Does *Islamic* Militancy Exist in India?

Islamic militancy in the form of armed protests against established regimes prevails in many parts of the world, including West Asia, North Africa, etc. These movements owe much more to socio-political and economic than religious factors.[1] Specific circumstances are giving rise to different movements in particular settings, but this has led many to jump to the conclusion that Islam is inherently radicalizing and, therefore, orients Muslims towards militancy. It must be noted that Islamic militancy in different parts of the world is not a monolithic entity. The violence does not come from Islam per se but rather from people's frustration with the inability of the established order to achieve serious political change. The frustration is elaborated in the language of Islam, and the violence finds a justification in its vocabulary. However, there are movements across the world where people other than Muslims are fighting to achieve political goals including India and Sri Lanka in South Asia and Northern Ireland in Europe. Muslim militancy by similar groups in similar situations easily gets projected as if it is inspired by religion. Any armed struggle of Muslims anywhere, regardless of its motive, is therefore generally perceived as part of a worldwide Islamic militancy and Islam is considered as inherently revolutionary.

In order to go deep into the roots of the turmoil it is important to understand these and various other groups and movements in their respective contexts. Individual leaders and groups take shape in specific places with distinctive histories and contemporary circumstances. Thus, each movement is different from other and needs a separate analysis. It is this factor that many analysts seem to gloss over while writing about Islam. Islam is not monolithic, nor does it prescribe a single course of political action. It offers a wide repertoire of possible political actions from which an individual can choose one according to exigency. Under the circumstances, any attempt to attribute a single course of moral action as singularly binding upon a Muslim is grossly misleading. Sweeping generalizations devoid of careful contextual analysis will lead inevitably to erroneous conclusions. The roots of any movement to be properly understood needs impartial investigation which are lodged in particular settings.

The paper shall attempt four things. First, it shall briefly explore whether there are elements within the Islamic corpus of beliefs and practices that contribute to militant political action. Second, it shall attempt an analysis of the Islamic concept of power and how this conception relates to the existential situation of Muslims in the contemporary world. Finally, it shall examine whether there are any trends towards Islamic militancy in India and, if the answer is in the affirmative, what forms it has assumed and where it is located. In the process the paper would explain the sources of this militant response in the Indian context. Finally, the paper shall make an attempt to deconstruct the terminology of Islamic militancy itself which is based on falsified notions of Islam.

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[1] For a detailed discussion on the factors leading to these movements see (Ayubi 1991, Halliday 1996, Shadid 2002,).

What is Islam?

Islam is an Arabic word and connotes submission, surrender, and obedience. As a religion, Islam stands for complete submission and obedience to God. Another literal meaning of the word Islam is 'peace' and this signifies that one can achieve real peace of body and of mind only through submission and obedience to God. Such a life of obedience brings in peace of the heart and establishes real peace in the society at large. A Muslim is a man and woman who had made submission of entire being to Allah and his demand that human beings behave to one another with justice, equity and compassion. It is an attitude expressed in the prostrations of the ritual prayers (*salat*), which Muslims are required to make five times a day. 'Show us the straight path', *Al-Fatiha*, the opening chapter (*surah*) of the Quran with its seven verses, is repeated several times at prayer five times each day. Entire books have been written on these verses. In order to comply with the stern teaching of the Quran, Muslims are required to give a regular proportion of their income to the poor in alms (*zakat*). They will also fast during Ramadhan to remind themselves of the privations of the poor, who cannot eat or drink whenever they chose. Social justice is, therefore, the crucial virtue of Islam. Finally, it is obligatory for a person, man or woman, if financially well off, to making pilgrimage to Mecca for *hajj* once in a life time. But these and other rules and regulations set down in the Shariah or Divine Law are only the outward shell of Islam. Thus full enactment of Islam's requirements demands that people must strive to gain nearness to God not only through wholesome works, which eliminate corruption and establish peace in the outside world, but also through the perfection of the inside world of their own souls.

