

Muslim Indians

Struggle for Inclusion

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2010924341

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Book design/layout by Nita Congress

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In Their Own Voices

“Muslims want jobs, not Iftar.”

“Spend government resources for Muslim education, not Hajj subsidies.”

In Their Own Voices:

The Stimson Center/ Institute for Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution Study

Summary of Findings and Major Themes

The purpose of the Stimson/Institute for Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution Study was not to use focus groups and interviews as a means of ascertaining the objective reality of the conditions of Muslims in India. There have been many systematic studies that have been comprehensive in scope, and others that have addressed one or another important dimension. Many are quite recent. These studies along with others in recent decades provide a baseline to assess objective realities. The Gopal Singh, Srikrishna, Liberhan, Mishra, and Sachar reports are cases in point.

Rather, what we have sought to address through our study has been the perceptions among a variety of Muslims of their own condition. Which of the issues identified by the reports do Muslims themselves feel are of greatest significance, and precisely what form do they themselves see these issues taking? While the approaches among our interlocutors varied widely regarding the issues raised and discussed, a remarkable consensus has emerged through the process as to the principal sources of concern to the Muslims of India.

The overall picture is of a community that feels a variety of acute challenges. It is overrepresented, relative to its proportion in the population as a whole, in the ranks of the poor and the economically vulnerable. It is underrepresented in the ranks of all public services—administrative, police, military, and diplomatic. It feels politically weak and divided. It is immobilized by a sense of fear that forceful articulation of its concerns will spawn a backlash and by anxiety that the larger society is unprepared to address its concerns.

The most significant findings are as follows.

- The predominant concern is education and the closely related issue of economic opportunity, for the benefit of individual Muslims and the community as a whole. This belies the general Indian perception that cultural or ideological issues of identity are the principal concerns of Muslims.

- Religious issues as such are a very minor part of the discourse and concerns. The concern about unequal treatment on the basis of religious identity is more important.
- The other principal emphasis is the concern with the rule of law, and personal security from mob violence or from injustice perpetrated by state institutions such as the police and courts.
- Muslim Indians are like their non-Muslim compatriots in their aspirations; contrary to popular non-Muslim perception, the tone of Muslim positions is constructive and emphasizes self-improvement and self-restraint.

There is a pervasive sense that non-Muslims are either unaware of Muslim concerns and points of view, or disinterested in or hostile to them. There is a sense that the evolution of Hindu sentiment is increasingly anti-Muslim, that the integral role of Muslims in Indian history and society is under attack, and that the national political discourse is infected by an exclusive majoritarianism. The image of the loyal Muslim community, once the source of nationalist and cultural pride for most Indians, is slowly being replaced by, at best, a sense of their irrelevance and, at worst, a sense that they somehow challenge the emerging self-image of the new India. The calumny that Muslims are “anti-national” and covertly sympathetic to Pakistan is never far from the surface.

Acceptance of such unfavorable views of Muslims and a triumphalist sense of Hindu identity have become pervasive. These subtly affect the climate of opinion, even among Hindus who may not exhibit bias or other hostile feelings toward Muslims. This is sought to be justified in terms of resistance to alleged “appeasement” of minorities. The actual experience of Muslims is of anything but appeasement: rather, they feel significantly discriminated against.

The predominant post-independence nationalist pride at the continuing presence of Muslims and Muslim heritage in secular India, distinguished from the narrowly religious identity of Pakistan, has now been replaced by suspicion. The celebration of India’s Muslim heritage has been replaced by cultural irritation. The celebration of the role of many prominent and distinguished Muslim leaders in the nationalist freedom struggle has now been ignored and increasingly given way to the calumny that Muslims are disloyal to India, with pejorative references to their localities as “Pakistan” and the suspicion that they support subversive activities. Such suspicions mark popular perception, and are subtly and not so subtly promoted by many in the news media and by some political leaders.

Outside the realm of cultural and ideological discourse, the increasing marginalization of Muslims in Indian society takes the following forms.

- *Increasing segregation and decreasing contacts between Muslims and Hindus.* This is found in the form of physical segregation of housing and communities, to an extent

greater than ever before, reflecting mutual security perceptions and concerns and deliberate choices. It is also found in the form of many Hindus losing interest in the lives and concerns of their Muslim fellow Indians. The long and proudly noted syncretic culture of India, where Hindus and Muslims participated in each others' festivals and religious observances, has now given way to a palpable irritation at the physical and sartorial indicia of Muslim identity. Public Hindu religious celebration is increasingly deliberately used to provoke and exclude rather than invite.

- *Muslim marginalization as a result of economic trends.* Processes of economic change that have affected all poor or economically vulnerable communities and classes have left Muslims at a progressively greater disadvantage. To some extent, this has been because Muslims are overrepresented among the poor and in those classes and traditional occupations that have been the most harmed by the direction that economic development has taken in India. The role of the state in protecting citizens against such shocks has meanwhile diminished. Avenues of economic advancement have recently depended more than before on education, and Muslims as a group have had particular difficulty in finding educational opportunity and availing themselves of it.
- *The significant role of state institutions in the marginalization of Muslims in Indian society.* In addition to Muslim underrepresentation in public services such as the Indian Administrative Service and the Indian Police Service, and in public sector enterprises, there has been a significant increase in anti-Muslim sentiment among officials at all levels. This has been reflected in discrimination against Muslims by court personnel, the police, the judiciary, and those officials responsible for the distribution of public welfare services and benefits (ration card, relief, public health care, and education) and other public goods such as permits and licenses. State officials including the police have been guilty of violence and other abuse against Muslims simply as a result of hostility. In general, Muslims do not trust the institutions of the state to protect their physical safety or their legal rights.
- *Pervasive decline in Muslim participation in all institutions, public and private, though all Indian citizens are equal under the Indian constitution and laws.* This is because of discrimination, deliberate social and cultural exclusion, and partly because Muslims have lost interest and become demoralized from seeking participation owing to the hostility and discrimination they encounter.

The principal policy issues on which the Muslim leadership articulated the demand for equality in the post-independence era were predominantly those that go to cultural identity, such as the laws of family and inheritance (personal law), the survival of Urdu, and the preservation of the minority character of Muslim educational institutions such as Aligarh Muslim University. The Muslim consensus is that these issues have receded in their actual importance and that the state appears to have conceded on them.

The focus and emphasis in recent years have shifted to issues of lack of empowerment, lack of full participation in society, and lack of economic opportunity. Since the early period of independence, the actual experience of the community has shifted from conflict at the community level to the state's collusion in injustice and violence against the community. There is a perception that the incidence of popular violence has diminished in recent years, but that its ferocity has increased, in instances such as the state-sponsored pogrom of 2002 in Gujarat. This appears to lead to a degree of pessimism about the actual effects of even successful efforts at building intercommunal understanding and at educating Hindus at the community level about the true state of affairs.

The series of reports that have addressed one or another of the key issues, such as those of the Gopal Singh, Srikrishna, Liberhan, Mishra, and Sachar Commissions, have not themselves led to substantive reform, nor is there an expectation that they will. However, they have sharpened both the Muslim community's understanding of the exact dimensions of its predicament, and its sense of grievance and alienation owing to the inaction of the state in response to them.

