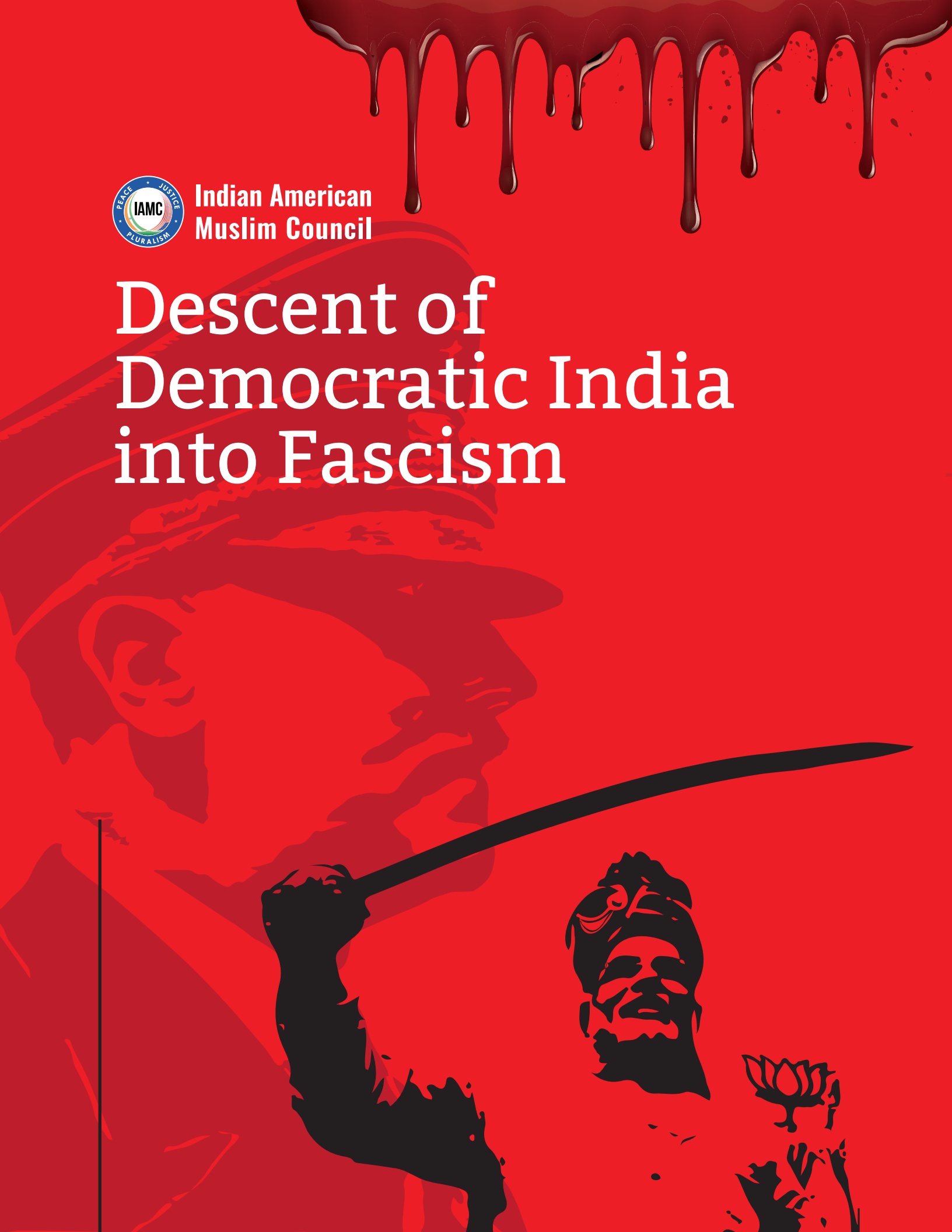




Indian American
Muslim Council

Descent of Democratic India into Fascism



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Executive Summary

India has seen drastic backsliding of democracy since Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power in 2014. His ascension has seen the rise of Hindu nationalism or Hindutva, a political ideology that advocates for turning India into a Hindu majoritarian country, where social and religious minorities, especially Muslims, Christians, and Dalits, are relegated to second class citizens, depriving them of all the basic rights.

