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Mission Statement & Editorial Process

We take pride in bringing various human rights and current affairs issues to the foray on a regular basis to our readers. The publication is a quarterly magazine which will be a compilation of essays, articles and artworks (including photo-essays and poems) written by practitioners, academics and students worldwide.

This is a thematic magazine and the entries are expected to critically reflect upon the individual themes concerned. This magazine will provide a platform to all ignited minds waiting to make their voices count through their writings and artwork.

Each entry will undergo a double-blind peer review on the content, style and originality by our experienced editorial team, comprising of academics, journalists, lawyers and students across the world. Contributions which do not meet the acceptable standards will be rejected and decisions of the editorial team will be final.



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Editor's Note



Religion and politics are two complex and intertwined aspects of human society that often intersect with profound implications:

- **Historical Influence:** Throughout history, religion has played a significant role in shaping political structures and governance, sometimes serving as a moral compass for rulers and societies.
- **Contemporary Issues:** In modern times, the relationship between religion and politics remains contentious, with debates over the separation of church and state, religious freedoms, and the influence of religious beliefs on policy decisions.
- **Identity and Conflict:** Religious identity can profoundly influence political affiliations and movements, leading to both unity and division among populations.
- **Ethical and Moral Frameworks:** Religious beliefs often provide ethical and moral frameworks that influence political ideologies, policies, and societal norms.
- **Challenges and Opportunities:** While religion can inspire social justice movements and advocacy for human rights, it can also contribute to conflicts and discrimination when intertwined with political power.

Navigating the intersection of religion and politics requires careful consideration of pluralism, tolerance, and the principles of democracy to ensure diverse beliefs are respected while maintaining societal harmony and progress.

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Religious Nationalism in the Context of Pakistan Harmony Pre-Colonisation, Divide and Rule and The Partition



Short Essays

Pranav Rao

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Religious Nationalism in the Context of Pakistan

Harmony Pre-Colonisation, Divide and Rule and The Partition

The Indian subcontinent witnessed the beginning of Islamic conquests in 1021 when Lahore was captured. In 1192, Hindu rulers in Delhi were overthrown by the Persianized Turks (from present-day Central Afghanistan), and a Sultanate, extending from Gujarat in the West to Bengal in the East and Madurai in the South was formed by 1323. Although these conquests are now closely associated with Muslims, religious affiliations were not used as primary identifiers in medieval Sanskrit texts. An Indo-Islamic society evolved through the centuries, promoting an amalgamation of cultures and coexistence throughout the subcontinent.

In 1757, the British expanded its dominance over India through the East India Company until 1858, when the British Raj was established and the government directly started its rule. While tension between the Hindu-Muslim communities was found pre-colonisation, the British government's divide-and-rule policies during this time intensified communal conflicts. Added to this, the expansion of communal organisations in the first half of the 20th century polarised the two communities causing friction and violence for political gains and corporate interests. Ultimately, when the British declared it would quit India, minority Muslims in pre-partitioned India (25% of the population) feared they would be marginalised in an independent India governed mostly by Hindus. Therefore, a Two Nation Theory backed by Muhammad Ali Jinnah demanded a separate nation, Pakistan in the West and East of India splitting the country and the two communities. What followed was among the most gruesome and horrifying migrations in history. While millions of Muslims made their way West or East to the newly formed Pakistan, countless Hindus and Sikhs walked in the opposite direction to India displacing over 12 million people. Consequently, the partition triggered a long-term rivalry between the two nations which resulted in three wars, the development of nuclear weapons and travel restrictions while impacting South Asia's geopolitical landscape. In religious contexts, India remained a secular country home to multiple religions including Muslims, Christians, and Sikhs with a Hindu majority. Although Pakistan was formed as a welfare Islamic state, it promoted a peaceful and equitable society where other minority religions could co-exist. Such minority communities, including the Hindus, are represented in the white colour of the Pakistani flag.

However, contrary to India's ideas of secularism and Pakistan's peaceful and equitable society, oppression of the majority over religious minorities has been prevalent. The political animosity between Hindu-majority India and predominantly Muslim Pakistan over the years has caused serious challenges to the minority communities.

