Introduction

India is the third largest Muslim populated country in the world with an estimated number of over 160 million, constituting roughly 15 per cent of its population. Apart from its substantial size, Muslims in India present a fascinating picture in terms of their historicity, socio-cultural diversity, religious composition, theological orientations, and above all, as the largest minority in a Hindu majoritarian secular country. All of these areas have been subjected to intense empirical as well as theoretical debates within academic circles; producing some of the fascinating scholarly works on Muslim society in India. The fundamental theoretical question that underlines most of these inquiries is the distinct character of Muslim encounter with modernity in the specific geopolitical landscape of India during colonial as well as post-colonial contexts. These studies have substantially enriched the debates on Islamic encounter with modernity by theorising the context-specific negotiations of Muslims with the ideological and institutional dimensions of Indian modernity, thus complicating metanarratives of this engagement at the global level.

Several of the contemporary Muslim situations in India reflect the complexities of this encounter; including the nature of political mobilisation of Muslims and their engagement with Indian democracy, their uneasy relationship with the Indian secularism and the fragmented sub-identities within Islam in India owing to diverse theological interpretations and mobilisations. These complexities reveal the extraordinary diversity within Muslim societies in dealing with the challenges posed by modernity and late modernity. They also challenge the stereotypical images about Muslims as a homogeneous and monolithic community bound together by a rigid religious identity, as the bewildering diversity within Indian Muslims in terms of theology, caste, class, ethnicity and geographic differences have played pivotal roles in defining the contours of these encounters.

The status of Muslims in India as the largest religious minority stands out as the most significant factor that influences the varied dimensions of their everyday existence. The
Muslim religious identity becomes seminal in areas such as citizenship questions, political articulations and socio-economic development as it has tremendous implications on historical as well as contemporary narratives of these dimensions. It is also central to the historical narratives such as the spread of Islam across the subcontinent and the rise of the Mughal Empire, colonial encounter with the British, partition of India and the genesis of Pakistan and the situation of Muslim minorities in the post-colonial India. The unique political scenario in India characterised by the growth of Hindutva ideological and political forces further complicates and problematises the question of religious identity of Muslims, as according to these discourses, Muslims constitute the ‘other’ of Hindu cultural nationalism. These discourses and political mobilisation are also interspersed with the legacy of frequent religious violence between Hindus and Muslims, where the latter suffered heavily compared to their Hindu counterparts. In that sense, the story of Muslims in contemporary India demands a comprehensive analysis through the lens of security, equity and identity as the citizenship questions, the nature of their political participation and development scenario are highly contingent on their Islamic religious identity.

This chapter makes an attempt in that direction by focusing more on the scenario of citizenship and political articulations of Muslims in contemporary India. It provides an account of the emergence of religious diversity in terms of reformist/revivalist movements within Indian Islam that led to the fragmentation of religious identities and resulted in the emergence of a vibrant public sphere among them. The nature of social stratification, especially the prevalence of caste and the recent caste-based mobilisation is discussed in the next section. A broad overview of the socio-economic profile of the community and the recently published Sachar Committee Report is discussed in the following section. The final part of the chapter looks into the political dimension of the community, and analyses especially their citizenship questions in the background of a surging Hindutva discourse in India.

**Religious diversity and theological contestations within Islam in India**

The dominant historiographical accounts on the spread of Islam in India tend to see it not as an expansion, which implies imposition, and which in turn implies use of force, an old European stereotype; but rather to view it as an assimilation (Eaton 2000: 35). This process was quiet and slow, shaped by diverse actors, in particular localities, pursued a variety of agendas and responded to what others did resulting in the establishment of substantial Muslim populations in different parts of India over several centuries (Saberwal 2010). Eaton also highlights the processes of culture as accommodation, appropriation, and assimilation, which had the effect of transforming what had begun as an Arab tradition into what we call a world religion (Eaton 2003:6). The complex historical processes characteristic of the spread of Islam also ensured the multiplicity of its religious articulations and identities, much contrary to the impression of Islam being a monolithic religion. During the course of its development, different theological schools and their institutionalisation have resulted in the fragmentation of Muslim identity across the subcontinent. Concerted efforts of religious reformism have played a vital role in this process, and characteristically, these efforts and the counter efforts shared uncompromising, yet, divergent understanding of what constitutes ‘true Islam’.

Throughout the Islamic history, the question of sources of authority from where specific guidelines can be drawn to govern personal as well as public affairs has been a highly contested one. Reformist and revivalist attempts are a reflection of concerted attempts to arrive at definitive conclusions regarding the question of authority in Islam, especially when
the community experience a sense of degeneration and downfall of its fortunes. A pattern of rethinking tradition, as a means of adapting to change was set well before Muslims felt the direct impact of western modernity but these processes got impetus in the context of colonial advent that reinforced the notion of a perceived downfall of its fortunes (Brown 1996; Dallal 1993). The reformist discourse exhorted to go back to the originals, and to find out the truth about Islamic teachings from the Quran and Hadith directly so that the dangerous innovation (bid’a) mostly influenced by Hinduism and blind adherence (taqlid) to the teachings of the classical law books can be avoided. Scholars have pointed out that though these movements claim a going back to the originals and the tradition; in reality all these movements were specifically modern (Asad 1986; Madan 1997; Nandy 1990; Reetz 2006; Robinson 2008; Sanyal 1996; Turner 2001).

