Religious Intolerance: Way to Eliminate Religious Extremism in The Light of Islam and Gandhian Approach

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ABSTRACT

India is the largest democracy globally; however, right-wing populism has led to a dramatic shift in India's political landscape, particularly for religious minorities and Dalits. Discrimination, abusive slurs, or news of violence against people in this group should not be tolerated even for a single day. "Hindutva" ideology, or "Hindu nationalism," advocates violence against Muslims and views them as outsiders and potential threats to the country's security. That has created a sense of feeling unsafe for Muslims in their own country and an unending wave of intolerance spread by the progenies of the RSS. In light of the Holy Quran and Gandhian approach, this paper defines the type of religious intolerance and how it is spreading and damaging the social fabric of the society and suggests ways to combat religious intolerance.

Keywords: Hindutva, Intolerance, Populism, Democracy, Gandhian Approach, RSS.

INTRODUCTION

Mahatma Gandhi once said that intolerance is a kind of violence that stunts democratic growth. (Wikiquote,2013) The accuracy of his observation and its consequence for India may be exemplified by several important political events in contemporary India. Considering India as an intolerant country may be a disquieting surprise because of the egalitarian spirit upon which the country emerged in 1947. India is the world's largest democracy and is acknowledged for its diverse and composite culture. The notion of India was founded on principles of tolerance and non-violence. Conspicuously, the country was bifurcated into two regions based on religion, and millions of individuals died in a division in 1947. It was one of the world's largest human migrations in the history of humankind. Millions of people have crossed the border, although millions of Muslims had chosen India as their homeland and refused to go to Pakistan. The Constitution of India declares India as a Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, and Democratic Republic, but the contemporary social and political scenario belies these ideas.

Modern India reflects Hindutva ideology manifested in violence for ridiculously based reasons. According to collins's dictionary, religious intolerance is "*an unwillingness to let other people act differently or hold different opinions from you"* (Collins Dictionary). Intolerance is a kind of a buzzword in India; everyone is talking and debating about it. It is trustful that still in this fast-paced era when people around the globe are moving towards development and adopting new technologies, here in India, we often get into argy-bargy. Once we talk about the nationalism or patriotism of Muslims in India is debatable for some right-wing extremists. Though Muslims were accepted in the country as citizens, the vulnerable community is struggling to prove its patriotism to their fellow citizens in contemporary India. Innocents are made a scapegoat for different crimes by some religious extremist groups. The debate on Intolerance in India started after five Christian institutions were vandalized in Delhi alone in nine weeks. Later, the debate was fueled by unfortunate and inhuman incidents like the burning alive of two Dalit children in Faridabad (Firstpost, 2015)., a communal remark like sending Muslims to Pakistan followed by the lynching of Akhlaq at Dadri (BBC, 2015), protest against Pakistani singer Gulam Ali (Press Trust of India, 2016), throwing ink on Sudheer Kulkarni and other similar intolerant incidents. Following these incidents, there has been a trend of writers returning their awards, intellectuals criticizing the government & Film stars raising questions against increasing Intolerance in Indian society (Indian Express, 2015).

Forms of Religious Intolerance

Robinson divides religious intolerance into **four forms**, depending upon the perpetrator and the intended target:

1. Inter-faith Intolerance (e.g., a Hindu – Muslim conflict)
2. Intra-faith Intolerance (e.g., Shia vs Sunni Muslims)
3. Intolerance by a faith group against a secular group (e.g., Christian fundamentalists vs Agnostics, Atheists, Humanists, Homosexuals.
4. Intolerance by a secular group against a religious group. (e.g., feminists vs some organized religions) (Robinson, 2009).

According to the most notable Pew survey, India is the least free country globally regarding religious freedom. Government Restriction Index (GRI) and Social Hostilities Index (SHI) are the two measurements used in the report to rank 198 countries worldwide based on their restrictions on religious freedom. India's performance is dismal on both counts, but the SHI index shows an even worse picture. At 8.7 out of 10, India received the "very high" ranking. Countries like Syria, Nigeria, and Iraq keep India Company at the bottom of the heap. Criminal acts motivated by religious hatred or bias, the use of force to dominate public life with their religious perspective, and harassment of women for violating religious dress codes are examples of social hostilities documented in the past (Pew Research Centre, 2017). India is a secular state, not a religious state and belongs to all religions. More than a hundred lynchings have been done by Hindu extremist groups across the country in cow protection since 2014. The mob lynching of Hafiz Junaid Khan on a train shocked the Nation, and Alimuddin Ansari's killing in Jharkhand raises the question in many minds like The future of Muslims in India and what type of society we are making. The nationwide campaign "*NOT IN MY NAME", was* launched by intellectuals to protest against the killings in the name of cow protection and gruesome murder of the seventeen-year kid in a train who were returning to their home after shopping on the occasion of Eid (Indian Express, 2017). The constant deterioration of the right of minorities is a threat and an alarm for Indian society and the role of government. Unfortunately, The silence of the Honourable Prime Minister on these killings gives more power and strength to those fringe elements who are involved in lynching and self-declared warriors of India.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1- To decipher Religious Intolerance in Indian Context.

