

“Demystifying the Conundrum of Communal Violence amid COVID-19 in India”

Harshita Sonkar¹

*Dr. Ram Manohar Lohiya National Law University,
Lucknow*

Introduction

As Karl Marx rightly said and I quote, “Religion is the opium of the people” I guess we all couldn’t agree more. Retracing our steps back to 9/11 which resulted in thousands of casualties, projecting Islam as not a religion of peace but a chariot of terror and violence.

But if the factual points are taken into consideration, it stands contrary. Around fifty thousand Muslim from across thirty-five countries, 93% of the Muslim rejected and vehemently abhorred the 9/11 attack. In fact, a study carried out by Robert Pape, a professor at University of Chicago and one of America’s leading terrorism experts carried out a study, drew a conjecture between suicide terrorism and Islamic fundamentals, and stated that , “there is little connection between suicide terrorism in Islamic fundamentalism or any of the world's religions, rather nearly all suicide terrorist attacks have in common is a specific secular and strategic goal to compel modern democracies to withdraw military forces from territory but the terrorist consider to be their homeland,”². Now when Muslims are not the cause and so is their religion then who are the perpetrators?

The blame goes to our media houses and the police authorities, who have stooped down to different level. When we discuss in context of India and the position of Muslims in India, I think history speaks for itself. With the nationwide implementation of CAA-NRC, the dirty politics have come into play. Their incessant game ascended to new level with the outbreak of COVID-19, giving it a communal angle altogether. Lets us see the chronology of the ordeal of our Muslim community.

Despicable crime against Humanity: The Godra Riots

This event was transpired when fueled with communal violence in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. On 27 February, 2002, ablaze in the train carrying Hindu pilgrims killed 59 peoples, who were returning from Ayodhya after a religious ceremony at the site of Babri Masjid. The Masjid was

¹ 2nd Year, B.A.,LL.B(Hons.), Dr. Ram Manohar Lohiya National Law University, Lucknow

² Hasan Mehdi, “Islam Is a Peaceful Religion” (*Islam Is A Peaceful Religion: Mehdi Hasan in an Oxford Union Debate following the murder of a British Soldier by an Islamist fanatic in Woolwich, Multimedia, Mehdi Hasan, New Age Islam*) <<https://newageislam.com/multimedia/islam-is-a-peaceful-religion--mehdi-hasan-in-an-oxford-union-debate-following-the-murder-of-a-british-soldier-by-an-islamist-fanatic-in-woolwich/d/12571>> accessed April 20, 2020

demolished 10 years back by Hindu mobs claiming it to be built on the ruins of a temple dedicated to Ram , a major deity in Hinduism³.

When the official inquiry was conducted, it was found that the fire in the train was accidental, caused by someone cooking or smoking inside a coach. This report was dismissed by Supreme Court as “invalid”. Later the Indian authorities eventually gave it a communal turn, rendering the Muslims as arsonist. This enraged the Hindus, who hacked more than 1000 of Muslims, raping the woman repeatedly, forcing them to watch their husbands and sons die. This was the condition of Muslim in our secular country.

Moving swiftly on to the protests which were held against the enforcement of CAA-NRC in India. Well, if we try to draw the conjecture between the two incident, i.e. the 2002 and the 2019, there are certain similarities. But before that, let us delve into the CAA-NRC mayhem.

Citizenship Amendment Act: A means to oust the Muslim population

A few months back, Modi Government came up with the nationwide implementation of CAA-NRC wherein, it allows Indian citizenship for Hindus, Sikhs, Jain, Parsi and Christians religious minorities who fled from the Muslim majority countries of Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan before December 2014 due to “religious persecution or fear of religious persecution”. But this does not include Muslims which violated the right to equality enshrined in the constitution. CAA coupled with NRC will lead to the disenfranchisement of the millions of Muslims. The voices of the protestors have been muffled , the students and the protestors were charged under the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act for allegedly hatching a conspiracy to incite the communal violence in New Delhi⁴.

Critical analysis of the two incidents

With this the government has set an extreme example of treatment and that the rights of equality without discrimination⁵ has been crushed to ground. By analyzing the two incidents, there oozes out two protagonists, the first being the police authority who turned blind eye to the grotesque incidents by abetting or aiding the killing, and secondly, the accusation levied upon the government complicity. But the last year’s incident was quite different as it was not preceded by a major infraction against the Hindu majority⁶ or followed by any kind of revenge to be vetted

³ <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/india-muslims-punished-indian-200306190342176.html>> accessed April 20, 2020

⁴ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/04/india-hindu-nationalist-gov-targeting-anti-caa-protesters-200422122213197.html>> accessed April 22, 2020

⁵ “What Is CAA” <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/what-is-caa/articleshow/73153785.cms>> accessed April 19, 2020

⁶ Ibid 2.

out as was the case previously, but this time they were punished for asking to be Indians. This proves that the Hindu Nationalist central government no longer needs a reason to attack the Muslim, which signals that the future of minority communities in India is in despondency.

