Hindutva Vs Islamophobia:

Analysis and Way forward

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Abstract

The issue of Hindutva and Islamophobia is a complex and sensitive that requires careful analysis and a thoughtful approach to address the challenges it poses to communities. Islamophobia is a result of the increase in the momentum of Hindutva and its political and social reflections. Organizations like RSS, Shiv Sena, VHP have made every effort to malign Muslims past and present. The policies of the ruling Hindu elite have polarized the pluralistic society and exploited their voters and supporters for their political gains. Addressing the challenges posed by Hindutva and Islamophobia requires a comprehensive and multifaceted approach. This executive summary provides a concise overview of the analysis and proposes a way forward promoting education, interfaith dialogue, media responsibility, legal protection, grassroots initiatives, and government commitment, it is possible to foster an environment of understanding, respect, and harmony between Hindu and Muslim communities.

Keywords: *Hindutva, Islamophobia, RSS, Interfaith, Hindu, Muslim.*

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of Hindutva and Islamophobia

Hindutva is an ideology of Hindu Nationalism premised on otherizationi. It constructs an idealized Hindu as the archetypical citizen of India. This idea of Hinduness, emerged in the early 20th century in India, seeking to promote and assert Hindu culture, identity, nationalism, and to protect Hindu interests aimed at political dominance of Hindus in India. The term was coined by

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Vinayak Damodar Savarkar in his 1923 pamphlet, "Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?" Hindutva encompasses a wide range of perspectives and interpretations. Hindutva is infused with an over and dominant element of masculinity. (S. Tharoor 2021)

Islamophobia often manifests as stereotypes, generalizations, and discriminatory attitudes towards Muslim individuals or communities. Islamophobia is a global phenomenon, affecting Muslims in various parts of the world, and more so India. Its first magnanimous reflection was destruction of 16th Century Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, India on December 6, 1992. (Saberin 2017)

1.2. Explaining the rise of Both Ideologies

The rise of Hindutva and Islamophobia in India has been a subject of significant attention and concern in recent years.

The rise of Hindutva can be attributed to growth of right-wing Hindu nationalist organizations and political parties, and various mainstream opinion leaders. These organizations have championed the cause of Hindutva and have gained substantial political power, shaping public discourse and policymaking in India.

Whereas the rise in Islamophobia is the result of Hindutva practices, and it is also fueled by global incidents of terrorism claimed under Islamist motivations. Sensationalized media coverage, through TV channels, like NDTV etc, hungry for ratings have contributed to the stigmatization and negative perception of Muslims as a whole.

1.3. Significance of the Issue

The issue at hand is a significant one as it has its impact on the most populous country in the world and almost 1/5th of the population is directly or indirectly affected by the menace of Hindutva of Islamophobia. Not only in India but it also goes to affect various parts of the world where Indians reside.

1.4. Purpose of the policy Paper

The purpose of the policy paper is to undertake an in-depth examination of the roots, expressions, and effects of Hindutva and Islamophobia on societal harmony. It aims to explain these phenomena and offers a course of action that encourages inclusivity, empathy, and peaceful cohabitation.

1.5. Scope and Limitations

Scope and limitations of the Policy Paper involve a comprehensive analysis of the issue of Hindutva vs Islamophobia, followed by the development of actionable policy recommendations in respect of India.

1.6. Statement of the Problem

The rise of Hindutva and the growing Islamophobia pose significant challenges to social harmony and religious tolerance in contemporary societies. The clash between Hindutva, a right-wing Hindu nationalist ideology, and Islamophobia, the discrimination and prejudice against Muslims, has created an atmosphere of hostility and division among the people belonging to opposing faiths. This complex issue requires a thorough analysis to understand its underlying causes, impacts, and propose a way forward for promoting tolerance, understanding, and peaceful coexistence for individuals, communities, and the nation at large.

This policy paper aims at examining the socio-political dynamics and implications of the clash between Hindutva ideology and Islamophobia, on the Hindu and Muslim communities with special focus on India.

2. Research Methodology

Qualitative research method approach has been used which caters for comprehensive and near perfect understanding of the statement of problem and is based on reasons. Nonetheless, wherever essential, significant empirical evidence has been blended in order to justify the arguments. This study is based on deductive approach and is descriptive and exploratory research to analyze the issue at hand. The study is based on unstructured approach, which assists in exploring the nature of the problem and describing the variation in Hindutva and Islamophobia in India. Application of historical research methodology has been made which involves the process of examining the significant past events in respect of the influence of Hindutva over the Indian policies and their impressions on Muslims in social and political spheres.