Shah Wali-Ullah (1702–1762) is widely considered as the forerunner of such reform and regarded as the one who inspired a number of reformist organisations in nineteenth- and twentieth-century India. He exhorted different Sufi orders to put their trust in a rational and broad-minded interpretation of the fundamentals of the Islamic belief system by focusing on Hadith as the authentic source of Islam and emphasised the exercise of independent judgment on an individual basis (Dallal 1993; Madan 1997; Sanyal 1996). Deriving inspiration from Wali-Ullah and declaring themselves as his successors, scholars like Nazir Husayn Dilhlawi (d. 1902) established Ahl-e-hadith, which adopted an extreme form of literalism in the matters of Hadith along with the rejection of taqlid. They disagreed with Wali-Ullah’s moderate approach and adopted and bound themselves to a single, literal meaning of texts of the Quran and Hadith and denied the efficacy of qiyas (the use of logical reasoning to decide a legal question) (Brown 1996; Sanyal 1996).

One of the most significant and systematic traditionalist attempts to reject the visibly western ideas of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817–1898) and his modernist Islam was the establishment of Dar ul-Ulum founded by Muhammad Qasim Nanotwi in 1867 at Deoband near Delhi. The basic aim of the Deobandi School was to return to the tradition of ‘the two main streams of Islamic tradition, that of intellectual learning and spiritual experience’ (Metcalf 1982:139). The Deobandi School advocated return to the Quran and the prophetic tradition and though they vehemently opposed the worship of local saints and their graves, they did not relinquish their connections with the mystical Sufi orders of Islam (Madan 1997; Metcalf 1982, 2004; Reetz 2004). Jamaat-e-Islami is significant in this analysis because it has raised political issues associated with Islam in the most forceful way. Abul ala Maududi (1903–1979), the founder of the organisation was convinced that a modern nation-state that functions on the basis of democracy, secularism and nationalism is against the basic tenets of Islam and argued that establishment of an Islamic state based on sharia is the paramount obligation of every true believer. Maududi’s ideas have had a long-lasting influence on the articulations of political Islam in the Indian subcontinent (Ahmad 2008, 2010b; Metcalf 2004). Tabligi Jamaat, established by M. Mohammad Illyas (1855–1944), which is currently the largest Islamic organisation in the world, on the contrary, eschew visible ideological positions and abstain from public debates and instead focus on individual transformation through preaching tours (Mayaram 1997; Metcalf 1993, 2004; Sikand 1999; Reetz 2006, 2008).

While these movements criticised the orthodoxy for corrupting Islam and deviating from its actual path, Maulana Ahmad Raza Khan Barelwi (1856–1921) established Ahl-e-Sunnat as a resistance movement from the traditional Sunni sections against the reformist attempts. The theological position propagated by Ahmad Raza was Sufi-oriented, shrine-based folk Islam of mainly rural north India. He accorded priority to the principles of adherence (taqlid) where Muslims were called upon to stick to established traditions and more particularly to
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their law schools (mahdab) and to their religious guide (pir), a function closely associated with Sufi heritage (Reetz 2006:65 Metcalf 1982; Sanyal 1996).

These attempts aimed at reforming the Islamic community on various theological grounds and are important in the analysis on the formation of Islamic identity. Other than agreements in some basic aspects, there are considerable differences of opinion among these various movements. While a perceived notion of the degradation and decline of religion was widely shared by all these movements, the question of dealing with it gave rise to a number of diverse positions and debates. These movements and theological debates hardly remained at the exclusive realm of the Muslim elites and exerted tremendous impact on the everyday life of ordinary Muslims across these countries. The very foundation of religious identification and perception of religiosity has been fragmented among the masses due to these centuries-long attempts at reforming the community. Claims as the practitioners of ‘true Islam’ are always made by defining ‘true Islam’ as a highly exclusionary term professed and practised only by the respective claimants. Other than disseminating their own theological position through the vast network of madrasas and religious institutions, these movements engaged in considerable public activities to refute others’ claim on the ‘true Islam’. These varied forms of interventions included debates and public meetings, religious tracts and fatwas, legal proceedings, preaching and so on. The public debates between various groups on a number of contentious issues were the most significant ways of reaching out to the public on several theological issues (Metcalf 1982; Sanyal 1996). Even while these debates failed to attain conclusive positions on theological controversies, they played a significant role in re-affirming the participant’s identification with their own group and this process was also creating an Islamic public sphere (or rather competing Islamic public spheres) (Reetz 2006:114). In other words, these debates produced one of the profound consequences of Islamic encounter with modernity: the objectification of religious knowledge and the democratisation of Islamic theology with long-lasting implications on the internal dynamics of the community (Eikelman and Piscatori 1996).

