



Building Peace in Challenging Times: Peace and Community Engagement between Hindu-Muslim in Post-Independent India

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ABSTRACT

In post-independent India, fostering peace and community engagement between Hindus and Muslims has been both a challenge and a necessity. This study analyses the various efforts and initiatives to promote harmony and mutual understanding between these two major religious communities. It highlights grassroots movements, government interventions, and the crucial roles of civil society. Civil society has been instrumental in these peacebuilding efforts, often stepping in where government initiatives fall short. Their projects range from providing legal aid to victims of communal violence to overcoming the differences among members of both communities. This study also explores the challenges faced by civil society organizations in promoting peace in independent India. The study analyzes key historical events shaping Hindu-Muslim relations and examines speeches and writings to identify themes in peacebuilding efforts.

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Introduction

Community engagement refers to building relationships with different communities to achieve sustainable dialogue and discourse. It emphasizes the significance of community interactions to promote a sense of belonging and cooperation (Borealis, 2023).

Another definition describes community engagement as a strategic process that aims to work with identified groups of people. This group can be related to geographic proximity, special interest, and common interest. Community engagement aims to address issues affecting the groups' lives (Pennsylvania State University, 2024). Community engagement involves different communities and organizations that work together to achieve social justice and bring transformation, and it also involves establishing peace between communities (Humanitarian Practice Network, 2023). Community engagement includes local organizations, individuals, and groups working to address community issues like social, economic, and environmental (Pennsylvania State University, 2024; Magdalene, 2020).

The root of the conflict between Hindus and Muslims can be seen during the colonial era. During the colonial era, social reforms occurred within Hindu and Muslim communities. Social organizations like Brahma Samaj under the leadership of Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1828) and Prarthana Samaj (1867), founded by Atmaram Pandurang, focused on reforms within Hindu society; however, these organizations were influenced by the Enlightenment ideas and Western reforms movement. These organizations were involved in social reforms like uplifting women and abolishing Sati (The practice of Widow immolation), Child marriage, and caste discrimination (Chattopadhyay, 1996). Arya Samaj, founded by Swami Dayanand Saraswati in 1875, also aimed to reform Hindu society. He blamed the Hindu religious text for the Hindu caste system, except the Vedas. Therefore, he focuses on the revival of Vedic texts, which can give new life to Hindu society. Arya Samaj aimed to purify Hindu society by removing inhuman practices in Hinduism, such as the caste system, child marriage, and the practice of Sati. Along with social reforms, Arya Samaj started the Shuddi movement, which aimed to reconvert Christians and Muslims, and it was known as Ghar Wapasi. That led to religious tension in India. Arya Samaj did not involve only Ghar Wapasi (Homecoming) of converted Christians and Muslims but also involved in cow protection. The Gaurakhsini Sabha (A cow protection society) was founded in 1882 by Dayanand Saraswati. The cow has been considered a sacred animal to Hindus and has cultural significance. However, it took a political turn in the late 19th century and became a symbol of Hindu revivalism and resistance to the influence of Christianity and Islam. Dayanand himself described cow

slaughter as a sin and urged followers to protect the cow. The activities of Gaurakshini Sabha contributed to communal tensions. Sabha's campaign against cow slaughter directly targeted Muslims. In 1893, a communal riot resulted in the deaths of 100 people, which was the consequence of the cow protection movement (Metcalf & Metcalf, 2006 Pp. 153-154 Jordens, 1978).

