

WHY MINORITIES FEEL ALIENATED IN INDIA

Relevant for: Indian Society | Topic: Social Inequality and Exclusion

“Every aspect of Muslim life has been targeted to create an impression that Muslims are the main problem of the country. “ Shahista (right), daughter of Mohammad Akhlaq, who was lynched in Dadri, in 2015. | Photo Credit: [Sushil Kumar Verma](#)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s statement that the new National Democratic Alliance government should win the trust of minorities and puncture the ‘myth of fear’ has been received in two different ways. A section of political observers remain unconvinced about this assurance. They argue that aggressive Hindutva politics has marginalised the minorities. If the Modi government is serious about this lack of trust, it needs to do much more. On the other hand, some have optimistically received Mr. Modi’s statement. They claim that minorities, especially Muslims, must appreciate Mr. Modi’s positive gesture and explore possibilities of constructive dialogue.

These definite and categorical sets of argument are partly appropriate. The increasing alienation of minorities is certainly not a myth and expecting the new government to respond to the anxieties, aspirations and imaginations of these communities is morally legitimate and politically justifiable. However, there is a serious need to ask a fundamental question: Why do minorities feel alienated in contemporary India?

This question takes us to an unofficial political mechanism that has produced a sense of fear among minorities in the last five years. This political mechanism relies heavily on a minority-majority binary to establish that Hindus and Muslims are the two core fundamental identities that represent two distinct and conflicting world views. There are four identifiable components of this unofficial political mechanism: discourse of violence, events of violence, justification of violence, and silence on violence.

The media — TV, newspapers, social media such as Facebook and WhatsApp and even films — has played a significant role in creating a violent anti-Muslim Hindu victimhood discourse in the last five years. Every aspect of Muslim life in India has been targeted to create an impression that Muslims are the main problem of the country. For instance, we are told that the birth of a Muslim child is a threat to the Hindu population; the education of a Muslim child is a symbol of separatism; the eating habits of Muslims are anti-Hindu (as Muslims eat beef); the married life of a Muslim couple is a social evil (as Muslims practice triple talaq); and even the death of Muslims is an anti-national act (because Muslims occupy valuable land for graveyards).

This aggressive anti-Muslim propaganda nurtured an equally powerful imagination of ‘Hindu victimhood’, at least in three possible ways. First, Hindus are presented as a homogeneous nation-state community with a unique and distinct culture. Hindu belief in multiple gods and goddesses is articulated as a distinctive feature of Hinduism to create a defining binary between Hindus and Muslims.

Second, the marginalisation of Hindus is demonstrated by producing quantifiable data/evidence. The Hindu Human Rights Report 2017 is an example of this political strategy. This report records the violation of human rights of Hindus in India. It argues that despite being a numerical majority, Hindus are treated as second-class citizens. In order to justify this claim, atrocities faced by Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are also included in the crimes-against-Hindus list.

Third, Hindutva groups construct what political theorist Partha Chatterjee calls the two imaginary domains of politics. The inner domain is defined as a realm of Hindu faith and culture where the state is not allowed to intervene. The Hindutva positions on Babri Masjid and Sabarimala stem from this inner domain of politics. However, this is not the case with the outer political domain, where Hindutva unequivocally invokes legal-constitutional discourse. The demand to recognise Hindus as a minority in eight States is an example of this selective use of the Constitution and law.

Despite establishing this discourse of hatred and violence, Hindutva forces failed to provoke Muslims to create a large-scale riot-like situation in the last five years. Issues like 'love jihad', 'ghar wapsi', Ram temple, and even the ban on triple talaq could not generate riots. In this hostile communal atmosphere, a new style of violence was invented, however — the lynching of Muslims. A few Muslim individuals were killed to create a powerful impact. It was very easy to mobilise a mob of unemployed youth in the name of Hindu pride, especially in the cow-belt region.

Interestingly, the government did not condemn this new form of anti-Muslim violence. On the contrary, Bharatiya Janata Party leaders not merely justified such events but also offered legal and political support to the accused. It began in September 2015 when Mohammad Akhlaq was lynched in Dadri, and his son Danish was brutally beaten up for allegedly eating and storing beef on Eid. Union Minister Mahesh Sharma, who was also the MP from Gautam Buddha Nagar, did not condemn this incident. He described the Dadri killing as an "accident", visited the house of the main accused and avoided any contact with the family of victim.

Former Minister of State for Civil Aviation Jayant Sinha evoked this line of argument differently in 2018. Mr. Sinha provided legal aid to the main accused involved in a lynching case in Jharkhand. When a fast-track court accepted the bail of the eight accused, he welcomed them at a public function. Justifying his move Mr. Sinha argued that the court had granted bail to the accused upholding the fairness of justice and, therefore, as an elected representative of people as well as a Union Minister, he was entitled to honour the "due process of law".

The Prime Minister maintained a strange silence on all this for a long time. In June 2017, he finally said "no person has the right to take the law into his own hands". Although he denounced cow vigilantism, Mr. Modi did not recognise the lynching of Muslims as a specific form of anti-Muslim violence. He reduced it to a law and order problem.

These political reflections, it seems, created the impression that lynching Muslims is a natural social phenomenon and the ruling establishment subscribes to the discourse of Hindu victimhood.

If the new BJP government is concerned about the myth of fear among minorities, it should systematically dismantle the mechanism that has actually created an atmosphere in which violence on religious lines has become normal and acceptable.

Of course, killing innocent Muslims is certainly a law and order problem. We do have a few laws to deal with such incidences of violence. But we certainly do not have an order.

Hilal Ahmed, an Associate Professor at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi, is the author of 'Siyasi Muslims: A story of Political Islams in India'

Please enter a valid email address.

It opens the window for India to take advantage of economic opportunities in the geopolitical

space

Join our online subscriber community

Experience an advertisement-free site with article recommendations tailored for you

Already a user? [Sign In](#)

To know more about Ad free news reading experience and subscription [Click Here](#)

or Please whitelist our website on your Adblocker

END

Downloaded from **crackIAS.com**

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com

CrackIAS.com