

COMMUNITARIAN AND MINORITARIAN PERSPECTIVES IN URDU NEWSPAPER DISCOURSE FROM 1985-2019

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled **“Communitarian and Minoritarian Perspectives in Urdu Newspaper Discourse from 1985-2019”** submitted by AFSHAN SHIREEN bearing Reg. No 11SPPH05 in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in POLITICAL SCIENCE is a bonafide work carried out by him/her under my/our supervision and guidance. The thesis has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma.

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DECLARATION

I, **Afshan Shireen**, hereby Declare that this thesis entitled “**Communitarian and Minoritarian Perspectives in Urdu Newspaper Discourse from 1985-2019**” Submitted by me under the guidance and supervision of **Prof. Vasanthi Srinivasan** is a bonafide research work. I also declare that it has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this University or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a work on communitarian and minoritarian perspectives in the domain of Urdu newspapers, using the themes of modern science, personal law, secularism and nationalism. The dominant perspective in the mainstream media and academic discourse about Muslims in India is usually minoritarian which depicts the community as aggrieved and marginalized, at the risk of being besieged by the dominant ‘other’. But the lesser known or largely unexplored perspective is the communitarian one which highlights such issues of the community which are not specific to a minority community. These are issues faced by any faith-based community that struggles to sustain its shared values against modern liberal virtues, a struggle that represents the tension between the ‘situated self’ and the ‘unencumbered self’, to use Michael Sandel’s terms. Urdu newspapers have been found to be representing the same tension between the imagined Indian Muslim community and modern phenomena and the values associated with them that stand to challenge the shared values of the former. Apart from throwing light on this communitarian issue, the thesis also explores in the discourse of Urdu newspapers, the communitarian aspiration to live and peacefully co-exist with the ‘other’, an aspiration which is so relevant in a multi-cultural nation like India. Delving into the interpretation of the discourse of five popular Urdu newspapers and covering the period from 1985 to 2019, this thesis reflects on the contradictions expressed in the communitarian and minoritarian perspectives on how Muslims in India ought to be addressing their issues. While doing so, the thesis also probes into how while articulating itself on the four themes addressed in the chapters of the thesis, the Urdu newspaper discourse is often dominated by the minoritarian perspective but not without a communitarian voice to compete with it.

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GLOSSARY

<i>Adab</i>	Respect
<i>Akhlaaq</i>	Manners, Values
<i>Ashraf</i>	Noble
<i>Aql</i>	Brain, Wisdom, Reason
<i>Buniyaadi</i>	Fundamental
<i>Fann</i>	Art
<i>Firqa</i>	Sect
<i>Hikmat</i>	Wisdom
<i>Huqooq</i>	Rights
<i>Ijmaa</i>	Consensus of Islamic scholars
<i>Ilm</i>	Knowledge, Science
<i>Jadeed</i>	New, Modern
<i>Jahiliyaa</i>	Age of Ignorance
<i>Kaaynaat</i>	Universe
<i>Madrassa</i>	School of Religious Learning
<i>Maghribi</i>	Western
<i>Mudaakhlat</i>	Interference
<i>Mukammal</i>	Complete
<i>Mulk</i>	Country
<i>Musaavaat</i>	Equality
<i>Pasmaandagi</i>	Backwardness, Deprivation
<i>Qaumiyat</i>	Nationality
<i>Qudrat</i>	Nature, Divine Power
<i>Ruboobiyat</i>	Divinity
<i>Sarmaayaa</i>	Capital
<i>Saqaafat</i>	Culture
<i>Taaleem</i>	Education
<i>Tajrbaa</i>	Experience

<i>Taraqqi</i>	Development
<i>Tehzeeb</i>	Culture
<i>Tehqiqaat</i>	Investigation
<i>Ulema</i>	Scholars of Islamic Law
<i>Ummah</i>	Community of Believers

INTRODUCTION

The current era is the era of education and technology and the community that remains devoid of both can lose out on every front.... The age in which we are living is the age of science and technology and we need to catch up with the pace at which it is progressing. But we need to also hold on to the foundational principles of Islam.¹

Our success does not depend only on mundane education, but religious education is also an important part of our life and if we do not attach it to our life then we have to face disasters in both the worlds.²

When nature created men and women in different forms and not equally, then who are we to make their rights and duties equal? God laid down different sets of rights and duties for men and women according to their nature and abilities...Whenever there was opposition to God's law on the distribution of rights and duties between men and women and whenever there were attempts to bring about equality in them, the results were very destructive.³

If you have chosen religious law and knowledge as the path to live your life, then it is obvious that freedom or fundamental rights have little meaning when faced with religious law and knowledge...In religion there is no unlimited freedom. If you have chosen the path of religion that imposes several rules of behaviour, then you have to let go of freedom that is given by fundamental rights because unrestrained freedom and rules can never go together.... Those who want to walk the path of fundamental rights should give up on religion...Those who have accepted religion will also accept as much freedom as is permitted to them within the religion.⁴

¹ The *Rahnuma-E-Deccan Daily*, December 19, 2016, p. 3.

² "Allah Se Door Kare Toh Taaleem Bhi Fitna (Education that Dissociates from God is Rebellious Too)", *Munsif Daily*, March 24, 2018, p. 6.

³ Muhammad Ansaarullah Qasmi, "Muslim Personal Law Se Mutaalaq Hukumat Ka Halafnaamah: Akhal-O-Insaf Ki Adalat Me (Government's Declaration on Muslim Personal Law: In the Court of Reason and Justice)", *Munsif Daily*, *Minarenoor*, November 25, 2016, p. 5.

⁴ Maulana Khalid Saifullah Rahmani, "Muslim Personal Law Aur Khwateen Ke Haqooq (Muslim Personal Law and Rights of Women)", *The Munsif Daily*, November 25, 2016.

*Secularism has become a mask worn by the leaders while doing political bargaining. Parties are traders of tickets, constituencies and seats but while playing this role they would never want to drop their secular mask. Secularism is treated like the Ganges of the Indian politics in which one can swim and immediately shed all political sins.*⁵

*The leaders of India's freedom struggle have understood secularism as a system of thought in which all the religious communities are embraced and no particular religious community is exclusively protected...India's values and diverse culture cannot be expressed in terms of the minority/majority binary. India's strength lies in its diversity and not in one colour and its perpetuation.*⁶

Modern ideas and phenomena of scientific progress, prosperity, gender equality, individual freedom and secularism that the statements above address have been debated from multiple perspectives. Taken from different Urdu newspapers, these quotes reflect a communitarian perspective involving an intricate relationship with modern phenomena and the ideas that they have produced. The Urdu print media is a public sphere that is as differentiated and contradictory as any other. It represents those internal struggles of a community that most of the time do not get highlighted in the mainstream English print media. Some of them are struggles to sustain the shared values of the community against the modern liberal ethics and some are the struggles to engage with the other communities in a relationship of trust and peaceful co-existence. Both the kinds of struggle are common to all the communities. But these communitarian struggles in India are never free from the politics of identity where each community is also in a constant battle to define itself against the other. And often this battle of protecting the 'minority' against the 'majority' overshadows the common communitarian struggles. This thesis explores the intertwining of communitarian and minoritarian strands regarding the phenomena mentioned above and their related experiences in Urdu newspapers from 1985 to 2019.

While in the Constitution of the country, religion is an individual's right, the dominant approach to religion has always been communitarian. It can in fact be said that religious identity provides

⁵ Qasim Syed, "Secularism Se Secularism Tak (From Secularism to Secularism)", *Roznama Rashtriya Sahara*, April 30, 2009, p. 5.

⁶ Ejaz Syed, "Secularism Duniya Ka Sab Se Zyada Galat Istamaal Hone Waala Lafz (Secularism, the World's most Misused Word)", *Etemaad Urdu Daily*, March 9, 2014, p. 2.

one of the significant communitarian sources in India. Being a Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian or Parsi defines how one ought to be living their mundane life in order to connect to God through a value system shared with the co-religionists. This is the reason why the concept of the ‘situated self’ rather than the ‘unencumbered self’ fits well into the Indian context. As enunciated by Michael Sandel, individual as the unencumbered self is independent of the goals that he chooses to pursue and the communities that he is a member of, whereas on the other hand, individuals as situated selves are shaped by the goals that they may or may not choose and are embedded in the communities to which they belong.⁷ While the unencumbered self is the central concept of contemporary liberal political theory which is resorted to in the endorsement of individual liberties, communitarians have rebutted this idea with the argument that such an atomized individual capable of arriving at decisions without any prior conception of good or set of values determining them is not real and that the conceptions of good or values that the individual is governed by are constitutive of him.

The communitarian approach to religion also attributes a specific meaning to identity – a collective self whose existence depends on the integrity of the community that its members are expected to uphold. Like any other collective identity, religious identity represents the standpoint of a community from where its members perceive various issues and ideas and this identity keeps reinventing itself according to the changing times and circumstances of the society. In the light of the communitarian principle, the rejection of any conception of good in the interest of individual choice is questionable. The principle of ‘the right being prior to the good’ which is often invoked by liberals to disallow all conceptions of good, stands in direct opposition to the communitarian principle.⁸ M.F. Hussain being deprecated into a long time exile owing to his paintings that are said to have derogatorily represented Hindu goddesses, an almost permanent ban on Salman Rushdie’s visit to India and the fatwas to kill him because of his references to prophet Muhammed that offended Muslims across the world, the recent Supreme Court verdict to allow women’s entry into the Sabrimala temple, a well-known pilgrimage site in Kerala, creating a hue and cry among its traditional visitors, a Hindi movie being renamed from Padmavati to Padmavat under political pressure from a Rajput organization that expressed displeasure over the use of the name of a

⁷ Michael Sandel, *Public Philosophy: Essay on Morality in Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 161-68.

⁸ Ibid.

revered Rajput queen from history and the way she was represented in the film and the long battle of the LGBT community to get recognition in the social mainstream which the Supreme Court finally gave in 2018 by striking down Section 377 of the Criminal Procedure Code are all instances of relentless tension between the principle of ‘right’ and the principle of ‘good’. They basically represent the tension between the liberal commitment to individual rights and liberties and the communitarian commitment to protect the shared values and identity of a community against any external development that threatens to disrupt its age-old values and cultural practices or even distort the images of its saints, prophets and other revered figures. And these tensions and contradictions are commonly faced by all the religious communities where the self/identity is always imagined in the collective, defined by shared beliefs, rituals, values and a shared relationship with the transcendental power or God.

With expanding technology today, it has become a lot easier to strengthen intra-religious communitarian bonding; yet an even more expanding space for the expression of liberal values like freedom of choice has also challenged religious communities and identities as they run the risk of getting shaken up by these values. The Constitution of India provides a framework for the accommodation of both, liberal and communitarian interests. The latter were crucial to deal with the multi-religious set up of the society, particularly with two competing religious communities that in post-Independence and post-Partition India have been relating with each other as Hindu majority and Muslim minority. Religion-based communitarianism thus becomes way too complicated in a set up that is marked by inter-religious conflict because often due to such a conflict, communitarianism gets confused with communalism which is fundamentally based on politicization of differences between the competing religious communities. This thesis tries to disentangle the often confused narratives of communitarianism and communalism.

1.1. Spectre of Communalism

The spectre of communalism (to adopt Marx’s famous opening lines of the Communist Manifesto) haunts the scholarship on the shaping of religion-based community identities in India. A huge amount of academic literature on communalism between Hindus and Muslims suggests that the very idea that both the communities are internally homogeneous strongly integrated by common faith and mutually exclusive is an ideological construct that emerged from the politics under the colonial rule to serve the power relations of the time. It also suggests that the identities of these

two communities were never fixed and their nuances were shaped by various factors at different times; they were defined and redefined using a range of symbols. The identities of these two communities were so fluid in colonial India vis-à-vis each other that one strand of thought associated with the 'Two Nation Theory' began to perceive them as two different nations. Peter Van der Veer in his work on the religious nationalism of Hindus and Muslims in India explains the construction of the two religious communities through "ritual communication" claiming that the religious identities are not "natural" and "given"; they are created through publicly performed acts or movements drawn from religious traditions and yet they send out meanings that do not necessarily correspond to these traditions; they rather serve the central interest of religious nationalism – to create a nation out of the religious community concerned.⁹ Sandria Freitag elaborates on two forms of community to be found in the nineteenth century north India confronting the imperial state. One is what she calls 'relational community' that is based on locally bound affinities like kinship, neighborhood, caste, etc., and the other is the broader abstract community with ideological basis – that which is imagined and has been, until the present times, the politically charged concept drawing the line between the self and the other.¹⁰ The transition between the relational community and the broader ideologically based community happens as a result of the performance of and participation in the ceremonial functions which Freitag refers to as 'symbolic behavior' in the public arenas. So according to this explanation, 'Hindus' and 'Muslims' had first been members of their own castes, tribes, villages and occupational groups; then they would transform into two broad religious communities in performing the religiously informed rituals in the public spaces, cutting across the differences of caste, class and locality. The point it conveys is that the ceremonial functions arouse a shared consciousness at a level different from the narrower sense of caste and class consciousness and that with their symbolic significance, they form the basis for the expression of larger community identities which subsume into their fold the social categories that otherwise keep the broad religious communities divided. Therefore, the struggle to define oneself against the 'other' strengthened the ideologically based religious identities and the communities constructed on them. This struggle became the cause of conflict between the two communities in various forms including riots and set the stage for the growth of

⁹ Peter van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India* (Berkeley: University of California, 1994), 80-85.

¹⁰ Sandria Freitag, *Collective Action and Community: Public Arenas and the Emergence of Communalism in North India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 88.

what turned out to predominantly mark the socio-political relationship between Hindus and Muslims – communalism- an element largely attributed to the politicization of religious identity. Gyanendra Pandey interestingly presents communalism itself as a colonial construct. The colonial historiography about India, as he explains, describes communalism as a feature predating colonial India and as an integral pre-modern aspect of the Indian society that was essentially characterized by religious bigotry.¹¹ Here, Hindus and Muslims are the social categories that are regarded as ‘given’ with internal homogeneity and mutual animosity. Both, Freitag and Pandey highlighted the overarching role of the Hindu and Muslim Zamindars in carrying out collective actions that expressed religious identities and conveyed the sense of being a ‘Hindu or a ‘Muslim’, a point that suggests that religious community was in a large way, a class and caste construct.

All the scholars mentioned above have linked the construction of religious communities to the overreach of the colonial state. Excessive concentration of authority in the state evoked the urge for resistance and the scope for resistance was found in the social spaces where associations of caste, tribe, kinship and religion held sway. The only effective way to defy the colonial authority was through these associations. These factors also provided the ones spearheading them a sense of autonomy from the colonial rule and an alternative world of indigenous authority and values. Religion, though never in isolation from the other factors, contained the impetus to expand community beyond the confines of caste, kinship and locality. However, in the struggle against the state, when the interests and values of communities broadly divided on religious lines contradicted, the result was communalism. This discussion of the academic treatment of ‘community’ in India has highlighted some observations that shall be important to the discussions that follow in the thesis. Firstly, community in India existed at various levels like caste, kinship and class but an all-encompassing community cutting across these boundaries, creating a conception of one homogeneous identity developed only with religion as the basis. Secondly, religious communities, as they exist today, are constructs perpetuated at the ideological level of colonialism, nationalism and communalism and at the level of collective actions (rituals and riots) asserting not only religious identities but also power relations of caste and class. Thirdly, the identity of one religious community is shaped and negotiated, to a large extent, in relation to the other religious community – this is a marked feature of the Hindu-Muslim conflict in India. This

¹¹ Gyanendra Pandey, *Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), 10-11.

politically and ideologically driven definition of the collective self, i.e. a community which is meant to also distinguish the other community has led to the establishment of a deeply entrenched majority-minority complex between Hindus and Muslims of India. Ever since this complex became entrenched, there has been a relentless confusion between the ‘communitarian’ spirit and ‘communal’ spirit of religious communities in India.

1.2. CO-EXISTENCE OF COMMUNITARIAN AND MINORITARIAN NARRATIVES

The purpose of this thesis is to unearth how communitarian perspective in Urdu newspapers in India concerning matters that hold moral and ideological importance often gets coupled with majority or minority complex which is undoubtedly a result of long-lasting communal politics. The focus of the thesis is on the co-existence of communitarian and minoritarian perspectives in the Urdu newspapers. While exploring the minoritarian narrative in the discourse, assuming that the Urdu newspapers would provide only one kind of narrative, it was discovered that subdued alongside this dominant narrative is a communitarian narrative which barely gets attention in the mainstream media or academic discourse. This thesis aims to throw light on this lesser-known point of view in a discursive sphere that represents Muslims of India and unveil the ambiguities and contradictions in their representation which are discerned in the communitarian and minoritarian perspectives of the discourse.

A communitarian perspective is one that emphasizes a ‘situated self’, with constitutive attachments and aims that are pre-given defining the self. One source of such constitutive aims and attachments is religious identity as imagined and articulated by and for a community. This identity is constituted by the shared virtues of the community representing it and in the communitarian perspective these virtues are said to shape the individual’s understanding of who he/she is and thus stand above his/her chosen values. Any way of thinking that leaves values and goals to the free choice of the individual and discards the sanctity of shared beliefs and traditions is not acceptable in the communitarian perspective. This thesis will highlight this conflict using the themes of modern science and personal law in two of its chapters. As these two chapters will show, piety, respect for family life, religiously conditioned ideas of freedom and equality are some overtly expressed

values in the Urdu newspaper discourse that are found be challenged by the modern liberal values of freedom of choice, formal equality, individualism and materialism. Looking at the ‘situated self’ in the context of religious community, this thesis also explores the concerns and challenges of engaging with the ‘other’. What kind of affinity of the community in question is acknowledged with the other communities, apart from differences? How is the shared culture and identity of the country perceived and how is the community’s contribution to it defined? These questions are taken up in the chapters on the themes of secularism and nationalism.

The other perspective on the same themes, better known and intertwined with the communitarian perspective, is the minoritarian perspective which is associated with minority religious communities and is unambiguously pitted against majoritarian politics. This perspective depicts a minority community as a victim of historically perpetuated injustices and discrimination and demands its recognition as a distinct group requiring protection from cultural homogenization by majoritarian politics and special opportunities to be on par with the ‘other’. The issues of a minority community are perceived largely in terms of its conflict with the majority community as the discourse analyzed in this thesis shows. While the communitarian struggle is to sustain the value system of the community in the face of the competing modern world of materialistic individualism and liberalism, on the other hand, the minoritarian struggle is to sustain the distinct identity of the minority community against overbearing influence of the majority community and keep up its cultural autonomy from the state. The narrative of comparison with the dominant ‘other’, of being constantly neglected in the matters of welfare, development and empowerment and living under the threat of cultural siege is the most fundamental feature of minoritarianism. This thesis throws light on the prevalence of both, the communitarian as well as minoritarian anxieties with the overpowering articulation of the latter in the Urdu public sphere.

It is necessary to first justify the use of the term community to describe the Muslims of India. There has been a lot of sociological data to prove that Muslims in India are not a homogeneous community and many historians have convincingly argued that the idea of Muslims as a community did not exist perpetually and that it was born out of the communal or separatist politics under the British rule. Peter Hardy, questioning Lord Dufferin’s unjustified remarks made in the nineteenth century about the attitudes and values of the Muslims of India, attributes the solidarity of the Indian Muslims, on which a community as well as a nation had developed, to two hundred

years of British rule.¹² Solidarity here is a reference to the kind of unity that dissociated Muslims from the ‘others’ and confined them within certain religious orthodoxies evoking in them the sentiments of alienation and separation from the rulers and the fellow citizens from the other communities and bringing them to a point where the demand for a separate nation alone could define their identity. According to his argument, Muslims were neither a community nor a nation in pre-British India. They were more divided than united on the lines of region, language, class, race and ethnicity. A bulk of them had been converts who continued to carry with them the rituals, beliefs and traditions associated with their ancestral religion.¹³ Until the British colonialists enumerated Hindus and Muslims as separate religious communities and emphasized religion as the primary mark of the Muslim identity, Muslims of India remained a scattered and diverse people with multiple identities, religion being just one of them. Mushirul Hasan vehemently opposes the colonial perception of homogeneity of Indian Muslims and asks, “*why is it exceptional if some Muslims, falling prey to colonial enumerations and definitions and their own fanciful theories, regarded themselves as an indivisible component of a religious collectivity? Other communities have nurtured similar self-images.*”¹⁴ His emphatically stated point is that it is an unfortunate fact that Hindus and Muslims, both have been harboring the colonial images of their own religiosity but such images of the latter alone became stereotyped and perpetuated as idiosyncratic tendencies of the community. Ayesha Jalal differentiates between the communitarian narratives of Muslim identity in the subcontinent of the nineteenth century British India and the communal narratives of the early 20th century driven particularly by the separate electorate system introduced by the British government.¹⁵ Her point is that before communalism turned into a new political ideology in contradiction to nationalism, Muslim identity was imagined and expressed by some renowned individuals less with religion and more with region and way of life as markers and when this identity was acquiring a greater religious-cultural dimension, it was quite a class led identity – the *Ashraf* (Noble) men determined what it means to be a Muslim. This new religion-based identity

¹² Peter Hardy, *The Muslims of British India* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 1.

¹³ Ibid, 6-11.

¹⁴ Mushirul Hasan, *Islam in the Subcontinent: Muslims in a Plural Society* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2002). 9.

¹⁵ Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam Since 1850* (London: Routledge, 2002).

that was developed was of course a backlash against the colonial rule that followed the decline of the Muslim rule.¹⁶

Joining this camp of scholars to regard Muslim community as a class construct and power-driven development was Paul Brass. He has explained various factors that were responsible for Muslim separatism and the growth of the Muslim community with fixed boundaries against the 'other'.¹⁷ Drawing on the Muslim politics in the United Provinces of British India, Brass explains four factors which were instrumental in building Muslim nationalism – firstly, the ability to use cultural and historical symbols and create myths about common sufferings that can appeal to the sentiments of the community as a whole; secondly, the social mobilization of the people to whom the sense of identity can be communicated; the existence of elite groups in positions of political and economic power, willing to perpetuate the sense of communal identity; and strong political organization. He too emphasizes that religious and cultural differences between Hindus and Muslims exist more at the elite level and less at the mass level. Another claim that his analysis makes is that it was in the interest of the Muslim elite to assert the differences rather than similarities between the two communities in such a way that the privileged groups could uphold their power and domination in their own region by promoting such cultural products that originate from them alone and are not shared by the other co-religionists. Brass explains language as one such cultural product. Until the modern times, Hindi/Urdu was part of the composite culture of Hindus and Muslims, but the politics of nationalism and communalism that brewed up in the colonial environment of 19th and 20th century India created two new languages – Hindi for Hindus and Urdu for Muslims. The processes of sanskritizing Hindi and islamizing Urdu were instigated and spearheaded by the intellectual and religious elites whose ideological constructs in no way represented the historical reality of the Hindu-Muslim relationship. There is a suggestion of power politics and political exigencies as motivators behind the construction of Muslim identity in not only Brass' analysis but also in the studies of other scholars who have claimed that a homogeneous Muslim identity is a construct and not a historical reality. For them, the internal differentiation of the community and its cultural similarity with other communities is a lived reality whereas the

¹⁶ Ibid, 46.

¹⁷ Paul R Brass, *Language, Religion and Politics in North India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 178-81.

separate identity of the community and its solidarity based on common religious belief is a politically fabricated myth.

From a contradictory viewpoint, there are scholars who have claimed that the root of exclusive identity of Indian Muslims lies in pre-colonial India. Their argument is that Muslims in India were bound as a distinctive community by the Islamic faith that gave a kind of distinctiveness to their culture due to which they could not identify themselves with the other communities. The process of propagation of the Islamic faith and mobilization of the community on its basis was, as they claim, independent of the intentions of the colonial government and the politically motivated Muslim leaders. Barbara Metcalf, Francis Robinson, C.A Bayly and Farzana Shaikh are some of the scholars who have held this viewpoint. It is their strong contention that though the separatist sentiments of Muslims as a community developed as a backlash against the loss of the political might of the Muslim ruling class to the British imperialists, the Islamic discourse and the way of life that it demanded outweighed all the other factors in building a sense of being one united whole with its apparent differences with the Hindus. The leaders who carried out the program of mobilizing the Muslim community were profoundly informed by the Islamic discourse.

One scholar who emphasized that the political expression of Indian Muslims as a community and as a nation was an essential aspect of their Islamic vision is Farzana Shaikh. She applied the Islamic concepts of *Ijma* (Consensus) and *Ummah* (Community of believers) to her understanding of the politically expressed will of the Muslim community and the politics practised by the Muslim leaders to assert the community identity of Muslims in colonial India.¹⁸ In her argument, the politics of identity that was demonstrated by the upper echelons of the Muslim community may seem to have been driven by power interests, but nevertheless it was in many ways a reflection of aspirations oriented towards an ethos that was as much Islamic as Indian. The kind of interests that the Muslim leadership was championing for the community, including the demand for a separate Muslim state was, as Shaikh claims, no less than the expression of *Ijma* or consensus of the community. Shaikh regrets the fact that the scholars who have dealt with Muslim nationalism in colonial India have blatantly ignored the normative discourse of the Islamic religion and tradition that profoundly influenced and guided the proponents of the distinct identity of Indian Muslims.

¹⁸ Farzana Shaikh, *Community and Consensus in Islam: Muslim Representation in Colonial India, 1860-1947*. (Delhi: ImprintOne, 2012). 1-48.

Leaders like Sayyid Ahmed Khan, Maulana Azad, M.A. Jinnah and Muhammad Iqbal took up the cause of the rights of the Muslim community not merely because of the sentiments like the loss of Muslim pride or political insecurity about the future of Muslims as a minority vis-à-vis the Hindu majority but significantly because they were either subtly or overtly committed to the Islamic vision of life that necessitated the solidarity of Muslims. Shaikh categorically underscores the significance of politics and political power in unifying Muslims and thereby achieving the righteous way of life as prescribed by Islam. Citing various examples from the Islamic history including Prophet Muhammad's own political expeditions, she argues that for Muslims there can be no meaningful politics without the resort to religion and no successful accomplishment of religious virtues without politics.¹⁹ She explains that conforming to the Islamic tradition whereby the *Shariat* was followed as the divine law and its rule subjected to the consensus of the community or *Ummah* which was to be kept unified through political authority, the Muslim leaders of colonial India were persistently trying to consolidate the Muslim community and give it a political representation which will eventually develop a common Islamic consciousness among its members. This concern to build a common consciousness bound by the Islamic faith is, as Shaikh contends, discernable not only from the demand for Pakistan in 1940s but also from the earlier instances like the campaign in favor of separate or communal electorate system that was introduced in 1909 and the Khilafat movement. It was based on the belief in the superiority of the Muslim community and Islam and the claim that Muslims of India deserve special consideration in terms of their political rights because of their special place in the Indian history. Another point that she makes, citing the theories of some scholars of Islam, is that in the Islamic tradition the basic entity is community and not individual; hence when the spokespersons of Muslims in colonial India stood for the distinct status of the community, they were upholding the Islamic tradition of making community the centre of politics and the means to realize the Islamic virtues and distinguishing Muslims as a superior people from the others. Francis Robinson argues that Muslims could never dissociate themselves from the values of the *Shariat* which they considered to be the divine law whose adherence was the only way of leading life like an ideal Muslim and the Islamic revivalist movements in British India were rigorously trying to emphasize the same to Muslims.²⁰ He also claims that the politics of the leading Muslim class largely represented the will of the Muslim

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Francis Robinson, *Islam and Muslim History in South Asia* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003). 44-5.

masses and that there were no vast discrepancies between them. In his view, the political mobilization of the community and assertion of its distinct identity during the colonial period was a phase in continuity with the preceding endeavors of the pre-colonial Muslim regimes to establish a way of life based on Islamic principles which would also build Muslim solidarity.

In this vein, the thesis explores the submerged but persistent communitarian dimension within Urdu newspaper discourse about Muslim identity especially as it is imagined, desired, defined and reinvented. While the historicist accounts focus on the ‘how’ aspect of community identity, this thesis focuses on the ‘what for’ aspect of the collective identity, uncovering the ends for which such an identity is forged and deployed in the public sphere.

1.3. VERNACULAR PRESS AS A PUBLIC SPHERE

In approaching the Urdu newspapers, this thesis is inspired by the rich scholarship on the public sphere. Based on the spread of newspapers, salons and other spaces, Habermas identified three features of public sphere. Firstly, it lies outside the confines of the state as well as the private domain of family and market. Secondly, it is a discursive space in which individuals without a political background engage in a dialogue on matters concerning general interest. Thirdly, the members interact with a rational mind and together build a common opinion on common good.²¹

The kind of reasoning that is envisaged in the public sphere by Habermas is one that is critical. Free discourse involving the common citizens and providing the ground for common reason to grow and to generate public opinion that is enlightened and critical is the characteristic that lies at the heart of the public sphere. Charles Taylor calls it a common space in which, “*the members of society meet, through a variety of media (print, electronic) and also in face-to-face encounters to discuss matters of common interest and thus able to form a common mind about those matters*”.²² Public sphere certainly is not a reference to a geographical space. It is a metaphorical reference to public interactions on matters of common interest – interactions that develop public opinion on such matters. This is where issues of common interest are sounded out by agents who stand outside the institutions of the state and essentially play their role as builders of public opinion which is meant to be a strong constraint and influence upon any tendency of the state towards an arbitrary

²¹ Craig Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 9-14.

²² Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 259, https://www.google.co.in/books/edition/Philosophical_Arguments/iqtLAsIBZ2sC?hl.

exercise of power. And this is where collective rationality comes into use under the conditions of free communication. The theory of public sphere was derived from some of the manifestations of its actual exercise like the press, political parties, literary societies and educational associations.

Print media, to mention newspapers in particular, constitutes one such area where public opinion is generated, various political virtues contested and images of communities built through discursive means. Vernacular newspapers have always provided a fertile ground to serve this goal. As Benedict Anderson claims, nations as imagined communities were integrated and strengthened by vernacular languages and the print revolution during the growth of early nation-states made it possible, particularly through novel and newspaper, for the citizens of a nation, who otherwise were separated by vast physical distance, to imagine each other's life and thereby created a familiarity that instilled in them the sentiments of living and dying for the nation.²³ In multicultural nations, vernacular press has played a significant role in building distinct ethno-cultural and ethno-religious identities. Francesca Orsini in sketching the early 20th century Hindi public sphere highlights the use of novels, newspapers and textbooks by the educated middle class elite of the Hindi heartland as literary domains to standardize the Hindi language with the aim of making it the basis of the country's national identity synonymous with Hindu identity.²⁴ The further progress of the Hindi public sphere from being an elite driven platform in the early twentieth century to build nationalism and thus challenge the colonial rule to becoming a much larger discursive space, encouraging greater political participation from the masses at large in the last quarter of the twentieth century was highlighted in depth by Sevanti Ninan in his work on the Hindi newspapers in the Hindi heartland of the last quarter of the twentieth century and their role in creating a vibrant public culture among their readers.²⁵ Though he uses Habermas' concept of public sphere in exploring the nuances of the discursive Hindi print media in Northern India, in his observation, Ninan challenges the argument put up by Habermas that as the public sphere adopts a commercial and consumerist approach, becoming more accessible to the commoners than ever before, its discursive quality deteriorates. In contrast, he argues that while the Hindi public sphere was spearheaded by an intellectual elite class in facilitating the national movement against the colonial

²³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 2006), 37-41.

²⁴ Francesca Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002).

²⁵ Sevanti Ninan, *Headlines from the Heartland: Reinventing the Hindi Public Sphere* (New Delhi: Sage, 2007), 13-31, https://www.google.co.in/books/edition/Headlines_From_the_Heartland/ZNvUmKRxt9UC?hl.

rule, towards the end of the twentieth century, due to a rise in the literacy rate and effective marketing & advertising strategies of Hindi newspapers in small towns and villages of the north that gave local issues more coverage than others, the mass readership became a conscientious contributor to the local public discourse and also took an agile interest in local politics of their region. He suggests that the publicness of the public sphere depends on how open it is to the participation of larger number of people.

A huge amount of academic research has been done to understand vernacular press as a domain where community identities are imagined and shaped through the discourse on issues relevant to the communities concerned. The identities defined and asserted are often ethno-national and the research carried out on this subject suggests that vernacular press has been an effective discursive means across the world to articulate collective consciousness based on language, religion, race and nationality particularly in the political scenarios whenever a community due to its marginalized existence is suffering an identity crisis. In such scenarios, news coverage, opinion columns, editorials and advertisements in the newspapers that communicate to their readers in their vernacular language, say a lot about their endeavors to awaken their audience to the need to reinvent their image and rehabilitate their broken identity by various means as suggested by their news features. The sports column of a Palestinian newspaper, turned out to become a site for championing Palestinian nationalism in the 1940s. Based on the analysis of its discourse, Tamir Sorek argued that *Filastin*, the leading Palestinian daily that ran under the British rule between 1911 and 1948, projected European countries in its sports column as powers to reckon with and the best examples for Palestinians to follow in order to regain their mastery over sports which they practiced with agility in the past but later abandoned and thus lost their glory and dominant position in the world.²⁶ Fiona Douglas' work based on a qualitative and quantitative study of Scottish national newspapers probes into the purposeful use of the Scottish language by the press to engender a distinct national identity shared by the readers which is primarily linguistic.²⁷

²⁶ Tamir Sorek, "The Sports Column as a Site of Palestinian Nationalism in the 1940s", in *Sport, Politics and Society in the Land of Israel: Past and Present*, ed. Yair Galily & Amir Ben Porat (New York: Routledge, 2009), 98-109, https://www.google.co.in/books/edition/Sport_Politics_and_Society_in_the_Land_o/Ar3hAQAAQBAJ?hl.

²⁷ Fiona M. Douglas, *Scottish Newspapers, Language and Identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), https://www.google.co.in/books/edition/Scottish_Newspapers_Language_and_Identit/gOOqBgAAQBAJ?hl.

The existing literature on vernacular press as public sphere, more or less suggests that newspapers do stimulate the imagination of a community about its identity and self-perception and have also been important facilitators of the discursive culture of the audience that they represent. Be it the immigrant communities trying to define their identity in the countries of their adoption or the communities in countries which have had a history of inter-communal conflict, print media is said to have provided all of them a platform to imagine themselves either in relation to or against the 'other' and articulate their collective reason on matters of public interest.

1.4. URDU PRESS AND MUSLIM IDENTITY IN INDIA

Urdu journalism in India is almost two centuries old. There was a time when Urdu was a tough competitor to Hindi and English in the market of communication of news in north India and parts of the Deccan region. The changes that the Urdu press underwent throughout its history are connected to many factors, the politics of language being one of them. Taking into consideration the fact that the discursive content in the Urdu newspapers today pertains to the needs and interests of Muslims, it can be said that the Urdu print media stands as the voice of the Muslim community. However, giving an entire picture of all the phases in the evolution of the Urdu press into a forum for the formulation and representation of the Muslim public opinion and all the factors that have made their contribution in this respect is not within the purview of the chapter.

There is a very strong link between the inclination of the Urdu press to represent the self-perception of the Muslim community in India and the Muslim identity attributed to Urdu. The analyses by various historians and linguists suggest that Urdu did not originate from any particular religious community. It emerged as a hybrid language by absorbing the attributes of Persian, Sanskrit and the local dialects of north India and parts of the Deccan. Its literary growth was facilitated by Hindus and Muslims for quite a long time. It came to be defined as the language of Muslims only in British India with the rise of communal consciousness which culminated with the partition of the country. Tariq Rahman explains how the language was indispensable for the ideological construction of an identity that was to serve as the base for a new nation.²⁸ He also observes that despite other languages like Punjabi, Sindhi and Pushto having much bigger presence in Pakistan, Urdu has always been upheld as the national language so that it could continue to represent the

²⁸ Tariq Rahman, *From Hindi to Urdu: A Social and Political History* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2011), 157-61.

religious and cultural fabric of the country. Commenting on the difference between the position of Urdu in Pakistan and India post-Partition, Rahman states that -

*While in Pakistan, Urdu is often associated with pro-establishment and right-wing forces; in India it is anti-establishment and generally stands for the autonomy, identity and the rights of the Muslim community. Though spoken only in parts of north India, and that too in the urban areas, it is a symbol of the Muslim identity for most Indian Muslims.*²⁹

Thus, today Urdu is regarded as an essential element of the Indian Muslim identity. The Urdu press has been through the same long journey of starting out as a means of spreading official information of the government, transitioning into a secular platform to facilitate the Indian national movement and finally ending up as a public sphere to represent the issues of Indian Muslims and define their common identity. In Ayesha Jalal's account of the Urdu press in the North Western Provinces and Punjab, the newspapers in the early nineteenth century have been described to be having apolitical matter concerning the popular needs, sentiments and interests.³⁰ Gail Minault, in her analysis of the history of the Urdu press in Delhi, comments that in their initial times, the newspapers were meant to inform the people about the functions, activities and important declarations of the royal regime at the pinnacle and in turn, inform the latter about the provincial administration and the general opinion of the people.³¹

A plethora of Urdu dailies, monthlies and weeklies in the northern parts of India mushroomed in the nineteenth century before and after the revolt of 1857. A good number of them were founded and run by non-Muslims proving the fact that the Urdu press was born with no political agenda of consolidating the Muslims of India and giving them a distinct political voice, a mission which was being pursued only during the movement for partition in 1930s. Munshi Har Sukh Rai (*Koh-i-noor*), Munshi Nawal Kishore (*Oudh Akhbar*), Mukand Lal (*Tariq-e-Baghavat-e-Hind*), Pandit Mukund Ram & Pandit Gopi Nath (*Akhbar-e-Aam*) and Diwan Chand Lal (*Chashma-i-Faiz*) are

²⁹ Ibid, 159.

³⁰ Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam since 1850* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 48-101.

³¹ Gail Minault. "From Akhbar to News: The Development of the Urdu Press in Early Nineteenth-Century Delhi" in *A Wilderness of Possibilities: Urdu Studies in Transnational Perspectives*, ed. Kathryn Hansen and David Lelyveld (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 101-117.

some of the known names associated with the Urdu press in colonial India.³² In fact the very first Urdu newspaper to have been launched in India, *Jam-E-Jahan Numa*, which was started in 1822 in the then Calcutta also was run by two non-Muslims – Hari Har Datt and Munshi Seva Sukh.³³ Under the regulation of British laws particularly after 1858, like the other Indian language newspapers, they didn't have a smooth exercise of their freedom of expression and had to not take an overtly cynical stand against the regime in order to have a long life. Also, all of them in the nineteenth century did not run in the same spirit. Some were pro-establishment and some were started with the intention of making the readers aware of the incidents that occurred during the revolt of 1857. Their nationalist temper began to rise from the last quarter of the century. One of the newspapers, *Khum Khana-i-Hind* founded in 1883 made appeals to Muslims to join hands with the Indian National Congress that was going to be established in 1885.³⁴ And then with leaders like Maulana Abul Kalam Azad joining this field, Urdu press acquired more nationalist zeal which is something that the Urdu newspapers that have been covered in this thesis keep underscoring. With a great sense of pride, *Roznama Rashtriya Sahara* in one of its editorials, comments that in 1920s, the Urdu newspapers ignited the nationalist fire in several villages and cities of India that caused anxiety in the British regime which went on to put restrictions on the Urdu press but with no great result because when one newspaper got banned, another would crop up with the same amount of nationalist zeal.³⁵

The Urdu press in post-Independence and post-Partition India is no longer a domain of formation of general public opinion. Nor does it carry the same nationalist aspirations that once brought the people across religions and regions together to fight an alien rule in British India. The role that it predominantly plays today is that of producing a discursive sphere for what it imagines as the Indian Muslim community and its concerns. This thesis is an attempt to disentangle the confluence of communitarian and minoritarian ways in which these concerns are portrayed through the prism of the Urdu print media; it tries to make sense of – a discursive space where Muslims of India are defined on one hand as a minority community that needs to be constantly guarded against

³² Abida Samiuddin, "Freedom Struggle and Urdu Journalism During the Nineteenth Century" in *They Too Fought For Freedom: The Role of Minorities*, ed. Asghar Ali Engineer (Delhi: Hope India, 2005), 119, https://www.google.co.in/books/edition/They_Too_Fought_for_India_s_Freedom/-XQCYl6T1vIC?hl.

³³ Ibid, 118.

³⁴ Ibid, 140.

³⁵ The Rashtriya Sahara. 13 August 2019, p. 5.

majoritarian domination and on the other hand as a strongly bound faith based community that needs to be constantly guarded against all kinds of sacrilegious forces. Five Urdu dailies including one largest selling Urdu newspaper constitute the primary research material for the thesis – The *Munsif* Urdu Daily, The *Siasat* Daily, the *Rahnuma-e-Deccan* Daily, the *Etemaad* Urdu Daily and *Roznama Rashtriya Sahara*.

1.5. CIRCULATION AND READERSHIP OF URDU NEWSPAPERS IN INDIA

According to the Registrar of Newspapers for India, Urdu press is the third largest in the country after Hindi and English. Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Telangana and Maharashtra are some of the states where the Urdu dailies have largest circulations.³⁶ Though Urdu press today is not as prominent in its functioning as it was in pre-Independence India, its presence all over the country is far from being meager. Interestingly, though Urdu press today stands as a medium to voice the opinion of Muslims of India, in the recent times, many of the Urdu language dailies have come under the ownership of non-Muslim entrepreneurs. Some of them are run by mainstream large media houses too. For instance, *Roznama Rashtriya Sahara* is run by Sahara India. The data of 2014-15 that the Registrar of Newspapers for India (henceforth RNI) provides and its analysis by some recently conducted studies throw light on some intriguing facts about the growth of Urdu press over the past few decades in terms of registrations and circulations of the newspapers.

As per the Census of India, 2011, Muslims constitute 14.23% of the country's population and the Urdu speaking people constitute 4.19% of the population; Urdu ranks seventh amongst the scheduled languages of India.³⁷ Unlike other vernacular languages, Urdu as a spoken language cannot be identified with any specific region or regions. It rather has a trans-regional presence with people speaking it in Delhi, U.P and Bihar in the north, Maharashtra in the west and Telangana and Karnataka in the south. Strangely, it has the official language status in Jammu & Kashmir despite the fact that most of its native Muslims do not speak the language. One of the recent studies based on the data produced by the RNI in 2014-15 suggests that though the portion of the Urdu speaking population has declined in the post-2000 period, the registrations and circulations of Urdu

³⁶ Abdullah Khan and Aman Vats, "Urdu Newspapers in India: Determinant and Conveyor of Muslim Public opinion", *Economic & Political Weekly* LIII, no. 23 (June 2018): 103.

³⁷ Census of India 2011. Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, 15. https://censusindia.gov.in/2011Census/Language_MTs.html

newspapers during the same period rose phenomenally. In fact, the circulations are described to have attained a sharp increase once in a decade since 1960s, particularly in the 1970s after the Emergency, during the late 1980s, early 1990s and again after 2006.³⁸ As one can easily point out, all these periods were crisis periods mainly involving the Hindu/Muslim conflict.

The study that is being referred to here also claims that any increase or decline in the circulations of Urdu newspapers did not correspond to an increase or decrease in the size of the Urdu speaking population. It shows that among Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Jharkhand which are all states with a large Muslim as well as Urdu speaking population and where Urdu is an official language, only Uttar Pradesh has recorded registrations of Urdu newspapers which exceed the state's share of Muslim and Urdu speaking population.³⁹ In other words, the percentage of registered Urdu newspapers in this state is more than the percentage of the Muslim and Urdu speaking population. The other two states have shown far less percentage of registrations. On the other hand, states like Jammu & Kashmir and West Bengal which have a sizeable Muslim population but a very minute percentage of Urdu speakers have always recorded a far higher number of registered Urdu newspapers constituting a huge share of the total number of registrations across the country.⁴⁰ Delhi is another place with a high number of registered Urdu newspapers though its share of Muslim and Urdu speaking population is much less than the presence of the Urdu newspapers in the city.⁴¹

To consider the data about all the registered publications in the year 2017-18 as provided by the RNI, Urdu dailies continue to hold the position of the third largest language press in terms of circulation, after Hindi and English with 1, 99, 37,049 copies per day.⁴² Urdu dailies also rank second in the list of languages and the number of dailies published in each of them. After Hindi language dailies that top the list with 3838 publications, it is Urdu language newspapers whose total number is 1145. As far as total circulation of all kinds of publications including dailies, weeklies, fortnightlies, monthlies, quarterlies and annuals is concerned, Hindi again tops the list

³⁸ Ankita Pandey, "Urdu Newspapers, Growing, Not Dying", The Hoot, accessed October 4, 2016, <https://asu.thehoot.org/research/research-studies/urdu-newspapers-growing-not-dying-9683>.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Registrar of Newspapers for India. Press in India 2017-18. Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 50.

with 19,56, 21,990 copies followed by English with 5,34, 53,564 copies and Urdu occupies the sixth position with 2, 52,89,731 copies per day. Uttar Pradesh has the highest share of circulation of Urdu publications with 9,236, 157 copies followed by Delhi, 3,513,560; Bihar, 2, 929, 598; Jammu & Kashmir, 2,439, 814 and Telangana, 1, 500, 259 copies.

Apart from the above-mentioned states which have shown the highest circulation of Urdu publications, there are many other states where Urdu press is considerably active with an above average circulation. These states belong to different regions of the country – Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, West Bengal and Karnataka. The trans-regional character of Urdu is plausibly reflected in the range and extent of the circulation of Urdu publications across the country. As the data from the RNI suggests, though the Urdu press does not hold a dominant position any more in the face of the might of the popular readership of Hindi and English print media, among other languages, Urdu publications in their circulation strength still hold a strong position.

According to a recent study on the content of the Urdu newspapers across the country, these newspapers are the key makers of Muslim public opinion in India.⁴³ With the exception of a few of them that are run by the BJP and RSS, all of them give immense coverage to those news stories and issues that hold specific significance among the Muslims of the country. The study is based on the review of a range of Urdu newspapers published from different parts of the country and all of them are described to be having similar overtones of self-representation of Muslims as the largest minority of India and also the attitude of a strong aversion to the Hindu right-wing groups including the ruling BJP. It also throws light on the coverage of international issues which again is inclined towards those matters that specially concern Muslims globally. The sampled Urdu newspapers' endorsement of the views held by the clerics of the community on various issues also is highlighted in the analysis which inevitably leads to the conclusion that there is very little room for the expression of a liberal viewpoint on any matter.

The sample of the Urdu newspapers that was chosen for research for this thesis shows the same characteristics that have been pointed out in the study that is discussed above. All the five newspapers, *Siasat*, *Rahnuma-e-Deccan*, *Munsif*, *Etemaad* and *Rashtriya Sahara* uniformly

⁴³ Abdullah Khan and Aman Vats, "Urdu Newspapers in India: Determinant and Conveyor of Muslim Public opinion", *Economic & Political Weekly* LIII, no. 23 (June 2018): 103-10.

communicate with Muslims as their primary audience. Regardless of the fact that Muslims of India make a highly diverse and heterogeneous community because of the differences of caste, sect, language and region, these newspapers have no qualms in depicting them as a community that is united fundamentally by a common faith and thus a common consciousness which is unaffected whatsoever by socio-cultural differences that prevail within it.

There are two broad perceptions about Muslims that are discerned in the analysis of the discourse of selected newspapers. One is that of Indian Muslims who are often addressed as '*Hindustani Musalmaan*', a community that is identified not only by its adherence to the Islamic faith but also by its minority status in India. The editorials and opinion columns unambiguously communicate the idea to their readers that *Hindustani Musalmaan* are a minority but a special minority as they account for the largest religious minority population in India and have a special role in the nation's history. This perception also asserts the victim status of the community. The other perception is that of Muslims as a global community consisting of believers in Islam from everywhere in the world and they are often addressed as '*Ummah*' or '*Millat Islamiya*'. This global fraternity of believers is said to be morally integrated by their common religious faith and emotionally bound together by common conditions of oppression inflicted either by Western global superpowers like the U.S or by the authorities within the nations where Muslims constitute a minority population like in India. Hence any news story that particularly concerns either the Muslims of India or the Gulf nations or the Muslim Diasporas in the Western nations, grabs the cover page of the newspaper. Unlike the mainstream English print media, the ban on Triple Talaq by the government of India, incidents of mob lynching of Muslim men, random and arbitrary arrests of youths in Kashmir on the charges of terrorist activities, violence in Israel against Palestinians, massacre of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar, terrorist attack on a mosque in New Zealand, etc. were enormously highlighted on the cover page and discussed for several days together after the incidents and invoked several times as reference points as well in the editorials and opinion columns of the sampled Urdu newspapers.

Among the five Urdu newspapers, *Rashtriya Sahara* has about five to six editions from different cities including Hyderabad whereas all the others are published in Hyderabad.⁴⁴ *Rashtriya Sahara* is exceptional also because among all the five it is the only one that is run by a corporate

⁴⁴ <https://www.akhbarurdu.com/roznamasahara/>

organization. All the others are either family-owned or individually owned newspapers. *Etemaad* was founded in 2002 by the Owaisi family which also runs a political party that has a powerful presence in Telangana – *Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen* or MIM. Its chief editor is from the same family – Burhanuddin Owaisi.⁴⁵ The *Siasat* daily was started in 1948 by Abid Ali Khan who belonged to an aristocratic Hyderabad family. He launched the newspaper along with his friend, Mehboob Hussain Jigar.⁴⁶ After the death of Abid Ali Khan, his son, Zahid Ali Khan took over and he continues to be the owner and editor-in-chief of the *Siasat*. *Munsif*, according to the Audit Bureau of Circulation, is the Urdu newspaper with the largest circulation and readership in India. It was established in 1977 by Mehboob Ansari. After his death the daily was run by his brother and later in 1996 handed over to Khan Lateef Mohammad Khan who is also its Chief Editor.⁴⁷ His business engagements also include real estate and he is the owner of the famous Khan Lateef Khan Estate which is named after him. Both, *Siasat* and *Munsif* are circulated not only in Telangana but also in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra. Both of them also stand out by the fact that their circulation goes beyond the national borders to reach out to the Middle-East, USA, UK and Canada as well. *Rahnuma-e-Deccan* is one newspaper that had evolved through Nizam's Hyderabad. Established in 1921, it is currently headed by Syed Viqaruddin as its chief editor.⁴⁸ It is one of the five best-known Urdu dailies circulated from Hyderabad. In its initial phase it ran till 1948 in the name of *Rahbar-e-Deccan*, taking a staunch position in favour of an independent Hyderabad. After the accession of Hyderabad into the Indian union, having got liquidated for a few months, it was re-launched under a new title, i.e., *Rahnuma-e-Deccan* in 1949 which has remained the same since then.

The owners/editors of these newspapers are not journalists only. They have been educationists and philanthropists too and both the roles have been aimed primarily at the welfare of Muslims of the state. They run educational trusts in the interest of minority education. They keep raising funds for the basic amenities of poor Muslim families in the state. Apart from being involved in the activities of community welfare, these newspapers also aim at religious awareness of their readers. To ensure that the members of the community stay connected with the Islamic faith and practise the dos and

⁴⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_Etemaad

⁴⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Siasat_Daily

⁴⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Munsif_Daily

⁴⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rahnuma_e_Deccan

don'ts prescribed by it is a significant objective of the Urdu print media which is evident from the weekly edition devoted to religious commentaries by clerics that all the five newspapers carry.

However, since it would be a very simplistic conclusion from these observations that the discursive culture among Muslims of India that the Urdu print media has been perpetuating is directed solely towards building a strong and united community which will not be open to interactions with the 'other', not have a sense of being part of a larger nation and not want to engage with modern liberal values, this thesis takes up the task of providing a different interpretation. It reflects on the complexities of the questions of the community's perceptions about being a minority in a multi-cultural country, grappling with majoritarian domination and being part of a faith-based fraternity across the world that has to interact as well as compete with economic, technological and cultural forces of globalization. These are the very questions where the community's perceptions as articulated in the Urdu press show a confluence of minoritarian and communitarian narratives.

1.6. METHODOLOGY: INTERPRETATION OF DISCOURSE/TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

The research undertaken for this thesis is based on the textual analysis of the five sampled Urdu newspapers. The time periods chosen for the study are in accordance with the four major thematics – modern science, personal law, secularism and nationalism. All four of them in some way or the other reflect the complex interplay of communitarian concerns and minority interests of Indian Muslims. Since these themes, particularly, personal law and the rhetoric of secularism in elections, address specific cases and events, the publications of the chosen Urdu newspapers during the specific months of occurrence of those cases and events have been taken up for the study. Broadly, the thesis covers the time period from late 1980s, the decade of the rise of Hindu nationalism under the auspices of the Bharatiya Janata Party along with the national debate on minority rights triggered by the Shah Bano case on the Muslim Personal Law to 2019 in which we witnessed politically significant incidents like the Pulwama attack, enactment of the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act and the abrogation of Article 370, all of which raised fiery debates on nationalism and secularism. The research largely involved the textual/content analysis of the editorial pages, opinion columns, articles of special weekly editions and to some extent the advertisement pages.

