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Your Ramadan, My Ramadan: Exploring the Dynamic Shades of the Holy Islamic Month in Hyderabad City

Mehak Siddiqui

The commercialisation of festivals can be clearly observed around the world and the term “festivalisation” has been coined to suggest an over-commodification of festivals exploited by tourism and place marketers. While this has attracted a substantial amount of academic work, not many works have focused on Islamic observances like the holy month of Ramadan, particularly in India. In this context, this paper seeks to explore the varying expressions and significations of Ramadan in modern-day Hyderabad, an Indian metropolis whose history is rooted in Islamic tradition. In-depth interviews were conducted with eight participants from different age groups and social strata, seeking anecdotes and experiences about the observation and/or celebration of Ramadan and Eid-ul-Fitr in Hyderabad. Responses were then broadly thematised to bring out the following major points of discussion: first, the multiple interpretations of the Islamic month within the Muslim community, namely variances in Ramadan culture among Islamic sub-communities; secondly, class differences in celebration of Ramadan among cosmopolitan groups; third, gendered notions about Islamic festivities, and lastly, indulgence in pleasure and public display of religiosity through Ramadan. This revealed the dynamic shades that Ramadan has taken on within the culture of Hyderabad City.

The commercialisation of festivals can be clearly observed around the world and has attracted a substantial amount of academic work, though not many works address this in the context of India. Festivals have been defined in the classical cultural-anthropological perspective as “a sacred or profane time of celebration, marked by special observances.”¹ More recently, Getz defined them as “themed, public celebrations”.²

1 Alessandro Falassi, *Time Out of Time: Essays on the Festival* (University of New Mexico Press, 1987), 2.

2 Donald Getz, *Event Management & Event Tourism* (Cognizant Communication Corporation, 2005), 21.

Further, the term “festivalisation” has been coined to suggest an over-commodification of festivals exploited by tourism and place marketers.

A religious festival intrinsic to Hyderabad City is the Islamic month of Ramadan, more commonly pronounced as *Ramzan*. It is an annual thirty-day ritual during which Muslims across the world are obliged to abstain from food, drink, and sex during the day. It is also a time to devote oneself to prayer and free oneself of what Islam deems to be “negative” thoughts and emotions.

Furthermore, giving alms to charity forms a crucial part of the Ramadan ritual, and believers are obliged to give cash and in-kind donations to the less fortunate. The month culminates in the celebration of *Eid-ul-fitr*, arguably the most important day of the Muslim calendar. Although *Eid-ul-fitr* has traditionally been associated with fanfare and festivities, recent years have seen the pious month of Ramadan transform into a euphoric spectacle of conspicuous consumerism and extravagance. It has transformed from a religious month to a cultural and commercial holiday,³ and the festivities are not just limited to Muslims anymore. People of all faiths and ethnicities partake in the celebration through shopping and seeking entertainment after *iftar* (the breaking of the fast at sundown). This results in new expressions and meanings of the existing ritual, which can be connected to Bakhtin’s concept of the carnivalesque.⁴ Since individuals of different social backgrounds participate in the same religious obligation, fostering a sense of unity and solidarity, it results in a communal celebration marked by inversion of social hierarchies, a temporary suspension of norms, and a sense of renewal and rejuvenation, all of which are factors that shape the carnivalesque as described by Bakhtin.

Additionally, Henri Lefebvre’s ideas on festivals can provide a lens through which to analyse the significance of Ramadan as a cultural

3 Ozlem Sandikci and Sahver Omeraki. “Globalization and Rituals: Does Ramadan Turn Into Christmas?,” *Advances in Consumer Research* 34, (January 2007): 610-615. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/279674339_Globalization_and_rituals_Does_Ramadan_turn_into_Christmas

