

SOCIAL ACTION

A Quarterly Review of Social Trends

RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN INDIA

- ❑ Religious Minorities in India: Constitutional Safeguards and Ground Reality (Editorial)
Sebasti L. Raj
- ❑ Legal Protection vs. Ground Reality: The Plight of Religious Minorities in India
Roshan Ekka
- ❑ Pluralism and the Politics of Inclusion: Rethinking Rights, Representation, and Social Justice for Religious Minorities in India
Nidhi Prakash
- ❑ Contributions, Challenges, and Inclusion of Religious Minorities in India
Jaimon Varghese
- ❑ Challenges Faced by Religious Minorities in India: A Comprehensive Analysis
Feroz Ud Din
- ❑ Between Faith and Fiction: Religious Minorities in India's Media Landscape
Devraj Takri
- ❑ Minority Voices: The Biata Community's Religious Journey in North East India.
Angela Nampui
- ❑ A Study on the Political Sociology of Identity Preservation and Challenges of the Buddhist Minority in Tripura
Marconi Debbarma & Twichangma Debbarma

A UGC-CARE APPROVED JOURNAL

SOCIAL ACTION

APRIL – JUNE 2025

VOLUME 75

No.02

SOCIAL ACTION is published on the 15th of January, April, July and October. Those who do not receive copies in time should write to the Business Manager within three months of the date of publication. After that free replacement copies may not be available.

EDITORIAL BOARD

Prof. Surinder Singh Jodhka, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi 110 067

Prof. Virginius Xaxa, Delhi University, Delhi – 110 007

Prof. Susan Visvanathan, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi 110 067

Prof. Arvinder A. Ansari, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi-110025

Prof. Babu P. Remesh, Ambedkar University Delhi, Delhi-110 006

Editor : **Denzil Fernandes**

Secretarial Assistance : **Satya Srinivasan**

Design & Layout : **Ruben Minj**

The material printed in this journal is copyright and should not be reproduced without the written permission of the Editor. © 2025 **SOCIAL ACTION**.

Articles in **SOCIAL ACTION** are indexed in ICSSR Research Abstracts, Sociology of Education Abstracts, Book Review Index, and Review of Publication Reviews. **SOCIAL ACTION** has been published continuously from 1951. A micro-film edition is available from University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106, USA.

Note: Social Action is listed in the UGC-CARE list of approved Social Science Journals.

Subscription Rates

Institutional/Personal	One Year	Two Years	Three Years
Ordinary Post	650.00	1295.00	1950.00
Registered Post	670.00	1340.00	2000.00
Foreign (Air Mail)	US\$ 100	US\$ 180	US\$ 250

Payments of Indian Subscriptions by DD/Postal Order/M.O. in favour
INTEGRATED SOCIAL INITIATIVES, payable at Delhi only.

No part of this publication can be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, without prior permission of the publishers.

The views published in its pages are those of the writers and not necessarily those of the Editorial Board.

SOCIAL ACTION

A Quarterly Review of Social Trends

APRIL - JUNE 2025

VOLUME 75

NO. 02

Editor: Sebasti L. Raj
Religious Minorities in India

- ❑ Religious Minorities in India: Constitutional Safeguards and Ground Reality (Editorial) iii
Sebasti L. Raj
- ❑ Legal Protection vs. Ground Reality: The Plight of Religious Minorities in India 119
Roshan Ekka
- ❑ Pluralism and the Politics of Inclusion: Rethinking Rights, Representation, and Social Justice for Religious Minorities in India 133
Nidhi Prakash
- ❑ Contributions, Challenges, and Inclusion of Religious Minorities in India 148
Jaimon Varghese
- ❑ Challenges Faced by Religious Minorities in India: A Comprehensive Analysis 161
Feroz Ud Din
- ❑ Between Faith and Fiction: Religious Minorities in India's Media Landscape 178
Devraj Takri
- ❑ Minority Voices: The Biate Community's Religious Journey in North East India. 193
Angela Nampui
- ❑ A Study on the Political Sociology of Identity Preservation and Challenges of the Buddhist Minority in Tripura 210
Marconi Debbarma & Twichangma Debbarma
- ❑ Book Review 224

SOCIAL ACTION

Themes for forthcoming issues

Caring for the Mother Earth

July-September 2025

(Last date to receive articles : 15 May 2025)

The Backbone of Indian Economy: The Farming Community

October-December 2025

(Last date to receive articles : 15 August 2025)

The Constitutional Rights of Women

January -March 2026

(Last date to receive articles : 15 November 2025)

The Vulnerable Sections of Indian Society

April -June 2026

(Last date to receive articles : 15 February 2026)

Articles of 4,500-5,000 words are printed on the above themes. To facilitate the processing, please send them by post and soft copy or email to avoid undue delay. Articles should reach the Editor at least two months before the month of publication at the address below. SOCIAL ACTION is published on the 15th of January, April, July and October.