Social stratification and emerging caste consciousness among Indian Muslims

Though sectarian diversity among Indian Muslims such as Ahmadiyyas, Bohras, Sunnis and Shias is evident, the question of caste assumes significance on several grounds.¹ The prevalence of the caste system among Indian Muslims is a testimony to the historical process of how a religion preaching equality gets transformed during its expansion and gets entrenched within existing hierarchical social structures of the host society. Upon the establishment of Muslim rule in India, a clear social stratification came to be established between the foreign and immigrant Muslims constituting the ashraf and the local Muslims who were converted to Islam in due course mostly from the lower castes becoming ajlaf. The lowest among the ajlaf was designated arzal, indicating their most depressed status (Jain 2005; Sikand 2005; Zainuddin 2003). One of the pioneering sociologists of Muslims in India, Imtiaz Ahmad, has recorded the elaborate caste system and forms of social stratification through his studies (Ahmad 1973, 2010a).² While the ashraf are divided into four major subgroups, called the Saiyed, Shaik, Moghal and Pathan, the ajlaf are further divided into numerous sub-castes in different linguistic areas of the country.³ Ahmad points out that caste structures found among Muslims are analogous to those of Hindus as the major attributes such as endogamy, occupational specialization, hierarchical gradation of status groups and ritual considerations in commensal restrictions are found among Muslims as well (ibid.). The persistence of
caste stratification among Indian Muslims has resulted in far-reaching consequences on their socio-economic mobility. Since the majority of Muslim converts were Śūdras and from Hindu ex-untouchable castes whose traditional occupations have been service and menial jobs, extreme social and economic backwardness prevented them from making use of the opportunities of education and other forms of social mobility that was available in independent India. They have been given the ‘Other Backward Class (OBC)’ tag along with socio-economic weaker sections from other religions and are hence eligible for the benefits of reservation in education and government jobs.

The reinvigoration of backward caste movements among Hindus since the 1990s has influenced the caste equations within Indian Muslims as well. There is increasing discontent among the large sections of lower-caste Muslims against Muslim upper-caste religious elites and this is evident from the emergence of lower-caste Muslim mobilisation in different parts of the country and increasing clamour for change from these activists (Ahmad 2003; Alam 2010; Hansen 2000; Sikand 2002; Zainuddin 2003). Though the religious elites try to suppress these movements either by denying the existence of the caste system in India or by raising the bogey of fragmenting an already beleaguered community on caste lines, these movements are attaining momentum (Ahmad 2003). Indicating deeper tendencies of lower-caste solidarity among Muslims, mobilisation of Dalit Muslims has also began attaining momentum and the champions of these initiatives argue that the socio-economic conditions of the lowest sections of Muslims are worse than that of the Hindu Dalits and hence call for urgent attention and intervention from the state. All India Pasmanda Muslim Mahaz represents such an initiative originated in Bihar during the early 1990s and now spreading to different parts of the country (Alam 2010). The increasing caste consciousness and fragmentation of a monolithic Muslim religious identity has significant implications for the political mobilisation of Muslims in the country and will be discussed in a later section.

The scenario of socio-economic development

The question of socio-economic development of Muslims in India needs to be located within the specific historic contexts of their mass migration to Pakistan following the partition and bloodshed in 1947 as well as their status as the largest religious minority in the post-colonial India. This foregrounding is important because, the question of socio-economic development of a minority community needs to be analysed in the wider context of three interrelated components, namely security, identity and equity. While their interrelation is extremely crucial, this section looks exclusively at the question of equity, and the following section will examine the implications of identity and security of the Muslim community in India.

The large-scale out-migration of Muslims into Pakistan immediately after partition resulted in the exodus of Muslims who occupied higher socio-economic status within the community. People engaged in non-agricultural professions and those who were educated, economically well-off and political elites tended to migrate, leaving behind the agricultural workers, the poor and the uneducated Muslims in India (Islam 2012; Basant and Shariff 2010). The overall backwardness of the community in terms of socio-economic development is heavily influenced by this legacy of migration and the absence of elites to provide political and entrepreneurial leadership.

Muslims are the largest minority in India; the total number reached 160 million in 2009 (Kulkarni 2010). The annual growth rate of the Muslims has averaged 2.7 per cent over the period 1960–2001, above the national average of 2.1 per cent. The geographical distribution of Muslims in India is highly dispersed and among twenty-six states, only Jammu and...
Kashmir has a Muslim majority population constituting of 67 per cent of the population while states such as West Bengal, Assam and Kerala have Muslim populations above 20 per cent. Of the total 594 districts in 2001, only twenty had a majority Muslim population and thirty-eight had a substantial, though not a majority, Muslim population. Literacy level of Muslims is estimated at 59 per cent, lower than the national average of 65 per cent according to the 2001 census. Also according to the 2001 census, the sex ratio of Muslims adheres to the national figure of 930 women per thousand men. Child mortality rate and infant mortality rates are slightly lower than the national figures of 57 (infant mortality rate) and 74 (under five mortality rate) according to the 2001 census and stand at 52 and 70 respectively (Kulkarni 2010 and Deolalikar 2010).