2- To suggest various Interventions to combat religious Extremism.

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

Intolerance, especially religious intolerance, divides people in the society and creates chaos in nations. It creates the condition of hatred and antipathy in the society between people of different religions, beliefs, castes, and practices. Unity and integrity are at stake in the absence of tolerance and harmony. Further, if these issues are politicized, the situation worsens. Intolerance results in the exclusion of those who are different and threaten the existence of the vulnerable group such as non-Muslims in the Muslim state or its opposite. In its extreme form, intolerance leads to violence among people of different strata and has a very high capacity of destroying national unity and integrity. So, causes of intolerance must be studied extensively, and remedial actions should be taken to restore universal 'brotherhood and tolerance' for which our country is known, as noted by Vivekananda in his address at Chicago Conference (The Hindu, 2016). Education for tolerance should be a top priority. That is why it is vital to systematically promote rational and effective tolerance teaching techniques that will systematically report the cultural, social, economic, political, and religious sources of intolerance. Towards this end, the hour needs to promote research in this area to completely eliminate this disease.

METHODOLOGY

In this particular study, the researcher follows the descriptive research method. The researcher describes the various forms of religious intolerance, and data was collected through secondary sources like (Newspapers, Journals, Reports, websites, Magazines, etc.)

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Hindutva ideology propounded by RSS bases its narrative solely on Hindu rights. The fear that they have been able to create in the minds of the majority community in India is the presumed increasing size of the Muslim population in India. However, they constituted only around 14 per cent of the population and recorded a decline by a few percentage points in the latest census (Census Organisation, 2011). Media, movies and the education system became the instruments of reinforcing the fear that Hindus are under a socio-cultural and economic attack. Distorting historical facts about Muslim rule in India and declaring them the 'other' has reaped electoral benefits for the ruling party but caused subversion of the rights of millions of people.

Since India's independence, the Muslim community has been marginalized socio-economically and politically. The Government of India, for the first time, appointed a committee to study the

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Social, Economic and Educational status of Muslims community in India under the chairmanship of Retired Justice Rajinder Sachar in 2006. The findings of this committee were no less than a shock as they revealed the pathetic condition of Muslims in India. Of the 14% Muslim population, not more than 2.5% are involved in administrative jobs. The report also found that Muslims are the most backward community in India regarding employment opportunities, healthcare access, housing, education, and landholding. The committee made specific recommendations to improve the condition of Muslims (Sacchar, 2006), but the Indian government never showed any seriousness towards it. The report of the Expert Group on Diversity Index (Ministry of Minority affairs, 2008) the data provided by the Post-Sachar Evaluation Committee Report (2014), India Exclusion Report (2014), the Census of 2011 and various NSSO reports point towards the socio-economic backwardness of Indian Muslims. Selected targeting of Muslims on one or the other pretext has also contributed to their marginalization. They are denied jobs and housing, resulting in their ghettoization. They are looked at with suspicion and denied the right to a dignified life. The Muslims in India have become the new 'untouchables'.

Islam and Tolerance

Many incorrectly believe that Islam does not allow the existence of other religions present in the globe. The Prophet Muhammad himself was positioned in dealing with people of other beliefs, with a practical example from his lifetime. For Examples of religious tolerance for people of other faiths found in the constitution which the Prophet laid in Medina

People of many different faiths lived in harmony on the Arabian Peninsula at the time of the Prophet. Many people did not belong to any particular religion; these included Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, polytheists, and others. Many examples may be drawn from the Prophet's life to illustrate his openness to individuals of various religions. It is necessary to examine the period of Islam's formal statehood, during which the Prophet Muhammad established specific laws following the religious precepts. Even while one may see many examples of tolerance given by the Prophet in the thirteen years of his stay in Mecca, one may wrongly conclude that it was primarily due to attempting to elevate the profile of the Muslims and the social position of Islam and in general. Therefore, the discussion will only cover the period beginning with the Prophet's relocation to Medina and ending with the constitution's establishment (Baloach et al., 2012)