In Pakistan, Hinduism constitutes the largest minority community with nearly 2.14% of the population practicing the religion. While religious freedom is facilitated through the Objective Resolution, Pakistan's fundamental and defining constitutional documents, it is not typical for Hindus to openly practice their religion. Similar to India's (and various other countries') political landscape, minority communities have been targeted for the inefficiencies of an administration and political gains. Hindus, considered to be anti-state and anti-Islam, are subject to discrimination and persecution while the electorate is mobilised and unified through the propagation of Islamic ideologies. However, contrary to the diversity and inclusions that exist(ed) in Indian societies, religious establishments, the state-run media and educational institutions perpetuate prejudice and discrimination against Hindus. Representation in the armed forces, judiciary and other positions of authority in public services is significantly lower, triggering further challenges. These issues, coupled with forced conversion and atrocities against the community have caused a steady exodus of Hindus from Pakistan. This essay examines the interplay between religion, nationalism and politics drawing examples from the exploitation of minority communities in Pakistan and through history.

Religious Nationalism in the Global Context

Shared pasts and memories foster a sense of kinship or solidarity among citizens, eventually nurturing a feeling of a nation and identity. While these recollections are potentially of heroic struggles or the nation's victories, they may also evoke memories of religious intolerance, betrayal and persecution. Typically, the desire for power is intrinsically linked to nationalism; therefore, competitive prestige is the ultimate objective. Events in history are perceived to be the perpetual rise and fall of superpowers while all that unfolds is evidence that their side is winning, and a hated rival is losing. Although nationalism is often confused with patriotism, the latter is defensive and is a strong commitment to a country that is not imposed on others. Therefore, a principal objective of nationalism is the increased power and prestige of the country over others and the certainty of righteousness. Historically, nationalistic ideas have led to discrimination, civil wars, oppression and genocide.

A conservative solidarity among citizens allegedly bound to a country through race, culture or biological background and the prioritisation of their needs – These were primary principles of Hitler and Mussolini extending their nationalistic ideologies and undermining democracy. Ethnic minority groups are frequently targets of discrimination and persecution by governments that have worked to safeguard or uphold a single dominant culture. Germany's misfortune including the defeat in World War 1, the harsh terms of the Treaty of Versailles, and the economic depression, were all used as justifications to persecute and genocide of the Jews in Adolf Hitler's Nazi Germany, murdering over six million Jewish people.



In Italy, a combination of nationalism, populism and violence to harness dissatisfaction led to the rise of Mussolini's fascist party. While these two cases are from an earlier era, contemporary history is populated with similar instances of discrimination and oppression stemming from nationalism.

In Xinjiang (northwest of China), China has been accused of crimes against and possible genocide of the minority Uyghur population. The broader issues of Islamic identity in Central Asia have fuelled ethno-religious conflicts and discrimination. Moreover, the heightened fight worldwide against terrorism after 9/11 has essentially made it possible for the Chinese government to conflate terrorism and separatism, further prioritising the Han Chinese (majority) over the mostly Muslim Uyghur population (minority). In Russia, Putin's nationalistic vision to defy the West coupled with the resurgence of Tsarist imperial nationalists who deny the existence of Ukraine and Ukrainians has triggered long-standing conflict. Russia's nationalism is motivated by the feeling of betrayal and the need for a strong leader, enabling them to tolerate authoritative leaders over the years including Vladimir Putin. However, his ideas of a "Russian world" consisting of Russia, Ukraine and other predominantly ethnic Russian nations, led to the takeover of Crimea and triggered the ongoing conflict with Ukraine. In the United States, Trump's presidency energised white nationalists through his rhetoric, personnel and policy decisions, giving white supremacists a platform, unparalleled in contemporary political landscapes. He connected to his core voters through campaigns that primarily featured his charisma, use of nationalist populism rhetoric and the stress on security threats due to illegal immigration. The Trump era in the United States, therefore, witnessed increased discrimination against immigrants and greater support for white nationalistic ideas. All the above-mentioned cases point to the oppression of a minority community irrespective of factors including religion, race, and location. The concept of the "other" that has betrayed or caused a downfall to "ours" and the need to perpetually win against them is a common factor and a primary cause of discrimination.

