Islamophobia Studies in India: Problems and Prospects

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ABSTRACT: This article aims to situate the problems and prospects of thinking about critical Islamophobia studies in the context of India. In doing so, first, the article traces the technical and political impasses to the emergence of critical Islamophobia studies in India by looking at the problem of denial of Islamophobia with respect to Indian nationalism and at the same time the rise of a new security paradigm in the context of the global war on terror. A new approach on critical Islamophobia studies, which is cognizant towards the mass desire of Islamophobia, is introduced in order to understand its popular base in India. Secondly, the limitations of the framework of communalism in developing critical Islamophobia studies are analyzed in light of the biopolitical aspects of state and society in India. Finally, the article proposes a preliminary roadmap to a new approach to understand the politics of Islamophobia as an active desire based in practice in India and introduces a new typology of precautionary and proactionary Islamophobia in the context of rising Hindu nationalism by locating its normative and derivative dimensions.

key words: Islamophobia in India, Hindutva, Hindu Nationalist, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Babri Masjid, decolonial horizon

INTRODUCTION

The definition of Islamophobia is often heterogeneous and diffuse, without a coherent and unified essence. A contingent position on Islamophobia that is valid in one context may not be useful in another context. The only consensus among the competing definitions of Islamophobia is that Islamophobia does exist (Hafez 2018, 212).[1] The geo-political and discursive context plays a determinative role in the definition of Islamophobia. However, a majority of the debates around the definition of global Islamophobia have happened in the context of what Salman Sayyid (2014, 15) described as a "Western plutocracy."[2] Efforts to define Islamophobia in the context of countries such as India, where Muslims are counted as minorities, are quite limited in number and scope. This article aims to analyze the problem of Islamophobia in India by looking at the impasse in the emergence of Islamophobia in the context of dominant approaches on nationalism and communalism and also propose new ways to look at the problem of Islamophobia in India by taking into consideration the biopolitical turn of state and mass desire of Islamophobia.

The comparative lack of studies on Islamophobia in Muslim- minority contexts in the global South, such as India, does not imply that there is no Islamophobia in those contexts. Though there are efforts to claim certain phenomena, movements, events, discourse, and acts as Islamophobic in India, there has been less of an effort to explain why this is so, whether from a comparative perspective or in its specific context. There exists a methodological dilemma regarding how one can approach Islamophobia in the Indian context, where Muslims are a minority with varieties of social, political, and religious experiences at different scales, without undermining its global,

national, urban, community, body, and emotional aspects (Najib and Hopkins 2020, 451). A cursory glance at the overview of critical Islamophobia studies[3] on the Western Muslim immigrant perspective—for example, the works of Farid Hafez (2018, 210–25) and Brian Klug (2012, 665–81)—is sufficient to prove that Muslim- minority contexts such as India are under-theorized in the paradigm of Islamophobia studies and demand serious attention.

The most visible form of Islamophobia in the context of India has been propagated by militant Hindu nationalist groups such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)[4] for the last hundred years. A pre-planned effort to psychologically influence the 'innocent masses' is the major premise of this particular approach to Islamophobia. However, Islamophobia is not limited to the politics of certain visible agents and their conscious efforts to build Islamophobic narratives that further divide the Indian society and alienate Muslim minorities. And it is important to understand the psychic investment of the masses in desiring Islamophobia through active participation in it (May 2013, 13–26). While studying these visible agents, one should not forget the problem that the structure of Islamophobia in India is related to and lies in modern discourses of politics, community, caste, gender, nationalism, state, religion, and economy that create the racialization of Muslims.

There are four parts to this article. The first part, split into two sections, is a discussion on the common problems in addressing Islamophobia in India from a global critical Islamophobia studies perspective. The two sub-sections look at the phenomenon of Islamophobia denial in the context of nationalism and provide an analysis of the prevalence of the theory of communalism, more specific to the Indian context, as an alternative to the theory of Islamophobia. The second part expands on a new approach to Islamophobia based on the mass practice of Islamophobia as a practice of desire. The third part of the article looks at the biopolitical turn of Islamophobia in India by further complicating the secular-communal logic in India. The final part of the article proposes another trajectory of Islamophobia in the context of India in terms of two diverging and converging practices: pro active Islamophobia and precautionary Islamophobia.

THE GLOBAL TRANSLATION OF ISLAMOPHOBIA

The global proliferation of Islamophobia offers an array of competing resistances and hermeneutical exercises from multiple contexts of Muslims. While Islamophobia proliferates through various facets of the Muslim subject— based on gender, caste, sexuality, religion, race, minority, majority, class, nation, etc., Muslims from differing contexts are forced to reckon with these multifaceted and competing definitions because of the globalization of the Muslim question (Grosfoguel 2012, 9–33). Thus Muslims cannot refuse to engage with a range of different voices or points of view about Islamophobia, even if only some of them appear relevant to the local contexts of a section of Muslims. Though there may be privileged contexts over others,[5] the globality of Islamophobia cannot be settled in a single and obvious meaning. It exceeds the particularities of the context it proliferates because of its interminable connection to colonialism, modernity, and racism and the world made in its wake (Maira 2011, 110–11). In short, Islamophobia is a phenomenon that was made planetary through modern colonial racist structures with the active collaboration of national elites, who imposed multiple modes of subaltern consensus in the local context.

The term Islamophobia has entered the everyday vocabulary of contemporary politics and scholarship. However, Islamophobia as terminology is not a neutral sociological category; it presupposes and creates different political relations in different contexts, and this becomes a site of contestation (Sayyid 2014, 14). The existing studies on Islamophobia show that the

linguistic reduction of political meaning to dictionary definitions is not going to work in a political context (Beshara 2019, 74). The argument is not that there is no relevance to tracing out the meaning of Islamophobia in a particular context. The meaning of Islamophobia is created in different contexts and circulated through different historical circumstances (Allen 2010, 5–6). The search for meaning in the context of Islamophobia is not devoid of political discourse (Jackson 2005, 148).

