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Hindu-Muslim Relations in Times of Coronavirus²

It is extremely disturbing that COVID-19 has undergone another dangerous mutation and took Islamophobia to the whole new level. It reaps a bloody toll in weakening India. Instead of uniting in the face of danger, we are observing the growing social divisions on the Hindu-Muslim line and the galloping increase in distrust between the two communities. It leads straight to the formation of conspiracy theories and acts of violence aimed at Indian Muslims.

Despite the horror of partitions and communal violence, Muslims are an integral part of Indian society. Peaceful coexistence never comes easy and in the Indian case it is the hallmark of an ancient civilization³. There is enough research material to indicate that Hindu-Muslim relations have always been complex, challenging and full of uneasy compromises. This study argues that their loyalties have not ceased to be questioned by Hindus. It engages into a field of research that still remains an uncovered, novel and dynamic phenomenon. Most importantly, this article raises an overarching question of the role of right-wing politicians in deliberate invoking the spirit of hatred. In this paper, I attempt to explore the consequences of the pandemic for Muslim communities in India, as well as conspiracy theories, such as *corona jihād*, *bio jihād*, *love jihād* or *population jihād* that began to flourish amid the coronavirus crisis.

Meanwhile, the right side of the political scene in India not only provokes unwarranted accusations and reacts sluggishly to the cases of violence against Indian Muslims, but indirectly calls for them, often making the coronavirus a tool of ruthless political game. Such “armed” coronavirus is a serious threat to the social order and the unification of Indian citizens in times of crisis.

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² The paper was written by Natalia Zajączkowska, a PhD student at the University of Lodz, who stayed in New Delhi during *Janata curfew* – a temporary lockdown in India.

³ J. Friedrichs, *Hindu-Muslim Relations: What Europe Might Learn from India*, New York 2019, pp. 1–6.

Quarantine from close-up

The first case of coronavirus in India was reported on January 30, 2020. Admittedly, the government, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, carried out an impressive information campaign more than a month before the announcing of the epidemiological status, which effectively reached almost every corner of the country. After March 22, far-reaching restrictions affected 1.3 billion people. The official number of cases in the second most populous country in the world was then only a few hundred, with a scarce amount of deaths.

On March 19, in lasting less than half an hour address to the nation of Hindi, the Prime Minister, Modi called on to join a joint mission to stop the COVID-19 pandemic. He then called for social distancing – refraining from leaving the house. Elderly people over the age of 65 were recommended to stay at home. In his speech, he often referred to the mantra “Ham Svasth to Jag Svasth”⁴ (Hindi: **हम स्वस्थ तो जग स्वस्थ**). However, the main message he passed on was to respect the lockdown and curfew (*Janata curfew*) scheduled for Sunday, March 22, 7am to 9pm. Later, on March 24, a 21-days-long national quarantine was introduced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Modi has requested youth working in Indian organizations for *sevā*⁵ in the form of information campaigns and social work missions aimed to raise the awareness of coronavirus among people. Within two days, every Indian citizen was obliged to call at least ten relatives and make sure that they are familiar with governmental regulations regarding Sunday *Janata curfew*, as well as recommendations for further actions against the virus. The quarantine in New Delhi was enforced by armed policemen moving on motorcycles, and medical staff was unexpectedly appearing in hotels, streets and transfer points to take temperature measurements and interview, where one had travelled during the last two months.

Be careful what you wish for. A danger of fulfilled election promises

It cannot be denied that the second term of Modi’s government is a series of misfortunes for the Muslim part of society. The Prime Minister seems to be immaculately fulfilling the promises made during the election campaign. The conflict between the government and the opposition, which has spilled out

⁴ Our health is the health of the world.