For nearly a century the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a paramilitary group whose founders were open supporters of ethno-fascism in Europe,¹ has preached and practiced the Hindutva ideology. PM Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is the political wing of the RSS. It now claims to be the world's largest political party.

Founded as a constitutionally secular democracy in 1947, India is increasingly being flagged as a dangerous place for minorities.

The Department of State, the United States Commission for International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights (UNHCHR), Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Freedom House and numerous other global organizations have expressed alarm at India's consistent egregious violations of human rights and religious freedoms.

According to the US Department of State's 2020 Country Report on Human Rights Practices, India's significant human rights abuses included "unlawful and arbitrary killings, including extrajudicial killings perpetrated by police; tolerance of violations of religious

freedom; [and] crimes involving violence and discrimination targeting members of minority groups including women based on religious affiliation or social status."

In both 2020 and 2021, the USCIRF recommended that India be designated as a Country of Particular concern - a label reserved for the world's most egregious human rights violators.

In an official report,² USCIRF stated, "The government, led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), promoted Hindu nationalist policies resulting in systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom."

The United Nations Human Rights Commission has on multiple occasions expressed concern regarding India's crackdown on human rights NGOs and activists using draconian anti-terror laws.

In 2020, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet stated, "I am concerned that such actions based on the grounds of vaguely defined 'public interest' leave this law open to abuse, and that it is indeed actually being used to deter or punish NGOs for human rights reporting and advocacy that the authorities perceive as critical in nature."

The Human Rights Watch has said BJP's leaders and its affiliated Hindu extremist groups have "long stigmatized minority communities as a threat to national security and to the Hindu way of life."

Amnesty International's 2020³ India summary states, "Human rights defenders, including

¹ <https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/responses/hindutva-and-the-meaning-of-modernity>

² https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/05-2021/India_Chapter_AR2021.pdf

³ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/asia-and-the-pacific/south-asia/india/report-india/>

students, academics, journalists and artists, were arbitrarily arrested, often without charge or trial... There was widespread impunity and



lack of accountability for murders and attacks carried out by vigilante mobs and police officers against religious minorities.” In September 2020, the organization was forced to close its Indian offices after its bank accounts were frozen by the government.

Freedom House⁴ changed India’s label from “Free” to “Partly Free” owing to the Hindu nationalist government presiding over “rising violence and discriminatory policies affecting the Muslim population and pursued a crackdown on expressions of dissent by the media, academics, civil society groups, and protesters.”

Genocide Watch,⁵ an NGO that monitors countries for signs of impending genocide, has placed India at Stage 5 (Organization) of genocide on Dr. Gregory Stanton’s 10 Stages of Genocide.

Hate Crimes Against Muslims

India is home to more than 200 million Muslims, who are about 14.2% of India’s 1.3 billion. Human Rights Watch reports that since Modi’s election, hate crimes against Muslims have risen sharply, ranging from property destruction, disruption of prayers, mosque vandalisms, public beatings, and mob lynchings, which are often filmed and made viral on social media. Muslims are labeled as being “traitors,” “anti-national,” and often targeted both by state and non-state actors when they dissent against the discriminatory policies of the Modi government.

BJP leaders have both explicitly called for Muslims to be shot, their citizenship to be taken away, and mosques to be demolished to make way for temples. Hindu extremists who are influenced by these leaders and the ideology of Hindutva are allowed to attack Muslims with impunity. On social media, anti-Muslim hate and bigotry, and calls for violence are routine: according to Frances Haugen,⁶ a former Facebook official turned whistleblower, Facebook in India is flooded with dehumanizing anti-Muslim content, while WhatsApp⁷ has been used to organize groups of extremists to commit violent acts against Muslims.



