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ABSTRACT: This article focuses on the relationship between nation-making and the emergence of Islamophobia in India. Studies on anti-Muslim violence and Islamophobia in India either tend to dismiss the concept or limit its deployment by identifying it within the actions of Hindu nationalist groups situating their rise as an exception to India's secular and multicultural trajectory. Premising on the idea that Islamophobia should be understood as the negation of Muslim political subjectivity, this article argues that Hindutva is not an aberration rather it is a continuation of the Indian nation-making project with the Muslim placed as the other of this project. This argument would include factoring in the systemic nature of anti-Muslim violence and social inequality by looking at the Muslim community's lived socioeconomic experience, and analyzing the commentaries on them.

KEYWORDS: Islamophobia, India, Indian Muslim, anti-Muslim violence, Muslim marginalization

CONCEPTUALIZING ISLAMOPHOBIA IN INDIA

Since the aftermath of the partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan, Muslims in India have been subjected to industrial scale violence and systemic exclusion. The partition resulted in the Muslim community in India being viewed with constant suspicion and having their loyalty always put under question for the alleged historic role of their ancestors in dividing the nation.¹ Secular fears of an assertion of Muslim subjectivity resulting in another Pakistan-like scenario led to the development of a coercive nationalist discourse which acted as an engine for assimilating the Muslim identity into the national identity. Attempts to challenge this norm were viewed as aberrations contra to national ideals of unity and co-existence, which led to academic indifference to the lack of conceptual categories to frame this history of systemic exclusion and violence. Scholars have produced numerous important and insightful studies measuring and analyzing the volume of and reasons for Muslim marginalization, discrimination, and violence, but there is a conceptual lacuna in naming and defining this phenomenon.² In this article, we will be addressing this lack of conceptual category by tracing the genealogy of this erasure and also contesting the identification of Islamophobia in India as being limited to the Sangh Parivar and the BJP.

Despite the persistence of anti-Muslim violence, prejudice, and exclusion being as old if not older than the Indian republic, the deployment of Islamophobia in India was quite late in comparison to its usage in the West. Although Islamophobia as a term has gained currency with the ever-increasing lynchings of Muslims and overtly racist comments and hate speech by mainstream politicians following the ascendancy of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to power in 2014, there remains a surprising absence of scholarly engagement with Islamophobia or the

nature of anti-Muslim violence in India.³ Despite the now common use of the term, there are instances of opposition to its use from secular-liberal or leftist intellectuals. These critiques, which display ignorance of the vast array of understandings of Islamophobia, argue that the fear of Islam is unique to the West due to Islam's shorter history there and not to India where Islam possesses a comparatively longer history. Such originist arguments dismiss Islamophobia as a concept by reducing it to its constituent parts (Islam + phobia) peddling a form of "etymological fundamentalism."⁴ For example, Ajay Gudavarthy dispelled the relevance of Islamophobia in India arguing that it is not an irrational fear (phobia) of Islam that leads to anti-Muslim violence as Islam is not an unknown entity in India, but it is the narrative of historical injury that fuels violence, thus mobilizing Islamophobia's etymological meaning to argue against its presence.⁵

Following Sayyid's conceptualization, Islamophobia will be framed primarily as the disciplining of Muslim subjectivity. Sayyid conceptualizes Islamophobia as something "that emerges in contexts where being Muslim has a significance which is political. What Islamophobia seeks to discipline is the possibility of Muslim autonomy, that is, an affirmation of Muslim political identity as a legitimate historical subject."⁶ Such a conceptualization of Islamophobia helps us to move away from framing Muslims as mere victims of hegemonic violence. This is vital because anti-Muslim violence in India is framed within concepts like communalism or communal violence, but the epistemological grounding of these concepts lays equal blame on the victim and perpetrator alike despite the overwhelming empirical evidence to the contrary.⁷ By domesticating subjectivities, the epistemological position ascribed to this secular narrative occupies the moral high ground by equating violence with the general category of religion, erasing the existing stark asymmetry between the dominant and subservient groups (Hindu and Muslim). Sayyid's conceptualization differs from other such conceptualizations in that it revolves around the question of Muslim subjectivity and places the mechanisms of its erasure at the center of his argument.

Linking the erasure of subjectivity to racism, Sayyid states Islamophobia as a form of "racialized governmentality."⁸ This is in line with Sayyid's and Vakil's definition of Islamophobia: "Islamophobia is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness."⁹ Defining Islamophobia as racism can run into problems, especially in India, as race and racism are seldom subjects of study or analysis in Indian social sciences. The conservative idea of racism as being determined by skin color leads race and racism to being understood as something that happens in the West where the white-black binary exists. However, Sayyid's and Vakil's definition is predicated on the function of racism as primarily being one of denying subjectivity. Positing Islamophobia as racism has been confronted with the argument that Muslims are not a race and that Islamophobia and racism are two distinct concepts.¹⁰ This argument is based on a reductive understanding of race being premised on visible biological differences (skin color) and racism as an irrational group prejudice that claims racial outsiders are inferior because of their innate racial membership. For example, Junaid Rana traces the racialization process to the historical stigmatization of Jews and Muslims, by the purity of blood as the indicator, from Christians in medieval Europe and links this mode of differentiation to contemporary Islamophobia.¹¹ Hence when Muslims are racialized, their Muslim identity becomes the marker that seemingly provokes verbal abuse, violence, state surveillance and legislations, suspicion, etc. irrespective of their ethnic backgrounds.¹² This problematizes the biological and phenotypical albeit dominant understandings of race as a concept.

