

Muslim Marginalization in India: From Ethnic Conflict Perspective

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Abstract: *With BJP arrival to power, secular face of India has received severe criticism in international community. Latest report of the American. Nationalistic patriotism with some other factors like relative development differences, discrimination at social and economic level, continuous discrimination by the ruling elite, lack of political representation and voicing out grievances have become the root cause of ethnic violence in India which can push to the generation of parochialism. Cultural genocide and deliberate unequal economic development have caused major loss of Muslim lives and property and generate issues including demographic reshaping and political disenfranchisement which has further severe implications for Muslims. This paper will try to highlight the ethnic violence on Muslims in India, analyze the reasons behind the ethnic conflict and its manifestation through primordial and instrumental theoretical framework and finally provide road maps to solution.*

Key Words: Kashmir, Insurgency, State Sponsored Terrorism, Negotiation, Minority

Introduction

India is a country which has a blend of communities united together under one flag. However, as its other name denotes Hindustan (the land of Hindus), the country is solely dominated by the Hindu majority people. Specially, the right-wing Hindu majority faction of the country who claims India as to be the holy and only land for the Hindus of the whole world. Notwithstanding the slogan of secularism and freedom, the country's minorities have always been targeted by the majority right-wing Hindu segment of India. Only those groups who serve the interest of those Hindu segments can live and survive. Due to dissimilarities in social-cultural practices and historical backgrounds, the minorities must deal with the issues of identity. This leads to insecurities about their life, boons, and prosperity. Moreover, the issue of identity and security create the issues relating to equity between the minorities and the majority. The minorities remain deprived from their basic

rights, benefits and opportunities in the country. Ethnicity is a multiplex prodigy in India. Although the country proclaims as the secular state, the issue of secularism and freedom preponderate in India. The orthodox approach by the right-wing Hindu factions are making the country not so secular to be lived in. They are trying hard to make it holy and solely land for Hindus of the world.

Issues of Muslims and other communities in India

India, like many countries of the world is a diverse country, residence to many ethnic communities. Muslims are the largest minority group in India. Others are Christians, Jains, Parsees, Sikhs etc. ([Concept of Minorities 2020](#)). In all the minorities groups, Muslims are the most affected one. Problems face by the Muslims in India, falls into three categories ([Mondal, P. 2020](#)).

- Issues for all poor people ([Mondal, P. 2020](#)).
- Issues for all the minorities ([Mondal, P. 2020](#)).
- Issues specifically faced by the Muslims ([Mondal, P. 2020](#)).

Almost all the minority groups face the issues of identity, security and equity in India. However, the Muslims become the target more than the others due to historical reasons.

Historical Perspective

The origin of anti-Muslim violence can be detected in India's historical resentment towards the Islamic conquest of India during the Middle Ages and the policy of divide and rule employed by the British colonizers to retrieve their disoriented political footholds after the triumphant mutiny of 1857 ([Narayani, G. 1981](#)). Moreover the rough partition phase of India and Pakistan also played a major role in this regard. A major role in the rise of ethnic violence was played by the Hindu right-wing parties which work under the umbrella of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) ([Jaffrelot, C. 2015](#)). The current BJP government led by Narindra Modi is also related to RSS and follow the Hindutva ideology of Vinayak Damodar Savakar and MS Golwalker who were huge admirers of Hitler and Mussolini. This right wing ideological and political faction of India has always been a great advocate of United India (Akhand Bharat) and want supremacy of Hindutva ideology in India despite having many ethnic groups and beliefs.

Theoretical Perspective

Ethnic conflicts pose a threat to international security and peace. Further explanation of ethnic conflicts can be understood through fundamental theories of ethnic conflict, Primordial and Instrumentalism. No single theory is strong enough to explain ethnic conflict but inclusion of both triggers ethnic conflict. For more stable account of ethnic conflict, ethnic identity (at the core of primordial) and ethnic

disparities/discrimination (at the centre of instrumental-ism) coincides to enhance the possibility of ethnic conflict.

