How Does Islamophobia in India Affect Bangladesh-India Relations?

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ABSTRACT

This research examines how the fear of Muslims and the politics of majoritarianism in India affects bilateral overtures between Bangladesh and India, based on areas of cooperation in trade, infrastructure, energy, and security, as well as existing conflicts over trans-boundary water resources, territory, and security issues—evidenced by secondary research data, including peer-reviewed articles, government documents, and newspaper articles and political speeches' discourse analysis. The study shows that Islamophobia in India has damaged the relations between the two countries, which has affected cooperation in projects and escalated tensions. This paper provides policymakers and regional organizations with essential knowledge to reduce conflict and promote regional unity and cohesion. In this way, this research adds fresh ideas to the changes in bilateral relations of South Asian countries by discussing an unfamiliar factor affecting the region.

Keywords: Discrimination, Communal rhetoric, Islamophobia, Communal politics, Democratization.

INTRODUCTION

Islamophobia, a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, is generally fabricated with unjustified hostility, fear, and hatred toward Islam or Muslims (Ushama, 2020). The rise of Islamophobia encompasses both traditional security and human security concepts. Preassumed narratives on Islam as backward, barbaric, or fundamentally incompatible with modern, Western values marginalize Muslim communities, and this fear breeds discrimination, which can exacerbate issues within domestic socio-economic and political sectors, as well as affect interstate relations (Beydoun, 2016). The emergence and continuous rise of Islamophobia in India is linked to its colonial past, political factors, and regional and global geopolitics. Sikander (2021) stated that political forces of India are not addressing islamophobia as a reaction to terrorism. Instead, they are using it as a strategic tool to create a unified Hindu identity and to transcend the historical social divisions of the caste system. In recent decades, the term islamophobia has been increasingly pronounced in India, which has garnered a lot of attention, especially in light of its consequences for Bangladesh, the neighboring country of India that has a Muslim-majority population.

Historically, culturally, and politically, India and Bangladesh have maintained a significant relationship, primarily due to India's support during Bangladesh's liberation war in 1971. Over the years, these ties have evolved through various traditional and non-traditional security commitments. Islamophobic sentiment has recently intensified in India, where discriminatory policies and political statements regarding Muslims have appeared. This process has accelerated in recent years due to the actions of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP); its leaders use Hindu communal rhetric to attain power. Eventually, majoritarianism, the rule of the Hindus, deepened Islamophobia, which brought systematized marginalization of Muslims (Chatterjee, 2022).

However, what once fostered empathy has now become a source of tension, influenced by rising Islamophobia and majoritarian statism in contemporary India. Recent measures, such as the controversial Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), the debated National Register of Citizens (NRC), and aggressive rhetoric, have

strained bilateral relations and sparked widespread protests in Bangladesh. The impact of Islamophobia extends beyond social fragmentation; it also complicates economic exchanges and diplomatic relations, further challenging the historic bonds between the two nations.

This paper analyzes how India's national policies fuel Islamophobic sentiments, which affect the relationship between India and Bangladesh. It discusses how exclusionary narratives affect Bangladesh-India's cooperative and conflictual partnerships. Furthermore, it examines how these dynamics deepen preexisting tensions regarding resource sharing, borders, and immigrants. This study also evaluates the internal impact on Bangladesh's stability, which has raised tensions and questioned its democracy towards India.

This paper examines the academic works, government documentation, and articles related to varieties of Islamophobia in India and its implications on the relations between Bangladesh and India. It is intended to form the theoretical background for the study by disclosing the phenomenon of Islamophobia and majoritarianism in the Indian context, their internal and foreign manifestations, and their impact on bilateral relations and antagonism. The review also presents previous research on trade, infrastructures, water sharing, border disputes, security concerns, and gaps, the most significant being India's communal politics' role in Bangladesh's regional democratization and stability.

Terrorism and religious extremism pose significant threats to human civilization. Islamophobia and religious extremism create a malicious cycle (Abbas, 2019), where each can exist in a feedback loop, potentially fueling the other. This relationship is not merely a straightforward cause-and-effect; rather, it is a dynamic interaction in which one can intensify the conditions that lead to the other. It may be seen that there is significant research on the subject of Islamophobia, but little on its ramifications for Bangladesh-India relations. Most previous research (Ushama, 2020; Amarasingam et al., 2022; Kunnummal, 2022; Hussain et al.,2019) concentrates on Indian communal relations internally rather than externally, and far fewer studies examine how Indians' Islamophobia influences their bilateral ties. The impact of Indian Islamophobia on Bangladesh's democracy, from increasing polarization to radicalization, is also missing from existing research. Addressing these gaps can improve our understanding of the issues affecting bilateral relations and regional stability. This paper will underscore the significance of conducting academic analyses and case studies to enhance comprehension of the phenomena in subregional studies. This raises the question of how these two important South Asian countries can enhance cooperation and formalize their relations despite existing tensions and conflicts. Achieving this will require effective policies from both nations.

RESEARCH METHOD

This report employs a qualitative research methodology to investigate the complex relationship between Islamophobia and bilateral relations. The analysis relies on secondary data collection, encompassing a comprehensive review of policy and legal documents, systematic media content analysis, and a detailed examination of existing academic literature and reports. This thorough approach offers a nuanced understanding of how institutional frameworks, public discourse, and scholarly perspectives collectively illuminate the impact of Islamophobia on the relationship between Bangladesh and India.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Islamophobia in India

The term islamophobia was coined in the 1980s and became globally popular after 9/11(Griffiths, 2011). Islamophobia was popularized by the West, where Muslims are a minority and an immigrant group. The idea of Orientalism, which permeates Europe, shows a bias against Muslims (Adetry et al., 2024). Undoubtedly, islamophobia is a by-product of racism, ultra-nationalism, fascism, or xenophobic sentiments that count Islam as a threat to other religions or civilizations (Itaoui et al., 2023).

The paper utilizes constructivist theory to analyze the complex interplay of India's Islamophobic nature and its effect on Bangladesh-India foreign relations. The term Islamophobia itself is a constructive framework

because of its close association with norms and ideas. Constructivists, in international relations, use the term 'intersubjective' to define Constructivism, by which Constructivists highlight that the world, especially its social and political dimensions, consists of more than just material objects and our shared ideas, beliefs, values, and the methods we use to communicate and discuss are essential components (Finnemore et al., 2001). Adler employs the term 'dynamics' to characterize constructivism, whereby constructivists examine political phenomena not as static entities, but as continuously evolving processes influenced by human interpretation (Jung, 2019). Constructivism posits that international relations, identities, and interests are not static but are socially constructed, with perceptions of "self" and "other" playing a critical role. In India, Islamophobia has fostered the perception of Muslims as "others," often linked to negative stereotypes and perceived threats.

Historical narratives, political discourse, and media representations contribute to this climate of fear. These prevailing narratives and norms in India regarding Islam can significantly influence its foreign policy towards Bangladesh. It is also important to recognize that Bangladesh possesses its own evolving national identity, which further impacts the bilateral relationship. Therefore, analyzing the evolution of identities and norms is crucial for understanding the dynamics of Bangladesh-India relations. Ultimately, constructivism offers a valuable framework for examining how socially constructed perceptions and identities shape the complex relationship between India and Bangladesh, especially in the context of rising Islamophobia.