Editor

SOCIAL ACTION

10, Institutional Area

Lodhi Road

New Delhi-110 003

E-Mail : socialaction@isidelhi.org.in

Religious Minorities in India: Constitutional Safeguards and Ground Reality

While Hinduism is the majority religion (85%) in India, the country is home to several significant religious minorities. The Muslims, with over 200 million people (14.2%), form the largest minority community in India. The Christians, with over 2.3% of the population, form the second largest religious minority group, followed by Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, etc.

The contributions of minority communities and leaders to nation-building in India have been immense, spanning the freedom struggle, politics, education, science, culture, and economic development. These communities have played a vital role in shaping India's pluralistic identity and democratic fabric. They have upheld India's secularism through civic participation, cultural exchange, and tolerance. Their contributions help balance majority power, reinforce democracy, and enrich Indian identity. The story of India is incomplete without the contributions of its minorities. They have not just shared in the destiny of the nation, but have actively shaped it.

The contributions of minority communities in education and healthcare services in India have been significant, especially in areas where public services are limited. Several minority leaders, religious institutions, and community organizations, minorities have played a vital role in nation-building, promoting equity, empowerment, and access to quality education and healthcare. The contributions of minority communities in education and healthcare have been inclusive, innovative, and humanitarian. They have played a critical role in India's social development, often going beyond their community boundaries to serve the nation.

The Constitution of India has made commendable provisions to safeguard and promote the democratic rights and privileges of the minority communities, as listed below. Article 14 guarantees equality before the law and equal protection under the laws to all persons, including minorities. Article 15 prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth and allows the state to make special provisions for socially and educationally backward classes, which can include minority groups. Article 16 ensures equality of opportunity in matters of public employment and allows for reservations or special provisions for backward sections of society, including minorities. Article 25 grants freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practice, and propagate religion (subject to public order, morality, and health). Article 26 allows religious groups to establish and maintain institutions, manage their religious affairs, and own

property.

Though the Constitution of India has made very clear provisions to safeguard and promote the rights of minority communities, the ground reality is far from satisfactory as far as the interests of the minorities are concerned. They are faced with discrimination and communal violence, social marginalization, especially in terms of education, employment, and political representation, and legal and political concerns, such as freedom of religion, anti-conversion laws, and personal laws.

The relationship between minorities and party politics in India is complex and deeply intertwined with the country's democratic and electoral processes. Political parties have historically engaged with minority communities in various ways, ranging from inclusive representation to vote-bank politics, which has led to both empowerment and controversy. Political parties often field candidates from minority communities to appeal to these voter bases. Some parties have traditionally sought support from Muslim and Christian minorities.

Some parties have been accused of using religious identity to polarize voters along Hindu-Muslim or majority-minority lines. Communal tensions have sometimes escalated during elections, with rhetoric targeting minorities or alleged appeasement being major issues. "Vote-bank politics" is a term often used critically to describe when parties cater specifically to the needs of a community (often minorities) to secure votes, without necessarily delivering long-term development or rights. This approach is criticized for being tokenistic and sometimes increasing communal polarization.

In this issue of *Social Action*, various scholars examine the status of religious minorities in India. They highlight the contrast between constitutional provisions and the realities on the ground. They also offer valuable suggestions to ensure and promote the interests of minority communities as promised in the Indian Constitution.

Roshan Ekka, in his article "Legal Protection vs. Ground Reality: The Plight of Religious Minorities in India," examines the gap between the legal protections enshrined in the Indian Constitution and the everyday struggles of religious minorities, focusing on issues such as violence, discrimination, and the erosion of secularism. By exploring the challenges faced by religious minorities, the role of political parties, and the gap in implementation, this study aims to provide insights into potential solutions for bridging this gap and ensuring equality and justice for all citizens.

Nidhi Prakash, in his research paper “Pluralism and the Politics of Inclusion: Rethinking Rights, Representation, and Social Justice for Religious Minorities in India,” explores the legal, political, and socio-economic dimensions of minority rights, focusing on constitutional provisions, judicial interpretations, and government policies aimed at fostering inclusivity. Additionally, the study highlights the role of affirmative action and policy interventions in addressing these challenges. The research underscores the need for inclusive governance and sustainable policy measures to strengthen democratic values, social justice, and minority empowerment in India.

Jaimon Varghese, in his paper “Contributions, Challenges, and Inclusion of Religious Minorities in India,” highlights how religious minority communities have contributed significantly towards various development sectors of the country, such as cultural and artistic development, economic development, political and social development, and educational and scientific development. He also highlights how these religious minorities have been facing several challenges, such as social discrimination, communal violence, economic marginalization, educational backwardness, political underrepresentation, and legal and bureaucratic hurdles.

