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The Rise of Islamophobia in India: Violation of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedom of Indian Muslims

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Abstract

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Key Words: Islamophobia, Islam, Muslims, India, BJP Government, Human Rights

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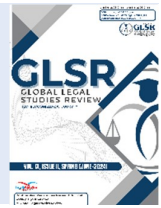
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The Rise of Islamophobia in India: Violation of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedom of Indian Muslims

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Abstract

This article examines Islamophobia in India and its impact on the human rights and basic liberties of Indian Muslims. Islamophobia is a new form of racism that has grown out of xenophobia, negative profiling, and stereotyping of Muslims. This article focuses upon the current state of Islamophobia, basic liberties, hate speech, discrimination, and violence against Muslims. These acts of prejudice, animosity, and violence against Muslim communities are major infringements on their human rights and a violation of their religious freedom. The BJP has been promoting a number of evil anti-Muslim policies, including discriminatory citizenship laws, the lynching of Muslims on suspicion of consuming or transporting beef and a ban on communal prayers. We conclude that the institutionalisation of Islamophobia through new laws and policies have a negative impact on Muslims' human rights and religious freedom in India. Similarly, the media in India also promotes Islamophobia.

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Introduction

The term Islamophobia refers to negative and hostile attitudes, anxiety, suspicion, fear, exclusion, or discrimination directed towards Islam and Muslims (Banks *et al.*, 2019). Poynting and Mason (2010) provide a consistent description of Islamophobia that focuses on anger, animosity, and resentment towards Muslims. There are aspects of

attitudes against Muslims that relate to cultural and racial/ethnic outgroups (Gravelle, 2021). The unfortunate fact is that for millions of individuals all around the globe, Islamophobia is not some abstract idea but a toxic reality. Islamophobia may manifest itself in a variety of ways, one of which is the insidious discrimination of Muslims in areas such as employment, housing, and educational



opportunities due to their religion. Pogroms and other types of state-sanctioned violence directed towards Muslim communities are the most extreme manifestations of Islamophobia. It was given a boost during the so-called war on terror when the activities of violent actors, who claimed to be fighting for the glory of Islam, resulted in ordinary Muslims having to confront the repercussions of their actions. It resulted in the belief that Islam is a violent religion. In the years after September 11, 2001, Muslims had to face more consequences like religious discrimination in the form of racial profiling, as well as violent vigilante assaults against Muslims (Daily Dawn, March 17, 2022).

The menace of Islamophobia, which is being fostered by hate speech as well as a lack of understanding and misinformation, is making Muslim communities suffer all over the globe. In spite of the shortening of distances and the closer proximity of different cultures, bigoted ideologies nevertheless widely persist in today's globalized world. Violence and discrimination on the basis of a person's sect religion, or race continue to afflict our ostensibly contemporary society because old tribal prejudices refuse to die down. Islamophobia is one of the bigoted ideologies that has affected a significant portion of the human population. This ideology isolates and demonizes Muslims, either due to their beliefs or the violent deeds of a few misguided organizations and people acting in the name of Islam. According to research conducted by the Pew Research Center on June 29, 2021, the Muslim minority in India, which constitutes the country's second-largest religious group, has traditionally had a contentious relationship with the country's Hindu majority. The two groups have, for the most part, coexisted peacefully over the course of many centuries, yet their histories are interspersed with instances of civil upheaval and violent conflict. The massive population that makes up India is both diverse and religiously devout. India is home to not just the majority of the world's Hindus, Sikhs, and Jains but also one of the world's biggest Muslim populations, in addition to millions of Christians and Buddhists. Throughout the years, Indian Muslims have often been the focus of discrimination for a variety of reasons, including inter-religious marriages, their food and clothing, and places of worship.

In spite of the fact that Muslims make up 14% of India's total population of 1.4 billion people, it has been observed that discrimination, hate speech, and violent acts against Muslims are becoming more common in many regions of India. Such hostility, discrimination, and violence committed against the Muslim community are major violations of their human rights and an infringement on their freedom of religion and belief (Maizland, 2022). Somdeep Sen (June 10, 2022) claims that Islamophobia has always been a major part of the ideology of Hindu nationalist movements in India. Since its founding in 1925, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a Hindu nationalist paramilitary organization, has been at the forefront of efforts to transform India into a Hindu homeland. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, the man who established and served as the first chief of the RSS, made the proclamation that "Hindu culture" is the "life-breath" of the nation. He went on to say that if India "is to be safeguarded, we need first to nourish the Hindu culture". In this context, the opposition to this vision, particularly among India's Muslim population, was deemed by leaders of the RSS to be reflective of "Muslim arrogance and insolence" (Ganguly, 2017).