⁵ Selfless work; often understood as voluntary work.

into the streets of large cities, is fueled by the anti-Muslim rhetoric of Indian authorities⁶. Hate speech is spreading like a virus infecting more and more minds across the country⁷. Nowadays, Muslims tend to be treated as second-class citizens and even more so as a threat. Since December 2019, India has been regularly torn apart by anti-government protests. People demonstrate their anger and disapproval for a policy based on phobias and inciting communalist (interfaith) divisions. The new Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which the Muslim community considers discriminatory, raises deep objections. The Act allows refugees from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan to obtain Indian citizenship, provided they are not Muslims. At the same time, it grants Indian citizenship to Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jains, Parsis and Sikhs who fled from the mentioned countries before 2015. There is no doubt that the new law is part of the greater nationalist programme of Modi's administration, aimed at marginalizing nearly 200 million Muslims in India⁸. Protests spread rapidly throughout the country, attracting not only Muslims, but also followers of other religions. At first, this unprecedented uprising was led largely by young and educated people, students of universities such as JNU and Jāmi'a Millia Islāmiya University in New Delhi. Also, it should be noted that the lion's share of the strikers were women – both mothers and grandmothers. They have redefined methods of peaceful protests, including artworks, book readings, lectures, poetry recitals and communal cooking⁹. Śāhīn Bāḡ (Hindi: शाहीन बाग़) District in the eastern part of the capital has become particularly famous for its sit-in peaceful protests, in which a pivotal role was played by women striking from morning to night. They abandoned their daily duties in the name of the resistance, which became a living inspiration and role model for other parts of the country. The sit-ins, organized by a collective called "Ham Bhārat ke log" (Eng. *We, the people of India*), have been inspired by the ongoing women-led protest in Śāhīn Bāḡ in New Delhi, with the protesters now calling the site

⁶ J. Slater, N. Masih, *As the world looks for coronavirus scapegoats, Muslims are blamed in India*, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/as-world-looks-for-coronavirus-scapegoats-india-pins-blame-on-muslims/2020/04/22/3cb43430-7f3f-11ea-84c2-0792d8591911_story.html [access: 26.04.2020].

⁷ P. Mohta, *Fuelled by social media, in India Muslims are "a convenient scapegoat" for the coronavirus*, <https://www.equaltimes.org/fuelled-by-social-media-in-india?lang=en#.Xuyioufgq00> [access: 10.06.2020].

⁸ C. Molloy, H. Cooper, M. Abadi, *Why Indians are protesting 2 controversial laws that could leave millions of Muslims stateless*, <https://www.businessinsider.com/india-citizenship-laws-muslims-modi-2020-2?IR=T> [access: 10.06.2020].

⁹ S. Bhura, *Shaheen Bagh protests continue to evolve in the midst of a lockdown*, <https://www.theweek.in/news/india/2020/03/23/shaheen-bagh-protests-continue-to-evolve-in-the-midst-of-a-lockdown.html> [access: 10.06.2020].

of the stir “Mumbaī Bāg”. Again, most of the protesters in Mumbaī Bāg were Muslim housewives, and some of them participated in the sit-in with young children on their laps¹⁰. The Śāhīn Bāg movement, termed ‘revival’ by many, continued uninterrupted until March 25, when it was finally suppressed by the police, ostensibly due to COVID-19 precautions¹¹.



N. Zajączkowska (photographer), 2020, March 3. *The ubiquitous poster on the streets of West Bengal cities calling for dharna – a peaceful demonstration against the laws considered anti-Muslim.*

Yogi Adityanath – the Prime Minister of the most populous state, Uttar Pradesh, is widely known for his controversial and defamatory statements about Muslims. He happened to accuse all anti-CAA protesters of treason, unclean intentions, relations with Pakistan and terrorism. During one of the political rallies, he issued a disturbing warning:

¹⁰ More than 100 women begin Shaheen Bagh-like protest in Mumbai to oppose CAA, NRC, <https://scroll.in/latest/951223/more-than-100-women-begin-shaheen-bagh-like-protest-in-mumbai-to-oppose-cao-nrc> [access: 10.06.2020].

¹¹ P. Nair, *Temporary Retreat? Anti-CAA Protesters Want To Strike Back At Shaheen Bagh, Again*, <https://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/india-news-temporary-retreat-anti-caa-protesters-want-to-strike-back-at-shaheen-bagh-again/303008> [access: 10.06.2020].

“Lekin Śīva bhaktoṃ par goli čalāega koi vyakti, danga karāega... bolī se nahī mānēga to goli se to mān hī jāega.”¹² (Eng. Whoever opens fire to the followers of the god Shiva will cause a riot... If they do not listen to our words, they will certainly listen to our bullets).

