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## Islamophobia Discourse in India and the Response of Minority Muslims

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### Abstract

*This article examines how Islamophobia has grown in contemporary India, as reported in the media. The study's focus is on how the media portrays Islamophobic discourse and how it affects the lives of Muslim minorities in India. What is the relationship between the Indian government's policies and the rise of Islamophobia? How do Muslim minorities in India respond to Islamophobic attitudes? As library research, this article contends that Islamophobia manifests in various forms of violence against Muslim minorities in India, including hatred, destruction, and physical violence against Muslims. This is supported by India's Hindu supremacist ideology, Hindutva, which has grown in popular in tandem with the victory of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Shri Narendra Modi in occupying the Indian government, as well as the tendency of the Indian mass media to appear to be biased in favor of the ruling party. Meanwhile, the Muslim minority's reaction to various acts of violence and Islamophobic attitudes in the Indian media is dualistic, namely a counter-attitude as practiced by Jamiat Ulama-I-Hind (JUIH) and an accommodating attitude as practiced by Muslim Rashtriya Manch (MRM).*

**Keywords:** Hindu, minority Muslim, Islamophobia, Hindutva, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

### Introduction

India is currently facing international blasphemy charges as a result of hate speeches made against the Prophet Muhammad and his wife Aisha by two prominent members of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Naveen Jindal and Nupur Sharma. The wave of protests spread to several Arab countries, demanding that the Indian government issue an open apology. They even called for a boycott of Indian products on social media (Shabbir, 2022).

The statements of the two BJP representatives appeared to confirm the alleged Islamophobic mindset in India's government administration. Before this statement became a global issue, acts of violence by the Hindu community against Muslim minorities in India were on the rise, as

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reported by local and international media (Bhayat et al., 2022; Biswas, 2022; Editorial, 2022; Sen, 2022; Shabbir, 2022). For example, in mid-November 2021, more than 20 men attacked and burned down a house in Nainital's northern suburbs. Fortunately, the owner of the house, Salman Khurshid Alam Khan, and his family was not present. In their testimony to local security forces, eyewitnesses stated that the attackers yelled slogans in an extremely hateful tone while carrying out their actions. The owner of the house, a National Congress Party politician and former minister during the tenure of Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, expressed regret that the attack was motivated solely by his faith. This attack comes just days after Salman published his book entitled *Sunrise Over Ayodhya: Nationhood in Our Times*, in which one of the chapters criticized the Hindu nationalism of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi (Aljazeera, 2021).

A mob also attacked the homes and four local mosques of the Muslim community in the Tripura area nearly a month before this incident. Local security officials reported that the mob of over 350 people included members of a local Hindu hardline group as well as allies of India's BJP. They vandalized the local Muslim community's homes and mosques after protesting the incident in Bangladesh's Hindu community (Bhaumik, 2021b). This act of violence causes fears in the Muslim community, despite security forces' promises to protect them (Naqvi, 2021). The total Muslim population in this state in Northeast India is estimated to be 4.2 million people, or 9% of the total population of the local area controlled by the BJP's local government (Bhaumik, 2021a).

In addition to the burning of houses and mosques, local and international media reported other acts of violence that killed scores of Muslims in several parts of India. Imtiaz Khan (12) and Majloom Ansari (32), two Muslims from Jharkhand, were victims of violence in March 2016 after being stopped by eight people while driving cows to be sold outside their village. Both were beaten and their bodies were hung by the people who identified themselves as the Cow Protection Committee (Yadav, 2018). Earlier, Ummar Khan, a local merchant, was assassinated by a group of local Hindus who did not want Umar to trade cows for consumption (Aljazeera, 2017).

These various actions demonstrate the violence inflicted on Indian Muslims. These actions confirm the findings of Varshney (2002) and Bhagat (2012) regarding the long history of Hindu vs. Muslim sectarian violence, which resulted in material losses, lives, and fears for both parties, particularly the Muslim ethnic minority. Several other researchers have described this situation as a manifestation of Islamophobia among modern Indian Hindus (Sikander, 2021; Ushama, 2020).

Based on this background, this article is looking to conduct a more in-depth study by focusing the study on three important questions: how does Islamophobia arise and affect the lives of Muslim minority communities in contemporary Indian politics? What is the relationship between the Indian government's political policies and the rise of Islamophobia? How is the Muslim minority in India responding to the Islamophobic discourse? These three issues are significant in

the context of intercultural interaction and communication between India's two ethnic groups in expressing their respective identities.

