

# Islamophobia and conspiracy against muslim during covid-19 outbreak in India

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## ABSTRACT

Islamophobia in India is nothing new. Muslims in India have experienced violence and crime by India's majority religious group, namely Hindus, since the partition in 1947. Discrimination against Muslims in India has become a common occurrence. Even Muslims became scapegoats for the spread of Covid-19 in India after the incident of disbanding Tablighi Jamaat activities at the Nizamuddin Markaz in New Delhi in March 2020. The government's involvement in the spread of Islamophobia is increasingly seen from the absence of legal action against what is done by the majority group against Muslims who are a religious minority group in India. Research Objectives: to examine the existence of a conspiracy and involvement of the Indian government in the spread of Islamophobia in India. They accuse Muslims of being the spreaders of the Covid-19 virus in India. This research is a qualitative research as the method in collecting data. The data collection technique used *was* documentation method. The conclusion of this study is the discovery of a conspiracy played by the Indian government and right-wing Hindu nationalist organizations in the spread of Islamophobia in India by issuing accusations and false news about Muslims as the source of the spread of the Covid-19 virus

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## 1. Introduction

India is included in the country with the largest population in the world, and even ranks second with a population of around 1.3 billion based on the 2020 census records [8], so when the Covid-19 pandemic hit the world, India was one of the countries with the largest number of cases in the world. Through records on the WHO's official website, there were 41,469,499 confirmed positive cases of Covid-19 from January 3, 2020 to February 1, 2022 with a total death toll of 496,242 [25]. Apart from being known as a country that ranks at the top in terms of population, India is also a country with a fairly high level of diversity in terms of ethnicity, race, and religion. There are several religions that make up the composition of diversity in religious aspects in India, among others, *namely* Hindus, Jains, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, and other religious groups, which include Parsis, Jewish, Tribal religions, etc. Even though it is known as a country with a high level of diversity, inter-religious conflicts involving majority and minority religions are still common today, especially conflicts

involving Hindus and Muslims. For example, the anti-Muslim violence that occurred in one of the states in India, Gujarat in 2002 [1].

In addition to this major incident, there are many other incidents experienced by minority religious groups, especially Muslims in this Hindu-majority country, and this form of hatred and religious violence occurs almost every day in basic terms though. Many of the basic rights of Muslims in India are not even available or are not recognized in the country. This caused a reaction from the Indian Muslim community which eventually sparked tensions between the majority and the minority and even the government got involved. A study written by [17] has proven that violence against Muslims in India has been around for a long time. The existence of the ISIS movement in Syria, the issue of beef consuming by Muslims which is a sacred thing that should not be done by Hindus, the harassment of the prophet Muhammad SAW are just a few examples of causes that are the reason or cause of the emergence of conflict and violence against Muslims in India.

The study also mentioned the involvement of the Indian government in spreading hatred against Muslims in India. Similar research was also carried out by [12], the study revealed that cases of crime and hatred against Muslims in India have led to the occurrence of Islamophobia. The intensity of crime and harassment as well as hatred against Muslims in India has increased since the partition in 1947. The growth of Islamophobia in India is increasingly fertile because of the involvement of the government [12]. The existence of a government that turns out to be not neutral but sided with the majority has become a strong fuel to be able to continue to fuel the hatred of the majority, which incidentally is from Hindus towards Minorities, Muslims, and this is increasingly seen very clearly with the existence of black campaigns *conducted through various media* who accused Muslims of having a big role in the spread of the Covid-19 virus in India.

This study aims to examine the existence of a conspiracy in crimes committed against Muslims in India and the spread of Islamophobia carried out by the Indian government and other actors through a black campaign that accuses Muslims of being the perpetrators of the spread of the Covid-19 virus.

## 2. Method

This research is a descriptive qualitative [15] using secondary data, namely through Library Research. The data collection technique used in this study is in the form of documentation, namely by collecting data from books, journals, official government websites and sources relevant to the topic of conspiracies related to allegations of spreading the Covid-19 virus in India carried out against Muslims to spread Islamophobia.

## 3. Findings and Discussion

### 3.1. Dream of Building Hindu Country

If we look back at the history of India, then first we will remember the partition that occurred in 1947, which made the Sub-continent in South Asia not only divided regionally, but also economically, ideologically, culturally and even religiously. The region is divided into several parts, including India, Pakistan and Bangladesh [11]. Technically, India is a country with a majority Hindu population while Pakistan is a country with a Muslim majority population.