Islamophobia in India can be understood through the Two-level game theory, which Robert Putnam introduced in his seminal 1988 article "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games". Two-level game theory posits that domestic and international affairs are interconnected. More demanding and valuable research (Putnam, 2017; Bjola et al, 2018) in this field aims to clarify this linkage, identify the underlying mechanisms, and develop testable propositions regarding how these complex interactions influence global outcomes. The theory counts the government as the "chief negotiator."(da et al., 2017). and Modi's Islamophobia, attributed to his government, is viewed as a deliberate result of the BJP's Hindu nationalist ideology. This stems from electoral strategies aimed at consolidating the Hindu vote, the implementation of discriminatory policies against Muslims, the use of divisive rhetoric by prominent leaders, and the perceived erosion of institutional checks and balances.

This paper defines Islamophobia in India as the rising social, political, economic, and security discrimination toward Muslims through national policies, media, and behavioral patterns. Islamophobia, in its broadest possible meaning as the antithesis of the Muslim, is perceived as hostility towards the Islamic faith and the people adhering to it. It originates from biased approaches towards the religious faith and or beliefs, whereby Muslims are perceived and or depicted as an unpopular and barbaric lot owing to terrorism (Allen, 2010). This phenomenon has spread globally, influenced significantly by history, politics, and culture, with Islamophobia closely intertwined with nationalism and populism (Esposito et al., 2011). Dalits, Adivasis, and Muslims together constitute 39% of India's total population, according to the 2011 Census. However, they represent 55% of undertrial prisoners, as reported in a 2015 NCRB study, which highlights a serious issue regarding the disproportionate representation of certain marginalized communities within India's prison system (Anand et al., 2024). In an article on Islamophobia in the Asia Pacific region, the writer specifies three factors: national histories of colonialism, interreligious conflict, and the global influences on rising apathy toward Muslims (Damayanti et al., 2022).

Table 1: Communal Riots (Monitored by the Centre for Study of Society and Secularism (CSSS), India. -2024

India-2024	
Total Communal Riots	59
Increase from 2023	84%
Total Deaths	13
Muslim Death	10

Source: https://csss-isla.com/secular-perspective/hegemony-and-demolitions-the-tale-of-communal-riots-in-india-in-2024/

Under two-level game theory, a communal riot is not merely a law-and-order issue; it can also serve as a political tool. By subtly or overtly inflaming communal tensions, a party may consolidate a "majority" vote bank or vilify a "minority" group to gain electoral advantage. The objective is to win the next election, and crafting a narrative of fear or injustice can be a highly effective strategy.

Research studying India's five newspapers published how India's religious festivals became a source of religious tension, and among 11 deaths, nine were Muslims during communal riots in 2024(Hegemony and Demolitions: The Tale of Communal Riots in India in 2024 - Centre for Study of Society and Secularism, 2025).

Firstly, the rise of islamophobia and concurrent Hindutva philosophy has got global attention, the Hindu-Muslim religious tension is not a recent event. Historical stigma has become a prime factor in the current rising islamophobia scenario in India (Damayanti et al., 2022). Foreign invaders in South Asia treated Hindus, Muslims, and other religious groups differently, creating a sense of otherness among them. During the Mughal Empire, Hindus faced discrimination, while Muslims experienced marginalization during the British colonial era (Damayanti et al., 2022). The prejudicial perspective says Muslims were impolite and destructive in committing violence against Hindus and destroying Hindu temples during the Mughal period, and the perspective was extended with the Western propaganda that Islam is promoted by using the sword (Ushama, 2020). Through the colonial history writings, the colonial rulers tried to legitimize the British Raj by presenting the Mughal rule of India as uncivilized and Barbaric (Mirror, 2023). Colonial scholars dramatized the Hindu-Muslim relations based on majority and minority calculations to ratify the two nations' theory in the Indian subcontinent. The "Return of Somnath Gate' is an example of British appeasement policy toward Hindus, in which the gate was returned as a political maneuver by Lord Ellenborough (Bansal, 2023). In the post-colonial period, the number of Muslims decreased from 25 percent to 10 percent because of partition (Thompson et al., 2019).

Secondly, historiography and administrative support from the British, who tried to make Hindus Indians and Muslims as foreigners, led to the rise of Hindu nationalism in India. The presence of Hindu ultra-nationalism as a political force has spread islamophobia in India. Till recently, there was a growing Islamophobia in India, characterized by prejudice originating from an irrational fear of the Islamic faith and its followers, and this has escalated, especially with the leadership influence of the BJP (Anam et al., 2024, P.17). V. D. Savarkar's 1923 book, 'Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu?' introduces the concept of Hindutva, defining Hindus as adherents of a specific religion. This perspective directly challenges the inclusive and secular vision of Indian nationhood promoted by Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru (Sahoo, 2020). The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which was founded in 1925, was identified as a driving force behind creating the Hindu Rashtra (Thompson et al., 2019). The polarization started with the Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Sangh Parivar led the Ram Janmabhoomi Movement, which reached at the pick when Hindu activists broke the Babri mosque in 1992 (Sahoo, 2020). The BJP effectively leveraged the movement and anti-Muslim sentiment to revive its party and seize power. Since 2014, India has seen the ideological shift from Gandhi's harmonic India to Hindu India. Majoritarian nationalism in India has strategically leveraged the global context of Islamophobia, which has a longer history predating the 21st century (Islam, 2024). Majoritarianism hence stands in juxtaposition to this phenomenon that has seen Hindu majority politics declared as supremacy in India at the expense of other minorities, but mainly Muslims. The spread of an offshoot of this has been the increasing dominance of a Hindu nationalist goal that supports the notion of India being a Hindu country, as defined in the Hindutva matrix.

Thirdly, in the era of interconnectedness, people celebrated territorial bonds, and fear or anxiety spread faster between the West and the Muslim world; there were mutual multi-layer relations. The West has its historical context for understanding the roots of contemporary Islamophobia, which spans nearly 1,400 years (Buehler, 2011). The United States intentionally brought the phobia to fill the enemy gap in the post-Cold War period to justify an interventionist nature in the USA's foreign policy. The media's positive representation of Israel and framing Arabs as villains was a visual example of the West's antagonism toward Islam (Buehler, 2011). The continuous focus of the West on 'Us Vs. Them'(Wodak,2008) policy after September 2001 has

marginalized Muslim states and symmetrically globalized the idea negatively. After the 9/11 attacks, the U.S. administration implemented the 'Green Scare' to target Muslims, replacing the 'Red Scare' that had historically referred to communists during the Cold War (Guemide, 2024). In India, as a close friend of the USA, India stood strongly with the USA in countering terrorism, but by blurring the terrorism with religious identity.

To understand how Islamophobia has unfolded in the Indian context, it is critical to discuss some of the domains around political and media narrativization of Islam, public policies, and so on. Despite religious tolerance and the Muslim presence, hate speech, along with activist division, has made Muslims and non-Muslims suspicious of each other. These misguided principles have brought about systematic exclusion and the use of force that only deepens the existing social-sectarian cleavages.