He described the Śāhīn Bāḡ protest as an ominous act of destabilizing everyday life and spreading social unrest. Moreover, he claims that those who lately supported terrorism in Kashmir, are now organizing vehement protests and raising false slogans of āzādī (Eng. freedom)¹³. He called anti-CAA agitation as “actions against India and a malicious attempt to damage the image of the country.” As stated during one of the many election rallies, this is an obstacle to the realization of the dream of great and united India (trl. *Ek Bhārat Śreṣṭha Bhāra*).

Amidst the third rally supporting *Bhāratiya Janata Party*, the candidate in Rohini, Yogi Adityanath, suggested that under the guise of combating discrimination lies the brutal face of terrorism and relationships with its largest sponsor – Pakistan: “You should understand what they want, what they think, what they do to India (...)”¹⁴.

It happens that the BJP politicians meet with the legal punishment for their outrageous and highly offensive speech. The Election Commission forbade BJP MPs A. Ṭhākur and P. Varmā to conduct an election campaign for 72 and 96 hours, respectively, after raising their traitors’ slogans (trl. *deś ke gaddār*) toward Muslims¹⁵. The BJP politicians warned their supporters against Śāhīn Bāḡ’s protesters who would “break into our homes and rape our sisters and daughters”, to which the fervently chanting crowd replied: “feed them with bullets”¹⁶.

¹² *Boli se nahi, toh goli se: UP CM Yogi Adityanath's warning for those obstructing Kanwariyas*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aLSCnab3KkE> [access: 10.06.2020].

¹³ *Those who support terrorists in Kashmir are staging protest at Shaheen Bagh: Yogi Adityanath*, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/elections/assembly-elections/delhi/those-who-support-terrorists-in-kashmir-are-staging-protest-at-shaheen-bagh-yogi-adityanath/articleshow/73845071.cms> [access: 16.06.2020].

¹⁴ *“Shoot the Traitors”: Discrimination Against Muslims under India's New Citizenship Policy*, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/04/09/shoot-traitors/discrimination-against-muslims-under-indias-new-citizenship-policy> [access: 15.06.2020].

¹⁵ *‘Bullets Will Surely Work’: After Anurag Thakur, UP CM Reveals Govt's Method to Deal with Dissenters*, <https://www.news18.com/news/politics/bullets-will-surely-work-after-anurag-thakur-cm-yogi-reveals-govts-method-to-deal-with-dissenters-2483619.html> [access: 15.06.2020].

¹⁶ *Goli Not Biryani For Terrorists: Yogi Adityanath At First Delhi Rally*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=48clexmuFBg> [access: 10.06.2020].

In 72 years of freedom, India has not experienced a major crisis

Today, India's institutions such as courts, media, investigation agencies, electoral commission are weakened and under pressure to follow the line of Narendra Modi. The concept of *Hindutva* (Hindi: **हिन्दुत्व**)¹⁷ is growing in strength and will ultimately entail the slow decomposition of constitutional order and the fabric of liberal democracy.

Even without the coronavirus, India has not been a safe haven for Indian Muslims. In Modi's India, a sense of insecurity among Muslims is on the rise. According to many, the unease about movement and the possibility of being assaulted were not a part of their lives before the current government came to power. Modi espoused a brand of religious nationalism that views India as a fundamentally Hindu nation (trl: *Hindū Raṣṭra*) and rejects Nehruvian secularism promoted by the country's founders.

It all started in 2014 when Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi swept to power with a desire to modernize India's economy, fight against corruption and aggressively assert India's role in the world, and to the belief that he can radically transform a country inhabited by 1.3 billion people. But the latest campaign in 2019 was based more on fear than hope. Admittedly, there are ample evidence that Modi keeps some of his election promises, especially the ones that perfectly fit into the us-versus-them dichotomy in a country already riven by dangerous divisions. Not only have there been several eruptions of the age-old Indian-Pakistani conflict, but also the special status of the state of Kashmir¹⁸ has been officially abolished. Another divisive decision has been made to build a temple of Rama in the place of the demolished Babri Masjid (Urdu: مسجد بابری). The place continues to be considered holy for both Hindus and Muslims. The next step was the adoption of the controversial NRC and CAA acts. Although it sparked a wave of mass protests, eventually it has been announced that Indian Muslims whose citizenship will be verified negatively may be threatened with exile to special, newly built detention camps¹⁹. It was anticipated that the anti-Muslim performance shown during an ardent election campaign reached its apogee and satisfied Hindu nationalists. Yet, this was not the end of instigating violence but rather just the beginning.

