# ANTI-MUSLIM PREJUDICES IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT

## ADDRESSING AND DISPELLING THEM

By

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Dedicated to the memory of
Swami Vivekananda
who said -
"I see in my mind's eye the future perfect India rising out of this chaos and strife, glorious and invincible, with Vedanta brain and Islam body."
And
Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose,
Who led an army comprising Indians of diverse faiths, with several Muslims, such as Shahnawaz Khan and Mahboob Ahmad at senior ranks

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#### What This Book Is All About

This book is not an academic work in the conventional sense of the term insofar as the fact that its simplistic tenor is directed not towards the intellectually elite but even a layperson. In this connection, I would request the readers to pardon the frequent usage of the first person. This is a subject that ignites a lot of passion, irrespective of the school of thought one subscribes to in this connection, but this book seeks a balanced approach. It does not seek to condone or brush under the carpet wrongdoings by Muslims or refuse to acknowledge that the Islamic world needs to undergo much introspection and reform. Nor does it endorse ludicrous conspiracy theories.

However, it seeks to expose the negative fashion in which Muslims as a collectivity are baselessly viewed by very many people, including by those who ironically have close Muslim friends or especially in the Indian context, those non-Muslims who may pray in Sufi shrines. The book seeks to bust myths about Muslims as people, and Islam as a faith, and expose that the supposedly objectionable facets of the religion or community are hardly exclusive to the same. The reader would have to read this book with a thorough sense of objectivity and open-mindedness, without being sentimental or without taking his/her own preconceived notions against Islam and/or Muslims as the basis to evaluate the book. In short, please don't read the book with a sense of bellige rence, and please peruse it, rather than skim through it.

Terrorism in the name of Islam is a major challenge the world faces today, but is Islam, a religion dating back to the 7<sup>th</sup> century, mainly responsible for this 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century phenomenon or do geopolitical developments have a major role to play? Is terrorism, or even terrorism justifying itself on religious grounds, a Muslim monopoly?

Are social practices like sacrificing animals, polygamy and marrying cousins exclusively Islamic practices?

Just because we encounter some literature denigrating Islam available online, offering cash prizes to those who can disprove the same, does it mean that we should believe all of it on face value?

It is true that Saudi Arabia has some of the most regressive laws, though of late, one is seeing some reforms even in that country. But have all Muslim-majority countries emulated the Saudi model? Do all or even most of them deprive non-Muslims of their right to freedom of religion or deprive women of their civil liberties?

And in the Indian context, is it fair to presume that a vast majority of Indian Muslims owe their allegiance to Pakistan, and is it fair to simply assume that those who are patently not like that, are exceptions to the general norm? And is Pakistan actually as bad for its religious minorities as many of us imagine it to be?

If we are indeed prejudiced against Muslims as a collectivity, what are the reasons for the same? In the Indian context, they are four-fold – a communal consciousness among both Hindus and Muslims fostered under British colonial rule that portrayed clashes between Hindu and Muslim rulers in the medieval period as religious clashes, the partition of India leading to the creation of Pakistan in a bloody fashion, Pakistan's belligerence with India and the terrorism perpetrated in the name of Islam globally and particularly in India.

Muslims also do need to understand that the prejudices against them need to be combated firmly, but coolly. By choosing to see those misunderstanding them as their downright enemies instead of those that can be engaged with as rational human beings (true, there are those who are very deeply prejudiced, but not everyone is), or by seeking solace in self-delusional conspiracy theories, they are harming themselves. I am a Hindu by faith and I have personally convinced several people to change their negative perceptions of Muslims, if not drastically then at least to a good extent. In fact, Muslims should not allow the fact that many non-Muslims are biased against them to exhibit the same degree of prejudice the other way, and they should be equally open-minded about understanding other religions, rather than advancing contentions employed by so-called scholars of comparative religion like Zakir Naik! The issue of Muslim communalism in India is something I plan to write a separate book on, but for now, I shall focus on enumerating the prejudices many of us, non-Muslims, especially Indian Hindus, have about Muslims. In this book, I have tried to cover all the major talking points and have made references to other material, online and in famous books by eminent personalities, which can be accessed in support of my arguments. I would encourage readers to go online and read the online articles and watch videos mentioned in the footnotes of this book, and indeed, if they so desire, they may indeed buy the books I have referred to. Perhaps, this is the first book of its kind exclusively dedicated to dispelling anti-Muslim prejudices in the Indian context in the most simplistic terms. Also, some may question my dedicating the book to Swami Vivekananda, pointing to some of his quotations taken out of context to suggest that he was against Islam and/or Muslims. However, I have disproved the same in a piece I have written. 1 The term 'Islamism' in the book is used to refer to a totalitarian ideology of imposing supposedly Islamic values and having hostile attitude to those professing other religions (and 'Islamists' to people following this line of thought), and is not to be confused with Islam as a religion per se.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Karmanye Thadani, 'Swami Vivekananda was not against Islam or Muslims', available at http://theindianeconomist.com/misuse-of-swami-vivekananda-by-extreme-elements-in-the-saffron-brigade/

