Communalism: Deconstructing Majority-Minority Relationship

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Abstract

India has not celebrated its awe-inspiring diversity but has only accommodated it. This is intended to make minorities a part of the mainstream but relative insignificance of minorities owes to democracy where majority matters much. Democracy by nature symbolises what J.S. Mill describes as "tyranny of majority" and the policies are heavily tilted towards the majority. Majority culture construes as the national culture.

Muslim identity across the world today is in complex warp post 9/11 terror attacks in America. It redefined the manner Muslims were to be globally seen and treated. As Islamophobia becomes a disconcerting phenomenon in the West, Muslims in India too have been struggling to reassert their identity. They are seemingly at odds with their fellow citizens espousing Hindutva ideology. A community or a tribe historically marginalised by dominating elites need to be protected by the State otherwise the aspiration of an egalitarian society remains unfulfilled. The Constitutional guarantees often get downplayed when it comes to securing rights of marginalised caste groups, tribes or religious minorities like Christians and Muslims. Although Dalits and Christians too bear with state apathy and provocations of non-state actors of Hindutva ideology, I wish to focus on the straining relationship between Hindus and Muslims vis-à-vis rising Hindutva jingoism. Such unsettling situations encourage chronic identity crisis and sense of social alienation among the community in distress. This paper attempts to analyse the same identity crisis experienced by Muslims in independent India. With charges of terrorism and extremism on them, their social existence seems to be in a great danger. Every day Indian Muslims suffer from communal wave of persecution and genocide.

Key words: *Hindus, Muslims, Minority, Hindutva, Communalism.*

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India has not celebrated its awe-inspiring diversity but has only accommodated it. This is intended to make minorities a part of the mainstream but relative insignificance of minorities owes to democracy where majority matters much. Democracy by nature symbolises what J.S. Mill describes as "tyranny of majority" and the policies are heavily tilted towards the majority. Majority culture construes as the national culture. India is a crisis state, and Muslims, an alienated, socially excluded and marginalised community in distress.

Muslim identity across the world today is in complex warp post 9/11 terror attacks in America. It redefined the manner Muslims were to be globally seen and treated. As Islamophobia becomes a disconcerting phenomenon in the West, Muslims in India too have been struggling to reassert their identity. They are seemingly at odds with their fellow citizens espousing Hindutva ideology. A community or a tribe historically marginalised by dominating elites need to be protected by the State otherwise the aspiration of an egalitarian society remains unfulfilled. The Constitutional guarantees often get downplayed when it comes to securing rights of marginalised caste group, tribe or religious minorities like Christians and Muslims. Although Dalits and Christians too bear with state apathy and provocations of non-state actors of Hindutva ideology, I wish to focus on the straining relationship between Hindus and Muslims vis-à-vis rising Hindutva jingoism. Such unsettling situations encourage chronic identity crisis and sense of social alienation among the community in distress. This paper attempts to analyse the same identity crisis experienced by Muslims in independent India. With charges of terrorism and extremism on them, their social existence seems to be in a great danger. Every day Indian Muslims suffer from communal wave of persecution and genocide.

After India's freedom from the clutches of the 200-year long British Rule in 1947, most Muslims decided to stay on in the country despite large-scale aggression, bloodshed and violence. It was nothing else but the love for their country coupled with a sense of deep-rooted connection with their motherland. In the heat of what is known as the partition riots, not to migrate to Pakistan was a conscious yet difficult decision for most individuals and families. Those who remained in India boldly faced the onslaught of communal violence or

the threat of it. Still, on and off, the Muslims of India are referred to as traitors and betrayers, as much as terrorists. Yet, by and large, Muslims chose to ally with secular forces. Gradually, discrimination, social stagnation and educational dispossession put together resulted in economic backwardness of the Muslims in large parts of the country. India has faced communal riots since independence. If we study the justice and reparation process of riots over the last 67 years of independence, we see that on most counts Muslims have failed to get justice and the perpetrators have never been held accountable in the absence of any strong and exclusive legislative tool to address this violence. In all these cases, existing IPC provisions have proven inadequate in addressing targeted violence.