¹⁷ *Hindutva* or Hindu nationalism is a political ideology that uses religious traditions in building identity and political agitation.

¹⁸ Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, 1950.

¹⁹ B. Pradhan, *Millions in India Could End Up in Modi's New Detention Camps*, <https://www.bloomberg.com/features/2020-modi-india-detention-camps/> [access: 10.06.2020].

At the end of March 2020, Islamophobia triumphed in India once again

I read about the *corona jihād* for the first time on WhatsApp when talking to a friend. 23-year-old Akşay, a Hindu belonging to the Sunār (Hindi: सुनार) caste, living in a village in northwestern India, who was eager to update me with the latest congregation of a Muslim missionary organization *Tablighī Jamā'at*²⁰ (Urdu: (ت)عامچ یغی لب ت) in New Delhi. Later on it turned out that the *Markaz Niṣām ad-Dīn* mosque (Arab. ماظن زكرم دجسم) – a place where more than 3,000 people gathered on March 13 – was soon to become one of the coronavirus hotspots. Suddenly, my friend made a serious allegation against Indian Muslims:

India ke Muslim log corona ko jān-buṅ ke phaila rahe hain²¹.

He continued by admitting that he is a fervent enthusiast of the ruling party. He also expressed his deep concerns that Muslims might deliberately be infecting their Hindu rivals. In his opinion, the situation is getting worse every day as a result of their easy-going, downplaying attitude towards the threat. He also does not exclude hostile actions coming from India's arch-enemy: Pakistan²².

Mānasi, a 22-year-old architecture student in Mumbai, in turn, complained about the recklessness of Muslims and their lack of elementary awareness of the threat:

Despite government restrictions and home quarantine across India, they have not ceased to pray together in mosques, do not comply with the ban on assembly and as if that was not enough, they do celebrate the holy month of Ramadan. They should understand that coronavirus does not attack based on religion and we are all equally exposed²³.

"Coronavirus exposes the idiocy of Islamophobia"²⁴, writes Mehdi Hassan, an Aljazeera journalist based in Washington DC. The Indian media and government tirelessly blamed Muslims for the infection as if *Tablighī Jamā'at* is the only reason behind this pandemic. There is also a bit of hypocrisy in stigmatizing only one of manifold religious or political groups and individuals (including

²⁰ Society for Spreading Faith.

²¹ Indian Muslims deliberately spread coronavirus.

²² A. Sonar, personal communication, April 17, 2020.

²³ M. Jadhav, personal communication, April 28, 2020.

²⁴ M. Hasan, *The Coronavirus Is Empowering Islamophobes – but Exposing the Idiocy of Islamophobia*, <https://theintercept.com/2020/04/14/coronavirus-muslims-islamophobia/> [access: 15.06.2020].

PM Narendra Modi), who continued to gather in public areas after the home quarantine in India was announced. For instance, it is BJP politicians, including Yogi Adityanath, who actively participated in a large religious gathering during which no social distancing was practiced²⁵. Unlike the *Tablighī Jamā'at*, this happened after Modi ordered the lockdown of the whole country, and admonished that people's lives and health were at stake. Suffice to say that PM Narendra Modi himself did not stop parliament, even when he ordered quarantine all over the country on the March 22. As late as of March 23, he focused on the state of Madhya Pradesh, in which the BJP party successfully overthrew the local government under the leadership of the biggest opposition party – Indian National Congress²⁶. It is worth adding that the *Tablighī Jamā'at* congregation was, in fact, held before the beginning of the lockdown in New Delhi on March 16 with the consent of the city authorities.

#CoronaJihad



Figure 1. Caricature posted on Twitter showing a Muslim terrorist, replacing suicide vest with a coronavirus, [in:] S. Desai, A. Amarasingam, #CoronaJihad: COVID-19, Misinformation, and Anti-Muslim Violence in India, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341651003_CoronaJihad_COVID-19_Misinformation_and_Anti-Muslim_Violence_in_India.

²⁵ A. Jain, *BJP Ignores PM Modi's Social Distancing Advice At Shivraj Singh Chouhan's Oath-Taking*, https://www.huffingtonpost.in/entry/bjp-madhya-pradesh-social-distancing-shivraj-singh-chouhan_in_5e79a7bbc5b62f90bc508234 [access: 15.06.2020].

