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THE MINARET

Muslim Public Intellectuals For Tomorrow



MASS MEDIA AS WEAPON:

LEGAL GAPS IN DIGITAL MEDIA ECOSYSTEMS
AND NORMALISATION OF HATE IN
CONTEMPORARY INDIA

FROM EVACUEE TO ENEMY TO ENCROACHER:

PROPERTY AS A TOOL OF MUSLIM
MARGINALISATION IN INDIA

WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM IQBAL TODAY?



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From the Editor's Desk

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the 2nd Volume of the Minaret Magazine!

In my journey as a Managing Editor in Project Mishkat, I have come across discussions of research ideas amongst the students who would want to contribute to the blogs and the Magazine. They would express frustration at the news of mob lynching, another demolition, and another invention of 'jihad' narratives affecting the lives of Indian Muslims in the country. And, as someone who believes in the strength of writing and the impact it can have, the revolution it can begin, I encourage them to write about it. To write about issues that make them restless and agitated, so much that an unadulterated original piece of art is produced.

Last year, our first issue was, by design, largely an internal effort, a way for our team to define the publication's voice and direction. The team members came together to express their passion and willingness to establish 'The Minaret'. With that foundation in place, this volume marks a deliberate expansion as we opened our pages to contributors from outside our core team for the first time. Writers and artists submitted their work in this cycle, and we see it as an important step in the magazine's growth: a shift from a publication produced for a readership to one produced with it, with the sole intention of engagement and community building.

Putting together Volume 1 taught us what kind of publication we wanted to be. Putting together Volume 2 has taught us what kind of community we are becoming and aim to be. This issue introduces a dedicated gallery section presenting the aspects of the lives of Muslims as submissions in their own right, intended to be viewed independently of the surrounding text. Finally, this volume includes coverage of the events we hosted to educate and raise awareness about issues affecting Indian Muslims. We felt it was important to document these gatherings and the conversations that came out, both as a record for readers who attended and as informative inputs for the public.

This volume carries the weight of everyday life alongside the weight of faith as the essays trace the struggles and legal battles Indian Muslims navigate alongside creative writing such as book reviews and reflections on philosophy and belief through a special dedicated section on Muhammad Iqbal, shedding light on Islamic Intellectual history. Then, photography closes the issue, holding tradition and contemporary experience in the same frame.

I am grateful to our contributors for their work and trust in this publication, to the editorial team and to the entire team of Project Mishkat for the hours spent in shaping and designing this volume. I thank our readers for their continued engagement with 'The Minaret' and hope that it feels more like a community whenever you read it.

We hope this volume reflects the growth we set out to achieve.

With Gratitude,

Siddeeqa Iram

Managing Editor, The Minaret



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Spotlight

Digital Surveillance and the Right to Privacy: Re-examining Constitutional Safeguards in the Digital Age

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Introduction

The rapid expansion of digital technologies has fundamentally transformed governance, communication, and economic activity. However, it has also ushered in an era of unprecedented digital surveillance by both state and non-state actors. From metadata tracking and biometric identification systems to algorithmic monitoring and artificial intelligence-driven profiling, surveillance capabilities have grown exponentially. This evolution raises critical constitutional questions about the protection of individual privacy in the digital age.

In India, the constitutional recognition of privacy as a fundamental right marked a watershed moment. Yet, the tension between state surveillance and individual liberty persists. This blog critically examines the adequacy of constitutional safeguards against digital surveillance, focusing on judicial developments, legislative frameworks, and emerging challenges.

Evolution of the Right to Privacy in India

The Indian Constitution does not explicitly mention the right to privacy. Early judicial interpretations were reluctant to recognise it as a fundamental right. In *Kharak Singh v. State of Uttar Pradesh* (1963)¹, the Supreme Court stated that Articles 19 or 21 did not protect the privacy of the people and thus restricted the constitutional rights against state surveillance.

Similarly, in *ADM Jabalpur v. Shivkant Shukla* (1976)², the court took a narrow approach of personal liberty during the Emergency, which effectively allowed the suspension of fundamental rights, including protections against unlawful detention.

The historic ruling in *Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (Retd.) v. Union of India* (2017)³, the Supreme Court unanimously decided that the right to privacy was a fundamental right inherent to life and individual liberty under Article 21 and also part of the freedoms guaranteed under Part III of the Constitution.

The court established a three-pronged test to determine the validity of any infringement of privacy, i.e., legality - existence of a law, necessity - legitimate state aim and proportionality - rational nexus between means and objective.⁴ This test has become the cornerstone for evaluating state surveillance measures.

Digital Surveillance: Scope and Mechanisms

Digital surveillance is a broad concept and includes communication interception, data storage, biometric identification, and algorithmic surveillance. Legal frameworks such as the Information Technology Act, 2000,⁵ (IT Act), the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885,⁶ and recent policy proposals enable the state to intercept and monitor digital communications. Interception guidelines codified in Rule 419A of the Telegraph Rules enable authorised officials to conduct surveillance under certain circumstances. Nevertheless, there remains concerns about the absence of a robust control mechanism and the risk of misuse of these legal provisions.⁷

Recent events such as Income Tax Bill, 2025 and Digital Data Protection Act, 2023 indicate an increase in surveillance authority, particularly in areas related to taxation, cybersecurity, and digital governance. These authorities can frequently access personal information without adequate procedural safeguards, raising significant constitutional concerns.⁸

Constitutional Tensions: Surveillance vs Privacy

The central constitutional dilemma lies in balancing state interests such as national security, public order, and crime prevention against individual privacy rights. Although the state defends surveillance on the basis that it is needed to govern people, uncontrolled surveillance may result in authoritarianism. The Supreme Court has repeatedly emphasised that privacy is essential for dignity, autonomy, and freedom of expression. In *Shreya Singhal v. Union of India* (2015),⁹ the court struck down Section 66A of the IT Act for violating free speech, recognising the chilling effect of vague and overbroad laws. Similarly, in *Kunal Kamra v. Union of India* (2024),¹⁰ judicial review was used to examine the regulation of online content by the government, with the issue of excessive state regulation and the absence of protection being identified. These cases demonstrate that surveillance not only implicates privacy but also affects other fundamental rights, including freedom of speech and expression.

The Proportionality Test in Practice

Although the *Puttaswamy judgment* established a solid framework of doctrine, its application is uneven. Numerous surveillance actions meet the legality criterion because of the statutory support but do not pass the necessity and proportionality test. An example of laws that allow digital searches or interception usually lack such as judicial oversight, well defined authorisation limits and accountability and redress mechanisms.

Although the *Puttaswamy judgement* established a solid framework of doctrine, its application is uneven. Numerous surveillance actions meet the legality criterion because of the statutory support but do not pass the necessity and proportionality test. An example of laws that allow digital searches or interception usually lack such as Judicial oversight, Well defined authorisation limits and accountability and redress mechanisms. These shortcomings are inconsistent with the constitutional need that limitations on the fundamental rights should be just, fair, and reasonable.ⁱⁱ In addition, extensive and generalized provisions grant discretionary authority to the authorities, which puts the chances of arbitrary surveillance at risk.

Data Protection and Legislative Gaps

The changing data protection regime in India aims at solving the privacy issues, but there are still critical gaps. The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 is one of the steps to control data processing and provide accountability. Critics however claim that it gives far-reaching exemptions to the government thus undermining privacy. The lack of a detailed surveillance reform legislation makes the issue worse. The current laws were made during a pre-digital age and are poorly suited to deal with the current technological reality. Consequently, the constitutional principles and legislative structures are not aligned with each other.

Surveillance and Chilling Effects

The chilling effect of democratic participation is one of the most pernicious effects of digital surveillance. People might be afraid of voicing their opposing views, political debate, or practicing their rights when they feel that they are under surveillance. This phenomenon directly undermines Article 19(1)(a)₁₂ of the Constitution. The fear of surveillance can lead to self-censorship, thereby weakening democratic institutions and public debate. The intersection of surveillance and free speech highlights the need for stringent safeguards to prevent abuse of power.

Re-examining Constitutional Safeguards

The digital age necessitates a re-evaluation of constitutional safeguards. While judicial recognition of privacy is a significant milestone, it is not sufficient in itself. Effective protection requires a multi-dimensional approach:

Strengthening Judicial Oversight

Surveillance practices ought to be taken through pre-judicial approval as opposed to executive authorisation. External control provides accountability and eliminates unreasonable intrusion.

Enhancing Transparency

The state should also implement transparency, such as the disclosure of surveillance practices and reporting on a regular basis. The citizens have a right to understand the use of their data.

Ensuring Procedural Safeguards

There should be a clear procedure that govern data collection, storage, and usage. Safeguards should include, data minimisation, purpose limitation and time-bound retention.

Legislative Reform

An effective surveillance law that is consistent with the constitution is essential. The proportionality test should be included in such legislation and provide strong solutions to breaches, which will guarantee the exercise of state power with reasonable restraint.

Technological Accountability

Corporate actors that are involved in data collection and processing should be subject to high standards of accountability. The role of the private corporations in the digital surveillance is not peripheral and has to be covered in the statutory framework.

The Way Forward

Digital surveillance is one of the greatest threats to constitutional democracy in the twenty-first century. Privacy as a basic right is a noble idea but this is compromised by the unrestrained growth of surveillance authority. Re-examining constitutional safeguards is imperative to ensure that technological advancements do not erode fundamental rights. A balanced approach rounded in legality, necessity, and proportionality is essential to reconcile state interests with individual liberty.

Institutional flexibility to technological change is the crucial determinant of the path of privacy in India. Courts should remain proactive in their interpretation of constitutional rights in the face of new challenges and the legislature should pass laws that are responsive to the new realities. The *Puttaswamy judgment* provides a strong normative foundation, but its promise can only be realised through effective implementation. Without robust safeguards, the right to privacy risks becoming illusory in the face of pervasive digital surveillance. Ultimately, the preservation of privacy is not merely a legal issue but a democratic imperative. It is central to human dignity, autonomy, and the functioning of a free society.

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Mass Media as Weapon: Legal Gaps in Digital Media Ecosystems and Normalisation of Hate in Contemporary India

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Mass media, in all forms, has been used as a tool of propaganda by institutions of power. Such a claim is not baseless as there are historical precedents wherein the normalisation and mobilisation of hate through mass media have been precursors to atrocities, from Rwanda to Bosnia to Sri Lanka.¹ Scientific theories that expose us to and consumption of violence and hate through mass media (such as television, movies, video games, and social media) increase the risk of violent behaviour, a phenomenon termed ‘media violence’.² Widely renowned theories conceptualise the effect of mass media as a tool of political propaganda on normalising violence, manufacturing consent for atrocities and hate in societies. For instance, Herman and Chomsky argue that mass media systematically manufacture public consent for elite power and state violence,³ while Gerbner and Gross contend that prolonged media exposure cultivates social realities that normalise violence and shape public perceptions and behaviour.⁴

Indian mass media has historically embodied our composite cultural identity, serving as a vibrant canvas for secular pluralism and interfaith harmony. Films such as *Amar Akbar Anthony* (1977) portrayed Hindu, Muslim, and Christian protagonists as brothers united by shared humanity, reflecting the Nehruvian vision of a syncretic nation.⁵ However, an unmissable ideological shift in the Indian mass media can be undeniably detected. While not exclusively, but such shift is also accompanied with a rise in, and normalisation of anti-Muslim sentiments.

More recently, the production of mainstream, high-budget, and highly sensationalised movies in Bollywood have created a lasting effect on the Indian society. Notable characteristics of such works include exaggerated negative stereotypes about Muslims often blurring the lines between reality and fiction, revisioning and rewriting historical memory and, covert and overt conditioning.⁶ While the authors do not contest the underlying truth in such contents but critique the hyper-depiction and over-generalisation of the same. This includes continued villainisation and vilification of Muslims, especially Muslim men, by portraying them as inherently violent and beast-like, sexually insatiable and depraved, terrorist sympathisers.⁷

Additionally, refuelling and sustaining communal polarisation through factually contested and over-dramatised narratives of history through Bollywood movies like *The Kashmir Files* (2022), *The Taj Story* (2025) etc., has been observed lately.⁸ A report by the Centre for the Study of Organized Hate (CSOH) details how AI-generated imagery and content have emerged as a powerful new tool for advancing anti-Muslim and Islamophobic narratives within India's vast and highly active digital ecosystem.⁹ The casualisation of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim sentiments through Bollywood and Indian pop-culture has resulted in not just explicitly and physically violent incidents but also soft violence in the form of social, economic, political, and civil exclusion, and the 'othering' and dehumanisation of Muslims.¹⁰ The authors attempt at discussing how the existing legal framework in India is ineffective in curbing such rapidly spreading phenomena.

Role of Mass Media

With the ever-increasing use of digital platforms such sentiments only amplify uncontrollably. In this regard, X (formerly Twitter) operates as a substantial vector for amplifying anti-Muslim propaganda. The official BJP Assam handle (@BJP4Assam) is one such example. AI-generated videos such as Assam Without BJP portray a dystopian future of Muslim demographic takeover, streets filled with skullcaps, burqas, public beef slaughter, racking up millions of views before deletion amid backlash.¹¹ Doctored clips depict Congress leaders in Islamic attire conspiring with Pakistani flags, while explicit "No Mercy" imagery shows CM Himanta Biswa Sarma shooting Muslim figures, normalising violence as electoral strategy.¹² In fact, even the Supreme Court highlighted X's failure to moderate such content violating platform policies against hate speech.¹³ WhatsApp also functions as a closed-network multiplier, turbocharging these narratives. Viral forwards peddle fabricated love jihad clips, morphed stills from films like *The Kerala Story*, and pseudo-historical memes linking Muslim practices (e.g., prayers, attire) to existential threats. These untraceable chains evade moderation, flooding family groups and preceding documented mob lynchings, embedding Islamophobia in intimate digital spaces.

