

THE INDIAN MUSLIM THE UNMAKING OF SECULAR INDIA

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Executive Summary

“Tyranny is the exercise of power beyond right,” wrote John Locke in the seventeenth century. His warning was not about brute force alone, but about the moment when laws, institutions, and silence become instruments of domination. India’s present realities bring that insight into sharp focus.

August 2025 unfolded as a month of unrelenting terror and state led tyranny for India’s Muslim community. What began with the brutal lynching of 20-year-old Suleman Pathan in Maharashtra revealed not just the savagery of mob violence but also the intimacy of betrayal: he was tortured and killed by a crowd that included his own Hindu friends, the same people with whom he had once celebrated Ganesh festivities. His death was not an isolated aberration but a chilling symbol of how everyday coexistence has been poisoned by communal hatred, where identity eclipses friendship, neighborliness, and humanity itself.

Just hours away in Uttar Pradesh, a different but equally calculated attack took place: the vandalism of the 200-year-old tomb of Nawab Abdus Samad. With saffron flags planted atop the historic structure, right-wing mobs claimed it as a Hindu site, echoing the long shadow of the Babri Masjid demolition. The incident underlined a growing Hindutva project, where reclaiming Muslim sites, whether tombs or mosques, becomes a spectacle of political domination and communal polarization.

Elsewhere across India, violence followed familiar scripts. In Hapur, Muslim youths were stopped, asked their names, and beaten nearly to death for their identity. In Gujarat, a Muslim man was not only attacked but later denied medical treatment. In West Bengal and Uttarakhand, victims were humiliated, forced to chant Hindu slogans, or physically degraded. The persistence of cow vigilantism, where accusations of beef consumption or cattle transport justify lynching, further exposed how vigilante violence has been mainstreamed into everyday life.

The assault is not confined to streets and marketplaces. Educational spaces, once thought to be safe havens for young minds, have been infiltrated. In Karnataka, a school’s water tank was deliberately poisoned to frame a Muslim headmaster, dragging even children into



the machinery of communal hatred. In Ahmedabad, a personal scuffle between students that turned deadly was opportunistically recast as a communal clash, with right-wing groups vandalizing the school to mobilize anger against Muslims.

At the heart of this violence lies a political ecosystem that normalizes hatred. The RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat openly reaffirmed his organization’s ideological alignment with the ruling BJP, while party leaders used platforms to question the legitimacy of Muslims participating in Hindu festivals or to revive discredited theories of “population jihad.” This rhetoric builds on historical revisionism that seeks to erase Muslim heroes from India’s Independence story while glorifying Hindutva ideologues like Savarkar. In this narrative, Muslims are no longer citizens with deep historical roots but “outsiders,” tolerated only if they subsume their identity into the majority culture.

The state itself is no bystander. These were not isolated incidents of mob violence; they reflected a deeper, systemic transformation in which the state itself amplifies and legitimizes

majoritarian aggression. With the passage of India's harshest anti-conversion law in Uttarakhand, Muslims face legal frameworks that criminalize religious freedom. The continued use of "bulldozer justice", razing Muslim homes and businesses, has become a form of collective punishment. And in a stark escalation, the government began deporting Rohingya refugees, including UNHCR-registered asylum seekers, in direct violation of international law. Each of these measures transforms discrimination from social prejudice into state policy.

Dissent is silenced with equal vigor. At Aligarh Muslim University, a student leader was charged with criminal offenses simply for raising pro-Palestine slogans during a protest, revealing how even expressions of global solidarity are policed when voiced by Muslims.

International actors have taken notice. Human Rights Watch condemned the Rohingya expulsions, the USCIRF once again recommended India's designation as a "country of particular concern," and the UN Human Rights Council expressed alarm over systemic discrimination. Yet, despite mounting global scrutiny, India's ruling establishment continues to double down, emboldened by the ideological backing of its parent organization, the RSS, and by a political culture where hate is both currency and governance.

Taken together, these events sketch the anatomy of a deeper transformation. What were once sporadic outbreaks of communal violence are now embedded into a multi-layered system of persecution: historical erasure provides ideological justification, hate speech fuels societal animosity, mobs carry out physical assaults with impunity, and the state itself cements exclusion through laws, demolitions, and deportations. India's Muslims today live under a coordinated siege, socially vilified, politically demonized, and legally marginalized.

This is not simply a crisis of minority rights; it is the unraveling of India's secular and democratic fabric. The trajectory revealed in August 2025 signals not a passing moment of unrest but an entrenched reality, one where the world's largest democracy risks transforming into a state-enabled model of religious persecution with profound consequences for its future social cohesion and political credibility.



