Islamophobia in India: The Orientalist Reformulation of Tipu Sultan—The Tiger of Mysore

Ismail Adam Patel
Visiting Research Fellow University of Leeds Twitter @IsmailAdamPatel

ISLAMOPHOBIA STUDIES JOURNAL
VOLUME 7, NO. 1 Spring 2022, PP. 82–95.

Published by:
Islamophobia Research and Documentation Project,
Center for Race and Gender, University of California, Berkeley

Disclaimer:
Statements of fact and opinion in the articles, notes, perspectives, and so on in the Islamophobia Studies Journal are those of the respective authors and contributors. They are not the expression of the editorial or advisory board and staff. No representation, either expressed or implied, is made of the accuracy of the material in this journal, and ISJ cannot accept any legal responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions that may be made. The reader must make his or her own evaluation of the accuracy and appropriateness of those materials.

DOI:10.13169/islastudj.7.1.0082
ABSTRACT: Islamophobia in India, with the coming to power of BJP, a Hindutva (Indian nationalist) party, is on the increase. To understand Islamophobia in India, the approach in this article diverts from studies that focus on empirical data of incidence and discriminatory legislation to the construct of the figure of the Muslim as the Other. My approach focuses on Hindutvaism and the British Orientalist construction of the 18th-century figure of Tipu Sultan as a signifier in the marking of Muslims as the Other. British Orientalists during colonialism and Hindutvaism in post-colonial India both construct Tipu as the figure of the Muslim. This brings the Orientalist discursive practice, which constructed the figure of Muslim as an obstruction to imperial British national imagination, in dialogue with the Hindutva Islamophobic narrative. To show that the Hindutva construction of the figure of Muslim has echoes of Orientalism, I adopt a decolonial approach of “coloniality,” as a continuation of Western-centric global political dominance, and “colonial situation,” as the perpetuation of discrimination against a marked identity in post-colonial nations. Contrasting the construction of Tipu in Orientalism and Hindutvaism situates Islamophobia as a repertoire of problematizing the figure of the Muslim in Orientalism. The approach challenges the view that the colonialist discursive practice that marked Muslims as Other is the preserve of Orientalism, highlighting the influence of Orientalism, as a way of thinking, in post-colonial nations and the unfinished business of decolonisation.

Key words: Tipu Sultan, Orientalism, coloniality, India, Hindutva, BJP, Islamophobia

INTRODUCTION

[Tipu Sultan, the tiger of Mysore is] the cruel and relentless enemy; the intolerant bigot
Colonel William Kirkpatrick 1811
[To celebrate Tipu Sultan is] giving up Hindutva
Atul Bhatkhalkar 2021

What can we learn from the above two quotations, separated by 210 years, problematizing Tipu Sultan, by a British colonialist and by the Hindutva (Hindu nationalist) in India? Tipu Sultan was the first in India to defeat the British in battle and, after that, for the next 32 years until 1799, halt their colonial expansion. Tipu Sultan, known as the tiger of Mysore, provided political significance in the British colonial discourse that constructed the figure of the Muslim as the Other. Tipu in contemporary India is again employed to provide relevance to the Hindutva, to gain a political mandate, manage Indian Muslims, and construct an exclusivist narrative of India.

The two above quotations underscore a discourse that undermines the figure of the Muslim in the British colonial narrative and the exclusion of the figure of the Muslim in the Hindutva construct of post-colonial India. They indicate that, despite the anticolonial jihad of
Muslims helping end British colonialism, there is still problematization of the figure of the Muslim. This is not to deflect from the “ethnic” hierarchy which existed in India before British colonial rule, but rather to remind that the pre-colonial construction of differences resisted the expulsion of any group from the notion of the collective. The quotation by an Orientalist and a Hindutva unmask a way of thinking that excludes Muslimness from the idea of the universal. The quotes also reveal a continuous challenge confronted by the Muslims from colonialism to post-colonialism. This complicates the idea of liberation for the Muslims in post-colonial India.