## **Literature Review**

The term Islamophobia is frequently used in various pieces of literature to refer to attitudes of fear, hatred, and prejudice expressed through unfair treatment of Muslim communities. This phrase is frequently used when discussing the phenomenon of terrorism and the presence of Islamic political forces that are perceived as a threat to non-Muslim groups (Safei et al., 2022). In the academic context, Islamophobia is a term used to describe antipathy toward the Muslim community's lifestyle and ideology. According to Elahi & Khan (2017), Islamophobia is any kind of distinction, exclusion, or restriction towards, or preference against, Muslims (or those perceived to be Muslims) that has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life.

Meanwhile, Gardell (2014) describes Islamophobia as the term used to connote socially, culturally, and politically produced prejudice, aversions, and discrimination against specific categories of humans, in this case, Muslims. In Islamophobia discourse, Gardell continued, Islam and Muslims are perceived as teachings and communities associated with tendencies to dominate, oppress, hate, deceive, conspire and wage war. Thus, Islam and the Muslim community are attached as representations of violence, terrorism, oppression of women, and threats to freedom of expression. In sum, Erik Bleich (2011) argued that Islamophobia is indiscriminate negative attitudes or emotions directed at Islam or Muslims.

Furthermore, Osman (2017) said that this Islamophobic tendency is not only found in Europe and North America but also in several other regions such as Asia. In the Asian region, especially in India, the case of Islamophobia is very interesting and is associated with the widespread Hindu nationalist movement. This supports another piece that Islamophobia mostly appears to be a political commodity rather than a natural phenomenon (Safei, et al., 2022). Meanwhile, in the case of India, Cipriani (as cited by Dauda, 2020), provides quantitative data on how Islamophobia is manifested throughout the country through verbal and physical attacks on property, houses, and places of worship, threats of violence, slander, and abuse of policies or laws, all of which have an indirect impact on Muslims and have restricted their freedom of religion, discrimination in education, employment, housing, or access to goods and services. Other forms of Islamophobia include negative portrayals, abuse of authority, and public statements by the media and politicians that stigmatize Islam and Muslims (Dauda, 2020).

From these various definitions, Islamophobia can be defined as any form of negative attitude, both expressed and manifested, that targets Islam and Muslim ethnic minorities. Thus, this negative attitude extends beyond verbal expressions of hatred to actions that denigrate Islam and threaten Muslims irrationally. Furthermore, Islamophobia manifests itself in a variety of ways,

including verbal and physical attacks such as threats, attacks, terror, and political policies that harm Islam and Muslim ethnic minorities.

A study of the context of Islamophobia in Hindu society toward Muslim ethnic minorities in India, in particular, has shown how this attitude has implications for a variety of things. After the partition of India in 1947, hostility between Hindus and Muslims grew day by day; hate crimes against Muslims peaked due to a variety of sociopolitical, economic, and religious factors. The Muslim community faces numerous challenges, including multiple cases of assault, murder, discrimination, and harassment as a result of Islamophobia, which primarily affects Indian Muslims (Hussain et al., 2019).

According to Hussain et al. (2019), the development of Islamophobia in India is related to the BJP's control of Indian politics, the social stratification of Indian society in which Hindus occupy the highest strata, and Islam is considered a threat to strata establishment, social marginalization of Muslims as a minority, and various expressions of hatred in the form of labeling violence and terror against Muslims. Furthermore, Hussain stated that Muslim minorities face discrimination in the educational and economic sectors.

Furthermore, another study is shown by Ushama (2020) which investigates the origins of Islamophobia in Hindu supremacist ideology, Hindutva, and how key figures in this ideology shaped it. According to him, the Hindu community's hatred of Muslim minorities in India cannot be separated from its historical roots in the form of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar's Hindutva ideology. Savarkar defines Hinduism as Indian society's identity in terms of religion, descent, and nationality. Hinduism, according to Savarkar, is the religious, moral, social, and economic equality of Indian society. This study is significant because it provides insight into the genealogy and historical roots of hatred and violence directed at Muslim ethnic minorities that are linked to specific ideologies.