²⁶ A. Ashraf, *How Modi's BJP lagged on Covid-19 response in Central India*, <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/how-modi-s-bjp-lagged-on-covid-19-response-in-central-india-35617> [access: 15.06.2020].

The emergence of the pandemic only exacerbated the conflicts that tore apart the social fabric of India. It reached its climax when the government announced that one of the coronavirus hotspots in early March was *Tablīghī Jamā'at* congregation and that their organizers violated the quarantine regulations. Soon after, minister for Minority Affairs M.A. Naqvi bluntly called the congregation a “Talibani crime” and its infected members – “human bombs, but in the guise of coronavirus patients”²⁷. In Karnataka there was a record number of attacks on Muslims after BJP MP A.K. Hegde condemned *Tablīghī Jamā'at* by calling them terrorists. Numerous recordings and messages calling to boycott Muslim sellers went viral on social media and WhatsApp claiming that their products are likely to be infected with a virus²⁸. In Uttar Pradesh Muslim street vendors were accused of “infecting vegetables with saliva” even by local politicians²⁹. Soon after, we could observe alarming acts of violence against Muslims, for instance, the attacks on milk sellers belonging to the gurjar (Hindi: **गुर्जर**) caste in Hošiyārpur, attacking Muslim volunteers under the pretext of poisoning water and food and boycotts of Muslim services and goods. Cities of Telangana, Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka were covered with posters prohibiting Muslims from entering certain districts. One of the most tragic cases was probably the refusal of hospital assistance to a pregnant Muslim woman, which led to the death of her unborn child³⁰. Islamophobic hashtags #CoronaJihad, #TablighiJamaatVirus, #CoronaBombsTablighi began to circulate in social media. One meme portrayed China as a producer of the virus and Muslims as its distributors³¹. There have also been many fake or manipulated films, showing Indian Muslims spitting on police and medical services, poisoning food before selling it, and ostentatiously neglecting the state of the epidemic³². The hate campaign takes place primarily

²⁷ *Coronavirus: Islamophobia concerns after India mosque outbreak*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-52147260> [access: 29.05.2020].

²⁸ M. Afeef, *Does Law Allow Calls to Boycott Muslims During the Covid-19 Lockdown?*, <https://thewire.in/communalism/covid-19-lockdown-muslims-boycott-law> [access: 2.06.2020].

²⁹ *'Do not buy from Muslims': BJP leader in India calls for boycott*, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/04/buy-muslims-bjp-leader-india-calls-boycott-200429034119722.html> [access: 2.06.2020].

³⁰ C.J. Werleman, *An Apartheid Era Begins in India, As Does a Moral Dilemma for its Allies*, <https://bylinetimes.com/2020/04/23/an-apartheid-era-begins-in-india-as-does-a-moral-dilemma-for-its-allies/> [access: 26.05.2020].

³¹ *Coronavirus: Islamophobia concerns after India mosque outbreak*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-52147260> [access: 26.05.2020].

³² A sample of the most widely shared fake news story include: “Muslim Worker in Restaurant Spitting in Food to Spread Coronavirus”: <https://www.altnews.in/old-video-falsely-viral-as-muslim-man-spitting-on-food-at-indian-restaurant-in-the-backdrop-of-coronavirus-pandemic/>; “Corona Infected Muslim Beats Hindu Priest”: <https://www.thelallantop.com/news/the-truth-of-viral-news-that-lone-pujari-was-beaten-up-by-rewa-sp-abid-khan-for-violating-lockdown/> [access: 3.06.2020].

on Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp but the growing and most dangerous reach has been reported on the relatively new Chinese application TikTok. One of the most popular fake tweets #CoronaJihad depicts a coughing Muslim, a member of the *Tablighī Jamā'at*. They were given epithets, such as “vile and despicable people”. However, thanks to the fact-checking journalism initiatives such as Alt-News or BoomLive, it quickly became apparent that the video was actually shot in Thailand³³ and there is no evidence that the recorded man was a member of the religious assembly in New Delhi³⁴. A similar fate befell many other films impugning Muslims to deliberately spread the virus. Another tweet with the words *corona jihād*, which was removed for violating Twitter’s rules, contained a caricatured representation of a Muslim trying to push an Indian off a cliff³⁵. Also “The Hindu” newspaper displayed a cartoon of Coronavirus with Muslim attire but later apologized for its “completely unintentional” decision to link the crisis to Muslim terrorists, and replaced it with a more neutral image³⁶.

