

HINDU NATIONALISM, MODI FACTOR AND THE IDEOLOGY MATRIX IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA

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Abstract

Hindutva has become a social reality with its overarching imprints on Indian polity and its subsequent reflection on India's political landscape. The revocation of Article 370 and the amendment in the Citizenship Amendment Bill are symptomatic of these undercurrents. The domestic underpinnings under Modi had been primarily guided by the Hindu nationalistic narrative. The non-acceptance and non-accommodative overtures in the guise of majoritarian values spearheaded India's transition into a narrow and parochial polity. The Modi phenomenon dwindled the construction of Nehruvian state based on mutual coexistence and composite culture. This paper attempts to dissect BJP's ideology matrix and its historical evolution. It explicates the manifestation of Hinduness in the tenure of Modi government from 2014 onwards. It further delineates the emerging contours of state and society in India and analyzes the contemporary ideological undercurrents within India.

Keywords: Hindutva, Composite Culture, Saffron Tide, Rashtra, Majoritarian.

Introduction

Prior to India's general elections in 2019, BJP introduced its *Sankalp Patra* (Election Manifesto). Its far most priority was a zero-tolerance approach to terrorism followed by national security and strengthening the armed forces of India. The very first point "Nation First" of the manifesto contained 14 points that had outrightly indicated that Modi's 2.0 would be more aggressive than imagined by the policymakers in the region. The underpinnings of the election manifesto catapulted Bhartiya Janata Party's (BJP) receptiveness among the middle and upper-middle-class Hindus nationals in India. The byproduct of polarized sloganeering paid BJP with a landslide victory in 2019-elections.

This article is based on the analysis of Modi's leadership and his association with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and its Hindutva ideology, and how that has influenced politics, polity, and society in India. The dramatic rise of Hindutva in the political environment of India is not just a coincidence. Hindutva ideology's origin and manifestation have deep historical roots. It refers to the primordial construct of Hindu identity. Hindutva derived from Neo-Sanskrit term which means "Hinduness in the masculine." The origin of Hindu nationalism in India dates back to the early 20th

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century.¹ Hindutva holds a staunch belief that Hindus have been subjugated historically by invaders and imperial powers which has made them a victim in their native land. It has consequently led to a posture of docility. It is widely argued that the invaders became the part of this land and integral feature and could not be driven out or integrated inside the nation.² They exploited Hindus at large and got control over the land. The Hindutva ideology believes that the Muslim rule in India caused tremendous destruction, widespread religious suppression, and economic deprivation for Hindus. V.D Savarkar, the founder of RSS, had a similar belief that the hatred for Muslims amongst Hindus considerably divides the nation and unites Hindus.³ This very construction of identity placed in the oppositional matrix has defined the contemporary contours of Indian polity which has become majoritarian in Modi's first and second tenure.

In the post-election scenario, the only point (from the manifesto) Prime Minister Modi has religiously fulfilled is Nation First. The other points including doubling farmers' income, on the path of Gram-Swaraj, India as the world's third-largest economy, Infrastructure, health for all, good governance, *Yuva Bharat* (tomorrow's India), education for all, women empowerment, inclusive development, etc., have been overshadowed with the pretext of national security. Modi's 2.0 is persistently failing in economy, development, health and governance but its national security mantra is rescuing the government – amid Indian media that creates desired optics for Modi's policies.

Within the 2.0 national security paradigm of Indian establishment, it was quite predictable that Modi will start from Kashmir. The abrogation of articles 370 and 35-A was part of the manifesto. The sub-point 14 of the first point of the BJP manifesto stipulates that "BJP reiterates its position since the time of Jan Singh to the abrogation of article 370. Also, it read that BJP is committed to annulling the article 35-A of the constitution of India as the provision is discriminatory against non-permanent residents and women of Jammu and Kashmir."⁴ The abrogation came right after the election results leaving the Muslim population of Indian Occupied Kashmir in disarray.

India made a good plan for the abrogation of article 370 but miscalculated the reaction. The abrogation appeared at a time when Pakistan's foreign policy was resurging and quite successful in internationalizing the Kashmir dispute. Although India abled to convince the international community that Kashmir dispute was still there because of cross-border terrorism from Pakistan, the abrogation of article 370 drastically changed this international perception. Pakistan's reaction at public and policy levels was quite calculated and surprising for the Indian establishment.

The abrogation of article 370 strengthened BJP's resolve to take stringent actions as per the desires of the radical Hindu voters. The enactment of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) proved to be a boiling point for the opposition parties in India. The regional parties in India especially Trinamool Congress in Bengal and left-wing in the South have their reservations on BJP's Kashmir policy. However, these parties could not politicize the issue due to fear of the hyperbolic reaction of radical Hindu forces. NRC and CAA provided the Indian left

and opposition to take BJP to the task. Both constitutional changes have become the only soft belly of BJP in the last 5 years.

