

MUSKAN & ALLAHU AKBAR: THE FORTITUDE OF AN INDIAN GIRL

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



Source: *India Today*

Introduction

On February 8, 2022, a young Muslim girl named as Muskan Khan, became a symbol of heroism and courage as she stood her ground in the face of terror-inducing right-wing thugs from the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). She adamantly repeated the slogan “Allahu Akbar” (Allah is Great) in response to the chanting of Jai Shri Ram (Hail Lord Ram) as she continued to walk gallantly to her class. Muskan Khan is a second-year student of B.Com. at the PES College in the city of Mandya in the Indian state of Karnataka. Her fortitude amidst of being surrounded by saffron terrorists made her a top-trend at *Twitter*, where hashtags like #Sherni (Lioness) and #AllahuAkbar continues to dominate.

In the aftermath of the unfortunate incident, the state authorities have ordered to shut down all schools and colleges for three days in order to diffuse the situation. However, it is pivotal to explore whether the incident was spontaneous or is there any specific pattern of behaviour prevailing in contemporary India driven by intolerance, hatred, and violence. Previously, in December 2021, a group of Hijab wearing Muslim girls were barred to enter their classroom. *Al Jazeera* noted that “When 18-year-old A H Almas and two friends walked into class on a December morning, the

teacher immediately shouted at them: “Get out.”¹ The latter incident clearly reveals a certain level of hatred. Barring students from entering the classroom and making such derogatory comments are not justifiable in the name of “social harmony.”



Figure 1: “The photo of the girls sitting on the stairs of the college that went viral on social media.”²

Why the incident took place: Social Harmony or Destroying Culture

As early as January this year, the Karnataka Government decided to put a ban on wearing of headscarves and ordering a uniform dress code for the school and college female students. However, such an initiative disguised as bringing ‘social harmony’ was a clear violation of the rights of minorities to wear a dress that best suited their culture. Despite cultural aspects, covering of head is a religious cum socio-cultural norm/obligation for Muslim women. Moreover, the collective culture of South Asia reveals that women usually cover their heads, as such can be seen in Sikh as well as Hindu women. Also, the Christian missionary women also cover their heads to show their religious commitment.

Who’s Who in Karnataka

The root of the Hijab controversy is the BJP Government in the state of Karnataka where the Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai, and the Governor Thawar Chand Gehlot, both belong to the right-wing BJP. The latter is relentlessly pursuing the Hindutva ideology to make India a “Hindu Rashtra” or a Hindu Nation, where there is no or little concept of religious tolerance and harmony.

¹ Rushda Fathima Khan, “Muslim Girls Wearing Hijab Barred from Classes at Indian College,” *Al Jazeera*, January 18, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/1/18/india-karnataka-muslim-college-students-hijab-ban-udupi>

² Ibid.

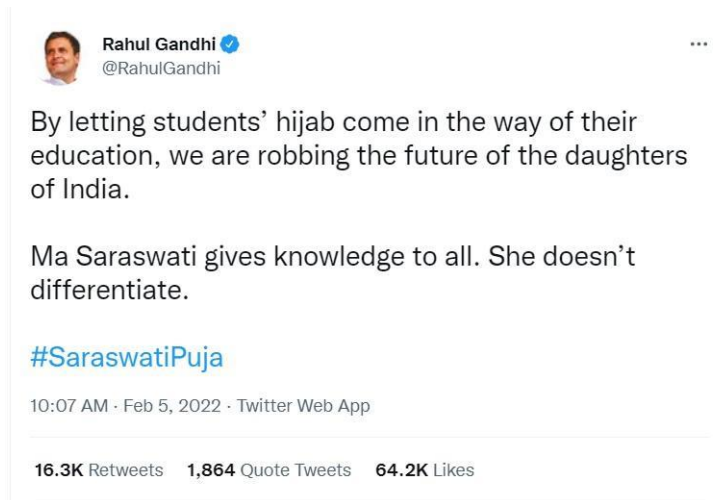


Figure 1: A tweet by Indian National Congress leader and member of Indian Parliament Mr. Rahul Gandhi.³