To understand the reformulation of the figure of the Muslim in India, the approach used here builds on the work of Edward Said’s Orientalism (1978), which showed that the East is a construct of the West and that its conceptualization is the relational Other of the West. The outgrowth from Said’s work, which is extensive, is summarized in four alternative reformulations. The first is the study of the West’s ongoing project to maintain superiority over the East and Eastern epistemology. To describe this, terms like post-orientalism (Hubinette 2003, 6) are employed. Post-orientalism is understood as a discursive practice of formulating the West-East in dichotomous terms. The second uses new-orientalism (Amin-Khan 2012), which addresses the problematization of Muslims and people of Oriental origins within the West. The focus here is constructing the difference of the ethnically marked citizens within former metropoles of colonizing nations. The third is the knowledge formation of those of Eastern origin, either in former colonial metropoles or colonies, which perpetuates Orientalism; Lau (2009, 572) has termed this re-orientalism. Here, the representation of the Orient as subaltern is through “that of the insider and outsider, where the representing power can be simultaneously self and other.” The fourth is Occidentalism as a counter-response to Orientalism that caricatures the Occident in parallel to the Orientalists’ Orientalism (see Al-Azam 1981; Carrier 1995). These four formulations continue to present the East and West in dichotomous terms, either by re-emphasizing the centering of the West or, in the case of Occidentalism, its destabilization.

Bringing the British colonial narrative in dialogue with the Hindutva disturbs the East-West bifurcation and focuses on the reformulation of the Orientalist narrative in post-colonial nations. This expands the idea of orientalism from being provincial and originating in specific political geographies and times to being a hegemonic global order. The approach abjures the clear distinction between the Orient and Occident and the separation of the colonial from the post-colonial. As Quijano (2007, 170) elaborates, the end of direct colonial rule did not end the colonial power structure of discriminatory social policies. Quijano describes “the most general form of domination in the world today, once colonialism as an explicit political order was destroyed,” as coloniality. While coloniality encompasses a global political landscape of Western-centric domination, Grosfoguel (2009, 23) adds the idea of colonial situation, which means the “cultural, political, sexual and economic oppression/exploitation of subordinate racialized/ethnic groups by dominant racial/ethnic groups with or without the existence of colonial administrations.” To the idea of the colonial situation, one can include the way of thinking that institutes identity as the alien Other within post-colonial nations.

As a way of thinking, the idea of the colonial situation addresses the reformulation of Orientalism in the Orient. If Said (1978: 2–3) outlines Orientalism as “a style of thought” that distinguished the Orient from the Occident and as “a corporate institution for dealing with the Orient,” then the colonial situation appreciates that the end of direct colonial rule did not create post-colonial nations that are independent of colonial social constructs. The idea of colonial situation addresses Hindutvaism marking of Muslimness as an antithesis to Indianness. The colonial situation imbricates Hindutvaism with Orientalism. From a colonial situation perspective, Hindutvaism is a political ideology that justifies the Hindutvaization of India.
Hindutvaism is thus not only a way of thought but also a means, including violence, to exclude non-Hindutva from the idea of Indianness.