One Quranic term that describes human efforts to realise perfection on all fronts is *jihad*, which means literally to "to struggle, to strive". But the term leads us to believe that Muslims are supposedly encouraged to take up arms in order to impose the faith by force, annihilating those who reject it. But it has never been one of the objectives of Jihad. Rather a greater jihad, according to Islam, is to fight against one's desires and wishes; it is a struggle each person has to do what is right. The "lesser" jihad involves the outward defense of Islam. Muslims should be prepared to defend Islam, including military defense, when the community of faith is under attack. In modern times this realistic position of legitimate use of force for a just war has been endorsed by the world community under the UN Charter (1945) and the humanitarian laws of war codified under the Four Geneva Conventions (1949).

Is Islam Really Militant?

Let us now turn to the question whether Islam is really radicalizing or that the Quranic verses orient Muslims towards militancy in a modest attempt to meet prejudice by reason, distortion by fact, and calumny by a sober analysis of events as adduced from unimpeachable historical records. This is important for one reason. Of late it has become commonplace and fashionable among a genre of scholars (one might, to borrow the expression from elsewhere might as well characterize them as 'pseudo-secular') to establish all that the Muslims can be rightly or wrongly blamed for at the original message of their faith. Quite apart from the highly motivated nature of this exercise, the perfunctory manner in which it is done itself deserved to be called into question. It must be noted here that every scripture has two sides, one temporary and perishable, belonging to the ideas of the people of the period and country in which it is produced, and other eternal and imperishable, and applicable to all ages and

countries. The intellectual expression and the psychological idiom are the products of time while the permanent truths are capable of being lived and seen by a higher than intellectual vision at all times. In short every scripture possesses both universal and particular values. Misunderstanding results when one attaches importance to particularity by glossing over universal messages. While all the known religions of the world call for *love, peace, tolerance, freedom of belief and mutual understanding*, many of the terrorists' acts are committed in this world by people who consider themselves religious. Every religion ordains its people to fight against injustice, oppression and tyranny and this is what Islam asks its followers to do and Krishna insisted Arjuna to do when he asked him to fight against his brothers Kauravas who were out of the right path.

The call to wage war against the unbelievers is repeated over and over in the Qur'an. "Believers, make war on the infidels who dwell around you." (surah 9:123; 8:65-69, 2:216, 9:73 – 95,9:29) "Prophet, strive hard against The Unbelievers and the Hypocrites",…and deal rigorously with them."(9:73). "So let them who sell the present life for the next world fight in the way of God…. Those who have faith fight in the way of God, and the unbelievers fight in the idols' way. Fight you therefore against the friends of Satan (4:74-76). "It must be noted here that the Quranic revelations did not come to Prophet Mohammad as a whole; they were sent piecemeal. The tone and tenure of the revelations differ from time to time. They came down sometimes as a few verses sometimes as a whole chapter. This was a continuing process, starting when Mohammad was 40 years old and lasting until his death, 23 years later. The Quranic verses cannot be understood in isolation. Every verse of the Quran must be read and interpreted against the background of the Quran as a whole. Even a cursory reading of the verses will show that the whole scheme of the Quran is based on god's guidance in the day-to-day life of the prophet. Verses came down to him as admonitions or directives to show the right path or to correct a wrong. Hence these could not deal with general or moral issues alone; they took into account specific events. They have, therefore, to be viewed from the angle of what is known in Islamic theology as 'occasions of revelations'. They are vital part of the Quran. On the basis of such understanding, one can easily argue, contrary to contemporary tendency of some people to hold Islam responsible for militancy, real or imaginary, of individual or groups of Muslims in specific locations, that Islam is tolerant and digestible.

Almost all the verses or *surah* in Quran which ask to wage war against the unbelievers refer to the existing conflict between believers and non-believers, between righteous and evil. Thus it can not be generalized beyond a particular case and a particular people – who were out of right path and bent upon to destroy the followers of new religion, Islam. Not only that they made several conspiracies to assassinate Prophet Mohammed and breached several treaties. It is here that Quran ask the Muslim to fight against them and teach them a lesson.[2] In effect, the endorsement to wage a righteous war is not open and general. It is contingent and can be justified only where there is a real and genuine threat of annihilation of the faith or the faithful.

