic construction of the Muslim history and contribution to Indian civilization is rife with references to desecration of Hindu temples (Thapar, 2008), hurting their religious sentiments because of dietary habits particularly eating beef. 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 (Dharampal & Mukundan, 2002), while others hold that beef eating in India was prevalent in India before the advent of Islam (Jha, 2010). 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' (Eaton, 2006).

This construction of history was coupled with the premises of violence being endemic in Islam, thus Muslim rule and history were rife with violent persecution, suppression of Hindu majority and intolerance towards their religious rituals. The Muslims later on were also labeled as disloyal citizens of India because they certainly do not believe in the divine sanctity of mother India (Islam, 2006). It was because of this very notion that Muslims were labeled as instigators of partition of *Akhand* (united) Holy India. This belief further reinforced the belief about denial of any role of Muslims in the struggle against British colonialism. Nonetheless, Muslims were actually at the forefront of struggle against British colonialism (Engineer, 2006). Many Muslims did support the demand for creation of Pakistan through partition of the Indian subcontinent, but the demand had its roots in the ultranationalist

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Hindu revivalism, Hindu notion of considering Muslims as different, antagonistic, impure nation and the threat perception among Muslims being reduced to a weightless minority in free democratic India (Cohen, 2006). Despite all these factual realities many Muslim leaders did oppose the partition (Islam, 2015).

After the partition became a reality millions of Muslim were left behind in Hindu majority India. These Muslims were made to bear the brunt of institutional marginalization by the state and its institutions (Khalidi, 2006). A systematic and periodic cycle of communal riots were initiated in the aftermath of partition against Indian Muslims (Engineer, 1995). The majority victims in these riots are Muslims as Hindu communal rioters are helped by police to oppress Muslims (Khalidi, 2003). The Hindu communalists have been decrying and alleging that Muslims are the initial instigators triggering the communal violence and what follows in the aftermath is just the Hindu reaction to Muslim instigation. The religious seminaries *madrasas* that impart education to millions of poor Muslims are being described as the 'dens of terrorism' in the vernacular Hindi press as a part of propaganda run against Muslims (Sikand, Y., 2005). The practice of polygamy, *purdah* (veil) and *talaq* (divorce) (Salam, 2018) has also been used to construct a negative image of Muslims in India. The stereotyped construction of all Muslims as potential terrorists became more strong in the aftermath of 9/11 attacks. Any untoward terrorist attack is always blamed on Indian Muslims unless proved otherwise (Mushrif, 2019).

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Islamophobia in India has a long history, but its practical manifestation can be traced to British colonialism. The British rule acted as a catalyst in furthering the divide, animosity and hatred among the two communities. Religion was the pivot on which the divide was articulated, though both Hindus and Muslims did share the same past. The basic premise on which Islamophobia is rooted is that Islam cannot coexist with Hinduism. These two religions have to clash as there are no meeting grounds between these religions. A premise based on the allegation that Islam is always desirous of supremacy and cannot maintain a subservient or equal status with any other religion, has been widely refuted (Eaton, 2003).

The demand and later on creation of Pakistan reinforced this perception of antagonism of Muslims with Hindus, that still reinforces Islamophobia in India because Indian Muslims still have their loyalties suspected in the eyes of Hindu majority and Indian state. They are suspected to harbor transnational sympathies with the state of Pakistan and other Muslim countries. The Kashmir dispute, whose roots can be traced to British colonial legacy, is still lingering whereas according to the partition plan it had to accede to Pakistan, but ultimately it got divided among India and Pakistan (Schofield, 2004). Since 1947 the inhabitants of the Indian-administered Kashmir are demanding holding a referendum to articulate their choice about maintaining the status quo, acceding to Pakistan or creating a new nation state (Noorani, 2013). This demand is being articulated vociferously by the Muslims of Kashmir, whose history and culture is completely different from that of Indian Muslims. The state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) existed as a princely state at the brink of partition, and its people had a different culture, history, norms and language from their counterparts in India and

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the newly created Pakistan. After the division of the state of J&K right to self-determination was promised to its inhabitants. But the demand has been met with an Iron fist policy by the Indian state. This secessionist movement has once again revived the partition memories, thus providing an opportunity to Islamophobes to strength their campaign against Indian Muslims. The Kashmir conflict has thus been reinforcing the Islamophobic atmosphere in India since India became an independent nation. The Kashmir issue, though political in nature, has religious overtures that render it religious in the eyes of the Hindu majority. They conceive the perception that Muslims by nature are violent and cannot become responsible citizens in a secular, democratic and republican India. It is because of this aggressive nature of Muslims that they are demanding secession, forgetting the fact that Kashmiri Muslims are certainly different from their counterparts in India.