Stuart Hall is helpful here in understanding the idea of race. He argued that by focusing on ordinary cultural practices and mapping the complex entanglements of economic, political, and social formations we could understand how race was constituted. His theorization was a forerunner in an emerging discipline of political and cultural theory that subjected the then

prevailing ontological understanding of race to critical analysis. Subsequently, he conceptualized race as a floating signifier. To comprehend this, we need to understand,

that race is a signifier, and that racialized behavior and difference needs to be understood as a discursive, not necessarily as a genetic or biological fact ... The meaning of a signifier can never be finally or transhistorically fixed. That is, it is always, or there is always, a certain sliding of meaning, always a margin not yet encapsulated in language and meaning, always something about race left unsaid. Always someone—a constitutive outside—whose very existence the identity of race depends on, and which is absolutely destined to return from its expelled and abjected position outside the signifying field to trouble the dreams of those who are comfortable inside.¹³

Hall conducted a historical review of the idea of race, drawing attention to how the meanings of signifiers of racialized identities evolved and were interpreted subject to both spatial and temporal influences. In the discourse of race, the body is often invoked as a transcendental signifier to bring the argument for biological determination to a close.¹⁴ Laclau had earlier theorized a floating signifier as something that “results from the unfixity introduced by a plurality of discourses.”¹⁵ Because of their plurality and the constant displacement of frontiers, the signifiers interrupt each other and finally become unable to connect in a chain of equivalence, leaving them floating. Similarly, the signifiers of race are located on the body, but at the same time, nothing constitutive of the body provides meaning to those signifiers. Eventually, signifiers associated with race float away devoid of any reality to stabilize their meanings, i.e., the meaning of race can never be fixed. Hall attempts to analyze why race as a construct remains conspicuous despite lacking a stable anchoring. According to him, racial signifiers assume meaning in the context of the discourses that govern individual and social action. These dominant discourses establish a field of power that masks and naturalizes the interests and origin of that particular discourse and its frontiers as sites of ongoing contestations. Factoring in state formations, especially in South Africa, Hall concludes that race “is an articulating principle of the social, political and ideological structures.”¹⁶ In the case of Muslims, culture, history, and territory were imprinted onto bodies to create a violent hierarchy of socially constructed divisions. Hence, Muslims are not a race not because they don’t share common ethnic markers but because Hall has demonstrated that it is discursively constructed. Although Muslims come from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds, they are racialized and discriminated against because of their name, cultural identity, or perceived behavior, i.e., they are treated as if they are a race.¹⁷

In this way, race has been able to mask the growing anonymity of mass social relations in modernity along with other types of group identity. This is where racism and patriotism seem to intersect since race takes the logic of national identification to its extremes. The faceless forms of exclusion and oppression that have accompanied the history of racial construction and formation are made easier by this anonymization of race. Goldberg terms this process as “race creation, i.e., an act of anthropic gods.”¹⁸ This creation emerges out of the creations of real social actors in their constructed reproductions and transformations of given discursive formations and expressions. This is established by the fact that contestations around race are in fact concerned with the meaning and nature of political constitution and community: “who counts as ‘in’ and who as ‘out’; who is central to the body politic and who is peripheral to it; who is autonomous and who is dependent.”¹⁹ It is this notion of race creation, underpinned of course by ideas of biological determined fixed immutable category, that is precluded from the theorizations of Islamophobia thus limiting Islamophobia to instances of corporeal violence, verbal abuse, and explicit anti-Muslim state legislations.

An examination of several studies will demonstrate these limitations in the conceptualizations of Islamophobia in India. For example, *Islamophobia in India: Stoking Bigotry*, published by the Islamophobia Research & Documentation Project at UC Berkeley, aimed primarily at documenting incidents of anti-Muslim violence in India and has the distinction of being the first such report on Islamophobia in India.²⁰ It presents a well detailed empirical catalog of anti-Muslim violence and discrimination since 2014 but its weakness lies in its tacit assumption of limiting Islamophobia to the BJP and the Sangh Parivar.²¹ The emphasis on the Sangh Parivar is understandable due to its explicit nature, but it inadvertently posits Islamophobia or the disciplining of Muslims in a truncated genealogy that has serious ramifications for debates surrounding Muslim identity and the secular nature of the Indian nation. Similarly, Anand affirms this narrative on Islamophobia in his essay “Generating Islamophobia in India.”²² For Anand, Hindu nationalism represented by the Sangh Parivar presents an aberration in the Indian state’s trajectory of generating Islamophobia. Anand does admit to the violence and systemic discrimination meted out to Muslims over the years by the Indian state but fails to name or incorporate it into his framing of Islamophobia. Nor does the socioeconomic exclusion of Muslims feature in this understanding of Islamophobia, thus controverting the systemic nature of Islamophobia, and hence identifying it solely with the Sangh Parivar/BJP and the pre-BJP period of non-Islamophobia. This reasoning entails placing faith in the democratic and secular credentials of the Indian state and a vigilant electorate to reverse the process of Islamophobia we are currently witnessing. A further example is Waikar’s interesting analysis of Islamophobia present in the speeches and podcasts of Narendra Modi.²³ While mapping Islamophobia in the Hindutva discourse, this study does make certain assumptions that are inimical to questions of Muslim subjectivity, especially the positioning of Islamists with their divisive politics as the Muslim counterpart to Hindutva and locating the rise of Hindutva groups as a reaction to the Khilafat movement.²⁴

This denial of subjectivity agency is further compounded by the methodological nationalism that is inherent to several studies on Islamophobia in India or studies that are critical of Hindutva or any studies on India for that matter. Here, methodological nationalism means understanding the categories, India and Hindu as self-contained units and more crucially, these categories 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 the histories narrated in Jawaharlal Nehru’s *The Discovery of India*, Shashi Tharoor’s *Inglorious Empire*, Amartya Sen’s *The Argumentative Indian*, etc., India as a timeless formation and its accompanying Hinduness with fully formed Hindu identities is considered a pre-given. In this story, 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. The India that was already here is often described in these accounts as tolerant, a characteristic that enabled the integration of these outsider Muslims to be gradually become part and parcel of India. 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.