The partition incident was the beginning of the dream of the founding fathers held by the right-wing Hindu group, *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)* [2]. The RSS was founded about 94 years ago with the goal of establishing a Hindu state. More or less the RSS adopted the teachings of Nazi Germany. One of the founders of the RSS also formulated the Hindutva ideology or ideology to establish a Hindu state. *One of the Nazi doctrines that were successfully adopted by the RSS group was the Nazi way of preventing the Jews, to be applied to solve their problems against Muslims in India. If we look at the current government of India, with the leadership occupied by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) party which is the holder of a structural position in the RSS, it can be easily read that establishing a Hindu state has become the agenda of the current government.*

### 3.2. Hindu-Muslim Conflict and Islamophobia in India

Freedom of religion and belief are human rights legally recognized in the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and

Political Rights, and the 1981 Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion and Belief. But in reality not all countries are able to guarantee religious freedom, including India. In fact, inter-religious conflict is no longer a new thing in India. *Inter-religious violence* often occurs in India, especially involving the majority group, namely Hindus and minority groups, namely Muslims.

The number of Muslims in India is about 12% of the total population of India's 1.3 billion people [12], or 14.23% of the 1.21 billion total religious population in India [9]. From this ratio, it can be seen that Muslims are one of the minority religions in India. However, it is not enough to see only as a minority religion. The existence of Islam in India is considered a separate threat to the majority when compared to other minority religions. See Fig. 1 to find out the ratio of the number of Muslims to Hindus and followers of other religions in India.

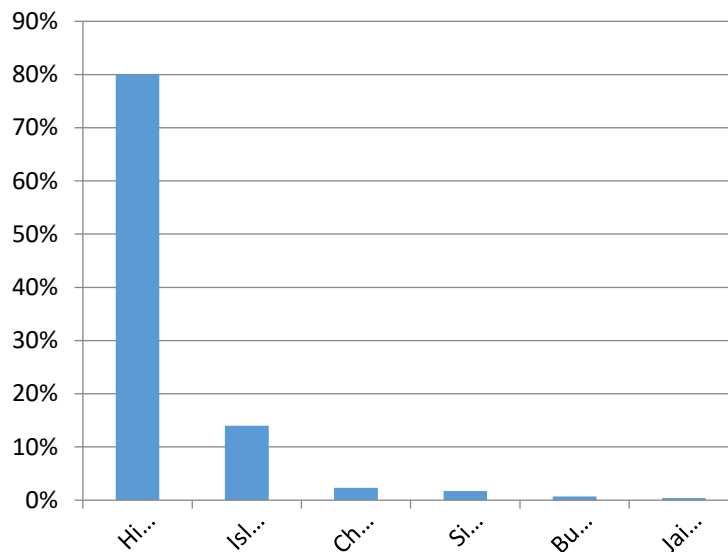


Fig. 1. Ratio of religious adherents in India by census organization of India in 2011

Violence and conflict between Hindus and Muslims in India has existed since the partition in 1947 and intensified when India was under the rule of right-wing Hindu groups who wanted India to become a Hindu state. Since the general election that positioned the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) which is the incarnation of the right-wing Hindu organization RSS, the number of violence driven by a sense of Hindu nationalism has been in the news every day [16]. A study conducted by the University of Massachusetts found that there was an increase in violence and hatred based on religion in the period after the BJP won the election in 2014-2019 compared to 2009-2013 [24]. Violence and hatred against Muslims in India is a form of Islamophobia.

Islamophobia is often described as a situation where Islam and Muslims are made social enemies [6]. Another opinion also stated that Islamophobia is a very complex phenomenon, where the boundaries and classifications of the terminology about Islamophobia revolve around the depiction of hostility based on religion [3]. Islamophobia is a kind of intolerance and discrimination caused by mistrust, fears and hatred of Islam and its adherents. It usually happens in combination with racism, xenophobia, anti-immigrant sentiments and religious intolerance [22]. Academically, Islamophobia is defined as the fear or hatred of Muslims or Muslims and the act of excluding them from social or public life [5].

Islamophobia in India is no longer a phenomenon that occurred because of the 26/11 attacks in Mumbai or the attacks on the Parliament Buildings in 2001. The phenomenon of Islamophobia has become a political tool to stir up Hindus who are still divided because of the caste system that is difficult to abolish [21].

### 3.3. Hatred Against The Tablighi Jamaat

Muslims in India are considered as a group that threatens national security, as if Indian Muslims are not part of the Indian people but Pakistan [24]. Even right-wing Hindu organizations regard

Muslims as a threat to the existence and dominance of Hindus in India [20]. That is why Muslims in India are marginalized and their every move is considered dangerous so that it makes Hindus feel the need to dispel so that Muslims in India do not have room to move.