The Quran permits to fight against injustice, oppression and tyranny and, in particular, those driven out at their homes to become refugees. The Quran does not sanctify warfare. It develops the notion of a just war of self-defence to protect decent values, but condemns

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[2] For a detailed analysis refer to (Ali 1968).

killing and aggression. "God forbids you not, with regard to those who Fight you not for (your) faith Nor drive you out of your homes, From dealing kindly and justly with them: For god loveth Those who are just"(60:8). "……. and do not aggress; God dislikes the aggressors" (5:87). "…….. you shall resort to pardon, advocate tolerance, and disregard the ignorant" (7:199). "Let there be no hostility except against those who practice oppression"(2:193).

In Islam power is not to be used for aggression. The Quran and hadith are very clear on this: that you must first explore and exhaust all possible peaceful means of resolving a problem before you can resort to the use of force. Islam asks the believers to use power only in response of aggression. Quran says If you do not build power you will not be able to respond to a people who is committing aggression and driving you out of your homes (see 9:13-14).

The Quran categorically prohibits any kind of aggression towards other: "If anyone kills another – except in retaliation for murder or for causing widespread mischief in the land – it is as if he killed the whole of mankind; and whosoever saves a life, it is as if he saved the whole of mankind" (5:32). The point that there is no compulsion or coercion in matters of faith is repeatedly asserted in the Quran (see 2:256; 6:107; 17:54; 42:48). Quran also prohibits any kind of intervention on others' faith: "I worship not that which ye worship, Nor will ye worship That which I worship. To you, your Way. And to me mine" (109:2,3 & 6).

When He (Allah) established you in the land with power, you will now use that power to establish an order in which justice will prevail, and in which values will be preserved, and you'll use power to eradicate evils(see 8:39). It makes it apparent that Islam has a clear preference for peace over warfare. The Quran confirms that even while Allah has made fighting and the development of power obligatory, if at any time the enemy is inclined towards peace, and is also prepared to disgorge the fruits of aggression, then you must also incline towards peace (see 8:61).

The relations of Muslims with others are based primarily on peace, mutual respect and trust. It is wrong to assume that non-believers are not entitled to this peace. The Quran ordains: "O people, we created you from the same male and female, and rendered you distinct peoples and tribes, that you may recognise one another. The best among you in the sight of God is the most righteous. God is Omniscient, Cognisant" (49:13). The theme in the Quran is peace as long as there is no oppression or injustice that can not be resolved by all the peaceful means available. It is one of the functions of Islamic law to protect the privileged status of minorities, and this is why non-Muslim places of worship have flourished all over the Islamic world. The Ottoman Empire, while affirming Islam as its own religion, gave formal recognition to Orthodox Greeks, Jews and Orthodox Armenians. In fact, under the Millet system, each of these three communities had certain legal rights to govern their own communities (Walzer, 1997).

The above discussion clearly reveals that there is no place for justification of militancy in Quran and Islam, like other religions, categorically asks its followers to maintain peace and harmony as long as there is no aggression. But more often the act of militancy is inspired by the belief that Islam is capable of offering a viable alternative in the shaping of contemporary

world. Here Islam is projected as a monolithic and closed religion based on unity of faith among its followers. This kind of projection of Islam is most popular among the common masses, which glosses over the fact that there are critical differences between Sunni and Shia Islam, and within each sect there is hierarchical division across status lines which are equally true of Hinduism. But the divisions within Islam do not come to the surface in India where mental ghettoisation among Indian Muslim because of minority status which, put them under inferiority complex, compels them to hide their differences and present them as one. But the differences are more evident where Muslims are secure of their existence and no wonder Paksitani state regularly witness clashes among different sects and groups. The same clash on caste lines is also evident in Indian Hindus. Besides, despite unity of faith which Muslims across world are required to follow, there are crucial differences in the patterns of belief and behaviour shaped and ordered by their temporal and environmental conditions to which Muslims adhere in the course of their daily lives.[3] Perhaps, the persistence of internal doctrinal and cultural variety and diversity within the system of Islam and its ability to adapt to local cultural environment has been nowhere more evident than in India (Aziz Ahmad 1969, Imtiaz Ahmad 1980). According to Imtiaz Ahmad (1995) the persistence of pluralism of belief and practices within Islam in India has two implications. Firstly, it goes to show that the unity and integrity of Islam as world religion is not axiomatic or given, but instead achieved through a complex interaction between codes derived through an Islamic scriptures and derived from the exigencies of living in differing ecological, social and cultural and political environments. Secondly, as a practiced faith Islam is far more pluralist than the extreme degree of reification commonly attributed to it.