Of the several identifiers Indians fall back upon to define themselves, language, caste and religion are the foremost. While these aspects of the Indian social identity have had some association with political wrestling and consequent violence, religion holds the distinction of riling the most number of people in most number of ways in our country.Religion today is a sharp knife that slices through the country's educated classes dividing them into two either pro-Hindu or anti-Hindu. The social media version of the debate is often abrasive, offensive, ill-informed or just a bitter verbal boxing match with the parties zealously trying to be the most vengeful, mistaking that to be a moral triumph. Within this context, the concept of secularism has been reduced to Congress' vote bank politics in India. Words like 'sickularist' recast the unwillingness to subscribe to any religious theology as anti-Hindu, pro-Muslim and hence detrimental to the health of the nation. The same climate vehemently discourages any debate over the nature of Hinduism in practice or how the religion manifests itself in some sections of the society.

With Prime Minister Narendra Modi now bolstering his development claims with loud assertions of his Hindu affiliation, the debate is being framed as secularism vs Hinduism, where each is viewed as antithetical to the other. Secularists are uninterested in debating the merits of Hinduism, while Hindutva supporters view secularism as a spurious ideology. This dichotomy needs to be challenged, pointing at the fact that the first liberal voices in the country emanated from a group of intellectuals who were as proud of their

religious identity as they were of their secular ideals. Instead of valourising destructive incidents like the demolition of the Babri Masjid Hindus must look to more productive sources of pride.

In a society where so many are without access to adequate education, health care and housing, where malnutrition is rife and where safety and environmental standards are violated every minute, to invest so much political energy and human capital in the demolition of a mosque and its replacement with a brand-new temple seemed wildly foolish, if not downright Machiavellian. As it turned out, the Ram Janmabhoomi campaign led to two decades of strife across northern and western India, with thousands of people losing their lives and hundreds of thousands their homes and livelihoods.

The jingoism of the so-called Hindutva followers has vitiated the best aspects of the religion, making it seem like a narrow, divisive philosophy with no place for debate or dialogue. The rampant association of the religion with criticism about the failures of a political party, arguably, has robbed it of its real identity in society. So people who have turned 'Hinduism' into a weapon to counter a political narrative have essentially successfully alienated the religion from everyone who don't intend to get caught up is a raucous politicking.If liberals want to successfully counter the intolerance of right-wingers, they must rescue Hinduism from Hindutva.

There is no denying of the fact that the highly charged atmosphere, coupled with communalantagonism, inflammatory speeches, crimes against minorities and the agenda of Hindutva have impelled the Muslim minority to stay fromthe mainstream of the national life of India. The Indian Muslims, approximately 16% of the total population, have beensubjected to continuous pressure and have been decimated frompositions of importance in all walks of life. Concerted efforts have beenmade to deprive them from their basic human rights. The IndianMuslims live a life of complete insecurity and aspersions are being cast on their Indian citizenship.

Despite making countlesscontributions to India in almost all spheres of life, the Muslims of Indiafind themselves increasingly vulnerable and pessimistic about thepossibilities of an economic, socio-cultural and political uplift in the Indian society. This study would try to examine the objectiveconditions that spark communal cleansing in the Indian socio-politicalcontext. The study will also concentrate on the thesis that Indian state-engineered activities through its defence organs presenting to theworld, the Indian Muslim's political consciousness about their fairexistence, as a manifestation of Islamic extremism or "terrorism againstIndian federation" so as to justify Indian state repression and communalviolence against the down-trodden innocent Indian Muslims.

Muslim's representation in all sectors of Indian life and development is abysmally low except in Bollywood. In 1952, Muslim representation in the Parliament was 4.3 % and the highest it soared was in the Parliament during 1984-89, when it stood at 8.4 %. At one point, it dipped to 2.9 %. Though there is a formidable concentration of Muslims in several constituencies but the multi-party and first-past-the-post electoral system works to their disadvantage and anti-minority parties mainly register their wins from these constituencies. This is because several secular parties put up Muslim candidates from these electoral segments. Electoral trends show that the Jana Sangh, the predecessor of the today's BhartiyaJanata Party (BJP) received 15 % of upper caste votes in 1967. But the BJP's share of the upper caste votes had risen to 52% by the 2004 LokSabha election. Similarly the Jana Sangh's share in Muslim votes was 2% in 1967 and its successor, the BJP claimed 11% Muslim votes in 2004 elections. This explains adequately as to why Muslims got further marginalized in matters of legislative representation.