Why Muslims use a particular word to name their political reality is a significant matter worth pondering in relation to the political discourse of Muslims. Islamophobia is a terminology that has developed through many historical contexts (Sayyid 2014, 1–3). Thus the relevant question here is: how can this terminology be creatively and dynamically used for a new politics of resistance to the oppression, exclusion, otherization, and injustice against Muslims (Beshara 2019, 75). Moreover, the effects of analysis and theorization of Islamophobia are important in the ways in which Muslim politics and ethics embrace, transform, and contest pluriversal political horizons like that of anti-imperialism/anti-colonialism, decoloniality, feminism, global left politics, liberation theology . In that sense, rather than defining Islamophobia in a purely technical way, it is better to view the theory of Islamophobia as part of the political struggles to examine and transform oppressive social orders, in the particular context of Muslim politics (Abbas 2019a, 66).[6]

The theorization of Islamophobia from the global North demands attention to questions of translation because of the normative position of the English language that makes it easy to write about the issues of Islamophobia in the global North. The Euro-Atlantic world shows minimal effort to resist English dominance in the critical studies on Islamophobia. The translation and adaptation of Muslim transnational vocabulary is one of the main areas of contestation regarding the politics of Islamophobia in Muslim- minority contexts such as India,[7] where the politics of translation plays a huge role in minority politics and language in relation to the caste Hindu majoritarian-normativity (Mitchell 2009, 181).[8] For instance, take the case of Islamophobia in Kerala, a south Indian state where Muslims are a minority. As in most other Indian states, Islamophobia is a foreign word in the context of Kerala. *Islam bhayam* or *pedi*[9] is the immediate and literal translation of Islamophobia. This direct translation of the word reduces Islamophobia to a mere social psychological fear about Islam. Such translation thus becomes a way to circumscribe the political and critical structural analysis of state and society, as implied by the theory of Islamophobia, and replaces it with a foreshortened theory of individualized social prejudice.

The Denial of Islamophobia in the Context of Nationalism

In the contemporary context of Hindu fascism[10] and nationalist mobilization aided by the logic of security, the global paradigm of Islamophobia becomes politically intriguing for at least two reasons: it releases the local contexts from the iron grip of nationalism by opening up local contexts to the decolonial horizon. At the same time, it recasts the critical Islamophobia studies paradigm to be capable of a unique critique of neocolonialism and nationalism simultaneously (Osuri 2017, 2436).[11] The dominant currents of Indian nationalism often work to establish the absence of Islamophobia in India either by erasing the Muslim question or by normalizing Islamophobia through the secular-communal paradigm. Though focused on the French context, Reza Zia-Ebrahimi's work (2020, 315–46) describes the politics of denying the existence of Islamophobia in different parts of the world and he describes the denial of Islamophobia itself as an act of Islamophobia. There are three specific issues to consider in the debate on the politics of "denial of Islamophobia" in the national context of Islamophobia.

First, the universalization of theory and its relationship to Islamophobia in a specific national context is one of the ways in which Islamophobia denial is expressed. A section of Indian civil society has been suspicious of the importation of global debates of Islamophobia to particular contexts, as it displaces their own equivocation in analyzing the ascendancy of anti-Muslim movements and logic in India. This equivocation sees the deployment of anti-Muslim politics as a mere problem of competitive communalism among different religious or social groups. Communalism then becomes a sectarian hindrance to national unity that is at the heart of anti-Muslim violence. The structural conditions of Muslim minorities in modern nation-states under the securitization paradigm—as critically implied by Islamophobia studies—are thus rendered invisible (Cox, Levine and Newman 2009, 3–8).

Secondly, the selective appropriation of global notions by the dominant nationalist discourse while denying the same political right to Muslims in a particular context becomes another model of denying Islamophobia. When Muslim women wear a veil or a certain dress code out of religious and other reasons, the exclusionary nationalist discourse would seek to raise the issue of non-native and globalized Islam[12] and blame it on Arab or foreign influence on local cultures (Osella and Osella 2007, 8–9). Such arguments are hinged on framing Muslim global relationships in light of suspicion and cultural treason, concealing the fact that global and local cultural interaction is a typical process in the world. The nationalist anxiety around local cultural practices argues for defending or protecting locals from global cultural practices because dominant nationalist anxiety wants to impose certain dominant nationalist cultural practices over local cultures.[13] Cultural pluralism from a nationalist perspective is about limiting cultural interactions in a national context by selectively adopting certain local cultures as nationalist culture while degrading others for being particularisms. The global or foreign connection itself is not an issue in a local context, but the problem is with whom and for what such connection gets mobilized, and there lies the conflict with whoever argues for a global understanding of Islamophobia (Koo 2018, 159–92).[14]

Finally, there is an additional dimension to the nationalist position on Islamophobia denial. Islamophobia, according to this, is a foreign English word imported by " Islamists" —those who try to politicize Muslims—to disrupt the peace and unity of the communities of a particular nationalist context (Sibal 2020). It is becoming a charge against those who use the global understanding of Islamophobia to speak about the political rights of Muslim communities in a particular context (Kala 2020).[15] Moreover, the public discourse around Islamophobia is seen as part of the larger agenda of Islamization of the political Islamists. However, nationalist fantasies of a homogeneous and timeless national identity—one that ignores the hybridity that has always been central to nations—do not recognize how their exclusive nationalist positions are never completely outside transnational political contexts (Gilroy 1993, 32–3).

The Security Logic of Islamophobia in India

For last three decades, the logic of war on terror and the institutions and mechanism that create it represents a significant political transformation, in India and globally. Yassin Al-Haj Saleh (2019) uses the term genocracy to refer to the situation where, owing to the crisis of capital and political contradictions, the nation-state turns to the figure of the fantastic evil of terrorism and gains legitimacy through its increasingly repressive and authoritarian transformation. Thus, the war on terror becomes an implicit technique of governmentality by which it structurally asserts its moral and political legitimacy (Stampnitzky 2013, 137). This technique of governmentality is built and perfected on the body and social life of the Muslim population, through global Islamophobia (Sayyid 2014, 19). Through being rendered and racialized as

terrorists and potential terrorists, through a unique and spontaneous convergence of media, law, and civil society, Muslim bodies, subjects, and collectives become excluded from the domain of social respect and human rights, and through this structural process, the industrial war machine and sovereign metaphysics "restores" balance from the general crisis of politics and economics, away from marginalized subjects and oppressed identities (Puar 2007, 37).[16] Contemporary Islamophobia in India represents a convergence of colonial, majoritarian, and neocolonial hatred of the Muslim "other".

