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Chapter 6 New Media, Identity and Minorities: The Role of Internet in Mainstreaming of Muslims in India



Mohammad Reyaz

Abstract India is home to over 172 million Muslims (14.2% of population), but most of them live an abysmally miserable life. For Muslims, questions of survival and security had taken centre-stage after independence. They were either ignored in the larger narrative of the country, at best or worse, stereotyped in the mainstream media and popular imaginations. The economic liberalization has helped a section of Muslims grow on the economic ladder, although much needs to be achieved. This new generation of Muslims considers themselves as active and equal citizens of the country. This has been possible largely due to mediatization in the increasingly wired global world. Internet and social media have provided an alternative “third space” of communication, and have given them voices that they hitherto had difficulties finding in the traditional media. Taking three examples: an online news portal, a Facebook group, and Twitter trends, this chapter analyses how new media is helping Muslims engage with the larger society by giving them an alternative platform to assert their identity. It concludes that Indian Muslims are actively using the internet and new technologies smartly to counter prevailing narrative and breaking stereotypes.

Keywords Indian muslim · Minority · New media · Social media · Identity · Third space

With 172 million Muslims according to the 2011 census, India is home to the third-largest Muslim population in the world (Reyaz 2015). But over 75% of them live an abysmally miserable life on less than a hundred rupees a day. Several government-appointed committees have expressed their concern on the socio-economic and educational conditions of Muslims in India (Sachar et al. 2006, Kundu et al. 2014). As a marginalized community that is also held responsible for the partition of the country and are otherwise perpetual suspects in the eyes of the majority community, questions of survival and security have remained immediate concerns for them.

The new generation of Muslims, however, consider themselves as active and equal citizens of the country. Surely, economic liberalization has helped them grow

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