Textual/content analysis is a method of collecting data in which by making sense of a text that could be a book, newspaper article, interview, speech, film or television programme, one tries to understand the meaning that is conveyed in it. This method is often called as content analysis wherein the researcher interprets the meaning, explicit or latent, in a text to understand the messages within the text, the contributors to the text, the audience to whom the text is communicated or even the culture or time to which it belongs.⁴⁹ There are two ways of using this method. One is conceptual analysis in which the frequency of the chosen concepts represented by particular words and phrases in a text is ascertained to establish the meaning of the text and the relational or semantic analysis where the words and phrases representing a concept are understood in relation to the other concepts in the text represented by other words and phrases.⁵⁰ Conceptual analysis was largely applied in this study wherein the frequency of Urdu and, in many places, English words denoting the central themes of the thesis and the related concepts was probed for exploring their communitarian understanding and the minoritarian perspective that coincides with it.

It is also important to emphasize here that though the meaning of a text is addressed by the author to the audience belonging to a particular culture and historical situation, it is assumed to be understandable to the others as well. As Gurpreet Mahajan stated in her work on hermeneutic understanding, it is also assumed that the meaning that a text conveys to its audience pertains to the latter's shared world of values and practices.⁵¹ This thesis is an attempt to understand the meaning of modern ideas conveyed in the Urdu newspapers to their target audience which mostly includes the Muslims of India and occasionally also includes Muslims in different parts of the world. As the newspapers undertaken for research clearly suggest, they address their ideas to a community of believers who are imagined as a united whole morally bound by their faith in Islam regardless of the multiple differences of language, caste, race and nationality that otherwise divide them. However, this research endeavor did not involve decoding of the intended meaning of the texts or what the author intended his texts to mean to his target readers because it is also assumed in the method of interpreting the meaning of texts that the texts are often encoded in such a way

⁴⁹ "Types of Content Analysis", <https://writing.colostate.edu/guides/>.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Gurpreet Mahajan, *Explanation and Understanding in Human Sciences* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011), 7.

that their objective meaning is accessible to the others too apart from the primary audience towards which it is directed.⁵²

As this thesis presents an interpretation of the discourse of Urdu newspapers, it is important here to clarify the sense in which the word discourse is used throughout. By discourse, I mean communication, dialogue or conversation between the author of a text and the audience to whom the author is addressing the text. In a discourse it is assumed that one is the speaker who is communicating some ideas or messages in some or the other form like spoken or written words, signs & symbols or any art form; and the other is the recipient of those ideas or messages. In the words of Emile Benveniste – *discourse must be understood in its widest sense: every utterance assuming a speaker and a hearer, and in the speaker, the intention of influencing the other in some way.*⁵³ Michel Foucault has broadly defined the term as ‘the general domain of all statements’, referring to all utterances or texts which have meaning and some impact in the real world.⁵⁴ I have used the term in this thesis in the light of the same meaning or definition.

This method has been used in the research of the topic of the thesis to understand the meaning and implications for Indian Muslims of the modern concepts of secularism, nationalism, science, equality and freedom as articulated in the public sphere of Urdu print media. Using the texts of the Urdu newspapers as its primary data, this study explains the alternative perspectives on the above-mentioned concepts and reflects on how these modern values when viewed from the vantage of a religious community in a multi-religious society acquire a different meaning which is determined by the particular ethos of the community and also its socio-economic status vis-à-vis the other communities. It explores how the Indian Muslim identity is significantly invoked in the public discourse of the community while engaging with the modern ideas covered in the thesis and how the communitarian interpretation of each of these ideas that is perhaps shared by the other religious communities too, is formidably entangled with the sensibilities of being a ‘special minority’.

This thesis basically presents an interpretation/understanding rather than explanation of the discourse of Urdu newspapers. Understanding and explanation are two different modes of inquiry

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Sara Mills, *Discourse: The New Critical Idiom* (New York: Routledge, 2001), Chapter 1.
<https://www.google.co.in/books/edition/Discourse/MAuIAgAAQBAJ?hl>

⁵⁴ Ibid.

in research that involve different approaches to the object of inquiry. While explanation is appropriate to the study of all the phenomena that can be causally analyzed, understanding/interpretation is concerned with the study of objects that are expressions of ‘life-worlds’ which are the worlds of meanings and are not within the purview of sense-perception. These expressions can take the form of signs, symbols, actions, speeches and written texts. It is assumed that the meaning that these expressions hold for their agent is comprehensible to the audience to whom they are addressed as both are deemed to be constituting the same world of shared practices and values. Considering the fact that the Urdu newspapers chosen for this study clearly address the communitarian issues to the ‘*Hindustani Musalmaan*’, it is assumed that the discourse on each of these issues is articulative of the inter-subjective meanings that are understandable not only to the audience to whom it is addressed, but also to the ones who do not belong to this particular shared world of inter-subjective meanings.

The interpretation of a discursive text and inferring of the meaning it conveys to its audience requires the knowledge of the language in which the discourse is spelt out either in the written or spoken form. The discourse analysis of the Urdu newspapers which this thesis presents was possible due to the prior knowledge of Urdu as a spoken language, its grammatical structure and its literary form. The analysis was carried out by probing into the use of specific words in the newspaper articles that denote the themes discussed in the thesis and connecting them to the whole article concerned and thus constructing the meaning of the whole discourse. To put it in more technical terms, the method of discourse analysis resorted to in the research for this thesis, involved moving between the part and the whole, establishing a coherence between words and sentences, sentences and articles, articles and the entire discourse, in order to derive the meaning that the discourse articulates about the themes. This thesis provides no causal inquiry into the class, gender or political affiliations of the authors of the texts interpreted and their ideological orientations. The chosen Urdu newspapers have been interpreted as discursive texts that carry a meaning for their target audience which is discernible and the purpose of this thesis is to discern that meaning. While doing so, it highlights the contradictions in the discourse on the four themes and the values attached to them – contradictions that reflect the communitarian and minoritarian perspectives about how Muslims of India ought to be engaging with the issues addressed in this thesis.

1.7.OVERVIEW

To give an overview of the thesis, the first chapter discusses the challenges of modern science and education that the Urdu print media perceives for the Indian Muslim community. It probes into the question of compatibility of science and Islam as addressed in the discourse and the extent to which the Western oriented modern science is acceptable and practicable in the Muslim community. The desire to raise the socio-economic status of the Muslim minority vis-à-vis the others by seeking and mastering modern scientific knowledge and the simultaneous anxiety about the flourishing Western inspired values of liberalism and materialistic individualism that the discourse articulates is a major highlight of this chapter.

The second chapter deals with a highly debated and contentious issue related to the identity of the community – personal law. It traces the nuances in the discourse from the Shah Bano case in 1985 to the recently passed law in 2019 banning Triple Talaq. The focus is on how the discourse has responded to the criticism raised against the Muslim personal law on the grounds of gender discrimination and injustice to women and how it has defended the law against the idea of a uniform civil code using not only the constitutional provisions facilitating multiculturalism but also the arguments asserting respect and acknowledgement of women's rights and freedom in Islam and pointing to the superiority of the sacred law over the law of the state.

The third chapter focuses on a theme which has had multiple interpretations in political theory and has come to acquire a highly politically charged meaning in the Indian political environment – secularism. A comparison of what the idea was supposed to mean in the constitution and in the country's historical tradition with its ideologically defined meaning in the compelling presence of the politics of majority/minority conflict is what the chapter seeks to do by analyzing the contradictions in the Urdu newspaper discourse. The dual struggle to live up to the normative spirit of Indian secularism to keep various religious communities united and promote harmony among them through their shared culture on one hand and to champion the minority agenda of secularism against the communal politics championed by majoritarians on the other hand is discussed in detail using the election discourse which highlights the minority-centric agenda of secularism and the concept of *Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb* that is based on the normative principles of secularism demanding peaceful co-existence of different religious communities and their mutual tolerance.

And finally the fourth chapter discusses the different strands of nationalism that are associated with Muslims in India and probes the inclinations of the Urdu print media towards each of them. One strand of nationalism that emerged in pre-Independence India and was aligned with partition politics and the ‘Two Nation Theory’ was separatist nationalism that perceived Muslims as a nation that was bound to live independently of the ‘other’. The other strand of nationalism is composite nationalism which cherishes a shared life with the other communities in the nation. And the third strand is trans-nationalism that imagines a global fraternity beyond the national boundaries. A minority community’s desire to be an integral part of the national mainstream and its equally important aim to strengthen the moral unity of the global community of believers as imagined in the Urdu public sphere will be the main aspect to explore in this chapter.

1.8. NOTE ON TRANSLATION

All the quotes from the sampled Urdu newspapers cited in the chapters of this thesis are translated by me into English. There was a heavy reliance on Urdu dictionaries for knowing the meaning of a lot of Urdu words in the interpreted articles. I have also transliterated many Urdu words that I have used in my writing for which I have provided English translation in parenthesis.

CHAPTER 1

MODERN SCIENCE AND EDUCATION: AN INSTRUMENTAL APPROACH

If there are various dimensions to the process of modernization in the West, then one that cannot miss attention is revolution in the field of science and technology. Modern technology has served all kinds of practical purposes and boosted the efficiency of labour and modern science has produced unchallengeable explanations of empirical reality of the world and rendered anything beyond the empirical world mythical and unworthy of investigation. Modern science has also been credited with demystification of the truths of the world. In other words, with the coming of modern science, obscurantism and mysticism lost their ground in the world of learning and knowledge and what was knowable was provable and verifiable as well. The theories in science proved so successful in explaining the natural and physical phenomena in the most credible manner that scholars of arts and humanities began to insist on the imitation of scientific methods in studying and explaining the social phenomena.

As history tells us, one of the drastic changes that occurred in the modern Western world with the advancement of science and technology is the gradual decline of the importance of religion in understanding and exploring nature and making it useful to humankind for a better living. The dichotomy of religion and modern science being originally a Western phenomenon was slowly adopted by the non-Western societies in the drive to progress and prosper, but unlike the western world, the Middle East, South Asia and other non-European regions did not hold both of them as two different tracks that can never meet. They did not treat religion as a domain without rationality and impetus for scientific knowledge. In fact, quite a few founders of modern science themselves conceded to the inter-connection of science and religion and believed them to be complementary to one another. As Thomas Dixon claims –

Pioneers of early modern science such as Isaac Newton and Robert Boyle saw their work as part of a religious enterprise devoted to understanding of God's creation. Galileo too thought that science and religion could exist in mutual harmony. The goal of a constructive and collaborative

*dialogue between science and religion has been endorsed by many Jews, Christians and Muslims in the modern world.*¹

However, the predominant orientation of modern science remained secular and its ever-increasing materialistic and utilitarian goals became the cause of unbridgeable schism between science and religion which has been discomfiting to societies where modern science came as an import from the West. The impact of the secularized science of the West on the Muslim societies is largely reflected in the Urdu newspaper discourse. The discourse also reflects on the nuances in the approach of Muslims to modern science as it got progressively divorced from morality and religion. It is found to be claiming that Muslims have by far been the most lethargic recipients of modern science and have thus remained backward and ‘unenlightened’ in comparison with the others. This chapter discusses how the Urdu public discourse in the country has depicted the relationship between science and Islam and argued for an educational system for Indian Muslims which will serve as the most suitable blend of modern scientific skills and Islamic values. In many ways the argument in the discourse suggests that if there is any aspect of Western modernity that the Islamic religion and tradition can be most compatible with, it is science and technology and that the inquisitive tradition of Muslims in the medieval centuries had produced its own science which was later overshadowed by modern knowledge under Western imperialism. The chapter also explains why the project of modernizing Indian Muslims through a reformed education cannot have a smooth collaboration with the mainstream educational system of the country and in what way they contemplate a reconciliation of modern science and religion. The communitarian standpoint is pronounced both in the ways in which science is upheld as a good to be embraced by the community for material progress and the ‘Islamic way of life’ as a reservoir of virtues to be preserved. The fault lines involved in reconciliations raise further questions.

¹ Thomas Dixon, *Science and Religion: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 2. https://www.google.co.in/books/edition/Science_and_Religion_A_Very_Short_Introd/efgTDAAAQBAJ?hl.

2.1. THE ISLAMIC SPIRIT OF INQUIRY

Of the 26 newspaper articles analysed in this chapter, the one that directly defines the term science which is perhaps what it is supposed to mean to the community to which it addresses is from the *Munsif*. To quote it –

*Science is the name of the knowledge (Ilm) of the reality about the universe (Kaaynaat) and nature (Fitrat). It means to find out the hidden facts in the nature...It also means to understand the divine nature, its distinguishing characteristics and their inter-relationship and when science is applied in day to day activities, it is called technology.*²

A noteworthy point about the articles discussed in this chapter is that they hardly use Urdu words while referring to science and technology. Though words are spelt out for knowledge (*Ilm*), education (*Taaleem*), reason (*Aql*) and investigation/inquiry (*Tahqiqaat*), science and technology are two words which are used without Urdu translations.

The observations about the compatibility of Islam and science made by various scholars are largely substantiated by the Urdu newspaper discourse which insists that the community adopt modern scientific knowledge as part of their regular education. The editorial columns on science in Urdu newspapers tell us loudly and proudly of the prosperous past of Muslim societies and their connection with agile scientific inquiry, discoveries and inventions. The obvious intention of these columns is to remind their readers of the mastery of Muslims of pre-modern age over different branches of science and get them to realize how far they have fallen below their own standards of learning and development. The *Munsif* daily writes—

*For five hundred years, the Islamic world was the centre of science and technology, knowledge (Ilm) and art (Fann).*³

The *Rahnuma-e-Deccan* writes –

² “Muslim Sciencedaan (Scientists)”, *Munsif Daily*, November 10, 2014, p. 9.

³ Ibid.

*The age of Islamic world's progress (Taraqqi) was the age of Europe's extreme backwardness (Pasmaandagi).*⁴

The article from which the statement above has been excerpted also points out that Muslims were masters of culture and civilization (*Tehzeeb, Saqaafat*) at a time when Europe is said to have been in the darkness of ignorance. For instance, when Europeans were not familiar with the use of soap for personal hygiene, Muslims had already invented it and called it *Sabun* in Arabic which was later adapted in the west as Soap. It says that from the discoveries and inventions of Muslims in the Islamic era, the Westerners took off and thus prospered far more than their predecessors in science, technology and civilization at large.

The *Munsif* makes a similar observation in another column - before the sixteenth century, Muslims mastered every field of knowledge and were ahead of everybody else; Arabic was not only a language of religious education, but also the language of contemporary sciences of those times.⁵ In the overtones of lamentation, it observes that Europeans adopted the knowledge acquired by Muslims and took it to such levels of progress that the latter were pushed even below the level of apprenticeship, let alone mastery in the world of knowledge. This seems to be a pricking realization to the Muslim mind in India which this article tries to express vociferously enough for the readers to understand that the need of the hour for Muslims is to adopt scientific knowledge of the Westerners and in turn build further on it with their own scientific enquiry. Commenting on how Muslim societies stayed bereft of modern Western science because of their refusal to accept a colonial import, the author explains their subsequent failure to catch up with the fast-developing trends in science and technology. The discussion in the article ends with the suggestion that to move towards science once again, considering the fact that they have drifted far away from it, Muslims just need to be aware of their own history where their ancestors demonstrated their scientific enquiries and discoveries with flying colours.

Science thus offers a hope for an advanced and prosperous life, something which Muslims were successful in achieving in the past and the West has established its monopoly over in the present. And there is a specific meaning and purpose in declaring this 'disappointing' fact to the Muslims

⁴ Mohsin Osmani Nadvi, "Europe Me Thi Jinki Khirad Raahbeen", *Rahnuma-e-Deccan Daily*, November 28, 2016, p. 11.

⁵ The *Munsif Daily*, *Minarenoor*, October 17, 2017, p. 9.

of the country – to urge them in the direction of upgrading their awareness of science and technology and thereby enlightening their lives which are presently soaked in ignorance and misery. Prosperity and progress are matters where Muslims lag far behind the Westerners whereas non-Muslims in India are able to match up to them in a fairly considerable way. This is the idea that is underscored in the newspaper discourse which certainly looks at science from a materialistic perspective in terms of what it can do to uplift the socio-economic status of Muslims. *Rahnuma-e-Deccan* through one of its articles from 1986 declares that -

*Muslims, in order to raise their condition and status, need to pay attention to science.*⁶

From a far more recent year, an article from the same Urdu daily states -

*The current era is the era of education and technology and the community that remains devoid of both can lose out on every front.... The age in which we are living is the age of science and technology and we need to catch up with the pace at which it is progressing. But we need to also hold on to the foundational principles of Islam.*⁷

It further says -

*Throughout the Islamic history, the Islamic scholars achieved success in every field of knowledge and while strictly following the principles of Islam, they set mind-boggling examples in the realms of scientific investigation and research.*⁸

Thus, apart from the materialistic interest attached to science, a highly pronounced interest of the discourse is to keep science and religion in a perfect balance and to present the former as a facilitator of the understanding of the latter.

There is enormous academic literature which apart from supporting the argument in the discourse about the leading role of the Muslim world in pre-modern sciences, further strengthens it with the evolutionary theory of development of science claiming that science being based on observation did not build on the observational and experimental works of a few individuals at a time; it evolved through time from one level to a more advanced level and in any given era it grew up within a

⁶ The *Rahnuma-E-Deccan Daily*, February 17, 1986.

⁷ The *Rahnuma-E-Deccan Daily*, December 19, 2016, p. 3.

⁸ Ibid.

particular socio-cultural and political setting as its leading breeding ground; modern science is the off spring of previously generated scientific theories and if the history of science has been a continuous process of discoveries being passed on from scientists of one civilization to another, then modern science built up by the Western civilization stands on foundations laid by the scientists from the pre-modern Islamic civilization. To quote Hogendijk and Sabra making this point -

*Between A.D. 800 and 1840, the most important centers of study of what we now call “the exact sciences” were located in the vast multi-national Islamic world.... In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, many Arabic scientific works and Arabic versions of Greek scientific and philosophical texts were translated into Latin, and in turn were appropriated into the Latin medieval culture. These translations were crucial for rise of “the renaissance of the twelfth century in Europe and they later played an important part in the development of the exact sciences during the renaissance of the sixteenth century.”*⁹

Another scholar, Ehsan Masood writes –

*Advances in our understanding of the natural world happen when scientists absorb latest knowledge in fields such as physics or biology, and then modify and improve it. They work rather like runners in a relay race, passing the baton of learning from one scientist to the next. Modern science regarded as a hallmark of modern Western civilization, achieved its place through the passing of many successive batons, which were handed to the scientists of Europe from those of the world’s non-Western cultures. These included those who lived in the cultures of Islam over a period of some 800 years from the 8th to the 16th centuries.*¹⁰

Of course, there are differences in the point of view about how Islamic Science developed as a prelude to modern Western science. George Saliba is one scholar who clearly and confidently differentiates between two perspectives which he terms as the classical narrative and alternative narrative.¹¹ The former is more widespread with its claim that the Islamic civilization, originally a

J.P. Hogendijk & Sabra, A.I., ed., *The Enterprise of Science in Islam: New Perspectives* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), VII, https://www.google.co.in/books/edition/The_Enterprise_of_Science_in_Islam/_AUtLNtg3nsC?hl.

¹⁰ Ehsan Masood, *Science and Islam: A History* (London: Icon Books, 2009). Chapter 1, https://www.google.co.in/books/edition/Science_Islam/H9yeHB1A-JwC?hl.

¹¹ George Saliba, *Islamic Science and the making of the European Renaissance* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007).

desert civilization, gained the ground for scientific progress only after coming into contact with people from the ancient civilizations carrying ancient scientific knowledge, particularly that which was Greco-Hellenistic. It also claims that all the scientific contributions of the Islamic civilization were not unique and that they could have come from the ancient Greeks had they had some more time to do so. In other words, this narrative does not see any independent role of the Islamic societies in building pre-modern science.¹² Saliba contradicts this narrative with the less popular alternative narrative which explains that even before coming in touch with the ancient civilizations, a good amount of scientific work was already done in the Arab world.¹³ Muzaffar Iqbal more strongly claims that there was a very rich Islamic scientific tradition before the translation movement that made the classical Greek scientific texts available to Muslims. He mentions Astronomy, Alchemy, Medicine and Mathematics as established fields of study in the Islamic tradition even before the major translations of Greek works took place.¹⁴

The exercise of translations carried out in the Islamic centuries is greatly highlighted in the discourse as well as the scholarly literature. But there are different points of view also on who played the main catalyst in the translation of significant Greek works of science into Arabic. As per the classical narrative, to use Saliba's term, these translations had happened largely because of the Christian scholars who settled in the Arab peninsula, particularly in places like Baghdad which turned out to become the center of scientific learning in the medieval centuries. But the Urdu newspaper discourse claims the major role of Muslims in these translations. To quote the *Rahnuma-e-Deccan* –

*Greek philosophy was considered as the pillar of knowledge but it was transmitted to Europe only with the help of Muslims who translated all the great works into Arabic. These works were then taught in Europe to disseminate the Greek knowledge and much later in the fifteenth century, the Arabic works were printed in a huge number of copies with the help of the printing press that played a big role in the spread of knowledge in the West.*¹⁵

¹² Ibid, 1.

¹³ Ibid, 26-27.

¹⁴ Muzaffar Iqbal, *Islam and Science* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2007), 15.

¹⁵ Nadvi, "Raahbeen", p. 11.

Nevertheless, there is no disagreement over the presence of agile scientific activity in the Arab peninsula before the beginning of the modern age and the inspiration that the Islamic sciences created for producing modern Western science, centuries later. It is this inspiration of the pre-modern Islamic world that is vehemently underscored in the discourse and the dark ages of Europe during the time of enlightenment in the Islamic world are no less highlighted as quoted below –

*When Muslims were reaching heights of success in the fields of science, art and business, Europe was living in the darkness of ignorance...The age of Islamic progress was the age of extreme backwardness for Europe.*¹⁶

Repudiating the claim that the modern science of the West triggered the age of learning and knowledge after the ancient Greek civilization, an article from the *Munsif* states the following –

*Capitalist system (Sarmaayadaaraana Nizam) and modern (Jadeed) science in Western Europe set new development goals; except for Western Europe there was no development happening anywhere else in the world; the culture of ignorance and lack of knowledge in which human beings lived for a long time was ended by modern science five hundred years ago – this claim of modern Western science is false...The science that exists today is based on Arabic sciences which are twelve hundred years old....Renaissance happened to Europe not in the 15th century as a result of what was happening in Italy. It happened as a result of Islamic knowledge that developed from the eighth century to the fifteenth century and this growth in the Islamic world was hidden by the Western scholars...Centuries before the age of modernity, the centers of knowledge were not in Europe, but in Baghdad, Samarkand and Bukhara....European Renaissance happened not in Italy but in the Muslim world at a time when knowledge was borrowed from Arabs....The scientific revolution of Europe was based on a new spirit of inquiry which was alien to the Greeks. Europe was introduced to new methods of science by Arabs. Arabs also introduced empirical (Tajrbaati) science which is a basic foundation of modern science.*¹⁷

Citing a Western scholar, the author of an article from the *Siasat* makes the same point that from the eighth century to eleventh century, all enhancement in knowledge happened due to Arab

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ “Maghribi Science Paraston Ke Tariqi Jhoot (The Historical Lies of Western Science Worshippers)”, *Munsif Daily*, January 31, 2019, p. 4.

Muslims. He also mentions an Australian scholar's observation that Muslims alone brought Europe out of the dark ages of ignorance and shown the direction towards knowledge. He quotes another Western scholar in these words –

*Taking the fading light of the Greek sun, the moon of Islamic science started shining which later lit up the nights of Europe. This moon disappeared after the dawn of renaissance in Europe.*¹⁸

The fact that pre-modern science that the medieval Muslim societies produced is attributed to the scientific spirit of Islam is reflected in the epistemological discussion in the newspaper discourse on the inter-connection of science and religion and their natural compatibility.

2.2. EMBRACING SCIENCE WITH FAITH

The newspaper discourse regards science as the centre of the ocean of knowledge whose purpose is to study the facts of nature which is something that the Quran obliges its believers to do. Science is recognized not just for its utility to the external world but also for its essence that shapes human attitudes in a certain manner enabling human beings to attain prosperity and progress on one hand and on the other hand making them learn the truths of life better. So, science is not only a tool for material progress but also a philosophy if one is to understand it through the discourse. Another claim that is made in the discourse is that science consists of knowledge that corroborates the knowledge of Islam.

The *Rahnuma-e-Deccan* comments thus –

*Science takes a human being closer to nature.... It finds out the paths to protect life.*¹⁹

*With scientific knowledge an individual comes out of his imaginary life and begins to live in the world of reality.... One also gains the ability to solve one's own problems.*²⁰

Commenting also on the misconceptions carried by a huge illiterate section of the Muslim population about science, the article states,

¹⁸ Mufti Muhammad Qasim Siddiqui, "Musalmāno Ki Saainsi Taraqqi Ka Zawaal (The Decline of Scientific Progress of Muslims)", *Siasat Daily*, January 25, 2019, p. 7.

¹⁹ *Rahnuma-E-Deccan*, February 17, 1986.

²⁰ Ibid.

*The biggest misconception about science is that it is extremely difficult for an ordinary mind to understand...Another misconception is that science is capable of driving people away from the Islamic religion and that it is contradictory to Islam...A third misconception is that it makes a human being less generous and more selfish.*²¹

Asking Muslims of the country to drop these misconceptions, the article exhorts them to embrace science whole-heartedly because apart from building technical skills in an individual it also creates a mind that is inquisitive to know the truth. So, in this perspective, science is useful as well as valuable; it is a means to serve various ends but it is also an end in itself having essence of its own; it is instrumental to the utilization of the resources of the external world and is also intrinsically good whose knowledge can be acquired only with the right spirit. Making the point about the need to receive scientific education with genuine intention of knowing science, the article criticizes the general tendency in the educational institutions to impart scientific knowledge and study the discipline like any other discipline with the sole aim of creating the best prospects in the job market. It articulates the idea that if the aim is to secure a degree and find a job, then the larger and more meaningful picture of science will never sink into the mind and scientific knowledge gets reduced to the business of learning by heart. On this point the article reads -

*The kind of mind that is needed to know and understand science cannot be cultivated through the practice of mugging up theories.*²²

Thus, we find a high level of consciousness in the discourse about the philosophy and non-materialistic purposes of science and every Muslim is asked to be mindful of them. The responsibility that is demanded of Muslims to take science seriously and work hard in its field has a very strong religious reason underlying it. Some significant parts of an article in the *Munsif* can be quoted here to explain how the discourse sees science and Islam as almost inseparable –

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

*The more a human being wonders about the elements of nature, the more awestruck he becomes...And in the process of understanding nature, if the mind does not falter, the scientist does end up accepting the existence of God.*²³

*Science is not about creating or inventing something new, but about unfolding the secrets of nature (Qudrat).*²⁴

*Through scientific discovery or investigation, we gain detailed knowledge (Ilm) of Allah's divinity (Ruboobiyat).*²⁵

*What is the distance between the sun and the earth? What is the speed of earth's rotation? What are clouds? What is air? How monsoons are formed? Where do clouds come from? What is the human digestive system? The more knowledge a human being acquires about these matters, the more amazed he will be over Allah's divinity.*²⁶

*As we know more about flowers and fruits, greater will be our love for God.*²⁷

*The ability to know makes Allah's followers God-fearing.*²⁸

So basically, these statements suggest that an inquisitive mind is needed to know the nature as well as its creator and that when human beings acquire the ability to understand the ways in which the nature operates, then they also become capable of knowing God's law and the divine mind. The article also states that until human beings started probing into the natural world which eventually led them to wonder about divine existence, they were not valuable creatures at all.

The rudiments of science stand in no contradiction to Islam and instead reflect the divine principles that are revealed in the Quran – this is the idea that the discourse communicates to its Muslim

²³ Mohsin Osmani Nadvi, "Science Aur Sanaat Me Musalmaano Ka Urooj Aur Zawaal (Rise and Fall of Science and Trade among Muslims)", *Munsif Daily, Minarenoor*, November 25, 2016, p. 4.

²⁴ Nadvi, "Urooj Aur Zawaal (Rise and Decline)".

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

readers. Emphasizing the importance of science in contemplating and connecting with God goes with some profound messages to the community implicit in the discourse. Firstly, though the age of medieval Islamic sciences is long lost and gone and taken over by modern Western sciences which are far more advanced, successful and prosperous, there are no reasons for Muslims to think of the latter as a foreign development which, if adopted, will corrupt their collective life. Secondly, if there is anything from the West that comes to the Muslim world as an opportunity to get back on the track of learning, exploring and developing, it is modern science and technology and thus Muslims should rather allow themselves to be inspired by its achievements than stay alienated from them. Thirdly, Islamic education with substantial room for learning of science is the door to modernity and enlightenment of Muslims.

The claims that the Urdu print media discourse makes about Muslims' traditional and historical connection with science have been upheld by many historians of Islam and scholars of Islamic tradition as well. All of them relate knowledge to the Arabic word '*Ilm*' which is one of the oft-repeated terms in the Quran. Science also is often described as *Ilm* insofar as knowledge in Islam is regarded as an integrated system in which each branch is organically linked to the other branches. *Aql* is another term used several times in the Quran, referring to reason or wisdom. Nidhal Guessoum states that –

*Indeed, the concept of reasoning appears in the Quran 49 times, always in the active form, not as an abstract idea or passive human ability. Man can thus learn anything – in principle. Conversely, this means that nature can be understood. Furthermore, knowledge is vast and encompasses many fields.*²⁹

Perhaps to make a clear and specific reference to science, the Urdu newspapers use the word as it is and the word *Ilm* is used to mean knowledge in general, as already mentioned before. Knowledge in the Islamic tradition includes every aspect of the universe which is ultimately connected with its creator and science is no exception in the endeavour of knowledge to create awareness about the existence of God.

²⁹ Nidhal Guessoum, *Islam's Quantum Question: Reconciling Muslim Tradition and Modern Science* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 54.

Several scholars of Islam have reflected on the close connection of science with Islam. Fazlur Rahman in his work on Islam and modernity explores the scope that the Islamic religion and the Muslim societies have for the production of scientific knowledge.³⁰ He reflected on the argument of some of the eminent Muslim reformers from different countries including Sayyid Ahmed Khan of India that the Quran itself invites and insists its followers to explore the universe of the Creator. Hence modern science not only becomes compatible with the principles of the Quran but also satisfies one of its essential urges. If the credibility of a faith depends on the degree of its conformity to the laws of nature then, as claimed by this argument, Islam passes this test far ahead of the other faiths.³¹ Another implied point in the argument is that the primacy of science in education as part of the modernization drive of various Muslim countries was not accidental. On the contrary, the adoption of modern science was meant to catch the rational and scientific spirit of Islam. However, Rahman in his work does draw the attention of the readers to the fact that the incorporation of sciences into the educational system wasn't as smooth as one would have expected. There were many amongst the modern Muslim reformers who condemned the import of modern science as a blatant imitation of the Western ways but their disagreement did not impact the progress that was being sought to modernize their societies with the promotion of scientific knowledge.³² Hence, he observes, during this time of modernization, Muslim countries could not have fallen in line with the Western standards of education as much in other fields as in the natural/physical sciences.

Another scholar of Islam, Maurice Bucaille, has been very compelling in claiming the Quran to be a religious as well as scientific text and his work titled, *The Bible, the Quran and Science*, was treated by other scholars of the subject as their most convincing and reliable reference point.³³ In this work of his, Bucaille has not only emphasized the rational and scientific overtones of the *Quran* but has also presented the Bible as a text far behind the Quran in its ability to build bridges with modern science. He says that the Quran has numerous verses that reflect on natural

³⁰ Fazlur Rahman, *Modernity and Islam: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982).

³¹ Ibid, 55-56.

³² Ibid, 57-58.

³³ Maurice Bucaille, *The Bible, the Quran and Science* (Adam, 2003), https://www.google.co.in/books/edition/The_Qur_an_Modern_Science/uld0Y-mLoVQC?hl.

phenomena and a right understanding of these verses itself requires a scientific approach. To quote Bucaille –

*For many centuries, humankind was unable to study certain data contained in the verses of the Quran because they did not possess sufficient means. It is only today that numerous verses of the Quran dealing with natural phenomena have become comprehensible. To understand all the verses dealing with the natural phenomena, one is now a day required to have an absolutely encyclopaedic knowledge embracing many scientific disciplines.*³⁴

He also asserted that in Islam, “*religion and science have always been considered as twin sisters.*”³⁵

Scholars have made these claims largely to justify the point that there is nothing in the Islamic tradition and culture that holds Muslims back from pursuing modern scientific endeavours contrary to the belief perpetuated by the Orientalists that Islam with its irrationalism can only be at loggerheads with Western modernity which is based on rationalism and scientific approach. The Quranic text is said to be having several references that could have been used for unearthing some scientific truths that the modern scientists are credited with today. To quote one such scholar, Abasi Kiyimba, who makes this point –

*The Quran offers hints that could lead to major discoveries if followed up diligently. Contemporary scholars have analysed Quranic references to various scientific subjects and have produced major texts in astronomy, embryonic biology and Earth’s composition, plants and many other subjects.... If pursued intelligently and without bias, such hints can lead to startling discoveries and inventions.*³⁶

Emphasizing on the organic connection between science and Islam, Muzaffar Iqbal argues that when science was growing in the Islamic world, neither was it distinguished as an entity from

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Abasi Kiyimba, “*Islam and Science: An Overview*” in *Islamic Perspectives on Science: Knowledge and Responsibility*, ed. Ali Unal. (Tughra, 1998), 12, https://www.google.co.in/books/edition/Islamic_Perspectives_on_Science/PtCG5y9Gc3cC?hl

Islam nor was there any need for external intervention to connect both of them. He makes the following remark –

*No one thought of “Islam” and “science” as two separate entities that had to be related to each other through an external mechanism. The fundamental aspect of the tradition is neither accidental nor does it point to any gap in the intellectual make-up of the Islamic tradition. Rather, it points to a profound understanding of the nature of science and its relationship to Islam. This relationship emerged naturally and because the scientific tradition was thoroughly rooted in the worldview created by Islam, no one ever thought it necessary to create an external apparatus to relate the two.... Science in the Islamic civilization was part of a larger tradition of learning that arranged different disciplines in a hierarchical structure like the branches of a tree. The trunk of the tree in this case was none other than the central concept of Islam: Oneness of God (Tawhid). Because of this central concept, all branches of knowledge, including natural sciences, were linked through inalienable nexus with metaphysical concepts of Islam. Each branch of knowledge was a contributing tributary.*³⁷

He further concludes that - science as a systematic study of nature and as it developed in Islamic civilization could not treat nature and its study as an entity separate from Islam.³⁸ Iqbal also argues that acquisition of knowledge is one of the primary duties of a Muslim according to Islam which the discourse keeps reiterating.

The connection of religion with science is not unique to the Islamic tradition. The discourse is suggesting something that is asserted by the scholars of the Vedic scriptures too. They too argue that modern Western science is based on truths that were revealed long ago in the *Vedas*, *Upanishads* and *Puranas*. While the Islamic scholars find the inspiration for the science that exists today, in the Arabian Peninsula of the medieval centuries, the Vedic scholars find the same in ancient India. Drawing up the connection between the Vedic world and modern science, Vanamali makes his claim in these words –

People have asked me how I dared to write about Physics which is an alien subject for me. My answer is that my in-depth knowledge of Hinduism has made it easy for me to understand quantum

³⁷ Iqbal, *Islam and Science*, 6.

³⁸ Ibid.

*Physics....When I went through the Puranas (stories of gods written by the sage Vyasa), I was struck at the amazing ways in which the great saints of the Puranas – Vyasa and Valmiki – had woven great truths into their stories. These scientific truths are not what the ancient Western world believed to be true but the truths of the most modern kind - that of quantum physics.*³⁹

Citing the same argument of Vedic scholars, Meera Nanda in her critical work on how what she chooses to call Vedic science came to be conflated with the scientific advancements of the modern world makes her observation in the following words –

*Some declare the entire Vedic literature as converging with the contents of and methods of modern science. Others concentrate on defending such esoteric practices as Vedic astrology, Vastu Shastra, Ayurveda, transcendental meditation, faith healing, telepathy and other miracles as scientific. We will call both of these claims together as ‘Vedic science’, as their shared aim is to prove that the mythos of the Vedas contains within itself, and even surpasses, the logos of modern science.*⁴⁰

Thus there is a clear parallel in the Indic discourse to the argument in the Urdu newspaper discourse that suggests that modern science over which the West claims its monopoly had its beginnings in the pre-modern and non-Western religions which is why the separation of religion and science in the non-Western societies was an alien thought until the Western ideas intruded into their culture.

2.3. CRITIQUE OF MYTHOLOGICAL REFERENCES

Anything in order to have credibility should have a ‘verifiable existence’ and not an imaginary reality, thus Islam is no different from science as it is based on facts that are ‘verifiable’ - this is the idea articulated in the discourse to strike down all that is considered unnatural on one hand and all that is obviously hypothetical on the other. The participants in the discourse do not desist from reiterating the claim that Islam is a religion that is based on the law of nature and that the Quran as a revealed book is a historical reality. This argument was used once to spotlight the mythological nature of the Hindu religion when Prime Minister Modi proudly hailed the scientific progress and

³⁹ Vanamali. *The Science of Rishis: The Spiritual and Material Discoveries of the Ancient Sages of India* (Simon & Schuster, 2015), https://www.google.co.in/books/edition/The_Science_of_the_Rishis/QGAoDwAAQBAJ?hl.

⁴⁰ Meera Nanda, *Prophets Facing Backward: Postmodernism, Science and Hindu Nationalism* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), 65, https://www.google.co.in/books/edition/Prophets_Facing_Backward/h3mUi5Uan_UC?hl.

technological advancement of the age of *Mahabharata*. An editorial column of the *Rahnuma-e-Deccan* cited parts of his public address made in one of the episodes of the well-known radio show, *Mann ki Baat*, where he urges the people to progress in the direction of science and technology and invokes anecdotes from *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* for inspiration.⁴¹ The author of the article suggests that there is nothing wrong in encouraging people to adopt the path of scientific enquiry and technological advancement, but doing so through the means of imagined and fictitious situations is not the right way. The situations that Modi had chosen to cite on his radio program were taken from the scriptures whose historicity is questioned by the author and are hence considered as inappropriate examples to inspire scientific temper. About one instance from the *Mahabharata*, Modi is reported to have said that *Karna* was not born from his mother's womb and so one can conclude from this instance that in those times genetic science was at the heights of success.⁴² Referring to Lord *Ganesh*, he is also reported to have said that an elephant's head fixed to a human body serves evidence about the progress of plastic surgery as well in those days.⁴³ The author notes that this specific address by Modi did not get pulled up stringently enough by the mainstream media for finding the past of India's science and technology in the country's mythological world.

A more recent article in the *Etemaad* criticizes the mythological references made by public figures to validate their claims about scientific and technological advancements in the age of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharat*. The article starts by referring to a recent science conference in which the Vice-Chancellor of the Andhra University made some claims about the scientific progress of ancient India. He is said to have spoken about advanced airplanes having been used by Lord Ram and *Raavan*.⁴⁴ Furthermore in the article, a leader from Tripura is reported to have claimed that internet and satellites existed in the age of *Mahabharat* because otherwise *Dhritarashtra*, sitting at one place, would not have received vivid information about the Great War happening on the ground in Panipat. The author of the article expresses concerns over these mythological stories being

⁴¹ "Modi, Science Aur Sangh Ka Taraqi Model (Modi, Science and Sangh's Development Model)", *Rahnuma-e-Deccan Daily*, November 9, 2014, p. 3.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Hasan Kamaal, "Ghair Saainsi Soch Mulk Ke Liye Tabaahkan (Unscientific Thinking Dangerous for the Nation)", *Etemaad Urdu Daily*, January 13, 2019, p. 2.

‘falsely’ projected as historical facts which can be more dangerous coming from renowned public figures.

2.4. REJECTION OF WESTERN SCIENCE’S VALUE NEUTRALITY

One significant suggestion of the author is that exclusion of mythology from the realm of science should never mean exclusion of religion from science and the prosperous life that it promises. In fact, the author comments that if Prime Minister Modi wants to validate some religious traditions, then there is nothing wrong about it, but while doing so he should also think about the religious values of other communities and so also the tradition of religious tolerance in India that should not be affected.⁴⁵ This remark is meant to imply that every religion insofar as it builds the moral fabric of the society deserves respect regardless of whichever community it is associated with. So, in this perspective, though the Hindu mythological world is not as rationally and scientifically driven as the Islamic world, its impact on the society hasn’t been as harmful as the irreligious ways of the western societies nourished under the fold of modern science. It also finds faults in the Western models of socialism, secularism and democracy which have further shunted religion out of the lives of people. As part of the critique of modern Western science and the irreligious culture it perpetuated, the author also points out that notwithstanding immense progress made in the field of science & technology, the societies in America and Europe are experiencing massive social disasters that are ruining family life; this is a clear hint at promiscuous relationships that have pervaded the Western societies as a fallout of a lack of religious code of conduct. All this discussion leads the author to the conclusion that religion is the only force that can clear away the mess that the Western societies have landed themselves into and that Islam thus becomes the most popular and rapidly spreading religion in the West.

Other Urdu newspapers assert that the inter-connection of religious knowledge and secular scientific knowledge is inherent in Islam and their separation is a ‘misfortune’ of the West which has produced nothing better than a life of materialism and egoism. The *Munsif* says –

⁴⁵ Ibid.

*In Islam there is no division of religious and secular knowledge. This division was only created in the later times for convenience.*⁴⁶

Referring to the Western history of knowledge, particularly the moment of renaissance and reformation which marked the birth of modern knowledge outside the confines of religion, the *Etemaad* claims that with half knowledge that Christianity had to offer, the Westerners could not find enough meaning in the religion which was a reason for them to confine religion to church and not allow its influence to creep into any other aspect in public life; moreover with growing economic prosperity, they became more materialistic, seeing little benefit in religion.⁴⁷ The fact that the West had to break free from the domination of the Church and papal power to discover the truths of the world and hence become enlightened is used in the discourse to build the argument that knowledge under the auspices of religion in the Western Christian world was bound by superstitious beliefs and power play of the clergy and needed a revolutionary struggle against the Church in order to attain a progressive form and the same experience didn't occur to the Islamic world because knowledge based on the last revealed book, i.e. Quran is all-encompassing with an answer in it to every possible question about life in this world and afterlife and leaving no matter to human imagination.

Voicing this argument, the *Etemaad* says that Christianity is not a complete religion as Christ could not pass all divine knowledge to his people during his lifetime but six centuries later, it was Prophet Muhammad who came with complete knowledge of God and His commandments, revealed through the last book; once the Westerners read the Quran, they would know that religion is meant to be observed in every walk of life.⁴⁸ Sharing the same argument, in fact the *Rahnuma-e-Deccan* claims that Martin Luther, a significant figure of Protestant Reformation drew his inspiration from Islam for this path-breaking movement against the Roman Catholic Church.⁴⁹

Centrality of money and material prosperity with little regard for religion and the order and harmony that it has to offer is highlighted in the discourse as the prime malady of the modern

⁴⁶ Najma Sultana, "Musalmaano Me Taalimi Pasmaandagi Ke Asbaab Aur Unka Ilaaj (The Causes of Educational Backwardness of Muslims and their Remedies)", *Munsif Daily, Minarenoor*, October 17, 2014, p. 4.

⁴⁷ Muhammad Sami, "Mazhab Aur Ahl Maghreeb Ka Zehni Khaljaan (Religion and Psychological Anxieties of Westerners)", *Etemaad Urdu Daily*, March 25, 2010, p. 4.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ *Rahnuma-e-Deccan Daily*, November 28, 2018, p. 11.

science driven Western world. Modern science coupled with capitalism has been depicted as the most destructively contagious feature of the West that has ruined the spiritual harmony of the other parts of the world. Insofar as it challenges the very existence of religion as an effective force in the lives of people, science of today will always be looked at in the Muslim world with an eye of suspicion and caution. Criticizing the Western scientists and philosophers for explaining the phenomena of the world as independent functions involving no divine intervention, an article from the *Munsif* comments thus –

*In the age of capitalism which continues even today, three people's ideas triggered a revolution in the West – Darwin, Freud and Marx. Darwin dismissed the divine role in human evolution. Freud explained sex as a function of human actions and Marx claimed economics/economic factors to be the basis of human culture. These revolutionary ideas created the same conditions that Arabic translations of the Greek philosophy created in the 13th century west which is termed as Renaissance. These three individuals' ideas dismissed religious philosophies and considered God to be a myth or a vain imagination. Because of the weakening roots of religion, the thought that there is actually nothing that is holy or sacred rules today.*⁵⁰

Another article from the *Munsif* while criticizing modern science also ropes in the Industrial Revolution and its adverse effects on the society –

*For the first time in history, female workers had to raise their voice for their rights; for the first time the concept of child rights was born...In the age of industrialization and capitalism, human life became mechanical....The capitalist greed caused tremendous destruction in the West but things didn't stop there, capitalist economy spread all over the world...Family as an institution has been adversely affected by advanced technologies of today...The technology that is drastically changing social relations has evolved from the mechanical man of the industrial age...Social media like WhatsApp, YouTube and Facebook have created a virtual world in which people are completely lost. They have gone offline in the real world and online in the virtual world...Earlier, industrial revolution with its machines damaged the human soul and now body, mind and everything is at stake.*⁵¹

⁵⁰ Keshav Rao Jadhav, "Musalmaano Se Ek Appeal (An Appeal to Muslims)", *Munsif Daily*, March 9, 2006, p. 4.

⁵¹ Umar Ibrahim, "Ikkiswi Sadi Ka Naya Insaan Aur Technology Ki Afiyuun (The New Human of the Twentieth Century and the Opium of Technology)", *Munsif Daily*, January 19, 2019, p. 4.

In the context of opposition to Burqa in the Western countries, another article from the *Munsif* comments on how the growth in science and technology today is challenging the symbols of non-Western culture –

*In the sheen of science and technology, if some nations are opposing mosques and Hijab and running campaigns against them, spreading religious hatred and trying to violate democratic freedom and fundamental rights, then it can be said that these nations are going back to those times of jahiliyyat when human beings were naked and not bound by rules or values. What can this situation be other than jahiliyyat where a common law and perspective are being fostered in a world that consists of diverse religions?*⁵²

This comment in the article implies the uneasiness about the culture that Western science and technology is producing and spreading across the world which is meant to put down every other culture that is contrary to the western ways. Underlying the not so subtle indictment of women's agency and choice is the critique of right over all notions of good. There is also concern about the cultural homogenization in the name of freedom, a concern that is the hallmark of communitarian arguments.

A major conclusion that this discussion leads to is that the Urdu discursive space in India sees the Islamic civilization as one of the prominent anchors in the history of science and technology and considers it as a religious obligation to revive the bygone times of scientific genius and technological advancement by catching up with the progress of modern Western knowledge but never at the jeopardy of the Islamic faith and the values attached with it.

A similar anxiety about delinking science from values is present in the Hindu discourse about the same. The religious revivalist movements under the British Raj also tell the same story of both Hindus and Muslims trying to strengthen their cultural roots and reinforce their religious values against the flourishing culture of the alien power. These movements also sought to attribute rational content to religious philosophy in order to outdo the Christian missionaries. Like their Muslim counterparts, Hindu thinkers also argue for the holistic nature of pre-modern and non-Western knowledge. While the Islamic scholars and the Urdu newspaper discourse do claim the

⁵² Syed Ali, "Burkhe Ki Mukhaalifat Maghreeb Ki Tehzeebi Shikast Hai (Resistance to Burkha is a Cultural Defeat of the West)", *Munsif Daily*, February 23, 2010, p. 4.

rational superiority of Islamic knowledge with ingredients that make the modern Western knowledge unchallengeable today like empirical inquiry and experimentation, they subsume all knowledge under the larger knowledge of the Almighty, i.e. Allah. To repeat Muzzafar Iqbal's point, different disciplines of knowledge are like branches of a tree whose trunk is the centre of the Islamic world – Oneness of God which is obviously beyond the limitations of sensual and empirical knowledge. This understanding of the knowledge of Allah is not very different from the Vedic understanding of *Brahman*, the ultimate self which is a united whole and is also beyond the limits of experimental knowledge.⁵³ *Tawhid* and *Brahman* are concepts where the experimental and experiential knowledge meet and become complementary and if the question of comparison arises then the latter is held superior to the former unlike in modern Western knowledge where anything that falls outside the purview of experimental knowledge is considered trivial.

The Quran in the Islamic view is the ultimate book of knowledge where science, philosophy and faith meet and in the Hindu perspective, Vedas, Upanishads and Puranas hold the same status. In fact, in the Hindu perspective, experiential knowledge is a rich source of profound spiritual theories. And the chief producers of this knowledge were the ancient sages or Rishis, as they are called, to whom the Vedas are believed to have been revealed by the Brahma, the Creator. Describing them as spiritual scientists, Vanamali writes –

Their knowledge of science in many fields like mathematics, geometry, astrology and physics, was immense. Without the use of modern instrumentation, they were able to discover more things about this universe than what was discovered up to the nineteenth century by the Western scientists. They knew that the earth went around the sun, that we are living in an expanding universe, and that matter is only energy in motion. They calculated distance of stars and planets and could foretell the coming of the different comets. They even wrote predictions about lives of people who would come after them. They could conjure up cities and palaces and wondrous meals and aerial vehicles even though they did not choose those things for their own lifestyle.... They were both philosophers and scientists and existed from the dawn of the Indian civilization, which is the dawn of time. The

⁵³ Vanamali. *The Science of Rishis: The Spiritual and Material Discoveries of the Ancient Sages of India* (Simon & Schuster, 2015), https://www.google.co.in/books/edition/The_Science_of_the_Rishis/QGAoDwAAQBAJ?hl.

*sages desired that humanity should progress materially as well as through a constant inner renewal of the cosmic law of righteousness, guided by wisdom embedded in our scriptures.*⁵⁴

This extraordinary experience of the extraordinary sages that made them competent to explore the hidden truths of the universe and thus make spiritual discoveries is underscored in Vasanthi Srinivasan's work as well on Radhakrishnan's philosophical writings about Hinduism.⁵⁵ These writings reflect on the autonomy of religious experience which can produce rational faith with a scientific spirit and the 'intuitive awareness' that emerges from this experience reveals the oneness of everything in the world with the *Brahman*.

The analogy drawn here between the Islamic and Hindu perspectives on science is intended to suggest that, notwithstanding the differences between them, both the perspectives confidently claim an advanced religious past that engendered rational principles that dominate the world today from the vantage of modern Western science. Both of them also reject the stark dichotomy of science and religion; reason and experience/faith and experiential and experimental knowledge. And they also view knowledge as a holistic system which ultimately connects everyone to some transcendental force. Thus, to the proponents of either perspective, an unconditional acceptance of Western modernity is an unimaginable option, given their faith-driven perspectives. This is how the question of maintaining a careful balance between the acceptable aspects of Western modernity, science and technology being one of them, and the indigenous religious value system arises which the discourse dwells upon.

This leads to the discussion about where Muslims see themselves in the modern educational system of the country and what kind of modern education they desire for the community. The discourse on this question represents a challenge-stricken mission of the community to modernize itself using the inputs of both Western and Islamic education.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Vasanthi Srinivasan, "Spirituality and Politics: Reflections on Radhakrishnan", *Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research* XXII, no. 4 (October-December 2005): 163-78.

2.5. NEED TO REFORM THE MADARSAS

A closer analysis reveals that notwithstanding a selective and qualified affirmation of scientific epistemology of modern science alongside a hopeful appeal to infuse moral values into the same, their advocacy for modern scientific education is primarily for the instrumental value it has in delivering economic goods. A perpetual assertion in the discourse about the need for modern secular education for Muslims in India is that Muslims are the most backward community in this matter; a long struggle still remains to achieve it abundantly. The captions to most of the articles that describe the educational condition of Indian Muslims use the words economic (*Maashi*) and educational (*Taleemi*) almost as twins to specify the backwardness of the community. Because of this kind of emphasis, the narrative of modern education is largely marked by concerns about employment opportunities and job security. So, when science and technology are discussed as subjects to be studied in colleges and universities, the discourse goes far beyond what scientific inquiry should philosophically and religiously mean to a Muslim and calls for utmost attention to how pursuing undergraduate and postgraduate courses in these two subjects can be economically beneficial. Of course, there is no running away from the question of what education itself should mean to a Muslim in the light of the Islamic faith. The discourse suggests that education/knowledge, whether traditional or modern, should be received in every possible way primarily because it is a religious necessity. The *Munsif* says –

*Islam is the only religion in the world that immensely emphasizes the importance of education.... Islam also tells its followers to receive knowledge from wherever it comes.*⁵⁶

*In Islam after faith it is knowledge that is emphasized.*⁵⁷

However, the persistent acknowledgement of the fact that Indian Muslims continue to remain backward, poor and on the fringes of the society because of lack of access to contemporary education has made it a thing of mixed value which is socio-economic and also religious/moral. The education that Muslims are said to be in need of is that which can assure them jobs and status and also at the same time make them people of *Akhlaaq*, i.e. virtue, values and manners. The institutions of modern education that Muslims are asked to target are the ones which offer courses

⁵⁶ Sultana, “Musalmaano Me Taleemi Pasmaandagi (Educational Backwardness among Muslims)”.