Feroz Ud Din, in his article on “Challenges Faced by Religious Minorities in India: A Comprehensive Analysis,” examines the multifaceted challenges confronting the minority communities, including legal and policy discrimination, state-sanctioned violence, societal exclusion, and international ramifications. In addition, the paper explores the historical roots of secularism, offers comparative perspectives with other multi-religious democracies, and highlights resistance movements that have emerged in response.

Devraj Takri, in his paper titled “Between Faith and Fiction: Religious Minorities in India's Media Landscape,” examines the portrayal of religious minorities in India's media landscape, focusing on print, television, and digital platforms. It explores how the minorities are depicted in mainstream media and how such portrayals influence public opinion and social cohesion. The findings suggest that religious minorities are often framed in negative or reductive ways, reinforcing societal divisions. Hence, this paper discusses the impact of such portrayals on the rights and visibility of these communities.

Angela Nampui, in her article on “Minority Voices: The Biare Community's Religious Journey in North East India,” explores the religious, socio-

political, and economic transitions experienced by the Biате tribe, an indigenous community of Northeast India. The research delves into the historical roots and migration patterns of the Biates, tracing their evolution from animistic traditions to Christianity. It examines the impact of these transformations on the tribe's governance, social structure, and cultural identity, emphasizing both the benefits of modernization, including improvements in healthcare, education, and literacy, and the difficulties of cultural deterioration and division.

Marconi Debbarma & Twichangma Debbarma, in their article “A Study on the Political Sociology of Identity Preservation and Challenges of the Buddhist Minority in Tripura,” examine the challenges faced by the Buddhist minority in Tripura, with a focus on socio-political marginalization, cultural preservation, and displacement issues. The study explores the lived experiences of the Buddhist community, their socio-economic struggles, and their efforts to maintain their cultural identity amidst growing pressures from ethnic tensions and political marginalization.

In conclusion, we need to recognize that the contribution of minority communities to education and healthcare in India is a testament to their deep commitment to social justice, national development, and inclusive progress. These communities have not only worked for their upliftment but have consistently reached out to serve the broader society, especially the most vulnerable. In doing so, they have strengthened India's secular fabric and reinforced the constitutional ideals of equality, fraternity, and human dignity. India's journey toward inclusive development and social harmony owes much to these contributions. Recognizing and supporting such efforts is essential to building a just, pluralistic, and empowered nation.

A balanced polity in a diverse democracy like India, where religion, caste, language, and region deeply influence public life, requires a political approach that ensures justice, inclusion, and stability for all communities, including minorities. Hence, the best political approach combines constitutional values, inclusive governance, and deliberate institutional checks to prevent polarization and promote harmony – an approach that combines pluralism with equity, liberty with accountability, and majority rule with minority rights, in the true spirit of India's Constitution. □

Sebasti L. Raj

Legal Protection vs. Ground Reality: The Plight of Religious Minorities in India

Roshan Ekka*

Abstract

India, a secular nation, is bound by a constitution that guarantees equal rights and protection to all its citizens, irrespective of their religion. Despite these constitutional protections, religious minorities in India continue to face discrimination, exclusion, and violence. This paper examines the gap between the legal protections enshrined in the Indian Constitution and the everyday struggles of religious minorities, focusing on issues such as violence, discrimination, and the erosion of secularism. By exploring the challenges faced by religious minorities, the role of political parties, and the gap in implementation, this study aims to provide insights into potential solutions for bridging this gap and ensuring equality and justice for all citizens.

Keywords: Religious Minorities, Legal Protection, Secularism, Discrimination, Political Parties

Introduction

India is a country with a rich and diverse religious landscape, where Hinduism is the majority religion, while Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, and Jainism are the principal minority religions. The Indian Constitution, adopted in 1950, guarantees several fundamental rights to all citizens, including those of religious minorities. Among these rights are freedom of religion, equality before the law, and protection from discrimination. These constitutional provisions embody India's commitment to secularism and pluralism, ensuring that individuals from all faiths can freely practice their religion without fear of persecution. The Constitution's emphasis on equal treatment under the law aims to safeguard the interests of religious minorities and uphold their dignity in all areas of life. Despite these constitutional guarantees, religious minorities in India continue to face numerous challenges that impede their full participation in society. Muslims and Christians, in particular, experience social exclusion, discrimination, and violence in various forms, including in the realms of employment, education, and housing. In many instances, these groups

*Assistant Professor, Political Science, Odisha State Open University, Sambalpur,
Email: roshanekka01@gmail.com/r.ekka@osou.ac.in

face prejudice when seeking jobs or housing, and their access to quality education is often limited. Such discrimination not only marginalizes these communities but also restricts their opportunities for economic and social advancement.