That sharpening of the sense of grievance and alienation poses a significant threat of social division and instability if the community's concerns remain substantively uncorrected.

Cultural, Ideological, and Social Diversity of Muslims

Regions of India vary significantly in history, cultural configuration, demography, the economic condition of Muslims, and the condition of Hindu-Muslim relations. The differences in perspective resulting from this were clearly reflected in our focus group discussions and interviews. Social stratification within the community on the basis of education, caste, class, and other factors has also resulted in variant perspectives. Finally, the Muslim community, like any other, benefits from a rich variety of philosophical, ideological, and religious perspectives which lend it a complexity that challenges generalization.

One of the fundamental questions raised is whether it is any more accurate to speak of a "Muslim community" in India or to generalize about the experience and concerns of "Muslim Indians" than it would be to do so about Hindu Indians. Should we perhaps refer instead to "Muslim communities of India"? Rather than thinking of these as homogeneous communities, even in the plural, is it more accurate to speak in terms of the particularly defined experiences of Muslims as citizens of India, as individuals, in particular localities, and of certain social classes? The variegated character of the Muslim community in India reflects the rich sociological, historical, and cultural variety characteristic of Indian society as a whole.

Diversity need not suggest a disunity of purpose or action. While the approaches to the issues varied widely in different parts of India, there was a clear consensus on the principal

problems that affect the Muslims of India. However, finding a unified—or at least consistent—voice, or coordinated political leadership for the Muslims nationally remains a challenge. The issue of inadequate political representation, identified as one of the key Muslim concerns, compounds this difficulty. There also remains disagreement about what form Muslim political organization and advocacy should take, as discussed below.

Muslims in Kerala appear to feel a sense of distinction from their northern compatriots, and to enjoy a greater sense of security than Muslims in other parts of India. The role of Muslim political organization in larger coalition politics is clearer. Nonetheless, even here established patterns are being destabilized, in part because the predominance of the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) is challenged by more varied and militant Muslim voices, in part because of the changes under way in secular Indian and Kerala politics, in part because communal polarization is increasing particularly in the north of the state as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and other extremist *Hindutva* organizations seek to make inroads, and in part because of a higher degree of radicalization in the Muslim community.

The radicalization is explained by several factors, including the Muslim backlash to communal developments in the state and a greater awareness than before of the national situation, and the impact of ideological influences from the larger Muslim world as a result of the substantial expatriate Keralite population in the Gulf workforces. While the sense of Muslim grievances and disadvantages being shared with vulnerable non-Muslim groups is present throughout India, it appears to be stronger in Kerala, probably because of the history of class-based politics in the state.

At the other end of the spectrum are the Muslims of Gujarat and Assam. In both cases, there is a remarkable strength and calmness in the tone of Muslim response, yet it is clear that they feel an acute sense of threat and crisis.

In the case of Gujarat, it is because the nationwide patterns summarized above—discrimination by state institutions, a pervasive cultural hostility, and physical segregation—are found in a particularly extreme form, as embodied in the pogrom of 2002 and its aftermath.

In Assam, the sense of threat is rooted in the combination of the extreme poverty of most Muslims, the state's ethno-demographic-political complexity, the relatively high proportion of Muslims in the population, the demographic insecurity felt by Assamese Hindus, concerns about Bangladeshi migration and its impact on how Assamese Muslims are perceived and how ethno-demographic issues are framed in terms of threats to national security. Despite the often-repeated nervousness that Assam is shaping up to be “the next Gujarat,” the political demography of Assam is seen to offer some degree of protection. Of 121 state assembly constituencies, 23 have Muslim majorities, and despite political party

divisions among Muslim members of the legislative assembly, there is a sense of Muslims being essential to the arithmetic of coalition building in the state.

In West Bengal, the issues that have been at the forefront of public attention in general, such as displacement of the rural poor and small cultivators in favor of industrial development, are also seen as having a disproportionate impact on Muslims. Thus, consideration of issues of concern to Muslims is seen as part and parcel of the wider debate about social policy. As in Kerala, the relative strength of class politics in the state may explain the greater willingness to frame the issues in terms of concerns shared with other communities. However, there is also a sense that, despite the opportunistic willingness of the Communists and the left-wing parties to embrace symbolic Muslim causes, all political parties remain unresponsive to the actual predicament and concerns of Muslims. Another important distinguishing characteristic of the Muslim situation in West Bengal is the extent to which the legacy of the partition of Bengal in 1947 between Pakistan and India continues to affect the perceptions of both Muslims (defensiveness) and non-Muslims (suspicion). And, while there remains a basic body of concerns that Bengali Muslims experience, their interests are often not exactly those of Urdu speakers in Kolkata and large cities, particularly those who are from Uttar Pradesh or Bihar.

Uttar Pradesh and the so-called Hindi heartland present particular challenges. These areas constituted the historical heart of Muslim power, cultural accomplishment, and prestige. The departure to Pakistan of Muslim elites, including many feudal land-owning elites as well as the modern educated and professional classes, left poorer Muslim farmers and artisans isolated and often leaderless. In Uttar Pradesh in 1947, a higher proportion of Muslims than Hindus was educated. This advantage has long since been reversed.

Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu offer social and political contexts where Muslims have been relatively empowered, owing to a combination of political history, demography, and more recent political developments, such as the dominance of anti-elitist populist Dravidian movements in Tamil Nadu or the dominance of Communism and left-wing ideology in Kerala. There is often a clear distinction between the morale, status, political participation, and accomplishments of Muslims in South India and in North India.²⁸

Caste is an important dimension that is frequently overlooked in discussions of Muslim Indians. Islam ostensibly does not recognize caste, yet the system retains viability as a principle of organization, ordination, and segmentation throughout Indian society.²⁹ Cer-

²⁸ See Syed Iqbal Hasnain, *Muslims in North India: Frozen in the Past* (New Delhi: Har-Anand, 2009).

²⁹ See Irfan Engineer, "Indian Muslims: Political Leadership and Ideology," in Amit Pandya and Ellen Laipson, eds., *Transnational Trends: Middle Eastern and Asian Views* (Washington, DC: Stimson Center, 2008), pp. 96–98.

tainly, caste acts to differentiate the interests of Muslims of high and low status, and the discussions in the focus groups grappled frankly with this element.

The issue of caste is a specific manifestation of a broader distinction of interests between socially excluded, less educated, and poorer Muslims, and the relatively well-off. While anti-Muslim social and cultural prejudice is suffered equally by both groups, the former would like to see less emphasis on issues of cultural identity and more on those that affect economic and educational opportunity. Even though poorer Muslims pursue material interests more markedly, this should not suggest that cultural issues such as Muslim personal law or *fatwas* against offenses against Islam are unimportant to them. On the contrary, these issues are at least as important, if not more so, to the poor. It is simply that they chafe at the articulation of only the cultural issues by Muslim leaders.

