

Lessons from Pakistan: Why we need to challenge misleading narratives of victimisation

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Pakistan, a nation founded on the principles of the ‘Two-Nation Theory’, was envisioned as a sanctuary for adherents of Islam—a new state dedicated to safeguarding the political rights and interests of Muslims from British India. The creation of Pakistan as a nation with the aim of safeguarding Muslim interests, especially Muslim elite (Ashraf) interests, encountered a tragic irony as internal conflicts led to severe atrocities against Muslims themselves.

Mohammad Ali Jinnah, address to the Constituent Assembly, 11 August 1947:

“You are free: you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other places of worship in the State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion, caste or creed—that has nothing to do with the business of the State... We are starting with this fundamental principle: That we are all citizens and equal citizens of one State. Now I think we should keep that in front of us as our ideal and you will find that in course of time Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not so in the religious sense because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as a citizen of the State.”

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The initial vision for Pakistan during the partition differed greatly from its current state. It aimed to be an inclusive nation, granting equal rights to all citizens irrespective of their caste, creed, or religion while respecting their religious beliefs. However, Pakistan has struggled to uphold these ideals, failing to provide equal treatment, and falling short of its founding principles.

Simultaneously, in a remarkable contrast, India, accused of Hindu bias towards Muslims and denying them fair representation, established itself as a nation that embraces the equality of all Muslims, irrespective of their sectarian affiliations granting them the freedom to voice their opinions and lead secure lives.

As a young Muslim woman in India, I deeply appreciate the freedom to express myself, voice my opinions, and lead a secure and liberated life.

India's rich tapestry of cultures, religions, and languages has created an environment where I can fearlessly embrace my identity. The unity, tolerance, and respect embedded in India's ethos, along with its constitutional guarantees, ensure my equal rights and empower me to pursue my dreams and contribute to the nation's progress. I am grateful for India's inclusive and progressive spirit, which enables me to thrive in a vibrant democracy.

Today, every Indian is aware of how medieval mindsets have resulted in the complete annihilation of minority rights in Islamist nations like Pakistan. The country is a failed state and has totally marginalised any liberal voice that is critical of elements that have hindered the country's progress. Violence and discrimination against Pakistan's religious minorities such as Ahmadis, Christians, and Hindus have intensified to a level where many live in daily fear of violence or harassment.

But, within the realm of Indian politics, certain factions of the left-liberal spectrum have perpetuated misleading narratives that suggest India is not a safe place for Muslims. These assertions, often based on selective incidents and biased interpretations, do a disservice to the harmonious coexistence and religious diversity that characterise India. While it is important to address any instances of discrimination or prejudice, it is equally crucial to recognize that India has a long history of upholding secular values and protecting the rights of its citizens, regardless of their religious affiliations.

India, as an independent nation, was established with a secular constitution, acknowledging its multi-religious identity despite having a Hindu majority.

The Union Finance Minister herself said violence prevails against Muhajirs, Shias, and other minority groups in Pakistan, whereas, in India, every strand of the Muslim community is doing its business. It is completely true, whereas the left-liberal narrative's relentless focus on linking India's safety with Pakistan and its tendency to amplify isolated incidents can undermine the progress made in fostering communal harmony and deflect attention from the myriad stories of Muslims thriving in India and working towards nation building, contributing to its vibrant tapestry of cultural pluralism.

There are so many Indian Muslim celebrities, sportspersons, politicians, businessmen, etc. who have poured dedication, talent, and achievements towards nation-building and have been commendable, playing a vital role in shaping India's progress and cultural diversity.

From athletes like Sufiya Sufi, Muskan Khan, and Abdulla Aboobacker Narangolintevida, to leaders such as A P J Abdul Kalam and Zakir Husain Khan, and entrepreneurs like Azim Premji and Yusuf Khwaja Hamied. Not to mention the notable presence of celebrities like Shahrukh Khan, Aamir Khan, and musicians like A. R Rahman and Salim-Sulaiman Merchant. Their achievements have had a significant impact on the nation and deserve appreciation.