A unique provision of Article 370 of the Indian constitution guaranteed special status to the state of J&K (Noorani, 2011). This special status of the Muslim majority state became a whip in the hands of rightwing political parties to reinforce Islamophobia. The rightwing political parties like Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) used the revocation of Article 370 as an important clause in its election manifestos of 2014 (Wallace, 2015) and 2019 (Sardesai, 2020) to garner votes, describing it as a tool of Muslim appeasement. BJP later abrogated the special status of J&K by revoking provisions of Article 370 on 5th August, 2019 illegally and unconstitutionally while enforcing a severe communication clampdown and restrictions in J&K.

The threat of demographic change is also one of the factors contributing to Islamophobia in India. It is a commonly held perception among Hindu masses that Muslim men are allowed to marry four times and thus practice polygamy (Jeffery & Jeffery, 2006). Through these polygamous marriages, more children are born, as compared to Hindu counterparts. It can certainly be concluded with simple arithmetic calculations that within a few decades the Hindu majority will be retrograded to a minority following the population explosion by Muslims, as their decadal growth will be much higher than that of Hindus. This threat of demographic change is further reinforced by the perception of Islam being a proselytizing religion and modern Islamic revivalist movements of 20th century like Tablighi Jamaat (TeJ) (Sikand, Y., 2002) and Jamaat e Islami (JeI) being born in the undivided Indian subcontinent and they still continue to function in India. These perceptions are certainly based on flawed premises because the decadal census reports have shown no such alarming growth rate among Muslims that can be presumed at demographic change coupled with the fact that a miniscule minority of Indian Muslims practice polygamy (Quraishi, 2021). Further, the Islamic revivalist movements like TeJ and JeI have very rarely engaged in proselytization of Hindus; TeJ is struggling hard to make Muslims follow and implement the teachings of Islam in their personal lives, whereas JeI India has long forfeited the dream of its founder Mawlana Abul Ala Mawdudi about the need for establishing an Islamic state. It has now joined the electoral fray and accepted the secular and democratic political culture of India (Ahmad, 2009).

## MANIFESTATION OF ISLAMOPHOBIA IN INDIA

Manifestation of hate against any community needs creation and manufacture of that amount and level of hate that will translate into violence. This manufacture of hate against Islam and Muslims has been underway since the last one century. It initiated with the disturbing trend of questioning the contribution of Muslims to Indian civilization. Muslim rulers were described as plunderers and desecrators of Hindu temples. They were labeled as foreigners and eight hundred year long Muslim rule was alleged to be a colonial occupation, whereas the factual truth is that Muslim rulers particularly Mughals enriched Indian civilization as any other sons of soil (Aquil, 2017). They played a decisive role in opposing and resisting the British colonial occupation (Dalrymple, 2007).

To construct a self delusionary version of history, a doctored history and rewriting of school text books as a project was undertaken (Flaten, 2017). This construction of history owes its origin to Hindutva regime of Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP). BJP owes its origin to Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) (Jaffrelot, 1996) that is an amalgam of various right-wing organizations of varied hues. RSS since its inception in 1925 has been successful in penetrating different state institutions including education and bureaucracy. RSS has spread its tentacles of hate, bigotry and extremism in every stratum of the Indian society. This ideology of hate preached by RSS and its affiliated organizations has created a culture of hate that expresses itself periodically in the form of communal riots (Islam, 2014). In these communal riots, 90% of the victims are Muslims, whose property is arsoned, men are killed and women are raped with impunity (Brass, 2003). In the recent history, Godra riots of 2002 are a horrible example of this phenomenon (Engineer, 2003). The institutional injustice against Muslims in India makes the guilty of these communal riots go scot free. This institutional injustice and invisible apartheid of even judiciary against Muslims have rendered them vulnerable, insecure and alienated.

Rewriting of history was responsible for the demolition of Babri Masjid at Ayodhya by a Hindu mob on 6th December, 1992. The whole campaign leading to the demolition of the 600-year-old mosque was over the allegation that it had been established by demolishing a Hindu temple in the birth place of Lord Ram (Akhtar, 1997). The Indian secular state could not save the 600-year-old structure, that was demolished within a few hours by a Hindu mob with most leaders of BJP and RSS overlooking the demolition. It is still remembered as the darkest day in the history of democratic and secular India. RSS and its affiliated organizations have now been able to lay their claims at the disputed site, after Supreme Court in its verdict granted permission for construction of the temple and allocated few acres of land away from the disputed site to Muslims for building a mosque. The verdict is being hailed as victory by the right wing political party and a watershed movement in contemporary history of India (Swamy & Sabharwal, 2020).