4 <https://freedomhouse.org/country/india/freedom-world/2021>

5 <https://www.genocidewatch.com/india>

6 <https://www.telegraphindia.com/india/facebook-whistleblower-frances-haugen-claims-hate-speech-in-india-linked-to-rss-accounts/cid/1833867>

7 <https://www.thequint.com/news/india/tripura-anti-muslim-violence-hindutva-groups-whatsapp#read-more>

Hate Crimes Against Christians



India is home to 30 million Christians. Since 2014, anti-Christian violence has increased along with Hindutva's influence. Hindu nationalists use fabricated allegations of forced conversions by Christians to break into churches, vandalize prayer spaces, disrupt congregations, harass and assault worshippers, molest women present, detain faith leaders, and socially boycott Christian communities. Human rights groups have reported more than 300 such attacks on Christians in the first 9 months of 2021, and in most cases, authorities often bow to extremist groups rather than protect vulnerable communities.

Hate Crimes Against Dalits

Dalits, formerly known by the dehumanizing term “untouchables”, hold the lowest social status according to the Hindu caste system. Dalits continue to face extreme human rights abuses because of their caste. According to National Crime Records Bureau, a federal government

agency, a total of 50,291 cases of crimes against Dalits were registered in 2020 only.

For Dalit women, violence is both caste-based and gender-based. In 2020, the gang-rape of a 19-year-old from Hathras, Uttar Pradesh made international headlines⁸ for the brutal nature of the victim's death and the government's sluggish handling of the case. In 2019 alone, an average of 10 rapes of Dalit women occurred per day.



Destruction of Mosques & Churches

As the BJP and affiliates have grown more powerful, Hindutva groups and government officials have begun to call for other mosques to be destroyed.

From 2020-2021 alone, there have been multiple instances of places of worship being destroyed by Hindu extremist mobs. The New York Times reports that during the 2020 Delhi pogrom, a mosque was set ablaze and three others were

⁸ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2/10/2021/india-a-year-later-the-rape-case-that-shook-a-nation-forgotten>

vandalized by a Hindu mob chanting “Glory to Lord Ram”. In May 2021, officials in the BJP-controlled state of Uttar Pradesh bulldozed a mosque that had been standing since the era of the Britishers. In December 2021, senior BJP leaders pitched for the demolition of Shahi Idgah Masjid in Mathura, Uttar Pradesh. In Gurugram, a few miles away from India’s capital New Delhi, 80 spaces designated for Muslim prayers have been shut down by Hindu extremists⁹ in the past three years. Friday congregational prayers are routinely protested and disrupted by Hindu mobs affiliated with RSS.



Churches and other Christian spaces have also been desecrated throughout India, according to International Christian Concern. In November 2021, a newly-opened Delhi church was vandalized¹⁰ during its first Sunday prayer. Just a day after, extremists broke into a Christian prayer hall¹¹ in the state of Karnataka. In December 2021, a mob of over 50 extremists attacked a Christian missionary school¹² in Madhya Pradesh, while students were inside.

Economic Boycott of Minorities

Hindu nationalist groups have put Muslim livelihoods under attack, often through the physical harassment of Muslim vendors and business owners. At the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, Muslim street vendors were targeted and scapegoated for allegedly spreading the virus. In August 2021, a Muslim bangle seller was beaten by a mob for selling his wares in a



“Hindu area.” A month later, two Muslim men in Mathura, a temple town in Uttar Pradesh, were beaten by Hindu extremists for selling meat. Other Muslim vendors have been forced to chant Hindu religious slogans to avoid further violence. For Muslims, who are largely self-employed and are the poorest among all religious groups in India, economic discrimination at this scale is set to further disenfranchise millions of people.