Thus the notion of Islamic solidarity which is invoked to hold Islam responsible for militancy does not hold true. It is argued that Muslims in any part of the world are a part of larger *umma*, and always ready to help their brother getting in trouble in any parts of the world, which is not the case in respect of Christianity, Buddhism or Hinduism. But in reality there is no such thing as Islamic solidarity and for that matter Islamic militancy does not exist. What is going on can be best regard as an act of militancy.

Jihad-e-Kashmir: Autonomy Movement or Islamic Militancy?

The Kashmir problem is quite different. It existed since the time of independence and is essentially an autonomy movement. That those spearheading this movement are Muslim is incidental to the whole issue. The political, social and legal factors that have been responsible for the present situation in Jammu and Kashmir deserve separate discussion and the paper does not allow presenting it here in details. However, it must be noted here that Kashmir where nearly 80 per cent of the population was Muslim remained under Dogra rulers (Hindus) from Maharaja Gulab Singh to Maharaja Hari Singh for 106 years from 1846 and 1952, yet there never arose a communal conflict. It was these Kashmiris who rejected the two nation theory of Jinnah in 1947 and took up arms to resist Pakistani sponsored armed infiltrators,

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[3] Thus Islam throughout most of its past as well as in the contemporary period has been characterised by an obvious paradox. This is its simultaneous unity as a world religion and is bewildering diversity as the living faith of local, regional and national communities. On the one hand, Islam projects itself and thrives on the celebration of the projection that it is everywhere the same. On the other hand, the patterns of beliefs and behaviour to which Muslims adhere in the course of their daily lives are everywhere diverse and varied. The diversity of Muslim beliefs and practices give an impression that there are as many Islam as there are situations that sustain them.

sang national anthem on every platform of Kashmir and supported the State's accession to the Union of India signed by Maharaja Hari Singh on October 26, 1947. They lived in peace and harmony for 40 years, supported the secular fabric of the state and opposed any and every communal move of a microscopic section of Jamat-e-Islami in the Valley. The foremost Kashmiri Muslim's leader, Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah, had to change the name of his 'Muslim Conference' to 'National Conference' because of public pressure as the Kashmiris, both Hindus and Muslims had grown together under the spirit of the Kashmiriyat.

It must be noted here that the nature of Islam in Kashmir is very different from some other parts of India. The r*ishi* tradition has predominantly shaped religious and public life in Kashmir for centuries and is the basis of their self-identity as Kashmiris. Some people held Islam responsible for the uprising of militancy in the valley which shows intellectual felony. Though we can not completely deny the existence of fundamentalist strain in the present Kashmiri movement, but the fundamental question here is, whether it is religion which instigate them to fight or the situation so develops that they feel inclined to take resort to religion as instrument to easily mobilize the people? As pointed out by Engineer, though Islam was always there in the Kashmir and it could have inspired them anytime during all these years, but why extremists appeared on the scene so late, in fact only at the end of 80s. The mistake lies with the Indian government who never kept the promise of granting autonomy and special powers to Kashmiris under Article 370. Not only that special powers promised to Kashmiris remained in the paper, but there was attempt by the Indian government to curtail the existing freedom and autonomy. Mandate of the people were hardly respected and democratically elected governments invariably were overthrown. The only fair election held was in 1977 during the Janata Government in the Centre. The movement for regional autonomy remained non-violent for four decades after independence. But when the democratic space to voice their demands shrank, people had no option but to take to arms to demand their rights which were long overdue. This provided opportunity to Pakistan to play with the heightened emotion of the people and it started providing support in the form of weapons and money to the Kashmiris to fight against the Indian government. Thus the nature of the entire movement changed form one of an indigenous movement to demand autonomy, to political aimed at destabilizing Indian government. In the light of above discussion the case of Kashmir thus can not be regarded as Islamic militancy.

Is there Possibility of Islamic Militancy in India?