On September 14, 2001, soon after the attack, the then US president George W. Bush delivered a speech declaring that "our responsibility to history is already clear: to answer these attacks and rid the world of evil" (Jones 2012, 8). The former Indian prime minister and RSS ideologue Atal Bihari Vajpayee supported the call of Bush in a speech on the same day by explicitly agreeing with the politics of a global war on terror (Jones 2012, 8)). He said, "Every Indian has to be a part of this global war on terrorism. We must, and we will, stamp out this evil from our land, and from the world." Immediately after the 2008 Delhi serial bombing, the former Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh declared that "We are actively considering legislation to further strengthen the substantive anti-terrorism law in line with the global consensus on the fight against terrorism" (Jones 2012, 59). The visible manifestations of this global security logic of Islamophobia in India are best exemplified through the introduction of draconian laws such as the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA)[17] and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA),[18] the banning of Muslims movements like the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI),[19] and the incarceration of hundreds of Muslim individuals without due process or access to bail after the events of September 11, 2001 (Singh 2012, 420–47; Ahmad 2009, 35–6) .

The new paradigm of national security in the name of the "war on terror" made the Muslim—whether citizen, immigrant, or refugee—a suspected figure or a security threat by constructing the "subject of risk" in different parts of the world (Cox, Levine and Newman 2009, 7). The problem with the security discourse after September 11, 2001 is that it modified the rights discourse of the liberal democracy and the welfare state to make the state of exception or emergency the normal technique of governance (Agamben 2005, 14). While the discourse of rights was maintained, it was also made conditional on the priority of securitization—prominently exemplified in the figure of the Muslim. The theater of immunization from the Muslim "other"—both global and national—became a dominant political objective of the world order after September 11, 2001 (Esposito 2008, 9). The Indian state also adopted the new language of security in the name of terrorism after September 11, 2001 with the support of the global powers to effectively curb the political rights of the Muslim minority and other dissenters of the state (Chatterjee 2006, 129). The quest for Muslim political rights or minority rights was abandoned and criminalized using the language of national security (Ahmad 2017, 116). The protest of the Muslim minority against this securitization in India further intensified the security measures of the state. Moreover, the public discourse is saturated with the language of national security (Ahmad 2017, 117). The media and dominant apparatuses of public sphere speak about Muslim minority politics through the language of security, rather than through frames of citizenship (Ahmad 2017, 117).

Disciplining the social mobility and political expression of Muslims by employing techniques of securitization is part of Islamophobia in the context of war on terror. The security discourse is aimed at depoliticizing Muslims by keeping the Muslim political subject away from speaking about the political rights and collective organization of the society. The reason for Islamophobia is not limited to the manufacture of prejudice and fear or the cultivation of religious misunderstandings about the Muslim minority; it is about the construction of a

Muslim subjectivity. Islamophobia is a form of racialized governmentality, which aims to construct a particular Muslim subjectivity in a particular direction to racialize Muslims or those who are perceived to be Muslims (Tyrer 2013, 104). After the electoral rise of Hindutva, the racialized governmentality of Islamophobia mediated by caste, community, religion, class, nation, and gender has become so pervasive that direct physical attacks against Muslims happen in India with impunity—especially in the form of lynching individuals and organized pogroms—through the political mobilization of RSS and its offshoots from cities to villages[20] (Ahuja 2019, 55). Muslim minorities are at a critical juncture wherein the fascist exterminationist logic has become the dominant political actor in India, controlling the state and a whole host of public institutions. Thus, Islamophobic governmentality is rapidly becoming one with a mass fascist organizing through movements like the RSS.

ISLAMOPHOBIZATION OF POLITICS IN INDIA: BETWEEN DESIRE AND PRACTICE

A short survey on the studies on Islamophobia in the Indian context reveals that the term "communalism" is used interchangeably to describe and translate the events related to Islamophobia (Siyech and Narain 2018, 186).[21] However, there is no serious reflection on such a term that is taken for granted in the literature on Islamophobia in India. The problem with the communalism framework is that it views the Indian mass as ontologically secular and constructs it as a victim of Islamophobic propaganda, rather than as participants in what I call the "Islamophobization of politics." In this schema of communalism, the mass politics in India has succumbed to ideological false consciousness based on religion and caste (hence communal) interests, contrary to their original interests (Panikkar 1993, 24–31). Thus the economic interest of the elites, concealed in the ideology of Islamophobia, is the main problem. The communalism framework ends up arguing that the Indian masses desire the construction of a Muslim "other," but against their own interests (Panikkar 1993, 30).[22] In this framework, therefore, the task of the anti-Islamophobic secular-nationalist framework is to educate the masses about the problem of communalism and to gain consciousness about their true interests.

The domain of Islamophobic desire is located in the cultural superstructure (Panikkar 1993, 30). Hence the cultural resistance at the level of ideological superstructure will help to unveil the economic interest behind communalism. Cultural resistance can uncover and unveil the truth for the mass only if there is a pedagogy of the oppressed. The argument here is that the Hindu right-wing nationalists cover their elite economic interests through hegemonic cultural politics diverting and deceiving the common masses to serve the capitalist class. The function of the secular force is to reveal the communal consensus in the domain of culture by actively interrogating the cultural preferences of the masses and revealing the true economic interests behind the hegemonic cultural production of Islamophobia (1993, 30). In the wake of Babri Masjid demolition by Hindutva forces, K. N. Panikkar (1993, 30) observes: "The secular offensive has necessarily to be two-pronged. First, to stop the advance of the communally convinced, and second, to retrieve the consciousness of the communally mobilized. The first calls for a frontal confrontation with communalism, recognizing that communalism thrives on aggression and lies. It should involve a denial of free space for communal politics and activities." Love jihad propaganda, mob lynching, communal violence, and hate campaigns against Muslims thus become sectarian issues or delusions in the domain of culture rather than genuinely motivated acts of the masses.