⁹ [https://www.siasat.com/only-20-of-100-namaz-sites-exist-in-gurugram-report2233363-/](https://www.siasat.com/only-20-of-100-namaz-sites-exist-in-gurugram-report2233363/)

¹⁰ <https://thewire.in/urban/watch-church-demolished-in-delhis-chattarpur-authorities-claim-encroachment>

¹¹ <https://www.ucanews.com/news/hindu-activists-intensify-attacks-on-indian-christian-prayer-meets/95170>

¹² <https://thewire.in/communalism/missionary-school-in-mp-vandalised-by-hindu-right-groups-principal-alleges-police-inaction>

Love Jihad- A Conspiracy Theory



A common fear-mongering tactic of the Hindu right is the conspiracy theory of “Love Jihad” - the idea that Muslim men are taking part in an organized effort to increase conversions to Islam by seducing and marrying Hindu women. According to various reports by human rights groups, successive probes have uncovered no evidence of such an agenda, and the central government itself admits that there is no credible definition of Love Jihad. Regardless, BJP leaders and Hindu extremists continue to use the hysteria around Love Jihad to further their own agenda. Many states have passed laws to stop so-called “love jihad”.

Hindu vigilantes have used this law to attack and file false police cases against Muslim men who are in consensual relationships with Hindu women. Muslim men face the threat of being beaten or even lynched over an interfaith relationship. In October 2021, a Muslim man was found beheaded and mutilated¹³ on a railway track in Karnataka state. Police reported that he had been murdered by Hindu extremists linked to Rama Sena for being in a relationship with a Hindu woman.

Anti-conversion laws

Following in the footsteps of BJP ruled Uttar Pradesh, several other Indian states have also passed anti-conversion laws, including Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand.

These laws have contributed to a huge surge in anti-Christian hate crimes. At least 305 anti-Christian incidents, including mob attacks, harassment, and church destruction, were reported between January and September 2021, according to a fact-finding report released by Christian NGOs. Hindu extremists repeatedly justify these attacks using baseless claims of forced conversions. Despite the lack of evidence, however, the extremists themselves are rarely punished, while Christians are often arrested and churches are shut down.

In October 2021, a mob of around 250 Hindu vigilantes ransacked a church in the BJP-controlled state of Uttarakhand. The mob beat people inside the church with iron rods, including the pastor and some of his family members, Al Jazeera reports. In the same month in Chhattisgarh, a far-right Hindu¹⁴ leader urged a rally of 1,000 people to “arm themselves with axes to teach Christians indulging in conversions a lesson” and “behead them.”



¹³ <https://thewire.in/communalism/karnataka-muslim-man-found-beheaded-on-train-tracks-police-suspect-right-wing-groups-involvement>

¹⁴ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2/12/2021/india-christians-church-hindu-groups-bjp-conversion>

Discriminatory Citizenship Law & National Register of Citizens



In December 2019 India legislated the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) to fast-track citizenship for non-Muslim migrants, raising concerns that it will be clubbed with a National Register for Citizens (NRC) to disenfranchise India's 200 million Muslims, who at 14.2% of its 1.3 billion are its largest minority. The NRC threatens to cancel the citizenship of those without decades' old documents. Thanks to the CAA all such people, except the Muslims, would retain citizenship.

In August 2019, the NRC declared half a million Muslims as outsiders in Assam, one of India's 28 states. They now face statelessness, citizenship loss, and incarceration in detention centers, USCIRF said in its 2021 annual report. The U.S.-based Genocide Watch, an independent watchdog, has raised a genocide alert for Assam.

Anti-Muslim Pogrom in Delhi



To revenge the anti-citizenship protests organized by members of the Muslim community, the Hindu right-wing mobs in February 2020 descended into the Muslim localities with swords, guns, petrol bombs, iron rods, crowbars, and metal pipes.