Since January 1, 2020, pilgrims from approximately 70 countries have come to India to attend Tablighi [14]. In March 2020, Nizamuddin Markaz in New Delhi was visited by thousands of Muslims from all over the world led by the Tablighi Jamaat. Unfortunately, that time coincided with the announcement of the lockdown throughout the city of Delhi. No exception, all activities even in almost all of India must be stopped to avoid the further spread of the Covid-19 virus in the country. On 22 March 2020, the Government of India closed the doors of the Nizamuddin Mosque in New Delhi with more than 2500 worshipers confined inside, after the gathering attended by worshipers from various countries was considered the biggest cause of the spread of the Covid-19 virus in India. This was concluded from the total number of COVID-19 positive cases in India amounting to 4400, of which a third came from the Markaz Nizamuddin cluster [7].

In early April 2020 following the news about the number of deaths in India as a result of Covid-19 cases, several television stations reported that 30% of these cases came from the *Tablighi Jamaat* and called the Covid-19 virus as the "Tablighi Virus" [14]. Along with this, more and more hashtags are appearing against Muslims in India, such as #CoronaJihad, #BioJihad, or #MuslimMeaningTerrorist, and these are being used by right-wing Hindu organizations to spread Islamophobia in India [17]. Check out Fig. 2 hash tag #CoronaJihad and the illustrations depicting the cornering of Muslims in India. Apart from members of the Jama'ah, accusations are also being leveled against Muslims in India blindly for no good reason, for example accusations against Muslim traders who say they have injected the fruits they sell with the Covid-19 virus, licked their plates. plates in Muslim restaurants to spread the virus through saliva, and so on [4].

Meanwhile, senior health journalist Vidya Krishnan told Al-Jazeera that the government is putting too much focus on the Jamaat. In addition, Indian health authorities have focused tests on people who have come across Jamaat members but have not carried out the same tracing on people who have come across other Covid-19 positive patients who are not related to the Jamaat [23]. In fact, several cases of refusal of Muslim patients in India have occurred because Muslims are associated as the center of the spread of Covid-19.



Fig. 2. Hashtag #CoronaJihad and the illustrations depicting the cornering of muslims in India

On April 8, 2020, WHO issued a statement denying accusations that Indian Muslims were the cause of the spread of the Covid-19 virus in the country, but the wave of Islamophobia and discrimination against Muslims in India continues and is increasing. Please see Table 1. to find out the intensity of violence and discrimination as a form of hatred against Muslims in India within one month after the Markaz Nizamuddin incident occurred.

From the [Table 1](#), we know that discrimination against Muslims in India occurs intensively and cannot even be separated from government intervention. This is clearly evidenced by the Indian government's indifference to several warnings delivered by world-class organizations, even by diplomatic representatives of countries based in India.

Table 1. Timeline of hate targeting muslim in India related to covid-19 on april 2020 released by [\[18\]](#)

Date	Description
April 1	Prejudice against Muslims in India has increased after the Government attributed the spread of Covid-19 cases in India to Muslims, especially the Tablighi Jamaat.
April 2	Fake news about the spread of Covid-19 by Tablighi Jamaat and Indian Muslims as well as accusations of deliberately spreading the virus by Muslims.
April 1-29	Boycott calls, violence and racial profiling against Muslim <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The hash tag #CoronaJihad appeared in at least 300,000 tweets and was viewed by 165 million Twitter users.</li> <li>2. Several members of the Tablighi Jamaat who returned to their hometowns were attacked</li> <li>3. Ban on buying products sold by Muslims conveyed by MLA Uttar Pradesh and distribution of Saffron flags to Hindu traders to mark that they are Hindus so that people are encouraged to shop at vendors with this sign.</li> <li>4. Contest with a prize of 10,000 Rupees to anyone who knows Muslims who have attended Tabligh at Markaz Nazamuddin.</li> <li>5. Calls for the execution of Jamaah leaders by members of Parliament from the BJP and calling them 'terrorists' and the use of the terms 'Corona Bombs' and 'Corona Jihad'.</li> <li>6. MP from BJP Ananth Kumar Hegde said that Covid-19 Bioterrorism has been perpetrated by Muslims.</li> <li>7. A TV Show Host and defender of the BJP, Arnab Goswami also mentioned the 'Corona Villain' associated with Muslims.</li> <li>8. Issued an announcement about the threat of fines to people who interact with Muslims.</li> <li>9. Allegations of massacre of Jamaat leader by a policeman in New Delhi</li> <li>10. At a place of worship belonging to the Sikh religion it was announced that it was forbidden to buy milk from Muslim sellers.</li> <li>11. There is a prohibition for Muslims to drink water from public taps</li> <li>12. Separation of Muslim patient rooms with other patients that occurs in some hospitals in Gujarat.</li> <li>13. A hospital in the state of Uttar Pradesh refuses Muslim patients and requires all Muslim patients to come to the hospital with a negative Covid-19 test result.</li> <li>14. Patient refusal to give birth to a Muslim woman in Rajasthan.</li> <li>15. Soldiers guarding the border gate between India and Nepal claim that there are certain groups who are trying to enter Indian territory with the aim of spreading the Covid-19 virus.</li> </ol>
April 8	Representatives from the WHO expressed their disapproval of what the stigma and issues were going on in India, but the ruling party continued to pursue these accusations.
April 15-19	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The emergence of a reaction from diplomatic representatives of the Gulf countries about accusations against Muslims as a form of spreading Islamophobia during the pandemic.</li> <li>2. The emergence of pressure from the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) for India to stop the violence committed against Muslims in India during the pandemic.</li> <li>3. 3 weeks after the targeting of violence against Muslims took place, the Prime Minister of India called for peace but the systematic targeting continued.</li> </ol>