4 Mikhail Mikhaïlovich Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*. (Indiana University Press, 1984).

and religious event.⁵ For instance, Lefebvre argued that space is not merely a neutral backdrop, but a dynamic social construct shaped by human activities and interactions. In this regard, Schmidt's study of Ramadan in the Indonesian city of Yogyakarta describes the transformation of urban spaces, particularly the shopping mall, during the month of Ramadan.⁶ The space of the mall becomes charged with ideological symbols associated with Islam, creating a distinct public space for the expression of Islamic modernities. These transformations can be observed through changes in the mall's aesthetics, such as the use of Arabic-looking fonts, stereotypical desert-camel imagery, and specific themes like "Enchanting Sahara". Symbols of excess, such as greetings for *Idul Fitri* (the celebration marking the end of Ramadan) and traditional food like *ketupat* (rice dumplings wrapped in palm leaves), are prominently displayed in malls throughout Ramadan. This increased presence and visibility of Islam in the public space during the thirty days of the holy month creates an "other space" within "normal, secular" public spaces.

At the same time, Lefebvre's concept of festivals as moments of collective celebration and social interaction resonates with the communal spirit of Ramadan, where people come together to break their fast, share meals, and engage in acts of worship and charity. These communal gatherings create opportunities for social bonding, cultural exchange, and the production of collective identities within urban settings.

Moreover, it would also appear that the "festivalisation" of Ramadan allows Muslim women to emerge from private domestic spaces and engage more in public life. Writing about women's roles in the commercialisation of Christmas, Schmidt argues that modern celebrations were ritualised by women in the nineteenth century, who welcomed an area of power in domestic life.⁷ It was an event that afforded them the opportunity to step out of the domestic sphere, shop,

5 Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life* (Verso Books, 1991).

6 Leonie Schmidt, "Urban Islamic Spectacles: Transforming the Space of the Shopping Mall during Ramadan in Indonesia," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 13 (September 1, 2012): 384–407. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649373.2012.689708>. 384.

7 Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Consumer Rites: The Buying & Selling of American Holidays* (Princeton University Press, 1997), 148.

and exchange gifts, mostly with other women. The author describes how detailed accounts of Christmas shopping endeavours have been discovered in the personal diaries of several women of that era, which clearly points to their emergence as superintendents of Christmas gift-giving.

Such commercialisation and reinvention of Ramadan, like that of other festivals, is not a recent phenomenon, but one that has evolved over several decades. Evaluating the historical emergence of this phenomenon, Schmidt speaks of American festivals in the early 1900s:

*“The modern, up-to-date businessperson recognised the economic potential in holidays, exploited them through sales and advertising, and took the lead to promoting them. Whether the occasion was Easter or the Fourth of July, Thanksgiving or Memorial Day, ‘wide awake’ retailers were to conjure up ‘the spirit of hearty celebration’ for the purposes of merchandising and consumption.”*⁸

Under the logic of capitalism, the masses easily took to the sales tactics and the advertising which resulted in the kind of widespread consumerism associated with most holidays today. However, one cannot completely disregard the presence of religious sentiment in the phenomenon of festival consumerism as there seems to be a complex and ambiguous interplay between piety and commercialisation. As Karaosmanoglu points out:

*“Notions such as “commodification of the past” and “late capitalism” can only describe one part of the whole picture of Ramadan spaces in Istanbul. The other part of the picture has less to do with consumerism, but more to do with the formation of a temporalized space, which produces new discourses and new experiences of life”*⁹

8 Schmidt, *Consumer Rites*, 18.

9 Defne Karaosmanoglu, “Nostalgia Spaces of Consumption and Heterotopia Ramadan Festivities in Istanbul,” *Culture Unbound: Journal of Current Cultural Research* 2 (June 11, 2010). <https://doi.org/10.3384/cu.2000.1525.10216283.285>.

In this context, this paper seeks to explore the varying expressions and significations of Ramadan in modern day Hyderabad, a city whose history is rooted in Islamic tradition.