The exclusion of the figure of the Muslim for the symbolic myth of Indianness is gaining strength and has seen Muslims in India face communal violence in the Gujarat riots of 2002, with around 2,000 Muslims killed; the destruction of the early 16th-century Babri Mosque in 1992; the Love Jihad campaign; cow vigilantism (Human Rights Watch 2019; Bacchetta 2000, 265); lynching; the biased anti-conversion laws that legitimate conversion from other religions to Hinduism but not vice versa (Khalidi 2008, 1550); and using Muslims as scapegoats for the coronavirus pandemic. In addition, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the State of Assam has banned Muslim educational seminaries. Nationally, the BJP government passed in December 2019 the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). The CAA fast-tracks Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi, and Christian immigrant citizenship applications from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh who arrived in India before 2015. However, it excludes Muslims. Closely allied to the CAA legislation is the call for a National Register of Citizens (NRC). The NRC aims to identify illegal immigrants. Both the CAA and NRC point towards making “religion” the basis of granting citizenship. The burden is upon Muslims to present their proof of Indian birth and citizenship. According to independent journalists, these legislations will affect up to 1.9 million Muslims and those failing to demonstrate their right to citizenship will be interned in detention camps (The Independent 2019: New York Times 2019; Bloomberg 2020). Such discriminatory governance, management, and policing underscore the increasing burden upon the Muslim citizen of India.

Through Tipu Sultan, the article contrasts the colonial with the post-colonial reformulation of the figure of the Muslim in India. This adds to the broader debate on colonialism’s unfinished residue, which constructs the social/political stratification of “the” people within post-colonial nation-states and marks specific categories as the alien Other. To understand the colonial situation, the first section of the article contrasts the discursive practice problematizing the figure of the Muslims during British colonialism with Hindutva. It considers how, in the metropole, Britain, Tipu provided signification in the contestation of political power, the justification of colonial ideology, and an existential threat to Britishness. Then an analysis is provided of the British imagination of Tipu Sultan as an ideal representative of Muslimness. This is contrasted with the problematization of Muslimness in post-colonial India. This is not to directly equate the Orientalist discourse with the contemporary marking of Muslims in India as the Other. But to illustrate that, despite divergence in the meanings of difference constructed out of the figure of Muslim, Muslimness is nevertheless constructed as problematic. The case of India shows that the political differentiation of its Muslim citizens has been a complicated process, a genealogy, in which Orientalism is implicated. In other words, the Orientalist imperial archive provides the condition of possibility in the problematization of Muslimness for the contestation of an Indian national imaginary.

THE ORIENTALIST PROBLEMATIZATION OF TIPU

When, in 1615, the British arrived in what is today known as India, they encountered a Mughal empire that stretched from the Indus basin in the north to the tip in the south. The British did not land on something we now call India. The idea of India as a nation is an outcome of not only internal and external political forces but a hegemonic Western centric framing of the globe into nation-states. In the 17th century the idea of India as a nation-state was as alien to the British as it was to the indigenous population of that vast land. Over the next century, a devolving of centralized Mughal political power accompanied by external European
colonial encroachments, including the East India Company, led to the British colonial order. It is worth noting that the noun India, in “East India Company”, refers to its operations in the regions of the Indian Ocean: China, Hong Kong, and Southeast Asia, and not of a geo-political entity called India.

From the middle of the 18th century, the East India Company made rapid military gains across the Mughal empire until they encountered Haider Ali in Mysore. However, after Ali’s death, at the First Anglo-Mysore War, his son and heir, Tipu Sultan, succeeded him to the throne. Unlike previous colonial successes, the East India Company registered its first defeat at the First Anglo-Mysore War. This, as well as the three wars that followed (1767–99), lasting 32 years, made Tipu famous as an anti-colonial bulwark who impeded British progress. The prolonged resistance of Tipu was formative in the politics of constructing Muslimness as a symbol of anti-colonialism and a relational other of Britishness. Hence, Tipu’s anti-colonialism became imbricated with the unfolding historicity of India. In the colonialist metropole, Tipu emerges in contestation over political power, the justification of a colonial ideology and a figure of the Muslim posing an existential threat.