In Modi's 2.0, Kashmir's question and CAA have become the failure of BJP's foreign and domestic policies respectively. More surprisingly, the lockdown in Kashmir and nationwide protests against CAA in India have been complementary to each other. Both issues are taken as examples of racial hatred towards minority communities. After the abrogation of article 370, Pakistan's stance on the matter was received with a cold shoulder but the leadership in Pakistan kept warning the world that much was yet to come. CAA proved those warnings and alarmed the regional countries in particular and the world in general about an expanding Hindutva ideology, if not stopped that would trigger the nuclear threshold.

Hindu Nationalism: A Historical Pretext

Hindu nationalism emerged as a ferocious response to Indian composite culture. It questioned the basis of Indian secular culture and negated the notion of coexistence having termed the rules of invaders exploitative. Hindu nationalism derives social and political expression in the spiritual tradition of Hindu's dominance. It largely defines the contours of Indians and non-Indians and intends to make a Hindu dominated society. It divides the nation and creates diversity in religio-cultural lines. Hindu nationalism wants a strong assertion and is non-accommodative towards other religious identities and ethnicities. It considers them a threat to the one Hindu identity. Hindu nationalism seeks to eliminate diversity and establishes one strong Hindu nation.

The current manifestation of Hindutva pivots around the central conception of *Hindutva*.⁵ Hindu nationalism discredits the historical progression of Indian civilization as diverse where religious and social identities existed side by side in a peaceful manner rather it believes that Hinduness was the central feature around which the Indian civilization has evolved and progress. It remained politically dominant until the intrusion of foreign invaders and the ethos and spiritual values of Hinduism also remained a dominant theme. The Hindu identity according to Hindu nationalists is constituted by three characterizations, i.e., *Jaati*, *Rashtra* and *Sanskriti*. *Jaati* is a common race where *Rashtra* denotes a collective nation and *Sanskriti* is the culture of a common civilization.⁶ The natural view of Hindu identity puts other identities in a confrontational matrix and describes them as a threat to Hindu identity This character of Hindu vs non-Hindus defines the contours and undercurrents of opposition towards non-Hindu identities and ethnicities.

Hindu nationalism in its history remained wary of the Muslim rule and its subsequent dominance. The Muslim rule had spanned over entire India hence making Indian society heterogenous. This heterogeneity was contradictory to the claims of one Hindu identity promulgated by Hindu nationalists. The opposition and enmity towards Muslims gave Hindus an opportunity to instrumentally use the variable of identity to raise unity in the ranks of Hindus and also cultivated a common hatred towards Muslim identity. Hindu religion has tremendous internal diversity and fragmentation amidst

the absence of a central text, belief, or doctrine. The rituals and norms structure also varies across different regions. The prevalent hierarchical social order and caste system are the defining characteristics of Hindu identity.

Hindu nationalism precipitated as an anticolonial undercurrent which opposed the European colonial rule on scriptural grounds. It denounced the notion of “White Men Burden” by eulogizing the scriptural and spiritual advancements of Hinduism. This thinking served as an impetus for the many reformist movements of Hinduism in the modern history⁷ The modern underpinnings of Hindu nationalism are in stark opposition to Indian composite nationalism, the narrative of the Indian National Congress. Hindu nationalism attempted to promote the association to the nation along religious and cultural lines. It further capitalized on the notions like *Baharat Maa* to promote and foster militant nationalist struggle. It also founded the ideological and cultural basis for the Indian independence movement. *Brahmo Samaj* movement was a cultural and religious reformist movement in India.⁸ This movement received well by westernized Indians and discredited the caste discrimination and called for the reinterpretation of Hindu scriptures. The movement of *Arya Samaj* was also a reflection of Hindu reformism which started at the end of the 19th century.⁹ This movement wanted to end the dominance of *Brahman* values and wanted to end the prevalent hierarchical structure caste discrimination of the Indian social structure. Swami Vivekananda and Aurobindo are two influential figures who have everlasting imprints on Hindu ethos and Hindu majoritarian values.¹⁰ Vivekananda wanted to cure western materialism through Hindu spirituality. He had been a very impactful figure who redefined the central notion of Hindu nationalism. He questioned the legitimacy of western superiority and presented Hinduism as an alternate to the western culture and its material undercurrents. The spread of Hindu values cultivated the spirit of national unity and made Hinduism a popular and dominant discourse in Indian polity.¹¹