The rise of Hindu communalism has gathered wide acceptance in today's environment which would have been unacceptable only a few years back. The fact that a right wing political party, BJP is ruling at the centre and in many of the states has given fillip to the Hindutva forces to impose their agenda on the national mainstream. There is an increasing tendency on the part of Hindu right-wing groups to present Muslims as the 'other' in order to unite Hindus against the Muslim so as to consolidate their hold over the power structure of the state. The rise of Hindutva forces has led many commentators to say that it will give rise to Islamic militancy in India (Narula; Kamal Chenoy; Sunil Khilnani; 2003)[4]. In order to deal with the issue it must be noted here that Muslim constitute largest minority in India that is

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[4] For a detailed of their view, except Narula, see the discussion organized by the Ethnic and Public Policy Centre, Washington, *(Centre Conversations*, February 2003, No 17).

11.6 (around 120 million) per cent of total population according to 1991 census of India. Thus India is the home to the second largest Muslim population after Indonesia. This makes the issue of Islamic militancy more critical in India.

The rise of Hindutva forces in India has already resulted in some devastating consequences. In February and March 2002, over 2000 people were killed in state-supported violence against Muslims in the western state of Gujarat, led by the Hindu nationalist BJP that also heads a coalition government at the center. The attacks were carried out with impunity by members of the BJP, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh ("RSS," National Volunteer Corps), the Vishwa Hindu Parishad ("VHP," World Hindu Council), and the Bajrang Dal (the militant youth wing of the VHP) (Narula 2003).[5] Collectively, these groups are known as the *sangh parivar*, or family of Hindu nationalist organizations. Police and state officials were directly implicated in many of the attacks. Nationwide violence against India's Muslim community in 1992 and 1993 and against India's Christian community since 1998, including in the state of Gujarat, has also stemmed from the violent activities and hate propaganda of these groups. The Indian government continues to exploit rhetoric surrounding the global war on terror to silence political dissent while the sangh parivar invokes the threat of Islamic militancy in the aftermath of September 11 to justify the persecution of Muslims. Operating under the guise of patriotism, the proponents of Hindu nationalism are achieving mainstream credibility. The promotion of Hindu nationalism as a legitimate political and cultural force has consequences beyond its impact on the lives of India's religious minorities. Attacks on Muslims in India have their corresponding effect on Hindus in Bangladesh and Pakistan. If the activities of these groups remain unchecked, violence may percolate to other parts of the South Asian region. When compounded with the growing political influence of the Islamic right and the military in Pakistan and Bangladesh, Hindu militarization may destabilize the region as a whole.

The process of modernization and democratization which has been undergoing in India have also helped in the creation of minority consciousness and enabled minorities to organize them politically.[6]They are not only determined to preserve their cultural identity, which has been threatened because of the rise of Hindutva concepts of national identity and secular state, but they also seek to grab the share in the development and prosperity resulting from ongoing process of modernization and liberalisation of the country. It must be noted here that the process of modernization has resulted in the increasing number of educated and underemployed youth within all religious communities. Further, the influx of uneducated or

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[5] The BJP is not the only political party complicit in large-scale episodes of communal violence in India. In 1984, following the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards, the then-ruling Congress (I) Party was charged with complicity in the killing of over 2000 Sikhs in Delhi.

[6] The current political and democratic assertion of hitherto underprivileged sections of the society like dalits, other backward classes/castes and women reflect their aspiration for intra-democratisation (social and educational reform) as well as inter-democratisation (recognition of equal social status in the society). This awakening is partly a result of politisation unleashed by the electoral democracy and partly due to social fragmentation of constituency. However, the social position of the Indian Muslims has been left untouched by the working of Indian democracy. Indian Muslim community by and large remains trapped in feudalised social mores, suffers from ghetto-mentality and inferiority complex and is unable to meet the challenges of modernity. Paradoxically enough, the community desires to live in a secular and democratic polity without democratizing itself (See Alam 2003).

undereducated migrants from rural into metropolitan areas in search of jobs and better opportunities creates groups of rootless people having no ties with neighbourhood and not held together by kinship bonds. Such alienated and atomized individuals are readily available to be moblised by militant organsiations that play on their emotions (Malik and Vajpeyi 1989).

