RISE OF RIGHT-WING INDIAN NATIONALISM: IMPLICATIONS FOR SOUTH ASIA

Marium Fatima, Ghulam Ali Murtaza and Arshi Saleem Hashmi[*]

Abstract

This paper examines the rise of right-wing Hindu nationalism in Indian politics in the 1980s premised on the hatred of minorities. It qualitatively analyses the political catalysts for the rise of Hindu nationalists, rationale behind Hindutva initiative, right-wing organizational interests, internal politicking among political parties, and the role powerful individuals played to promote Hindutva ideology through the works of intellectuals and expert in the field. It takes into account the important dimensions of the strategy employed to instill anxiety against the threat amongst the masses to draw electoral support. The paper elaborates on the discourse strategies utilized to propagate the Hindutva ideology within Indian society through media and politics. It actively analyses the ramifications of Hindutva ideology on Indian domestic politics as well as regional politics and highlights the potential risks that may ensue in South Asia.

Keywords: Hindu Nationalism, Discourse, Hindutva, BJP, Right-Wing.

Introduction

Modern Indian history of the 1980s witnessed political turmoil as India faced secessionist movements in Assam and Punjab in addition to the longstanding issue of Kashmir, thus, marking violent conflicts based on caste and community a recurrent theme of mobilization and counter-mobilization in politics. Indian National Congress, predominantly, a centre-left party despite earlier electoral triumphs faced shrinking popular support because of the bad governance and corruption, however, increasing political insecurity led Congress to evoke majoritarian sentiments to recapture its lost political ground.

During the 1980s, uncertainty pervaded Indian society, particularly, its middle class while Hindu nationalists skillfully drew political advantage through a communal politics and organizational competence against this backdrop. In 1989, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) succeeded in winning eighty-five seats in general elections (previously held two) signifying the popularity of Hindu nationalists in Indian politics. Towards the end of this politically-fateful decade, the remarkable success of Hindu nationalists transcended beyond politics, transforming the social landscape of India and depicting innate acceptance of Hindu nationalism in the minds of Indian polity. Therefore, this

---

[*]Marium Fatima is lecturer at the Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, National Defence University, Islamabad. Ghulam Ali Murtaza received his Masters Degree from School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, UK. Dr. Arshi Saleem Hashmi is Head, Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, National Defence University, Islamabad.

paper discusses crucial factors contributing to the spectacular victory of Hindu nationalism in the 1980s and the reasons for not reaching maturity earlier. This study advances by analyzing two general aspects. The first aspect is the political environment of the 1980s where developments prior to the decade defined and influenced the politics by engendering a slew of crisis which in turn was capitalized by nationalists to gain recognition and influence.

The second dimension of this study deliberates upon the internal progress of Hindutva movement (a predominant form of Hindu nationalism) and the dynamics, strategy and discourse employed by Hindu nationalists to expand influence and gain political victory. It argues that the interplay of two dimensions suggested the presence of a dialectical relationship between them and that the two did not play out in isolation from each other. This paper attempts to treat the two in separate sections to make lucid arguments despite an established link between the two aspects which becomes evident later as the work proceeds further.

This study has four parts: the first part commences with organizational history and ideological description of Hindu nationalism, juxtaposed to various affiliates. The second part presents the favorable political backdrop of the 1980s for the concomitant surge of Hindu nationalism and the crisis-ridden political environment under Congress. The formation of volatile elements in the political scene of the 1980s which occasioned the mobilization on the basis of identity (caste and communal) has been analyzed on the premise of a cohesive and encompassing theoretical framework. Furthermore, this work would examine if the uncertain and unpredictable political and social environment prevailing in the 1980s benefitted the Hindu Nationalists by providing fertile grounds to secessionist movements and economic deterioration. Additionally, this paper divulges the chemistry of disparate political contexts with political actors. In the third part, the focus is shifted away from structure and context to disclose how Hindutva elements used discourse and cultural practices as a strategy to develop an identity of selfhood and subjectivity for people which led to its emergence as a unified and well-coordinated political force in the 1980s. The fourth and final section of the paper discusses the implications of the right-wing Hindu nationalism within India and the neighboring states as the potential clash of communal ideologies.