The aforementioned framings of Islamophobia maintain Hindu nationalism as an interregnum thus normalizing the pre-BJP Indian state’s systemic exclusion of and violence towards Muslims. There is the underlying presupposition that Muslims in India were benefiting from the fruits of a plural democracy until the political rise of the BJP/Sangh Parivar. In such a discourse, Islamophobia assumes a transitory nature that can be resolved through the

strengthening of non-Sangh Parivar secular political parties and platforms. This proposition is in tune with the dominant global discussions on Islamophobia that reduce it to what is labeled a far-right phenomenon, thus concealing the role that the construction of a European identity has played in generating Islamophobia.²⁵ Putting the controversy around such labels aside, such a proposition only becomes possible when the prime “other” of the Hindutva discourse, i.e. Muslims, are relegated to victimhood, unable to speak and hence devoid of subjectivity. Suffice to say, we trace the disciplining of Muslim subjectivity in the very attempts to conceptualize Islamophobia and to attest that Hindu nationalism is not a parenthesis but is rather constitutive of the Indian state.

The concerns raised at a meeting of the Muslim leadership in 1964 in Lucknow will demonstrate the fallacy of limiting Islamophobia to the Sangh Parivar. *The Times* report of that meeting ran with the headline “*Plight of Muslims in India Discussed – Results of Increased Hindu Nationalism.*”²⁶ The leaders and scholars included those from Muslim organizations and movements and those with secular credentials like Husain B. Tyabji. According to the article, this meeting was held to discuss the “manifold injustices and prejudices” Muslims in India have been suffering and the “outbreaks of murderous violence against Muslims.” The article cites that in the wake of massacres of Muslims at Rourkela and Jamshedpur and the riots in Calcutta, 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. The Muslim leadership cited five major grievances plaguing the community: a) the absence of government will in curtailing violence or bringing to justice the perpetrators of violence, b) the open and increasing association of Muslims in India with Pakistan and the subsequent suspicion of being in bed with the enemy, c) the caste consciousness of Hindu society dominating trade and commerce leading to Muslim exclusion from the economic activity, d) the discrimination shown by firms, especially British ones, towards employing Muslims, a policy initiated by former minister for home affairs Vallabhbhai Patel who had advised British firms to send Muslim applicants to their Pakistani branches, and e) the growing “McCarthyite” attitude of the public sphere that a Muslim is not an Indian.

With this list of grievances, one could be forgiven for identifying it as occurring very recently in the last five to six years and not back in 1964. The gravity of these grievances further the genealogy of Islamophobia and contest the claim of state complicity in Islamophobia as emerging with the political rise of the Sangh Parivar. Rather, these meetings showcase that Islamophobia is constitutive of the Indian secular state and the Sangh Parivar as only an extension of this trajectory, albeit a mutative one. Hence, what constitutes Islamophobia cannot be limited to the violence and hate speech practiced against Muslims ever since the inception of the Indian state. Instead, Islamophobia becomes fundamental to the idea of the nation, national unity (Indianness) and its deployment of secularism functioning to discipline the capacity of Muslims to speak for themselves even in times of existential crisis and importantly masking the systemic nature of socioeconomic discrimination and social inequalities. It is interesting to note here that the news article mentions a speaker at the Lucknow meeting being disappointed by the attitude of the educated Muslim elites’ indifference to the sufferings of the community, remarking that Indian Muslims, like the African Americans, have their Uncle Toms. Rather than being a forced upon comparison, the Muslim leadership in India identified with black suffering. They drew parallels with their respective communities, indicating an implicit understanding of the nature of the supremacy they were subjected to and further points towards a sense of futility among the Muslim leadership.²⁷ A look at the numbers of the socioeconomic discrimination will further demonstrate the systemic nature of Islamophobia in India.

THE MUSLIM IN THE MACHINE

We are not trusted by the government,
 Nor are we among the prominent courtiers of the ruler
 Neither are we among the educated elite
 We have no share in trade or the industry
 Nor do you find us in the civil services
 Or in the business

Maulana Altaf Hussain Hali (1837–1914)²⁸

The equitable treatment meted out to minorities is considered to be the hallmark of Indian secularism. The exclusion of the Muslim identity from the political terrain should not be understood in terms of post-partition Muslims constituting a demographic minority as Muslims were never a demographic majority during the long period of Muslim rule in India. Rather here, minoritization refers to the systematic process by which political autonomy and access to power was gradually eroded by “pressures exerted on language, literature, culture and identity,” a process that was inaugurated by British colonial hegemony in the wake of the rebellion of 1857.²⁹

