

The Experience of Multiculturalism of Muslims as Minorities in India and Russia: A Literature Review

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Abstract

This study aims to examine and compare the experiences of Muslims as a minority in the context of multiculturalism in India and Russia. The method used is a qualitative study with a literature review approach to scientific journals, international organization reports, and official statistical data post-2020. The results of the study show that Muslims in India face challenges in the form of social discrimination, sectarian conflict, and political marginalization, while in Russia, the challenges are more related to securitization policies, institutional discrimination, and cultural nationalism. However, both countries also show efforts to maintain cultural diversity through inclusive policies, multicultural education, and the role of civil society organizations. This study provides insights for pluralistic countries in strengthening social cohesion based on multiculturalism.

Keywords: Multiculturalism; Muslim Minorities; India; Russia; Social Integration

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji dan membandingkan pengalaman umat Muslim sebagai minoritas dalam konteks multikulturalisme di India dan Rusia. Metode yang digunakan adalah studi kualitatif dengan pendekatan kajian literatur terhadap jurnal-jurnal ilmiah, laporan organisasi internasional, dan data statistik resmi pasca tahun 2020. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa umat Muslim di India menghadapi tantangan berupa diskriminasi sosial, konflik sektarian, dan marginalisasi politik, sedangkan di Rusia tantangannya lebih berkaitan dengan kebijakan sekuritisasi, diskriminasi institusional, dan nasionalisme budaya. Meski demikian, kedua negara juga menunjukkan adanya upaya untuk merawat keberagaman budaya melalui kebijakan inklusif, pendidikan multikultural, serta peran organisasi masyarakat sipil. Penelitian ini memberikan wawasan bagi negara-negara majemuk dalam memperkuat kohesi sosial berbasis multikulturalisme.

Kata kunci: Multikulturalisme; Muslim Minoritas; India; Rusia; Integrasi Sosial

INTRODUCTION

Multiculturalism has become a central theme in global discussions about identity and social cohesion, especially in countries with significant minority populations. Multiculturalism has now undergone changes to always adapt to circumstances and is difficult to avoid because it is closely related to the dynamics of national and state life, as well as in social society (Rosyadi & Burhan, 2025). India and Russia, two large countries rich in history and diversity, provide interesting examples of how experiences of multiculturalism can differ despite facing similar challenges.

India, as a country with a Muslim population, has a long tradition of interaction between various ethnic and religious communities. However, the relationship between Muslims and the Hindu majority has often been influenced by identity politics, social conflicts, and stereotypes. a deep and comprehensive understanding of the period of Islamic renewal in India, its historical context, internal and external dynamics, and its impact on the development of Islamic thought and practice in the modern era (Ikhsan et al., 2025). Therefore, understanding the dynamics of multiculturalism in India is crucial to creating a space for constructive and inclusive dialogue.

Meanwhile, Russia, which is predominantly Orthodox, has a large Muslim community, especially in the Caucasus region. In Russia, no matter how strong the state's hegemony is in imposing the desired culture on its citizens, it still encounters very strong resistance from the indigenous population (Curup et al., 2021). The experience of Muslims in Russia is often shaped by government policies aimed at integrating various ethnic groups into the Russian national identity. However, tensions between Muslim communities and the government, as well as stereotypes circulating in society, can hinder this integration process.

Multiculturalism is an approach that recognizes cultural diversity in a society and guarantees rights and equality for all groups. Multiculturalism is not only limited to diversity, but also includes aspects of tolerance, respect, and protection of minority

groups (Kymlicka, 1995). This term comes from the word "multi" which means many or diverse, and "cultural" which is related to culture. In this context, multiculturalism implies the unity of various cultural groups with equal rights and socio-political status in modern society. Multiculturalism recognizes the reality of cultural diversity that includes various tribes, races, religions, and subcultures. This means that a multicultural society consists of various communities that have different cultural identities but respect each other.