According to primordialist, differences in ethnic identities become the reason of ethnic conflict. These identities are the inherent feature of humans and passed on from generation to generation due to common blood, cooperation and hospitality found among the members of in group and hostility and hatred for the out-group members. Primordialists anticipate that conflict is inevitable in ethnically heterogeneous societies. In the case of India primordialist argue that conflict between Hindus and Muslims is due to ferocious history, cultural and religious differences, difference in the language resulting in extreme ethnic poles having zero tolerance for each other due to which hatred becomes the inherent part. Roots of such intolerant behaviour and violence in India lies in the resistance towards Islamic domination of India during middle age divide and rule policy of British imperialism and bloody partition of United India into Hindu majority India and Muslim majority Pakistan. Ancient hatred among different ethnic identity and mutual fear of expulsion and domination as suggested by the primordialist become the indispensable cause of deep, irreconcilable ethnic conflicts. In the past we witnessed incidents like the great Calcutta killing 1946, 1947 massacre of Muslims in Jammu, Operation Polo in Hyderabad, 1969 Gujarat riots, 1964 East Pakistan riots, Bombay riots, Gujarat riots 2002 and many more incidents in which Muslims were brutally killed and massacred by Hindus. Similarly, the present scenario in India, where Muslims are marginalized politically, socially and economically and their rights have been violated by the right-wing Hindu nationalist ruling party BJP can be seen as the continuation of such ancient hatred.

Instrumentalists attribute that marginalization and politicization of ethnic identities. To enhance socioeconomic and political benefits for an ethnic group at the cost of oppressing other ethnic groups. Competition to

gain more resources, security concerns, greed among different ethnic identities and sentiments of grievances and frustration present in the oppressed ethnic identity further infuriate ethnic conflict. Instrumentalist attribute Hindu Muslim ethnic conflict to the power hungry political ideology of Hindutva mainly focused on the domination and well-being of Hindus only through violent means to gain political power and just to benefit their patronized Hindu community for instance Hindu Nationalist Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India, in order to maximize foreign funding only to Hindutva organization many non Hindutva organizations have been blocked and banned. Since the Right-wing Hindu Nationalist Party BJP Bharatiya Janata Party has taken the control of the government Muslims have been at high risks. Discriminatory citizenship Amendment Act CAA passed by the Modi administration risked the lives of millions of Muslims. Under this citizenship Amendment Act all non-Muslim immigrants (Sikhs, Jains, Christians, Bengali, Hindu) from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan will be granted faster path to enjoy Indian citizenship excluding Muslims in India which created a fear of statelessness among Muslims as their citizenship could be stripped and disenfranchised. This act mainly aimed at discriminating Muslims as many BJP leaders have already made Hindu Nationalist and anti Muslim remarks in their interviews and speeches which resulted in deadly attacks against Muslims which include killings, murders, force conversions, rapes, torture, detention in the concentration camps for Muslims and threat to their life by the violent Hindu mobs as they believed to have political approval and protection.

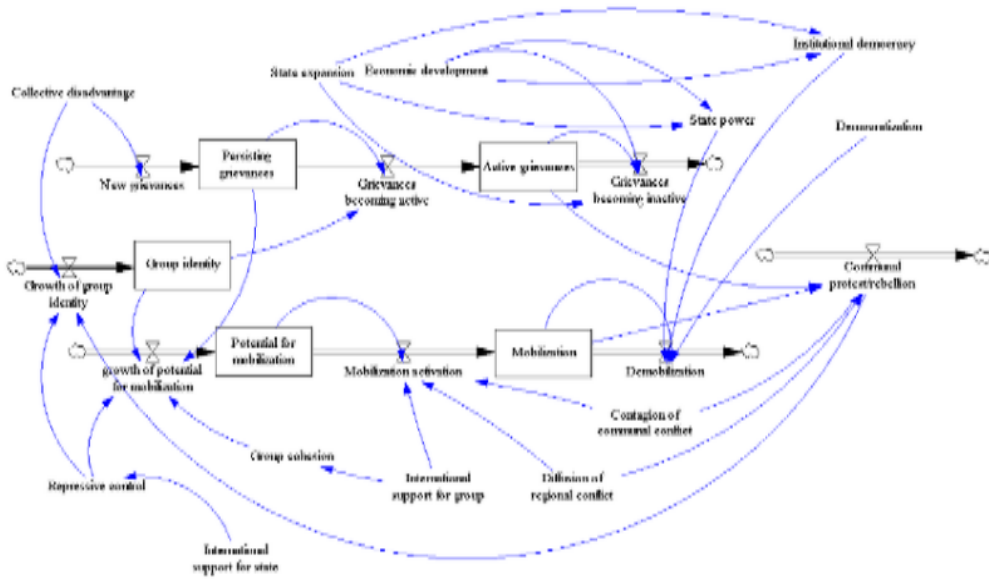
Another discriminatory action against Muslim by the right wing Hindu Nationalist party is in May 2019 BJP Bharatiya Janata Party government revoked the constitutional autonomy