In the colonial administrative framework that followed, safeguards and representations for minorities including Muslims became an established principle. Political safeguards in the form of special provisions and quotas for Muslims in legislature and public services were characteristic of British colonial administration, for example, the instituting of separate electorates for Muslims in 1909. During the nationalist phase and in political discourses up until the constitutional deliberations, the term “minority” was largely used in this sense. In her study of the constitutional debates on minority rights, Bajpai explains how the term “minority” was used by religious groups to signify the sociopolitical disadvantage a particular group suffered from in contrast to other communities. This definition of the term was often invoked to demand special provisions and entitlements because of the disadvantages this group suffered from. Contrary to contemporary notions, the demographic status was deployed to denote numerical strength rather than the lack of it, in order to throw weight behind its demands, claiming entitlement to political safeguards.³⁰

Dalit and tribal representatives also claimed minority status in the constitutional debates emphasizing themselves as “political minorities,” citing their exclusion from mainstream Indian society and their socioeconomic barriers as reasons for constitutional safeguards.³¹ Despite granting constitutional safeguards and protection in the form of affirmative action policies in the spheres of state employment, higher education, and political representation for Dalits and scheduled tribes, they are not legally classified as minorities. The Muslim League also put forth demands for electoral safeguards and in July 1947, the minorities committee recommended electoral reservation in the legislatures for Dalits and Muslims; these recommendations were initially included into the constitution draft. Other than provisions for Scheduled Castes and tribes, these proposals were subsequently rejected as the Congress leadership viewed separate electorates as incompatible with nationalist secular ideals, stating that the interests of individual citizens were more relevant than those of religious communities.³² Hence, the provisions and safeguards that Muslims had been accorded were abolished under a liberal regime. The impact of this exclusion can be understood when the socioeconomic status of Muslims is measured against the backdrop of national development and progress.

It was only after more than half a century of independence that the Indian government, under the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, set up a high-level committee in 2005 headed by the former chief justice of the Delhi High court, Rajinder Sachar, to measure the social, economic, and educational condition of Muslims in India. This report offered a comparative analysis between the differentials between Muslims and other socio-religious communities (SRCs) in demographic features and in the spheres of education, employment, credit and infrastructure access and representation in public programs. The committee submitted its report, which later came to be known as the Sachar Committee Report (SCR), to Parliament in 2006—one of its major findings was that the socioeconomic conditions of Muslims in India were below that of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Although reports like the Gopal Panel Report (1980) and the National Sample Survey Organization (1990) had earlier tried to bring the issue of Muslim marginalization to the fore, these reports did not garner significant attention, primarily owing to the lack of breadth of empirical rigor of the Sachar report and the lack of political will. Hence, a brief survey of the findings of the SCR and the present socioeconomic condition of Muslims in India is in order.

According to the SCR, Muslims in India are at a double disadvantage due to the existing low levels of education in India combined with the low quality of education. Their exclusion increases exponentially as the level of education increases and that “in some instances the relative share for Muslims is lower even than scheduled castes (SC) who are victims of a long standing caste system.”³³ The report cites that only 17 percent Muslims above the age of 17 years have completed matriculation (year 10) as compared to 26 percent for all SRCs.³⁴ In the premier universities and colleges in India, only 1 out of 25 undergraduate students (4 percent) and 1 out of 50 postgraduate students (2 percent) was Muslim.³⁵ As per the 2011 Indian government census, Muslims rank at the bottom of the higher-education ladder along with Scheduled Tribes (ST).³⁶ A 2018 study titled *Intergenerational Mobility in India* concluded that in terms of educational mobility, Muslims in India are worse off than their African-American counterparts.³⁷ Apart from the African-American analogy used by the authors of the paper, which is quite striking, these findings affirm that there has been no substantial change to the educational situation of Muslims in India since the debates and discussions that erupted following the SCR findings in 2006. The seriousness of these indicators can only be realized when contrasted with the fact that from 1881 onwards up until 1931, Muslims had higher literacy rates than their Hindu counterparts including literacy of the English language.³⁸

The worker population rates³⁹ (WPR) for Muslims in 2006 were much lower than for all other SRCs in rural areas and only marginally lower in urban areas.⁴⁰ Although Muslims fared slightly better than Christians in unemployment percentages according to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (2017–18),⁴¹ Muslims have the largest non-working population in India, with 116.1 million Muslims (67.42 percent of the Muslim community in India) categorized as “non-working”.⁴² Government services and Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) have traditionally been the largest employers in India but according to the SCR, Muslims only represented 4.9 percent in government services and 7.2 percent PSUs with an even lower representation of 3 percent in the Indian administrative and bureaucratic services.⁴³ The figures for government services have deteriorated further since 2006 and are considerably lower than other SRCs. It is worth noting here that 2020 saw a slight increase of Muslim representation from 4 percent to 5 percent in the prestigious Indian Administrative Services⁴⁴ which subsequently triggered fears of a planned Muslim takeover of the Indian bureaucracy by means of a covert “*administrative Jihad*.”⁴⁵ The share of Muslims in the police force in 2013 was 6.27 percent, which amounts to 108,602 Muslims serving in the police force. From this, 41,089 were from Jammu & Kashmir alone, so if we exclude J&K, the share for the rest of India would be an abysmal 4.07

percent.⁴⁶ Muslim representation in the judiciary is low at 7.8 percent in comparison to 23 percent for OBCs and 20 percent for SC/STs.⁴⁷ While there is no official data for Muslim representation in the Indian armed forces, according to a survey titled “*Minority Report*” by the news channel CNN-IBN, Muslims comprise roughly 2 percent, i.e. 28,000, in the 1.4 million strong Indian army.⁴⁸ Muslims did not fare much better in the private corporate sector either with a composition of only 3 percent.⁴⁹