By displaying the contradictions of capital and social inequalities visited upon the bodies of Muslims, Islamophobic forces communalize the majority of Indians by creating the other/

enemy hybrid in the bodies of Muslim minority (Teltumbde 2020, iii). By creating the "false" hope of getting rid of the Muslim "other" as a foreign element or national "other" and healing the nation, the majoritarian forces create a division among the vast majority of the oppressed masses in terms of religion or using the binary of Islam versus Hinduism in India. Here, rather than the elimination of Muslims, the ultimate aim of the cultural production of Hindutva is to minimize the struggle against the economic interest of the ruling elites (Puniyani 2020, 81–2). Hindutva is the cultural hegemony of the Brahmanic caste politics mobilizing the mythical identity of Hindu nationalism in the name of a national majority and an authentic culture, serving the corporate interest of the Indian elites, most of whom are Brahmin corporate elites. Hindutva creates a politics of desire at the level of culture to serve the interest of the corporate class in India. The function of the negative desire of Hindutva is to give a false hope of liberation from the Muslim "other" while simultaneously boosting the economic interest of the ruling class. The task of secular nationalism is to reconfigure this negative desire to a liberatory horizon in terms of economic interest. The raw hatred for the Muslim "other" or the productive work of desire in facilitating Islamophobia thus becomes secondary in this process for a greater struggle against the economic interest of Indian elites. The secular nationalist rhetoric in India treats the question— why do the masses desire a Muslim other— as a false political question. The framework of communalism provides insufficient attention to the problem of the state of exception and the securitization of Muslim bodies after the global war on terror.

In summation, Islamophobia must be seen as elementary to power and politics in India and it is a multiplying desire in the body politic of India (Massumi 1999, 116). Islamophobia, and its structural functions at the level of desire as a phenomenon, has to be understood as a constitutive element of social relations in India—that is, all forms of politics are a part of the production of Islamophobia. The multiplications of Islamophobia created by the Indian nation-state and its various biopolitical manifestations are in need of critical appraisal taking seriously the politics of desire in the formation of Islamophobia. In order to avoid the problem of secular idealism, one must look at Islamophobia as a norm rather than a false exception. Islamophobia in India is like a "banal evil," as proposed by Hannah Arendt, because Islamophobia is not only about the practice of fringe groups inspired by the ideological politics of Brahminical Hindutva but also about how ordinary citizens practice and reproduce it as part of the daily routine, seeing it as their self-interest (Arendt 2006). The social surveillance of Muslim food culture, the cultural policing of the space of intimacy of Muslim students in campus politics, the molecular becoming of the lynch mobs, are all part of everyday Islamophobia of the ordinary masses and larger Islamophobization of politics. Even the opponents of Islamophobia (posited as communalism) in the secular and progressive nationalist horizon participate in the reproduction of Islamophobization of politics by being subservient to the structural logic of nationalism, the state-form, and the construction of people in postcolonial India.

BETWEEN BIOPOLITICS AND NECROPOLITICS: ISLAMOPHOBIA AFTER COMMUNALISM

If not a complete abandonment, the discourse of communalism demands at least a critical evaluation in order for a serious study on Islamophobia with respect to critical Muslim political agency. The term communalism limits the critical-structural-analytical scope of critical Islamophobia studies by denying an analysis of power, state, and social formation with respect to Muslim minority conditions. The discourse of communalism sees anti-minority violence as contamination of an unadulterated humanism mediated by the nation. The explanatory power of communalism is such that it is very difficult to move away from its analytical

labyrinth when understanding the issues related to the Indian Muslim minority or marginalized communities in particular. According to historian and noted public campaigner against communalism K. N. Panikkar (2015, 46):

> Communalism is primarily a relationship between communities governed by mutual distrust, enmity, and antagonism which, in due course of time, engulfs all areas of human existence, particularly social relations and political life. Although violence has been integral to communalism, expressed through physical confrontation between the members of different communities, the more overarching manifestation has been its political ideology.

Communalism in India is often publicly understood as a violent conflict between communities in the name of religion, caste, and language (Panikkar 2015, 47). Panikkar (2015, 47) argues further: "But communalism is not confined to violence alone; it is a multifaceted phenomenon of which humanism is the first casualty." The opposite of communalism, for Panikkar, is humanism as a signpost towards a universal identity in the context of the Indian nation-state. Here, humanism is expressed as metaphysics of the commons, but in the form of the identity of being Indian (a citizen), which is argued to transcend linguistic, religious, and caste boundaries. However, modern communalism in India is connected to the history of anti-colonial resistance when the Indian national metaphysics and its claim to universality were challenged within the framework of what Panikkar calls "primordial identities of caste and religion" (Panikkar 2015, 47). The political mobilization within the lower castes and religious minorities that challenges the prefigurative claims of Indian universalism are effectively termed "communalism", which clearly undermines the challenge to upper-caste Hindu mobilization and Hindu majoritarianism. K. N. Panikkar (2015, 49) further argues:

> Muslim communalism, on the other hand, exploited the minority syndrome and anchored its politics on separatism, which was encouraged by colonial rulers. Constitutional arrangements since the Minto–Morley Reforms in 1909 progressively conceded the principle of separation, culminating in the Partition of India. Partition was the outcome of the communalization of both Hindu and Muslim communities.

After the partition of India and prior to the emergence of critical studies on Islamophobia, the term communalism was widely used to describe anti-Muslim violence and discrimination in Indian society and politics against Muslim minorities (Khalidi 1995, 15). However, a critical evaluation by K. N. Panikkar shows that there are severe analytical and political limits to the word communalism, which has a fraught history of multiple meanings, to the extent that it loses its political valency by concealing questions of power and inequality, and by assuming minorities and majorities are equally indexed by the humanism of national citizenship. By equating minority challenges to citizenship and exclusion— using the terms such as "minority syndrome"— with majority violence and practices of exclusion, and by further arguing that the conflict between marginalized communities and dominant communities is symbiotic to each other, rather than a question of power and inequality, the term communalism sacrifices a material analysis of anti-Muslim apparatus in India for an idealistic fidelity to Indian national metaphysics and claims of liberal citizenship.

A brief look at the genealogy of communalism demonstrates that it serves the interest of the Hindu upper-caste normativity of the nation to the detriment of Muslim political agency and autonomy (Tejani 2007, 113). The violence against Muslims is mainly described using the frame

of communalism or communal violence (Khalidi 1995, 17). Tellingly, quite often the resistance of Muslims against their exclusion and oppression is indiscriminately termed communal. The communalism discourse equates a dominant majoritarian group that has traditionally grabbed power and privilege over Muslims and other minority groups through multiple means of hegemony and domination, and further delegitimizes the politics and resistance of the minority, and essentially protects majoritarian dominance. This position on communalism has no handle on the fact that Muslims continue to be the biggest victims of the so- called communal violence in postcolonial India (Khalidi 1995, 17). The normativity of the communalism framework is thus used to hide Muslim abjection by employing a meta-theory of violence without really acknowledging the power dynamics between the dominant and dominated communities.