⁵⁷ Shah Nawaaz Farooqui, “Insaani Taareeq Me Ilm Aur Siyasat Ka Taaluk (Relationship of Education and Politics in Human History)”, *Munsif Daily*, September 24, 2018, p. 4.

in engineering & medicine or the ones that train students for top government jobs, particularly, civil services because these are the professions that are supposed to aid them in climbing up the social ladder.

The percentage of Muslims in Medical and Engineering colleges has gone down massively over the decades since independence; there is hardly any representation of Muslims in the Indian Civil Services; higher education is an urgent need for them to find a place in high government jobs and thereby raise their economic conditions and also make a contribution to the field of policy making – these are the remarks made in an article whose author thinks that modern higher education has the solution to the difficulties of the community in achieving a progressive and dignified life.⁵⁸

As per another observation, the government services presently have less than 3 percent of the 16 crore Muslims in the country; though young Muslims are receiving education in medical and engineering colleges in large numbers, they only intend to flee to foreign countries and earn huge money in dollars and other currencies; in government services of the country they would get not only money but also honour and reputation; many Muslims today, despite having a lot of wealth, struggle in their daily lives to get basic services in government offices and they also have to face communal discrimination.⁵⁹

So, the modern professional education that is being demanded for the community is supposed to be having the impact of empowerment in terms of not just economic upliftment through employment opportunities but greater involvement in the mainstream of the society through participation in policy making roles. And perhaps, Muslims will have to prudently and practically choose the fields of education according to the said purpose. They are required to be purposefully selective in their approach to modern secular education which is set on Western lines. The *Munsif* actually complains that initially the languages in which modern scientific knowledge was being communicated were alien to Muslims and when they started learning these languages, they did so to learn the Western culture and ethos; they learnt them to read Shakespeare and Bernard Shaw

⁵⁸ Muhammad Naazm Ali, “Musalmaan Aur Aali Taalim (Muslims and Contemporary Education)”, *Siasat Daily*, March 25, 2018, p. 5.

⁵⁹ Mudassar Ahmed, “Ae Humaare Rab Hame Kaamyabi Ki Raah Dikha (O Lord, Show Us the Way to Success)”, *The Rahnuma-e-Deccan*, January 29, 2018, p. 10.

but in the field of science and technology they remained so far behind the Western powers that there could be no competition between the two.⁶⁰

The discourse is highlighting a specific approach to modern secular education which perhaps is not different from the middle-class attitudes in any other community. In the light of the fact that an advanced education in science and technology has taken the Westerners to unprecedented levels of success and development and its adoption in the non-Western world has proved very promising and also that the field of arts in India has been creating opportunities for entry into high public offices, the choices in pursuit of modern education are expected to be in tune with the existing dynamics of job market and based on the prospects of material prosperity and social reputation. Thus literature, philosophy, fine arts and the like from the modern educational system are not worthy of any investment as they do not generally assure a career of money and status, nor do they help particularly a Muslim in reaching a position of social, political and economic equality with the privileged non-Muslim majority.

Muslim community's desire, as represented in the discourse, to use modern science and other forms of modern knowledge for serving the materialistic purposes of improving the socio-economic status of the community vis-a-vis the others and moving along with the others in contributing to and benefitting from the development of the country is without doubt more utilitarian than moral. Hence a very significant argument that builds up in this discussion is that the mainstream Western oriented education cannot give anything more than material satisfaction to the Indian Muslim mind and perhaps to the Muslims of every other nationality, considering the fact that the discourse keeps connecting the issues of the country's Muslims as common issues with Muslims across the world. If Muslims have to modernize themselves, then they ought to be utilizing the technical tools of contemporary education and not the moral ones because to build character in themselves and fill themselves with virtues, they see a huge world of learning in their own religion.

With religion as the only centre for moral learning and philosophical enlightenment, *Madarsa* cannot be treated as an out of date educational institution which needs to be abandoned. The tradition of Islamic educational training through the organized system of *Madarsa* is very long in

⁶⁰ Sultana, "Muslamaanon Me Taalimi Pasmaandagi", p. 4.

India. Through an intensive religious education, the prominent *Madarsas* in the country have produced *Ulemas* who are scholars of the *Quran* and the *Hadith* and also expert advisors to the community on the matters of Islamic law. The discourse shows the desire to sustain this traditional form of education but not without criticism about its setbacks which are commonly noted across the country. A major problem with the *Madrasas* which is often highlighted is that while trying to serve as alternative formal educational institutions, they miss out on a large part of contemporary education that the mainstream secular institutions offer and due to this inadequacy, Muslims gaining education from *Madarsas* become ineligible for employment opportunities and also alienated with contemporary values that are universally endorsed. But this criticism does not make up enough reason in the discourse to suggest abandonment of *Madarsas*. Reforming them on contemporary lines with modern subjects of learning like Mathematics and Science is the fairest thing to do in order to modernize the *Madarsas* and broaden the scope of knowledge they have to offer. The fact that the *Madarsas* are far from these efforts is a bigger question of criticism in the discourse.

An article in the *Siasat* while blaming the pre-Independence politics of the Muslim elite for the educational backwardness of common Muslims today, comments on the existing condition of *Madarsas*. The main argument of this article is that most of the *Madarsas* functioning in the country today are running on the same track that was laid down by the traditional Muslim elite and are thus way too anachronistic for the contemporary times. The article insists that the progress of the community is possible only if the existing powerful Muslim middle class makes way for changes that will transform the *Madarsas* into institutions of modern and scientific learning. The following comment about the Muslim elite and the *Madarsas* is quoted from the article -

*The elite Muslim leadership before independence worked for its own political interests and played a major role in communalizing Muslims and separating them from Hindus. They have successfully achieved their goal of a separate nation leaving the common Muslim lot, who remain in India, in misery. Now if Muslims have to progress, then they need scientific and modern education. Madarsas should be converted into institutions of modern learning. Are the Muslim elite in India today ready for this change? Will they permit the change?*⁶¹

⁶¹ R. Upadhyaya, "Hindustani Musalmaano Ke Liye Acchi Taaleem: Taariqi Pasmanzar (A Good Education for Indian Muslims: A Historical Background)", *Siasat Daily*, Sunday Edition, April 16, 2017, p. 1.

As these lines suggest, a positive change that allows selective adoption of modern knowledge will make a huge difference to the quality and personality of the *Madarsas* and eventually they will become a perfect alternative to the mainstream non-religious education. The other choice in favour of modernization of Muslims which is rather outrageous is a total shift from the *Madarsa* to the mainstream educational system.

The discourse on modern education for the Indian Muslims actually also highlights where exactly there is an irreconcilable conflict with the West. An entirely secular education itself is regarded as a flawed sacrilegious system of the West which is never to be imitated and the biggest antagonist from this system is the Western culture, i.e. *Maghribi Tehzeeb*.

2.6. SHUNNING THE MATERIALIST CULTURE

Where *Madarsas* are in no way ruled out and instead believed to be places with potential for a balanced education containing modern/contemporary curriculum along with traditional-Islamic learning, missionary educational institutions are dreaded. Missionaries are presented in the discourse as the most sought-after institutions of early education in India which while polishing the young minds with modern knowledge and etiquette that are most appealing in the mainstream national and global spaces, also gradually dilute the traditional values of the communities that the next generation is expected to carry. The *Siasat* considers this kind of erosion of the native culture as the conspiracy of the West. Commenting on the present times, an article from the daily states that missionary schools and colleges are mushrooming all over the Muslim world and in India as well which is a cause of concern; that these institutions have for a long time been carrying out their mission to spread Christianity and if they fail to succeed anywhere, to at least turn Muslims against their own religion; and that they have been responsible for the westernization of Muslims.⁶² It also affirms that nothing is above faith (*Imaan*) for a Muslim and in a bid to access modern education, Muslims cannot give up on their faith. The article ends up suggesting that in order to escape this dangerous mission of the missionaries, Muslims should either send their children to schools where there is no such mission in operation or create their own schools where modern and religious education is equally imparted.

⁶² Syed Ahmed Nadvi, "Missionary Schoolon Ki Taalieem Musalmaano Ke Liye Lamha Fikriya (The Education of Missionary Schools, a Worrisome Situation)", *Siasat Daily, Sunday Edition*, August 19, 2018, p. 5.

In fact, the recent developments in the country have further increased concerns about the damage that Western oriented education can do to the young Muslims of the country. Decriminalization of homosexuality and adultery by India's apex court incited a very anxious discourse about the level to which inappropriate sexual behaviour due to the 'Western practices' can soar and how this would easily affect the modern educational institutions where the younger lot of the community often want to see themselves. In a follow up to these landmark Supreme Court judgements, the editorials of the Urdu newspapers featured articles depicting the Western culture in terms of its tendencies to promote promiscuity that has ruined its native societies and is out to ruin the Indian traditions as well. For instance, the *Siasat* comments that India, a country that has been religious and never welcomed indecent ways of life is getting trapped in the obscenities of the Western culture. To quote the article –

*The followers of Western culture always take recourse to progressive thinking while welcoming every obscenity in the West. This is not progressive thinking but an awful thing in which human being loses his sense.*⁶³

In the same context of the Supreme Court judgement on Section 377, to quote another article –

*Now in schools, innocent children, youngsters and employees will be induced to adopt homosexual ways...When this epidemic gets encouragement in schools and children try to ask their parents for its explanation then the latter will have to justify the ideas supporting homosexuality.*⁶⁴

The protection that these articles say the Muslim community needs is against the unbridled sexual relationships that Western values would anyway eventually lead to and the only way to secure it is through a well-grounded system of Islamic education.

Hence modernization of *Madarsas* is never going to be an exhausted idea in the discourse as it gives a perennial hope of the most suitable composite education for the Indian Muslims where there shall not be even a slight compromise of the fundamentals of Islamic learning. The *Siasat* chooses to call *Madarsa* the fortress of Islam which is unfortunately drifting from its aim and putting off thousands of Muslims who see more wisdom in admitting their children in mainstream

⁶³ Maulana Syed Ahmed Nadvi, "Pasti Ka Koi Had Se Guzarna Dekhiye" *Siasat Daily*, Sunday Edition, September 23, 2018, p. 5.

⁶⁴ Muhammad Siraj Ul Rahman Farooqi, "Humjins Parasthi Ki Ijaazat Qeher Khuda Ko Daawat (Permission to Homosexuality, an Invite to the Divine Wrath)", *Siasat Daily*, September 2018 30, p. 4.

contemporary schools because of the charm of their lavish infrastructure and the brighter future that they promise to offer. Blaming the lack of modern facilities and the inefficient system of the contemporary *Madarsas*, it laments over the fact that the graduates from these institutions unavoidably develop inferiority complex about their educational background and look at the modern universities with charm and desire.⁶⁵ The solution that it suggests is a cooperative alliance between the modern universities run by Muslims and the *Madarsas* wherein the former will open up educational opportunities for the pass outs from the *Madarsas* and in turn the *Madarsas* will make their Arabic learning and religious education accessible to the graduates from the modern universities.

Criticizing a lot of Muslims for their obsession with well-established and rich schools and colleges, the author of an article from the *Munsif* argues that such institutions have nothing great to offer to Muslim children and that in institutions run by Muslims, they will at least receive religious education and learn lessons about the best practices preached by Islam. The problem with non-Muslim institutions, the author points out, is that Muslim children are getting detached from their religion. He further comments that –

*Our success does not depend only on mundane education, but religious education is also an important part of our life and if we do not attach it to our life then we have to face disasters in both the worlds.*⁶⁶

Underscoring the division of knowledge into religious and modern-scientific as one of the greatest drawbacks of western education and declaring Islamic knowledge as a composite whole, a benefit offered by the *madarsas*, the *Rashtriya Sahara* makes the following comment –

Muslims had progressed and prospered as long as they did not divide knowledge into branches. They were once experts of the Quran as well as science. They mastered Islamic education and secular/worldly education...But in today's scenario, people studying in madarsas think they cannot become doctors and engineers.... Regardless of whether a Muslim acquires education in a madarsa or at home, it is indispensable for him to have religious education because without it he can become anything but his religious identity will not remain intact. Only his name will define him as

⁶⁵ Mohsin Osmani Nadvi, "Deeni Madaaris Ke Faarghain Aur Unki Asri Taaleem", *Siasat Daily*, March 7, 2009.

⁶⁶ "Allah Se Door Kare Toh Taaleem Bhi Fitna (Education that Dissociates from God is Rebellious Too)", *Munsif Daily*, March 24, 2018, p. 6.

*a Muslim, otherwise there will be nothing Muslim about him. He will be ignorant about the rights of his parents, wife, children and his responsibilities towards the community and nation.*⁶⁷

Stressing the point further about the need to balance Islamic education and contemporary education, the author of the article says that a lot of people in the community are following their religion in the wrong way because they are illiterate in religious knowledge and thus have to depend on the advice of Maulvis for rituals as basic as sacrifice of goats on the occasion of Eid-ud-Duha; this is also the reason why triple talaq is most arbitrarily practised using social media like WhatsApp and Facebook. The conclusion that the author comes to is that Muslims have to understand that they need experts of Islam as much as they need doctors and engineers and both can benefit each other and contribute to the growth of the nation and the community which is possible only when knowledge is acquired not in divisions but in a composite form. The significant suggestion that is made is that there must be a bridge of opportunities between madarsas and mainstream modern educational institutions so that the ones studying in the madarsas can have benefits from the latter to become doctors and engineers in future and the Muslims being educated in the modern environment get accepted by the former for training in Islamic education. The article also stressed the importance of technology in promoting and propagating religion in novel and innovative ways.

The advertisements published in these leading Urdu newspapers about schools seeking to provide ‘modern’ education to Muslim children prove the same point about the need for a balanced education with certainly no compromise on Islamic values. They emphasize the promise that these new schools are here to give the best combination of modern and Islamic education. The modern very apparently is specified as English language, Mathematics and Science which will make the students capable of competing with the outside world on equal terms.

On the other hand, Islamic education is meant to groom them in *Akhlaq*, i.e. manners and values for which the parents of the present generation are not finding enough time to teach their children. The critique of materialistic attitudes produced and perpetuated by modern science in the West that the texts quoted above elucidate, is also a reflection on the kind of values that the Madarsa education is expected to promise to the youth of the community from the Islamic point of view –

⁶⁷ “Mazhabi Taleem Se Doori (Keeping Away from Religious Education)”, *Roznama Rashtriya Sahara*, January 14, 2019, p. 7.

respect for family life, sexual uprightness, piety and comradeship of the community which the modern science is projected to have ruined in the Western societies and found be progressively doing the same in India. The description of modern and Islamic education clearly suggests that the ‘modern’ has scientific enlightenment and contemporary ruling languages to offer which the religious education is deficient in and the latter would in turn fill in deficiencies of the modern education in ethics.

It is necessary at this point to cite once again Meera Nanda’s work on Hindu nationalism. Showing no qualms in criticizing the Hindutva project of converting secular India into a ‘Hindu Rashtra’, she explains how modern science and technology became the essential catalyst in executing the project. She largely highlights the aggressive pursuit of technology by the Hindu nationalists as they did while in power in 1998 by successfully testing nuclear weapons, to revive the glory of Vedic India, reinforce the Hindu traditions and assert their superiority. As she defines Hindutva in her own words –

*Hindutva is basically an ultranationalist and chauvinistic movement that seeks to modernize India by recovering the supposedly pristine Vedic-Hindu roots of Indian culture. To that end, it is committed to acquiring the most modern technology and putting it in the service of a religious-nationalist resurgence.*⁶⁸

Taking the argument further, she contends that while following the Western technological innovations with a sense of chauvinistic nationalism and religious pride, the Hindu nationalists ended up creating an alternative modernity for India which she chooses to call reactionary modernity – a modernity of a non-Western nation that will chase the West as far as possible for its science and technology but will also feed on the culture and values of the land of its birth. She expresses regret over the rapid development of this kind of alternative modernity in India, which she also calls ‘Hindu modernity’, as it allows religion with all its inequities to hold sway over the society, leaving no room for the other category of modernity to grow. The proponents of the other alternative modernity have been called as the postmodern left who wish to counter Western modernity with a science and culture that will be secular and not rooted in any particular religion.

⁶⁸ Meera Nanda, *Prophets Facing Backward: Postmodernism, Science and Hindu Nationalism* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), 4.

Meera Nanda's work in a way tries to awaken the secular liberals and leftists of the country to a fast-changing India that is progressively falling into the hands of the Hindutva ideologues who are on a mission to perpetuate Western created technological innovations and use them to raise the pride and glory of the Hindu nation without addressing a deeply entrenched system of patriarchy and caste inequality.

A similar tendency of chasing Western science and technology without losing the cultural identity of the community can be found in the editorials of Urdu newspaper discourse too. There is however no chauvinistic and aggressive nationalism at play in this agenda which Nanda identifies in the Hindutva agenda and the reason is quite clear – in the narrative of Hindu nationalism, religious and territorial identities coincide and to assert the pride of Hindus is to assert the pride of the land and its ancient traditions by resorting to the most modern technologies including building nuclear weapons to protect 'Hindu India' against its Islamic neighbour.⁶⁹ On the other hand, in the post-partition narrative of Indian Muslim nationalism, the idea of 'one religion, one nation' holds no meaning at all. The scientifically and technologically advanced past of the terrains where Islam had first flourished that the newspaper discourse celebrates is a mark of transnational fellowship. And the dreams of progress and prosperity of Indian Muslims with the aid of modern science and technology are presented in the discourse as dreams of a vast minority of India that is struggling to regain its lost glory and, more importantly, to become competent enough to be an equal partner in the development of the nation. A disgruntled and marginalized community that holds the position of the largest religious minority of India needs confidence to stand up to the country and the world which are turning progressively anti-Muslim and without encouraging modern scientific education, particularly in the centres of religious learning like the madarsas, Muslims cannot be empowered – this is the thought reflected in the discourse regarding how the community should relate with the Western imports of science and technology.

The expectation that is voiced in the discourse is that there should be an ever-increasing number of doctors, engineers and scientists from the community who will also be devout Muslims and the latter goal is to be ensured by keeping a strict restraint on the infiltration of Western culture into the value system of the community. By making these points the discourse implies that modern science is only a means to make life better in the mundane world; for every other thing Islam is

⁶⁹ Ibid, 41.

there to offer a solution as well as an answer. To modernize a Muslim using science and technology is to acquaint him or her with the contemporary knowledge about the laws of operation of the natural and physical world and build his/her capability to discover, invent and prosper. And to modernize them with values is to enlighten them with the Islamic way of life. But there appears to be some anxiety as to whether these two can be easily reconciled. On one hand there is ever increasing success of Western science and technology along with promises of a better economic life to the non-Western world and on the other hand it has produced materialistic, self-centred and irreligious individuals.

Actually, this anxiety is expressed with much clearer ideas by some scholars of Islam who have also largely contributed to the discourse on the relationship between Islam and science. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Ziauddin Sardar and Muzaffar Iqbal are some names to be mentioned in this context. Though there are differences in their perceptions on the matter in question, there is one common aspect in their understanding of the study of nature from the Islamic perspective and its stark contrast with the metaphysics and epistemology of modern science. That common aspect is the claim that nature, being dependent on its Creator, reflecting the work of the divine power, is a system with a sacred force underlying it that cannot be captured by the empirical methods of study given by modern science. To quote Muzaffar Iqbal in this regard –

*In case of Islam, the Quranic view of nature is characterized by an ontological and morphological continuity with the concept of God – linkage that imparts a certain degree of sacredness to the world by making it a sign pointing to a transcendental reality.*⁷⁰

Explaining Nasr's point of view, Guessoum states that –

He remarks that the Western civilization is the first one to construct a science, a knowledge and description of nature that negates the sacred altogether...Indeed, Nasr blames modern science in toto for all the ills that can be found in society, from the onslaught on the environment to the 'debasement' of man...Nasr insists that what distinguishes his traditional philosophy (and thus his Islamic Science) from contemporary Western approach is the holistic, unifying and sacred approach he and his school demanded from any system of knowledge. Indeed, what makes modern science, philosophy and life so wrong and broken in his view is, on one hand, its fragmentation

⁷⁰ Iqbal, *Science and Islam*, 6.

*and disorder and, on the other hand, its expulsion of spirituality from the world, nature and the cosmos.*⁷¹

He also quotes Ziauddin Sardar who expresses almost the same view –

*Attempts to rediscover Islamic science must begin by a rejection of both the axioms about nature, universe, time and humanity as well as the goals and direction of Western science and the methodology which has made meaningless reductionism, objectification of nature and torture of animals.*⁷²

This underlying factor of the ‘sacred’ in nature that the modern Western science excludes from its purview and the science driven by Islamic principles affirms, as the scholars mentioned above argue, is a major point of contradiction between Islam and modern science, making them largely irreconcilable which the Urdu newspaper discourse doesn’t seem to be acknowledging. The issues that all three have pointed out are related to modern science not respecting nature for the involvement of the ‘transcendental force’ in its operation and hence mindlessly having caused damage to it with its own invented technologies that are satisfying the aspirations of the modern ambitious and selfish individual at the cost of the ‘bountiful and merciful creation of God’. Perhaps these concerns, if addressed in larger political and public domains, could have engaged very well with the demands of the contemporary struggles in the civil society for the protection of environment, human rights and animal rights against the destructive modern technologies. But such an engagement is not happening because the Muslim world, having mostly forgotten its own Islamic scientific tradition, has given in to the power of modern science and technology. While the Muslim nations are chasing it, as Muzaffar Iqbal observes, to build their national strength and prosperity, the Muslim community in India is in want for it to elevate its economic status and come out of its socially backward condition as the Urdu discourse asserts. As a consequence of this helpless and endless pursuit of modern science and technology which has created a deep-rooted dependency in the Muslim milieu, the chances of reviving the pre-modern science and exploring its potential for further growth in harmony with the natural environment appear hollow. This is the grim dilemma facing the religious communities that the discourse does not perceive owing to its desperation to see Muslims of the country rise up to the level of their counterparts from the other

⁷¹ Guessoum, *Islam’s Quantum Question*, 112-13.

⁷² Ibid, 125.

communities, using the science and technology of the modern West, while being strictly on guard against the modern Western values of liberalism, individualism and materialism as though both the pursuits are two separate tracks and the community can choose to run on one and rule out the other.

What these scholars have stressed upon is hardly acknowledged in the discourse – that science in any age has never been value-neutral as it is a product of the civilization to which it is born and that it evolves and progresses within the value system of that civilization and engenders the same culture that the civilization is embedded in. Hence, as they suggest, if the religious communities want to get rid of the ‘irreligious aspects’ of the modern Western science and also of the culture that they have fostered then they need to get back to their own scientific roots because embracing Western modernity selectively is not going to work.

2.7. CONCLUSION

Science and culture are two dimensions of Western modernity with which the Muslim world cannot have an easy relationship. The chapter has tried to unveil the ambiguities and tensions in the Urdu newspapers regarding modern science and its promises and problems. The exemplary pursuit of truth in an open-ended manner is seen as emblematic of a scientific spirit, and in this sense, Islam already is said to have embodied and pioneered such inquiry into nature. Muslims are exhorted to recall this past and thus selectively embrace modern science as well as modern education. There are fond hopes that Islam can not only be reconciled with modern science but also reform the latter by infusing moral values. But this is somewhat undermined by the deep and persistent anxiety about the value-less aspects of modern science and the individualist thrust of modern education. Here the communitarian strands are pronounced; that modern science is fragmented rather than holistic, that it ignores other forms of knowing, it is excessively materialist, it ignores moral values and so on. The shared values and understandings of Muslims are said to be a collective good that cannot be sacrificed for progress. Within this framework, Islamic identity is a source of moral values, *Akhlaq*. Ensuing from this communitarian emphasis, there is an instrumental approach to modern science and education without losing the moral and cultural anchor provided by Islam. To this end, Muslims are counselled to strengthen their presence in

science and engineering and technology so as to benefit from the economic booms. And because modern Western science is not responsible for keeping people godly, the responsibility of the institutions whose primary role is to impart religious education becomes more significant in this respect. The Madarsa style of traditional education is not to be disregarded and abandoned; all it needs is a tryst with modern science, technology and languages to enhance its value in the community and the mainstream society. In this regard, the Urdu newspaper discourse is comparable to discontent expressed by many thinkers of other faiths regarding the soulless nature of modern science and education and its erosion of moral virtues. Less pronounced is the minoritarian emphasis on distinctiveness or competitive assertion of this community against other communities. While the communitarian concerns about moral relativism and desacralisation are genuine, questions do arise about whether this perspective is attentive to inequality and injustice within the community to which we now turn.

CHAPTER 2

PERSONAL LAW: A PLURALIST DEFENCE

Personal laws contradict the uniformity of modern law and yet they are permitted to exist in the country where religion plays a pivotal role in the lives of the people. The system of religion-based family laws which are better known as personal laws is a case for multiculturalism in the religiously and culturally diverse India. Derived from age-old religious scriptures, these laws fall immensely outside the purview of the Constitution though the state keeps intervening in their functioning. However, the Constitution also provides for a Uniform Civil Code under Article 44 which is part of the non-justiciable Directive Principles of State Policy and represents the vision of legal uniformity throughout the country. Neither has the UCC come into existence, nor have the personal laws been entirely modified in accordance with the spirit of the modern Constitution. The conflict between the two camps – one that wants to turn Article 44 into a reality and the other that wants to sustain the system of personal laws has been a never-ending one.

The feminist perspective casts the attachment to personal law as an offshoot of patriarchal religions that place women in lower and disadvantaged position vis-a-vis men. A second perspective is informed by the politics of identity or to put it more specifically, the politics of majority/minority identity. A large part of the narrative on this conflict between the program of Uniform Civil Code and the personal laws is marked by the ideological struggle of the majoritarians and minoritarians to define their identity against each other. With the Hindutva ideologues under the political leadership of the BJP claiming the responsibility of bringing the country under a common civil law, the idea of Uniform Civil Code has over the years become an essential part of the ‘saffron agenda’ against which the personal laws are pitted as an essential part of minority rights. Submerged in these two dominant perspectives is a third one, that uncovers a conflict between the modern legal system on the one hand that demands uniformity of law based on impersonal reason

and on the other hand, a pre-modern system that recognizes the multiplicity of customs and traditions of various communities and seeks to make room for laws that will be driven by context.

The Urdu newspaper discourse has for long tried to be the voice of the Muslim community in the debate on personal law and Uniform Civil Code and the analysis of the discourse shows that it has responded to all the three aforementioned perspectives with a more anxious stress on the majority/minority conflict in the contemporary times. It is a well-known fact that after the famous Shah Bano case of 1985 the Muslim personal law became the focal point of the debate on the need to continue with personal laws and the prospects of a common civil code. Since this case, the Muslim personal law has time and again come under criticism for its provisions of Triple Talaq, post-divorce alimony and polygamy all of which, particularly the first two, have gravely affected women and have also been questionable on the Constitutional grounds of equality before law (Article 14) and social justice. On the other hand, the Muslim clergy through their representation in the All India Muslim Personal Law Board have stood firm in their stand in favour of the personal law notwithstanding its problematic provisions and have strongly resisted any move from the state and any proposal from the civil society for reform.

Though this debate seems jaded, recent developments on the Muslim personal law - the Supreme Court judgement in August 2017 striking down Triple Talaq as unconstitutional and the passing of the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act in July 2019 that criminalizes the practice of Triple Talaq – have not only raked it up once again in the Urdu print media but also made the debate persistent and nuanced. This chapter tracks the debate in the years post-Shah Bano and its nuances in the past few years to reflect on the concerns about how secure the identity of minority communities is as well as about the rights of women and the sanctity of the personal law as articulated in the editorials of the Urdu newspapers. The analysis of this discourse shows responses to three different strands of opposition to the system of personal laws, particularly, the largely unreformed Muslim personal law. These responses do reflect the fears of a minority community about getting dissolved in the majority identity through the aggressive agenda of the Hindu nationalists to bring in a uniform civil code, but they also voice perspectives that often do not gain the spotlight in the mainstream analyses.

Bolstering the very obvious minoritarian perspective, the communitarian urge to live up to the Constitutional spirit of multiculturalism and to keep up the religiously sanctioned traditions and

the Islamic viewpoint on women's freedom and gender equality together constitute the discourse in question. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss these different dimensions of the Urdu newspaper discourse on the Muslim personal law, the controversies it has been embroiled in and its anti-thesis, i.e. uniform civil code and to explain the minority-centric and non-minority centric perspectives that they reflect.

3.1. WOMEN'S RIGHTS OF A SITUATED KIND

There's nothing in the Constitution of India that treats women differently except where the intention is to benefit them in the interest of equality and justice. Articles 14 and 15 do implicitly subsume equality between sexes and prohibit gender discrimination. This makes the Constitution the most rational and legitimate ground for women's rights activists and feminists to address the issues of curbs on the basic liberties of women and their unequal treatment in different domains of society. Apart from Articles 14 and 15, Art. 44 also has been regarded in the women's rights discourse as a promising provision to ensure gender equality and justice particularly because it is related to the rights in private family life which are often ignored by the state policies.

Archana Parashar argues that though the UCC could be viewed through the prism of the principle of gender equality, the Constitution makers did not draw up such a connection and that the matters of the establishment of a UCC and reform of the personal laws were always discussed more in the light of minority rights and religious freedom of communities than gender equality and justice.¹ She also stresses on the state's failure to test the discriminatory provisions of personal laws on the Constitutional principles of gender equality and freedom from discrimination. Vrinda Narain in her exclusive work on the position of women in the Muslim personal law argues that the Constitution makers had no plan to keep the personal laws protected from the principles and demands of Fundamental Rights which would require major reforms in them.² Most of the significant contributors to the women's rights perspective on personal laws have mainly targeted the state for its lack of action to abrogate provisions like Triple Talaq and polygamy that are unfair to women and for giving in to the politics of minority rights and autonomy of religious

¹ Vrinda Narain cites this argument. Vrinda Narain, *Reclaiming the Nation: Muslim Women and Law in India* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 87.

² Vrinda Narain, *Gender and Community: Muslim Women's Rights in India* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001) 5.

communities which have deeply entrenched patriarchal relations and where there is no scope to voice women's rights. While some of them suggested a uniform civil code as the only way out of the patriarchal system engendered by personal laws on the pretext that a uniform family law would treat women across the communities as equal individual citizens and confer on them the same set of rights in marriage, divorce and property based on Constitutional ideals, the others saw practical wisdom in reforming the existing personal laws in a major way that will ensure conformity with the Constitutional principles of equality, justice and freedom. Zoya Hasan argued that Muslim women's rights had been subsumed in the debates like 'minority versus majority', 'personal law versus uniform law', 'secularism versus communalism' and 'modernity versus communitarian traditions'.³ She suggests that Muslim women and other women's equality can be achieved to a certain level through legal reforms and the absence of such reforms has been a hindrance to the achievement of the Constitutional ideal of 'equality before law'. Flavia Agnes while blaming the state says that its very move to codify a major part of the Hindu family law was a negation of Constitutional demand for a uniform civil code.⁴ She makes the point that the state's codification of the Hindu family law with enactments like Hindu Marriage Act, Hindu Succession Act, Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, all passed in 1955-56, was an obstacle in the way of achieving a uniform civil code and a negation of Articles 14 and 15 of the Constitution as by reforming the law of a particular community in the light of gender equality and justice and not doing the same to the personal laws of the other communities, the state excluded the non-Hindu women from the benefits of fair legal provisions.

Another observation made in the women's rights discourse is the contradictory relationship between the community right to religion and assertion of religious identity on one hand and women's basic rights as equal citizens on the other hand and the need to not subject the latter to the political exigencies of the former. Vasundhara Daghamwar says in this regard that the politics of community rights and identity often carried out with recourse to the fundamental right to freedom of religion under Article 25 of the Constitution and its endorsement by the state has relegated the equality provisions of the Constitution and thereby created a very disadvantageous

³ Zoya Hasan, "Gender Politics, Legal Reforms and the Muslim Community in India" in *Appropriating Gender: Women's Agency, the State, Politicized Religion in South India*, Ed. Jeffery Patricia and Amrita Basu (New York: Routledge, 1998), 72.

⁴ Flavia Agnes, "Law and Gender Inequality" in *Writing the Women's Movement: A Reader*, Ed. Mala Khullar (New Delhi: Zubaan, 2005), 113.

position for women.⁵ Kirti Singh in her work on Constitution and Muslim personal law says that though Art.25 is subject to restrictions including those of other fundamental rights like right to equality and the state can make laws restraining religious freedom in the interest of social reform and justice, not many advocates of reforms in the Muslim personal law, except women's rights groups have advocated reforms on Constitutional grounds.⁶ Robert Baird can be quoted here in this regard –

*Since the values deposited in the Constitution of India have supreme legal status, their implementation in the interest of gender equality requires the restriction of other religious values and practices which might otherwise have constitutional protection.*⁷

Basically, the women's rights discourse on personal law has almost unanimously invoked the Constitution of the country in voicing its stand against the unreformed patriarchal personal laws like the law that the Muslim community in the country has been obliged to follow. It looks at Constitution as a substantially fertile ground to inspire laws in the interest of women's equality and freedom. In its perspective therefore, community rights of which personal laws are regarded as an essential part will always clash with the rights of the individuals, particularly women, and so restraining them in a way that their pursuit does no harm to women's basic rights and liberties would not be an unfair thing to do. The state's non-interference in the personal laws on the grounds of protection of community rights and the unwavering assertion of these rights by the community leaders have kept women's rights in a constant jeopardy.

Delving into the Urdu newspaper discourse in this regard is like delving into a totally different discursive world. Constitution solely appears as a champion of religious freedom of communities and a protector of the rights of minorities. And when it comes to women's rights, the Constitution is not a supreme authority. It can only be a secondary alternative to Islam. The discourse in no way takes on the constitutionally driven campaign for gender equality that challenges the personal law as it does not perceive Constitution as the ideal way to realize women's equality and freedom. Its position on women's rights is not any different from its position on science and knowledge. In

⁵ Vasudha Dhagamwar, "Women, Children and the Constitution: Hostages to Religion, Outcaste by Law" in *Religion and Law in Independent India*, ed. Robert Baird (New Delhi: Manohar, 2005), 302-23.

⁶ Kirti Singh, "The Constitution and Muslim Personal Law" in *Forging Identities: Gender, Communities and the State*, Ed, Zoya Hasan (New Delhi: Kaali, 1994) 96-97.

⁷ Robert Baird, ed., *Religion and Law in Independent India* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2005), 146.

fact, it is part of its larger perspective on modernity. If reason and science in the modern world brought a better life to humanity through dynamic discoveries and inventions, then the Islamic world already set the ground for its revolutionary beginnings and in the same way if the modern societies are also marked by a sense of gender equality and freedom for women, then this could not have happened without the establishment of Islamic societies where for the first time women were treated with equal respect as men – this is the point that the discourse confronts the opponents with.

The response of the Urdu newspapers to the concerns expressed by the women's rights discourse regarding gender inequality and injustice in the Muslim personal law rather emphasizes on the excesses of injustice to women in the other communities that emanate from their religious beliefs and practices and dismisses the feminist cry for gender equality on the pretext that the Islamic religion provides immense ground for women to exercise freedom and be treated equally with men. It also emphasizes that the Islamic sense of women's freedom and equality does not and need not fall in line with what they mean in our modern Constitution. Commenting on a Muslim woman's right to divorce, the *Siasat* stated –

*The Shari'ah allows a woman to free herself from the relationship of marriage when it becomes a painful bondage for her.... In a way, Talaq in Islam opens up the door for freedom which is not available to women from the other communities. The non-Muslim women are forced to live with their abusers and depend on them for their survival.*⁸

On a woman's right to divorce in Islam, a similar view is stated in an article from the *Rahnuma-e-Deccan*,

*Islam allows a woman to live with self-esteem by not requiring her to stay on with her marital life even when it is getting traumatic.*⁹

To mention the latest discourse on the right to divorce after the successful enactment of the Triple Talaq bill –

⁸ “Khwaateen Se Ghair Maamuli Hamdardi Ka Izhaar Muslim Personal Law Me Tabdili Ke Liye Hai (Expression of Undue Sympathy for Women Meant for Reform of Muslim Personal Law)”, *Siasat Daily*, August 31, 1985.

⁹ “Muslim Mutalqa Khwaateen Hi Ke Naam Nihaad Haqooq Ke Tehfaz Se Dilchaspi Kyun? (Why Exclusive Interest in the Protection of Rights of Divorced Muslim Women?)” *Rahnuma-E-Deccan Daily*, February 17, 1986.

*Marriage among Muslims is a contract which gives equal rights to men and women to take decisions and every decision requires the consent of women...By giving women the right to take a decision and start a new life, Islam brought about a revolutionary change.*¹⁰

There is also a repulsion for the kind of image of women that the judicial verdicts on the divorced Muslim women's right to maintenance and the arguments of all the groups that have agreed with the verdicts are said to have created. The judgments like the one in the landmark Shah Bano case highlighted the repercussions of irrational pronouncements of *Talaq* for women who would have nothing to survive on owing to their destitution, unless they claim regular maintenance from their former husbands. This is not acceptable in the Muslim view, firstly because it contradicts the Islamic provision of maintenance for divorced women and secondly because it leaves the divorced women at the mercy of the very men who have been responsible for their destitution. The argument in the discourse for Islam as a more liberal and just religion is that Muslim women under the personal law enjoy the right to a fair share in the ancestral property and thus those who are able to secure property need not depend on their former husbands and it should be the responsibility of the state to look after the welfare of women who are divorced as well as destitute. This is how women would stay free from the atrocities of men who have been abused them and also live a life without a dependency. Commenting on the Supreme Court judgement in the Shah Bano case, the *Siasat Daily* states,

*The Supreme Court Judgement has indeed undermined Muslim women's dignity by requiring them to claim maintenance post-divorce from the men who have been responsible for their destitution.*¹¹

The repeated underscoring of the economic privilege that women under the Islamic law enjoy over the others and the security, dignity and independence that the right to inheritance endows them with is an expression of the faith that the community has in the gender-just foundations of its personal law. Reflecting on specific statistical data, the *Munsif Daily* in 2017 also tried to prove that the social situation of Hindu women is far worse than that of Muslim women because the incidence of not only divorce and being abandoned by husbands, but also of the practice of marrying more than once and keeping more than one wife is higher among the Hindus than the

¹⁰ Suhail Anjum, "Kya Ye Khamoshi Ki Zabaan Khalb Ko Bilaakhir Taskhir Kar Legi?" *Munsif Daily*, Nuqoosh, August 4, 2019, p. 2.

¹¹ The *Siasat Daily*. 9 September, 1985.

Muslims.¹² The author of the article makes a reference to a survey report published in the Indian Express in the 2017 which claims that the number of divorce cases among Muslims was around 1307 in 2017 whereas among the Hindus the number was as high as 16,505. A reference is also made to Ritu Menon's work, "*Unequal Citizens: A Study of Muslim Women in India*" which describes the percentage of Muslims and Hindus indulging in the practice of marrying more than once as 5.7% and 5.8% respectively.

There is an untiring effort in these newspapers to prove that with all the so called flawed unfair provisions of the Islamic law, Muslim women in India are not as oppressed as women in the majority Hindu community. The comparison of the condition of widows from both the communities and angst over the misrepresentation of Muslim women in the mainstream media are the usual features of the discourse on the personal law versus uniform civil code debate which are cited below -

*In the Hindu society widows are excluded from all affairs of mundane life whereas in Islam widows have the right to marry again and start a new life. A Muslim woman is entitled to divorce her husband if he's cruel and start a new life.*¹³

Addressing the BJP government which has time and again, since it came to power in 2014, singled out the unfair provisions of the Muslim personal law and suggested reforms, the article cited above also suggests that before pointing fingers at the *Shari'ah*, they should look at their own *Vedas* and *Puranas*.

Making the same appeal to the BJP government, the *Rahnuma-e-Deccan* says –

*Instead of playing politics over the issues of Muslim women and the issue of Triple Talaq, the BJP government should rather also look after those Hindu widows in Mathura and Kashi who are forced to live a life of helplessness.*¹⁴

Roznama Rashtriya Sahara's comments go thus –

¹² Syed Wahajuddin, "Kya Zaafrani Hukumat Ko Waqi Musalmaano Ke Masaail Se Hamdardi Hai? (Is the Saffron Regime Genuinely Sensitive to the Problems of Muslims?)" *Munsif Daily*, April 15, 2017.

¹³ Ehsaas Nayaab, "Talaq Ordinance Naakhabil Bardaasht Hai (Talaq Ordinance is Intolerable)", *Munsif Daily, Nuqoosh*. September 23, 2018, p. 4.

¹⁴ Syed Latiefuddin Qadri, "Supreme Court Ka Faisla Aur Uske Mazmaraat (Supreme Court's Verdict and its Meaning)", *Rahnuma-e-Deccan Daily*, August 27, 2017, p. 4.

*Even today the instances of divorce in the Muslim community are far lesser than in the other communities...The media should also highlight the issues of abandonment of women, dowry deaths and female foeticide in the Hindu community. Everyone wants to highlight only Muslim women's agonies in order to target and malign Islam and Muslims.*¹⁵

*Those who are weeping over the sufferings of Muslim women should look at the picture of Rajasthan where a woman walks miles of distance to get back home carrying pots full of water on her head and the husband relaxes on the cot. TV anchors should be made to know that a law banning child marriage also was made in India but even today in Rajasthan this practice continues openly. In the Bhil society divorce proceedings happen in a Panchayat wherein the husband publicly tears off a piece of his turban and gives it to his wife following which the proceeding is concluded. In Mizoram, Meghalaya and Goa there are very different traditions and procedures of divorce but people in television cannot see all this. They can only see Muslims' issue of Talaq.*¹⁶

Striking comparisons between the socio-economic conditions of Muslim women and those of Hindu women on being abandoned in marriage are found in the discourse on the Triple Talaq law as well which mainly targets the BJP government. Addressing the latest legislative measure, an article from the *Munsif* claims that the instances of divorce to women in the Muslim community have drastically decreased unlike the numerous instances of Hindu women having been left abandoned without being legally divorced. Raising questions about this law, the author writes –

*Why is the government so concerned only about Muslim women when the condition of Hindu women is a lot worse? Those Hindu women whose husbands have abandoned them without a divorce are trying to survive by begging outside temples and dharmashalas. Isn't the government concerned about them?*¹⁷

¹⁵ Shakeel Samdani, "Is Zehmat Ko Rehmat Me Badal Sakti Hai Muslim Leadership (This Trouble can be Turned into a Blessing by the Muslim Leadership)", *Roznama Rashtriya Sahara*, August 23, 2017, p. 9.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Muzaffar Hussain Ghazali, "Talaq Salasa Bill, Personal Law Aur (And) Opposition", *Munsif Daily, Nuqoosh*, August 11, 2019, 2.

Rashtriya Sahara makes a similar observation about Hindu women abandoned without a legal divorce. An article sarcastically citing the government's sympathy for Muslim women, comments thus –

*The government never explained why it is sympathetic to Muslim women alone? Why not to Hindu women? Lakhs of abandoned Hindu women and widows beg outside temples and dharmashalas and government is not concerned about them. And many of them wear Burqa like Muslim women and beg outside mosques.*¹⁸

Apart from harping on the difference in the social reality of women from the Muslim community and the other communities and the relatively better conditions of the former, the discourse has also articulated what women's freedom and equality mean in Islam. The claims that are made suggest that in history the Islamic religion came with a better life and status for women who were demonized in the earlier religions and cultures and this is the reason why Muslim women, if there is strict adherence to and right interpretation of the Islamic law, will always be better placed than the other women and thus there is no ground for justifying the reform of any provision of the law that deals with Muslim women's rights. A 1986 edition of *Rahnuma-e-Deccan* carried an article in which the author contends that Islam with its evolution brought the air of women's freedom and rights and proved all the religious/cultural societies, including the Western, backward in this sphere. It states that -

*Islam is the only religion to have attributed a high status to women, otherwise all the civilizations, be it Graeco-Roman or Arab, European or Asian, have equally disregarded women's rights. Nowhere did a woman have rights even over her mind. In the English society, she had no right to raise her voice against men, no right to spend her earnings on herself, no right to marry anyone of her choice and her property and wealth after marriage belonged to her husband. In the Jewish society she was considered as unfaithful and misleading because the one who induced Adam to indulge in a forbidden act was a woman. This is precisely the reason why the Christian societies also have not accorded any dignity to her. In the Indian Hindu society, there was the practice of Sati which implied that she had no independent identity of her own.*¹⁹

¹⁸Suhail Anjum, "Talaq Salasa Kanoon Se Ghabarana Kaisa (Why Worry About Talaq Salasa Law?)" *Roznama Rashtriya Sahara*, August 3, 2019, p. 5.

¹⁹ *Rahnuma-E-Deccan*, 1986.

*Women's rights have always been disregarded in the European/Christian, Jewish, Hindu societies and the Arab society during the period of Jahiliyya. It is Islam that raised women's status and gave them the dignity that they deserve. Islam is the only religion that has entitled women to a share in the family property and the right to marry and divorce at her will.*²⁰

As another article echoes:

*In the history of humanity, women's rights and status in Islam have been portrayed in such a negative light that women appear to be miserable and worth sympathizing with; deprived of worldly pleasures and basic human rights.*²¹

*From the miserable conditions of the Arab world there arose a revolution that, with an amazing momentum, changed the world of women.*²²

These statements claim that when the world was plagued by gender inequalities and inhuman treatment of women, Islam came and changed their lives for the better and accorded them with rights and liberties that they deserve. The statements also contain an assertion of Islam's progressive and enlightening spirit with regard to women by virtue of which the Muslim societies overtook all others in pursuing the freedom and equality of women. They express the rationale behind the persistent refusal of the community to accept any suggested positive reform in the provisions of the Muslim personal law that directly affect women.

Another argument in the discourse is that the idea of women's rights (*Huqooq Niswan*) which is invoked by all those groups that condemn the existence of personal laws is a shallow imitation of the Western ethos. To cite an article in the *Siasat Daily* -

While Islam has kept women free from economic responsibilities and public roles, the modern politics of gender equality has thrust additional burdens on them that were originally meant to be handled exclusively by men. Dragging women into the public domain, the politics of gender

²⁰ Salma Aslam, "Islam, Aurat, Haqooq Aur Faraaiz (Islam, Women, Rights and Duties)", *Rahnuma-E-Deccan Daily*, March 31, 1986, p. 10.

²¹ "Taariqi Pasmanzar (Historical Background)", *Rahnuma-E-Deccan*, March 17, 1986, p. 2.

²² Ibid.

*equality has stripped women of their dignity and purity and turned them into objects of male gaze and desire.*²³

*Those who are shouting the slogans of women's rights/freedom should know that the Islamic law and religion cannot change with the changing generations, societies, science and technology.*²⁴

These statements bring out a very protectionist view of women's freedom whereby a woman is free when she is secure from the public gaze of desire and possession. Hence, we would also find a strong endorsement of the system of purdah in this discourse. Invoking the values of Islam, an article from *Rahnuma-e-Deccan* states -

*Islam binds every woman to the rule of Purdah. When she is out in public, she has to be behind the veil. Though Islam confers equal rights on men and women, women are bound by the rule of Purdah.*²⁵

This is a statement from the newspaper's editorial of 1986. Thirty years later, the interpretation of the Islamic view of women's freedom and equality remains the same as the following lines from the *Etemaad* Urdu daily, a newspaper of the recent times suggests –

Islam obliges women to practise Purdah and it is this aspect which has been targeted the most by the women's rights activists...These activists say that Purdah has confined women within the four walls of home...It is the law of nature that priceless and valuable things are more protected than the ordinary ones...In the same way woman is delicate and hence she requires special care. Hijab does not enslave her but protects her from all the threats to her dignity.... Those who shout the slogans of women's rights and freedom do not give importance to woman's nature but Islam does. It warns men against harsh behaviour with women...If freedom of women means exhibiting themselves before anonymous men, staying free from the responsibilities of mother, sister, daughter and wife, breaking free from home and wandering around, then such a freedom is

²³ Muhammed Naseeruddin, "Haqooq Niswaan: Ek Pur-Fareb Naaraa (Women's Rights, a Slogan Full of Deceit)", *Siasat Daily, Sunday Edition*, April 30, 2017, p. 5.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ "Musalmaano Ka Parda (The Veil of Muslims)", *Rahnuma-E-Deccan Daily*, February 15, 1986, p. 3.

*shameful. Women, especially Muslim women do not need this freedom. They are thankful that whatever Islam has given them is natural and just.*²⁶

This article cited above was published recently when the Triple Talaq bill was introduced for the first time by the government of India in the Lok Sabha in 2018 and was passed by the house but not by the Rajya Sabha.

A debate on how protected women's rights are under the Muslim personal law was triggered even when the Modi government referred the matter of Uniform Civil Code to the Law Commission in 2016. An article in the *Munsif Daily* states thus –

*In the interest of women's rights there is no need to abandon our religion and look up elsewhere; our religion has given women the kind of rights (Huqooq) that have not been given anywhere else.*²⁷

Referring to the non-Islamic societies, particularly the Western, the author argues that whatever is happening now in the name women's rights is the consequence of and reaction against the injustices to women that their religion, customs and traditions have perpetuated and hence the laws that they have brought up as corrective measures do not apply to the Islamic world which has an inherent legal system sanctioned by its religion that treats women as fairly as they are supposed to. Right to divorce, freedom to have a second marriage, right to a share in the ancestral property and the property of the husband; right to dower from the husband and an exclusive claim over her wealth and the entitlement to use it according to her free will have been underscored as privileges of women uniquely associated with Islam.

There are two more articles of the *Munsif Daily* from 2016 that directly take on the advocates of women's rights and their ideas of gender equality and women's freedom which are by and large considered to be imitation of Western ethos. To quote one of them which basically responds to an allegation made in an English newspaper against the Muslim Personal Law Board that this body was set up only to protect the rights of Muslim men –

²⁶ Safia Arfat Fatima, "Islam Aur Aurat...Pasti Se Bulandi Ka Safar (Islam and Women...A Journey from Lowliness to Superiority)", *Etemaad Urdu Daily*. January 6, 2019, p. 3.

²⁷ Mufti Inamul Haq, *Munsif Daily, Minarenoor*, September 16, 2016, p. 5.

*Islam has divided rights and responsibilities among different groups of human beings on the basis of justice.... In social and family lives also the rights and duties of men and women are based on just principles that completely fall in line with human nature.*²⁸

Enumerating all the rights and privileges that the *Shari'ah* confers on women which are elucidated in a compilation by the Board, the article suggests that in all matters of marriage and divorce, women are entitled to the best privileges according to the abilities and the roles that they play. One bottom-line of the article is that equality, if it were to be taken as sameness or identical treatment, was never a natural condition and to be just is to treat everyone in accordance with their needs and abilities. Therefore, due to their different natural abilities and the roles they play accordingly, men and women will not hold the same set of rights. The other significant point of the article can be better described in the following excerpt:

*The Western culture that is being regarded as the liberator of women has not left any stone unturned in humiliating women and in the name of freedom it has forced them to take on maternal as well as paternal responsibilities. She has to bear children, feed them, bring them up and at the same time also do a job and earn money. Then she has been disgraced in such a way that from advertisement of a match box to those of jewellery, clothing and cinema, her body is projected with nakedness. Would any gentleman like to see his mother, sister or daughter in a condition of nakedness? And then due to this shamelessness and the burden of masculine responsibilities on women, the system of family life is crumbling.*²⁹

The article concludes that these issues evolving out of the pursuit of the Western ideas of equality and freedom are never considered by the liberal activists of women's rights and on the other hand the Islamic law is in absolute agreement with the law of nature and only such law is right for human beings that falls in line with God's nature.

The other article from the *Munsif* targets the frequent use of Constitutional provisions by the women's rights discourse to justify the campaign against personal laws and battle for gender equality. It mainly picks on the phrases 'fundamental rights' (*Buniyaadi Huqooq*) and equality (*Musaavaat*) calling them media slogans that are beautiful to hear but just empty words when

²⁸ Maulana Khalid Saifullah Rahmani, "Muslim Personal Law Aur Khwateen Ke Haqooq (Muslim Personal Law and Women's Rights)", *The Munsif Daily*, November 25, 2016.

²⁹ Ibid.

applied to reality. While raising some fundamental questions against the liberties permitted by the Constitutional provision of fundamental rights, it makes the following observation on women's equality –

*When the nature created men and women in different forms and not equally, then who are we to make their rights and duties equal? God laid down different sets of rights and duties for men and women according to their nature and abilities...Whenever there was opposition to God's law on the distribution of rights and duties between men and women and whenever there were attempts to bring about equality in them, the results were very destructive.*³⁰

These assertions about gender equality and women's freedom in Islam would in no way harmonize with women's rights discourse that takes the Constitutional principles of equality and freedom as its basic premise. They do not dismiss gender equality, gender justice and women's freedom but expect the 'rebels' from within the community and people from outside the community to understand that the way Islam sees equality and freedom for women is different from the definitions that may be considered as standard and universal in the modern times. Where the feminists insist that the biological difference should not be the factor to be considered in determining the rights and liberties of men and women, the Urdu newspaper discourse contends it to be the very reason why Islam differentiates the two sexes while defining their rights and responsibilities. While feminine and masculine are social constructs for feminists, the discourse essentializes these categories on the basis of the Islamic perspective that views the two sexes as different sets of people with different natural abilities and hence deserving not the same rights. So gender equality finds its place in the idea of 'equal but different' in the perception that comes out from the analysis of the Urdu newspaper discourse and it is very close to the understanding of gender in Difference Feminism whose major advocates like Sara Ruddick and Carol Gilligan essentialize masculine and feminine qualities and consider men and women as two different categories who think and perceive things differently.³¹ Naturalizing the feminine qualities of mothering, nurture and care, both the Difference feminists have associated women with roles that have been traditionally assigned to them and detached them from the question of equality of rights

³⁰ Muhammad Ansaarullah Qasmi, "Muslim Personal Law Se Mutaalaq Hukumat Ka Halafnaamah: Akhal-O-Insaf Ki Adalat Me (Government's Declaration on Muslim Personal Law: In the Court of Reason and Justice)", *Munsif Daily, Minarenoor*, November 25, 2016, p. 5.