3. Analysis and Findings

In order to present a clear understanding of the topic, the analysis and findings have been further divided into analysis of Hindutva and analysis of Islamophobia in the following manner:

3.1. Analysis of Hindutva

The analysis of Hindutva ideology is further divided into following sub-topics which are described and discussed is appearing in the following paragraphs:

3.1.1. Emergence of Hindutva Ideology

The emergence of Hindutva ideology has its roots in the early 20th century in India, influenced by various historical, social, and political factors. These include the colonial context, Hindu reform movements, communal tensions between Hindus and Muslims, ideological pioneers like Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, and the political mobilization of organizations like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). It has evolved over time and gained prominence

through the influence of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which has promoted Hindutva principles in mainstream politics.

3.1.2. Hinduization of Minorities

During the recent years it has been witnessed that the Muslims are not being treated equally in the social and legal spheres of life. It is further supported by BJP MP Subramanian Swamy, when he said "the equality as given in Indian Constitution is for the equals and Muslims are not equal to Hindus".[ii]

This kind of policy statement from a leader of his stature creates a sense of fear and alienates the Muslim population of India.

3.1.3. Examination of Hindutva's impact on society

Hindutva has adversely affected religious minorities in India, particularly Muslims. PM Modi and other Hindutva preachers have openly asked public not to view movies starred by Muslim Khan heroes . There have been incidents of religiously motivated violence, discrimination, and social marginalization, in almost every part of India. Muslim women are being brandished as veiled sculpture, and there have been incidents where scarfed female students haven been harassed and molested. These actions reflect a perception of Hindu majoritarianism, and an erosion of secular principles enshrined in India's constitution.

In order to give rise to Islamophobia, the mainstream media always highlight out of proportion individual acts of terrorism and keep airing comments of the hardliners on the talk shows which aggravate the situation and cause great sense of alienation among Muslims.

Owing to rise in Hindutva, the Muslims of India have limited their political exposure. As a result of General elections held in 2019, only 27 Muslim member of Parliament have been elected for Lok Sabha. Although Muslim population in India is 14.2% as per the census of 2011 but their representation in the Lower House comes to less than 5 per cent of its total composition[iii].

There is always propaganda against Muslim community and many producers make films showing the cruelty of Muslim rulers and glorifying the resisting Hindu Rajas, as in Padmavat, Panipat, Tanhaji Subedaar. The negative portrayal of Muslim characters is more than twice of positive percentage. Bollywood represent Muslim characters adverse for society (Altaf 2020). Worst of all, the 2002 Gujarat massacres are squarely blamed not on Modi's hatefulness and incompetence but on his opposition, and he is positioned as the hero, through a Bollywood movie[iv].

4. Analysis of Islamophobia

4.1. Manifestations of Islamophobia

Islamophobia is a burning issue in the world and more so in India because of its magnitude and frequency. The manifestations of Islamophobia are so evident that in 2004 United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan opened a UN conference on *"Confronting Islamophobia"* with the lament, "When the world is compelled to coin a new term to take account of increasingly widespread bigotry, that is a sad and troubling development. Such is the case with Islamophobia." (Aslam 08 Jan, 2021).

Throughout his tenure as Prime Minister, Modi has consistently pushed his agenda of economic development to the forefront of India's political and social discourse. While Modi's Islamophobia is executed subtly, it is nonetheless a function of the way in which Hindutva conceives of Muslims as subordinate to Hindus.[v] Modi has never accepted Gujarat massacre of Muslims as an act of terrorism. (D. S. Tharoor 2018).

Even at international forums voices have been raised against the Islamophobic tendencies. "The spread of Islamophobia, both in terms of the phenomenon's momentum and outreach, is particularly alarming these days, for it has emerged as a new form of racism characterized by xenophobia, negative profiling and stereotyping of Muslims," Ambassador Akram said. (Dawn 2022).

4.2. Causes and contributing factors of Islamophobia

Ignorance about Islam and its teachings has led to misconceptions and stereotypes about Muslims. Biased reporting, sensationalism, and the focus on acts of terrorism committed by a small minority of extremists creates a perception that all Muslims are a threat to India. Right wing Hindu Political leaders or parties who promote anti-Muslim sentiments also contribute to an atmosphere of fear and hostility towards Muslims. Historical conflicts have also left lasting cultural imprints on negative attitudes towards Islam and Muslims in India, percieving them to be "other" or foreign.

Most of the Hindus, guided by Hindutva, do not distinguish between extremist ideologies and the beliefs of the wider Muslim population. Muslims who are visibly identifiable, such as those wearing Islamic attire, face discrimination based on their religious identity.

4.3. Impact on Muslim community and individuals

In India, the Muslim community and individuals have suffered at the hands of Islamophobes in many forms. The Muslims are being pushed to the wall. Physical attacks, vandalism of mosques, and verbal abuse are some of the alarming consequences of Islamophobia. These incidents have create a sense of

fear, insecurity, and trauma within the Muslim community.