#### Introduction

In the last so many months, several incidents that have taken place deserve our attention. The shooting down of the chief of the Ranvir Sena, a Bihar-based upper caste Hindu terrorist group, that has killed many innocent Dalits in the name of fighting Naxalism (the Laxmanpur-Bathe massacre in 1997 is significant in this connection, for which death sentences had been awarded to the perpetrators), was indeed a major development that ought to have reminded our nation that terrorism or even terrorism perpetuated in the name of religion is certainly not a Muslim monopoly (though terrorist attacks by Muslims hit the nerve centres like Delhi and Mumbai and hence get much more media attention), just as the attack on a former Indian Army officer in London by Khalistani terrorists, besides other such fortunately unsuccessful plots by Khalistani terrorists in India itself, should have.

Another recent development that deserves attention in this context are the decrees issued by a Khap Panchayat declaring that women ought not to use cellular phones or ride bicycles or engage in love marriages, besides several honour killings of couples engaging in inter-caste or *intra-gotra* marriages that have been carried out, showing that the Taliban is not the only entity on this planet with such a regressive agenda, and Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army, an ultra-right wing Christian armed group in Uganda or the bill mandating the death penalty for homosexuals in that country motivated by religious reasons, too should have reminded us of the same. Coming back to India, a Dalit being killed for trying to access a public hand pump and a Dalit MP being denied entry in a temple, both being fairly recent developments, should remind us, Hindus, that we need to introspect before boasting about being liberal and progressive.

Not too long ago, a Muslim who happens to be the son of an Indian Army officer who served in the 1971 war and has won several medals, and who served in the Army himself, was allegedly subjected to communal slurs by someone from the staff of an airline in an airport over a not-so-serious issue, and this has brought the question of the prevalent communal divide in our country at the forefront yet again, just as the issue of the Allahabadi Mosque/Pandav remains issue, or even more recently, the Hindu-Muslim violence in parts of Uttar Pradesh has, though it is certainly true that India has come a long way since the early 1990s, and there are and have always been many Hindus and Muslims who are not only not prejudiced against any religious group but are ever-ready to fight tooth and nail to eliminate such prejudices (I belong to this very category, and am only one among the people constituting this huge section of our society, though some Hindus of this variety also sometimes subconsciously exhibit prejudice in their statements, such as "He is a Muslim but he is a nice person", the 'but' implying some inherent contradiction between the two attributes, which one needs to take cognizance of and refrain from doing!), and there are even those who do have some prejudices on both sides but they do not harbour extreme hatred or support violence.

Jawaharlal Nehru had once stated that while communalism may appear to be a giant, it has feet of clay and the nation can be exorcised (yes, 'exorcised' was the word he used and it's quite an apt one, for communalism is indeed a demon) of it if the lies and half-truths on which it rests are busted. Communalism in India exists among the Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians in its own ways, but this particular book shall focus on the prejudices, we, Indian non-Muslims, particularly Hindus, have about Muslims, especially Indian Muslims. A major reason for a boost in such prejudices is the approach of the Western media, which has indeed exhibited an anti-Muslim bias in reporting (please see the annexure) and another is the fact that many progressive and peace-loving Muslims would simply want to evade the fact that these wrongdoings have a basis in their religion, even though a distorted version of the same, or they would like to evade the truth by seeking solace in baseless conspiracy theories or instead of giving a clear and coherent response to eliminate a prejudice against their own community, they would start bashing