³¹ Alison Stone, *An Introduction to Feminist Philosophy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 132.

vis-à-vis men on the pretext that women's essential situation makes them unsuitable for the rights and opportunities available to men.³² It is interesting to note that two articles cited in this section underscoring the Islamic sense of women's equality and freedom are written by women writers and that further confirms the inclination in the discourse towards 'difference feminism'.

Alongside difference feminism, the idea of a situated freedom vaguely discernible in this discourse also resonates to some extent with the idea of positive liberty which, as Charles Taylor conceptualizes, is based on some pre-conditions and a choice between purposes that are essential to one's identity and purposes that are not so essential to the identity – these pre-conditions and purposes are usually collectively defined in a specific socio-cultural environment.³³ Outside such an environment of shared life and meanings attributed to it, one cannot distinguish between the significant and insignificant purposes. Freedom in the sense of positive freedom as conceptualized by Taylor consists in the realization of one's true self – a self that is moral and is capable of acting on what is good based on a shared understanding in a community. In the context of personal law, it could be said that one's freedom is defined by the goals that are rendered as most significant to being Muslim according to the Islamic canon and whose meaning is understood collectively by all those who are morally and culturally as a community associated with the canon.³⁴

The Islamic understanding of women's freedom that is discerned in the discourse more or less equates it with security. To be secure from the public eye, male gaze and any physical harm is to be free. This is another aspect that starkly challenges the women's rights discourse which stands for women's autonomy and freedom of choice. A protectionist perspective looking at women as bodies to be guarded against harm and humiliation obviously cannot facilitate their full autonomy. Feminists consider such a kind of protection as control. Security is also envisaged in the economic condition which is another source of freedom. Muslim personal law's provision of *Mehr* or dower for women in marriage and right to inheritance are supposedly the facilitators of dignity and self-reliance. Though freedom of choice and consent is implicitly suggested in a woman's right to marry and divorce at her will under the Islamic law, the discourse presents it as one of the liberal elements of Islam that is not to be misunderstood as a mark of right to autonomy and self-

³² Ibid,133.

³³ Charles, Taylor, "What's Wrong With Negative Liberty," in *An Introduction With Readings*, ed. Nigel Warburton (New York: Routledge, 2001), 212, https://www.google.co.in/books/edition/Freedom/2wxhpF_O6z0C?hl.

³⁴ Ibid, 208.

determination because in Islam an individual is not supposed to have a free will independent of God's will that is laid down in the *Quran* and the *Hadith* from where the Islamic law is derived. Thus, a woman's will is as much subjected to the divine law as is a man's will but not in a uniform way which is why the law becomes questionable in the women's rights discourse when it is tested on the Constitutional grounds of both equality and freedom.

To summarize this discussion of the Urdu newspaper discourse on women in Muslim personal law in India and its rebuttal to the questions of gender equality, justice and freedom raised by the women's rights discourse, the conflict between the religiously informed perspective and the Constitutionally driven perspective on these questions that the newspaper discourse reflects appears to be irresolvable because of the formidable incompatibility of both the perspectives. The newspaper discourse suggests that there is no question of any compromise with the Constitutionally driven ideas of gender equality and women's freedom that the mainstream media and women's rights activists keep campaigning for, because to do that would mean to meddle with a great part of the Islamic law. Secondly, the discourse represents an alternative view of gender justice and freedom which is expected to be understood only within the context of Islam and not by comparing it with universal standards which it dismisses as Western constructs. Thus, the discourse suggests that for the Muslims, the scheme to modernize the conditions of women need not be inspired by the kind of modernization that happened to the West as Islam proved itself to be more advanced in its approach to women even when the world was lagging far behind it. The invincibility of the Muslim personal law that the discourse establishes also creates a hierarchical relationship between the secular law and religious law to which the chapter now turns.

3.2. INVIOABILITY OF THE SACRED LAWS

The modern state also demands that the sacred and the profane be kept apart and religion be subjected to the laws of the state. State is regarded as the sole institution of justice, welfare and development and its laws are not to be contradicted by any authority even if that authority is religion and if contradiction does occur then the latter has to fall in line with the former. In other words, the secular/profane has to prevail over the religious/sacred. The role of the state to regulate religious affairs becomes a necessity in India where practices based on religion that defy the modern notions of 'right' and 'just' have always needed an over-arching authority to either reform them or do away with them. Rajeev Bhargava has pointed out how difficult it is in India to

marginalize religion as just one of the many activities in society and how important it is for the state to take the lead in modernizing religion on the lines of liberty, equality and justice which are the adopted values of the Constitution.³⁵ The state has maintained, to use Bhargava's term, 'principled distance' in choosing to intervene in the Hindu law and reform some of its significant parts on the grounds of justice and keep away from the Muslim law as a mark of its policy of secularism oriented towards the protection of minority rights. As Gurpreet Mahajan pointed out, the state has also been expected to protect the liberty of the religious communities to profess, propagate and practice their religion (though it is a liberty that is formally granted to the individual) and personal law has been informally considered as one of the essential practices of the community.³⁶

The study of the discourse tells us that personal law is also a matter of primacy of the sacred law over the secular or profane strictures and this priority is to remain permanent to the community. Its invariable stand is that the Muslim personal law is based on the divinely revealed scripture of the Quran and any attempt to reform the law shall be an act of offence against the Creator. The discussions on the Shah Bano case in the mid-1980s and the discourse on the recent ruling by the Supreme Court that struck down Triple Talaq and the law enacted by the government to criminalize the practice have presented the law based on the Quran as a moral/legal framework that plausibly competes with the Constitution of the country. They also reflect on the importance that is attached to living the Islamic life in its totality rather than in parts. To quote an article published in the *Siasat Daily* in 1985 regarding the Supreme Court judgement on Shah Bano –

*Islam and Islamic life stand above everything else for which a Muslim should be ready to sacrifice his life as well.*³⁷

To quote another article in the recent year from the *Munsif*, 2016 –

³⁵ Rajeev Bhargava, "Can Secularism be Rehabilitated?" in *Secular States and Religious Diversity*, ed. Bruce J Berman, Rajeev Bhargava and Andre Laliberte (Vancouver: UBC, 2005), 83-85.

³⁶ Gurpreet Mahajan, "Contextualizing Secularism: The Relationship Between State and Religion in India", in *Secularism, Religion and Politics: India and Europe*, ed. Peter Losonczi and Walter Van Herck (Routledge, 2017), Chapter 2, https://www.google.co.in/books/edition/Secularism_Religion_and_Politics/r-bfCgAAQBAJ?hl.

³⁷ The *Siasat*, 1985.

*The advancement of science and information technology has improved the amenities of life. But the human values, rights and obligations that the Quran has laid down wouldn't change.*³⁸

Another thought expressed in the *Munsif* daily is that religion should pervade every walk of a Muslim's life as insisted by the Quran which contains a detailed description of the code of conduct and rules to be followed in every matter including the matters that fall within the purview of personal law indicating that Islam lays down the philosophy as well as science of life -

*Islam tells its followers to be entirely absorbed in its ideals and follow the path laid down by Allah in all their matters.*³⁹

The article from which the above stated text has been quoted also reminds its readers about the invincible attachment of the community with its religion that makes Muslims unwilling to accept any compromises in religious matters. To quote the text further -

*In this degenerated age, wherever in the world Muslims choose to live, they are so attached to their religion that any kind of attack on it is intolerable to them.*⁴⁰

Since the Shah Bano case, the dominant voice in the community has time and again raised itself against the interference (*Mudaakhlat*) of the secular legal institutions like the Supreme Court and high courts in the religious law of the community. The oft-repeated headline in the sampled Urdu newspapers in the years post-1985 was – “*the interference of the Supreme Court (or any other interference) in the Shari'ah shall not be tolerated.*” A reading into the content under these headlines brings out concerns not only about the cultural security of the Muslim minority but also about the inviolability of the ‘sacred’ which needs to be kept out of the control of the secular authorities. The *Rahnuma-e-Deccan* states -

Even the most eminent experts of law cannot interfere into the Shari'ah.....we shall follow the Supreme Court as the apex authority in the matters involving the laws of the state but where God's

³⁸ The Munsif Daily, 2016.

³⁹ Ghulam Nabi Falahi, *Munsif Daily*, December 4, 2016, p. 4.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

*law is involved, there the acquisition of adequate knowledge about it alone is the qualification for interpreting it.*⁴¹

Another article reads,

*As there can be no intervention in the five tenets of Islam, there can also be no intervention of any authority in the Shari'ah that Muslims follow in the matters of Islam.*⁴²

From the contemporary publications, an article in the *Munsif Daily* reads –

*Muslim personal law is a divinely written law which can neither be changed by human beings nor reconsidered by them. Even the prophets sent by God had no right to change the law. The non-Muslim people amend their religion as they like and that is the reason why they cannot understand why amendments to the Islamic religion are not possible.*⁴³

The *Siasat Daily*, commenting on the immutability of the Muslim personal law states the following

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*The personal law that is based on the Quran and the Hadith cannot change and has to remain the same till the Day of Judgment.*⁴⁴

Apart from the sanctity of the Islamic law or the *Shari'ah*, its superiority over the other religious laws also has been emphasized. The article from which the aforementioned statement in *Rahnuma-e-Deccan* has been quoted claims that Islam is a complete religion and the *Shari'ah* a complete law and both without any exception touch upon every aspect of human life and hence trying to reform the law in any manner would be an act of ignorance -

*Islam has been a complete (Mukammal) religion from the day it was born. It covers the totality of human life. To change a complete religion and a complete law like the Islamic law is an idea of ignorance.*⁴⁵

⁴¹ “Supreme Court Ne Shariat Me Mudakhalat Karke Ek Ghalat Misaal Qaayam Ki Hai (The Supreme Court Has Set a Wrong Example by Interfering in the Shariat)”, *Rahnuma-e-Deccan Daily*, November 25, 1985, p. 8.

⁴² “Personal Law Aur Hamaari Zimmedaariyaan (Personal Law and Our Responsibilities)”, *Rahnuma-E-Deccan*, March 24, 1986, p. 6.

⁴³ *Munsif Daily*, June 19, 2016.

⁴⁴ *Siasat Daily, Sunday Edition*, April 16, 2017, p. 5

⁴⁵ “Shariat Me Mudakhalat (Interference in the Shariat)”, p. 8.

A very similar statement is made in the *Munsif* as well –

*Islam is a complete religion and is in accordance with the law of nature. There is absolute transparency in it and every entitlement is well written.*⁴⁶

Much like the Western view, the Islamic view considers being modern as a condition that contrasts with the state of ignorance. However, while in the Western world the dark ages of ignorance came before the advent of science, in the Islamic world ignorance was the age before the coming of Islam, a religion which also carried within itself the scientific element. The age before the Islamic era is referred to as *Jahiliyya*, a word that has a specific significance in the Islamic history. In Arabic, it literally means ignorance and for an Islamic scholar/historian it refers to the age of ignorance before the revelation of the Quran.⁴⁷ In that age, ignorance is said to have existed not in terms of lack of knowledge but in terms of non-realization of the reality of God and his supremacy and disobedience to his law.⁴⁸ It could also be taken as a deviation from God's command and submission to the human authority. Of course, the age of *Jahiliyya* is also remembered for its social conditions that are comparable to any backward society ravaged by superstitions, obscurantism, polytheism and inhuman practices like female infanticide. Islam is said to have set in the age of enlightenment for the next few centuries to come. This historical explanation of the coming of Islam is often invoked to support the argument that Islam is the most advanced religion and therefore its legal injunctions are far superior to those of the other religions and the laws of the state.

In defence of the Muslim personal law, none of the leading Urdu newspapers surveyed has missed this argument invoking the moral, intellectual and rational superiority of Islam. The repeatedly used word, *mudaakhalat*, i.e. interference, in the discussions on the personal law referring to external interference substantiates the point that for the community there can be no compromise on its religious law as it is infallible and far ahead of other religious laws and that the state-made laws also cannot match up to its sanctity and superiority. It also stresses on the need for a different

⁴⁶ Abdu Jabbar, "Muslim Personal Law Me Kisi Bhi Khism Ki Mudaakhalat Naakhaabil Bardaasht (Any Kind of Interference with the Muslim Personal Law is Intolerable)", *Munsif Daily, Nuqoosh*, September 17, 2017, p. 2.

⁴⁷ Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, John Orbet Voll and John L Esposito, *The Contemporary Islamic Revival: A Critical Survey and Bibliography* (Connecticut: Greenwood, 1991), 27, https://www.google.co.in/books/edition/The_Contemporary_Islamic_Revival/9wsH2c7mYm8C?hl.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

kind of expertise for interpreting the Islamic law that can come only from the traditional scholars of Islam or the *Ulema* and not from the non-Muslim amateurs.

The sacred law/profane law dichotomy, subjection of the customary/religious laws to the laws of the state and the exclusive domination of the state over the society are some of the features of the modern Western world that failed to find acceptance in the Muslim mind as suggested by the discourse. Relating the personal law with the sanctity and integrity of the Islamic religion and its inviolability even before the supreme law of the land is a mark of a high level of religiosity that the Muslim community wants to maintain within itself. It certainly implies that modernity is welcome but not at the risk of damage to the religion that is based on a scripture that is considered as a text of enlightenment, civilization and advancement. The discourse also expresses the discomfort of the community about the modern policy of seeking justice in the non-religious or rather secular legal sources and placing the religious values far behind the values derived from human rationality.

In the Muslim view, as reflected in the discourse, the reform of the personal law is an idea encouraged either by the ones promoting the Hindu majoritarian agenda or by those individuals and groups, including some members of the Muslim community, whose way of thinking is shaped by the knowledge imparted by the modern secular educational institutions that insist on setting religion aside while drawing up fair terms and conditions to govern relations in the worldly affairs, believing that human beings can think and define what is right without the support of religion. To put it more simply, the modern knowledge disregards religion if religion is to serve as the basis for a just society. An article in the *Munsif* written in the context of the recent debate on the Muslim personal law and the uniform civil code reads thus –

Those Muslims who have no great knowledge about Islam also are contributing to the propaganda about Islam's discriminatory provisions because in the present era, a very misleading slogan rules – 'rise up from religion and think on humanitarian grounds, this is where the success of humanity lies'. This slogan is catching up the most with the youth and the ones belonging to the contemporary educational institutions. The message that is being promoted through this slogan is that being within the confines of religion, it is not possible to find justice. Hence, for the achievement of justice to humanity on the basis of humanitarian principles, we need to keep

*religion aside. The claims about religion in this message may apply to different religions of the world but not to Islam, a religion that came to humanity with complete knowledge of justice.*⁴⁹

As the above text corroborates, there is no better source of justice than religion for Muslims and human rationality as an independent source of the norms of being ‘right’ is non-existent in their perception. This perception is a direct hint at the infallibility of the religious law and its inviolability at the hands of secular authorities. If the human moral agency cannot be trusted in a particular community to define what is right and just for the society and always needs to submit to the sources of trans-human authority, then the community’s conflict with the ethos of the modern age is not implausible. An unapologetic sense of venerating religion beyond doubt in every human affair runs through the Urdu newspaper discourse on the personal law.

The rigid preference of the Muslim community for the religious law over the secular law in the matters in which religion ruled since the pre-independence era has raised questions about the probability of amendments particularly when they become exigent to the new circumstances of the contemporary times. But the scholars of Islamic studies and the column writers of the Urdu newspapers have been similarly claiming that the Islamic tradition boasts an attribute which can serve as a force to prevent stagnation in the religion and its law. It is termed as ‘*Ijtihad*’ which is also often counted as one of the sources of the Islamic law. *Ijtihad* is a method by which independent reasoning is applied to derive a ruling from the *Shari’ah* with regard to a matter or situation that is not originally covered by the law.⁵⁰ This one attribute has been invoked to prove the point that Islam is not devoid of the tools to legally regulate the contemporary issues and so there is no need for Muslims to look up to the secular authority of the state for reinventing their own law to suit the needs of the changing times. On *Ijtihad*, an article from the *Rahnuma-e-Deccan* reads –

As far as finding legal solutions in the Quran and the Hadith to the issues arising out of the contemporary circumstances is concerned, the task can be carried out in the light of the Islamic rules and principles themselves by the method called Ijtihad, but it is not a domain of any common

⁴⁹ Haq, *Munsif Daily*, September 16, 2016, p. 5.

⁵⁰ Taha Jabir al Alwani, *Ijtihad*, (London: IIT, 1993). 4.

*man. It's a task of interpretation (Tozee) requiring abundant knowledge of the Shari'ah and its sources for which only the Ulema can be trusted.*⁵¹

The contemporary editorials, much like those of 1980s speak for an active role of the Muslim clergy, i.e., the *Ulema* and their exclusive involvement in the decisions regarding any dispute over the Islamic law. The discourse on the Triple Talaq judgement by the Supreme Court expresses regret over the absence of a dynamic and responsible clergy which is cited as the main reason for an externally initiated reform of the law. Stated below are the statements from the Urdu newspapers that express opinion on this matter -

*There is a need for consensus among the Maulvis and Ulema who are the only ones with the potential to interpret the Shari'ah in the right way...Due to lack of consensus among the clergy, the issues pertaining to the personal law of the community keep coming to the courts of secular law which gives communal forces enough chance to meddle with the Islamic law.*⁵²

*Due to the political and ego clashes among the Ulema who are actually supposed to take charge of the matter of Triple Talaq, the issue has become a joke before the people.*⁵³

*The Ulema class in the pre-independence period that was very vocal in defending and guarding the Shari'ah against the laws of the state does not exist anymore today. The Muslim Personal Law Board today has lost all its learned and articulate Islamic intellectuals who could confront the state in favour of the Shari'ah.*⁵⁴

*For the Islamic law on divorce to be established, the responsible members of the leading Muslim organizations should shed their personal differences and hostilities and sit behind closed doors to draft a law that will reflect the spirit of Islam.*⁵⁵

As far as protection of Muslim women's rights is concerned, our Ulema's leadership is there to resolve all the matters in the light of the Quran and Sunnat. If any issues arise, we completely trust

⁵¹ "Shariat Me Mudakhalat", p. 8.

⁵² Syed Faisal Ali, "Ek Naya Tasaadum Hai, Ek Nayi Qayaamat Hai (A New Conflict, A New Apocalypse)", *Roznama Rashtriya Sahara*, September 17, 2017, p. 5.

⁵³ Miraaq Mirza, "Ilma-e-Deen Aur Muslim Samaaji Kaarkanaan Ke Liye Challenge", *Roznama Rashtriya Sahara*, January 14, 2019, p. 7.

⁵⁴ Rashid-ud-Din, "Yaa Rab Dil Muslim Ko Woh Zinda Tamannaa De (O Lord, Give Muslims that Lively Aspiration)", *Siasat Daily, Sunday Edition*, August 27, 2017.

⁵⁵ Samdaani, "Is Zehmat Ko Rehmat", p. 4.

*that the knowledge and wisdom of Ulema will resolve them.... Some women who are questioning and condemning the Islamic law are illiterate about it. They are far from religion and ignorant of the rules of Islam....Because of their ignorance, they are not aware that women's real empowerment is there in adherence to Islam.*⁵⁶

*Whether Triple Talaq is valid or not is a question to be left to the experts of Islamic law who are well-versed with the Quran and Hadith....Shari'ah does not come from the opinions of the Mullahs. It has a direct basis in the Quran and Hadith...Some people with a liberal outlook who have rejected the provision of Triple Talaq on the pretext that it is not sanctioned by the religion are actually ignorant as their knowledge of the Quran is superficial. They have known the Quran only through its translated verses that do not capture the spirit of Islam.*⁵⁷

These textual parts of the discourse are mainly stressing on two points. One is that the clergy will always be the only credible group from the community to take a final call on every disputed provision of the *Shari'ah* and if it is not happening now, it is only because of lack of unity and consensus among the *Ulema* and their political differences. The secular courts of law, Constitutional experts and intellectuals taking interest in religious studies cannot get to the inner meaning of the *Quranic* verses the way the traditional *Ulema* can and hence they can never qualify as reliable interpreters of the Islamic law. The other point that is implied in the texts above is that reform in terms of abolishing practices like Triple *Talaq* which are not originally sanctioned by the religion and have been massively misused is not ruled out any more in the contemporary times. The fact that the pronouncement of Triple *Talaq* in one instance to conclude divorce is banned in many of the countries following the Islamic law is acknowledged in the discourse and the need to adopt the same measure in the direction of justice under the leadership of a responsible clergy also is suggested. The All India Muslim Personal Law Board with its poor leadership and flawed politics is expected to continue to exist and steer the much needed legal reforms for the community as no better representative organization for the Muslims of the country is envisaged.

The disillusionment with the lack of responsibility on the part of the All India Muslim Personal Law Board and the clergy has become even more pronounced in the discourse after the passage of the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, 2019 which declares Triple *Talaq* as

⁵⁶ Nayaab, "Talaq Ordinance Naakhaabil Bardaasht Hai (Talaq Ordinance Intolerable)", p. 4.

⁵⁷ Mirza, "Ilma-e-Deen (Religious Learning)", p. 7.

an offence for which it is punishable with three years of imprisonment. Once again, the lethargy and political differences of the Ulema have come under question and once again the discourse has described the clergy as the only potentially leading class that could have and should have taken the initiative to prohibit the practice of triple talaq. That the Islamic law is not anybody's game to play and needs to be handled only by the men of the community trained in its knowledge is a point reiterated in the discourse. Of course, the responsibility for reform is expected from the community at large too. One of the dominating thoughts coming from the discourse on this latest development in the Muslim personal law is that had the community been serious about fighting its own internal battles, there would not have been externally initiated legislative actions which anytime threaten the autonomy of the community in guarding the sanctity of its religious law, particularly in the current situation of the country which is glaringly imbued by the politics of communal polarization. The statements below, from the newspapers express these concerns but in no way deny the necessity of the law in question –

*No doubt the law has come as an advantage to Muslims who have always been upset about Triple Talaq but due to their own differences, could not do away with the practice.*⁵⁸

*It is an insult to Muslims that their religious law gets reformed by the government but without their advice.... The question that now arises is why should Muslims be upset about the passing of this bill? If this law makes Muslims fall in line with the Quran and Sunnat in the right way, then why should it be taken as their defeat?*⁵⁹

*Millat Islamiya is obliged to present its religion in the right way. Unfortunately, they have presented a very bad image of Islam and spread a lot of misconceptions about the Shariat.*⁶⁰

⁵⁸ "Talaq Salaasa Bill Ki Manzoori: Musalmaan Kya Karein? (Talaq Salasaa Bill's Approval: What do Muslims do?)" *Siasat Daily*, August 4, 2019, p. 5.

⁵⁹ Muhammad Akram Nadvi, "Teen Talaq Ke Bill Ki Manzoori Aur Musalmaan (Triple Talaq Bill's Approval and Muslims)", *Siasat Daily*, August 6, 2019, p. 5.

⁶⁰ Muhammad Naseer-ud-Din, "Talaq Salaasa Bill Ki Manzoori, Naye Challenges Ka Nukhta Aaghaaz (Talaq Salaasa Bill's Approval, Facts about the New Challenges)", *Siasat Daily*, August 11, 2019, p. 7.

*How can the media and courts understand the benefits of Talaq when they have not understood the law, principles and spirit of Islam? And why would the current government understand it if it desires to swallow up the Muslim culture?*⁶¹

*The Muslim Personal Law Board has been very careless in this matter and is equally responsible for the law of Triple Talaq...As far as the practice of Triple Talaq is concerned, the initiative for reform should come from within the community.*⁶²

*Maulvis for a long time have emphasized that Triple Talaq is not a legitimate practice in Islam but nobody listens to them...It is high time that Muslims of India took steps for reforms in their lives in accordance with the Quran.*⁶³

*The All India Muslim Personal Law Board only made promises about fighting this practice and calling for a social boycott of all the men who indulged in it but it actually did nothing effective.... Maulvis and the AIMPLB members need to look back and find out as to how and why the law allowing Triple Talaq came into existence.*⁶⁴

*The All India Muslim Personal Law Board has been inactive all through the conflict over the issue because of which the government took the chance to make a law on a matter which is concerned with the community's internal affairs.*⁶⁵

Though Muslims in India do not have the option of following the Islamic law in the matters other than family and property, the discussions and commentaries in the discourse on what the personal law should mean to the community say a lot about the supremacy that is accorded to religion in every aspect of life and the endeavour of the representatives of the community to guard the 'sacred' matters from the profane influence of the state. They also throw light on the pride of Muslims in the modernity of the 'sacred', as the ruling thought is that the Islamic religion has no roots in the

⁶¹ Iqbal Ahmed Engineer, "Kya Ye Khamoshi Ki Zabaan Khalb Ko Bilaakhir Tashkeer Karlegi?", *Munsif Daily, Nuqoosh*, August 4, 2019, p. 2.

⁶² Muzaffar Hussain Ghazali, "Talaq Salaasa Bill, Personal Law Board Aur (And) Opposition", *Munsif Daily, Nuqoosh*, August 11, 2019, p. 2.

⁶³ Abdul Aziz, "Teen Talaq Ka Kanoon, Ek Lamha Fikriya (Triple Talaq Act, a Moment of Worry)", *Roznama Rashtriya Sahara*, August 1, 2019, p. 5.

⁶⁴ Suhail Anjum, "Talaq Salaasa Kanoon Se Ghabraana Kya? (Why Worry about the Talaq Salaasa Act?)" *Roznama Rashtriya Sahara*, August 3, 2019, p. 5.

⁶⁵ Rahman, "Talaq Salaasa Par Kanoon (Law on Talaq Salaasa)", *Roznama Rashtriya Sahara*, November 29, 2019, p. 5.

dungeons of the dark ages of ignorance and depravity – it rather marked the beginning of the age of humanity as civilized, enlightened and free beings and its law covers every part of human life and experience so much that there is no inadequacy in it for the secular law of the state to meet. Falling in line with the Constitution in the matters of personal law in order to keep up with its modern liberal principles is thus a demand that has always been difficult for Muslims in the country to satisfy because doing that would mean to bend the ‘sacred’ towards the ‘profane’ in a community where the ‘sacred’ is supposed to permeate every sphere of life. It is equally difficult for them to accept the proposed Uniform Civil Code, a liberal option endorsed by all those who see in it a solution to all the injustices inherent in the system of personal laws, because that would mean eroding the rule of religion from the only sphere of law where its commands and principles have enjoyed exclusive domination over the community. So the defence of the Muslim personal law in the discourse is also aimed at underscoring the supremacy of the ‘sacred’, i.e. the religion-based law over the secular law and the need to respect it by leaving it in the hands of those who are religiously trained to understand the law and lead the community in following the Islamic way of life.

3.3. MULTICULTURALISM AND LEGAL PLURALISM

Werner Menski comments that Uniform Civil Code will always be a distant dream and hence the state in India has been able to only achieve its ‘mirror image’ through reforms in different personal laws that will make them consonant with the Constitution.⁶⁶ These reforms and the consequent codifications were strategically planned and implemented with the intent of modernizing the personal laws without bringing them in line with the idea of legal uniformity and thereby preventing the dissolution of the individual identity of these laws. He also cites the minute attempts/changes that made a huge difference to the Muslim personal law. His main point is that the modernist ambition of bringing about legal uniformity in the matters where religion has dominated for a very long time is far from the reality of the system of law in India as the civil matters of marriage, family and inheritance assume a different legal understanding when viewed in the light of the religious scriptures of every prominent community and hence legal pluralism which coincides with religious pluralism in India is a particularity that is rooted in its history and

⁶⁶ Werner Menski, “Recent Debates in the Uniform Civil Code Debates in India”, *German Law Journal* 9, no. 3, (March 2008): 1.

tradition and cannot be overthrown to pave a way for some modern form of uniformity that Uniform Civil Code aims at. This is the same argument that the Urdu discourse has been trying to justify over the last three decades of the personal law versus UCC debate. To all the modernists that stand for legal uniformity under the supremacy of the Constitution, the discourse emphatically claims that the Constitution is very much a framework for sustaining a long-standing tradition of legal pluralism as well.

In fact, if the feminists and the liberal secularists and more recently, the Hindutva ideologues have invoked the Constitution for advocating the principles of gender equality and legal uniformity in their opposition to the system of personal laws, then the Urdu newspaper discourse has invoked the Constitutional principles of religious freedom, multiculturalism and protection of minority rights in its defence of the Muslim personal law. The discourse is selective in publicly endorsing only those Constitutional values that are significant in fostering an environment in which the religious minorities can live their cultural and legal traditions fearlessly. Constitution is the only ground where the discourse tries to find a legitimate voice for its campaign against either a uniform civil code or externally initiated reforms in the personal law of the community. The Constitutional principles of equality, freedom and justice are acknowledged, but at level of community rather than individual. Hence Articles 25, 29 and 30 are quoted as the basic foundations of the Constitution because they ensure the freedom to practise one's religion and promote and sustain the cultural practices of a community. The discourse indicates that the essence of the Constitutional sense of freedom and equality lies in these communitarian provisions where each community is free to practise its religion and traditions and no community will be discriminated against in this respect and personal law is an essential part of a community's religion and tradition.

In 1986 a big legislative step was taken by the Indian Parliament towards the welfare of divorced Muslim women in destitution but it was the last of its kind of measure to codify the Muslim personal law.⁶⁷ Thereafter, the debate on the reform of Muslim personal law had become too entangled in the politics of identity and majority-minority conflict to widen the scope for any kind of positive change. The widely upheld argument in the scholarly literature that the anti-change

⁶⁷ The government of India under the Rajiv Gandhi regime passed the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986. Specifying a divorced Muslim woman's right to maintenance from her former husband, Section 3 (1) (a) states that, "*a reasonable and fair provision and maintenance to be made and paid to her within the Iddah period by her former husband.*"

attitude of the leaders of the community and the *Ulema* in the matters of personal law is entirely a call for the protection of the rights of the Muslim minority against the cultural domination of the Hindu majority stands very well corroborated by several appeals made in the Urdu newspapers for non-interference in the Muslim personal law. Back in 1986 which was a year of political controversy over the Supreme Court judgement in the Shah Bano case and also over the proposal to bring into action the Uniform Civil Code, an article in the editorial column of the *Rehnuma-e-Deccan* alleged that the Shah Bano case was a drama that was deliberately staged to raise the issue of UCC and thereby make all efforts to absorb the Muslim personal law into the Hindu civil code which will subsequently subsume the civil codes of all the minorities.⁶⁸

The studies that tried to understand the intricacies of the matter tell us that personal law is more than a system of rules to be followed by Muslims in the matters of marriage, family and property; for them it is a very prominent symbol of their identity in a country where there are many factors that exert the power of the Hindu majority. While making this point, Granville Austin stated that -

*The discrepancy between the two religions regarding the importance of the personal law to their adherents would be of little matter in public affairs were it not for the desire of some militantly Hindu groups to employ it for political purposes – such as for winning elections and discrediting the Muslim community for not being truly “Indian”, indeed for being a foreign substance within the Hindu body that constitutes the “true” India. Under this stimulus, Muslims’ identification of themselves with Islam and the personal law accompanying it has been greatly intensified.*⁶⁹

The discourse expresses the same concerns about the security of the Muslim identity and minority rights in this debate which were highlighted by the academia as the most pertinent reason for the community to resist change in its personal law and also resist a uniform civil code. On one hand the urge for legal pluralism and the need to respect it as a Constitutional principle resonates with the ideas of multiculturalism. On the other hand, the discourse on this debate also remains

⁶⁸ Rahnuma-E-Deccan. 18 July, 1986, p. 3

⁶⁹ Granville Austin, “Religion, Personal Law and Identity in India” in *Religion and Personal Law in Secular India: A Call to Judgement*, ed. Gerald James Larson. (Indiana University Press, 2001), 15.

embroiled in the struggle to define the distinct identity of Muslim minority whose continuity depends on symbols like personal law.

The Urdu newspapers from 1985-87 and the ones from 2016-19 show little discrepancy in citing an anti-minority agenda in the state's policy to either reform the Muslim personal law or establish a common code for the entire nation. When we look into the discourse of the late 1980s, we find that it targets communal forces prevalent in those times that influenced the state into anti-minority policies like the uniform civil code. And the contemporary discourse takes a direct dig at the government as it is led by a right-wing party known for its propagation of majoritarian Hindutva ideology. As already mentioned, while spotlighting the anti-minority agenda of some political forces in targeting the Muslim personal law, there is also an assertion of a unique identity and difference that the Muslims possess and that needs to be protected. Making the point about the uniqueness of the Muslim identity in India, *Rahnuma-e-Deccan* states that,

*Muslims are the only minority in the country to have kept their personal law distinct from the personal law of the Hindu community which subsumes in its fold other minorities – Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists.*⁷⁰

*Personal law reflects the soul and character of the Islamic community and to interfere in it is to erase out the community.*⁷¹

*Why would various parties have so much sympathy for Muslim women regarding their rights in the personal law when no such sympathy was expressed on so many occasions of atrocities on the community since independence? The intention thus is not to improve the lives of Muslim women and stand for their rights but only to reform the personal law of the community.*⁷²

Muslims might not look up to the Constitution for debating on the individual right because they see the Quran and the *Hadith* as the only reference points for it but the Constitution becomes the best platform to contend for their collective right to religious and cultural freedom. In the context

⁷⁰Syed Moinuddin Qadri, "Yaksaan Civil Code Bill Ki Peshkashi Ka Elaan Aur Muslim Khiyaadat Ki Zimmedariyaan (Presentation of Uniform Civil Code Bill and the Responsibilities of Muslim Leadership)", *Rahnuma-e-Deccan*, August 25, 1986, p. 3.

⁷¹ "Muslim Personal Law Aur Hamaari Zimmedariyaan (Muslim Personal Law and Our Responsibilities)", p. 6. Islamic community in India has been referred to as *Millat Islamiya* which is a term also used to refer to the Islamic community across the world.

⁷² Ibid.

of their liberty to practice their religious law in the face of the cultural domination of the majoritarian forces, they have constantly invoked the Constitutional provisions that are inclined more towards group rights than individual. The *Siasat* remarks -

*To follow and practice personal law is part of every citizen's fundamental right to religion.... The constitution does not demand the enforcement of the uniform civil code on the religious minorities.*⁷³

*Article 29 of the Constitution guarantees the fundamental right to protection of culture to the minorities and everyone knows that religion constitutes the most significant part of culture. Muslims are not only a religious minority but also a cultural minority and marriage, divorce, property and related matters which are all governed by personal laws are also part of the culture of a community. Hence each religious and cultural minority has a Constitutional right to the protection of its customs and conventions with regard to these matters that are covered by its personal law.*⁷⁴

The above stated texts have been quoted from the Urdu newspapers in the years after the Shah Bano case, i.e. 1985, 1986 and 1987. Since those were the years of the Congress rule, the anti-saffron cries in the matter of Muslim personal law with great concerns about the vulnerability of the Muslim minority to the dangers of the Hindutva agenda were not as rampant in the discourse as they are in the contemporary years. The texts quoted below point to the Muslim distrust of the state-directed policy of justice through either the reform of the personal law or the enforcement of the uniform civil code because of the fear of forced assimilation in the saffron culture –

*The current government along with the RSS, through its interference in the Shari'ah wants to create a way for a Hindu Rashtra to build up.*⁷⁵

*Presently, the main target of the saffron forces in their mission to create a Hindu Rashtra is the Muslim community.... Even before independence these forces tried to ruin the Muslim culture.*⁷⁶

⁷³ "Yakhsaan Civil Code Ki Tadvein Aur Dasroori Mukhaf", *Siasat Daily*, January 19, 1987.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Syed Wahajuddin Hashmi, "Kya Zafraani Hukumat Ko Waqi Musalmaano Ke Masaail Se Hamdardi Hai? (Does the Saffron Regime Really Care about the Problems of Muslims?)" *Munsif Daily*, April 15, 2017.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

*The groups holding the saffron ideology should not forget that they are not the only people of this country. Throughout its history, the country has had people of different religions, castes and communities living in it.*⁷⁷

*The central government of the BJP led by Prime Minister Modi is now showing a lot of interest in the rights and welfare of Muslim women only to intervene in the community's personal law and impose a uniform civil code on all the communities...If the BJP really cared so much for the Muslim women and was sincere about justice to them, then what was it doing when the rioters in Gujarat in 2002 widowed and killed so many women?*⁷⁸

*The existing BJP government and various non-governmental organizations are trying to turn Muslim women against the Shari'ah in the name of women's rights....The Hindu leaders should first look into the conditions of their own women instead of caring for the rights of Muslim women....The only way the community can protect its personal law against the attempts towards the uniform civil code is by a collective effort.*⁷⁹

The above texts drawn from the articles from chosen Urdu newspapers published in 1985-86 and 2016-17 show very similar overtones of minority insecurity and opposition to the idea of hegemonic integration of religious/cultural differences into a single fold which would implicitly represent the majoritarian culture that they see underlying the policy of reforming the Muslim personal law and establishing a uniform civil code. They also speak of the need of the Muslim community for the state interference in all matters other than religion and culture. It sees deprivations in the areas of employment & educational opportunities, security, social status and dignity. While for the community, its cultural deprivations have been caused by the lack of adequate social recognition of its religious faith and cultural practices, for the critics of the Islamic law on the other hand, religion and culture of the community are the sources of deprivation of the basic human rights that the modern liberal politics stands for.

The current debate in the Urdu print media is more heavily tilted towards the majority/minority conflict and further imbued with the fears of saffron agenda and its threat to the religious/cultural survival of Muslims. Suggestions from the government to bring up a uniform civil code and

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ "Muslim Khwateen Se Hamdardi", *Siasat Daily*, April 23, 2017, p. 5.

⁷⁹ The *Siasat Daily*, *Sunday Edition*, 16 April 2017, p. 5.

abandon the “unconstitutional provision” of Triple Talaq are snubbed as nothing other than the conspiracy to weaken the community and cover up the acts of crime and violence committed against Muslims in earlier decades which the ruling party and its ideological partners are said to have committed. The women’s rights’ rhetoric is what the discourse believes to be an effective garb in which the BJP and the Sangh parivar most comfortably carry out attacks on the symbols of the religious identity of the Muslim minority.

Quoted below are the relevant texts from the discourse on the Supreme Court judgement on Triple Talaq –

*It is true that in the eyes of law all Indian citizens are the same but every community’s personal law is different and the right to rule a personal law or the court’s right to interfere in a personal law is not valid.*⁸⁰

*Ever since the BJP came to power, it has been trying to bring up a uniform civil code for the whole country but because it realized that this dream is difficult to achieve due to the internal diversity of the majority community itself, it started to resort to reforms like abolition of Triple Talaq as a way of interfering and tampering with the personal law of the Muslim community.*⁸¹

*Talaq-e-Biddat is fundamentally a matter of the Islamic law and of Muslims. Only Muslims have a right to decide or not decide on this matter.... The All India Muslim Personal Law Board itself has opposed the practice of Triple Talaq and has suggested a social boycott of all those men who have resorted to it.*⁸²

*The traditional practice of Triple Talaq among Muslims is a serious issue and there is scope for discussion on it from a legal as well as religious perspective. But there should be no politics on this issue.*⁸³

⁸⁰ Abdul Jabbar, “Muslim Personal Law Me Kisi Bhi Qism Ki Mudaakhalat, Nakhaabil Bardaasht (Any Kind of Interference in Muslim Personal Law is Intolerable)”, *Munsif Daily, Nuqoosh*, September 17, 2017, p. 2.

⁸¹ Rashiduddin, “Ya Rab Dil Muslim Ko Who Zinda Tamanna De (O Lord, Give Muslims that Lively Aspiration)”, *Siasat Daily, Sunday Edition*, August 27, 2017, p. 1

⁸² Masoom Muradabadi, “Talaq Salaasa Par Siyasi Jang Ka Faateh Kaun (Who is the Winner of the Political Battle on Talaq Salaasa?)”, *Etemaad Urdu Daily*, 27 August 2017.

⁸³ Samdani, “Is Zehmat Ko Rehmat”, p. 9.

*If the decision that has come from the Supreme Court on Triple Talaq had been taken within the community, then there would have been no need for the apex court to interfere in the matter....In the light of this decision the communal forces can try to bring up and enforce the uniform civil code....However, the Supreme court has also clarified that there can be no tampering with any community's personal law....This is the significant aspect of our legal system where every community's personal law is guaranteed protection and this is what is the beautiful face of India...The Supreme Court has done what the Ulema could have done. Unfortunately, now the Shari'ah has come under a scanner.....Uniform civil code is not possible because of the massive religious and cultural diversity of India.*⁸⁴

*The Supreme Court's judgement is welcome because apart from banning Triple Talaq it has also ruled that there can be no tampering with any community's personal law as it is part of each community's religious freedom to follow their personal law and bring about any changes in it.*⁸⁵

Quoted below are the texts from Urdu newspaper editorials regarding the Triple Talaq ordinance that was passed in the Lok Sabha in December 2018 –

*The Supreme Court in August 2017 ruled that Triple Talaq was unconstitutional and also suggested some legislative measure to make this judgement impactful. This was then a hint that the intention of the government was not right and that it wanted to deliberately put Muslim men into jail and thereby fulfil its anti-Muslim agenda...In the name of Muslim women's empowerment, the BJP is only trying to provoke them against the Muslim personal law and destroy Muslim households....If the government genuinely wants to empower Muslim women, then why can't it educate them, provide employment opportunities to them and deliver justice to women who lost their loved ones in riots?*⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Syed Faisal Ali, "Mohtaram Nahi Jaage (The Respected Has Not Woken Up)", *Roznama Rashtriya Sahara*, August 27, 2017, p. 5.

⁸⁵ Israr-Ul-Haq Qasim, "Talaq Par Adaalati Faisla Aur BJP Ki Siasat (The Court Verdict on Talaq and the BJP's Politics)", *Roznama Rashtriya Sahara*, August 29, 2017, p. 5.

⁸⁶ Zaheer Ansari, "Talaq Salaasa Bill Muslim Khwateen Se Hamdardi Nahi (Talaq Salaasa Bill is No Sympathy for Muslim Women)", *Munsif Daily, Nuqoosh*, January 6, 2019, p. 7.

*The Triple Talaq bill is an intrusion into the Islamic law which is not acceptable to any Muslim man or woman. Any Muslim who accepts it will no longer remain a Muslim.*⁸⁷

*The BJP very cleverly gave its political colour to this issue by standing along with Muslim women affected by Triple Talaq in their fight for justice. With this action, the BJP stepped into the homes of twenty crore Muslims like an uninvited guest and that's how their personal matter became a national issue with the help of the puppet media.... Islam and the Shari'ah were being made the targets of criticism. All this happened through a planned conspiracy.... Today our identity has become an issue.... Today conditions are such that Muslims have to fight the battle of their identity on their own. Ulema should in unity resist all the conspirative attacks on the Shari'ah and familiarize the community with the current political and social conditions.*⁸⁸

All these texts show mixed responses in the discourse to the judgement of the Supreme Court to declare Triple Talaq unconstitutional. They do acknowledge that Triple Talaq is unfair and to curb this practice is the need of the hour. At the same time, while appreciating the Supreme Court's decision which was long expected to come from the traditional leadership of the community, they also express a deep discomfort about how this ruling could exhort the Hindu nationalist BJP regime to take legislative actions that will jeopardise the existence of the Muslim personal law and consequently the identity of Muslims as well.

As long as the Hindu nationalist forces are involved in the program of unifying all religious communities under a common civil code, Muslims would always want to protect themselves and their personal law against what they perceive as cultural homogenization. This is the idea implied in the contemporary discourse which is undoubtedly entangled in the politics of majority/minority conflict where the struggle is to constantly voice the rights of an endangered minority against the hegemony of communal forces.

Taking the discourse out of the context of the politics of identity, one would find a struggle of another kind – struggle to establish the idea that the life of every community is composed of beliefs, rituals and traditions that carry meanings which are understandable only within the cultural context of the community and not when some abstract principles are invoked to understand them. And

⁸⁷Mufti Muhammad Mustafa Abdul Khadoos Nadvi, "Teen Talaq Bill Ek Challenge Aur Fitna (Triple Talaq, a Challenge and Mischief)", *Munsif Daily, Minarenoor*, January 25, 2019, p. 7.

⁸⁸ Mirza, "Ilmaa-e-Deen (Religious Learning)", p. 7.

thus, this interest in sustaining the personal law is rather ‘communitarian’ than ‘communal’ and it need not always be pitted against the communal majoritarian forces. The communitarian appeals are often addressed to the liberals who advocate rights of the individual against the diktats of the state or the community.

The conflict between rights of the individual and interests of the community is overtly articulated in the *Munsif* while discussing the same debate. In this editorial discussion the fundamental rights, particularly the ones that pertain to the liberties of the individual are directly condemned for being used by the media to endorse the campaign of women’s rights activists and liberals against the unjust provisions of the *Shari’ah*. It clearly explains its stand that fundamental freedoms like freedom of thought and expression, if not restricted, can go to any extent and take a toll on the religious practices of a community. The text that makes this point is quoted below –

They (fundamental rights/Buniyaadi Huqooq)) are very vaguely defined. For instance, freedom of thought could mean freedom to express one’s views. But what are its limits? Without limits, it will turn into freedom to express as one wills.... Today some Muslim women are opposing Talaq Salasa for violating their fundamental rights. Tomorrow someone from the community can go to court and complain that five times prayer adversely affects his business and hence it is a violation of his economic rights. One can dismiss Roza on the grounds that it violates the right to food and health.⁸⁹

This text is a very apt illustration of how a religious community is mocked and disrupted when the abstract liberal ideas of individual rights and freedom are applied to the understanding of its traditions and rituals. The article also says that such a tendency to use fundamental rights to argue against whichever religious commands that do not suit one’s interests would weaken the individual’s conformity and connectivity with his/her religion. The other major point that the article makes is that the rituals and traditions of a community, especially those that are derived from definite religious scriptures are not always compatible with the liberal rights of the individual and where there is a conflict between the two, it would be naive to expect that they can be taken together with justice to both. Religion inherently consists of rules and principles that demand immense restraint on one’s behaviour in every walk of life including private intimate spheres. The

⁸⁹ Rahmani, “Khwaateen Ke Huqooq (Rights of Women)”.

pursuit of any one of them requires that the other be forgone or compromised. However, as the text quoted below also suggests, religion accommodates restricted freedom which will enrich an individual's life but fundamental rights that thrive on the liberal idea of freedom can do no such justice to religion and thus to the individual's life as well -

*If you have chosen religious law and knowledge as the path to live your life, then it is obvious that freedom or fundamental rights have little meaning when faced with religious law and knowledge...In religion there is no unlimited freedom. If you have chosen the path of religion that imposes several rules of behaviour, then you have to let go of freedom that is given by Fundamental Rights because unrestrained freedom and rules can never go together.... Those who want to walk the path of Fundamental Rights should give up on religion...Those who have accepted religion will also accept as much freedom as is permitted to them within the religion.*⁹⁰

Raising questions about the bias and insensitivity of the courts in dealing with the cases of Muslim personal law, the article makes the following statement –

*When the courts ignore the unfair and unjust practices/rituals of other communities that don't even have a religious basis or validity and cite their age-old existence and religious sentiments attached with them as reasons for doing so, then why can't they respect the religious sentiments of the second largest majority of the country attached with their personal law? The courts never say that the Shari'ah is fourteen hundred years old and that they cannot turn a blind eye to this reality. In this regard, they don't even invoke Articles 25 and 26 of the constitution that entitle every citizen to practise and propagate their religion.*⁹¹

It is thus apparent that the discourse perceives personal law as every community's inherited tradition, not different from the other rituals and traditions of the community which the Constitution seeks to protect as an individual's right and a group's right to religion. And the identity of a community constituted by various religious/cultural factors including personal law is considered to be far larger than the identity of the individual. The unfair rituals mentioned in the text are references to the practice of *Jalikattu* which recently fell into a controversy with the animal

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

rights activists in the Supreme Court; and also a practice in the Jain community to fast incessantly for days together. The question raised here is why Muslim personal law cannot be treated on equal terms with these other practices which the state tries to understand and respect as socially and religiously established traditions regardless of their negative implications for the fundamental rights of the individuals and other creatures. This is not just a question of a minority community whose religious/cultural rights are getting neglected. It is also a communitarian question that could be raised by any community when any of its cultural practices is first criticized and later curbed for impeding the exercise of basic individual liberties.

For the ones who see either of the two policies, i.e., Uniform Civil Code and reform of personal laws as a modern-liberal solution to the problem of injustices inherent in the personal laws, the other answer that the discourse offers is that there is no modernity or progress in erasing out the separate identities of the minorities. It warns of the subversion of the Indian secular and democratic state at the hands of communal (*firkha parasth*) forces and reminds the liberals that modernity is also about tolerating differences and welcoming diversity; that without protecting and respecting the identities of the minorities, the country's secular and democratic ideals are far from realization. An article in the *Rahnuma-e-Deccan* declares that an essential characteristic of any democracy is the religious freedom that every religious community is entitled to and another integral feature of a democracy (*jamooriyat*) is the policy of promoting welfare of its religious minorities.

*“Democracy stands on the faith and trust of its religious minorities.”*⁹²

Multiculturalism, cultural pluralism and legal pluralism are oft-repeated theories in the academic discourses on personal law/uniform civil code debate and the same theories have been reverberating in the Urdu newspaper discourse through its persistent demand that personal law of any community be treated as a personal matter of the community where any outside intervention is equal to an impediment to the community's freedom and autonomy. They have also reverberated in the idea that in a religiously and culturally diverse country where differences of beliefs and rituals exist not only between the communities but also within the communities, a uniform civil code as a substitute for multiple customary laws is unviable and to make it happen is to cripple the

⁹² Majeed Bedaar, *Rahnuma-e-Deccan Daily*, October 24, 2016.

Constitutionally established multicultural democracy with the cultural hegemony of the dominant forces.

The discourse of the newspapers in this debate rejects the vision of a society having a uniform legal system that actually contains all the potential to exert the values of the dominant community depicting them as the values of the nation and instead asks for a society where each community can celebrate its culture without any insecurity. Its distrust of the uniform civil code becomes all the more intense in the present political situation as highlighted in the discourse. Considering the ruling BJP as the flag bearer and the face of Hindu nationalism, Muslims, as the discourse suggests, now see any external move to reform their personal law as deliberately orchestrated by the saffron forces who are out to 'Hinduize' the nation. Thus, one of the insights that can be drawn from the discourse is that the communitarian concerns, despite being equally important to all the communities cherishing their distinct culture and desiring to keep it always alive can anytime merge into a conflict of majority and minority interests due to the politically volatile inter-communal relations.

It is also interesting to note that in its minority-centric response to the liberal advocates of legal uniformity, the discourse takes a selective view of the constitutional provisions covering religious and cultural liberties. To justify its demand for the continuity of personal laws it chooses to not only invoke Art. 29 which pertains to cultural rights of distinct groups, but also use Art. 25 which in no way refers to community rights and rather stresses on the individual's right to his/her belief and conscience and practise the same. The Constitution is depicted as the supreme law promising cultural autonomy to communities and protection to minorities. And the liberal demands of the Constitution for the freedom, autonomy and equality of the individual citizens are completely out of the view. In fact, the conditions in which the bill on Triple Talaq was finally passed into an act in 2019 have further marginalized the liberal concerns of liberty and equality of individual citizens and the feminist concerns of gender equality and justice and brought exclusively to the core of the discourse, the identity conflict between Muslim minority and Hindu majority. The second time victory of the Hindu majoritarian party in the 2019 general elections after a good amount of communal campaigning, quick passage of the Triple Talaq bill by the Parliament and scrapping of Article 370 immediately after the Triple Talaq law are some factors that make women's rights perspective and liberal critique almost irrelevant to the current Urdu newspaper discourse on

personal law and Uniform Civil Code, centre-staging the minority rights perspective. Though the discourse on the Triple Talaq law appeals a little to the issues of women's rights, it does not give enormous attention to it as it has given to the issues concerning the survival of Muslim minority in a new India that is found to be rapidly falling into the ideological fold of the BJP regime. Discussions about the Triple Talaq law in the discourse talk about a range of issues that explain the difficulties of being a minority that is the sole target of the hate campaign of the majoritarian forces in state power. The discourse in question that now perceives every step from the government for reform in the community as a political conspiracy against a long-antagonized minority is highlighted below –

*This bill could not have been passed by Modi on his own initiative. It happened at the behest of the RSS....The plan of the RSS is to dissolve their (Muslims) religious identity and prevent them from following Islam by intruding into their Shariat. Their interference in the Shariat will not be confined to Triple Talaq, it will extend to all other provisions one after another till the entire law is absorbed.... This bill is not only unjust to women but is also a conspiracy to ruin Muslim families.*⁹³

*What makes this law difficult for many, particularly Muslims, to accept is the fact that it has come from the BJP...This will no doubt be used for creating further animosity between Hindus and Muslims....It is a known fact that the government is eager to bring in a uniform civil code after which all the different communities will lose their personal laws.*⁹⁴

*The BJP and saffron groups have no sympathy for Muslim women nor do they intend to do justice to them. Their main target is the Islamic faith and law.... They feed on the idea that every person born in India is a Hindu and thus everyone should adopt the Hindu culture and Hindutva. Right since their inception, their only objective has been to somehow gain political power and thereby spread the saffron (Zaafraani) ideas across the country and put an end to the secular character of the Indian Constitution.*⁹⁵

Taking advantage of the majority that they enjoy presently in the parliament; they want to use Talaq Salasa to dissolve Muslim personal law and establish a uniform civil code. They aim to

⁹³ "Musalmaan Kya Karein? (What do Muslims Do?)", p. 5.

