

REPORT

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State of Religious Minorities in India

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Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Hindutva (Hindu nationalist) leaders, groups, and rhetoric has become pervasive in Indian government and society, resulting in polarization through hate speech, discriminatory policies, and violence targeting religious minorities. Hindutva ideology seeks to turn India into a Hindu Rashtra (Hindu Nation) and paints religious minorities (Muslims, Christians etc.) as a threat to its autocratic and majoritarian vision for Indian society. These right-wing Hindu nationalists who commit acts of discrimination and violence against religious minorities often have the backing of local and state actors and enjoy a culture of impunity which only emboldens their statements and actions.



The significant events of hate speech, discrimination, and violence targeting Muslims and Christians over the month of February 2022 indicate a continuation of this systematic and geographically widespread pattern of persecuting religious minorities and reveal the many parts of society which are complicit in upholding Hindutva ideology with impunity, including the India's legislative, executive, and judiciary. This in light of the continual lack of condemnation and prosecution of the the calls for mass violence against Christians and the genocide of Muslims at the dharma sansads (Hindu Religious Parliament) held in Haridwar (Uttarakhand), Delhi, and Raipur in December 2021 demonstrate that religious minorities face the threat of these genocidal sentiments turning into genocidal action.

Hate Speech and Elections

While failing to condemn calls for mass violence and genocide to be committed against religious minorities, BJP candidates utilized the same polarizing and dehumanizing rhetoric in their 2022 election campaigns. The 2022 election season has prompted



campaign speeches from BJP candidates which reinforce Hindutva ideology of turning India into a Hindu nation while encouraging anti-Muslim sentiment and violence. In Uttar Pradesh's Amethi district, BJP candidate Mayankeshwar Sharan Singh was filmed using anti-Muslim rhetoric in a campaign speech. He said, "If Hindus in India wake up, the beard of Muslims will be pulled and made into a choti (a braid kept by Hindus). If you have to live in Hindustan you have to say 'Radhe Radhe' [Hindi

salutation], else, like those who went to Pakistan during the partition, you can go too... you have no use here."¹

BJP candidate from Uttar Pradesh's Dumariyagan assembly constituency, Raghvendra Pratap Singh, claimed that "any Hindu who doesn't vote for me has Miyan [slur for Muslim] blood in his veins. He's a traitor."² Singh emphasized his hard stance on "Muslim terrorism," stating that instances of terrorism have decreased during his term. He falsely asserted that since Muslims had been "driven out of power," "Women and children are able to roam around safely on the streets."³ He then warned Muslims that "if any Hindu is insulted and if you look at any Hindu girl, then I'll get you beaten so much and cut so much..." while threatening to send Muslims "back to Pakistan."⁴ Singh promised, "If you make me legislator again, Muslims will stop wearing skullcaps and start putting [on] tilaks (a mark worn by Hindus on forehead)..."⁵

Not only are anti-Muslim talking points being spread through campaign speeches, but Hindu-nationalist government leaders have pushed for

1 <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/up-assembly-election-second-hate-speech-video-by-bjp-mla-emerges-amid-uttar-pradesh-election-2775119>

2 <https://thewire.in/communalism/hindu-who-doesnt-vote-for-me-has-miyan-blood-in-veins-bjp-mla-threatens-muslims-with-violence>

3 <https://thewire.in/communalism/hindu-who-doesnt-vote-for-me-has-miyan-blood-in-veins-bjp-mla-threatens-muslims-with-violence>

4 <https://thewire.in/communalism/hindu-who-doesnt-vote-for-me-has-miyan-blood-in-veins-bjp-mla-threatens-muslims-with-violence>

5 <https://thewire.in/communalism/hindu-who-doesnt-vote-for-me-has-miyan-blood-in-veins-bjp-mla-threatens-muslims-with-violence>

revoking Muslim voting rights. Bihar state BJP legislator, Hari Bhushan Thakur demanded revoking the voting rights of Muslims in the state, stating:

“They (Muslims) are increasing population and want to make India a Muslim state. Muslim leaders have agenda to make every country an Islamic state. We cannot allow that to happen. Hence we have demanded from the government the withdrawal of voting rights from them and make them second class citizens.”⁶

