THE IDENTITY CRISIS OF THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY IN INDIA
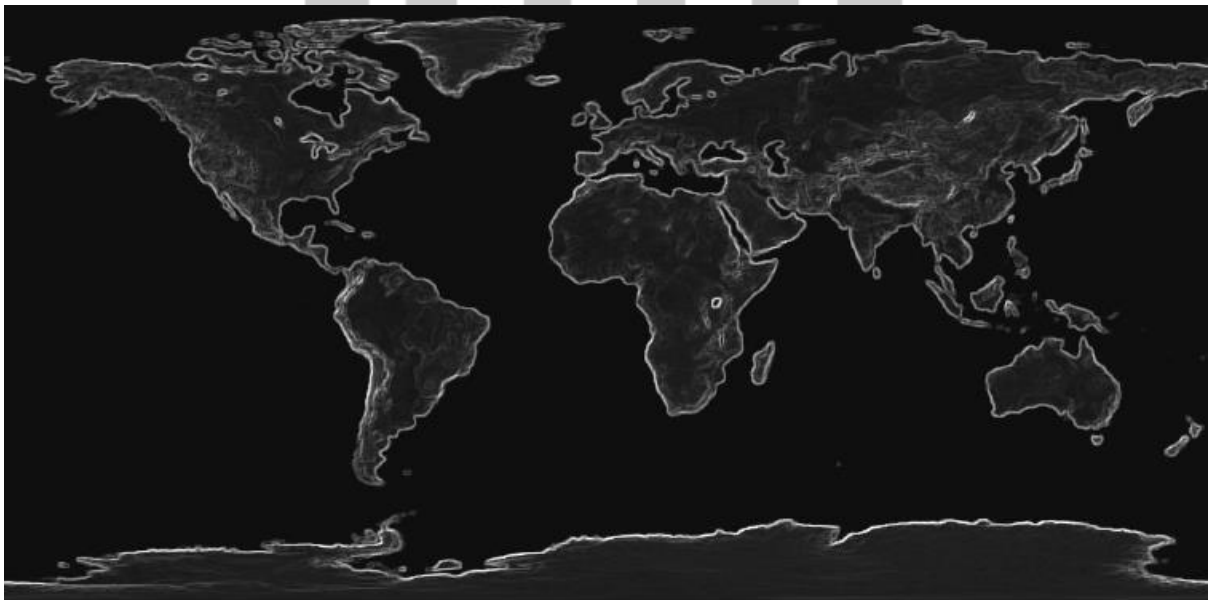
Veritas et Aequitas

Introduction

The new rhetoric of India has been revivalistic rather than reformist. It has been recreational rather than progressive. The political obligation to uplift the downtrodden, backward and disadvantaged communities of the society has become blurry due to engagement of the political machinery in religion-related and caste-related politics. In recent times, the practice of religious extremism within the Indian state has posed a plethora of threats to the secular identity of the world's largest democracy. The constitution of India provides for equal entitlement to all its citizens to profess, practice and propagate any religion as well as freedom of conscience through Article 25-a. Furthermore, through Article 26, it grants the religious sects the freedom to manage their religious affairs without any interference from the state.

Thus, secularism (the belief that religion should not be a part of the affairs of the state) has been a notable aspect of India's identity, as conceived by its constitution. However, it was put on a religious freedom blacklist by a US Commission formed to analyze International religious freedom. Their Report stated that 'In 2019, religious freedom conditions in India experienced a drastic turn downward, with religious minorities under increasing assault'. This was consequential to brutal developments in India spurred by a series of political legislation that led to persecutions and oppressions against the largest minority religion of India, the Muslims. The average Muslim in India, from being perceived as a Pan-Islamist to suffering humiliation at the hands of religious fanatics, has been facing a crisis of Identity. An identity crisis persists "when a community finds that what it had once unquestionably accepted as the physical and psychological definitions of its collective self, are no longer acceptable under new historic conditions."

The historical narrative of exclusion of Muslims and their crisis of Identity

The contemporary Muslim community of India is quite an extended version of the Muslim society in the pre-independence era. It's a legacy with not only perpetual pride over the reputation and grandeur of Muslim rulers but essentially inherited problems from its earlier existence. History lays down that the isolation of Indian Muslims has been influenced by different factors in different situations. Shedding light on the contributions of the local heroes in resisting imperialism to incite nationalism amongst Indians served negatively for the Muslims of different regions due to a lack of relatability and a sense of belonging. The process beheld revival of Rana Pratap in Rajasthan, Shivaji in Maharashtra, Sri Krishna Deo Rai in Andhra Pradesh and so on. An attempt on a Muslim's part to revive their local hero was perceived anti-national as Muslim rulers were looked upon as despots, tyrants and proselytizers.