Main Points

Targeted Violence – From the lynching of Suleman Pathan in Maharashtra to the desecration of Nawab Abdus Samad's tomb in UP and assaults across Hapur, Gujarat, West Bengal, and Uttarakhand, Muslims face escalating identity-driven attacks.

Educational & Cultural Communalization – Schools and campuses have become sites of polarization, with fabricated cases like the poisoned water tank in Karnataka and communal framing of student violence in Ahmedabad.

Political & Ideological Drivers – RSS-BJP alignment, hate speech on "population jihad," and cultural exclusion reinforce historical revisionism, erasing Muslim heroes while glorifying Hindutva figures.

State-Sanctioned Discrimination – Anti-conversion laws, bulldozer demolitions, Rohingya deportations, and systemic ghettoization show state complicity in codifying prejudice into policy.

Suppression & Global Alarm – Muslim dissent is criminalized, while international bodies like HRW, USCIRF, and UNHRC condemn India's persecution model, warning of secularism and democracy unraveling.



Anatomy of Violence: Events, Incidents, and Impunity

The Lynching of Suleman Pathan

On August 11, 2025, 20-year-old Suleman Khanⁱ Pathan was brutally tortured and killed by a Hindu mob in the Jalgaon district of Maharashtra, a state that now reports the second-highest incidence of hate speech after Uttar Pradesh. The victim, a popular and well-integrated member of his community, had led the local Ganesh festivities in 2024 and was preparing for a police The Indian Muslim Prejudice Turned Policy in India recruitment exam when he was killed. On the day of the attack, he was dragged from a cafe and beaten with iron rods and sticks by a mob that chillingly included some of his closest Hindu friends. The mob reportedly dragged him for kilometers, stopping several times to continue the assault, and chanted, "Mussalmaan hai, maar daalo isko" (He is a Muslim, kill him). The victim's family, who were also beaten when they tried to intervene, stated that Pathan's nails had been pulled out and his ears were bleeding, reflecting a deliberate intent to humiliate and terrorize.

The family has alleged a chilling pattern of police inaction and complicity, claiming that while an official complaint (First Information Report) was filed promptly, the police refused to include the names of mob members the family had identified. The police reportedly demanded that the victim's family gather their own evidence, a request that highlights the severe gap in accountability and the failure of the criminal justice system to protect its most vulnerable citizens.

Vandalism of the Tomb of Nawab Abdus Samad

The month of August also saw a significant communal flare-up in Fatehpurⁱⁱ, Uttar Pradesh, on August 11, when a right-wing mob, led by the district president of the BJP, vandalized a 200- year-old tomb of Nawab Abdus Samad. The group, which included members of the Bajrang Dal and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), claimed the tomb was not a Muslim burial site but a Hindu temple of Thakur ji and Lord Shiva, citing symbols like a lotus and a trident as proof. The mob also placed a saffron flag on the structure, bringing both communities to a standoff that resulted in stone-pelting.

This incident is part of a broader pattern of claiming Muslim sites as Hindu sites, the most prominent example being the Babri Masjid case, where the site was claimed, demolished, and ultimately handed over to Hindus. Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav accused Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath of shielding the accusedⁱⁱⁱ, whom he claimed were BJP leaders and workers, by stopping the parliamentary affairs minister from naming them in the state assembly.

Other Incidents of Communal Violence and Targeted Attacks

The Suleman Pathan case and the Fatehpur incident were not isolated but part of a larger pattern of violence and harassment across several states.

- On August 28 in Hapur, Uttar Pradesh, a Hindutva mob brutally attacked three Muslim youths, Wasim, Rizwan, and Aamir, who were returning home from work. The mob, armed The Indian Muslim Prejudice Turned Policy in India with iron rods and sticks, initiated an unprovoked assault after asking the youths for their names and discovering their Muslim identities^{iv}. One of the victims was left in critical condition.
- A young Muslim man, Mohammad Shoaib, was attacked near the Surat railway station in Gujarat and subsequently denied medical treatment^v at multiple hospitals in Delhi NCR.
- Incidents of "cow vigilantism" persisted. The USCIRF report noted^{vi} that one such attack in August led to a Muslim migrant worker being beaten to death by cow vigilantes, falsely

accusing him of eating beef. A separate case from the same month involved a group of Hindu men violently attacking a 72-year-old Muslim man because they believed he was carrying beef. In West Bengal, a BJP youth leader, Parijat Ganguly, led an assault on Muslim^{vii} men who were carrying cattle for agricultural work, forcing them to do sit-ups while their hands were tied.