The Saheefah

 If any breach of its articles was regarded as an act of treachery, The Prophet's constitution, dubbed the 'Saheefah' by early historians, maybe the best illustration of his tolerance for different religions. Once in Medina, the Prophet Muhammad's role as a religious leader was over; now, as the political head of a state guided by Islamic principles, he had to establish clear rules of governance to maintain peace and harmony in a society torn apart by decades of war and ensure that Muslims, Jews, Christians, and other faiths could coexist in harmony. Due to this, the Prophet wrote down a 'constitution' that specified the responsibilities of all parties that dwelt in Medina, their obligations towards each other, and some constraints placed on them. All parties were to follow what was mentioned (Admin, 2017). In the Holy Quran, surah number (109) Surah Al-Kafirun states " *Say, "O disbelievers, I do not worship what you worship. Nor are you worshippers of what I worship. Nor will I be a worshipper of what you worship. Nor will you be worshippers of what I worship. For you is your religion, and for me is my religion." Surah Al-Baqarah   verse no 256 states that "There shall be no compulsion in {acceptance of} the Religion." (The Holy Quran)*

Gandhi perspective on Communal Harmony

M.K Gandhi was considered the father of the Nation. he has worked a lot on communal harmony and Hindu- Muslim relations: and Nathuram Godse executed him after six vain attempts. Nathuram accused and murdered Gandhi for esteeming Muslims. The man who devoted his life to the country's independence and taught a lesson of *Non-violence* was murdered by Hindu Religious extremists. Gandhi gives "SARVADHARMA SAMABHAVA", which means considering all religions as equals and paying equal admiration and respect to all the religious customs of the world. This principle was one of the eleven pledges proposed by Gandhi and practised by him and his fellow ascetics as part of the general code of conduct in his Ashram (Panicker, 2001). The theological and spiritual groundwork of this Gandhi a thought and vision of inter-religious dialogue is the correct understanding and strict practice of this vow. Gandhi considered all religions as equally valid and as different paths to the same God and for the realization of this God. Respect and reverence for other religions and religious founders and thirst and an inner urge to study the tenets of other religions (Mazumdar, 2003a). Talking about communal harmony on April 8 1919, Gandhiji said:
"As children of the same mother, both Hindus and Muslims should treat each other as if they were their siblings. If this could happen, it would be a dream come true. Nevertheless, before this unity can happen, both communities will have to give up a lot and change their ideas in a

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big way. Members of one community sometimes use words that are so crude that they only make things worse between them and the people they are talking about. In Hindu society, we do not hold back when we talk about the Mahomedans and the other way around. Many people think that there is a deep animosity between Hindus and Mahomedans that cannot be broken.". (Mazumdar, 2003b).

Expressing his views regarding cow protection, Gandhiji (said on three November 1917)

It is disheartening to perceive the state of bullocks in our towns and cities. As it turns out, protecting the cow and her offspring is a significant issue. More cows have been slaughtered due to our use of the issue as a weapon against Muslims. When a Muslim brother is killed to preserve a cow, it is not because of religion but it lacks. I am confident that if we approached our Muslim brothers and sisters with love and compassion, they would understand the unique situation in India and be willing to work with us to preserve the cows. Success in this will accomplish several things at once. In a world without conflict between Hindus and Muslims, the cow will be protected, pure milk will be readily available at a lower cost, and our bullocks will be the greatest in the world. We cannot preserve the cows by slaughtering Muslims. We should behave exclusively via love. Thus, alone shall we succeed. So long as we do not have unwavering trust in truth, love and non-violence, we can make no progress (Mazumdar, 2003c).

CONCLUSION

Minorities in India are faced with an existential threat. Their rights are being violated, and they are on the approach of becoming second-class citizens in their own country. If their rights are abused continuously, they will either evaporate off the map of India or ricochet with devastating ramifications for the entire country. The divisive politics being played in the country is putting at stake the lives and livelihoods of millions of people as well as the secular democratic character of India**.** Extremism can be defeated by adopting the ideology of Non-violence and SARVADHARMA SAMABHAVA propounded by the father of Nation Mahatma Gandhi.

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