Multiculturalism encourages acceptance of differences and promotes tolerance among different groups. This is essential to create harmony in a religious society. Taylor, in his essay *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition* (1994), emphasizes the importance of recognition in a multicultural society. He argues that recognition of different cultural identities is essential to building justice and equality. Without this recognition, individuals can feel alienated and unrepresented. Kymlicka, in his book *Multicultural Citizenship* (1995), states that multiculturalism is not just about recognizing cultural diversity, but also the need for protection and rights for minority groups. He argues that in order to achieve social justice, society must recognize and respect cultural differences. In his book *Identity and Violence* (2006), Sen highlights that multiculturalism can help prevent conflict by strengthening diverse identities. He argues that recognizing different identities can create constructive dialogue and build a more peaceful society.

Social identities formed by factors such as ethnicity, religion, and culture, not only influence interactions between individuals, but also play a significant role in shaping political attitudes and voting patterns among the community. In this context, identity politics becomes an important phenomenon to understand, because it can direct changes in the political system and social policies of the country. (Munandar & Susanti, 2025). Parekh, in *Rethinking Multiculturalism* (2000), criticizes the approach that relies solely on tolerance as the basis for multiculturalism. He emphasizes the need for

a deeper understanding of cultural differences and promoting intercultural dialogue as a means of building social cohesion. Modood, in his book *Multiculturalism: A Civic Idea* (2007), discusses how multiculturalism can be applied in public policy. He argues that multiculturalism should be part of national identity and promote inclusivity in a diverse society.

Meanwhile, pluralism is a form of teaching and way of thinking that values diversity and accepts the diversity of other religious communities as part of the basic principles of life (Rosyadi & Burhan, 2025). Pluralism is a concept that refers to the existence of diversity in society, whether in terms of culture, religion, ethnicity, or outlook on life. In a social context, pluralism emphasizes the importance of recognizing and respecting differences and accepting various identities in society so that harmony in life is created in society. In his theory of justice, John Rawls emphasizes the importance of "overlapping consensus" in a pluralistic society. He believes that diversity can be managed through the principle of justice that allows various groups to live side by side with mutual respect for individual rights and freedoms.

Jurgen Habermas sees pluralism in the context of communication and discourse. He emphasizes the importance of a democratic public space, where each group can participate equally in shaping social and political policies without any domination of one group over another. In his study of culture, Clifford Geertz states that pluralism is an unavoidable reality in modern society. However, in order for pluralism to remain harmonious, a deep understanding of cultural values and different identities is needed.

In the theory of Social Relations in Multicultural Society, several theories are relevant in understanding interactions between groups in diverse societies such as Social Contact Theory (Allport, 1954) which states that interactions between different groups can reduce prejudice if they occur in equal conditions. In communities with diverse backgrounds, good communication can help reduce prejudice, stereotypes, and conflicts that may arise due to differences. (Chairozi et al., n.d.). Basic Principles of

Social Contact Theory Allport argues that to reduce prejudice, interactions between different groups must take place under certain conditions.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative method with a library research approach. This method is used to examine, compare, and analyze the experience of multiculturalism of Muslims as a minority group in India and Russia based on relevant scientific sources. This type of research is a descriptive qualitative study, because it aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of multiculturalism from the perspective of the Muslim community in two non-Muslim majority countries.

The data used in this study are secondary data obtained from national and international scientific journal articles, relevant academic books, research reports of official institutions and international organizations, policy documents or laws relating to minority rights, credible news articles as contextual complements. Data collection was carried out through a systematic literature search using keywords such as "Muslim minority in India", "multiculturalism in Russia", "Islamophobia", "religious freedom", and "minority rights" in databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, Scopus, and DOAJ. Filtering sources with criteria of relevance, academic reputation, and recency. Data was analyzed using the content analysis method, with data reduction steps by sorting information that is relevant to the research focus.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. India

India is known as a country with high ethnic and religious diversity. Based on the latest data, the Muslim population in India is around 14-15%, making it the largest minority community in the country. This diversity creates rich social dynamics, but is

also often accompanied by tensions. The relationship between the Muslim community and the Hindu majority is often influenced by identity politics, social conflicts, and stereotypes circulating in society. For example, experiences of discrimination and social injustice can exacerbate negative perceptions of the Muslim community.