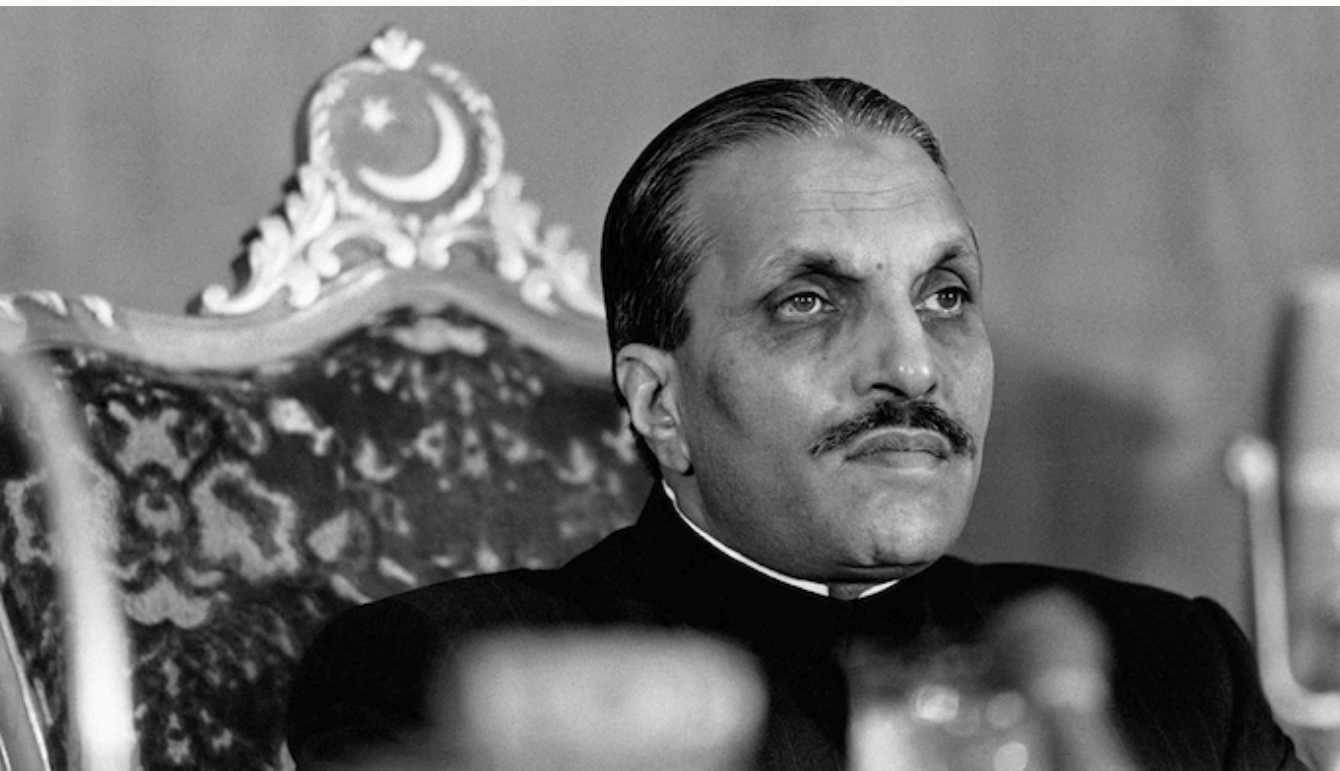
Religious Nationalism and Oppression in Pakistan

With a decentralised approach to governance in the Indian subcontinent throughout history, regional decolonisation created political and institutional vacuums where Muslims and Hindus had to compete. Consequently, the two-nation theory was justified and supported by Islam, creating West and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). Pakistan's national identity was heavily contentious due to identities of exclusions. The concept of Pakistan was fundamentally rooted in religion, aspiring to create a unified Islamic nation thus promoting ideas of religious nationalism in the country. Contrary to these ideas, on 11 August 1947, 3 days before the creation of Pakistan, Jinnah's crucial speech addressing the Constituent Assembly announced the country would be tolerant, inclusive and secular. In the speech quoted often, Jinnah declared "You may belong to any religion or caste or creed – that has nothing to do with the business of the state." However, religious idealists argued that this was incompatible with the anti-Indian and anti-Hindu narrative they were attempting to establish and subsequent military governments were accused of manipulating or even deleting the speech from official records.