India's Domestic Politics and Islamophobia

In the last few decades, the rise of Hindutva policy, sponsored by the BJP, has marginalized minorities, especially Muslims. Several policies and events have institutionalized Islamophobia and worsened communal relations:

1. Case Study of Babri Masjid and Construction of Ram Mandir: Ayodhya's historical significance as a melting pot of spiritual traditions in early India, where several faiths coexisted and contributed to the town's cultural landscape, is highlighted by its multi-religious significance, which includes Buddhism, Jainism, and Hinduism (Islam, 2007). The demolition of the Babri mosque in 1992 and the Supreme Court's 2019 judgment allowing the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya have significantly bolstered the majoritarian movement in India (Govind, 2023). The mosque's destruction and the violence that followed were activities intended to establish Hindu supremacy over a site that was revered, symbolically connecting religious identity to national narrative and territorial authority (Bacchetta, 2000).

2. Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 and the National Register of Citizens: The CAA provides automatic citizenship to refugees from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan only if they are not Muslim. The amendment clarifies the commitment in Modi's 2014 election manifesto to provide citizenship to persecuted Hindus from neighboring Muslim-majority states (Islam, 2024). This law has elicited quite a campaign as it creates a clear discrimination against Muslim refugees despite India's Constitution of a Republican, Secular, and Democratic state (Hossain, 2024). In Assam, the NRC is intended to detect and deport foreigners who have entered the country without valid travel documents. In practice, Muslims bump up against the facts of governance. Namely, many have been rendered stateless or, at the very least, vulnerable to detention or deportation. The primary contention of the CAB is that it goes against the Citizenship Act of 1955 and the key tenets of Indian law. Regarding the purpose and ramifications of these policies, the bills show a stark disagreement between the opposition and the ruling party. The opposition worries that these programs taken together may establish a foundation for discrimination based on religion, especially against Muslims (Thomas, 2019).

3. Communal Violence and Lynching: Communal violence and lynching represent two separate and overlapping forms of collective violence that are grounded in prejudice and discrimination. Lynching of Black people in the United States' Southern and border states was used by white communities in the late nineteenth century to intimidate Black people and maintain the prevailing system of white supremacy (Gibson, 2010). Gibson (2010) reported that from 1882 to 1951, the Tuskegee Institute documented a total of 4,730 lynchings in the United States, including 3,437 Black individuals and 1,293 white individuals. Mob lynching in India is a complex issue influenced by a combination of historical, social, caste, religious, regional, and political factors, reflecting deep-seated prejudices (Prakash, 2021). Since 2014, India has seen a significant increase in incidents of mob lynching, prompting some to label this trend as the "new normal" in the country (Bhowmik, 2021).

The increase in mob lynching of individuals suspected of cow meat smuggling or involvement in 'love jihad'—a baseless propaganda spread by Hindutva forces alleging a conspiracy among Muslim men to marry Hindu

girls and convert them to Islam—demonstrates this animosity (Prakash, 2021). According to the Human Rights Watch report of 2019, between May 2015 and December 2018, at least 44 people were killed across 12 Indian states, including 36 Muslims (Human Rights Watch. (2019).

The introduction of new legislation and stricter laws regarding cow protection has, unfortunately, coincided with a surge in violence across India. Laws prohibiting cow slaughter have a long history in the country. Significant incidents of cow protection-related violence in colonial India include the Fyzabad and Ayudhya riots in 1912, the Calcutta beef riots in 1909, clashes in Patna, Muzaffarpur, Bihar, and Gaya from 1911 to 1917, a mob attack by 25,000 Hindus on a Muslim village in Ibrahimpur on September 30, 1917, and the Delhi riots of 1924 (Akram et al., 2021) .

However, between 2016 and the end of 2020, more than 50 fatalities were reported due to lynchings or mob violence, often triggered by suspicions of cow slaughter or trade.
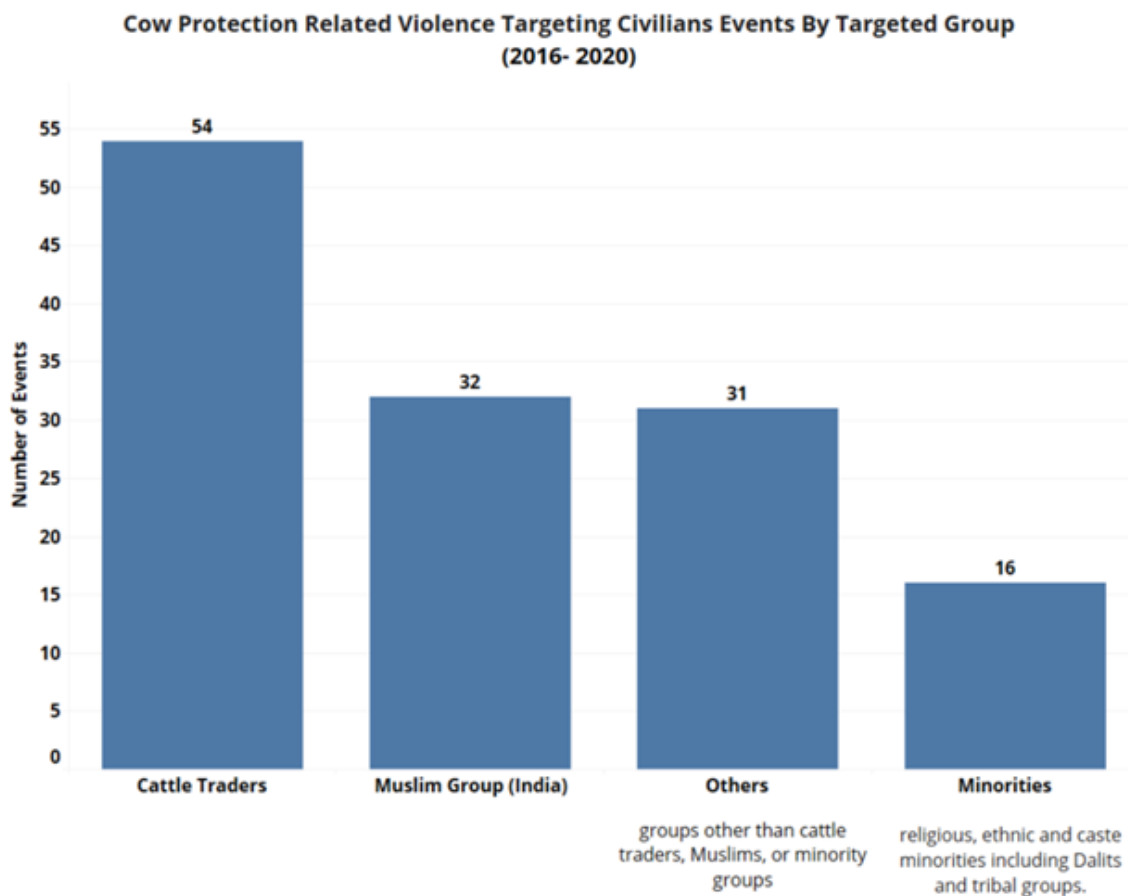

Fig. 1. Cow Protection-related violence targeting civilians in India (2016-2020)

Source: (Maskara, 2021)

These acts of violence, often perpetrated by individuals who enjoy legal protection, have worsened the situation for Muslims and contributed to communal violence and lynching in Bangladesh.