The reformist movement was not confined solely to the Hindu community. In the late 19th century, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan spearheaded the Aligarh Movement, which sought to advance modern education among Muslims. To achieve this objective, he established the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College in Aligarh in 1875, which later evolved into Aligarh Muslim University in 1920. This institution, was primary, where he mixed scientific education with Islamic values. He was also involved in social reforms, including the upliftment of women and the abolition of Purdah. However, the primary aim was to promote modern education among Muslims, but it also contributed to Hindu-Muslim tensions in several ways. Aligarh emphasized the separate educational and socio-political development for Muslims, which fostered a sense of distinct community identity, different from the Hindu majority. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan articulated that Hindus and Muslims were distinct nations, and the British supported the movement. Therefore, it had close ties with the British colonial administration, and advocacy for Muslim interests often caused tensions with the Indian National Congress (Metcalf & Metcalf, 2006, pp. 160-161, Blackwell, 2008). Further, the British exploited the differences between Hindus and Muslims during colonial India on various occasions—British policies like the Bengal partition in 1905 and Morley Minto reforms in 1909 further divided society (Keen, 1998). At the beginning of the 20th century, communal organizations like the Muslim League 1906 and Hindu Mahasabha 1915 took place to represent the interests of their respective communities, which impacted the relations between both communities (Dar, 2016; Bandyopadhyay, 2017). However, leaders like Gandhi and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad tried to unite Hindu Muslims during colonial India (Pant, 2010; Hameed, 2014). However, their efforts were not sufficient to prevent Indian partition on religious lines in 1947.

Post Partition: Riots in India

After the partition, two nations came into existence: India and Pakistan. Indian leaders of independence, mostly Congress leaders, did not prioritize any religion when it came to the formation of the state. On the other hand, Pakistan established itself as a state, which was the result of the two-nation theory and, therefore, a nation for Muslims.

Hindus are the largest population, and the Muslim community is the second largest group. It was expected that after the partition, the gap would be reduced between Hindus and Muslims, but conflict is still very much visible between both communities.

Several prominent scholars have described how the partition of India inspired or contributed to the ongoing conflict in the country. Ashish Nandy argues that partition has left a lasting culture of violence that has continued to fuel communal tensions and conflict. Partition is responsible for the breakdown of the trust between communities, which is still there among the people of both communities (Nandy, 1983). Christopher Jafferlot argues that the partition of India fuelled a sense of insecurity among the Hindu community in India, and the Hindu nationalist group capitalized on this sense of insecurity after the partition (Jafferlot, 1996).

However, no significant communal disturbances occurred until 1961, when the Jabalpur riots broke out. Unlike any electoral competition, it was a conflict between a Hindu and a Muslim bidi manufacturer. However, due to the influence of the A.B.V.P. student wing of Rashtriya Sewak Sangh on the media, another interpretation of this riot came out in the Hindi newspaper was that A Muslim boy (the son of a Muslim Bidi manufacturer) raped a Hindu Girl (the daughter of a Hindu bidi Manufacturer). From here, riots broke out in eastern India -Rourkela, Jamshedpur, and Ranchi in 1964,1965 and 1967. Since then, riots and conflicts between Hindus and Muslims have become tools to create differences between the country's political leaders (Juliette Galonnier, 2013; Engineer,1992).

In 1989, a riot broke out between Hindus and Muslims in the Bhagalpur district of Bihar, and it continued for two months (Gupta and Sharma1996). The Bhagalpur riots were one of the worst communal riots since independence, and this riot is significant because police and district administration were with communal forces. Two months before, there was tension between Hindus and Muslims on Muharram and Bisheri Puja in the town. However, the government did not act because elections were around the corner. The congress government in the state wanted to see cracking down too strongly on communal tensions because it could risk alienating religious vote banks before the elections. People's Union for Democratic Rights started its intervention in January 1990 when a fact-finding team investigated the first phase of the riots. After a few months, a report named Bhagalpur Riots was published (Peoples Union for Democratic Rights, 1996, pp.1-2).