Among the relatively well-to-do, there is a distinction between the more traditionalist—often those who have prospered in business in traditional occupations and artisanal industries—and those who have benefited from modern education and participation in modern corporate and bureaucratic settings. The former tend to favor issues of identity more than the latter.

Self-Help and Spirit of Responsibility

There can be little doubt that, following the trauma of the demolition of the Babri Masjid, Muslim opinion in India underwent an evolution that resulted in a rejection of the traditional leadership's emphasis on cultural issues such as Urdu, Muslim personal law, and the minority character of certain state-supported institutions such as the Aligarh Muslim University. These were replaced by an emphasis on the community's educational and economic advancement.

The clear message that has emerged from our study is that, despite a fair share of anger and anxiety expressed, the community is willing to take responsibility for its own welfare. Indeed, the Stimson Center's research into other aspects of Indian social and political life, and into the political and ideological currents in the wider Muslim world, suggests that the rejection of the rhetoric of victimhood is particularly noticeable among Muslim Indians, more so than among non-Muslim Indians or among non-Indian Muslims.

The predominant tone is one of accepting responsibility for attitudes that compound the "backwardness" of the community and for taking measures to reverse this, expressly rejecting blame of others. Alongside this, however, is a sense that a culture of hostility and the unresponsiveness of state institutions and policies make the task of self-improvement extremely difficult if not impossible.

Some object to the rhetoric of "self-improvement" or "introspection" as blaming the community for the failures of the wider society. Others note that, even when Muslims wish to

take self-help measures, such as establishment of better quality educational institutions, they require the support, cooperation, and permission of the state. The state is seen as particularly unresponsive to Muslim initiative, though there is also a recognition that all Indians suffer from similar unresponsiveness. “Attitudinal change” in general thus refers to both the need to effect a change in the way Muslims view their own responsibility and the need to communicate more effectively with Hindus about Muslim concerns.

A commonly expressed view is that most of the problems identified as affecting Muslims are also shared by many Indians, whether as a result of poverty, vulnerability to economic change, or disadvantaged social status. These problems include poor quality public health and education, malnutrition, and stressed livelihoods. There is recognition that their solution depends on national action. Nonetheless, there is a sense that these problems are more acute among Muslims, who suffer from additional disadvantages because of their religious identity, and that they must demand social policies on issues of security, participation, and services that take note of this particularity. For example, it was noted that Muslims are often bypassed in targeted programs such as the Prime Minister’s 15-point program, and that there is specific discrimination in the distribution of welfare assistance.

Regaining the trust of non-Muslims was repeatedly emphasized, whatever may have been the reasons that trust was lost. It is assumed that the improvement of relations with non-Muslims is the key to empowerment, again regardless of who is to blame for the deterioration of those relations. There appears to be almost no significant dissent from the need to take a pluralistic approach to political organizing and the need for coalition building.

A wide consensus exists on the need to note the latent strengths within the community and to build on them, and to avoid focusing on Muslim weaknesses, even while struggling for justice and demanding appropriate social policies.³⁰ There is significant emphasis on the importance of drawing on Muslim religious, intellectual, and historical traditions as sources of guidance for the social, ethical, and cultural approaches necessary for survival and prosperity in contemporary India.

When Muslims discuss the role and importance of internal institutions, educational and cultural, there is repeated mention of the role to be played by traditional charity—*waqf* property and *zakat* funds. These are not viewed as an alternative to government aid, which continues to be seen as essential, but as an important means to supplement scarce and inad-

³⁰ Islamist leader and member of Parliament Mahmood Madani, of the Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Hind, notes: “In my view, the biggest challenge before Muslim leaders is to move away from a destructive and pointless emotionalism towards framing a constructive agenda for the community. Young Muslims are doing very well today in fields as diverse as the media, the sciences, engineering and sports. How can we work to broaden these gains for the widest possible section of the community?” (Swami 2008, op. cit.)

equate resources, and as essential tools for preserving a degree of Muslim autonomy in the continuation and governance of Muslim institutions.

Muslims are concerned that the effectiveness of these traditional charitable tools is vitiating by the corruption of *waqf* boards, by parochialism or sectarianism or petty personal interests and grudges. They worry about the narrow vision that guides Muslim charitable giving, directing it to religious schools rather than schools that provide young Muslims with the practical skills to overcome the handicaps of the state educational system and of social discrimination. Support to religious education suffers from lack of accountability and poor quality control. Thus even when, as is often the case, there is support for religious education as an essential element in a total strategy and as a supplement to education for livelihoods, there is widespread concern that the quality of religious education provided is poor. There is also a sense that mercenary impulses have led to the deterioration and even evisceration of the quality of education provided by private educational foundations and bodies.

Renaissance

There is a sense that a “renaissance” in the cultural and intellectual life of Indian Islam is as necessary as political mobilization and building of Muslim community institutions. There is a sense of decline of the “spark” of greatness in Indian Muslim civilization.

Whether regarding political organization or the place of Muslims in the wider Indian culture, there is a sense that there is an internal intellectual vacuum that needs to be filled. In part this reflects a desire to step back from day-to-day struggles and develop a more strategic vision of concerns about poverty, representation, and media bias, partly on the basis of empirical research. We heard often that there is a dearth of independent analysis on the Muslim predicament in India, and that mainstream Indian research institutions have not made this a priority or recognized its significance to larger issues of national governance.

Aspiration to a renaissance also reflects the need to develop a renewed sense of intellectual authority within the community—something that transcends the criticisms leveled at the unrepresentative character of almost all Muslim leaders. There is a broad consensus, except among the most ideological elements, that the development of true intellectual leadership and authority requires moving beyond rigid dogmas, be they political or religious. There also appears to be broad acceptance of the need for diversity of points of view and ideologies in order to arrive at the richest and most useful and serviceable intellectual regeneration of Muslim life in India.

The need for intellectual renewal and leadership extends to grassroots issues (for example, the need for a coherent vision of the economic changes under way and their impact on

Muslim livelihood), to national issues (public policy and the evolution of the national political ideology and cultural matrix and its implications for the place of Muslims in Indian society), and to global issues (“Where are the *fatwas* regarding the global economic crisis, greed, and environmental degradation?”)

Many raised a concern about the lack of an adequate educational and institutional framework to sustain an Indian Muslim renaissance. They noted that Muslim institutions are lacking or, like Aligarh Muslim University, weakened. Others point to the need for women to play an integral role, suggesting that in the absence of adequate education for Muslim women, the Muslim community’s intellectual regeneration will remain fragile.

There is a concern that renewal or reform could bring to the fore more radical, pan-Islamist, and anti-Indian ideologies. Nonetheless, there is also confidence in and a substantial commitment to strengthening the South Asian Islamic traditions of tolerance and pluralism. This endeavor is under way in academic settings (e.g., the work of Shaheeb Rizvi at Rizvi College, Mumbai; or of Akhtarul Wasey, who heads the Islamic Studies program at Jamia Millia University in Delhi) and in the work of ideological community organizing such as by Iman Tanzim, founded by Mohammad Hamid Engineer to preserve Bareilvi Sunni approaches and identity in India.