4. Hate Speech and Media Propaganda: There is no definite definition of Hate speech under international law, but the world is seeing the rise of hate speech, which ends up with violence. The anti-Shia hate speech by Salafis in Egypt to anti Muslim hate narratives in Myanmar show how hate speech gradually turns into physical attack, lynching, or genocide. Media plays a prominent role in shaping public perception through its selection, framing, and dissemination of information, making it a potent force in the spread of conflict or Islamophobia. In 1994, Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM) used hate speech to incite ordinary Hutus to take part in the genocide against Tutsis. According to Report 2024: Hate Speech Events in India

indicates that the vast majority of these hate speech events targeted religious minorities, which has increased from 668 in 2023 to 1,165 in 2024.

After 9/11, Western mass media played a role in spreading islamophobia. Between 2001 and 2011, Western media significantly intensified its coverage of Muslim militants (2%-25%), highlighting them prominently in the news, while stories about everyday Muslims remained largely overlooked. Additionally, after 9/11, America's George W. Bush used the media to justify the Iraq invasion in the name of Islamophobia. The media acts as an actor in India, which contributes to the spread of Islamophobia through sensationalized reporting, misinformation, and fake news. During the COVID-19 pandemic, a significant segment of Indian media exploited the health crisis to advance a pre-existing Islamophobic agenda. The fourth pillar of democracy, the media chooses a majoritarian appeasement policy and business instead of ethics. Author and activist Arundhati Roy connects Indian media with Nazi-led German media with an observation of normalizing Islamophobia, showing the gravity of the current Indian media's bias.

5. Rohingya Refugee Policy: India has also been accused of its stance on the Rohingya issue. Now, opening its doors to more than a million Rohingya refugees, where are the safe zones for Indian Muslims? Why are Rohingya Muslims being sent back to Myanmar? For this reason, this policy has been recognized as an addition to Islamophobia and the formation of a negative image of a regional power (Georgekutty, 2024).

DISCUSSION

Impact on Areas of Cooperation

Islamophobia in India has significant effects on bilateral relations in the context of trade, infrastructure, energy, security cooperation, and others. Even though the two nations' relationship has always been more realistic and utilitarian, especially in the context of raising mutual economic and strategic benefits, the rising sectarianism from India will only undermine current cooperation and distort future cooperation through the disruption of ongoing initiatives.

1. Trade: Bilateral trade has been central to Bangladesh-India relations since the early eighties, as both countries shared locational advantages and had similar commodities to trade in. Among all the major trading partners, India is just behind China for Bangladesh, with recent trade estimated at $16 billion. It reveals that major Bangladeshi products found in India are textiles, jute, and fish, while major Indian products found in Bangladesh are machinery, agricultural products, and raw materials (BASU & DATTA, 2007, P.11).

Bilateral and multilateral trade has been encouraged through what has been signed in this regard, such as the SAFTA- South Asian Free Trade Area and BTIA- Bangladesh-India Bilateral Trade Agreement. Also, India provided duty-free and quota-free benefits to Bangladeshi products through its duty tariff preference measure. These have promoted economic interaction and have brought development to the area.

Nevertheless, Islamophobia fosters an atmosphere of mistrust and animosity, which makes it challenging to build the kind of rapport required for fruitful business dealings and collaborations. According to Boston Review, the anti-Muslim sentiments are costing Western countries (Hayoun, 2013). The core idea is that Islamophobia isn't just a domestic issue confined to the political or social sphere of one nation. Its effects spill over due to global interconnectedness. Several countries, as Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Iceland, have enacted legislation that bans or significantly restricts Dhabiha, the Islamic method of slaughter, which represents institutional Islamophobia (Aziz et al., 2024). Islamophobia greatly impedes growth, investment, and innovation in the global halal trade industry (Aziz et al., 2024, p.29). Growing Islamophobia and the existing anti-Muslim sentiment in India pose a dire threat to this trade relationship.

The public in Bangladesh, which has a religion like Islam as part of its identity, feels that India has stepped up the ante to marginalize Muslims. Indian goods have come under particular boycott sentiments from a specific segment of the Bangladeshi population, which may impact the bulk of the business. For example, the

enactment of the CAA coincides with the ongoing anti-India movement, "India Out," on Bangladeshi social media platforms, which calls for a boycott of Indian products (Mazumder, 2024) . In addition, conflict within communities has created political enmity, thus complicating the process of negotiating new trade liberalization deals or addressing continuing differences over tariffs and non-tariff barriers (Gupta et al., 2018, P.19). Several times, Hindu nationalism has created India-Bangladesh border instability in the perspective of protecting the Hindu religion, which impacts bilateral trade.

Suvendu Adhikari, a prominent leader of the BJP in West Bengal, has threatened to halt India's land trade with Bangladesh over the allegation of attacking the Hindu minority in Bangladesh (The Economic Times, 2024). History says that, under the leadership of the BJP (as a coalition government) in February and March of 2002, almost 2000 people were killed in Gujarat due to anti-Muslim violence (Narula, 2003). After spreading the rumors of disrespecting the Quran during the annual festival of Durga Puja in Bangladesh, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Bajrang Dal (BD), associate organizations of the ruling BJP, rallied and vandalized mosques and killed six people in 2001 (Shah et al, 2021) in Tripura, which is a transit hub between Bangladesh and India. Tripura and Bangladesh's internal commerce increased significantly from Rs 230.24 crore in 2013-14 to Rs 715.98 crore in 2023-24 (Singh, 2024). Tourism is a vital component of the national economy. The disruption of bilateral relations between two countries may impact tourist numbers, which has a direct impact on the national economy. For example, according to the Department of Commerce, 77.5 million overseas visitors came to the United States in 2015, which financed 1.1 million American jobs (nearly 14% of overall travel and tourism-related occupations). The ban on Muslims is projected to result in a direct spending loss of between $14 billion and $30 billion annually (Hayoun, 2013). Similarly, the chronological events and media's misleading information about the two countries has decreased the number of tourists from Bangladesh to India, which was around 23% of India's inbound tourism (Gandhi, 2024).

2. Infrastructure: Development cooperation has become a key pillar of the bilateral relationship between India and Bangladesh, reflecting their shared vision for regional prosperity, connectivity, and human development. Other areas of cooperation include infrastructure development, where both nations have implemented projects to enhance their transport networks for economic growth. These developments are highlighted by, among others, the construction of railways, including the Maitree Express between Kolkata and Dhaka, as well as the construction of ports, such as Payra Port in Bangladesh and its connection to the Indian logistics chain. All these projects are intended to increase economic cooperation between the region, cut transport costs, and foster people exchanges (Chakravarty, 2023, P.94).

Businesses and investors from nations with a majority of Muslims may be reluctant to make investments in nations with high levels of Islamophobia, which represents an unhealthy economic climate. The Dubai Port Controversy is an example where Dubai Ports World (DP World) announced the acquisition of the British shipping and logistics giant P&O in a $3.7 billion transaction that received little public attention. Widespread resistance to the acquisition only surfaced after Senator Charles Schumer launched a high-profile campaign against it, suspecting that an Arab-based corporation is more prone to terrorist infiltration (Flynn, 2006).