. Following Jinnah's death, several civilian and in tandem with religious groups have attempted to transform him into an Islamic leader to align with the anti-Hindu sentiment and gain legitimacy in Pakistani society. Amidst a longstanding national identity crisis, this helped them find a new identity that gained traction in the 1970s during General Zia-ul-Haq's rule. To combat mainstream opposition to his rule and gain support from religious extremists, Zia employed Islamization extending his mission to "cleanse and purify Pakistan". While discriminatory laws against minorities were introduced, any opposition to the laws was silenced either through assassinations or charges of blasphemy. These laws have often been used by vested interests against Pakistan's minority groups. Thus, deviating from the founder's vision for the country, the implementation of discriminatory laws against minorities and the propagation of Islamic ideas advanced religious nationalism in Pakistan.

Violence against religious minorities in Pakistan escalated due to the growth of Sunni Islamist militants, which recruited and inspired members by condemning non-Sunni Muslims. Military intimidation, violence and the government's failure to enforce laws have further allowed such religious extremists to carry out acts of violence in the name of religion. Every year, there are persistent allegations of Hindu women being abducted, forced to convert to Islam and forced into marriages with Muslim men. While thousands of Christian and Hindu girls suffer forced conversion by Muslim men, police inaction, the failure of the justice system and the non-recognition of Hindu marriages in court make Hindu women vulnerable to these heinous crimes. A minor Hindu girl was threatened to convert to Islam and marry against her will in 2023 triggered a debate about Pakistan's justice system. Several such cases of mostly minor Hindu girls are reported in Pakistan with generally no response from authorities. Condemning violations of human rights, the United Nations urged Pakistan to respect their international commitment, prosecute offenders, enforce laws pertaining to child and forced marriage and abduction and trafficking of minor girls. Accounts also suggest the mainstream media fail to report on such issues accurately. In 2020, construction of a temple in Pakistan's capital was halted due to pressure from political elites and after a mob demolished the boundary wall. Nearly a decade ago, after claims that a Hindu had desecrated the Qur'an, a crowd set fire to a Hindu community centre in Southern Pakistan, which was followed by attacks on four other Hindu temples. The persistent violence against Hindu properties and temples depicts the discrimination faced by Hindu communities.

While the cases mentioned above bring to light direct or visible discrimination against the Hindu minorities in Pakistan, unnoticed reports of discrimination and oppression are frequent. In Sindh province with the largest population of Hindus, conversions are widespread owing to social and religious discrimination, economic hardships or protection. Taking advantage of the minorities' economic disadvantage, local religious leaders converted nearly 50 Hindus in a single mass conversion. Mostly living in poverty, a large number of Hindus convert to Islam every year as they are guaranteed land ownership and an increased economic status for the family. Further, with minimal representation of Hindus in positions of power or authority in government institutions, conversion is rampant to reach a higher status.



Often, the contributions of the minority communities in Pakistan are also forgotten since the names of Hindu-founded institutions changed. Therefore, the minority Hindu community in Pakistan faces perpetual discrimination and oppression through forced conversion, violence, intolerance and hate. The creation of Pakistan as an Islamic state and the subsequent rise in religious nationalism has further fuelled religious discrimination, violence and intolerance.

Conclusions

The oppression of minority Hindus in Pakistan helps understand the causes and consequences of religious nationalism and abuse of absolute power. With increased polarisation and communal disharmony worldwide, mitigating such extremism has now become vital. In Gaza for example, similar narratives and sentiments have led to a genocide of the minority population. In India, discrimination against minority Muslims and the demolition of the Babri Masjid led to violence against minority Hindus in Pakistan. While such religious discrimination is a serious threat and defies human rights conventions, it is important to understand they cause long-lasting ripple effects. To that end, this essay demonstrates the need to amplify discourse and debate against religious nationalism and discrimination.



About the Author

I'm Pranav Rao, a graduate of MA in Political Communication from the School of Journalism, Media and Culture, Cardiff University. My research interest includes the rise in right-wing populist governments, public opinion and the media's representation of democracies. Through my research and work, I aim to inspire positive political decisions.