⁹⁴ Akram Nadvi, "Teen Talaq Ke Bill Ki Manzoori (Triple Talaq Bill's Approval)", p. 3.

⁹⁵ Naseer-Ud-Din, "Naye Challenges Ka Nukhta Aaghaaz (Facts about New Challenges)", p. 7.

*abrogate Article 370 and in the name of women's freedom and equality, abolish purdah; turn Muslim women against the Shariat by raising the slogans in favour of their free entry into mosques; stop the tradition of Azaan; conquer the historical mosques by giving them different names; curtail the freedom of running religious institutions that the Constitution guarantees; end the Islamic identity by taking away religious freedom; stop the promotion of religion and thus render the coming generation irreligious. In the same way through their new education policy they want the new generation to imbibe saffron ideas. Through mob lynching in the name of Gau-Rakhsa, they want to convey the message to Muslims that if they want to live in India, they have to live as Hindus only...The issue is not about how Muslims can live here; it is about whether they can live here as Muslims or not.*⁹⁶

*To divert attention from other more significant issues, the issue of Triple Talaq is being magnified, using the media in such a way that it is becoming apparent that Triple Talaq is just a way to impose a uniform civil code in the country.*⁹⁷

*The fundamental reason for bringing up the Triple Talaq bill was to intrude into Islam and gain the support of Muslim women in passing the bill so that divorce becomes difficult and women are forced to live at the mercy of their husbands and marriage which is a contract in Islam ceases to remain so. In this way the family life as prescribed by Islam will be drastically affected and Muslim culture will be besieged.*⁹⁸

Ever since the BJP came to power, the minorities have been living in fear....Instead of caring for real issues like unemployment, it has been using the issues of cow protection, Mandir/Masjid and Triple Talaq for dividing Hindus and Muslims and consolidating the Hindu vote....This bill will be disruptive to the Muslim society because the purpose with which it was introduced and passed will not be confined to Triple Talaq but rather in the name of women's rights, control on the birth of children and number of marriages one can have could also be insisted upon....Before this act is misused for political reasons, precautions need to be taken. It is the responsibility of the people

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷“Teen Talaq Toh Bahaana Hai (Triple Talaq is an Excuse)”, *Rahnuma-e-Deccan Daily*, August 7, 2019, p. 3.

⁹⁸ Ahmed, “Kya Ye Khamoshi Ki Zabaan Khalb Ko Bilaakhir Taskheer Karegi”, p. 2.

*running mosques to send out a clear message to the community that pronouncing Talaq thrice in one instance is not allowed in Islam.*⁹⁹

*The intention behind the propaganda of the government and the media against Triple Talaq is not to protect Muslim women's rights but to target Muslims and the Islamic law so that their homes are destroyed and the non-Muslim women who are taking interest in Islam and trying to know it are stopped from doing so.*¹⁰⁰

It is evident from the latest discourse on the law on Triple Talaq as mentioned above that today personal law for a minority community like Muslims is hardly a matter of debating women's rights. It is a matter of guarding a community's religious faith and sacred law but most importantly of desperately ensuring the survival of its identity vis-a-vis the government that represents and promotes a majoritarian vision. The hate campaign of the government against Muslims that the discourse underscores in this particular legislative measure and links with other issues like Article 370, UCC and beef ban has made every question that is often raised with regard to personal law irrelevant except for the fears of the minority about its rights and survival of its identity.

The problem is that in defending and promoting a community's culture, the individual is the victim who is denied the right to choice. Choice is free for the community but hardly available for the individual. Bhikhu Parekh and Gurpreet Mahajan have at large dealt with this problem of tussle between Multiculturalism that stands for cultural diversity and liberalism whose focal point is individual liberty.¹⁰¹ They have pointed out that multiculturalism in India and elsewhere has given public recognition to cultural and religious minorities through special community rights and such a recognition is justified because it protects them against cultural homogenization by the majority and guarantees every individual a rightful access to his/her culture but on the other hand it has also led to the validation of some illiberal practices that impinge hard on the basic liberties of the individual. Gurpreet Mahajan also specifies that special community rights tend to freeze the identities of the individuals and allow the communities to impose every cultural practice on their members. She thus suggests what she calls a 'non-conformist membership' of the communities

⁹⁹ Muhammad Najeeb Qasmi, "Teen Talaq Bill, BJP Ka Siyaasi Hathkanda (Triple Talaq Bill, BJP's Political Trick)", *Munsif Daily, Minarenoor*, August 2, 2019, p. 4.

¹⁰⁰ Ahmed, "Personal Law Board Aur (And) Opposition", *Munsif Daily, Nuqoosh*, August 11, 2019, p. 2.

¹⁰¹ Gurpreet Mahajan, *The Multicultural Path: Issues of Diversity and Discrimination in Democracy* (New Delhi: Sage, 2002).

that gives each individual the option of following their culture in the presence of other cultures and also lets them abstain from some practices without getting ostracized.¹⁰² To quote her –

*All identities are subject to construction and reconfiguration. Effectively this means cultures and communities are, in a manner of speaking, under-determined, for the practices and institutions that constitute them are themselves changing. Consequently, special rights have to be structured in a way that takes cognisance of this under-determined nature of cultures. Instead of conceiving them as measures that enable communities to protect their culture, they must, instead, be designed to give individuals the choice of carrying on with a given way of life, if they so desire. What needs to be promoted and valued through them is, what I have called, a non-conformist membership.*¹⁰³

These options that sustain the individual's freedom of choice are in no way suggested by the discourse analysed in this chapter. The discourse calls upon the Muslims in the country to be united in the struggle against homogenization but at the same time also forbids them from looking any other way than Islam in building their conception of good life. As the question of women's rights has been most prominent in the national debates on the Muslim personal law, the discourse constrains women's freedom of choice to move out of the community for seeking the privileges of the secular law.

3.4. CONCLUSION

To sum up, the chapter discussed the response of the Urdu newspaper discourse to different strands of opposition to the system of personal laws. They include the feminist or women's rights perspective, the majoritarian perspective which aims at national integration through a common civil code and the liberal perspective that argues for legal uniformity. It is clear from the discussion that Muslims of India have been represented as a community inextricably attached to their personal law notwithstanding external criticism and internal acknowledgement of the injustices that some practices like Triple Talaq have been causing to women. The discourse since the Shah Bano case has consistently demonstrated an anti-change attitude which is based on different ideas and arguments.

¹⁰² Ibid, 215.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

One important conclusion of this chapter is that unlike the mainstream discourse where the politics of identity and majority/minority conflict has grabbed the centre of attention to understand why a uniform civil code or the reform of Muslim personal law is a highly contentious issue for the community, the Urdu newspaper discourse offers a lot more alternative insights to understand the same. The chapter has explained that while taking on the feminist opponents of the Muslim personal law, the discourse draws attention to the atrocities that women of the other communities have been subjected to by their rituals and customary practices and tries to argue that no other personal law grants women the kind of comforts and privileges concerned with marriage, divorce and property that the *Sharia'h* does. By alluding to the system of *Purdah*, provision of *Mehr* or dower for women in marriage and right to a share in ancestral property as guarantees of security and freedom, the discourse challenges those fighting for women's rights with the Islamic conception of gender equality and women's freedom where a free world would be a protected world and the world of gender equality would be one where roles are assigned and rights conferred exactly according to the particular nature of the sexes. Regardless of whether or not the discourse conceives any idea of feminism, its depiction of women's rights in *Sharia'h* and arguments about the advanced position of women in Islam demand that a Muslim woman's freedom and equality be understood within the context of Islam only.

Another response as discussed in the chapter was to the liberal critique. Declaring the Muslim personal law based on the *Sharia'h* to be immutable and sacred, it has clearly hinted to the advocates of common secular law that religious law will always be superior to the secular law among Muslims and due to the divine rationality that underlies it, it is incomprehensible to those who have mastered only the secular law and are not trained in the sacred knowledge of the religious law. With this argument the discourse has been holding the *Ulema* in the highest regard in matters of personal law despite admitting major loopholes in the ways they enforce the law. Along with this argument, also comes the communitarian critique of uniform civil code that conceptualizes freedom as a community's undeterred practice of its religion and culture and equality as absence of discrimination against any community in granting religious and cultural freedom.

Rights of women and gender justice in Islam, sanctity and superiority of the Islamic law, multiculturalism, cultural and legal pluralism sanctioned by the Indian Constitution are the recurring narratives in the discourse to defend the Muslim personal law against any external

interference for reform and any idea of a uniform civil code. But because of the robust ideology that Hindu nationalism has turned out to be at the hands of the BJP and Sangh Parivar, all these narratives currently lie hazy in the background with the 'besieged Muslim minority' at the forefront of the discourse whose main battle at the moment is to save its religion and culture from dying.

As a result, the communitarian angle, emphasizing the significance of legal pluralism based on actual practices is not probed further for its potential in inducing reform from within. If women do become breadwinners, as exhorted by their appeals to embrace scientific knowledge and higher education, would they not also want to be more assertive in the domestic sphere? It is not inconceivable to expect practical wisdom in pushing forth from the elevated status of women in Islam to sifting through essential and inessential customary practices so as to make room for greater freedom in the present. Very few articles by women have been found in the Urdu newspapers that endorse the personal law as it is and there hardly is any inclusion of those voices that urge for reform. The resultant picture of the discourse is that of a perception in which community rights stand above the individual rights and gender justice and women's freedom in the domestic sphere are matters to be viewed in the light of the sacred law of the community rather than the secular law of the state. The minoritarian fears about cultural homogenization of the community under a uniform civil code have undermined the significance of the existing, though hazy, qualms about the lack of interpretive flexibility regarding the sacred canons and the need to bolster robust dialogues within the community on some controversial practices.

CHAPTER 3

SECULARISM: STRATEGIC VERSUS NORMATIVE COMMITMENT

It may be plausibly argued that secularism is such an exhaustively debated concept in the country that any further academic discussion can be almost trivial. But an in-depth inquiry into the nuanced narratives of the politics of majority and minority identities raises some questions about secularism in India that not only deserve academic attention but also require some serious deliberations about how to deal with the challenges that decades of politics of religious identity have thrown up. Another reason why the need for a debate on secularism can never die down is the complex interplay of religion and politics which has constantly produced a clash of interests between the majority and minority communities in which the slogan of secularism was time and again used by the belligerents in their own way to favourably settle their disputes. Moreover, the contestation over what it means to be secular continues even today as the majority/minority conflict has been a perennial scenario in the country and the overbearing influence of this conflict on the conceptualization of secularism is precisely what this chapter problematizes.

The architects of the Indian Constitution, while conceptualizing secularism in accordance with the Indian social setting, certainly thought in terms of creating a space for the religious minorities where they can live by their religion without any fear and are not denied equal citizenship rights. But alongside the Constitutional provision, there has also been the ideological manoeuvring of secularism in the realm of majority/minority politics of identity. The Urdu public sphere has conceptualized this notion often within the context of struggle against the assimilative politics of Hindu majoritarianism. Claiming that Muslims of India are a special minority, the participants in the Urdu public discourse have made their niche in such a way as to pioneer the task of constructing an ideology and policy of secularism which is meant to promote the interests of not only the Muslim minority but other religious minorities as well.

The chapter discusses the Urdu newspaper discourse on the concept of secularism drawing massively on the election discourse that covers the general Lok Sabha elections from 1989 to 2019. It first discusses the election discourse which is imbued with narratives specifically asserting the

importance of commitment to secularism as a factor to be considered by the minorities while expressing their will through their votes. The discourse reflects on the ideological and instrumentalist approach to secularism that Muslims in the country are expected to adopt. There is no denying the fact that this approach is the outcome of the long-standing Hindu/Muslim conflict. Some valid questions to raise here are – does being secular to the Indian Muslim, as suggested in the Urdu discourse, only mean to align with the non-communal forces to battle with majoritarian communalism through strategic voting? Does it only mean to keep a constant vigil on the *Hindutva* agenda of the BJP? Does the Urdu public sphere see only a minority agenda in the Constitution's program of secularism? Is secularism only a political and ideological weapon and a Constitutional safeguard to the minorities in the Indian Muslim public imagination with no positive buildup of the concept which extends beyond the purpose of self-protection? Are these ambiguities and criticisms regarding the nature and practice of secularism given its political salience, similar to the English discourse on 'pseudo secularism'? Are there attempts to push beyond the ideological use of secularism and draw out its normative potential? By ideological use, I mean the deployment of secularism as a rhetorical tool, as a partisan strategy, as a means to oppose majority communalism. By normative use, I mean commitment to secularism as a principle that is ethical, conducive to the greater good of inter-religious harmony.

Rajeev Bhargava aptly elucidated the normative commitment in the policy of secularism that the Indian state as well as society is expected to live up to – to enable various religious communities to “live together well”.¹ Bhargava suggests that in a society where there is diversity as well as conflict, the most ideal form of secularism would be one which would lay down the path of dialogue between the divergent communities. So, religion will not be excluded from the public sphere and will instead be made part of a discursive culture within it. And dialogue will occur in an environment of “minimally overlapping good”, a kind of common good which shall be born out of those values of different communities which will not be incommensurable and incompatible.² This model of secularism does reflect a specific normative commitment to promote a culture of religious tolerance and create a shared space of common good to which all the religious

¹ Rajeev Bhargava, “What is Secularism For?”, in *Secularism and its Critics*, ed. Rajeev Bhargava (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 508-9.

² Ibid, 537-40.

communities would refer through deliberations based on equal participation. This wouldn't be possible, as Bhargava warns, when issues on which the religious communities are deeply divided are allowed into the public sphere. The normative commitment of the model of secularism that Bhargava advocated is closely linked with the principle of mutual respect between the religious communities and mutual acceptance of each other's distinct faith. Tolerance cannot be taken as involuntary approval of the other's faith and beliefs. It has to entail the understanding that the other's faith is as valuable as one's own and commonalities can be derived from all the communities engaged in dialogue. The principle of value-pluralism is therefore implicit in this model. It shall not be a mere strategy to bring the communities in line with law and order. It shall rather be a doctrine aimed at building inter-faith solidarity and cherished by every community. Bhargava in a way tries to find a solution to the challenges that the doctrine of secularism faces in India. Of course, it is based on the hope that the incommensurable communities, particularly the Hindu majority and the Muslim minority will find a common ground. A common ground is essential for solidarity and solidarity is a much needed factor when religious diversity is conflict-ridden. In the absence of appeals to inter-communal solidarity and cooperative spirit, secularism becomes only a pacifying instrument between extremely inward-looking isolated communities. As Bhargava and other scholars have suggested, since religion is deeply ingrained in the Indian social life, the adoption of the Western idea of secularism that excludes religion from public affairs isn't advisable at all and since there is religious diversity in the country, the doctrine of secularism cannot be indifferent to the question of how to hold the religiously divergent communities together in the spirit of tolerance, mutual respect, cooperation and unity. The discussion of these two strands of discourse will also try to explain why the normative dimension of secularism is overshadowed by the ideological dimension.

4.1. 'SECULARISM' IN THE URDU VERNACULAR AND CONSTITUTIONAL CONNOTATIONS

Being one of the comparatively modern languages of India, Urdu consists of a vast vocabulary including words that refer to the developments of the modern times most of which are attributed to Western science, philosophy and society and introduced in India under the colonial rule. For instance, nationalism and communalism are two parallel forces that evolved and grew up in colonial India and finally played a big role in shaping its destiny at the threshold of Independence.

Urdu easily imbibed these two ideas with words like *Quamiyat* which refers to nationality or nationalism and *Firkha Parasthi* or *firkha vaaranaa* which denotes communalism and thus they appear in the newspaper articles as and when needed with no English versions, indicating the common readers' knowledge about their meaning. But ideas like socialism and secularism couldn't sink into the colloquial Urdu language which is why they are used in Urdu newspapers exactly the way they are referred to in the English language.

Though secularism was a significant principle under consideration while building up the Indian Constitution, Urdu journalistic discourse has not made any great attempt to communicate it to its target readers in the vernacular words. There are other words in Urdu like *Firkha humaahangi* used in the newspapers which mean agreement or consensus between the communities but they don't seem in any way to be a replacement for the term secularism. The term *Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb* is a frequently used expression signifying the shared culture of Hindus and Muslims of India. And yet the English term, secularism is used alongside these vernacular expressions with a level of political seriousness that the latter are not awarded with.

In the Urdu public sphere secularism is a term carrying the expectations and aspirations of the minorities of India and the fears that grip their marginalized existence caused by the preponderance of majoritarian communal forces. Over the decades since the rise of the Hindu right-wing forces in the 1980s, secularism in the Indian Muslim public mind has meant the sole ideological force to prevent the intimidating spread of majoritarian communalism. The discussion in the following pages will explain how the Indian Muslim conception of secularism as articulated in the Urdu newspaper discourse is a political exigency for not only the Muslim minority but perhaps even for the other minorities when they have assimilative right-wing politics jeopardizing their religious/cultural identities.

Scholars who have exhaustively debated the subject of secularism have established the indisputable proposition that the Indian sense of secularism is distinct from the Western sense; while the latter emerged as a result of the historical moment of separation of the church and the state, the former emerged as an ideal way of dealing with the country's enormous religious diversity. As Gurpreet Mahajan observes, secularism in the West demanded that religion be kept apart from the public affairs of the state whereas in India it implied that the state must give equal recognition and respect to all the religions and without discrimination facilitate the preservation of

every culture and religious freedom of every individual.³ From the viewpoint of the Indian Constitution, secularism means to provide adequate protection to the religious minorities and there have been several scholarly responses to the Constitutional provisions that were framed in the light of what secularism meant to the members of the Constituent assembly of India. There has been a tendency among many scholars to appraise the secular credentials of the Indian state with the Western principle as the yardstick and then eventually recognize the idiosyncrasies of secularism in the Indian situation.

For instance, Donald E. Smith, being one of the scholars who have given a critical insight about the idea of secularism as derived from the Indian Constitution, chose to give a very mixed view of Indian secularism where on one hand the constitution is lauded for its secular fabric and on the other hand some stark anomalies in it are firmly noted and criticized. In his understanding, there are three sets of relationships that characterize a secular state.⁴ One is the relationship between individual and religion from which state is excluded and which is based on the principle of liberty. The second is the relationship between the individual and the state from which religion is excluded. Right to equality that is enshrined in Art.14-18 of the constitution undoubtedly defines this relationship where every citizen, regardless of his religion and other particular identities, is to be treated as equal to other citizens and have an equal access to the resources and institutions of the state meant for use by all. The third is the relationship between state and religion which is supposed to be characterized by neutrality, i.e. separation of politics and religion, a principle that the Constitution maintains by forbidding the state from promoting any religion.

Smith comments on how these three tenets are compromised by the limitations inherent in the Constitution itself. The religious freedom, particularly of communities, is circumscribed when the state is authorized to step into the religious domain and dictate reforms in the direction of social justice and modernization of the society. For example, the state intervention in the Hindu religious practices like that of denying the Dalits access to temples is on one hand justified on the grounds of justice and equality but on the other hand becomes a curb on the liberty of the Hindu community

³ Gurpreet Mahajan, "Contextualizing Secularism: The Relationship Between State and Religion in India", in *Secularism, Religion and Politics: India and Europe*, ed. Peter Losonczi and Walter Van Herck (Routledge, 2017), chap 2, https://www.google.co.in/books/edition/Secularism_Religion_and_Politics/r-bfCgAAQBAJ?hl.

⁴ D.E. Smith, "India as a Secular State", in *Secularism and its Critics*, ed. Rajeev Bhargava (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 178.

to hold on to its religious customs and traditions. The principle of equality before law and non-discrimination quite apparently gets contravened by the special provisions like reservation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes made in the Constitution. As far as the principle of separation of politics and religion is concerned, Smith points out that there are two aspects to it – non-interference of state and religious organizations in each other's matters and absence of a legal connection between the state and a particular religion. The Indian state upholds the second aspect but could hardly keep up with the first one. Despite remarking on the anomalies in the secular fabric of the Indian Constitution, Smith admits the hope that the anomalies would disappear with the passing of time. One of them that he views optimistically is the state intervention in the Hindu religious practices. His view is that since the state has already adequately tackled the unjust aspects of the Hindu religion, there would be little need for it in future to interfere in the religious matters of the Hindu community; and then the way would also be clear for the adoption of a Uniform Civil Code which will automatically drive out the separate personal religious laws. Judging the “secularness” of the Indian Constitution by the yardstick of the principle of “wall of separation” and taking an account of problems like communalism between Hindus and Muslims, persistence of religious personal laws, selective and excessive intervention of the state in the Hindu religious institutions, Smith declared that despite these problems, India will remain a secular state.

However, a more outright criticism has come from other scholars. For instance, T. N. Madan and Ashis Nandy have declared that the doctrine cannot fit in the Indian social system where religion inherently permeates public and private life.⁵ They have conceived the root cause of the problems of secularism not in any original traditions and belief systems of India but in the very essentiality of the Western doctrine and its application to the Indian ethos. Both of them have criticized secularism as a Western import whose hierarchical categorization of the ‘religious’ and the ‘secular’ has been harsh on Indian lives. Such a categorization, as they claim, not only demands that religion be kept out of public life, but also undervalues religion as a primordial factor which contradicts modernity and development and it's the adoption of this typically Western idea that has made Indian secularism repressive to the society. In their contention, imposition of a negative attitude to religion that does not conform to the cultural environment of India could do little to drive religion out of politics and instead has aggravated the politics of religion and religious

⁵T.N. Madan, “Secularism in its Place,” in *Secularism and its Critics*, ed. Rajeev Bhargava (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 298.

conflict between various communities. In other words, both of them suggested that secularism in any form has worked on Western lines and when imbibed by the Indian Constitution and practised as a policy by the Indian state, it has not only failed to resolve formidable inter-religious conflicts but has also taken them to increased levels of intensity and complexity. Moreover, it has not allowed any room for the representation of non-believers as secularism is most of the time invoked as a strategy to bring about compromise and harmony between members of the clashing faiths. A critique like this says a lot about secularism in India being more of a matter of managing religious conflicts in a diversity of faiths than maintaining a separation between religion and politics. Nevertheless, there's a lot more between these two strands that the Indian secularism has to offer.

Insofar as secularism in India implies equal respect for all religions and equal treatment of all religious communities, it emanates from the religious diversity of the country and the need to keep the religious communities in harmony. This conception also includes the principle of tolerance and is not of modern origin. From Rajeev Bhargava's conception of secularism's normative commitment in India, i.e., to enable various religious communities to "live together well", this chapter draws its main premise that secularism as a mere strategy to keep religious differences between communities in control assumes a very instrumentalist meaning which narrows its scope and goals. Its essential principle goes way beyond the instrumentalist view – tolerance, inter-communal harmony and unity and mutual respect between communities for each other's religion. So instead of building a cooperative spirit among the religious communities along with the ability to accept the worthiness of each other's faith, if secularism becomes a force to merely keep communal differences and animosity in check for law and order to prevail most of the time, then it has failed to serve its real purpose.

The public sphere of the Urdu print media recognizes it as the civic responsibility of the communities to subdue their differences and create a common ground for their cordial bonding and interaction but it also finds the efforts in this direction largely hampered by its own fears and anxieties about the overwhelming prevalence of the majoritarian communal forces. The chapter focuses on the enormity of the ideologically driven and 'minority centric' conception of secularism in the election discourse of the Urdu newspapers and a relatively limited discourse on the normative dimension of Indian secularism that lays stress on tolerance and inter-communal harmony based on composite culture.

4.2. A NON-PARTISAN IDEOLOGY OF THE MINORITIES

On the surface, it may seem that the Muslim minority has for long believed the Indian National Congress to be the only reliable flag bearer of secular politics at the national level and in the states barring the ones where the regional parties held sway. But all one needs is to just dig a little beneath to know that the desolation of Muslims with the Congress party which is glaring in the current scenario is not a new development. Much as the Congress party would like to project itself as the national face of secularism, it has received an image of itself that largely negates its belief. The Urdu newspaper discourse provides proof that the party has always been surrounded by the suspicions of minorities about its sincerity to protect their rights and thereby uphold secularism. In fact, the desolation with the Congress comes from its secular image that has failed to assure the minorities of better conditions of life and a secure future. The discourse has been making this point time and again.

In the late 1970s when the Congress hegemony over the country was for the first time crushed by a new party - the Janata Party, it was openly declared in the articles that this party was the new choice of the Indian Muslims who found the Congress to be hopeless in fulfilling the needs and aspirations of the community and hoped that by giving a new party a chance, they would stand to gain something substantial unlike the age-old party that gave them only empty promises and used them as an electorally profitable population. It indicated that the Indian Muslims were far from rigid in supporting any party that displayed its seriousness in giving real benefits to the minorities. In fact, whenever references were made to the word secularism then, they were made to convey that whichever party is in power is obliged to give the minorities a fair access to the resources and opportunities that the country has to offer. A 1977 edition of the *Rahnuma-e-Deccan* states that –

*Secularism demands that there shall be no discrimination on the basis of caste, race and religion and all citizens will have equal rights.*⁶

It further says –

Minorities and backward classes trusted the promises made by the Congress about redressing all the injustices done to them and hence they have been constantly voting only the Congress to power.

⁶“Yeh Kaisi Andher Hai? (What Darkness Is This?)” *Rahnuma-e-Deccan*, June 25, 1977.

*But the Congress has still not done enough to resolve the issues of the minorities and backward classes.*⁷

Specifying the condition of the Muslim minority, it says –

*All the injustices done to the largest minority of the country have not been compensated. In this secular and democratic country, since the time of independence, nothing has been done to compensate injustices done to Muslims in the educational and financial spheres.*⁸

The article admits that Muslims and the backward classes have turned away from the Congress and entrusted the responsibility for the amelioration of their conditions to a new party, hoping that it would fill in the loopholes in the policies of the Congress. It concludes that the prosperity of minorities is the key to the success of secularism, democracy and socialism - the three Constitutional ideals – and if the Congress or other progressive parties give them adequate representation, then a new hope will be born in them.⁹

The anti-Congress stand remains constant in the election discourse of the Urdu newspapers from the late 1980s to 2019. An article in a 1989 edition of the *Rahnuma-e-Deccan* which is titled as ‘Secularism and the Congress’ responds to the statements made by two Congress leaders regarding the defeat of the Congress in the 1989 general elections. One of the two leaders claimed that voting was done communally and thus Hindus voted for the BJP and Muslims voted for the Janata Dal, whereas a small secular vote went to the Congress.¹⁰ In response to this observation, the author of the article writes that there had been no drop in the secular vote; on the contrary the Congress committed a murder of secularism by giving permission for laying the foundation stone of Ram Mandir in the Babri Masjid against the court ruling. The author also states that the secular voters did not fall into the traps of the communal politics (*Firkha Parasthi*) of the Congress and instead voted in favour of the Janata Dal. The word ‘secular’ in this article is used to describe all those voters who use their vote in elections to turn down parties that have played the religious card for making political gains and suggests that whichever party is able to serve as a promising alternative

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ “Secularism Aur (And) Congress”, *Rahnuma-e-Deccan*, December 1, 1989, p. 2.

to the Congress and the BJP, which have failed to keep up their commitment to secularism, is desirable for change and those who voted with this desire were truly secular. Making similar observations, another article from the same newspaper states that minorities, particularly Muslims, in order to protect secularism and democracy in the country, should vote against the Congress because it played the Hindu card in the Babri Masjid issue and insensitively ignored the sentiments of Muslims.¹¹

A 1991 edition's article states –

*Until when will the minorities be ignored by the Congress in the garb of secularism and until when will Muslims be the target of this fraud (fielding of only a handful of the Muslim candidates in the elections)? In this secular and parliamentary democracy, Muslims face some serious problems which the Congress-led government during its rule all these years has not been able to resolve. What can be achieved from a secularism where no political party is able to do any justice to Muslims?*¹²

Another 1991 edition's article states that the Congress and Janata Dal were different from the other parties as they were able to garner maximum Muslim vote in the general elections; but it also emphasizes that –

*In the garb of secularism, the Congress party has caused immense damage to the Muslim minority.*¹³

Pointing out the destructive role of the “communal forces”, it says that –

*The communal forces that are out to tarnish the secular character of the country should be defeated. This election is a big challenge for the country and especially for the linguistic and religious minorities whose identity is under the threat of being ruined by some fundamentalists (Buniyaad Parast).*¹⁴

¹¹ “Faisla Aapke Haath Me (The Decision is in Your Hands)”, *Rahnuma-e-Deccan*, November, 22, 1989, p. 2.

¹² “Muslim Numaaindagi Me Congress Ki Kotaahi (Reduction of Muslim Representation in the Congress)”, *Rahnuma-e-Deccan*, April 23, 1991, p. 2.

¹³ *Rahnuma-e-Deccan*, April 24, 1991.

¹⁴ Ibid.

The articles mentioned above express the opinion about the Congress that seems contextual to the Babri Masjid issue, but the lack of faith in the party's secular values is not specific to any particular period of crisis and controversy like the post-Shah Bano period; this opinion is rather reflected in the discourse of the decades from before the rise of the BJP and its Hindu nationalism and the controversial episode of the Shah Bano judgement to the 2000s that witnessed the Godhra carnage and the Gujarat riots and later, the rise of Modi as a national leader. A 2004 article from the *Rahnuma-e-Deccan* states that –

*Muslims never attached themselves to the Congress or other secular parties so strongly as to not be able to think of supporting parties like the BJP. But unfortunately, the BJP did nothing concrete for Muslims to win over them.*¹⁵

*Let alone having any value for Muslims, the Congress that was once the upholder of secularism is now doing nothing to protect it.*¹⁶

Coming to 2009, the discourse shows no restraint in denouncing the Congress party's second consecutive government formed in that decade. The *Etemaad Urdu* daily picks on all the countries that adopted a policy of cooperation and cordiality with Israel and condemns the Congress-led UPA government for the same, questioning its credentials about being secular on the pretext that such a policy is a hard hit on the sentiments of the Muslims of the country. It reads –

*The present Indian government claims that it is secular. But its inclination towards Israel proves that it is not and that it is against real secularism....24%-25% of the citizens in India are Muslims. They make every necessary effort in building the nation. The members of the Indian government are familiar with the fact that Indian Muslims consider the government of Israel as ruthless. In such a situation it would be offensive to a large section of the population to regard Israel as a legitimate state.... If the Indian government was secular, then it would have been sensitive to Muslims in its internal as well as external affairs.... We have put up with secularism in this country. It is a pleasant mask to cover the new realities of the country. It is fraud, an empty slogan.*¹⁷

¹⁵“Kya BJP Ko Muslim Voton Ki Tavakko Hai? (Does the BJP Hope for Muslim Votes)” *Rahnuma-e-Deccan*, March 22, 2004.

¹⁶ *Rahnuma-e-Deccan Daily*, March 7, 2004.

¹⁷ Syed Bashaarat, “Secularism Mehaz Ek Fareb (Secularism is a Mere Deceit)”, *Etemaad Urdu Daily*, August 3, 2009, p. 4.

One could expect the 2014 election discourse to be softer in its rhetoric about the Congress in the face of a far more robust BJP with the controversial figure of Narendra Modi as its prime ministerial candidate but notwithstanding a subtle support to the Congress, the attitude of non-acceptance of the party as a genuine secular party stands unshaken. Keeping this perennial rhetoric intact, the *Rahnuma-e-Deccan* while generally condemning political leaders for pretending to be secular and actually promoting the ‘saffron agenda’, targets the Congress and Rahul Gandhi stating that the Congress has been no exception in this matter despite always claiming to be the champion of secularism and democracy and that the party is proud of Rahul Gandhi but he has said things that will promote the saffron agenda – like comparing Modi to Aurangzeb and linking the Muslim youth held in the Muzaffarnagar riot case to ISIS.¹⁸ It also states that after Narasimha Rao, Rahul Gandhi is further exposing the party’s fake policy of secularism. Another editorial article states that the Congress since independence has done nothing for the minorities, particularly Muslims. Listing various issues of specific importance to Muslims like reservation which was never made for the community, communal violence bill which could never be passed to check violence against minorities and arbitrary arrests of Muslim youths on false charges and their prolonged detention in jail without trial, the article criticizes that the Congress and all other so-called secular parties have betrayed Muslims as well as every ‘common man’.¹⁹ Two more statements from two different editorial articles of the same daily that cite the Congress’ fake secularism are paraphrased below. They describe how Muslims often get deceived and disempowered during elections by ‘secular politics’ –

*Muslims never understood the value of their vote and the Congress and other secular parties have played a big role in distorting their understanding of their own political significance. All these decades they have been made to think, first by the Congress and then the other secular parties, that the BJP and other communal parties are out to besiege them and hence they should entrust the secular parties with the responsibility of protecting them against the hostile intentions of the communal parties.*²⁰

¹⁸ “Aurangzeb Ka Modi Se, Phir Tipu Sultan Ka Kis Se Taqaabul? (If Modi is Compared with Aurangzeb then Who Will Compete with Tipu Sultan?)” *Rahnuma-e-Deccan Daily*, March 5, 2014, p. 3.

¹⁹ Sami Ahmed Qureshi, “Tamaam Partiyaan Bashumul Congress Ne Musalmaano Ko Sirf Zakhm Diye (All Parties Including Congress Have Only Caused Injury to Muslims)”, *Rahnuma-e-Deccan Daily*, March 17, 2014.

²⁰ Jalaluddin Aslam, “Musalmaano Ke Liye Apne Vote Ki Ahmiyat Samajnaa Zaroori (It is Imperative for Muslims to Understand the Value of their Vote)”, *Rahnuma-e-Deccan Daily*, March 24, 2014, p. 10.

Commenting on the plight of Muslims in the 2014 elections with no hopes from the Congress, the other article states that –

*At the moment, there are two big electoral rivals before Muslims. One has been using secularism since Independence only to betray them and do nothing more than make them a vote bank – the Indian National Congress. The other is always in an endeavour to wipe out Muslims from the country. Hence the Congress is no longer reliable, nor can any other party calling itself secular, be trusted.*²¹

The *Etemaad* makes the following observation on the Muslim electorate's stand on the Congress-
*There was a time when Muslims voted in large numbers for the Congress but now they have lost faith in it as the party has failed to live up to its promises made to them – Muslims haven't yet got reservations and Muslim youth continue to be arrested on false charges.*²²

From the 2019 electoral discourse of the Urdu newspapers which was desperately in search of a strong alternative capable of striking down a gigantic BJP, the *Siasat* is found to be making the following statement about the Congress –

*From the opposition, the Congress is the only party that can challenge the BJP and its Hindutva ideology. But it has not done enough to impress upon Muslims and draw up an electoral strategy that will benefit Muslims because like others, the Congress also is afraid of the Hindutva forces. It is also scared of acquiring the label of Muslim-inclined or pro-Muslim party. Hence it is neither able to gain the support of the majority nor get close to the minorities.*²³

The late 1970s discourse, as already discussed earlier in the chapter, clearly shows the disappointment of Muslims with the Congress which was due to its failure to redress the injustices done to them and give them a fair representation in various institutions of authority and development. It can thus plausibly be said that in the Urdu public sphere, secularism is demanded

²¹ Muhammad Abdul Rashid Junaid, "Hindustan Me Intakhaabaat Secularism Aur Firkha Parasti Ke Darmiyaan (Electoral Battle in India Between Secularism and Communalism)", *Rahnuma-e-Deccan Daily, Sunday Edition*, March 30, 2014, p. 1.

²² Masoom Muradabadi, "Musalmaan Congress Se Barham Kyun? (Why Are Muslims Angry with the Congress?)" *Etemaad Urdu Daily*, March 16, 2014.

²³ "Muslim Nawaaz Secular Party Ka Maslah (Problem of a Muslim Friendly Party)", *Siasat Daily*, March 26, 2019, p. 3.

as a Constitutional responsibility of the state rather than of a particular political party and considering the election discourse, the Congress is no flag bearer of secularism for Muslims; in fact any other party that does not carry the baggage of atrocities against Muslims is welcome to carry on the program of a democratic and secular India as suggested in the *Siasat* daily –

*Muslims cannot trust the BJP and the Congress for their well-being. The only feasible option left for them is to vote in every state for those regional parties that hold a friendly attitude towards them.*²⁴

The discourse thus suggests that the expectations of Muslims for a secular state have not always been partisan and certainly not Congress-driven. And it says about a lot more than the community's persistent distrust of a particular party's policy of secularism. The above statements also reflect on the inevitable connection of secularism with minority rights and social justice in India. In fact, there are many expressions in the discourse that reduce minorities to Muslims who are unhesitatingly described as the largest minority and yet the most backward community in the country. They underscore the importance of justice to minorities, particularly Muslims, in maintaining the credibility of a secular nation. If making special provisions like Reservation for minorities is the main test of secularism, then, as the discourse suggests, any party that lives up to these expectations is definitely a secular party and all the parties that are failing to do so are just pretending to be secular.

4.3. SOCIAL JUSTICE, MINORITIES AND MUSLIMS

The way the Indian Muslims relate the concept of secularism to the state's responsibility to protect the rights of minorities, as projected in the discourse, has a lot to do with the way the Constituent Assembly debate on how minorities were to be treated was set and the consequent provisions of the Indian Constitution that emerged out of it. Separate electorates and reservations for minorities were totally ruled out in order to prevent the tendencies of communalism and further disintegration of the country. It was thus decided to guarantee them those safeguards that will allow them adequate freedom to practise their religion and preserve their culture.

²⁴ Ehteshaam Qureshi, "Kya BJP Ka Agenda Waaqih Badal Gayaa? (Has BJP's Agenda Really Changed?)" *Siasat Daily*, August 29, 1999.

The Constituent Assembly debates on minority rights were mainly focused on what a secular state ought to be doing for its minorities and backward classes. A set of clashing viewpoints came up in the discussion, of which the one expressed by the Muslim members of the Assembly continues to hold sway over the Urdu print media even after decades of this debate.²⁵ As Shabnam Tejani cites the argument of a member of the Muslim League in the Constituent Assembly Debates –

*The right of a group or community of people to follow and adhere to its own personal law is among the fundamental rights...Now the right to follow personal law is part of the way of life of those people who are following such laws; it is part of their religion and part of their culture. If anything is done affecting the personal laws, it will be tantamount to interference with the way of life of those people who have been observing these laws for ages. This secular state which we are trying to create should not do anything to interfere with the way of life and religion of the people.*²⁶

Keeping in line with the same viewpoint, the argument has remained consistent in the discourse that it is the Constitutional right of Muslims like any other minority to retain their personal law which is an integral part of their religion and culture and that because our nation is secular and democratic, the rights of the religious and cultural minorities cannot be taken for granted.²⁷

Shabnam Tejani, in tracing the Constitutional history of Indian secularism delineates two issues – protection of minorities and justice for the Scheduled Castes – of which, as she points out, only the former was considered in the debate on secularism and the latter became a subject about backwardness.²⁸ This would mean that the Constitutional provisions for the protection of minorities and promotion of their culture alone were deemed essential to the permanent secular structure of the state unlike the matter of justice to the Scheduled Castes through the Constitutional

²⁵ Shabnam Tejani, *Indian Secularism: A Social and Intellectual History, 1890-1950* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008) 250-54.

²⁶ Ibid, 251-52.

²⁷ “To follow and practice personal law is part of every citizen’s fundamental right to religion.... The constitution does not demand the enforcement of the uniform civil code on the religious minorities.”

“Article 29 of the constitution guarantees the fundamental right to protection of culture to the minorities and everyone knows that religion constitutes the most significant part of culture. Muslims are not only a religious minority but also a cultural minority and marriage, divorce, property and related matters which are all governed by personal laws are also part of the culture of a community. Hence each religious and cultural minority has a constitutional right to the protection of its customs and conventions with regard to these matters that are covered by its personal law.” “Yakhsan Civil Code Ki Tadveen Aur Dastoori Mukhaf”, *Siasat Daily*, January 19, 1987.

²⁸ Tejani, *Indian Secularism: A Social and Intellectual History*, 253.

provision of Reservation which was intended to be a merely temporary arrangement to compensate for centuries of their oppression. In fact, justice for the Scheduled Castes was meant to be a matter of affirmative action by the state rather than a feature of the secular character of the Constitution.

The Constitutional sense of secularism enshrined in the provisions that allow every individual the freedom of conscience, and every community, the freedom to practice, propagate and promote its religion and culture is highly internalized in the Urdu discursive space. In fact, the Indian Constitution's program of secularism is taken as essentially a scheme for the protection and well-being of minorities. But this conceptualization comprises more than religious freedom and cultural rights. If, as Tejani points out, the subjects of minority rights, which mainly include religious and cultural freedoms, and affirmative action for the backward classes were Constitutionally intended to remain segregated, with the logic of secularism applicable only to the former, then it can be said that Muslims did not go along with this segregation. The principle of secularism has been applied to the provision of affirmative action as well because the Indian Muslims in the discourse are often clubbed with the other backward classes and the state-guaranteed representations for them through the provision of Reservation are as much regarded as a responsibility of the secular Indian state as the protection of their religious and cultural liberties is.

The election discourse has unambiguously and in fact vociferously voiced the concerns of Muslims about their most miserable condition in the matters of education and employment and its appeal to the Muslim electorate was for a kind of voting where a genuinely secular party is brought to power that can actualize their basic socio-economic needs or may have sincerely tried to do so in the past. The compensatory actions in favour of the Indian Muslims would thus be a part of the efforts of the secular Indian state to bring justice to an oppressed community and in the discursive space these actions are demanded as an essential test of the country's secular and democratic values. Liberty and justice to minorities are equally significant aspects of the Constitution's secular program in the perspective that is reflected in the Urdu newspapers. On the liberty front which involves the community's cultural freedom like the right to its personal law, the secular state is expected to strictly abstain from the community, but on the justice front which involves the question of redressing its misery and disadvantaged position, the secular state is obliged to intervene in the matters where the community's socio-economic status is in a perpetual state of repression. The observation about Muslims being the largest minority and yet the weakest of all

the communities with absolutely no support system to back them has left the discursive sphere with a progressively restrained option of clamouring for a Muslim-centric secularism which is of course open to the other minority voices as well.

The discourse suggests that the socio-economic backwardness of Muslims caused by the neglect on the part of the state makes them no different from the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes who the Constitution assured of special protection until they became well off. The fact that they are not considered as another backward class to be taken care of by the state is the reason why social justice and secularism are conjoined ideas in the Muslim minority-centric perspective. The election discourse articulates their frustration of being an oppressed community with no state support other than fake or pseudo-secularism by stressing that Muslims do not need the symbolic gestures of wearing skull caps and throwing *Iftar* parties but their painful longing is for a dignified life enabled by substantial education and employment opportunities and an adequate representation in the country's political and administrative institutions and if the ones in power do not recognize these needs of the community then they are superficially secular and not actually. Statements below illustrate how secularism as a minority agenda eventually becomes synonymous with Muslim agenda and justice for Muslims becomes a metaphor for commitment to secularism. They also categorically explain why Muslims with no support system to protect their cultural and socio-economic rights would first look for people from their own community to vote for in elections and then look up for others if their primary preferences are not promising –

*There has been one advantage of caste in politics. Various castes have got political representations from their respective leaders but nothing like that has happened to Muslims. Over the past many decades, politics could, to some extent, break down the barriers between upper and lower castes but Muslims have remained backward due to communal politics. Muslims have had absolutely nobody to represent them in politics. They have had no strong political platform which is indispensable to the struggle for fundamental rights. The choice that they always face is between fake secular parties and openly communal parties. The need of the hour is a united Muslim vote and that is how the community can show its political strength.*²⁹

²⁹ Saabir Raza Rahbar, "Musalmaan...Maazi Ki Tarah Naa Aakhbat Andeshi Ka Saboot Na Dein (Muslims Should Not Show their Naivety Like in the Past)", *Rahnuma-e-Deccan Daily*, March 9, 2014, p. 4.

*Sikhs have their own party to vote for; Dalits have so many parties representing them, Marathas vote only for the Maratha candidates, then why are Muslims expected to play the card of secularism and vote for parties that call themselves secular but are not actually secular...Muslims need to produce their own political leadership and parties that can represent them and address their issues better.*³⁰

*Unless Muslims think seriously about increasing the number of their representatives in the parliament, their issues will never be resolved. In the upcoming elections they should look forward to voting with solidarity for Muslim candidates in their respective constituencies. In all the elections that have happened so far, Muslim vote was divided due to the consideration of caste, region and personal interest. Instead of these factors they should vote on the basis of a candidate's sincerity and contribution to the development of the community as well as nation...Wherever Muslim candidates are weak with very bleak chances of winning the election, Muslim voters should unanimously vote for candidates who stand for secularism and are sincere and truly desire the nation's development.*³¹

*As the most backward and marginalized community in India, Muslims need to strengthen themselves politically. For all the national and regional parties, Muslims have been important only as a vote bank.... To make themselves politically visible they cannot depend on others...It is a general tendency among people in power to constantly suppress the weaker sections of the society.*³²

*In the past five years majoritarianism has left Dalits and minorities backward in education and employment.*³³

These are all statements from the election discourse of 2014 and 2019. The discourse articulating the Indian Muslims' distrust of the Congress party's secular character as discussed earlier similarly highlights the need to take the issues specific to Muslims seriously if a party is to be believed as

³⁰ Zahiruddin Siddiqui, "Musalmaan Kab Tak Jhoote Secularism Ki Bhent Chadte Rahenge? (How Long Will Muslims Submit to Fake Secularism?)" *Rahnuma-e-Deccan, Sunday Edition*, March 16, 2014, p. 1.

³¹ Ghouse Sevani, "Firkha Vaaranaa Tashrad Aur Siyaasi Asraat (Communalism and its Political Consequences)", *Rahnuma-e-Deccan Daily, Sunday Edition*, March 23, 2014, p. 4.

³² "Apna Vazan Badhaane Ke Liye Musalmaano Ka Siyaasi Istehkaam Naaguzir (Political Stability Indispensable for Muslims to Increase their Strength)", *Munsif*, March 20, 2014, p. 4.

³³ Parvez Hafeez, "Kya Hamaara Puranaa Hindustan Hamey Vaapas Milega? (Will We Get Our Old India Back?)" *Etemaad Urdu Daily*, March 17, 2019, p. 5.

secular at all. It also explains why in the past few years secularism has lost its popular ground and why the Hindutva ideology has impressed upon more hearts than secularism has. Due to the political necessity to associate secularism with India's largest minority that is described as one of the most backward classes, the ideology has become unattractive to the voters from the majority community.

On the other hand, the ever-rising tide of the BJP and Hindu nationalism in the past decade rejuvenated secularism into an ideological form that the advocates of old secularism would not like to recognize – an ideology that is a guard of the minorities and weaker sections against the upper-caste driven BJP and a strategy for Muslims, to be intelligently worked out in order to dispel their fear of majoritarian domination, a topic that the chapter now turns to.

4.4. ELECTION STRATEGY OF MINORITIES TO FIGHT COMMUNAL POLITICS

Basically the election discourse before the rise of the Hindu nationalist politics indicates the Indian Muslim consciousness about the vulnerability of minorities and the marginalized groups to any kind of injustice in the political system, the special place of the Muslim minority among the marginalized sections, and the need to invoke secularism to remind the state that the Constitution demands that whosoever is in power is responsible for ensuring to all the minorities their due share in the opportunities for a better standard of living and compensation for all the inequities that they have experienced so far. Thus in the Urdu public sphere during this period, i.e. before the late 1980s, the 'secular' was being defined largely as a commitment to ensure equal representation to the minorities in every sphere of national life and the use of the word did not extend to the specification of which parties alone are reliable for serving the purpose and which parties the minorities need to be protected from. The Hindu right wing groups like the RSS, Hindu Mahasabha and Vishwa Hindu Parishad were recognized as threats to the existence of the minorities but secularism as such was not being ideologically constructed to battle with majoritarian communalism.

Spotlighting of the backwardness of the Muslim minority and the need to give them special attention is a perpetual feature of the discourse on secularism as one can observe in the discussion above. But as the discourse further developed in the recent times, secularism acquired an ideological colour which reflects more than just the desire for justice to the less privileged

minorities. The rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party marked the beginning of a profoundly nuanced understanding of secularism in the Urdu public sphere. The discourse now indicates that Muslims need an ideology that will promise them an equitable share in the nation's resources but will also keep them protected against the gigantic wings of Hindu majoritarian forces that have always been keen on creating a uniform assimilative cultural identity of the nation. A major part of the conceptualized secularism in the discourse is an anti-thesis to majoritarian communalism or Hindu nationalism and also the only ideological tool for Muslims and perhaps the other minorities to sustain their discrete identities which fear a gradual death at the hands of the hardliners from the majority community.

The *Ramjanmabhoomi* movement aiming at the building of *Ram Mandir* at the site of the *Babri Masjid*, reform of personal laws, proposal to introduce a uniform civil code, the mission to convert India into a Hindu *Rashtra* and establish *Ram Rajya* and constant perpetration of communal riots in different parts of the country – these issues have been invariably forming the context for the discursive idea of secularism as a contradiction to the ideology of the BJP over the past thirty years. The discourse in the past three decades somewhat represented parallel ideas of social justice and anti-assimilative culture in its imagery of secularism with the latter getting politically more stark and profound in expression with every passing decade. How things have changed for the minorities in the country after the rise of the BJP is an observation emphatically made in a 1986 edition of the *Rahnuma-e-Deccan* which points out the difference between the era before 1980 and the era after 1980, the year of the birth of Bharatiya Janata Party and also states that the birth of this party marked the beginning of communal politics in independent India whereas the Indian National Congress and the Communist parties, being the other major national political parties, do not indulge in the same.³⁴ As obvious as it is in this observation, the Congress Party may have been distrusted all the time for its lack of a genuinely secular character but wasn't shunned either, in the minds of Muslims especially when the belligerent party was believed to be endangering their very existence as a community with a distinct religion and culture.

The election discourse of the Urdu newspapers that condemns the BJP and its policies represents secularism in its most pragmatic form which is also a mark of political opportunism of minorities necessitated by the identity politics of a political party. Moreover, due to the exigencies of electoral

³⁴“Firkha Parasth Jamaayatein (Communal Organizations)”, *Rahnuma-e-Deccan*. 12 January 1986, p. 2.

politics the discursive domain of Muslims has been progressively portraying secularism as the sword whose making requires the support of all the parties that are not anti-Muslim but rather sympathetic to the community, in order to cut down the saffron wings of the BJP and the *Sangh Parivar*.

The discourse also suggests that the identity issues which are often used by the political parties in elections to gain political mileage are no empty issues to the people to whom they are addressed. Contrary to the general belief that such issues do little in contribution to their social standing and economic well-being, it proves the point that any issue of identity is as fundamental to the Muslim minority of India as their socio-economic conditions and perhaps the same may apply to other identity groups or communities as well. They wouldn't be content with the bread and butter policies when on the other hand some other policies that can most likely curb their distinct collective identity are on promotion. The election discourse of the Urdu newspapers never missed taking note of and even spotlighting those programs and policies listed in the BJP's manifestos that directly offend the Indian Muslim identity.

Construction of Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, enactment of a uniform civil code for the whole country in replacement of the existing personal laws for different religious communities, abrogation of Article 370 of the constitution that assigned a special status to the state of Jammu and Kashmir since its accession to India, establishment of Ram Rajya or a Hindu Rashtra in India, which are the most contentious programs of the BJP as highlighted in the Urdu discourse have no direct connection with the problems of inadequacies in the areas of education, employment and political power that Muslims in the country have been found to be plagued by and yet these programs are represented in the discourse as matters that deeply affect their collective soul. The way these matters have been raised time and again in the Urdu print media reminds us of Charles Taylor's claims about identity and recognition contending that lack of public recognition of a collective identity or its misrepresentation is another grave deprivation.³⁵ Ever since the early days of Hindu nationalism and the BJP in the 1980s, the Urdu public discourse has keenly tracked the 'majority-centric' goals of the party and centre staged them in every general election over the past twenty years in order to alert the community about the dangers lurking for it in the victories of the BJP.

³⁵ Charles Taylor, "Politics of Recognition", in Multiculturalism, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 25-74.