As per the SCR and government reports, there has been a statistical decline in poverty levels from the 1980s onwards, which has continued to fall in subsequent years.⁵⁰ However, Muslim poverty levels have increased in urban areas to about 33.9 percent—slightly better than that of SC (34.1 percent) whereas it was 24.3 percent for other marginalized communities (OBC) within the Hindu community.⁵¹ In 2012, only 63.7 percent of Muslims had tap water, which was the lowest among all SRCs. Muslims have the lowest proportion of latrine facilities existing for the exclusive use of their household. With 28.2 percent in 2008–9 and 22 percent in 2012, Muslims account for the highest proportion of the population sharing latrine facilities with other households. Census data suggests that the use of electricity as a source of light is less for Muslims as compared to the national average and most of SRCs. Muslim-dominated villages have been left out and completely ignored from the schemes of electrification.⁵² One finds a proportional decrease in the number of schools in villages with substantial Muslim populations. While 82 percent of villages with 10 percent Muslim population or less have educational institutions, this decreases to 69 percent in villages with sizeable Muslim populations.⁵³

Although Muslims make up 14.23 percent of the national population, they make up 24.9 percent of the total number of beggars. This means that every fourth person in India categorized as a beggar is Muslim.⁵⁴ In terms of community, those most likely to report poor health were 35 percent Muslim, due to low access to healthcare; Muslims are also more likely to suffer from poor health or die younger.⁵⁵ Prominent in the SCR are also indicators that access to loans and credit across both public and private sector banks is low when compared to other SRCs; the empirical findings were mirrored later in a study titled *Broken Promises* by the Centre for Peace Studies (CPS) in 2014.⁵⁶ Another interesting analogy in the SCR compares the racial practice of “redlining” in the US to similar practices called “negative geographical zones” employed by Indian banks to exclude Muslim localities from their services of lending and credit.⁵⁷ With the numbers on Muslims out in the open, several government mandated committees like the Rangnath Mishra Commission (tabled in Parliament in 2009) and the Kundu Committee Report (2014) to name a few were formed to suggest criteria for identifying socioeconomic barriers among linguistic and religious minorities and to recommend constitutional, administrative, and legal policy directives to remedy the situation. Both these reports, in tandem with policy experts, recommended reservations for Muslims in the spheres of education, government employment, housing, and to facilitate access to healthcare and development.⁵⁸ Unsurprisingly, none of the recommendations or directives have been implemented thus far, but our focus here is not on the efficacy of policy directives but rather on the narratives that explain the socioeconomic barriers, exclusion, and discrimination that Muslims face in India. Although terms like “discrimination,” “prejudice,” “exclusion,” and “marginalization” are deployed to name the mechanisms that create socioeconomic barriers in these reports and commentaries, they exist informally, thus masking the reasons that Muslims face institutional discrimination and structural exclusion.

Here, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva’s *Racism without Racists: Colorblind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America* is useful to interpret and frame the numbers from the Sachar Committee report. Bonilla-Silva examines the changing dynamics of racism in the post-civil rights era United States. He shows how overt forms of racism (racial slurs, physical violence,

etc.) have been replaced by a less visible, but equally powerful, form of covert racism, which he terms colorblind racism. According to Bonilla-Silva, colorblind racism refers to the ideological narrative that the white majority have developed to rationalize and justify contemporary racial inequalities, and simultaneously exonerating themselves from any responsibility in the maintenance of these inequalities or associating it with any forms of privileges they benefit from. This ideology explains racial inequalities as arising from nonracial dynamics and interprets the socioeconomic indicators of minorities as resulting from the product of market dynamics, naturally occurring phenomena, and the alleged cultural limitations of the African American community.⁵⁹ Bonilla-Silva outlines four frames through which the systemic discrimination of minorities are interpreted and rationalized.⁶⁰ He divides them into abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and the minimization of race. Together, they facilitate the ways in which the dominant racial group can continue to be racist but in a covert and subtle manner. When we subject some commentaries on the Sachar committee report to Bonilla-Silva's frames, it helps identify these subtle and covert forms of Islamophobia.

The frame of abstract liberalism deploys the logic of political liberalism (equal opportunity) and economic liberalism (individual choice) to explain racial social inequalities. This claim is an abstract notion of equal opportunity as it mandates ignoring the fact that Muslims are significantly underrepresented in employment, universities, and schools. Similarly, the argument of individual choice also ignores the segregation that results from institutionalized state state-sponsored practices that closes off opportunities and spaces for education, housing, employment, etc. The frame of naturalization allows the dominant community to explain racial phenomena by labelling them as natural occurrences. These help to justify socioeconomic marginalization by locating it within the larger geographical imbalances which is beyond the control of human actors or the state. For instance, Sanjeer Alam attempted to contextualize Muslim socioeconomic deprivation, attributing it to a larger issue of regional imbalances in development thus neglecting the relationship between the history of systemic violence against Muslims and their socioeconomic status.⁶¹