On the administrative side too, Muslim representation is appallingly low. Muslims barely represent 5% among the personnel employed by the Central government. Their representation in judiciary is a little better i.e., 7%, yet far below what their numbers deserve. Representation of Muslims becomes paltrier as one ascends to look for them in the higher echelons of the bureaucracy.

Muslim literacy rate stands at around 60% while the national literacy rate exceeds 70% today. The Christians are well represented in education, health and other social sectors of development, mainly because of the tradition of social service by the missionaries. But Muslim politics has mainly revolved around the axis of cultural identity and mobilization as seen on the emotive issues such as Muslim Personal Law, Urdu, Aligarh Muslim University et al.

But a new movement is rising from among the backward sections of the Muslim community, which focuses on socio-economic issues. There are bright patches here and there. In south Indian states, the literacy rate among Muslims is higher than the state's average literacy rate. States such as Andhra Pradesh have implemented reservation for the community. In the same state, Muslim representation in police and certain other departments is stated to be 16 %, which is much higher than the share in state population i.e. 9 %. It serves as an index that when people are offered privileges and facilities, they themselves become pressure groups.

One of the major reasons for Muslim backwardness is emptying of North Indian states of Muslim middle class due to migration to Pakistan on the eve of Partition. Curiously, decline of Muslim representation in several northern states coincided with the rise of political and social awakening.We need to ponder over a few issues.So far, the Indian state has engaged with religious minorities as legal minorities, not as citizens. Invocation of secularism is very formal. But what is it in concrete terms, is yet to be explained. Secondly, internal democratisation among Muslims and Christians is far weaker than among Sikhs and Buddhists. This is owing to the fact that Muslims were tagged 'conquerors' and Christians were stigmatized with 'civilising mission' of the British colonial rule.

It is disconcerting and deeply dispiriting to see how many otherwise liberal and self-described modern members of the upwardly mobile and Westernised middle classes in Indian society today have bought so easily into the fallacious and pernicious theories peddled by the merchants of Hindu majoritarianism. These theories are based on sheer falsification of the

facts relating to the history of Indian civil society and the creation of the Indian nation-state in 1947. Any elementary familiarity with the rudiments of Indian history, just its factual framework, even setting aside the Hindutva campaign-sponsored controversy over interpretations of history, would underline again and again, how much a product of religious syncretism is the civil society that we call India today. Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, Muslim influences blended cheerfully in the social and cultural landscape of the subcontinent at least from the 13th century onwards even as Muslim and Hindu rulers periodically battled over symbols such as temples and mosques more as instruments of political power than religious significance. To suggest today, as the SanghParivar and its increasingly fervent following in the media and the Hindu upper middle classes are doing, that the religious minorities are guests in a "Hindu India" and therefore deserve lesser conceptual recognition in the delineation of India's national identity is nothing but a subtle form of "ethnic cleansing" albeit at the intellectual and ideological level.

This is probably why the Sangh Parivar is so insistent on rewriting the history books. It needs to blot out unwelcome reminders of alien cultural presences that have coexisted determinedly with Hindu culture for ages and to ensure that the idea of a single Hindu community being the dominant political, cultural and social presence is dinned into the minds of children so that future generations of Indians would have no qualms in seeing Indian as synonymous with Hindu and India with Hindu Rashtra. Even if as a political project it might be alright for the SanghParivar to imitate what has so often been loudly scoffed at by them, the totalitarian impulses that damaged Soviet and Chinese societies in the '50s and write Indian history as they would have liked it to have happened, there remains a nagging question. Is it fair to deprive Indian children of the overwhelming and richly textured wealth of information about India's multicultural past and syncretic traditions that is now available thanks to the painstaking research and substantive historiographical advances by so many world-class Indian historians whose methodology and techniques were in no way inferior to their acclaimed Western counterparts? It shows how low is our national sense of intellectual self-worth that we reduce D.D. Kosambi, Romila Thapar, Irfan Habib and other historian-

scientists to "left-wing" ideologues when their work, the envy of many a leading European historians, has taken the knowledge of India's past forward by leaps and bounds. If not for their meticulous scrutiny of historical records including agrarian tax and revenue documents, the sense of connectedness that today's India feels with the events that took place in the past in the subcontinent that did not have a territorial national identity until 1947 would not be a genuine one.