Ideology of Hindu Nationalism

Hindu nationalism in the latter half of the 19th century, as an ideology and political project, originated via three methods: firstly, British objectification and essentialization of Indian communities; secondly, Indian civilization's unique characterization through the intellectual contribution of orientalists; thirdly, certain Hindus were inclined to emulate Semitic religion's discursive techniques.[1] There is no evidence to suggest that in the subcontinent the right-wing Hinduism offered articulate practical resistance to British imperialists but the right-wing was convinced that decentralization of Hinduism was the religious fault-line that made room for foreign powers, Mughals and British, to subjugate India. The Indo-Persian origin of the Mughal dynasty has been overlooked by Hindu nationalists branding it as foreigner despite

spending more than 1200 years in the Indian subcontinent while erroneously owned Aryanism which has foreign roots in Central Asia. Hinduism is a tolerant and pragmatic religion termed as pseudo-secularism by Hindu nationalists (Hindutva ideologues), a derogatory political term in the Indian context to demean the minority pacification efforts of secularists labelling these efforts as anti-Hindu, whereas, right-wing politicians capitalize on the term 'communalism.' In order to make concerted efforts for a centralized and forceful interpretation of Hinduism, a Hindu physician Dr. Hedgewar (1925) formed a nationalist organization, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), asserting multi-tiered influence on all strata of Indian society.[2]

A Hindu nationalist family, Sangh-Parivar, is a group of organizations with independent policies but having common objectives entrenched in the philosophy of Hinduism spanning politics and defense of the faith. The religiously pluralistic India, envisioned by Gandhi, did not fit well with the non-accommodationist RSS ideology which culminated in the assassination of Gandhi at the hands of Nathuram Godse, an incensed RSS member. RSS was briefly banned in the aftermath of Gandhi's assassination but the outfit became re-functional acquiring the largest membership of around 6 million Hindus.[3]

After the partition of the subcontinent in 1947, RSS being a staunch proponent of one Holy Undivided Land and opponent of the right of self-determination for minorities attributed the partition of India to be a direct backfire of inadequate secular pro-minority Nehruvian policies erroneously granting them political representation as Indian Citizens. Contrarily, Hindu nationalists aspired for a 'Hindu-nation India' without minorities or minorities' submissive to Hindutva ideology (not to be mistaken with Hinduism). In contemporary Indian politics, the nationalists accuse Congress of having an appeasement policy towards Muslims embedded in secularism, whereas, the Congress politicians assert that RSS claims of Hindus and Muslims being two separate nations led to trust deficit of Muslims in 'Free India', therefore, the two-nation theory was founded followed by the struggle for political power in a separate state (Pakistan).

Dogmatically, Hindu nationalists narrowed down the perception of a nation to culture by using culture-specific terminology, such as organic and homogenous entity while other religious communities especially Muslims were excluded. The threat perception attached to Indian Muslims was founded on false security risk to the integration of the Indian state. Savarkar, the chief Hindutva ideologue, defined 'Hindu' broadly including Sikhs, Buddhists, and Jains. Since Muslims and Christians fall short of fulfilling the criteria of Hindu religion, therefore, their loyalty to the state is generally suspected.[4] The ideological rivals of Sangh-Parivar labelled this phenomenon as perpetration of saffron terror and authoritarian majoritarianism of Hindu right-wing nationalists.