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Navigating Religious Freedom in The Present Political Context of India

Mahesh Ganguly

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Introduction

Religious freedom, which is a fundamental right recognized by international declaration and state constitutions, plays a significant role in the political environments of many countries worldwide. It represents the idea that people should be free to adopt, practice and abandon their beliefs without worrying about any retaliation or discrimination. The fight for religious freedom has historically been intertwined with the advancement of politics and the pursuit of power; religious wars have shaped political landscapes and nations histories, from the roman empire's persecution of the early Christians to the protestant reformations challenge to catholic dominance. The modern conceptions of religious freedom within political systems were established during the Westphalian era, which introduced new ideas of religious tolerance and separation of religion and the state. The concept of religious freedom has taken on new dimensions with the emergence of religious nationalism, identity politics and favoritism in contemporary times.



Religious freedom: what does the term imply

What does the term religious freedom actually mean and what does it imply for society? Is religious freedom only the ability to attend worship services? Is religious freedom absolute or the foundation of any sociopolitical structure? Is the notion of freedom limited only to the internal beliefs, or does it extend to actions taken in the public sphere? Should religious freedom ever be prioritized over other societal needs? See, there are a lot of questions but no conclusive and universal answers, only the popular definitions given by UN agencies, academicians and researchers.

The theme of religious freedom has been described as “an explosive one, both historically and at present”. Religious freedom is significant because it is hypothesized to be a vital feature of Westernized liberal democratic societies. Many people believe that the right to religious freedom is inalienable. Many contend that backing religious freedom also helps national security (Farr, 2008), economic prosperity proposed by Gill in 2008 terrorism and violence reduction (Saiya, 2019), and a more secure and free society (Glendon, 2019). It has also grown in importance as a component of western nations foreign policies especially for the americans. The liberal political worldview views religious freedom as central consequential and advantageous. The popular definitions of religious freedom are 1. ‘Free exercise of religion’ comes from the first amendment of the US constitution, which essentially means that the government must not limit the ability to practice one’s religion (Fox, 2021). Fox described this interpretation of religious freedom as relatively narrow and focusing especially on the freedom to engage in religious activities. 2. ‘religious persecutions and repressions’ which means ‘an effort by a government to repress major activities by a given religious group, commonly with the goal of eliminating that group in the long or short term (Jenkins, 2007) 3. ‘Religious tolerance’ focuses on giving equal rights and privileges to minorities. (Fox, 2021) ‘tolerance means putting up with those you dislike or with whom you disagree’ (Eisenstein, 2008). In Karpov’s view political tolerance is the willingness to extend civil liberties to the political out groups (Karpov, 2008) 4. ‘Freedom from religion’ means they include the right of religious minorities not to have elements of another religion forced upon them and also the right to be free from mandatory religious practices even for nominal members for the majority religion. (Fox, 2021). Joustra in her article points out that “for the ardent religious believer..religious freedom often means the right to restrict the freedom of others or to impose one’s religion on the larger world, that’s why the most important religious freedom is freedom from religion (Joustra, 2018). Other definitions of are 5. Absolute separationism (fox, 2021) which essentially follows the united state paradigms, in which the government must be explicitly uninvolved in religion in any way. 6. Neutrality in which the state does not show preferences and treats all religions equally.



This conception allows support for religion as well as repression, persecutions and restrictions as long as the policy falls equally on all religions (Fox, 2021). 7 Laicism model, it is essentially a French model of religious policy which restricts the religions presence in the private sphere and public sphere must be secular including the majority religion.



Religious Freedom in Indian Body-Politik

Religious freedom in India is a fundamental right inscribed under Articles 25-28 of the Indian Constitution. In 1947, modern India came into being as an independent and sovereign nation, and in 1976 through the 42nd amendment act the preamble of the Indian constitution was changed to declare India to be a secular state. What was actually accomplished by this amendment is to explicitly say what was previously contained implicitly under the Articles 25 to 28. All Indian nationals are entitled to the peaceful practice and propagation of their respective religions but these rights are not absolute and are subject to public order, morality, health and other provisions. Article 25 says that all persons are equally entitled to freedom of 'conscience' and the right to freely profess practice and propagate religion; so, it covers both religious beliefs and practices. Article 26 guarantees and protects collective freedom of religion and religious denominations of their sections that means right to establish as well as maintain institutions, right to manage its own affairs, right to own and acquire movable and immovable property and right to administer such property in accordance with law. Article 27 lays down that nonperson shall be compelled to pay any taxes for the promotion or maintenance of any particular religion or religious denomination. This provision of the constitution prohibits the state from favoring, patronizing and supporting one religion over another. Under Article 28 no religious instruction shall be provided in any educational institution wholly maintained out of state funds. Further there are article 29 which provides 'protection of interests of minorities' and article 30 which grants the right of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions. There were explicit provisions pertaining to secularism, although they were expressed in 'res ipsa loquitur' terminology. Indian type of secularism differs from western style secularism on the grounds that the Indian constitution holds secularism in the highest regard and gives it the greatest weight. western state considers religion to be completely non- interfering.