The irony is that the political entities called India and Pakistan that came into being in 1947 when the British left the subcontinent had no formal or institutional connection to the previous structures of rule of the subcontinent except for the fact that their people were the inheritors of the cultural and historical memories of generations who had lived on the same terrain. Therefore for any community, whether Hindu or Muslim, to claim that it enjoyed unbroken hegemony or had prior territorial claim of the subcontinent would be falsifying the actual social and political realities that unfolded over the centuries which saw Hindu and Muslim rulers vying with each other, often co-opting each other against challengers within their own communities and collaborating eventually with British imperialism. Any scrutiny of the basic facts of Indian history would readily yield the conclusion that the sense of Indian nationhood was a late-born one, first taking shape in the colonial era and then acquiring moral and political resonance as a resistance movement against British imperial rule which, it is to be noted, took shape as a national movement claiming to represent the aspirations of all the religious, linguistic and ethnic communities that lived in the subcontinent. Whatever momentum the Indian nationalist struggle had that effectively dislodged the British from India, was due to the overwhelming moral authority of its representation of a broad sweep of communities in India.

It must also be recalled that in the traumatic aftermath of Partition, it was democratic and pluralism-affirming India which had the greater moral shine worldwide than Islamist Pakistan which by its communal origins deriving from the "two-nation" theory had already lost considerable ground in the international reckoning. It cannot now post-facto be wished away or written out of memory that when the new nation-state India adopted its Constitution,

it determinedly enshrined a commitment to recognise that as citizens of the new democratic republic, all communities living in India, regardless of their numerical strength, would have their cultural and religious rights given equal importance before the law. It must also be recognised that there was no prior existence of the Indian state before the new governing entity that came into being in 1947. Both then and when it became a republic in 1950, the founders of the new state were clear that they would commit themselves resolutely to making India a secular state and a parliamentary democracy, which could effectively contain the undermining tendencies of majority and minority communalism and, equally important, the disintegrating tendencies of linguistic and ethnic affiliations.

Minority Phenomenon and the Indian Muslims

Ever since the beginning of human society, there has been a constant grading inthe social spectrum of human society. The formation of human groups is determined byattraction and repulsion of all these phenomena, which may be said to be produced byfields of force. Since the identity of interests of all types of social groups has not been achieved, the majority – minority relation is greatly heightened. It is most useful to thinkof majority – minority relations as an ongoing social function, characterized by varyingdegrees of repressive measures underlined by overt and covert hostility. The objects ofcompetition may range from political power and opportunities for education to economicpower and employment. Therefore, there is an inevitable conflict of interests inconsequence. This sets in the process of conflict seeking rewards by the demand foreliminating or weakening the competitors; attention shifts from the contest itself to aneffort to eliminate rivals. In this regard, examples of Red Indians and Negroes in theUSA, the Protestants in Spain and Latin America, the French in Canada, the Japanese inBrazil and the Muslims in India can be cited as some of the classic examples of minoritygroups. Due to the psychology of ethnocentrism, people are harassed in varying degrees.

Therefore, the following are the general effects of a minority position (Hamilton,

1993, p. 7):

- Minority groups are held in lower esteem and are objects of contempt, ridicule and violence.
- They are specially segregated and socially isolated.
- They are victims of unequal access to education, employment and professions.
- They may suffer from restricted property rights.
- They may be deprived of the right to suffrage and public office.
- Generally speaking, a minority is "A group of people differentiated from others in the same society by race, nationality, religion and language – who think of themselves as a differentiated group and are thought of by others as a differentiated group with negative connotations (Wagley and Harris, 1958, p. 16).

It is a distinct ethnic group or community with certain characteristics, ethnic, linguistic, cultural or religious, living together, within an alien civilization and are objects of collective discrimination. Differentiation is not an inevitable or natural process – it has to be culturally set before being defined as such. There are mainly five functional characteristics in a minority position as comprehensively defined and attempted by UNESCO conference (Ashworth, 1968, p. 13) as follows:

- Subordinate segment of the population
- With special physical and cultural traits
- Possessed of self consciousness bound by some special traits and disabilities
- Whose membership is compulsorily transmitted by a rule of descent
- Marriage is confined within the group by choice or necessity