Another riot that is very important to examine is the Godhra Riots (2002)¹. Godhra riots broke out in 2002 in Gujarat, which took the lives of thousands of people. It started with a train burning incident when 59 Hindus were killed returning from Ayodhya. Bhartiya Janta party was in power in Gujarat, and Narendra Modi was the chief minister. In response to the train burning incident, thousands of people were killed in riots, mostly Muslims; there was the involvement of the Hindu Militant organization Bajrang Dal after the riots. Due to communal riots, the B.J.P. continued winning elections under the leadership of Modi in the state. Similarly, he adopted the same strategy during his election campaign in 2014 and 2019 as a prime minister candidate and managed to win both times. Under his prime ministership strategy of communal polarisation, it has become a significant tool for political gain at the national level (Jafferlot, 2024).

The politics of riots were not only facilitated by the Bhartiya Janta Party but also by the Indian National Congress, which has been in power for decades both at the state and national levels. The Indian National Congress, just after the partition, portrayed itself as the sole protector of communal harmony and minority rights; however, congress leaders had been involved in the violence many times, but it has ignored its involvement; for example, the congress leader was involved in the Assam Riots(1983) in which thousands of Bengali Muslims were killed it was because Congress was looking its political base among majority community in Assam (Pandey,1990).

After the partition, leaders of the Indian independence movement decided to keep India as a secular state instead of a religious state like Pakistan. Anyone can be Indian regardless of their religion. Nevertheless, just after a decade, tensions between Hindus and Muslims arise in the form of riots. Leaders from different political parties exploited the social differences between Hindus and Muslims for their electoral gain. That has become a barrier to community engagement between the communities.

Work of Non-Governmental Organisations: Community Engagement between Hindus and Muslims

Mob lynching refers to acts of violence carried out by large groups of people against an individual or individuals without following due legal process. The mob takes the law into their own hands based on perceived wrongdoing by the victims, even if the actions were not illegal. It involves offenses against persons or property, both public and private, in the name of a punishment without adhering to any rules of law (Deswal, 2020). When the Bhartiya Janta Party came into power in 2014, lynching cases

¹See also RB Sreekumar (2021) Gujarat Behind the Curtain

increased. To help people who have suffered due to lynchings, Karwan-e-Mohabbat, a civil society organization named Karwan-e-Mohabbat, came into existence. Karwan-e-Mohabbat² (Caravan of Love) is an N.G.O. founded by human rights activist Harsh Mander in 2017. The *Caravan of Love*, also referred to as the *Peace Yatra*, is a nationwide civilian initiative aimed at combating mob lynching and communal or religiously motivated violence. The primary objective of *Karwan-e-Mohabbat* is to mitigate violence by fostering awareness through consciousness-raising efforts. Members associated with the movement offer medical and legal assistance to families impacted by communal conflicts or incidents of mob lynching (Kumar, 2018). In a 2019 interview, Harsh Mander explained that the Karwan journey, which commenced in Nagaon, Assam, on September 4, 2017, and concluded in Porbandar on October 2, 2017, was initiated in response to the growing incidents of intolerance and violence. These cases primarily targeted Muslims, Christians, and Dalits and were perpetrated by Hindu mobs, often incited by rumors of cow slaughter and child trafficking (Scroll, 2019). During the Karwan journey, Harsh Mander observed that the police often fail to register lynching incidents as hate crimes, instead categorizing them as violations of cow protection laws. He also noted that Muslim victims frequently refrain from filing police complaints due to fears that, rather than addressing the lynching, authorities might charge them with cattle transportation offenses. In response, the Karwan's mission is to support families affected by hate and violence in four key ways. First, by seeking legal justice; second, by providing psycho-social care to help families cope with trauma; third, by assisting them in obtaining government compensation and addressing other needs such as education and healthcare; and finally, by supporting them in rebuilding their livelihoods and meeting material needs (Mander, 2017).