The framework of communalism also works to establish another problem in relation to Islamophobia. When communalism comes to replace Islamophobia, Islamophobia becomes a deviance from the secular ideals of state and society (Ansari 2016, 62). However, there is no room for the analysis of secular forms of Islamophobia except through the lens of "deviance" of secularism to communalism. The agents and structures of communalism and secularism are essentialized in such a way that there is little space to understand the violence perpetrated in the name of the norm it establishes. In his study of Islam and nationalism, M. T. Ansari (2016, 62) observes, "By positing a secular state and a secular subject, which has to be fashioned from the material of a subcontinent now narrativized and read as a nation in retrospect, and by eliding the notion of difference, Indian secularism breeds communalism." The suggestion is that there is a need to move beyond the binary of communalism and secularism in the analysis of Islamophobia in India. Islamophobia is not another name of communalism. Islamophobia is not the product of the so-called communal forces alone. The secular character of the government or political movements does not guarantee impunity from the problem of Islamophobia (Abbas 2019b, 34). The practice of easily converting and replacing the violence against Muslims as communalism exonerates the secular involvement in the production of Islamophobia, especially the question of secular state violence through law and order regimes, and the logic of a global "war on terror." The activities, the space, and the limits of secular violence against Muslims by the Indian state apparatus should also be analyzed as instances of Islamophobia in India, which communalism theory refuses to do as its vector of anti-Muslim violence is limited to the logic of the victimized Muslim "community."[23]

To understand both the timidity and the unthinking position of communalism framework, one only need to look at the way it understands the biggest expression of violence of the anti-Muslim regime that forms the point of departure to understand Islamophobia in India: the Kashmir question. According to Ather Zia (2019, 53), "In general, the perception of Indian Muslims, even if they did not choose to go with Pakistan in 1947, is of the 'other' in India. Thus the hypervisibility of the Kashmiri body increases because it is not only a Kashmiri body but also a Muslim body, making it doubly killable." Despite the fact that Kashmiris have been suffering military violence, mass debilitation, mass incarceration, enforced disappearances, and total political repression under various Indian governments across the spectrum, the progressive civil society of India—the biggest proponents of the communalism framework—have used the term communalism to forcefully deny the politico-ethical legitimacy of the Kashmiri liberation movement and the desire for freedom from the oppressive rule of India. In fact, most of the proponents of communalism assert that Kashmiri desire for "freedom," or what is popularly known as *azadi,* should only be realized within the confines of India (Upadhyay and Robinson 2012, 42; Mehta 2010, 10–11; Engineer 1995, 2167–8).

However, it is important to recognize a critical distinction between the Kashmiri experience of Islamophobia and the so-called mainland Indian experience (Junaid 2013, 158–90).

For several decades, the Indian Muslim population has experienced the apparatus of Islamophobia mainly through a biopolitical regime of majoritarian norm and discipline, spawning both legal and social regimes of everyday discrimination and ghettoization qua political-economic abjectification of Muslim population (Robinson 2008, 194–200; Umar 2019, 457–77). While exterminationist violence has been frequent, the biopolitics of discipline and exclusion have been the key element of the Islamophobic apparatus in mainland India, and the exterminationism itself can be seen as a product of abjectifying structures of biopolitics (Reid 2006, 29–30).

The necropolitical zone of death and disappearance are the constitutive features of the Islamophobic apparatus operated by the Indian state in Kashmir (Zia 2019, 50). Rather than mere disciplining, the aim has been to enact total repression of the Muslim population (Osuri and Zia 2020, 254). While mainland Islamophobia could be expressed through mass incarceration, hate campaigns, exclusion, discrimination, surveillance, and pogroms, Kashmir in itself is an open prison where dense large- scale presence of army, paramilitaries, and physical surveillance are everyday features of life (Zia 2018, 103–28). The framework of communalism completely falls apart and even appears politically inactive in the question of Kashmir as it conceals the power and violence of the Indian state, and denies the moral-political legitimacy of Kashmiri liberation movements by derogatorily terming them as both separatist and communal. According to Ather Zia (2019, 50–1), Kashmir could be seen as a state of exception, theoretically and normatively in relation to the mainland Muslim experience and "[I]n the state of exception, created by the Indian military occupation in Kashmir, the legal order operates only by suspending the law itself." However, ascendant fascist extermination logic wedded with the global war on terror and biopolitical logic has made the line between biopolitics and necropolitics of Islamophobia increasingly blurred. Pogroms, encounter killings, mass incarceration, extensive surveillance, political repression, have all become part of the shared experience of Islamophobia in India across mainland and occupied territories, in varying degrees, by both state and mass fascist infrastructures (Osuri and Zia 2020, 252). In the theoretical praxis of Islamophobia the mainland Indian experience is seen as coterminous with the necropolitical zone of Kashmir, bearing subsequent ethico-political ruptures in the Indian nation-state. On the other hand, communalism understands the anti-Muslim project in India through the the biopolitical zone of the mainland (Osuri 2017, 2439–40). The Islamophobia paradigm recognizes the violence of Indian universality, and facilitates the intensification of molecular ethico-political antagonism to the molar[24] configurations of nation, state, law, public sphere, and subordinate civil society. In conclusion, by subordinating the study of anti-Muslim apparatus in India to the defense of Indian nationalist humanism, the communalism framework possesses neither the political acumen to respond to the Hindutva fascist ascendancy and its uses of the state apparatus nor the analytical capacity to understand the global mutations of Islamophobic logic operating through empire, war on terror, national security, and structural racism across the world in racializing Muslims or those who are perceived to be Muslims.

