

Hate Crimes against Muslims and Increasing Islamophobia in India

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ABSTRACT

This article attempts to shed light on the issue of hate crimes against Muslims in India resulting in escalated incidents of Islamophobia. For a holistic understanding of the issue, the authors discussed political ideologies in India, social stratification in Indian society, social marginalization of Muslims, and the forms of social discrimination faced by Muslim community. In India, hostility between Hindus and Muslims increased day by day after the partition in 1947; hate crimes against Muslims reached its peak because of various socio-political, economic and religious factors. Muslim community confronts many challenges including multiple cases of assaults, murder, discrimination and harassment due to Islamophobia which predominantly prevails against Indian Muslims.

Key Words: Hate Crime, Islamophobia, India, Muslims, Hindu-Muslim Conflicts

Introduction

The present study intends to discuss the issue of hate crimes against the Muslim minority in India resulting in escalating incidents of Islamophobia. In addition, the study sheds light on the educational and economic discrimination faced by the Muslims due to Islamophobia. The phenomenon of Islamophobia in India is not new. It has a prolonged historical context of power and controlled towards struggle over assets that created resentments among the people of the subcontinent after the partition in 1947 (Hussain et al., 2018). However, hate crimes against Muslims and Islamophobia is still prevalent in India. Muslims are marginalized in India because of their “monotheistic” belief system. In every walk of life, Muslims face social

disapproval and neglect and the majority of them lack basic rights and fundamental freedoms of human life.

Political ideologies in India

Political ideology of the post-colonial India is based on egalitarian ethos. However, the reality in everyday life is totally different. In order to start democratic order in the country, different constitutional policies were initiated to eradicate the disabilities of the disadvantaged communities residing in the country including Muslims (Shah, 2007); disadvantaged communities comprise about one-third of the total population of the country.

Due to widespread Islamophobia, Muslims in contemporary India are confronting the problems of their identity, security and equity. The majority of the Muslims perceive that their identity is not admired, they are not secure and they are not garnered the fundamental rights as enjoyed by other Indian communities (Zainuddin, 2003). Currently, the political scenario in India is posing a threat to the issue of equity. BJP government is furthering the identity crisis and insecurities of life among Muslims, almost in every part of the country. This implies that the Muslim community is facing higher relative deprivation as compared to other Indian religious groups. Evidence suggests that the present Indian government is religiously prejudiced towards Muslims and consequently they are facing different hate crimes (Mondal, 2003).

It is not possible for any nation to gain socio-economic prosperity until the holistic development is ensured for its citizens in every walk of life. This implies that it is not possible for any country to develop until the socio-economic uplift of all minorities residing in the country. India is one of the most religiously and ethnically diverse countries in the world, with some of the most deeply religious societies and cultures (Bandyopadhyay, 2002). It is not possible for India to march forward when minorities are illiterate, neglected and socio-politically weak. However, the backwardness of the Muslim community is being utilized as a source of electoral gain by mainstream political parties in India. Different groups' interests i.e. non-secular religious groups and secular and progressive politicians merge and reinforce each other in terms of their stand against Muslims (Sachar et al., 2006; Shah, 2007).

Social stratification in Indian society

Population dynamics of Indian society indicate unequal and hierarchical arrangement of different groups; however, these groups depend on each other for maintaining the social fabric of the society. Social ranking of different communities, tribes, and caste groups is widespread in India. In addition, differential privileges are attached to each caste, tribe and ethnic community (Zainuddin, 2003). Some caste groups are ranked higher as compared to the others. Similarly, the Hindu community is ranked higher as compared to the Muslim

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community. In maintaining a social ranking of different communities in India, the social system is operating in such a way that the majority Hindus consider that the development of the Muslim community will harm them socially and politically (Gautam, 2016; Sachar et al., 2006).

Social marginalization of Muslims

While Muslims constitute one of the major minorities in India, they are stratified into different social groups. According to Mondal (2003), Muslims in India do not form a community in sociological terms; they belong to different groups and sub-groups based on ethnic, social and cultural grounds. Nevertheless, marginalization of the Muslim community binds them into one ethnic group (Sachar et al., 2006). 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 (Robinson, 2007).

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 (Bandyopadhyay, 2002). 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 (Shah, 2007). 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 (Modal, 2003).

Hate crimes

India is the second largest country with a diversified society based on culture, language, and religion. India claims to be a diverse ethno-religious state in the world that has multiple segregated groups on the basis of religion including Muslims, Buddhists, and Christians (Hussain et al., 2018). It shows that India is characterized by various religious identities hate crime is prevalent in India against Muslim minority. Green, McFalls, and Smith (2001) mentioned that the hate crimes denote the bias against one or more social groups on the basis of religion, caste, ethnicity, language, identity and gender.