Politics of Power

The contention regarding how, and not if, colonisation should proceed fractured the British political establishment, between the Whigs, headed by Edmund Burke, who wanted to centralize the colonial project, and the Tory supporters of the East India Company. Although what triggered this was the conduct of Warren Hastings, who led the East India Company, when he was the Governor-General of Bengal from 1772 to 1785, the Anglo-Mysore defeat also made an impression. The Whigs contended that the East India Company’s colonial project reduced the empire to private individuals. To undermine the members of East India Company, the Whigs labeled them as Nabob, corruption on the Urdu word Nawab, a Muslim nobleman. The Muslim trope of Nabob, constructed through a generic figure of the Muslim, became a euphemism for the members of the East India Company as immoral and “oriental despots” (Lawson and Phillips 1984, 239). In the Whig–Tory debate, the name of Tipu Sultan in 1783 appeared 107 times in the local newspapers, outside of national papers, from Aberdeen to Bath. This domestic political background is one of the horizons that “brought unprecedented attention to Indian affairs in Britain” (Rudd 2011: 26). Tipu Sultan’s anti-colonialist stance was thus a signifier that provided a framework around which the debate for gaining political mandate unfolded.

Political Ideology

Within the Tory–Whigs debate, Tipu, as a figure representing Muslimness, started to gain traction from the Second Anglo-Mysore War. Tipu’s capture of British soldiers and their treatment as prisoners, exaggerated or otherwise, surfaced in the metropole. These included Tipu’s parading of British prisoners for amusement, forcing them to be circumcised, and forcibly converting them to Islam (Colley 2002,: 76). These accusations about Tipu’s treatment of his British prisoners were later published in a book by one of the prisoners, James Bristow (1792). William Kirkpatrick (1811, xiv), a British East India Company army officer, also framed Tipu Sultan in Orientalist tropes. He published Selected Letters of Tippoo, claiming that Tipu was “the cruel and relentless enemy; the intolerant bigot . . . the oppressive and unjust ruler; the harsh and rigid master; the sanguinary tyrant.” According to Chakraborty (2013, 55–8), Kirkpatrick’s analysis of the Letters had a significant “impact on English imagination”
and “shaped the views of future writers,” including the novels *The Surgeon’s Daughter* by Sir Walter Scott, *Tipoo Sultan: A Tale of the Mysore Wars* by Captain Meadows Taylor, and *The Tiger of Mysore* by G. A. Henty. Dalrymple (2002, 472) states that the editing and commentary of the *Letters* provided a view of Tipu “in the most fearsome light possible.” The publication of the books, supported by political debates and the media, was synchronized to undermine Tipu, thus corroding any sympathy that his image had resisted.

**An Existential Threat**

By the Third Anglo-Mysore War, the framing of Tipu as a danger to the British as well as to the indigenous people increased in frequency and reached a wider circulation. After being depicted as a brutal leader, a despot, and torturer of British prisoners, Tipu was caricatured as a fanatical Islamic bigot, a “ferocious champion of Islam” (James 1997, 68), consolidating Muslims political factions and expanding the Islamic frontier. Tipu was transformed from being a mere Sultan of Mysore to Tipu, the Muslim tiger. Tipu, the proselytizer of English prisoners, was projected as equally forceful to the Hindu population and good Muslims. In the truce agreement of the Third Anglo-Mysore War, the terms stipulated that Tipu hand over to the British commander Cornwallis two of his sons as hostages. The capture of Tipu’s sons by Cornwallis in 1792 was presented “as [Tipu being] a calculating and heartless tyrant and the British conquerors of his domain as messengers of peace and justice” (McPhee 1998, 202). Interest in the metropole regarding the hostages gained momentum and artists like Daniel Orme, Francesco Bartolozzi, Joseph Grozer, Anthony Cardon as well as others promoted the portrayal of Tipu as a contemptuous figure. The Orientalist depiction of Tipu as callous was also “represented in everything from sculpture to embroidery and used to decorate things as varied as cushions, pocket journals and commemorative coins” (Willcock 2013, 121). Tipu, presented as the merciless father ready to give up his children, morphed with the idea of the British, not as hostage-takers, but as paternalistic, adopting brown children. It showed the British as rescuers of the Orient from their infancy and inferiority. As Almeida and Gilpin (2005, 158) state, “the distinction between the savage Tipu and the paternal Cornwallis, like the earlier distinction between the inhuman Indians and the merciful British, could not be more clear even to the simplest of the English folks.” The Orientalist representation was supported by presenting Tipu’s diplomatic, economic, and technological relations with external political powers as an existential threat.