THE INDIAN MODEL: PROACTIONARY AND PRECAUTIONARY ISLAMOPHOBIA

The biopolitical production of Hindutva both through its disciplinary and necropolitical performance does not fully explain the Islamophobic desire of the masses in India (Lobo-Guerrero and Dillon 2009, 10–15). An analysis based on the state-form focuses less on the question of desire for a Muslim "other" in producing Islamophobia and limits itself to state. The libidinal investment of the masses in a force that actually works to oppress them demands a close look from the perspective of the practice of Islamophobia in India (Deleuze and Guattari

2003, 31). Such an analysis helps to bridge the gap between the analysis of the state-form and of the fascistic desire of the masses, to understand it as being a compound problem of Islamophobic desire immanent to the Indian nation and postcolonial sovereign logic. Hence, this article proposes two ways to approach the practice of Islamophobia in India. One is proactionary Islamophobia rooted in the exclusion, expulsion, and extermination of the Muslim minority by actively experimenting with new forms of political subjectification through an ever-evolving Hindutva praxis. The second is precautionary Islamophobia, which is an active desire, passively practiced through discrimination, hate campaigns, surveillance, and symbolic violence against Muslims by following from the secular-communal-nationalist paradigm, and the biopolitical logic of discipline exercised by state apparatuses.

Proactionary Islamophobia is about how Indian nationalism and state create the "other" in the figure of Muslim by securitizing and problematizing the body politic of Muslims through constant reconceptualization of the meaning of the figure of the Muslim—security threat, sexual deviancy, cultural infiltrators, abject masculinity, purity and pollution, and many other apparatuses. Proactionary Islamophobia in India is closely connected to the politics of Indian nationalism which demands an elaboration. The politics of Indian nationalism is built through the hegemony of upper-caste Hindu nationalism (Aloysius 1999, 245). The otherization of Muslims and subalternization of Muslims as part of Islamophobia is to maintain the domination of Hindu upper-caste politics of Indian nationalism or Brahminism[25] by creatively reconstructing the figure of the Muslim or the perception of being Muslim (Sarkar 2005, 271). The politics of Hindu upper-caste nationalism is connected to the question of caste internally and the question of Islam externally (Sarkar 2005, 273). There is no Hindu when there is no caste hierarchy divided by multiple castes where Brahmins are at the top and outcastes are at the bottom (Aloysius 1999, 2). National unity is impossible as long as there is caste hierarchy (Aloysius 1999, 208). The function of the construction of the Muslim enemy is to displace the caste hierarchy and to form the fantasy of Hindu unity for the national body political apparatus. The loss of Hindu unity or the loss of purity of the Indian nation is maintained by displacing the antagonism of caste hierarchy to the alleged religiosity of Muslims (Shani 2007, 116). The Muslim "other" becomes the external "other" that unifies the Hindus across caste and the question of caste becomes consolidated through the process (Shani 2007, 149). There is no Hindu without Muslims. Islamophobia is the condition of the possibility of being a Hindu-Indian[26] (Sarkar 2005, 288). The logic of Islamophobia in India is profoundly connected to the politics of Hindu nationalism.[27] Without addressing the question of Hindu nationalism, it is impossible to resist Islamophobia. By following the proactionary logic of Islamophobia, the global securitization discourse and majoritarian Hindu nationalism jointly produce the new politics of Islamophobia in India (Kunnummal and Esack 2021, 1–26).

The reproduction of proactionary Islamophobia happens through a derivative and connected discourse that can be named precautionary Islamophobia. The production of precautionary Islamophobia is happening primarily not through the open call for the expulsion and extermination of Muslims or those who are perceived to be Muslims, but through the civil desire to get rid of the excess of Muslimness and the affirmation of its otherness in the public sphere through the logic of discrimination, lack of representation, and denial of the politics of self-determination. It can come from either a position of neutrality towards Muslims or even from a position of empathy. Though precautionary Islamophobia can feed proactionary Islamophobia, both are different in their practice. Those who are opposed to proactionary Islamophobia may be practicing precautionary Islamophobia even without an explicit anti-Muslim prejudice or programmed political project. The gendered Islamophobia of Indian

feminism or queer movements, the secular determinism of Indian communist parties, or the soft-Hindutva politics of Indian National Congress can be called examples of precautionary Islamophobia (Fernandes 2020, 54–62; Chatterjee 2006, 123; Bhagavan 2008, 39-48). Precautionary Islamophobia may exhibit care and respect for Muslims as long as they are not politically active as Muslims. As we have noted earlier, Muslim victimization is largely in India neutralizing and circumscribing the antagonism of Muslim political agency to state and society through the secular-communal paradigm, and reasserting the primacy of national unity over questions of social justice.

The precautionary logic views proactionary forms of Islamophobia practiced by groups like the RSS as a deviation from the noble norms of national unity. However, the analysis of the role of the state in critical Islamophobia studies shows that, rather than being deviation, these proactionary forms represent the dual convergence and intensification of the desire of Islamophobia in line with the genocratic aims of the state and the majoritarian impulses of the nation.

Through the genocratic logic of war on terror, the distinct experience of necropolitics becomes increasingly blurred in the domain of the state (Mbembe 2003, 11–40). Suppose precautionary Islamophobia represent a limited democratization of the biopolitical management of Muslims. In that case, when the civil society takes up the project of desire, the ascendancy of Hindu militant nationalist groups like the RSS represents the even more massive democratization of the necropolitical-genocratic apparatus of Islamophobia, and Muslim extermination, instead of mere discrimination, becomes a mass exercise not limited by the state monopoly over violence. It is precisely this connection that Islamophobia studies illuminates through its global and critical decolonial analysis of state, society, and politics.

CONCLUSION

The theory of Islamophobia represents not merely an empirical exercise in terms of facts and figures but the critical agency of a new age of Muslim political mobilization. It exists and elaborates its politics at the precise point of the crisis of modern nation-states and the post colonial world. If this Muslim political agency criticizes the humanist, secular, or nationalist commons in India and beyond, it is to elaborate a vision of a just world not animated by Islamophobia and the structural logic that underpins it, locally and globally. This is not to deny the importance of common existence, but to create the space for a line of flight out of the circumscribed humanism/universality of Indian politics, through a cosmopolitan and global outlook in the decolonial horizon for a pluriversal and generic conception of commons outside of the limits of nation, state, and postcolonial liberal democracy and its citizenship ethos and adjacent civil society logic, in and beyond India.