Western concept of secularism does not support public display of religion. In Indian essence creating a constructive connection between state and religion is what secularism is all about. In India the state supports every manifestation of a religion in an equal manner that is why Rajiv vergava terms this type of secularism as 'principled distance' not equidistance⁸ (Rajiv Vergava, 1988). Bhargava has maintained that secularism in India does not imply that the state refrains from being involved in questions of faith. Conversely the state has taken strong stand in religious matters in some instances for example by outlawing animal sacrifices, Dalit can enter into the temple. There have been occasions when the government has treated various religious sects differently. For instances the state changed Hindu personal laws in line with several new Hindu Code measures but if god not later laws for other religious minorities in the same way example is muslims were permitted to continue using sharia law (Bhargava, 1990). The Supreme Court has consistently stressed the value of religious freedom and upheld secularism. There are numerous cases like *Bijoe Emmanuel vs State of Kerala*, 1987, AIR 748; *The Ahmedabad St. Xaviers College vs State of Gujarat*, 1974, AIR (SC) 1389, *Shayara Bano vs Union of India* (triple *talaq* case) AIR 2017 SC 1388, in which the top court upheld the individual freedom of religion and belief and enforcing the belief that India being a secular and democratic state.



Religious freedom in India since 2014

In January 2022, a few female Muslim students at a government pre-university college in Udupi district of Karnataka were allegedly denied entry to classrooms for wearing an 'extra piece of cloth' - the Hijab. In September 2021, seven tribal Christians were tonsured in a village in Jharkhand for following their own religious beliefs. Fearing backlash, the Christian Tribals did not even report the matter to the Police. In January 2020, the Madhya Pradesh government promulgated, 'The Madhya Pradesh Freedom of Religion Ordinance, 2020' which specifies the procedure for undergoing religious conversion and prohibits unlawful religious conversion. This ordinance repeals the 'Madhya Pradesh Dharma Swatantrya Adhinyam,' 1968, which previously regulated religious conversions in the state. All these glaring realities have been highlighted by the report of the International Religious Freedom Report of the Office of International Religious Freedom, United States Department of State. There were numerous instances of violence by law enforcement authorities against members of religious minorities in multiple states across India. The report further pointed out that the attacks on members of religious minority communities, including killings, assaults, and intimidation, occurred in various states throughout the year. These included incidents of "cow vigilantism" against non-Hindus based on allegations of cow slaughter or trade in beef and incidents in which Muslim men were alleged to have married Hindu women to convert them. There were also attacks on pastors, disruption of Christian and Muslim worship services, and vandalism of Churches. (Report of religious freedom; 2022).

The report also mentioned calls for genocide extermination for muslim mainly from the ruling party leaders. Notwithstanding this, the Indian government has categorically rejected it and maintained that reports of this kind are based on inaccurate information, flawed understanding and incomplete comprehension. Through the current government has been accused of enacting anti Muslim laws and enforcing anti minority policies, such as the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019; which was notified by the government on 22 January, 2024, on the very first day of the Ramadan! and also abrogation of the special status of Jammu and Kashmir , since assuming in power. Moreover the home ministry no longer provides data on ‘communal incidents’ occurring in India and the national crime records bureau now only publishes data on religious riots only.(civilsdily.com). The state authorities have also tightened their restrictions on foreign funding in recent years. Although foreign funding is essential to any NGOs, the authorities frequently view it with suspicion. One example of this is ‘compassion international’, christian charitable child welfare organization that has been operating in India for 48 years. As per the report, compassion international was accused of alleged pro-selytization and was forced to receive funds only with the prior permission from the ministry of home affairs. As a result of these financial restrictions, the organization closed its operations in India in 2017, despite advocacy efforts to defend it.