The involvement of state machinery in orchestrating, perpetuating the riots and then shielding the rioters has become evident in the post-Babri demolition and Godra riots (Ayyub, 2016) as very few among the guilty have been brought to the book. Most of the rioters, their masterminds and organizations like RSS continue to function smoothly. The Indian society after every communal riot has been polarized on religious lines. This polarization has led to

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the ghettoziation of poor Muslims and with marked differentiation between 'purely' Hindu and Muslim areas, particularly in northern India including the capital city of Delhi.

The media construction of Muslims particularly in the aftermath of 9/11 in India has been similar to its counterparts in the West. The media both in vernacular Hindi and English, electronic and print have described Muslims as potential terrorists (Rawat, 2004). Whenever any untoward incident takes place the media houses promptly pronounce Muslims as guilty. These media trails have reinforced the negative Islamophobic perceptions about Muslims among the masses. The media image of Muslims and Islam has been very negative and problematic in India. Urdu as a rich language has been reduced to penury and now completely exclusivist to Muslims. It has been described as a language used by Muslims because most of the religious literature produced in South Asia is available in Urdu. Urdu that was a syncretic common language of both Hindus and Muslims in undivided India is marginalized as Muslim and *Jihadi* language by state and other media institutions (Farouqui, 2006).

In the post-Babri phase in India, Hindutva organizations and their right wing political parties like BJP have been on the forefront in their campaign of Islamophobia. Reinforced by the media image of Muslims, some of these righ-wing organizations have resorted to violence and bomb blasts in various parts of India (Gatade, 2011) to scapegoat Muslims, and have been successful in implicating innocent Muslim youth on dubious charges of terrorism in Malegaon and Sabarmati train bombings. Thus, a witch hunt of Muslims started particularly after 9/11 and when a series of bomb blasts rocked various parts of India innocent Muslim youth were framed as perpetuators of these terrorist attacks (Mushrif, 2009). Hundreds of Muslim youth were charged under the anti-terrorist acts for the crimes that they had not committed. 'Secular' Congress and communal BJP are both responsible for the witch hunt of Muslim youth. After decades of snail's pace judicial process scores of these youth were deemed innocent by the judiciary but the precious youthful years of these innocent youth were lost fighting a judicial battle while remaining behind the bars (Khan & Haksar, 2016). The sleuths of security agencies including Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) who are responsible for ruining the careers and lives of these Muslim youth have still not been brought to book and they are still working on their posts observing impunity from rule of law. Further the anti-terrorism laws in India have been rampantly misused to persecute the Muslim youth as reflected in the low rate of convictions (Ramakrishnan & Trivedi, 2021).

The Islamophobic environment prevailing in India is manifested evidently during communal riots, in the aftermath of bomb blasts and in the impunity of the guilty Hindus. But since the general assembly elections of 2014 and 2019 in which the communal right-wing party BJP, the political face of RSS gained a decisive victory with Narendra Modi, who is accused of being the mastermind of Godra riots became the Prime Minister of India (Suhrawardy, 2015) the communal atmosphere became brazenly overcharged with violence. With such a political arrangement, millions of lower rung members of RSS present in every nook and cranny of India became emboldened to carryout individual attacks against Muslims without any fear of facing the law. These attacks against Muslims carried out by individual groups of Hindu right were encouraged by the silence of state institutions against the guilty. A number of killings of Muslims have been carried out by the lynch mobs particularly on the issue of slaughtering cows and storing or transporting beef.[2] The dietary habits of Muslims are being regulated and scrutinized to ensure that they are not guilty of

eating beef. A cow in present day India is much more secure and protected entity than a Muslim. These acts of mob justice by cow vigilante groups are still being experienced in various parts of India.[3] The atmosphere is now completely charged with communal hatred, and the Hindutva regime of BJP is turning a blind eye to the atrocities against Muslims. In many cases it upholds the victim Muslim as guilty because beef ban has been imposed in many parts of India, that now justifies the role of lynch mobs and kangaroo courts.[4]