The need to reclaim the historical record is important to many Muslim Indians in the face of an onslaught by right-wing officials to “Hindu-ize” the telling and teaching of Indian history and airbrush out the substantial role of Muslims and Islam. Two specific points deserve special note. One is the attempt to recover and propagate the history of Muslim political organizing and protest as a guide to action under current conditions and as a corrective to the view of Muslims as “anti-national.” The other is the observation that if Indian Islam and Indian Muslims are not placed in the context of Indian history, the only historical context available for Muslim Indians as a guide to present identity and action will be that of global Islam.

Economic Situation

The partition of India resulted in the loss of a significant portion of India’s educated and professional Muslims and Muslim entrepreneurs. Those who remained were joined by those in certain traditional economic and occupational sectors who have had some success; particularly artisans became successful and increased the scale of their enterprises. Traditional agriculture, even on a small scale, also continued to provide those Muslims engaged in it with at least subsistence. State policies such as directed and subsidized lending by nationalized banks provided a degree of support for both types of activity. Even so, the Muslim population of India has suffered from chronic and endemic poverty and poor education.

As the Indian economy has modernized rapidly in recent years, and as the role of the state in economic development and employment provision has diminished, the economic situation of Muslims has become more vulnerable. The small-scale and informal corners of all economic sectors have become less useful as a source of reliable livelihood.

Muslims have been consistently underrepresented in state employment, public services, and public sector enterprises. The falling proportion of Muslims in public employment affects all levels, including the lowest and most menial, suggesting that discrimination rather than lack of educational qualifications is to blame.

Previously, public employment did at least provide opportunity for some Muslims. Recent economic developments have made such public employment less attractive and less significant. The diminishing number of jobs in public services and the public sector, and their diminishing competitiveness in wages, has meant that an always poor support for Muslims has been eroded further.

The principal factor that Muslims identify as a means of improving their economic situation is the provision of quality education that equips students for livelihoods and advancement in the modern economy. There is also a widely expressed need for the provision of affordable and available credit. For a community that suffers from “redlining” and the absence of banks in Muslim localities, this would represent a radical departure.

While Muslims are suffering disproportionately owing to their vulnerable position, it is recognized that they are suffering in common from the impacts of liberalization and globalization felt by most Indians—the diminution of the importance of state employment and the assault on traditional sectors of the economy. Some Muslims note the signal lack of Muslim participation, let alone leadership, in the Indian anti-globalization movement, despite the fact that this would reflect their objective interests and provide opportunity for united political action with non-Muslims.

There is substantial discussion about the need for reservations (affirmative action in government employment and admission to educational institutions) for Muslims, or at least the removal of the bar to caste-based reservations for Christian and Muslim Dalits and “Other Backward Classes” (OBCs). At present, Muslims view themselves as the victims of reservations, since they see opportunities closed to Muslims that are reserved for Dalits and OBCs. Whatever may be the likely or perceived benefits of reservations in the context of educational opportunity, there is also recognition that, with respect to employment, this discussion may be taking place just as public employment is diminishing in significance.

There is a prevailing sense that there are obstacles to economic collaboration with non-Muslims through employment, trade, or joint investment. Muslim economic empowerment

must either take place through such collaboration or be self-sufficient. While the latter may seem a reasonable response under the circumstances, it contributes to the sense of vulnerability and apartheid/ghettoization/separation. Exclusively Muslim businesses are vulnerable to violence, especially in times of riots. Many recall Muslim businesses in artisan occupations being targeted by mobs out of envy at their prosperity.

Practice of Politics

Key factors identified as relevant to the practice of politics by Muslim Indians are the choice between coalitions with non-Muslims and autonomous Muslim political organizing, models of successful mobilization by other disempowered groups such as Dalits and “Other Backward Classes” (OBCs), the state of opinion among Hindus, the significance of recent structural trends in the larger polity, the dearth of high-quality Muslim political leadership, and the tactical and strategic mistakes made by significant portions of Muslim leadership historically and today.

There is also a widespread sense that, quite apart from outreach to and interaction with non-Muslims, Muslims need more interaction among themselves. An oft-repeated theme in many focus groups was relief that a wide variety of Muslims were gathering to discuss what is important and what to do about it.

The value of cultural identity politics is increasingly doubted. There is a sense that the privileging of identity politics by both the state and Muslim leadership—and the cutting of deals on that basis—has prevented strengthening of impartial state institutions and the rule of law, and the practice of political compromise based upon a multiplicity of political interests. The expression of inchoate Muslim discontent or unease in sacred or cultural terms has prevented the full-fledged emergence of a Muslim political discourse based upon material interests.

Opinions and perceptions vary widely as to how truly secular majority Hindu opinion is. Some believe that the vast majority of Hindus are secular and either unaware of Muslim concerns owing to the existence of the wall of separation, or are cowed into silence. Others believe that there is a more alarming development of anti-Muslim sentiment, and that the proportion of Hindus who remain committed to a secular polity is diminishing rapidly.

There is widespread concern about the poor quality of political leadership for Muslims. Even those who are honest, selfless, and well intentioned are seen as too focused on short-term goals and struggles, and lacking in vision as to how the practice of politics can strategically advance the long-term welfare and status of Muslims.

The older generation of Muslim leadership is seen as having been culturally divorced from the concerns of ordinary Muslims. It is faulted for being both self-serving and too

“Westernized.” There is a sense of a newer generation of potential leaders emerging, equally educated but more devout and in better touch with ordinary Muslims. The older generation leadership’s emphasis on politics rather than education is seen as a disservice to the community.

Politics is seen as increasingly failing to attract Muslim intellectuals to it; it is widely understood that this reflects the general decline in standards of Indian political leadership. The criminalization of politics and its deterioration through corruption and caste-ism are also seen as signs of a more general decline of political standards that has affected the welfare of Muslims. This is closely related to the perception that standards of bureaucratic practice, and the caliber of bureaucrats, have declined. On the one hand, this is understood as having a disproportionate impact on Muslims, because the weakening of standards is seen as opening the door for communalization of the bureaucratic culture. However, here too there is a sense that most Indians suffer from this, though Muslims do so disproportionately.

At issue is the optimal model for Muslim political organization. For the Muslims who remained in India, the organizational paradigm based on the struggle against British imperial power is that of united action on common problems with all Indians regardless of religious identity. In the post-independence period, Muslim participation in the Congress Party or other coalitions did little to disturb this pluralistic model. As Muslims have more recently felt marginalized by the political rhetoric, cultural discourse, policymaking, and calculations of political parties, and less personally secure, the utility of coalition politics in serving Muslim safety and prosperity has been questioned more.

There is broad and emphatic agreement among Muslims that, given their geographic and demographic distribution, there is no alternative to the practice of coalition politics.³¹ A significant question is whether this is best done through participation within secular political parties, or through separately organized Muslim parties making alliances with non-Muslim political parties. Given the large aggregate number of Muslims distributed throughout India, there is a sense that if Muslims find a way to unite to work on common concerns, their weight in coalition politics could be considerable, significant, and productive. A model that is often discussed is the relative success of Dalits and “Other Backward Classes” (OBCs) in promoting their political and economic interests through strategic alliances.