The pattern of multicultural participation in India is seen in various aspects of life, including politics, social, and economics. Cultural adaptation is a complex and important process in a multicultural society (Hal et al., 2025). India has a complex democratic system, where various ethnic and religious groups participate in general elections. Major festivals such as Diwali, Eid, and Holi involve cross-religious participation, creating space for mutual respect. However, minority groups often face challenges in accessing economic opportunities, education, and health services. Government efforts to increase the participation of minority communities in social development need to be strengthened.

The Indian government has enacted various policies to maintain cultural and religious diversity. The Indian Constitution guarantees the rights of minorities and provides autonomy in practicing their culture and religion. The Islamic education curriculum in India has undergone significant development and modernization, which has opened the door for Islamic education in the country to follow the trend of inclusivity by collaborating closely with its national curriculum (Rezeki, 2024). The federal system allows each state to develop local culture and language. In addition, the multilingual policy supports education in the mother tongue, while the celebration of religious holidays reflects respect for diversity. However, challenges such as inter-religious tensions and caste discrimination still need to be addressed seriously.

Although efforts to maintain diversity in India are significant, the challenges remain enormous. National Security Theory is a conceptual framework used to understand and analyze various aspects related to security (Fariz & Muzaki, 2024). Inter-religious tensions, especially between Hindu and Muslim communities, are often

fueled by political issues and provocations.

The ongoing caste system discrimination also hampers social progress. In addition, separatist movements in some areas show that diversity is not always well received, creating long-lasting tensions. Indian Muslims experience complex dynamics in the context of multiculturalism. Historically, the Muslim community has made significant contributions in the fields of art, architecture, and literature. However, the results of the literature review show that after the partition of India-Pakistan in 1947, Muslims experienced social and political marginalization. Phenomena such as communal violence, discrimination in the employment sector, and unequal access to education are challenges that are still faced today.

Under the Hindu nationalist (Hindutva) government, identity tensions have increased. However, there is also space for collaboration between communities in cultural and economic activities, especially in urban areas.

B. Rusia

Russia, with an estimated 10-15% Muslim population, mainly in the Caucasus region, faces different challenges. Despite government policies to integrate Muslim communities into the Russian national identity, discrimination and ethnic tensions persist. Some regions experience significant tensions, often related to political and economic issues. Inconsistent government policies in managing ethnic diversity have left many communities feeling marginalized, especially in areas with an Orthodox majority.

In Russia, patterns of political participation are often influenced by ethnic factors. While there is political representation for certain ethnic groups, many minority communities feel marginalized in decision-making processes. Inter-ethnic relations vary in some regions, with cooperation and harmony possible, while in others, tensions and conflict can arise. Policies that support diversity are often not implemented

consistently, leading to feelings of injustice among minority groups.

Russia also seeks to maintain diversity through a policy of multiculturalism recognized in the constitution. Likewise in the context of the growth and development of intellectual traditions in Russia, especially during the era of the Soviet Union. In this context, it seems that the role of Islam is not given up for the sake of the anti-religious political interests it adheres to (Z et al., 2012).

The government needs to support the preservation of regional languages and local cultures through educational programs. Intercultural dialogues and cultural celebrations are held to increase understanding and tolerance between ethnic groups. The approach to intercultural communication as a form of activity is subject to general laws, such as sociocultural determinism and communicative-cognitive (Dimitruk et al., 2025). However, ethnic discrimination and social injustice remain major challenges. Inconsistent policies and lack of political representation for minority groups need to be addressed to achieve better integration.

Russia faces similar challenges, where ethnic discrimination and inter-religious conflicts often undermine social stability. Inconsistent government policies in managing diversity cause discontent among minority groups. Social and economic injustice also exacerbates ethnic tensions. The rise of extreme nationalism can worsen the situation, where cultural homogeneity is emphasized and diversity is ignored.

In Russia, Muslims are spread across regions such as Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, and the North Caucasus. Unlike India, Russian Muslims have a more regional experience of multiculturalism. In Muslim-majority regions, such as Tatarstan, Islamic identity is more accepted as part of the locality. However, in urban centers such as Moscow and St. Petersburg, Muslims often face stereotypes, especially related to issues of migration and terrorism.

