HINDUTVA AND THE MUSLIM SUBJECT

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Dismayed by the increasing violence and socioeconomic exclusion affecting the Muslim community in India, the Muslim leadership decided to hold a gathering (in the city of Lucknow) of Muslim leaders and community representatives from the political, religious and cultural spheres to address the issues at hand. The purpose of this convention was to address the frustration, demoralization and pessimism affecting Indian Muslims and the apprehensions regarding the safety and security of their lives, property and social footing. *The Times*' report of that meeting ran with the headline "Plight of Muslims in India Discussed – Results of Increased Hindu Nationalism". According to the article, this meeting was held to discuss the "manifold injustices and prejudices" that Muslims in India have been suffering and the "outbreaks of murderous violence against Muslims". The article cites that in the wake of spiralling violence, the leadership of the Muslim community found themselves in a state of "confusion, helplessness, and despair". The Muslim leadership agreed among themselves that the chief cause for this deteriorating position of Muslims in India is Hindu nationalism. They cited five major grievances plaguing the community: Firstly, the absence of government will in curtailing violence or bringing to justice the perpetrators of violence. Secondly, the open and increasing association of Muslims in India with Pakistan and the subsequent suspicion of being in bed with the enemy. Thirdly, the caste consciousness of Hindu society dominating trade and commerce, leading to Muslim exclusion from the economic sphere. Fourthly, the discrimination shown in the employment market towards Muslims. And, fifthly, the growing belief in the public sphere that a Muslim cannot be a proper Indian.

Given the contemporary plight of Muslims in India, one would not be wrong to assume that this meeting of Muslim leaders took place quite recently. However, this meeting in which the above-mentioned grievances were aired was held on 9 August 1964 (*The Times*, 1964). The fact that this puts to the test the commonsensical history and nature of Islamophobia in India is what constitutes the rationale

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for the theme of this special issue. Thus, as an opening salvo, the special issue intends to interrogate the narratives that place the Sangh Parivar and its ideology as an aberration of a secular democratic India and to critique and problematise existing categories, concepts, and importantly, the ontological and epistemological presuppositions they are founded on. It also aims to trace the historical conventions and contexts within which narratives and meanings are produced and a hegemonic project articulated. These meanings arise from a complex interplay of the discourses we find ourselves embedded in, and our purpose here is to uncover the genealogy of sedimented discourses and to identify and construct alternative discourses.[1] But not all narratives are recognized or given credence, and this is starkly evident in the narratives of Muslim subjects as they are often subsumed, censured or erased and attempts at assertion are often met with categorisations of fundamentalism or extremism. More often, nationalism, national identities, national cohesion and integrity, national development and national security are the altars on which Muslim subjectivity is sacrificed.

This antagonism between Muslim narratives and the nation-state is best illustrated when examining the spatial reconfiguring of modern Delhi. Since its founding by the Delhi Sultanate in the thirteenth century to the end of Mughal rule in the nineteenth century, the city of Delhi has occupied an important place in Muslim political memory. Touted as *Qubbatul Islam* (sanctuary of Islam), historically, the city was a haven for Muslim elites and scholars migrating from Persia and Central Asia reflecting a Muslim collective identity (Kumar 2010: 100). A community's collective identity is enshrined in its body of beliefs, rituals and institutions and in the public preservation of monuments and sites of historical reminders that acts as catalysts for a potential recall. In his study of the medieval ruins of Delhi, Vivek Anand Taneja documents the erasure of Muslim histories and captures the scale and agony of this erasure as recorded in Maulana Ata-ur-Rahman Qasimi's *Dilli ki Tarikhi Masajid* (The Historic Mosques of Delhi 2001). Muslim homes, shops, and businesses were taken over by the state under the purview of the Custodian (of Enemy Property) Law and sold to those from the Hindu and Sikh communities migrating from the newly formed Pakistan for considerably low prices. More devastating was the Indian state's decision to completely efface the Islamic landscape of Delhi. Mosques, graveyards, tombs and sacred sites were completely demolished against the appeals of the Muslim community to render Delhi a virgin territory. Bureaucratic offices, centres of governance and cultural institutions were built by the Indian government over the rubble of Muslim collective memory.