The academic as well as policy-level attempts to look at the socio-economic development of Muslims as a distinct religious group is of very recent origin in the Indian context, as most of the literature on Muslims revolved around issues such as identity and communalism. It has been pointed out that colonial rule and the influence of modernisation theory on Indian social sciences and state-led developmental discourses has been significant, forcing upon them an evolutionary view of development where the traditional and primordial affiliations such as caste and religion would vanish at the advent of modern institutions as well as ideologies (Jodhka 2007; Upadhya 2001). This tendency also went hand in hand with a secular notion of development, especially at the formative years of Nehurian era, refusing to recognise caste and religion as legitimate categories to understand development status of different sections of the population. Though the Indian constitution recognised the precariousness of religious minorities and provided special rights, economists who worked with ‘hard data’ generated through the ‘secular’ economic and demographic variables dominated the mainstream development discourse, paying scant attention to the development experience of religious groups (Jodhka 2007:2297).

The distinct socio-economic condition of Muslims as a religious category came to the fore and aroused considerable public debate with the publication of a report popularly known as the Sachar Committee Report in 2006 (Basant 2007; Basant and Sheriff 2010; Islam 2012; Jodhka 2007; Robinson 2007; Shah 2007). The Report essentially deals with the relative deprivation of Muslims vis-à-vis other socio-religious communities (SRC), thus providing a comparative and comprehensive framework on all important development parameters. The Report shows that 25 per cent of Muslim children in the six to fourteen age group have either never been to school or have dropped out at some stage. Using the 61st round of National Sample Survey, the Report shows that Muslims stand second with 31 per cent of the headcount ratio (HCR) living below poverty line, just behind the SCs/STs with an HCR of 35 per cent. More than half of the Muslim workers are self-employed in household enterprises and concentrated in certain areas such as tobacco and textile products, retail and wholesale trade, repair and maintenance of motor vehicles, electrical machinery and apparatus manufacturing, and so on, and their participation in the informal sector is much higher than most other SRCs.

The Sachar Committee also looked at the representation of Muslims in government employment and demonstrates that they are highly under-represented in proportion to their population; for example only 3 and 4 per cent of the officers of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) and the Indian Police Service (IPS) in 2006 were Muslims. The Report also shows that the number of Muslim members of major policy making bodies is not only inadequate, but has drastically declined in parliament and state legislative assemblies over the years. In a nutshell, the Report observes that the socio-economic condition of Muslims in India is somewhat better than that of the SCs/STs but worse than of the Hindu OBCs.
More important is that while most of the SRCs have received some benefit in the economic development, the position of the Muslims has been somewhat reversed in the past sixty years as their economic opportunities have shrunk and political space has been conspicuously abridged (Shah 2007:839).

One of the significant implications of the Sachar Report is its reformulation and recasting of the category of Muslim as a monolithic, pan-Indian identity. The Report divides Indian Muslims on caste lines into ‘general’ and ‘OBC’ categories, recognises the three fold caste-like divisions such as *ashrafs*, *ajlafs* and *arzals* and advocates the listing of arzals as scheduled castes along with similar categories from other religions. In that sense, the Report facilitated a shift from a discourse of treating Muslims as a ‘community’ with specific cultural histories and self-identities with clearly marked out boundaries into a ‘population’, identified and described through a language that primarily belongs to the state (Jodhka 2007: 2998). This shift, it is argued, will facilitate new forms of mobilisation from within the community in future and the question of citizenship will begin to take priority over the questions of identity and cultural distinctiveness (Jodhka 2007: 2998).

**The political dimensions of Muslims in India: questions of citizenship and identity**

The story of Muslims in post-colonial India, especially their political mobilisation and citizenship questions are significant on various counts. There have been intense debates among scholars of Muslim societies regarding the compatibility of Islam with modern institutions and systems such as secularism and democracy. While scholars such as Gellner (1981) and Geertz (1965) point out the inherent features of Islam that prevents it from undergoing secularisation process, Giddens (1999) and Huntington (1996) highlight the essentially anti-democratic and anti-modernist tendencies of Islam. On the other hand, a vast array of scholars have argued, based on ethnographic as well as historic works, and demonstrated the complex processes through which Islamic communities have successfully negotiated with the challenges of modernity (Brenner 1996; Euben 1997a, 1997b; Hefner 1997, 1998; Moaddel 1998; Piscatori 1986; Robinson 2008). Scholarship on Indian Muslim’s encounter with electoral democracy and secular state adds many valuable insights to the complexity of these negotiations that are highly contingent on the socio-political and historical contexts of Indian society. The Muslim experience in India also stands testimony to the travails of a secular constitution striving to protect the minority rights in an atmosphere of surging Hindu nationalist politics and communal tension.