Even in the face of these developments militancy within Indian Muslim community has not found widespread expression. This is not to deny that there are radical Muslim groups in India, but they have failed so far to earn wide public acceptance. The radical Muslim groups situated in the peripheral regions like Assam in the north east and Malabar region in Kerala can not be said to inspire to fight for religion.[7] Rather their anger needs to be understood in the context of marginalization and economic deprivation which always engulf peripheral region. Their anger against the state is manifested by targeting specific groups. Thus their struggle is to achieve political gain rather than to earn religious merit. Islamic militancy is not possible in India because of India's adoption of liberal-democratic framework after independence. India's success as a democracy lies in its successful handling of minority problems. Indian constitution like other democratic country incorporates a number of provisions which aim at safeguarding the interests of minorities and allow them to maintain their own identity through cultural and educational rights and provided special safeguards to protect their interests. However, the fruits of these special measures could not help much, especially to the Muslim minority, to achieve economic prosperity. But they could feel a sense of security.[8] But this sense of security has been gradually, especially in the 90s, shattered owing to rise of Hindutva forces. This poses a serious question for Indian democracy; whether this will give rise to Islamic militancy? There is no any concrete answer to this question and much will depend upon the nature of Indian state, whether it will be able to maintain its democratic and secular credentials or will it allow it to be maneuvered by the right wing forces. However, since independence the political balance of power has undergone a significant change and the politico-legal system does not allow any operative system for the rise of militant Islam in India. Indian Muslims have had never in a position to give a militant response for their grievances as in such situation they are the principal sufferers. Because of the above reason and the growing power of the Indian Muslim middle class, militancy can not take root among the community. Faced with grievances, they would rather prefer to resolve it through democratic means rather than taking to arms.

Unlike migrant Islam in Europe, Indian Islam is historical Islam and there exists a very close proximity between Indian Muslim and Indian Hindu across cultural lines, which also makes Islamic militancy a distant possibility in India. As put by Assayag, 'the continuous process of integrative and antagonistic acculturation has allowed each tradition to preserve its peculiarities and maintain a demarcating line between Hindus and Muslims'. 'This is obvious because Hinduism and Islam, as they were practiced until recently, continue to show a great deal of flexibility and a spirit of accommodation in their mutual relations. In fact, they display an understanding that is infinitely richer than the limited sectarian approach adopted by dogmatic, fundamentalist and neotraditionalist circles on both sides' (Assayag 2004).

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[7] To know in detail about the insurgency in Assam refer to (Baruah 1997, Phukan 1996).
[8] I am not saying this sense of security was always intact among the Indian Muslim. There were always communal riots and in those riots Muslims were the worst sufferers. But those riots were always confined to certain pockets. But believe in the democratic means to resolve their grievances could not be depleted.

Conclusion

The above discussion clearly shows that like other religion Islam uphold the values of peace, tolerance and brotherhood. Islam asks its followers to wage war only in self-defence. The major point that is thrown out of discussion is that Islam is not monolithic; rather it is eclectic in nature which also discounts Islam as revolutionary force and militancy as inherent in Islam. As put by Eaton, as in South Asia as elsewhere, religious traditions have been continuously redefined, reinterpreted, and contested, as competing social groups have risen or fallen in prominence and influence. Then what terminology is most appropriate to describe the Muslims who are demanding change which range from advocating socio-political-economic reform to seeking violent revolutionary action. Some scholars favour "Islamic fundamentalists" or "Muslim fanatics", some speak of "Islamic militancy". But it can be best describe only as an act of militancy. Because Islam does not justify militancy and prohibits killing except in retaliation of murder and to establish peace.

The rise of Hindu fundamentalism has provided the opportunity to the radical groups within the Muslim community to mobilize the Indian Muslim to fight against it. But they have failed to gain support from the Muslim masses. The repercussion of rise of Hindu militancy may be felt well beyond the Indian territory, throughout South Asia. Pakistan and Bangladesh where Hindus are in minority may be target of attack by the fundamentalist Muslim group. Thus it is in the interest of entire South Asian regions that the rise of Hindu fundamentalism must be stopped. Here the role of the state becomes quite important. The rise of aggressive Hindu nationalism, which threatens the already fragile secular and democratic fabric of India, if not stopped, may provide opportunity to the radical groups within the Indian Muslim community to exploit the situation to their advantages. But whether they would be successful or not, it all depends on how the state is going to play its role.

[Quotations from the Quran from *The Holy Quran (Arabic text with English translation and commentary)*, Amna Corp, Brentwood.]

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