In India, although its constitution proclaims the state to be secular, yet an insight at the last six decades shows that Indian secularism, works invariably in favour of the Hindus (Aurora, 1999, p. 172-173). The recent judgment in the 1987 Hashimpura massacre is a testimony to the fact. Twenty-eight years down the line, the acquittal of all 16 accused left the kins of the victims and the survivors distraught, while the absolved PAC personnel said it was an end to a long ordeal suffered by them and their families. Muslims everywhere are looked upon with suspicion and hostility. They find it difficult to get into government service. Trade

and industry do not employ them. Economically they have been ruined and the deterioration gets more severe every day. Culturally it is expected of them to be assimilated into the general Hindu milieu. With charges of terrorism and extremism loom large, their social existence seems to be in jeopardy. Indian Muslims continue to suffer from persecution and genocide. They are branded by many as radicals, fundamentalists, fanatics and whatnot. Such has become the identity of Muslims in India, a place where the families of the victims continue to weep for years, and after much deliberation they have to live with 'denial of justice'.

Indian Communalism: Rousing Chauvinism against Muslim Minority

The Hindu – Muslim communal views of their respective history, its interpretationand its appropriation for sharpening the edges of communalism, were mostly developedduring the course of colonial rule in India. This reconstruction of colonial history isemployed as a powerful instrument for creating communal solidarity and hatred at thesame time. Prior to independence, the Congress – Muslim league quest for freedom essentially represented the economic, political and cultural aspirations of both Muslimsand Hindus. The major cause of communal conflict, before the advent of free India, wasthus the struggle between the Hindus and the Muslim and their respective elite forpolitical power and control of economic resources. Needless to say, the Muslims of thesub-continent, despairing of a fair deal, sought their salvation in a separate homeland. Inthe post-partition period, the Indian Muslim masses left behind in India found them in anawkward situation and were unable to react meaningfully to the hostile and dominatingpolitico-economic attitude of their rival Hindu citizens.

The partition riots continued up to 1948 and occasional skirmishes here and theretook place till 1950 (Bhagwant, 2001, p. 5). In the decade between 1950 and 1960, theevents of communal violence were marginal. However, after the frenzy of 1947-48, thecommunal bloodbath was again witnessed in 1961 in Jabalpur in the state of MadhyaPradesh (Quoted in Shakir, 1989, p. 92).

Later rioting erupted in various parts of East-India like Calcutta, Jamshedpur,Rourkela and Ranchi. In 1968-69 communal aggressions caused a chain reaction in the Southern part of India as the state of Gujarat saw intensive and widespread killingincidents (Gupta, 1970, p. 102-104). In Ahmadabad also, massacre, arson, looting andslaughter of thousands of Muslims continued for a week. The communal violence inAhmadabad had its repercussions elsewhere, in Baroda, Bharuch, NadiadAnand,Jamnagar, Bhuj, Veravel, Junagarh, etc. The riots in Aligarh, Ahmedabad and Moradabadturned into a clash between Muslims and the predominantly Hindu police force, withlatter mercilessly beating up the Muslims and indulging in violence (Sadiq, 1988, p. 51).

By 1970, the number of districts affected by the communal virus rose to 216representing 70 percent of the Indian basic administrative set-up. Out of the total of 525serious communal riots in 1986, 96 were reported in Gujarat, 65 in Bihar, 61 in WestBengal, 51 in Maharashtra, 48 in Karmataka, 45 in Andhra Pradesh, 41 in Uttar Pradesh, 31 in Madhya Pradesh, 24 in Rajasthan, 21 in Kerala, 14 in Tamil Nadu, 10 in Odisha, 8 inthe Indian-held Kashmir, 7 in Assam and 3 in Delhi (Chaudhry, 1989, p. 333). Theugliest incident of Hindu fanaticism since 1947 took place on 6, December 1992 when the historic Babri Mosque in Ayodhya was razed to the ground. Hindu communalism,drawing its sustenance from hate, prejudice and bigotry towards the Muslim minority andits cynical refusal to accept the pluralistic nature of Indian society, blackened its own faceby destroying the mosque in the name of Ram (William, 1998, p. 200). The uncivilizedact of demolition of the historic mosque was carried out in the presence of the top brass of BJP-VHP-RSS combine and contrary to the assurances of the state government given to the Supreme Court of India (Ganga, 1996, p. 6).