As stated by A. Appadurai, an expert on media, culture, and communication at New York University:

“One of the key features of anti-Muslim sentiment in India for quite a long time has been the idea that Muslims themselves are a kind of infection in the body politic (...). So there’s a kind of affinity between this long-standing image and the new anxieties surrounding coronavirus”³⁷.

Indian intellectuals, human rights defenders and 101 former civil servants called on the Indian authorities in an open letter to defend the discriminated Muslim minority and expressly articulated that religious minorities are not responsible for the pandemic:

“We know where this virus comes from. We know this is a pandemic that the whole world is exposed to. This is not something that results from the presence of religious minorities in India. (...) From the point of view of public health, the start of the hunt for witches affecting mem-

³³ M. Lothian-McLean, *Man who had coronavirus appears to be caught on camera spitting on a stranger's face just hours before he died*, <https://www.indy100.com/article/coronavirus-thailand-spits-passenger-dead-anan-sahoh-9445181> [access: 10.06.2020].

³⁴ P. Chaudhuri, P. Sinha, *Video of Sufi ritual falsely viral as mass sneezing in Nizamuddin mosque to spread coronavirus infection*, <https://www.altnews.in/video-of-sufi-ritual-falsely-viral-as-mass-sneezing-in-nizamuddin-mosque-to-spread-coronavirus-infection/> [access: 10.06.2020].

³⁵ B. Perrigo, *It Was Already Dangerous to Be Muslim in India. Then Came the Coronavirus*, <https://time.com/5815264/coronavirus-india-islamophobia-coronajihad/> [access: 26.05.2020].

³⁶ D. Harichandan, *Cartoonscape – March 26, 2020*, <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/cartoon/cartoonscape-march-26-2020/article31167023.ece> [access: 29.05.2020].

³⁷ B. Perrigo, op.cit.

bers *Tablīghī Jamā'at* and spreading to the entire Muslim community will be counterproductive"³⁸.

Indian Muslims overnight have become the culprits responsible for the spread of coronavirus in India.

#BioJihad #PopulationJihad #LoveJihad

In the public debate, there is more and more talk of *bio jihād* or *corona jihād*. This is just the latest in a series of different forms of giving the Arabic word *jihād* new, pejorative meanings. Nowadays, the more and more popular Hindu nationalist message is that *population jihād* (#PopulationJihad) is posing a major threat to the Hindu majority³⁹. According to this narrative, Muslims are trying to transform India into a Muslim country, maintaining a high rate of their population. Nationalist and religious circles also warn against *love jihād* (#LoveJihad or #RomeoJihad) cultivated by fanatical Muslim men. *Love jihād* basically means attracting women from non-Muslim families (mainly Hindus and Christians) so that they convert to Islam and power the Muslim community called *ummah*⁴⁰. However, of all conspiracy theories, *corona jihād* is by far the most outrageous because its political fuel is the epidemic and deaths of the people.

Conclusion and remarks for further research

This article is not an exhaustive elaboration of the topic at hand, but merely a brief sketch of the novel phenomenon of growing Islamophobia in times of coronavirus. As the infectious disease broke out in India, it was not perceived as an entity spreading organically throughout the country, but rather as a sinister plot devised by Indian Muslims to intentionally infect the Hindus population. At no point did BJP politicians endeavor to resolve the conflict, instead, they nourished it and eagerly participated in fuelling *Hindutva*-oriented movements. In this article, I argue that the politicization of the coronavirus outbreak against religious minorities is the most visible aspect of the BJP-led response towards it⁴¹.

³⁸ 101 Former Civil Servants Write to State CMs on Continued Harassment of Muslims, <https://thewire.in/communalism/coronavirus-muslims-ias-open-letter> [access: 20.04.2020].

³⁹ *Struggle for Hindu Existence*, <https://hinduexistence.org/category/population-jihad/> [access: 29.05.2020].

⁴⁰ *Love Jihad*, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/topic/love-jihad> [access: 29.05.2020].

⁴¹ C.J. Werleman, *An Apartheid Era Begins in India, As Does a Moral Dilemma for its Allies*, <https://bylinetimes.com/2020/04/23/an-apartheid-era-begins-in-india-as-does-a-moral-dilemma-for-its-allies/> [access: 26.05.2020].