Muslims see the need for unity of secular political forces as the principal strategic thrust of Muslim political organizing, owing to the serious threat to secular culture and governance

³¹ Islamist leader and member of Parliament Mahmood Madani, of the Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Hind, notes: “How can we make common cause with Hindus, Sikhs, Christians and others to solve problems like unemployment, housing and health?” (Swami 2008, op. cit.)

posed by recent developments. They also believe that secular forces are weak—that secularism is only nominally adhered to by some parties, which abandon or dilute their secular commitment when it suits their short-term interests; and that even a solid unity of committed secular forces is incapable of producing stable political majorities.

A specific task articulated for coalitions with the likeminded is the larger Indian struggle to “reclaim democratic spaces” in Indian society by emphasizing the need to resist erosion of democratic norms and rights and the rule of law. This deemphasizes the element of religious identity and emphasizes instead the rights of citizenship, the denial of which particularly affects Muslims, but is shared by many Indians.

As ideological frameworks for the guiding of Muslim political action in coalitions with non-Muslims, the emphasis is variously on seeking in Islamic teaching the principles that embrace plural politics and unity with non-Muslims (the example of the Prophet’s statecraft in Madina);³² or on political participation on the basis of secular democratic principles alone, and leaving religious guidance to the private sphere. A variant of the latter approach is found even among those who believe that Muslims should first concentrate on developing unity within, where some urge that such a united Muslim front should organize on political rather than religious principles.

There are several obstacles to any of these approaches to Muslim political empowerment. Muslim power is fragmented among multiple political parties, and its voice is fragmented by region and subcommunity. Even politically active Muslims are not for the most part in influential or leadership positions in the secular political parties, thus limiting the reach and depth of Muslim issues in secular politics.

Coalitions of Muslim and non-Muslim political parties are seen as less successful recently (except in Kerala) than is united and strategic voting by Muslims for secular regional or national political parties (as in the recent Uttar Pradesh elections). Even where there appear to be powerful secular parties in alliance with Muslim political parties, the types of issues that such coalitions address are those related to religious identity—because of opportunism or lack of imagination—rather than the livelihood and governance issues of pressing concern to most ordinary Muslims. Nonetheless, there is recognition that in places such as Kerala and Assam, where the numbers of Muslims and their distribution makes them significant to political arithmetic, the Muslim community has avoided being politically marginalized to the extent found in other states.

³² A liberal Muslim approach to basing progressive principles on scriptural authority is found in the extensive work of Asghar Ali Engineer, who looks to the Quran as authority on the key concerns of India’s Muslims: women’s rights, justice, publicly funded welfare, and above all knowledge; see Asghar Ali Engineer, *Muhammad (PBUH) as Liberator* (Mumbai: Center for Study of Society and Secularism, 2010).

If there is a long-term trend in Indian politics of jockeying by multiple parties to form coalitions, then strategic coalition building by Muslim political parties can be useful, as can strategic Muslim voting for secular parties. This will be particularly so where the demography is favorable to Muslims. If the pattern of weak and shifting coalition governments is replaced by a more stable order of competition between two enduring alliances each led by a major national party, then strategic voting remains a viable strategy, although Muslim political parties will have difficulty finding an effective role.

There is a pressing need expressed for Muslims to organize politically on a national scale. The character of many objective challenges is national, such as the rapid economic changes wrought by globalization, and the policy responses, good or bad, are also national ones. Moreover, there is a perceived national convergence in the cultural and attitudinal threats to Muslims posed by *Hindutva*, and here too there is seen practical national coordination among anti-Muslim political forces, demanding a national Muslim response.

However, there remains a nervousness about organizing nationally, particularly on the basis of a rhetoric of warning and alarm. There is an anxiety about evoking echoes of “Islam in danger.” This was the slogan of the Muslim League, the last national organizing of Muslims on the basis of a perceived threat to Muslim welfare and status in a plural India, which ultimately led to partition. The fear of a Hindu backlash to such national Muslim organization is always present. Given the perceived urgent need for national unity of Muslim action today, the question often discussed is on what other basis may this be done?

One approach suggests that what is really called for is national *coordination* to address issues of common concern, not a political party or even a national organization. What is most needed is a common voice and a common vision of the future of Indian Muslims. Among the examples of coordinated initiatives offered are drives to increase Muslim voter registration, and especially the participation of women, the poor, and migrants.

Other voices call for a fundamental reform of the Indian electoral system. Objections are raised to the institution of “reserved seats” where only a member of the group in question, whether Dalit or Muslim, may serve. The irony is that this practice was developed by the British purportedly to guarantee the Muslim minority of undivided India adequate representation. Muslim Indians today object that these have become a Muslim ghetto. They also object that many seats reserved for other groups are in legislative constituencies with substantial Muslim populations, which are thereby disenfranchised. Discussions of ways to ensure that Muslims as a minority have adequate representation and influence over the choice of the successful candidate include many of the electoral reform ideas current in global political discourse. “First past the post” is rejected in favor of proportional representation or 51 percent margin requirements accompanied by either single transferable or second-round voting.

Quality Education—The Highest Priority

The issue that recurred most prominently in every focus group and almost every conversation was that of the need for quality education and the need for Muslims to embrace that as a strategy for advancement.³³ In almost all cases, education was identified as the single most important Muslim concern in India today. This is, of course, sharply at odds with the general non-Muslim perception of a community inordinately concerned with issues of religious identity.

Following the shock to the Muslim community's self-confidence and sense of security resulting from the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in 1992, a clear commitment was made to self-improvement, and to turning to education as a tool of that, and a corresponding turn away from mobilization around identity issues. Muslim experience since then has been discouraging for various reasons. While many feel that too many Muslims are apathetic about educational opportunity, most feel that even widespread eagerness for it has received a poor response from both official policy and Muslim institutions.

Expansion and improvement of educational opportunity is seen as important to Muslim advancement for several reasons. Most important of course is the impact on livelihoods, and thus on economic and social advancement. The provision of more and better quality opportunities for vocational education and practical skill acquisition is seen as essential, particularly as a means of advancement for poor and working-class Muslims. A distinct aspiration is availability of quality English-medium education and education in the tools of global commerce such as information and other technologies.

Quality education is also seen as essential for building effective Muslim leadership, and for arriving at intellectual vision and clarity of purpose. A leading Muslim journalist put it succinctly: modern education is essential to the development of a Muslim middle class, and a middle class is essential to the development of effective leadership for Muslims. There is a perceived dearth of opportunities, aspiration, and role models for young Muslims to develop into politicians, lawyers, journalists, sociologists, economists, and others who can speak to the larger cultural, political, and social context. In the absence of an opportunity to play a leadership role in their own society, the most educated of Muslim Indians, including doctors and scientists, have left India to seek employment elsewhere, thereby depriving the community of its best qualified cadres. This absence leads to social stagnation, which in turn leads others to make the same decision, thereby resulting in a further Muslim "brain drain."