The saga of partition and the creation of a Muslim majority nation still hang on the political discourse of Indian society as a testimony to Muslim separatism and their uneasy relation with a secular constitution. With the Muslim League dissolved in north India and its leadership filtered through to Pakistan, the political trajectory of the Muslim community was defined within the democratic and secular framework; its future lay in coming to terms with the broad contours of Indian secularism and rallying round political parties with avowed secular goals (Hasan 1988, 1990). Moreover, a spate of bloody communal violence that followed partition and the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi by a Hindu fanatic closely associated with RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) discredited the arguments of Hindu nationalism and Muslim separatism and made secularism as the only possible basis for a modern Indian state (Brass 1990: 229). Upholding the principle of secularism, the Indian constitution had incorporated significant provisions for the protection of the socio-cultural identity of religious minorities in India.9
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It is evident that Muslims who remained in India failed to emerge as a powerful political force and this is mainly due to their scattered demographic distribution across the country and the internal schism based on sectarian and theological differences. After independence, at least for a couple of decades, the Indian National Congress became the most trusted party of Indian Muslims. Historically too, Jamiyat al-ulama-I Hindi, an influential party of the ulema associated with the Deoband seminary, was a close supporter of the Congress throughout the freedom struggle. Jamiyat’s support was based on the tacit understanding with the Congress that a number of key issues dear to the ulemas such as places of worship, religious endowments, Muslim Personal Law, and other institutional aspects of Islamic culture would be protected (Hasan 1990, 1988; Khalidi 1993; Malik 2012). The other major Muslim organisation, Jamaat-e-Islami was in a quandary as it found it impossible to adhere to and openly proclaim the vision of its founder Abul ala Maududi as it would be impractical and suicidal to argue that secularism and democracy are un-Islamic and the real obligation of a true Muslim is to strive for an Islamic state. Two prominent Muslim political parties which have been successful in sending representatives to the parliament are the Indian Union Muslim League and the Majlis-i Ittihad al-Muslimin. While the former is confined to the northern districts of Kerala the latter has retained its political base in Andhra Pradesh, especially in Hyderabad. The political fortunes of these organisations support the argument of Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph that Muslim voters tend to favour confessional parties where Muslims are in significant numbers, and vote for national parties when in a smaller minority (Rudolph and Rudolph 1987).

From the beginning of the 1980s, the Indian political system began to witness radical changes as political mobilisation based on ascriptive identities such as caste and religion began emphatically to appear on the political front, offsetting the rhetoric of secular democratic politics. Hansen argues that in the field of political discourse, during the 1980s majoritarian and communal themes were becoming ever more accepted and legitimate and the majoritarian notion of the ‘rights’ of the Hindus was gradually becoming a ‘legitimate problematic’ (Hansen 2005: 332). This turn in terms of the ascendance of Hindu nationalism and growth of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) posed significant challenges to the citizenship questions of Muslims in India. This is of paramount importance because, fundamentally, Hindu nationalism was conceived and nurtured through various strategies over decades as opposition to the ‘Muslim other’ who by definition do not belong to the cultural imagination of Indian nationalism, because, their holy land is elsewhere (Varshney 1993).

A reinvigorated Hindutva politics since the 1980s has played a crucial role in the construction of this ‘Muslim other’ in Indian political discourses, but its genesis goes back to the time of Indian independence and impinges on the ways through which the Indian nation-state was conceived and imagined. Pandey suggests that while the political discourses immediately after partition acknowledged the nationalist credentials of Hindus as given and original, those of the Muslims who remained in India were suspect on account of their being Muslims and this axiomatic view was further strengthened by the agitation for separate Muslim rights (Pandey 1999; Malik 2012). Following Talal Asad, Pandey also argues that the institutionalisation of terms such as ‘majority and minority’ on the basis of religion resulted in creating a pan-Indian idea that members of some cultures belong to particular politically defined space, but those of others (minority) do not. Hence, the Muslim minority, who originally fought for Pakistan and later constrained to stay back, came under the perpetual burden of demonstrating the sincerity of their choice: they had to prove that they were loyal to India and, hence, worthy of citizenship (Pandey 1999: 610–611).
This burden of having to demonstrate their patriotism and nationalism on demand gets exacerbated in a political climate dominated by Hindutva discourse that thrives on exclusionary politics and vilification of Muslims. Scholars working on the phenomenal growth of Hindutva organisations since the 1980s that culminated in the formation of the BJP government in 1999 at the centre have dwelt extensively on the carefully drafted ideological and tactical strategies which included the incorporation of selected symbolic and mythological elements from popular Hinduism as well as the systematic vilification of Muslims and Christians (Anderson and Damle 1987; Brass 2003; Breman 2002; Chatterji 1994, 1995; Fox 2007; Fuller 2001; Jafferlot 1996; Ludden 2007; Nandy et al. 1997; Noorani 2000; Pandey 1991,1993; Rajagopal 2001; Van der Veer 1987, 1994; Vanaik 1997). These campaigns have consistently sought to highlight the sense of betrayal and inferiority of the Hindu majority in secular India, and demanded acts of atonement, purification or sacrifice to restore the glories and unity of Hindudom (Corbridge and Harriss 2000: 189).