Tipu sought military assistance from allies in faith and politics, including the Ottomans, Persians, Afghans, and French, in order to resist the East India Company. However, only the French responded to his appeal for help. The British imperialists of the 1790s problematized French sympathy, which never included military assistance. In February 1792, the interception by the British of a letter written by Napoleon praising Tipu became evidence of Tipu’s existential threat. The rationale was that, if Tipu were to win, the French would also win and Britain would be in danger both in the periphery and the metropole. The media and political elites synchronized their efforts to wage war against the danger of Tipu Sultan. The crisis posed by the alliance between Tipu and Napoleon thus demonstrated that a justification for war was not required and General Richard Wellesley (Willcock 2013, 138) commanded a pre-emptive strike. This was the final Fourth Anglo-Mysore War in which, after 32 years of resisting the British, Tipu finally was overrun.
The Tiger and the Lion as Signifiers in the Problematization of Muslimness

In the genealogy of Tipu–British relations, the interstices of politics, colonial resistance, and imperial rivalry concurrently construct the empire as paternalistic and benevolent and the figure of the Muslim, through Tipu, as the Other. The construct of Tipu as the Other was formulated through his ensign of the tiger. The image of the tiger and its stripes were on Tipu’s throne, coinage, swords, and guns of his army. The tiger began to represent Tipu as well as the thwarting of the empire’s advance. The tiger entered the British lexicon to connote the undesirable, cruel, and alien to British normative values (Colin 1990). However, the lion, a ferocious beast, is also an attribute of the British. In contrasting the lion with the tiger, the first edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1771) states the following (quoted in Grant 1989, 129):

The tiger is more ferocious, cruel and savage than the lion. Although gorged with carnage, his thirst for blood is not appeased; he seizes and tears to pieces a new prey with equal fury and rapacity, the very moment after devouring a former one; he lays waste the country he inhabits; he neither dreads the aspect nor the weapons of men . . .

The myth of the British lion versus Tipu the tiger served to contrast their divergent purposes. Unlike the British lion, Tipu, the Muslim tiger of Mysore, was projected as callous for having handed over his two sons as hostages. The traits of the tiger identifiable in Tipu more widely embodied the figure of the Muslim. As Eliot Weinberger (1985, 101) states, the tiger personified an “obstacle to progress, everything that was not white, western, male, good. Its literal metaphorical vanquishing became a British obsession.” Tipu’s defense of his territories became projected as a broader war “support[ing] of the Mahommedan religion” (Kirkpatrick 1811, 94). Tipu Sultan, the Muslimsphere, and the tiger, were orientalized as the savage adversary facing the brave, dignified, and noble British lion.

**HINDUTVA: PROBLEMATIZATION OF TIPU**

In his study on online nationalism in India, Shahin (2020, 9) shows that the figure of Tipu is employed to argue that Muslims are alien invaders whose loyalty is external to the nation of India. One social media post typifies the sentiment; it stated that Tipu was “quite willing to bring in foreigners like the French, Ottomans, Afghans. Same story with Islamists today. Concept of nation-state eludes them and the whole world has to be converted” (Shahin 2020, 9). The practice of simultaneously constructing Tipu as a degenerate alien and connoting a historical figure Tipu with contemporary Muslims in India goes beyond the common social media sphere. Political figures use a similar approach, with Mohan Reddy, the BJP State President of Andhra Pradesh, considering the promotion of Tipu as “anti-Hindu” (*United News of India* 2021). BJP intolerance has led to them accusing a former political party partner, Shiv Sena, of disowning Hindutva aspirations (*India Today* 2021b) because they put up a poster to celebrate Tipu Sultan’s birthday anniversary. In the southern state of Karnataka, the BJP Minister banned the public celebration of Tipu Sultan’s birthday, with Hegde, a BJP minister, stating that Tipu was “a brutal killer, wretched fanatic and mass rapist” (*First Post* 2017). Further, the Hindutva, in conjunction with the BJP, is campaigning to remove the history of Tipu Sultan from the school curriculum because, they say, Tipu “forcibly converted” people to Islam, used “Persian language,” and was “not a freedom fighter” (*India Today* 2019).

