EXPLORING THE LANDSCAPE OF ISLAMOPHOBIA STUDIES IN INDIAN CONTEXT: A REVIEW OF RECENT LITERATURE

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A B S T R A C T

This academic paper explores the developing Islamophobia research landscape and provides a thorough account of current scholarly developments in the area. Understanding Islamophobia's forms, underlying causes, and effects is crucial for academics, policymakers, and society at large because it continues to be a serious global issue. A corpus of current literature on Islamophobia is synthesized and examined in this study using a systematic methodology. The review starts out by clarifying the philosophical underpinnings of Islamophobia and the numerous forms it might take in diverse sociocultural contexts generally, and specifically the Indian context. Hence, in order to fully understand the intricacies, this study reviews contemporary works that examine the sociocultural and political origins and effects of local Islamophobia industry, emphasizing the necessity for nuanced, context-specific analysis and interdisciplinary approaches.

INTRODUCTION

The term "Islamophobia" carries a lot of meanings. Around 1920, it underwent its first development in France in a colonial setting. The term "Islamophobia" was originally used in the 1997 Runnymede Report. In this study, Islamophobia was broken down into eight distinct components, ranging from the idea that Islam is an immutable monolith to its intrinsic violence and inferiority to the west. This report impliedly acknowledged the racialization of Muslims, which converts hatred of Islam into hatred of those who identify as Muslims. Islamophobia is a phrase used to characterize a situation that would otherwise go unnoticed, according to those who favor its use (Sayyid, 2014). Islamophobia is therefore prized as a means of formulating a plan to lessen the injustices meted out to Muslims. Islamophobia encompasses a wide range of behaviors that go beyond its usual definition of hate of Islam or Muslims and arises in response to the problematization of Muslim identity. Islamophobia must be viewed as a challenge to Muslims' ability to identify as Muslims and present themselves as such in future.

Islamophobia is a complex phenomenon that involves more than just sporadic outbursts that reflect the social or psychological makeup of the perpetrators; rather, it manifests itself in particular groups. Islamophobia can be used in a variety of contexts to describe situations that are influenced by certain cultural, economic, and historical variables (Sayyid, 2014). Islamophobia has taken many different forms in India, including hate speeches, lynchings, mob violence, mosque vandalism, the destruction of Muslim-owned businesses, and heightened surveillance of Muslims. Additionally, Islamophobia has been firmly institutionalised through state institutions and legal frameworks. The direct result of such violence has been the increasing ghettoization and segregation of Muslims, limiting their access to socioeconomic prospects as they are already on the margins of marginalisation. Islamophobia has dramatically increased in India since the BJP took office in 2014 (Thompson et al., 2019).

Since India's independence, Muslims have been marginalised, according to the Sachar committee Report (2006). Indian Muslims have fallen to the bottom of the social and economic ladder due to their long-term marginalisation. In addition, a Post-Sachar Committee assessment from 2014 said that Muslims continue to suffer disproportionately because of limited access to healthcare, inadequate educational opportunities, economic hardship, and insufficient political participation. The COVID-19 virus was recently portrayed as a Muslim menace and a religious invasion meant to infect the Hindu people. Media outlets portrayed this as "Corona Jihad" or "Corona terrorism," which, according to some claims in Indian media, Muslims employed on purpose to spread disease (Thompson and Kanjwal,2020). At the state and societal levels, discrimination against Muslims is present in India. Muslims now get their privileges from adhering to Hindu majoritarian values rather than the Indian Constitution. As long as they adhere to Hindu traditions, they are regarded as true Indians. In Indian society, where social inequality has always been significant, otherization

might be considered as a normalising phenomenon (Kaul,2020). The British colonialists' orientalist agenda, which reduced Muslims' identities to their Muslimness, caused society's divisions on the basis of religion to widen after they arrived in India. This division became increasingly apparent with the emergence of Hindu nationalism in the 1920s, which led to a surge of Islamophobia. (Ushama,2020). Islamophobia is a term used to describe prejudice and bigotry against Muslims, Islam, and their religious practises in the Indian setting. The discourse about Islamophobia that is pervasive in India combines issues of politics, religion, and nationalism. Any claim of Muslim identity is viewed as a danger to the nation's secular structure. In India, a social and political climate has been established in which it is customary to attack someone because to that person's religious affiliation. The anti-Muslim agenda has permeated more deeply into official institutions, where it is actively contributing to the creation of Islamophobic policies. (Beydoun,2017).