The Hindutva protagonists are not the advocates of a Hindu theocratic state, and they have thoroughly problematised the Nehruvian version of secularism by casting it as ‘pseudo-secularism’, which implies that secularism has been distorted and biased in favour of minorities in India. They accuse that secular parties, mainly Congress and the Left, are brainwashed by western-influenced liberals and are practising ‘minority appeasement’ and engage in ‘vote bank politics’ to win over minority votes. The Hindutva discourse depicted Islam as inherently intolerant and aggressive, backward and feudal, and a community that enjoys undeserving rights in the guise of secularism in India. The Shah Bano controversy of 1985 bolstered this view that Indian National Congress, led by its Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had meekly given in to the demands of Muslim clergy, overturning the Supreme Court’s historic judgment that aimed at upholding the constitutional requirement for a uniform civil code (Jafferlot 1996; Kishwar 1998). The Salman Rushdie controversy of 1989 where the concerted efforts of various Muslim organisations against his book *Satanic Verses* ultimately resulted in its ban also played out by the Hindutva discourses as an example of an intolerant and assertive Muslim community coercing the Indian government to toe its line. According to these narratives, the on-going sub-national struggle in Jammu and Kashmir is the manifestation of Muslims’ religiously rooted anti-national tendencies that try to divide and sabotage national integrity of India.

The Babri Masjid agitation of the early 1990s and the subsequent demolition of the mosque on 6 December 1992 was the culmination of a protracted ideological and organisational campaign on these lines by Hindutva forces. Hansen points out that Ayodhya was made the central and highly mobile metaphor for a ‘something lacking’ among the Hindus, and the Babri Masjid was portrayed as a traumatic wound in the nation and in Hindu civilisation – ‘something lacking’ that could be healed through the removal of the mosque and the construction of the temple (Hansen 2005: 326). The Babri Masjid demolition was widely celebrated by the Hindutva protagonists as the ‘awakening of a resurgent Hindu’; as the illustration of reversing a historic wrong, disregarding the constitutional and judicial establishments that has been insensitive to the religious sentiments of the Hindu majority in India.

While the Hindutva discourse disparaged secularism and its practice in India, Muslims have an ambivalent and uneasy relationship with the conceptual and institutional aspects of secularism in India. For Muslims, the destruction of the mosque represented a complete breach of trust in the secular constitution and the judiciary that had ordered the maintenance of the status quo of the mosque. Muslims across the country firmly believed that the entire episode was well orchestrated with the tacit connivance of the Congress government at the
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centre and the BJP government in Uttar Pradesh where the mosque was situated. The sense of betrayal still lingers on as the accused in the demolition, especially those implicated by the Liberhan Commission, are still scot-free and enjoy highly powerful positions within the government and BJP.13

For Muslims, the secular constitution and its promise appear ineffective given the grim picture of Hindu–Muslim violence in the country (see the chapter by Veziany in this book) and the the overriding Hindu majoritarian character of the state apparatus, which could not even ensure their physical security and safety. Wilkinson estimates that the overall number of casualties (dead and injured) since independence in Hindu–Muslim riots is around 40,000 besides causing enormous economic losses running into thousands of crores of rupees (Wilkinson 2005).14 It has been pointed out that the very stature of Muslims as a minority in terms of population and political power results in them bearing the brunt of violence in comparison with their Hindu counterparts, especially given the fact that major communal riots have occurred in towns and cities where they have attained economic success through their traditional artisanal and entrepreneurial skills (Engineer 1983; Hasan 1988). The rise of the BJP in many north Indian states has significantly altered the ways in which the state deals with religious violence, giving rise to the accusation that the state takes a highly partisan stand against Muslims during riots and the most striking example is the 2002 Gujarat pogrom that resulted in the deaths of more than 1,000 Muslims. The Gujarat government, headed by Narendra Modi – the current Prime Minister of India and the then Chief Minister of Gujarat – was at worst highly partisan and at the best inexcusably hesitant in preventing anti-Muslim violence and in its willingness to call in central troops and paramilitary forces to do the job for them (Wilkinson 2005:19; Setelvad 2005). Given the recent communal riots in Muzaffarnagar in Uttar Pradesh and in Assam, where Muslims suffered heavily during the riots and the state administration turning ineffective, this trend seems to be the rule rather than the exception in the current political scenario of the country. This in turn contributes to the spiral of a heightened sense of insecurity among the Muslims leading to increased ghettoization in their residential spaces, which further contributes to the sense of alienation and isolation (Breman 2002; Kirmani 2008; Mahadevia 2002).