The right-wing Hindutva groups have been for a long time running a smear campaign of demographic change of Hindu majority in India. Since past few years a new catchy phrase and a theory of Love Jihad have been invented by the right-wing groups to justify violence against Muslims. According to this theory of Love Jihad, Muslim men trap Hindu girls in their love, ultimately marrying them after reverting them to Islam. The Muslim community has thus started this campaign of Love Jihad in order to lure innocent Hindu girls to Islam and bear Muslim children (Gupta, 2009). Hence right-wing groups always make sure that no inter-community Hindu-Muslim marriage takes place. This societal ban has further reinforced the divide among Hindus and Muslims. Also no evidence has been appropriated that can substantiate the allegations about any such effort and campaign being carried out by Muslims consciously as Love Jihad (Kalidasan, 2021).

The discriminatory laws of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and National Register of Citizens (NRC) passed by the BJP are aimed at marginalizing Muslims even further. Muslims are supposed to prove their nationality, otherwise they will be declared as non-citizens with their properties confiscated and being rendered stateless. A movement against these discriminatory laws was initiated by Muslim women in a small muslim dominated area of Shaheen Bagh of Delhi in 2019. The movement was non-violent and aimed at repealing these laws while upholding the spirit and values of Indian constitution, but it was targeted, maligned, attacked and described as being sponsored by Pakistan and Islamist elements (Mustapha, 2020). A purely non-violent, women led, constitutional and progressive protest movement was labeled as terrorist and Islamist because it was initiated by muslim women and centered in a muslim area (Salam, Ziya Us; Ausaf, Uzma, 2020).

During the pandemic the headquarters of Tablighi Jamaat (TJ) in Nizamuddin, New Delhi was described as the Corona hotspot. The TJ activists were labeled by the media as indulging in Corona Jihad against Hindus. The fact that administrators of TJ headquarters had requested the government to help them shift the TJ activists to other places once the abrupt lockdown was announced, died in the cacophony of voices that called for the arrest of TJ members. The media painted them in harrowing colors labeling them as primary agents responsible for spread of Corona in India. For more than two months April-May 2020 the media was blaring and blaming TJ for pushing India to the brink. They were made scapegoats to divert attention from migrant crisis and incompetence of the government to handle the corona crisis. Meanwhile the media described the Hindu pilgrims as being stranded due to lockdown while targeting TJ members as being hiding in the Nizamuddin headquarters. Then there was a deliberate omission or little coverage of the fact that numerous TJ members donated plasma for patients suffering from Corona once they recovered (CSSS, 2021).

In 2021 the Kumbh Mela was held so were the elections in the state of West Bengal where the guidelines of social distancing, wearing face masks and avoiding congregations were thrown to winds. It led to a huge surge in Corona positive cases but media and political

parties did not blame Hindus or political parties for the surge in pandemic (Kamal, 2021). It very well manifests the prevailing Islamophobia in India.

## PHOBIA OF ISLAMOPHOBIA

The Islamophobic environment in India since the partition of the subcontinent, retrograded Muslims to internalize and inherit a cluster of vices that have now become endemic to them. Among these vices the biggest is the ghettoziation of Muslims. The perception of 'other' reinforced by the threat of communal violence has made Muslims to live in secluded ghettos (Gayer&Jaffrelot, 2012). Further the image of Muslims being terrorists has made the Hindu majority deeply insecure about welcoming any Muslim in their neighborhood. This seclusion has made these ghettos the dens of all wrong doings. This ghettoziation of Muslims has reinforced their marginalization that has rendered them as one of the most backward communities in India (Jamil, 2017).

Further, the Muslim apathy towards education, has rendered the doors of progress closed on them. Very few Muslims are admitted to prestigious universities in India. There are a few Muslim minority universities like Aligarh Muslim University, Jamia Millia Islamia and Jamia Hamdard that Muslim students do opt for (Sikan, Y.S., 2008). The poor Muslim masses find the doors of education closed on them. They are being discriminated in educational institutions. This phenomenon is not restricted to public institutions of education only, but Muslim children do face discrimination, racial slurs and Islamophobic taunts even in elite private schools (Erum, 2018). They have accepted the fact that state institutions are biased against them, even if they educate their children, they certainly will not find a government job. Hence when the end means of education is to secure a job, its real purpose is lost. Moreover, there exists an alternative system of *madrasa* education that imparts only exclusivist religious knowledge to the students, thus making them redundant to enter the competitive global market. The *madrasas* follow a traditional system of learning, curriculum and pedagogy, which has not been revised for centuries. They are in no way open to include changes in their curriculum that would make their students understand the challenges and issues that present-day Muslims are facing. The traditional closed system of education fears any change and looks at it with suspicion or state intervention that intends to dilute the religious nature of these *madrasa* institutions (Jhingran, 2012). The education in *madrasas* is juristic in nature and each juristic school of thought differs from the other in their interpretation of Islam. These *madrasas* enforce and integrate among their students the perception of being the only truthful inheritors of the religion. They thus deem the other schools of thought as deviant, which need to be corrected. It leads to mutual suspicion, illogical debates about niceties of theology and ultimately to sectarianism. Most of these madrasas do impart a sectarian teaching and training to their students who after completing their education, use time and energy in proving their sect as the only rightful inheritor of true Islam while decrying others as deviated. Thus a lot of energy and resources of the community are wasted in the useless pursuits that further perpetuate sectarianism among Muslims, reinforcing the image of Muslims being a divided sectarian lot (Moosa, 2015).