Moreover, YouTube's recommendation algorithms exacerbate this. Pseudo-historical channels echoing Sudarshan News style push temple reclamation and Mughal atrocities, often tied to trailers for *Chhaava* or *The Taj Story*. Viewers starting with film clips are algorithmically funnelled to extremist content. Studies confirm sharp Islamophobic amplification in India-specific feeds.¹⁴ OTT platforms enable complicity through selective curation. They host and boost Islamophobic shorts from these films while suppressing counter-narratives, fostering echo chambers. Government blocks for obscenity underscore inconsistent enforcement, allowing propaganda to permeate daily consumption.¹⁵ The legitimacy granted by endorsements and acknowledgements to these movies further expands the extent to which propaganda films have an effect on negative mass mobilisation. Consistently granting state or central tax exemptions on movies, while may not be making any significant impact economically, grants an official legitimacy, moral authorisation and validation.¹⁶

In the Indian context, significant legal gaps also persist in the regulation of third-party service providers, enabling the unchecked amplification of hateful cinema-related content on social media platforms. While the Information Technology Act, 2000 classifies social media companies, content hosts, recommendation engines, and cloud-based AI tools as ‘intermediaries’, the safe-harbour regime under Section 79 does not adequately differentiate between passive hosts and active third-party service providers that curate, recommend, monetise, or algorithmically amplify content. The due-diligence requirements under the IT (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 largely focus on post-facto takedowns and user complaints, rather than imposing a clear statutory obligation on platforms, content delivery networks, ad-tech services, or AI-based content generators to prevent the proactive circulation of communal or hateful cinematic narratives. As a result, third-party actors involved in editing, clipping, subtitling, synthetic media creation, and targeted distribution often fall into a grey regulatory zone, escaping both content certification norms under the Cinematograph Act, 1952 and direct criminal liability under the Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023.

The illiberal emergence and rise of self-censorship by writers, creators, and filmmakers due to the many precedent-setting instances of direct state censorship, legal harassment, weaponisation of anti-Muslim sentiments and the ‘cancel culture’¹⁷ by prominent figures as well as the hyper-mobilisation, pledges for boycott and state-backed vigilante violence has caused mainstream media to be dominated by the divisive and communal movies.¹⁸ Major OTT and streaming platforms such as Netflix and Amazon Prime have increasingly sidelined, shelved, or outright rejected projects perceived as diverging from prevailing dominant narratives. This is evident in the stagnation of films like Anurag Kashyap’s *Maximum City* (shelved) and Dibakar Banerjee’s *Tees* (2024), as well as in earlier instances of direct state intervention, such as the 2008 ban imposed by the Gujarat state government on Nandita Das’s *Firaaq* (2008), which explored the aftermath of the 2002 Godhra riots.¹⁹ The latest, most prominent incident of direct state censorship being the blocking of the Indian release of *The Voice of Hind Rajab* (2005), the Oscar-nominated film about the murder of a five-year old girl Hind in Gaza, by the Central Board of Film Certification due to potential negative effect on diplomatic relations.²⁰

Sahyog is a centralised content-takedown portal launched by India’s Ministry of Home Affairs that allows government and law-enforcement agencies to directly issue notices to online intermediaries for the removal of ‘unlawful’ content under Section 79(3)(b) of the Information Technology Act, 2000. Legal commentators and digital rights groups have criticised Sahyog as a parallel censorship mechanism, arguing that it enables large-scale content removals without the transparency, procedural safeguards, or judicial oversight mandated under Section 69A of the IT Act.²¹ Taken together, these instances point to a sustained pattern of institutional control and pressure on cinematic expression, shaping what themes are permitted to reach the public through mass media.

Conclusion

Dissent and counter-narratives are essential, especially in times of rising illiberalism, as they become vital archives of facts and reliable collective memory, when the society is being flooded with propaganda. The critically essential acknowledgement of the intense struggle between hegemonic forces in the media industry attempt to dominate and capture cultural narratives and production and the counter-hegemonic voices that persist remains significant consequentially. Despite their critical flaws, *Mulk* (2018) and *The Great Shamsuddin Family* (2025) remain important as imperfect yet sincere attempts by artists to affirm India's pluralistic ethos, even while operating within problematic tropes of Muslim patriotism and casual Islamophobia. More importantly, there needs to be a significant development in the legal framework to plug in the existing gaps, thus ensuring the spirit of dissent and inclusion in the democratic society we live in.

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Beyond the Headlines: Islamophobia and Indian Muslims

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The most dangerous form of injustice is the one that becomes normal. When hatred starts to speak the language of nationalism, when the narratives of media continuously begin to dilute the members of a specific community by questioning their constitutional loyalty (prohibited under Section 197 of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023) (BNS),¹ and when the public institution merely remains the observer of grievous injustice, then the discrimination stands above the isolated social attitudes and becomes the structural reality. In the last 12 years, since the Modi government came into power, the Muslim population in India has found itself at the core of media trials and agencies' scrutiny.² From recurring disputes on places of worship, to hijab ban in educational institutions, from persistent denial of bail in the majority of cases involving Muslims to the rise of bulldozer justice, issues extend far beyond isolated acts.

The 2026 World Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) ranked India 157th out of 180 countries, underscoring the evolving impact of majoritarian narratives within the media ecosystem.³ Polarised media debates, fear-driven coverage, and online hate campaigns have systematically reduced Muslims from citizens of the Republic to mere tools of permanent distrust by validating fear in the public's eyes.

This Article seeks to reflect upon the changing dynamic of Islamophobia in India from mere social stigma to a critical constitutional issue developed from political responses and media representation. Meanwhile, it moves further by arguing there is an urgent need for not only legal reforms but also intellectual awakening within the Muslim community through empowerment in socio-political representations and the establishment of independent community-led media platforms by ensuring engagement in constitutional discourse.

Constitutional Provisions v. Lived Realities

It is an inevitable fact that the vision of the Indian Constitution is to protect the religious and linguistic minorities and to ensure the peaceful existence of all communities. Article 14-18 of the Constitution guarantees the existence of equal treatment and non-discrimination.⁴ Similarly, Article 25 provides freedom of conscience on one hand, and the right to practice religion, propagate, and profess on the other.⁵

However, the application of these principles sounds fake and unconvincing to Muslims in the country. Reports on socio-economic conditions of the Muslims alarmingly revealed that: “Muslims make up nearly 14 per cent of India’s 1.35 billion population but do not have the same representation in government or private sector jobs.”⁶ Multiple government-appointed commissions have found that the community is at the bottom among India’s social groups in terms of education and employment. Similar observations were made by the Sachar Committee (2006), which called Muslims the ‘most disadvantaged’ community in almost all socio-economic thresholds. The Commission specifically mentioned that only 8% of Muslims were employed in the formal sector, compared with an overall 21%. Women further suffer disproportionately within the Muslim community, with mere participation of 15% in the women’s workplace in 2011, against over 27% for Hindu women.⁷

Recent investigation of Al- Jazeera has shockingly underscored on the above mentioned numbers, by specifically pointing out the case study of Lubna Amir, a qualified Indian dentist, who even after applying to a dozen of clinics across India, received no replies despite having excellent academics. She later realized that she was merely denied because of her religious identity.⁸ Leading Human Rights Expert Apoorvanand in his article titled ‘*The Banality of India’s Islamophobia*’ argued that prejudice against Indian Muslims was always there since partition, but the present dominance of RSS and BJP has further exacerbated the marginalisation of Muslims in all dimensions, including economic, social and political areas.⁹ Therefore, what may have originated as social bias has now acquired the deep and pervasive form of political backing. The present collapse between constitutional guarantees and lived realities has compelled us to question whether our laws are really equipped to manage and confront these structural Islamophobic trends. And do these constitutional safeguards only appear on paper or do they also have any practical application?

The Legal Lacuna of Hate Speech

The key challenge in combating Islamophobia in India is jurisprudential failure in curbing and regulating the recurring prevalence of hate speech by not merely common citizens but surprisingly by constitutional functionaries. Although there is an offence concerning hate speech, like the act of promoting religious enmity, addressed in the form of scattered statutory provisions such as Section 196, 299 and 353 of BNS.¹⁰ Thus, the present escalation calls for the need to enact a standalone and specialised law for regulating hate speech instances. However, the problem of hate speech has evolved not merely due to a lack of statutory enforcement, but also due to the failure in the enforcement of existing laws. Recently, India Hate Lab Report, 2025 revealed an alarming increase in the incidence of hate speeches, specifically against Indian Muslims increasing from 1,165 in 2024 to 1,318 in 2025. The report concluded 74% surge in anti-minority hate speech.¹¹ Therefore, such incidents are no longer episodic but steadily embedded within the public structure of the society.

This issue becomes even more problematic when such incidents of hate speech emanate from the individuals holding constitutional positions. Over recent years, public narratives have repeatedly witnessed the expression of hatred solely against the Muslim community. This involves the hate expressions like 'love jihad', 'land jihad', 'spit jihad', 'Miyan Muslims', 'Aurangzeb ki aulad' and other countless incidents of invocation by individuals sitting in high constitutional designations, including the Prime Minister, chief ministers, cabinet ministers and many other permanent executives (Bureaucrats).¹²

This controversy has further sparked after hateful remarks of Assam Chief Minister, Himanta Biswa Sarma, urging people of Assam to trouble *Miyan Muslims* (derogatory term used in reference to Bengali-speaking Muslim immigrants in Assam), illustrating hostile and constitutionally unbecoming rhetoric, ignoring the sanctity of the office he is holding.¹³ The statements made by constitutional position holders are not merely confined to the podium from which they speak, but create a long-lasting impact in influencing social dynamics.

This is exactly where lacuna in Indian jurisprudence in dealing with hate speeches actually arises. Traditional penal laws, while criminalizing certain forms of incitement, continue to fail to adequately redress the constitutional injury triggered by continuous events of hate speech. The issue is not about determining the ingredient leading to hate speech, but the real problem lies in examining the repeated public speeches by constitutional actors diluting the fraternity, dignity and equality between the subject of the states.

Considering the gravity of the issue, Public Interest Litigation (PIL) naming *Roop Rekha Verma & Ors. v. Union of India* (W.P. (C) No. 199/2026) was filed before the Hon'ble Supreme Court. The petition is based on limited but significant premises- that there is an absence of an established constitutional framework or remedy regulating the speech of constitutional actors, even where such falls short of criminal hate speech but otherwise dilutes India's fraternity and institutional integrity. Thus, lack of a guided standard leads to the emergence of a constitutional vacuum.¹⁴

The petition although rejected by the Hon'ble Supreme Court on a vague ground that 'speech originates from thoughts, and thoughts cannot be controlled', the question before the Hon'ble Court is not whether constitutional functionaries should surrender free speech, but whether the hateful expressions made by the people of the State can be ignored, despite leading to profound distrust and disharmony in society. Therefore, the Hon'ble Supreme Court should reconsider its decision, examining the nature and gravity of this issue.

In a constitutional democracy like India, which is rooted in the principles of fraternity, equality, liberty, and free speech. The continuous silence, despite recurring instances of hate speech, targeting one particular community in the face of normalisation, can itself become the testimony of constitutional failure.

The RSF Press Freedom Index, while ranking India to 151st position out of 180 countries revealed the alarming increase in majoritarianism narrative, narrowing the space for minorities especially Muslims, in mainstream public discourse.¹⁵ The report opened space for raising questions like- whether mainstream Indian media is reporting the incidents concerning Islamophobia and whether it is also becoming a tool for normalising the recurring prejudice against Indian Muslims.¹⁶

The role of media narratives in embracing the delusion of Islamophobia has become an inevitable feature of Indian social discourse over the last 12 years through provoking headlines, communally charged debates, and TRP-driven sensational broadcasting.¹⁷ Muslims are often targets of these mainstream and state-backed media houses by portraying them as terrorists, gangsters, jihadis, and projecting them as a political scapegoat. Recurring portrayals and rhetoric by media houses compelled ordinary citizens to gradually accept it as a social reality.¹⁸ Therefore, it can be said that Islamophobia is not merely the product of discriminatory policies of the state, but also largely affected by media-based anti-Muslim portrayals.

However, the present problem is not only restricted to mainstream media but also affects a large section of alternative media. Despite the fact that alternative media resist direct communalism, it often struggles when it comes to proportionate representation.¹⁹ Muslims or other marginalised sections often fail to occupy any leadership positions in these media houses, leading to dilution of expression, which is triggering the real oppression and exploitation of these communities.

These isolated and selected instances of visibility prove the troubling reality of the fourth pillar of Indian democracy (Media), and speak to the urgent need for independent media houses for marginalised communities, especially Muslims, who are major victims of hate speech and hyper-visible controversies. It is high time for members of the Muslim community, especially the so-called intellectual class, to establish autonomous media houses, research centres, think tanks, and other independent institutions.

Conclusion

Islamophobia in India is no more a myth, with the continuous incidents of hate speech, and anti-Muslim media narratives, it has gradually transformed into dangerous social reality. The marginalisation of Indian Muslims is not episodic, but has become a structural harm that can't be resolved through ad-hoc measures, like welfare legislations, or judicial pronouncements. Therefore, it requires the beginning of new-era of intellectual renaissance among the members of Muslim communities. The era can revolutionize the notion of the entire community by establishing independent Muslim media houses, think tanks, and research centres. Only this can guarantee that Muslims raise their own voice against the oppression they are facing.

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From the Ground

From Evacuee to Enemy to Encroacher: Property as a Tool of Muslim Marginalisation in India

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Introduction

In January 2026, twelve Muslim men in Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh, were detained by the police for offering namaz inside a private house.¹ One of the detainees petitioned before the High Court alleging that he had been threatened with the demolition of his property. The High Court issued protection orders and held that any violence would be presumed to have occurred at the instance of the authorities.² Considering the current milieu of the country, the High Court's approach is commendable. However, in an unsurprising development, the roster of the judges was changed.³

The case demonstrates the gradual invasion of the state into the private spaces of its citizenry. From the large estates of nawabs after partition, to the private spaces of a common person, the state control is not limited to the extrinsic aspects like demolitions and evictions, but to policing their conduct inside those spaces. From Akhlaq's lynching to the Bareilly incident, things have degenerated.⁴

Fahad Zuberi argues, that architecture is never neutral; rather, an expression of political imagination, a bridge that connects communities or a boundary that separates them. This insight applies with particular force to the question of Muslim property in India. Every decision about whose structures are preserved and whose are demolished, whose neighbourhoods are developed and whose are cleared, is a political decision about who belongs, and who does not.

Punitive Domicide

The term 'demolition' seems to be a neutral word. It implies an administrative act of removal of an unauthorised structure. But as Zuberi argues,⁶ what has been happening to Muslim homes and neighbourhoods in India is something qualitatively different. He uses the term 'punitive domicile' to describe the deliberate destruction of homes, not as a by-product of neutral urban governance, but as a form of punishment.

Domicide can be defined as the destruction of the home as an act of violence. The home is not merely a structure but also an aspect of identity, belongingness. Its destruction is therefore not the destruction of the structure, but the destruction of a belongingness.