Harsh Mander is also part of the "Insaniyat and Aman Citizen Council, " which promotes social solidarity, tolerance, and inclusiveness. It has three main functions: First, it has a rapid action and response team that goes to the spot where any information related to violence comes out and tries to do that fact-finding. After that, it files a report to authorities and civil society. Secondly, the council will organize some activities like film festivals, dialogues, and fairs to make people against communal hatred and create common ground between people. Lastly, the idea of I.A.C.C. is to develop civic leadership in every district and come together against hate and identity-based attacks (Rajsamand,2018). Karwan has also included the three objectives of I.A.C.C. (Mander,2017). Karwan Mohabbat is a group of writers, journalists, photographers, social workers, students, and lawyers who have traveled through Jharkhand,

²See also Harsh Mander (2018) "Reconciliation: Karwan e Mohabbat's Journey of Solidarity through a wounded India"

Rajasthan, Karnataka, Delhi, Western Uttar Pradesh, and Haryana. Karwan also made inquiries into the lives of the surviving victims and met with families who had lost someone during their Karwan journey; most of the affected families were from Dalits and Muslims (Salvi,2018). Aman Biradari is another N.G.O. founded by Harsh Mander in 2008. It works for secular and just India by focusing on developing local-level institutions that strengthen mutual bonds of tolerance. It includes youth and women from diverse backgrounds and faiths to foster fraternity, respect, and peace between people of different religions, castes, and language groups. They also provide livelihood support, legal support, and constitutional knowledge. They use constitutional ideas to frame ideas of tolerance and consolidate interpersonal relations (Aman Biradari Trust, 2018).

In his book "Justice before Reconciliation: Negotiation a New Normal in post-riot Mumbai and Ahmedabad, " Dipankar Gupta compared the Mumbai riots in 1992 and the Ahmedabad Riots in 2002. Hindu mob destroyed the 400-year-old mosque Babri Masjid in the city of Ayodhya in the state of Uttar Pradesh, which led to communal riots in many places in India, including Mumbai in 1992-93, which witnessed a series of bomb blasts. There was not only a loss of life but also a loss of harmony between Hindus and Muslims, and it also created a distrust of Muslims of the Police due to their involvement in the riots, due to which mostly Muslims suffered (Nilesh, 2011). Following the 1992 Mumbai riots, the Mohalla Committee was established by F.T. Khorakiwala, a Muslim businessman, with the assistance of Nirmala Niketan, to help victims secure government compensation. The concept of the Mohalla Committee soon spread to various parts of Mumbai, with committees being formed in 23 sensitive areas, organized by local police stations. The police served as facilitators in the formation and functioning of these committees (Thakkar, 2004). Committee members comprised a diverse range of individuals, including businesspeople, shopkeepers, mill and factory workers, government employees, lawyers, doctors, housewives, and social workers (Korde, 2004). The committee's meetings were held at the local police station, with the station officer presiding over the sessions. That would help victims to regain their trust in the Police, which helped communal forces during riots. Mohalla's committees also helped victims with water, electricity, and other civic needs. Sadly, the number of Hindus in meetings was very low. However, when we compare these Mumbai riots with Gujarat, we get very little hope. Dipankar Gupta argues that in Mumbai, many agencies within the government were sympathetic to the victims. Khorakiwala and Julius Ribeiro set up the Mohalla committee supported by police officers like Satish Sahani. The most significant achievement of the Mohalla committee was to make interaction easier between authorities and Muslims affected by riots.

On the other hand, in the case of Gujarat, there was no administrative support to solve the communal tensions between communities. State machinery was unhelpful to those who made claims on the government for relief (Gupta,2011). Dipankar Gupta was hopeful that initiatives like the Mohalla committee could resolve the tensions between the communities, which did just after the Mumbai riots to some extent. However, he neglected some of the limitations of the Mohalla Committee. Partnership with the Police is a fundamental principle of Mohalla committees. However, there have been many occasions wherein Police find it challenging to treat citizens as equal partners. Also, there have been some police officers, particularly those on the lower rank, backing committees for their self-interest by making members of Mohalla committees their informers about communal tensions due to the lack of adequate local leadership. After effectively working for years, it has also been politicized; people have joined the Mohalla committee to increase their influence in the police administration instead of putting serious effort into communal harmony (Thakker,2004).