The frame of cultural racism rests on culturally based arguments and stereotypes like the aversion to education among Mexican people or the higher fertility rates among black people to explain a minority's socioeconomic location. For example, Tasneem Shazli and Sana Asma state the lack of courage among Muslim women due to the ancient traditions prevalent in Muslim societies as one of reasons for their educational backwardness. Although they do cite the lack of schools and infrastructure also as determining factors, it is listed after other reasons such as lack of freedom for Muslim women and Muslim parents discouraging their daughters from pursuing education.⁶² A minimization of racism frame is employed to suggest that although discrimination exists, there are equally other important factors to explain why a minority lags behind in education and employment. Such studies would entail looking at a community's attitude towards education and schooling. Bhalotra and Zamora hint at Muslim parents being less ambitious about educating their children than parents of other communities as a plausible explanation for educational marginalization.⁶³ Even in studies where anti-Muslim violence has been linked to Muslim socioeconomic exclusion, violence has been attributed to solely right-wing Hindutva organizations and the studies suggest restructuring and transforming oppressive political structures without linking the systemic nature of state violence in question.⁶⁴

This mode of color blindness precludes the discussions on the systemic and institutional nature of Islamophobia in India. It does so by deploying discursive representations of opportunity, individualism and national diversity that reproduce social hierarchies. While this legitimizes expressions of Islamophobia and the notion of Hindu supremacy, this does not imply that the majority of Hindus are intentionally Islamophobic and use these frames as a

form of oppression, nor is there any form of national consensus among the majority about the state of Muslim marginalization. But many are so influenced by this racial or national logic that they do not realize their own privileged position despite being horrified at anti-Muslim violence. Islamophobia remains something that only the Sangh Parivar does and Muslims as being impacted only by their rhetoric and action. This renders invisible the extent to which they themselves are raced and thus mystifying their own social locations and political choices. This is crucial because the categories Hindu and India are approached as fixed ahistorical categories and not subject to critical inquiry. Subsequently, people associated with these categories, despite their anti-Hindutva politics and activism, understand them as untouched, unlike the Muslim or Dalit categories that are subject to the constant dynamics of change and resistance. Where the Hindu identity can be sidestepped by a declaration or confessional political maneuvering, as seen in anti-racist debates, what it means to be Muslim or speak Muslim (asserting political subjectivity) is subject to constant interrogation. This is quite similar to Alastair Bonnet's identification of whiteness being reified in the anti-racist debates in the West. Such reification enables anti-Hindutva proponents to

occupy a privileged position in the anti-racist debate; they are allowed the luxury of being passive observers, of being altruistically motivated, of knowing their racial identity might be reviled and lambasted but never made slippery, torn open or indeed abolished.⁶⁵

CONCLUSION

Gayer and Jaffrelot in their *Muslims in Indian cities: Trajectories of Marginalisation* cite a Muslim author who claims "that there is no future for Muslims in this country" in order to emphasize the magnitude of resentment prevalent among Muslims in India.⁶⁶ In the corresponding footnote to this statement, Gayer and Jaffrelot cite the relevant source but also provide a precautionary note accentuating the author's affiliation to the *Jamaat-e-Islami Hind*, which they label as an extremist organization further indicating that his views are extreme in nature and are not representative of Indian Muslims at large.⁶⁷ This demarcation of Muslims based on the explanatory power of extremism into unacceptable extremists and acceptable moderates in a work studying Muslim marginalization is an indicator of the disciplining of Muslims even within studies supposedly trying to highlight Muslim marginalization and anti-Muslim violence. These very sympathetic narratives on Muslim exclusion and violence negates the possibility of Muslim subjectivity. This is compounded by narratives of Muslims arriving in an India that already pre-existed, creating a binary opposition between those who were already here (Hindus) and those who came (Muslims). This aids in normalizing Muslim erasure in bureaucracy, institutions of law and order, government and spheres of development, thus sustaining a racially ordered hierarchy of social networks and institutions managed by the dominant group. Hence, any discussions on Islamophobia in India cannot be limited to the corporeal violence or Sangh Parivar exclusivity, rather it has to factor in the longstanding nature of anti-Muslim violence and pogroms, socioeconomic marginalization and the disciplining of Muslim subjectivity through the discourses of national integration and development.

ENDNOTES

¹In Indian popular memory the Muslim League, led by the divisive Mohammed Ali Jinnah, is held solely responsible for the partition by demanding a separate Pakistan; for an alternative perspective highlighting the

role of the Indian National Congress in the creation of Pakistan see: Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge University Press, 1985). For studies detailing the complex narratives on the partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan, see: Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India*, Vol. 7 (Cambridge University Press, 2001); Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices From the Partition of India* (Penguin UK, 2017); Ayesha Jalal. "Secularists, Subalterns and the Stigma of Communalism: Partition Historiography Revisited." *Modern Asian Studies* 30.3 (1996): 681–9. It is also pertinent to note postcolonial historiography's comparatively lesser investment in the complexities involving the partition of Bengal between India and Pakistan. For a detailed study on this, see: Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932–1947*, Vol. 57 (Cambridge University Press, 2002).

²Christophe Jaffrelot and Laurent Gayer, *Muslims in Indian Cities: Trajectories of Marginalisation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); Abdul Shaban, ed. *Lives of Muslims in India: Politics, Exclusion and Violence* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2018); Rakesh Basant and Abusaleh Shariff, *Handbook of Muslims in India: Empirical and Policy Perspectives* (OUP Catalogue, 2010).

³A People's Tribunal was organized by the Solidarity Youth Movement, a Muslim grassroots activist group, for looking into cases of Muslims wrongfully accused of terrorism and imprisoned without bail or legal recourse in June 2014. The jury, comprised of eminent legal experts and senior journalists, condemned this state of affairs and called for action against the government's witch-hunt of Muslims. However, they vehemently refused to allow the word "Islamophobia" to be used in their findings and subsequently "Islamophobia" as a term was expunged from the jury report. This same organization later in 2016 organized an academic conference on Islamophobia which offered the first such platform to look at and conceptualize Islamophobia in India.