Meanwhile, Sikander (2021) believes that the roots of Islamophobia in India cannot be separated from the historical experience of British colonialism (Patel, 2022). One of the important policies that influence this issue is the separation of India into two political regions, India and Pakistan, which are more based on religious differences, Islam and Hinduism. This separation further aroused ongoing suspicions between the Muslim and Hindu minorities that led to conflict and violence to this day. This condition is exacerbated by the media coverage in India of Islam and Muslims. This is illustrated in Sumra's (2020) study which explores the involvement of the Indian mass media in the issue of Islamophobia. Sumra believes that the mass media has played a role in increasing sentiment toward Islam and Muslim society in India by analyzing the three main English-language media in India, *The Times of India*, *The Indian Express*, and *The Hindu*, in reporting about Islam and Muslim minorities from late November 2016 to late January 2017.

Even in line with media developments, representations of Islamophobia are increasingly popping up with movements on social media run by Hindutva supporters who circulate Islamophobic

hate speech on social media, as well as several instances of anti-Muslim violence which overall suggests that Hindu nationalism in India codes the Muslim minority in the country as particularly dangerous and untrustworthy (Amarasingam et al., 2022). Islamophobia has influenced the Indian media in reporting related to the COVID-19 pandemic which raised the issue that minority Muslim communities are the spreaders of the Coronavirus which has an impact on the emergence of hate speech memes and racial statements posted by Indian netizens on social media accusing Muslim minorities of spreading the virus (Baharuddin & Baharuddin, 2022).

Although India appears to be a democratic country, it does not appear to be accompanied by an increase in tolerance and respect for religious minorities, because the Hindu majority and Muslim minorities are frequently involved in violent conflicts with religious overtones (Varshney, 2002). The trend of Hindu communal violence against Muslims continued from 1950 to 1990, reaching a climax in the early 1990s. Several states had the highest number of deaths as a result of violent communal conflicts between the two groups. Varshney discovered a death toll of nearly 120 people per 100,000 inhabitants in Gujarat, while Bihar recorded a death toll of nearly 80 per 100,000, Maharashtra, Assam, and Uttar Pradesh at more than 42 per 100,000, and Jammu and Kashmir and Madhya Pradesh at more than 20 souls per 100,000 citizens (Varshney, 2002).

Recently, Bhagat's (2012) study updated the violence rate from 1960 to 2002 by listing the Ahmadabadi area as having 1103 victims of violence or 47 people per 100 thousand people, followed by Bombay with 906 people or 11 people per 100 thousand, and Hyderabad 331 people or 15 people per 100 thousand inhabitants. However, based on the ratio of victims to the total population, the Bhiwandi area is the most vulnerable, with 168 victims per 100,000 million people, followed by Sitamari (122 deaths) and Godhra (85 deaths). The most violent metropolitan cities in India are Ahmedabad, Mumbai, and Hyderabad. As a result of such conditions, some cities are always prone to riots, resulting in spatial marginalization, growing distrust, and increased vulnerability of the Muslim community. These various studies can be used as a starting point in examining how the discourse of Islamophobia in the Indian mass media and as a political product has changed intercultural interactions in India. However, these studies have not demonstrated the relationship between Hindutva ideology and BJP political governance. In addition, various writings also have not explored the implications that arise in the context of intercultural communication between Muslim ethnic minorities and Hindu majority ethnic groups who are supporters of Hindutva ideology. Therefore, this article will present an analysis of how the discourse of Islamophobia as a political discourse that is circulated through various types of mass media has implications for intercultural interaction and communication between the two groups which is shown through the response of Muslim minority groups.

### ***Method***

This research is a qualitative study which is described by (Creswell, 2012) as a picture through narrative and conducting studies in natural situations. Therefore, this study tends to use an

inductive approach to analysis. By applying the library research method, this paper collects and observes library sources in the form of books, journal articles, repositories, and online mass media reports related to the discourse of Islamophobia in India. Data collection is carried out based on the focus of the discussion which is then studied one by one and linked between one information with other information deemed relevant.

Practically, data collection and analysis are carried out online using internet resources, taking into account technical constraints due to social distancing caused by the COVID-19 pandemic situation. The data is then analyzed using triangulation techniques, in this case, the concept of Islamophobia, media discourse, history, and political history in India, all of which are based on research findings in the form of books and scientific publications.