Methodology

To investigate the changing face of Ramadan and its varied interpretations and meanings, I used purposive sampling to select eight individuals (four male and four female) in Hyderabad City, whom I already knew and whom I thought would provide valuable insights for the purpose of this research. The table (Figure 1) further describes the respondents, who all self-identified as belonging to the middle and upper-middle class during the interview process.

I conducted semi-structured interviews in-person with each of the participants about their knowledge, experience, opinions and feelings about the month of Ramadan in Hyderabad City. Open-ended questions were asked and the entire interview recorded then transcribed. The interviews were conducted in a mixture of English and Urdu languages depending on the participants' fluency. Transcripts were analysed vis-à-vis literature related to the topic and recurrent themes were identified.

Community Sub-culture

This was a major theme that surprisingly did not emerge in any of the reviewed literature. Muslims are divided into two major communities—the Sunnis and the Shias, each of which is further subdivided into various groups whose beliefs slightly vary. Although a complete analysis of how the observation of Ramadan differs among all these communities is beyond the scope of this paper, a major finding that cannot be ignored is the marked difference between the Ramadan rituals of the Shias and the Sunnis. The Shias break fast communally at the mosque every evening, with one or more families sponsoring the catering for each night of the month. Women too go to mosque and prayers are offered before the fast is broken at sundown. The Sunnis, on the other hand, break the fast at home, following which only the men go to the mosque while the women pray at home. Dinner or iftar

is then had at home and is usually a meal prepared by the women. A twenty-one-year-old female postgraduate student responded strongly when asked what she feels about the extravagance that has crept into a holy month of prudence:

“I belong to the Shia community and we observe Ramadan in a very different way than the Sunnis. We have a simplistic ritual of going to the mosque, offering prayers and then having a light iftar after which we offer prayers again. We do not engage in the lavish feasts and materialistic culture of other Muslim communities because Ramadan is a time of devotion and self-restraint. At the same time, Sunni Muslims hold a similar view of the Shias, thinking that the daily gatherings at the mosque are parties of sort and that iftar should be a family affair at home.”

A middle-aged female homemaker from the Old City area of Hyderabad said:

“Ramadan is a time when the whole family eats together every day. My husband and son arrive from work early and my daughter helps me prepare a hearty meal that we all enjoy together. Once a week, we eat out but whether at home or outside, iftar brings us closer together while prayer brings us closer to Allah. I don't like the Shia ritual of going to the mosque every evening. They are only interested in dressing up and going to the mosque to socialise and eat expensive catered food.”

Similar sentiments were echoed by the respondent's husband and twenty-year-old daughter, both of whom reiterated that spending quality time with family, whether at home or outside, is what makes *iftar* and Ramadan time special for them, as opposed to Shia Muslims allegedly more focussed on “dressing up” and going to the mosque to “socialise and gossip”. Hence, there appears to be a process of “othering” between the two communities, with both thinking that “their way” of observing Ramadan is the “right” way. Individuals of both sub-groups therefore seem to define their own self-identity through the construction of the “other”.

Social Class

Almost all the respondents made some sort of reference to the class differences that exist in the observation/celebration of Ramadan. A twenty-two-year-old postgraduate student residing in Hyderabad, but originally from the state of Bihar, spoke about how food consumption and behaviour in public spaces in Ramadan are connotative of social status:

“There is a constant comparison that goes on between neighbours in a residential area with regard to who is having more lavish iftars or shopping for more expensive clothes and other commodities. The poorer people try to emulate the rich by eating out or by having more of expensive non-vegetarian food at home. People often go beyond their means in Ramadan just in an attempt to show that they can afford it, even if they actually cannot.”