Emergence of Hindu Nationalists on Political Realm

The emergence of Hindu nationalism in the 1980s was studied and explored in the failure of two principal architectures in the realm of Indian politics, i.e., the secular Indian state and Congress party. Scholars, such as Nandy and Chatterjee (both anarcho-

communitarians) link the rise of Hindu nationalism to the entire initiative of rationalization and modernization of the Indian state.[5] In Nandy's view-point, against the institutional backdrop of Indian society, modernism and secularism as an initiative could not become successful. He candidly places the blame on the Indian state for allowing the rise of Hindu nationalism. Nandy, a staunch supporter of Gandhi, asserts that state-institutions and modernism were unsuitable, therefore, the Indian state initiated a disenchanting and dislocating process of modernization. According to his critique, an implication that emanated from the modernization discourse manifested when modernization adversely altered the religious, local and communal landscape of Indian polity. Nandy lamented the consequences of this process as clueless Indian people were left devoid of dignity falling prey to surging religious radicalism which he termed as a false religion.[6]

Nandy's criticism of Indian secularism rather enforced secularism and modernization is founded on the assumption that South Asian religions as systems of faith have an inbuilt mechanism and tolerant apparatus for coexistence to each other. Nandy asserted that modernization and secularization initiatives undertaken by the Indian state had sapped and altered the capability of religions to function as systems of faith. He contended that modernization weakened the ability of religion to address the needs of people in India. Therefore, religion instead of acting as a system of faith caused the psychological fulfilment of its adherents as an ideology channelized to be intolerant of diversity. The popular shift towards religion as an ideology promoted self-assertion of ethnic groups represented by radical movements, for instance, Hindu nationalism or religious identity which Nandy coined as a perversion of faith.[7]

Partha Chatterjee explores the inter-relationship of Indian secularism vis-a-vis religion. Chatterjee resembles Nandy for supporting the removal of religion as an ideology from the political sphere and believes that religious tolerance should have been an effective tool to achieve it but his ideals about secularism are divorced from Nandy's point of view. Chatterjee primarily contends that secularism (not estranged to Indian politics, therefore, still able to succeed) fails in India because, practically, religion is not completely isolated from Indian politics.[8] State-intervention, according to Chatterjee, entails approval of one community over another which results in religiously charged politics suggesting the transfer of decision-power on religious matters and communities outside the scope of the democratic sphere, thus, separates religion from politics.

Thomas Blom Hansen presents another critique of Indian secularism in *The Saffron Wave* amd characterizes the predominant myth of Nehruvian-era with hyper-rationalism and secularism, a notion recognized not only by the mainstream politicians but also the political rightists and leftists otherwise critical of the notion. Blom contended that the Nehruvian notion of India did not embrace the vision of secular citizenship.[9] Communities were taken as a point of reference by colonial powers in India to comprehend the complicated Indian social landscape through essentialization presenting governance problems (persisting in the post-colonial era). Additionally, the colonial government policy that educated classes necessitated a different governance

challenge and strategy persevered in the post-colonial era (Mandal commission report). Hansen quoted Kaviraj who brilliantly expounded on Nehru regime's inclusive secular public sphere fit to sophisticated and un-intimidated elites at perfect ease with a stroll.[10] India, in an attempt to reinforce its legitimacy, presented communities (culturally and religiously diverse) as a charming exhibition of Indian nationhood and culture, an alternative to fragmented communities. Hansen asserts that policies of the centralized planning commission and its rationality stood in stark contrast to the dominant structure of clienteles erected by none else but the Nehru regime to ensure Congress grip on power which later revealed the illogical stress on the Indian state.

Arguments propounded by all the three authors suggest different features of political contextualization since partition which helped Hindu nationalism to succeed later. Given that the observations may be flawed, for instance, Nandy's argument of religion as inherently tolerant system of faith is unsubstantiated. Similarly, one may question Chatterjee's proposition that if in a democratic fashion religious groups are allowed to regulate their internal matters then how would they thwart any chances of political influence and how the cascading effects of such politics would be controlled to guard the democratic values of a secular state.