The Geography of Exclusion

The Gujarat Disturbed Areas Act⁷ is perceived as a protective measure. It was meant to prevent distress sales of property during communal violence.⁸ In practice, however, it has functioned to freeze communities into segregated enclaves, requiring state approval for property transactions between communities in designated areas.⁹ The long-term effect has been to prevent residential integration, leaving Muslims marginalised in geographically segregated neighbourhoods and made the survivor of poverty, crime and fear.¹⁰ Modern urban infrastructure with elevated highways, gated communities, etc reinforces this invisible segregation, allowing passage through cities without encountering Muslim neighbourhoods at all.¹¹

Gated-colonies, ghettos are also manifestations of exclusion and marginalisation. However, it is not limited to ghettoisation. Not having basic infrastructure like health and education is also a form of marginalisation which often goes unnoticed. New Delhi's Jamia Nagar is a prime example of it - from Sukhdev Vihar to Shaheen Bagh, Jamia Nagar has three police stations,¹² at least four police posts,¹³ but no government hospitals, only a few government schools with no meaningful upliftment.

Hannah Arendt¹⁴ sees public space as the space wherein individuals present themselves as visible members of the political community. To be excluded from it is to be excluded from political existence itself. The systematic marginalisation of Muslim communities in India is, therefore, not merely a sociological phenomenon. It constitutes the practical denial of equal citizenship to the community. If one applies the 'untouchability' logic of the Sabarimala temple entry case,¹⁵ this denial is also a form of untouchability.

The Evacuee Property and Enemy Property Laws

The roots of dispossession in independent India can be traced since partition. The bureaucratic response to it laid the groundwork for decades of legal dispossession. The East Punjab Evacuees (Administration of Property) Act, 1947¹⁶ created the legal fiction of 'evacuee property' for the property left behind by those who had migrated to Pakistan. On paper, this was a custodial arrangement, designed to preserve property until its rightful owners could return. In practice, it was confiscation sanctioned by law.¹⁷

It is important to note that this legislative setup was built under the Congress government which has been largely perceived as secular and committed to the causes of Indian Muslims. The Enemy Property of those people that were now the citizens of a country at war with India, that is, Pakistan. Though perceived as a war-measure aimed at hostile foreign nationals, it disproportionately targeted Indian Muslims.

The Act had created the figure of the 'citizen enemy' - the Indian Muslims whose continuing ties of culture, religion, and family to Pakistan rendered his loyalty suspect and his property forfeited.¹⁸ Sanobar Umar argues,¹⁹ that the Enemy Property Act²⁰ was not a neutral war-time security measure. It was necessary to India's post-colonial ideas of territorial nationalism and the normalisation of majoritarian ideas of belongingness.

The Supreme Court, in *Union of India v. Raja Mohammed Amir Mohammad Khan*,²¹ held that lawful Indian heirs could not be denied succession on account of their ancestors' choices. However, the Act was amended²² by the BJP government and effectively reversed the court's judgment. It expanded the definition of 'enemy' to include legal heirs and successors, 'whether or not citizens of India'.²³

Despite possessing an Indian passport, an Indian citizen, born in India, could now be treated as an enemy of the state just because of the choices made even before her birth. The tragedy is that these laws targeted, by and large, the Muslim elite. The zamindars and nawabs were mostly prone to suffer by these laws, while an ordinary Muslim was largely untouched by these laws. This has changed in contemporary times as the state has found another tool to dispossess which does not call for complex legislative enactment as executive authorities alone suffice.

The Waqf Amendment Act 2025

Under the 2025 Act²⁴ the protection to the registered waqf properties is explicitly negated if the property is disputed or claimed by the government.²⁵ The practical effect is dangerous. Numerous mosques, graveyards, dargahs, madrasas, etc., lack formal documentation, either because it was never created or because it was lost during the upheavals of Partition and subsequent decades of communal violence. Declaring such properties disputed costs nothing and carries no evidentiary burden for the state, yet it exposes the property to seizure. This captures scholar Sharjeel Imam's contention that riots are manufactured not just to take human lives, but also to weaken the community in terms of culture and politics.²⁶

Moreover, the Act mandates that the Waqf Board includes at least two non-Muslim members and the chief executive officer need not be a Muslim. No such requirement exists for Hindu temple trusts, Sikh gurudwara committees, or other religious endowment bodies.

This was done under the pretext of curbing corruption, however, multiple other options could be explored to do so, external supervision and state-control is not necessary.

The Bulldozer State

The tools of the dispossession of Muslims have been democratised in contemporary India. By targeting the belongingness, the bulldozer has become a symbol of hate and of the state's illegitimate power.

In 2023 alone, over 107,000 homes were demolished and more than 515,000 people evicted.²⁷ Muslim-owned homes constituted approximately 44 percent of those demolished in 2022 and 2023.²⁸ Moreover, demolitions increased in the aftermath of communal tensions and protests.²⁹ The pattern of targeting shows that the demolitions were not an administrative necessity, but a satisfaction of the majority's conscience.³⁰ In Gujarat, 350 homes belonging to Muslims were demolished just two months after the Supreme Court's guidelines.³¹

In Assam, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Delhi demolitions were carried out as punishment following incidents of protest.³² Muslim-owned properties were selectively bulldozed while nearby Hindu-owned properties were left untouched, even when they shared the same legal infirmities.³³

It is a systematic practice. The political marketing of this phenomenon has been brazen. Government officials have openly celebrated the bulldozer as a symbol of justice.³⁴ Uttar Pradesh's Chief Minister hailed as "Bulldozer Baba" not as a criticism but as celebration.³⁵ The bulldozer has become, in the vocabulary of majoritarian politics, a signifier of Hindu assertion over Muslim space. A symbol of not just power, but of hate.

When 'encroachment' is discovered suddenly in the wake of the alleged encroacher's participation in some protest or an alleged crime, one can argue that the illegality is a pretext, not a reason. A state that tolerates illegality uniformly and then suddenly enforces it, that too selectively, is not enforcing the law. It is using the law as a weapon.

The issue is not limited to demolitions, but accountability of state agencies also. Even if one believes the demolished structure as 'encroached' or 'illegal', the question is what was the state doing for all those years? If a structure built years ago is found to be an illegal encroachment, the state has had years to act on that illegality since its existence. It had all the resources and institutions to prevent such encroachment or at least act on it. Moreover, to sustain in a building, one needs at least electricity connection, water-supply connection. The larger question is why was the state facilitating the illegality by supplying electricity and water in such a building. This is clearly abetment.³⁶

The Supreme Court's order

In its 2024 order issuing pan-India guidelines on demolitions, the Supreme Court held that such bulldozer demolitions violated the right to shelter and constituted collective punishment.³⁷ Violations of these guidelines were to be treated as contempt of court, with costs paid from the salaries of the officials responsible.³⁸

The judgment was widely celebrated; however, it was inadequate as a practical remedy. The court did not acknowledge that the survivors of such demolitions were mostly of one community, that is, the Muslims. This could have been a crucial engagement with the question of discriminatory intent and might have opened the door to stronger relief. Moreover, no orders regarding compensation for those already dispossessed were issued. Unsurprisingly, the demolitions continue despite the apex court's orders.³⁹

The Right to Property

Not having right to property as a fundamental right has implications for the victims of bulldozer demolitions.⁴⁰ A fundamental right is directly enforceable against the state. When there is a violation of a fundamental right, the court ought to be more stringent in its interpretation. Doctrines like proportionality, reasonable classification and due process are invoked. On the contrary, a constitutional right is enforceable only through ordinary legal proceedings.

If the Indian Constitution guaranteed the right to property as a fundamental right, the claims of those whose homes have been demolished without following the due process would have been of substantially greater constitutional weight. Courts, applying the proportionality standard, would have been required to examine whether the demolition served a legitimate public purpose, whether it was the least restrictive means of achieving that purpose, and whether it bore a reasonable relationship to the stated justification. The state's practice of demolishing structures which it tacitly permitted through years of inaction would be scrutinised seriously. Merely declaring the right to housing⁴¹ as a fundamental right under Article 21 will not do any good until the right is actually realised.

The question of selective enforcement, which is central to the discriminatory nature of these demolitions, would have been far more readily justiciable under a fundamental rights' framework, which obligates the state to justify its actions.

Conclusion

The history reveals a pattern of dispossession that continues since independence, from the Congress governments to the BJP governments of the present. The tools have changed, the target is largely the same. In the early decades, it was elite Muslims whose property was swept away.

Today, it is ordinary Muslims whose homes are bulldozed, and their private conduct is policed. The guarantee of the right to property as a fundamental right would not, by itself, reverse this pattern, but it would raise the legal costs of dispossession, strengthen the remedies available to victims, and require courts to engage more seriously. It would, at least, require the state to justify itself more fully.

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Faith and History

Echoes of Arafat

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Every year on the ninth of Dhul Hijjah, the sacred Day of Arafat, millions of Muslims from every corner of the earth pray and make supplications on the vast, sun-scorched plain outside Makkah, dressed in identical seamless white cloth. Stripped of rank, nationality, and wealth, they stand as equals before their Creator. This gathering is not merely a ritual of faith, it is a living, breathing reenactment of one of the most consequential moments in Islamic history. For it was on this very place, in the year 632 CE, that Prophet Muhammad ﷺ delivered his Farewell Sermon a declaration so far ahead of its time, that even the most progressive legal minds of the modern West only arrived at fragments of its vision thirteen centuries later.

Yet, when the history of human rights is taught in schools around the world, the story almost invariably begins in a meadow beside the River Thames in England. It begins with Runnymede, 1215 CE, and the Magna Carta. The conversation rarely, if ever, begins at Arafat, 632 CE. This is not an accident of history. It is a product of a deep and deliberate historical amnesia, a collective forgetting that has allowed Western civilisation to claim the sole authorship of freedom, while an entire tradition of human rights, delivered to all of humanity on a mountain plain in Arabia, has been sidelined, caricatured, and dismissed.

This essay is an attempt to restore that memory not out of polemical spite, but out of a sincere love for the truth. It is an invitation to sit with the historical record honestly and ask: what did the world's first universal declaration of human rights actually look like? And who delivered it first? Before we arrive at Arafat, we must be honest about what happened at Runnymede. The Magna Carta of 1215 CE is celebrated with an almost reverence in Western political culture. It is taught as the cornerstone of democratic liberty, the founding text of the rule of law, the seed from which all modern human rights eventually grew. This mythology, however compelling, is built on a profound misreading of what the Great Charter actually was. The Magna Carta was not a declaration of universal human rights. It was a political contract hammered out between a tyrannical king, John of England, and a group of rebellious barons who were angry that he was taxing them too heavily and seizing their lands without due process to fund ongoing wars.

They remained legally invisible, bound to the land as the property of their lords, with no right to trial, no right to property, and no right to challenge authority. The phrase “free man” that appears in the Charter’s clauses referred explicitly and exclusively to the landed nobility. Everyone else simply did not count.

To put this in concrete human terms: the women of England, the enslaved, the landless poor, the religious minorities they all stood outside the circle that Runnymede drew. And this remained largely true for centuries. English women would not gain the right to own property independently of their husbands until the Married Women’s Property Act of 1882, a full 667 years after the barons celebrated at Runnymede. In France, similar rights would not arrive until 1938.

This is the West’s timeline of rights: slow, begrudging, extracted through centuries of protest, revolution, and suffering, and even then, applied selectively. Keep this timeline in mind as we turn to what was declared at Arafat, six hundred years before Runnymede, to an audience of over one hundred thousand people gathered on a barren plain.

The Arafat Declaration

When Prophet Muhammad ﷺ stood on the slopes of Mount Arafat in the final days of his life, he was not addressing a room of barons or a parliament of elites. He was speaking to over a hundred thousand people men and women, Arabs and non-Arabs, the free and the formerly enslaved, all gathered in those white garments that erased every visible distinction of class and colour. His voice was carried across the crowd by companions who relayed his words to those who could not hear. It was, in every meaningful sense, a universal address.

The sermon touched on racial equality, the abolition of economic exploitation, the sanctity of life and property, the rights of women, the accountability of rulers, and the brotherhood. Consider first the declaration on racial equality, which remains one of the most powerful anti-racist statements ever uttered in human history:

“O People! Your Lord is One and your father is one. All of you are from Adam, and Adam is from dust. An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab, nor does a non-Arab have superiority over an Arab; a white person has no superiority over a black person, nor does a black person have superiority over a white person — except through piety and good deeds.”— Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, Farewell Sermon, Arafat, 632 CE

This statement was delivered in a world dominated by racial hierarchies, tribal supremacies, and caste-like distinctions. It did not merely discourage discrimination; it theologically uprooted the very premise upon which racial superiority rests. The Quran had already laid this foundation:

“O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you.”— Surah Al-Hujurat [49:13],

In a single verse, the Quran redefines nobility. Not bloodline, not skin colour, not tribal ancestry only the content of one's character and the depth of one's righteousness. The West arrived at legal racial equality in different forms between the 1940s and 1960s the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, the Civil Rights Act in the United States in 1964. Islam had made it a divine command over thirteen centuries earlier.

The Misconception about Women

Perhaps no aspect of Islam has been more systematically distorted in the modern imagination than the status of Muslim women. The image most commonly projected by Western media is one of a veiled, voiceless figure, stripped of agency and held captive by her faith. This caricature is not merely inaccurate; it is a breathtaking inversion of the historical truth. The Muslim woman of the 7th century had more legal, economic, and social rights than her English counterpart would have for over a thousand years to come.

Let us begin with the Farewell Sermon itself. In the very address from which Western commentators occasionally excerpt the racial equality passage, the Prophet ﷺ devoted significant attention to the rights of women not as afterthoughts, but as central pillars of his final message:

“O People! It is true that you have certain rights over your women, but they also have rights over you. Treat your women well and be kind to them, for they are your partners and committed helpers.”— Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, Farewell Sermon, Arafat, 632 CE (Sunan Ibn Majah, Vol. 3, Hadith 1851)₂

The framing here is crucial. In a world where women across the world were routinely inherited as property when their husbands died, where girl infants were buried alive for the shame of their birth, where women had no voice in their own marriages and no ownership over their own lives the Prophet ﷺ stood before a hundred thousand people and declared women to be partners. Not possessions. Partners.