The political landscape of India has radically shifted since the BJP took office. Muslims are painted as anti-Hindu and accused of failing to uphold India's secular identity. The majority of the 53 people murdered in the riots in Delhi in February 2020 were Muslims. Right after Kapil Mishra, a BJP MP, made a divisive statement about anti-CAA protestors and publicly endorsed using violence against them, there was unrest. Witness testimonies and video footage from the riots demonstrated that police assisted Hindus in escalating violence against Muslims (Human Rights Watch, 2021). In addition, Amnesty International Report titled "Human rights in Asian pacific: A Review of 2019" in its study details how the BJP, through arbitrary measures, drove 2 million people to the verge of statelessness by abolishing Jammu and Kashmir's special status. The report also examines the anti-Muslim laws that the BJP passed after taking office. An amendment to the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) now makes it possible for the government to label someone a terrorist. The government uses the law's overbroad and imprecise definition of a terrorist to imprison many regular people and activists, particularly Muslims. According to the research, Muslims are being murdered over beef, and most of those responsible for these atrocities are found not guilty by juries. The introduction of bills like the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAA) can be viewed in the context of the institutionalisation of Islamophobia. (Connah,2021)

In this perspective, this paper examines some of the important works on the general theme of Islamophobia and particularly looks into its symptoms and social manifestation in Indian context. The selected works are examined thematically and analytically. This review article attempts to put these academic works in greater context of global Islamophobia. It is not in scope of this review article to examine the works critically or get into detailed accounts while discussing the themes. So, this article keeps to its main objective of providing an account surveying the landscape of literature on the theme of Islamophobia in Indian context.

DEFINING ISLAMOPHOBIA: AN OVERVIEW OF THE SCHOLARLY OPINIONS

There is significant variation when it comes to the definition of Islamophobia. Authors like Lee et al. (2009), Abbas (2004), and Zuquete (2008) defines Islamophobia as the fear of Muslims or Islamic faith where people make blanket judgements about Islam. According to Stolz (2005) Islamophobia is a rejection of Islam, Muslim groups, and Muslim individuals on the basis of prejudice and stereotypes. It may have emotional, cognitive, evaluative as well as action-oriented elements (e.g., discrimination, violence). In a study titled "Defining and Researching Islamophobia" in-depth studies on defining and quantifying Islamophobia have been conducted by Bleich. He draws the conclusion that the concept of Islamophobia is still relatively new in the social sciences. The phrase's meaning isn't frequently understood, nevertheless. To comparing levels of Islamophobia to levels of other categories like racism, anti-Semitism, or xenophobia across time, place, or social groups is therefore exceedingly difficult. Over time, the concept of Islamophobia has changed from being primarily political to one that is increasingly used for analytical purposes. Researchers use the term "Islamophobia" to describe the origins, prevalence, dimensions, intensity, causes, and effects of anti-Islamic and anti-Muslim emotions (Bleich,2012).

According to Allen (2016) "Islamophobia is an ideology, similar in theory, function and purpose to racism and other similar phenomena, that sustains and perpetuates negatively evaluated meaning about Muslims and Islam in the contemporary setting in similar ways to that which it has historically, although not necessarily as a continuum, subsequently pertaining, influencing and impacting upon social action, interaction, response and so on, shaping and determining understanding, perceptions and attitudes in the social consensus – the shared languages and conceptual maps – that inform and construct thinking about Muslims and Islam as Other. Neither restricted to explicit nor direct relationships of power and domination but instead, and possibly even more importantly, in the less explicit and everyday relationships of power that we contemporarily encounter, identified both in that which is real and that which is clearly not, both of which can be extremely difficult to differentiate between. As a consequence of this, exclusionary practices – practices that disadvantage, prejudice or discriminate against Muslims and Islam in social, economic, and political spheres ensue, including the subjection to violence – are in evidence. For such to be Islamophobia however, an acknowledged 'Muslim' or 'Islamic' element – either explicit or implicit, overtly expressed or covertly hidden, or merely even nuanced through meanings that are 'theological', 'social', 'cultural', 'racial' and so on, that at times never even necessarily name or identify 'Muslims' or 'Islam' – must be present." Islamophobia is valued as a way to provide a strategy for the reduction of injustices aimed towards Muslims, according to a study conducted by Sayyid (2014). Islamophobia encompasses a wide range of behaviours that go beyond its usual definition of hate of Islam or Muslims and arises in