Taneja cites an anecdote from Maulana Qasimi's book about a conversation Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (the only Muslim cabinet minister in the secular government) had with Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru relaying both his and the

Muslim community's concerns about the demolition of Muslim sacred spaces. Nehru's reply to Azad was that "half of Delhi is graveyards and mosques. Our schemes will fail if we don't have room to build" (Taneja, 2013). Nehru's reply is an apt metaphor to illustrate that the construction of India requires the destruction of Muslim identity and its corresponding symbols and sites, thus capturing the scale and nature of the institutional erasure of Muslim subjectivity. Taneja further shows where a prominent Tughlaq-era mosque figured in the pre-partition Delhi guide map now stands the *Sahitya Akademi* and *Lalit Kala Akademi* (Taneja 2013). Nothing remains there to indicate that a 700-year-old mosque once stood where today India's premier cultural institutions thrive. Here, one cannot but remember Malcolm X's denouncement of the Pilgrims, "We didn't land on Plymouth Rock ... Plymouth Rock landed on us!" (Haley and Malcolm X 2007: 205) and tweaking it into Muslims didn't land on India … India landed on them!

Now, when using Muslims and India in a statement, be it an academic study, a newspaper article or even a social media post, there is the assumption of the indubitable presence of the Sangh Parivar and their ideology of Hindutva influencing that equation.[2] That the Hindutva discourse aims to erase any semblance of Muslim subjectivity is axiomatic and recognised as common sense. Hence, the special issue chooses not to dwell specifically on the threat Hindutva poses to Muslims. The reason for dispensing with Hindutva's othering of Muslims is not only due to the voluminous genre of academic output, literature and commentaries dealing with it, but primarily due to two reasons. Firstly, this genre's emphasis on Hindutva as a parenthesis (as mentioned earlier). This outlook uses religion as the primary category in its analytical arsenal, thus placing itself on a presumed neutral epistemological vantage point. The ramifications of this are that the same category of religion is also used to measure and discipline Muslim attempts at political subjectivity.

In the genre of anti-Hindutva literature and rhetoric that exceptionalises the Hindutva discourse, the rise of Hindutva poses the only clear and present danger for Muslims and the corollary that the condition of Muslims pre-1990s wasn't as bad as it is today. This relies on the historical presupposition of India as a secular democracy in the Nehruvian tradition until the ascendancy of Hindutva to a position of national influence in the 1990s and then one of total dominance in 2014, i.e., Hindutva as an aberration. Hence, the conceptual privileging of the Nazi template as an analytic for framing Hindutva as a form of fascism to distinctly mark it as an aberration from secular democracy. In addition, the use of the category religion contributes to Hindutva being framed as a form of fundamentalism. Despite the volumes of contemporary academic contestations challenging the demarcation of religion and politics, leading one to question if anyone "still believes in the myth of secularization'", it is nevertheless reified into all ideas of

governance in India (Casanova 2011: 11). The loose nature of these conceptu-alisations leads them to be deployed as and when necessary, irrespective of the discursive terrains involved. Inevitably, attempts at Muslim political subjectivity are seen as the Muslim equivalent of Hindutva and are manifest in it being branded as Islamofascism and Islamic fundamentalism.[3]