Pragmatically, the experience and empirical evidence support the assertions of these authors despite the shortcomings. Hansen's argument, for instance, about weak Indian secularism and the rise of Hindu nationalism in the 1980s is intelligible.[11] Hindu nationalists allege that the state and Congress party's pacification of Muslim minority and disparagement of Hindu religion provided an impetus to their movement, a view that resonates well with their supporters and conforms to Nandy and Chatterjee's opinion. Since religion was not completely disconnected from Indian politics, therefore, in Chatterjee's view, Indian democratic politics remained confounded by religious issues.[12] The legislation, such as the Hindu Code Bill (1950) ensured Hindu nationalists' relevance in Indian politics opening the opportunity for continued exploitation. Likewise, the Supreme Court decision in the Shah-Bano case and the subsequent decision by Congress government to counterpoise the ruling through parliament paved the way for religious polarization of the country, stimulated the Hindutva movement.[13] These authors merely offered explanations to an extent, however, they failed to take factors into account other than religion and religious communities instrumental in the surge of Hindu nationalism. The mutual interaction between religious communities and the secular state remained beyond the scope of their analysis. Therefore, this study attempts to find that why did Hindu nationalists achieve significant success in the era of the 1980s and not earlier.

The success of Hindu nationalism in the 1980s can be best expounded and comprehended by Sumantra Bose's theoretical studies which adjusted and realigned Gramsci's work into Indian perspective and context. With the help of concepts derived from Gramsci's research work, Bose designed an all-encompassing theoretical framework to investigate the rise of Hindu nationalism situated in the entirety of India's 1980s political sphere.[14] Following Gramsci, Bose studied the growth of the Hindutva element against the backdrop of what he calls 'organic-crisis' of the Indian state.

Systematic features of permanence constitute such organic-crisis which, essentially, is multidimensional where communalism is one aspect of it. He argued that the glorification of communalism and the conflict it represents underestimated and veiled the inherent challenges in Indian society based on ethnicity, caste and linguistic schism. These social conflicts hold fundamental illustrative importance to rationalize the up-rise of the Hindutva movement.[15]

Bose by realigning with Gramscian notions splits organic-crisis in Indian state into two major aspects: first aspect function at the level of a democratic system while the other is situated in the sphere of the multiparty political system. The first dimension where democratic regimes have to deal with the crisis of legitimacy is further divided into two constituents:

- Regime efficacy crisis which considerably represents that regime is short of competence to deal with the fundamental political problem at the root of a political system;
- Effectiveness which signifies the regime's capability for the successful execution of policies (already formulated).

According to Bose, the Indian state failed to resolve four formational problems existing in Indian political organization, i.e., lack of national integration, slow economic progress, absence of social egalitarianism, and strength of multiparty democratic values by consolidation in a democracy.[16] Congress party previously wielded political and ideological hegemony but in a multiparty political spectrum it is unable to maintain the socio-political supremacy. Drawing on Bose's works, the entire crisis served as a background which became the context for pro-Hindutva political elites, the BJP to grapple for power. Examining the political field of the 1980s through the lens of theoretical framework adopted in Gramsci and Bose's work, it elucidates upon catalysts for the origins of the surge of Hindu nationalism. In the 1980s, owing to the Indian state's failure in regulating centre-state relations and strong tendencies for centralization (crisis of legitimacy of the democratic regime), secessionist movements rose in India leading to a spike in violence.

The middle-class in India, particularly, became prey to insecurities spawned by secessionist movements; both Congress and Hindu nationalists took political advantage of this insecurity. Majoritarian democracy or political fashion adopted by Hindutva forces in the 1980s had already become an accepted mode of politics initially pioneered by Congress into Indian politics. In the face of diminishing political hegemony, Congress adopted a majoritarian style of democracy in the 1970s and 1980s, a political reconfiguration of new form across India. Decreased supremacy of Congress in the 1970s introduced majoritarian politics charming marginalized communities, however, in the 1980s, majoritarian politics acquired communal character.

Bose identified the legitimacy crisis of democracy as mass-mobilization based on caste discrimination and consequent violence with counter-mobilization of rival castes presented structural problems. Social injustice made quota-system for lower castes controversial which denotes a failure of the Indian state and dominant political

party. The political scene became confounded by the appearance of social groups, therefore, the patronage policy of Congress which had guaranteed its supremacy, had become fragmented. Superior castes so far supporting Congress in Gujrat and Uttar-Pradesh withdrew support in the 1980s fearing loss of political grounds to BJP as middle castes started intense political activism. As evident from the above discussion, Hindutva nationalism found an encouraging situation in the politically explosive 1980s with structural problems. The recognition of majoritarian style of politics as mainstream deterioration of centre-state relations and caste conflict are among others.

