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**Topic- State and Muslim Minority in India and Israel: A Comparative Study**

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**Abstract**

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**Introduction**

This research puts India and Israel in a comparative equation and examines how these states perceive their respective Muslim communities, forming the largest religious minorities. The aim of the study is not to find out which state is better out of the two and what lessons one can teach the other. However, it seeks to explore how these two states, which take pride in having the oldest of histories, culture, enviable diversity and most importantly the only successful democracies in their respective regions, govern the Muslims. In other words, the study aims to examine: How the two States (India and Israel) have treated their Muslim population and what is their status in almost seven decades after their formation as respective nation-states.

**Findings:**

This study began with the discussion of the formation of states in India and Israel and very clearly it emerged that both the states, after getting rid of their British colonial past, chose to adopt the form of government that was popular in Europe, that is, democracy. One of the several common features between the two states was the presence of a considerable number of Muslims who were either left behind during the partition or chose to live within the new boundaries with new national identity. However, their fate would depend on how the majority community would perceive them.

During the study it has been found out that although both the ideologies have apparently embraced democracy and call for an inclusive state with equal rights to everyone, but with their respective convictions, they consistently try for an absolutist and exclusionary system that would keep the minorities out of the state mechanism. Muslims have been a particular target among all the minorities in both the cases. Muslims are seen as the invaders, responsible for dispossession of power of the majority communities for almost a millennium. Even after becoming the nation

states, when Muslims continue to live as minority in India and Israel, they are generally accused of extraterritorial loyalties.

It has been found that despite constitutional guarantees for Muslims in both the states the citizenship rights can't be fully exercised due to the pressure by the majoritarian groups. The Muslims have been relegated to be the second-class citizens, as the state fails to safeguard their rights. A lot of people get internally displaced in India after communal riots, where the police role has been found very partisan. These people continue to live in the camps fearing to be killed if they return to homes that are already destroyed. There is not enough compensation for them (insufficient compensation is the case with the victims of natural calamities irrespective of their faith, therefore, it is a major governance issue in India) to rebuild their homes and start their businesses again. In Israel also, the Arabs are forced to live as closed communities, in ghettos. They are allowed to go to the universities and avail other national services. However, as discussed in the earlier chapter, there is a prevalent practice of discrimination against them. Secondly, it has been found out that the central principle that guides the relationship between Muslims and the state is seeing the latter as the 'other', as dictated by the majoritarian forces. Hence they live in perpetual insecurity.

Two hypotheses became the basis of carrying out this study: The first one probed the partial exercise of the constitutional guarantees and the citizenship rights given to Muslims, due to the pressure of the ideological forces in the democratic set up. Subsequently, it was assumed that the central principle that guides the relationship between Muslims and the state is seeing the latter as the 'other', as dictated by the majoritarian forces, hence the Muslims live in perpetual insecurity. During the study it was found out that both the cases were true in India as well as in Israel. It was discussed that how the majoritarian groups have compelled the successive governments against taking any affirmative action for the minorities. Over the years, the governments have made several policies for the minorities; however, at the level of implementation they have failed. The political parties can't overlook the compulsions of majoritarian groups, as they do not want to lose voters during the elections. Hence, the ultimate sufferers turn out to be the members of minority community both in India as well as Israel. Further, although there has been no official policy in India to see Muslim as the "other" (in Israel there is an open discrimination against the Arabs), however at the societal level, exclusionary practices are quite prevalent. It has been discussed in the chapters, the Muslims find it difficult to find a house in Hindu dominated areas;

the Muslim dominated areas are blacklisted by banks, corporate offices and other organisations etc. The governments are not able to ensure Muslims the sense of equality, therefore, leaving them with insecurity.

In the current scenario, religion plays a vital role in politics at various levels in both the states. The majority invokes religion to gather maximum support while the minority also has to resort to religion for political purpose. In between the actual losers are the members of the minority community that can never win a number game and hence assume a little significance in the imagination of the political parties. Muslims are considered to be strong political force in small pockets, however, in the last six decades they have not been able to emerge as a united political force to somewhat counter the majoritarian threats and demand equality from the government.

India is a very large country as compared to Israel, however, the set of challenges faced by both the states are quite similar and it has been acknowledged by the officials as well. The biggest challenge is to sustain democracy in the deeply divided society with a particular community that has the Muslims in significantly large number. The Muslims consider themselves as the citizens of their respective states and deny any charges of extra-territorial loyalty that are hurled at them. This level of distrust on the part of the majority community as well as the apathy from the governments cast serious doubts over the smooth functioning of any democracy. India and Israel were particularly chosen for this study because these two are the states who are quite close to the democratic ethos in their respective regions, the founding leaders in both the states adopted and embraced democracy.

Recently, however, the Israeli government has instituted procedures that will gradually lead to the greater minority representation. India, meanwhile, has appointed Muslims to high ranking positions of a primarily ceremonial nature, such as the position of the President of the Republic, in an attempt to disguise discrimination in lower-level public sector (in upper and lower echelon of the bureaucracy- an important instrument for formulating and implementing the government schemes and also in the maintenance of law and order) appointments. The Israeli government does not bother with such “camouflage” because discrimination blatantly exists at all levels. Electing an Arab-Palestinian President does not appear to be a viable option, certainly not in the coming decade. Rather than seeing Muslims only in some positions of repute, it would be better to see their holistic development and bring them on a par with the rest of the communities in both the states.

It will be in the interest of both the states that they should not allow the violent majoritarian forces to dictate the terms to the government and influence the public policy. There is a test for the commitment towards secularism as well. Although Israel seeks to become a Jewish and democratic state, the idea appears to be an oxymoron. It simply can't be two at the same time. Becoming Jewish does not clearly mean if it is a state for Jews or a state governed on Jewish theological principles. Even now, the state administration is finding it very difficult to handle violence by the Jewish groups demanding to abolish several laws made with secular consideration and European understanding of a nation state.

Similarly in India, Hindutva groups, irrespective of the nature of the party ruling at the Centre, have been virtually allowed to wreak havoc on the entire system. The groups with the help of their members have carried out a number of riots, massacres and individual killings for what they believe is necessary to deter the "Other". These groups, as has been mentioned and discussed during this study, seek to make India a 'Hindu Rashtra', a Hindu and a democratic state, the idea of which is quite similar to that of Israel. The idea of India is not to rally behind any religious ideology but the secular and plural values that have been here in this part of the world for centuries.