others, leading to mudslinging matches and still others would give unsatisfactory answers, and just beat about the bush making vague statements signifying that all religions are good and there are good and bad people in every community, but very few would actually give logical responses. I am not a Muslim (I am a Hindu, and in fact, I belong to the Sindhi Hindu community, which was largely displaced from their homeland during the partition riots, my paternal grandparents being no exception, and a good many of my relatives even from my maternal side, who are Punjabi Hindus, underwent the same fate) but owing to my strong commitment to impartiality, I have, like many other non-Muslims in India and elsewhere, made an effort in this direction. No, I am not silent about the wrongdoings of Muslims and I am equally outspoken against them, and I do plan to write about Muslim communalism in India ('communalism' in India specifically refers to socio-political solidarity in the name of religion that often clashes with the legitimate rights and interests of other religious communities) too. I do not sympathize with anyone who kills innocent civilians and I advocate the death penalty for such people (though I am a firm believer in human rights, I feel that it is only appropriate for the ICCPR to permit countries to provide for the death penalty for serious offences in the rarest of the rare cases, as it does). I support a uniform civil code in India and I have written an article about the same<sup>2</sup>, and in that very article, besides others, I have also dealt with the pain of the Kashmiri Hindus; so, I should not be mistaken for being a pseudo-secularist.

However, not being biased in favour of Muslims doesn't mean we should be biased against them (far too many people fail to make this very simple distinction), and the lies and half-truths that generate an unwarranted sense of resentment, even if not hatred, for a particular class of people constituting a sizable fraction of the population of our country and the world at large, need to be busted. Though many of the prejudices enumerated are prevalent universally, this series focuses on them from the standpoint of Hindus in India. References shall also be frequently made to the saffron brigade, and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Karmanye Thadani, 'I Support A Uniform Civil Code and I Am Not Communal', available at http://www.youthkiawaaz.com/2012/06/i-support-a-uniform-civil-code-and-i-am-not-communal/

though even that is actually not a defined homogeneous entity and has several relatively moderate elements, the references to it in this series are with respect to its more extreme elements. Also, the reference to 'Muslims' in this piece is to people who identify themselves as such or are identified as such by others, owing to socio-cultural reasons, such as their name, and so, namesake Muslims (who may well be atheists or agnostics) too are included within the scope of the usage of the term here; in any case, they too are victims of prejudice, for those prejudiced hardly tend to make any distinction between practising and non-practising Muslims.

### Clearing the Historical Record Impartially

Having examined what this series is all about, let us straight away address the prejudices. The history after the advent of the Muslims, to the communal Hindus, simply means forced conversions and demolition of Hindu temples (which indeed did take place and I would assert that those Muslims or even Hindus denying or ignoring these occurrences are equally biased, but that's beside the point), overlooking how Hindu rulers like Mihirakula and Pushyamitra Shunga persecuted Buddhists and destroyed their places of worship or how the Shaivites and Vaishnavites looted and/or destroyed each other's temples<sup>3</sup> or how there were Muslim rulers who gave royal grants to support templebuilding (no, Akbar wasn't the only one, and another prominent example was Safdar Jang from Awadh, and in fact, even his descendants, or even Ibrahim Adil Shah from Bijapur<sup>4</sup>). In fact, even the Portuguese rulers in Goa forcibly converted Hindus to Christianity and demolished Hindu temples and in Europe too, Christians have indeed had a long history of persecuting Jews. Besides, in the Indian context, while there were indeed conversions to Islam by force and also because of the discrimination meted out to Hindus by the Muslim rulers (and those denying this, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, are also biased in my opinion), many conversions were also owing to the influence of Sufi saints and to emancipate oneself from the caste system. In any case, it does not make any sense to stigmatize today's more than 140 million Indian Muslims for acts committed by some Muslim rulers (not Muslim people in general) centuries ago.

Historians have suggested that a total solar eclipse or even a star explosion may have taken place then.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> To cite another example of an act outraging religious sentiments in India's pre-Islamic history, one may turn to this passage in Kalhana's *Rajatarangini* referring to how Harsha uprooted the idol of the local Kashmiri deity Parihasakeshavam –

<sup>&</sup>quot;Deep darkness spread all over the land even during the day."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> "Ibrahim Adil Shah (ruler of Bijapur) gave up wearing jewels and adopted the rudraksh of the Hindu holy man. In his songs he used highly Sanskritised language to shower equal praise upon Saraswati, Prophet Muhammad and the Sufi saint Gesudaraz." (source: 'Naipaul's musings on Vijayanagar misleading', available at <a href="http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/hyderabad/Naipauls-musings-on-Vijayanagar-misleading/articleshow/16358501.cms?intenttarget=no">http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/hyderabad/Naipauls-musings-on-Vijayanagar-misleading/articleshow/16358501.cms?intenttarget=no</a>)