## **Results and Discussion**

### ***Islamophobia in India: History and Political Discourse in India***

Until 2001, the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs noted that India's total Muslim population reached 138.18 million or contributed 13.4 percent to India's total population of 1.028 billion. This number puts Muslims in India in second place in India's population by religion. The first order is occupied by Hindus as many as 827.57 million people or accounting for 80.5 percent of the total national population. After Hindus and Muslims, India's population is also dispersed into various religious community groups, namely Christians 24 million or 2.3 percent of the total national population, Sikhs 19.2 million or 1.9 percent of the total national population, Buddhists 7.9 million or 0.8 percent, Jains 4.2 million people or 0.4 percent, other religious groups 6.6 million people and 727 thousand people do not state religion. The Muslim community itself is spread across Assam (30.9 percent), West Bengal (25.2 percent), Kerala (24.7 percent), Uttar Pradesh (18.5 percent), and Bihar (16.5 percent) (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2011). As the second largest religion in India, Islam is one of the religions that is projected to continue to grow along with the increase in the national population of the country in the South Asian region.

Historically, the problems of the Muslim community in India have been seen after the division of India by the British colonial government in 1947, namely Pakistan under the rule of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, while India was under the administration of the Indian National Congress led by Jawaharlal Nehru. This incident did not entirely make the Muslim community then moved to Pakistan, but some decided to stay in India, as well as several Hindu communities who chose to stay in the area that later became Pakistani territory. The Muslim community who remained in India then lived in India's socio-political dynamics which tended to be dynamic along with socio-political changes. In terms of political life, for example, India has grown into a democracy with a republican system of government with a multi-party system. From the 1950s to the 1980s, The Indian National Congress, a secular-nationalist Indian political party, dominated Indian government politics. However, since the 1980s, the Indian government has been run by a coalition government until 2014, the right-wing Hindu BJP took control of India's government



until now.

Political changes in India's government have the potential to escalate violence against the Muslim community. Between 2010 and mid-2017, IndiaSpend recorded 66 cases of violence against Muslim communities related to cow protection, with 22 people killed and 200 injured. The majority of the deaths and injuries occurred following the rise of the Hindu national party BJP in 2014 when the incidence of violence increased in several states (IndiaSpend, 2017). In line with the report, Sumit Ganguly – an Indiana University Professor of Politics – mentioned the trend of increasing violence against the Indian Muslim community shortly after the BJP and Modi political parties ruled India and that one form of violence against the Muslim community is persecution triggered by the sale or consumption of beef (Ganguly, 2019).

The Council on Foreign Relations also stated that at least three waves of violence against important Muslim communities could not be separated from the BJP's involvement (Maizland, 2022). *First*, there were riots in Muzaffarnagar, Uttar Pradesh. More than sixty people were killed in conflicts between Hindus and Muslims in towns near Muzaffarnagar after two Hindu men were killed in an altercation with Muslim men. Furthermore, 50,000 Muslims fled and were forced to stay in relief camps for months, with some never returning home to avoid further violence. Security forces conducted inspections and discovered the involvement of Hindu radical groups with the support of local BJP leaders. *Second*, in March 2020, violence broke out in New Delhi as Muslim minorities and others protested the *Citizenship Amendment Bill* (CAB). About fifty people were killed, the majority of whom were Muslims. The policies of the Modi government, as well as the involvement of lower-level BJP politicians, have resulted in violent acts against Muslims.

*Third*, there are anti-Muslim protesters. Random attacks on Muslims have become more common in recent years. Hindu mob attacks have become so common in India that the Supreme Court has dubbed them the "new normal." Vigilante groups attacking people accused of selling or killing cows are one of the most common forms of anti-Muslim violence. According to a Human Rights Watch report in 2019, this cow protection group has killed at least 44 Muslims. Muslim men have also been attacked after being accused of 'love jihad,' a term used by Hindu organizations to describe Muslim men who allegedly try to seduce and marry Hindu women to convert them to Islam (Amarasingam et al., 2022).

These three forms of violence add to the list of violence against India's Muslim minority. In 1992, violent conflict broke out following the seizure of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya. The dispute over a mosque in the northern city of Ayodhya has turned into a deadly form of violent conflict in recent decades. The Hindu community claims the Mughal Dynasty had built a mosque in the birthplace of the Hindu god Ram in the 16th century AD. At its peak in 1992, Hindu militants destroyed the mosque. This violent conflict is considered the deadliest Hindu-Muslim clash since the partition of India-Pakistan in 1947.