India claims to be a secular state (Clementin-Ojha, 2014; Guha, 2017) with a safe and secure environment for every ethnic and religious minority (Sharma, 2012). However, despite being a leading ethno-religious minority group living in India, Muslims are struggling for their basic human rights. There has been a continuous wave of hatred between Muslims and Hindus since the inception of Pakistan and India (Kumar & Bhatia, 2018). Furthermore, Islamophobia induced because of the external factors i.e. international rivalry among different superpower countries (Green, et.al, 2001).

Hatred against Muslims escalated after the 9/11 attacks in New York that resulted into defamation of Muslims as terrorists at a global level. Correspondingly, Muslims in India also faced the challenge of being labeled as violent and terrorists where every incident of terrorism was associated with them (Hussain, 2006; Mitra & Ray, 2018). The rivalry between Pakistan and India is another significant aspect of creating a hostile situation between Hindus and Muslims in India leading to Islamophobia. Regional power dynamics, Kashmir dispute, and incompatibility between the states of Pakistan and India are the other core issues related to Islamophobia (Paul & Paul, 2005). Literature such as newspaper editorials, magazines, movies, dramas, academic researches, and novels etc. depict the Muslims as militants and criminals that construct an illusionary image of terrorist and jihadi in Indian society leading to hate crimes against Muslims.

Islamophobia in contemporary India

The population of India comprises of 80% Hindus and 20% other ethnic groups where Muslims are encountering the dilemma of Islamophobia and hate crimes (Chamie & Mirkin, 2017). In India, the major incidents of Islamophobia are enlisted as Kolkata incident in 1964; Nellie massacre in 1983; Hashimpura massacre in 1987; Bombay Riots in 1992; Gujrat riots in 2002; Muzaffarnagar Riots in 2013, murder of Muhammad Akhlaq in Badli in 2015; Anwar Hussain and Hafizul Sheikh Murder in Bengal, Junaid Khan incident, and Muhammad Afrazul killing in Rajasthan in 2017 (Human Right Watch, 2017; Saldanha, 2017). Tatsuni (2009) reported multiple cases of individual assault, murder, rape and sexual harassment in the last decade. There are multiple reasons of hate crimes against Muslims; however, the 1947 partition of the subcontinent is one of the vital reasons. Furthermore, the anti-Muslim sentiments are ignited by political parties in electoral campaigns to gain political mileage. As discussed earlier, contemporary socio-political and religious factors are the major contributors of Islamophobia in India. In addition, the hatred created among Hindus at the time of partition for power and control resulted in Islamophobic attacks in the form of physical, psychological, religious and sexual assaults against Muslim community (Hussain et al., 2018).

Discrimination against Muslim community

Keeping in mind the severity of the problem, the Indian government constituted a committee to study the social, economic and educational status of the Muslims living in India. This committee was chaired by a retired Chief Justice of Delhi High Court. The objective of conducting this study was to collect authentic information about the social, economic and educational status of the Muslims residing in India (Sachar et al., 2006). Because of the lack of authentic information about social, economic and education status, it is not possible to plan, formulate, execute and implement specific interventions related to the Muslim community. Moreover, the report aimed to help starting policies and programs to uplift Muslim community in terms of their socio-economic backwardness. The report found that the Muslim community is facing both educational and economic discrimination in India mainly because of Islamophobia (Robinson, 2007).

Educational discrimination

It is reported in the Sachar Report that the social and educational conditions of the Muslims are worse in certain states i.e. West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Assam. Interestingly, these states have a high population of the Muslims. This implies that the Muslim community is facing higher deprivation in terms of social and educational development (Sachar et al., 2006). Sadly, these states are also facing a higher level of Islamophobia. In terms of educational development, it is found that in certain states i.e. Andhra Pradesh, the literacy rate among both urban males and females is lower. However, it is important to note that literacy rate is increasing at a higher pace among all the other scheduled caste groups and tribes as compared to the Muslim community (Robinson, 2007; Shah, 2007).

With the passage of time, the Muslim community is taking interest in education across the country. However, enrollment is worse in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, and Uttaranchal. For example, drop out is about 25% among Muslim children in the age group of 6-14 years. In India, this percentage is the highest as compared to all the other scheduled castes and tribes. Muslim children do not complete their primary schooling and majority of the children dropout which negatively affect their socio-economic development (Sachar et al., 2006). On the other hand, mean age to complete matriculation is also higher among Muslim community as compared to the other communities living in India. In addition, only 4% of the Muslim community participates in higher education i.e. graduates and diploma holders. For example, in premier colleges of the country, only one student out of 25 students is Muslim. However, one out of 50 Muslim students is found to be enrolled in postgraduate courses (Shah, 2007).