An interesting manifestation of this can be observed in the trend of *iftar* parties that has become more popular in the past few years. Various organisations and elite families organise lavish feasts and invite high profile guests such as politicians to celebrate the “spirit of Ramadan.” This often includes consumption of “authentic” Hyderabad delicacies, such as *haleem* and *biryani*, catered by the most popular restaurants in the city. *Iftar* parties can be seen as status symbols where the guest list reflects influence, and where the focus is more on making connections rather than breaking fast. Recently, there has also been a trend of “*sahr* get-togethers” as recounted by Amjad Ali, a thirty-two-year-old respondent:

‘Sahr or sehri is the early morning meal that is consumed before dawn in order to fast for the day. Since most shops and restaurants in Old City area are open throughout the night during Ramadan, youngsters often get together for this meal, especially since many of them cannot meet for iftar as they work at various offices. Younger children often play cricket or some other sport late into the night as they cannot do so during the day-long fast.’

Such night-long entertainment activities are predominantly the preserve of lower-middle class families who live in and around the Old City area. It is often looked down upon by the upper-middle-class, who perceive it as a nuisance and disturbance of the “peaceful” and “spiritual” nature of Ramadan. “Ramadan nights are for prayer and devotion, not roaming the streets and restaurant-hopping,” said a twenty-one-year-old upper-middle class Muslim woman.

Despite the apparent class distinctions and status assertions that mark the holy month, Ramadan and *iftar* are widely portrayed – especially by the media – as common ground for a diversity of people, with no discrimination on the basis of religion, age, class, and ethnicity in any sense. Ramadan is constructed as producing a multi-cultural and a multi-religious space in the cosmopolitan city of Hyderabad.

The above findings are congruent to what Salamandra describes as the longstanding rituals of dining at *iftar* cafes and shopping during the holy month in Damascus.¹⁰ She talks of the early nineties and how this period saw increased public displays of religiosity during Ramadan, with people frequenting mosques as an expression of status rather than piety. She further discusses how Syrians agree that fasting is designed to promote empathy for the poor, and how feasts are often donated to the needy, but points out that such customs may reinforce, rather than undermine, social hierarchy.

In addition, food consumption reaches its height during Ramadan and prices rise considerably, which is ironic considering that the month is supposed to be a time of fasting and economic prudence. Luxury and exotic foods become available to the rich who can afford it, while the poor are “taunted” by images of this consumerist lifestyle which is completely out of their reach.¹¹

The homemaker from the Old City also spoke about how she likes to cook more non-vegetarian fare during Ramadan and experiment with different kinds of sweet dishes. Ironically, there is greater expenditure

¹⁰ Christa Salamandra, *A New Old Damascus: Authenticity and Distinction in Urban Syria* (Indiana University Press, 2004), 94.

¹¹ Ibid., 96.

on food during Ramadan despite it being a month of abstinence.

Hence, it appears that Ramadan celebrations have become associated with elite status and wealth. People use it as a way of distinguishing themselves. It is all about eating lavishly, dressing up in finery, buying the best of goods, and attending the most happening *iftar* parties.

Gender Inequality

Strong gendered notions emerged with regard to the role and behaviour of men and women during Ramadan. Moreover, these are so deep-rooted and often linked to Islamic teachings and texts, that they are hardly questioned and enjoy a common-sense status. The women are responsible for preparing grand *iftar* meals and shopping for all necessary ingredients. They also have to plan family gatherings and take care of any gift-giving involved. Four female participants of the 20-28 years age group spoke about how they were expected back home earlier than usual during Ramadan in order to help with preparation of the *iftar* (in cases where it is prepared at home), or simply to engage in prayer. The same was not expected of male family members. Women also have to shop for gifts to exchange with cousins on *Eid-ul-fitr* and are generally expected to don more “Indian” clothes during Ramadan rather than jeans or other western attire.

This somewhat relates to what Salamandra says: “An ‘organised’ Damascene housewife stocks up on non-perishable provisions (for Ramadan) as early as possible, suggesting that it is the woman’s responsibility to shop for Ramadan eatables.”¹²

Furthermore, Frankl has mentioned how housewives buy various commodities for months before the onset of Ramadan because “however difficult the eleven non-fasting months, there are always more than enough supplies of food during Ramadan, oxymoron though that statement may be”.¹³

12 Ibid.

13 P. J. L. Frankl, “The Observance of Ramaḍān in Swahili-Land (With Special Reference to Mombasa),” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 26, no. 4 (1996): 416–34. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1581840>.