These celebrities not only have the fundamental liberty to practice and excel in their profession of choice but, they also have fundamental rights of dissenting and criticising the government whenever they feel the need to do so. A fine illustration of this would be when Farhan Akhtar while being clueless about the CAA-NRC was dissenting and criticising the government for enacting the same. Contrastingly, the celebrities in Pakistan were terrified to speak up in favour of Imran Khan given the current circumstances of the case made out against him. If Big celebrities live under such constant fear of the Pakistani Army one can only wonder what a common citizen would be going through, especially someone who is a minority considering the religiously fanatical nature of the Pakistani Army. For instance, established journalist and activist, Gul Bukhari who is a vocal critic of the Pakistani Army was abducted for openly criticising the military and its alleged meddling in politics.

One of the key reasons why fundamental liberties are strongly upheld for Indian citizens, regardless of their religion, is the robust separation of powers among the legislature, judiciary, and executive. In contrast, Pakistan has experienced constitutional replacements and an imbalance between the parliament, judiciary, and military, leading to limited enjoyment of fundamental liberties. The lack of separation of powers and failure to clarify the military's role in politics and the economy have allowed the military to exert influence, depriving Pakistani citizens of cherished liberties. Thus, when citizens cannot even enjoy something as simple as the right to free speech, one wonders to what extent would someone who is a minority be able to enjoy these fundamental rights, let alone the right to equality.

Whilst politicians are not absolved of responsibility, it is vital to stress the need for the military's non-interference in politics in Pakistan. Whereas in India it is strictly the sole duty of the military to protect the borders with a significant budget, warranting their exclusive focus on national security. Interestingly, there has not been any single instance where the Indian military has interfered with the political sphere in any manner nor engaged in actively supporting or funding terror organisations in any manner. It is a well-known fact that during the Kargil War, the Pakistani Army had not only funded and provided terrorists with weapons and gears for high-altitude warfare but they had also worked alongside them in violating India's territorial integrity. It is the attitude of Pakistan in supporting and conniving with terrorist outfits like Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-

Mohammed (JeM) that resulted in Pakistan being put on the infamous grey list of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), the Global Watchdog on Terror Financing and Money laundering, for a period of 4 years.

It is pertinent to note that these terror outfits are religiously driven by radical Islam and on the idea of *Gazwa-e-Hind* wherein they see all non-muslims as kaffirs who ought to be converted to Islam even if it is with the use of force or terror. This highlights the religiously fanatical nature of the Pakistani Military which is also the ruler of the country and is very problematic as far as minorities and their rights are concerned. This is also a reasonable explanation for why the demographic percentage of non-muslims has significantly dwindled since the creation of Pakistan and highlights the anti-minority nature of the state. Whereas a perusal of the census would reveal the exponential growth of non-Hindus in India since independence.

India is home to left liberals who often portray themselves as victims and exhibit an excessive preoccupation with Pakistan, both in the media and on the international stage while spinning a web of lies in connivance with the Islamists to falsely portray the country as anti-minority in nature. In essence, a society under the dominance of Islamists is characterised by disorder, turmoil, and unrest. Their allegiance lies solely with their own community and faith, without any attachment to any nation or group. They are willing to employ extreme methods to achieve their goals, even if it means turning against their own allies if they challenge their religious beliefs.

Additionally, the left-liberals often publicly state that they would be better off living in Pakistan. But if anything, it becomes clear that this puffery is made with the intention of highlighting Pakistan in a good light even when the citizens of Pakistan might feel otherwise. By perpetuating the belief that India is a living hell for Muslims, they unintentionally align themselves with the Pakistani agenda, which ultimately stems from a specific mindset. Embracing a more nuanced and inclusive approach, Indian Muslims, and especially the youth of our country can contribute to strengthening national unity and harmony while countering divisive agendas. Thus, it is crucial for Indian nationalists to actively challenge this narrative and for Muslim youngsters to maintain a balanced perspective.

In light of the contrasting narratives surrounding India's inclusive tapestry and Pakistan's struggles with minority rights, it is essential for us to reflect and ask ourselves: How can we challenge misleading narratives and promote unity and inclusivity in our own communities? What steps can we take to ensure that all individuals, regardless of their religion or background, are treated with dignity, respect, and equality?

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