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the issues of religious freedom in India has described the erosion of Fundamental Rights, particularly of religious and other minorities, in India as ‘massive, systematic and dangerous.’ During the UN Human Rights Council’s Universal Periodic Review Process held on November 10, 2022 at least 21 countries urged India to improve its protection of freedom of religion and rights of religious minorities, with several raising concerns over increasing violence and hate speech and the government’s adoption of discriminatory policies such as “Anti Conversation” laws.



In this critical juncture let’s take an insight into the kind of religious discrimination as well as religious freedom is prevalent in the country in the current scenario. Firstly, government restrictions on religious freedom have risen in several different ways (Pew Research Center, 2019). According to the study of pew research center, laws and policies restricting religious freedom and government favoritism of religious groups have consistently been the most prevalent types of restriction globally including India. There is inter-religious tension and violence although it has declined markedly globally but in the Indian scenario it is continuously in rising trend example a dispute between two Hindu and Muslim high schools students of Gujarat escalated into a mob attack on the villages muslim residents, 50 homes are ransacked (International Religious Freedom Report, 2017).

There is also a continually rising trend of limiting religious activities of religious groups and individuals across the asia pacific while China and the countries of central Asia are in the top; India also featured in the top 10 countries of the list published by the pew. In the category of harassment of religious groups by the government , the Asia pacific region including india also stands out as relatively higher. Pew research shows in 2017 alone harassment or intimidation of religious groups by the government was reported in 86% of the countries in the region! Religion related harassment in India also has received global attention in recent years with unlawful property damage of most of the muslims being the most common type of harassment reported , another is arbitrary arrests and unlawful and prolonged detention of the minority communities, killings based on religion in most of the states is on high. India also featured in the top 10 list of countries with high levels of religious violence by organized groups. The times of India on September 22, 2022 reported a series of violence done by the Bajrang Dal workers in which they assaulted four muslim youths at a Garba venue on Sindhu Bhavan, Gujarat. There are numerous reports of organized violence committed by the hindu radical groups where they attacked muslim youths for refusing to chant ‘jai shree ram’. These organized groups have increasingly used force in an attempt to dominate the public sphere with their own version of perception of religion. In the category of individual and social group harassment India also featured in the top 5 of the list. This type of harassment includes derogatory remarks on the minority groups on social media, online trolling through memes and abusing, Islamophobic posts, spreading fake news or publications of articles that are distorted and false. Online digital media platform the wire in its survey found that 60% of the participants surveyed said they have come across contents on social media platforms that incites violence against Muslims.

The overall restriction of religious freedom by the government authorities and its machinery fairly stable although in ‘high’ category in India , ranks 34 in government restriction index (GHI) ; when compared to the social hostilities involving religion (SHI), India ranks at the top of the list with 9.4 score in an overall score of 10 which is worse than neighboring Pakistan and Afghanistan! (Pew Research center, the Social Hostilities Index, 2019). In addition to social hostilities and government restrictions towards minorities , a new trend has emerged in India in recent years : ‘ freedom from religion’. Coming to the study of Fox (2020), he includes 26 measures which involve legislating religious precepts as law and government institutions which enforce religious law.(Fox, 2020) these includes restrictions on interfaith marriages, restrictions on conversions away from majority religion, censorship of press or publications for being anti religious , restriction of special kind of foods, mandatory closing of businesses during religious holidays.

Way forward

Given the current landscape of discrimination and religious freedom in India, a forward looking strategy that addresses social, legal, and political dimensions is necessary. Acknowledging the complexity and sensitive nature of the matter, this is the time to strengthen legal safeguards, enhancing education, ensuring accountability, promoting interfaith dialogue and funding research so that India can aim forwards to a more inclusive and harmonious society where the rights and freedom of all religions and communities are respected and protected.

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I'm Mahesh Ganguly , a UGC NET qualified Junior Research Fellow with a bachelor degree in Dentistry, currently pursuing a major in International relations and area studies from MMAJ Academy of International Relations, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delbi. An IMPRI fellow, my research interests include global politics, security and strategic studies, diplomacy , foreign policy analysis and public policy. I aim to engage myself in rigorous research in the emerging aforementioned fields and issues and seek to make my contribution and dent in the relative disciplines.