It was the start of Islamophobia in India; after that, many Islamophobic acts of discrimination have taken place in India, which have deprived them of their human rights and fundamental freedom. The western Indian state of Gujarat was the site of brutal anti-Muslim riots in 2002 when Modi was serving as the chief minister of Gujarat. Apoorvanand (January 13, 2022) argued that Muslims in India have felt a sense of imminent danger ever since the Hindu nationalist BJP took office in 2014. However, over the course of the past year, open antagonism against the Muslim community has grown to new heights. Today, Hindu nationalists on the far right are making it clear to Muslims that they will no longer be treated as equal citizens in their own country. It is happening with the support of local authorities and the government. Their dietary traditions as well as their religious rituals are coming under fire and may possibly be criminalized. Simply due to the fact that they are Muslim, Muslim women are subjected to harassment and acts of humiliation. Present ways of making a living for Muslims are in danger. There have been several calls for the annihilation of Muslims. Being Muslim in India under the control of

the BJP is no longer a safe choice. According to Somdeep Sen (June 10, [2022](#)), Indian Muslims are subjected to attacks and are forced to live in fear as a result of the fact that lynching and hate speech are almost an everyday occurrence in the nation. For instance, in March 2019, a Muslim man who was attempting to stop the Hindus from destroying an Islamic religious structure was murdered by a mob of Hindus in the state of Uttar Pradesh, which is the most populous state in India and is currently led by Yogi Adityanath, a hardline Hindu monk-turned-BJP politician. In 2015, a Hindu mob also lynched a Muslim man, this time a 52-year-old man, on the suspicion that he was storing beef in his house. This lynching was carried out as a part of the so-called "cow vigilante mission", which was a violent campaign against the eating of beef and the trade in cattle that was spearheaded by BJP members. In the period between May 2015 and December 2018, Human Rights Watch reports that similar assaults resulted in the deaths of 44 people, including 36 Muslims. The basic aim of this article is to bring up the issue of human rights and basic freedom for Muslims in India, such as the right to life, liberty, property, religion, creed, and worship.

Historical Background of Islamophobia in India

The emergence of Hindu nationalism in India happened at the same time as the rise of Islamophobia in that country. Hindu nationalism started taking the place of liberal values, and the government's policies began discriminating against minority groups. This Islamophobia was widely supported and propagated in electoral politics by the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (1951–1977), which was the political wing of the RSS, and the Janata Party (1977–1981), which was the predecessor of the current Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). According to a (late) historian, Mushirul Hasan, their activities were "fueled by the stereotype of an aggressive Islam on the rampage," and the goal of building a "Hindu country" was one of their primary motivations. In the same vein, they were against the concept of secularism which, they thought, was nothing more than a means to placate the country's religious minorities, most notably the Muslim community (Hasan, [2020](#)). In fact, a functionary of both the RSS and the Jana Sangh suggested the "Indianization" of the Muslim community as a

means of "purging" them of "disloyal inclinations" (Sen, 2022).

In addition, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), also known as the World Hindu Council, has been a significant driving force in the promotion of Hindu nationalism both domestically and internationally. The organization was founded in 1964, and its mission statement states that its purpose is to "organize and consolidate the Hindu society". According to the VHP's official website, the organization's activities are mostly focused on topics such as temple building, the protection of cattle known as "Gau Raksha", "religious conversion of Hindus by the Christian church", Islamic terrorism, and infiltration of Bangladeshi Muslims (Sen, 2022). The Shah Bano case in 1985 is one of the most important incidents that demonstrate the existence of Islamophobia in India. Other cases include the reoccurring polarisation of views between the Islamic Brotherhood and Hindu populations. Specifically, in 1992, a group of VHP activists, together with members of the RSS and the BJP, overran the barrier that was around the Babri Masjid and destroyed the mosque, which had been built in the 16th century. Some members of the Hindu nationalist movement claim that the mosque was constructed on the site of a temple that was thought to be the birthplace of the Hindu god Lord Rama. Thousands of people, the vast majority of whom were Muslims, were killed as a result of the widespread communal riots that followed (Purohit, [2019](#)).

