

Cocktail of Islamophobia and Misogyny in India

Maham S. Gillani

Recently, more than [80 Muslim women were put up for sale](#) on an open software development site called GitHub without their consent or knowledge. The photos of the women were posted on the app where they were presented as ‘S**** deal of the day’. Underneath the pictures was their personal information along with statements that they could be purchased. People were able to bid for them and offer different prices. By the time the women found out about the online auction, it had already been 20 days. This unsettling harassment campaign was targeted at mostly educated, outspoken and prominent Indian Muslim women including, inter-alia, pilots, journalists, researchers, and artists.

GitHub suspended the users’ accounts only after the news of the incident began to spread and the targeted women and activists started speaking out. This was too little, too late as the personal information of the Muslim women had already been leaked, making them vulnerable to online harassment and abuse. Nabiya Khan, a Delhi-based poet and writer, whose photo was shared on the infamous app [said](#) that she’s being harassed online “day in and day out, with people sending all kinds of pictures and pornography to me.” Although the [Delhi police have registered an FIR](#) against the perpetrators of this horrendous act, there seems little hope that they would be punished. An affected woman [lamented](#), “These people are not sorry and they are not scared because they know nothing will happen to them.”

This incident also underscores the growing scourge of Islamophobia in India. Many of the 200 million Muslims in the country feel terrorized because of the regular attacks on their homes, schools and mosques by BJP goons. There are also regular reports of Muslim men getting lynched because of alleged violations of the sacred rites of cow—a revered entity in Hindu faith. These hate crimes have fueled a climate of anxiety, fear and concern in the Muslim community. The poisonous ideology of the Hindu nationalist BJP is to be blamed for the Muslim blood on the streets of India.

The Hindutva ideology views the Hindus as the real custodians of India and sees the Hindu way of life as the only authentic model for the country. It is in this context that Muslims are viewed as “outsiders” or “others”. Giriraj Singh, a government minister, [remarked](#), “All of India’s Muslims should have been packed off to Pakistan at

partition.” Since assuming the top office, Narendra Modi has given carte blanche to the Hindutva fanatics to intimidate, hound and kill Muslims. His BJP supporters feed on the narrative of hatred and exclusion of Muslims. This acerbic rhetoric against one of the largest minorities in India not only undermines its secular character, but also gives license to the ideological foot soldiers of the Sangh Parivar to prey on Indian Muslims without any restraint.

The rise of Modi and the right-wing BJP has led Muslims in India being treated as second-class citizens. Modi’s government passed discriminatory laws such as the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) that barring Muslims, allows other persecuted minorities—Parsis, Buddhists, Jains, Hindus, Christians and Sikhs—a fast-paced route to citizenship. Additionally, adoption of National Register of Citizens (NRC) can lead to the loss of citizenship of those who cannot prove their citizenship. Together CAA and NRC essentially mean that Muslims who cannot produce the required documents may be rendered stateless and have no recourse to citizenship, unlike people from other faiths. Such discriminatory, chauvinist, and prejudiced laws are an affront to the democratic spirit of the Indian constitution and violate the basic human rights of Muslims.

India which credits itself as the largest democracy in the world has legalized discrimination against Muslims by passing such laws and stoked the flames of communal hatred, while overlooking violence against them. During Modi’s five year tenure the constant attacks against Muslims have made them feel alienated and under siege. The Human Rights Watch (HRW) also expressed its [concern](#) over the plight of minorities in India, “Prejudices embedded in the government of the ruling Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have infiltrated independent institutions, such as the police and the courts, empowering nationalist groups to threaten, harass, and attack religious minorities with impunity,”

If India, under the Modi regime, still claims to be a democracy, then, it must take stringent action against those violating the rights of Muslims, especially Muslim women who are a minority within a minority. Robust measures should be taken to shield Muslim women from online and offline abuse and misogyny. More generally, Muslims have been a vibrant minority in India for the past many decades and have played an instrumental role in the progress and prosperity of the country. They should

not be alienated or marginalized at the behest of the goals of a Hindu nationalist leader, Narendra Modi.

The writer is a researcher at Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies (CASS).