Secularism is that fine shield that has provided minorities with a consistent ideological rebuttal to every policy that reflected the majoritarian nationalism and an analysis of the election discourse has produced abundant evidence to prove this point. To be more specific, secularism for the Indian Muslims, is the only protector of their rights against the perils of Hindu communalism and the discourse in the Urdu newspapers on how the Indian Muslim voters ought to be voting in the elections to the Lok Sabha and the legislative assemblies has constructed it as a policy meant to rescue the Muslim minority from the dreadful *firkha parasth* (communal) forces – consequently giving the picture of an entrenched secular/communal binary which rules not only the Indian Muslim ethos but also the larger Indian political scenario.

The vigilant observation of the BJP as a communal party was already being made in the Urdu print media in the first decade of party's emergence. The Babri Masjid/Ramjanmabhoomi movement and the Shah Bano case were two grand narratives around which the critique of the BJP's communal politics was built in the 1980s. The anti-BJP stand hardened further and virtually forever after a major turning point in the history of the Hindu-Muslim conflict occurred in 1992 – the Babri Masjid demolition. From here on, we find the Urdu print media eagerly using its discursive space to constantly keep highlighting the anti-Muslim policies of the BJP and manoeuvre secular politics as the only effective way of keeping Hindu communalism in check. Mentioned below are the quotes from the chosen newspapers that testify the point that in their election narratives, most expressions of secularism have no meaning deeper than a determined and tactical fight against the BJP and its saffron alliances and that its representation can only happen at the hands of parties that are undoubtedly opposed to the BJP and also in the same way empathetic to Muslims:

*In order to weaken the chances of the BJP and other communal parties, the secular parties need to build a strong alliance among themselves instead and contest the elections together rather than separately.*³⁶

³⁶ "Secular Jamaaitein Phir Siyasi Dorahe Par (Secular Parties at the Political Crossroads Once Again)" *Rahnuma-e-Deccan*, August 13, 1999, p. 2.

*Those who believe in secularism and democracy must take the responsibility of fighting the communal forces like the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the Hindu Mahasabha.*³⁷

*It is very disappointing that for the past twenty years, the BJP and the Sangh Parivar have been perpetuating such hate politics against the country's second largest majority, i.e. 15-20 crore Muslims and that the Indian Muslims started seeing dangers to their own identity in their own country. That's why in every election, Muslims have to carefully think and decide to support and bring victory to some secular political party in Delhi and get a Prime Minister who will at least ensure protection to them.*³⁸

*Even today anti-Muslim BJP's danger has not disappeared and the only single way to ward off this danger is the success of the secular forces.*³⁹

*The Muslim associations must support secular political parties in order to pull down the communal political parties.*⁴⁰

*All the parties that are calling themselves secular are only busy winning seats and bargaining with each other for political gains.... The secular parties don't understand that from their endeavours to pull each other down, the communal parties are able draw maximum benefit.... They need to be united.*⁴¹

These quotes taken from the articles published during different periods of general elections to the Lok Sabha from 1991 to 2009 directly strike the readers with the point that communalism, particularly the one that the BJP and its allied groups have been carrying on their shoulders, since the inception of the party, is a formidable dread for the Indian Muslim minority and secularism is the only weapon to fight it out and deter it, provided its political representation comes from the right kind of parties that are as opposed to the BJP as Muslims and other minorities are.

³⁷ The *Rahnuma-e-Deccan*. 23 February 1986.

³⁸ Zafar Aagha, "Musalmaan Jazbaat Se Nahi Hosh Se Kaam Lein (Muslims Should Act on their Mind, Not Instincts)", *Roznama Rashtriya Sahara*, April 14, 2009, p. 5.

³⁹ Zafar Aagha, "Secular Taaqaton Ki Kaamyabi Muslim Raidahon Ki Zimmedaari (Success of Secular Forces, A Responsibility of Muslim Voters)", *Siasat Daily, Sunday Edition*, April 12, 2009.

⁴⁰ Aagha, "Hosh Se Kaam Lein", 5.

⁴¹ "Secularism Siyaasi Kaarobar Ki Munaafah Baksh Mandi (Secularism, A Profitable Market for Political Business)", *Rahnuma-e-Deccan*, August 30, 1999.

The pre-1992 election discourse is found to be making appeals to the Muslim voters to remember while casting their vote, the Congress party's apathy towards the community in the Babri Masjid issue, its silent encouragement to the Hindu right-wing in this matter and lack of interest in the issues of particular concern to the Muslims. The *Rahnuma-e-Deccan* highlighted some of these other issues back in 1991 – scrapping of minority status to the Aligarh Muslim University, unfair treatment of Urdu, interference with the personal law, constant attempt to impose the uniform civil code and denial of employment opportunities.⁴² This was the reason why the discourse insisted on the secular vote of Muslims for parties other than the Congress and the BJP, be it the Janata Party in the late 70s or the Janata Dal during 1989-91.

But this rhetoric of elections in the Urdu print media from the late 1980s up to the early 90s which despite labelling the BJP as communal does not unambiguously single it out as the exclusive threat to the Muslims, metamorphoses into a far more determined and unwavering anti-BJP narrative towards the end of the century and remains unchanged ever after. The election discourse of 1998-99, 2004, 2009, 2014 and 2019 treats the BJP and the *Sangh Parivar* as the only great communal threat on which the minorities have to keep a constant vigil using the strength of secular political forces.

There are two articles from two different Urdu newspapers, i.e., *Roznama Rashtriya Sahara* and the *Siasat Daily*, published in 2009 during the 15th Lok Sabha elections, which summarize what the Urdu public sphere regards to be the fear psychosis that the communal politics of the BJP and its allied groups has instilled in the community over the past 20 years. To quote them –

*From 1980 to 2000, the Indian politics was stained by the blood of Muslims massacred in so many deadly riots in Muradabad, Meerut, Bhagalpur, Hyderabad and Mumbai....Regardless of whether the people received any great benefits from the UPA government or not, one thing that definitely relieved the Indian Muslims was an environment free from riots and curfews.*⁴³

For the past five years the Indian Muslims lived without any communal riots hitting them. There was no Muslim genocide.... The most significant aspect of this government is that the anti-Muslim

⁴² “Congress, Muslim Akhlait Aur Intakhaabaat (Congress Muslim Minority and Elections)”, *Rahnuma-e-Deccan*, April 25, 1991, p. 2.

⁴³ Zafar Agha, “Musalmaan Jazbaat Se Nahi, Hosh Se Kaam Lein (Muslims Should Act on their Mind, Not Instincts)”, *Roznama Rashtriya Sahara*. April 14, 2009.

*communal campaign led by the RSS and the BJP that prevailed intensely from 1992 to 2002 was brought under control by the Congress after it came to power in 2004. After a long time Indian Muslims lived peacefully with dignity in these five years.*⁴⁴

These excerpts, while condemning the BJP for its politics of hate against the Muslims, also acknowledge the ability of the Congress to recover a life without fear and violence that trapped them under the previously ruling BJP government before the Congress once again came to power in 2004. This is the reason why the election discourse of this period was more sorted about who the antagonist was for the Muslims and who all could stand by the latter's side in the face off. Therefore, all the parties including the Congress that hold strong objections to the BJP and show the will to protect Muslims against communal violence are regarded as secular parties. The discourse repeatedly insisted that these so-called secular parties had to be united in order to avoid the division of the secular vote, particularly the Muslim vote. This point implies that an unambiguously anti-BJP stand and at least an official declaration that "we stand for the rights of all the minorities", are criteria enough for a party to be considered secular and qualify for the Muslim vote. This kind of scenario of the Indian Muslim voting based on the consideration of a party's 'secular orientations' as highlighted in the election discourse of the Urdu newspapers does give a picture of an opportunistic attitude towards those who project themselves as secular parties and the discourse admits that such opportunism has become a systemic requirement for Muslims for their own survival in the communally poisoned electoral politics of the country. In other words, voting en masse by Muslims in a strategic way with the aim of encouraging anti-BJP parties which may just be superficially secular is the only way to respond to the communal voting that the BJP has been encouraging among the Hindus. The discourse has categorically conveyed to its readers that no party that calls itself secular is genuinely secular. Making this point elaborately, an article in the *Roznama Rashtriya Sahara* says –

Secularism has become a mask worn by the leaders while doing political bargaining. Parties are traders of tickets, constituencies and seats but while playing this role they would never want to

⁴⁴Agha, "Secular Taaqaton Ki Kaamyabi (Success of Secular Forces)".

*drop their secular mask. Secularism is treated like the Ganges of the Indian politics in which one can swim and immediately shed all political sins.*⁴⁵

The article also names leaders like Lalu Prasad Yadav, Mayawati, Jayalalitha, Chandrababu Naidu, V.P. Singh and Deve Gowda for their one time or more than one-time alliance with the BJP to form governments in their respective states while also carrying the desire to be considered secular. It complains that the parties/leaders who call themselves secular do not hesitate to build connections with the BJP and then explains the rationale informing such political behaviour stating that there are no permanent friends and foes and no permanent ideological orientations in politics because the one and only goal to pursue is power. To bring up another similar quote which is from the *Rahnuma-e-Deccan* –

*All the parties that are calling themselves secular are only busy winning seats and bargaining with each other for political gains.*⁴⁶

The post-2002 discourse basically advises the Indian Muslims to fall in line with the same rationale in their struggle against the Hindutva-oriented communalism that the BJP is identified with and extend support to those ‘secular parties’ that for the moment are found to be maintaining a conspicuous distance with it. So, in the political dictionary of the Urdu public sphere, to be secular is to stand for the rights of minorities at least in the election manifestos and to take a definite stand against the BJP. It would be interesting here to produce some more instances of the nuanced election discourse post-2002 on this matter which indicates the difference that a national BJP government and the communal massacre of Muslims in Gujarat that occurred during its tenure, made to the Urdu public sphere’s understanding of what it means to make secular choices in elections. Commenting on the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance government’s five-year rule in the context of the 2004 Lok Sabha elections, an article in the *Rahnuma-e-Deccan* reads thus –

Until five years ago, during elections, the battle was among the secular parties only. But in these five years, many changes have come about and now the electoral battles are positioned between the communal parties and the secular ones. Secularism has become very weak and communal

⁴⁵ Qasim Syed, “Secularism Se Secularism Tak (From Secularism to Secularism)”, *Roznama Rashtriya Sahara*, April 30, 2009, p. 5.

⁴⁶ “Secular Baakirdaar Ummeedwaaron Ke Intakhaab Ka Mashehra (Gathering of Secular Contestants of Character)”, *Rahnuma-e-Deccan*, August 30, 1999.

*forces are becoming stronger. If this government continues for another five years then the country and its society will be absorbed in the saffron colour and the darkness of the ancient traditions; and the culture of the minorities, particularly Muslims, will be in jeopardy.... The country's secular parties and Muslims have a long way to go in order to be successful.*⁴⁷

In the context of the 2009 elections, an article from the *Siasat Daily* already cited earlier is once again being quoted here –

*The polling dates are nearing and it is still difficult to figure out as to which party will form the government. Will Sonia Gandhi's UPA again come to power at the centre? Will India re-establish its secular tradition or will Advani and Modi once again succeed and smear the whole of India with the blood of Muslims?*⁴⁸

In the same context, commending the Muslims for the way they voted in 2004 and appealing to them to vote in the same manner in 2009, an already cited article from the *Roznama Rashtriya Sahara* comments thus –

*In the 2004 elections, Indian Muslims strategically voted for different secular parties in different regions by first figuring out the ones with the potential to defeat the BJP in each region and then voting en masse for them.*⁴⁹

Addressing the BJP as the primary enemy of the Indian Muslims, the *Siasat daily* makes a similar appeal to the latter in the following words –

*To defeat their enemy, they need to do what they did in 2004 – vote for whichever secular parties that show the potential to help them defeat the BJP.*⁵⁰

Some paraphrased and some quoted, the texts from the election discourse of the newspapers during the 2014 and 2019 general elections are stated below–

⁴⁷ Syed Ali, “Jeet Ke Liye Secular Partiyon Ka Taal Mel Aur Muslamaano Ka Ijtemaai Role Behad Zaroori (Cooperation of Secular Parties and Leading Role of Muslims Necessary for their Victory)”, *Rahnuma-e-Deccan*, March 15, 2004.

⁴⁸ Agha, “Secular Taaqaton Ki Kaamyabi (Success of Secular Forces)”.

⁴⁹ Agha, “Hosh Se Kaam Lein”, p. 5.

⁵⁰ The *Siasat Daily*. 24 April 2009.

*It is a great trouble for India's Muslims that this time a choice has to be made between communalism and secularism. As regards government based on secularism, it is the only kind where the cultural and religious identity of minorities, particularly Muslims can be protected, whereas the BJP, RSS and Sangh Parivar are determined to kill the identity of Muslims. In the current scenario, the secular parties are scattered whereas the communal parties with every passing day are getting stronger and more united.*⁵¹

*Today Muslims face dual problem. On one hand there are secular parties that have been continuously acquiring power by garnering the votes of Muslims. And on the other hand, there are communal forces whose aim is to suppress the identity of Muslims. Never before was communal environment as widespread as it is today. To resist these circumstances, the primary responsibility lies with those forces that consider themselves as champions of secularism and democracy. Muslims are the next group to take charge as they are always the soft targets of communalism.*⁵²

*The coming Lok Sabha elections will be a Mahabharata between secularism and Hindutva.*⁵³

*All these five years, Modi worked only on the goal of Hindu Rashtra and if he is brought back to power, then this vision will become a reality.*⁵⁴

*In past five years, such a vicious resentful environment has been created against Muslims in the country that even the parties that call themselves secular have stopped fielding Muslim candidates in elections. Only political unity in elections can bring back to Muslims their lost dignity and pride.*⁵⁵

The above stated excerpts from the articles representing the post-2002 election discourse of the Urdu newspapers throw light on the increasing anxiety of the Urdu public sphere about the political success of the BJP and the determination to persuade the community to think on the lines of acting in a strategic way so as to keep the BJP away from the portals of government and thus make secular

⁵¹ Zafar Ali Khan, "Intakhaabi Amal Me Muslamaano Ko Bharpoor Hissah Lena Chahiya (Muslims Have to Abundantly Participate in the Electoral Process)", *Siasat Daily, Sunday Edition*, March 16, 2014, p. 3.

⁵² Masoom Moradabai, "Musalmaan Congress Se Barham Kyun? (Why are Muslims Angry with the Congress)" *Etemaad Urdu Daily*, March 16, 2014.

⁵³ *The Munsif Daily*, 15 March 2014, p. 4

⁵⁴ Zara Agha, "Narendra Modi Ka Ikhtadaar Se Baahar Jaana Kyun Zaroori Hai (Why Is It Imperative for Narendra Modi to Exit from Power)", *Siasat Daily, Sunday Edition*, March 17, 2019.

⁵⁵ Syed Zafar Mahmood, "Voting Ke Liye Millat Ke Bedaar Hone Ka Waqt (Time for the Community to Wake Up for Voting)", *Roznama Rashtriya Sahara*, March 21, 2019, p. 5.

choices in the elections. Another aspect of this discourse is that secularism gets all the more reduced to an anti-BJP ideology which is to be represented by those political parties that definitely stand against the BJP and definitely stand in favour of the minorities. Thus, while reading through the discourse, secularism comes as a belligerent ideology on the opposite side of the Hindutva ideology in a war where Muslims are expected to use their collective practical wisdom in pulling down the latter with the strength of the former.

Practical wisdom is another necessary attribute underscored in the discourse while making appeals to support secular political parties. Recognizing the fact that since Independence there has been no strong mainstream Muslim leadership in the country to represent the community, the editorials have advised Muslims that instead of waiting for their own leadership to develop, they should rather rely on those forces that can keep them protected from the venomous politics of communal parties in the current scenario. As already discussed in the chapter, given a favourable chance, Muslims are expected to vote for Muslim candidates only, due to the failure of the Congress and other so-called secular parties to satisfy their needs and aspirations. But because of the aggravation of the fears aroused by the BJP, Sangh parivar and Hindu nationalism, it has become exigent for them to expand their range of preference and look for the prospects of their survival and security in parties that may be superficially secular but certainly not aligned with the saffron forces. So, Congress is never ruled out, nor is any other party that has consistently articulated its stark opposition to the BJP. This condition that is depicted in the discourse demonstrates the crisis of secular India where secularism is trapped in ideological uses by minorities that express their exclusive agonies of being in a confrontational relationship with the majority. An instrumental rather than normative approach to secularism hence becomes necessary for their survival. In this regard, the *Siasat* and the *Roznama Rashtriya Sahara* are quoted below:

*Unfortunately, the Indian Muslim leadership have been denied the right to make independent choices using their practical wisdom and are expected to stay confined within the boundaries of the so-called secular parties which they cannot break away from.*⁵⁶

In the upcoming 15th Lok Sabha elections Muslims know that in every state there needs to be a strong Muslim leadership. There is a huge section of people in the country who have a secular

⁵⁶ Syed, "Secularism Se Secularism Tak (Secularism to Secularism)", p. 5.

*mindset and who want peace in the society. Muslims can interact with them. We need them as much as they need us.*⁵⁷

The *Roznama Rashtriya Sahara* also asks the Muslims of India to –

*not be emotional while deciding their own fate through voting in the elections of 2009 and rather use their practical wisdom (Hikmat Amli) in choosing the parties that are secular and capable of defeating the BJP instead and not get carried away by the Muslim candidates or Muslim political parties.*⁵⁸

Elaborating the same emphasis, the *Siasat Daily* makes the following appeal –

*They should not get carried away by emotions while voting. They should not take an emotional decision to vote for Muslim candidates or Muslim parties that have just developed recently.... How to make a rational choice in the elections? Firstly, it is necessary to identify your biggest enemy. Do the Muslims need to be told who their biggest enemy is even after the experiences of Babri Masjid demolition and the Gujarat riots? Secondly, they need to align with all those parties that they know are capable of defeating their biggest enemy.*⁵⁹

*Muslims cannot be fooled the way they were earlier. Their vote got divided a lot of times that adversely affected them but in 2004 and 2009 they voted intelligently and brought the Congress to power.*⁶⁰

*It is up to the electorate to make a choice. Will there be a rule of communal fanatics or the rule of Constitution and law? The question that arises is – in what way will the parties that call themselves secular contain communalism? All secular parties should plan a strategic way to keep the communal forces away from power after elections. The Congress is losing its secular fabric and yet it is the only party that can challenge the BJP, but it has no strong leader to do so.*⁶¹

⁵⁷ Mahmood Fareed, “Pandave Lok Sabha Intakhaabaat Me Musalmaan Vote Ki Ahmiyat (The Significance of Muslim Vote in the 15th Lok Sabha Elections)”, *Siasat Daily Sunday Edition*, March 1, 2009, p. 5.

⁵⁸ Agha, “Hosh Se Kaam Lein”, p. 5.

⁵⁹ The *Siasat Daily*, 24 April 2009.

⁶⁰ Saleem, “Muslim Vote Ka Muttahida Istamaal Baadshaahgar Saabit Hoga”, *Munsif Daily, Nuqoosh*, March 2, 2014, p. 7.

⁶¹ Rashiduddin, “Sab Yahi Kehte Hain Main Hoon Doosra Koi Nahi (Everyone Says I am the One, Nobody Else)”, *Siasat Daily, Sunday Edition*, March 9, 2014.

To obstruct his (Narendra Modi) journey to become the prime minister, the secular forces without getting influenced by any leader or emotional agenda of religious clergy should unite and make successful a candidate who shows the potential to defeat the BJP.⁶²

They (Muslims) also need to be insightful about how secular a party is before voting for it because in the election season every party wears the mask of secularism.... A good candidate is one who lives up to the secular principles of the party. If Muslims get caught up in electoral confusion due to the presence of too many secular parties like in Bihar and UP, then the BJP will surely have an advantage.⁶³

The parties that have been dividing the secular vote particularly the Muslim vote need to be careful and clever if they want to defeat the BJP this time. Secular leaders in order to protect the secular fabric of India need to take on the BJP seriously.... If the secular voters do not act sensibly, then the future of secular India and Muslims will be a matter of great concern and worry.⁶⁴

In elections the responsibility of Muslim voters is more significant than that of the others to vote with wisdom and ensure that they do not become a vote bank for any political party....Issues generally raised in elections are important but what is equally important is to prevent the growth of communal forces...Tactical voting is the need of the hour...If in any parliamentary constituency there are more than one Muslim candidate, then the Muslim voters should unanimously vote for any one of them because if our vote is divided, then secularism cannot be protected. Besides this reason, it is us who will have to suffer the consequence of a divided vote.⁶⁵

There are so many constituencies with a huge Muslim population that voters there, can ensure the victory of Muslim candidates but only if their vote is united and not divided. Muslims in such constituencies must take either of the following steps during elections:

- 1. If there is a Muslim among the candidates fielded by the secular parties, then all Muslim voters should unanimously vote for that candidate only.*

⁶² *Siasat Daily, Sunday Edition, March 16, 2019.*

⁶³ Agha, "Musalmaano Ko Bharpoor Hissah Lena Chahiye", p. 3.

⁶⁴ "Secular Raai Dahinde (Secular Voters)", *Siasat Daily*, March 18, 2014, p. 3.

⁶⁵ Syed Faisal Ali, "Muntashir Vote Se Secularism Ki Hifaaazat Mumkin Nahi (Protection of Secularism Not Possible With Diffused Vote)", *Roznama Rashtriya Sahara*, March 9, 2014, p. 5.

2. *If there are two or more Muslim candidates fielded by the secular parties then Muslims should give their united vote to any one of them who is found to have done concrete work on the ground in the interest of Muslims.*
3. *If the secular parties have not fielded a Muslim candidate, but there is a strong independent Muslim candidate who has done constructive work on the ground for Millat Islamiya, then the Muslim voters should unanimously vote for that candidate.*
4. *If there are no Muslim candidates at all on the battleground, then Muslim voters should unanimously vote for any one of the non-Muslim candidates (from the secular parties) who is empathetic to Muslims.*⁶⁶

A strategic ideology to be applied with practical wisdom (*Hikmat Amli*) in order to consolidate Muslim and other secular votes, a strong drive against the BJP and Hindutva and an indispensable element in the struggle of Muslims for survival against the fast-breeding proponents of majoritarian nationalism or forces of Hindu communalism – this is how a minority-centric secularism could be described after reading the discourse of the recent decades. The irony of this approach is that while secularism is pitted against the BJP’s Hindutva ideology and the party is condemned for being exclusivist in uniting a particular community on religious lines and thereby dividing the nation, minority identities also get hardened on the same lines leaving little scope for secularism to hold on to what it was originally meant to be in the Indian democracy – a condition where religious communities will be open to peaceful interaction and cooperation with each other and their representation would be general and not communal. Communalization of elections in India has been a long and continuous process in which majority and minority identities have come about as formidable constructs to be constantly at logger heads with each other and secularism in this political conflict of identities has come to be ideologically shaped by either side to perpetuate its own existence against the other. Hence one has to search for a secularism that is committed to uniting the communities on the basis of mutual respect and cooperation. This is the next sub-theme of the chapter.

⁶⁶ Mahmood, “Bedaar Hone Ka Waqt (Time to be Vigilant)”, p. 5.

4.5. GANGA-JAMUNI TEHZEEB: THE FADING CULTURE OF RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE AND COMMUNAL HARMONY

Interestingly, the Urdu newspaper discourse on secularism also tells the story of how the peculiarly Indian idea of celebrating diversity and living together with mutual respect and tolerance has eclipsed into a politically aggressive idea of fighting for one's identity against hostile majority.

An Urdu daily, which is now no longer in publication, back in 1977 speaks of the peculiarity of the Indian secularism in these words –

*Ours is a secular nation and the nation has been kept secular because it is a nation of people following different religions, speaking different languages, holding different points of view.... Our secularism is not an imitation of any other system but is rather a concept adapted to the Indian conditions.*⁶⁷

The diversity factor that is highlighted in the above-mentioned quote is the fundamental premise on which the Indian concept of secularism is based which is why the Constitutional provisions of Articles 25, 29 and 30 are often underscored in the discourse as secular provisions that were made in accordance with the country's religious and cultural diversity. So far, the chapter tried to explain how the Urdu newspaper discourse has been depicting secularism as a negative tool of the minorities to fight the dangers posed by the majoritarian communal forces and how it is taken in the Constitutional sense as a safeguard of the minority rights and a guarantee of social justice. This leaves us with the question of the scope for positive and broader secularism in the Indian Muslim perception. In fact, the discourse shows mixed narratives of secularism which are ideologically driven, politically inclined towards the majority/minority conflict and also oriented towards social justice on one hand and on the other hand reflect the broader normative purpose of secularism that emanates from the religiously and culturally diverse set up of India. However, the normative narrative is not as highly pronounced as the narratives of social justice, minority rights and struggle against majoritarian domination. The election discourse is ubiquitously pervaded by the word 'secular' which is used in direct opposition to the communal politics of the Hindu right-wing.

⁶⁷ *Al-Jamaat*. 18 January 1977.

We now need to discuss if the Urdu public sphere recognizes the broader commitment of the Indian conception of secularism which includes the contributions by not only the scholars like Rajeev Bhargava, but also some age-old practices and policies of the Indian state in the past. In fact, Bhargava while stating the essence of Indian secularism virtually reiterates a characteristic that emperors in history demonstrated in their policies. The Hindu religion is often attributed with the principle and tradition of toleration of other religions. ‘*Sarva Dharma Sambhav*’ is taken to be one of the integral tenets of Hinduism and Gandhi used this concept to take on communalism.⁶⁸ In history, toleration was meant to be a policy necessary for smooth administration of the country. Emperor Ashoka’s *Dhamma* and Emperor Akbar’s *Din-i-Ilahi* have been cited as historical instances of the official endeavours to draw different communities into a relationship of mutual understanding and tolerance. It can therefore be said that the program of Indian secularism is incomplete without the aim to create and maintain the spirit of religious tolerance and inter-communal solidarity.

This particular aspect of secularism is certainly an acknowledged theme in the Urdu newspaper discourse but in a subdued form in comparison with the other narratives. Though there is no single Urdu word in the newspapers that exactly translates the word ‘secular’, there are quite a few words used in the discourse which come very close to meaning this dimension of Indian secularism. Words like *Firkha Humaahangi*, *Etemaad* and *Ganga Jamuni Tehzeeb* are widely used in the discourse to describe the element of solidarity, dialogue, trust and fellowship between the communities, particularly, between the Hindu majority and the Muslim minority that either needs to be built or, if already there, needs to be protected against any threats from the communal forces. While *Firkha Humaahangi* and *Etemaad* would mean inter-communal harmony and trust, *Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb* is a reference to the composite culture of two or more communities. The discourse on Indian secularism’s positive and normative dimension is built up around these Urdu words all of which more or less mean synergy and bonding between the communities. An article of the *Munsif Daily* from the 1991 edition actually makes claims about the country’s secular spirit by invoking the age old traditions of the indigenous religions of the land.⁶⁹ The article first alludes to

⁶⁸ Ragini Sen, Wolfgang Wagner & Caroline Howarth. *Secularism and Religion in Multi-faith Societies* (Switzerland: Springer, 2013), 42,

https://www.google.co.in/books/edition/Secularism_and_Religion_in_Multi_faith_S/IvC3BAAAQBAJ?hl.

⁶⁹ Srinivas S. Sohoni, “Bharat Ka Sadiyon Purana Secular Iqraar (India’s Centuries Old Secular Agreement)”, *Munsif Daily*, April 7, 1991.

the Vedas, citing their message that all human beings are of the same race and hence they should treat each other with friendship and cordiality.⁷⁰ Commenting on the indigenous religious traditions, the author writes –

*The Vedantic, Buddhist and Jain traditions have together made a deep impact on the country's values and also introduced an attitude of tolerance and compromise in the religious matters.*⁷¹

The article seeks to also remind its readers that India is a land of several religions of which quite a few significant ones came as imports from outside but steadily became absorbed in the prevalent culture of the country and have existed as integral parts of it. About the Hindu-Muslim connection, the author says –

*The synergy of the Hindu and Islamic culture is reflected not only in their religious philosophy but also in their language, values, art (Fann) and music (Mosiqi).*⁷²

This is one article in which the words ‘secular’ and ‘secularism’ are used throughout as synonymous with religious tolerance, agreement and harmony and shared culture between the main communities of the country and with an appeal to maintain this tradition that is intrinsic to the country’s socio-cultural setting and its indigenous religions. However, the Urdu expressions of tolerance, agreement and harmony between the religious communities which are usual rather than exceptional in the discourse are layered by the elements of hope and anxiety – hope that India still holds the potential to keep up its *Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb* or composite culture and spirit of tolerance among its various religious communities and anxiety about the largely challenging and formidable obstacles that the ever-increasing communal politics has created in the way to recreate a secular India. Commenting on the obstacles, the *Rahnuma-e-Deccan* makes the following statement –

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

*Today India is among the world's developed nations. But today we are also experiencing an enormous obstacle to our society's development and prosperity. That obstacle is the increasing level of communalism.*⁷³

The repeatedly used terms to describe the shared life of the country's Hindus and Muslims marked by mutual trust, empathy, agreement and tolerance are *Fikha Varaana Humaahangi*, *Baahami Etemaad* and *Ittehad*. Using these terms, the article further states –

*Communal harmony (Firkha Varaana Humaahangi) is indispensable not only for the development of the country but also for its security....While following our religion if we try to understand other religions, then problems will be resolved on their own....The one who loves his nation will struggle to build mutual trust and tolerance between various religions.....Mutual trust, agreement, the spirit to value each other's emotions, views and culture and an environment of fraternity are extremely necessary today.*⁷⁴

Acknowledging the long-time peaceful co-existence of Hindus and Muslims, the article blames the external forces in the country's recent history, i.e., the Britishers, for the terrible fracture of this relationship which the internal communal forces in the contemporary times are not allowing the society to repair. The author thinks that the people in the society are bound by the same amount of onus as the state to rebuild the culture of trust and empathy among the religious communities. An article from the 1980 edition of the same daily, while stressing on the responsibilities of Hindus and Muslims states thus –

*The question is not what the government can do for building communal harmony, but what the two communities can do to fulfil this need.*⁷⁵

In the same overtones as the 2004 article cited above, it says that *Firkha Varaana Humaahangi* is the need of the hour which is good for everybody and also suggests that there should be a common platform where both the communities can come together and exchange their ideas and enhance

⁷³ Ibrahim, "Nafrat Mitao, Desh Badhao (Remove Hatred, Build the Nation)", *Rahnuma-e-Deccan*, April 5, 2004.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ "Firkha Varaanaa Humaahangi (Communal Harmony)", *Rahnuma-e-Deccan*, January 29, 1980.

their bonding or fellowship. It points out that at the moment the social bonding between the two communities is very little, an observation that remains the same in the contemporary times.

The election discourse addresses the long-standing tradition of tolerance and mutual cooperation with the overtones of regret and lamentation. It is actually an illustration of why this tradition of secularism in India is becoming fragile and losing roots. ‘A Muslim vote for a Muslim candidate’ is an involuntary aspiration and strategic voting in the name of secularism by minorities for any party that is starkly anti-BJP is the only effective option with the politically mightier presence of the majoritarians. In all the references to *Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb*, a typically North Indian term used to describe the composite culture of Hindus and Muslims, the discourse suggests that the tradition of living together is deeply cherished by the minorities who recognize it as one of the most valuable characteristics of the Indian culture, but unfortunately, maintaining this tradition has become an endeavour full of challenges entrenched by the saffron forces and the communal environment perpetuated by them. Stated below are those texts from the recent election discourse that underscore this aspect of secularism in India and the challenges that it is facing –

*A unique thing about our country is that different communities practising various religions and cultures have lived together with love and solidarity for ages. Their peaceful coexistence and agreement (Humaahangi) is deeply entrenched and cannot be shaken. But for quite some time there has also been a group that wants to end this culture of mutual understanding, respect and solidarity and has been trying to do so using religion, regionalism and majority/minority factors...In 2004 and 2009, the BJP tried hard to come to power but people chose secularism over communalism.*⁷⁶

Secularism originally meant detachment from religion. Hence the countries that have a strong bonding with religion wouldn't want to call themselves secular. In India secularism has meant religious tolerance and it also stands for unity between different religious communities. This particular concept was developed during India's freedom struggle when the country needed it the most. Gandhi and Nehru are regarded as the main proponents of the Indian sense of secularism.

⁷⁶ “Jamooriyat Aur Secularism Ka Tehfaz Zaroori (Protection of Democracy and Secularism Necessary)”, *Rahnuma-e-Deccan*, March 24, 2014, p. 3.

*Even after them, secularism continued to be associated with all those political leaders who believed in Hindu-Muslim unity. But today, secularism is nothing more than a slogan.*⁷⁷

*It is no strange thing to know that in India secularism is the most misused word. There was a time when this word was taken to be the soul of the Constitution and the country's democracy. Jawaharlal Nehru declared that India has never understood secularism in the European sense in which it means detachment from religion and not to be associated with any religious community... The leaders of India's freedom struggle have understood secularism as a system of thought in which all the religious communities are embraced and no particular religious community is exclusively protected...India's values and diverse culture cannot be expressed in terms of the minority/majority binary. India's strength lies in its diversity and not in one colour and its perpetuation.*⁷⁸

*We are happy that 75-80% of the people in the country believe in secularism. But the country's secular fabric is not safe and is under threat from communal forces which have a minor and yet very strong presence. It thus becomes the responsibility of the secular voters from every community to vote with unity and not let their secular vote get divided.*⁷⁹

It is true that communal forces with the help of media channels are fostering an environment of religion-based hatred but such forces are meagre in their population because a huge part of the country's population consists of people who have time and again proved their sense of fraternity across the religious communities. The country still stands firm on its Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb whose foundation was laid by Muslim rulers in history. It is a culture where a person is identified not with his religion, race or caste but with the race of humanity and where every person regardless of his religion or caste deserves equal human rights. But unfortunately, some fundamentalist groups that emerged during India's freedom struggle ended up dividing the country on the basis of religion and such groups later went on to successfully form governments in different parts of the country. There was a time when non-Muslim women would cover their heads with their dupatta over the sound of Azaan and Brahmins would visit Dargahs. Hindus and Muslims

⁷⁷“Secularism Toh Lateefah Ban Chuka Hai (Secularism Has Become a Slogan)”, Roznama Rashtriya Sahara, March 1, 2014, p. 5.

⁷⁸ Ejaz Syed, “Secularism Duniya Ka Sab Se Zyada Galat Istamaal Hone Waala Lafz (Secularism, World's Most Misused Word)”, *Etemaad Urdu Daily*, March 9, 2014, p. 2.

⁷⁹Ali, “Muntashir Vote (Diffused Vote)”, p. 5.

*live together in this country and cannot avoid each other. In fact, they need each other. Even fundamentalist Hindus have needed the services of Muslims. This tradition has been consistent in the country and it is necessary for the people and their associations to work for its continuity.*⁸⁰

*India is a country where there existed a tradition of religious tolerance between various communities even before Muslims came to India and Islam became an established religion in the country. Then the Muslim rulers further strengthened this tradition and Islam was inspiring many people to convert, with its principle of equality.*⁸¹

*The fact is that a handful of people are out to ruin the age-old Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb of the country and also its culture of tolerance. But a huge section of the population consists of people who are upset with the growing disharmony and these people are enough to defeat the communal forces in the general elections.*⁸²

*Rahul Gandhi was right in pointing out that in the coming elections, the choice before the people is between the ideas of Mahatma Gandhi and the ideas of Savarkar. Gandhi stood for an India based on the Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb which has a very long history and still remains very strong. This Tehzeeb is peace-loving and is open to every culture, region and race. And Savarkar's idea of a Hindu Rashtra seeks to create a new India on the basis of violence. This vision looks at India as a nation belonging to the majority only and considers minorities as second-class citizens.*⁸³

The ruling government has been determined to spread communal hatred all over the country against Muslims. Though Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Pandit Nehru visualized a secular India where voting of government would happen not on a religious basis and on the contrary, a Hindu would be elected from a Muslim majority constituency and a Muslim would be elected from a

⁸⁰Muhammad Ziauddin, "Jabra Maslat Ki Jaane Waali Firkha Parasti Aur Haqeeqi Manzar Naamah, *Munsif Daily*, March 9, 2019, p. 4.

⁸¹Ehsaan Fehed, "Hindu-Muslim Taaluqaat Aur Jaarhanaa Qaum Parasti (Hindu-Muslim Relations and Aggressive Nationalism)", *Munsif Daily, Minarenoor*, March 22, 2019, p. 7. The article also blames the upper caste Hindus for disturbing the established inter-communal harmony in the country because of their insecurities about the growing popularity of Islam and its threat to the age-old caste system.

⁸²Syed Ajmal Hussain, *Hindustani Voteron Ki Mazhabi Khutoot Saf Bandi (Religious Classification of Indian Voters)*", *Munsif Daily, Nuqoosh*, March 24, 2019, p. 7.

⁸³Agha, "Narendra Modi Ka Ikhtadaar Se Baahar Jaana Kyun Zaroori (Why is it Necessary for Narendra Modi to Exit from Power)".

*Hindu majority constituency, the communal forces right from that time made this dream impossible.*⁸⁴

All these statements highlight the high sensibilities of the participants in the discourse, about the constructive and normative commitment of Indian secularism to build a nation on the basis of inter-communal solidarity and religious tolerance and the Constitutional and traditional importance that is attached to this commitment. They clearly target the majoritarian forces and not the Hindu majority while vehemently voicing the grievance that this unifying spirit of secularism of India is in a permanent jeopardy. The sensibilities also extend to the plan of the Indian secularists to not encourage voting on the basis of religion or caste so as to keep the nation united rather than divided. An article from the *Munsif* daily in 2017 in response to the Supreme Court's judgement that to appeal for votes on the basis of religion, community or caste is a corrupt practice, lauds the court for its judgement but also doubts on the ability of the present regional and national political parties to abide by the command of this judgement. Agreeing that in a secular state, electoral politics should be conducted without appeals to the citizens' religious, caste, linguistic or regional identities, it attacks the BJP's persistent effort to garner votes on the same lines.⁸⁵ The *Siasat* also comments on this judgement and the BJP's political behaviour that stands to challenge it –

*In the years after 1990, the Bharatiya Janata Party with its promotion of religion has distorted the secular minds.... It has, in the name of religion, perpetuated hatred in the minds of the people of the nation. As a result, today the secular nation is seeing the stain of communalism on its forehead.... It is the duty of every citizen and leader to be secular in performing their role. Hopefully the Supreme Court judgement that prohibits vote appeals based on caste, religion, race, language and region will have some positive impact on the upcoming assembly elections of five states, particularly Uttar Pradesh.*⁸⁶

The *Rahnuma-e-Deccan* makes the following statement –

⁸⁴ Abdul Qadir Shams, "Parlimaani Intakhaabaat Aur Musalmaano Ki Buland Aawaazein (Parliamentary Elections and Loud Voices of Muslims)", *Roznama Rashtriya Sahara*, March 29, 2019, p. 5.

⁸⁵ Muhammad Imran, "Intakhabi Manzar Par Mazhab Ka Istamaal Mamnoo (Use of Religion in the Election Scene Prohibited)", *Munsif Daily*, January 9, 2017, p. 4.

⁸⁶ "Secular Intakhaabi Amal (Secular Electoral Process)", *Siasat Daily*, January 4, 2017, p. 3.

*The Supreme Court's judgement against the practice of making vote appeals on the basis of factors like caste, religion, race, language and region is welcome. But will it stop the BJP, whose identity is based on the Hindu religion, from making vote appeals on the basis of religion?*⁸⁷

The argument that is reflecting in these statements and the discourse at large is that if Muslims are found to be voting communally, then it is certainly a systemic necessity because if they do not vote as a community, then their issues will become insignificant and their identity will be overpowered by the identity of the Hindu majority when it is electorally consolidated at the behest of the party that stands as the leader of Hindu nationalism and perhaps all the minorities express themselves communally and seek communal representation because of the same fear of majoritarian domination.

The use of the term *Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb* in the discourse seeks to remind the readers, time and again, that confrontations between the communities can only be politically motivated because their shared life has a longer age than the majority-minority confrontational relationship. There are vibrant expressions of *Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb* outside the election discourse as well. Urdu in the newspaper discourse is certainly an ardent representation of the country's *Ganga Jamuni Tehzeeb* or composite culture. It is also regarded as the only Indian language with a trans-regional and trans-religious identity which makes it capable of serving as the language of the country and of course, its development and unity. The unwavering campaign for the second official language status to Urdu in various states with a huge Urdu speaking population and also to an extent, for the status of a national language that the discourse has been carrying out over the past decades is justified on the same grounds.

On the association of Urdu with the composite culture of India, the *Rahnuma-e-Deccan* comments thus –

Urdu is a fundamentally Hindustani language. It has Aryan roots and consists of Persian, Arabic and Turkish words. It would be strongly unjust to associate Urdu with any specific community because it is the symbol of the country's composite culture (Ganga-jamuni tehzeeb).....

⁸⁷ “Supreme Court Ka Kaabil Sataaish Faisla Lekin...? (Supreme Court's Verdict Praiseworthy But...?)” *Rahnuma-e-Deccan Daily*, January 7, 2017, p. 3.

*Innumerable languages and dialects have merged into it...It has taught the lessons of love and friendship.*⁸⁸

In 1977, in the context of a hunger strike in Hyderabad that was observed by several youngsters to pressurize the government of Andhra Pradesh to make Urdu the second official language of the state, an article states –

*One of the things that Hyderabad is known for is its Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb and Urdu is part of this Tehzeeb....The Congress-led government of Andhra Pradesh should remember how the Congress party lost the recent Lok Sabha elections in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh mainly because it ignored Urdu and did not accord it the official language status. The ‘Urdu Waale’ voted against them in all these states and Andhra Pradesh can meet the same fate.*⁸⁹

The fact that the speakers of Urdu are referred to as ‘Urdu waale’ instead of Indian Muslims in the newspaper discourse proves that Urdu is expected to be more than just a minority language and that the Urdu public sphere looks at the minority language status as a politically imposed image. As Kavita Datla has observed, Urdu has carried the vision of a secular and modern India in which as a common medium of modern education and communication, instead of English and the lesser spoken Sanskritized Hindi, Hindustani which is more commonly spoken in different parts of the country by people belonging to different religious communities and draws a major volume of its vocabulary from Urdu, will keep the nation integrated and developed.⁹⁰ And most importantly, if the idea of *Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb* stands for secularism based on the celebration of a shared cultural life of the religious communities belonging to divergent belief systems, then Urdu should be the ideal icon of this kind of *Tehzeeb*.

The debates on the historical role of Urdu in building the composite culture and identity of Hindus and Muslims and the status that it deserves in independent India are of course imbued with the sentiments of being communalized and marginalized as well. The anxieties and insecurity of a

⁸⁸Saleem Abidi, “Urdu Zabaan Hindustan Ki Mushtarkha Ganga Jamuni Tehzeeb Ka Aainaadaar Hai (Urdu Language, a Reflection of India’s Ganga-Jamuni *Tehzeeb*)”, *Rahnuma-e-Deccan*, February 9, 1987, p. 9.

⁸⁹ “Urdu Doosri Sarkari Zabaan – Ek Jaayaz Mutaalba”, *Rahnuma-e-Deccan*, May 31, 1977.

⁹⁰ Kavita Datla and Taylor Sherman have worked extensively in the area of Urdu nationalism. See Kavita Datla, *The Language of Secular Islam: Urdu Nationalism and Colonial India* (University of Hawai’i Press, 2013) and Taylor C. Sherman, *Muslim Belonging in Secular India: Negotiating Citizenship in Postcolonial Hyderabad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

minority about getting merged in the culture of the majority do get articulated in the discourse on this matter too. Basically, the discourse on Urdu and its contribution to the country's secular character loudly makes a statement of how communal politics has reduced Urdu to the language of Indian Muslims and thereby massively cut down the interest of non-Muslims in the language and retarded its full-fledged growth in independent India. On this aspect the *Rahnuma-e-Deccan* may be quoted as under –

*The growing inclination towards communal politics at the end of the nineteenth century detached Urdu from the identity of Hindustani to satisfy a huge section of Hindus and the same section started emphasizing on the term Hindi in Hindustani. In the 20th century, Hindi communalism and anti-Urdu sentiment increased so much that people forgot the Hindustani language. The question of majority and minority was raised. Consequently, the question of language became a communal question.*⁹¹

*It (Urdu) cannot be taken as the language of Muslims because not all Indian Muslims speak Urdu....The identity of Urdu is not attached with any specific religious community. Nobody denies the commendable role of Urdu in the (India's) freedom struggle. But due to its adoption as the national language of Pakistan, it began to be viewed with suspicion in the country of its birth....Declining interest in Urdu among the non-Muslims also became the reason for treating the language as the language of Muslims.*⁹²

These statements also imply that the cultural assets that are recognized in the Urdu public sphere as the symbols of the *Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb* have never enjoyed a better status than that of the minority culture in the mainstream spheres which is the sole reason behind their progressive deterioration. And since the majoritarian communal politics is held mainly responsible for their minoritized identity, the composite culture that they are said to be representing seems to have meagre chance of its preservation and promotion beyond its peripheral existence as long as the challenges of communalism persist.

The discourse on a local conflict over a heritage monument of the Hyderabad city reflects the same set of sentiments and also the paradox of secularism as *Ganga Jamuni Tehzeeb* and secularism as

⁹¹ Rahnuma-e-Deccan, January 18, 1993, p. 8.

⁹² M.A. Siraj, "Madar Watan Me Urdu Ka Zawaal (Decline of Urdu in its Motherland)", *The Rahnuma-e-Deccan*, November 27, 1989, p. 9.

a much-needed weapon to fight majoritarian communalism and protect the minorities from its clutches. *Charminar*, a 16th century monument of Hyderabad which has been a site of communal clashes many times post 1960s due to the consecration of a part of the site with a temple, once again became a site of a Hindu-Muslim communal clash in November 2012 which received a considerable amount of coverage in the Urdu newspapers. The root of the conflict was the alleged attempt to expand the structure of the temple which was seen as a threat to the integrity of *Charminar*. Though the temple authorities claimed that the task undertaken during this time was that of decorating the temple, the dominant voices from the Muslim community considered it as a step to impinge further on the space around *Charminar*. One kind of response to this conflict that is found in the Urdu discursive sphere may be described as the collective anger of the Muslim community. This kind of response pervades the Urdu newspapers of the city. The developments over the temple are viewed as distortions not just to an age-old heritage site, but also to the community's existence. Within two months of the *Charminar/ Bhagyalakshmi* temple controversy and the violence that followed, the Urdu newspapers carried articles on the other acts of selective vandalism against the structures of symbolic importance to the Muslim community and described them as a long-time practice. An article in the *Siasat* questions the legality of Bhagyalakshmi temple and other 'non-Muslim' structures erected in proximity to various heritage sites of the city. Some of such sites that are mentioned in it are *Golconda* fort and *Qutb Shah's* mausoleum.⁹³ In fact, in the *Munsif* the status of *Charminar* was analogized with the fate of Babri Masjid and a fear was expressed that another monument involving the sentiments of the Muslim community may get dismantled in the name of a temple.⁹⁴ There is another statement from the *Munsif* that sums up the anxiety of the community over this matter –

*To tamper with Charminar is to tamper with its Tehzeeb; visiting of the Bhagyalakshmi temple by the so-called devotees is not a sincerely religious or spiritual act, but a political act meant to undermine the magnificence (Azmath) of Charminar; the state government's encouragement to the communal forces behind the conflict has scratched the wounds of the aggrieved Muslim community.*⁹⁵

⁹³ The *Siasat* Daily, November 20, 2012, p. 9.

⁹⁴ The *Munsif* Daily, November 15, 2012, p. 5.

⁹⁵ The *Munsif* Daily, November 16, 2012, p. 4.

Statements like the one mentioned above about the saffronization of *Charminar* and other sites of similar importance to the Muslims of the city with illegal encroachments of temples do send a message to the community that it is beleaguered at the hands of the communal forces representing the majority community. But there is a clear and definite flip side to this typically ideological argument and this is where the idea of *Ganga Jamuni Tehzeeb* holds sway, though not in a very ardent way. The discourse brings out the grief of the community over the cultural siege of a monument it identifies with and also reflects on the disappointment that a responsible citizen can perhaps feel with regard to the scenario in question where a historical monument representing the shared culture and heritage of the city and cutting across the religious differences is in the plight of identity politics. The *Munsif* Daily declares that *Charminar* is not any specific community's religious monument or place of worship but is rather a heritage monument which is the identity of the Hyderabad city and is therefore the responsibility of the entire city; to tamper with the monument is to tamper with the city's culture.⁹⁶ It also comments that since the communal forces that are threatening the existence of *Charminar* get encouraged by the indifference of all the political agencies – government, police and political parties, the secularism, in whichever form, they try to demonstrate is only a sham. The *Siasat* also makes a similar observation with similar overtones –

*Charminar is the symbol of Hyderabad's Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb and its preservation is the duty of every responsible resident of the city.*⁹⁷

The *Charminar/Bhagyalakshmi* temple conflict at the discursive level thus provides another instance of struggle in the Urdu public sphere to assert the desire for composite culture-based secularism in the face of challenges of communal politics of identity. Urdu and the *Charminar* monument are presented as victims of ulterior motives of political belligerents who have had enough power to communalize their identity and reify the same.

The conceptualization, in the discourse, of secularism in India in terms of the *Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb* is thus mediated by the constraints of communal politics which have entrenched polarized identities even in those cultural areas where affinities or similarities across the communities have been a long time lived reality. Urdu and *Charminar* are underscored in the discourse as areas where

⁹⁶ Munsif. 16 November 2012, p. 4

⁹⁷ Siasat. 18 November 2012, p. 2

a rich composite culture of Hindus and Muslims is heavily layered by the politically volatile struggles of identity politics and communal polarization. The debates in the newspapers about the status of Urdu and dangers to the monumental site of Charminar are mixed with hope and anxiety much like the election discourse on how Muslims should vote – hope that secularism in the country will remain rooted in its composite culture, keeping the diverse communities united; anxiety about the growing possibilities of the minorities coming under the cultural siege of the majority with the robust efforts of political forces towards it, making secularism nothing more than an outcry of minorities.

4.6. CONCLUSION

To conclude, the chapter began with the aim of understanding the nuanced concept of secularism based on the premise that the crisis of secularism in India is closely associated with the majority-minority equation. Using the election discourse, it first tried to clarify at length that for the Muslim minority in India, as the discourse suggests, secularism is not to be identified with any particular party or parties as every party including the Indian National Congress has used it pragmatically for its own electoral gains and eventually turned Muslims into a profitable vote bank.

The chapter then explained that the Indian Muslim ethos as represented in the Urdu print media has thoroughly recognized secularism through those provisions of the Constitution that seek to protect the culture and religious freedom of minorities. The Constitutional logic of secularism is further extended by the discourse to the provisions of justice to the backward classes in which Muslims also are included as an equally backward class. While making demands for justice to Muslims on the pretext that they are the most aggrieved and vulnerable minority for whom there is no genuine political representative, the discourse largely perceives secularism in terms of adequate compensatory or affirmative action in favour of the community.

The main reason for the vulnerability and socio-economic backwardness of the community that the discourse underscores is the communal polarization of the society by the majoritarian forces at the behest of the BJP and *Sangh Parivar*. Secularism thus becomes a much-needed ideology to represent minority interests and resist the growth of the exclusivist ideology of Hindutva. As an anti-communal and pro-minority agenda turns out to be more pronounced in the election discourse of the 1980s and 1990s owing to the Ramjanmabhoomi movement and the Babri Masjid

demolition. As the chapter further explains, this perception of secularism becomes even starker and almost exclusively targeted against the BJP post-2002 which is when the discourse has been found making ever-increasing appeals to the community to use their practical wisdom in choosing any party that shows the potential to defeat the BJP in the electoral battles and thereby bring down the communal fire by a great amount.

The last part of the chapter intended to explain if the Urdu public sphere in India recognizes the positive role that secularism is meant to play in binding the communities together and weaving them all into one strong nation. The analysis of the newspaper discourse on elections, role of Urdu and a local dispute over a monumental site and temple in the city of Hyderabad has discerned the normative conceptualization of secularism denoting religious tolerance, compromise, agreement, affinity and harmony between the communities. The analysis led to the conclusion that the campaign for the strengthening of the composite culture and inter-communal harmony is time and again obstructed and subdued by the anxieties of Muslims about the constant progress of the majoritarian communal forces particularly after the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party to the heights of politics and the plight that they have inflicted and are capable of further inflicting on the minorities.

Thus, the Urdu public discourse imagines secularism largely in ideological terms to counter the ideology of the Hindu right wing and as a pragmatic policy in electoral politics where all compromises with any non-BJP party are welcome if they assure the defeat of the BJP. Secularism in this sense is a minority-centric concept as already claimed in the chapter and on the other hand the broader sense of secularism or secularism in its more constructive form appears in the discourse as an alternative paradigm whose existence and influence remains overshadowed by the nuances of majority/minority politics.