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- Tax Tribunals





When He Dived into a Utopian Realm

Naganandhini N.R.

Poem

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Naganandhini N.R., 'When He Dived into a Utopian Realm' (2024) 3(1) Your Voice Magazine 12.

"Can I not just put this tilak
Twixt my brows?
If I would rub --
A tiny little streak in red?
I'd be called names and scorned by many!"
Speaking to himself, swallowing woe
He dusted the residual cones
Off his accidentally consecrated fingers
A mingled sheen of red, yellow and white
Orphaned, looking away mourned.

Clicking his tongue, he doffed his turban off
And faced himself in the oval mirror;
Curly locks dangled across his bushy black beard
His countenance shrunk recollecting snapshots of violence
As he peered deep into the center,
An internal call from the upper planes
Summoned his barren self
And he bowed to the command
Of the pointed Supreme Light
Pervading the All-Universal Cosmos.

"Where all men, women and children
Splashed in multicultural attires

Feasted in communion amongst the diverse congregation
Where fish and peas, beef and kheer, honey and chilli
All harmonious like a salad bowl cheerfully together
Patted on the back of each other receiving affably..."
Closing his deeply tormented eyes
He dived into a utopian realm;
Then he envisaged an incredibly marvelous tableau;
The Hindus clad in saffron dhotis visiting the mosque
The bearded Muslims lighting candles at the St. Paul's
The frocked priests anointing the idol of Lord Shiva
And all of them stepping out embalmed
Meet at a common junction in the premises
Belonging to no hefty hegemony but all!
They shake hands, greet and exchange sweet pleasantries.

What a soothing spectacle ahead!
For a Hindu would borrow the Quran
While a Bhai would recite verses from the Geetha
A Christian would carry a pocket-sized portrait
Of Lord Waheguru, yet praise Inshallah underneath!
While a Sikh would preach verses from the holy Bible
To his Parsi and Hindu brothers.
Sensing ominous, he stirred from the utopian dream
When danger lurked teetering at the brink
Threatening the inter-regional harmony;

Rupturing identities, cleaving cultural, religious and social ties!
Like Lenny, the little Parsi girl in Cracking India,
He earnestly wished that India had never cleft apart
Why India, Bangladesh and Pakistan?

"If our country were a Brobdingnagian mirror
Capacious to capture a multitude of us
Impartial of the acquired social marks
Race, caste, religion, region and culture
It is alarmingly broken and we are so horribly split
That ourselves we cannot lucidly spot
Where do we truly belong, our family is lost!
How meaningless is vasudaiva kutumbakam
If it were not for embracing rich diversity peacefully
Accepting, assimilating and preserving homeliness?"

With a plate bearing camphor and tulsi agarbatthis
His red-veiled mother circled about the house
In the dressing room, he stood terrified
Cupping his hands before an imageless wall,
He began, "I do not want to go, Ma
Carrying a face that is not culturally mine
Midst those who proudly wear their crosses and caps
Why cannot I with my turban or tilak?
They will bully me, beat me, curse me
I cannot cry, it is the last day of my college."

About the Author



Naganandhini N.R., a passionate literature student, is a poet since her late teenage years. She hails from a town in Tamil Nadu recognized by the epithet "Niagara of India". Her pen, the penchant wand she calls, is a witness to more than thousand literary pieces. A varied range of quotes, poems and fragmentary anecdotes embody her literary spectrum. In addition, recently she has produced a humorous series of thirteen stories written in the manner of episodes encompassing her campus life at EFLU, Hyderabad. Her poems endorse people, places and events that either affect or attract her in an uncommonly striking manner.



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- Prepared 10,000+ headnotes on Direct and Indirect Taxes for reputed national and international clients till date.
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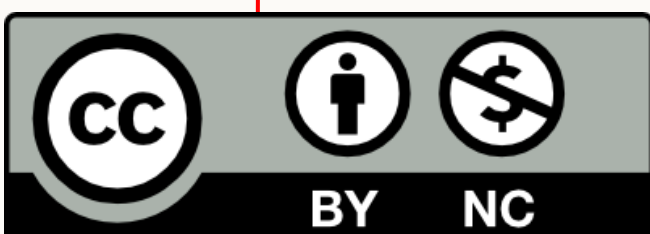
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