The growth of fringe groups of extremists who believe in terrorist reprisal from within the community has worsened the precarious situation of Muslims in the contemporary era where the ‘war on terrorism’ enjoys unquestionable legitimacy. A series of terrorist attacks since the early 1990s – serial bomb explosions in Mumbai and Coimbatore in 1993 and 1998 respectively, the attack on the parliament in 2001, and the 2008 Mumbai attack being the most violent among them – by Muslim radical groups who are suspected of having cross-border connections have brought the Muslim community into the limelight with regard to the question on terrorism. The terrorist attacks that occur with unfailing regularity across the country have only intensified the already existing burden of suspicion and prejudice faced by that community.15 There have been widespread accusations of unlawful arrests and illegal detention of Muslim youths by the police on the basis of mere suspicion, and this, further exacerbates the process of alienation that has been well underway for several decades.

On the other hand, observers of Muslim politics have begun to argue that the Hindutva onslaught has helped in the creation of an alternative pan-Indian political consciousness among Muslims and has given rise to a new form of politics. In a decisive departure from the traditional Muslim politics led by elites who were wary of secularism and obsessed with questions of religious identity and cultural factors, the new political discourse is thoroughly democratic, unflinchingly embraces secular language and articulates itself as citizen politics that translates itself through the demands for equality, recognition and equal rights to ensure
an egalitarian living (Alam 2008; Jodkha 2007). According to this argument, implementation of the Mandal Commission Report following the OBC agitation and the publication of the Sachar Committee Report has already facilitated this process and the possibility of a broad-based political alliance of the backward communities, Dalits and Muslims is highly promising and imminent. On similar lines, Hansen also mentions the emergence of a plebeian politics among Indian Muslims premised on the powerful emotions attached to Muslim identity in contemporary India while it also questions the very notions of a unified Muslim community by expanding into religious and cultural practices previously not politicised, such as sectarian and caste differences (Hansen 2000: 269). These arguments echo the observations regarding the changing character of Muslim politics across the world where there is a decisive adoption of liberal secular language of equality, social justice, human rights and secularism indicating the turn towards post-Islamism and civil Islam (Bayat 2007; Roy 2004). Some of the overzealously optimistic commentators are even celebrating an ‘India’s Muslim Spring’ namely the emergence of a new generation of Muslims who want to rid the community of its insular and sectarian approach by concentrating on things that affect their everyday lives (Suroor 2014).

Conclusion

The citizenship question of Indian Muslims is quite fascinating given the specificities of its historic legacy and the complex socio-political and ideological contestations that mark present times. Scholars of Indian Muslims have demonstrated beyond doubt the fallacy of treating them as a ‘community’ with given socio-political dispositions due to their shared religious identity. Yet, the identity of a Muslim minority in a secular Hindu majoritarian country constantly informs their everyday existence and continuously shapes the multiple contours of their citizenship question in India. Scholars have also exhibited the futility of privileging Islamic theological doctrines as determinants of their socio-political positions and instead have demonstrated how these positions are quite contingent on external contexts that often compel theology to reinvent itself. Yet the fatwa issuing ulema who vouch by theological infallibility and command leadership within the community too is a reality for Muslims.

Like any other socio-religious groups, propelled by processes of globalisation and economic reforms, Muslims in India too are undergoing rapid socio-cultural transformations resulting in critical reformulation of their living. Significant advancement in education and the emergence of a new middle class who is benefiting from the opportunities of a globalised era is redefining the character of Indian Muslims. Increasing democratisation of religious authority and the emergence of a vibrant public domain where theological and ideological matters are thoroughly discussed and debated are definitely positive signs for the community. The active involvement in the democratic process of India and the constructive engagement with a secular liberal paradigm to articulate their collective demands and aspirations add to the democratic spirit of the country. Yet, the future of their citizenship question and integration into the collective imagination of Indian nationalism is highly contingent on the present as well as the future prospects of Hindutva ideology in the country.

At present, the most significant development in Indian polity for the Muslims is the usurpation of political power at the centre by BJP in the 2014 election with an overwhelming majority resulting in the virtual decimation of the opposition and the ‘secular’ parties. Even more significant is the elevation of Narendra Modi, who has been pilloried as the mastermind of the 2002 anti-Muslim pogrom and widely recognised as the mascot of hard-
line Hindutva as the Prime Minister of the country. It is too premature to guess the specific policy orientations and administrative interventions of the new government in several contentious matters related to the minority question in India and the responses from the community. Yet, it is evident that Muslims in India are passing through some of the most momentous phases of their recent history and only the future will demonstrate how the community negotiated with these challenging times.