The conclusion that this discussion leads to is that the discursive scope of positive secularism that aims at strengthening the spirit of religious tolerance, peaceful co-existence and shared living between the communities in the country by thriving on their cultural similarities is perpetually challenged by identity politics where secularism is only a narrow ideology that is needed to counter the hegemony of the majority. Because of the political appropriation of secularism by minorities, the concept has become confined within a subaltern existence where it is definitely the voice of the politically, economically, socially and culturally oppressed groups with little stimulus to arouse

a national desire to celebrate diversity with a shared culture and keep the communities in harmony with each other. The normative ideal of Indian secularism has found a ground in the Urdu public sphere but is yet to become the dominant narrative for which perhaps the over-bearing influence of identity politics needs to make way.

CHAPTER 4

BELONGING WITH A DIFFERENCE: QAUM, MULK & UMMAH

Continuing the analysis of the intertwining of the communitarian and minoritarian strands, this chapter probes into the ideas of nation and supranational belonging. Nations continue to hold political as well as moral power and nationalism is far from being a redundant ideology. The ‘imagined communities’, to use Benedict Anderson’s phrase, are still alive and don’t look like they will die even in the most distant future that one can imagine. The international system is invariably anarchic because nation-states still rule it with the principle of mutual non-interference and no supra-national body so far could loosen the hold of the nation-states on the matters of ‘how to make the world a better place’. Nationalism keeps exhilarating people to commit themselves to the collective national life. Despite the global economic engagements and technological dynamism that is increasing the connectivity of the world, nations have survived all the unprecedented changes that these phenomena have brought about in the recent times.

There are some questions that the chapter deals with – Are national and religious commitments mutually exclusive in the Muslim community and does one belonging to the community have to choose between the two? How has the public sphere defined the national or rather Indian identity of Muslims? These questions are relevant because there have been moments in history when the Muslim community in India itself was depicted as a separate nation and also because Muslims have been found to be identifying themselves as a fraternity whose expanse surpasses the national boundaries of the world. This chapter will show that the theory that Muslims in the country are a nation within a nation due to their cultural and religious distinctiveness holds little strength in post-Partition India. They are a *Qaum*, i.e. community, part of a larger nation, i.e. *Mulk*, identifying themselves with an even larger community, i.e. *Ummah*. The Urdu newspaper discourse keeps debating the question of building a morally strong *Ummah* of which Indian Muslims are a definite part. And simultaneously, it also keeps negotiating the identity of the Muslim *Quam* in the face of a robust Hindu majority of India. In other words, there are endeavours in the public sphere to shape

an Indian Muslim identity which represents a *quam* struggling to sustain its distinct existence as a minority vis-a-vis the ‘other’ in the country and is also trying to live up to its commitment to universal Muslim brotherhood. How the community’s shared understanding of belonging to the same nation as the others is paralleled by its equally strong sense of being a distinct community that shares its ‘beleaguered’ status with Muslims elsewhere in the world is the core subject of the chapter.

Muslim nationalism in India is not an unexplored subject in the academia. John Esposito refers to what he understands as three different Muslim positions regarding independence and nationalism that developed during the British imperialism in India.¹ One position, as he describes, was held by the traditionalists who saw nationalism as a “Western-bred phenomenon” which can grow only within the confines of geographical divisions and racial prejudices unlike the inherent tendencies of Islam to create a universal community cutting across all cultural and ethnic barriers. He describes the second position as the one that was represented by one of the prominent Muslim leaders of India’s freedom struggle, i.e. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and it is often called as composite nationalism which is based on the shared history and experience of the Hindu and Muslim communities. The third position that he highlights is Muslim nationalism that was perpetuated by the then leader of the emerging Pakistan, i.e. Muhammad Ali Jinnah. It was more or less based on the two-nation theory about the identity of Hindus and Muslim vis-a-vis one another. Esposito’s differentiation of these three positions which were observed to have emerged in decades before India’s independence, is going to be used in this chapter to explain the Indian Muslim stance on nationalism as reflected in the Urdu newspapers.

The study of the Urdu public discourse proves the point that the separatist kind of Muslim nationalism that was responsible for the creation of Pakistan in the subcontinent is the least desirable path for the integration of Muslims of post-Independence India. The Indian Muslim sense of fraternity generally oscillates between a kind of composite nationalism that underscores the distinctiveness and historical significance of the community and an appeal to the perceived international brotherhood of the Muslims across the world. In other words, the Indian Muslim nationalism has been constantly ruled by the consciousness of the minority identity that the

¹ John Esposito, *Islam and Politics* (Syracuse University Press, 1998), 93-5, https://www.google.co.in/books/edition/Islam_and_Politics/SlhxoTHLxeMC?hl.

community holds in the face of the Hindu majority and the religious commitment of the community to keep up the integrity of the *Ummah*. The question that seems valid here is why the Indian Muslim sense of nationalism should be a subject of enquiry at all. The Indian Muslim sense of nationalism has its own intricacies that are deeply connected with the political and ideological environment of the community within the country and the aim of this chapter is to explain these intricacies as represented in the discourse.

Using Esposito's classification of the Indian Muslim positions on nationalism, the chapter argues that the nationalist inclinations articulated in the Urdu newspaper discourse on one hand represent composite nationalism that speaks of all communities sharing and celebrating the nation together but with a fair acknowledgement of every community's distinct cultural identity and, more importantly, of the need to protect minorities from cultural assimilation with the majority. On the other hand, they dissolve into the ideas of fraternity across the nations based on the spirit of belonging to the same religion. The nationalist consciousness is torn between a shared nation where no compromise on the dignity and identity of the religious & cultural minorities is acceptable and a world community of believers in which faith in Islam will reign supreme. The discourse that has been analysed shows the interplay of *Qaum*, *Mulk/Watan* and *Ummah* – factors which come out as essential to the Indian Muslim's imagination of a fraternity, each being entangled with the other.

The discourse depicts two sites of vehement expression of composite nationalism. One is the heritage of Urdu language and the other is the history of sacrifices of Muslims for the nation. Both the sites are also used for expressing anguish about the refusal of the political system of the country to acknowledge the contributions of Muslims to the spirit of the nation and give them the status and position that they deserve.

Since nation came as a modern and specifically Western development, the non-Western nations emerged to be anomalous by the Western standards because of their particular characteristics, one of them being lack of cultural uniformity. If the focus is fixed on South Asia, we wouldn't find any different situation. The wind of nationalism which once came blowing from the west became an integral part of the political-cultural environment of this region as well. The ideology of nationalism has not only lived through times here, but also been reinvigorated in different ways. In post-colonial India, the nationalist narratives have never fallen short of political articulation.

The most exuberant articulation has been in terms of religious identity. Peter Van der Veer's work on religious nationalism in India shows how particular religious movements had been effective stimulators of nationalism in both the communities which also became the cause of stark divisions between them.² As a response to the imperialist domination, one of the measures resorted to in pre-Independence India was the revival of the indigenous culture and promotion of religions that were prominently prevalent before the British rule. The revivalist movements which were meant to rejuvenate the Vedic traditions among Hindus and the Muhammadan preachings among Muslims were hence creating identities whereby one could hardly distinguish between the 'national' and the 'communal'. While Hindu and Muslim nationalisms led to the creation of separate nations in the subcontinent, post-Independence they have constantly put the integrity of the religiously and culturally diverse nation under question.

Nationalism based on religious identity was never an easy affair in India, a country that is divided between a huge Hindu majority and a sizeable Muslim minority. It has had an ever-lasting impact of conflict and distrust between both the major religious communities. When religion becomes the basis for constructing a nation and propagating nationalism, a multi-religious nation like India would always face the challenge of conflicting nationalist ideologies shaped by the disturbed political history of the belligerent religious communities whose differences of faith and identity become even starker due to these ideologies by which each community alienates the other. The nationalist sentiments of both the communities have been conditioned by the historical circumstances of pre-Independence India. Both the kinds of nationalism that thrive on separate religious identities have identified the two communities as antagonists insofar as they practise religions that have no agreement with each other. A universalist nationalism did not resonate with the Indian environment as intensely as ethnic nationalism did. These two categories of nationalism were used by Christophe Jaffrelot in his study of the emergence and rise of Hindu nationalism in order to specify the Hindu ideologues as the advocates of one of the Western types of nationalism, i.e. ethnic nationalism.³

The Hindutva ideologues' ethnic nationalism has used a combination of three factors - territory, race and religion to define national identity. Jaffrelot traces the beginnings of Hindu nationalism

² Peter Van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India* (University of California Press, 1994).

³ Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1999) 11-13.

in organizations like the Arya Samaj and Hindu Mahasabha which were established during the British era and were meant to counter the spread of Christianity which was facilitated by the missionaries. Their strategy, as he claims, was to 'stigmatise' and at the same time emulate the 'threatening other' so as to rejuvenate the Hindu religion and culture in a way that makes it worthy of comparison with the Western culture. The idea of a nation sprang up only later from V.D. Savarkar's concept of Hindutva and a sense of ethnic nationalism that the concept reflected. Jaffrelot pointed out that keeping with the strategy of reconstructing the Hindu culture in accordance with the Western idea of nation, Savarkar used territory as a prime element to define who a Hindu is and regarded the Aryans, who first settled at the banks of the Indus and embraced the Himalayan land, and their descendants as Hindus. Savarkar, he says, also claimed in his writings that the Aryan settlers formed the first Hindu nation. The need to save the attempts to rebuild the Hindu nation from exclusivism of caste and religion that could shrink the identifiable Hindu nation without the 'others', led Savarkar to accept all those inhabitants of the Indian territory as Hindus who embrace and worship the land of their residence. He is also said to have welcomed, in his writings, the Muslims and Christians of India, people who became converts in the past few centuries, to assimilate into the Hindu society.⁴

This kind of majoritarian nationalism that negates the minorities' right to their own cultural existence is the context in which the Indian Muslim sense of nationalism needs to be understood. If the Indian Muslim thought has not been able to dissociate religious identity from its conception of nation, then so has been the tendency of the Hindu political ethos as well, represented by those who imagined a nation with the Hindu culture as its centre. The basic premise of this chapter is that the concepts of nation and nationalism in the Urdu discursive sphere are in no way immune to the ideological politics of majority/minority identity and are thus invariably shaped by it.

Commenting on the Muslims' sense of distinction from the Hindu majority, Rajmohan Gandhi observes that in the Indian history, Muslims, unlike the other ethnic peoples who came from outside, have been found unable to mingle into the culture and traditions of the Indian soil which is why all the invaders before the coming of Muslims were tolerated and accepted by the natives but Muslims always received an attitude of hostility and alienation from the people of their adopted

⁴ Ibid, 28.

land.⁵ But he also points to the fact that in about six hundred years of living in the country, the Muslim population could not have expanded without conversion, which means that a majority of them are of the same ethnic breed as the Hindus and yet hostility with Muslims surpassed all the forms of conflict with the Britishers who ruled the country while keeping up their race and culture unlike the latter who came to be identified as both – followers of the Islamic religion and the people of the Indian nationality. Gandhi relates the puzzling problem of distrust of the Indian Muslims' nationalist commitment to the religious world-view of the community. In his observation while Hindus loved as well as venerated their land along with all its elements like rivers and mountains, for Muslims on the other hand, this kind of veneration was no different from worshipping the land and its elements which amounts to idolatry – an unforgivable offence in Islam.⁶ His other observation is that Muslims are called on by their religion to build and serve the community of believers spread across the world and therefore nationalism becomes an antithesis to Islam's spirit of international brotherhood.⁷

The discourse shows the same problems in the conceptualization of nation and nationalism which are related to the 'special minority status' that it claims for Muslims in the country and also to the transnational loyalty that Muslims are expected to maintain towards an imagined global community of believers.

⁵ Rajmohan Gandhi quotes the famous Muslim scholars and travellers from the period of early Muslim invasions in India, Al-Beruni and Ibn Battutah, who observed that the Hindus looked upon the invaders as outcastes and consciously kept away from the barbarian Muslims. Putting forward the argument of students of History from both the communities, he also says that, "*though India had succeeded in integrating foreign elements that entered India before the Muslims (Greeks, Scythians, Kushans and others), she could not Indianise the Muslims.*" Rajmohan Gandhi, *Understanding the Muslim Mind* (Penguin Books India, 2003), 4

⁶ "*The Hindu loved, even venerated, the land, rivers and mountains of India. His supposed Central Asian origins never figured in the lore on which he was raised. India was his soil, his sacred earth. The Muslim, especially when wanting an argument or provoked into one charged that the Hindu's devotion to India amounted to a worship of earth and clay and was merely another instance of idolatry.*" Gandhi, 14.

⁷ "*The Muslim is taught that he is part of a world-wide community of the faithful and that nationalism is a sin; in actual practice this sin might disfigure the relations between one Muslim country and another but he should not lose faith in Islam's larger brotherhood.*" Ibid, 13.

5.1. URDU AND LINGUISTIC NATIONALISM

As the discursive narratives in the Urdu newspapers suggest, Urdu is a language assigned with communal as well as nationalist fervour and never identified in regional terms unlike the other languages of India. Urdu and Hindi belong to the same family and their grammar and vocabulary are so identical that one can very well take them to be the same language. Their association with two different religious communities, i.e. Hindi with Hindus and Urdu with Muslims, was a historical consequence of that phase of the Indian national movement when communal identity coincided with national identity; this was when Hindi was Hinduized with a heavy Sanskrit vocabulary as part of the Hindu nationalist drive and Urdu was heavily Persianized and injected with Islamic literature in order to consolidate the Muslim community on its basis.⁸ Urdu eventually became so important to the identity of Muslims in pre-Independence India that they formed a new nation with it as the official language and consequently the leaders of independent India thought that Hindi was the only logical choice to be the official language of the country. In the set-up of a multi-religious and multi-lingual India where Hindi, along with English as the associate official language of the government of India, has been constantly promoted as the standard lingua franca of Indians, with no great success though, and the other significant Indian languages have acquired a regional identity through the linguistic reorganization of the states of India, Urdu has been struggling for its identity despite India being the only land of its birth.

This struggle of Urdu to survive and attain a status of national importance is widely highlighted in the discourse. It provides a narrative about how the trans-regional language which had secular beginnings with cross-sectional contributions to its rich literature became the victim of pre-Independence communal politics and eventually had to compromise with a new identity thrust upon it in post-Independence India – the language of Muslim minority. The discourse on the identity and status of Urdu in India has not changed in any major way over the decades from the 1980s and 90s to the contemporary times. It reflects efforts in the Urdu public sphere to carry the *Qaum* and *Mulk/Watan* together so that both are equally cherished and none is compromised for the other. Urdu is portrayed as the language of the largest minority of India and such a portrayal indicates a desire to homogenize the linguistically diverse Indian Muslims. But on the other hand,

⁸ Tariq Rahman, *From Hindi to Urdu: A Social and Political History* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2011), 98-99.

the discussions in the newspapers also highlight the significance of the language in terms of national pride. So, in the discursive sphere, Urdu is certainly one of the sites where there is an assertion of the Indian Muslim nationalism that celebrates a culture shared across various communities constituting the nation, but not without appeals to let every community be its distinct self.

The representation of Urdu in the newspaper discourse is marked by mixed concerns that point to the significance of the language to the community as well as the nation. The discourse on this matter has been on a constant mission to promote the language and use it for articulating the particularity of the Indian Muslim identity and asserting the Indianness of the Indian Muslims. Ignoring the fact that the Muslims of India settled in different parts of the country are embedded in the local cultures of their respective regions and are hence the speakers of various languages apart from Urdu, the discourse has persistently tried to drive its target readers to believe that Urdu is the language of the Indian Muslims. The *Rahnuma-e-Deccan* back in 1987 stated,

*For the past three hundred years, Urdu has been the mother tongue of the Indian Muslims. There is a huge majority that is trying to wipe out Urdu. For them, to wipe out Urdu is to wipe out Islamiyat.*⁹

This statement clearly defines the Indian Muslims as a homogeneous linguistic community and also says much more. Hinting at the danger of the death of Urdu, it suggests that those who are out to kill the language are also looking forward to killing the Islamic culture that the language carries. Statements like this give an overt indication that some cultural attributes like language are quite essential in imagining a homogeneous community vis-a-vis the others. One can very well find in them Benedict Anderson's imagined communities that build up on standardized languages. They also vindicate the argument of scholars like Mushirul Hasan that when a community is to be homogenized, then the makers of a 'high culture' take the lead in realizing this objective and this high culture is supposed to serve as a common thread to integrate people into an identity that will transcend their lived experience of local cultures including the regional languages.¹⁰ Thus Urdu certainly is a symbolic factor for those who constitute the Urdu public sphere in India with which

⁹ *Rahnuma-e-Deccan Daily*, July 27, 1987, p. 9.

¹⁰ Mushirul Hasan, *Legacy of a Divided Nation: India's Muslims Since Independence* (New York: Routledge, 2018) Chapter 1, https://www.google.co.in/books/edition/Legacy_Of_A_Divided_Nation/l3ekDwAAQBAJ?h.

to portray a community that is imagined to be internally homogeneous but externally distinct from the others. Such a portrayal of the community by using language along with religion may produce a sense of nationalism that draws boundaries between the Muslims of India and the others as it appeals to an abstract linguistic unity of a religious community that is territorially scattered over the country.

The Majority-Minority prism is inseparable from the public discourse on any matter that pertains to the Indian Muslims and hence a discourse on Urdu in the Urdu newspapers would be no exception in viewing the matter from the same prism. In terming Urdu as a minority language, the Urdu newspapers have sought to not just reflect on the size of the population speaking the language in India but to get the focus right on the impoverished condition of the language and the community that speaks it the most. Commenting on the minority status of Urdu, the *Rahnuma-e-Deccan* questions that -

*Why in our country whose Constitution protects the rights of the linguistic and religious minorities, Urdu is treated with injustice?*¹¹

The articles in the newspapers that discuss the condition of Urdu in India have presented a picture of an agonized and forlorn language with no substantial educational infrastructure to revive its rich position that it enjoyed earlier; a language that its own speakers are unable to promote in the face of the powerful languages of the union government – Hindi and English – and the regional languages which enjoy a privileged status in their own states. In minoritizing Urdu, associating it with the ‘largest minority’ of the country, and asking for its uplift to the level of the currently privileged languages, the Urdu public discourse has viewed the Indian Muslims as a beleaguered unity where the *Qaum* demands more support and patronage from the *Mulk* for its survival. Blaming Muslims as well in the contemporary times for the gradual demise of Urdu, the *Munsif* comments that –

We are losing connection with Urdu. Hindus have considered it as their duty to teach their children Hindi and hence the language is still alive today. But the young generation of Muslims today, particularly of North India, have no familiarity with Urdu. Don't they, particularly their parents,

¹¹ *Rahnuma-e-Deccan Daily*, 20 June, 2018.

*know that our entire cultural heritage is based on this language? And consequently, the future generation will be devoid of the Islamic religion.*¹²

However, the same discourse on Urdu also has a very strong narrative on composite nationalism which suggests that there is much more than the community-centric view and minority politics that is attached to the language. There are many articles in the Urdu newspapers that celebrate the roots of Urdu which it shares with Hindi and many other languages. They have underscored the *Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb* that the language stands for and this is where the paradox in the discourse lies. In the same discursive space, Urdu is regarded as the cultural attribute of Indian Muslims which is highly neglected, much like the community it is associated with and eulogized for keeping up the tradition of a shared life between Hindus and Muslims. In observation of its syncretic culture, the *Rahnuma-e-Deccan* says,

*Urdu is a fundamentally Hindustani language. It has Aryan roots and consists of Persian, Arabic and Turkish words. It would be strongly unjust to associate Urdu with any specific community because it is the symbol of the country's composite culture (Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb)*¹³

*Innumerable languages and dialects have merged into it...It has taught the lessons of love and friendship.*¹⁴

The above stated claims about the language prove that the 'Urdu public' never wanted to envisage Indian Muslims as a community whose culture has no affinity with the culture of the rest of the nation. Promotion of Urdu and its elevation from a repressed condition is for them a requirement in the interest of the country as it is a linguistic tradition that epitomizes the composite culture of India. It's necessary to cite here, Kavita Datla's work on the development of Urdu as a secular language. She explained how in the princely state of Hyderabad an intense drive was carried out in the early decades of the twentieth century to produce a rejuvenated Urdu meant to become a standard modern medium of communication for the whole country and how as part of this drive the Muslim intellectuals and educators worked hard on secularizing and modernizing the Urdu

¹² Hakim-ul-Rahman, "Muslamaano Ke Liye Lamha Fikr Yeh (It's a Moment of Worry for Muslims)", *Roznama Rashtriya Sahara*, November 23, 2014.

¹³ "Urdu Zabaan Hindustan Ki Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb Ki Aainadaar Hai (Urdu language is a Reflection of India's *Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb*)", *Rahnuma-e-Deccan*, February 9, 1987, p. 9.

¹⁴ Ibid.

literature in order to make the language a substitute for English in independent India.¹⁵ The Urdu newspapers from the 1980s and the contemporary times of course do not exactly express the same ambition that Datla explored in her work but they do bring out a desire to see Urdu revive as a secular language to bind different religious, regional and linguistic groups together. A more nuanced perception comes when the Urdu language is given an overtly mainstream nationalist colour by according it a significant historical role in the making of the nation during the freedom struggle. Placing the language in the active politics of Indian nationalism and anti-colonial struggle is a definite way to assert the Muslim community's long-standing involvement in the Indian nation's birth against the might of the British colonialism. The sentiments of distress are expressed over the condescended status of Urdu despite the language's passionate endeavours to script the colonized India's nationalist aspirations and exhort Indians with the same. As one article from 1988 in the *Rahnuma-e-Deccan* states:

*That language which once before independence most loudly sang the songs of India's freedom, shouted slogans and urged the people of the country to sacrifice their lives in the battle for India's liberation is the same language that after independence has become a victim of negligence and indifference.*¹⁶

It further reads:

*It is to be said repeatedly that Urdu took a considerable part in India's freedom struggle and with great joy, enthusiasm and respect, it took into its fold, the books of all the religions of the country.*¹⁷

The *Siasat* in a very recent article of 2019 while reminding the readers of the priceless sacrifices of Muslims for the country's independence makes the same claim –

*The most popular and inspiring patriotic songs that were composed during the freedom struggle were in Urdu.*¹⁸

¹⁵ Kavita Datla, 'The Language of Secular Islam: Urdu Nationalism and Colonial India' (Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2013) 1-19.

¹⁶ *Rahnuma-e-Deccan*. 20 June 1988.

¹⁷ *Rahnuma-e-Deccan*. 20 June 1988.

¹⁸ *Siasat Daily*, September 17, 2019, p. 5.

Interestingly, the role of Urdu journalism in facilitating the Indian National Movement also is highlighted in the discourse. *Rashtriya Sahara* states that the main purpose of Urdu newspapers like *Awadh Akhbar*, *Milaap* (1923), *Pratap* (1919), *Qaumi Awaaz* (1945), *Haqeeqat* and *Al-Hilal* was to arouse nationalist sentiments in Indians.¹⁹ It also claims that during 1920s there was a lot of pressure on the press to publish British government's advertisements but the Urdu newspapers staunchly refused to abide by this command and thus started receiving support from many nationalist groups of the time. It further says that the efforts of these newspapers ignited the nationalist fire in several villages and cities of India and perturbed the Britishers so much so that the latter tried to put as much restraint on Urdu press as it could but it wasn't successful because wherever it banned an Urdu newspaper, a new one cropped up with the same amount of nationalist zeal. The *Rahnuma-e-Deccan* also listed Urdu newspapers in the pre-Independence period from 1859 to highlight their revolutionary role.²⁰ It needs to be noted here that many of these historical newspapers were founded by non-Muslim editors and the intention behind mentioning them in the discourse is definitely to signify the secular nationalism that the Urdu print media stood for.

This personification of Urdu is a very striking part of the discourse on the language. The use of Urdu language in composing national songs and poems is enough of a ground for claiming its innate nationalist or patriotic zeal and from this assertion it is clear that the contributors to the Urdu public sphere in India have been looking at Urdu not just as a language spoken by most of the Muslim minority, but also as one of the veins of Indian nationalism. They have thus desired a special recognition to the language for all that it has done for the country in the past. In another edition of the *Rahnuma-e-Deccan*, an article while stressing the national character of the Hindustani language, a standard North Indian lingua franca which is written in both, Arabic-Persian and Devnagiri scripts, and linking its close connection with Urdu, states that –

The word Hindustani was historically always used for Urdu. All the Hindustani works used to be written in the Urdu script. Even the new language which came to be known as Devnagiri Hindi, its educational learning was carried out using the Urdu script and its form was shaped by the common Urdu language along with Sanskrit words. But the growing inclination towards communal politics at the end of the nineteenth century detached Urdu from the identity of

¹⁹ *Roznama Rashtriya Sahara*, August 13, 2019, p. 5.

²⁰ Sheikh Fahimullah, "Jung Azaadi: Urdu Sahaafat Ki Adabi Khidmaat Ka Pasmanzar (Freedom Struggle: A Background of Urdu Journalism's Literary Service)", *Rahnuma-e-Deccan Daily*, August 15, 2019, p. 12.

*Hindustani to satisfy a huge section of Hindus and the same section started emphasizing on the term Hindi in Hindustani. In the 20th century, Hindi communalism and anti-Urdu sentiment increased so much that people forgot the Hindustani language. The question of majority and minority was raised. Consequently, the question of language became a communal question.*²¹

Apart from highlighting the evolution of Hindi, Urdu and Hindustani, which is a well-researched theme in the academia, the statement above underscores the communalized realities of Hindi and Urdu of which the latter had become a victim of the majoritarian politics while it could have been the country's national language (*Qaumi Zabaan*) in the form of Hindustani. A similar observation is made by the *Munsif* daily in a 1985 edition in which the article concerned claims that while Hindustani, which was expressed in Nagari and Urdu scripts, was a more popularly spoken language in the country and could have been logically chosen as India's national and official language at the time of independence, unfortunately the mainstream leaders of the Indian National Congress who were also responsible for drafting a just and fair constitution of the country, adopted the Nagari-scripted Hindi and eventually alienated Urdu forever.²²

The politics of Hindi and Hindustani and the exclusion of Urdu from the fold of both the languages, particularly the latter, is a persistent issue even up to the present day. A very recent edition of the *Munsif* daily makes the same observation about the status of Urdu in India post-Independence and post-Partition and how the identity of the Hindustani language, which was originally born out of Hindi as well as Urdu and developed with a greater vocabulary from Urdu, got exclusively defined as common or colloquial Hindi leaving Urdu outside its frame. Making this observation it states or rather questions thus-

*The language that we call Hindustani, if it is not Urdu then what is it? In most regions of India, the colloquial language even today is Hindustani. This Hindustani language today has kept about a hundred and fifty crore people speaking different languages connected. What is the identity of the language which is being called Hindustani, whether because of communal sentiment or any other reason?*²³

²¹ *Rahnuma-e-Deccan Daily*, January 18, 1993, p. 8.

²² *Munsif Daily*, May 27, 1985.

²³ *Munsif Daily*, January 13, 2018, p. 9.

The discourse on Urdu in the newspapers is a case for composite nationalism which celebrates cultural diversity but also insists on the acknowledgement of repressed and beleaguered conditions of some cultural groups through the affirmative action of the state; this kind of a nationalism that demands recognition of the cultural difference can only come from the vantage of a cultural minority.

Nonetheless, despite taking a minoritarian perspective of Urdu while asserting the Indian Muslim nationalism, the discourse does not rely as much on the Arabic/Persian roots of the language as on its Indian Aryan roots that it shares with Hindi. Much like many scholars who have explained the affinity of Hindi and Urdu, the writers of articles in the Urdu newspapers do describe both the languages as ‘twin sisters’. In fact, they have often addressed the speakers of Urdu as *Urduwaale* which is an all-encompassing expression with no references to any specific religious community unlike otherwise where Urdu is given the label of a ‘minority’ language. Calling out to *Urduwaale* or speakers of Urdu, an article from *Rashtriya Sahara* complains that it is their lethargy and inaction that has halted the progress of the language.²⁴ It also blames the state for the current position of the language stating that Urdu is not the language of any particular community but is accused of having divided the nation on communal lines and whenever there is a discussion on giving it the privilege and position that it deserves, the reason that is invoked to shut the matter is that Urdu is the language of Muslims. Putting the onus of preserving and further promoting the language on the *Urduwaale* and time and again asserting the language’s contributions to the country’s history says a great deal about the aspirations in the Urdu public sphere to rebuild Urdu’s composite culture and nationalist spirit and thereby keep rejuvenating the Indian Muslim sense of nationalism.

In a 1994 edition of the *Rahnuma-e-Deccan*, it is in fact stated that culture is moulded by time and history and is not subject to any political agenda; any attempt to homogenize the country’s culture would be unnatural because at any given time, culture naturally tends to be mixed, shared and composite; hence there should be no opposition to the adoption of Hindi in the Devnagiri script as

²⁴ Feroz Bakht Ahmed, “Urdu Ki Tarveej Ke Liye Lisaani Qaidon Par Tawaja Ki Zaroorat (Need for Attention to Linguistic Rules to Promote Urdu)”, *Roznama Rashtriya Sahara*, August 20, 2019, p. 5.

the official language of the country because the language is no different from Urdu except for the difference of the script.²⁵

The analyses by Kavita Datla and Taylor Sherman about how a nationalist spirit was breathed into Urdu by the Muslim public figures while at the threshold of a post-colonial India will find a bit of corroboration in the Urdu newspaper discourse.²⁶ Their works argue that the communal fervour that Urdu gained in the pre-Independence politics was not the only reality of the language; Urdu also carried the secular dream of the Indian Muslim nationalists, who saw their future in India after independence, to build the new nation on the basis of a common modern language rooted in the Indian culture which will serve as the best alternative to English and a bond to keep the culturally diverse nation united. One major step in this direction to modernize Urdu, as these works based on the study of the Muslim public culture of Hyderabad explain, was to inject as much modern Western knowledge into the Urdu literature as possible so that the language could stand on par with English and be ready to represent a modern India. Since this ambition of the Muslim nationalists could never be fulfilled after independence, the Urdu public discourse in the past few decades doesn't show such hopes but does voice the expectations of repairing the damage done to the nationalist potential of Urdu.

For instance, the *Munsif* daily in its very recent edition discusses the need to take exactly the same steps that Datla had highlighted in her work on Urdu nationalism in colonial India. It insists that all the Urdu educational institutions should conduct workshops and seminars for imparting not only the knowledge of Urdu *Adab* and *Tehzeeb* (both the words more or less mean the same, i.e. culture) but also scientific knowledge and thereby make Urdu suitable to the contemporary times so that an increasing number of Urdu speaking people will be motivated to become literate in the language.²⁷ The aim behind the promotion of Urdu now is a lot more modest than what Datla contemplated in her work on Nizam's Hyderabad and why it has become modest is explained by the recurring point in the discourse that the prolonged communal politics of language has undermined its potential to be a national language and reduced it to being just one of the minority

²⁵ *Rahnuma-e-Deccan Daily*, February 25, 1994.

²⁶ Kavita Datla, *The Language of Secular Islam: Urdu Nationalism and Colonial India* (Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2013). Taylor C. Sherman, *Muslim Belonging in Secular India: Negotiating Citizenship in Postcolonial Hyderabad*, Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

²⁷ *Munsif Daily*, January 13, 2018, p. 9.

languages. The Urdu public sphere wants a relentless growth of Urdu so that it acquires a modern appeal among its speakers most of who are not embedded in its literary culture and keeps withstanding the challenges of time that are rendering it totally insignificant.

A linguistic tradition with a rich and glorious past, a historical medium of communication of secular national aspirations and, a beleaguered minority language of a beleaguered minority religious community in the present emerging from the communal politics of the past and sustained even now – these are the attributes of Urdu that the discourse defines while observing it as a source of composite nationalism in India.

5.2. HISTORY AS THE SITE OF NATIONALIST EXPRESSIONS

Hurling attacks at the right-wing Hindu hardliners for constantly targeting Muslims and asking them to leave the country if they cannot imbibe the ‘Indian’ culture, MIM leader, Akbaruddin Owaisi in his very infamous speech in 2013 said -

*We shall never leave this nation as we always belonged here and will do so forever and God forbid, if we do have to leave, then we shall take along with us Taj Mahal, Red Fort and Qutub Minar as well. After that what will be left in the country?”*²⁸

This statement from his inflammatory and aggressive speech reflects on another important site that is often used by the Urdu public sphere to prove the strong attachment of Indian Muslims with the land where they reside – the legendary acts of Indian Muslims in the past that added to the country’s history - the priceless treasures of heritage and the memories of victories of the nation against its enemies. Invoking the Muslim historical figures and their indelible impressions on the nation’s image, the discourse claims Indian Muslims’ ownership of the nation on equal terms with the others. In citing the role of Indian Muslims in history, the discourse intends to depict the joint efforts across the castes and communities to liberate the nation from the British rule and to draw special attention to how Muslims even before the British era made a difference in nation-building but are remembered only as destructive invaders in the pages of the country’s history.

²⁸ “Akbaruddin Owaisi’s speech at Nirmal, Adilabad,” YouTube video, 1:04:42, “TeluguOne,” January 4, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C59ZMNT6KrY>

Making a statement of solidarity with the people of the nation by underscoring the struggles against common external enemies in the past has been a continual effort in the Urdu public sphere. Time and again there have been discussions on the valour and passion of the Muslim martyrs of India's freedom struggle since 1857 and even before that. One such glorified hero is Tipu Sultan. The *Munsif* calls him and many Muslims who fought battles against the British imperialists as *Mujahidin* i.e. crusaders, of India's freedom struggle. In the context of Tipu Sultan's birth anniversary celebrations organized in Karnataka under the auspices of the state government which began this initiative in 2015 with the conduct of seminars and workshops about the ruler as part of the celebrations, the *Munsif* said -

*It would be good if such seminars are held in schools, colleges and universities as well. In this way, the new generation will be acquainted with the crusaders (Mujahidin), especially the Muslim crusaders of India's freedom struggle.... And if they also learn that there was no distinction of religion among those who sacrificed their lives for the country, then there will be no influence of the existing politics of hate and divide over young minds.*²⁹

Asserting about Tipu Sultan's resentment for the Britishers and his relentless struggle against them, the *Munsif* further comments thus about him -

*Tipu Sultan was one of the early crusaders of India's freedom struggle; it was his endeavour till his last breath to not let the Britishers overpower the nation; he had intense hatred in his heart for the Britishers; since the age of 15 years, he along with his father had fought battles with them; it is a fact that he exerted all his strength in the effort to drive them out of the country.*³⁰

This article was also published in response to the hue and cry raised by the BJP workers in Karnataka questioning the rationale behind the idea of celebrating the birthday of an anti-Hindu ruler. Responding to this accusation the article states:

The organizations that are promoting the Hindutva ideology have called Tipu Sultan a cruel and communal ruler who forced people to convert to Islam; through their tough protests and criticism,

²⁹ Muhammad Imran, "Tipu Sultan Bhi Ek Musalmaan (Tipu Sultan Also a Muslim)", *Munsif Daily*.

³⁰ *Ibid*.

*parties like the BJP and Vishwa Hindu Parishad have once again proved that they wish to wipe out the Muslim history of this country and establish Hindu Rashtra”.*³¹

Rejecting the accusations by the Hindu right-wing forces, the article voices the feeling of pride that the community and the nation ought to be sharing about a man who upheld the composite traditions of the Indian society -

*Tipu Sultan never differentiated even between the different prominent languages spoken in his dynasty.... There had been a long-standing culture of inter-religious trust in India and Tipu Sultan played a phenomenal role in maintaining the same culture.*³²

The article also makes allusions to the other Muslim rulers like Babur, Akbar, Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb who are said to have done their own bit in protecting the country's integrity and taking it to the continually increasing levels of progress but the it does lament that -

*Such rulers and their glorious acts are ignored only because they were Muslims; but after all they were Muslims of the Indian land.*³³

A more recent edition of the *Munsif* daily once again discusses Tipu Sultan in the context of an occasion where, as part of the celebration of India's 69th Republic Day, the Delhi Assembly's gallery walls were decked with the photos of several revolutionaries of India's freedom struggle and the Bharatiya Janata Party expressed its objection to the inclusion of Tipu Sultan among the legends. On this matter the newspaper states –

*Tipu Sultan truly was the first leader of India's freedom struggle. The biggest reason for the deprecation of Tipu Sultan is that he was a Muslim. Do the communal forces know that Muslims' sacrifices in India's freedom struggle played a significant role? On the other hand, not a single member of the RSS sacrificed his life for this country's independence.*³⁴

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ “Tipu Sultan Ki Tasveer Par Hungama (Uproar Over Tipu Sultan's Picture)”, *Munsif Daily*, January 29, 2018, p. 4. The phrase ‘communal forces’ which is the English translation of the phrase *firkha parasth* is a direct reference to the right-wing Hindutva ideologues who are institutionally represented by the mainstream Bharatiya Janata Party and the allied non-political groups including the RSS, VHP and the Bajrang Dal.

While underscoring the importance of history in a nation's progress, the article also states that –

*The communal forces should never forget that a country that does not remember its ancestors' legendary acts and sacrifices certainly cannot progress. With their opposition to Tipu Sultan, the communal forces are pretending to be patriots. If they truly loved their nation then they would not have opposed in this way another lover of the nation.*³⁵

The *Siasat* calls Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan the first rebels against the Britishers to confront them directly.³⁶ *Rashtriya Sahara* also describes Tipu Sultan as a forerunner of India's struggle against the British rule and emphasizes his significance in the following way –

*It is disappointing that it is an unknown fact that in the whole world, there has been no ruler other than Tipu Sultan who lost his life while fighting in a battlefield. He was a true patriot who fought the Britishers valiantly and died for the nation.*³⁷

All these articles are outspoken declarations to their readers that they belong to a community whose ancestors had left no stone unturned in not just guarding but also enhancing the nation's pride. It is also a wakeup call to the 'others' that they cannot turn a blind eye to the sweat and blood that the Muslim rulers and freedom fighters had shed in their efforts to resist the mighty enemy and its overpowering wings. Remembering the sacrifices and achievements of the community in the past for the nation and reminding the ones who have forgotten them is a necessary way in the public discourse to establish its nationalist position in which *Mulk/Watan* is no less important than the *Quam*. It also implies that in the realm of nation-building in the past, Indian Muslims have been the most underrated community and that their inextricable connection with the nation's past has to be remembered time and again so that they can recover their lost status and dignity as equal citizens of India.

The public discourse does like reminding the Muslims of this century about the last Mughal emperor as well; his love for the nation and his unrelenting aggression against the British in India's

³⁵ Ibid. Here the country or the nation is hailed as *Qaum* in Urdu and in many places, the words *Qaum*, *Mulk*, *Millat*, *Ummah* and *Watan* have been used interchangeably as though they mean the same. However, Urdu scholars do maintain a difference between these terms.

³⁶ "Mulk Ki Azaadi Me Musalmaano Ki Sabse Zyaada Qurbaniyaan Lekin Kaun Jaanta Hai (Muslims' Maximum sacrifices in India's Freedom Struggle but Who Knows)", *Siasat Daily*, January 20, 2019, p. 5.

³⁷ Masoom Moradabadi, "Rakh De Koi Zara Si Khaak, Watan Kafan Me (Put Some Ashes, the Nation is in Shroud)", *Roznama Rashtriya Sahara*, August 14, 2019, p. 5.

first war of independence. Making this observation, *Siasat* which claims that Bahadur Shah Zafar was the first Indian who zealously fought for India's independence and it was his battle with the British Raj that triggered the revolt of 1857, says -

*During his imprisonment, when his sons were beheaded and their heads presented before him, there were no tears in his eyes. But on the contrary, a brave emperor and an honest Muslim saw his sons' heads and said, 'this is how the heads of the martyrs are to be presented with reverence and not thrown into drains'. The same Bahadur Shah Zafar who was held captive thousands of miles away in Rangoon during the war of India's independence, remembered his nation till his last breath and kept the light of the revolution illuminated.*³⁸

These lines apart from articulating the nationalistic spirit of a specific Muslim ruler also suggest that being an earnest Muslim and being a nationalist are no contradictory paths and indeed guarding the nation and always standing by it is a religiously prescribed duty of any Muslim. Bahadur Shah Zafar's same statement is quoted in *Rashtriya Sahara* as well while discussing the contributions of the Muslim revolutionaries.³⁹ Addressing Muslim men and women of India and telling them about the significance of their ancestors who certainly came as invaders and then went on to rule the country for several centuries, an article from the same newspaper asserts –

*This is our nation. This is where we have to live and die. We have our own history here. We had once come here from outside. But if this is a fact to be considered, then so should the fact that many other communities in India were living outside India before making their home here. They have embraced this nation and so have we as our beloved one. For eight hundred years we have ruled here with love and harmony and created a place for ourselves in the hearts of the people. We have recreated this nation and given it a great culture...This nation was divided into small kingdoms, we made it great, strong and healthy.*⁴⁰

Commenting on their role in integrating the disintegrated country, the *Munsif* makes a similar point –

³⁸ The *Siasat*, 20 August 2017, 5.

³⁹ Moradabadi, "Rakh De Koi Zara Si Khaak", 5.

⁴⁰ Rahman, "Musalmaano Ke Liye Lamha Fikriya (A Moment of Worry for Muslims)".

*India has been welcoming into its fold, people from different races and religions coming from outside. But India was also divided on the lines of caste.... When Muslims stepped into Buddha's India, its political, religious, social and economic structure was broken. They settled here and mingled with the natives. They first laid the foundation for a unified country and then got engaged in their mission to strengthen the country, brighten its future and integrate it...In bringing together different communities and groups like beads in string, Muslims played a significant role...This established culture of living together with religious/cultural differences was immensely disrupted under the British rule which was based on the policy of divide and rule. It created distrust and animosity between the two great communities.*⁴¹

*Muslims ruled India for many centuries; they were always opposed to the British rule. They aligned with Hindus to fight the Britishers but the Hindu/Muslim unity could not stay for too long as the British Raj ruined it with its rigorously executed policy of divide and rule.*⁴²

The *Rahnuma-e-Deccan* makes the following statement –

*Muslim emperors ruled India for seven hundred years. Though they did not replicate the Islamic culture completely, they promoted Islamic education on the basis of the principles of tolerance and justice and never forced the Shariat on Hindus. They allowed Hindus to follow Dharamasastra.*⁴³

The *Siasat* also alludes to the disproportionate attention paid to the heroic acts of the Hindu and Muslim women of the royal blood due to their religious differences. In the context of the ideological drive of the Maharashtra government led by the BJP, that came to power in 2014, to reform the Indian History text books by centre staging the period of Shivaji Maharaj, the popular Maratha king from the seventeenth century and pushing into oblivion the history before and after his reign, the newspaper comments on how even the Indian Muslim heroines have no place in

⁴¹ Latief Sajaani, "Sir Syed Ka Nazariya, Qaumi Yakjehti (Sir Syed's Outlook, Communal Harmony)", *Munsif Daily*, March 22, 2018, p. 9.

⁴² Arif Aziz, "Jad-o-Jahad Azaadi Me Musalmaano Ka Valvala Angez Kirdaar (Muslims' Ardent Role in Freedom Struggle)", *Siasat Daily*, August 15, 2019, p. 10.

⁴³ Syed Habib Imaam Qadri, "Hindu-Muslim Ittehad Ko Sabotage Karne Ka Zimmedaar Kaun? (Who is Responsible for the Sabotage of Hindu-Muslim Unity?)" *Rahnuma-e-Deccan*, August 15, 2019, p. 11.

history in comparison with their Hindu counterparts. Naming some of them, the *Siasat* comments thus –

*Which all Muslim rulers would you label as communal (firkha parasth)? If all the Muslim rulers had been on a mission to have forced religious conversions, then today Hindus would not have been in majority. Muslims continue to be a minority which proves their empathy and cordiality with the Hindus but while Rani Lakshmibai and Ahilyabai Holkar are being given their due importance, Razia Sultana and Chand Bibi aren't being given the same. Chand Bibi is in no way less valuable than Shivaji Maharaj.*⁴⁴

This observation prima facie seems disoriented, but by reading between the lines the point that it is trying to make, comes out clearly, that in return for their valour and prowess with which they guarded the nation and their amity with the Hindu culture and tradition, the Muslim rulers have not been awarded any appreciation in the national memory.

There is another article from the *Siasat* that mentions another Muslim heroine and her act of bravery in the revolt of 1857 –

*Everyone knows about Rani Laxmibai, but nobody knows about the forgotten heroine of India's first war of independence - Begum Hazrat Mahal who frightened the then British Chief Commissioner, Sir Henry Lawrence and defeated the British Army on 30 June 1857.*⁴⁵

Representation of history that can leave a deep impact on the people is found not only in the area of education through course books, but also in various forms of popular art, particularly cinema. A recent Hindi movie by the well-known director, Sanjay Leela Bhansali, went through a political controversy that exerted enough pressure to even get its title changed from *Padmavati* to *Padmavat* in order to not further offend the group, Karni Sena, that raised objection to the film for its allegedly inappropriate representation of Queen Padmini, a revered thirteenth century Rajput queen. While all controversy before the release of the film revolved around how right or wrong was the portrayal of the character of Queen Padmini, after its release the film received a lot of flak from the critics for glorifying an age old Rajput custom of *Jauhar* in which women burn themselves to death to

⁴⁴ *Siasat Daily*, August 20, 2017, p. 3. Ahilyabai Holkar was the Queen of the Malwa Kingdom in the eighteenth century and Chand Bibi belonged to the Bijapur and Ahmednagar Sultanates in the sixteenth century.

⁴⁵ "Musalmaano Ki Sabse Zyaada Qurbani" (Maximum Sacrifices of Muslims), p. 5.

avoid violation of their dignity by the foreign invaders in case of a defeat. Another reason for criticism that was not very emphatically discussed in the mainstream media was the demonization of Muslim rulers of India through the depiction of a nasty and ugly character of the thirteenth century Delhi Sultan, Alauddin Khilji. This controversy provided another platform for the Urdu public discourse to vent a couple of emotionally strong expressions about a patriotic and secular Muslim past of India. The *Etemaad Urdu* daily comments on this matter in the following way –

*Muslim rulers are often accused of having killed thousands of people, destroying temples, and forcefully converting Hindus into Islam at the point of their swords. If these claims were true then India would have been a Muslim nation. They had a lot of time in their hands to make this happen but they did not do so and instead, made their home here and loved and enriched it. In every walk of the life of this nation, the impressions of Muslims can be found and if you ignored them, then you were far from a clear vision.*⁴⁶

Rashtriya Sahara seeks to present historically recorded facts provided by historians and other academics that also include non-Muslims to defend its stance on the ruler in question who is described in the article as a highly misrepresented ruler. Prof. Syed Ali Nadeem Rizvi from the Aligarh Muslim University is quoted as saying that –

*In the records of history, Khilji is remembered as one of the most progressive rulers of India. After the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate by the Turks, Khilji involved Indians also in its administration. Before Khilji's rulership, the other rulers of Delhi did not include the native people in the government, Turks alone were awarded offices. With Jalaluddin Khilji's rise to power, the opening up of offices to the natives began and with this step taken far ahead by Alauddin Khilji, the Sultanate did not remain exclusively Turkish as it was also a regime by the Indians.*⁴⁷

He is also quoted as saying that the *Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb* that India is famous for was initiated by Khilji and was later perpetuated by Emperor Akbar and that one of Khilji's greatest acts was to protect India from the Mongolian attacks. The inputs from the experts presented in this article were also meant to reflect on the dynamic aspects of the lesser-known dimensions of Khilji's rule like

⁴⁶ Ejaz Syed, "Padmavat Me Musalmaan Hukmiraano Ki Kharaab Shabih (Bad Portrayal of Muslim Rulers in *Padmavat*)", *Etemaad Urdu Daily*, January 28, 2018.

⁴⁷ Dilnawaaz Pasha, "Asal Naa Insaafi Khilji Ke Saath Hui (Actual Injustice was Done Against Khilji)", *Roznama Rashtriya Sahara*, January 29, 2018, p. 7.

trade, market and economy. The same set of claims made by the historians who were quoted in the article cited above from the *Rashtriya Sahara* was published in the *Munsif* daily as well. In addition to these claims the daily also comments critically that –

*The ruler who has been portrayed as a savage in the film was actually a sophisticated ruler of India who established a Sultanate on the basis of peace and the Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb....Muslims today don't at all worry that their ancestors who ruled India for ages keeping the Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb alive, and who weaved together into a beautiful string the disintegrated parts of India that was time and again broken and plundered by several invaders, are condemned as thugs of the country and falsely characterized in the films and in this way the Indian history is mocked.*⁴⁸

Besides the accounts of heroic and patriotic deeds of Muslim rulers to protect the country and recollection of the culture of religious tolerance that Muslim dynasties perpetuated over the centuries, the discourse is marked by repeatedly enumerated memories of sacrifices of Muslim revolutionaries in British India. From ordinary individuals to clergymen and top political leaders like Maulana Azad and Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, all are remembered tirelessly as Indian Muslims who in close collaboration with Hindus unconditionally supported the Indian National Movement. These accounts are summarized below. They contain clear expressions of pride for the deeds done in the past and lamentation over these memories not having been maintained and a lot of times distorted too in the mainstream historical accounts –

*Indian Muslims who fought several battles against the Britishers, confronted guns, stood ready to get hanged and participated in mass protests to get the country liberated from slavery are now being accused of disloyalty to the nation and terrorism...Muslim clergy also has a history of its own contribution to India's freedom struggle and unfortunately today even madarsas are being associated with terrorist activities. If some individuals from these institutions pick up guns, how can the madarsas be termed as terrorist or anti-national?*⁴⁹

Indian Muslims fought the Britishers in huge numbers and sacrificed their lives but their sacrifices are hardly recorded in the pages of history. They were deliberately kept away from public

⁴⁸ “Film Padmavat Me Alauddin Khilji Ki Beizzati Ke Baavajood Musalmaano Ka Sabr-o-Zabt (Muslims’ Patience Despite the Insult of Alauddin Khilji in Film *Padmavat*)”, *Munsif Daily, Nuqoosh*, January 28, 2018, p. 7.

⁴⁹ “MulK Ka Jashn Jamooriyat Aur Musalmaan (Country’s Republic Day And Muslims)”, *Munsif Daily*, January 26, 2019, p. 6.

*knowledge....Ashfaqullah Khan was hanged on the charges of conspiracy against the British Raj and that made him the first Indian revolutionary to be executed by the Raj...Some Indian Muslims contributed lakhs of rupees to the Indian National Army...The evil intentions communal forces have not allowed these facts about these contributions and sacrifices of Indian Muslims in history to reach the ordinary Indians today.*⁵⁰

*If we look into the history of India's freedom struggle, it would be evident that among the freedom fighters, Muslims were the frontrunners who resisted the atrocities of the Britishers most intensely and whose valuable sacrifices deserve to be scripted in gold.*⁵¹

*Maulana Mohammad Ali Jauhar, one of the leading figures of the Khilafat movement was another leader who always struggled for India's independence and never accepted the British rule...Though many revolutionaries sacrificed their lives for the nation, among them the one who holds special importance is Shaheed-e-Watan, Ashfaqullah Khan.*⁵²

5.3. THE INDIAN MUSLIM FACE OF COMPOSITE NATIONALISM

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad is a pivotal figure in the discourse on the secular politics of Indian nationalism. Standing firmly with the Indian National Congress in the struggle against the colonial rule and taking a position of strong opposition to the separatist politics of the Muslim League, he came out as an uncompromising Muslim leader who advocated composite nationalism. Nation to him meant a nation based on communal harmony between Hindus and Muslims. Hence, he is often venerated in the discourse as the icon of Hindu-Muslim unity in India. He is a prominent name in the Indian Muslim milieu because apart from being an ardent nationalist who fought for a united India, he stood for Islamic values as well, a point which is highlighted in the Urdu print media as a reason to celebrate his personality and present him as an inspiration for the community to follow in their capacity as both, Muslims as well as Indians. His nationalist position represented an Indian Muslim perspective in which the nation with its religious diversity will be cherished and its composite culture will always be celebrated along with the Islamic spirit.

⁵⁰ "Musalmaano Ki Sabse Zyaada Qurbaaniyaan (Maximum Sacrifices of Muslims)", p. 5.

⁵¹ "Musalmaano Ka Valvalaa Angez Kirdaar (Muslims' Ardent Role)", p. 10.

⁵² Moradabadi, "Rakh De Koi Zara Si Khaak Watan Kafn Me (Put some Ashes, the Nation is in Shroud)", p. 5.