The anti-Muslim violence that started on February 23, continued for four days and nights resulting in the killing of 53 people, mostly Muslims, injuring 400 and displacing hundreds of families, according to The New York Times. Shouting "maro shaale mulleko [kill the bastard Muslims] and jai Sri Ram [a Hindu nationalist slogan]", the Hindu mob burned Muslims "alive in their homes or dragged out into the streets and lynched", The Guardian reported.

According to Time Magazine, the violence started after a legislator in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party, Kapil Mishra, made a provocative speech threatening violence against Muslims. USCIRF while echoing the views of the Delhi Minorities Commission in its annual report said that the violence was "seemingly planned and directed to teach a lesson to a certain community which dared to protest against a discriminatory law."

Abuse of Anti Terror Laws



The Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) is a draconian anti-terror law¹⁵ that allows Indian law enforcement to designate someone as a “terrorist” and detain them without producing any incriminating evidence. The UAPA was amended in 2019 by Narendra Modi’s party to allow authorities to designate individuals as terrorists. The law has been used to criminalize dissent and curb the right to free speech for minorities.

During the 2019 protests against the discriminatory Citizenship Amendment Act, several Muslim activists including Umar Khalid,¹⁶ Sharjeel Imam,¹⁷ Khalid Saifi,¹⁸ and Safoora Zargar,¹⁹ were arrested for sedition and “promoting enmity.” Khalid, Imam, and Saifi and hundreds of other Muslims are still languishing behind the bars as prisoners of conscience.

84-year-old Jesuit priest and activist Stan Swamy was also arrested under the UAPA for

allegedly stoking inter-caste conflict. While in prison, he was denied bail several times, despite suffering from Parkinson’s disease. He later contracted Covid-19 and died. After his death in July 2021, the Indian government was accused by international human rights bodies of judicial murder for denying Swamy basic healthcare.

Attacks on Journalists & Media Freedom



Modi’s India is one of the most dangerous places for journalists. Over the last seven years, the Indian government has intensified its crackdown²⁰ on journalists and media houses for not toeing the Hindu nationalist line. Journalists are routinely threatened, intimidated, arrested, booked - and silenced through gag orders and charges concocted by the state. The government also uses federal agencies like Income Tax Department and Enforcement Directorate to crack down on media houses that are critical of the state policies.

15 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/16/8/2021/india-uapa-terror-law-scrutiny>

16 [https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/umar-khalid-uapa-in-delhi-riots-arrest-jnu-pota-tada6597705-/](https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/umar-khalid-uapa-in-delhi-riots-arrest-jnu-pota-tada6597705/)

17 <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/sedition-uapa-case-nothing-in-speech-caused-religious-animosity-says-sharjeel-imam/articleshow/88028528.cms>

18 [https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/delhi/khalid-saifi-uapa-delhi-riots7470632-/](https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/delhi/khalid-saifi-uapa-delhi-riots7470632/)

19 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/8/3/2021/indian-state-is-afraid-of-strong-women-activist-safoora-zargar>

20 <https://www.thenation.com/article/world/india-violence-journalists/>

According to BBC,²¹ a total of sixty-seven journalists were arrested and nearly 200 physically attacked in India in 2020. Journalist Siddique Kappan has been in prison since October 2020²² and charged under sedition law and draconian anti-terror law UAPA for trying to report on gang rape and murder of a Dalit girl in Uttar Pradesh state. Aasif Sultan, a journalist from Kashmir, has been in jail for more than three years²³ for writing a story. Washington Post columnist Rana Ayub has been regularly hounded by the Hindu nationalists and the BJP government for being vocal against the persecution of minorities. In November 2021, two journalists, Samridhi K. Sakunia and Swarna Jha were arrested for reporting and documenting anti-Muslim violence²⁴ in the Indian state of Tripura, where Hindu mobs attacked mosques and properties owned by Muslims, according to The New York Times.²⁵

India ranked²⁶ at 142 out of 180 countries in the 2021 World Press Freedom Index by Reporters Without Borders.