The Saffron Tide

BJP was formed in 1980 after the collapse of the Janata Party and was led by Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Lal Krishan Advani. BJP in its first phase steered itself away from the ideology of RSS and emphasized socialist traits of Gandhian philosophy. The elections of 1984 were a setback for BJP as it could only clinch two seats. The narrative of Gandhian socialism could not get much acceptance in the polity. Following the defeat in 1984-elections, BJP managed to evoke a close association and working relationship of BJP, Shiv Sena and Vishwa Hindu Parishad. They picked up common symbols and raised unity around the Ayodhya *Ram* temple issue to consolidate, expand and harness public support. *Ram Janmabhoomi* movement strengthened BJP and its allied parties considerably.¹² The outrightly communal approach and its popular manifestation made BJP a significant political force. It effectively used religious symbols and garnered public support. The *Rath Yatra* was an effective political move where Advani dressed up like *Ram* had a countrywide campaign to donate for *Ram* temple. The televising of *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* on *Door Darshan* also created steady support for the cause of BJP and benefitted it politically.¹³ It consequently led to the

increased support of BJP and it made a significant turnaround in 1991-elections by having clinched 120 seats in the Lok Sabha.

Following the demolition of the *Babri Mosque* in 1991, communal riots sparked which took a very devastating turn and led to the loss of many lives. It made the political environment of India polarized and volatile. The crude display of politics by BJP in the aftermath of the demolition of *BJP* consolidated more support for Hindu nationalism. BJP had increased acceptance and it grew more popular in the backdrop of this eventuality. The saffron tide became an alternative for the otherwise composite culture of Indian polity. It made BJP a plausible alternative for the disenchanted voters of Congress and those who were at centre-right and seeking the dominance of Hindus. These all factors precipitated and resultantly led to a victory by BJP in 1996-elections. Although this government could not last long and could only hold reins of power for thirteen days, the victory in elections was demonstrative of a fact that BJP is now a robust political force at the national level who has significant political capital to make government. The power slipped out of the hands of BJP when *Janata Dal* supported by Congress made a government with Deve Gowda as Prime Minister. Inder Kumar Gujral was made the Minister of External Affairs. The withdrawal of support of Gowda by Congress after a year made Inder Kumar Gujral as the Prime Minister of India.¹⁴ BJP with other like-minded regional parties evoked an alliance in 1998 called the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). The upcoming elections brought BJP and Vajpayee in power again. This government again could hold power for merely one year and with new elections in 1999, BJP made a robust inroad in power with Vajpayee as Prime Minister again for a complete tenure. In the span of 18 years, the saffron tide became the undeniable political reality of India.

Modi 1.0 and the Resurgence of Hindutva

The comeback of BJP in 2014 came in the aftermath of the two unimpressive tenures of the Indian National Congress and its United Progressive Alliance (UPA). The emphatic comeback of BJP in this tenure also brought Modi at the forefront. Modi came in the limelight in Gujarat when the Chief Minister Keshubhai Patel faced serious allegations of corruption and embezzlements for which he had to resign.¹⁵ Modi benefitted from this opportunity and got himself nominated for the Chief Minister of Gujarat in 2001. The months after his appointment as Chief Minister of Gujarat, the worst communal riots broke out. Militant Hindus orchestrated arsons and claimed the lives of Muslims in the vogue of impunity. It came in the backdrop that Muslims had torched 58 Hindus on a train. The state of Gujarat, law enforcement agencies and all institutions were complicit in this heinous act. Official statistics revealed that 850 Muslims lost their lives in these riots.¹⁶ The unofficial records and sources confirmed that more than 2000 Muslims lost their lives and 150,000 Muslims sought refuge in camps for the safety of their lives.¹⁷

Modi was blamed for not managing effectively and to have condoned with the militant Hindus who made that violence a nightmare for Muslims. Modi even did not pursue the perpetrators and also did not agree to the resignation of him and his

cabinet.¹⁸ Instead, *Sangh Parivar* tried to use the Gujarati community to provoke them for violence.¹⁹ Modi became an icon of terror and was denied visas for the UK and USA; his career truly hinged on 2002's massacre. Had there been no riots Modi would not have won the 2003-elections in Gujarat with thumping majority.²⁰ In the domestic pretext, it made Modi a leader and ardent hardliner in the ranks of Hindu nationalists and also brought him in the first line of leaders of BJP. This was the reason that when Atal Bihari Vajpayee tried to remove Modi from his seat, the BJP leadership including L.K. Advani supported Modi and he was not removed.²¹ Modi stayed as the Chief Minister of Gujarat from 2001 to 2014.²²