There is a connection between the continuous ascent of the RSS and the VHP and the increase of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim prejudice in India. Both of these groups are considered to be Hindu ultra-nationalists, and they stand accused of inciting violence across India. It has been determined that the RSS is the headspring of Hindu supremacy and has the goal of establishing a "Hindu Rashtra". In the process, it has supported policies that are exclusive, and it has given Hindus the impression that all other religions have a lower position than their own. The VHP, the RSS, the BJP, or an organization ideologically linked with them are responsible for the bulk of the violence committed against India's religious and ethnic minorities (Deshmukh, [2021](#)). Kaul ([2020](#)) argues that the Hindutva agenda of the Indian nation, particularly in its post-2014 hardline incarnation

under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi and his supporters, is converting India into a culturally Hindu nation with upper-caste rich Hindu men at the top. According to Kaul (2020), the Hindutva agenda of the Indian government involves changing India into a culturally Hindu nation within a hierarchically organized Hindu-ness, with upper-caste rich Hindu men at the top. Kaul's argument is that this process is transforming India into a Hindu nation. According to this new conception, Muslims get their rights and access to justice not as equal and free persons as stated by the constitution but rather as a result of their conformity with the norms of the Hindu majority. Those who disagree with the dogmas of Hindutva are portrayed as agents of the West, Pakistan, or anti-nationalist organizations. Their lives may be taken; they can be raped; they can be physically assaulted; they can be slandered, harassed, or bullied; or they can be stripped of whatever institutional or other authority they may possess, depending on the circumstances and the degree to which they are vulnerable.

In India, Islamophobia promotes violence, subjugation, and intimidation against Muslims who are treated as a threat to the country. It does this in a number of ways: the neighboring Muslim state of Pakistan is seen as an existential enemy; Muslim refugees, like Rohingyas, are seen as "invasive pests"; Kashmiri Muslims are seen as emphatically problematic and always terrorist Muslims; and Indian Muslims are seen as suspect citizens. A Muslim man in Pune was killed by a mob of Hindu extremists in 2014, on the day Modi was elected because he wore a skull cap (a Muslim symbol). The state has been taken over by an ideology of aggressive nationalism, which also has widespread backing from the general population. It is becoming more apparent that the institutions of the state, such as the police and the courts, are acting to assist the Islamophobic anti-Muslim violence by delaying the hearing of cases or making judgments that are problematic (Kaul, 2020). The Supreme Court of India declined to hear the appeal about the communications blockade in the Kashmir area after August 2019. By doing so, they collectively punished Kashmiri Muslims by denying them access to essential means of life and livelihood (Maizland, 2022).

The final Ayodhya verdict on the Babri Masjid was announced in November 2019, and it determined that the contested site should be given

to the Hindus. The verdict was based on a 1024-page Supreme Court judgment that did not name the judge who wrote it. A special court acquitted all BJP activists in September 2020 of any culpability in the demolition of the Babri Masjid by the Hindu radicals. At the start of 2020, protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) passed in December 2019 and the projected National Register of Citizens (NRC) were in full force. This was due to the fact that the CAA changes would discriminate against only Muslim refugees from Pakistan and Afghanistan when it came to the granting of Indian citizenship. It did not apply to Hindus or other religious refugees. The process of verifying citizenship via the NRC would be a large bureaucratic undertaking that would disproportionately impact the most disadvantaged groups in the country with regard to their capacity to obtain all of the requisite documentation. It would result in the formation of a religious foundation for citizenship that would exclude Muslims and the introduction of enforced statelessness on a scale that would affect millions of people throughout the country. The year 2020 saw the beginning of the building of prison camps for those who were regarded as non-citizens (Kaul, 2020).