An extension of this can be observed in the trend of women always taking care of festival shopping, whether it is for new clothes for the family to wear or gifts/cards to exchange with relatives and friends. Amina, a twenty-six-year-old Muslim female respondent summed this up:

“I am not usually a shopping buff but during Ramadan, my female cousins and I all get together and shop for new clothes and accessories. Even if we are not actually buying things, we like to go around the shops and take in the sights. It is also the time of year when our parents allow us to go out at night alone to have haleem, followed by ice-cream. Ramadan evenings are lots of fun. Eid is the best because you get to wear beautiful new clothes and enjoy with cousins and friends all day. My non-Muslim friends also come over to my place to have the delicious food my mother cooks, and I love the whole atmosphere of festivity.”

Amina also mentioned, however, that although she is allowed more freedoms during Ramadan, it cannot be compared to what her younger brother Salim enjoys:

“My brother often stays out throughout the night playing with his friends and eating at various restaurants that remain open, but I being a girl can of course not do this. It is not safe and I also have to help out my mother with household chores, besides studying and other college-related work.”

Such gendered inequalities are not surprising given the traditionally patriarchal nature of both the Indian and Islamic cultures. However, Amira’s responses point to an interesting deviation from the norm when it comes to women’s everyday experiences. When questioned about being “allowed” to venture out alone during the night in Ramadan, she elaborated:

“Usually, I never go out in the nights. My family doesn’t like or permit it. Because as females, we have to be more cautious about things like safety. But in Ramadan, the nights are lively and so many women are

out, so my parents allow it as long as I'm with others whom they know. So, it turns into a good time of staying out, shopping, trying different food, and spending time with my cousins and friends."

The two other Muslim female respondents added to this view by describing how Ramadan is a more active communal time for Muslim women in Hyderabad City. They specifically talked about how girls and women organise and participate in communal activities such as *iftar* parties and prayer gatherings that are followed by time for socialising. Moreover, the respondents discussed how women's involvement in religious rituals and practices tends to intensify during Ramadan. This may include attending special prayers at mosques, reciting the Quran, and participating in religious lectures or study circles. This is a departure from the usual ritual of girls and women praying and engaging in other religious practices on their own at home. Therefore, although gendered notions and deep-rooted sex role stereotypes are integrated into the behaviour of men and women during Ramadan, just as they are throughout the rest of the year, Ramadan grants Muslim women increased opportunities for social interaction and networking in public spaces. Their presence in public spaces such as mosques may increase during Ramadan as they actively engage in spiritual activities alongside men.

Pleasure and Public Display of Religiosity

Scholars such as Bhabha have explored the festivalisation of religious events as a form of cultural politics that contributes to identity formation among minority communities.¹⁴ In the context of India, where secularism is synonymous to all religions playing an equal role in public life rather than none at all, the emergence of Islam in public spaces during Ramadan can perhaps be seen as a contestation against the dominant Hindu festivals of *Diwali*, *Dussera*, *Holi*, etc, which have always had greater public visibility. The "festivalisation" of Ramadan, therefore, can be viewed as a political act of the minority Muslim community to assert their faith and culture against homogenous constructions of national identity. Most respondents indicated some

14 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Routledge, 1994).

semblance of this, as they all agreed that Ramadan is a time when the Islamic face of Hyderabad City is in the public limelight, attracting both Hyderabadis and visitors to the city. Rafiq Shaikh, a garments store owner in the Charminar area spoke at length about how Ramadan has, over the years, become almost synonymous to shopping:

“Ramadan is the best time of year for business in the Old City. People love to buy new things, especially toward the end of the month in preparation for Eid. Young girls come looking for latest fashions of ethnic clothing inspired from the Hindi and Telugu film industries. There is also added demand for fancy burqas (veils) and hijab (headscarves). Men don’t usually come to shop; it is the women who buy clothes for them too. Lots of tourists also come to Hyderabad at this time, some from abroad but also from other parts of India. The jewelled bangles that are a speciality of Hyderabad are in high demand, just like haleem and biryani at restaurants. People from all over the twin cities flock to Charminar to experience the true Hyderabadi Ramadan.”