The Maitree Express (Shringla, 2018) was built between Kolkata and Dhaka, which has added a new dimension to the connectivity between India and Bangladesh. The 13108 Kolkata-Dhaka Maitree Express accommodated 29,519 passengers and generated revenue of Rs 1.74 crore. In contrast, the 13109 Dhaka-Kolkata Maitree Express transported 31,040 passengers, yielding revenue of Rs 1.87 crore (Gupta, 2017). Consequently, the Payra Port in Bangladesh also aims to make a significant contribution to the nation's economic growth by enhancing trade facilities and meeting future demands (Ahmed, 2017). According to the Prothom Alo report, 3,160 ships, of which 484 were foreign, had entered the port, and the center had received Tk 1,576 crore (Hossain, 2024). It has also strengthened regional trading and integration among various economies. These infrastructure projects have improved transportation networks, facilitated economic development, and strengthened bilateral relations between the two nations. However, the political dynamics arising from sectarian speeches and discriminatory anti-Muslim policies in India could hinder or even reverse these efforts.

Moreover, new tensions between the communities have also affected discussions on the projects that connect people from neighboring countries. Regulatory concerns related to issues such as land acquisition, resource allocation, and regulatory permission indeed involve one party trusting the other, and that can be a severe blow when one side feels the other is antithetical to their philosophies. This has resulted in the slow execution of projects and poor reception of new programs and projects in organizations. The constant changes have also contributed to a lengthy implementation process, reduced interest in new projects, and slowed implementation.

3. Energy: Energy cooperation has remained one of the most noticeable forms of joint effort between India and Bangladesh to meet Bangladesh's 'Power to All' goal (Shringla, 2018). Bangladesh buys power from India through transmission lines, while Indian investors invest in Bangladesh's traditional power plants and renewable energy systems. For instance, the Maitree Super Thermal Power Project in Rampal underlines that cooperation in this sector may only bring advantages (Das et al., 2018, P.659).

The energy cooperation partnership between India and Bangladesh has made marked progress in the last few years in meeting the peak energy requirements of these two countries. Following the grid interconnection in October 2013, Bangladesh has been importing electricity from India to improve its energy supply reliability. Bangladesh had a Power Purchase Agreement with India for the import of 2,656 MW of electricity by FY 2022-23, including 1,496 MW from Adani Power Jharkhand, 1,000 MW from the Baharampur plant, and 160 MW from the Tripura plant (Chowdhury, 2024).

The Maitree Super Thermal Power Project in Rampal, Bangladesh, is a successful instance of such cooperation. This new 1,320 MW coal-fired power project is managed by the Bangladesh-India Friendship Power Company (BIFPCL), a joint venture between India's National Thermal Power Corporation and Bangladesh's Power Development Board (BPDB). Construction began in 2017, and commercial operations commenced in December 2022 (Power Technology, 2024).

Bangladesh has the potential to generate electricity, but it faces significant challenges in its power sector due to a lack of fossil fuels and other operational issues. In 2018, the country's electricity supply reached only 10,958 MW, while the highest demand was 14,014 MW. This shortfall led to outages and unmet demand (Mahbub, 2024). Bangladesh's electricity generation is largely dependent on fossil fuels, which in turn makes the country reliant on India for energy imports. However, the growing Islamophobia in India may lead to shifts in this cooperation. Dissent against India's domestic policies have raised questions in Bangladesh regarding the energy agreements between the two nations (Ahmed, 2023). Currently, political dynamics have intensified concerns about the environmental and social impacts of proposed projects, such as the Rampal Power Plant, prompting the public to scrutinize the genuine intentions and benefits of these partnerships. Different narratives and disinformation on social media can destabilize the rationality of energy importation and exportation. For example, tensions arising from political violence or border disputes stemming from communal conflicts may threaten supply chain security in such cross-border infrastructure, potentially halting future energy cooperation on renewable energy.

Impact on Areas of Conflict

Today, Bangladesh and India, as two sovereign states, have a relationship between these countries is influenced by numerous political factors. Key issues include water-sharing disputes, boundary conflicts, and security threats. At their core, these conflicts are rooted in historical and geopolitical factors, which have recently been exacerbated by rising Islamophobia and majoritarianism in India. This section examines the reasons behind the ongoing escalation of these disputes and the socio-political realities that impede the pursuit of a viable and effective resolution.

1. Water Disputes: In the past decade, water has emerged as a key issue in international relations, with discussions about a "human right to water" gaining momentum at the UN and beyond (Gleick, 2005). Disagreements over water have always remained a problem in the relationship between India and Bangladesh since the 1970s (Aktar, 2021) . Out of the 54 common rivers that flow between upstream India and downstream

Bangladesh in the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna (GBM) basin, only the Ganges has a bilateral agreement (Rahman et al., 2019).

Out of all the issues, the one that has resisted some resolution is the Teesta River. Bangladesh has long been demanding a fair share of the water in the Ganga, particularly during the dry season, when the country's agriculture depends heavily on water. However, India has shown little enthusiasm for finalizing it because the West Bengal government also depends on the Teesta River water for its uses. Even after multi/ bilateral talks, which include assurance of solving the Teesta water-sharing issue during different official visits, no definitive decision has been made; hence, Bangladesh remains unsatisfied and more skeptical of India's gestures (Sood & Mathukumalli, 2011, P.47).

However, disputes on sharing the Ganges River water were addressed politically by signing the Ganges Water Treaty in 1996 (Thomas, 2017). Although the treaty has the potential for convenient cooperation, it has been followed by obstacles. Though favorable, Bangladesh complains that most downstream nations unilaterally built dams and barrages that hinder adequate water flow and harm Bangladesh.

The northeastern states are changing due to the continuous push of the BJP government's nature and propaganda. The Northeastern states and Bangladesh share water resources. For example, the Feni River, which marks the boundary between the Tripura district of India and the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh, has been in historical discussions on this topic since 1958 (Water Beyond Borders, 2020) . The changing nature of violence in Tripura toward minorities may affect Bangladesh-India water talks or adjustments. Increasing violence against Muslims and prejudice in India and India's perception of Bangladesh's internal issues through the Hindu lens have given a new nuance to these water conflicts. Attacking the Bangladeshi mission in Agartala to arrest Chinmoy Krishna Das, a Hindu leader in Bangladesh, has flared up the tensions between the two neighbors and degraded the weight of ties (Shankar, 2024) . The increased tension in the relations between the two countries due to the increased use of communal politics may give three possibilities on the water issue. Firstly, the people of Bangladesh may become distrustful of Indian offers or agreements about water sharing as a result of Islamophobic discourse. Secondly, the diplomatic strain may cause delays, stalemates, and breakdowns in water negotiations.

2. Border Issues: The 4,000-kilometer border linking India and Bangladesh is considered larger than the America-Mexico and Israel-Palestine borders (Vachhrajani, 2024) and one of the Earth's most turbulent and important borders. The connected border has been a reason for migration, armed confrontations, people smuggling, and human trafficking. Migration is a global phenomenon; however, illegal migration poses a security threat by violating the laws of destination countries (Rather, 2013). Several such disputes, at least until the 2015 Land Boundary Agreement, have been resolved, but violence and tensions continue, mainly in the areas in which communal memory conflicts with migration discourses (Ranjan, 2018, P.7). Violence and shooting incidents near the border are common, with Indian border security forces often firing on Bangladeshi civilians.

Table 2: Border Killing between Bangladesh-India

Period	Bangladeshi Civilians Killed (by the Indian side)	Bangladeshi BGB Personnel Killed (by the Indian side)
1972	2	0
1972-1981	103	0
1982-1991	179	4
1992-2001	264	10
2012-2016	178	0

Source: Hassan, M., & Bala, A. (2019). An analysis on India-Bangladesh border killing. International Journal of Social, Political and Economic Research, 6(1), 69-83.