In the public discourse, every characteristic, political decision, and incidence of Tipu is a point of contention. The battle over the significance over Tipu ranges from Tipu Sultan being
the destroyer of Hindu Temples (Mackenzie 1793, 203; Korath 1993, 10) to patronizing them (Hasan 1951, 354); from being the ardent foe of Hindus to the veneration of Hindu priests (Subhan 2002, 43); from emphasizing the calligraphic inscription on his sword “My victorious sword is lightning for the destruction of the unbelievers” (Sharma 199, 118), and thus as a xenophobic Muslim, to the inscription on his ring which has the name of the Hindu God Rama (Olikara 2012), and thus as a pluralist; and from his alliance with the French and other Muslim Sultanates, and thus as an anti-Indian (Shahin 2020), to having Hindus in his administration and army, and thus as being an inclusivist.

These and other aspects of Tipu in circulation are signifiers in the political contestation for hegemony in the myth of Indianness. For the inclusivist it is a political jihad against an exclusive objective of the Hindutvaization of Indianness. The essentializing of Tipu by the Hindutva is thus not a debate about historical accuracy, or as the first Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru put it, “the search for truth” (1946, 512), but rather about character assassination, understood as “a deliberate and sustained effort to damage the reputation or credibility” (Shiraev and Icks 2014, 4) not only of Tipu as a historical figure but what that figure comes to represent, Muslimness. If, through Tipu, the Orientalists constructed the Muslimsphere and the figure of the Muslim as a danger to Britishness, then Hindutvaism reformulates the same logic. The debate over Tipu provides a focus on the figure of the Muslim as an object, an ontic analysis (physical characteristics/ modes of conduct) that categorizes and catalogues Muslims. In other words, the debate around Tipu forms a register that is determined with those holding a power-knowledge advantage of what is normative.

The struggle over Tipu Sultan as a historical figure is thus about who is acceptable to be a part of India. That is, who should be honored, who represents the nation’s heritage, and whose memory counts. Tipu Sultan is a tool, a signifier, in the struggle for a hegemonic myth of a Hindutvaization construction of Indianness which erases Muslimness. It is through Tipu that, in parallel to Orientalism, Hindutvaism essentialized the Muslim subject into an object. However, while the Orientalist construct, through the symbolism of Tipu, hegemonized the Muslim as the Other, the Hindutvaist reductionist historicity confronts the figure of Tipu. In whatever way the emergence of India is considered, Tipu’s role cannot be ignored and this blindsides Hindutva. This is played out in the most public way today in India. On one side, we have 12 episodes of the television drama The Sword of Tipu Sultan aired in 1990 and repeated in 2001, and, on the other, as mentioned earlier, we have the BJP-led government’s banning in 2019 (Yasmeen 2019) of Tipu’s birthdate celebration and calling for a removal of Tipu from the school curriculum. However, both BJP initiatives have met with the resistance of the provincial governments. Tipu’s birthday continues to be celebrated privately and there is also resistance to omitting teaching about Tipu in schools. The other political parties continue to use Tipu’s image on posters, his palaces are promoted as tourist attractions, and arts and literature continue investing in him. The contestation led to the establishment in 2019 of a national political party named Tipu Sultan Party and in the state of Andhra Pradesh the local government is challenging BJP central government from stopping it from installing a statue of Tipu Sultan.