Mobilization of Right-Wing Hindu Nationalists

Hindu nationalists were quick to grab the political opportunities offered in the 1980s and they lost no time in using diverse strategies to rally people behind their political agendas materializing ineptly fertile ground. Hansen contended that most of the individuals constituting a society identify themselves through cultural and commercial expressions and political discourse in a given public sphere. Hansen, hypothetical supposition is corroborated by Hindu nationalists' deliberate endeavors to use symbolic Hindu practices to influence political identities using Hindutva discourse.

Hindu religious pilgrimage to sacred sites, *yatras* and smaller *upayatras* (religious processions of lesser significance relying on religious symbolism), were arranged by Sangh-Parivar in the 1980s to guarantee public visibility and capture public space. In order to register an impact in the society during these processions, effective communication strategy employing theatrical display of rituals including a symbolically significant act was the newly concocted and reinterpreted myth about Lord Ramayana's relevance to the contemporary India. In 1987, state-owned television channels broadcasted heroic Ramayana and Mahabharata holding Indians of varied castes glued lending support to Hindu nationalists. Hansen believes that Hindu Nationalists found fertile ground in Indian society from a plethora of imagery and narrative broadcasting through epics which helped in mobilizing people for the Ram janambhoomi campaign after 1989.[17]

In 1985, the reorganized Vishva-Hindu-Parishad (VHP) amongst all affiliates of RSS was at the vanguard to create unity among Hindu sects through organizing a chain of processions towards Ayodhya, where a committee for sacrifice for the liberation of Lord Rama's birthplace served as a stage. These strategies led the Faizabad District Court and later the Supreme Court of India to give in to the pressure, therefore, decreed to open Babri Mosque for Hindu worship. VHP extended its network amongst Indian diaspora through Diaspora Diplomacy who welcomed the VHP message openly and started funding Sangh-Parivar because of disconnect from local religious backdrop while the people at home did not embrace the message easily.[18]

Hindu nationalists changed their strategy in the political domain, therefore, BJP which had initially adopted a moderate approach until the elections of 1984 acquired a more aggressive posture because the moderate approach did not sit well with RSS leadership and cadre. In its former incarnation, Jan-Sangh, originally a nationalist

right-wing political party, constituted a coalition government with Janata Party in 1977 opposing Congress. Janata Party later morphed into Bharatiya Janata Party in 1981, which currently holds the largest representation in the Indian parliament. RSS overtly supported Congress for Delhi state legislature elections and general election (1984). Since BJP was wiped out in 1984-elections that forced BJP camp to rethink their political strategy. BJP and RSS political realignment in the 1980s was equivalent to submission of BJP's conservative respectable high-command, nonetheless, this change resulted in political success for BJP in 1989-elections.

The internal developments within Sangh-Parivar demonstrates the growing confidence of Hindu nationalists in the 1980s. In the middle of increasing insecurity, social disintegration, and economic discontent of the 1980s, particularly, more profound for superior and intermediary caste Hindus, the discourse strategy of Hindu nationalists involving the display of power and manliness reminiscing imaginary golden history and most importantly the promise of establishing a society based on harmony proved to be a matter of reassurance for a considerable number of people in India. Hindutva forces in Indian politics used abusive language in public discourse which in addition to undereducated classes disappointingly included some well-known academicians. Surprisingly, the Hindutva philosophy was entertained in the works of academics who originally embraced liberal and left-centrist views. The Nehruvian secularism concept during 1947 revolved around three major pillars, i.e., parliamentary democracy, state-led economic development, and secularism.

Democracy and economic prosperity fared well in India but secularism is debatable because Congress showed contradictions of right and left. Congress was more of a right-wing party during partition with a tainted track record of minority rights but leftists within Congress tended to be more egalitarian and compassionate towards all Indian communities. Currently, Hindutva right-wing lean towards social-order embedded in Hindu religion challenging egalitarian perception built by Congress through political discourse to woo increased political support of traditional religious communities. The general narrative of Hindu extremists was constructed on the idea that political space had shrunk for the Hindu population due to secular Congress which coerced Hindus to shun any religious discourse under threat.