Many of these events are linked to alleged smuggling attempts or unauthorized border crossings. However, the emergence of the new phenomenon of Islamophobia has also added new challenges to the management of borders. After 9/11, in India, the narrative of the "global war on terror" was frequently framed as a straightforward conflict between "good and evil," which was often interpreted as a division between Hindus and Muslims (Rahman et al., 2024) . The political construction of Bangladeshi migrants as 'infiltrators' and 'illegal immigrants' has not only impacted the border but also made it militarized to a greater extent. Consequently, trust between the two countries has eroded, and India has become the target of hate among the Bangladeshi people.

Thus, the communal tensions spiraling up border conflicts are especially crystallized in the NRC and the CAA. The NRC implemented in Assam seeks to detect illegal immigrants, most of whom are claimed to be from Bangladesh. Despite the objections of the Assamese, the non-inclusion of nearly two million people or more, most of whom are Muslim, into the NRC has raised concerns over future deportation to Bangladesh. Though the Indian government has given word that deportation will not happen without consultation with the Bangladeshi government, the NRC issue narratives have created tension and suspicion.

Adding fuel to the fire is the CAA, which gives citizenship to non-Muslims fleeing from neighboring countries. Bangladesh regards the act as discriminatory and evoking, and Bangladesh has been cooperative in dealing with migration issues. Suggestions that Muslims from Bangladesh are not wanted in India have caused anger and demonstrations in Bangladesh, thus making talks on border control and immigration more difficult.

3. Security: Issues of security for both countries have been traditional about cross-border terrorism, insurgent groups, and criminals. However, the coming of the new century has seen the emergence of a new problem, including the management of refugees and radicalization due to the emergence of Islamophobia.

Refugees, particularly those concerning the Rohingya people, are becoming very politically charged. While approximately 0.9 million Rohingya refugees from Myanmar have sought refuge in Bangladesh (Hossain, 2020). Since the late 1970s, Rohingya refugees have been migrating to India, primarily fleeing persecution and violence in Myanmar (formerly Burma), especially after crackdowns such as "Operation Nagamin" in 1978 (Basavapatna, 2018) . Some have attempted to travel to India, where they are hated and likely to be deported. Despite many Rohingya holding UNHCR refugee cards and previously receiving Long-Term Visas (LTVs) from FRRO, the BJP government has explicitly stated that it considers all Rohingya as "illegal immigrants." This narrative directly contradicts their status as recognized refugees by the UNHCR (Verma, 2022) . New Delhi's refusal to permit Rohingya into the country and its recent decision to deport those who sought asylum in India have angered Dhaka as the government struggles to accommodate a humanitarian crisis. The ineffective coordination of refugee management has led to conflicts of interest and insecurity among the people (Abedin, 2021, P.9).

The other major security threat is the prospect of radicalization. People effectively argue that the current treatment of Muslims in India, along with the suppression and invasion of Muslims by the Hindu majority, as well as the philosophical genocide and anti-Muslim rhetoric, create a fertile environment for the rise of extreme hatred. Especially in Bangladesh, where the Islamic religion is an important part of the nation's ethos, these developments are seen as a clear and present danger to security in the region.

These dominant narratives of exclusion and domination in India's domestic politics may further radicalize vulnerable populations on both sides of the border. Current discontent offers extremists an opportunity to recruit new followers and serves as a pretext for their heinous actions, exacerbating counter-terrorism efforts. Meanwhile, the rapid erosion of trust between India and Bangladesh has hindered cooperation in intelligence sharing and operational responses to these threats.
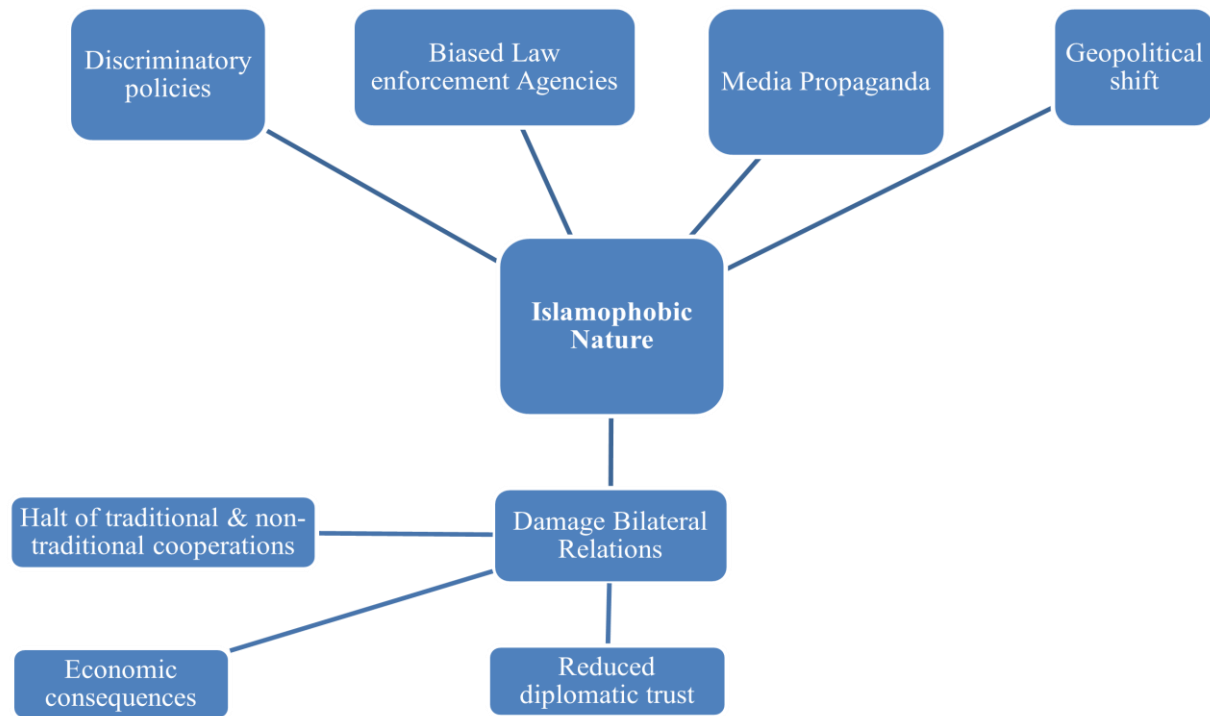
Fig 2: Islamophobic Nature & Bilateral relations (Author's Own)

The diagram reparents, for fueling Islamophobia, discriminatory national policies, biased laws and media propaganda and concurring geopolitics are closely interlinked. Undoubtedly, in bilateral relations the Islamophobic nature of state reduced diplomatic trust, economic cooperation and other cooperations which also influence in geopolitics.

The foreign policy influenced by religious perspectives undermines mutual trust and the historical diplomatic bond between countries. India's growing Islamophobia and intervening nature on Bangladesh's minority issues gradually affects public opinion, which has a direct impact on bilateral relations. Additionally, geopolitical shifts may further complicate these dynamics.

