Violence against Muslims in Contemporary India

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ABSTRACT

The history of Hindu-Muslim conflicts in India is not new; it has its roots in middle ages when Muslims took charge of sub-continent. At the end of British regime, Hindu-Muslim hostility reached its peak which resulted in violent partition of sub-continent in 1947. Because of ever mounting hostility and hatred of Hindus, Muslims minority in India has been the victim of systematic and pre-planned violence. The present study aims to explore physical and psychological violence faced by Muslims in contemporary India.

Key Words: **Violence against Muslims in India, Minorities in India, Hindu-Muslim Conflicts**

Introduction

The present study aims to shed light on physical and psychological violence faced by Muslims in India. The phenomenon of violence against Muslims is not new; it has a long history in sub-continent (Varshney, 2003). Ethnically segregated groups based on caste i.e. Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras and religious beliefs i.e. Hindu, Muslims, Christian and Buddhists had been living together in Indian sub-continent (Bhasin, 2006). There has been a continuous struggle for power and control over resources among them which generates hostility and hatred (Baviskar, 2003; Varshney, 2003).

After the partition of sub-continent in 1947, a new form of Hindu-Muslim conflicts started in India that worsens with time. However, it is repeatedly claimed by the Indians that India is a secular state which does not support any particular religious ideology and it is a safe place for diverse religious minorities to live (Guha, 2017). However, substantial academic evidence highlights that India is more favorable for Hindus and Muslims are second citizens there. Since partition, there has been a continuous wave of violent conflicts between Hindus and Muslims (Guha, 2017), especially in Indian occupied Kashmir, a Muslim majority area. But the situation became worse after 9/11 when Muslims were labeled as terrorists across the globe (Hussain, 2006). India propagated that Muslims are responsible for every terrorist activity in India (Paul & Paul, 2005). They

represented Muslims as criminals in literature i.e. novels and movies as well. These politically charged myths subjected Muslims to physical and psychological violence. Below is the detail of physical and psychological violence faced by Muslims in India.

Physical Violence

According to 2011 censes in India, about 80% of the population is Hindu and 20% are other religious and ethnic groups. From 20% non-Hindus, 14.2% are Muslims who are vulnerable and facing physical violence such as physical assaults by Hindu mobs which include not only mass killings of Muslims but damage to their belongings as well (Human Right Council, 2017). In the recent century, two of these violent attacks are Gujarat riot in 2002 and Muzaffarnagar riots in 2013 (Sayaa et al., 2013). But, in last century after partition, there have been many such riots which caused mass killings of Muslims. However, individual cases of physical assault, murder, rape and sexual harassment are countless (Tatsuni, 2009).

Diverse factors are responsible for physical violence against Muslims. But after partition, one of the major factors is political one. Political parties in India such as Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and Shiv Sena used anti-Muslim violence as electoral strategy (Graff & Galonnier, 2012). They advocated Hindu nationalism by spreading hatred against Muslims. In addition, socio-economic and socio-political factors are also responsible for spreading violent conflicts (Kanungo, 2003). Pre-partition struggle for political power by Muslims created hatred among Hindus which is also manifested in mobs attacks against Muslims. Physical, sexual and religious assaults against Hindus or Muslims also give birth to collective violent conflict in India (Akomah, 2009).

Psychological Violence

Since partition, the situation of Muslims kept on worsening day by day. Besides physical violence, they had to face psychological violence. In secular state of India Hindus are permitted to write down their religious sayings in public places but Muslims face socio-political difficulties to perform their religious rituals even in mosques (Rajagopal, 2001). Muslims face restrictions not only by Hindu public but also by state institutions to perform their rituals, for example, Muslims should acquire police permission for holding meetings and for public gatherings (Human Right Council, 2017).

Ban on religious rituals is one form of psychological violence but falsified cases are also lodged against Muslims because of anti-Muslim rivalry (Kaur, 2005). According to the National Human Right Commission (NHRC), more than a half of Indian prisoners are either Muslims or Dalits and Adivasis. It does not mean that they commit more crimes but they are economically and socially unprivileged (Human Right Council, 2017). They are unable to afford the financial

burden of such cases. This implies that unprivileged position of Muslims is one of the reasons of psychological violence against them (Kanungo, 2003).

Muslims are also the target of hate speeches by the members of central council and members of parliament which initiate interethnic hatred, tension, anxiety and fear (Varadarajan, 2002). In the last two decades, Muslims experienced more threat to their life and security because of the psychological violence by the political workers of BJP and Shiv Sena. Muslims are continuously monitored by volunteer Hindu organizations to not perform such rituals which are anti-Hindus. If they are found performing such rituals, in a few cases they were stabbed to death by Hindu mobs (Puniyani, 2006). Besides collective psychological violence by Hindu mobs, Muslims men and women are harassed at public places such as in parks and in bazaars (Human Right Council, 2017).

Conclusion

In India, Muslims are the victims of physical, psychological and financial violence since partition. In most of the cases, physical violence is perpetuated systematically by Hindu mobs. However, the involvement of state agencies in supporting violence is against the rights of Muslim citizens in Indian state. Academic evidence suggests that political parties, volunteer organizations and state agencies initiate both physical and psychological violence against Muslims in the name of Hindu nationalism. This victimization of Muslims is increasing their social marginalization and vulnerability in India.

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