The *modus operandi* of Islamophobes in India follows a well-established pattern of fake news, morphed images, outright fabrications, and lies⁴². There are ample evidence that blaming Muslims for the pandemic has become a deadly sport, with one fake news story or video after another going viral across the social media⁴³. While hate speech against Muslims has already been a common practice in India, the research findings suggest that the outbreak of the pandemic has given it renewed vigour. Undoubtedly, it entails a long-term bearing of continuous hate speech, further stereotypization, and even acts of physical violence⁴⁴. For Muslims, the COVID-19 pandemic provided yet another *raison d'être* for the country's militant Hindu nationalists to discriminate against and denigrate them. As stated by JNU Professor J. Ali, "islamophobia has been transposed onto the Coronavirus issue"⁴⁵. These alarming developments have prompted condemnation around the world. While New Delhi has shown little concern for criticism flowing over from Europe and America toward its human rights violations, it must be alarmed by the unfamiliar howls of rage emanating from Arab states of the Persian Gulf and the rest of the Middle East. Most importantly, as the world's largest democracy and second largest population is in the grips of fighting a virus, the government does not cease to fan the flames of communal polarization to march the country ever closer to taking on the identity of a *Hindū Raṣṭra*. If the current trend toward Indian Muslims continues, the odds are that Islamophobia will soon cross another dangerous tipping point.

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⁴² S. Roy, *Hate Goes Viral in India*, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/05/hate-goes-viral-in-india/> [access: 15.06.2020].

⁴³ C.J. Werleman, *The Most Dangerous Place for a Muslim During the COVID-19 Pandemic is India*, <https://insidearabia.com/the-most-dangerous-place-for-a-muslim-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-is-india/> [access: 29.05.2020].

⁴⁴ F. Nabeel, M. Raashed, *The Hindutva Aspect of COVID-19 Outbreak in India*, <https://cscr.pk/pdf/perspectives/The-Hindutva-Aspect-of-COVID-19-Outbreak-in-India.pdf> [access: 29.05.2020].

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Hindu-Muslim Relations in Times of Coronavirus

Summary

The history of Hindu-Muslim conflicts in India is century-long. Ever mounting hostility of Hindus has been the primary reason why Muslim minorities in India have fallen victim to the increasing levels of systemic violence. COVID-19 has undergone another dangerous mutation and took Islamophobia to the whole new level. Instead of uniting in the face of danger, we are observing the

growing social divisions on the Hindu-Muslim line and the galloping increase in distrust between the two. Are Muslims terrorists who are engaged in *jihād* using the virus as a weapon? Such superficial judgement is not in the interest of anyone. Nuanced understanding of the novel witch-hunt against Muslims is essential before jumping to any hasty conclusion. The present study aims to explore the consequences of the pandemic for Muslim communities in India, as well as conspiracy theories such as *corona jihād*, *bio jihād*, *love jihād* or *population jihād* that began to flourish amid the coronavirus crisis.

Keywords: Hindu Muslim Relations, India, coronavirus, COVID-19, conflict, nationalism, hindutva

Индусско-мусульманские отношения во время коронавируса

Резюме

История индусско-мусульманских конфликтов в Древней Индии. Постоянно усиливающаяся враждебность индусов была главной причиной того, что мусульманские меньшинства в Индии стали жертвами растущего количества систематического насилия. COVID-19 подвергся другой опасной мутации на наших глазах и принял исламофобию в своем строковом коде. Вместо того, чтобы объединиться перед лицом опасности, мы наблюдаем растущие социальные разногласия по линии индусско-мусульманских отношений и рост недоверия между ними. Используют ли мусульманские террористы, которые участвуют в джихаде, вирус как оружие? Такое поверхностное суждение не в интересах кого-либо. Прежде чем делать какие-либо поспешные выводы, необходимо детально понимать роман «Охота на ведьм против мусульман». Настоящее исследование направлено на изучение последствий пандемии для мусульманских общин в Индии, а также на теории заговора, такие как корона-джихад, био-джихад, любовный джихад или демографический джихад, которые начали процветать в условиях кризиса коронавируса.

Ключевые слова: Индия, коронавирус, COVID-19, теория заговора, индусско-мусульманские отношения, конфликт, мусульмане, индуистский национализм