ENDNOTES

[1] There are at least three major approaches to the study of Islamophobia as defined by Farid Hafez (2018). One is the socio-psychological approach that relies on terms such as prejudice or bigotry to define Islamophobia (Hafez 2018, 214). The second approach, informed by critical race theory, is to define Islamophobia as a form of anti-Muslim racism (Hafez 2018, 219). The third approach is the decolonial reading of Islamophobia, which places the politics of racialization of Muslims in the last 500 years of Euro-American colonial power structures and related practices (Hafez 2018, 220). This article views all these approaches as part of global Islamophobia studies. Some recent works on Islamophobia divert from these trajectories and provide a transhistorical essence with the argument that "Islamophobia has always been there as a phenomenon in history since the birth of Islam in the early 7th century" (Iqbal 2020, xiii).

[2] Using the scheme introduced by Salman Sayyid, it is possible to divide the planetary Islamophobic landscape into four different contexts (Sayyid 2014, 14–15): The Muslim-majority contexts (such as the member states of the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC)—with a few exceptions), the Muslim-minority contexts (India, China, etc.), the Western Muslim immigrant contexts (Europe and North America), and the Muslim micro-minority contexts (Brazil, Japan, South Korea, etc.).

[3] For a detailed discussion on the method and practice of critical Islamophobia studies from the context of the United States of America, please see the work of Robert K Beshara (2019, 4–6). Beshara does not explain the method and practice of critical Islamophobia for multiple contexts. His analysis is based on decolonial studies, critical theory, and studies in orientalism.

[4] The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (National Volunteer Organization) was founded on September 27, 1925, in Nagpur, Maharashtra, India by a Brahmin named Keshav Baliram Hedgewar. The racialized understanding of caste and Hinduism was central to the worldview of RSS.

[5] E.g., the recent niqab ban in Sri Lanka becomes less discussed vis-à-vis the French and Canadian niqab ban in the global Islamophobic landscape (Mirza 2013: 303–18; Zine 2006: 239–52).

[6] Tahir Abbas (2019a, 66) in a recent monograph on Islamophobia further suggests that "The challenge of tackling Islamophobia, despite the problems involved in classifying it as a concept, is not one that Muslims can undertake on their own. Muslim groups must work with other religious minority groups facing comparable levels of discrimination, intimidation, violence, exclusion and racialization, helping to reduce the likelihood of counter-competing narratives and wasting resources and political opportunities."

[7] It is interesting to note that "The People's Linguistic Survey of India 2013 mentions that there are over 780 languages in India. Of these 780, around 210 languages belong to north east India" (Dechamma 2014). It is almost impossible to speak about "local" language India without considering the diversity of languages that is excluded by the so-called national mainstream/official languages such as Hindi and Sanskrit.

[8] Lisa Mitchell (2009, 181) observes that "The word most commonly used in Telugu today for the English term 'translation' is *anuvadamu*. Yet it appears that *anuvadamu* has not always been equivalent to the English notion of 'translation'."

[9] *Bhayam* or *pedi* means "fear" in Malayalam.

[10] See works on Indian fascism through the global racialization discourse by Sen (2015).

[11] This article broadly concurs with Goldie Osuri's (2017, 2436) position that, rather than seeking the disjuncture between the promise and failure of post-colonial nationalism and its innate contradiction, the problem of postcolonial sovereignty demands fresh interrogations in the context of India and its relationship to its internal colonial subject population.

[12] Caroline Osella and Filippo Osella (2007, 8–9) argue that "The post-1980s take up of *pardah* has been heavily criticized by non-Muslims as a foreign, not local (*nadan*) custom and an unwelcome innovation attributed to Arab influence via the Gulf. Post-reform changes in dress appear to provoke extreme anxiety, if not resentment, among non-Muslims. Hindu men complain that it is unfair that Muslim men can see Hindu women's bodies while non-Muslims are denied the pleasure of seeing Muslim women's bodies. However, in reality, a white *pardah* dress was in use up until the 1960s, while many older Muslim women can still be seen wearing the old-fashioned style Indian *burqa.*"

[13] The national festivals of India are a case in point. Most of the time, national festivals are criticized for being festivals of certain brands of Hindu upper-caste cultural practice which have been imposed as national festivals

by destroying the diversity of festivals from different local or regional or lower caste or religious minority contexts (Lukose 2009, 182).

[14] Farid Hafez (2018) reflects on the context-specific definition of Islamophobia because Islamophobia is not about the universal presence of Muslims but it is specifically about the politics of those who practice Islamophobia in a particular context: "Islamophobia is about a dominant group of people aiming at seizing, stabilizing and widening their power by means of defining a scapegoat—real or invented—and excluding this scapegoat from the resources/rights/definition of a constructed 'we.' Islamophobia operates by constructing a static 'Muslim' identity, which is attributed in negative terms and generalized for all Muslims. At the same time, Islamophobic images are fluid and vary in different contexts, because Islamophobia tells us more about the Islamophobe than it tells us about the Muslims/Islam."

[15] The position of Sadhana Kala (2020) is a popular narrative: "Muslims are in India for a thousand years and are integrated with the society. But it is easy for radical Islam and Islamists to find footholds among the Indian Muslims. Because Indian Muslims' economic, education, literacy, and employment status, and share in political, bureaucratic, and judicial power structure, is low. They are therefore likely to fall prey to the lure of lucre and other incentives and advance the designs of the Islamists."

[16] Jasbir Puar's (2007, 37) main thesis is that, in the imperial hemisphere, the inclusion of queer, women, and other marginalized subjects into legitimate citizenship was directly accompanied by the war on terror. Here, war on terror was justified as a project of highly civilized countries, which are inclusive and civilized, against the so-called homophobic and misogynistic barbarian terrorists of the Middle East. Genocidal warfare was given rhetorical and political backing through appropriation of feminist and queer challenges to state and society. The body designated as terrorist is seen as fundamentally outside society and civilization, and as deserving no social rights or respect and can be tortured and eliminated at will—without any backlash.

