

RISING TIDE OF EXCLUSIONARY POLITICS: VIOLENCE AGAINST MUSLIMS IN INDIA

By

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(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)



According to Pew Research Survey, India is home to more than two hundred million Muslims,¹ making it predominantly the largest minority group in the country. For years, India has celebrated its diversity and thriving pluralistic society. However, a recent report by Human Rights Watch (HRW) has expressed deep concern over the state of minorities in the country. The report states, “attacks continued against minorities, especially Muslims, even as authorities failed to take action against BJP leaders who vilified Muslims and BJP supporters who engaged in violence.”² The report came a few days before 23rd February 2021, marking the first anniversary of the New Delhi Clashes. The clashes were one of the worst incidents of communal violence faced by the city over a decade. They culminated in the death of 53 people including 40 Muslims³ in the aftermath of protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) 2019. Ever since then, the situation for minorities, especially Muslims in India has only escalated under the BJP regime.

1 Stephanie Kramer, "Key Findings About the Religious Composition of India," Pew Research Center, last modified September 21, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/09/21/key-findings-about-the-religious-composition-of-india/>

2 "World Report 2021: Rights Trends in India," Human Rights Watch, last modified January 13, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/india#7ebcf0>.

3 Beyza B. Donmez and Shuriah Niazi, "Human Rights Watch Accuses India of Targeting Minorities," Anadolu Ajansi, February 19, 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/human-rights-watch-accuses-india-of-targeting-minorities/2150298>.

The ill-treatment of Muslims is the new norm in India. The entire month of October is replete with incidents of violence against Muslims. On 10th October 2021, members of the far-right organization Bajrang Dal barged into an event in Indore and accused the organizers of promoting “love-jihad.” The organizers were penalized by this group for allowing non-Hindus to participate in a Garba event⁴ – an event to celebrate the Hindu Festival “Navaratri” dedicated to the Hindu goddess, Durga. Clashes broke out at the event and consequently, four Muslims were arrested by the Police to “restore peace.”⁵

Similarly, 5th October witnessed a clash over something as trivial as flags of two different colors i.e. saffron and green in Kabirdham, Chhattisgarh. Within 48 hours, the altercation morphed into communal tensions which culminated in vandalism. As a result, a mob of 3000 right-wing Hindu fanatics, while chanting the slogans of “Jai Shri Ram” attacked numerous homes and vehicles of Muslims causing severe damage to their property and lives. This Hindu mob not only defied the curfew imposed by the administration but also pelted the local law enforcement bodies with stones. The entire episode rendered dozens of civilians and police officers injured.⁶

Previously, in September 2021, the Muslims in Assam faced an eviction drive where more than 1300 families were compelled to leave their homes and live in makeshift houses made up of tin. “Land” is the bone of contention in Assam between the state and the people where BJP is constantly targeting Muslims living in the area. Assam is home to over 12 million Bengali Muslims. These locals are now being labeled as “encroachers,” “intruders” and “illegal immigrants” by the government. The issue in Assam, though in legal terms, is about freeing the government land from encroachment; however, Muslims in Assam have been living on the “government land” for ages without any title deeds and have invested their energy and blood in the soil to make a home and live out of it. Therefore, without any tangible resettlement plan, any evictions taking place under the eviction spree are completely arbitrary⁷ with little to no recourse for the people. Furthermore, during this entire eviction process two people, including a 12 years old,⁸ have lost their battle to life. In one of the many violent incidents in Assam, a photographer stomped the face of a dying man, Moin-ul-Haq.

⁴ "VHP and Bajrang Dal Activists Allege 'love Jihad' at Indore Garba," *The Times of India*, October 12, 2021, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/indore/vhp-and-bajrang-dal-activists-allege-love-jihad-at-indore-garba/articleshow/86954548.cms>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Gargi Verma, "Argument over Flags Erupts in Communal Violence in Chhattisgarh's Kabirdham," *The Indian Express*, October 6, 2021, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/curfew-in-chhattisgarh-town-following-clashes-25-detained-7554541/>.

⁷ Sadiq Naqvi, "'They Started Shooting': Assam Muslims Recount Police Killing," *Al Jazeera*, September 29, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/29/assam>

⁸ Editorial, "Violence During Assam Eviction Drive is Born out of Divisive Politics. Govt Must Reach out," *The Indian Express*, September 25, 2021, <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/editorials/assam-government-bengali-muslim-community-eviction-drive-7532914/>.

The video of the incident went viral over social media unraveling before the world the true face of intolerant and extremist India.

This persecution of minorities in India has raised questions about New Delhi's democratic credentials across the globe as well. In 2020, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (IRF), an independent government agency classified India as a "country of particular concern," in its latest report. The report states, "The national government allowed violence against minorities and their houses of worship to continue with impunity, and also engaged in and tolerated hate speech and incitement to violence."⁹ It is pertinent to note that it is the lowest ranking ever granted to India by IRF.

It also becomes imperative to understand how is the Modi regime managing to get away with all these violent acts? The answer is simple: it takes entire systemic machinery to discriminate against a group of people. Previously minorities, especially Muslims have faced discrimination in employment, education, and housing, however, the situation has only aggravated with time where BJP has deployed every tool at its disposal to target Muslims. For example, a 2019 report on the "Status of Policing in India" by Common Cause, a non-governmental organization, showed that "about half of the police personnel (in India) reported that Muslims are likely to be naturally prone towards committing violence."¹⁰ The irony of this finding could not be starker where those responsible for ensuring the safety and security of everyone have an inherent bias against the largest minority group living in the country.

One in two police personnel feels that Muslims are likely to be "naturally prone" towards committing crimes (%)

<i>"In your opinion, to what extent are people from the following communities naturally prone towards committing crimes..."</i>				
	Very much	Some-what	Rarely	Not at all
Upper-caste Hindus	6	27	32	24
OBCs	5	28	34	23
Dalits	7	28	30	24
Adivasis/tribals	5	26	31	27
Muslims	14	36	25	17

Note: All figures are in percentages and rounded off. Rest of the respondents did not answer.

Source: Status of Policing in India Report, 2019

⁹ US Commission on International Religious Freedom, Annual Report, April 2020, 20. https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF%202020%20Annual%20Report_42720_new_0.pdf.

¹⁰ Common Cause, POLICE ADEQUACY AND WORKING CONDITIONS A STUDY OF PERFORMANCE AND PERCEPTIONS STATUS OF POLICING IN INDIA REPORT 2019, (Delhi: Common Cause & Lokniti, 2019), 120. https://www.commoncause.in/uploadimage/page/Status_of_Policing

Even Genocide Watch issued a Genocide Alert for India in 2020 for the treatment of minorities especially Muslims in Assam and IIOJK. According to the alert, India has completed the first eight stages of the genocidal process and is only two steps away from meeting the criterion of complete genocide, as identified by the founder of the genocide watch.¹¹

Gone are the days of exterminating an entire population through concentration camps. The new modus operandi for genocide involves lynching, mob violence, and stripping people of their right to political participation through state laws and machinery. BJP's consistent anti-migrant and anti-Muslim policies have widened the gulf of mistrust and suspicion between the Muslim population and the state. Its exclusionary politics have sown the seeds of hatred necessary for proceeding towards the next step which might be imminent given the precarious state of affairs for Muslims in the country.

¹¹ Genocide Watch, Genocide Watch is issuing a Genocide Alert for India Administered Kashmir, (Genocide Watch, n.d), https://d0dbb2cb-698c-4513-aa47-eba3a335e06f.filesusr.com/ugd/137a5c_b8365ad3aa0346bf9e7df3c63fdade57.pdf.