In February 2020, soon after the visit of Bolsonaro from Brazil and during President Trump's visit to India to hold rallies with Prime Minister Modi in Gujarat, the anti-CAA/NRC protests were met with severe violence. Targeted violence was carried out against Muslims in Delhi. These Muslim neighborhoods, in particular, were those that had voted against the governing Modi-led BJP in state elections (Kaul, 2020). Every action taken by Muslims is seen through the lens of Islamophobia. In the year 2020, Muslims were even suspected of conducting Corona Jihad, which refers to a campaign to purposefully spread the virus across India. Consequently, Islamophobic assaults and campaigns of disinformation continued in India to blame Muslims for the spread of the coronavirus (Sen, 2022).

There is evidence that technology, especially social media, helps to spread and amplify Islamophobic hate against Muslims (Kaul, 2020). The year 2022 began with a vicious assault on Muslims in India, which marked the beginning of the new year. Images of more than one hundred Muslim women were posted on an app called Bulli

Bai, along with the assertion that they were "available for employment as maids". Those who were targeted included notable actors, journalists, and campaigners, among other public figures. Moreover, blasphemous remarks were made by an official of the ruling party about the Prophet Muhammad and his wife Aisha. In response to these comments, Muslims rushed to the streets in protest. They used brutal force, arbitrary arrests, and punitive house demolitions against demonstrators which is a blatant breach of India's pledges it has made under international human rights law (Aljazeera, June 15, [2022](#)).

Violation of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms in India

There are around 200 million Muslims living in India, making it home to one of the world's biggest Muslim populations; nonetheless, they are a minority in the predominantly Hindu nation. Even though the constitution protects Muslims, they have been subjected to systemic discrimination, hatred, and violence in India ever since India became independent. Experts believe that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the governing BJP have been pursuing a Hindu nationalist agenda and contributing to an increase in anti-Muslim sentiments in the country. Since Modi's reelection in 2019, the government has undertaken controversial policies that, according to critics, violate the rights of Muslims and are aimed at disenfranchising millions of Muslims. Since Modi came to power, there has been an increase in the frequency of acts of violence against Muslims. These actions have resulted in protests in India as well as criticism from throughout the world (Maizland, [2022](#)).

In a country where nearly 80% of the population is Hindu, it is important to understand how and why "the Muslim" and "Islam" are seen as a threat to the nation. It is essential to have a solid understanding of the origins and expressions of Hindutva, which refers to a current type of majoritarian Hindu nationalism that has seen a resurgence in popularity. Hindutva, also known as "the assertion of Hindu-ness as a key political identity", seeks to construct the concept of a pure nation and Hindu territory that must be preserved against its foes, or "Others", both inside and beyond the country (Kaul, [2020](#)). The Hindutva project in India stretches back to the time before

the partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan, which led to the establishment of a postcolonial, independent India. Its beginnings may be traced back to the establishment of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in 1925, which was followed by the growth of a family of right-wing Hindu nationalist groups that came to be known collectively as the Sangh Parivar. The RSS was established in 1925. There were a number of famous early RSS ideologues who admired Nazi Germany and championed ethnic and Hindu nationalism in India (Sen, [2022](#)).

During the first few decades after India's independence from British rule, the Nehruvian concept of a secular socialist democratic republic was the dominant political ideology. However, at the beginning of the 1990s, a number of other economic and social dynamics combined to result in the rise of Hindutva along with an "opening up" of the economy via liberalization that was enforced by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In the 1990s, the BJP's Hindu nationalist leaders built their legitimacy via a series of "rath yatras", which literally mean "chariot processions", around the country. These spectacles of Hindu power culminated in the ruination of a historic mosque known as the Babri Masjid which was located in Uttar Pradesh. This ancient archaeological monument was destroyed in December 1992 by thousands of volunteers from organized right-wing Hindu vigilante groups who had converged on the site. In Ayodhya, the birthplace of the Hindu deity Ram, they aimed to make way for the construction of a temple in his honor. This one event was a turning point in the process of establishing the subordinate existence of Muslims who were considered to be Indians (Kaul, [2017](#)). The demolition of the Babri Masjid had far-reaching repercussions for both Indian Muslims and the secularist movement in India. The government's reaction was inadequate, and Congress and the BJP formed an "informal coalition" in response to the situation. Under the terms of this alliance, Hindu interests shall be protected at all costs, and the BJP will work to maintain social order. The problem is made worse by separatists in Kashmir and the Kargil War, both of which led to the discrimination of non-Kashmiri Muslims residing across India. This adds another layer of complexity to the situation (Deshmukh, [2021](#)).