Since 1992, the tragic happenings during the communal contentions havedeepened the sense of horror and misery of the Muslim minority. In 2002,NarendraModi's state of Gujarat broke the previous records of Anti-Muslim atrocities,when stray cases of assault, murder, stabbing and rape went on unabated and uncheckedfor a week. The overall picture is that the loss of lives, injured or disabled, loss ofmoveable or immoveable properties, missing persons and honour is incalculable. Indiangovernments whether the "so-called progressive" or

conservatives have evidently failedto protect the Muslim minority from an organized vandalism.

The Indian Muslims strongly believe in cultural assimilation but do not want tolose centuries old traditions of their own and the doctrines of religious diversity as well astheir faith. The persistence of communal violence is usually sought to be explained bycontinuing Hindu-Muslim religious rivalry. A majority of analysts hold religion asmainly responsible for communal confrontation, and certainly religious symbols,mythology and terminologies are frequently employed in various communal frenzies.Undoubtedly, communal propaganda is a subtle and lethal weapon in the speeches,writings and dealings of the Hindu communalists. However, some scholars hold theeconomic factors responsible for the eruption of communal aggression and they arguethat:

> *"In the communal – ridden society of India, most of the employers, industrialists and middlemen are Hindus, whereas the majority of employees, workers and artisans, are Muslims (Singh, 1989, p. 3)."*

Thus in such a set-up, communal riots are a distorted version of the class conflict.

Furthermore, there is a competitive conflict of interests within the middle class andamong the self-employed people over access to given opportunities like government jobs,export contracts, market shares, etc. The prevailing group identities clash on communallines.

Going by the foregoing analysis of Hindu-Muslim communal strife, it seems thatpolitical factors also play the role of bread and butter in this conflict. The Muslims inIndia are considered to be politically deprived group. Their frustration increases whenLiberal parties like Congress pursue the same communal lines as the BJP, SanghParivarand other anti-Muslim political factions espouse and romanticize Hindu quest forpermanent dominance over the Muslims. Following the above aspects of communalism,these systematically designed riots can be viewed as the clandestine handiwork of Hindumilitant and fanatic organizations who seek to achieve their parochial objectives throughrioting. RSS, Shiv Sena and Bajrang Dal do not accord the status of the Muslims as equal citizens (Kirmani, 2001, p.

6-7). By trying to achieve their objective of purging India ofMuslims, they resort to rioting, thus depriving them from privileges and preferentialtreatment. Resultantly, when Hindus appraise the Muslims, negatively on religious /political grounds, the Muslims develop antipathy towards the Hindus, and this leads tocommunal tension and hostility.

Attempt to curtail Indian Muslims' fair existence has been articulated bynumerous Hindu circles with such a vision whose appeal will ultimately demolishGandhi's dream of a secular and democratic India. In pre-partition India and even duringNehru's regime, the influence of individual Muslims found prominence through theiractive participation in the congress policies, but due to dual attitude of congressleadership, it lost nationalist resilience which provided opportunity to Hindu rightwingers to flourish the glorification of Hindutva rather than secularism. Although Article17 of the Indian constitution "abolished" the concept of untouchability and its practice inany form, yet, the victimization of the Indian Muslim community reflects systematicbrutality with the complicity of Hindu extremists and exposes the pitiable situation in arepresentative secular democracy (Gail, 2003, p. 2).

On what basis then are the so-called Hindu nationalists demanding greater cultural space in India's national landscape? There is as yet no clear evidence presented to the country as to what in their view constitutes "appeasement" of the Muslim community whose members are as much Indian citizens, with as much right to cultural and social space within the Indian national fabric, nor is there any clearly discernible reason for the shrill panic being voiced over "forcible Christian conversions". It is all the more amazing that in the obvious absence of any marked sociological or demographic shift in favour of the Christian community at least in the last few decades, there is not enough scepticism among those self-proclaimed modern Indians who yearn to be part of the global community and not enough questioning by them as to why the issue of conversions has suddenly acquired so much urgency.