Notes

1 Sunnis are the vast majority among Indian Muslims and Shias constitute roughly 25 per cent. Ahmadiyyas and Bohras are minuscule minorities with less than one million each.


3 See Ahmad and Chakravarti (1981) for a detailed enumeration of Muslim castes in different geographic regions of India

4 For the emergence of the backward class movement in India in the 1990s following the Mandal commission agitation that demanded 27 per cent of reservation for Other Backward Classes in government jobs and educational institutions, see Yadav (1996) and Jafferlot (2000)

5 The term pasmanda means those who are left behind and the Pasmanda movement highlights the plight of Azrals and argues for their mobilization against the upper-caste Ashraf within the community (Alam 2010).

6 The 2001 decennial census shows Muslims constituted roughly 14 per cent of the Indian population amounting to a total of 138 million while other minorities such as Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains constituted 2.34, 1.87, 0.77 and 0.41 respectively. The following census held in 2011 has not yet released the population statistics of religious groups.

7 The Prime Minister’s High Level Committee, headed by justice Rajendra Sachar was appointed on 9 March 2005 and submitted the report titled ‘Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community’ in the last week of November 2006 and tabled it in parliament on 30 November 2006. The committee visited almost all the states and apart from the 578 representations it received on the conditions, grievances and demands from several Muslim groups and organisations, it heavily depended on quantitative data available from the Census, National Sample Surveys, National Family Health Survey and information from banking and financial institutions, government departments, universities, etc.

8 The most recent election held in 2014 that witnessed a Hindutva wave across the country saw an all-time low of only twenty-four Muslim members of parliament, representing a mere 4.4 per cent of the total strength of the house, and the BJP, the ruling party which won an absolute majority with 282 seats, does not have a single Muslim member.

9 The Indian constitution champions the cause of minorities through two significant provisions; that of non-discrimination and provision of minority rights. The Chapter on Fundamental Rights (Article 14–30) ensures that no citizens will be discriminated on the basis of caste, gender, race, religion, sex and place of birth in the country. Article 16 and Clause 2 of Article 29 specifically affirm the principle of non-discrimination in the field of employment by the state and admission to educational institutions maintained by the state or receiving aid from state funds respectively. In terms of minority rights, Article 29(1) guarantees the right of religious minorities to protect and conserve their culture. The right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice and to receive state grants are guaranteed to minorities through Article 30(1) and Article 30(2). Many of these provisions have been strengthened by a series of innovative court verdicts in favour of minorities, especially in matters relating to educational rights (Alam 2008). The most significant legal provision to protect the distinct cultural identity of Muslims in India is the protection of Muslim Personal Law or Sharia law that governs matters related to ‘personal’ aspects such as marriage, divorce, adoption, inheritance and succession of Muslims. The commitment of the Indian constitution to the principle of secularism is enshrined in Articles 25, 26, 27 and 28. Article 25 (1) grants ‘freedom of conscience’ and ‘free profession, practice and propagation of religion’ to all citizens while Article 26 confers the right upon the members of a religious group to
‘manage religious affairs, establish institutions and acquire movable and immovable property for religious and charitable purposes’. Article 27 prevents the state from levying a tax upon citizens to promote any particular religion while Article 28 prohibits the impartation of any religious instruction in educational institutions supported by state funds.


11 The central thesis of Hindutva ideology is articulated in the book *The Essentials of Hindutva* (1922) by V. D. Savarkar and according to him, a true Hindu can be defined as ‘a person who regards this land … from the Indus to the Seas as his fatherland as well as his Holyland’. It is evident that this formulation excludes ‘alien’ religions like Christianity, Islam and Judaism from the national imagination of ‘true Indians’ since their holy land lies outside the geographic boundaries of India.

12 In 1985, the Indian Supreme Court overruled a Muslim personal law by granting Shah Bano, a 62-year-old woman alimony from her divorced husband. This resulted in powerful backlash from Muslims across the country who saw it as an infringement on the Sharia law and successfully pressurised Rajiv Gandhi, the then Congress Prime Minister to bring in a constitutional amendment to overrule the Supreme Court verdict.

13 The Home Ministry appointed retired High Court Judge M. S. Liberhan on 16 December 1992 to look into the circumstances of the Babri Masjid demolition and, though originally mandated to submit the report within three months, the Commission submitted its report after forty-eight extensions and a delay of seventeen years. In the report submitted on 30 June 2009, the Commission holds sixty-eight people culpable including the top leadership of BJP such as Atal Bihari Vajpayee, L. K. Advani, Murali Manohar Joshi etc.

14 For an exhaustive account on communal riots see Wilkinson (2005) and Brass (2003).

15 Investigations into two terrorist attacks, the 2006 Malegaon bomb blast and the Ajmer bomb blast, have revealed the involvement of radical Hindutva groups behind these blasts and hence blunted the argument that all terrorist attacks in India are the work of Muslims.

References


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