Secondly, this genre, with its emphasis on Hindutva, limits its framing of Muslims under the category of minorities. Muslims are imagined as mere collateral in Hindutva's onslaught on secularism, the only language frame is victimization and any attempt at political subjectivity or assertion is branded as extremism. For example, in their study, Gayer and Jaffrelot cite a Muslim author who claims "that there is no future for Muslims in this country" to emphasize the magnitude of resentment against Hindutva prevalent among Muslims in India (Jaffrelot and Gayer 2012: 315). In the corresponding footnote to this statement, while citing the relevant source, Gayer and Jaffrelot provide a precautionary note accentuating the author's affiliation with the "extremist organization" *Jamaat-e-Islami Hind*. They state that his views are "extreme" in nature and are "not representative of Indian Muslims" at large (Jaffrelot and Gayer 2012: 379). This demarcation of Muslims based on the explanatory power of extremism into unacceptable extrem-ists and acceptable moderates in a work studying Muslim marginalisation is an indicator of the disciplining of Muslims even within studies supposedly trying to highlight Muslim marginalisation and anti-Muslim violence. Hence, one of the focuses of the special issue is the Muslim subject and there are two reasons for placing Muslims in India at the heart of the discussion on subjectivity and the use of "Muslims in India" rather than the widely used "Indian Muslims".

The first reason is the category of "Indian" itself. As a term solely in itself, "Indian" contains within it various subjectivities that are considered intrinsic to it and not in need of being marked exclusively but, as a prefix, it subsumes and determines those subjectivities that are not considered intrinsic to it. For example, the term "Indian Muslims", with Indian as the prefix to situate the Muslim, is used very commonly and a simple Google search of "Indian Muslims" would yield thousands of hits with the phrase dominating media headlines, posts, talks, videos and in the titles of several academic essays and books. On the contrary, a similar search for the phrase "Indian Hindus" pales in comparison and one is yet to find any academic study that has it in its title. This demonstrates the inclusiveness of the Hindu identity and the exclusiveness of the Muslim identity in the term Indian and its uncritical acceptance point towards its hegemonic power. So, the questions that beg to be asked are: what does Indian mean in its secular nationalist deploy-ment and what type of historicity do these meanings rely on?

Secondly, in the studies that are critical of Hindutva or any studies on India for that matter, India and Hindu are considered as being immanent in history.

This is reflected even in the works of those who are widely accepted as opponents of Hindutva. For example, in Jawaharlal Nehru's *The Discovery of India* (1946), Amartya Sen's *The Argumentative Indian* (2005), Shashi Tharoor's *Inglorious Empire* (2017), etc., India as a timeless formation, and its accompanying Hinduness with fully formed Hindu identities, is considered a pre-given. In this discourse, Muslims are framed as invaders who came over, settled and ruled over swathes of this entity India until the colonial period, i.e., Muslims who were there came to an India that was already here. Although the Hindutva revisionists have taken the Muslim invader to unparalleled heights, the seed of its historicity was sown by the stories narrated by secular nationalism. It is owing to the hegemonic nature of the secular nationalist narrative that it is qualified as the truth rather than being subject to historical veracity and analysis. It is hegemony that renders certain narratives as being truer than others. When we look at the secular nationalist narrative, we witness the power it wields over other narratives and the source of this power is its wide uncritical acceptance over the last century.

As this setting is of narratives, I would like to narrate a personal story that illustrates this disciplining of Muslimness in the anti-Hindutva rhetoric. The Solidarity Youth Movement, a grassroots Muslim activist organisation based in Kerala, organised a public event titled "People's Tribunal on Terror Cases" in June 2014. This tribunal aimed to question the constitutional validity of the anti-terrorism legislations and shed light on the gross human rights violations and the subsequent securitization of the Muslim community. Following a spate of terrorist attacks, the Indian government enacted anti-terror legislation, namely the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), in 2008. Like all anti-terror laws in different parts of the world, it operated on the suspension of normative rights and legal protection accorded to individuals turning on its head the legal dictum that a person is innocent until proven guilty. On the contrary, with provisions that allowed arrest and indefinite detention – on the basis of suspicion and hearsay, the absence of bail and plea processes and the detainees being predominantly Muslims – UAPA's legal dictum was guilty until proven innocent.