Another violent clash took place in Gujarat in 2002 which was then under Modi's leadership as head of the Gujarat government. The clashes broke out after a train of Hindu pilgrims traveling from Ayodhya through the western state of Gujarat caught fire, killing dozens. The Hindu community accuses this incident of being carried out by the Muslim minority, so the Gujarat Hindu mobs then killed hundreds of Muslims, raped Muslim women, and destroyed businesses and mosques. While the then head of Gujarat's government, Modi, and his Hindu nationalist party BJP did little to prevent violence and in some cases encouraged it, Indian government investigations determined the train fires were purely an accident.

Local and international media themselves continue to report acts of violence in the form of attacks and destruction of residences and places of worship, property confiscation, and violent vigilante actions against Muslims. Some of them are the attack on Muslim houses and mosques in Tripura, northeastern India, the burning of the house of politician Salman Khurshid, the destruction of villages, and the confiscation of Muslim family property in Malwa District, Madhya Pradesh, and several shop closings. beef to the murder of cattle traders as experienced by Mohammed Akhlaq Saifi and others (2015-2021). Since 2010, the killing of Muslims related to the consumption and sale of beef has totaled 94 cases and 90 of them occurred after the Hindu BJP led the government. These various acts of violence represent the growing Islamophobia among Hindu India by the exclusion, restriction, or attacks on Muslims thereby eliminating the freedom of Muslims in the political, economic, social, cultural, or other fields of public life (Siyech & Narain, 2018).

### ***Hindutva Ideology and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)***

According to Ganguly (2019), the Hindu Community's violent actions against minorities Muslim are the result of two interconnected factors: the Hindutva ideological legacy and the revival of the Hindu nationalist BJP party on the Indian political and government map. On the one hand, Hindutva offers the ideology of the Hindu community's sociopolitical revival, while the BJP as a political party is tasked with translating Hindutva's ideological direction into the Indian government (Ganguly, 2019). As a political ideology, Hindutva was articulated by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar who is an Indian Hindu nationalist figure as well as an important figure in the *Hindu Mahasabha* (Greater Hindu Society), a militant Hindu nationalist organization that asserts the supremacy of Hinduism as a religion and culture in India. Savarkar defines Indian culture as a manifestation of Hindu values which later this concept grew as the main principle of Hindu nationalist ideology.

According to Arvind Sharma (2002), Savarkar uses the term 'Hindutva' to define Hindu identities, which he defines as one who: (1) considers the entire Indian subcontinent to be their homeland (*fatherland/ motherland*), (2) is born to Hindu parents, and (3) regards India as a holy land. Based on this, Savarkar developed three key Hindutva principles: the same nation (*Rashtra*), the same race (*Jati*), and the same civilization (*Sanskrit*). According to Sharma, this definition



emphasizes that Indian citizenship (Hindu Nationality) is restricted to four groups of religious communities descended from Indian civilization (Indian Religions), namely Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs (Sharma, 2022).

This ideology is an expression of the experience of the Hindu community who lived in the colonial era, the memory of the pressure of religion and local Indian society under the political control of the Mughal dynasty which was Muslim and Arab, the da'wah of Islam and Christian missionaries as two foreign religions to the midst of the local Indian community, the expression of that local religious and cultural traditions are despised by foreign cultural and religious agents, as well as the revival of Indian Hindu society itself (Bapu, 2012: 62–67, 70–71). This background became the basis for Savarkar in formulating the Hindutva ideology in reaffirming the supremacy of Hinduism and Indian culture.

Despite pressure from the Indian National Congress Party government, which seeks a revival of secular India, the Hindutva ideology has continued to evolve. The strengthening of India's indigenous cultural and religious identity appears to be the motivation for the various Hindu organizations that have sprouted up across the country to carry on this heritage ideology. The *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS), an Indian Hindu nationalist paramilitary organization founded in 1925, is one of the main organizations that play a role in continuing the teachings of Hindutva ideology. The RSS actively promotes Hindutva ideology to realize the ideals of preserving superior Indian civil society's culture and values. There are at least 70 RSS wing organizations representing various fields such as politics, professionals, economics, social services, women, religious, regional, education, tribal, communication and media, research institutes, literature, children, and foreign wing organizations, one of which is the political BJP. With the help of many members of its partner organizations, the RSS can freely express Hindutva ideology in Indian society.