Muslims face challenges in finding jobs, securing promotions, or accessing equal opportunities due to bias and stereotyping. Constant exposure to Islamophobic rhetoric and negative portrayals in media also have made a psychological impact on Muslims, which leads them to increased stress, anxiety, and depression. Muslims have been marginalized and this phenomenon has given rise to the feeling of "us vs. them" mentality. Negative portrayals and stigmatization have resulted in self-censorship or reluctance to openly express one's faith. Even the greats like Javed Akhter and Naseer Uddin Shah are unable to express themselves freely[vi].What is worrying is that even the great actor like Naseeruddin Shah said though there is no outright bigotry in the industry, actors faced harassment if they dare to speak out - the reason that the biggest Khans chose silence. (Shah 2021).

Muslim children also face harassment at schools, resulting in lower academic performance and emotional distress. The perpetuation of Islamophobia can undermine their integration into society. Islamophobia contributes to the erosion of trust between Hindus and Muslims in India. (Team 2022)

5. Findings

Hindutva and islamophobia are very sensitive issues in India and have impacts on both Hindu and Muslim Communities. Hindutva has gained significant political influence in India, with the Bhaaratiya Janata Party (BJP) being the primary political vehicle for its ideology. The BJP, in alignment with Hindutva principles is marginalizing Muslims. Some of the policies and actions associated with Hindutva, such as passing of the controversial Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the introduction of National Register of Citizens (NRC), are discriminatory against Muslims. Defending the Amendment Bill, Mr. Amit Shah, BJP Home Minister said "There is a fundamental difference between a refugee and an infiltrator. This bill is for refugees". (Watch 2019). Therefore, he called Muslims infiltrators and other as refugees, depicting the Hindutva policies of alienating Muslims in India and creating hatred between the communities. Not only people like Amit Shah but many Hindu leaders of national caliber like Smriti Irani have always tarnished the image of Muslims. Behind this hate rhetoric they have political motivations of exploiting their Hindu vote bank. The ordinary voters and supporters are carried away by political sloganeering and hate speech against Muslims in various parts of India, more importantly the traditional support bases of the BJP and their allied parties who share their views.

Although other mainstream political parties like Congress do not openly and frequently give rise to Hindutva policies but regional parties who have the support of Hindu bigots clearly and frequently speak against Muslims. Whereas, historically there have been instances where incidences regarding

Islamophobia have been glorified. When it comes to Islamophobia the secular parties in India have not been completely silent but whenever they got a chance they spoke against Muslims and their rule over India, in order to gain political mileage and gain the public sentiments. At the end of 1971 war and resultant creation of Bangladesh Mrs. Indra Gandhi the Prime Minister of India said "We have taken revenge after 1000 years" (Syed 2001). This was, in fact, a clear reference to centuries of Muslim rule over Indian sub-continent.

The organizers of a three-day conference on "Dismantling Global Hindutva" which was co-sponsored by universities like Stanford, Harvard and Princeton, were harassed by the Hindutva activists from India and elsewhere. Groups belonging to Hindu right-wing groups and individuals vehemently opposed the conference, and calling it a "Hinduphobic gathering". "The Hindutva groups both in the US and India are miffed at the huge academic support for the conference and they just want to silence us at any cost." Said Dr Meena Kandasamy, one of the participants who read her 10-year-old poem. (Naik 2021)

On September 3, Hindu Janajagruti Samiti, a far-right group whose members are accused of assassinating journalist-activist Gauri Lankesh in 2017, wrote a letter to India's Home Minister Amit Shah, seeking action against the India-based speakers of the conference[vii].

There are 213 million Muslims living in India which constitutes the largest religious minority in any country. Between 1951 and 1961, the Muslim population expanded by 32.7%, 11 percentage points more than India's overall rate of 21.6%. But this gap has narrowed. From 2001 to 2011, the difference in growth between Muslims (24.7%) and Indians overall (17.7%) was 7 percentage points. (Kramer 2021).

This reveals that owing to the Hindutva policies Muslims in India are unable to exercise their free will regarding childbirth. Whereas, being oblivious of the ground realities and in order to build a soft image of India, the National Security Advisor Ajit Doval highlights India's inclusive democracy, providing space for citizens regardless of religious, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds . Islamophobia has affected Muslim community in India. Negative stereotypes, fear, and discrimination against Muslims have been perpetuated through media portrayals, political rhetoric, and social biases. Individual and group acts of terrorism carried out by extremist groups claiming Islamic motivations have contributed to the stigmatization of Muslims. Islamophobia has led to the implementation of discriminatory policies against Muslims of India.

Both Hindutva and Islamophobia intersect with broader issues such as religious identity, nationalism, and socio-political power dynamics. In some instances, Hindutva and Islamophobia reinforce each other, with anti-Muslim sentiments being fueled by Hindu nationalist ideologies and vice versa.