⁴Salman Sayyid and AbdoolKarim Vakil, *Thinking Through Islamophobia: Global Perspectives*. Hurst, 2010, 13.

⁵Ajay Gudavarthy, "There is Communalism—Not Islamophobia—in India." *The Wire*, May 1, 2019, <https://thewire.in/communalism/muslim-prejudice-islamophobia-india>.

⁶Salman Sayyid, "A Measure of Islamophobia." *Islamophobia Studies Journal*, 2.1, (2014): 10–25.

⁷Paul R. Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India* (University of Washington Press, 2011); Asgharali Engineer, ed. *Communal Riots in Post-Independence India* (Universities Press, 1997); Parvis Ghassem-Fachandi, *Pogrom in Gujarat: Hindu nationalism and anti-Muslim violence in India* (Princeton University Press, 2012); Sudhir Kakar, *The Colors of Violence: Cultural identities, religion, and conflict* (University of Chicago Press, 1996); Steven I. Wilkinson, *Votes and Violence: Electoral competition and ethnic riots in India* (Cambridge University Press, 2006); Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, nationalism and history in India*. No. 7 (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁸Sayyid, Salman. "A measure of Islamophobia." *Islamophobia Studies Journal* 2.1 (2014): 10–25, 19.

⁹Sayyid, S., and AbdoolKarim Vakil. Defining Islamophobia. *ReOrientations*, 2018. (<https://criticalmuslimstudies.co.uk/project/defining-islamophobia/>).

¹⁰Brown, Malcolm D. "Conceptualising racism and Islamophobia." *Comparative Perspectives on Racism* (2000): 73–90; Cheng, Jennifer E. "Islamophobia, Muslimophobia or racism? Parliamentary discourses on Islam and Muslims in debates on the minaret ban in Switzerland." *Discourse & Society* 26.5 (2015): 562–86; Lauwers, Anna Sophie. "Is Islamophobia (always) racism?." *Critical Philosophy of Race* 7.2 (2019): 306–32.

¹¹Rana, Junaid. *Terrifying Muslims: Race and labor in the South Asian diaspora* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

¹²Meer, Nasar, and Tariq Modood. 2010. "The Racialization of Muslims." 69–84 in *Thinking Through Islamophobia: Global Perspectives* edited by S. Sayid and AbdoolKarim Vakil (New York: Columbia University Press).

¹³Hall, Stuart. "Nineteen race, the floating signifier: What more is there to say about 'race'? [1997]." *Selected writings on race and difference* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021), 359–73, 361.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 370.

¹⁵Laclau, E., Butler, J., and Zizek, S. *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary dialogues on the Left* (London: Verso, 2000), 305.

¹⁶Hall, Stuart. "6. Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Dominance [1980]." *Essential Essays, Volume 1* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018. 172–221), 177.

¹⁷Sayyid, S., and AbdoolKarim Vakil. Defining Islamophobia. *ReOrientations*, 2018. (<https://criticalmuslimstudies.co.uk/project/defining-islamophobia/>)

¹⁸Goldberg, David Theo. "The semantics of race." *Ethnic and racial studies* 15.4 (1992): 543–69, 560–1.

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰Paula Thompson, Rhonda Itaoui, and Hatem, Bazian, *Islamophobia in India: Stoking Bigotry, Islamophobia Research & Documentation Project* (UC Berkeley, 2019).

²¹The Sangh Parivar is an umbrella term to refer to the family of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). It encompasses the BJP which is the political wing of the RSS and an assortment of Hindu militant movements that include the Arya Samaj, the Hindu Mahasabha, the Vishva Hindu Parishad, the Bajrang Dal and student organizations (ABVP) and workers' union movements (BMS).

²²Dibyesh Anand, "Generating Islamophobia in India." In *Thinking through Islamophobia: Global Perspectives*, edited by Salman Sayyid and AbdoolKarim Vakil (Hurst Publishers, 2010), 265–70.

²³Prashant Waikar, "Reading Islamophobia in Hindutva: An Analysis of Narendra Modi's Political Discourse." *Islamophobia Studies Journal* 4.2 (2018): 161–80.

²⁴Hindutva is the official ideology of the Sangh Parivar.

²⁵Salman Sayyid, "Islamophobia and the Europeanness of the other Europe." *Patterns of Prejudice* 52.5 (2018): 420–35; Farid Hafez, "Shifting borders: Islamophobia as common ground for building pan-European right-wing unity." *Patterns of Prejudice* 48.5 (2014): 479–99; Enes Bayraklı and Farid Hafez, eds. "European Islamophobia Report 2015." Seta, 2016.

²⁶Plight of Muslims in India Discussed—Results of Increased Hindu Nationalism. 9 August 1964. *The Times* (<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/archive/article/1964-08-10/7/1.html#start%3D1964-08-08%26end%3D1964-09-10%26terms%3DIndia%26back%3D/tto/archive/find/India/w:1964-08-08%7E1964-09-10/1%26prev%3D/tto/archive/frame/goto/India/w:1964-08-08%7E1964-09-10/6%26next%3D/tto/archive/frame/goto/India/w:1964-08-08%7E1964-09-10/8>).