response to the problematization of Muslim identity. In order for Muslims to represent themselves positively in the future, Islamophobia must be viewed as an attack on Muslims for being Muslims Islamophobia is a complex phenomenon that involves more than just sporadic outbursts that reflect the social or psychological makeup of the perpetrators; rather, it manifests itself in particular groups. Islamophobia can be used in a variety of contexts to describe situations that are influenced by certain historical, economical, and cultural variables. He contends that it is necessary to view Islamophobia not in terms of its ostensible components but rather in terms of the variety of its manifestations. Islam can be practised in different ways depending on the social, cultural, and historical context, which influences how Islamophobia is used to describe a scenario. The origin of Islamophobia has been traced by many scholars like Junaid Rana (2007), Salman Sayyid (2014) and others. The term Islamophobia have many connotations and precisely have developed in France in 1920 in the colonial context. The intellectual foundation of Islamophobia today can be traced to Edward Said's book Orientalism. Orientalism theorizes that the West came to see itself, its cultures, and its institutions as superior to their Muslim counterparts (Said,1977). The term "Islamophobia" first used in the Runnymede report in 1997. In this study, Islamophobia was shown as the result of an interaction between racism and orientalism. The study implicitly acknowledged the racialization of Muslims by equating opposition to Islam with opposition to persons identified as Muslims in modern society (Sayyid,2014). According to Beydoun (2018), in this context Islamophobia is the manifestation of orientalism.

Islamophobia has appeared in India in several different ways. Although the emergence of Islamophobia and its relationship to Hindu nationalism have not been thoroughly investigated, some recent studies have concentrated on some aspects of Islamophobia in India. Prashant Waikar (2018), in a recent research, notes that Hindu nationalism is an ideology built on otherization. In addition to engaging in physical acts of violence, Hindutva portrays the past of Muslims' reign in the subcontinent as a time of unparalleled brutality and attacks Muslims symbolically by portraying Muslim men as vicious and barbarous. In this situation, Hindutva is intentionally anti-Muslim. According to him, the ideology of Hindutva labels Muslims as foreign invaders and believes that historically people of South Asia have been held together by the collective consciousness of shared Hinduness. A version of Hindu nationalism promoted by those believing in Hindutva or Hindu-Rashtra is characterized by strong majoritarian characteristics. The groups demonize minorities and brand opposition as anti-national, inciting fear among communities and organizations outside mainstream Hindu society (Ahmad,2023). In a different study, Upadhyay (2020) discusses how India's ongoing discrimination against Muslim communities, occupation of Kashmir, support for the war on terrorism, and anti-Pakistan nationalism are all examples of how Islamophobia is reflected in India. He continues by saying that the "Ghar wapsi" propaganda used by Hindu nationalists creates and upholds the universal declaration of Hinduism. They advocate for

Hindus who have historically reverted to Hinduism after converting to Islam or Christianity. A few more studies have been done by Ushama (2020), Kunnummal (2022) and Patel (2022) on the rise of Islamophobia in India. These studies have mainly focused on history and roots of Islamophobia in India. These studies claim that the beginning of British rule in India and the subsequent emergence of Hindu nationalism are the origins of Islamophobia in India. Khaled in a study titled *"Exporting Islamophobia in the Global War on Terror"* has done a case study on India. He adds that Hindu nationalists associate Indian identity to Hindus only and disqualify Muslims on the basis of partition done along religious lines back in 1947. Moreover, millions of Muslims were forced to move from the Indian subcontinent to Afghanistan and its neighbouring areas. This mass migration ultimately played a pivotal role in the establishment of Pakistan as a post-colonial nation (Ahmad & Malik, 2023)

RECENT DEVELOPMENT IN ISLAMOPHOBIA STUDIES: THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF SOME RECENT WORKS ON INDIA

Hindu nationalism and Islamophobia have notably risen in India since the BJP came to power in 2014. Religion and nationalism coexisted, leading to a variety of complex relationships that radically altered India's geopolitical landscape. After reading this examination of recent writings on the subject, readers will have a better understanding of the historical basis of Islamophobia in general and, more importantly, in the context of India. In recent years, Hindu nationalism, which highlights a homogenised Hindu identity as the foundation of Indian nationality, has gained popularity in Indian society. Islamophobia, a phenomenon characterised by prejudice, bigotry, and hostility towards Islam and its adherents, has been on the rise along with this upsurge. To perform a thorough analysis of these ideologies in their current forms, it is crucial to study the development of these ideologies and their interaction across time. Through an examination of the historical roots, ideological underpinnings, expressions in various contexts, and wider consequences, this review paper seeks to give readers a better understanding of these phenomena and their significance within the intricate web of Indian society in particular and the larger wider world. It will also highlight the knowledge gaps in the area and the demand for more study to look into their increasing complexity.