This process of spurring regionalism in Indian history forms a part of the desire of the Muslim community for separatism. During that time, the communities in India reared a regional approach towards the attainment of political power. The objective of national freedom was underpinned by simultaneously ongoing regional movements to evoke the Indians in the All India National Movement. This was done purposefully as a much divided India needed to be united. In all this politically designed havoc, where they did not find any identification, they saw beyond the demarcated boundaries of the territory of India and identified themselves with Ulemas and Clerics of the Islamic World. Thus, the growth of a prevailing political ideology of Pan-Islamism came as a reaction to the trends in the politics of India.

The colonial politics was guided by interest. Thus, the response to a free India was not separatist but opportunistic. After the formation of a new constitution with secularism as its fortitude, the Muslim community required a new orientation politically and socially. However, every social issue associated with the Muslims was politicized gravely, even in a new India, under urban leadership. This forms a reason for the deficient and inadequate process of social change amongst the Indian Muslims.

De-establishing the misconstrued image of the Indian Muslim community as a unified community

A very strong myth that lurks around the identity of the Muslim community in India is that the Indian Muslims are a homogeneous, united, and monolithic social group. This is erroneous. We can justify this by understanding the evolution of Indian Islam. They are diversified to the core akin to the diversity in India. Islam in India has evolved along with the evolution of India itself. The germination and progression of Islam in India has been conditioned by autochthonous customs and traditions, one of which is diversification. The diversity is primordial and can significantly be witnessed in contemporary times through the social and political relevance of Muslims. The distinctiveness within Indian Islam is witnessed in political terms as Muslims throughout India do not form a united electorate, playing out the religion card to cater interests. A major chunk of their community has since eons voted on the basis of the reliability of a political party and only a few take caste and community into consideration while voting. Muslims are sect-based and tend to follow region-based folkways and rituals. It is thus, a composite community.

The consequences of identity crisis for Muslims

The agreement on the formation of Pakistan, though fragmented, left a trail of exclusion, separatism, disbelief, and skepticism for the Muslims of India. According to Amitabh Kundu, a visiting professor at the Institute for Human Development, The condition of Muslims in the job markets is worse than the Scheduled Tribes of Urban India. This was also reported by a government commission that Muslim Indians' socio-economic state is more deplorable than that of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The real consequences can be known by looking into the space offered to them in the job markets and into the community as a whole.

Despite being India's largest religious minority, constituting 14.2% of India's population, they form only 4.5% of the employees under the Railway Sector. Out of this low percentage of 4.5%, about 98.7% are positioned at lower levels. The most highlighted moment of the recent riots in Delhi was the inaction by the Delhi police force towards the Hindu idolatry group and their atrocities against the anti-CAA rioters. This apathetic attitude towards the minority group and the protection of their rights can be considered a root cause problem arising from how accepted they are in the police force itself. There are only 8 police chiefs in India's 591 districts, which is only 0.01% of the Indian Muslim community. A study by Tata Trusts has shown that only 3-4% of Muslim representation is seen in the Indian Police.

Fifty percent of the Muslims in India are living below the poverty line in impoverished and abysmal conditions. They are the most illiterate out of all the communities in India with a 42.72% illiteracy rate. Jains top the literacy rate chart at 84.7%, followed by Christians at 74.3%, Buddhists at 71.8% and Sikhs at 67.5%. This oblivious attitude of the state towards

the mere literacy rate amongst their largest minority has resulted in some major lack of representation from the particular community. Today, there is only one Muslim Justice (Justice S. Abdul Nazeer) out of the thirty-four Supreme Court Justices of India. Out of the 247 Justices which the Supreme Court has housed, only 18 (6.75%) have been Muslims. Also, an Economic Times Intelligence Group analysis reported that Muslims make up a poor 2.67% of professionals at higher ranks in the top 500 Industries of the Indian Economy as listed under the BSE Ltd, that is, only 62 out of the 2,324 directors and senior executives.