BJP's resurgence and the rise of Modi were simultaneous in the years 2012-2014. The United Progressive Alliance (UPA) depicted the governance in the last years of its rule marked by many scandals and misgovernance. Modi expected the nightmare of Gujrat had substantively transformed the outlook of Gujrat. Gujrat was presented as a model in comparison to Congress's governance.²³ The supporters and protagonists of Modi argued that Modi did not let any catastrophe like Gujrat happen again. He was presented as an inspiration and tales about his self-made aura helped him greatly in becoming BJP's candidate for the Prime Minister in 2014-elections. His extended rule over Gujarat was presented as the decade of development during which the state of Gujarat managed to hit double-digit economic growth. He ensured huge investments in Gujarat and brought business tycoons on the same page. This reputation, later on, helped him in becoming the Prime Minister of India.

BJP made itself a substantive alternative for Hindu traditionalists and the Indian middle class. BJP consolidated ideological base and further expanded itself to incorporate the issues of governance, economic growth and national security in India. The outlook of BJP seemingly is the combination of security, ideology and governance. BJP underscores the same tenets in its public oration, tirade and electoral manifestos. BJP has not restricted itself a myopic ideological party but also reflects the shared vision of India which includes all the prevailing issues of statecraft along with a hardcore ideological base. The thumping electoral win of BJP in 2014 and the percentage of votes was reflective of this phenomenon.²⁴

BJP has completely sidelined the senior leadership like Advani and Jaswant Singh. Jaswant Singh broke association with BJP and said to have been pushed to the wall.²⁵ BJP combined traditional Hinduism with issues of modern statecraft. RSS played a vital role in the electoral landscape after the nomination of Modi and announced to give 2000 volunteers to BJP to run the electoral campaign of Modi.²⁶ BJP tried to inculcate the soft phase of Hindutva in 2014 with a mild approach towards contentious issues and more talked about the economy, development and governance although the *Ram Temple* was still there in the electoral manifesto of 2014-elections.²⁷ Modi's public speeches talked about smart cities, connectivity, roads, infrastructures, tourism and technology. Modi engaged the business community, Indian middle class and youth to get wider electoral support and it worked for him.²⁸ All these factors massively helped BJP and gave BJP a thumping and unprecedented mandate. BJP for the first time single-

handedly got simple majority and the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) reduced Congress to rather a very nominal existence in Lok Sabha.

During his first tenure of government (2014-2019), Modi cultivated a wave of soft Hindutva across India. He displayed aggressive nationalism and tried to instill national patriotism by making national security a major focus. Modi's foreign policy pivoted around border security, internal security, and defense modernization. Modi invested in mainstream media and made it excessively pro-government and polemicized the rhetoric. India under Modi had exacerbated border tensions with Pakistan, China, Bangladesh, and Nepal. The aggressive overtures were used as cosmetics to broaden political support at home. With China, India had a volatile border dispute along the McMahon line, western Himalayas, Doklam, Aksai Chin and Sikkim.²⁹ BJP built rhetoric of not compromising on internal security. The superficial discourse was built around the surgical strike on Pakistan in the aftermath of Uri attacks. In the aftermath of the Pulwama attacks which were carried out by an aggrieved Kashmiri who was humiliated at the hands of Indian security forces, India staged a chimerical mantra of Balakot strikes. India tried to make an incursion in Pakistan's mainland and dropped payload on an unmanned land in Jaba and escaped. The next day India was given a response in a dock fight where its two planes were shot down and the pilot was held captive. The pilot was released afterward as a goodwill gesture. This entire development took place with the Indian elections in the near offing. Modi successfully used this rhetoric of teaching Pakistan a lesson in the domestic pretext and through media, tirade maneuvered the domestic impulse. Dr. Zafar Nawaz Jaspal in his book has highlighted the stratagem of surgical strike and its maneuvering by Modi-led government.³⁰ BJP built rhetoric of attacks from Pakistan-based terror groups, Maoist attacks, Chinese border intrusions and illegal immigrants from Bangladesh jeopardizing India's internal security in its electoral campaign and this polemic marked an, even more, the stronger return of BJP back in power for the consecutive term with the highest ever mandate of Indian history. It is, though, a sad fact that mob lynching of minorities and cow vigilantism and hooliganism of Hindu radical nationalists became a ubiquitous phenomenon in Indian polity during Modi's rule.