For these Hindus, Shivaji and Rana Pratap are not hailed just as brave warriors but as men who fought for a Hindu cause against the 'foreign' Muslim invaders (even though the Mughals had both adopted India as their home, and Muslim rulers with small kingdoms too resisted Mughal invasions). Little do they realize that both Shivaji and Rana Pratap had Muslims in large numbers in their armies and, in fact, in Shivaji's case, the person who manned his artillery was a Muslim, and also that the Mughal army had a large number of Hindus - in fact, the attacks against Rana Pratap and Shivaji were respectively commanded by Man Singh and Jai Singh, both of whom were Rajputs. Also, the very idea that the Muslims per se ruled India is erroneous (Jaswant Singh rightly points out in his book on Jinnah that we seldom refer to British rule over India as Christian rule, though the British did promote Christianity), for many Hindus were nobles in the courts of Muslim rulers in the Mughal period and even in the Sultanate period under some rulers like Mohammed bin Tughlaq (and in the Arab world too, rulers like Salahadin gave Jews and Christians high positions of power), and there were Hindu rulers allying with the Muslim emperors, who were much better off than the average Muslim peasant. In fact, in the context of Rana Sanga, he had collaborated with nobles of Afghan descent like Daulat Khan Lodi to invite Babar to defeat Ibrahim Lodi and when Babar decided to stay on, the Rajputs and Afghan nobles put up a united front against Babar; so, viewing such conflicts from the evelens of religion is not appropriate.

Also, even if we overlook the Aryan invasion theory, the Kushans, Shakas, Parthians and Indo-Greeks did come to India from outside and assimilate with the local culture. True, they embraced the local religions<sup>5</sup>, but we don't consider them foreigners for they adopted this country as their own. As has been mentioned earlier, religious intolerance did exist even among local rulers before the advent of Islam in India – that doesn't mean we classify them as foreigners.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Though even in the religious context, there was much plurality with Athenian deities, also portrayed on Kushan coins, as pointed out by Shailendra Bhandare in his essay *Gods on Gold*.

In fact, the whole idea of portraying the Hindu civilization as inferior by many Muslim rulers in India was a result of a desire to dominate the indigenous population (it was the same for the British who put up sign-boards with statements like "Dogs and Indians are not allowed"), but before the conquests by Muslim rulers, at least **the Arabs were much in awe of India**, as an essay by the progressive Muslim public intellectual Arif Mohammed Khan, respected even by critics of Islam like Arun Shourie, in his (Khan's) book *Quran: Text and Context* brings out, which even mentions how an Arab thinker sought to portray idol-worship by Hindus as Hindus' using the idol as some sort of *qibla* or focus-point, which is what gives Muslims the direction to pray, and he asserted that Hindus very well knew that idols of stone were not God Himself, something men like Vivekananda and Radhakrishnan were to say centuries later!

Likewise, the saffron brigade would hardly acknowledge the contribution of nationalist Muslims (such as Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Asaf Ali, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Ashfaqullah Khan, Maulana Barkatullah, Mohammed Currim Chagla, Badruddin Tyabji and Shahnawaz Khan – and many of these were highly devout about their faith, and Maulana Azad is acknowledged as having been one of the greatest scholars of Islam in the world, who pointed to how all religions have the same humanitarian essence, citing Quranic verses, in his highly acclaimed work Tarjuman-ul-Quran) in the freedom struggle and would only focus on the Muslim League, the communal party that partitioned the country, though there were elements within that party too that opposed the partition. In 1942, 75,000 Muslims cutting across party affiliation had gathered in Delhi before the Cripps Mission and shouted slogans against the partition of India, which had been perhaps the largest mass gathering in Delhi till then. 6 In fact, the interview of

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> For more on this, one can refer to Maulana Azad's autobiography *India Wins* Freedom (even otherwise an excellent book) and Rizwan Qaiser's book 'Resisting Colonialism and Communal Politics: Maulana Azad and the Making of the Indian Nation'.

Maulana Azad given to the journalist Shorish Kashmiri in 1946 is a must-read<sup>7</sup>, in which in spite of his clearly visible chauvinism about his faith (which he laudably did not conceal to appease Hindus), he praised Hindus as being open-minded to embrace schools of thought from the world over, such as Marxism, and rejected the idea that Hindus were basically intolerant and Muslims would be a vulnerable minority in independent India, especially if it is not partitioned, and more importantly, brilliantly prophesied that if Pakistan were to come into being, it would face secessionist movements, starting with one by Bengalis in East Pakistan that would definitely succeed and he went on to say that Pakistan would become a military dictatorship, a hub of religious extremism, and subservient to foreign powers, besides have hostile relations with India, costing the subcontinent dear, all of which has proved to be remarkably accurate!