of Jammu and Kashmir, India's only Muslim majority state, and abrogated Article 360 and deployed additional army which detained thousands of Kashmiris including the political leaders and cut off their basic daily life facilities like internet connection. This unjust and brutal discriminatory behaviour of the ruling BJP towards the smaller and weak Muslims just to satisfy their hunger of power and domination of their ethnic identity, further exacerbated the already violent situation and turned into extreme ethnic conflict and sectarianism in India.

BJP's policies have shown the biasness of Hindu Nationalists against Muslims. Since 2018 over a dozen of Rohingya Muslims have been deported to Myanmar by the BJP government. The abrogation of Kashmir's autonomy, 2019 citizenship Amendment Act and (NRC) national registration of citizenship in addition use of violence against Muslim shows the discriminatory behaviour of the right-wing ruling elite. As the instrumentalist argue, in case of India it is the elite politicization or manipulation of ethnicity i.e. in citizenship Amendment Act, religion is the main criteria for granting citizenship which infuriated and become the building source of frustration and grievances among weaker ethnic identity, Muslims, which induce ethnic conflict. However it is difficult to understand why people are willing to mobilize on ethnic lines, so here the wisdom of primordial theory overrules the instrumentalist that the importance of ethnicity to commemorate sense of common blood, shared values, in group versus out group, and most importantly a shared sense of solidarity is absolute necessity for collective action.

Gurr's Model

Gurr's systematic dynamic model on ethnic conflict can be best applicable on ethnic conflict in India.



Figure

Violence against Muslims has been on the rise since the proliferation of Hindu Nationalist parties which use cultural nationalism to defend their violent behavior towards Muslims because according to their prospective Muslims are not fully Indians due to their religion. Hindu Nationalist give excuse of historical subjugation of India and view Indian Muslims as traitor and still allied with Pakistan and fear that they can be radicalized therefore defensive measures must be taken to eliminate history repeating itself and ensure their pride. Delhi riots 2020 is the best example of application of Gurr's model. Discriminatory and oppressive behavior of the dominant Hindu majority has created grievances and frustration among Muslims in addition discriminatory and biased policies of the government have further infuriated the minority to mobilize themselves and rebel against the Hindu Nationalist government. Many protests in Delhi have been witnessed against the government in return the government used force to demobilize them. This whole scenario led towards the extreme ethnic riots in India. Many countries like Pakistan and international community have accused India of violation of

human rights which has damage the image of India internationally.

How can it be termed as an ethnic conflict?

As to talk about an ethnic conflict so, it is a dispute or quarrel between two or more ethnic groups. The reason behind these squabbles may be political, social, economic or religious. Such conflict could be violent and non-violent both in which the individuals actively participate for the sake of survival. In democratic countries the conflict over the distribution of resources can be link directly or indirectly with ethnic groups. Also, there are other sub types of ethnic conflict such as religious, bureaucratic, cultural, separatist etc.

India has several ongoing ethnic conflicts like Khalistan movement, in Kashmir or movements in the south part of the country. However, the ethnic conflict which includes Muslim community in India is purely religious. The Hindutva ideology claims Islam and Muslims as their arch rivals and reason behind every problem in their country. As discussed earlier, the roots of these conflict go back to historical events in the

subcontinent. So, this antagonism between right-wing Hindus and Muslims makes it an ethnic conflict.