In addition, Muslim candidates in Uttar Pradesh have been arrested and harassed as well as had their candidacies canceled through criminal charges brought against them, technicalities, and externment orders. “Externment” is a tool of Indian law enforcement which prohibits a candidate from running in a district or region if the administration believes that said candidate will invalidate the “law and order” in that area by running.⁷

Earlier in January, the Muslim incumbent state legislator from the Kairana constituency,⁸ Nahid Hasan, was arrested for a long-pending case against him, resulting in the cancellation of his candidacy. Candidate and state secretary of the All India Majlis-E-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) Party, Saif Khan,



had his candidacy in Unnao district revoked over a technicality of a missing signature on his poll nomination.⁹

According to Khan, at least ten candidates from his party had their candidacies canceled. Due to harassment, Khan ultimately had to flee the city over safety concerns. Another Muslim Congress candidate and active voice against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), Akbari Begum, from Bijnor similarly had her nomination canceled last minute due to a missing signature from her party head on her nomination form.¹⁰ Recently, a Muslim Congress candidate from Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh, Salman Imtiyaz,

6 <https://www.deccanherald.com/national/bjp-mla-demands-withdrawal-of-voting-rights-of-muslim-community-1084771.html>

7 <https://twocircles.net/2022feb23/445144.html>

8 <https://twocircles.net/2022feb23/445144.html>

9 <https://twocircles.net/2022feb23/445144.html>

10 <https://twocircles.net/2022feb23/445144.html>

was “externed” from his constituency, revoking his candidacy.¹¹

Discrimination and Violence Against Muslims



February saw a continuation of violence committed against Muslims by right-wing Hindu nationalists. Two right-wing Hindu nationalists, Sachin Pandit and Shubham, were arrested for an assassination attempt on Asaduddin Owaisi, the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) chief and Member of Parliament from Hyderabad, Telangana. On February 3rd, a group of 3-4 Hindu extremists fired upon Owaisi while he was attending an election-related event in Meerut, Uttar Pradesh. One of the assailants is a member of the BJP with ties to BJP leaders from Uttar Pradesh.¹² This assassination attempt comes after violent Hindutva rhetoric

calling for the killing of Muslims and the murder of Owaisi. Hindu Raksha Dal candidate, Pinky Chaudhary encouraged his followers to attack Owaisi, stating “I want to warn Owaisi, as long as the volunteers of Hindu Raksha Dal and warriors of Hindu Raksha Dal are working for Hindutva, they will slit your throat and glorify my name.”¹³

In Bihar, a Muslim man was kidnapped by Hindu extremists on February 16th.¹⁴ The kidnappers demanded a ransom before they repeatedly assaulted, killed him and burned his body. On February 19th, a video circulated on Instagram showing the kidnappers berating the victim with accusations that he consumed beef and killed cows, revealing that the kidnapping was motivated by anti-Muslim sentiment.¹⁵ On February 18th, four men barged into the house of social



activist and student leader Anish Khan in the Howrah district of West Bengal.

¹¹ <https://twocircles.net/2022feb23/445144.html>

¹² <https://thewire.in/communalism/sachin-pandit-arrested-owaisi-assassination-attempt-display-bjp-membership-facebook>

¹³ <https://thewire.in/communalism/sachin-pandit-arrested-owaisi-assassination-attempt-display-bjp-membership-facebook>

¹⁴ <https://thewire.in/communalism/bihar-muslim-man-kidnapped-and-killed-family-alleges-communal-motive>

¹⁵ <https://thewire.in/communalism/bihar-muslim-man-kidnapped-and-killed-family-alleges-communal-motive>

The men held Khan at gunpoint, forcing him upstairs where they killed him.¹⁶ Khan had been outspoken against the discriminatory Citizenship Bill and had previously written to local police seeking protection last year. Local police were slow to respond, and after an initial probe into the handling of the case, three policemen were suspended.¹⁷ Two of these officers were later arrested, however the chief minister refused to hand the case over to the CBI.