Communal tensions, often fueled by political rhetoric and misinformation, exacerbate these challenges. Periodic outbreaks of violence, such as the 2002 Gujarat riots, illustrate how religious differences can swiftly escalate into violent conflict. Furthermore, some states have enacted laws that restrict the religious freedoms of minorities, including anti-conversion laws, which disproportionately impact Christians and Muslims. These laws have been criticized for intensifying the marginalization of religious minorities, as they frequently result in social ostracism and legal obstacles for individuals seeking to change their religion. Despite the robust legal framework in place to safeguard religious minorities, the persistent social, political, and economic barriers they face highlight significant gaps between constitutional guarantees and the lived experiences of these communities. The struggle for full equality and integration into the broader society continues to challenge religious minorities in India.

Objectives and Research Methodology

The primary objectives of this research are:

1. To assess the legal protections provided to religious minorities under the Indian Constitution.
2. To identify the key challenges faced by religious minorities in India.
3. To analyze the gap between legal provisions and the ground realities for religious minorities.
4. To explore the role of political parties in either mitigating or exacerbating these challenges.

The research methodology entails a qualitative analysis of both primary and secondary sources, such as constitutional provisions, reports from human rights organizations, scholarly articles, and case studies concerning religious violence and discrimination. Data is also gathered from interviews and testimonies of religious minorities, where applicable.

Legal Protections for Religious Minorities in India

In India, the Constitution provides legal safeguards for religious minorities, ensuring their right to freely practice their religion, equality under the law, and protection from discrimination. These provisions are designed

to uphold religious freedom, foster a secular society, and prevent the marginalization or persecution of minority religious groups. The Indian Constitution provides several provisions to protect the rights of religious minorities:

1. **Article 25 – Right to Freedom of Religion:** Article 25 guarantees individuals the right to practice, profess, and propagate any religion of their choice, ensuring religious freedom without interference, subject to public order, morality, and health.
2. **Article 15 – Prohibition of Discrimination:** Article 15 prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth, ensuring equal treatment for all citizens in matters of access to public spaces, education, and employment.
3. **Articles 29 and 30 – Cultural and Educational Rights:** Articles 29 and 30 protect the rights of minorities to preserve their language, culture, and heritage, and establish educational institutions to promote their interests, ensuring autonomy for minority communities in cultural and educational matters.
4. **Article 14 – Equality before the Law:** Article 14 guarantees equality before the law, ensuring that no citizen is denied legal protection based on religious identity, promoting justice and fairness for all individuals in the eyes of the law.
5. **Article 46 – Promotion of Educational and Economic Interests:** Article 46 mandates the state to promote the educational and economic interests of minorities, including religious minorities, to enhance their status and reduce social inequality.

Ground Reality: Challenges Faced by Religious Minorities

Despite constitutional protections, religious minorities in India face discrimination, social exclusion, violence, and limited access to resources. These challenges hinder their full participation in society, often exacerbated by political, social, and economic marginalization. The significant challenges faced by religious minorities are like:

Communal Violence: Religious minorities, particularly Muslims, have been victims of communal violence in India. Incidents like the Gujarat riots (2002), Muzaffarnagar riots (2013), and Delhi riots (2020) have exposed the vulnerability of these communities. These violent events are often fuelled by religious and political tensions, where communities clash due to prejudices, incitement by political leaders, and social divides. In

these riots, religious minorities face property destruction, physical harm, and displacement. Political and social polarization often intensifies these conflicts, as sometimes political parties exploit religious sentiments to gain support, further aggravating communal rifts.

Discrimination: Religious minorities in India often face systemic discrimination in various fields such as employment, education, and housing. Studies, like one conducted by the Institute of Social Sciences (2019), highlight that Muslims, for example, experience higher unemployment rates compared to Hindus. Additionally, in educational institutions, they often face harassment and bias. In housing, religious minorities sometimes struggle to find accommodation in predominantly Hindu neighbourhoods, as landlords may refuse to rent to them. These forms of discrimination marginalize these communities, limiting their opportunities for social and economic mobility and contributing to their continued exclusion from mainstream society.

Hate Crimes: Hate crimes targeting religious minorities, particularly Muslims, have seen a troubling rise in recent years. Attacks by cow vigilante groups on individuals accused of cow slaughter or beef consumption have become common, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas. These vigilante groups claim to protect Hindu sentiments regarding the cow, which is sacred in Hinduism. However, these attacks often lead to violent deaths, injuries, and social stigmatization of minorities. Such incidents foster an atmosphere of fear and intolerance, with minorities often becoming scapegoats for broader socio-political issues.

Anti-Conversion Laws: Several Indian states have enacted anti-conversion laws, primarily targeting religious conversions from Hinduism to Islam or Christianity. These laws, which often require individuals to seek permission before converting, have led to increased social harassment and stigmatization of people seeking to change their religion. Converts, particularly in tribal or rural areas, face intense scrutiny, public shaming, and even legal action. These laws are often framed under the guise of preventing forced conversions, but in practice, they disproportionately affect minority communities, restricting their right to freely choose and practice their religion.