Underlying and Proximate Causes

Muslims have always been treated unfairly in India from the very beginning. Since 1947, the treatment with Muslims in India has been biased in one way or the other. However, the arrival of identity politics, in 1980s, gave fuel to the fire in India ([Crowne, W. 2013](#)). It was a time when people started to mobilize on the basis of ethnic lines i.e. caste, race, language and specially religion. Due to this very reason, Muslims of India suffered a lot. The biggest advocate of identity politics in India has always been the BJP party which runs on the Hindutva ideology of the RSS. In short, BJP being the band of RSS have played a pivotal role in marginalization of Muslims in India. Their, advocacy for the “Akhand Bharat” and Hindustan as the only and Holy land for the Hindus of the world have been some prominent causes for the ethnic issues for Muslims in India. There are some more underlying and proximate causes behind this factor:

Underlying Causes

To start with the structural cause, as it is well obvious, India was once a colony of the British and the Hindu Muslim ethnic divide was present even in those times. However, the Hindus were somehow closer to the Britishers, as compare to Muslims. Moreover, when the Britishers left, they did not make any rationale arrangements for the post-colonial era. It was just because the Hindus were closer to the Britishers and they were also in the majority, so they got maximum advantages after the partition. Even the notion of secularism by leaders like Nehru and Gandhi did not could not do much in front the right-wing Hindu ideologies. Their hatred for the Muslims has been increasing to this day. In short, the post-colonial structure has proven out to be weak and proved many theories right about why a separate homeland was needed for the Muslims.

Now, the political cause behind this issue is the ruling of BJP led by PM Modi in India. As

discussed again and again in this paper that the BJP runs on the Hindutva ideology of RSS so, it is quite obvious that Muslims can have no place in India during their regime. The current PM Modi has been repeatedly accused for the killing of Muslims in Gujrat. In the current regime, one could clearly see how the BJP government and their members openly raise their voices against Muslims and their politics revolves around hatred for Pakistan. In short, the biggest democracy of the world has not very democratic in the real sense.

There are other underlying causes like economic cause and social causes. The Hindus of the subcontinent claims the land and resources of the whole subcontinent as theirs inherently. They consider their religion their race as superior from all the other ethnic groups. Moreover, the historic cultural rivalry between Hindus and Muslims has been a key cause for the marginalization of Muslims even in the modern India.

Proximate Causes

Although, there can be many proximate causes in an ethnic conflict i.e. Internal Mass level factor, External Mass level factor, External Elite level factor and Internal Elite level factor ([Kempin, T. 2020](#)). However, in the case of ethnic conflict of Muslims in India, there two proximate causes which play a vital role e.g. the “external mass level factors” and the “Internal Elite level factor”.

The external mass level factor behind the issue is the historical rivalry between India and Pakistan. India’s political culture revolves around the hatred for Pakistan and Muslims. If a candidate wants to receive majority in the elections so, he/she has to show his/her hatred for Pakistan and Muslims. For them, every problem in India is due to the presence of Muslims and Pakistan. Pakistan is the reason behind terrorism in India, Muslims are behind the spread of corona virus in India, Pakistan is sending infestation in their country and many more. They make Pakistan and Muslims responsible for every problem in their country.

The second major proximate cause is the Internal Elite level factor in India. Most of the

ruling elite of India do not have any soft corner for the Muslims. As discussed earlier, India's political culture revolves around hatred for Muslims and Pakistan. Political candidates gain popularity by using this tool in India. This notion of populism has been very fruitful for the current ruling party of India. The revocation of Article 370 and 35-A is a modern example of Hindu populism in India against Muslims in India. Also, the citizenship amendment bill has raised a lot of questions over the secularity of the biggest democracy of the world. The face of BJP, PM Modi and his allies, as discussed earlier are also not very popular in the Muslims due to their biased approach towards them. So, the ruling elite and their hatred for the Muslims is also a major cause for the ethnic issue of Muslim in India. Right wing hindu nationalist government has created a narrative about muslims as "invaders" of right-wing India.

RSS and BJP leader Rajaishwar Singh openly announce his government intentions to ethnic cleanse Muslims. "Muslims and Christians will be wiped out of India by December 31, 2021. 'We' have decided that Islam and Christianity will be finished in India by 2021 this is the pledge taken by my colleagues. This is our pledge.". Similarly, Amit Shah, minister of home affairs of India, called Muslim immigrants as termites and infiltrators. Another recent incident where BJP's legislator Suresh Tiwari asked his people not to buy from Muslims because they spread Corona Virus in India and called it a "Corona Terrorism". "Keep one thing in mind. I am telling everyone openly. There is no need to buy vegetables from 'miyans' [Muslims]". these narratives have become a major reason of hatred among Hindus for Muslims which further infuriate already deteriorated conditions.