Ashutosh Varshney argues that the structure of civic life in a multiethnic society is fundamentally linked to the occurrence or prevention of ethnic violence. Varshney has made two arguments to explain these links: interethnic and interethnic networks of civic engagement³ play very different roles in ethnic conflict. Interethnic networks are agents of peace because they build bridges and manage tensions. However, if communities are organized on interethnic lines and interconnections with other communities are very weak, and then ethnic violence comes into existence (Varshney, 2001, pp. 362-363). Varshney argues that because Calicut had trade associations that had Hindu, Muslim, and Christian officeholders. If the president was from one community, the general secretary was from others, and they were not politicized also. Politics around them did not influence officeholders in trade associations in Calicut, but in the case of the Gujarat riots and Aligarh riots, trade associations failed to establish a distance from politics; therefore, they did not act as a moderating force, and many members of the association took communal stance or remained out of fear. Lastly, educational activities differentiated Calicut from Aligarh. Calicut has film clubs, a famous theatre, and science societies. Reading Room is a unique Kerala institution that fosters deep social engagement between readers from different social and cultural backgrounds. Young people from most communities often gather weekly to read newspapers and political books. These civic engagements help Calicut tackle communal tensions, while in Aligarh's case, their role is not non-existent or political (Varshney, 2001).

³See also Aamna Ahmad (2020) Enhancing civil participation in India.



However, in May 2003, the Marad Massacre took place in Calicut, Kerala, which resulted in the death of eight Hindus. Islamic extremists killed them. A judicial commission investigated the incident and concluded that the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) was directly involved in the massacre (Indian Express,2006). This incident created a sense of distrust and insecurity among the locals (The Hindu,2004). Another communal violence in Calicut took place in 2015 when a member of the Indian Union Muslim League member murdered a member of the democratic youth federation of India. It took a communal shape, and more than 80 Muslim houses were attacked by the communist party of India(M)and raised slogans like 'Go to Pakistan' (Hindustan Times,2016). These kinds of incidents weaken communities' trust in each other, which impacts community relations. It creates an environment of suspicion, miscommunication, and unwillingness to collaborate on any issues. Restoring trust is challenging.

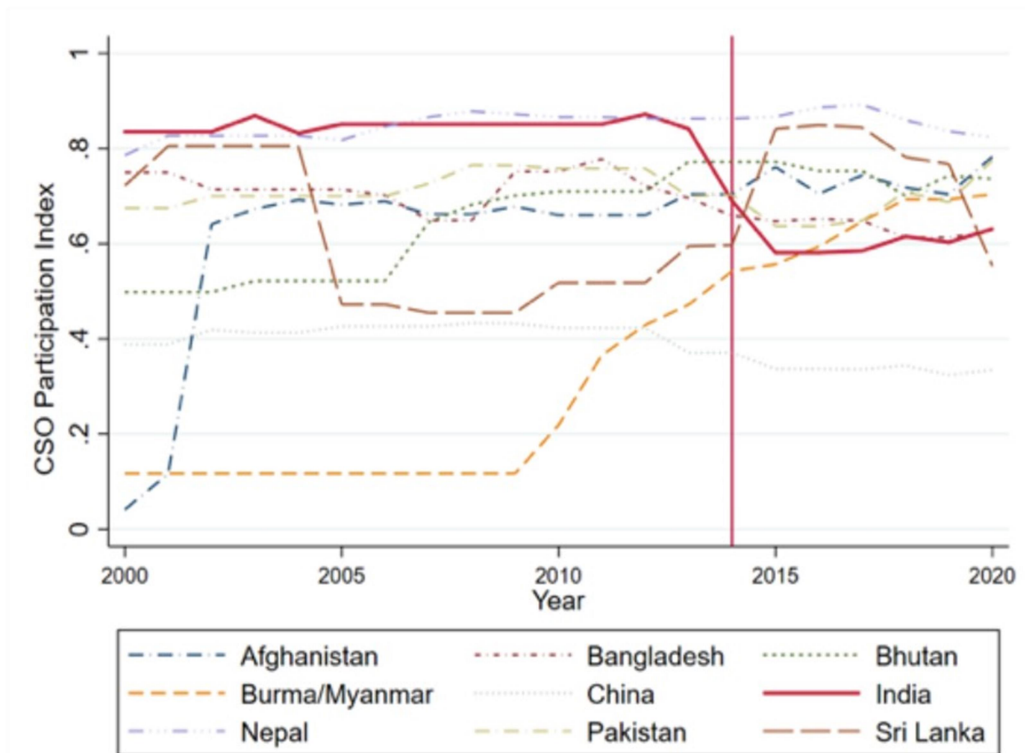
These riots in Calicut have proved that Varshney's conclusion about Calicut raised some serious questions: Why do these communal tensions emerge if intercommunity associations are historically rooted and have been part of society, which was seen as significant factors that have promoted peaceful relations between communities by Varshney?