COVID-19 and its impact on Muslim: Communal Angle at the time of adversity

It would be enigmatic but government giving a communal turn to every other incident comes no surprise to us. The outbreak of a fatal virus which has taken tons of lives worldwide has been presented and distorted in a way to give an outlet to communal violence. The recent event suffice it all, starting with the Tablighi Jamat wherein thousands of devotees from all corners of India congregate and share a message of piety⁷, which proved to be India's first "super-spreader", and rising the infection in the nation of 1.3 billion people by thirty per cent⁸

This congregation amid coronavirus was definitely despicable but it provoked the spasm of Islamophobia in Hindus against Muslims. This created room for fake news, which spread at supersonic speed across the whole country. A Muslim vendor spitting on fruits to spread saliva, which dates back to February⁹, following up this, Muslim licking the utensils to spread the corona was later proved to be a hoax when the same result on Google search threw up several results including a Vimeo link from July 31, 2018, which carried the same video. According to the description, those were Dawoodi Bohras licking the leftover food from the utensils to not waste even a morsel¹⁰.

This congregation has proved to be fatal for the whole community at large. Muslims have developed an aversion to backlash. There is mental, physical and psychological warfare waged against Muslims, further pushing their ostracisation in the society. A term of "corona jihad" has been coined to describe this conspiracy¹¹. The media acted as a catalyst by pouring the report, signifying that the larger number of cases could be traced back to the event. The government further carried this and projected it to be a fault on the part of the community at large since it's difficult to filter those who attended the event and those who hadn't, rendering every Muslim a potential carrier of the virus. The recent incident of Palghar lynching spewed venom when the

⁷ "How Tablighi Jamaat Event Became India's Worst Coronavirus Vector" <<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/04/tablighi-jamaat-event-india-worst-coronavirus-vector-200407052957511.html>> accessed April 15, 2020

⁸ Ibid 3.

⁹ Chandra D, "Man 'Spitting' on Fruits Held in MP, Viral Video as Old as 16 Feb" (*The Quint* April 5, 2020) <<https://www.thequint.com/news/india/man-spitting-on-fruits-held-in-madhya-pradesh-raisin-viral-video-as-old-as-16-february?fbclid=IwAR1UCwdqAD0kQBrW11a3vO1zC8uV73MFSzA1VNVokgdxPujh7koZBdzyGH4>> accessed April 20, 2020

¹⁰ Chaudhuri P and Chaudhuri Pooja_Chaudhuri P, "Old, Unrelated Video Shared as Muslims Licking Utensils to Spread Coronavirus Infection" (*Alt News* April 1, 2020) <<https://www.altnews.in/old-unrelated-video-shared-as-muslims-licking-utensils-to-spread-coronavirus-infection/>> accessed April 20, 2020

¹¹ Ibid 3.

fingers were laid on Muslims. Later it was declared categorically that there was no involvement of Muslims in the mob lynching¹².

It is ironical and flabbergasting when Muslims were accused of the spread of the virus since the government tried to downplay the gravity of the situation prior to the event. It allowed the parliament to function amid the outbreak and letting nearly 1.5 enter the country without proper screening between January and March¹³. Tablighi Jamat was just a minuscule proportion. This had its reactionary when the hospital segregated patients on religious lines¹⁴.

Shielding the imperative in the name of communal violence

The emphasis should be laid on all the people who are acting cynically and should be held responsible irrespective of their religion. Since people cannot differentiate between the Muslims who were the part of the congregation and the Muslims who weren't, they treat everyone equally, subjecting them with an equal amount of wrath. Thanks to media, who are acting as catalyst instead of carrying discussion on imperative topics and the future endeavours of the government in providing safety and security to the doctors, the PPE kits which were found to be defective and inadequate¹⁵. The condition of stranded labourers and the initiative taken by the government at a different level to provide them with basic needs¹⁶ such as food, shelter and their future endeavours with regard to the loss of jobs after the pandemic should be emphasized.

Conclusion

The way in which the Constitution is distorted is condemnable. The government is trying to divert the attention of the population from the economic recession which is the next challenge for all of us in the queue by emphasizing more on the communal violence. This proves that the government has failed to render its duty towards its citizen. Ousting a community from the country, distorting the very nature of secularism, establishing a '*Hindu Rastra*' is nothing but a means to hide their shortcomings and brainwashing people in the name of God. It simply

¹² Deshpande A, "Palghar Lynching: Maharashtra Minister Makes Public List of 101 Arrested" *The Hindu* (April 22, 2020) <<https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/mumbai/palghar-lynching-maharashtra-minister-makes-public-list-of-101-arrested/article31402878.ece>> accessed April 23, 2020

¹³ Hamid MAA, "Muslims Victim of Conspiracy Theories" *New Straits Times* (April 21, 2020) <<https://www.nst.com.my/opinion/letters/2020/04/586345/muslims-victims-conspiracy-theories>> accessed April 22, 2020

¹⁴ <<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/04/india-hospital-segregates-muslim-hindu-coronavirus-patients-200416080547650.html>> accessed April 20, 2020

¹⁵ Kaul R, "Covid-19: 60,000 Imported PPE Kits Fail Quality Tests" *Hindustan Times* (April 19, 2020) <<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/covid-19-60-000-imported-ppe-kits-fail-quality-tests/story-aTjbZ488d8mj3HjrV0VWM.html>> accessed April 20, 2020

¹⁶ Das G, "136 Million Jobs at Risk in Post-Corona India" (*Livemint* March 30, 2020) <<https://www.livemint.com/news/india/136-million-jobs-at-risk-in-post-corona-india-11585584169192.html>> accessed April 25, 2020

concludes that the country is going to the dogs. There is a dire need for reformation at every stage of governmental administration to ensure the proper functioning and a change should be brought about in the media sector so that there is no room for fake news.