In England, under the legal doctrine known as coverture, a married woman had no independent legal existence. The moment she wed, she and her husband became one person in the eyes of the law and that person was the husband. She could not own property, could not sign contracts, could not inherit in her own name, and could not keep her own wages. Any money she earned, any land she inherited, passed automatically to her husband upon marriage. This was not the law of the medieval Dark Ages — it was the law of England right up until the Married Women's Property Act of 1882. The well-known philosopher John Stuart Mill, writing at the time, remarked with bitter clarity that in this respect, the legal position of a wife under English common law was worse than that of a slave. In France, similar property rights for married women would not arrive until 1938. The contrast with what Islam had established over thirteen centuries earlier is staggering.

The Quran, revealed in the 7th century, is explicit and unambiguous on the economic independence of women:

“For men is a share of what the parents and close relatives leave, and for women is a share of what the parents and close relatives leave, be it little or much — an obligatory share.”— Surah An-Nisa [4:7],

*“For men is a share of what they have earned, and for women is a share of what they have earned.”
— Surah An-Nisa [4:32],*

These were not aspirational statements. They were legally enforceable divine commands. A Muslim woman in 7th-century Arabia could own property in her name, manage her own business, retain all her earnings, accept or refuse any commercial transaction, and inherit from her family and not a single dirham of what she owned could be touched by her husband without her explicit consent. The *mahr* (dowry) she received upon marriage was hers alone, forever, regardless of whether the marriage ended or not.

Khadijah Bint Khuwaylid (RA), the first wife of the Prophet ﷺ, was herself a successful independent merchant and a businesswoman who employed men, conducted her own trade negotiations, and managed her own substantial wealth. She was not an exception to the Islamic rule; she was an expression of it. And she predated England’s Married Women’s Property Act by over twelve centuries. *“Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim.”— Prophet Muhammad ﷺ (Sunan Ibn Majah, Hadith 224),*

That second hadith, transmitted by Imam Ibn Majah, uses the word ‘Muslim’ a term that in Arabic is gender-inclusive, encompassing both male and female. The obligation to learn, to grow, to seek understanding — it was never the exclusive preserve of men in Islam. Aisha bint Abu Bakr (RA), the Prophet’s wife, transmitted over 2,210 hadiths and became one of the foremost legal authorities of the early Muslim world. Male companions of the Prophet ﷺ would travel to her to seek rulings on religious questions. She was not a curiosity or an exception; she was a result of a system that had always insisted on the intellectual and spiritual equality of women.

There is something profoundly moving about the moment of the Farewell Sermon, when you understand what it meant in its historical context. A man who had begun his mission in a society where girl children were buried alive, where the tribal code ran by blood and vengeance, where the weak had no recourse and the powerful answered to no one, this man stood on a plain and delivered what amounted to a complete restructuring of the moral universe. He addressed women’s rights, racial equality, economic justice, the sanctity of life, and the accountability of rulers, all in a single address, to over a hundred thousand people, in 632 CE.

He did not negotiate these rights with a group of angry barons. He did not grudgingly extend them through centuries of political struggle. He declared them as divine truths, rooted in the nature of what it means to be human, truths that no king, no parliament, and no majority vote could legitimately revoke.

This is, ultimately, the difference between the human rights framework that emerged from Arafat and the one that emerged from Runnymede. The Magna Carta created rights as political compromises things that could be expanded or contracted depending on who held power. The Farewell Sermon declared rights as divine trusts obligations placed by God upon every human being toward every other human being, regardless of what any earthly power might decide.

The Prophet ﷺ concluded his sermon with a question directed at the entire gathering, to which they replied:

“We will bear witness that you have conveyed (the message)”⁶

The question that remains is ours to answer: will we, finally, truly hear it?

Conclusion

A full and honest reading of history requires us to acknowledge a truth that has been long obscured: the rights that the modern world considers its proudest achievements equality before the law, the right of women to own property, the right to challenge those in power, the obligation of the state toward its most vulnerable citizens were not invented by the Western Enlightenment. They were declared on a barren plain in Arabia in the year 632 CE, by a man in a white seamless garment, to a gathering of over a hundred thousand human beings who had come from every direction of the world

The West did not discover human rights. It rediscovered fragments of them, slowly and painfully, over a thousand years, while the tradition from which they had originally sprung was either ignored or actively suppressed. Women in England could not own property until 1882. Black Americans were not legally equal citizens until 1964. The European welfare state is barely a century old. The accountability of rulers to ordinary citizens, including women, was a lived reality in Madinah in the 7th century.

This is not a call for any political project or ideological programme. It is simply a call for intellectual honesty. The next time the history of human rights is told, let the story begin not in a Thames-side meadow in 1215, but on a sunlit plain outside Makkah in 632 where one man spoke to all of humanity, and left them with a covenant that the centuries have not been able to erase.

Endnotes

1. 'Book 15: The Book of Pilgrimage, Chapter 19: The Hajj of the Prophet' Hadith 1218 a (*Sunnah.com*) <<https://sunnah.com/muslim:1218a>> accessed on 3 August, 2026
2. Sunan Ibn Majah, 'Book 9: The Chapters on Marriage, Chapter 3: The Wife's Rights over the Husband' Vol 3, Hadith 1851 (*Sunnah.com*) <<https://sunnah.com/ibnmajah:1851>> accessed on 2 August, 2026
3. Ibid
4. Muhammad Taqi Usmani (tr), 'Surah An-Nisa (The Women)' *The Meanings of the Noble Qur'an with Explanatory Notes* 4:32 (Farid Book Depot 2019)
5. Sunan Ibn Mājah, 'The Book of the Sunnah, Chapter 17: The Virtue of the Scholars, and Encouragement to Seek Knowledge' (*Sunnah.com*) <<https://sunnah.com/ibnmajah:224>> accessed on 2 August, 2026
6. *Book 15* (n 1)

Critic's Corner

Talashnama: The Quest, A Mirror Held with Love

Titu Mir (Pen name)

Imagine an invisible camera that can capture visuals of an entire village. Visuals that not only show how a village looks—rooftops, place of worship, land, ponds, trees, and roadsides—but also how people and communities live within it. Their regular lifestyle and rhythm. Their relationship with each other and the gossip they enjoy in the *Chai Tapri*. How they think and see life. Their inner world. The camera can capture it all, as it is. Ismail Darbesh's pen acted like that camera, and it beautifully captured the lifestyle of the contemporary Muslim community in the novel *Talashnama*.

Before driving to the heart of the novel, it's worth noting that both the author's background and the birth of *Talashnama* itself are quite fascinating. Anyone who knows the dwellers of rural Howrah, especially Domjur, would be genuinely struck, hearing a novelist emerge from that land.

Starting with the author's background, Ismail Darbesh is a Bangla graduate. He started writing stories, essays, and features for local magazines during his college days. But there is something called fate, which doesn't give what you wish for without a test. He faced the test of time and, in the pursuit of stability and financial success, had to halt his writing. And of course, the nobility of people, who, rather than appreciating, apparently don't spare a moment to discourage a writer or a dreamer in the form of ostensible well-wishers. Call it poverty or ignorance, a mindset became common in rural South Bengal that education does not earn you any profit, hence it is a waste of time. And to not waste any more time, Darbesh also started a small garment business in his locality, which he still runs today.

The advent of cheap internet and smartphones in India has changed so many things. Along with its endless cons, it reduced the digital gap between urban and rural areas. While the masses continue to be intoxicated by cheap data, Darbesh found a new opportunity in 2016 to resume his writing once again. This time, not through the traditional pen and paper, but by a digital keyboard on Facebook. And that is how *Talashnama* was born. It came to life through a series of posts on Facebook. The posts became so viral online that they compelled a popular Bengali publisher *Abhijan* to publish them in the form of a complete novel in 2021. It was then translated into English by V. Ramaswamy and published by HarperCollins. The success story of the novel is all around Hindustan Times, Frontier Magazine, Scroll, and other major news outlets.

The protagonist of the novel is a woman named Riziya. She is a meritorious student and the village's first girl to cross the threshold of a college. She has an outspoken personality and falls in love with the Mosque's Imam, Mawlana Tahirul. But what made her run away with a non-muslim guy, Suman? And how do the two communities – Hindu and Muslim – view that? These are the things that pull the story into something far larger than a love story.

Talashnama highlights many contemporary issues of the Muslim community – poverty, scarcity of education, ignorance and devotion – but it especially lifts the veil in showing the plight of Muslim women. Yes, there are several ecosystems in the world that apparently only care about Muslim women and champions talking about them, masking their other intentions. But what makes *Talashnama* a masterpiece is the way it's written. The author's language neither appears like a critique nor like a defender. *It doesn't tell, but it tells everything.* It beautifully mirrors the current condition of a community, areas of regression and the nuances that come with them.

Darbesh sets off the novel with a few questions on the first page, “Has anyone ever received absolute light? And yet, why does the earth itself carry on with half daylight and half night? Why is a side of the moon in perpetual darkness?” I feel this is the theme of the book.

The book is written in a humorous way, yet it cuts deep when it matters. There are instances when Azan is delivered in the ear of a newborn baby, and there are deaths. One turned into a *Pir* (Spiritual master) after demise, and a *Majar* (mausoleum) evolved in the village, and another – an atheist – was denied a *Janazah*, and even a piece of land in the graveyard. One loves Imam and Mosque so much only to stay in power.

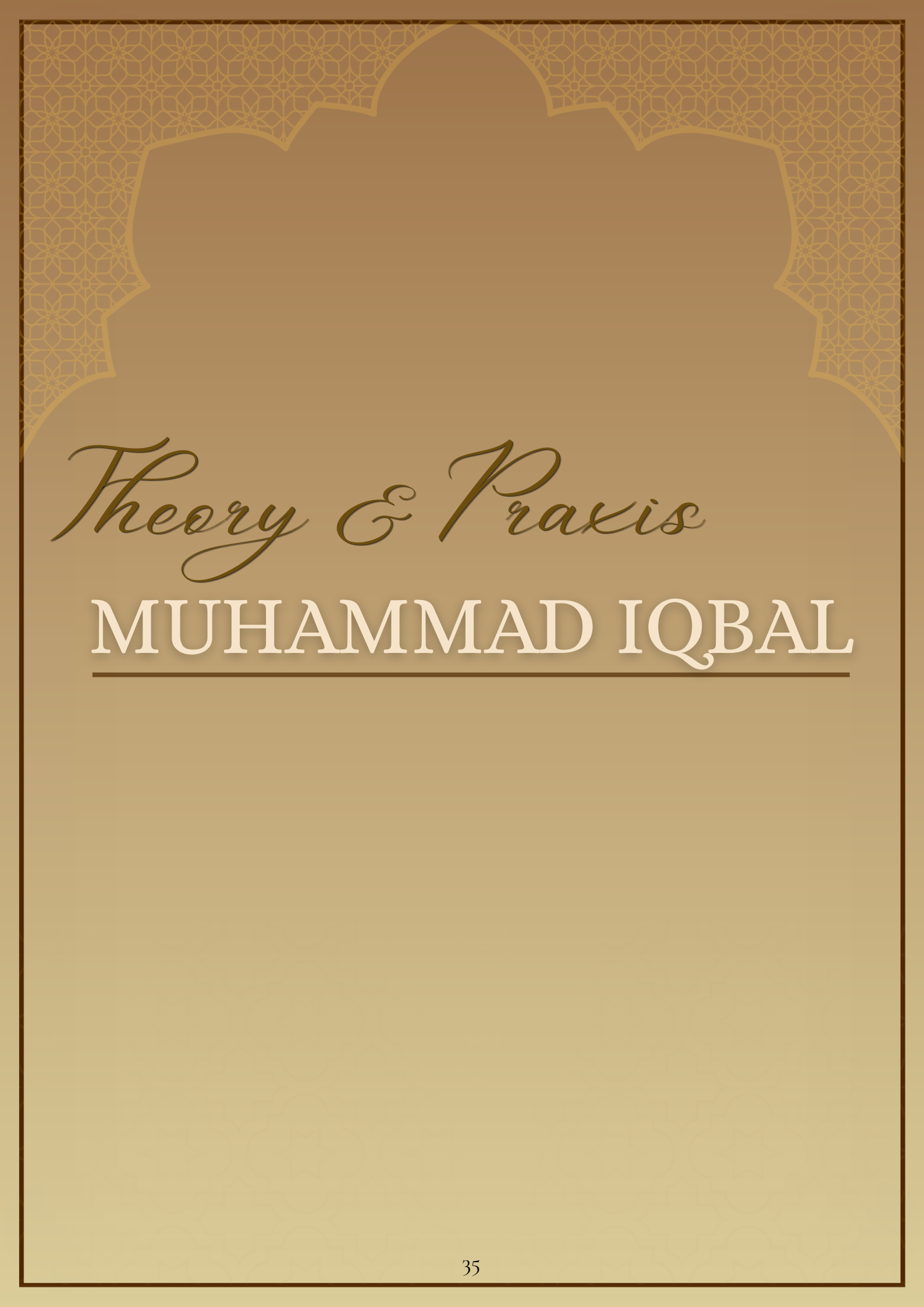
In the book, you will find provocative lines addressing the issues of women like: “It was only Muslim men who got married. Women did not. They were married off.” And at the same time, you will find a character like Nurul Huq, the father of five daughters, whose furious mother thinks Nurul's wife is inauspicious because she only gives birth to daughters. But Nurul's chest swells with pure joy as he remembers that his Prophet had only daughters.

Every society has an altruistic young dreamer who believes change is possible. Maruf is that person in *Talashnama*. The modern world may call him a progressive Muslim. Maruf has a love affair with books. In the novel, he beautifully compares the journey of religion to the flow of a river, discussing Islam with his best friend Suman: “The river carried along gravel, pebbles and garbage with it. The pebbles could be likened to the customs and conduct of various countries and communities. Sometimes, like a tributary, a divergent philosophy, which was in conflict with Islam, joined this river. Gradually, those too became a part of the religious and cultural heritage. In time, these acquired such a sacred status that they became as essential as the other duties under Islam. Consequently, the religion became terribly burdened.”

There are tons of other writers, Muslims and non-Muslims, who have already written truckloads of books regarding the internal issues of the Muslim community. According to me, what sets *Talashnama* apart is ‘affection’. Let me put it more simply: Muslims have an innate, deep love for their prophets and tradition. And with love comes a great deal of concern. Now, there are many writers who view religion like Islam as no more than ancient fables and write to bring change within the fundamentals of Islam. Instead of change, such writings hurt and have hardened the very community they intend to address. In the case of *Talashnama*, it intends to change as well, but it has something unique, and that is affection and love for its own community. Which is why, where established writers failed to pierce the premise of the Muslim community and obviously failed to secure a little space in their bookshelf, *Talashnama* successfully secured a grand place in the heart of Bengali Muslims.