It is also surprising why the onus has not been placed on those campaigning for Hindu majoritarianism to explain the legal and ethical basis for the demand that Muslims must be shown their place and must accept that India belongs primarily to the Hindus. Having now robbed Indians of the right to know their own history as it really was, it has become far easier

for the Sangh Parivar and their patrons in the Vajpayee administration to manufacture

a version of Indian history and nationhood that despite its patent inauthenticity paves

the way

for the creation of a new majoritarian-oriented political identity. So powerful an effect does this heady brew of Hindu nationalism have that inconvenient questions such as the prospect of a falling economic growth rate, down to 4.4 per cent, do not have to be answered. So effective is the demonising of the Muslim community in the narrative of Hindutva that only few ask whether it is wise to be perpetually confrontationist with our neighbours, Pakistan and Bangladesh. This has also helped to create uncritical acceptance of the Vajpayee administration's collaboration with the U.S.-led coalition and virtually no disquiet about the ethical and moral implications of the global war against terror. There is very little scrutiny too of the considerable domestic political stakes that the BJP and the Sangh Parivar have vested in the campaign to turn India into a Hindu nation.

Instead of heaping scorn and abuse on those of us who question India's lurch towards majoritarianism and its repudiation of the pluralism and democracy that has served it so well, it is time that those Indians who pride themselves on being part of the global community yet have bought unquestioningly the notion that the minorities are responsible for some imagined economic deprivation, ask some hard questions. By driving the minorities to the margins of a civil society of which they are equal inheritors and thereby polarising Indian society, rendering it more vulnerable to bitter internal conflicts, how can the dream of a modernising India becoming part of a wider global community sharing a vision of faster economic growth and greater prosperity really materialise?

The National Commission for Minorities (NCM) which was constituted by the Government of India to monitor the development of minorities in India has been ineffective in addressing the grievances and developmental gaps of the Muslim minority and has proved to be a mere symbolic affiliation. If one looks at the minutes of the meetings of the NCM that have taken place in the past 12 months, the actual functioning of the commission seems to be limited largely to issues like investigating complaints of encroachment of land at religious

places, restoration of historical heritage buildings, issues related to minority marriage acts, holding seminars on social issues, neglect of Urdu, denial of holidays for a particular minority festival, research studies on minorities, hindrance in observing religious ceremonies, and hurting religious sentiments.

The NCM lacks both the financial and political autonomy needed for independent and effective functioning. In 2013-14, its budget was Rs 451 lakhs, 72% of which went towards paying salaries (Rs 323.43 lakhs). If one looks at the annual plan of action, there are 35 items of work listed to be completed during 2014-15, and the period is almost over. Most of the work constitutes preparation of annual reports, newsletters, updating of the commission's website, etc. The National Commission for Scheduled Castes and National Human Rights Commission have more political power than the NCM, and they are more independent. Reports from the NCM are not binding on the Government of India and are never tabled in Parliament. The apathy of the Indian state is evident in the fact that, till date, 13 states in India are yet to form state minority commissions. It is not surprising that Gujarat, a state where Muslims suffered a state-sponsored genocide in 2002 and are not only victims of communal violence but also of state impunity, is amongst those 13 states.

The NCM clearly does not address the critical issues of socio-economic exclusion and discrimination suffered by Muslims in India as evident from the proceedings of meetings or action taken by the NCM. The commission could have played a pivotal role in evaluating the progress of minorities, especially after the findings of the Sachar Committee.What emerges here is that institutions and development programmes meant for minorities have not delivered much by way of addressing the exclusion of Muslims. Indeed, they have reiterated the bias and discrimination Muslims face on a regular basis. There is complete lack of will and commitment on the part of the government to address these issues.

Apart from faring abysmally on development indicators, Muslims live in an insecure environment where they face targeted and communal violence on a regular basis, coupled with day-to-day discrimination in accessing rights and entitlements.

Conclusion

To suggest that the religious minorities are guests in a 'Hindu India' is nothing but a subtle form of 'ethnic cleansing'. Constitution is our greatest guarantee, as it ensures equality, freedom of expression, freedom of religion and safeguards against discrimination and marginalisation. Muslim identity across the world today is in complex warp, post 9/11 terror attacks in America. It redefined the manner Muslims were to be globally seen and treated. As Islamophobia becomes a disconcerting phenomenon in the West, Muslims in India too have been struggling to reassert their identity. They are seemingly at odds with their fellow citizens espousing Hindutva ideology.