³³ In an interview replete with prolix answers, Mahmood Madani, leader of the Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Hind, answers the question, "What is the most important issue for the Muslim community at the moment?" with the single word "Education." *Indian Express*, August 31, 2008.

There is a sense that Muslims must come up with an educational strategy that allows them to counter the effects of many new professedly Hindu schools established by *Hindutva* organizations which promote an aggressively hostile anti-Muslim worldview. Like *madrassah*, these trade on the poor availability of affordable quality education and therefore attract a captive audience of poor Hindu students—potentially the natural allies of Muslims on the basis of class—whose attitudes are thus poisoned against Muslims at an early age.

The issue of Muslim religious education is important, and gives rise to a variety of positions. Many feel that religious education is important not only for cultural identity but also as a basis for the articulation of social ethics to guide Muslim participation in society and polity. Unfortunately, religious educational institutions are often found to teach neither livelihood skills nor Islamic values effectively. They are often faulted for emphasizing religion at the expense of marketable skills.

Yet *madrassah* are often the only practical educational opportunity available, owing to the poor not being able to afford other school fees, and to overcrowding and quality problems in state schools. Other disincentives from participating in the state system include a curriculum that increasingly ignores the Muslim role in Indian history and society, and undercuts Muslims' sense of Indian identity and their sense of place in Indian society. The anti-Muslim prejudices of many teachers and school officials are also a significant source of worry.

Attempts by Muslims to establish institutions to provide quality modern education for Muslims are frustrated by political interference in the operation of schools, poor funding, and legal and regulatory barriers. Many instead seek to standardize and modernize *madrassa* curricula, to make them more useful for teaching livelihood skills, and to help refocus the thrust of religious instruction to make them positive tools for elaborating Muslim ethics for the modern world and a plural society.

An important part of the ideological context for *madrassa* education is that even some progressive secularists see the religious institutions as a means of independence and innovation. It is suggested that the original impulse of the religious education movement was to liberate: to empower those not tethered or constrained by conventional wisdom to teach. Some produced good results, and most did not, but the good would have been impossible had the institution been formalized.

Rule of Law

After the issue of educational opportunity and quality, the most frequently expressed and highest ranked concern is that of the fear and insecurity prompted by an increasingly hostile state and the indifference of their fellow citizens. There is a disturbing disjuncture between Muslim perceptions of these issues and those of their detractors. Muslims feel

beleaguered by an increase in discrimination and violence at the hands of state institutions and officials, while their detractors seek to define the principal threat to the rule of law as emanating from Muslims, in the form of disloyalty and willingness to condone terrorism.

The issue of insecurity is related to that of education in several ways. Insecurity about physical safety, property, and one's place in the society gives rise to a lack of ambition, and a social depression that dissipates ambition and aspiration among the young. Family allocations of scarce resources to educating youth are also affected by calculations about the likely poor return on those investments owing to the denial of equal employment and economic opportunity to young Muslims. Indeed, there is a widespread sense, particularly in volatile localities, that educational advancement at the individual or community level has produced a backlash and has led to educated Muslim youth being arbitrarily targeted by police as suspects in terrorism investigations. Anti-Muslim bias in the police, and police violence and abuse, particularly against Muslim youth, are repeated sources of complaint.

The aggressiveness and arbitrariness of state institutions against Muslims have been fueled by a growing popular perception that terrorism in India is a specifically Muslim phenomenon, and that many otherwise innocent Muslims tolerate or are sympathetic to it. Muslims believe this perception is promoted by the state and the media. Victims of terrorism are compensated quickly and effectively by the state; Muslim victims of mob violence, who also see themselves as victims of a kind of terrorism, are not. The media provide lurid coverage of terrorist incidents while glossing over incidents of anti-Muslim mob violence on the pretext of not fueling communal antipathy.

The increase and impunity of police and mob violence against Muslims have been facilitated by an increasing pattern of physical and cultural separation between Muslim and other communities; this is increasingly being referred to as "apartheid."

Also discernible is a growing antipathy to the symbols of Muslim identity such as beards and traditional clothing. The intensified "ghettoization" of Muslim life proceeds from housing discrimination and a mutual fear of violence. Muslims are consequently denied quality housing and equal access to facilities such as banking or water, sanitation, and transportation infrastructure. While ghettoization makes for a sense of safety and the development of community institutions, it also contributes to the lack of understanding by non-Muslims of Muslim perceptions and life realities. At best, violations of the rights of Muslims are likely to be neglected or acquiesced to; at worst, Muslims are likely to be suspected by their fellow citizens.

Attempts to exercise or vindicate their rights by availing themselves of the legal protections still formally guaranteed by the Indian constitution and laws meet additional obstacles. Human rights lawyers are intimidated or discouraged from representing Muslims,

particularly in cases alleging “anti-national” activity. Judges are increasingly hostile to Muslim defendants and litigants. Lawyers and evenhanded judges are also subject to pressures such as blame for opposing bail for anti-Muslim rioters.

The role of the police is particularly problematical. There is a perception that the police forces have become increasingly susceptible to anti-Muslim prejudice. Opinion is divided as to whether this stems from blatant hostility or from a pervasive culture of ignorance and prejudice. Muslims cite the involvement of the police in shielding anti-Muslim rioters, police refusal to register criminal complaints (“first information reports”—FIRs) against rioters or their registration of FIRs in a form that makes prosecution impossible, and poor (presumably deliberately so) police investigative work on FIRs.

Recent developments remind all of the possibilities of redress. Thus, the Supreme Court’s order in March 2008 that cases arising from the Gujarat riots should be reinvestigated reassured observers that perpetrators might be held accountable. Similarly, certain cases had earlier been transferred to other jurisdictions (Zahira Sheikh, Bilkis Bano) when they were not properly prosecuted in Gujarat.

Migration of Muslims within India intensifies patterns of personal insecurity, especially in the form of intercommunity tensions. Migrants are particularly vulnerable to victimization by criminals and political thugs, and are used as scapegoats for mobilizing mobs. They are also vulnerable to extortion and intimidation by Muslim criminals in these fragile social settings. New arrivals into an urban environment are likely to be resented by other marginal groups in the context of stressed livelihoods and economic competition, and the issue of religious identity is readily at hand for demagogues to exploit such resentments. Finally, in economically marginal environments, unemployed migrants are more susceptible to recruitment for crime. Regardless of how frequently this occurs in fact, the perception that this is so adds to unfavorable views of Muslims.

Opinion on what to do about threats to security and the unequal implementation of legal protection inclines, as on the question of political organizing, to outreach to and education of Hindu public and elite opinion as to the true dimensions of the problem. There is a sense that Muslim leaders need to articulate more specifically the ways in which their problems resemble those of other Indian groups with the rule of law and to develop rhetoric, campaigns, and united action with other victims, including other religious minorities and economically or socially disadvantaged groups.