Religious Intolerance and Media Role: The media plays a powerful role in either deepening or reducing religious tensions. At times, media outlets are criticized for spreading divisive stories, especially about Muslims and Christians, by exaggerating incidents. Biased reporting or selective

coverage can stir up fear and hatred, creating a sense of distrust. When religious minorities are portrayed negatively, it strengthens harmful stereotypes, leading to violence and exclusion. In this way, the media can contribute to the ongoing cycle of intolerance and division.

Political Exploitation of Religion: Religious minorities in India face challenges not only from social prejudice but also from political exploitation. In many instances, political parties have used religion as a tool to gain votes by appealing to religious sentiments, leading to further division. Political leaders have sometimes been accused of encouraging or turning a blind eye to violence against religious minorities, especially when it aligns with their electoral interests. This has led to a situation where political motivations exacerbate communal tensions, allowing discrimination and violence to persist without accountability.

Economic Marginalization: Religious minorities in India, particularly Muslims and Christians, often face economic marginalization. Studies indicate that Muslims, in particular, suffer from low access to financial resources, education, and employment opportunities. The lack of economic opportunities contributes to their ongoing exclusion from the broader development narrative. Minority communities frequently live in economically underdeveloped areas, where access to basic services such as healthcare, clean water, and sanitation remains limited. This economic exclusion perpetuates cycles of poverty and social marginalization, further limiting their ability to participate equally in society.

State-Sanctioned Discrimination: In some states, laws and policies disproportionately impact religious minorities, such as Muslims and Christians. Policies that restrict religious freedoms, such as anti-conversion laws or laws limiting religious practices, often target minorities. These legal frameworks hinder their ability to express their religious identity freely and contribute to their sense of alienation. Additionally, the selective implementation of these laws often results in religious minorities being treated unfairly, reinforcing societal biases and inequalities.

Constitutional Protections vs. Ground Reality: A Gap in Implementation

While the Indian Constitution provides a strong framework for the protection of religious minorities, the ground reality often reflects a significant gap between legal provisions and their implementation. The reasons for this gap include:

1. **Weak Enforcement of Laws:** Although India has laws that protect religious minorities from hate crimes, communal violence, and discrimination, enforcement is often weak. Police and judicial indifference, coupled with political interference, contribute to delayed or denied justice for victims. In many cases, the perpetrators of violence or discrimination against minorities are not held accountable, which fosters a culture of impunity. The lack of swift and effective legal action undermines the trust of religious minorities in the justice system and perpetuates the cycle of violence and marginalization they face, leaving them vulnerable to future attacks.
2. **Political and Social Polarization:** In recent years, India has seen an increase in political polarization, particularly with the rise of religious nationalism. Political parties often use religious identity to mobilize voters, which exacerbates divisions between religious communities. This strategy deepens social rifts, fostering an environment of fear, mistrust, and intolerance. As religious identities become more politicized, the secular fabric of Indian society is threatened, and the sense of unity and shared citizenship is weakened. This political and social polarization hampers the peaceful coexistence of diverse religious groups, undermining national cohesion and social harmony.
3. **Bias in Social Structures:** Discrimination against religious minorities in India remains deeply entrenched in social structures, particularly in rural areas. Religious biases are often evident in the workplace, schools, and even within families, leading to exclusion from economic and social opportunities. Minorities face challenges in accessing resources such as quality education, healthcare, and housing, which limits their ability to improve their socio-economic status. This systemic bias perpetuates inequality, contributing to the marginalization of religious minorities. Such discrimination not only hinders individual growth but also weakens social cohesion, fostering division and resentment among different communities.

Secularism at Threat: A Cause for Worry

Secularism has been integral to India's democratic structure since its inception, ensuring that the country remains a space where all religions are treated equally and the state stays neutral in religious matters. This principle of secularism fosters an environment of coexistence among India's religiously diverse population, from Hindus and Muslims to Sikhs, Christians, and others. However, in recent years, secularism has increasingly

come under threat due to the rise of religious nationalism, particularly Hindu nationalism. This growing political force has led political parties to use religion as a tool to gain votes, further dividing communities along religious lines.

Political parties, especially those promoting the idea of Hindutva (Hindu nationalism), have capitalized on religious identities to galvanize support, shifting the focus from policies of unity to those that emphasize religious differences. This has not only polarized Indian society but also resulted in the politicization of religion, which undermines the secular ideals that once held the country together. In this environment, religious minorities, particularly Muslims, face increasing scrutiny and discrimination.

Laws such as the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) have exacerbated these tensions by offering citizenship to non-Muslim refugees from neighbouring countries while excluding Muslim refugees. This law has sparked widespread protests and criticism, with many arguing that it discriminates against Muslims and violates India's secular Constitution. Similarly, anti-conversion laws have been enacted in some states, which target religious minorities, especially Christians and Muslims, by making it difficult for them to change their religion. These policies foster the perception that the state is favouring one religion over others, further deepening religious divides. Moreover, media platforms, both traditional and social, have played a crucial role in spreading divisive narratives, portraying religious minorities negatively. These narratives often fuel intolerance, contribute to hate speech, and, in some cases, incite violence. This has created an environment where religious minorities feel marginalized and threatened.