Since the issue of Islamophobia has gathered so much importance, and needs to be highlighted and resultantly addressed, therefore the United Nations Organization decaled March 15 as "Islamophobia Day"[viii]

Owing to the Hindutva ideology and Islamophobia impacts, the Indian society is losing its diversity. Globally, India is perceived to be not doing so well in respect of human rights. In their quest for Hindu Nationalism, the Hindutva followers have destroyed the social and secular fabric of the country.

6. Recommendations

The efforts to reduce Hindutva and Islamophobia require a multifaceted approach that involves individuals, communities, civil society organizations, government of India and United Nations. Here are some recommendations to address these issues:

6.1. Empathy and Humanization

Muslims and Hindus have been living side by side since centuries. Though their relationship cannot be treated as ideal but they need to know each other very well and also understand each other's sensitivities to religion and culture. Therefore, it is imperative that concerted efforts are taken by the government and civil society organizations to promote storytelling, cultural events, and personal narratives that humanize individuals from different religious backgrounds, highlighting their shared humanity and aspirations. People should be engaged in empathetic manner

6.2. Education and Awareness

Encourage inclusive education that cultivates awareness, respect, and awe of religious variety. Introduction of lessons on many religions in school curricula, emphasizing their shared values and contributions to society. Debunk myths, stereotypes, and misconceptions about Hinduism, Islam, and other religions by setting up awareness campaigns and seminars. To foster empathy, tolerance, and camaraderie among students, encourage interfaith conversation and participation. Facilitate regular interfaith dialogues, workshops, and events that bring people from diverse religious backgrounds together to build bridges of understanding and cooperation.

6.3. Media's Social Responsibility

It is also recommended that Media outlets be apprised to report religious issues objectively, fairly, and accurately while avoiding sensationalism and stereotyping of Muslim population. Media should encourage ethical reporting that steers clear of provocative terminology and concentrates on developing mutual respect and understanding between Hindus and Muslims.

6.4. Political Leadership and Legislation

In India's highly charged atmosphere, the political leaders should actively discourage and condemn hate speech, religious discrimination, and divisive rhetoric. They should enforce constitutional provisions to protect religious freedom and equality. Through legislation the media outlets should be bound to report objectively on religiously sensitive issues and create an atmosphere of mutual respect among Hindu & Muslim communities. Political leaders should encourage the media to promote inspiring tales of people from various religious origins and their contributions to Indian society. Human Rights Advocates like Arundhati Roy maybe engaged for legislation aimed at diversity and acceptance of all religions and their followers

6.5. Countering Misinformation and Stereotypes

Promote initiatives that counter stereotypes and misinformation about Hinduism, Islam, and other religions through media campaigns, online platforms, and community discussions. Encourage fact-checking organizations to address and debunk false narratives and conspiracy theories related to Muslims and Islam. Sensitize social media platforms to combat hate speech, online harassment, and the spread of religiously motivated misinformation.

6.6. Grassroots Initiatives and Community Empowerment

The policy makers should support grassroots organizations and initiatives that promote interfaith dialogue, peaceful coexistence, and understanding at the community level. The government should provide funding and resources for community-led projects that bring people from different religious backgrounds together to promote harmony and address common social issues. Steps may be taken to empower local leaders and organizations to advocate for religious tolerance and work towards eliminating Hindutva and Islamophobia from within their communities.

6.7. International Collaboration

United Nations Organization should give rise to international collaborations and exchanges to be put in place to learn from successful initiatives implemented in other countries to address religious tensions and promote interfaith harmony. The government of India should provide support to international organizations and platforms that work towards countering religious discrimination and fostering dialogue and cooperation between and among Muslims and Hindus. Framework may be put in place for continuity of dialogue, seeking to understand others' perspectives and experiences, and will work as repulsive factor whenever there is a danger of divergence from the mutually agreed standards.

7. Conclusion

In India the communal politics has continued to exist for a long time. However, under the present Modi regime it has touched new heights, and Islamophobia has been brought on the forefront of government policies. This policy paper brings out that Islamophobia in the Hindutva ideology and practical manifestation is rooted in Savarkar's crude concept of self and the other. Hindutva policies place Muslims forever in the outgroup and they are considered by zealots as a threat to Hindus and their religion. In the Islamophobic findings as mentioned above, Indian Muslims have been depicted as internal enemy who are bent upon weakening India and pose hurdle against the quest of Hindu domination. Therefore, it was in the fitness of things to dissect the topic of Hindutva versus Islamophobia so that the issue could be understood in the contemporary world. International Institutions, political parties, Government of India, members of civil society and media can collaborate and play a very positive role in mitigating the impact of hatred created by Hindutva ideology. The increasing internationalization and technological advancement will in due course of time neutralize the negative impact created by Hindutva. Because of social media it is very easy for people to establish contacts with each other across communities and learn from their experiences to be accommodating and appreciative of the diversity on the basis of religion.

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