- In Uttarakhand, an elderly Muslim man named Rizwan was forced to chant Jai Shri Ram^{viii} and threatened with his beard being cut off. Similarly, in other instances of violence, victims were stripped or tied up and forced to chant Hindu religious slogans.



The Communalization of Educational Spaces

The pervasive nature of communal narratives is perhaps most evident in their infiltration of educational spaces. In a disturbing incident on July 14th in Karnataka's Belagavi district, the drinking water tank of a government primary school was poisoned in a plot^{ix} to force the transfer of its Muslim headmaster, Suleman Gorinaik.

Twelve students became ill after drinking the water. A police investigation led to the arrest of three people, including a local leader from the right-wing group Sri Ram Sene, who had reportedly conspired to use an innocent boy to carry out the act and create suspicion around the headmaster. This specific event, where a group attempted to malign an individual based on their religious identity and professional position, reflects the extent to which communal animosity has infiltrated local communities and educational institutions.

In Ahmedabad, a tragic, non-communal murder of a 15-year-old student by a junior was opportunistically co-opted by Hindu nationalist groups. On August 21, right-wing organizations like the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Bajrang Dal staged protests outside the school, allegedly using the tragedy to escalate the situation into a communal issue by vandalizing property and assaulting school staff. The murder itself, which was a result of a prior scuffle between two students, was entirely devoid of any communal motive.

Political and Public Discourse: The Normalization of Hate Speech

This month also saw a continuation of a larger pattern where political and public figures used inflammatory rhetoric to further marginalize India's Muslim community. These statements often serve to legitimize violence and discrimination by framing Muslims as an existential threat to the nation.

The Rhetoric of the Ruling Class

During an August 2025 lecture series marking the centenary year of the RSS, chief Mohan Bhagwat clarified the relationship between his organization and the ruling BJP^x. He stated that there were no heart-to-heart differences but only differences of opinion, confirming close ideological coordination and a shared direction between the two entities. The RSS has a long history of anti-Muslim actions, and its politics are based on the slogan of turning India into a Hindu religious state.

In a similar incident, a BJP leader in Karnataka sparked a row on August 25 by questioning why a Muslim author was invited to inaugurate a Hindu religious festival. The leader stated that Dasara is not a secular event and asked if the author believed in the Hindu goddess. This illustrates a trend of using cultural events to exclude minorities.

Following the vandalism of a 200-year-old Muslim tomb in Fatehpur, Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav accused Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath of shielding the accused^{xi}. Yadav, in the state assembly, claimed that the accused were BJP leaders and workers and that the Chief Minister was deliberately preventing their names from being revealed to the public. He argued that the incident was part of the BJP's divisive communal politics and that if the accused had

belonged to any other community, the situation would not have been handled with such leniency.

The idea of a "population jihad" was given renewed fuel by a May 2025 working paper from the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council, which claimed the share of the Hindu population had decreased between 1950 and 2015, while the Muslim share had increased. Despite critics arguing the report's selective use of data, BJP leaders and their allies have used it to amplify unfounded suggestions that the Hindu majority is under threat.



Historical Revisionism and the Otherisation of Muslims

The erosion of India's secular fabric is also being pursued through a systematic historical revisionism that delegitimizes the Muslim community's deep historical connection to India. As India celebrated its 79th Independence Day in August 2025, historians and community leaders voiced concern over the deliberate removal of Muslim heroes like Bahadur Shah Zafar, Tipu Sultan, Begum Hazrat Mahal, and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad from the national narrative. This erasure is not an academic exercise but a strategic project that coincides with the subtle glorification of Hindutva ideologue Vinayak Damodar Savarkar^{xii}, who viewed Muslims and Christians as foreign elements. By portraying Muslims as having foreign loyalties or as having been enemies of the nation, this revisionist project provides the ideological foundation for the

discrimination and violence that define the present. This narrative is explicitly used to paint Muslim figures as outsiders in Hindu India, and this propaganda often invokes the idea that Muslims are an existential threat to the nation. The notion that Muslims and Christians can only be considered part of India if they subsume themselves into the majority culture is a core tenet of this Hindutva-inspired ideology. This ideological shift is crucial, as it provides a cultural and historical justification for the physical and legal marginalization of minority communities, making it easier for a radicalized public to accept and participate in acts of discrimination.