Official attempts at legislation aimed at addressing the problem of communal violence are met with less enthusiasm on the part of Muslims than one might expect. A draft bill proposed by the national government is criticized because it proposes to increase the powers of police and to enhance the powers of government to designate disturbed areas in such

circumstances, where individual mobility would be limited. Such approaches have been criticized as empowering the very state institutions that have been complicit in anti-Muslim violence. It is suggested instead that the Indian Criminal Code provides all the necessary powers to prevent and punish communal violence, and thus that the real issue is the willingness and capacity of state institutions to enforce existing laws.

An added complexity in the relationship between Muslim Indians and the rule of law is the issue of Muslim personal law. Muslims in India are today governed by a distinct set of *customary* family and inheritance laws, and this has occasioned some debate within the community. Some see the dual structure of personal law as protecting the Muslim way of life, while others see it as a denial to Muslims of legal equality. Anti-Muslim opinion, as one might expect, sees this as special treatment and “appeasement.”

Some Muslims support codification of Muslim personal law while maintaining its separate character, as a way to preserve the distinct norms of the community while providing more protection, consistency, transparency, and uniformity. Others believe that separate laws are symbolically pernicious for participation and citizenship, that all citizens of India should be governed by a uniform legal regime, and that an all-India uniform civil code is appropriate. Yet others believe that in the absence of codification, reform of an archaic and patchwork customary Muslim personal law should be undertaken immediately, as a reflection of the Muslim community’s own desire to reform and modernize from within.

There is also a significant current of thought that believes that, in order to speak cogently in favor of formal rights, Muslims need to address the denial of rights by Muslims among themselves, in the exclusion and even persecution of the Ahmadi/Qaddiani sect, or in the treatment of women as inferior in rights, or in the persecution of Hindus in Muslim majority areas such as the Kashmir Valley.

Urdu

An Indo-European language, Urdu developed as a *lingua franca* in most of northern India through a long process of synthesis between indigenous Indian languages and Persian. It thus reflected an important synthesis between pre-Islamic and Islamic cultural influences. Once the common language of northern India and many other urban centers, and the language of literature and learning regardless of religion, Urdu has sharply declined in India, even while one variant has become the national language of Pakistan.

The issue of Urdu, its use in public life, its teaching in schools, and its survival as an all-India language was till recently seen by many Muslims as a bellwether of the status and welfare of Muslims in the Indian nation. Certainly, among non-Muslims the perception

seems to have developed since independence that Urdu is a distinctly Muslim language. Today, opinion in the Muslim community on Urdu is more ambivalent and equivocal.

With the emphasis on economic advancement and opportunity, and the integral role of modern education in that, there is a widespread perception that emphasis on Urdu acts to isolate Muslims from opportunity. Those educated in Urdu schools, now almost exclusively Muslims, are seen as ill prepared for higher education. Urdu schools are seen as of almost uniformly poor quality. Training of Urdu teachers is weak or nonexistent. In the Uttar Pradesh curriculum, students must choose between the study of science and the study of Urdu.

Among some, there is a perception that the decline in Urdu's usefulness and the decline in the quality of Urdu education reflect an anti-Muslim bias in Indian society. They note that Urdu's removal as an option in the public service commission examinations (judicial) in Uttar Pradesh saw the number of Muslims passing decline from 40 out of 300 to 3.

Other Muslims note that Urdu is not distinctly a Muslim language, that until recently it was the language of educated Indians of many religions (some of the greatest modern writers of it were Hindus), and that many distinctly Muslim subcultures of India have not historically embraced it, such as in Kerala, West Bengal, Assam, or Gujarat. They note that in many places, including rural areas of the Urdu heartland, poor Muslims know Hindi better than Urdu. Many suggest that commonly used regional vernacular languages promote a Hindu-Muslim sense of cultural unity, whereas Urdu may separate Muslims from, for example, their Gujarati neighbors. Attention and resources for Urdu are demanded more forcefully by Muslims who are historically of its linguistic group, such as in Uttar Pradesh, non-Bengalis in Kolkata, and Rajasthan.

There is agreement on one important point: Urdu's demise reflects a tacit rejection of the syncretic culture and of the secular ethos based upon it.

Gender

The issue of the role and status of women is one that arises frequently in discussion about the current state and future of the Muslim community. There appears to be a significant variety of opinion. The conservative/orthodox/traditional perspective argues that traditions such as veiling are respectful and confer dignity, and that the rights of Muslims include the right to "veil our women." Others, including supporters of women's equality, believe that the issue of women's status is used to malign Muslims by those hostile to the community. Feminists believe that the community has to simultaneously struggle on both fronts, externally against such hostility and internally against the conservatives.

Muslim advocates of women's equality see themselves as doubly beleaguered, as Muslims from without and as women from within. There is a concern that candid discussion of the particular concerns of women is inhibited on the grounds that it constitutes internal disloyalty, showing Muslims in a bad light. In some cases, it is impossible to conduct a discussion accommodating all these points of view. In Lucknow, we were compelled to hold two separate focus groups, because traditionalists refused to invite feminists. Few disagree, however, that the state of the Muslim community cannot significantly improve without improvement in the status of Muslim women.

On a positive note, there has been an improved focus on female education (as on all education) since 1992–93. Muslim girls are doing better in education than boys, and the participation of girls in elementary education is improving. (However, this is a bittersweet accomplishment, as the participation of boys is declining.) The demographic ratio of females to males is better among Muslims than among Hindus. It is noteworthy that many, though by no means all, who take a conservative view of lifestyle issues such as women's clothing or public profile also support the need for more attention to women's education, if not their participation in the workforce.

The negative trends include the fact that participation in the workforce is lower for Muslim women than non-Muslim women; that health indicators among Muslim women are exceptionally poor; that they suffer high incidences of domestic abuse; and that in access to services they are twice disadvantaged, as Muslims and as women.

Media, Popular Perception, and Outreach

There is a strongly expressed need to engage in a campaign to better inform non-Muslims about the state of the Muslim community and its concerns. For some, but by no means all, this includes better educating non-Muslims about the true teachings of Islam and the Quran. For others, the issue is more about breaching the wall of separation that has sprung up between Muslims and Hindus. Some note that more contact of any kind is generally desirable; that in Gujarat, for example, the fewest clashes and least violence occurred in localities that had the most intercommunal interaction. However, our field visits and interviews in Gujarat suggest that the difficulty of crossing the line will be considerable.³⁴

All agree that it is imperative to remove the stereotypes about Muslims. These have become toxic not only to Muslim welfare but to the state of Indian secularism and democracy. They

³⁴ My Muslim driver, as Gujarati as I am, and conversing with me in an earthy Gujarati accent, pointed out the segregation of Ahmedabad to me. "This is a Muslim area," he said, "and that is a Gujarati area." By the latter, he meant of course "a Hindu area." The fascists are succeeding in changing language and perception to suggest that only Hindus are true Gujaratis.

include cultural stereotypes having to do with appearance or meat-eating, as well as those that relate to terrorism. There is widespread agreement that the news media, particularly television, are partly to blame for the proliferation of these stereotypes, and that they are essential to any potential solution.