Since the 9/11 attacks and the beginning of the "War on Terror" a decade later, there has been a strong link between worldwide Islamophobia and an Indigenous Indian variant. This happened after the attacks on the World Trade Center. The western Indian state of Gujarat was the site of brutal anti-Muslim riots in 2002, while Modi was serving as the chief minister of Gujarat (Kaul, 2020). Many people believe that the Gujarat riot was a state-sponsored operation; however, it was really caused by the state's negligence. The local media accused the government of being complacent by either failing to put an end to the riots or actively organizing and participating in them (Deshmukh, 2021).

Islamophobia in Modi's India is the Norm and not a Fringe Occurrence

Obviously, even before he became Prime Minister, Narendra Modi had already established himself as a prominent Hindu nationalist. This was the case even before he took office. He was an active RSS member early in his political career, and by the late 1970s, he had ascended the ranks to become a regional organizer. In 1985, RSS gave Modi a position in the BJP. Since that time, he has worked his way up through the ranks of the party, eventually becoming the Chief Minister of Gujarat in the year 2001. But in 2002, when Muslims were exterminated in Gujarat as a consequence of a train carrying Hindu pilgrims caught fire, his credentials were most clear. Almost immediately after the attack, Modi pointed the finger at the Pakistani agencies and began parading the corpses of the victims around the streets of Ahmedabad. As a direct consequence of this, Muslims were the victims of what has been referred to as an "orgie of killing and rape". Nearly 2,000 people, the vast majority of whom were Muslims, were murdered. In addition, 2,000 houses belonging to Muslims were demolished, and 150,000 people were forced to flee their homes (Sen, 2022).

By 2014, the Modi-led BJP and other extremist politicians had supplanted the Hindu nationalists of the 1990s. These politicians had no qualms about publicly espousing clear anti-minority views, especially when it came to Muslims. It was especially problematic because of the rise of the Hindutva movement in the 1990s (Kaul, 2017). In 2019, a general election that was characterized by significant anti-Muslim prejudice was won by the BJP, which was headed by Modi. This victory gave

the BJP a majority for the second time. When it comes to the dramatic religious shift that has been taking place in India, the vast majority of the rest of the world has remained mostly silent. It is probably due to the fact that India is a "growing power", a "democracy", and a "market". Since the Modi regime, Islamophobia has undeniably been institutionalized as an official policy of the state (Maizland, 2022). It was made abundantly clear in 2019, when the government led by Modi attempted to realize the "dream" of Hindu nationalists to bring back Hindus who had been exiled from the state of Kashmir, which has a majority Muslim population, by removing provisions from the Indian constitution known as Article 370 and Article 35A that gave Kashmir a unique status (Khan *et al.*, 2021).

In acknowledgment of the unresolved international and bilateral political disagreement over Kashmir, the special autonomous status of Kashmir that was provided by Article 370 of the Indian constitution was abolished in August 2019. The state was divided into two union territories, which are now known as Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh (Khan *et al.*, 2021). Without the Kashmiri people's consent, the territory's legal and constitutional status was changed quickly. It included its split, the repeal of Article 370, and its loss of statehood, all of which have had a huge effect on the territory and its people. After these changes were implemented, a blockade was placed on all means of communication for a period of many months. This blockade included all internet and telephone services. In the year 2020, there were several changes made to the "domicile law". The status of Indian communities as permanent settlements was recognized, which paved the way for further demographic changes. In August of 2019, colonial justifications were used to justify the lack of consent and suppression of criticism. These justifications included the claims that it was being done for the "modernization" and "development" of the population and that it would bring greater rights to Kashmiris. The elimination of the distinctive features of Kashmiri Muslim identity has resulted from the designation of Kashmir as the "crown" of territorial India and as an integral part of the idea of India itself.

A movement that supports the enactment of a law to regulate the country's population is gaining traction in India's northern and central regions. The campaign's stated goal is to increase people's

awareness of the critical need to limit India's population, which now stands at 1.34 billion and is second only to China's 1.39 billion. On the other hand, its subtext underscores a basic idea held by right-wing Hindu organizations, namely the notion that Muslims are attempting to "overtake" Hindus. Islamophobia serves as the driving force behind the campaign, which is being pushed in both the offline and online realms. Facebook posts propagate the conspiracy notion that the 200 million Muslims in India will someday surpass the 966 million Hindus, while WhatsApp groups disseminate messages inciting fear and animosity. Offline, public gatherings are being conducted in which it is said that Muslims are to blame for India's rapidly growing population (Purohit, [2019](#)).