The literature also notes that state policies towards Muslims tend to be ambivalent. On the one hand, the state recognizes the existence of Islam as a traditional

religion; but on the other hand, supervision of religious activities is quite strict, especially since security policies were tightened after 2000.

CONCLUSION

The experiences of multiculturalism in India and Russia demonstrate the complexity of preserving diversity. Both countries face significant challenges in their efforts to promote integration and intercultural dialogue. While there are initiatives to celebrate diversity, the challenges faced require a comprehensive approach. Constructive dialogue, multicultural education, and inclusive policies are essential to creating harmonious and respectful societies. These efforts must be strengthened so that all ethnic and religious groups feel recognized and valued in the broader social context. This literature review shows that the experiences of Muslim minority multiculturalism in India and Russia are shaped by different historical, social, and political dynamics but share similarities in terms of challenges of integration and social acceptance.

In India, Muslims face challenges of multiculturalism marked by increasing inter-religious tensions, socio-economic discrimination, and political restrictions exacerbated by Hindu majority nationalist sentiments. Meanwhile, in Russia, although Islam is recognized as part of the traditional religion, Muslims often experience stigmatization, strict surveillance, and restrictions on religious expression, especially in non-Muslim areas.

The main similarity between the two countries is the tendency of the state and the majority society to marginalize Muslims, both structurally and culturally. The main difference lies in the form and intensity of control: India tends to experience horizontal tensions between communities, while Russia displays vertical state control over religious expression.

Overall, Muslims in both countries continue to demonstrate resilience through

adaptation strategies such as strengthening community-based educational institutions, participating in local politics, and developing an inclusive cultural identity. Therefore, the success of multiculturalism depends on the existence of space for dialogue, social justice, and state recognition of the equal rights of minority groups.

Implications

Theoretical Implications

This study enriches the literature on multiculturalism by highlighting the importance of political and historical context in shaping the experiences of Muslim minorities in two large, secular countries that differ in their policy approaches to religion. These results suggest that multiculturalism cannot be separated from the dynamics of power and dominant national identity narratives.

Social Implications

These findings emphasize the need to strengthen cross-cultural awareness among majority societies, both in India and Russia. This effort is important to minimize prejudice, stereotypes, and identity-based violence. Expanding the space for encounters between ethno-religious groups through inclusive education, media, and cross-community social activities can be a path towards a more harmonious society.

Policy Implications

Governments in both countries need to revise or strengthen policies to protect religious minorities, including strengthening anti-discrimination laws and fair justice enforcement mechanisms. Recognition of the cultural and religious rights of Muslims must be part of a national integration strategy, not considered a threat to the unity of the state.

Practical Implications for Muslim Communities

Muslim communities in India and Russia need to strengthen internal solidarity through education, economics, and independent and widely networked civil organizations. Active involvement in the public and political sphere is also important

as a strategy to legitimately and constructively fight for civil rights within the framework of the state.

This literature review concludes that the experiences of Muslims as minorities in India and Russia demonstrate the complexity of multiculturalism in the context of a modern nation state. Although both countries formally uphold the principles of secularism and diversity, the reality on the ground shows that Muslims often experience social, economic, and political marginalization, although in different forms and intensities.

In India, Muslims face challenges in the form of institutional discrimination, communal violence, and limited access to social resources such as education and employment. These dynamics are exacerbated by the emergence of a nationalist ideology based on the majority religion (Hindutva), which tends to marginalize minority religious identities. In contrast, in Russia, despite formal recognition of Islam as part of traditional religions, the state applies a strict control approach to religious activities. Muslims in Russia are often negatively associated with national security issues and extremism, especially in urban areas and non-Muslim areas.

A striking similarity between the two countries is the weak protection of the rights of the Muslim minority in practice, despite constitutional guarantees. However, Muslim communities in both countries have demonstrated adaptability and resilience, including through strengthening community-based education, building networks of socio-religious organizations, and participating in public spaces peacefully and legally.

Thus, the success of multiculturalism practices in India and Russia is highly dependent on the political will of the state, critical awareness of the majority community, and strengthening the internal capacity of minority communities. Without all three, multiculturalism will only be a normative concept without substantive realization.

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