If this trend of rising religious nationalism continues, secularism in India faces a grave threat. The nation's pluralistic identity is at risk, as religious polarization erodes the foundation of inclusive democracy and harmonious coexistence. The social fabric that has long held the country together is being torn apart, and urgent steps are needed to restore the ideals of secularism and religious tolerance.

The Role of Political Parties in Addressing the Struggles

Political parties in India play a significant role in shaping the lives of religious minorities. Some secular parties, like the Indian National Congress (INC) and the Communist Party of India (CPI), have worked to protect minority rights, advocating for policies of equality and social justice.

However, others, particularly right-wing parties such as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), have been accused of exploiting religious divides for electoral gains, often promoting religious nationalism and marginalizing minorities. This exploitation deepens religious tensions, leading to social exclusion, communal violence and undermining India's secular principles. Political agendas directly impact the well-being of religious minorities:

Secular Parties and Minority Advocacy: Secular political parties like the Indian National Congress (INC) and the Communist Party of India (CPI) have historically played a crucial role in advocating for the rights of religious minorities. These parties have supported policies to ensure equality and protection for all religious communities, upholding the secular nature of the Indian Constitution. For instance, the INC has introduced affirmative action policies such as reservations in education and government jobs, aimed at uplifting disadvantaged religious groups like Muslims and Christians. Similarly, the CPI has been a vocal supporter of minority rights and has consistently emphasized social justice and secularism in its platform.

Right-Wing Parties and Religious Nationalism: Right-wing parties, particularly the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), have faced significant criticism for promoting religious nationalism, which some argue undermines the secular fabric of India. The ideology of Hindutva, championed by certain factions within the BJP, is rooted in the belief that India should be primarily a Hindu nation. This form of Hindu nationalism presents a vision where religious minorities, especially Muslims and Christians, are often seen as secondary citizens or even "outsiders." This rhetoric fosters an environment of exclusion, where religious minorities feel marginalized and vulnerable to discrimination.

The rise of Hindutva has been linked to several policies and incidents that have sparked fears among religious minorities. For example, the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) passed in 2019, which offers citizenship to non-Muslim refugees from neighbouring countries, has been widely criticized for being discriminatory. Such policies, combined with inflammatory rhetoric from some political leaders, have created a climate of insecurity for religious minorities in India. The emphasis on Hindu identity in politics has led to growing polarization in society, making it difficult for communities to coexist peacefully. As a result, many religious minorities feel increasingly isolated and alienated, questioning their place in a nation that prides itself on its secular and pluralistic ideals.

Inclusive Policies: Several political parties in India have introduced policies aimed at improving the socioeconomic status of religious minorities, including provisions for reservations in education, employment, and political representation. These affirmative measures are intended to uplift historically disadvantaged groups such as Muslims, Christians, and other religious minorities, providing them with better access to opportunities and resources. The reservation system, for instance, ensures that a certain percentage of seats in educational institutions and government jobs are allocated to these communities, helping them overcome the barriers to social and economic mobility.

However, these policies have faced significant criticism for being insufficient and poorly implemented. Despite their well-meaning intentions, many religious minorities report that they still do not experience substantial improvements in their living conditions. Bureaucratic inefficiencies, corruption, and lack of proper infrastructure often hinder the effective implementation of these policies. In some cases, the criteria for eligibility and the reservation quotas are not properly communicated or managed, resulting in minimal impact. Furthermore, the lack of monitoring and accountability often leads to the benefits of such schemes being inaccessible to the most marginalized groups. As a result, religious minorities continue to face substantial socio-economic challenges, questioning the real impact of these policies in addressing their struggles for equality and justice.

Key Findings

1. **Legal protections for religious minorities exist but are often poorly enforced:** India's Constitution provides legal protections for religious minorities, including the right to practice, profess, and propagate their religion freely. However, these rights are often not effectively enforced. Issues like political interference, weak law enforcement, and inadequate judicial action lead to delays in justice, leaving minorities vulnerable to violence and discrimination. This weak enforcement contributes to a sense of insecurity among religious minorities, as laws designed to protect them are not always upheld or acted upon swiftly by authorities.
2. **Religious minorities, particularly Muslims, face high levels of discrimination, violence, and exclusion:** Religious minorities in India, especially Muslims, frequently face systemic discrimination in areas such as employment, education, and housing. Discriminatory practices are widespread, with Muslims often experiencing higher unemployment rates and social exclusion. Additionally, incidents of communal violence,

such as mob attacks, are common. These communities are subjected to harassment, exclusion from mainstream society, and violence, which hampers their social and economic opportunities. This marginalization has profound consequences, preventing full participation in societal development.