As part of the Solidarity Youth Movement's activism, they engaged with the families and legal representatives of several Muslim youth who were charged and detained under these terror laws. The famous Russell Tribunal, organised in 1966 to evaluate the American military intervention in Vietnam, was the inspiration for organising a public tribunal on these terror cases. The structure of the tribunal composed of a jury of eminent human rights activists, legal experts and public intellectuals, who would listen to the testimonials of legal representatives of those detained and their family members and would subsequently produce a unanimous verdict on the human rights abuse and violations due to these terror laws. Due to the sensitive nature of the event and the fact that it was taking place just a few

weeks after Narendra Modi's ascendancy to power, the event generated media interest and much controversy leading to a packed auditorium of attendees to witness the proceedings.

The jury members were well-known for their anti-Hindutva activism and writings, commitment to human rights and often taking up the cause of Muslims and other minorities. After spending the better part of a day listening to the testimonials and legal opinions, the jury was to take a recess to consult among themselves to produce the tribunal's findings. There were no serious disagreements between the jury members regarding the draconian nature of these laws, their excesses and their impact on the Muslim community. The sole point of contention turned out to be the inclusion of the term Islamophobia in the jury findings. The idea was to include the statement that these laws operated on the basis of Islamophobia, thereby introducing the concept to wider public circulation. A couple of prominent jury members voiced their vehement opposition to the inclusion of the term Islamophobia in the tribunal findings and even threatened to quit the jury and walk out of the event if others were to persist with including Islamophobia. Finally, the organisers had to succumb to their demands and reluctantly agree to remove the term Islamophobia from the tribunal findings to save the event from being disrupted at the last moment.

What transpired was that an event to highlight the securitisation of the Muslim community in India, organised by Muslims, was disciplined by secular human rights activists and experts on what terms or concepts Muslims can and cannot use to narrate their own stories.[4] This forecloses debates surrounding political legitimacy and discussions around Muslim autonomy. Although Muslims in India have been the victims of industrial-scale violence, political erasure and socioeconomic marginalisation, the perpetrators were always identified as right-wing Hindu groups often facilitated by the Indian state. Secular activists and thinkers were always at the forefront of defending both Indian secularism and Muslims in India. Hence, even though this incident was not the first instance of such disciplining or erasure of Muslims, for me as a Muslim, it was a recognition of the conceptual affinity between the disciplining modalities of the Indian secular discourse and the Hindutva discourse.

Critical Muslim Studies as Counter-Framing

This special issue appears in ReOrient because of the way in which engagements with Critical Muslim Studies inform our understanding of how problematising and unravelling the production of hegemonic discourses by centring Muslim subjectivity. The reason for this centring is not because those involved in shaping Critical Muslim Studies are predominantly Muslim. Instead, Muslim subjectivity or the debates surrounding it signify a series of interrogations in which Islam and Muslims exist as an impediment that needs to be contained or overcome.

> Thus, the Muslim Question is a mode of enquiry that opens a space for interventions: cultural, governmental and epistemological. How a fifth of this planet's population comports itself in the world depends on its answers. The Muslim Question encompasses the difficulties associated with the emergence of a distinct political identity that appears to be transgressive of norms, conventions and structures that underpin the contemporary world (Sayyid 2014: 3).