In addition, a twenty-eight-year-old male, non-Muslim doctorate student pointed out how Ramadan in Hyderabad is a phenomenon worth witnessing:

“I think that Ramadan is that time of month which truly brings out the Islamic identity of Hyderabad. People of all ages and ethnicities love trying out traditionally Muslim food during this month and the mosques, especially in the Old City, are beautifully decorated and lit up. There is a general air of spirituality and festivity which is at once similar and distinct from that of other festival times in the city.”

Furthermore, Ramadan in Hyderabad involves a transformation of the Old City area into a tourist attraction, and certain factors like the consumption of the traditional dish of *haleem* mark it as a truly Hyderabadi ritual, unique to the city and its cultural ideology. Hyderabadi *haleem* has in fact acquired the much-coveted Geographical Indications certificate from the Government of India, which is a sort of intellectual property right granted to original products from a specific

region that carve a niche identity in the minds of consumers. *Haleem*-eating has in fact also been integrated into the high-tech face of the city with traditional restaurants around the Hitech city area taking up interesting names such as Hitech Bawarchi. Most restaurants provide special offers during Ramadan, and “*iftar*-packs” which can be home-delivered. The modest *iftar*, which was traditionally a small family affair has metamorphosed into a grandiose feast, what with families treating it as a get-together or a way of asserting their status, and corporate houses using it as a means of appeasing Muslim employees and patrons.

Amjad Ali, a respondent who is employed as a driver with an upper-class Sunni Muslim family, said:

“For the past few years now, during Ramadan, my employers host several grand iftar parties for their extended family, friends, and business associates. On such days, I am usually required to work overtime in order to pick up and drop off some of the guests. My boss provides iftar for me and my family too. They have several courses of food, including exotic delicacies that I have never tasted anywhere else. People come dressed in finery and often stay late, socialising with each other. Prayers are offered but they seem to be secondary to the main objective of feasting and having a good time. I am a middle-class man and had never imagined Ramadan could be such an extravagant affair. On days when my boss does not have a party, they are usually attending other parties and I am permitted to leave early. On these days, I eat simple food prepared by my wife and then take her out for a walk or some shopping after offering prayers. The Old City area is very lively during Ramadan nights and we enjoy going there.”

Non-Muslims too like to frequent the Old City area (especially Charminar) during Ramadan to shop and taste *haleem* and/or *biryani*. All five of the respondents in their twenties spoke of their experiences of going out with friends several times during Ramadan, especially to have *haleem* in the Old City. One female respondent who enjoys photography also said: “The Charminar and Mecca Masjid are simply beautiful during Ramadan. They are lit up and I love going there to

take some good photographs and of course, do some street shopping.”

These festivities can be compared to the culture of Ramadan festivals in Istanbul,¹⁵ wherein city squares are lit up and transformed into marketplaces and entertainment sites. This can be seen as an attempt to revitalise the spirit of “old” Ramadan culture and promote a sense of community among all social classes combined. Furthermore, Salamandra also writes about how mosques become part of a public culture of display during the holy month in Damascus.¹⁶ These places of worship are lit-up and decorated and it becomes customary for people to attend the special night prayers even if they do not attend the mandatory daily prayers during the rest of the year. Going to the mosque during Ramadan is a way of asserting one’s faith and Muslim status, a political act of reaffirming one’s Islamic identity and heritage.