3. **Political and social polarization, along with the rise of religious nationalism, is undermining secularism in India:** India's political and social environment has seen increasing polarization, particularly with the rise of religious nationalism. The promotion of Hindutva, a form of Hindu nationalism, has further exacerbated divisions between religious communities. Political parties have used religious identity to mobilize voters, leading to greater intolerance and societal rifts. This growing polarization undermines India's secular fabric, making it difficult to maintain the pluralistic and inclusive values enshrined in the Constitution, as religious minorities often feel marginalized and excluded.
4. **The failure of political parties to address the struggles of religious minorities contributes to their marginalization:** Political parties in India have largely failed to effectively address the struggles of religious minorities. While some parties have introduced policies to protect their rights, these efforts are often inconsistent or poorly implemented. Secular parties sometimes fail to act decisively during communal violence, while right-wing parties have been accused of exploiting religious divides for electoral gain. The failure to address the issues of religious minorities contributes to their continued marginalization, as these groups struggle to gain equal access to opportunities, protection, and justice in society.

Discussion and Analysis

India's Constitution guarantees the protection of religious minorities through a range of fundamental rights, including the right to freedom of religion, equality before the law, and protection from discrimination. However, the gap between these legal protections and the ground realities faced by religious minorities is vast and significant. While the constitutional provisions aim to foster a just and inclusive society, weak enforcement of laws, political manipulation, and entrenched societal prejudices often render these protections ineffective, leaving minorities vulnerable to discrimination, violence, and exclusion.

One of the primary challenges is the weak enforcement of laws designed to protect religious minorities. While legal frameworks exist to safeguard

minority rights, including provisions against hate crimes, discrimination, and communal violence, their enforcement is often inconsistent and insufficient. Law enforcement agencies and the judicial system frequently fail to act swiftly, and in many cases, political interference impedes the timely delivery of justice. This creates a situation where religious minorities, particularly Muslims and Christians, feel a lack of security, as perpetrators of violence and discrimination often go unpunished, deepening the sense of injustice among affected communities.

Furthermore, political manipulation exacerbates the plight of religious minorities in India. In recent years, the rise of religious nationalism has increasingly shaped the political discourse. Political parties have sometimes used religious identity to rally support, fostering divisions between communities and undermining the secular principles enshrined in the Constitution. The promotion of ideologies like Hindutva has contributed to the marginalization of religious minorities, particularly Muslims and Christians, who are often portrayed as outsiders or second-class citizens. This political polarization not only deepens religious tensions but also contributes to the social exclusion and vulnerability of minorities.

In addition to political factors, societal prejudices and biases against religious minorities persist across various social and economic spheres. Religious minorities often face discrimination in employment, education, housing, and other areas of daily life. For instance, Muslims face higher unemployment rates and are sometimes subject to harassment in educational institutions. These biases create a climate of fear and exclusion, preventing religious minorities from accessing opportunities for social mobility and economic advancement.

While legal protections are vital for ensuring equality and justice, the ground realities reveal a disturbing truth: without proper enforcement, political will, and societal change, these legal rights often remain symbolic rather than practical. The plight of religious minorities in India, therefore, is not only a matter of inadequate legal protection but also a reflection of deep-rooted societal divisions, political exploitation, and institutional apathy that must be addressed to ensure a truly inclusive society.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, the plight of religious minorities in India highlights a significant disparity between the legal protections enshrined in the Constitution and the harsh ground realities these communities

face. Although India's legal framework provides essential rights to religious minorities, including freedom of religion and protection from discrimination, the enforcement of these laws is often weak. Instances of communal violence, such as the Gujarat riots in 2002 and ongoing attacks on Christians, reflect the failure of law enforcement and the judiciary to provide adequate protection for religious minorities.

The rise of religious nationalism, especially in the form of Hindutva, has made life harder for religious minorities. This belief often treats minorities, like Muslims, Christians, Buddhists and others as less important or as outsiders, which creates more division in society. Political parties, whether secular or right-wing, have also been inconsistent in addressing the struggles of religious minorities, with delays or failures in responding to incidents of violence and discrimination.

In this context, the gap between legal rights and ground realities is a reflection of weak institutional enforcement, societal prejudices, and political manipulation. For religious minorities to truly benefit from constitutional protections, there must be a concerted effort to ensure the effective implementation of laws, the promotion of secularism, and the eradication of discriminatory attitudes. Only then can India realize its constitutional promise of equality for all citizens.

Recommendations

1. **Strengthen Law Enforcement:** The government should prioritize the effective implementation of laws protecting religious minorities. Ensuring swift justice for hate crimes and communal violence will help deter further attacks and promote a sense of security and justice for marginalized communities.
2. **Promote Interfaith Dialogue:** Encouraging open interfaith dialogue can foster understanding, reduce stereotypes, and build bridges between different religious communities. Such efforts can help address tensions, promote peaceful coexistence, and develop a more inclusive society where religious differences are respected and celebrated.
3. **Affirmative Action:** Expanding affirmative action policies to include religious minorities in education and employment can address socio-economic disparities. By providing equal opportunities for advancement, these policies can help reduce poverty, improve social mobility, and promote economic integration among marginalized groups.