Crackdown on Civil Society

Indian government regularly harasses, detains, and prosecutes activists, nongovernmental organizations, and civil society members who are critical of its policies, according to Human

Rights Watch's World Report 2021.²⁷ The government repeatedly denounces human rights and environmental activism as "anti-national".

Amnesty International said²⁸ the government uses both UAPA and FCRA, India's primary anti-terror and foreign funding laws to silence the dissent from civil society. In 2018, at least 16 prominent human rights defenders including Sudha Bharadwaj, Gautam Navlakha, and professors Anand Teltumbde,²⁹ Shoma Sen,³⁰ and Hany Babu³¹ were booked under UAPA in a single case under trumped-up accusations of having links with Maoist organizations, based on evidence which The Washington Post investigation has dubbed as "fabricated". In 2020, in response to the nationwide anti-citizenship law protests, the Delhi Police, which reports directly to India's Home Minister Amit Shah filed nearly 700 cases and arrested nearly 2000 people, mostly student leaders, anti-Citizenship law activists, and human rights defenders. Most of them are currently languishing behind the bars.

FCRA, the foreign funding law has been used as another tool to choke civil society. Since 2014, several organizations have been targeted under the law, including Amnesty International, Greenpeace India, Lawyers Collective, Centre for Promotion of Social Concerns and thousands of other non-profits across India. In September 2020, Amnesty was forced to shut its offices in India as a result of the continuous witchhunt by the BJP government.

²¹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india55906345>

²² <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india56290116>

²³ <https://www.thepolisproject.com/read/the-systematic-criminalization-of-journalism-in-kashmir-a-profile-of-aasif-sultan/>

²⁴ <https://maktoobmedia.com/03/11/2021/tripura-uapa-against-lawyers-over-fact-finding-report-on-anti-muslim-violence/>

²⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/15/11/2021/world/asia/india-journalists-arrested-crackdown-tripura.html>

²⁶ <https://rsf.org/en/india>

²⁷ <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021>

²⁸ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/10/2020/india-counter-terror-raids-on-civil-society-groups-signal-escalating-crackdown-on-dissent/>

²⁹ <https://thewire.in/rights/anand-teltumbde-arrest-open-letter>

³⁰ <https://thewire.in/rights/shoma-sen-uapa-nia-bhima-koregaon-rona-wilson-arsenal-consulting>

³¹ <https://thewire.in/education/hany-babu-nia-elgar-parishad-delhi-university-language-politics>

Human Rights Abuses in Kashmir



Since August 2019, when the Indian government rescinded Kashmir's special status, the gross human rights abuses by the security forces are witnessing a sharp upward trend, continuing the saga of harassment, extrajudicial detentions, killings, enforced disappearances, that the region's civilian population has been enduring since the onset of the military crackdown in 1989.

According to Human Rights Watch,³² the Indian authorities continue to enforce restrictions on movement including routine harassment and ill-treatment at checkpoints, arbitrary detention, torture, and extrajudicial killings. Journalists and publishers are summoned day in and day out for their reporting. Internet services are blocked at will. Over the last more than 2 years,

the internet was shutdown for nearly 18 months—the longest-ever shutdown in any democracy.

The Indian authorities have also clamped down on media freedom and are using the abusive counterterrorism law against activists, journalists, peaceful protestors, and critics of the government, Amnesty International said in a report.³³

On November 22, 2021, India's federal counterterrorism agency arrested³⁴ prominent Kashmiri human rights activist Khurram Parvez under trumped-up terror charges, apparently for his work documenting cases of enforced disappearances and investigating unmarked graves in the region.

³² <https://www.hrw.org/news/25/11/2021/india-kashmiri-activist-held-under-abusive-law>

³³ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/11/2021/india-kashmiri-activist-held-under-abusive-law/>

³⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/23/11/2021/world/asia/kashmiri-activist-india-antiterror.html>

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