Also in 2019, the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi passed the CAA, which provided a fast road to Indian citizenship for non-Muslim migrants from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. This was seen as an effort to impose a "religious test for Indian citizenship", which would essentially remove Muslims from the country's citizenry, and it was suggested in combination with a National Register of Citizens (Sen, 2022). The gender aspect of Islamophobia was also coming into the spotlight, with girls and women being attacked because of the way in which they dressed as well as the broader belief that Muslim women are oppressed and so need to be liberated (Dhingra, [2022](#)). It is a matter of great concern that Islamophobia continues to find great resonance in political realms. It ultimately resulted in the institutionalization of Islamophobia via new legislation[s] and regulations, such as visa restrictions and discriminatory travel bans. A number of academic studies (Morey & Yaqin, [2011](#); Shooman, 2017; Mughal & Ahmad, [2018](#)) have shown that Islamophobia is most prevalent in the media as well as in the rhetoric of far-right organizations, political parties, and groups. These individuals and organizations have a tendency to capitalize on and build on the general fear of Islam in order to achieve electoral success. There are a number of media channels that continue to "promote fear and negative stereotypes towards Islam and Muslims, most notably through functioning as a forum for the mass distribution of anti-Muslim propaganda". In 2021, anti-Muslim propaganda was spread by both elected and unelected politicians in India. The openly anti-

Muslim media in India and anti-Muslim laws and policies in several Indian states also supported this propaganda.

Conclusion

It is concluded that Islamophobia has manifested itself in a wide variety of ways, such as attempts to link and equate Islam with terrorism, the intentional destruction of holy sites and Islamic symbols, the manifestos of far-right parties, disinformation campaigns, and negative propaganda, a ban on minarets, discriminatory laws, mob lynchings by cow vigilantes, and attacks on women for wearing hijab. Violence of any kind threatens the hopes we all have for a better tomorrow. The conclusion that has been reached is that Islamophobia has taken many different forms. These kinds of actions put at risk our common goals of achieving peace around the globe and a harmonious future for everyone. There are over 200 million Muslims living in India, making up the biggest minority community in what is otherwise a predominantly Hindu nation. For many decades, Muslim populations have been subjected to discrimination in a variety of spheres, including employment and education, as well as obstacles to the acquisition of wealth and political power. They account for a disproportionately high number of victims of community violence.

Islamophobia in India is multifaceted, ubiquitous, deeply ingrained, and rapidly on the ascent, which poses a serious threat. It mostly affects disadvantaged Muslim groups in places that are either economically depressed or politically unstable. Muslims in India are forced to contend with racist stereotypes, demonstrate their patriotism, endure rising levels of physical and symbolic violence, and still face the perception that they are covert agents of Pakistan or likely non-citizen migrants or refugees. All of these challenges come on top of the fact that they are already persecuted. What Muslims experience in India, and in Kashmir in the name of India, is escalating violence and heinous violation of rights; this is made worse by the use of technology, such as social media hatred, internet usage restrictions, massive data registers, and surveillance and newer

"non-lethal crowd control" style weapons, as well as by the creation of infrastructure like detention camps or the adoption of laws that allow for demographic change or land grabs. In other words, the situation is getting worse.

Islamophobia is still not well understood, despite the widespread effects that it has. It is very necessary to spread more information about this phenomenon and to disseminate remedies by promoting a deeper understanding and complete respect for basic freedoms and human rights. The goal of this paper is to spread the message of cultural

harmony, interfaith, tolerance, and peaceful co-existence across all faiths, races, and nationalities. It is imperative that attempts be made to foster tolerance and pluralism in a world that is riven by hate. This involves providing people of all faiths with the opportunity to freely practice their religions. In spite of the fact that we come from a variety of backgrounds, it is in all of our best interests to respect one another's religious convictions, do away with the most common types of religious discrimination, and work to prevent acts of violent instigation.

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