Figure 2: Pakistani activist Malala Yousafzai tweeted.⁴

³ “Rahul Gandhi,” *Twitter*, February 5, 2022, <https://twitter.com/RahulGandhi/status/1489828107641053188>

⁴ “Malala,” *Twitter*, February 8, 2022, <https://twitter.com/Malala/status/1491061297718435844>



Figure 3: India Today interviewed Muskan Khan.⁵

Muskan Khan & Gurmehar Kaur

The brave Muskan has reminded us of Gurmehar Kaur. The latter stood up against the right-wing extremists of Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) in Delhi University in 2016-17. It is worthy to remember that Gurmehar's father Captain Mandeep Singh (Company Commander of 4 Rashtriya Rifles of the Indian Army) died on August 6, 1999, in a battle with the Kashmiri freedom fighters. However, Gurmehar "was trolled on social media for saying not Pakistan, but war, killed her father."⁶ More or less like Muskan, in 2017 Gurmehar was twenty years old and she did not hesitate to confront the extremist Hindus. It is horrible that she had to leave Delhi on the threats of "rape and murder." Congress leader Rahul Gandhi praised Gurmehar by saying that "Against the tyranny of fear we stand with our students. For every voice raised in anger, intolerance and ignorance there will be a Gurmehar Kaur."⁷ The same is feared regarding Muskan and her Hijab wearing fellows. It is possible that she may come under threats and extremist groups could harm her and her family.

⁵ "IndiaToday," *Twitter*, February 8, 2022, <https://twitter.com/IndiaToday/status/1491005151314087939>

⁶ Manjeet Sehgal, "All about Gurmehar Kaur's Father Captain Mandeep Singh, Who Was Killed in Operation Rakshak in 1999," *India Today*, March 1, 2017, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/gurmehar-kaur-captain-mandeep-singh-ramjas-college-delhi-university-abvp-operation-rakshak-963397-2017-03-01>

⁷ "Who Is Gurmehar Kaur? What's the Ongoing #SaveDU Campaign All about? All Your Questions Answered," *The Indian Express*, February 28, 2017, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/who-is-gulmehar-kaur-whats-the-ongoing-savedu-campaign-all-about-all-your-questions-answered-4547653/>



Figure 4: Gurmehar Kaur's screenshot.⁸



Figure 5: A screenshot from Gurmehar Kaur's video that went viral.⁹

Analysis and Afterthought

Today's India under the right-wing leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi has become a living hell for non-Hindu minorities, especially Muslims. Arguably, denying a nation of its cultural practises is the beginning of a larger agenda to fake and fade its identity and to gradually blur the lines of

⁸ "Solidarity To Gurmehar Kaur," *Counter Currents*, February 28, 2017, <https://countercurrents.org/2017/02/solidarity-to-gurmehar-kaur/>

⁹ "Who Is Gurmehar Kaur? What's the Ongoing #SaveDU Campaign All about? All Your Questions Answered."

being a distinct nation. History reveals that such tools are used on a massive scale to reduce nations into mere communities and groups with marginal identifiable indicators.

It is quite worrisome that previously Southern India was somehow safe from communal activities. However, with BJP presence in Karnataka and its Hindutva ideology to turn Gandhi's secular India into an intolerant and violence-ridden right-wing India, the Hijab controversy can be argued as the horrific opening of a new dark beginning.

It is appreciable that many voices from within India supported the courage of Muskan and her fellows for their fortitude in the face of extremists. Political figures like Rahul Gandhi and Asaduddin Owaisi also extended their vocal support. Also, secular dissident voices from within India, disagreeing with the master narrative have little or no space in India. Seemingly in Modi's India, only social media platforms are available for such debates and arguments. It is encouraging that internationally acclaimed influential women like Malala Yousafzai also expressed solidarity with the Hijab wearing girls of India.