The findings of the Pew Research Center (in Corichi & Evans, 2021), which examined nearly 30,000 Indian adults, support this analysis. The purpose of this study is to assess the various dimensions of Hindu nationalism by asking how important the ideal Indian identity is in Indians' lives. Pew Research noted that nearly two-thirds of Hindus (64%) said it was very important to be a Hindu to truly be Indian. Likewise, from the linguistic aspect, Hindus associate Indian national identity with Hindi (59%). Hindus who associate their religion with national identity tend to also associate Hindi with being native Indian. Overall, about half of Hindus (51%) say being a Hindu and speaking Hindi is very important to be a real Indian. Most Jains (36%) also express these two sentiments, followed by Buddhists (25%), Muslims (23%), Sikhs (18%), and Christians (15%).

Furthermore, the Hindu informants, Pew Research also asked their opinion about the placement of Hinduism and Hindi into a unified national identity. Hindu informants in northern India recorded a percentage of 69% agreeing, from central India as many as 83% agreed, then Hindu

informants in South India recorded 42% percent agreed, and finally, Hindu informants from Northeast India recorded 39% agreed. Furthermore, Pew Research also looks at how the beliefs of Hindu nationalism reflect people's political behavior. About half of Hindus said they voted in the 2019 election by voting for the ruling BJP (49%). However, support for the BJP was much higher among Hindu informants who said both Hinduism and Hindi as two very important things to be a true Indian. Six out of ten Hindu voters who attach great importance to these two attributes say they voted for the BJP in the 2019 parliamentary elections. Only 33% of Hindu informants who said not being Hindu or not being able to speak Hindi was very important to national identity reported voting for the party.

According to the analysis above, Hindutva persists as an ideology of Hindu supremacy and Indian culture that is voiced through the various wings of the organization that it supports, so that it becomes a strategy for shaping the character of Indian society. On the one hand, Hindutva, which emphasizes Hinduism and Indian culture as supreme, has a positive impact on the revival of Hindu society and culture, but on the other hand, Hindutva excludes religions and communities that are deemed insufficient to represent Hindu identity, such as Islam.

In Indian politics, the BJP is one of the two main parties of India besides the Indian National Congress (INC). The party was founded on April 6, 1980, and has been in power since 2014 with Narendra Modi as Prime Minister. The BJP itself originated from the Bharatiya Jana Sangh formed by politician and Cabinet Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee (1901-1953). After his dispute with Nehru following the Liaquat-Nehru Pact, he left the cabinet and founded the Bharatiya Jana Sangh party with the help of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (1951). In 1977, Bharatiya Jana Sangh entered into a political alliance of several parties to form a new parent party, the Janata Party. However, the Janata Party also disbanded, forcing the elite Bharatiya Jana Sangh to form its party, the BJP in 1980 and began participating in the 1984 elections. After being in opposition for nearly 10 years, the BJP subsequently succeeded in seizing Indian political power in the 2014 general election. with Narendra Modi running as India's new PM.

Chhibber & Verma (2017) noted that the emergence of the BJP and Modi into the reins of power of the Indian government was based on some factors, including ideological shifts in Indian politics by not only paying attention to social issues but also the role of the state in the national economy; the BJP's ability to attract conservative economic and social groups into its political coalition; and most importantly, the figure of Narendra Modi who is portrayed as a leader who has succeeded in creating progress for the state of Gujarat and at the same time a representation of the Hindutva politician figure in modern politics (Chhibber & Verma, 2017).

Following its birth roots, the BJP itself emerged as a Hindu nationalist political force with the partnership of various Hindutva ideological wings such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), through a joint umbrella organization, Sangh Parivaar.

His Hindu nationalism tries to reconstruct the monolithic Hindu religious identity as a victim of the evil monolithic Muslim identity. Citing the BJP manifesto in the 1996 *Lok Sabha* (People's Council) election, the discourse of Hindu nationalism that he promoted encouraged the participation of the Indian Hindu community to welcome the 'new millennium of the construction of the ancient holy land of India to create an Indian society that lives with pride, prosperity, and strength in welcoming life in the next millennium'.