Thus, Critical Muslim Studies differ from the study of Muslims, which is principally based on anthropological presuppositions. Whenever we analyse or try to make sense of something, we always do it through a frame of thinking or understanding, similar to donning a pair of spectacles. Even when we assume we aren't wearing any such frames and claim to have an unbiased understanding or view; it only reinforces the hegemonic nature of that particular frame that deems it so natural or neutral that we are unaware of its particularity. In short, there is no moment when one is without a frame of seeing, understanding and articulating. Frames structure social reality and create meaning by linking individual perceptions to more significant structural and ideological processes. They help organise our lived realities and determine our attitudes and perceptions on myriad issues (Ortega and Feagin 2016). When it comes to Islam and Muslims, it is often the frame of Eurocentrism that is employed. Through a Eurocentric frame, Muslim subjectivity, histories, modes of knowing and understanding are either erased or positioned as inferior, backward and sometimes as subversive, whereas a Critical Muslim Studies counter-framing endeavour prioritises:

> As a first premise that for a people to survive in struggle it must be on its own terms: the collective wisdom which is a synthesis of culture and the experience of that struggle. The shared past is precious, not for itself, but because it is the basis of consciousness, of knowing, of being. It cannot be traded in exchange for expedient alliances or traduced by convenient abstractions or dogma. It contains philosophy, theories of history, and social prescriptions native to it. It is a construct possessing its own terms, exacting its own truths (Robinson 2000: 33).

In this context, Eurocentrism is to be understood as an epistemological category whose function is to clearly demarcate between what is European (people with a history, philosophy or theory) and non-European (people without a history, philosophy or theory) and subsequently, the West becomes the sole authority at history-making or storytelling (Sayyid 2017). As the hallmark of Critical Muslim Studies is a rejection of Eurocentrism, its counter-framing functions by identifying its particularity and exposing the limits of the frames we consider natural, neutral and unbiased. This process of counter-framing is not about raising a critique of the normative in the literal sense.

Following Foucault, we understand that critique should be much more than simply stating that something is wrong or problematic. A critique should put to the test the foundations on which our assumptions, familiar and taken-for-granted modes of thought and practice rest. It should "show that things are not as self-evident as one believed and to see that what is accepted as self-evident will no longer be accepted as such" (Foucault and Kritzman 2013: 154-155). Hence, a Critical Muslim Studies project can be summarised as the articulation of a new language, a language that helps articulate a Muslim subjectivity enabling Muslims to write their own history and tell their own stories. It is from within this framework of critique that the articles in this special issue have attempted to reorient understandings of Hindu nationalism and the framings that emerge from a particular arrangement of Muslim subjectivity post-independence facilitated through a preference for a so-called secular interpretation of Islam. The articles trace the construction of these presuppositions, thereby aiming to provide a more extensive historical and complex political background to the debates on what is happening to Muslims in India.

For instance, the foundations of Indian identity formation and the regulation of Muslimness vis-a-vis the secular underpinning of the Indian constitution are critically evaluated in positioning India as a racial state in the opening article by Sheheen Kattiparambil. The argument factors in theorisations of race and how it is integral to the formation of the nation-state. The article conducts a critical survey of certain provisions of the Indian constitution to reveal the nature of racialised governmentality. The often-asserted claim by the secular political platform in its opposition to Hindutva is the distinction that is made between Hinduism and Hindutva. Muhammed Shajahan's article interrogates this rhetorical move to exceptionalise the BJP and Hindutva from the secular mainstream by looking at the juridical processes that legally define Hindutva and its relationship to Hinduism, Hindu culture and secular sovereignty of the state in India. The article examines how the Indian state is required to make an ontological enunciation of Hinduism, which is uncommon in the case of other faiths and traditions. The emphasis of this article is "Hindutva verdict" authored by Chief Justice J.S. Verma in 1995. Sreenanti Banerjee's article brings into light the transgression of a female Muslim subject in contemporary India, helmed by a secularising state apparatus. It does so by studying an incident of religious conversion and marriage (of a Hindu woman to Islam) that took place in 2016. The article examines the legal and judicial discourses of the court case and at the core of this argument is how both the contemporary Indian State in its Hindu ethnonationalist dispensation as well as the liberal-secularising, Indian feminist critique of that State, i.e., two ideologically opposed entities but united through the governmental apparatus of concepts and theories.