The discourse immensely projects the personality of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad as the modern Indian Muslim icon that the *Quam* ought to follow if it really aims to see itself grow in post-colonial India. Azad's importance in the Urdu public sphere did not crumble with the passage of time. The Urdu newspapers of the 1980s/90s and the contemporary times show no difference in their veneration and celebration of Maulana's leadership. For them he is a quintessential modern Indian Muslim from whom the entire community should be drawing inspiration on various fronts particularly for the roles he played as a political leader, educationalist, scholar and journalist. His multi-dimensional life and career as highlighted in the discourse made him an irreplaceable asset to the community and the nation. The discursive opinion about his nationalist orientation that is repeatedly articulated in the Urdu newspapers leads to the conclusion that he was one of the few leading flag bearers of composite nationalism. His secular approach to the Indian national movement and refusal to support in any way the separatist Muslim League is pointed out as a major signifier of his sense of composite nationalism. Another signifier in the discursive sphere is his formidable stand against the two-nation theory and its realization through the partition of India. This ideological position of Maulana Azad has been very impressive to the Urdu public sphere and also the reason to hail him as a legend –

*After Bahadur Shah Zafar, Maulana Azad was the only Muslim leader who united Hindus and Muslims together on a common platform in the struggle for India's freedom.*⁵³

*Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was the only person who, before and after the partition of India, never approved of the idea of India's partition. Even Gandhi and Nehru at the end, agreed in favour of partition but Maulana Azad held on to his position like a hard rock.*⁵⁴

The *Rahnuma-e-Deccan* praises him for having been a complete Indian Muslim (*Mukammal Hindustani Musalmaan*) who brilliantly balanced his love for India with his faith in Islam.⁵⁵ While acknowledging his inclination to take his service to the nation as a religious duty, the discourse implicitly approves of the theory that religion calls upon its followers to serve the land of their birth as part of their sacred duty. On this aspect an article in the *Rahnuma-e-Deccan* observes:

⁵³ *Rahnuma-e-Deccan*, November 21, 1993, p. 2.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

*Maulana propagated to the followers of all the religions that there are two kinds of religious thinking. One kind of thinking is very narrow and divisive that distinguishes people on the basis of religion and creates hatred among them. He also said that every religion has a soul which integrates people. It is this soul of every religion which is of service to everyone. It stands for the spirit to dissolve oneself for the others. This is a lesson that all the religious groups and all such individuals who want to create separate sects of their own should learn.*⁵⁶

The interpretation of Maulana's approach to religion and politics that we find in the Urdu newspaper discourse is similar to the way Gandhi is associated with religion and politics. For Gandhi, politics and religion were inseparable and his perpetual application of religious concepts and principles to practical politics is often regarded as 'spiritualization of politics', a tendency that is attributed to Maulana as well in the discourse. He is projected as a leader who has rather spiritualized nationalism by relating national service to the Islamic faith and its basic foundations and giving a pan-Indian and secular colour to it in order to bind the people of the country from all the faiths into a common fold of the Indian nationality. The interpretation in the Urdu public discourse of Maulana Azad's pan-Indian nationalism and his commitment to pursue it with the Islamic spirit and the appeal to the Indian Muslims to adopt the same nationalist attitude implies the desirability of synchrony between the national interest and religious interest and the belief that the synchrony is achievable.

In fact, in the eyes of the 'Urdu public sphere', Maulana Azad stands out among his contemporary nationalists because of the balance that he maintained between his commitment to the nation and commitment to his religious faith and his refusal to compromise one for the other. Comparing him particularly with a range of Muslim ideologues of his time, the *Rahnuma-e-Deccan* states the following -

*The Muslim League for obvious reasons was aggressive with Maulana Azad. Even those Muslims stood in opposition to him who differed with him on various issues – the nationalist Muslims who were excessively nationalistic and felt proud only about being Indian; and the Socialist or Communist Muslims who had no interest in religion at all.*⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Rahnuma-e-Deccan. 15 August 1993.

⁵⁷ Rahnuma-e-Deccan. 15 August 1993.

This statement categorically differentiates between four ideological strands among the Indian Muslims during the national movement. One strand represented by the Muslim League idolized the two-nation theory and perceived nation in terms of common religious identity. The second group of ideologues who have been termed as ‘Nationalist Muslims’ represented a kind of nationalism in which nationality was a pre-eminent identity with nothing else to compete with it. The third category comprised Muslims who, owing to their socialist orientation, perceived the nation in terms of class struggle and kept religion out of their frame. And the fourth ideological strand came from Maulana Azad who stood for a nationalism that did not divide the Indians on religious lines and in which every religious faith would be cherished. In categorizing these different ideological strands and pitting three of them against the one held by Maulana Azad, the article has insisted on the significance of holding on to the multicultural nation and the Islamic faith on equal terms. The emphasis is also on not disregarding religion in the interest of the nation or any other interest. The right-wing religious nationalists and the communists have been treated with equal amount skepticism because of their ‘inappropriate treatment’ of religion.

While building the narrative on Azad’s conceptualization of composite nationalism, the discourse largely uses the writings and speeches of the leader and it is from there that the idea of *Muttahida Qaumiyyat* gets discovered, an Urdu phrase that means composite nationalism or nationalism based on unity of all communities. Quoted below are those discussions about Azad that mention and also probe into the ideological implications of his written and said words –

*In Maulana Azad’s view India is home to different races, cultures and languages. So how can we change this socio-cultural arrangement? If we do not accept it then the country’s unity and integrity will be adversely affected. Therefore, instead of hating each other, we better try to maintain our democracy. We have to fulfil this goal with utmost commitment so that the vision of composite nationalism is realized.*⁵⁸

In the context of the rule of the right-wing government of India, the *Munsif* makes the following observation while alluding to Azad’s speeches –

⁵⁸“Maulana Azad Ki Siyaasi Khidmaat (Maulana Azad’s Political Service)”, *Rahnuma-e-Deccan Daily*, November 17, 2014.

*Hindus generally are aware that India has been home to several races, cultures and religions and for a long time the country has had this kind of socio-cultural arrangement which now cannot be disturbed or changed. But a minority of Hindus and Muslims have failed to understand this reality...Now the question that arises is – In these circumstances what does the spirit of Islam direct towards and what message does it have for the Indian Muslims in the religious/cultural environment in which they are living.... Maulana Azad gave the best leadership in understanding the spirit of Islam in the context of Indian environment. He said – I am a Muslim and I feel deeply about it. The thirteen hundred years old glorious traditions of Islam are part of my inheritance. Islamic education, history, heritage and culture are my wealth and it is my duty to protect it. I cannot tolerate anyone's interference in religious pursuits. But apart from these sentiments, I have another sentiment too and my Islamic spirit does not impede this sentiment of mine. I acknowledge that I am an Indian. I stand for India's composite nationalism without which India's heritage is incomplete.*⁵⁹

In response to the ideas of Azad as quoted above, the article asks its readers –

*Shouldn't this be a leading goal for the Indian Muslims that can keep them acquainted with the Islamic spirit and also the exigencies of their socio-political circumstances? If this message from Maulana Azad is valuable then how many people recognize it? It deserves to be promoted in all grand ways and popularized in such a way that is internalized by all Muslims and is passed on to non-Muslims as well. Hence the path other than the one suggested by Azad would be harmful to both, the nation and the community.*⁶⁰

In the same article, Azad is also quoted to have said that –

Muslims in India better accept the fact that they have to live in this country with non-Muslims and this is their destiny that they cannot change. They should build amicable relations with them in their neighbourhood. They should present a good character to the others and make themselves trustworthy persons and responsible citizens. But at the same time, they should not ignore their

⁵⁹ Mohsin Osmani Nadvi, "Maulana Abul Kalam Azad", *Munsif Daily*, November 7, 2014.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

*responsibility toward their faith. They must indeed try to promote their religion all over the country using various religious languages.*⁶¹

Another article from the *Munsif* in 2014 quotes Azad from his address at the Indian National Congress session in 1940 –

*If amongst us there are some Hindus who want to revive the life they lived thousand years ago, then they should realize that they are dreaming and that this dream will not come true. In the same way if there are Muslims present here who want the same culture back that they brought to India thousand years ago, then they better forget this dream.... For the past thousand years we have unconsciously become united by a common sense of composite nationalism. We have mingled so well with each other that separating one from the other has become impossible and if anyone tries to make an unnatural attempt to do so, there will be no success. This is an arrangement created by God and it is better for all of to accept it.*⁶²

In response to this quote the author of the article comments –

*During the freedom struggle, one perspective that was building up was that they were pro-British. Those who held this perspective were looking at Muslims with great suspicion. Maulana had cleared away this misconception about Muslims and even convinced the critics about the fact that like their fellow countrymen, Muslims too hold that instinct of liberation from the Britishers. Because of his efforts, the Hindu and Muslim revolutionaries got a chance to come together and enhance their individual strength with their collective strength and solidarity...His thoughts are as relevant to the country today as they were in his time and it is necessary for all the political leaders and political parties to follow the path that he insisted upon, the path of communal harmony and composite nationalism.*⁶³

In its latest article, while reflecting on his unshaken commitment to composite nationalism and his resentment for communal politics, the *Munsif* observes that presently in India, a huge gulf is being

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Muhammad Imran, “Maulana Azad Ki Aali Qaidana Hesiyaat (Maulana Azad’s Exalted Position)”, *Munsif Daily*, March 3, 2014, p. 4.

⁶³ Ibid.

created between Hindus and Muslims and in a time when the country is facing so many challenges like poverty and unemployment, the leaders today need to follow the path taken by Maulana Azad.⁶⁴

The *Siasat* also discusses Maulana's writings and speeches –

*Azad wrote that in Independent India, in order to build and strengthen composite nationalism, we should not only strive for unity and trust between different religious groups but also tackle the issue of regional differences. These differences will in future be pernicious to Indian nationality.... In his 1942 address, Maulana says, "according to me, Muslims in India do not hold the status of a minority. It is rather the second largest majority and this majority has the right to take part in all decisions, political, cultural, etc., to shape the country's destiny."*⁶⁵

The discourse therefore suggests that Maulana Azad's political ideas and leadership inspire a desire to stay committed to religion and nation alike and maintain an eternal balance between religious duty and duties towards the nation which in Azad's mind are not discrete categories. They also endlessly sustain the belief that composite nationalism is the only way to continuous prosperity of Muslim *Qaum* and the Indian *Mulk*. He is an immortalized icon that the discourse time and again discusses in order to disseminate among the members of the *Quam* the ideas of what it means to live for the *Mulk/Watan* and how important it is for an Indian Muslim to uphold and cherish both the identities. His name is hailed in the discourse to exhort the community to maintain the tradition of composite nationalism in affinity with others and also to indicate to the others that Muslim leaders like Azad are the treasure of the community as well as the nation.

As the discourse proves, recalling the past is an effective way of asserting a community's significant role in the making of the country particularly if the community is a minority and its contributions are not adequately recognized. Recalling history also helps in reminding the community of its attachment with the land and the need to celebrate its common ownership with the 'other'.

⁶⁴ Muhammad Imran, "Maulana Azad Ki Siyasi Baseerat Aur Mufaahamat Ki Policy (Maulana Azad's Political Intelligence and Policy of Compromise)", *Munsif Daily*, August 19, 2019, p. 4.

⁶⁵ The *Siasat*. 15 August 2014. P. 10

So far, the chapter has discussed two major realms where the Urdu public discourse has been articulating the nationalist orientation of the Indian Muslims and in both the realms, the discursive argument has been found to be inclined in favour of composite nationalism that celebrates a nation of different cultures sharing a common life and recognizes the affinities rather than differences between the sects. Of course, the nationalist discourse is also mixed with the desire to give the Indian Muslims their due share in the credit for building the nation over the centuries.

5.4. TRANS-NATIONALISM AND INDIAN MUSLIMS

The other standpoint on nationalism in the Indian Muslim political psyche which came to be represented in the ideas of the renowned poet and philosopher from pre-Independence India, Muhammad Iqbal, is based on the imagination of a transnational community. His ultimate vision for Muslims was meant to beat the very idea of a territorial nation and build a bond that is rather spiritual and beyond the ties of race, language, ethnicity and of course, territory. Ironically, Iqbal's political vision for the Indian Muslims began with a stance that fell in line with the ideology of the Muslim League which is why Esposito in his classification, placed Iqbal in the category of separatist Muslim nationalism. In fact, Iqbal also delivered his famous address at the 25th annual session of the Muslim League in 1930 where he overtly expressed his desire for a separate nation for the Muslims of India, an idea which he based on the argument that India is not a nation but a continent of nations of which Muslims constitute one. Likewise, he envisioned that Muslims across the world would form their own nations and develop themselves internally to the level where they are ready for the ultimate end.⁶⁶ The nationalism of every Muslim nation for him was the first step towards the unification of all the believers across the world.⁶⁷ His eventual rejection of territorial nationalism was in keeping with the Quranic call for creating the *Ummah* and abolishing every such institution that may be an obstacle to this process.

Nation and nationalism are very big obstacles if the aim is to build a world community of Muslims and the argument that is used to support this claim is that while the building of the *Ummah* requires melting down all the racial, cultural and ethnic differences among the Muslims around the world in order to create a spiritual unity, nation and nationalism thrive precisely on these differences to construct national identities. Iqbal also envisaged the spiritual harmony of the people of the book,

⁶⁶ Fateh Mohammed Malik, *Iqbal's Reconstruction of Political Thought in Islam* (Delhi: Media House, 2004), 26.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 28.

i.e. Jews, Christians and Muslims. In light of the Islamic philosophy, Iqbal claimed that nation was far from the culmination of the growth of humanity and nationalism can only contradict the mission that Islam has assigned to every Muslim.

The analysis of the Urdu public discourse shows that the trans-nationalism of the Muslim societies need not have political ambitions. It might instead signify an inclination towards the spiritual unity of an 'imagined community' of Muslims across the world. A keen observation of the content of the Urdu newspapers brings out this point. The news coverage in these dailies gives a clear idea about what the happenings in the Muslim world mean to the Indian Muslim public sphere. In comparison with the English newspapers, the Urdu dailies have been more inquisitive and elaborate in reporting the crucial moments in the Muslim countries as and when they happen. Any prolonged catastrophe in these countries is captured on the front page of the Urdu dailies unlike the other language newspapers in the country including English. A crisis in a Muslim nation especially the one caused by a Western or any non-Muslim nation elicits an emotionally charged opinion from this particular discursive space. Such kind of news coverage suggests a certain kind of empathy and solidarity with the Muslim world which is obviously based on the affinity of common faith. But this trans-national unity that the discourse represents is shaped more by moral rather than political concerns.

The *Ummah* and *Millat Islamiya* are the frequently used terms in the discourse to refer to the community of believers in Islam. The terms are used with immense reverence for the common faith that all Muslims share regardless of their ethnic differences. Though there is no support for *Jihad* that is being projected through global terrorism, there is a definite engagement with the global community of Muslims at the moral level which is where *Qaum* and *Millat* become indistinguishable in meaning while connoting a people bound by the Islamic faith. The discursive engagement of the Indian Urdu discourse with the global Muslim world is marked with the sentiments of pride and agony about their common being. The *Rahnuma-e-Deccan* speaks of the uniqueness of the Islamic values that Muslims across the world ought to uphold as the non-Muslim world takes no interest in the circumstances of the Muslim societies, but it does get swayed by their culture and the roles they play in accordance with their religion.⁶⁸ *Ummah* here is imagined not as a fraternity preparing for a war against the non-Muslim world. It is rather seen as a global

⁶⁸ *Rahnuma-e-Deccan*. 6 July 1987, p. 2.

community which despite its cultural heterogeneity is homogeneously conspicuous by its piety and indomitable adherence to its faith.

A comparison of the Urdu newspaper literature of 1986-1993 and that of the last few years brings out the fact that the conception of *Millat* or *Ummah* is almost invariable in the Indian Muslim public sphere. In this conception, the idea of Muslims everywhere in the world, living a life of repression, is all the more invariable. The victimization of Muslims in any country is a site for propagating Islamic unity based on peace, patience and tolerance. Interestingly, while we may expect the concerns in the public discourse about how Muslims could tackle the crises caused by the ‘other’ anywhere in the world to be a post-2001 development following the 9/11 incident, the ubiquitous victim status of Muslims had evolved in the discursive imagery even before. The *Rahnuma-e-Deccan*, for instance, in a 1993 edition through one of its articles, stresses on the commonality of experience between the Muslims of Bosnia, Kazakhstan, Palestine, Thailand, Yugoslavia, Burma and India (which particularly at that time included Muslims in Kashmir and Ayodhya) based on the fiascos they had to face at the hands of non-Muslim opponents.⁶⁹ The article is more or less a harangue to all the suffering Muslims, telling them that their suffering will persist as long as they do not find the right way out which is directed by the preachings of the *Quran* and the *Sunnah* and that both the scriptures point towards tolerance and patience instead of violence and militancy as the means to liberate themselves from their agonies. The overtones of the article are clearly layered by spiritual appeal rather than political. It also spotlights the power of argumentation which Muslims rarely use in their confrontation with their opponents. This point was emphatically discussed in relation to the case of Babri Masjid demolition and the way Muslims in India dealt with it. The stand taken in the article is that had Muslims brought reason, logic, debate and discussion into play while managing the dispute, they could have successfully got their opponents onto their side as this was the only way by which the latter could be convinced that their theory of the divinity of Ram and his place of birth was illogical; and also that Islam advocates rational argument as the path of ‘*Dawat*’, i.e. the invitation to adopt the Islamic religion. Commenting on the common condition of Muslims all over the world and on how they are supposed to manage it, the article states,

⁶⁹ *Rahnuma-e-Deccan*. 11 January, 1993, p. 2

*Muslims should keep in mind the fact that this world is not a bed of flowers for them but rather a place of their test and examination. Quran and Sunnah are their two most significant guiding factors and it is in these sources that the solutions to all their problems are present.*⁷⁰

What it means to fall in line with the *Quran* and the *Sunnah* is where it specifies the path of patience, tolerance and logical argument with the opponent. It is a clear indication that the discourse does not wish to identify Islam with any militant agenda and perceives all Muslims as a people linked by common conditions of repression who need to share a common commitment to resolve all their disputes with the non-Muslim opponents in the most rational and peaceful manner and in the light of the religious scriptures. This is also the reason why there is an unambiguous stance against terrorism which is seen as a problem breeding from the inappropriate power politics of the Muslim nations and its encouragement by the non-Muslim super powers. The contemporary Urdu newspapers say nothing different on this matter from the content of the discourse in the 1980s and 90s. The crises that Muslims in different countries are experiencing today were cited in the newspapers thirty years ago also and the questions on how Muslims of the world including the Indians should cope with them reflect the consciousness that they are an *Ummah* divided between the nations.

Their long-standing situation of being aggrieved, either due to the internal turmoil of their countries or external conflicts, has been the predominant site for the discourse to articulate global or transnational Muslim fraternity. It is perhaps the only narrative in which the transnational bonding comes out in the most profound expressions. These expressions voice the loyalty that all Muslims ought to be sharing towards their religion by taking a resolute stand against any aggressor party that is regarded guilty of violating the rights of any Muslim population of any country. A recent edition of the *Munsif* daily with an article compares the level of resoluteness, determination and solidarity among the Muslims of today with that of the Muslims of the yesteryears. The further elaboration of this point is best stated in the following quote from the article –

Today with time a lot seems to have changed. On one hand, Muslims once had high spirit, passion and hope on the basis of which they raised the standards of rights and justice and on the other hand their global power and defence has become very weak and constrained. Consequently, they

⁷⁰ Ibid.

*are being driven by fear everyday. Aggression against them is ever-increasing. Their global and national power has become so limited that while once by virtue of their knowledge and ability, they inspired other nations with the message of freedom and self-determination, today they are finding it difficult to even breathe the air of freedom. Crushed beneath attacks from various quarters, they are forced to consider the factor of expediency even while voicing their own rights.*⁷¹

On how Muslim peoples across the world have changed in their response to each other's crises the article says –

*Be it atrocities on the Muslims of Burma or the painful story of the Muslims of Palestine, the world has seen with its eyes wide open, that along with the Muslims across the world, the Muslims of India also have taken every step together in protesting for justice. But today the disappointing condition is that when the Prime Minister of Israel, a country against which Muslims always held a tough position of opposition and whose aggression is absolutely unacceptable to them, comes with the same aggressive attitude to India as a guest, Muslims of this country fail to even assert that they cannot tolerate the presence of a leader in their land who doesn't know how to be just; has been found guilty of violating the rights of the Palestinian Muslims; and forced so many of them into martyrdom.*⁷²

A significant point made in this article is that today Muslims in every country where they reside are extremely immersed in their domestic affairs and that they have allowed the 'other powers' to rule as they wish to the detriment of their victims; therefore, they need to rebuild a common stand against any form of injustice inflicted on any Muslim population. The apparent appeal in the articles cited above is to a globally scattered people, united by religion and divided by politics and nationality, having had a glorious past of power and determination and yet very deficient today in their basic rights and a common voice to speak up against the forces of the world that are persistently oppressing them; a people that is certainly Anderson's 'imagined community' at the transnational level.

The recent developments in Kashmir, from the Pulwama attack in February 2019 to the abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution in August 2019, triggered a debate of the same kind in the

⁷¹ Muhammad Imran, "Aakhir Hum Kahaan Hain? (Where are We?)" *Munsif Daily*, January 20, 2018, p. 4.

⁷² Ibid.

discourse that appeals to the idea of common sufferings of Muslims at the hands of non-Muslim regimes and the need to join hands in a united spirit to earnestly walk the Islamic path of peace and tolerance with the hope that the turbulent times will vanish soon and a normal life will return. Despite the acknowledgement of Kashmir as an integral part of India in the discourse, there are many factors cited in it that lead it to argue that this region stands out from the rest of India because of its Muslim majority population that is still not free from the grief of atrocities and violation of human rights. The factors cited include decades of terrorist violence supported by Pakistan, arbitrary arrests of a huge number of Muslim youths that extend to several other parts of India, human rights violation by the armed forces, discrimination against Kashmiri students in colleges and universities across the country and the most recent condition being the denial of the special Constitutional status without seeking the consent of the representatives of the people of Jammu & Kashmir. It would be interesting to quote some articles on Pakistan's involvement in Kashmir –

*The question is who is responsible for the tragedy of Kashmir. As of now, whatever has happened in Kashmir, Modi government will be held responsible for it and the ruthlessness with which the Kashmir operation has been carried out, for that also the Modi government is responsible. But the fact is that for the past thirty years, Kashmir has been living in shadow of the armed forces and Kashmiris are also getting killed. For this Pakistan alone is responsible who has placed gun in the hands of Kashmiris in the name of Azaadi (Freedom). The emotional Kashmiri thought that he/she will achieve freedom. But on the other side, the game of Pakistan was to expand terrorism in Kashmir so much that the Indian Army is stranded in the valley and is unable to look up at Pakistan.*⁷³

Thousands of people (by 1989) got on to the streets and started getting killed one by one. Soon later, with the training and weapons offered by Pakistan, Kashmir valley became trapped by terrorists trained and armed by Pakistan and belonging to both the sides of the border. Once again Kashmir was in the grip of a political storm. On one hand there was the extremist face of Islam

⁷³ Zafar Agha, "Kashmiri Almiya Se Duniya ne Bhi Muh Mod Liya (The World Also Has Turned Away from Kashmir's Tragedy)", *Siasat Daily*, Sunday Edition, August 18, 2019.

*that came from Pakistan and Afghanistan, and on the other hand the extremist Hindu nationalism was on its rise.*⁷⁴

*Pakistan had always not only aided the separatists and terrorists in Kashmir in every possible way but also never allowed peace to be established in the region. Hence it is only partially true to say that Article 370 alone is responsible for terrorism in the Kashmir valley. Otherwise the real perpetrators of terrorism are the Pakistan Army and ISI. This is why Pakistan is shaken up by India's step of separating Jammu & Kashmir from Ladakh and abrogating Article 370 and is condemning it.*⁷⁵

Since for a long time, abrogation of Article 370 has been understood as part of the Hindutva agenda of the BJP and the Sangh Parivar, its fulfilment under the BJP government cannot have a communally neutral response from the discourse which has accused the government of a conspiracy to dissolve the identity of the only Indian state with a Muslim majority while retaining the special status of North-Eastern states like Nagaland.⁷⁶ The discourse has compared the latest scenario in Kashmir with the situation of Palestinians and Muslims in Bosnia, Myanmar and Kosovo and has expressed disappointment over the lack of diplomatic support from the Middle-Eastern states. To quote the discourse from the newspapers-

*Kashmir lies abandoned. Modi is touring the world including countries in the Middle East but is not even peeping into that part of India whose political situation has been drastically changed by him.... Unfortunately, Arab nations have not raised their voice on any of the issues of Indian Muslims. They are welcoming a leader who has dissolved the only Indian state with a Muslim majority and turned it into a union territory.*⁷⁷

Whatever the Home Minister, Amit Shah may say to justify this move (abolition of Art. 370), he cannot hide the party's conspiracy behind it which is to dissolve the only Indian state with a

⁷⁴ "Jammu Kashmir Ki Khamoshi Hi Is Waqt Ki Sabse Badi Awaaz Hai (Jammu & Kashmir's Silence Only is the Biggest Voice Now)", *The Munsif Daily*, August 27, 2019, p. 4.

⁷⁵ Asad Raza, "Dehshadgardi Ka Sarchashma Pakistan Ya Article 370 (The Source of Terrorism: Pakistan or Article 370?)", *Rashtriya Sahara*, August 17, 2019, p. 5.

⁷⁶ Nazimuddin Farooqi, "Ek Mulk, Ek Dastur Ka Naaraa Haqeeqat Ke Aaine Me (The Slogan of One Nation, One Consitution in the Light of Facts)", *Etemaad Urdu Daily*, August 18, 2019, p. 5. "Sirf Kashmir Hi Kyun? (Why Only Kashmir)" *Munsif Daily*, August 7, 2019, p. 4. Rashid-Ud-Din, "Kabhi Kabhi Waqt Ne Unko Nahi Maaf Kiya (Sometimes Time Didn't Spare Them)", *Siasat Daily, Sunday Edition*, August 25, 2019.

⁷⁷ Rashiduddin, "Kabhi Kabhi Waqt Ne Unko Nahi Maaf Kiya (Sometimes Time Didn't Spare Them)", *The Siasat Daily, Sunday Edition*, August 25, 2019.

Muslim majority and thereby restructure its demography on the lines similar to Israel by encouraging settlement of people from outside the valley because of which Kashmiris will become homeless and nationless like the Palestinians.⁷⁸

Despite getting so many defeats, Western Christians found their way into Bosnia to conquer and occupy it. Hence since then, i.e.1875, Bosnian Muslims have had to live amidst European Christians...Through an alliance with Germany, Austria and Hungary decided to keep Bosnian Muslims isolated and facilitate the prosperity of Christians. Over the years after forced occupation, the Christian population in Bosnia increased in a huge way and all the basic liberties were denied to Bosnian Muslims....And then around 1995, there was a planned genocide of Bosnian Muslims...The same fate is awaiting Kashmir which can turn into Bosnia probably after many more sacrifices of lives, shootings of pellets and genocides.⁷⁹

Scrapping of Article 370 without the consent of Jammu and Kashmir Assembly was part of their objective to perturb Indian Muslims...We need to understand that Indian Muslims in the 20th century were born only to deal with the challenges here (in the country). Kashmir is another challenge from God that we need to get through...By God's grace, presently our condition is better than the conditions of Muslims of Palestine, Myanmar and Kosovo.⁸⁰

The current situation in Kashmir is no different from the situation of Palestinians. Like Palestine, Kashmir has become a region for the world to ignore...From the latest development, there are some lessons that not only Kashmiris but also Muslims across the world need to learn. One is that in politics there is no room for emotional decisions and those who take such decisions can only end up with failure. Pakistan successfully perpetrated terrorism in the region by playing with the emotions of young Kashmiris...Secondly, no struggle for freedom can be won through the path of terrorism.⁸¹

⁷⁸ "Kashmir Par Bada Faisla, Bade Khadshaat (Big Decision on Kashmir, Big Dangers)", *Etemaad Urdu Daily*, August 6, 2019, p. 4.

⁷⁹ Muhammad Tabrez, "Jis Kashmir Ko Khoon Se Sencha? (The Kashmir that was Nourished by Blood?)", *Munsif Daily*, August 10, 2019, p. 4.

⁸⁰ Syed Zafar Mahmood, "Article 370 Ka Inhiraaf: Kashmir Ke Liye Kadvi Davaa (Abolition of Article 370, a Bitter Dose for Kashmir)", *Roznama Rashtriya Sahara*, August 8, 2019, p. 5.

⁸¹ Zafar Agha, "Kashmiri Almiya Se Duniya Ne Bhi Muh Mod Liya (The World Also Turned Away from Kashmir's Tragedy)", *Siasat Daily, Sunday Edition*, August 18, 2019.

Islamophobia is another theme used in the discourse to reflect global injustice against Muslims and misrepresentation of Islam across the world. The recent shootout in New Zealand which killed about 50 Muslims who were attending Friday prayers at a mosque has been cited as an event that validates the fact that Muslims, much like others, are at the receiving end of world-wide terrorism and the perpetrators of such crimes against them are the ones who are on a spree to contain the spread of Islam and suppress Muslims which is the core objective of the propaganda of Islamophobia. All the five leading Urdu newspapers have shared their perspective on the killings in New Zealand. The statements are paraphrased below –

*The terrorist attack that took away the lives of about 49 Muslims proves that Muslims are as exposed to terrorism as others are and that they are not the perpetual perpetrators of terrorism. It also proves that terrorism has no religion.*⁸²

*The New Zealand attack is the result of the hate campaign against Muslims across the world and Islamophobia perpetuated everywhere. Unfortunately, this terrorist attack is largely being seen as act by some mentally disturbed person.*⁸³

*Why do people's judgements differ so much? When we attack, it is terror and when you do it, it is frenzy. Ever since 9/11, there has been a propaganda in the West against Islam. On one hand Palestinians are labelled as terrorist for taking up knives to fight for their rights and on the other hand, when Israelis gun down innocent children and women, they are called peace-loving. On one hand killing of lakhs of Muslims in Iraq, Libya, Yemen, Burma, Kashmir, Misr and Afghanistan is considered as part of the efforts to create peace and on the other hand when Muslims attack any fair-skinned people, the whole religion of Islam will be declared militant.*⁸⁴

New Zealand attack has made one thing clear. No part of the world is free from the dangers of terrorism or religious hatred. The world needs to first realize that there are various forms of terrorism and if all of them have to be ended then that cannot be done by targeting the followers of a particular religion. There have been so many incidents of firing in America but they are not

⁸² Muhammad Imran, "Muslamaan Dehshatgardi Ke Shikaar (Muslims the Target of Terrorism)", *Munsif Daily*, March 25, 2019, p. 4.

⁸³ "Muslamaano Ka Qatal Aam (Massacres of Muslims)", *Siasat Daily*, March 17, 2019, p. 5.

⁸⁴ "Hum Karein To Dehshatgard, Tum Karo To Deewane (We Are Terrorists When We do it and You Are Mentally Disturbed When You Do it)", *Rahnuma-e-Deccan Daily*, March 22, 2019, p. 3.

*taken as terrorist attacks whereas any attack by Muslims is called a terrorist attack only with the intent to repress them.... There is also a need to liberate all Muslims who have been framed in false cases and jailed. On the grounds of terrorism, lakhs of Muslims in Pakistan, Iraq, Afghanistan and other countries have been targeted.*⁸⁵

*The world is united in its voice against the killing of Muslims in New Zealand. But unfortunately, the person responsible for the killings is being called Islamophobic, whereas if some violent incidents are perpetrated anywhere in the world, they are declared as terror strikes only.*⁸⁶

These statements basically hint at how the growing violence against Muslims across the world which often misses the attention of the mainstream media has been facilitated by the hate campaign popularized by the West as Islamophobia particularly after 9/11 and how ironically Muslims who are often linked with the global phenomenon of terrorism are getting increasingly victimized by the same.

Jihad is one concept that the discourse uses for morally binding all Muslims in the battles against their oppressors. It enunciates the concept in accordance with the verses of the *Quran* which define it and any deviation from the Quranic meaning is strongly disapproved of. The *Rahnuma-e-Deccan* quotes the Quranic meaning of *Jihad* as struggle against anything that is wrong.⁸⁷ It further describes that at the societal level it would mean a struggle to be waged when Muslims are attacked or displaced from their homes or when their religion is offended. It is meant to end injustice and atrocity and establish peace and tranquillity; it also seeks to protect human rights and deal with any aggression that disturbs peace. *Jihad* as a militant or armed war is suggested as the last resort according to the principles of Islam and the discourse very keenly underscores this aspect in order to suggest that Muslims are supposed to be tied together against the aggressors through peace and with patience and that terrorism is far from being the Islamic path to justice.

So, the world outside India is definitely larger than the *Mulk* where Muslims despite being embodied in different nations and ethnicities are expected to view a common life beyond the

⁸⁵ “New Zealand Ki Masjid Par Hamla, Dehshatgard Kaun (Attack on a Mosque in New Zealand, Who is the Terrorist?)”, *Etemaad Urdu Daily*, March 16, 2019, p. 4.

⁸⁶ Munawar Hasan Kamaal, “Selbi Dehshatgardi: Muslim Tehzeeb Par Hamla”, *Roznama Rashtriya Sahara*, March 17, 2019, p. 5.

⁸⁷ *Rahnuma-e-Deccan*. 22 November 1993, p. 8.

national bodies based on the Islamic faith and to care for the well-being of all the Muslim communities that make up this common life. Besides, another expectation that is voiced in the discourse is that the Indian Muslims acknowledge and always remember the golden age of Islam and not be swayed solely by their national identity. The author of an article in the *Rahnuma-e-Deccan* advises the Indian Muslims to understand their religion that gave birth to intellectuals, poets, scientists and philosophers among the Muslims all over the world who pervaded large parts of Europe, Asia and Africa and enriched them.⁸⁸ The author also says that the ideal path for all Muslims as advocated by the Prophet of Islam is where they would have to approach their non-Muslim counterparts with tolerance and, more importantly, respect for their way of life.

Trans-nationalism in the discourse as discussed above is an expression of the moral unity that the Indian Muslims ought to be forging with the Muslims of the world which is considered essential for redressing any major crisis they suffer. It is also a vantage from where a global Islamic spirit is imagined that has to be kept integrated to uphold the integrity of Islam. Nothing in the discourse suggests that the desired transnational unity is based on the political/ideological goal of building a world of believers to be ruled by common laws and temporal authority; and thus it neither falls in line with Samuel Huntington's 'clash of civilizations' theory, nor does it bear any agreement with the transnational aspirations of Mohammed Iqbal. The former is not conceivable to the Indian Muslim public as the discourse has constantly suggested that there is no demand for political conflicts between the Muslim and non-Muslim civilizations. Iqbal on the other hand dreamt of a world of spiritual harmony of Muslims which according to him can be realized only through the individual territorial nation states. Territorial Muslim nationalism to him was a necessary step to realise the final stage of transnational spiritual unity of the believers. The discourse analysed shows a commitment to the idea of spiritual harmony of the believers but in consonance with a composite national living with the 'other'. The transnational aspirations of the Urdu public discourse are not as ambitious as those stated by Iqbal. They basically suggest that the Indian Muslims inevitably possess a dual identity – one is ethnic and territorialized; the other is religious and shared across the national boundaries – and it is their moral responsibility to stay spiritually connected with the imagined *Ummah* and not relegate their identity as Muslims beneath their identity as Indians.

⁸⁸ *Rahnuma-e-Deccan*. 29 November 1993, p. 10.

The *Ummah* that is imagined in the discourse is a disgruntled conglomeration of Muslim societies which despite having roots in a glorious past are living in a miserable present. The narratives in the Urdu newspapers produce a theory that starkly contradicts the theories on global Islamic terrorism and militant *jihad* which perceive both the phenomena as consequences of an extremist ideology derived from the Islamic religion aiming at a direct confrontation with the non-believers and thus threatening world peace. The contradicting viewpoint that the narratives bring out is that terrorism in the name of *Jihad* is far from the vision of Islam and Muslims everywhere are at the receiving end of terrorism and the retaliatory actions of the powerful Western and non-Western nations.

These narratives therefore clearly imply that Muslims across the world are living in a constant state of fear of anti-Islam syndrome, i.e. Islam *Dushmani*, as the Urdu newspapers describe it (which perhaps the mainstream media prefers to call Islamophobia) and the forces that have been perpetuating it for a long time; the syndrome exists and manifests in different forms wherever Muslims reside together in huge numbers and thus Indian Muslims are not free from it; all Muslim societies need to adopt a rational and discursive approach to the problem, complying with the Islamic principles and they stand equally responsible to demonstrate solidarity with any Muslim group that comes under the siege of injustice or aggression.

5.5. CONCLUSION

The aim of the chapter was to explain the nationalist orientations of Indian Muslims as articulated in the Urdu newspaper discourse by using the nationalist positions formulated by John Esposito. One of them is separatist nationalism that saw Muslims of India as a nation that deserved to be carved out of the larger whole. The second is composite nationalism that envisions a nation of various communities celebrating their shared culture. And the third position perceives a fraternity of Muslims across the national boundaries as an ideal unity to pursue.

The chapter has explained that among Esposito's three nationalist positions, separatist nationalism is the least preferred path in the public discourse to articulate the Indian Muslim sense of nationalism. Its strong anti-Partition rhetoric and outright denial of the two-nation theory, the dominant doctrine of the twentieth century Muslim nationalism in pre-Independence India, prove the point. Another feature in the discourse that proves this point is the way the Urdu word *Qaum*

has been used. The word means ethnic community, race or tribe, but in India, *Qaum* has specifically meant religious community which may either coincide with the *Mulk*, i.e. territorial nation as in case of Pakistan or may exist as a part of the *Mulk* as in case of India. While in the former case, the words *Qaum* and *Mulk* may comfortably be interchangeable without making a difference, in the latter case of religious diversity, the conceptual difference needs to be maintained in order to emphasize the specificity of religious community in the word *Qaum*.

Nevertheless, the Urdu newspaper discourse also describes the Indian nation as a *Qaum* and nationality as *Qaumiyyat*. It is a purposeful use of the term referring to a nation of several racial, religious and linguistic communities that habitually lived together for ages and would like to continue to live so forever. This connotation of the term indicates a heavy tilt towards composite nationalism and the chapter probed into it using the discourse on Urdu and the Muslim history of pre-Independence and pre-British India. In the discourse, the Urdu language has been accorded the status of a potential *Qaumi Zabaan*, which exclusively means national language in the context of the discourse on which language could have best represented India. There is no denying the fact that the word *Qaum* is very well used with reference to the Muslim minority of India also, but its alternate use to signify the Indian nation and its composite culture is a lesser known fact and requires to be highlighted. The alternate use of the term has also been found in the discursive references to Maulana Abul Kalam Azad where he is described as a champion of *Qaumi Ekta*, a phrase that denotes national unity in recognition of his unshaken support for a united and undivided India.⁸⁹ In fact, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, a figure in history often associated with a Muslim nationalism that was exclusive rather than inclusive is quoted to have said that –

*Qaum is a word that describes the natives of a country. Hindus and Muslim live and die in the same country. Remember that Hindu and Muslim are words with religious connotations given to them. But otherwise, Hindus, Muslims and Christians, all of who live in this country form the same Qaum.*⁹⁰

Another statement of his is quoted from his address in Lahore –

⁸⁹ The *Munsif Daily*. 9 July 1989.

⁹⁰ Lateif Sajani, “Sir Syed Ka Nazariya, Qaumi Yakjehti Sir Syed’s Outlook, Communal Harmony”, *Munsif Daily*, March 22, 2018, p. 9.

*In this address I have mentioned the word Qaum a couple of times. By this word I don't mean Muslims only.*⁹¹

Thus, one religion, one nation is an idea that in no way appeals to the Indian Muslim public psyche in post-Independence India. Instead, there is an unwavering search for an equal position vis-a-vis the Hindu majority in the shared nation. One major conclusion that can be drawn from the analysis presented in the chapter is that composite nationalism articulated in the discourse is more than a mere celebration of a shared nation; it expresses quite a few demands that point towards the need to share not just the land with the country's largest minority but also the respect that a citizen deserves for belonging to it. Constant assertion of lack of recognition to the Muslim community for its contribution to the national culture speaks of a nationalist spirit that ought to be distinguished from the spirit of the rest of the nation – a spirit emanating from a community that has been a victim of communal politics and whose cultural attributes like Urdu have been de-nationalized and minoritized in the present and demonized in the past.

The chapter has presented discourses in the Urdu public sphere on the nuances of the status of the Urdu language and the history of Muslims in India. Both the discourses were explained as sites of nationalist expressions of the Indian Muslims. Urdu was found to be depicted as a revolutionary language of India's freedom struggle which also represented the country's composite culture more authentically than the Sanskritized Hindi but unfortunately failed to gain a national status and instead was reduced the status of a minority language. The history of Muslims in India, as the chapter explained, is portrayed in terms of the valiant battles of the Muslim rulers to protect the nation against external attacks, their active endeavours to promote and maintain the *Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb* and also the sacrifices of the Muslim revolutionaries of India's freedom struggle which stand all forgotten in the present times. One can easily catch the similar overtones in both the discourses – the overtones of dissatisfaction, grudge and longing. The expression of composite nationalism in the Urdu public sphere is mixed with the desire for recognition of the difference that the *Qaum* has made to the *Mulk*.

The chapter also presented an analysis of the discourse on the question of transnational solidarity of Indian Muslims with the Muslim nations and communities of the world. It was explained that

⁹¹ Ibid.

the discourse insists on the spiritual unity of the *Ummah* or the community of believers and the Indian Muslims, as a religious duty, ought to be taking an active interest in keeping up this fraternity by demonstrating an uncompromising stand against either any external armed attack on a Muslim nation or atrocity or injustice inflicted on a Muslim minority group within a nation. Since the perception of the Muslim communities and nations, as found in the discourse, is that of agonized societies that are crushed and that share their victim status with the Indian Muslims, it also suggests another conflict – a moral conflict between the Muslims of India who are religiously and spiritually connected with the *Ummah* and the foreign policy positions/interests of the Indian nation. The conflict can time and again arise whenever India as a nation chooses to either be friendly to a power that has been hostile to Muslims or be indifferent to any major crisis or catastrophe that falls on Muslims anywhere in the world.

Thus, the Urdu public discourse brings out the interplay of the concepts of *Quam*, *Mulk* and *Ummah* in its imagination of Indian Muslims and attempts to balance different levels of loyalty reflecting a shared sense of fraternity within the community as well as with the multi-cultural nation and the world community of believers.

CONCLUSION

The thesis began by stating its objective as exploring the complex confluence of communitarian and minoritarian perspectives on modern values in the discursive sphere of Urdu newspapers in India. Modern science, personal law, secularism and nationalism were the themes that the thesis focused on in order to understand the alternative narratives in the discourse. Through a close analysis of five Urdu newspapers, it tried to explore the conflict between the communitarian interests and liberal values often found in all the religion/faith-based communities and its co-existence with the identity politics of minority rights. As the analysis of the discourse in the newspapers suggests, the communitarian struggles in a multicultural country like India that is marred by deep-rooted religious and ethnic identity conflicts are very complicated because they involve religious and ethnic communities finding themselves threatened not only by the value-neutral rationality of science and the liberal virtue of individualism contributed by modern Western philosophy, but also by each other's politicized values and cultural practices. The communitarian struggle is even more complicated when it is viewed from the vantage of a minority religious community that perceives itself as subverted and at a perpetual risk of being diluted in the culture of the majority.

The major communitarian tensions with the 'not very often problematized' phenomena of modern scientific knowledge, legal uniformity, secularism and nationalism which are discerned in the Urdu discourse and are perhaps the struggles common to all religious communities, have no representation in the mainstream English print-media. These internal struggles need to be attended to because, as the discourse analyzed in the thesis has suggested, religion and culture in India are great forces to reckon with and the virtues that they inspire like charity, simplicity, solidarity with one's fraternity and respect for nature and its resources deserve to be sustained but are unfortunately at the risk of getting progressively eroded by the amoral drive for material success and exploitation of nature that modern science and technology have led to. The conflict of religious communities with liberal notions of freedom and equality is a formidable one that needs a well-negotiated reconciliation so that the liberal and communitarian norms find their space for expression and none is compromised for the other – a purpose that is upheld by the Constitution of India. There are some significant conclusions that can be drawn from this thesis.

Firstly, the majority/minority battle in India over the past decades since 1980s has become progressively vehement and has thus undermined the significance of the conflict between the community rights and individual rights. From the minoritarian perspective, the conflict that matters more now is that of guarding the minorities against the cultural domination of the majority. Chapter 2 on Muslim Personal Law highlighted the argument in the discourse against a uniform civil code or reform of the personal law of the community perceiving the policies as part of the majoritarian agenda of the BJP. Though the discourse takes on the feminist critics and advocates of legal uniformity who demand a liberal alternative to the personal laws to ensure individual liberty and equality before law to women, the fear of cultural assimilation with the majority is more profoundly articulated in it. Though the chapter presented this conflict as one which is multi-dimensional and directed against women's rights critics, advocates of legal uniformity and the Hindu right-wing critics, it also ended up concluding that with the fast-rising BJP in the last decade and its ascendance to power once again, the conflict now has become one dimensional where the problem that is viewed is only of safeguarding the minority culture from the rule of the majority culture. The main point of this particular conclusion is that while the balance and compromise between community or group rights and individual rights has not been inconceivable in political theory or public policy, its possibility is paid little heed in the discourse as the bigger conflict is the struggle for the community identity.

The case that the discourse makes for multiculturalism while defending the Muslim Personal Law is propelled more by the need of the community being a minority to survive the cultural tyranny of the majority than by the liberal principles of toleration and individual freedom of choice to practice one's religion and culture. The much-needed social structure of multiculturalism or cultural pluralism to recognize the distinctive identities of minority groups and the historical injustices done to them was purposefully recognized by the Constitution which the Urdu newspaper discourse highlights as its fundamental feature. But when some cultural practices like those legitimated by personal law are condemned for violating individual rights, rights that are equally guaranteed and valued by the Constitution, then despite presenting a bold defence of Islam's liberal spirit as an answer to the liberal critics, the discourse has been more inclined to invoke the minority rights narrative against the Hindu right-wing critics because their threat currently seems larger.

The question of possibility of exercising individual freedom of choice while also sustaining the culture of a community and thus balancing between community and individual rights is losing its significance as a debatable topic in a social set up where a community's identity is rigidly defined not only by its cultural practices but also by its status as a dominant majority or oppressed minority in relation to the 'other'. Therefore, in the intense and never-ending battle to keep up the religious traditions of the community and the deepening majority/minority identity conflict, the liberals standing for the constitutional right to equality and freedom will find it hard to find a place for themselves in the debate.

The discourse also harps on the reconcilability rather than incommensurability of reason and faith and believing God to be the centre of the universe, it treats science as an essential mechanism to explore the divinely created nature as explained in chapter 1. Its obvious implication is that modern science in religious communities outside the Western world will always be viewed as a domain of knowledge with limitations of its own as it excludes the experience of the 'transcendental' which is believed to be the preeminent force underlying nature. Hence the dominant notion of modernity that is largely characterized by separation of science and religion, the sacred and the profane is critically identified in the discourse as exclusively Western and not suitable to the other world like the Islamic societies where religion, far from being a hindrance, is said to have triggered significant scientific developments.

Another communitarian concern that the discourse expresses is with regard to the possessive, acquisitive and materialistic individual that modern science has been breeding almost everywhere in the world. This kind of modern individual in the critical narrative of the discourse cares only for wealth and material success regardless of the moral costs that he is required to bear in the process of gaining them. The critique of possessive/acquisitive individual comes from the other ideological standpoints too. The communitarian critique in the discourse is representative of the common anxieties of all religious communities in the country about the damage that modern science is doing to the relationship of the individual with religion and the indifference of the rational and materialistic individual of modern science to his organic connection with the community to which he/she belongs. So the credibility of the potential of modern science to serve humankind and make their lives better than ever before will always stand to be challenged by the faith based communities of non-Western societies that raise questions on the moral integrity of the possessive individual

who is connected neither with the divine force to understand the actual meaning of life nor with the community from where he could derive the wisdom to understand the divine force and the actual meaning of life. Detachment of science from religion as a source of ethics is a strictly unacceptable aspect of modernity for Muslims as the Urdu newspaper discourse claims and presumably also for the other communities. Thus, the status of modern science in India will hardly ever cross the level of being a field of knowledge and skill that needs to be mastered for material progress and complemented with a superior domain of religion which is necessary for the holistic growth of the individual. In other words, where science with its limitations ceases to answer questions, religion will provide answers that will cater to spiritual curiosity, an instinct that is held to be far higher than the basic sensory experience.

The Indian Muslims' experience of being a huge and yet a subverted minority that looms large in the discourse may have obscured but certainly not negated the communitarian concerns that are shared with the other communities – of a world that is globalized by modern science and technology and liberal values which may have worked well with the West, but when welcomed into countries like India, have threatened the integrity of the value system of the religious communities that continue to define the identity of individuals. It has also not negated but rather affirmed the need to not forget that India has always been a multicultural nation with a long history of communities living together, notwithstanding the differences of faith that were once overridden by cultural similarities.

And finally, the conceptions of nationalism and secularism that are original to and rooted in the Indian situation of religious and cultural diversity and endorsed by the Urdu discourse are losing ground in the current scenario of identity politics. Composite nationalism and *Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb*, which were supposed to be the backbone of a united India and also serve as the paths to inter-communal shared understanding of good life, despite finding a promising voice in the discourse, hold little strength vis-à-vis the boisterous cry to save the 'beleaguered minority' against the 'intimidating majority'. The minority rights perspective on any larger issue of the country is necessary to deal with the injustices that are perpetuated against certain groups on the grounds of caste and religion, but to allow it to dominate the discourse is to distort the picture of the country's socio-political reality that equally demands a well-sustained balance between individual

rights/liberties and the communitarian right to self-expression and also revival of inter-communal harmony which currently is in a grave crisis.

Nevertheless, the communitarian perspective that is articulated in the Urdu newspaper discourse has been found to be calling into question, the acceptability of modern science for the materialistic, acquisitive and amoral individuals it has produced, of a Uniform Civil Code for its abstract notions of freedom and equality that defy the culturally situated notions prevalent across the diverse communities of the country, of a secularism that does not include justice to minorities and of a nationalism that is based on a uniform cultural identity. Contrary to what it questions, while it demands a society of alternative conceptions based on a shared understanding of the culturally specific meaning attributed to each of them within and between the communities, the communitarian perspective stands overpowered by the politics of majority/minority identity.

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Belonging With A Difference: Qaum, Mulk & Ummah

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ABSTRACT

This paper probes into the ideas of nation and supranational belonging in the Muslim community of India. Based on the discourse analysis of five Urdu newspapers published in the city of Hyderabad – *Siasat*, *Rahmona-e-Deccan*, *Munshif*, *Rashtriya Sahara* and *Ellemaal*, the paper argues that the theory that Muslims in the country are a nation within a nation due to their cultural and religious distinctiveness holds little strength in post-partition India. They are a *Qaum*, i.e., community, part of a larger nation, i.e., *Mulk*, identifying themselves with an even larger global community, i.e., *Ummah*. How the community's shared understanding of belonging to the same nation as the others is paralleled by its equally strong sense of being a distinct community that shares its 'beleaguered' status with Muslims elsewhere in the world is the core subject of the paper. In other words, the paper unravels the endeavours in the Urdu public sphere to shape an Indian Muslim identity which represents a *qaum* struggling to sustain its distinct existence as a minority vis-a-vis the 'other' in the country and is also trying to live up to its commitment to universal Muslim brotherhood.

KEYWORDS: Nation, Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb (Composite Culture), Composite Nationalism, Trans-Nationalism, History.

1. INTRODUCTION

There are some questions that the paper deals with – Are national and religious commitments mutually exclusive in the Muslim community and does one belonging to the community have to choose between the two? How has the Urdu public sphere defined the national or rather Indian identity of Muslims? These questions are relevant because there have been moments in history when the Muslim community in India itself was depicted as a separate nation and also because Muslims have been found to be identifying themselves as a fraternity whose expanse surpasses the national boundaries of the world. Muslim nationalism in India is not an unexplored subject in the academia. John Esposito refers to what he understands as three different Muslim positions regarding independence and nationalism that developed during the British imperialism in India.¹ One position, as he describes, was held by the traditionalists who saw nationalism as a "Western-bred phenomenon" which can grow only within the confines of geographical divisions and racial prejudices unlike the inherent tendencies of Islam to create a universal community cutting across all cultural and ethnic barriers. He describes the second position as the one that was represented by one of the prominent Muslim leaders of India's freedom struggle, i.e., Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and it is often called as composite nationalism which is based on the shared history and experience of the Hindu and Muslim communities. The third position that he highlights is Muslim nationalism that was perpetuated by the then leader of the emerging Pakistan, i.e., Muhammad Ali Jinnah. It was more or less based on the two-nation theory about the identity of Hindus and Muslim vis-a-vis one another. Esposito's differentiation of these three positions which were observed to have emerged in decades before India's independence, is going to be used in this chapter to explain the Indian Muslim stance on nationalism as reflected in the Urdu newspapers.

Using Esposito's classification of the Indian Muslim positions on nationalism the chapter argues that the nationalist inclinations articulated in the Urdu newspaper discourse on one hand represent composite nationalism that speaks of all communities sharing and celebrating the nation together but with a fair acknowledgement of every community's distinct cultural identity and, more importantly, of the need to protect minorities from cultural assimilation with the majority. On the other hand, they dissolve into the ideas of fraternity across the nations based on the spirit of belonging to the same religion. The nationalist consciousness is torn between a shared nation where no compromise on the dignity and identity of the religious & cultural minorities is acceptable and a world community of believers in which faith in Islam will reign supreme. The discourse that has been analysed shows the interplay of *Qaum*, *Mulk/Watan* and *Ummah* – factors which come out as essential to the Indian Muslim's imagination of a fraternity, each being entangled with the other.

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