In this regard, BJP calls on Indian citizens as 'A patriotic Indian' to come together to form a good Indian government (*surajya*), economic independence nationalism (*swadeshi*), India's territorial defense force (*suraksha*), anti-corruption (*shuchita*), and Indian Community Empowerment (*samrasata*). This form of government is expected to be able to realize a prosperous and strong India, a country where every citizen considers our land (*bharatbhoomi*). This political platform is believed to be a derivative of the Hindutva ideology which has the ambition to unite India with all its original cultural and religious supremacy (Chowdry, 2020).

According to the CFR, the BJP implemented several important policies that impacted the marginalization of Islam and Muslim society during his first term in office (2014-2019). Some of them are by amending the Indian citizenship law (the Citizenship Amendment Act) 2019, setting up India's National Register of Citizens (NRC), and revoking the special autonomy of Jammu & Kashmir as India's Muslim-majority region (Maizland, 2022).

Through this amendment, the Government of India under the leadership of the BJP protects every Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi, and Christian immigrant who has been a minority community from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. Under the citizenship law, the Modi government also revised the waiting period to gain Indian citizenship for immigrants from the religious minority community from eleven to six years. This amendment is considered contrary to the previous principle of Indian citizenship which is secular by not making religious beliefs the basis for naturalization of Indian citizenship for immigrants. Even this amendment also collides with the prohibition of the state to discriminate against citizens and requires legal equality and protection. Despite criticism from various quarters, the Modi government insists the law is designed to protect religious minorities who are vulnerable to persecution in these three Muslim-majority countries.

Another key policy of Modi's BJP government is to revoke Jammu and Kashmir's special autonomy as an Indian state on August 15, 2019. Both Hindu-majority Jammu and Kashmir-majority Kashmir have achieved independence and are now governed by New Delhi. The Jammu and Kashmir region previously received special autonomy as a result of its election to join India despite the majority Muslim population. Article 370 of the Indian Constitution contains the special autonomy provisions for Jammu and Kashmir, which are considered to have the privilege of being local citizens.

Meanwhile, in terms of Narendra Modi's personality as an Indian leader with a Hindu nationalist

background in Islam and Muslim ethnic minorities, Modi's Islamophobic tendencies were contained. His analysis of 35 texts of Modi's speeches as Prime Minister of India shows Hindu centralism as a complete role model for India's social, economic, political, and educational development, and public life. Modi has consistently pushed India's economic development agenda forward, free from the problems that plague India today, but always uses the ideal Hindu past as a reference in his ideas. Even in responding to Islam and Muslims, Modi positioned the subtlety of Islamic Sufism as a Hindu contribution after Islam developed in India (Waikar, 2018).

In other words, the BJP's role as a political organization has been critical in translating the ideas of Hindu and Indian supremacy embodied in Hindutva ideology. The BJP has initiated several political policies and laws that reinforce Hindutva's political ideals for the advancement of society and his country in the light of Hindu supremacy. The citizenship policy for immigrants with Indian religious backgrounds, changes in population data, and the decline in the special status of Jammu and Kashmir cannot be viewed as separate policy units, but rather as the transmission of Hindutva ideas in the political sphere.

### ***Two different poles in responding to Islamophobic discourse in India***

Although it is clear that there is unfair treatment from the Indian government, the Muslim minority in India itself displays a face that is not singular. This is because India's Muslim minority itself is divided into two groups in response to Islam's relationship with Hinduism and Indian culture in general, namely the exclusivist and the syncretic (Varshney, 2002). An exclusive Muslim group tends to avoid dealing with people outside their community, whereas syncretists accept local religious or cultural values. These two attitudes are manifested in the political context as opposing and accommodating attitudes toward the policies of the Government of India, which have implications for the context of multicultural life in India.

*First*, Jamiat Ulama-I-Hind (JUIH) is seen as taking a firm and opposing stance in response to various forms of violence and marginalization of Muslim ethnic minorities. This group deserves to be referred to as a representation of the Muslim minority who have dared to speak out against the Indian government's Hindu nationalism-promoting policies. There are several statements and attitudes that describe how this community responds to Hindu community terror acts, as well as the Indian government's 'partisanship' toward Hindu groups. In 2008, JUIH issued an important statement condemning hatred and violence against Muslim minorities in India (Gupta, 2011).