In Gujarat's Bharuch district, a mob of nine right-wing Hindu nationalists stone pelted and beat a Muslim man while they forced him to chant "Jai Shri Ram."¹⁸ The mob also pulled the man's beard and called him a "terrorist."¹⁹ The victim has filed an FIR with the local police who have arrested three in connection to this case. However, the victim's family alleges that one of the perpetrators is the nephew of a local BJP leader and fear that due to this connection, the perpetrators will soon be released.²⁰

Incidents of anti-Muslim violence also included instances of police brutality. On February 14th, news outlets reported the death of Muslim 18-year-old Zeeshan Malik in New Delhi who died from torture while in police custody.²¹

This month, discriminatory policies

towards Muslims also intensified in BJP-controlled Karnataka. The Karnataka government issued a directive on February 5th which prohibits students from wearing clothes "which disturb equality, integrity and public law."²² This order validates the growing pattern of state education institutions banning students from wearing the hijab to school. These bans are a result of a sustained campaign by Hindu extremist groups who have been mobilizing the Hindu students donning saffron shawls



to organise protests against Muslim students wearing Hijab to schools and colleges.

Earlier, a ban was imposed on Muslim students for wearing hijab in the Bhandarkar's Arts and Science Degree College in Kundapur, resulting in Mahatma Gandhi Memorial College (MGM) in Udupi to also institute a ban.

¹⁶ <https://twocircles.net/2022feb25/445151.html>

¹⁷ <https://twocircles.net/2022feb25/445151.html>

¹⁸ <https://maktoobmedia.com/2022/02/24/called-terrorist-muslim-man-beaten-in-gujarat/>

¹⁹ <https://maktoobmedia.com/2022/02/24/called-terrorist-muslim-man-beaten-in-gujarat/>

²⁰ <https://maktoobmedia.com/2022/02/24/called-terrorist-muslim-man-beaten-in-gujarat/>

²¹ <https://maktoobmedia.com/2022/02/19/18-year-old-jailed-muslim-youth-dies-in-delhi-family-alleges-torture>

²² <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/bangalore/karnataka-hijab-controversy-clothes-ban-harmony-public-order-7758633/>

These decisions sparked protests from hijab-wearing Muslim students during which Muslim women were heckled, harassed and intimidated by Hindu students wearing saffron shawls. On February 8th outside MGM, a group of hijab-wearing Muslim students were met with a mob of 100 saffron-clad Hindu student protestors. A report by The News Minute found that this protest by Hindu students was not spontaneous, but planned and organized by the Hindu Jagarana Vedike (HJV), a Hindu extremist

have also occurred in other parts of India and were met with police brutality. At



group.²³ The report asserts that the HJV instigated Hindu students at MGM college to protest their Muslim classmates and provided them with saffron shawls and turbans.

Hijab wearing students are also being barred from entering a school in Jaipur, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and other parts of India. Protests against the hijab ban in solidarity with Muslim students

a protest organized in Uttar Pradesh, policemen were seen beating burqa-clad women with batons.²⁴

The Hijab issue has been sent to be heard before Karnataka's High Court, and on February 11th, the Court issued an interim order upholding Karnataka government's hijab ban.²⁵ Until the High Court gives a final judgment, the interim order will be in effect. As the case continues, the Muslim students who brought the case to the High Court continue to face harassment. The BJP Karnataka wing's official Twitter handle tweeted their identities and personal details, including their addresses.²⁶ Twitter has since taken down the post. One of the petitioners, Hazra Shifa, also alleged that her brother was beaten up

23 <https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/tnm-investigation-how-hindutva-group-mobilised-saffron-scarf-student-udupi-college-160810>

24 <https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/tnm-investigation-how-hindutva-group-mobilised-saffron-scarf-student-udupi-college-160810>

25 <https://scroll.in/article/1017175/explainer-does-karnataka-hcs-interim-order-restricting-hijab-violate-the-right-to-religion>

26 <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/bangalore/bjp-tweets-identities-of-minors-in-hijab-row-twitter-takes-it-down-7775574/>

by right-wing Hindu-nationalists.²⁷

This past month also saw violence committed against Muslim homes, businesses, and places of worship. On February 9th, 4-5 unidentified persons vandalized the Jamia Masjid in Hampapur village, Karnataka by pelting



the building with stones, breaking the windows.²⁸ February 20th, in the aftermath of the murder of Bajrang Dal member Harsha Jingade in Shivmogga district, Karnataka, Muslim households were ransacked and attacked by Bajrang Dal extremists.²⁹ So far, the riots have resulted in 14 instances of property damage and one instance of assault. Many Muslim families have fled their homes in Seegehatti, Bibi Street, Clarkpet, and Azad Nagar. While the Karnataka government asserts that all instances of violence will be investigated, so far no arrests have been made and there are no plans for compensation for damaged homes or businesses.