Table 3: Seeming changes may affect bilateral relations

Area of cooperation or conflict	Perceived changes
Water	In 2024, Bangladesh experienced severe flooding. To enhance cooperation on flood warnings for the 54 rivers that flow between them, Bangladesh and India established a joint river commission in 1972. However, geopolitical shifts and ongoing criticism of each other's treatment of minorities since 2021 have strained water diplomacy between the two countries. At that time, Md Nahid Islam, the adviser on information and broadcasting affairs, accused India of contributing to the flooding, suggesting that India failed to provide adequate warnings to Bangladesh. If this mistrust persists, the agreement for sharing Ganga waters, set to expire in 2026, may encounter challenges. This situation is reminiscent of India's 2019 decision not to renew the 1989 agreement with Pakistan regarding the sharing of hydrological data, following India's abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir.

Trade	Continuous political distance and verbal sparring with each other on migration and religious minorities, India and Bangladesh have recently imposed a series of tit-for-tat trade restrictions that are impacting businesses in both countries. Bangladesh restricted land imports of cotton yarn from India and India also restricted jute products from Bangladesh through the land ports.
Diplomatic Strain	In 2025, India's many BJP leaders made propaganda of 'Hindu khatre mein' (Hindus are in danger) has instigated Bangladeshi majoritarian. After arresting Chinmoy Krishna Das in Dhaka, India showed concern on Bangladesh's minorities which was precepted negatively by Bangladeshi people. Regarding the issue, mob attacked the Bangladesh Assistant High Commission at Agartala. The Government of Bangladesh stated that it is the host government's responsibility to protect diplomatic missions from any form of intrusion or damage.
Halted cooperations	In 2025, India ended a transshipment agreement which was used by Bangladesh for exports and Bangladesh cancelled a $21 million navy-based defense contract with India.

RESULT AND FINDINGS

Perceptions and Responses from Bangladesh

The foundation of Bangladesh–India relations lies mainly in historical and cultural ties, along with political co-relations. As a result, Islamophobia and majoritarianism in India have influenced the attitudes of the Bangladeshi government, civil society, and its citizens towards their larger neighbor. This section explores public opinion, government responses, and the role of media and civil society in shaping these perceptions.

1. Public Sentiment: The NRC and CAA are seen as initiatives that directly incite communal tensions, especially between the minority Muslim community and the Hindu majority in India. As a result, Muslim organizations and political parties in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan have voiced significant opposition to these policies (Hassan, 2023). Many view these measures as provocative to the shared history and culture between Bangladesh and India, as well as a challenge to the independence and secularism established during the 1971 liberation war.

Anti-Muslim policies and incidents in India are closely known in Bangladesh since many consider them an insult to both countries, culturally and religiously. The public believes there is systematic prejudice against Muslims; this has created anti-India sentiment, and, more so, from civil society and the media (Latif, 2024, P.14). Abu Sufian (2020) stated in his article that Bangladeshi society may become more anti-Indian as a result of the NRC-CAA, particularly among the younger population (Sufian, 2022). . Demonstrations against the CAA and NRC have been observed throughout Bangladesh (Dhaka Tribune, 2019), and the country accused India of continuing its betrayal of the spirit of pluralism.

2. Diplomatic Strains

These domestic policies have negatively affected the two countries' diplomacy. Approximately 2 million people will be stateless if the CAA and NRC are properly implemented, which will create chaos in South Asia. Bangladesh will not remain indifferent to the situation of a large-scale humanitarian crisis and forced movement of people, which will significantly strain bilateral diplomatic relations (Hassan, 2023). Indian Muslims and the possible consequences of their oppression, which may lead to the destabilization of the whole region. For instance, the deportation of the so-called 'illegal immigrants' under the NRC proposed has stirred up a picture of economic and social issues, even with the refugee inflow to Bangladesh.

3. Media and Civil Society

The media serves as a powerful lens for understanding different communities. Its narratives can significantly influence public opinion and contribute to stereotypes and biases. Media coverage often perpetuates negative

stereotypes about Muslims, reinforcing existing prejudices and contributing to animosity, discrimination, and social division against the Muslim community (Rege, 2023) . The Bangladeshi media and many civil society representatives significantly influence people's attitudes towards Indian policies. News outlets and activists have reported events such as the CAA, NRC, and communal riots, and social media platforms have associated these events with their possible impacts on Bangladesh. Nevertheless, social media has played an active role in raising people's awareness toward minorities in India, supporting Indian Muslims (Ali, 2025) and criticizing Indian policies. The quick spread of hashtags such as #NOCAB on Twitter and Instagram highlights social media's ability to galvanize public opinion and raise awareness about an issue (Bhilwar, 2021).

After the July uprising, there was some news about many anti-Hindu riots; however, semantic and statistical data have denied them as overstated or fabricated. Indian media is consistently disseminating fake news about the Islamophobia situation in India and its impact on how Bangladesh is perceived. Following the ousting of Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, both mainstream and social media in India frequently reported incidents of attacks on Hindus in Bangladesh, with some reports sensationalizing the situation by labeling it a 'Hindu Massacre' (Dey, 2024) '. However, contrary to these reports, especially the horrifying ones, fact-checkers later said that most were fake news or overblown. Rumor Scanner's investigation reveals a troubling finding: from August 12 to December 5, 2024, 49 Indian media outlets spread 13 false reports about Bangladesh (The Daily Star, 2024). This could lead to several negative consequences, including fostering mistrust and suspicion at both the public and governmental levels, and potentially influencing policy discussions and public opinion.

In the 1990s, the term "civil society" frequently had a positive connotation, linked to democratic values, citizen empowerment, and social progress (Islam, 2021). An independent and well-informed civil society in Bangladesh plays a crucial role in fostering a mature and mutually beneficial relationship with India. This can be achieved through active engagement in advocacy, dialogue, education, research, and lobbying. In the last decade, Bangladesh's civil society has failed to make an outstanding stand to act due to being controlled by political power (Civicus, 2024). The paper "Politically Engaged Civil Society in Bangladesh: A Case Study Analysis" poses important questions regarding the interactions between civil society, political actors, and the state in Bangladesh. It argues that simply having many civil society organizations (CSOs) does not guarantee a robust and independent force for democratic consolidation. Instead, factors such as political influence and resource needs greatly impact these organizations' operational environment and effectiveness (Tasnim, 2017).   On 5 September, one hundred twenty-five Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) highlight the serious humanitarian and human rights issues related to the exclusion of 1.9 million people from the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam, and from Bangladesh, there were Centre for Peace and Justice, BRAC University, Council of Minorities, Naripokkho, Odhikar as signatories (Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion, n.d.). In the era of social media and misinformation, media and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) of Bangladesh play a crucial role in articulating the thoughts and concerns surrounding Bangladesh-India relations.

Is it a Threat to the democracy of Bangladesh?

This trending Islamophobia and majoritarianism in India are lethal threats to Bangladesh's democracy and stability. In Bangladesh, more so because the country has been founded and nurtured based on secular fundamental principles, they have an impending test due to exclusionary ideologies that have spilled over from the neighboring state of India, which impact the governance and stability of the Bangladeshi state.

Firstly, the rise of right-wing Hindu nationalism in India and the dichotomous actions of Hindutva impact not only India's Muslim population but also neighboring countries such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh (Qamar, 2021). India's policies, particularly the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC), have been criticized for discriminating against Muslims. There is concern that these actions are igniting religious disharmony and undermining Bangladesh's secularism. As the Indian government continues to implement the CAA and NRC, Islamophobic attacks in India have contributed to a growing anti-India sentiment in Bangladesh. India's communal card on Bangladesh, and its Islamophobic nature through the Hindutva lens, creates more anti-India sentiment and hateful narratives on India by Islamic organizations.

