

Integration of Muslims into mainstream societies as equal citizens bothering many nations | OPINION

The question of integrating immigrant Muslims into mainstream societies as equal citizens is bothering many countries today, writes BJP's Ram Madhav.

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OPINION

RAM MADHAV
Member, Governing Council, India Foundation

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Until a decade or two ago, Sweden, the Nordic country in Northern Europe, was considered one of the safest European destinations. But last year, a German newspaper, Bild, headlined that “Sweden is the most dangerous country in Europe”. Today, the country is the second-most dangerous in gun crime numbers, close behind Croatia.

Unregulated immigration and the European Left’s fad with romantic doctrines like multiculturalism have turned Sweden into a cesspool of gangsterism and violence in just two

decades. Sweden was under a Left-dominated Social Democrat government for almost 30 of the last 40 years, including the last eight years. Unlike its neighbours — Finland, Norway, and Denmark — that took a hardline stance against immigration, Sweden's rulers allowed the influx of immigrants. The result was that in a country of 10 million, every fifth person is an immigrant, a number unusually high for any European country.

Sweden's Left-leaning leadership is now feeling the heat. After a series of riots by immigrant gangs rocked the country during Easter holidays in mid-April, Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson admitted that decades of romance with multiculturalism have only resulted in the failure of integration of the immigrants into Swedish society.

"Segregation has gone so far that we have parallel societies in Sweden. We live in the same country, but different realities. Integration was poor, and alongside, we have experienced intense immigration," Andersson rued.

Conner Rousseau, a prominent Vooruit (a Left social-democratic party) leader from Belgium, rang alarm bells when he declared that multiculturalism has failed. "When I drive in some areas, I don't feel like I am in Belgium," Rousseau complained recently.

Leaders, such as Germany's Angela Merkel and France's Emmanuel Macron, have held similar views for many years. Merkel called multiculturalism a "life lie" and a "sham" as it led to "parallel societies". After a series of attacks rocked his country, France's Emmanuel Macron came down heavily against Muslim separatism promising to take action against foreign training of Imams and imposition of Halal menus in cafeterias. "Our model is universalist, not multiculturalist", Macron argued.

The question of integrating immigrant Muslims into mainstream societies as equal citizens is bothering many countries today. Rising lawlessness, street violence and gangsterism, mushrooming growth of madrasas and Arabic schools, increasing insistence on speaking in Arabic, wearing head-to-toe Burqa and occupying large public spaces for daily prayers have been seen by many in the West as deliberate acts of defiance to nation-state ideology.

All this is leading to a rise in reactionary Right-wing politics in several European countries. But the Islamists and their apologists refuse to address the integration question. Instead, they dub the reaction as xenophobia or Islamophobia. The Islamic bloc has even succeeded in getting a resolution passed at the United Nations against so-called Islamophobia. Amb. Tirumurthy, India's Permanent Representative to the UNGA, forcefully pointed out that all religions are victims of various phobias and hence no one religion can claim exclusive victimhood in the name of Islamophobia.

More importantly, this victimhood politics shouldn't preclude Islamic society from looking seriously inwards. Macron's important suggestion of remaking the religion itself into an "Islam of Enlightenment" should be the need of the hour.

Christianity had undergone a similar reformation several centuries ago, the first trigger for which was Martin Luther's revolt against the Catholic Church in 1517 through a document famously known as The Ninety-Five Theses. The time has come for Islam to have its reformation.

One country that presents an interesting and emulative example is Indonesia, which also happens to be the world's largest Muslim country. Indonesia has largely insulated its almost 240

million Muslim population from radical Islamist ideologies. It is the world's third-largest democracy too, proving that Islam and democracy can go together.

Besides its progressive leadership, from President Sukarno downwards, one organisation that has played a pivotal role in this reformist crusade was the Nahdlatul Ulama NU, Indonesia's largest Muslim body. Starting in 1926, the NU has grown into a 90-million member strong organisation over decades and its leadership has fearlessly championed the cause of Islamic reform.

NU's Central Board has recently published documents that insisted that Muslims should adopt the concept of the nation-state instead of the caliphate. It declared the modern nation-state as theologically legitimate and enjoined its Muslim citizens to be patriotic. "Muslims must obey the laws of any modern nation-state in which they dwell", it insisted. In a historic move, it decreed that there was no legal category of infidels (*kafir*) within the modern nation-state. "Muslims have a religious obligation to foster peace rather than automatically wage war on behalf of their co-religionists, whenever conflict erupts between Muslim and non-Muslim populations anywhere in the world", the document advised.

NU's efforts under the progressive leadership of its chairman Pak Yahya Cholil Staqf are significant because Islam faces a serious perception challenge due to specific theological interpretations like *Ummat*, *Kufr*, *Jihad*, etc and consequent acts of exclusivism and terrorism. Muslims across the world are facing a backlash to it. Unless serious efforts for greater integration on the lines of NU are made, the divide between Muslims and non-Muslims is bound to grow.

Fundamentalism breeds fundamentalism. In India and Europe, Islamist exclusivism is giving rise to anti-Islamist radicalism. Just as radicalised Islamists have caused a severe dent in Islam's image, radicalism in the name of opposing Islamism can impact the image of others too. The *Swastika* is a sacred Hindu symbol of divinity and spirituality. But Hitler's misuse has brought ignominy to it. Secularism is a noble political principle. But years of its misuse by India's political establishment have reduced it to a parochial idea. If a similar thing were not to happen to noble philosophies like Hindutva, radicalism needs to be reined in.

Fighting Islamic radicalism should be a serious reformist exercise for the enlightened citizens and governments of the world, not a domain for lumpen elements. Else, as Gandhi said, the Old Testament commandment of 'an eye for an eye' will leave the whole world blind.

<https://www.indiatoday.in/opinion-columns/story/mislim-integration-right-wing-left-politics-1950804-2022-05-18>