

Name of the Scholar: Subham Jaiswal

Name of the Supervisor: Dr. Nazia Khan

Name of the Department: Department of Political Science

Title: Political Narratives and Electoral Process Since 1990: A Study of Muslim Communities in Varanasi and Meerut Districts of Uttar Pradesh

Findings

The thesis locates a key shift in the 1990s, when narratives of religion, identity, and nationalism acquired intensified political salience and reshaped the grammar of electoral democracy. For the Muslim community, this decade was a period of introspection and re-identification-when questions of “security,” “representation,” and “identity” took on new political meaning. Rising communal violence, declining political participation, and a crisis of social acceptance forced Muslims to reconsider their socio-political existence. The narratives constructed by the media and political parties during this period not only legitimized Hindu nationalism at the national level but also normalized a discourse of distrust and fear toward. The 1990s became a phase of the decisive power of political narratives in Indian democracy – where the definitions of both ‘nation’ and ‘minority’ were reimagined.

The study addresses all prominent narratives around Muslims in India from the 1990s to 2024. And find that prejudicial attitudes that were earlier confined to social boundaries have increasingly found open expression in political statements, media discourse, and even administrative practices, indicating that religious majoritarianism has normalized communalism within India’s democratic framework. Communalism today is no longer a temporary or episodic phenomenon associated only with moments of conflict; rather, it has evolved into a permanent structure of political discourse and electoral debate. In this context, the ideology of Hindutva; distinct from the pluralistic and diverse traditions of Hinduism- has come to function as a doctrinaire and exclusionary framework for defining national identity.

The rise of populist political culture among sections of the majority population has further intensified this process, sidelining the concerns of Muslims, the country’s second-largest population group. Once labelled as a ‘vote bank’, Muslims have increasingly been rendered “politically untouchable” under the influence of Hindutva politics, leading many political parties to hesitate in openly addressing their socio-political conditions. Paradoxically, majoritarian discourse often mobilizes a rhetoric of victimhood, which can legitimise exclusionary framings. In such a scenario, it becomes essential to situate contemporary practices of “othering” within India’s broader historical and socio-political context, where past communal tensions and religious divisions are selectively invoked and instrumentalized for present political gains.

These narratives study underscore three fundamental points of subject formation or subjectification of the Muslim community:

First, the use of historical mythmaking narratives supports Muslims in selectively curating memories of the Mughal period, stories of conquest (Islamic imperialism), and the trauma laden with the partition. This process transforms history into an emotional reservoir which can be used as a catalyst for political mobilization in politics. These narratives are to be viewed and understood as affective cues, rather than recollections of the past, which validate contemporary anxieties and restructure collective memory to view Muslims as historical “outsiders”.

Second, the interlocking discourses of security, loyalty, and nationalism embed suspicion into the sense of citizenship. Within this discursive formation, Muslim belonging appears conditional Citizenship, is not a settled constitutional guarantee but a status imagined as fragile, reversible, and always potentially subject to surveillance or disciplinary scrutiny.

Third, the “normalisation of otherness” ensures that political rhetoric, language, and media commentary routinely position Muslims beyond the symbolic boundaries of the national moral community. This process does not rely on overt hostility alone; it works quietly through repetition, insinuation, and cultural coding, gradually naturalising the idea that Muslims occupy a space of difference; an identity adjacent to, but never fully inside, the nation’s normative core.

A core contribution of the research is its argument that Muslims in India are not simply a religious or cultural community but a “narrated political category”. This political identity is constructed, understood, and reconstructed through a continuous flow of narratives concerning allegiance, otherness, security, citizenship, and nationhood. This identity is not static but constantly shaped and negotiated within the changing discourses, power relations, and collective memories of the time. From the colonial and post-Partition burden of “proving loyalty” to the competing identitarian politics, through the Islamophobic security frames of the terrorism discourse, and into the assertive Hindutva majoritarianism that has intensified, each historical fluctuation has influenced the political subjectivity of Muslim communities in a new way; they deeply mould the lived experiences, self-understanding, and civic imaginations or collective memory of Muslim communities. This point extends far beyond electoral politics or episodic moments of voting. It directly implies constitutional values and the evolving relationship between the state and its citizens. When a community that constitutes a “second majority” within the state is persistently framed through narratives of suspicion, loyalty, and security, the question ceases to be merely political in the conventional sense and becomes fundamentally constitutional.