In this sense, the political value of raising Tipu’s Orientalist memory by the Hindutva is to construct the figure of the Muslim figure as the alien Other. While the figure of the Muslim as the Other is not hegemonized, however, in the power-knowledge imbalance the Muslims are undermined. This is reflected in the BJP and its opposing political party, the Congress, which routinely trade political blows regarding the subject of the Muslim for the sake of stamping their political authority. The Congress party, which has governed India for over five decades, is accused by the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh—the umbrella term for the different strands of Hindu nationalists) sympathizers of promoting the Muslims at the expense of the Hindus. RSS, the
ideological wing of BJP, decries the “endless appeasement of the Muslim population” (RSS 2012). In 2019, Narendra Modi, the leader of BJP, fought the election on the ticket of the “Hindu First” (Poonam 2019), supporting an idea that the figure of the Muslim is eroding Indianess with overwhelming success.

The RSS prompts its affiliates to advance a national movement for the “protection of Hindu Dharma” (RSS 2012). The RSS doctrine, promoted by the BJP Maharashtra minister Ashok Chavan, accused the Congress of “Muslim appeasement” and said that it should be called the “Muslim League Congress” (India Today 2021a). In the political fray, Prime Minister Modi labeled Congress leader Mani Shankar Aiyar as having a “Mughlai mindset” (Business Standard 2017). Mughlai, a corruption of Mughal, is a derogatory term and an Islamophobic slur which is allied to Nabob in the narrative of Orientalism. The latter is understood as an alien characteristic of an exotic, sexualized, and despotic individual (Phillips 1985: 379) while the former casts Muslims as intruders and invaders of India. In order to counter the anti-Hindu/Indian smear, Rahul Gandhi, the President of Congress, responded by saying that the BJP behaves like the “Muslim brotherhood” (Economic Times 2018). In response, BJP emphasized that Congress is associated with Muslims and is also the “killer of the idea called India.” Parallel to the Whig–Tory Orientalist discourse, both the main political parties in India tried to validate their loyalty to Indianess by deflecting the figure of the Muslim from Indian national imagery.

While the Whigs and Tories remained polarized in regard to the Anglo-Mysore Wars and colonisation they were united within an Orientalist way of thinking about the figure of the Muslim. In contemporary India, the major political parties and elites, while differing in many aspects, remain muted in defending the figure of the Muslim. More than any other idea, it is Hindutvaism that converges with Orientalism as a way of thinking about the Muslim. This is understood from Gramsci (1971: 376–7) not simply as a system of ideas but as means of social formation, that “organise human masses and create the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc.” In this context, Tipu qua the figure of the Muslim provides an aberration of the common sense of the empire project and also the Hindutvaization of India. The idea of Tipu qua Muslim emerges as the antagonistic Other which disrupts the mythical symbolism of Britishness and Hindutva Indianess. The Muslim is thus an obstruction and, in Gramsci’s terms, men are moved to take practical steps. That is, Tipu as a symbol of Muslimness, signifies interruption of the common sense of Britishness/Indianess and measures taken against Tipu and the figure of the Muslim are not only justifiable but necessary.