²⁷One can find similar apprehensions among Muslim leaders in the late colonial period. Beyond simple analogies, these leaders feared a future where Muslims in India would suffer a plight similar to that of the

African American community. For example, Mohammed Ali Jinnah speaking to students in 1937, warned that “we do not want to be reduced to the position of the Negroes in America.” See: From Jinnah’s speech in December 1937 in Calcutta to the All India Muslim Students Associated cited in: Wolpert, Stanley A. *Jinnah of Pakistan* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1984), 156. Another example is Maududi’s observation of the modes of discrimination that African Americans suffer from and his warnings that Muslims in India would face a similar fate, see: Maududi, Abul A’la. *Tehreek-e-Azadi Hind aur Musalman*. Lahore: Islamic Publications, (1938) 1999, 270–1.

²⁸Cited in: Abdur Rahman, *Denial and Deprivation: Indian Muslims After the Sachar Committee and Rangnath Mishra Commission Reports* (Routledge, 2019), 46.

²⁹Aamir R. Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture* (Princeton University Press, 2009), 12.

³⁰Rochana Bajpai, “Minority Representation and the Making of the Indian Constitution.” *Politics and Ethics of the Indian Constitution* (2008): 354–91.

³¹*Ibid.*

³²*Ibid.*

³³Rajindar Sachar, “Sachar Committee Report.” *Government of India* (2006): 50.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 58.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 68–9.

³⁶Charu Bahri, “Muslims At Bottom of Higher-Education Ladder, Alongside Backward Tribes.” *IndiaSpend*, July 22, 2016, accessed December 18, 2020, <https://archive.indiaspend.com/cover-story/muslims-at-bottom-of-higher-education-ladder-alongside-backward-tribes-28385>.

³⁷Sam Asher, Paul Novosad, and Charlie Rafkin, “Intergenerational Mobility in India: Estimates from New Methods and Administrative Data.” *World Bank Working Paper*, Accessed December 2018, <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~novosad/anr-india-mobility.pdf>.

³⁸Christophe Jaffrelot and Laurent Gayer, *Muslims in Indian Cities: Trajectories of Marginalisation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 315.

³⁹This refers to the percentage of people working in the population in that specific age group.

⁴⁰Rajindar Sachar, “Sachar Committee Report.” *Government of India* (2006): 89.

⁴¹Amrita Madhukalya, “Unemployment rate among Christian men highest: Govt.” *Hindustan Times*, June 28, 2019, accessed December 22, 2020, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/unemployment-rate-among-christian-men-highest-govt/story-BqMtQpHQUNLoqLBxmbiWso.html>.

⁴²Zeeshan Shaikh, “Largest share of non-workers among Muslims.” *The Indian Express*, June 8, 2016, accessed December 22, 2020, <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/largest-share-of-non-workers-among-muslims-2840123/>.

⁴³Rajindar Sachar, “Sachar Committee Report.” *Government of India* (2006): 165.

- ⁴⁴Sanya Dhingra, “5% Muslims among new civil services recruits, only one in top 100.” *The Print*, August 4, 2020, accessed December 21, 2020 <https://theprint.in/india/governance/5-muslims-among-new-civil-services-recruits-only-one-in-top-100/474488/>.
- ⁴⁵Najmul Hoda, “Indian Muslims in govt battle Sudarshan’s ‘UPSC Jihad’ and Sarkari Musalman traitor tag.” *The Print*, September 23, 2020, accessed January 3, 2021, <https://theprint.in/opinion/indian-muslims-govt-sudarshan-upsc-jihad-sarkari-musalman-traitor/508542/>.
- ⁴⁶Abdur Rahman, *Denial and Deprivation: Indian Muslims After the Sachar Committee and Rangnath Misbra Commission Reports* (Routledge, 2019), 317.
- ⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 314.
- ⁴⁸Aziz A. Mubarak, “Why Muslim headcount in Indian Army necessary?.” *Two Circles*, March 13, 2012, accessed January 15, 2021, http://twocircles.net/2012mar13/when_will_indian_armed_forces_do_justice_muslims.html.
- ⁴⁹Naren Karunakaran, “Muslims constitute 14% of India, but just 3% of India Inc.” *The Economic Times*, September 7, 2015, accessed December 22, 2020, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/muslims-constitute-14-of-india-but-just-3-of-india-inc/articleshow/48849266.cms>.
- ⁵⁰Rajindar Sachar, “Sachar Committee Report.” *Government of India* (2006), 151.
- ⁵¹Abdurrahman. *Denial and Deprivation: Indian Muslims after the Sachar Committee and Rangnath Misbra Commission Reports*, 283.
- ⁵²*Ibid.*, 287–90.
- ⁵³*Ibid.*, 260.
- ⁵⁴Zia Haq, “Untouched by economic growth: One in 4 beggars in India a Muslim, reveals census.” *Hindustan Times*, July 30, 2016, accessed January 6, 2021, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/untouched-by-economic-growth-destitution-illiteracy-hurt-india-s-muslims/story-Lz5HhyifkPxZ4pu5gT85N.html>.
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- ⁵⁶Abdurrahman, *Denial and Deprivation: Indian Muslims after the Sachar Committee and Rangnath Misbra Commission Reports*, 245–6.
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- ⁵⁹Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo, *Racism Without Racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in the United States* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006), 2–3.
- ⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 77–8.
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- ⁶⁴Taha Abdul Rauf, "Structure of Violence and Muslims." *Lives of Muslims in India* (Routledge India, 2018), 145–62.
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