The sort of phenomenon described above obviously has its critics. Not everyone is happy with what they see as the growing commercialisation and festivalisation of Ramadan, with conspicuous consumption and exhibitionism displacing the spirituality and expression of social connectedness which they feel once characterised the season. But such notions of austere Ramadan piety are just as beholden to modern constructions of nostalgia as are the commodified representations of the month.

To conclude, Ramadan has indeed taken on varied shades in Hyderabad City and expressions of dominance and resistance can be found in the behaviour and attitudes that people have adopted toward it.

Caste (or community), class, and gender may influence the multiple significances of the holy month, but Ramadan festivities on the whole are central to the experience of the past and the future, the new and the old, the global and the local. As well as a space of consumption and a site of spectacle, Ramadan allows a diversity of people from all ages, religions, classes, and ethnic backgrounds to unite to celebrate a common event. As a result, Ramadan attempts to create a space where “Islamist” and “secularist” discourses intertwine.

15 Sandikci and Omeraki, “Globalization and Rituals”, 610.

16 Salamandra, *A New Old*, 96.

It is perhaps a sign of Islam being a minority religion in Hyderabad that shopping malls in Hyderabad have not yet become sites for revival of the commodified version of the Ramadan ritual, as they have in places like Turkey and Indonesia. It is only the Old City area of Charminar, a predominantly Muslim neighbourhood, that is transformed during Ramadan, and not so much the glitzy modern face of Hyderabad City.

Processes of commodification and festivalisation are perceived and interpreted in different ways by different individuals and groups, often reinventing traditionally religious rituals. This is influenced by various stakeholders, including political parties, commercial sectors, and the media. The commercial sector in particular plays a significant role in the reinvention of festivals.¹⁷ Exoticised and commoditised celebrations help create new habits of consumption and consumerism. Furthermore, the mainstream media and popular culture also contribute to the reinvention and reinterpretation of religious festivals as more inclusive and diverse cultural celebrations. The representation of cultural events in media can impact how they are perceived and practiced by the masses,¹⁸ and the convergence of traditional values with modern media can lead to a reinterpretation of cultural events.¹⁹

In recent years, the resurgence of Hindu nationalism in India has had complex and varied impacts on Ramadan celebrations in the country. While it is important to recognise that India is a diverse and pluralistic society with a significant Muslim population, Hindu nationalist sentiments and policies have at times influenced social dynamics and interfaith relations. News reports have indicated instances of religiously motivated violence or hate crimes targeting Muslims, particularly during Ramadan. In March 2024, for example, international students at Gujarat University in Ahmedabad City were assaulted for performing Islamic prayers during Ramadan.²⁰ Such acts

17 Karaosmanoglu, “Nostalgia Spaces”, 285.

18 John Fiske, *Reading the Popular* (Routledge, 1989).

19 Marwan Kraidy, *Hybridity, or the Cultural Logic of Globalization* (Temple University Press, 2006). https://doi.org/10.26530/oapen_626979.

20 Saikat Kumar Bose, “Centre’s Firefight After Foreign Students In Gujarat Attacked Over Namaz,” *NDTV*, March 17, 2024. <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/gujarat-university-mob-attacks-foreign-students-over-namaz-inside-gujarat-hostel-5-injured-5254783>.

have been enabled by a growing sense of Islamophobia in the country, propagated by political leaders, popular culture, and celebrities.

In such a political climate, Ramadan festivities become all the more vital as an act of dissent and in reclaiming public spaces. Its reinventions reflect the changing social, cultural, and historical dynamics of a society and contribute to the creation of new experiences and meanings associated with the event. Overall, contested understandings of religious festivals like Ramadan reveal the continual struggle in which modernity vies against tradition, commercialisation vies against religious sentiment, and varied interpretations and significances of festivals coexist in a multifaceted pluralistic society.

Appendix

Male Respondents	Female Respondents
Muslim, 44 years old	Muslim, 40 years old
Muslim, 32 years old	Muslim, 31 years old
Muslim, 22 years old	Muslim, 21 years old
Christian, 27 years old	Hindu, 28 years old

Figure 1

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