I’ve written too many words praising the book, it is time to flip the coin. I feel the end of the book is a little abrupt and filmy. Yes, it is a work of fiction, but the novel feels too real throughout most of its pages. It is only towards the end that it starts to feel a little cinematic. Nevertheless, if you are a person who is interested in knowing about the contemporary Muslim community, culture, and areas where it thrives and falls short, this is a book that deserves a place on your bookshelf.

Since I’ve already written so much, let’s end the review with a memory. I only met the author once at a Bengali literature event at Maldah. As it turned out, we were living in the same guesthouse. What I remember – after the ice broke – was that I was going through his phone gallery and there were pictures of dozens and dozens of books that were kept in the open sunlight to dry. I asked him, “How many of these books have you read?” With a little smile on his face, he replied, “All of them”. One or two years later, when I was walking through the lane of Park Street, Kolkata, my glance caught the racks of Oxford Bookstore. From behind the glass, I could see they were filled with the English version of the book, *Talashnama: The Quest*. The story of my district and people had finally made its way here. With a smile of pride, I continued walking forward.



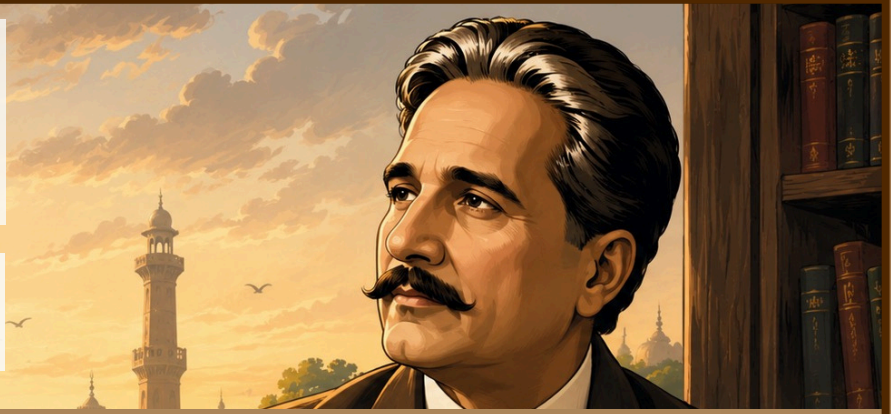
Theory & Praxis

MUHAMMAD IQBAL

What can we learn from Iqbal today?

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First of all we have to appreciate that Iqbal was a voracious and prolific reader. We find that Iqbal was reading the most contemporary thinkers of his time—Bergson, Nietzsche, Whitehead, McTaggart, Spengler, William James. He was deeply conversant with modern science, mathematics and philosophy. He was even more conversant with the Islamic tradition from al-Farabi to Mulla Sadra, Hallaj to Sirhindi, Iraqi to Razi, Abdul Wahhab and Shah Walilullah to Jamaluddin Afghani.

Iqbal was reading voraciously because he wanted to arrive at a solution to the problem: the weakening of selfhood. For Iqbal this was a problem only to be resolved via an alternative metaphysics. The metaphysics that Iqbal is against is pretty clear — it is the metaphysics of monism. This metaphysics is one of identity: the identity of substance and attributes, of substance and subject, of essence and existence. It creates a concept of selfhood which we might call the ‘Subject’; self-contained, ruled by the identity principle and whose manifest aspects are the following in each sphere: in politics it is nationalism, in religion it is pantheism, in art it is aestheticism, in science it is determinism. All of these are drawn from the same traditional concepts of monism: the identity of substance and attribute, subject and object, essence and existence.

Iqbal attempts to find resources that would allow him to move beyond this metaphysics. In doing so, his system would require a critique of all these traditional philosophical concepts, and above all a critique of the metaphysics of identity. A critique that would be followed by a reconstruction of a new metaphysics: a metaphysics of difference. This is why Iqbal reads thinkers like Bergson, McTaggart, Nietzsche, James and Whitehead.

They were the leading figures in Western philosophy at the time, and Iqbal was remarkably up to date with their writing. For example, Spengler’s two-volume book was translated into English only in 1926, but Iqbal had not only read it by 1929 (the year of the lectures collected together as *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*) but also constructed the lectures as a reply to Spengler’s view on Islam.

Iqbal's reference to these Western process philosophers is a sign that we need to repeat because only then can we see him as our contemporary. With Iqbal we need to reconstruct a metaphysics of difference and for that we have to take reference to our contemporary philosophers of process and evolution: Deleuze, Foucault, Agamben, Badiou, Zizek, Lacan and Derrida in the Continental tradition and the American pragmatists such as Wilfrid Sellars and Robert Brandom in the Analytic tradition.

Let me talk about what would happen when we read Iqbal's system as a first attempt by any Subcontinental thinker to create a system of metaphysics of difference, and the effects that it would have on various aspects of human reality. First of all we would talk about the political sphere: nationalism as a political imaginary has to be discarded. Nations are based on imagined ethnic and linguistic ties which depend upon the successful subsumption of an individual to national interest. The individual who is different from the collective becomes forcefully included and erased within it. The identification of an individual with the collective leaves no space for disagreement or dissent. The individual citizen in their day-to-day behaviour must reflect the morals and codes of the nation; there are some, however who do not belong to the nation and refuse identity — they are different, so they must be excluded. All nationalism functions on this basis. What is Iqbal's alternative? It is a pragmatic devolution of sovereignty but not sovereignly — only autonomously. It is instructive that in his famous Allahabad Address, given at the Muslim League's Session of 1930, Iqbal talks about autonomy and not sovereignty. Autonomy is linked to selfhood — and it is the condition of the self that it is free, not determined by anything other than its own *nomos*. Unity exists as unity of purpose, not substance. Yet there can be various purposes, and some of them would be at odds with each other. What would be the standard by which valid purposes are distinguished from invalid ones?

This standard cannot be external to the self. It has to be the standard that strengthens selfhood; not the standard that weakens it — as happens in the political sphere of nationalism. Thus the autonomy that Iqbal is trying to conceive is closer to the model of the *Sahiban* rather than the *Khilafat*: a collective bound together by a singular purpose — to awaken the self. The institutions that would bind this collective together would then not simply be bureaucratic, soulless institutions — they would be simultaneously religious and legislative — a body (*ijma*), that would have the right to conduct *ijtihad* or radical reinterpretation of the Quran, the hadith as something not to be taken literally but as an example.

Iqbal follows Shah Waliullah in arguing that “the Prophet who aims at all-embracing principles, however, can neither reveal different principles for different people nor leave them to work out their own rules of conduct. His method is to train one particular people, and to use them as a nucleus for the building up of a universal shariah. In doing so he accentuates the principles underlying the social life of all mankind, and applies them to the concrete cases in light of the specific habits of the people before him. The shariah values (*Ahkam*) resulting from this application (e.g. rules relating to penalties for crimes) are in a sense specific to that people; and since their observance is not an end in itself they cannot strictly be enforced in the case of future generations.”

In the dimension of religion, then, Iqbal focuses on the radicality of interpretation: a hermeneutics of reconstruction. This reconstruction demands not adaptation to modern life (as is the case with the reformism of someone like Sir Syed) but transformation of modern life. For Iqbal, modern life is quite paradoxically not modern enough because it has become stuck in nihilism and has accepted this nihilism as its end. It is unable to think beyond nihilism as its inevitable condition. This is what Iqbal refuses. This nihilism has two facets—a refusal of the creative power of time and a denial of personal immortality. This nihilism has to be transformed through *ijtihad*. Time has to be seen as open to the new, and human life is not necessarily finite. Modernity has to be transformed into a project of openness to the new and the different. And the human self does not find its end with death but can go beyond it—not in serial time but in Bergsonian duration. The intensification of one’s powers—and all power is relational—means that religion has to create a new kind of human being, a self who can be affected by difference without losing its cohesiveness. This dialectic between intensifying the power to be affected and the cohesion of the self is best visualized in Iqbal’s common image of the pearl in the ocean.

Religious thought has to go beyond the binary of the spiritual and the material, between idealism and realism, as he writes: “with Islam the ideal and the real are not two opposing forces which cannot be reconciled. The life of the ideal consists not in a total breach with the real which would tend to shatter the organic wholeness of life into painful oppositions, but in the perpetual endeavour of the ideal to appropriate the real with a view eventually to absorb it, to convert it into itself and illuminate its whole being.” Thus Iqbal refuses all mysticism and spirituality that denies the world and becomes ascetic—his diatribes against Christianity and some particular versions of Sufism are well known.

Religion, like politics, is concerned with creating a new type of human. And this is the case with philosophy and aesthetics as well. Iqbal's poems, as we well know, are powerfully exhortatory—they call on us to transform ourselves and become different, open ourselves both to the past and the future, and imagine possibilities hitherto unheard of. But the self is dialectical—it is always involved in a movement outside itself and a return to itself. It stays at the limit—and this is the definition of life. What if life is the secret metaphysical term at the core of Iqbal's metaphysics of difference? Life as the limit form, existent only in its transformative reconstruction of reality.

Thus biology and the natural sciences too have to be reconstructed—departing from the traditional understanding of the gene as a blueprint which seeks replication without difference. An expressionism in biology—the genome as a text that is reinterpreted and expressed in the organism. The physical and chemical sciences too have to be reconstructed—there are multiple references in Iqbal to the latest theories of physics, from Einstein and Whitehead's concepts of relativity to Heisenberg's uncertainty principle. The metaphysics of identity underlying physics—that reality is composed of singular, physical atoms—is one that Iqbal seeks to overcome by thinking of reality not atomistically, as atoms in a void, but as pure movement that thought breaks up into things: “the answer is that the notion of a thing is derivative. We can derive things from movement; we cannot derive movement from immobile things...the universe which seems to us to be a collection of things is not a solid stuff occupying a void. It is not a thing but an act.”

This system of metaphysics of difference makes Iqbal close to the French thinkers of the 1960s—especially Gilles Deleuze. This similarity is not utterly remarkable if we see the provenance of their systems, drawn from careful and idiosyncratic readings of Nietzsche, Bergson, Whitehead and a critique of German Idealism from Kant to Hegel. But the problem with the French school is ultimately the same problem that Iqbal diagnoses Nietzsche with, of being one-sided and thus utterly useless. Their absolute affirmation of difference, untempered by the internal weight of the past, is mistaken. Iqbal writes: “Only we should not forget that life is not change, pure and simple. It has within it elements of conservation also. While enjoying his creative activity, and always focusing his energies on the discoveries of the new vistas of life, man has a feeling of uneasiness in the presence of his own unfoldment...this is only another way of saying that life moves with the weight of its own past on its back and that in any view of social change the value and the function of the forces of conservatism cannot be lost sight of.”

This could be read as a return to and a validation of the metaphysics of identity. But I do not think this should be our reading. Because that would mean the return of all the phantoms that Iqbal has been banishing—nationalism, ascetic mysticism, atomism, aestheticism, subjectivism, monism, and textualism. Iqbal has been seen as someone who goes far with his metaphysics of difference but then betrays it by returning to a metaphysics of identity. I am not denying that it is a legitimate reading. Yet, the problem with that reading is that it sticks too close to what Iqbal says and does not attempt to repeat what he does. We need to stop being textualists about Iqbal and reconstruct him in the way he reconstructed all those texts he read.

*The Crisis of Modern Subjectivity:
Rethinking Muhammad Iqbal and the
Islamic Tradition by Muhammad U.
Faruque: A Summary*

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The paper '*The Crisis of Modern Subjectivity: Rethinking Muhammad Iqbal and the Islamic Tradition*' by Muhammad U. Faruque examines the major contributions of Muhammad Iqbal, focusing on his concept of the self (*khudi*) and his interpretation of Sufism, which he regarded as central to his engagement with the Islamic intellectual tradition and to his effort to reinterpret Islamic thought in relation to modern science. Developing a critical inquiry on epistemeological relativity, Faruque stations Iqbal's ideas alongside earlier figures of the Islamic tradition and the subsequent scholarship that has examined his philosophical and literary contributions. Through this comparative approach, the paper highlights the formative influence of Western epistemology on Iqbal's attempt to synthesize the intellectual traditions of the East and the West. It ultimately argues that the Eurocentric orientation of Iqbal's thought undermines his project of intellectual revival by misrepresenting the historical development of key doctrines within the Islamic intellectual tradition.

Muhammad Allama Iqbal, a pioneer of Muslim intellect who remains a personality of such magnitude whose effect has managed to create a scholarship of its own kind. The creation of a dedicated scholarship around Iqbal has cemented his legacy on two polemical ends, as the paper argues. At one end, there is a defensive and apologetic reception of Iqbal's imagination and its philosophical impact on a national scale, which leads to the dismissal of any critical scholarship aimed at scrutinizing his existing works. And the other end, Iqbal's profound novelty and literary greatness are portrayed as unsurpassable in existence.

In a close reading of the first section, this paper examines Muhammad Iqbal's explication of his theory of the self — often criticised for adopting a tone similar to Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of the *Übermensch*. It explores the fragments of selfhood embedded in Sufi practices and how these have been misconstrued in later scholarship on Iqbal. A notable divergence in the relationship between *khudi* and *insān-e-kāmil*, as understood by earlier Islamic scholars, reveals a perspective that contrasts with those of earlier Muslim predecessors.

In the absence of valid Sufi accounts supporting the realisation of a superior being, contemporary scholars such as Ebrahim Moosa have interpreted Iqbal's concept of khudi as embodying a 'superhuman' and moreover, the idea of Muhammad Iqbal as a philosophical figure grants leverage to his contributions to the intellectual tradition. However, from a critical standpoint, the author contends regarding Iqbal's own intellectual training required to engage with earlier Islamic intellectual traditions, including philosophy (*falsafa*), theology (*kalām*), and philosophical mysticism (*irfān*). In his view, the Islamic intellectual tradition fell short to procure intellectual acumen producing only few thinkers similar to the status of the Hindu philosophical thought. This characterisation of intellectual history, as done by Iqbal carries on a reductionist approach which portrayed the Islamic intellectual environment as uncondusive for the growth of scientific and philosophical pursuits. With such a perception, it becomes problematic for Islamic knowledge to be faithfully justified on its own terms within Iqbal's work.