Modi 2.0 and the Emerging Realities in India

Modi's 1.0 was a success story only because of India's large size economy and mushrooming businesses. As the priority in the first five years was to improve the economy and then start fulfilling the ideological pledges, the 2.0 began with the falling Indian economy. The abrogation of 370 and CAA might be the right decision in BJP's perspective, the timing is wrong. Both decisions have not triggered governments in the world but verily triggered the international community worldwide. More interestingly, it was not the international community that came to voice for Kashmiris or CAA affectees rather the local Kashmiri diaspora and Indian liberal or left alliance reached the international community to take voice on behalf of the unheard voices.

The second term of Modi in power has not only polarized Indian society but also divided it permanently. The reaction against BJP's policies has been increasing

within Indian society. At the crossroad of socio-political transformation, the old liberal order in India has crossed the horn with the new Hindu nationalist social order. The state machinery and the entire political apparatus have stood by BJP's aspiration. However, the regional divide, liberal segments in almost all states, and a constitutional contest between states and federation have barred BJP from establishing a political order of its desire. The second tenure of Modi is cultivating a phase of hard Hindutva in the Indian polity. The ideological standpoint of BJP is now coming at the forefront which is reflective of non-accommodative behavior towards at large. The highest ever mandate given to BJP in 2019-elections has made Modi and BJP overconfident to redress all the issues who have ideological commitments attached to them. Modi, Amit Shah and Ajit Doval are spearheading India's trajectory to a rather narrow polity with Hindutva at the helm of affairs.

The revocation of article 370 was the first major onslaught of Modi. An inhumane curfew is placed in Kashmir since the revocation of article 370. The miseries and repression of Kashmiris continue unabated. It has given fresh momentum to the local insurgency movement in Kashmir. The educated youth and people from all walks of life are joining the resistance movement. The examples of this phenomenon are Manan Wani, Rafi Bhatt and Raiz Naiko. The illegal annexation of Kashmir on August 5, 2020, makes the already precarious region more volatile. The human rights violations and the atrocities of Indian armed forces are impinging Kashmiris intensely and severely.

The amendment in CAA is the second reckless step taking by Modi in the first year of his second tenure. This amendment specifically targets Indian Muslims and downgrades them to second-class Indian citizens where they will have to prove their citizenship. It has sparked a national level controversy in India and is tantamount to revoking India's secular identity and a significant step towards making Hindu *Rashtra*.³¹ The countrywide protests against the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) and NRC have emerged as a daunting challenge to the Modi-led government in its second tenure. The Ayodhya judgment given by the Supreme Court of India is symptomatic of the change and wave of Hindutva prevailing in India. It was a judgment given to satisfy the will of the majority. Indian justice dispensation is dual-faced when it comes to communal prosecutions and matters. Earlier a decision was given against Afzal Guru with no credible evidence of him involved in the Indian parliament attacks of 2001. In 2019, a court in India has acquitted three Kashmiri men from the Lajpat Nagar blast case after 23 years in jail.³²

It is pertinent to mention that Modi's 2.0 is not limited to changing the domestic landscape of the Indian society. It is aimed at creating an impact across the borders of India in South Asia. The resistance at the domestic level is limited to the state level but it is not alone. The South Asian states including Pakistan, Nepal, and Bangladesh have voiced against BJP's actions impacting the region in particular and Asia in general. What is missing is a genuine collaboration between the protestors in Indian (both Kashmir and CAA affectees) and governments of regional countries. The voices raised against BJP in South Asia are not at the government level except Pakistan and

only social activists have spoken against the injustice. The recent standoff with China in the Galwan valley has badly dented Modi's repute. Modi's muscular nationalism is for every other country in the region except China. India's apparent consternation with China was a fact check for Modi's aggressive and offensive foreign policy but Modi chose to demonstrate docility. The dispute of the Line of Actual Control (LAC) was the litmus test of Modi's foreign policy but India's cautious and restrained response demonstrates that India under Modi takes China calculus very differently as compared to the other neighbors in the region. The border issues with Nepal are also resounding. Nepal's parliament recently changed its map through a constitutional amendment after India's claims on its certain territories. The Northeast of India is also facing consternation with secessionist movements.

Conclusion

The heightened bashing of Pakistan, rhetoric and tirade have provoked more radicalization in the Indian state and society. The hard phase of Hindutva has triggered India's stride into a narrow and parochial polity. The minorities are unsafe and insecure in Hindutva-led Modi's India. The belligerent onslaught by Prime Minister Modi in his 2.0 term does not augur well for the region. The grossly illegal revocation of article 370 and CAA have changed the contours of state and society in India. Pakistan needs to focus on how to deal with a proto-fascist Hindu nationalist Prime Minister. It would be important to remember that Pakistan may not be at war with Hindutva, but Hindutva is at war with Pakistan given the islamophobia mindset of Modi, Hindutva followers, and BJP.

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