



Indian Muslims for Secular Democracy
Equality Justice Compassion Peace

Press Release

May 3, 2017, New Delhi

Indian Muslims for Secular Democracy (IMSD) is a recently launched forum of Indian Muslims and their secular allies who subscribe to the view that the core values of Islam – equality, justice, compassion and peace – are in consonance with the principles enshrined in the Indian Constitution and the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. IMSD seeks to address issues facing the Indian Muslim community nationally and internationally. However, it views the problems *within* the community as its *primary concern*.

Aims of IMSD:

- To combat within the community tendencies of religious supremacism, casteism, exceptionalism, bigotry, intolerance, extremism and terrorism;
- To promote gender justice in all spheres of life;
- To rejuvenate Islam's tolerant tradition and celebrate diversity.

Membership of IMSD:

Membership of IMSD is open to anyone who sees herself/himself or is seen as a Muslim. IMSD welcomes other secular-democratic allies who endorse its 'Declaration' and 'Document'.

A Delhi chapter of IMSD has been launched in March 2017.

Our immediate goal: Triple *talaq* (instant divorce), *halala* and polygamy as currently practiced amongst some Muslims must be declared unconstitutional. Triple Talaq not only violates the Constitutional Rights guaranteed to Muslim women, it is, in fact, anathema to Islam itself. Islamic law prohibits Triple Talaq in certain terms. Consequently, the shameful practice of halala (which is a corollary to the menace of Triple Talaq) also has no place in Islam. Not only that the Delhi High Court has declared Triple Talaq to be illegal, most Islamic countries too have put a statutory ban on it. However, in India a mischief continues to be played on Muslim women in the name of Islam by vested interests within the community. Some have even sought the declaration of these blatantly unilateral, inhuman and anti-women practices as "un-Quranic". IMSD hopes to work towards bringing an end to this practice and secure equal rights to the Muslim woman.

IMSD fully supports the petitions pending in the Supreme Court of individual Muslim women victims of triple talaq, which have been backed by three Muslim women's organisations. IMSD welcomes the fact that these petitions are now to be heard by a Constitutional Bench (11th-19th May 2017) and is hopeful of a verdict in favour of Muslim women. We hope that the apex court will also examine and include in its verdict the constitutionality of the "privilege" of unilateral divorce enjoyed by Indian men under Muslim Personal Law.

IMSD deplores the attempt of certain political parties to politicise and communalise what is clearly a straightforward issue of gender justice and fundamental rights guaranteed under our constitution. We also appeal to the electronic media to refrain from turning the issue of gender justice into TV shows pitching Muslim women against moulvis especially chosen for their regressive views.

We assert that those who engage in or rationalise the lynching of Muslim men, initiate or endorse government measures that at one stroke snatch away the livelihood of tens of thousands of Muslim families may posture as but can never be well-wishers of Muslim women.

Proposed Programmes/Activities/Campaigns of IMSD:

In the coming period IMSD proposes to initiate various programmes and activities towards the furtherance of its aims, objectives and principles.

I. Addressing the maladies within:

In keeping with its conviction that for IMSD members the prime responsibility lies within the community, it will initiate programmes and launch campaigns aimed at:

- Invoking and rejuvenating the tolerant traditions within Islam
- Celebrating India's diversity, promoting mutual respect and communal harmony
- Promoting gender justice and gender parity in all spheres of life, including codification of Muslim Personal Law, right of women to equal access, on par with men, to all sacred and community spaces, women's right to dress of choice
- Promoting the idea of secular governance and separation of religion from state affairs across the world, including in Muslim majority countries.
- Promoting the idea that in a secular society there must be punishment for law-defined crimes but none for faith-defined sin (apostasy, blasphemy, heresy).
- Opposing the notion of religious identity-based politics
- Opposing the death penalty for any crime
- Combating within the community tendencies of religious supremacism, casteism, exceptionalism, bigotry, intolerance, fanaticism, extremism and terrorism
- Fighting any kind of moral policing within the community
- Demanding an end to state subsidy for all religious rituals including Haj subsidy.

II. Muslims and the Indian state:

In addition to institutionalised discrimination, the Indian State's connivance in, or sponsorship of pogroms targeting Muslims and other religious minorities in recent decades – Nellie (1983), Delhi (1984), Mumbai (1992-93), Gujarat (2002), Kandhamal (2007) – is a matter of serious concern.

Along with other human rights organisations and secular-democratic forces, IMSD will campaign for new laws, policies and programmes to be put in place to ensure,

- Impartial enforcement of rule of law
- Punishment for hate speech
- Punishment for perpetrators of communal and caste crimes.
- Justice and full reparation to the victims of violence
- Affirmative action to end discrimination and promote equal opportunities.

IMSD invites all Indians to join us in our effort towards building an India that prevents discrimination and promotes equality.

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