From a philosophical perspective, the paper argues that Muhammad Iqbal's understanding of Sufism contains several instances of oversimplification and biased interpretation. This is exemplified in his reading of Abd al-Karim al-Jili's fundamental treatise *Al-Insān al-Kāmil fī Ma'rifat al-Awākhir wa al-Awā'il* (*The Perfect Human Concerning Knowledge of the End and the Beginning*). In engaging with this work, Iqbal appears to err in his conceptualisation of *dhāt* (substance), explaining *Mutlaq al-Dhāt* (the Divine Essence) as unknowable to human perception. Iqbal's position on the Divine Essence oversimplifies al-Jili's view, even though he cites the latter as the basis for his own concept of the perfect human. In attempting to further extrapolate the idea of the perfect being from al-Jili's works, Iqbal introduces elements of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's philosophy, particularly the notion of "pure thought," along with Christian theological concepts such as the term 'God-man'. At the same time, he mistranslates several key terms-for instance, *tajallī*, which he renders as "illumination," but which is more accurately translated as 'manifestation' or 'self-disclosure'. This lapse in reading and interpretation of al-Jili creates a significant distortion of the historical tradition of Sufism and its associated figures as represented through Iqbal's philosophy.

Adding to the debate on the characteristics of Sufism, Iqbal continues to adopt a Eurocentric perspective in '*Bedil in the Light of Bergson*' (1916), where he alleges Persian Sufism for subsuming the spirit of great intellectual figures in Islamic history. He also identifies pantheistic tendencies within Sufism to be a major corrosive force, offering a simplistic critique of its practices rather than engaging with the appropriate scholarly literature on the subject. Furthermore, the Sufi concept of *fana*, which is understood as 'self-negation,' contrasts sharply with Iqbal's perception of *fana* which he explains as 'inactivity'.

In his commentary on Abd al-Qādir Bīdīl's work on Sufi metaphysics, Iqbal falls short of grasping Bīdīl's allusion to Ibn 'Arabī's concept of divine imagination, which transcends human imagination. For Iqbal, the argument containing allegory presented by Bīdīl remains incapable of explaining the relationship between humans and knowledge, leading to a misinterpretation of the entire proposition as originally made by Bīdīl .

Apart from philosophy and metaphysics, the author further presents substantial evidence of oversights made by Muhammad Iqbal in the realm of natural sciences. In his interpretation, Iqbal elucidates the theory of evolution as proposed by Ibn Miskawayh, combining it with his own understanding of evolutionary theory. The writings of Ibn Miskawayh provide insight into the progression of attributes from mineral to vegetal, animal, and ultimately human life. Meanwhile, Iqbal, employing logic similar to that of Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory, projects Ibn Miskawayh's treatise to articulate his own understanding of barbarism evolving into civilization through physiological and spiritual changes—an idea that is absent in the original text. This blending of traditional theory with modern scientific explanations reveals Iqbal's attempt to form a superficial connection between two fundamentally different theories.

Continuing his intellectual exploration, Muhammad Iqbal presents a theoretical dialogue between Albert Einstein's Theory of Relativity and his own concept of the self, which he describes as non-spatial, non-temporal, and absolute, yet unaffected by external influences. For the author, the implications that Iqbal draws echo his interpretation of the theory of relativity, which he employs to elaborate on the impact of motion and space on human psychology, highlighting the interrelation between the observer and reality. However, his argument reveals a notable lack of rigorous mathematical foundation in theoretical physics, as Iqbal relies instead on mystical interpretations of the theory of relativity offered by prominent traditional Muslim intellectuals.

In response to the epistemic domination resulting from colonial activities, Muhammad Iqbal vehemently challenges the colonial episteme by strategically positioning the Islamic intellectual tradition and highlighting its unique coherence in contrast to it. However, the paper seeks to demonstrate that Iqbal's extensive undertaking lacks a coherent methodological approach, portraying the achievements of the Islamic intellectual tradition merely as precursors to modern science rather than as significant accomplishments in their own right. Iqbal attributes a hedonistic character to the progress of Western knowledge while simultaneously acknowledging the intellectual prowess he gained through figures such as Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Friedrich Nietzsche, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and William Wordsworth.

As the paper progresses, the second section addresses Iqbal's perspective on selfhood within the Islamic philosophical and theological tradition. Rejecting the dualistic interpretation of the Cartesian principle, Iqbal advocates for the unity of mind and body on the ground of permanence between the former and the latter element, belonging to the same framework of operation which can not be separated from each other. The paper develops the claim that building on this rejection, Iqbal situates the same position within the Islamic philosophical and theological tradition concerning selfhood. By examining the reasons behind the oversight of Iqbal's assessment, it becomes clear how he simplifies the multidimensional debates surrounding selfhood in the Islamic context: specifically, the effort to find a balance between the material and immaterial conception of the self.

In his work *Gulshan-i Raz-i Jadid* (*The New Rose Garden of Secrets*), which Muhammad Iqbal presents as an extension of *Gulshan-i Raz* (*The Rose Garden of Mysteries*) by Mahmud Shabistari, the inquiry gravitates around the notion of *fanā*—the annihilation of the self. Shabistari opens his argument through the question of self-realisation, or the problem of I-ness ("Who am I?"), accompanied by a call to "travel within yourself." Iqbal's interpretation, however, locates the meaning of this inquiry in the accumulation of knowledge by the human individual—the "I" in his philosophy—along with a zeal to uncover the secrets of the universe through scientific knowledge. For Shabistari, by contrast, the dictum "travel within yourself" signifies a commitment to a spiritual journey that transcends the spatio-temporal realm, requiring the renunciation of corporeal existence in order to achieve union with the Absolute Divine, who is referred to as the "I" in the original text.

Evidently, the author underscores the claim that Iqbal's engagement with the notion of the "I" concerns human immortality, a view that theoretically diverges from Shabistari's original conception. In continuing his argument, the author contends that Iqbal reduces the concept of *fanā* by interpreting it merely as a 'loss of individuality' or a 'negation of selfhood,' in contrast to the more nuanced descriptions offered by prominent Sufi thinkers such as Shah Waliullah Dehlawi. It is important to note that the Sufi conception of *fanā* and *baqā* involves the removal of the veil between God and the human being; the conventional self conceals the divine self. Iqbal, however, interprets this process differently—not as the dissolution of illusory consciousness but as an act of 'self-affirmation', a conclusion he also draws from the famous utterance of Mansur al-Hallaj, "I am the Real" (*ana al-ḥaqq*). Within Iqbal's argument, there appears to be a failure to acknowledge the distinction between self-loss the process of relinquishing one's attributes in approaching God and *fanā*, which represents the culmination of that process. By treating *fanā* in isolation, Iqbal overlooks its complementary counterpart, *baqā*, understood in Sufi thought as the divine ordinance that grants subsistence to the annihilated self of the individual.

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Predicament:

Iqbal or Iqbal's?

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محمد بھی ترا جبریل بھی قرآن بھی تیرا
مگر یہ حرف شیریں تر جہاں تیرا ہے یا میرا؟

When Muhammad Iqbal passed away in 1938, he left behind a legacy that continues to perplex scholars working on different eras across the spectrum of Islamic intellectual history. Regarded by some as the most significant Muslim philosopher-poet of the twentieth century, Iqbal has been subject to what can only be described as hagiographic veneration in South Asian scholarship. This uncritical reverence is characteristic of intellectuals who, grappling with the stark realities of their postcolonial condition, were compelled to project or forge a stabilizing identity within geopolitical contexts of nationalist hostility and material scarcity. Yet this very adulation has, paradoxically, impeded serious critical engagement with his work.

In this context, Muhammad Faruque's contemporary intervention, *The Crisis of Modern Subjectivity: Rethinking Muhammad Iqbal and the Islamic Tradition*, represents a rare and necessary corrective to this unscholarly tendency. Faruque's examination of Iqbal's engagement with premodern Islamic thinkers (particularly his readings of 'Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī, 'Abd al-Qādir Bīdīl, and Maḥmūd Shabistārī) reveals what he identifies as a pattern of philological error and anachronistic projection that calls into question Iqbal's credentials as a reliable interpreter of the Islamic intellectual tradition. The central thrust of Faruque's argument is deceptively simple but potentially devastating in its implications: Iqbal's much-vaunted "reconstruction" of Islamic thought is built upon systematic misreadings of the very tradition he claims to represent; these 'misconstructions' are so fundamental that they undermine Iqbal's authority as a reformer altogether.

The evidence Faruque marshals is striking in its specificity. When Iqbal engages with al-Jīlī's concept of the perfect human (*al-insān al-kāmil*), Faruque documents how he conflates distinct technical terms, mistranslates the fundamental Sufi concept of *tajallī* as 'illumination' rather than 'self-disclosure' or 'manifestation,' and imports Hegelian categories such as "Pure Thought" that have no basis in al-Jīlī's text (51–52).

These are not mere quibbles about translation choices but categorical errors that fundamentally distort the metaphysical architecture of al-Jīlī's thought. Similarly, Faruque argues that Iqbal's reading of Bīdīl through the lens of Bergson's philosophy of duration and *élan vital* imposes a framework so alien onto the text that what emerges is a figure barely recognizable as the historical Bīdīl (71). Perhaps most problematically, Iqbal's characterization of the Sufi concept of *fanā* (annihilation of the self) as 'self-negation' or 'absorption in the Universal self of God' represents what Faruque identifies, through careful textual analysis, as a fundamental misunderstanding of terminology that is simply absent from the Sufi lexicon in this form (52). This is because concepts such as negation or absorption are hardly found in Sufi discussions of *fanā*, which denotes a complex progressive process of spiritual transformation rather than a simple erasure of individuality (52; 67–68).

When one considers that Iqbal's virtually eponymous philosophy of *khūdī* (selfhood) is constructed in explicit opposition to this particular construal of *fanā* as ontological privation, the implications of Faruque's critique become clear: if his analysis is correct, the central pillar of Iqbal's philosophical edifice, namely, the search for selfhood, rests upon a foundation of misunderstanding.

Yet Faruque's critique extends beyond identifying such conceptual errors to interrogating Iqbal's methodology itself. The predicament, according to Faruque's analysis, is Iqbal's consistent tendency to read premodern Islamic texts through the lens of modern European philosophy rather than attempting to understand them on their own terms (57; 71). This approach is not merely methodologically questionable but represents what might be termed "interpretive colonialism": a framework in which a premodern Islamic text is denied its own voice, conceptual apparatus, and internal logic, and instead conscripted into service as a mere anticipation of Western modernity.

Faruque supports this charge by noting that Iqbal reads "Bīdīl in light of Bergson, al-Jīlī in light of Hegel, selfhood and consciousness in relation to Einstein's physics, and Sufism in conversation with Nietzsche" (71). The irony that Faruque purports to identify is profound (and perhaps Shakespearean in its tragedy): writing explicitly to restore Muslim intellectual confidence in the face of colonial subjugation, Iqbal adopts a hermeneutic strategy that tacitly accepts the colonial narrative wherein 'real' philosophy only happens in the West, and Islamic thought can only be validated by demonstrating that it somehow prefigured Western achievements (57).

Faruque finds confirmation of this tendency in Iqbal's own admission that most of his "life has been spent in the study of European philosophy and that viewpoint has become [his] second nature" (qtd. in Faruque 49; see Iqbal, *Shikwa* 8). Crucially, Faruque is careful to note that his article "does not attempt to discredit all of Iqbal's intellectual achievements or dismiss them out of hand," but rather intends "to critically assess his ideas within the broader context of Islamic intellectual history" (49).

The implications of Faruque's critique, though rightfully provocative to a stagnant and one-dimensional Iqbalian scholarship, are perhaps not as far-reaching for the protagonist himself as they appear at first glance. If Iqbal indeed systematically misread the premodern Islamic tradition and his translations are philologically untenable, what remains of his mantle as the 'reconstructor' of Islamic thought? To secure the claim of his enduring relevance, one must recognize that Iqbal's work serves as a profound hermeneutic map of the anxieties and aspirations defining the colonized Muslim intelligentsia of the early twentieth century. It is precisely in this historical situatedness that his work offers its most potent guidance for the contemporary Muslim subject, whether situated within the Western metropole, the transnational diaspora, or the traditional heartlands of the East.

It is here that the distinction animating this article's title demands articulation. The phrase 'Iqbal or Iqbal's' embodies a substantive bifurcation of two discrete intellectual predicaments that are often conflated. The first—Iqbal Predicament—is the question Faruque addresses with considerable philological rigour: was Iqbal a competent and faithful reader of the premodern Islamic intellectual tradition that he claimed to re-construct? So, did he understand al-Jīlī on al-Jīlī's terms, Shabistārī on Shabistārī's terms, and *fanā'* as the Sufi tradition itself articulated it? Faruque's answer, as we have seen, is largely negative, and the textual evidence he adduces is not easily dismissed. His critical intervention performs a genuinely necessary service to a field long resistant to such scrutiny.

The second predicament, however—Iqbal's Predicament—is the question that Iqbal himself was labouring to resolve: how does a colonized Muslim intelligentsia reconstitute philosophical selfhood when the very categories through which this selfhood might be articulated have been colonized in advance? In its *cor cordium*, my argument states that these two predicaments, each meaningful in its own context of production, become intelligible only when read alongside one another. Thus, the Iqbal Predicament, pursued without sustained attention to Iqbal's Predicament, yields an account of the thinker that is philologically sharper but perhaps historically thinner, one better equipped to catalogue how Iqbal misread certain Islamic texts than explain why he bothered to read them at all.

At this juncture, I offer a framework that reviews Iqbal's relationship to his predecessors through a hermeneutic lens other than that of philological fidelity. Harold Bloom's theory of poetic influence offers a suggestive analogy. In *The Anxiety of Influence*, Bloom argues that the history of poetry, and, by extension, of intellectual production, is not advanced by dutiful inheritors who reproduce their predecessors faithfully, but by 'strong poets' who achieve originality precisely through their acts of creative misreading. Bloom terms the foundational mechanism of this process *clinamen*, a 'corrective movement' or 'poetic swerve' in which the later poet departs from the precursor not out of ignorance but out of the necessity of clearing up an imaginative space within which something genuinely new might be thought (14; 19–49).