Constitution's recognition of relative equality among communities

According to a subcommittee called the Protection of Minority Rights created by the United Nations Human Rights Commission in 1946, 'minorities' are non-dominant groups of a population that desire to preserve steadfast ethnic, religious and linguistic traditions or characteristics which are different from the rest of the population. The equality which is debated upon and demanded by the minority groups in a secular country is relative equality and not absolute equality. Equality is ubiquitous only amongst those who are equal in number. Thus, equal opportunities for each community is what makes them equal within society. Therefore, a degree of positive discrimination is asseverated by the constitution of India in favor of the disadvantaged. Like, Article 15 allows the state to create any 'special provisions' for women and children. Similarly, in this context, in 2005, Article 15 was amended through the 93rd Amendment Act and empowered the state to make special provisions for the socially, economically and educationally backward classes of India.

Revelation of the true situation of the Indian Muslim community

Following the aforesaid, the Sachar committee (The Prime Minister's High-Level Committee) and the Ranganath Misra Commission (The National Commission for Religious and Linguistic Minorities) were formed in 2006 and 2007 respectively. The Sachar committee observed the aforementioned underrepresentation and negatively disproportionate figures associated with the Muslims in India. It laid down that according to all development indicators, the Muslim community ranks last in every aspect. Their record is below average in all socio-economic domains.

It thus emphasized the formulation of an Equal Opportunity Commission, which would be designed according to the UK's Racial Opportunity Commission. It suggested an enhancement of the representation of Muslims in all government bodies, including the judiciary. On very similar lines, the Ranganath Commission suggested the Government of India to set aside 10% of seats in all non-minority educational institutions for Muslims. It also suggested a 10% share for Muslims to be earmarked in all government schemes like Prime Minister's Rozgar Yojna, Rural Employment Generation Program etc.

After the coming out of these two commissions, a lot of damage was done to the secular credentials of the world's largest democracy. The minority communities in India, especially the Muslims were enraged and appalled as the unfairness which was harbored against them under the veil of secularism and equalism was finally out in the open.

Propaganda against a minority group is fatal

Irrespective of the nature of the political fabric of the Indian society, Indian Muslims have remained a marginalized community for a long time now, especially post-independence. According to the Indian government statistics, there have been 249 riots per year. Riots rising out of Hindu-Muslim antagonism and a hostile polarization, form a considerable part of this number. The sprouting of the Citizenship Amendment Bill laid down a new path for religious antagonism and added fuel to the already existing discriminatory fire against the Muslims. The bill became an act and amended a 64 year old citizenship law. Perceived to be discriminatory, unconstitutional and unsecular by the people of India, the citizenship amendment bill divides migrants into muslims and non-muslim and empowers faith to determine the citizenship of a person. This can be highlighted as a landmark decision in ascertaining the threat to secularist identity of India.

New Delhi saw the deadliest communal violence in decades in February, with at least 53 people dead during the two and a half days of rioting. Out of these 53 people, 36 were Muslims (most casualties are born upon by the Muslim community) and 15 were Hindus. The occurrence of this is woeful for India as a whole and the misinformed public shall understand the broader reasons behind such violent happenings. Dots shall be connected and the carefully concealed linkage of communal violence with that of the oligarchy of our democratic nation shall be realized. Propaganda in the religious domain causes persecution and oppression of minority religions around it. A quintessential precedent is that of Germany during World War II. The anti-semitic propaganda or the Holocaust led to the death of around 6 million Jews, exemplifying ethnic cleansing. In order to prevent an unfortunate situation of assumption of fascist characteristics in a democracy like India, immediate systemic changes need to be made.

Conclusion

The crisis of identity has formed a part of the total problem of political development in India, the other crisis being those of- legitimacy and participation. India is wedded to secularism. Realizing this, if all the communities within India can form a new concept of nationalism, one that is purely based on national interests, the conflict between identities based on traditional or external legacies, could be mitigated. This would flag the route for the rise of a single identity for all the sections of the nation, uniting them on a common acceptable and viable ground. If all the communities of India can adopt a reformed concept of nationalism, one that is purely based on national interests, the conflict of identities based on old hostilities and legacies, could be avoided. The entire Muslim community needs to come together to solve its identity crisis. They must let themselves to overcome the prejudices and freely participate in the developing Indian polity and society by making contributions to the political process. However, this free participation can only be achieved if the people of India accept the true and genuine identity of an Indian Muslim and accept them with open hands by letting them grace every private and public sector so that India can finally gain from the one-fifth of it's neglected population, the Muslims.