How to solve the Conflict?

There is no iota of doubt that the main reason behind the Hindu Muslim tussle in India is purely religious. It is unfortunate that after so many years of the partition of 1947, the Indian land have failed to eliminate the hatred between Hindu and Muslims. Indeed, one of the major reasons

behind this could be religious fanaticism. The right-wing Hindu ideology support the radical approach of Hindus against Muslims. The current populist regime in India is a keen follower of this ideology in India and so, it becomes difficult to resolve the issue in India.

It is true that this hatred by the Hindus against the Islam and Muslims has historic roots. The Muslims have ruled the subcontinent for hundreds of ages and the Hindus do not want them to take over India again and so, they want to eliminate them completely from the Hindustani soil completely. To resolve the issue, it is highly recommendable that this orthodox mindset of extremist Hindus need to be eliminated. The right-wing Hindus segment need to realize this fact that the subcontinent cannot afford to have war which would be based on religion. War based on religion are more deadly and dangerous as compare to other war as emotions and sentiments of the people are more charged and touched. The subcontinent is home to one of the biggest population of Muslims and Hindus in the whole world and any kind of war in this area would be disastrous and destructive for the people of both religions.

Both parties need to come on the table and resolve the issue through dialogue. The principle of co-existence needs to be adopted. The idea of secular India needs to be revised which aims to recognize every citizen as equal. Indian society is the most diverse society in the whole world, home to many religions of the world. Any kind of religious tussle could not just disturb the peace of subcontinent but the peace of the whole world. A small disturbance could have spill over impact in the whole world. As the Samuel Huntington said in his thesis that the modern wars would be based on religion so, a tiny fight could make a big impact in all over the world specially in the modern age of social media in which information spread like a fire in the jungle. So, it's a very sensitive matter which needs to be tackled with care.

We saw that how the image of secular India was exposed in the whole world due to the policies of current government. It is not good for India and Indian people as the trickle-down effect of the

matter would be create impact on a very large scale. We saw that how the policies of the current government were taken by the other religions and cultures of the country and how the paused freedom movement were resumed like Nagaland etc. So, the only solution to resolve the conflict could be through dialogues and table talks. The populism needs to be utilized for some good goal in the biggest democracy of the world. The principle of freedom and co-existence needs to be adopted and every citizen in India needs to be given equal right.

Furthermore international institutions should intervene to stop ethnic violence on Muslims in India. But unfortunately stakes of big powers are so high in India that they consider it an intrastate matter. As we have seen that when Delhi was witnessing worst of ethnic riots and protests President Trump visited India and supported Indian President Modi by saying “I had very powerful answer from PM Modi, said Trump He told me that they are working very closely with minorities in India ... PM Modi said that there are 200 million Muslims in India, and that his government is working closely with the minorities.” calling it an “individual case” which disappointed Muslims ([Petersen, H.-E. 2020](#)).

To stop ethnic conflict in India underlying and proximate causes must be addressed which unfortunately seems impossible during the presidency of Right-wing Hindu Nationalist Modi.

Conclusion

Hindu parochialism which can be manifested into various form like Hindu “ethnocentric”, “fundamentalism”, “chauvinism”, “racism”, “vernacular-ism”, “regionalism”, “linguistic chauvinism” or prioritizing Hindu caste and culture under Hindutva regime and Ideology has led to hatred among Hindus and Muslims over resources, power and domination of Hindu Identity. By saying more explicitly, resource mobilization, economic backwardness of Muslims, political and social deprivation or colonial attitude of ruling elite or fascist motives raised grievances among Muslims. By concluding the whole debate, under situations like economic crises, unstoppable spread of Corona Virus, border tensions with China, Nepal and Pakistan, extreme poverty and shortage of food, it is high time for India to take appropriate steps to end ethnic violence by giving equal treatment to Muslims and eliminating Anti-Muslim rhetoric they created. India should focus on its secular agenda without politicizing religion or identity. The ethnic violence can take societies backward and turn grievances into rebellion which has the deadly consequences. India has 14.2% Muslim population making it 172 Million Muslim citizens so elimination of Muslim insecurities is necessary for peaceful coexistence of heterogeneous multiethnic India which can further create a conducive environment for economic activities and peaceful cultural assimilation leading India towards prosperous path.

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