Civil Society under Attack by the Governments

Civil society organizations encompass a wide range of entities, including community groups, charitable organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), labor unions, indigenous groups, faith-based organizations, and professional associations.India, being a democratic country, allows civil society to work for their interest. However, experts have recently claimed that Indian democratic metrics are deteriorating due to the control of media and academics.

According to V-Dem Data sources, civil society participation was lower during 2011-2016 than in the previous decade.

Figure 1.



Civil Society Participation Index
Source – (V dem data)

Not only has participation in civil society decreased, but there has also been increased use of the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act⁴(amended in 2020) to restrict foreign funding for N.G.O.s. Sedition cases against people who worked in civil society are on the rise. Increases in sedition cases were more than 28% from 2014 to 2020 compared to the last decade (Updhyay & Adhikari, 2021).

On many occasions, Indian Prime Minister Modi proclaimed India a mother of democracy, but his government was suspicious of N.G.O.s and civil society actors. On June 25, 2022, human rights activist Teesta Setalvad was arrested in the case of misleading the Supreme Court regarding the Godhra riots. Even two police officers are in prison due to their stand on the riots, which is not in favor of the state. Civil society has been targeted systematically as well. The Foreign Contributions Regulation Act (2010) (F.C.R.A.), the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (P.M.L.A.), and other measures such as the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (U.A.P.A.) deployed by the government to fulfill their majoritarian

⁴See also M.P Singh (2022) Unlawful Activities(Prevention)Act,1967

agenda (Amnesty International, 2023). In the case of F.C.R.A., Indian N.G.O.s need F.C.R.A. clearance to use foreign funds for developmental work. Firstly, the F.C.R.A. was amended by Congress in 2010. It gave certain powers to the state to deal with N.G.O.s, and N.G.O.s needed to renew their licenses every five years. Bhartiya Janata Party used this law to cancel the registration of many N.G.O.s. After the 2010 Amendment, from 2011 to 2014, under Congress rule, 3987 NGO registrations were canceled, while during B.J.P., from 2015 to 2022, more than 16 thousand N.G.O. registrations were canceled (Mukherji, 2022; Amnesty International, 2023).

Another amendment regarding F.C.R.A. came in 2020, which damaged N.G.O.s more than the previous amendment. It was passed without parliamentary discussion or deliberations. After this amendment, all N.G.O.s must operate through the State Bank of India branch at Parliament Street in New Delhi for foreign funding. It will enable the state to track foreign funding organizations. Even N.G.O.s who were working in India were not spared. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced in the 2020 budget that the tax-free nature of domestic donations would be reviewed every five years. These changes impacted those N.G.O.s working for Minority rights. For example, The Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative was suspended for some time, and its license was canceled after some time. Other Human rights-oriented organizations like I.N.S.A.F. and Peoples Watch denied F.C.R.A. approval (Mukherji, 2022).