Indian Muslims despite being so great in number have yet failed to establish a national level newspaper in English that can become the voice of the community. A number of regional and national level newspapers and journals are published in Urdu or in other vernacular languages but most of them are religious in nature. Even if they are journalistic their reach is beyond the policy framers, decision makers and intellectuals because vernacular languages are read only by few sections of society even among Muslims. Only one English fortnightly *The Milli Gazette* is published in English language and that too has closed down after rendering a yeoman service to Indian Muslims by reporting their side of story that usually does not find space in the mainstream media. The condition of electronic media is much more pathetic because the few Muslim channels aired are just relaying lectures on religion. Muslim media in India has yet to evolve to such a distinction where it begins to report about community issues and universal affairs related to the common people.

Similar is the case with political parties. There are few Muslim political parties in various Indian states where Muslims are in majority but no common single Muslim leader has been successful to evolve or emerge as a stalwart leader who can represent the aspirations and diverse interests of Indian Muslims as a whole. Some Muslim politicians like Asaduddin Owaisi of Hyderabad is trying to make his party All India Majlis Itihaadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) as pan India, but his efforts have met with limited success. The political fate of Indian Muslims has been oscillating between various political parties who successfully use them as vote bank. The division of Muslims in India along various lines has rendered it a cumbersome task to establish a common political party that can take care of the interests of Indian Muslims. The various secular and right-wing political parties have been successful in keeping the Muslim masses and their community leaders divided.

The Muslim community particularly its religious leaders have been very sensitive when it comes to issues related to gender justice and Muslim personal law. There is a demand from Muslim community to change the juristic laws related to oral and triple *talaq* (divorce) as well as codify the Muslim personal law as has been done by various other Muslim countries. But these demands have met a stiff opposition from the religious clergy who are adamant not to accept any change, even if it is in favor of the Muslim community. This indigenization *viz-a-viz* any progress, inclusiveness and pluralism has retrograded the Muslim community to a phobic culture wherein any new change is deemed to be rejected *in toto*. Despite the opposition from Muslim clergy the judiciary went ahead and declared Triple Talaq as illegal and any Muslim man found guilty can be penalized and incarcerated for a period not exceeding three years. Now that Muslim men have been targeted through this law, reinforcing the already prevalent Islamophobia and the notion of Muslim women in need of rescue from their men by Hindu right wing (Agnes & Khan, 2018). This law certainly has not empowered Muslim women, instead it has rendered them more vulnerable towards sufferings in marriage. The relationship between Hindu Radicalization and Islamophobia has not been established yet. But if probed they may certainly be a part of the vicious cycle. In Europe this has been the case especially in England (Abbas, 2019) but the efficacy of this theory in India is yet to be put to test.

## COUNTERING ISLAMOPHOBIA IN INDIA

Hindus and Muslims have co-existed in India for centuries. This coexistence certainly is a lesson for various societies where diversity is still abhorred. The Hindu-Muslim relations in India can act as a role model for such societies (Friedrichs, 2019). However Islamophobia is a factual reality in India now. But no serious efforts have been undertaken by the marginalized Muslim community to dispel the Islamophobic image of Islam and Muslims. There is no serious attempt at promoting interfaith dialogue among Hindus and Muslims. No departments of comparative religious studies is engaged in teaching a comparative study of the fundamentals of Islam and Hinduism that would certainly have helped clear the smokescreen each community has about the other. The *madrasa* curriculum is devoid of any subject related to Hinduism. Muslims are an unfortunate community because they are not even familiar with Hindu beliefs. The inclusion of comparative religious studies and interfaith dialogue will certainly help in dousing the raging fires of Islamophobia. Muslims only cannot be blamed for not taking steps towards reconciliation and understanding each other. Even the government, civil society and other sections of society are not serious about dispelling the myths prevalent between the communities, whereas expecting Muslims to initiate steps towards reconciliation is too much as they are among the most marginalized communities in India.