The Criminalization of Political Expression

The institutionalization of discrimination^{xiii} also extends to the suppression of dissent. In Aligarh, a student leader and PhD scholar named Talha Mannan was booked by police for raising proPalestine slogans during a fee hike protest at Aligarh Muslim University. The complaint against him, filed by a district president of the Hindu Raksha Dal, alleged that the slogans could disrupt communal harmony, highlighting how expressions of solidarity with international causes, particularly those involving Muslims, can be criminalized under the pretext of maintaining social order.

The State at Work: Law and Policy Legislative and Judicial Frameworks

The legislature and Judiciary also played its part in shrinking the space for Muslims. A key development was the approval of the India's harshest anti-conversion law^{xiv} in Uttarakhand. The law introduces sweeping provisions, including an expansion of the maximum penalty for forced conversions from 10 years to life imprisonment. Its definition of inducement is chillingly broad, criminalizing a range of activities from offering employment or gifts to praising another religion. The bill also grants district magistrates the power to make warrantless arrests and to confiscate property based on mere suspicion, with the burden of proof placed on the accused to demonstrate their innocence.

Systemic Actions: Demolitions and Deportations

State-sanctioned persecution is also evident in the government's use of its bureaucratic apparatus for the targeted harassment of minorities. The practice of demolishing

Muslim-owned homes and properties under the label of illegal construction, a tactic often referred to as bulldozer justice, has become a systemic form of collective punishment. This action is not merely about law enforcement but is a deliberate strategy of "forced ghettoization" and an attempt to erase the presence and history of Muslim communities from public life.

Furthermore, states governed by the BJP have been engaged in a campaign to expel ethnic Rohingya and Bengali-speaking Muslims, whom the government has labeled illegal immigrants. The campaign, initiated in May 2025, has led to the deportation of at least 192 UNHCR-registered Rohingya refugees and the arbitrary detention of hundreds more. Human Rights Watch has condemned these actions as reflecting the ruling party's policy to demonize Muslims as illegal migrants and showing an utter disregard for human life and international law. The state's active participation in these forms of physical and legal marginalization represents a dangerous shift from mere rhetorical attacks to a policy of targeted, collective punishment.

International Scrutiny and External Reactions

The deteriorating conditions for India's religious minorities have not gone unnoticed by the international community. On August 28, 2025, the Human Rights Watch, issued a news release condemning India's expulsion of Rohingya refugees^{xv}, framing it as a reflection of the BJP's policy to demonize Muslims as illegal migrants. The organization called on the Indian government to immediately end the unlawful expulsions and recognize the Rohingya as refugees.

This condemnation aligns with a pattern of consistent scrutiny. The USCIRF has repeatedly recommended that the US government designate India as a country of particular concern (CPC)^{xvi} for engaging in and tolerating systematic, ongoing, and egregious religious freedom violations. The USCIRF report specifically cited the propagation of hateful rhetoric and disinformation against Muslims by BJP members, including Prime Minister Modi, and the subsequent vigilante violence and property demolitions.

The United Nations General Assembly also expressed concern in July 2025 over reports of

discrimination, violence, and derogatory rhetoric against religious minorities in India^{xvii} and urged the government to adopt robust measures to prevent these acts.



A Systemic Erosion of Rights

The events of the last few weeks provide a chilling snapshot of a multi-layered and coordinated assault on India's Muslim community. The ideological groundwork is laid through the systematic revision of history, which seeks to erase the contributions of Muslims to the nation's founding and portrays them as foreign elements. This rhetorical foundation is then amplified and disseminated by a politically aligned media ecosystem that manufactures and propagates inflammatory conspiracy theories to create a climate of fear and hatred. This climate, in turn, provides the pretext and justification for on-the-ground mob violence, which operates with a disturbing sense of impunity, often with the apathy or complicity of local law enforcement. Finally, the state itself, through the enactment of discriminatory laws and the implementation of tactics like bulldozer justice and refugee expulsions, actively participates in the marginalization and persecution of its minorities.

The anti-Muslim violence in India has evolved from a series of spontaneous, localized riots to a systemic and state-enabled form of persecution. The state is no longer a neutral observer but an active participant in the marginalization of its largest minority, using its legislative, judicial, and executive powers to institutionalize discrimination. The institutionalization of these discriminatory practices, as evidenced by the new anti-conversion law, is a critical development. It signifies a shift from ad hoc incidents to a formal, legal framework of exclusion, posing a significant threat to India's secular identity, its democratic institutions, and the fundamental rights of its largest minority population. The events of the last few months demonstrate that the current climate of fear and insecurity is not a temporary phase but a deeply entrenched reality with long-term implications for the nation's social cohesion and democratic future.

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