In its statement, JUIH affirmed its rejection of the description of Islam as a religion of terror, as well as its rejection of all forms of unjustified violence, violations of peace, bloodshed, murder, and looting. The statement also emphasized the fundamental principles of Islam, which the Indian Muslim community believes can help each other achieve good causes and reject oppression. The statement issued by India's largest Muslim organization was intended to dispel the Indian Hindu community's suspicions of the local Muslim community in light of the Hindu community's growing suspicion and the increasing number of acts of persecution against the

Muslim community.

Even to strengthen the statement of position, JUIH later expressed his refusal to use the term '*kafir*' (infidel) against the Indian Hindu community. This organization sees that the use of the word '*kafir*' needs to be understood not rigidly but must be placed in the context of building a harmonious society as well as an image of Islam as a tolerant religion (Indiatimes.com, 2009). But on the other hand, JUIH showed a strong attitude toward India's national anthem, *Vande Mataram*. This refusal is based on the interpretation that calling India the motherland is un-Islamic behavior and even has the potential to drag Muslims to violate the principle of the priesthood of a Muslim (The Times of India, 2009).

In addition, JUIH's attitude is also shown by criticism of the policies of the National Register of Citizens or NRC. The organization suspects that the implementation of this policy is part of India's Hindu right-wing efforts through the BJP government to isolate India's Muslim minority while encouraging Hinduization of India in various aspects. Syed Arshad Madani, the head of JUIH, stated that this policy was a big threat not only to Muslims but also to the Hindu community without strata (*dalit*) (India Today, 2020). This attitude of rejection then made JUIH appear as a front-line group in opposing the violence of the local Hindu community and the political stance of the government controlled by the Hindu nationalist party.

In contrast to the first group, the second group showed a more accommodating response to the Islamophobic discourse and the Indian government's political policies. The second group is represented by the Muslim Rashtriya Manch (MRM). In contrast to the more opposed JUIH, Muslim Rashtriya Manch accommodates the idea of identity politics promoted by the Hindu nationalist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in filling the gap in Hindu-Muslim relations in India, even MRM itself claims to be part of the RSS. Therefore, it is not surprising that MRM's attitude is more contrary to the JUIH. One of the accommodative stands of the MRM group is their support for the policy of prohibiting the consumption and trade of cattle in the Indian region, supporting the singing of the Vande Mataram national anthem as well as assessing it as an Indian national identity that does not conflict with Islamic values at all. In addition, another attitude that is more important is the fact that this organization provides support for the BJP in reaching the top of the political power of the Indian government, including agreeing to the policy of abolishing the special autonomy rights of Jammu and Kashmir, an area that is considered to be an important stronghold of the Muslim ethnic minority in India. Thus the response given by the last Muslim minority group tends to be accommodative to the Hindu nationalists who dominate the current Indian government politics. This difference in stands may be due to the identity of MRM itself, which still has a historical relationship with RSS as a network that builds and raises BJP as a political party. The MRM group prefers to maintain their cultural identity as Indians, thus making them more syncretic, while the JUIH group can be seen as a more ideological group which makes them more exclusive.

## Conclusion

This study shows that there are several things about the phenomenon of violence against Indian Muslim minorities and how it has received a response from the minority Muslim community. Some things that can be known include; *First*, violence against India's Muslim minorities increased when the Hindu nationalist party along with the right-wing RSS rose to become a political party until it reached its peak when the BJP emerged as the dominant political party in India. *Second*, violence against Indian Muslim minorities cannot be separated from two things, the existence of Hindutva ideology with Hindu supremacy and indigenous Indian culture and the rise of the BJP as a strategic partner of Hindutva. In addition, the Hindutva ideology which is seen as a trigger for violence in various regions in India is also increasingly echoed through discourses that appear in the mass media so that Islamophobia is no longer just a discourse on Hindu-Indian identity politics, but has also become a discourse in every news about Hindu-Muslims relations in India. *Third*, the response of the Muslim community in India itself turns out to be dualistic, namely showing a contra and accommodative attitude towards various Islamophobic discourses and Indian government policies. However, this study has some limitations, both in terms of data and methods used. On the data aspect, because this paper relies on written data presented in various documents in the form of books, print media, and online, this paper is limited to what can be accessed in writing, while the context of Hindu-Muslim interactions in India related to Islamophobia discourse is further from what the media and other written documents can report. Meanwhile, in the methodological aspect, the use of library research—due to the pandemic situation—has implications for the limited correlation between one source and another that requires further verification. Therefore, more comprehensive research on similar topics is still needed to get a broader and more accurate description.



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