Jammu and Kashmir

Over the past month in Muslim majority Jammu and Kashmir, journalists and activists have been targeted by Indian security forces. Since August 2019, the region has seen an increased Indian military presence, resulting in human rights abuses against civilians. Indian security forces utilize the Public Safety Act (PSA), a lawless law and Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), a draconian terror law “to detain those deemed critical of the government, from lawyers and activists to journalists, priests, poets, academics, civil society members, and Kashmiri civilians.”³⁰ In particular, this month security forces have effectively closed down Kashmir’s press club; arrested, interrogated, and



detained journalists and human rights defenders. On February 4th, Kashmiri journalist and editor of The Kashmir

²⁷ <https://hindutvawatch.org/proceedings-in-hijab-case-on-petitioner-alleges-attack-on-her-brother/>

²⁸ <https://maktoobmedia.com/2022/02/15/stones-pelted-at-mosque-in-karnataka-locals-allege-revenge-over-hijab-issue/>

²⁹ <https://www.thequint.com/cyber/crime/harsha-murder-shivamogga-muslims-leave-homes-businesses-behind-for-safety#read-more>

³⁰ https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/dec/10/how-terrorism-law-india-used-to-silence-modis-critics?fbclid=IwAR0Kj2BsU5b7wj2WVlQYuisHyCGpWwQKCOiSAAnrxTGJYg5x7Kk7b7_R8aU

Walla Fahad Shah was arrested by police for his coverage of a violent police raid in January which police has labeled “anti-national content.”³¹ This month, Al Jazeera also reported that stories by Kashmiri journalists have begun to disappear from the digital archives of newspapers.³² These stories were critical of the Indian government and detailed human rights abuses committed by Indian security forces against civilians in the region.

Violence Against Christians



February also saw the continuation of harassment and violence committed by right-wing Hindu-nationalists against Christians. In late January, a mob of 12 men led by a member of the Hindu extremist Bajrang Dal attacked two

pastors in Haryana’s Ambala Cantonment for false allegations that these pastors accepted foreign money to lure people into converting to Christianity.³³ The mob beat the two pastors, tried to force the two to recite a Hindu prayer, and burned one of the pastors’ Bible.³⁴ Later this month, forty members of the Shalom Kalashya Church in Phuldaudi village located in Jhabua district of Madhya Pradesh were forced by right-wing Hindu nationalists to convert back to Hinduism.³⁵ Members of the VHP and Bajrang Dal led a “Ghar Wapsi” (homecoming) re-conversion ceremony where Christians



were forced to partake in the rituals of breaking the coconut and eating food offered to deities.³⁶ According to The Voice of the Martyrs Canada ministry partners, tribal Christians in Jharkhand

31 <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/05/world/asia/kashmir-editor-arrested.html?s=09>

32 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/13/kashmiri-journalists-accuse-newspapers-of-erasing-archives>

33 <https://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/world/2022/february/2-indian-pastors-beaten-by-hindu-extremists-bible-burned-see-i-have-set-your-jesus-ablaze>

34 <https://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/world/2022/february/2-indian-pastors-beaten-by-hindu-extremists-bible-burned-see-i-have-set-your-jesus-ablaze>

35 from <https://www.mnnonline.org/news/hindu-nationalists-target-indias-christian-women-and-girls/>

36 <https://www.christianitydaily.com/articles/14954/20220216/christians-india-forced-reconvert-hinduism-report.htm>

similarly have been pressured by right-wing Hindu nationalists to convert back to Hinduism. Perpetrators use threats of rape and selling the daughters of Christians to pressure Christians into renouncing their faith. If Christians refuse, they carry out these threats. Gangs of vigilante Hindu women in the area also have gone into villages to identify and intimidate Christians into converting. Additionally, the Jharkhand government has refused to supply tribal Christians with food and aid.

Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand along with Karnataka, Odisha, Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Uttarakhand have enacted anti-conversion or “Freedom of religion” laws which give legal justification for officials to disproportionately target Christians (as well as Muslims) for alleged forced conversions.³⁷ In states

with anti-conversion legislation, police often take little effective action when prosecuting discrimination, harassment, and violence targeting Christian communities, and are even complicit in arresting Christians for alleged “forced conversions.” In late January 2022 and early February 2022 alone, there were 14 instances of anti-Christian violence and 12 cases in which Christians were arrested for allegedly forcibly converting Hindus in Madhya Pradesh.³⁸

Christian places of worship were also vandalized and destroyed this month. “Unidentified miscreants” carried out the unauthorized demolition of a Christian prayer hall, St. Anthony’s Holy Cross Center, in Mangaluru, Karnataka, leaving thirty Christian families homeless.³⁹ On February 15th, the Kolar district administration of Karnataka accompanied by around 400 policemen pulled down a 20-foot Jesus statue in Gokunte village.⁴⁰

37 <https://www.newframe.com/hindu-extremists-target-indias-christians/>

38 <https://www.christianitydaily.com/articles/14954/20220216/christians-india-forced-reconvert-hinduism-report.htm>

39 <https://www.newsclick.in/Mangalore-Why-Was-The-40-Year-Old-St-Antony-Holy-Cross-Prayer-Hall-Demolished>

40 <https://thewire.in/communalism/violation-of-court-order-bengaluru-archbishop-on-demolition-of-jesus-statue-in-kolar>

Recommendations

The developments in hate speech, discrimination, and violence targeting Muslims and Christians over February 2022 display the hold of Hindutva ideology, leaders, and groups on India's government, judiciary, and society. Modi, the BJP, and their candidates have profitted off of perpetuating Hindutva's polarizing anti-Muslim rhetoric and condoning calls for mass violence and genocide through their silence. India's judiciary is also complicit in cementing Hindutva ideology's hold by not effectively holding perpetrators of hate speech, discrimination, and violence targeting religious minorities responsible and upholding and enforcing discriminatory laws and policies which disproportionately target religious minorities. The complicity of government and judicial officials in upholding Hindutva signals to perpetrators that they have the approval of their government, police, and courts and no fear of repercussions, which only serves to embolden and escalate the violence of right-wing Hindu-nationalists.

The complicity of actors from the local to the national level across civilian, judicial, and governmental sectors of society in upholding Hindutva ideology and persecuting religious minorities demonstrate that the mechanisms for mass violence and genocide are in place. In order to de-escalate the current situation and prevent an impending genocide, the following recommendations should be implemented:

- As state parties to the 1948 Genocide Convention, the international community, and the Indian government are obligated to take the recent calls for genocide and mass violence against Muslims and Christians at Haridwar, Delhi, and Raipur seriously, condemn the genocidal sentiments, and hold those who made the speeches responsible.
- As signatories of the UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief and UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, the international community as well as the Indian government has a responsibility to ensure that police effectively investigate, prosecute, and prevent instances of harassment and violence committed against Muslims and Christians.
- States should repeal their "Freedom of Religion" or anti-conversion laws which have been used to disproportionately target religious minorities and justify harassment and violence.
- The Karnataka High Court and state government should uphold the freedom of religion of Muslim students to wear whatever religious garb they so choose, setting the standard for educational institutions statewide.
- In particular, the President of the United States has the ability to place

sanctions on individuals who have committed, directly aided, ordered, or are complicit in gross human rights violations through the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act. These sanctions include barring entry to the US or blocking any transactions relating to property or interests held in the United States. With regards to recent calls for

genocide at events like Haridwar, the President could place sanctions on those responsible. These sanctions could also be applicable to those responsible for or complicit in the ongoing human rights violations in Jammu and Kashmir, including the recent violations of freedom of speech and press.