The right-wing politicians deemed custodians of conservative ideologies (Hindutva movement) gained considerable public support especially from less educated classes because it offers an easy solution for ensuring Hindu structural order and protection against social adventurism of other ideologies. Right-wing Hindus do not interact with other religious communities because they follow conservative social ideologies due to preconceived prejudices. Whereas, Intellectual classes with liberal ideals tend to be non-conformist to traditional Hindutva ideology, therefore, more receptive of new ideas conforming to the original political manifesto of Congress.

In recent years, less cultured elements brought right-wing revolution erroneously believing that Hinduism was endangered despite 80 percent of Indians following Hinduism. Additionally, Hindus enjoyed 70 years of continuous economic and political control yet right-wing successfully harps on 'threat' and 'danger' mantra in

public discourse. Hindutva brand of one leader, one religion and one language, is supported through constructed facts disregarding historical diversity of India; dissent is tagged as a threat to order, therefore, propagating intolerant anti-democratic values. Academics and journalists tried to expose Hindu leaders discourse sowing Hindutva seeds establishing religious supremacy of Hinduism against other religions through different approaches. Hindutva politicians planned to convert Hinduism into an unyielding monochromatic entity bent at discovering its masculine and aggressive side to ensure Aryanization. They erased the difference between Hindu religion and Hindu-Rashtra demonizing Muslims as disloyal to India and pitching Hindus against Muslims.

Implications of Hindu Right-Wing Nationalism

Before partition, Congress as an anti-colonial movement reclaimed political power against British colonizers; however, the current shift in Indian politics has caused BJP to declare other nations as invaders. BJP official websites candidly designate India as a 'Hindu civilization' steadfast in the face of invading Turk and Afghan Muslim armies symbolizing Hindus as 'we the natives' and Muslims as 'others the outsiders.' This demonstrates that BJP is bent upon politicizing the indigenous Indian communities on the lines of religion and does not shy away from divisive politics in favor of the majority Hindu population. In order to comprehend the Indian right-wing politics, BJP's rise to power thrice and ensuing confrontational foreign policy and religious bigotry can be studied linearly. During the first term in power, BJP leader Vajpayee on his visit to the US (2000) remarked being RSS member first and Indian Prime Minister later.[19] BJP's first tenure (1998) marked extreme measures nuclearizing South-Asia, warmongering rhetoric of rightist politicians against Pakistan, improved ties with Israel disregarding the sensitivities of a huge population resenting Israeli expansionist designs and Palestinian human-rights violation.[20] A favorable foreign-policy towards Israel was the first step with symbolic significance dawning many years down the line when BJP came into power again (2019).

The second BJP tenure (2014) capitalized on jingoistic posture in election campaign towards Pakistan; the electoral-win for Modi, master-mind of Gujrat Muslim massacre, manifests an acceptance of right-wing Hindu nationalism. Modi's government refused to condemn Israeli air-strikes on Gaza and abstained from voting in the UN while agreements for strong bilateral relations between Modi-Netanyahu displays paradigm-shift in India-Israel relations.[21] Modi's government adopted a deliberate strategy to enforce Hindu literature in educational institutions, imposed laws against cow slaughter, boycotted Indian movies which promoted the message of tolerance towards Muslims, strict bans on Christian missionaries, and the policy to grant Indian nationality to non-Muslim Bengalis only constitute a combination of extreme actions intended to sponsor widespread cultural-violence in India.[22] Hindu right-wing groups under BJP's political patronage try to establish strict control over protesting against the story-line of Bollywood movie *Padmaavat* depicting love between a 14th-century Hindu queen and a Muslim king suggesting that inter-communal relations in India are combustible. Hindutva forces' effort to radicalize art is a strategy to stifle thought-

process so that no intellectual academician dare venture into liberal or inclusive pursuits of art.[23]