Prevention of the Money Laundering Act (2002) has been used as a tool against leaders and politicians working in civil society. The Enforcement Directorate (E.D.) has been used to attack N.G.O.s like Amnesty International and the Centre for Equity Studies that worked for minority rights. Authorities have used P.M.L.A. to attack and harass human rights activist and N.G.O.s, seizing their properties. Antiterrorism Laws like U.A.P.A. have been misused against several student activists who organized protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (2019). The government accused the student of involvement in the Delhi riots in February 2020, which took the lives of 53 people, mostly Muslims. Many human rights activists were arrested under these provisions, but the Police closed many of the cases due to the lack of evidence, and the remaining cases are still pending. The delay in filing charges shows that the government is using these laws against those critical to them (Amnesty International, 2023).

These three laws have become a tool to damage the space for civil society and human rights activists. The FCRA, PMLA, and U.A.P.A targeted many civil society organizations involved in promoting

communal harmony between Hindus-Muslims. Mostly Hindu and Christian NGOs have been approved, while mostly Muslim NGOs' approval has been rejected, which indicates discrimination against the Muslim community. These laws have been used against Muslims and have led to a sense of alienation among the Muslim community. NGO and community have a significant role in providing services and in the facilitation of interfaith dialogue, but due to these laws which shutdowns of NGOs have affected social cohesion. Therefore, there needs to be reform in these laws so that social cohesion can be promoted.

Several states have passed freedom of religion acts or anti-conversion laws that include controversial marriage provisions, which are also referred to as "Love Jihad"⁵ Laws. Commentators like Rahul Machaiah describe the term as the conversion of a Hindu woman to Islam after she marries a Muslim man. Therefore, Hindu woman needs to be protected from the danger of conversions (Machaiah,2020).

Government official of Uttar Pradesh claims that the law will help prevent fraudulent religious conversion and protect young women from love Jihad (Shrivastava,2021). But Critic like Eric Bellman argues that these laws target Muslims and interfaith couples, and there are many examples where militant activists and authorities have harassed interfaith couples (Bellman,2020). Even critic like Roli Shrivastava claims that these laws have impacted women's rights; therefore, these laws treat women in a "Paternalistic way," which means women need protection at the cost of their right to make rational decisions about changing faith or choosing a partner (Shrivastava,2021; Goitom,2021). States like Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Madhya Pradesh have enacted anti-conversion laws that prevent conversions only for marriage. Gujarat, Haryana, and Assam have also passed these laws. BJP-ruled state Uttarakhand enacted the Freedom of Religion Act 2018 and claimed it would deal with conversion only to facilitate the marriage process. In Uttarakhand, four people were booked in the case of violating the law. So, it's already being used. In Uttar Pradesh, under this, 35 were arrested, and women and minorities have been harassed due to this law. In Uttar Pradesh, Police are stopping consenting adults not to do interfaith marriages. In Madhya Pradesh also, Muslims who were accused of putting pressure to convert to Islam were arrested under this law. Allahabad High Court overturned that religious conversion for the sake of marriage was unacceptable, which was justified by the UP government. Even one advocate named S.F.A. Naqvi challenged the constitutional validity of the anti-conversion bill. He argued that the central government had already adopted legislation on interfaith

⁵See also Andrea Malji and Syed Tahseen Raza(2021) the securitization of Love Jihad

marriages, namely the Special Marriage Act 1954; therefore, creating and implementing this law at the state level makes no sense (Hindustan Times,2020). The high court advised the Police not to take coercive action against the accused.