**SUMMARY**

The idea of colonial situation has provided a horizon to contrast the problematization of the figure of the Muslim in Orientalism and Hindutvaism. While Orientalism and Hindutva nationalism have their independent discourses, the understanding of coloniality, whereby Islamophobia is normalized, provides the political condition for their interaction. That is, despite the theoretical discrepancy in the signification of Tipu within the Orientalist and Hindutvaism discourses, the two narratives become entangled in the construction of a British/Hindutva utopia. If as Wallerstein (2006, 75) states, Orientalism was about “reifying and essentializing the Other” that asserted the Orient was adulterating Britishness, then in Hindutvaism Muslimness through the signifier of Tipu violates a myth of a pure Hindu India. Where the figure of the Muslim is constructed with origins external to Bharatmata (mother India), as an outlier, emerging as a threat, an interruption to the common sense of Hindutvaization. The BJP nationalist constructs of India Bharatmata, as the sacred space, provokes the
ideologists to defend India, metaphorically and literally. Moreover, associating geography with sacred faith silences fellow Hindus from resisting the xenophobic nationalist narrative. This is not to say that all Hindus consider India from a perspective of a sacred space. Nonetheless, their respect for sacred symbolism provides the context of muting resistance against the violence committed for the sake of hegemonizing a mythical representation of Indianness. Such violence includes the targeting of Muslimness, as per the list provided in the introduction and other cultural violations. This includes the changing by BJP members of city names like Allahabad to Prayagraj; Mughalsarai to Deendayal Upadhyaya (an ideologue of RSS); the attempts to remove the Taj Mahal from tourist maps (Sen 2019; Akins 2017), and the eradication of the Urdu language, which is associated with Muslims, from state institutions, including the school curriculum (Khalidi 2008, 1548). Recently, impunity has been afforded to individuals like Yogi Adityanath, a Minister in the BJP government, to proclaim, “If Muslims kill one Hindu man, then we will kill 100 Muslim men” (Adonis 2021).

The weaponization of Tipu Sultan, both in Orientalism and Hindutvaism, helps to understand how Muslimness is made visible and normalizes the undermining of the figure of the Muslim. This is an appreciation that both BJP and Congress, just like the Whigs and Tory, vary in the degree of exercising control over the figure of the Muslim through governmental rationality, which Foucault (1991, 87–104) termed governmentality. It is here that the constructions of both Orientalism and Hindutvaism make Muslimness an obstruction to their respective national imageries. The figure of the Muslim becomes a target of management that justifies exceptional practices and disciplinary techniques. As such, the battle of both Orientalism and Hindutvaism over Tipu’s narrative is also a way of understanding the normalization of exercising political power and cultural dominance by the politically powerful. But, equally important, the figure of the Muslim becomes a justifiable target for violence.

The colonial situation in this context is the representation of Muslims in India which is enriched by the Orientalist repository of knowledge. The employment of the colonial situation resists bifurcating the construction of the figure of the Muslim as the Other from the colonial to the post-colonial periods for a nuanced relational appreciation. It is through Tipu Sultan that the appreciation of the continuity of marking Muslim as Other is made through a discontinuity of the discursive practice. A genealogy of problematizing of Muslims in India has shown that the leading political parties converge to hegemonize the idea of the Muslim as an obstruction to Hindutva Indianness. It is here that Tipu Sultan is reformulated from Orientalism while nevertheless continuing to provide a signifier in the construction of the figure of the Muslim as an Other. For Muslims, this means that the anti-colonial struggles of previous Muslims and Tipu need to be rehabilitated to free India from the xenophobic challenges of Hindutvaization.

ENDNOTES

1 Hindutva refers to an ideology, a political movement, and an objective that lays the foundations of this ideology. Hindutvaism is the institutionalization of this objective. Hindutvaization is the effort to implement Hindutva hegemony (Mohammad-Arif and Naudet 2020).

2 On January 6, 2021, the Supreme Court of India declined to stay controversial laws recently enacted in several states to tackle “love jihad”—a theory accusing Muslim men of luring Hindu women into marriage with the aim of forcefully converting them to Islam. Such laws are currently in place in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Madhya Pradesh. Other states, such as Haryana and Karnataka, have also announced their intention to introduce similar legislation. See https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/1/15/indias-love-jihad-laws-another-attempt-to-subjugate-muslims
Tipu is mentioned 107 times in 1783 in local British newspapers—from Edinburgh to London. https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/search/results/1783-01-01/1783-12-31?basicsearch=%2btippoo&freesearch=tippoo&retrievecountrycounts=false&sortorder=score

REFERENCES