4. **Political Accountability:** Political parties should be held accountable for their actions concerning the protection and welfare of religious minorities. Ensuring that policies promote secularism and inclusivity, and addressing any harmful political rhetoric, will help strengthen democracy and maintain religious harmony in India.
5. **Improved Legal Framework:** The government should consider updating existing laws and introducing new legislation to address emerging forms of discrimination and violence against religious minorities. Strengthening the legal framework ensures better protection and greater deterrence against violations of minority rights.
6. **Community Education Programs:** Investing in community education initiatives that focus on promoting religious tolerance and awareness can help combat prejudice. Teaching young people about diversity and the value of pluralism fosters a culture of inclusivity, reducing inter-community conflicts.
7. **Support for Victims of Violence:** Establishing support systems for victims of communal violence, including legal aid, psychological counselling, and financial assistance, can help victims recover and reintegrate into society. Ensuring justice for victims is essential in healing and preventing the recurrence of violence.
8. **Religious Freedom Advocacy:** National and international advocacy for religious freedom should be strengthened to protect minorities from persecution. Governments and NGOs must work together to ensure that religious minorities have the freedom to practice their faith without fear of discrimination or violence.
9. **Media Responsibility:** Media outlets should adopt ethical reporting practices that promote religious tolerance and avoid sensationalizing or perpetuating divisive narratives. Responsible media coverage can play a crucial role in shaping public opinion and reducing religious tension in society. □

Reference

- Constitution of India. (1950). *The Constitution of India* (P. S. Acharya, Ed.). New Delhi: Government of India.
- Constitution of India. (1950). Retrieved from <https://www.constitutionofindia.net/>
- Khan, S. (2019). Religious Minorities and Social Integration in India. *Journal of South Asian Studies*, 45(2), 155-172.
- Chandhoke, N. (2019). Secularism in India: A critical evaluation. *Journal of Indian Politics*, 12(3), 234-250.

- Ghosh, J. (2018). Religious Minorities and Constitutional Guarantees in India. *Indian Journal of Law and Society*, 45(4), 523-535.
- Institute of Social Sciences. (2019). Discrimination and unemployment: The plight of religious minorities in India. Retrieved from <http://www.issinstitute.org/>
- Khan, S. (2020). Hate crimes and religious intolerance in India. *Journal of Social Issues*, 42(3), 207-223.
- Sanyal, R. (2018). Religious conversion laws in India: The impact on minorities. *Indian Law Review*, 33(4), 101-115.
- Khan, S. (2023). Violence against religious minorities in India: A growing concern. *Journal of Religious Studies*, 42(4), 310-325.
- Singh, A. (2021). Religious violence in India: A historical and contemporary analysis. *Political Sociology Review*, 29(2), 100-115.
- Gupta, V. (2021). Challenges in enforcing laws for religious minority protection in India. *Journal of Indian Legal Studies*, 35(2), 122-137.
- Sharma, P. (2020). Political polarization and its impact on religious minorities in India. *Political Sociology Review*, 47(3), 256-270.
- Kumar, R. (2019). Religious biases and socio-economic exclusion in rural India. *Social Development Journal*, 41(4), 312-325.
- Kumar, R. (2021). Secularism and religious nationalism in India: A fragile balance. *Indian Journal of Political Science*, 56(2), 155-170.
- Rao, P. (2020). Religious identity politics and its implications on Indian secularism. *Journal of Contemporary Politics*, 48(4), 102-118.
- Sharma, S. (2022). Media, politics, and the erosion of secularism in India. *Media Studies Journal*, 43(1), 59-75.
- Kumar, R. (2020). Secular parties and the protection of religious minorities in India: An analysis of their historical role and contemporary challenges. *Journal of South Asian Politics*, 45(3), 212-229.
- Rao, S. (2021). Hindutva and the rise of religious nationalism in India: Implications for secularism and minority rights. *Journal of Indian Politics*, 37(2), 145-160.
- Sharma, R. (2020). The impact and challenges of affirmative action policies on religious minorities in India. *Indian Journal of Social Policy*, 42(3), 88-102.
- Kumar, S. (2021). Religious minorities in India: Legal protections, discrimination, and political challenges. *Journal of Indian Social Issues*, 58(4), 202-218.
- Mehta, A. (2022). Religious minorities in India: Legal protections, ground realities, and the struggle for equality. *Indian Journal of Social Justice*, 47(3), 145-160.
- Smith, J. A. (2023). Policies for promoting religious harmony and protecting minorities in India. *Journal of Social Justice and Human Rights*, 32(1), 45-61.