To be sure, to read Iqbal through this lens is not to excuse the specific philological errors Faruque justly anatomizes (the mistranslation of *tajallī*, the Hegelian interpolation into al-Jīlī's metaphysics, the flattening of *fanā'* into mere 'self-negation') but rather to ask whether these departures might be understood as the conscious or unselfconscious swerves of a thinker who recognised, perhaps more acutely than his critics may allow, that a faithful reproduction of the Sufi tradition as received would not answer the socio-existential crisis confronting his audience. Had Iqbal rendered *fanā'* with the nuance of a Shāh Walī Allāh by translating it as a complex, progressive interplay of annihilation and subsistence across multiple *laṭā'if* of consciousness (Faruque 67–68), he might indeed have produced a more accurate account, but it is far from certain that such an account would have possessed the rhetorical height and the philosophical depth necessary to galvanise a colonized Muslim population towards what he understood as the urgent work of self-reconstitution.

Crucially, this is not an apologetical defence of an Iqbalian exceptionalism: precedents for such creative appropriation within the Islamic tradition are not too difficult to locate. As Frank Griffel has demonstrated, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī's celebrated demolition of the Aristotelian philosophers in the *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa* was itself a profoundly transformative engagement: far from simply refuting Avicennan philosophy, al-Ghazālī retooled and reconfigured many of its core teachings within the apparatus of *kalām*, producing a new rationalist theology that the *falāsifa* he ostensibly dismantled would scarcely have recognised as a faithful account of their own positions (97–101). Again, Mullā Ṣadrā's philosophical enterprise involved comparable manoeuvres; as Sajjad Rizvi has demonstrated, Ṣadrā engaged in what might be termed creative appropriation, by conducting an 'intimate and anxious dialogue' with his predecessors in which 'he boldly attacks every school while he employs all of them in the construction of his own' (20).

The Islamic tradition, then, is not a static monolith but a living palimpsest: new threads are woven into its matrix in dialogical contestation with the preexisting fabric. So, if subjected to the same type of philological scrutiny Faruque applies to Iqbal, the writings of both these figures would reveal comparable tensions between prior source and contemporary appropriation vis-à-vis their own sociohistorical contexts. This is not to suggest that all such readings are equally productive, nor that philological accountability is dispensable. It is rather to observe that the Islamic intellectual tradition has never advanced solely by means of accurate transmission; it has advanced, in some decisive moments, through acts of interpretive audacity that transformed the inherited material into something its originators may not have consciously intended but their historical moment required. Therefore, to speak aphoristically, fidelity is not the sole criterion of faith.

However, even if one concedes that the Bloomian framework offers a partial vindication of Iqbal's interpretive liberties, there remains the more disquieting dimension of Faruque's critique: the charge that Iqbal's hermeneutical strategy constitutes a form of what we have termed 'interpretive colonialism', i.e., the subordination of Islamic intellectual categories to European philosophical standards. Faruque quite rightly contends that Iqbal reads 'Bīdīl in light of Bergson, al-Jīlī in light of Hegel, selfhood and consciousness in relation to Einstein's physics, and Sufism in conversation with Nietzsche' (71); the structural irony that an ostensibly anti-colonial thinker harnesses a thoroughly colonial hermeneutic remains stubbornly undeniable. What this framing does not sufficiently account for, however, is the question of audience.

Iqbal was not writing for the *ulamā* of Deoband or Bareilly, or the Sufi masters of the *khānqāhs*; he was consciously writing in English for a Muslim intelligentsia whose intellectual formation was already, irreversibly, European. *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (delivered originally as a series of lectures in English in Madras, Hyderabad, and Aligarh) addressed audiences for whom Bergson, Hegel, and Einstein were not foreign impositions but the very conceptual currency of educated discourse, the philosophical air they had been trained to breathe and inhabit. To read al-Jīlī through Hegel was, in this context, not necessarily to subordinate the former to the latter; it was a creative attempt to render the former *intelligible* to a readership that had lost—through no fault of its own, but through the systemic epistemicide undertaken by colonial education—the capacity to encounter al-Jīlī on his own terms. Iqbal himself seems to have understood this predicament with a lucidity that borders on anguish; his candid acknowledgement that the European viewpoint had become his 'second nature' reads less as an inadvertent confession than as a precise diagnosis of the very condition his philosophy was labouring to overcome.

The question, then, is not whether Iqbal's distinctively European lens distorted the Islamic tradition, but whether any undistorted lens was available to a thinker in his position. Given that a translation is always-already an interpretation, the demand that thinkers in the past should have conducted the life of the mind with the vocabulary of our present may subtly enact a kind of anachronism: in this case, the expectation that an intellectual operating within the constraints of colonized milieus should have possessed, in 1926, the emerging decolonial methodological resources that yet remain underdeveloped in 2026.

There is a further dimension to this predicament that extends beyond Iqbal's particular historical circumstances and touches upon the conditions of interpretive possibility itself. Faruque's critique operates upon an implicit methodological premise—premodern Islamic texts possess a recoverable core of intrinsic meaning, and Iqbal's failure consists in his inability or unwillingness to undertake this excavation. The premise is not unreasonable; indeed, it underwrites the entire discipline of intellectual history, but it is perhaps more fraught than Faruque's analysis allows. Who should (or could) claim to have understood al-Ghazālī or Ṣadrā on their own terms, while presenting their cosmologies in the contemporary terms of our twenty-first-century English idioms? The hermeneutical tradition, from Schleiermacher through Gadamer, has long recognised that no act of interpretation proceeds from a position of methodological innocence; every reader brings to the text what Gadamer terms a *Wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*, a historically-effected consciousness, that shapes the encounter before it begins (Gadamer 301–10). Iqbal's own historically—effected consciousness was quite European in its formation. But the question that follows is whether the historically—effected consciousness of contemporary Islamic studies—a discipline that emerged within the institutional structures of Western academia, relies upon categories of periodisation, genre, and intellectual genealogy developed within European historiography, and communicates its findings overwhelmingly in European languages—is as radically different from Iqbal's as the confidence of the corrective implies.

This is emphatically not to suggest that Faruque's readings of al-Jīlī or Shabistarī are themselves compromised by their Anglo-American institutional contexts; his philological work is meticulous and stands on its own merits. It is rather to observe that the demand to read premodern Islamic texts 'on their own terms' is itself a methodological aspiration shaped by particular intellectual conditions; however, these were conditions that Iqbal did not share and that were, in the 1920s, scarcely available to anyone. The discipline that now possesses the tools to identify Iqbal's errors is, in no small measure, a discipline that Iqbal's generation of thinkers helped to make necessary.

To acknowledge this inheritance is not to diminish the corrective but to resituate it: to recognise that the Iqbal Predicament and Iqbal's Predicament are not only distinct but historically sequential: our contemporary capacity to delineate the first with scholarly rigour is itself a consequence of the historical fact that the second was inhabited in real-world conditions.

What, then, is the nature of this predicament? Faruque's article performs an indispensable service: it dismantles the hagiographic insulation that has for too long shielded Iqbal's engagements with the premodern Islamic tradition from the scrutiny they deserve. The Iqbal Predicament, as we have termed it, has been posed with a precision and scholarly integrity that the field of Islamic Studies cannot afford to ignore, and one hopes that future Iqbalian scholarship will take Faruque's findings as a point of departure rather than an occasion for defensive retrenchment. However, I have argued that the Iqbal Predicament, if pursued in isolation, produces a portrait that is significantly incomplete. It tells us what Iqbal got wrong about al-Jīlī, Shabistārī, and *fanā'*; crucially, it fails to tell us why these particular misreadings took the form they did, yet proved so generative for a colonized Muslim intelligentsia in search of philosophical self-reconstitution, or why the questions Iqbal was attempting to answer remain, nearly a century later, so stubbornly unresolved. So, Iqbal's own Predicament, namely, the enduring crisis of Muslim subjectivity forged under the conditions of epistemic modernity did not end with Iqbal.

The Muslim intellectual, situated today in the Western metropole, who navigates the competing claims of an inherited tradition and a dominant secular epistemology, inhabits a version of the same predicament that drove Iqbal to his admittedly imperfect reconstructions. That the tools now exist to diagnose his errors more precisely than he himself could have done is a mark of genuine scholarly progress; but that the condition he was responding to persists largely unaltered is a reminder that diagnostic precision, however necessary, is not yet a cure. The title of this article poses a disjunction—Iqbal or Iqbal's—but its argument has been that the disjunction is ultimately false. We cannot fully understand what Iqbal got wrong without understanding what he was trying to get right, and we cannot responsibly set aside his answers without first reckoning with the enduring force of his questions. The predicament, in the end, belongs to neither Iqbal alone nor to his critics alone: it is the predicament of anyone who seeks to produce knowledge under conditions that they themselves have not produced.

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Events & Webinars

HALAL & SHARIA-COMPLIANT INVESTMENTS

Drawn from a webinar with Saif Ahmed and Abdullah Zaman held on May 10, 2026

Speaker 1

Saif Ahmed

Founder and Managing Director of Zamzam Capital

Saif Ahmed spoke on halal investments and options to invest. He began by explaining that Islam is not limited to acts of worship alone. Along with faith, sincerity, morals, and ethics, Islam also governs *Muamalat*, which includes social, political, and economic activities. Investments form part of these economic activities and are therefore governed by sharia.

He then addressed why screening ratios such as 5%, 30%, or 33% are permitted when interest itself is prohibited. To answer it, he said, one must understand the sources of sharia: not only the Quran and Hadith, but also *Ijma*, *Qiyas*, and other recognised principles used for contemporary problems. The stock market did not exist in the time of the Prophet (PBUH) or the Sahabah, and when it came before scholars in the 1960s and 1970s, it was initially rejected because pure companies were hard to identify. Only after extensive deliberation did scholars develop screening criteria, and differences in ratios arose from slightly different approaches within that accepted framework. These criteria, he noted, matter especially for minority shareholders with little influence over management.

Islamic finance, Mr. Ahmed explained, is a financial activity that does not contradict sharia; compliance is primary, and no other benefit can justify a non-compliant product. He identified Riba, Maysir, and Gharar as the key prohibitions, and clarified that interest-free finance does not mean free finance: returns must come through profit-sharing, trade, or leasing. Because Islamic institutions compete in the same markets, their profit rates may resemble conventional ones without becoming impermissible. He noted the sharia-compliant indices on Indian exchanges and the broad categories of Islamic finance: interest-free loans, equity-based, trade-based, and leasing structures.

Stock selection, he continued, begins with the nature of the business, excluding alcohol, gambling, interest-based lending, and similar activities, which rules out conventional banks, non-banking financial companies (NBFCs), casinos, lotteries, and gaming firms. Conventional insurance is problematic because of uncertainty. The defence sector itself is not prohibited, but many screens exclude defence firms on ethical grounds because modern weapons can harm civilians at scale.

The standards differ worldwide; Zamzam Capital, according to Mr. Ahmed, follows criteria approved by Darul Uloom scholars and Mufti Taqi Usmani, applying financial tests on debt, non-compliant assets, and non-compliant income once a business is confirmed permissible. Investors, he added, should purify dividend income by donating the non-compliant portion.

Widening the lens, Mr. Ahmed observed that the Muslim community in India remains heavily concentrated in real estate and bullion, with comparatively low equity participation driven by financial illiteracy and limited awareness of compliant options. Greater diversification is beneficial, he argued, and the equity allocation should rise over time, alongside more community professionals studying finance to build compliant products. He named three primary avenues: real estate, gold and silver, and sharia-compliant stocks and funds, noting that equities offer capital gains and dividends while preserving liquidity. Direct investing demands years of study, which is why many rely on professionally managed products, while compliant products remain limited; he hoped more would emerge as participation grows.

In Conversation with Mr. Saif Ahmed

1. Are gold and silver Exchange-Traded Fund (ETFs) such as Tata Silver ETF considered sharia-compliant investments?

Our view, and the view of our Sharia Board, is that ETFs are not sharia-compliant when it comes to gold and silver. There are special rules that apply to gold and silver in addition to the general rules that apply to other assets and commodities. Gold and silver transactions should be conducted on a spot basis and through immediate exchange. The delivery of the metal should also take place in a Sharia-compliant manner. In ETFs, investors do not actually take delivery of the gold or silver. Even where delivery is available, it is not necessarily from the same metal that was originally purchased. Therefore, when it comes to gold and silver, it is best to buy and hold the physical metal.

2. Why are some IT companies excluded from your sharia screening despite operating in a permissible sector?

We use five financial ratios for screening, whereas some screening methodologies use one, two, or three. We also conduct qualitative screening. In qualitative screening, we examine issues that may not be visible in the financial statements. For example, companies such as TCS, Infosys, Wipro, and HCL may satisfy financial screening criteria, but we exclude them because a significant portion of their income comes from the banking and insurance sectors. The work they perform for these sectors is core to their business activities. Therefore, our Sharia Board does not recommend these companies, even though they operate in a generally permissible sector and may satisfy financial screening requirements. Other Sharia screening providers may take a different view. The choice ultimately rests with the investor.

3. How much money does a person need to begin investing?

A person can start with almost any amount, but the answer depends on individual circumstances and net worth. The important point is not to place all your money in the stock market. One should avoid making equities one hundred percent of the portfolio. Depending on a person's stage of life and risk tolerance, a meaningful allocation can be made to equities while still maintaining cash reserves and other assets. Real estate requires large amounts of capital, which often results in people concentrating all their savings into a single illiquid asset. Investors should think carefully about diversification and maintain some liquidity as a buffer.

4. Why do you believe Muslims remain behind in investing and financial participation?

Muslims remain behind because of financial illiteracy, a lack of knowledge about sharia-compliant investing, and a long-standing preference for traditional assets such as real estate. Financial inclusion within the community has also historically been lower than in many other segments of society. While the situation is improving, greater awareness and education are still needed. At the same time, I believe people should avoid taking shortcuts in matters of sharia compliance. Where halal alternatives exist, we should make the effort to learn about them and use them rather than seeking easier but questionable alternatives.

5. Are interest-free loans available in practice?

People often look for interest-free loans, but money itself loses value over time. Instead of conventional interest-based lending, Islamic finance provides alternative structures. For example, if a person wishes to purchase a vehicle or equipment, the transaction can be structured as a sale rather than a loan. The financier purchases the asset and then sells it to the customer at an agreed profit, with payment made over time. If the transaction is structured correctly, the profit earned is halal for the financier, and the arrangement remains sharia-compliant. Islamic finance offers several such structures, and they should be implemented with proper documentation and guidance from qualified sharia scholars.