Conclusions

Muskan Khan is not just a person, but a symbol of fortitude; however, hitherto, she is also a victim of harassment. It is fortunate that her bravery attracted media attention and she could defend herself. Distressfully, we may never know of the countless such cases in today's India where people belonging to minorities face saffron extremists of the ruling BJP of PM Narendra Modi. It is possible that Muskan and her family like Gurmehar Kaur will have to leave Karnataka and to relocate somewhere else due to threats.

The Pakistani leadership wishes to have normal relations with India; nonetheless, with the growing intolerance and hatred towards minorities, the dream of a peaceful and prosperous South Asia could be in tatters. With such policies, India will eventually become a hub of Hindu terrorism with a potential to induce terror to the worldwide Hindu diaspora. Also, such genocidal policies could bring India and its neighbouring Muslim majority Pakistan to an untoward situation or skirmishes at the Line of Control (LoC) or at the international boundary. It is to be remembered here that Hindu monk Yati Narsinghanand Giri called for a Muslim genocide in India at a meeting of extremist Hindus in January this year. The Genocide Watch has issued an alert for a coming genocide of Muslims in

India.¹⁰ The President of *Genocide Watch* Gregory Stanton emphasised PM Modi to stop it from happening.¹¹

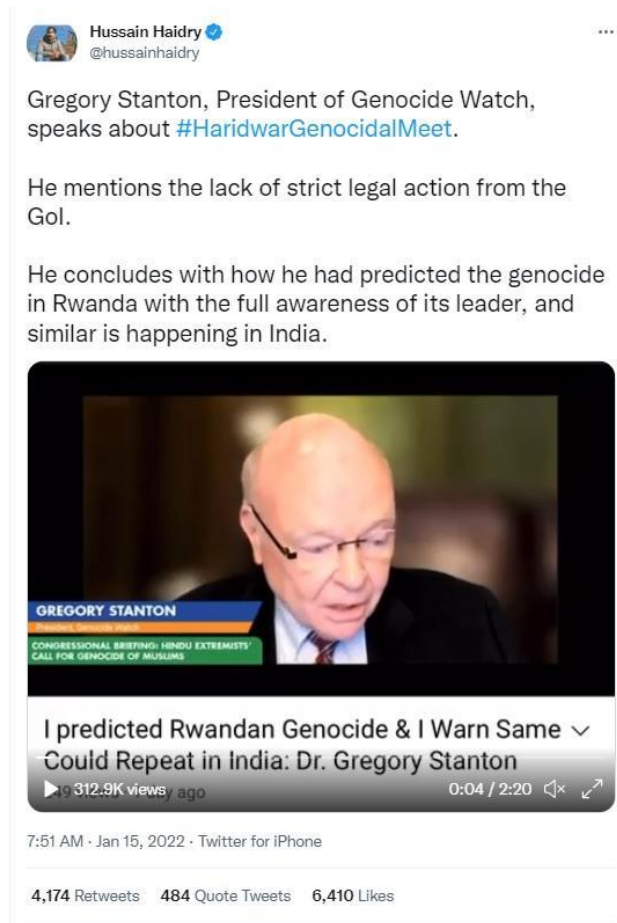


Figure 6: Gregory Stanton, President of the *Genocide Watch*.¹²

¹⁰ "Genocide Alerts," *Genocide Watch*, 2022, <https://www.genocidewatch.com/countries-at-risk>

¹¹ Karan Thapar, "As PM, Modi Has a Moral Obligation To Denounce Hate Speech: Gregory Stanton," *The Wire*, January 21, 2022, <https://thewire.in/communalism/full-text-gregory-stanton-karan-thapar-narendra-modi-haridwar-hate-speech-genocide-india>

¹² "Hussain Haidry," *Twitter*, January 15, 2022, <https://twitter.com/hussainhaidry/status/1482183557162233860>