Also, it may be noted that the Hindu Mahasabha's anti-Muslim diatribe and errors of judgment by the Congress leadership also contributed to the partition of India. The Hindu Mahasabha as a party (its individual leaders who were also Congress leaders notwithstanding) never opposed British imperialism, and in its early years, even thanked the British for having liberated India from Muslim rule. Men like Bhagat Singh and Subhash Chandra Bose had openly condemned the Hindu Mahasabha; yet, Hindu rightists portray these men as their icons, only because the latter left the Congress and the former was never in it (though this is not to suggest that I am a camp-follower of today's Congress or even a basher of the BJP per se).

Bhagat Singh was a self-proclaimed communist who was ideologically opposed to religion per se, and his organization had a clear stand of not aligning with any communal party, including the Hindu Mahasabha.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> 'Maulana Abul Kalam Azad: 'The Man Who Knew The Future of Pakistan Before Its Creation', available at http://www.newage.islam.com/articledetails.aspx?ID=2139. He has also made some of these predictions in his autobiography *India Wins Freedom* published in 1957, and the authenticity of the passages containing his predictions in that account is indeed unquestionable.

Speaking of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, he was secular to the core and he was very critical of Hindu communalists who made sweeping negative generalizations about Muslims. In a speech he delivered in January 1940 (before he left India to join the Second World War), he praised the Ahrars, a Muslim group in Punjab, for rising against the British when the Congress leadership was deliberating, and said of the Hindu communalists – "Nevertheless, there are people-and stay-at-homes at that-who do not scruple to cast aspersions on the patriotism of Indian Muslims as a body."<sup>8</sup>

Netaji's grand-nephew Sugata Bose laments-

"The Hindu right lauds his military heroism, ignoring his deep commitment to Hindu-Muslim unity and the rights of religious minorities." 9

In fact, Savarkar, the most prominent leader of the Hindu Mahasabha in the 1940s and thereafter in his life-time, had supported the partition of India and as Amartya Sen points out in his book *The Argumentative Indian*, he had been speculating such a possibility even before Jinnah suggested it, as Savarkar felt the country would be better off without Muslims. Much as he is glorified by the Hindu rightists, Savarkar had written a mercy petition to the British while he was in jail in the Andamans seeking to be released and subtly apologizing for rising against the Empire, and on his return to mainland India, he opposed Gandhiji's Quit India Movement and did not undertake any activity against British imperialism. Though some contend that he suggested to Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose to ally with the Axis Powers to fight the British, there is no conclusive evidence of the same.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Cited in Sugata Bose, 'His Majesty's Opponent – Subhas Chandra Bose and India's Struggle against Empire', p. 172

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Sugata Bose, 'His Majesty's Opponent – Subhas Chandra Bose and India's Struggle against Empire', p.326

To digress a bit, some clarifications about Gandhi and Nehru would also be in order here. While both of them have indeed been subjected to much unjustified criticism, we shall focus here only on the allegation of them being Muslim-appearers.

In this context, it may be mentioned that it is a piece of false propaganda that Mahatma Gandhi was overly generous to the Muslims (when the partition riots, not to be confused with the Direct Action Day riots preceding the same, erupted, the first place he visited was Noakhali, where Hindus were being massacred) and happily yielded to the partition, or that he was being generous by the insistence of the payment of 550 million rupees to Pakistan, for it was a lawfully ordained sum to be paid (had India not paid, Pakistan would have filed a case against India in the International Court of Justice, and it must be understood from the legal point of view that Pakistan had attacked the sovereign princely state of Jammu and Kashmir in 1948, before it became a part of India; hence, the war had never been waged against India in that sense). Gandhi was bashed by both the Hindu Mahasabha and Muslim League of being biased in favour of the community they did not claim to represent – a price one has to pay for being truly impartial. Also, it must be pointed out that Hindu extremists had made attempts on Gandhiji's life even in the 1930s much before there was really any question of the partition, and much scholastic research has been done on this subject (an excellent book on this is Let's Kill Gandhi, and though it's written by someone from the mahatma's lineage, it is remarkably objective, acknowledging the role of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose in the freedom struggle; however, an even better book in Hindi is Gandhi ki Shahadat by one Mr. Fernandes), but which has failed to reach a large mass of laypersons.

Also, a good many people blame Nehru for rejecting Gandhi's idea of abdicating power in favour of the Muslim League, which he did reject (Gandhi's proposal at this juncture was impractical, for ultra-extremist Muslims were already after Jinnah for giving them what they perceived was a moth-eaten Pakistan in terms of size, and an attempt was made

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