There is a need to establish an indigenous Muslim media in English that is universal in its appeal and relates the Muslim side of story. Alongside, Muslim political parties in India need to network with each other in order to safeguard the Muslim interests. The witch hunt of innocent Muslim youth will stop only when Muslim politicians can have a decisive voice in their constituencies and do not let the security agencies have a free hand to implicate Muslim youth falsely on the pretext of fighting terrorism. The Muslim vote bank will not then have to oscillate between various political parties whose leaders time and again have failed to safeguard the life, property and women of the Muslim community. There is a dire need for social reform among Muslims particularly on issues related to gender and *madrasa* curriculum. Thus change has to be internal and indigenous instead of being state imposed. It is a depiction of this healthy change that movements like Bhartiya Muslim Mahila Aandolan (BMMA) among Indian Muslims has surfaced who are tirelessly working to put a ban on the practice of oral divorce and seek to establish gender justice through legal, theological and gender just interpretations of Islam (Soman & Niaz, 2020).

Similarly, there are voices calling for *madrasa* curriculum reforms. They are coming from within the *madrasa* alumni and their administrators (Sikand, Y., 2008). The state also needs to formulate policies that favor Muslims so that alienation can be countered and Muslims can once again be a part of the mainstream. Further, the reservation policy for Muslims and their minority institutions should be respected by the state, so that suspicious relationship among the Muslim community and state is breached (Zaman, 2008). Finally, a permanent resolution of Kashmir dispute will help in a long way to counter Islamophobia in India.

## CONCLUSION

Islamophobia in India is still an under-researched subject, despite the fact that it is *sui generis* in its manifestation. The problem with the Eurocentric academia is that its larger-than-life research projects focus mainly on Muslims in the West or in the Middle East, whereas Arab Muslims are actually less in number and diversity when compared to Asian Muslims, particularly those living in South Asia. There is a need to have a concrete study about Islamophobia in Indian and its varied manifestations, particularly the communal riots, a peculiar and constant feature of Indian society and political culture. The phenomenon of communalism is in reality Islamophobia in action. A number of pioneering studies have been conducted on the issue of communalism, but the role of Islamophobia in communalism is still a scarcely researched issue.

The need for such a study becomes much more inevitable because Islamophobia in India is a growing trend. In recent years, the growth of Islamophobia in India has touched new heights with attacks against Muslims and Kashmiris becoming a common feature. The trend to wear the religion on sleeve whether in the form of beard or *hijab* makes one more vulnerable to the hate attacks conceived because of Islamophobia. These Islamophobic attacks have seriously damaged the secular and democratic credentials of India. The need of the hour is to rise and struggle against Islamophobia because it can be successfully countered and rebutted. Islamophobia has firm roots and long history in India but it certainly can be retracted by adopting a multi-pronged strategy by the Muslim community.

*Madrasas*, community leaders and civil society all have their role in the fight against Islamophobia in India. If the disturbing trend of Islamophobia is not checked well in time, Indian Muslims will feel more alienated from the mainstream that can lead to the disturbing trend of resorting to violence by Muslims for rectifying the wrongs done to the community.

## NOTES

1. The seven-member High Level Committee, chaired by Justice Rajindar Sachar, submitted its final report to the Prime Minister on November 17, 2006. The Sachar report made it evident that Indian Muslims are among the most marginalized sections of Indian society. The complete report titled *Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim community in India*, also known as the Sachar committee report can be accessed at http://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/sachar_comm.pdf (accessed on September, 22, 2020).

2. The killing of Mohammad Akhlaq in Dadri, Uttar Pradesh by a Hindu lynch mob on 28 September, 2015 on the pretext of storing and eating beef is a glaring example of this mob violence. See http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/next-door-to-delhi-mob-kills-50-year-old-injures-son-over-rumours-they-ate-beef/(Accessed on September, 22, 2020).

3. Two Muslim youths who were transporting beef were made to eat cow dung by a Hindu mob, *Indian Express*, June, 29, 2016.

4. Vigilante cow protection groups must be brought to justice, *Amnesty International*, 1st July, 2016.

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