A community or a tribe historically marginalised by dominating elites need to be protected by the State otherwise the aspiration of an egalitarian society remains unfulfilled. The Constitutional guarantees often gets downplayed when it comes to securing rights of the marginalised caste group, tribe or religious minorities such as Muslims. Although Dalits and Christians too bear with state apathy and provocations of non-state actors of Hindutva ideology, I wish to focus on the straining relationship between Hindus and Muslims vis-à-vis the rising Hindutva jingoism. Such unsettling situations encourage chronic identity crisis and a sense of social alienation among the community in distress.

Minorities have to knock at the doors of the Courts every time conflict arises on the definition of minority and interpretation of the Article 30 as no legislation has been put in place to ensure the protection of rights and interests of minorities. Amelioration of the general lot of the minorities and arresting the downslide is possible by: First, ensuring accessibility to quality education and health facilities and insurance by the State and second, redefining the Madarsa system. Third suggestion could be a loud thinking. In order to make the system inclusive, we need to legislate that no MP or MLA will be declared elected if he does not get one-third votes of the minorities of the Constituency he is elected from. Fourth, multi-religious instructions should be provided in schools in order to inculcate the spirit of secularism.

From Sir Syed Ahmad Khan to Dr. Zakir Hussain, from Maulana Abul Kalam to A.P.J Abdul Kalam, from Irfan Habib to legendary Shahrayar, from Lt. Gen. Zameeruddin Shah to veteran Naseeruddin Shah, and a number of equally talented Muslims have enriched various hues of the collective consciousness of India that also makes it a culturally and aesthetically admired nation. Conversely, Muslims are yet to get their due share. Bharat Ratna, the highest civilian award for one son Malviya and no consideration for the other son Syed; it bears an eloquent testimony to double speak.

Under the prevailing circumstances, the energy and enthusiasm of the Indian Muslims toparticipate in the national life of Indian society seems to be weakening day by day. Lastbut not least, the possession of fear and inferiority complex and narrow, ad-hoc self-interests has doomed the future of Muslims in India. The answer to this problem lies inthe identification of Indian Muslim minority as equal citizens. Indians will have tocontain the explosive blending of Hindu revivalism with governmental machinations,which is clearly fundamentalist. Following this statement, it is further suggested thatHindus should not attempt to co-opt or incorporate all distinct communities, including theIndian Muslims, into the Hindu fold and must refrain from accomplishing the mission ofHindutva. India with its old ideal of secularist anti-fundamentalism will not only preventits society from communal pollution but will also create political tranquillity and regional cohesion with Pakistan.

Both the Muslims and the Hindus have developed, over the decades, stereotypedopinions, images and particular perceptions of each other. Such concepts tend to dominate the mindset of orthodox and conservative sections of the rival communities, inparticular, the Hindus. There are weighty reasons to believe that the Hindu communalelements have made much space into intelligence organs, police, paramilitary forces andpolicy making institutions to sabotage all peaceful measures of civil society organizationsand all the secular elements, apart from encouraging and promoting communal activities.In almost all the communal riots, prejudiced actions on the part of law enforcing agenciesare noticed by the world print and electronic media and are reported. The repeatedoccurrence of communal violence and the failure of the law and order machinery

toprotect the life, property and honour of the Muslim minority, is the outcome of a sustainedhatred, garbled versions of Indian history, traditions and prejudices against the Muslimminority.

Undoubtedly, at the root of communal conflicts and hostilities against the Muslimminority in India, both a cause and an effect of tension, is the confrontation with Pakistanon a number of issues. As the relations with Pakistan worsen, the Muslims in India areautomatically suspected of being a fifth column for Pakistan. The depth of religiousfeeling in India today is mirrored by the Hindu attitude towards global war againstterrorism. The Indian media and even commoners seem to be very delighted by theMuslim's discomforts in different war theatres of world. The Indian-Israeli nexus has grown powerful, which instills prevocational fascism in the Indian youth. It is a settledphenomenon that the Indian Muslims are too large and too poor ever to be able to leaveIndia but Hindu revivalism is reinforcing disenchantment among the Muslims with Indiansecularism. So far the response of Hindu communalists has been unrelenting. The choicelies with the Indians. Do they want to emerge as a modern secular state which protectsthe fundamental rights of its citizens of whatsoever creed, colour or religion, guaranteedunder their secular constitution or do they want to lark back to the dark ages of Hindu religionism?

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