In the immediate wake of terrorist attacks and bomb blasts, television offers long coverage of the scene, with a grim train of images of death and destruction, but little or no coherent reportage to place it in context and help viewers understand what is known about the situation and the perpetrators. Since the persons apprehended (and frequently—and much later—released for lack of evidence) are almost always Muslim, and often devout and therefore of “Islamic” appearance, the presentation of their photographs, juxtaposed with images of carnage, acts subliminally to associate Muslims with the horrors being visited on innocents. Rarely is there a fair and accurate depiction of the Muslim victims of such events.

Later, newspapers as well as television will uncritically offer the minutest details from the police investigations of the networks and conspiracies alleged to have been behind such events, though such “evidence” is based on police interrogation and therefore routinely on torture. Again, because this involves Muslim suspects who are ordinary citizens, this solidifies the popular perception of vast terrorist networks in the Muslim community manned by ordinary Muslims.

Muslim statements of condemnation of terrorism are rarely covered by the press. And mob violence against Muslims receives far less coverage than bomb blasts, despite the fact that the former are significantly more deadly and destructive than the latter.

The media rarely, if ever, provide positive coverage of Muslims and their accomplishments, and the full extent of Muslim life—cultural, economic, and social—is similarly neglected.³⁵

As with many areas and institutions of Indian life, the poor performance of the news media in relationship to Muslims is understood by Muslims as a reflection of a more general deterioration in media quality and incisiveness. This deterioration is in part due to the fact that the emerging electronic media require immediacy and therefore reward speculation, and that these new media do not have the time-honored and -honed standards of print journalism to guide and constrain their activities; moreover, there has been serious deterioration of Indian journalism in general, including the 150-year-old print media.

³⁵ Islamist leader and member of Parliament Mahmood Madani, of the Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Hind, notes: “Muslims are only reported on when they are victims of some tragedy, or when someone who is Muslim commits an atrocity. When will you understand and report on the community—and when will Urdu journalists do the same for their readers?” (Swami 2008, op. cit.)

To rectify this state of affairs, almost all agree that there is a pressing need for more Muslims who are politically aware to undertake careers in the media.

Violence

We sought to candidly explore attitudes to political violence. While non-Muslim opinion tends to assume, without reflection or evidence, a greater degree of tacit Muslim support for militant violence than is actually the case, Muslims are much more conscientious in examining their own attitudes toward violence. This conscientiousness springs both from the fact that terrorism perpetrated by Muslims has led to suspicion being cast on the community as a whole, and from the fact that, for the last half-century, Muslims have suffered from political and mob violence more than any other group of Indians.

The overwhelming body of Muslim opinion rejects violence in any fashion or for any political purpose. There is instead a sense of gratitude at living in a democratic society with constitutional protections and legal institutions, however flawed. Indeed, we often heard the sincerest expressions of patriotism and pride and love for “their” India, and a sense that they were better off in their Indian freedoms than Pakistanis in their Islamic state. And we particularly noted that, in hundreds of hours of conversation, the issue of Jammu and Kashmir was mentioned on no more than two or three occasions. On one of those, a Muslim asked for principled advocacy of all minority rights, including those of Kashmiri Pandits.

Even from a purely pragmatic perspective, Muslim Indians understand clearly that terrorism, or association with it, are not in their best interest. As a minority, they evince a keen awareness of their vulnerability, and know that they will be the unequal victims of a violent encounter.

However, there is acute concern within the community and among all schools of thought about the escalation of pressure and injustice by *Hindutva* extremists. This is compounded by the effects of increasing insinuation into state and other institutions of *Hindutva* sympathizers. There is a concern that this can only lead to an increase in youthful outrage and desperate resistance, and corresponding repression and retaliation against the Muslim community as a whole. With the most viciously communal individuals and groups—including senior politicians—publicly boasting of the atrocities they have perpetrated on Muslims, a vicious cycle of reaction and counterreaction seems increasingly likely.

Many feel that their capacity to speak out forcefully against extremist rhetoric (as distinct from violent actions) within the community is undercut by the fact that the entire community feels targeted from the outside. In a context where so many innocent young Muslims are profiled and wrongfully accused, many feel honor-bound to stand up for the rights of

all suspects. That some of those they advocate for are active *jihadi* complicates matters in a way that would not be the case if the state were scrupulous in arresting suspects.

In the post-9/11 world, where Muslims are forced to prove their loyalty to the established order before anyone will listen to them, where developing a long-term strategy and vision for the community is a heroic effort, and where they fight for their daily rights against mob and police violence, self-policing within the community against violent extremists is that much harder.

Some Muslims resent having to issue repeated denunciations of terrorism. They note that such denunciations to date have frequently been ignored by the press and public opinion. They also resent the presumption of guilt that appears to be implicit in such a demand.

It would of course defy credibility to suggest that sympathy for violence and desperate measures is entirely absent in the Muslim community. However, our research found it to be insignificant in scope, no greater than the sympathy expressed to us by non-Muslim opponents of the status quo for Naxalites and Maoists. Indeed, in a typically Indian response, the only interlocutor who expressed admiration for *jihadis* did so by reference to the positive example of “Naxalite and Maoist *jihadis*.” Our interlocutors noted that the Dar-ul-Uloom Deoband has repeatedly and forcefully issued public condemnations of terrorism and suicide attacks.

That said, there is an emerging anxiety about the prospects of radicalization of at least some Muslim Indian youth, however few, with potential consequences for Muslims as a whole. Historically, the pattern and expectation of instigation of terrorist incidents in India has been by Pakistan-based terrorists; however, since 2007, there have been several cases of Indians, often educated youth, involved in planning such attacks.³⁶

The case of the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) is an instructive one. SIMI has been associated with the new Indian Mujahideen organization which has claimed many recent home-grown bomb plots. Founded at Aligarh University, the major center of modern Muslim higher education in India, SIMI originated as a militant but peaceful organization in the student wing of the radical but above-ground Jamaat-e-Islami Hind. The consensus among intelligence and police professionals is that by the early 1990s SIMI had already turned to terrorism and covert and conspiratorial organizing, before the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, the attacks on the Bombay Stock Exchange, and the subsequent anti-Muslim violence.

³⁶ See details at footnote 8.

Those more sympathetic to SIMI see its turn to terrorism and conspiracy as rooted in its harsh treatment by a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government, before it was responsible for any terrorist acts. They ascribe its radicalization to its proscription under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act and to the detention and torture of its members. Certainly SIMI's origin in educated Muslim youth organizations runs parallel to, if it has not actually given rise to, a tendency of law enforcement agencies to target educated and militant Muslim youth whenever any terrorist events occur or are foiled, particularly those associated with the Indian Mujahideen.

Whatever the disputes on its merits, what is not disputed is the sequence of events surrounding the banning of SIMI. Law enforcement and intelligence agencies had sought this ban earlier, and believe that "vote-bank politics" prevented it. The BJP government banned SIMI in 2001; although the ban was lifted in 2003, it was reimposed in 2006. Meanwhile, political leaders of important states (Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Kerala) argued that its banning constituted victimization. The conclusion to be drawn is that the business of internal security has, for good or ill, become part of the politics of Muslim political participation in India.