Muslims are also deprived in terms of provision of school infrastructure facilities as they are not provided with basic facilities as per their needs. For example, in the majority of the states, educational institutions are not offering courses in mother tongue and in this way systematically depriving those Muslims

who speak Urdu. For example, there is a dearth of facilities for teaching the Urdu language in many states of the country (Robinson, 2007); in only three states, government Urdu medium Muslim schools are found. On the contrary, the majority of the Northern states of Uttar Pradesh lack such institutions which facilitate Muslims to increase their enrollment and literacy rate. The severity of the situation might be noticed from the fact that only a few educational institutions offer Urdu as an optional subject (Sachar et al., 2006). However, Sanskrit is offered as an optional subject in almost every public sector school. This implies that Muslim children are systematically being deprived of educational facilities which result in poverty and socio-economic deprivation and discrimination. It is also found from these findings that the state is not impartial for removing the systematic deprivation of the Muslim community (Shah, 2007).

Since the partition of sub-continent, availability of educational facilities for Muslim community remained lower as compared to all the other communities. Largely, the focus remained on the uplift of Hindu community. An intervention that stems from state policies undermined the rights of the Muslim community. Arguably state policies tend to discriminate in the provision of educational facilities because of their hate against Muslim community which indicates increasing Islamophobia in India. According to the Sachar Report, changes in educational policies in India favored all the scheduled castes and tribes but did not provide any support to the Muslim community for increasing enrollment and literacy rate (Sachar et al., 2006).

Illiteracy among Muslim youth in India leads to unemployment; unemployment rate is the highest among Muslim youth. This implies that Muslims are among the most vulnerable groups in India in terms of provision of social, economic and educational facilities (Robinson, 2007). It is important to note that being a Muslim reduces the chances to graduate, attain a good job and enjoy basic human freedom. In addition, being an urban citizen also increases the vulnerability of the Muslim community towards educational facilities (Mondal, 2003).

Economic discrimination

The Sachar Report (2006) analyzed relative deprivation and deprivation of Muslim community in terms of different development dimensions. According to the data, the socio-economic condition of the Muslims is not consistent across the country. There is a great variation across the states and among different ethnic backgrounds of the community. However, deprivation is found common across the community. Muslim community faces deprivation in all the dimensions of development. When compared with scheduled castes and tribes, the condition of the Muslim is better. However, Muslims are ranked lower on every indicator of development as compared to general Hindus and other minorities. These findings of the report indicate that Muslims are discriminated and they are subjected to deprivation because of their religion (Mishra & Singh, 2002).

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Academic evidence suggests that there are two basic reasons behind poor socio-economic condition of the Muslims i.e. discrimination and poverty. However, the majority of the Indian communities are not discriminated and poor like the Muslim community (Razzack & Gumber., 2002). According to the Sachar Report, discrimination is the highest against the Muslim community and perpetrators of discrimination are religiously and politically strong. In other words, discrimination is backed by anti-Muslim groups and some religious minded political parties i.e. BJP. However, some ethnic communities are well off i.e. Jains, Sikhs, and Parsis. These communities are not facing overt discrimination. These communities are as well off and privileged as upper-class Hindu caste groups. However, scheduled castes and tribes are facing discrimination and the reason is the historical caste system in India (Sachar et al., 2006).

Discrimination and poverty faced by the Muslim community is not the part of historical caste system but rather is based on religious rivalry. This rivalry increases Islamophobia and hate crimes against Muslims. Moreover, they are facing a restriction in terms of social and physical mobility. Muslims are also facing low representation in the labor market as their participation is lower in professional and technical works (Brass, 2011). Islamophobia is also decreasing their number in informal sector because they are being discriminated to increase their potential to secure high rank jobs. Muslim community is not only discriminated in informal public sector but they are being discriminated in private sector employment as well (Sachar et al., 2006). For example, the representation of the Muslim population in IAS and IPS officers was less than five percent in 1960 which declined instead of increasing. However, economic discrimination varies across the country as in some states economic discrimination is lower i.e. Assam and Andhra Pradesh and in others, it is higher (Robinson, 2007; Shah, 2007).

Conclusion

Muslims are the most vulnerable ethno-religious group in India who are encountering hate crimes since 1947. Islamophobia against Muslims in India escalated in the form of physical and religious assaults such as murders and riots etc. Although previous studies highlight the active role of political parties and non-governmental organizations in addressing the issue of Islamophobia, state agencies in India have not been able to address the issue of hate crimes against Muslim residents. Vulnerability and marginalization of Muslims have been intensified over the period of time in India. In addition, hate crimes and Islamophobia are increasing educational and economic discrimination against Muslim community.

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