[17] The declaration of POTA was after the attack on Indian Parliament on December 13, 2001 when five or six men drove a white Ambassador car to the Indian Parliament to carry out what is described as a "terrorist attack"—though there are counter-narratives to the story spread by the state agencies (Singh 2006, 116). Following the USA's Patriot Act, the Indian state joined in the global "war on terror" with POTA that sanctioned 180-day detention without charge, presumptions of guilt, vague review procedures, summary trials, and trials in absentia. It is observed that POTA was harsher than the USA Patriot Act. The act was passed by the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party or Indian People's Party) led government—a right-wing Hindutva party—in power (Jones 2012, 56).

[18] The UAPA was first passed by the Indian state to ban organization that is unlawful in 1967. For the first time in the history of Indian state, the central government acquired the power to ban an organization, a power that was earlier limited to the provincial states. Later, after the quashing of POTA, the UAPA was amended thrice in 2004, 2008, and 2012 by expanding the notion of "unlawful activity" and adding new terminology such as "terrorist act". This law targets the freedom of speech, assembly, and organization in the name of national security. Individual liberties or rights were curtailed with detention without trial and bail, arbitrary period of police and judicial custody, the manipulation and purposeful delay of chargesheet for an undetermined period, and allowing the use of custodial confession as evidence (Singh 2012, 420).

[19] The Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) was one of the largest Muslim student movements of India which was established on April 25, 1977 in Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh. After the events of September 11, 2001, the ruling Hindu nationalist party BJP banned SIMI on September 27, 2001 to make it an unlawful association. "In 1977, the number of its core members, *anṣār*, was a mere 132 and that of its sympathisers, *iḵhvān*, 5000. In 1981, *anṣār* numbered 461 and *iḵhvān* 40,000. In 1996, the number of *anṣār* declined to 413 of which 54 were women. Given the absence of data from 1997 onwards, even an exaggerated estimate would not put SIMI's *anṣār* membership beyond 1000 in 2001 when it was banned" (Ahmad 2017, 117).

[20] Hindutva is a distinct form of Hindu militant nationalist mobilization. From a broad anti-caste position, the distinction between liberal Hindu democratic politics and Hindutva of the RSS is another way to conceal the politics of caste by defining and classifying what is Hindu for Indian politics (Omvedt 2011, x).

[21] There are authors who want to remove the term Islamophobia altogether from the political vocabulary to describe the issues and problems related to Indian Muslims (Gudavarthy 2019).

[22] K. N. Panikkar (1993, 30) divides the communalism of the masses into two: "In evolving alternate methods of struggle it would be useful to make a distinction between the communally convinced and the communally mobilized. All those who now support communalism are not necessarily hardcore communalists. Many of them do not share the belief in the political goal of Hindu Rashtra or even the coercive methods of Hindutva. They positively disapprove of riots and killing of fellow citizens. Yet, they share the cultural assumptions of communal arguments and propaganda. The communally mobilized are fast becoming communally convinced, given the relentless communal endeavor to transform their consciousness."

[23] The communalism discourse tends to forget that the victim position in itself does not guarantee a political solution for the problem of Muslim minorities. The solution arises only when the experience of victimization is organized in terms of a critical liberatory framework that addresses the political context in which the victimization is produced. The theorization of Islamophobia should address this problem of excessive focus on the narrative of Muslim victimization that results in freezing the emergence of the Muslim political agency. The experience of Muslim victimization does not guarantee that the subordinated Muslim social agent will develop a liberatory perspective with respect to their victimization. A Muslim victim only becomes a political agent when they find a liberating political discourse in terms of understanding and analyzing the violence faced. The communalism framework does rely on Muslim victimhood but refuses to speak about Muslim political agency in their fight against their victimhood. The advantage of the critical Islamophobia studies framework is that it gives equal importance to Muslim victimhood and Muslim political agency.

[24] According to Deleuzean scholar Tom Conley (2005, 172), "Molar entities belong to the State or the civic world. They are well defined, often massive, and are affiliated with a governing apparatus. Their molecular counterparts are micro-entities, politics that transpire in areas where they are rarely perceived: in the perception of affectivity, where beings share ineffable sensations; in the twists and turns of conversation having nothing to do with the state of the world at large; in the manner, too, that a pedestrian in a city park sees how the leaves of a linden tree might flicker in the afternoon light."

[25] The new politics of Brahmanism is connected to the upsurge of Hindu militant formations in India in the early decades of the 19th century. Brahmins were seen as the spiritual heirs of the materialist Europeans through this "Aryan" myth (Figueira 2002, 143). Dorothy M. Figueira, in her comparative study of Indian/ Hindu and Nazi-oriented German revivalism, pointed out that the history of India understood as a superior civilization was appropriated in the paranoiac nationalist upsurge in Europe (specifically Germany) through the imagination of Europeans as the civilizational partners of Aryan Brahmins. Racial origins of the Hindu social order were proposed from orientalist ideas of the Hindus as the Indo-Aryans. Militant Hindu nationalists like Vinayak Damodar Savarkar defined Hindus to be of the same race, culture and civilization or in other words, the same "race-*jati*" (Sharma 2011, 165). Later Indological studies tied together Brahmin supremacy and white supremacy as myths through the appropriation of Sanskritic symbols which were placed out of context to develop the idea of the racially superior "Aryan" (Figueira 2002, 141).

[26] "Nagpur, the birthplace of the RSS in 1925, had also been the site of the All India Depressed Classes Conference, in May 1920, when Ambedkar began wresting the leadership of Dalits from more moderate groups associated with Vithal Ramji Shinde's efforts at reform from above under high-caste initiative . . . And the RSS image of its own origins as embodied, for instance, in the official biography of its founder, K. B. Hedgewar, locates lower caste assertion on par with the Muslim threat as the twin dangers that lay behind Hedgewar's initiative" (Sarkar 2005, 288).

[27] The Hindu–Muslim problem is two-headed: caste and religion. The "religion"-only framework wants to fix the Hindu–Muslim question to religion while the "caste"-only framework wants to fix everything to caste. Historically Hinduism is developed through the complex interaction of caste and religion—earlier with Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity, Islam, and then later through colonial politics—to eventually establish itself in the form of so-called Semitic religions such as Islam and Christianity to shape its new name. The formation of Hinduism into a new religion is closely connected with the preservation of the caste system in modern colonial times. Though they were influenced by it, Islam and Christianity were not created to maintain caste through its theological project. In other words, though caste within Islam is a derivative discourse of Hinduism and it is not possible to equate Islam to the Hindu Brahminical order.

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