The question of how Muslim affiliation is articulated and contested in genres of performance is the focus of Jaclyn Michael's article. It theorizes Muslim belonging in India and reveals the important role of performance in constructing notions of religion, community, and nation. The context of the article is the public and private performances of Muslim identities in response to the official exclusion of Muslims from the premises of citizenship in the 2019 CAA (Citizenship Amendment Bill) legislation. It illustrates a new trend in how Indian Muslims are understood in terms of their relationships to the nation and society, unapologetically confronting persistent stereotypes in culture and scholarship that render being Muslim and Indian a contradiction. Abdulla Moaswes' article, interestingly, examines how global iterations of Hindu nationalism impact global Muslim subjectivity, and in this regard, the article assesses the position of Palestine and its liberation struggle within the global Hindu nationalist imaginary. It argues that the way Hindu nationalism constructs Indian Muslim and Palestinian subjectivities as being analogous and connected through tropes of them as invaders and terrorists aligns with the broader imperialist constructions of Muslim subjectivities. Analysing in detail the historical, political and legal discourses around the demolition of the Babri masjid, the central question addressed in Tahir Jamal Kiliyamannil's article is how the Muslim narrative shifted from one rooted in religious reverence in the nineteenth century to one anchored in secular symbolism resulting in the regulation of Muslimness. The article uses the Babri *masjid* dispute to demonstrate how the conduct of Muslims is self-disciplined so as to align with the logic of the modern nation-state and the grammar of existence granted through constitutional avenues. This illustrates the expulsion of Muslims from the political community, leaving them without any legitimate political claims.

The articles in this special issue present propositions and critiques that are seldom seen in the larger genre of literature on Hindu nationalism or Hindutva or studies on Muslims in India. By exploring this theme through various disciplinary avenues and conceptual contestations, this issue aims to bring to the fore broader deliberations on political identity and Muslimness. Collectively, these articles challenge the discursive practices of Indian nationalism and secularism by locating the debates surrounding Muslim political subjectivity and inviting further theoretical interventions to create fields of intelligibility, thus enabling the conditions for reorienting Muslimness.

Notes

1 Drawing from Edmund Husserl, Ernesto Laclau employs sedimentation as a concept to understand the stabilisation of meaning constituting an objectivity without any consideration of how meaning was originally constituted, i.e. the routinisation and forgetting of the origins; see: (Laclau 1990: 34).

2 The Sangh Parivar is an umbrella term to refer to the family of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). It encompasses the BJP, movements that include the Arya Samaj, the Hindu Mahasabha,

the Vishva Hindu Parishad, the Bajrang Dal, the student organisations (ABVP) and workers' union movements (BMS).

3   Manfred Halpern was one of the earliest to use the neologism Islamofascism to portray the Muslim Brotherhood (Halpern 2015). Other notable works that have deployed this category (Rodinson 1978; Laqueur 2006; Barry and Schwanitz 2014). In these works, the argument is premised on supposed similarities to Nazism in terms of organisational structures, an alleged lack of critique against Nazism in the Muslim world, the relationship of Amin Al-Hussein to Hitler, etc. In India, Sitaram Yechury has used Islamofascism based on these arguments to describe the *Jamaat-e-Islami Hind*. For critical contestations of these arguments, see: (Brynjar 2006; Gershoni 2014; Motadel 2014; René 2012).

4   Two years later, the Solidarity Youth Movement organised the first-ever conference on Islamophobia in India in 2016, which was attended by international academics working on Islamophobia and national experts on Muslims in India with several young Muslim researchers and academics presenting their papers. The conference proceedings were published as a book the same year. Over the years, several Muslim organisations have organised talks, seminars and produced publications on Islamophobia such that it is now widely accepted as a concept to name and describe the condition of Muslims by mainstream Muslim organisations and movements and a section of the secular intelligentsia. For a robust analysis of the theoretical foundations of the activism of the Solidarity Youth Movement; see: (Kiliyamannil, Thahir Jamal 2022).

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