One step-ahead is the attack on architectural legacy. The rightist politicians argued that Taj-Mahal had no status of Indian (identifying Indian as Hindu) heritage because it was built by a Muslim ruler which predicts conflict of culture, history and art within the Indian society. [24] Academically, right-wing demand for Hindu holy-books to be made a national scripture because common Indian ancestry was 'Hindu first', depicts that Hindutva forces are seriously attempting to indoctrinate the next generation with one ideology. Politically, a law-maker rather a Hindutva ideologue at National Assembly eulogized Gandhi's assassin, Godse, as a national hero conveyed a message of gloom for the very fabric of the Indian society.[25] Rise of Hindu right-wing political discourse culminated in populist majoritarian dictatorship causing the public to lose power suppressing all political dissent and policy disapproval. Any criticism levelled at the Modi regime draws a very undemocratic black-mailing response of being anti-state and pro-Pakistan posture.[26] It is a discourse-strategy employed to preserve social-order and national-security, therefore, the Modi government brutally cracks down on valid political dissent playing upon the Hindu populations' insecurity of disintegration.

Socially, Hindu-Muslim tension over cow is old but Hindu right-wing militants aided by BJP's pro-cow ideology stigmatized the Muslims (for beef-consumption) emboldening Hindus to settle personal-vendettas on the pretext of Muslim eating, selling or buying beef. Hindu mob is galvanized into lynching, attacking Muslims with bricks and burning homes upon allegations of slaughtering (or eating) cow.[27] In order to challenge the political history by chalking out a different national identity, Hindutva elements frequently raise monochromatic saffron flags to represent 'Greater Mother India' (with expansionist designs include today's Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka) instead of Indian national flag (trichromatic representing minorities) which envisaged a pluralistic society.

Departing from internationally recognized humanitarian values, Hindu nationalists use national security as a tool against persecuted groups declaring Rohingya Muslim refugees as terrorists. Right-wing discourse in India is less cultivated often making recourse to threatening and repulsive incitements propagating a threat perception against any change in social-order.[28] International relations in South-Asia have specifically become strained owing to hardline policies, tough rhetoric against Pakistan, and frequent military aggression at the Line of Control (LOC) in Kashmir. Hindu nationalist (Modi) government openly supports insurgency in Baluchistan to destabilize Pakistan and derail China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to stop potential economic boom which may hinder its hegemonic designs.[29] The right-wing Hindu government also tried enforcing the Hindutva ideology in Nepal pressurizing it to declare Hinduism as state religion. Nepal's decision to adopt secularism brought a confrontational response from BJP through a blockade.[30]

The hostile reaction to innocent civilians fleeing persecution branding them as 'outsiders', demand for firm military action in Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK) in stark contrast to the Law of Occupying Powers, and human-rights violations of minorities

and lowers castes are the outcome of bigoted beliefs of right-wing politicians making the public discourse.[31] John Stuart Mill (1861) rightly said that adherence to conservative notions does not necessitate mental alertness or thought-process because it is an effort to maintain status-quo which BJP is arguably trying to do.[32] Rise of the Hindutva ideology candidly promote Hindu religious fundamentalism where Sangh-Parivar demands a Hindu country, however, BJP's narrative of a cohesive and homogenous society is challenged by the presence of a huge minority population (twenty percent of the total population). BJP's fantasy to rid India of minorities, i.e., 'purify the country', difficult to achieve so far, nevertheless, the Hindutva ideologues after assuming power again in 2019 have set the year 2021 as the deadline to purge India of all other religious denominations.[33]

In the absence of an effective opposition, the Modi government after winning the 2014-elections morphed itself into an authoritarian regime despite acquiring power through electoral competition in a multi-party system. The Modi regime was placed in an advantageous position, therefore, it influenced the 2019-election results by using coercive tactics to silence opposition on the ploy of national security and identity.[34] Strong Hindutva forces in India reignited the Khalistan movement by mobilizing Sikh diaspora,[35] whereas, earlier Congress decision to make Manmohan Singh Prime Minister had weakened the radical Sikh separatists.[36]