Hindu nationalism has a long-term impact on Indian politics and is not merely a passing trend. 'Hindutva' is the name given to the philosophy that underpins Hindu nationalism. The origins of Hindu nationalism and the prominent proponents of the ideology, such as Savarkar, Golwalkar, Hedgewar, and many others, have been widely discussed by researchers like Christopher Jaffrelot (2009), Chakrabarty (2019), Tanika Sarkar (2022), Jyotirmaya Sharma (2011), and many more. The trajectory of Hindu nationalism has been captured in detailed manner by Jaffrelot in his book *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader*. He highlights how Hindu nationalism was born as the reaction to the Khilafat movement. The main ideologue of Hindu

nationalism Savarkar (2021) wrote the book *Hindutva* as the response to pan-Islamic mobilization of the khilafat movement, where most of his thoughts derive from his deep-rooted hostility towards Islam and its followers. Christopher focuses on the shift in neo-Hinduism from reformism to revivalism, where V.D. Savarkar and Golwalkar are two names that bear highlighting. Their primary concept was that Muslims and Christians were aliens in Hindu-majority India and should be treated as such. Religious minorities should swear loyalty to Hindu symbols of identification because they feel they will best represent the Hindu culture that is associated with India's national identity. Hitler served as an inspiration for their ideology, which advocates applying ethnic nationalist logic to India's Muslim minority, which is a threat to Hindu society.

The emergence of Hindu nationalism was also traced by Jonn Zavos (2000) in his book *The Emergence of Hindu Nationalism in India* in which he has highlighted development of Hindu nationalism as political ideology by mobilizing Hindus by focusing on the ideas like what it means to be Hindu. In a similar study done by Chakrabarty (2019) in his book titled *Hindu Nationalism in India: Ideology and Politics* provides a detailed description of how Hindu nationalism strengthened its roots in India. The author makes a key observation in this passage about how Hindu nationalists are concentrating on defining the fundamentals of national culture and its interpretive bounds in order to regain their sense of identity. The philosophy underlying this notion of cultural awakening was to create a plan where Muslims would be labelled as "the hated other" since they were seen to be to blame for India's demise. He also emphasises how Hindu nationalist politicians have demonised Islam, portraying it as a violent and discriminatory faith. They aimed to demonstrate through their criticism of Islam that Muslims are incapable of being dependable allies in nation-building due to their limited outlook and inability to comprehend the suffering of other people. They appealed to people to stand against the foreign invaders which included Muslims, as they are the ones to be blamed for the 'pathetic condition' of the country. In the similar capacity Dibyesh Anand (2016) in his work *Hindu Nationalism in India and the Politics of Fear* has also mentioned how Hindu nationalism as a movement has portrayed Muslims the threatening other. The central tenet of Hindu nationalism is that the national identity and culture of India are inextricably linked to the Hindu religion as mentioned by the McDonald (2003) in his work, "Hindu Nationalism, Cultural Spaces, and Bodily Practices in India". Paul Brass (2011) in his study, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India,* has traced some detailed outline of Hindu nationalist political activities. He claims it comprises of historical revisionism coupled with the denigration of Muslims as a distinct people, and that it is a foreign body inserted into the core of a Hindu India. He makes the observation that in order to establish Hindu hegemony, Indian Muslims are seen as a threat.

Another important recent work has been done by Tanika Sarkar (2022) in her book titled *Hindu nationalism in India*. She claims that the present

dominant version of Hinduism, known as Hindutva, mixes the pervasive Islamophobia of India's government with the violent nationalism of V.D. Savarkar and M.S. Golwalkar's anti-minority Brahmanicism. Eviane Leidig (2020) on the other hand, describes right-wing extremism while analysing Hindutva in an effort to close a theoretical and empirical divide. It locates the historical roots of Hindutva in colonial India, where it came into regular touch with fascist Italy and Nazi Germany ideologues, who in turn engaged Hindutva in order to promote their own intellectual breakthroughs. Hindutva players had a significant role in the majoritarian identity formation and violent nation-building that took place after India gained independence. Hindutva was not fully "mainstreamed" until the 2014 election of the current prime leader, Modi. In order to construct a narrative that stoked Hindu uneasiness, Modi energised his campaign by harping on themes of a Muslim "threat" to the Hindu majority. As a result, Hindutva has come to represent Indian nationalism.