### 3.4. Conspiracy Theory Against Muslim In India During Covid-19 Outbreak

According to Keeley in a work written by Douglas explains that, conspiracy theory is defined as a secret move carried out by two or more strong actors. Conspiracies are usually carried out in the act of seizing political or economic power, violating human rights, hiding important secrets and actions to change the constitution [\[10\]](#). Other experts say that the conspiracy is formed by history, which is a belief that explains how the actors in history met to plan certain unlawful or criminal purposes, which were carried out in secret [\[19\]](#). We can clearly draw conclusions about the definition of conspiracy, which is an act of conspiracy by two or more parties carried out for illegal purposes and to the

detriment of certain parties. Usually this conspiracy theory follows a series of major events related to political, social, humanitarian and historical tragedies.

As heads of state around the world are fighting against Covid-19 and making various efforts to stop its spread, then something else is happening in India. The Indian government uses the pandemic phenomenon as a weapon to carry out a mission to spread Islamophobia by carrying out systemic slander against religious minority groups, namely Muslims, and doing things that are inhumane to them. India makes Muslims as scapegoats in the phenomenon of increasing positive cases of Covid-19 [18].

What the right-wing or Hindu nationalist organizations, the RSS and the government are doing is no accident. Although the Indian government calls for peace and an end to domestic wars with its own people, the reality is that in some cases in states that discriminate against Muslims, there is no action from the competent authorities to bring on peace. There is even no legal action against tweets that direct slander or that spread fake news and violence perpetrated against Muslims in India especially the Tablighi Jamaat. In fact, some news stations in India are no longer neutral as if they have been used as weapons by the Indian government to launch the ideals of 'Hindutva' through the spread of Islamophobia.

If we look back at the definition of conspiracy put forward by Douglas, that an event is said to be a conspiracy if it is carried out by two or more powerful actors through secret plans and actions which are usually carried out in crimes that have the smell of power struggles, violations of human rights, control of the economic sector, changing the constitution of a country, and so on, then we find clues to what is being experienced by Muslims in India. Hindus as the majority religious group in India do not act alone in their aggressive actions against Muslims throughout India. Behind it all is a right-wing Hindu nationalist group that gave birth to the current ruling party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), where it is well known that the BJP acts as a political tool of the radical Hindu organization RSS [13]. Likewise, if we look at the history of the birth of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) which adopted the Nazi ideology in eliminating Jews from Germany by making Jews scapegoats for the spread of the typhus virus, the same tactic was applied in India by making Muslims the scapegoats for the spread of the Covid outbreak. -19 in India to eliminate Muslims from India.

#### 4. Conclusion

From the description above, we can conclude that behind the multicultural and multireligious India, there are problems in the implementation of human rights in the religious field. India, with a majority Hindu population, is determined to eliminate Muslims from the country because even though Islam is a minority religion, its population is the largest among other minority religions in India. Muslims are considered a threat to India's National security. Partition history in 1947 also became one of the causes of the emergence of violence against Muslims in India. This is also based on the ideals of the Hindu Nationalist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) to make India a Hindu country, as stated in Hindutva. The birth of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) from the RSS which is currently the ruler, made the BJP a political tool for the RSS in carrying out its Hindutva mission. All forms of violence and hate speech are used to spread Islamophobia in India, including using Muslims, especially members of the Tablighi Jamaat which took place in India in March 2020, as scapegoats for the widespread spread of the Covid-19 virus in India. Baseless violence, discrimination and even the use of hashtags on social media are carried out to corner Muslims in the position of those who must be responsible for the spread of Covid-19 in India. From these incidents, it is known that there is no legal action from the government that should straighten out the tangle. From the attitude of the government which is indifferent and indifferent, it even looks like pouring gasoline on flame. The reality is that it is one of the actors and even the mastermind behind the spread of Islamophobia which is a form of conspiracy to commit crimes against Muslims in India. So from the above study it is known that the form of violence perpetrated by Hindus against Muslims and the spread of Islamophobia which scapegoates Muslims as the source of the spread of Covid-19 is a form of conspiracy with the actor Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) with the government through the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as a ruler party of the current Indian government.

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