Also, bigotry against Muslims and arrogance are evident in some narratives, which label Bangladesh's internal movements demanding democracy as the work of external agents. Referring to the 2024 student movement in Bangladesh as an 'Islamist takeover' and blaming Pakistan and China for the incident to appeal to the Indian audience reflects a biased and Islamophobic perspective (Bajpai, 2024).

Secondly, communal tensions also breed polarity in the electorate. To understand contemporary communalism in India, including the rise of Hindutva and the associated Islamophobia, it is essential to recognize its deep historical roots in colonial strategies aimed at fragmenting Indian society for imperial control (Jan, 2018) . Religious and nationalist motifs are now often and closely linked in political campaigns. For political parties, especially those adhering to a Hindutva ideology, Islamophobia serves as a strategic tool to unify and strengthen the majority Hindu vote (Qundeel, 2024) .

For instance, other BJP personalities have also made assumptions, like Meenakshi Lekhi, who claimed that the BJP has planned to change the name of Bangladesh to the "Islamic Republic of East Pakistan' (Anam, 2024) . These narratives deny Bangladesh's internal agency, while India tolerates Hindu nationalism and simultaneously portrays the Islamic identity in Bangladesh as extremism. This represents a troubling double standard. India's Islamophobic narratives divide Bangladesh's politics into religious and nationalist divisions.

In Bangladesh, like in other developing countries, patron-client networks are deeply ingrained in the political system, contributing to polarization (Osman, 2010). Critics say that India's uncritical support to the Awami League government, and its regime under Sheikh Hasina, is despite evidence of democratic backsliding and human rights abuses mounting internationally. This blind support is sometimes perceived as India being the Awami League regime's patronage (Rahman, 2024) by some sectors of the Bangladeshi public and opposition, which helps its political survival. Bangladesh's 2018 and 2024 national elections were another reason for complaints of Indian interference that hampered public trust in democracy (Parvez, 2024). The external patronage of India has fueled the political polarity in Bangladesh, which is channeled through India's big brotherhood syndrome and has resulted in anti-India sentiments among Bangladeshis.

Thirdly, the historical trajectory of jihadism in South Asia, along with the exploitation of this threat by right-wing Hindu groups in India and the global repercussions of 9/11, creates a complex array of challenges for Bangladesh's democracy. the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the 1980s contributed to the emergence of jihadist groups in South Asia, particularly Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), Harkat ul-Jihad Bangladesh (HuJI-B), Jamaat ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), and various Al-Qaeda affiliates, driven by geopolitical and financial motivations. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, India witnessed a rise in indigenous Islamist terror organizations and attacks linked to groups based in Pakistan. This context indicates that the legitimate security threats posed by certain individuals or factions within the Muslim community have been leveraged to vilify the entire Muslim population unjustly (Siyech, 2021), which may threaten Bangladesh's internal security and democracy.

Geopolitical shift

The consequences of hatred and mercenary majoritarianism do not end with certain spheres of interaction. The lack of trust between India and Bangladesh may eventually weaken the general relations. Thus, it can be challenging to continue permanent relations. Therefore, the relationship between public opinion in the two nations remains influential in determining the diplomatic relations. Because the public in Bangladesh is increasingly more displeased with India's communal policies, the government lacks the autonomy to continue its Alerts: communally based policies (Devine et al., 2006, P.111).

Moreover, over the recent past, India has been perceived as a majoritarian state in Bangladesh, compromising its soft power and, thus, the degree and range of shared acceptance machinery it can mobilize in Bangladesh. This has led to the opening of opportunities for other regional players like China to deepen their footing in Bangladesh by providing what is perceived to be a less politically motivated strategic partnership.

The Way Forward

Recent strands of Islamophobia and majoritarianism in India are the threats that are eroding Bangladesh-India relations and endangering cooperation and stability in the region. To overcome such problems, there is a need to regain credibility by practicing transparency in communication throughout the rank and file. Specific areas that require attention include the sharing of water in the Teesta River, border management, and security. There are multiple ways to approach communal discourses and minimize their impact, including eradicating hostility directed towards other communities, changing legislation that may negatively affect minorities, and increasing interaction between people of different cultures.

Focusing solely on economic relations through CFIA and other balanced trade initiatives, like CEPA and energy pipelines, can highlight a mutually beneficial relationship. It's essential to negotiate water-sharing and border issues while enhancing border monitoring through improved security cooperation. Additionally, there is an opportunity to strengthen collaboration on common challenges by utilizing platforms such as SAARC and BIMSTEC to address regional responsibilities.

One of the final steps is to engage civil society and the media in addressing and countering fake news while building consensus around the potential benefits of coalitions. They can foster trust, stabilize relationships during the designated period, eliminate tensions, and prevent long-term conflicts.

CONCLUSION

The paper examines the significant research issue of evaluating the impact of Bangladesh-India bilateral relations on the rising Islamophobia in India, which is marked by increasing discriminatory policies and violence against the Muslim minority. The paper highlights how India's perceived hegemonic foreign policy and its "patron" role toward Bangladesh undermine mutual trust and cooperation. This situation exacerbates anti-India sentiment, intensifies political polarization, and threatens the democratization process in Bangladesh.

The key findings indicate that, despite a historically utilitarian relationship centered on mutual economic and strategic benefits, rising Islamophobia in India is undermining current cooperation and distorting future initiatives. Additionally, the research underscores an atmosphere of mistrust and animosity toward border trade and fruitful business dealings, joint infrastructure and energy projects. The complicated aspects that are under negotiation are also afflicted with low hope due to the Islamophobic nature of India.

The paper outlines a path forward that includes restoring direct dialogue, eliminating stereotypical narratives in the media, and fostering fair mutual cooperation in bilateral relations. To navigate the challenging relationship between the two most populous neighbors of SAARC (South Asia), it is essential to enhance people-to-people contacts and mutual respect. These efforts, grounded in a commitment to international law, should evolve into close, strategic cooperation.

The research clearly illustrates how Islamophobia in India, viewed by many in Bangladesh as state-sanctioned communalism, breeds deep suspicion and animosity, making genuine cooperation increasingly challenging. Long-standing issues such as water disputes and border management are further complicated and exacerbated by this communal perspective. The findings suggest that the Bangladeshi government's autonomy in foreign policy, especially regarding India, is significantly limited by growing public discontent with India's communal policies. Additionally, the research indicates that India's rising majoritarianism and Islamophobic reputation are severely undermining its soft power in Bangladesh.

The paper acknowledges limitations, such as the complexity of defining Islamophobia because of its broadness. The paper only defines Islamophobia in India through its domestic policies, media, and public perceptions, and other lenses (institutional biases, non-state actors, and political parties, except the BJP's behavior, socio-economic dynamics) are missing. The future research directions should focus on policy

reformations related to improving strained bilateral relations between Bangladesh and India due to India's Islamophobic nature. Further studies may examine the effectiveness of the stressed relations effect on the region. In conclusion, India has had significant Islamophobic tendencies, often bolstered by strengthening Hindu nationalist narratives and policies deemed discriminatory toward Muslims, which causes deep public distrust and anti-India sentiment in Bangladesh. This directly impedes the regional cooperation in key domains, with dire consequences on regional stability and the encouragement of alternative geopolitical realignments

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