Jyotirmaya (2011) in his book titled *Hindutva: Exploring the Hindu Nationalism* throws light on the exponents of Hindutva and discusses in detail the works of Dayanand Saraswati, Sri Aurobindo, Swami Vivekananda and Vinayak Damodar Savarkar. Another of his work, *Terrifying vision: MS Golwalkar, the RSS, and India,* is also focused on how Hindutva ideologues, Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) has shaped India. Hindu nationalism draws its ideology from Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). This trajectory has been discussed in detail by Adreson and Damle (2018) in their book *Messengers of Hindu Nationalism: How the RSS Reshaped India.* It provides a thorough explanation of how RSS came to be and influenced India's future debate. The analysis of RSS's quick transformation into a potent political force forms the book's main theme. The authors explain how RSS pushed the nationalist ideology of Hindutva, how it connected to the Sangh Parivar's social inclusivity, and how it influenced how those groups viewed secularism, democracy, and Hindutva. The book also analyses how Hindutva emerged from an odd reading of Orientalism that sees hostilities between Hindus and Muslims as struggles between two groups, with Hindu history being marked by defeat and subjugation. Hindu nationalists aspire to create Hindu supremacy over the state and civic society in reaction to this danger. In the same line of thought, a study is done by Pralay Kanungo (2002) who finds out that in the daily discussions of RSS the 'Muslim oppression' and 'Muslim atrocities' are repeatedly mentioned. In a communalized environment, one's perception of the "other," who are viewed as foes, changes from community consciousness to communal consciousness. According to Kanungo, the RSS has made it simple for them to persuade Hindus of the validity of their anti-Muslim viewpoints by creating stereotypes about Muslims. In order for the BJP to be successful politically, the RSS developed new tactics for organising the Hindu community by engaging in anti-Muslim campaigns that portray Muslims as a threat to India's secular society.

Numerous academics have connected the triumph of the BJP in the general elections of 2014 and 2019 to the development of Hindu

nationalism. In his writings, Ramachandran (2020) examined the violent tendencies of Hindutva ideology and the long history of institutional, cultural, and direct violence against Muslims. Numerous Muslims have been killed by lynching since Modi took office in 2014, textbooks are being revised, places with Islamic names are being renamed (such as Allahabad becoming Prayagraj), and laws that violate the secular foundation of the Indian constitution are being passed. The violence against Muslims in India after 2014 is examined in this article. This study points out the BJP leaders and the mainstream media have played a major role in stereotyping Muslims thus preparing a ground for violence against Muslims. This is seen in the increasing instances of cow vigilantism and the role that demonization plays in inspiring crowds to attack Muslims. Hindutva activists defend this brutality as a religious obligation and in the name of protecting cows. According to a different investigation by Kalim Siddique (2016), the RSS has participated in several incidents of intercommunal violence, which have been attested to by numerous judicial bodies. The author uses the Gujrat riots of 2002 as an example, in which more than 200 Muslims died. Narendra Modi was the Chief Minister of Gujrat at the time of the violence, and it is said that he and his party affiliations actively participated in the planning and execution of the attacks against Muslims.

Frorer (2006) added that the pursuit for power by Hindu nationalists can only be successful in the presence of a perceived threat, real or imagined, to the Hindu majority community. The idea of 'threating other' whose roots and loyalties appear to lay outside of this community is the cornerstone of the Hindu national movement in India. The Muslim community has always been seen as the "threatening other" in the language of the Hindu nationalist movement. This tactic aided the BJP, a Hindu nationalist political party, in gaining power.

CONCLUSION

It is inferenced from the review of the academic literature above that the problem of Islamophobia is deeply entrenched in the historical, socio-cultural, and political culture of Islamophobic spaces in general and in this case, it is also correct for Indian context too. In-depth research has been done on this phenomenon's numerous facets, offering insight on its historical origins, socio-political underpinnings, and impact on the everyday lives of Muslims in India. These studies have made it clear that there is a need for critical discussion, policy changes, and grassroots efforts to combat Islamophobia and advance interfaith cooperation. The goal of this paper is to lay the groundwork for further research into this occurrence and to take action to solve the issue before it negatively impacts a sizable section of the Indian population.

Since, India is essentially a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic country where people speak hundreds of languages and live a diversity of religious identities, it is incumbent to witness identity differences and cultural divergences. To not let these differences be the breeding grounds for any kind of xenophobia- islamophobia being the most prominent one, there is a

need to further the studies on islamophobia from various perspectives-sociological, political, economic, anthropological, psychoanalytical, and theological. Most of the studies cited here have been majorly delving into socio-political and economic-cultural aspects of this problem. There is a dire need to focus on the other aspects of the problem as well to analyze the issue of islamophobia in its totality, to ensure national social cohesion remains unharmed, and sense of citizenry and constitutionalism remains intact.

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