The Special Marriage Act of 1954 offers a legal framework for marriage that is applicable to individuals irrespective of their religion, allowing interfaith couples to marry under its provisions. In 2021, a petition was filed by advocate Vishal Thakre, along with the NGO 'Citizens for Justice and Peace,' led by Teesta Setalvad, challenging the constitutional validity of the Uttarakhand Freedom of Religion Act 2018 and the Uttar Pradesh Unlawful Religious Conversion Ordinance 2020 (The Wire, 2021).The advocate argues that authorities are lifting people in the middle of wedding ceremonies due to the oppressive nature of these laws. However, the court initially asked the petitioner to approach the high court of Allahabad. Later, the chief Justice agreed to hear the petitions and issued notice on positions to the state government. However, the court refused to put any stay on these laws by saying that if you ask for relief, we cannot entertain it under Article 32 of the Indian constitution (Goitom,2021). Since these laws have been passed, there have been no changes. These laws have increased the tension between Hindus and Muslims. These laws are perceived as targeting Muslim communities; therefore, these laws have been made to restrict religious freedom, particularly foreign religions like Islam and Christianity. Anti-conversion laws sometimes scrutinize and criminalize interfaith marriages, particularly between A Hindu girl and a Muslim boy. The Hindu nationalist organizations have promoted a narrative that Muslim men convert Hindu women after marriage; however, Hindu nationalist organizations, through the 'Love Jihad 'narrative, try to consolidate Hindu votes. Therefore, anti-conversion laws have created an environment of suspicion and hostility in Hindu-Muslim relations.

Conclusion

As we have seen in the first section of the paper, initially, community engagement activities were promoted by political organizations on the issues of development and education, and some of them came up with the problem of bringing Hindus and Muslims together. At the beginning of the 20th century, two incidents created animosities against each other. Firstly, the Bengal Partition (1905) came up with the idea of separating Bengal on religious lines, which created a line where reunification happened, which was perceived to be a victory for the Hindus. Muslim leaders approach the British demanding separate electorates (1909). These two incidents led to hostilities between communities, but it does not mean there was no community engagement during colonial India. The Servant of India Society worked to

provide relief, and they did so without any bias for religion, caste, or class. Some of the political leaders, particularly the Muslim League and Hindu Mahasabha, found partition to be a solution to avoid communal tensions. Leaders believed that things would get better between communities after partition, but instead of that, partition became a reason for communities not to trust each other. But that was for a short period, and the first riots occurred in 1961 after several riots. Various reasons, namely social, economic, political, and cultural, have led to the riots. Riots have caused the death of thousands of people from both sides.

The government has appointed commissions to investigate riots many times. In most of the investigations, the complicity of the Police or the bureaucracy or in riots and a biased attitude towards the Muslims. That has caused Muslims to distrust authority. The government never tried to reduce the gap between communities; instead, they have made riots a tool to gain in electorate politics. Civil society has taken many initiatives to reduce the gap between Muslims and authorities. Mohalla committee was such an initiative after the Mumbai riots of 1992-93 that revived the trust of Muslims in authority by creating a space where Muslims and Police interacted, which brought normalcy between both (Gupta,2011).

In the case of Kerela, the public library and film studio became a place where people from different communities interacted, which helped them to know each other. Other parts of India, especially the Hindi heartland, have been unable to provide such spaces (Varshney,2001). However, these initiatives still have loopholes in reducing the gap between communities, so they cannot be part of riots. Despite the tensions between the Muslims and the Indian State, there are civil society initiatives by the people on the ground that continue to flourish. However, most organizations focus on bringing about Justice for the affected. Karwan-e-Mohabbat is the first of its kind and aims to build trust between communities by meeting with the victims of communal lynchings and paying tribute to the lost lives. Aman Biradri is another initiative that works for secular and just India by building local-level institutions to strengthen the mutual bond of tolerance.

These are the few successful examples of community engagement by civil society groups that has strengthened the relations between Hindus and Muslims. However, the role of community engagement or civil society has been under attack by regimes. It has come with many restrictions, such as amending laws like U.A.P.A., F.C.R.A., and P.M.L.A., which have become tools to restrict N.G.O.s and leaders involved in human rights activities.

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