6. How can salaried individuals avoid earning interest through conventional savings accounts?

Many banks offer current accounts that do not pay interest. Where possible, individuals can request a current account and use it for salary deposits. If an employer requires salary payments to be made into a particular savings account and there is no alternative, then a practical approach is to transfer the funds to a non-interest-bearing account as soon as possible so that interest does not accumulate.

7. *What resources would you recommend for someone who wants to study the Sharia aspects of investing in greater depth?*

The first book I would recommend is *Introduction to Islamic Finance* by Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani. It is a short book, but it provides a very good introduction to the subject. If someone wants to understand Islamic finance and sharia-compliant investing, this is an excellent place to start. I would also recommend following educational content on sharia compliance. At Zamzam Capital, our YouTube content focuses entirely on sharia compliance-related market discussions. We also publish sharia screening updates periodically and discuss the challenges involved in the screening process. These resources can help investors develop a better understanding of sharia-compliant investing and the issues involved in stock screening.

Speaker 2

Abdullah Zaman

Founder and CEO of Ethica Invest

Investing looks easy from the outside, and is anything but. That was the premise Mr. Abdullah Zaman set out at the start of the session. Building a platform for investing is relatively simple, he explained, but consistently generating good returns over a long horizon is difficult for everyone involved.

The first obstacle, according to Mr. Zaman, is psychological. Investing is not linear. People naturally project recent patterns forward, so if a decline convinces them prices will keep falling and if a rise convinces them prices will keep rising. Yet short-term prices are largely noise; over the long term, he maintained, they are driven by company fundamentals and the degree of mispricing. The trouble is partly cultural: many Indians treat investments the way they treat bank fixed deposits, expecting steady, safe annual gains, when returns do not arrive in a straight line, and volatility is the price of admission.

He extended the point through real estate and gold, both of which people hold for years without watching daily. Stocks, he argued, deserve the same long-term treatment and more conviction, because equities represent ownership in productive businesses that generate revenue, employment, and economic activity, while gold merely stores value. That, in his account, is why equities have historically outperformed many other asset classes over long stretches.

Investing, he said, requires a horizon of at least five to ten years; anything shorter edges toward speculation. The second hurdle is herd mentality: investors should buy when sentiment is pessimistic and turn cautious when optimism runs hot. The third, and hardest, is intensive study of a company, its management, industry, competitors, and financials.

Too many chase shortcuts through social media and rumour, he warned, and mental laziness is a greater obstacle than physical laziness. Even correct theses can take years to play out, and the strongest performance comes when earnings and valuation multiples rise together. He closed his session by asserting the importance of compounding: early on, most portfolio value comes from an investor's own contributions, but over time investment gains dominate, a principle he said applies equally to institutions such as universities, trusts, and hospitals seeking sustainable income.

In Conversation with Mr. Abdullah Zaman

1. How does the concept of valuation multiples work?

You have to watch market perception. Take TD Power as an example. The company makes generators, but globally there is a shortage of energy because we need significantly more energy for data centres, the US power grid upgrade, and the India power grid upgrade. Energy has become very relevant, and everyone wants energy. Electricity consumption is increasing across all sections of society. Three years ago, very few people used AI. Since the emergence of ChatGPT, AI usage has grown rapidly. Every query typed into an AI system consumes electricity. As a result, energy-related businesses have gained much greater attention.

Similarly, water purification became an important theme two or three years ago. Water-related stocks started performing well. The businesses themselves did not grow that much, but because the sector became very important, the valuation multiple increased, and those stocks became multibaggers.

2. What would you recommend as simple readings for someone who wants to understand how the stock market works and begin learning investment methods and mechanisms?

There are some good books to begin with, such as *One Up on Wall Street* and Warren Buffett's *Annual Letters*. I would recommend everyone to read Buffett's *Annual Letters*. Investors should also read Management Discussions, Management Letters, and Annual Reports. Whenever management is optimistic about a business or an industry trend, read what the competition is saying as well. If all the competitors are saying the same thing about an industry trend, then think over it carefully and speak to people from that industry.

3. Stock markets are influenced by global politics and international stability. With the world order shifting and the rise of right-wing governments across the globe, do you think long-term investing will remain profitable and predictable under these circumstances?

First of all, I do not know the future. There have been phases in the stock market when, unfortunately, the market did not move for more than ten years. Those phases were often influenced more by economic policy decisions than by the nature of politics itself.

Prior to World War II, we had a gold-backed monetary system. Later, currencies were pegged to the US dollar, and the US dollar was pegged to gold. In 1971, when President Nixon suspended the convertibility of the dollar into gold, the world moved to a completely fiat monetary system. Despite these changes, the market still went up. If you are investing, I would say do not focus too much on politics and do not worry excessively about macroeconomic conditions. Investing is more about whether businesses can make money and less about whether a government is left-wing or right-wing.

I am not justifying any political inclination. I am simply saying that stock markets move on their own terms and often have little to do with politics as such. Political developments can affect markets. For example, Trump's tariffs had both negative and positive effects on different parts of the market. In every situation, there are businesses that benefit and businesses that are affected. There is always a way to make money if you can identify where the opportunities lie.

4. What are your views on mutual funds and ethical funds as investment options?

I do not have a particularly a favourable opinion of them, but if you do not have a large enough corpus, investing in mutual funds is a good option. We do not recommend mutual funds because we are purely a stock recommendation company, but for a start, Tata Ethical Fund is an option. You can also consider other shariah-compliant funds. They may not necessarily call themselves Shariah-compliant, but if you invest in a pharma mutual fund, a renewable energy mutual fund, or a utilities mutual fund, then from a thematic perspective, those can also be considered shariah-compliant.

Personally, I believe some ethical funds may contain companies that are not Shariah-compliant, so I am not a big fan of them. However, if you want to start small and understand how investing works, you can set up an SIP in Tata Ethical Fund. There is nothing wrong with that.

5. What is your view on dividends as a source of return?

Personally, I find it frustrating that governments tax dividends even after companies have already been taxed at the corporate level. So, I am not a fan of dividends. In any case, dividend yields on Indian stocks are generally around one to two percent, so they do not matter that much from an investment perspective.

6. What are your views on the Accounting and Auditing Organisation for Islamic Financial Institutions (AAOIFI) shariah standards for investing?

It is a good starting point. We also follow shariah standards to some extent. There are a number of points in AAOIFI that I do not agree with, but those disagreements are mostly related to Islamic banking. When it comes to investing, more or less, the standards are fine.

7. If interest is considered prohibited, how can investors rely on the purification concept and debt-ratio standards in stock market investing?

This is a very common question. The stock market is one of the few avenues where Muslims can invest money in small amounts while maintaining liquidity. This is not possible in the same way with real estate or jewelry. Because of this situation, scholars have permitted stock market investing on the basis that the benefits outweigh the shortcomings, and they have established certain standards. These standards, including debt-ratio thresholds, have been developed for the benefit of the wider Muslim community. Ultimately, it is a personal decision.



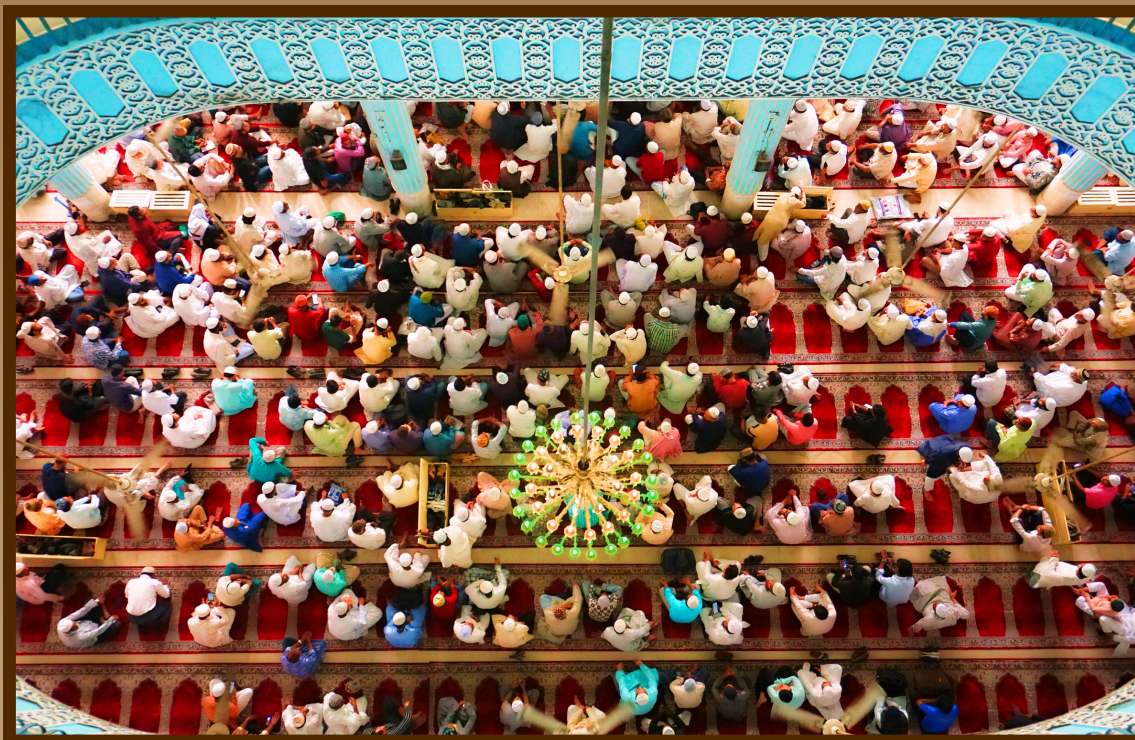
Creative Corner

*Fatima Zohra,
Masters in English Literature, Delhi University*



In the by-lanes of Nizamuddin Dargah, commerce and devotion have never been separate languages. This teal-framed threshold is not just a business but a living archive of Muslim material culture that survives not in museums, but in the hands of ordinary men who open their shutters every morning post Fajr.

*Al-Noman, Bachelor of Social
Science, University of Dhaka*



House of Learning



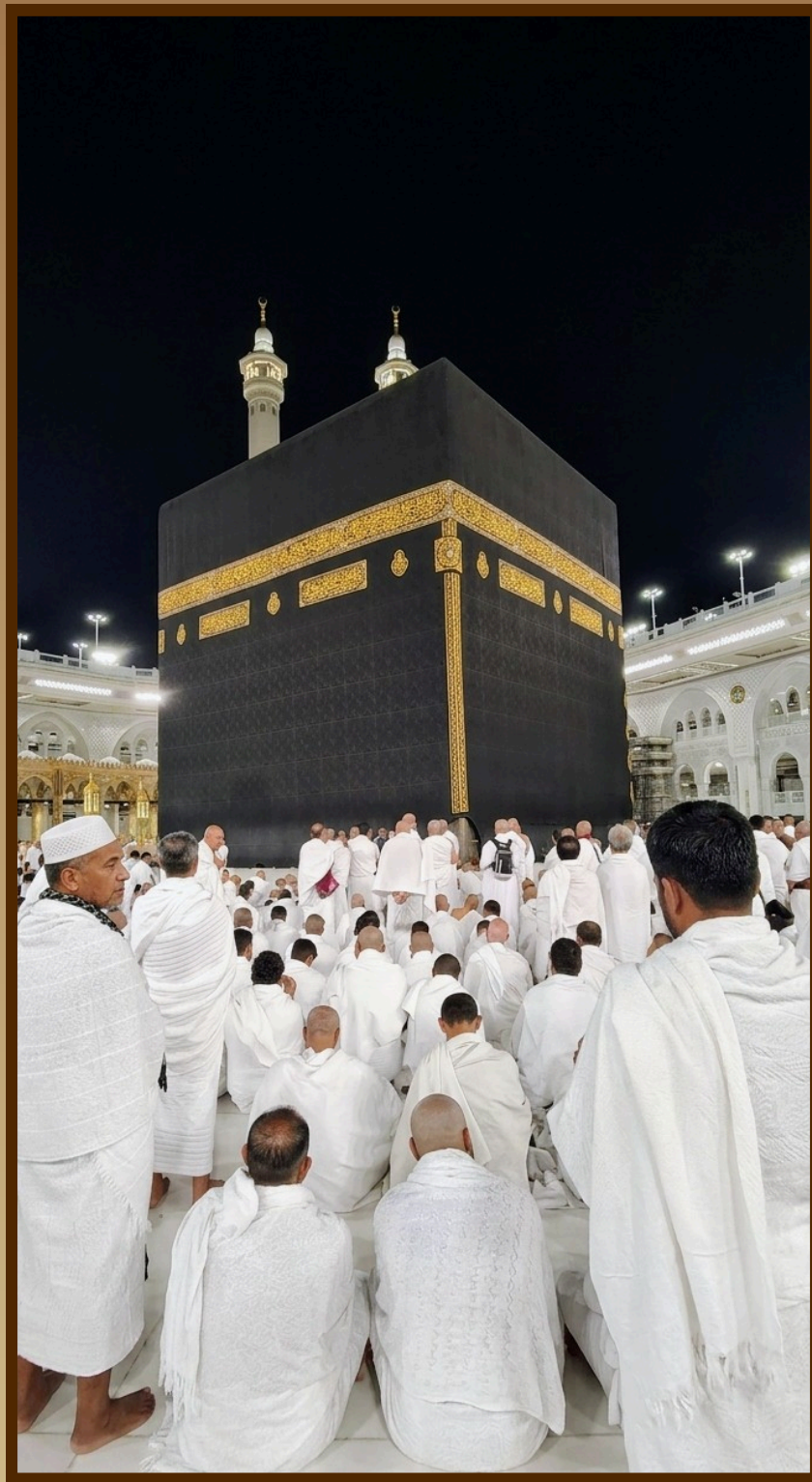
Rows of Faith

*Syed Ahmed Hussain,
Law Student*



Everyday Congregation:

From a modest mosque in India, where faith lives in simplicity and routine, in a gathering of a small group of people



Collective Devotion (Kaaba):

At the most sacred space, where with every 'Allahu Akbar,' millions of heads prostrate in unison. Across both spaces, the act remains the same, namaz. Different settings, different scales, but the same devotion, reflecting a shared identity of Muslims beyond place.



Project Mishkat

Project Mishkat is a student-led initiative bringing together scholars, researchers, and thinkers to foreground critical legal discourse on Muslim identity in India. At a time of profound shifts in the country's political and legal landscape, the project serves as a platform to explore themes of law, citizenship, and minority rights, with a commitment to fostering Muslim public intellectualism.