In Kashmir, a Muslim-majority autonomous territory under Indian military occupation, BJP created an unprecedented divide by mobilizing the Hindu population to communal riots in 2014. Alliance of People's Democratic Party with BJP disillusioned Kashmiri youth and fueled the separatist movement, thus, drawing a strong reaction from Indian armed forces. The extrajudicial killing of young Hizbul-Mujahideen commander, Burhan Wani (2016), aggravated the situation. BJP rolled back political efforts of previous governments to keep Kashmir a bilateral issue between India and Pakistan in the spirit of Shimla Agreement (1972) by flagrant human-rights violations drawing attention of the international audience.[37] Pakistan has persistently lobbied to internationalize the human-rights violations in IOK to weaken India's strategic supremacy since the right of self-determination provided by the Security Council Resolutions has been denied to Kashmiris.[38] The office of High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) issued an international report five days after imposition of Governor's rule in IOK on June 14, 2018, criticizing the BJP government for human-rights violations, thus, demanding a UN Inquiry.[39]

Sidelining political decency, Modi made fiery speeches to raise public anxiety as a psychological tactic based on religious-phobia that brought him political victory in 2019-elections but increased vengeance against Muslims.[40] Indian armed forces under Modi displayed pristine brinkmanship by crossing into Chinese Territory in June 2017 leading to a 73-day stalemate to prevent the construction of a road on behalf of Bhutan. Without calculating the inherent weaknesses of Indian armed forces, India is flexing its military muscles competitively, driving India into a Thucydides trap exhibiting the importance of US-India relationship. General Rawat also expressed the possibility of a two-front war with China and Pakistan, drawing candid diplomatic snub from China.[41]

In the milieu of February 14, 2019, Pulwama attack on Police force convoy in IOK, the BJP government gained political edge in pre-election campaign by making allegations against Pakistan for harboring terrorist attacks inside India. Though Pakistan denied, the BJP government upped its ante against Pakistan with threats of surgical strikes pushing the entire region to the brink of war, benefitting politically by military adventurism on February 27, 2019 to quell Indian public eagerness for disciplining Pakistan. Political manifesto of abrogation of Articles 35-A and 370 (determining the special autonomous status of Kashmir) allowed Modi to win the election with a greater majority and amend the Indian constitution by scrapping Article 370 on August 5, 2019. Kashmiris, even pro-Indian political leadership, believe that this unilateral legal move is tantamount to lawfare, ultra-vires of Indian constitution.

From a legal standpoint, firstly, since the right of self-determination of Kashmiris and demilitarization has been recognized by UNSC Resolutions No 39, 47 and 122, therefore, the current military conflict entails the application of the Geneva Conventions of armed conflicts of international character. Secondly, if the Indian constitutional arrangements vis-a-vis Kashmir are accepted then it would draw the implementation of Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocol II. Adopting the first legal perspective means that under international law, the Indian government as an occupying power violated a series of positive legal obligations to administer the occupied territory under articles 47 and 49 of the Geneva Convention-IV. Genocide Watch issued genocide alert about IOK, therefore, advising the UN to warn India not to commit genocide in Kashmir and Assam.[42] BJP's Discriminatory Citizenship Amendment Bill (2019) stripping Muslims of Indian citizenship and dividing the families in Assam redeveloped the refugee crisis, which may potentially lead to a protracted social conflict with Bangladesh. The Sri Lankan government is dismayed with external influences from foreign forces involved in frequent attacks on minority Muslims even before the Easter attacks (April 2019). Frequently, fingers point towards Modi for spreading Hindutva Fascism to Sri Lanka pitching Buddhists and Christians against Muslims while cementing ties with Tamil Hindus to recreate internal disturbance in Sri Lanka.[43]

Conclusion

Successive Indian regimes' policy of accommodating minorities varied with political climate. Congress under Indira Gandhi subtly played on 'Hindu card' comparatively less obvious but existent. Congress, however, constructed an attractive narrative for majority Hindus that minorities particularly Muslims could make political demands which the 'liberal' Congress government addressed to make a show of Indian democracy and secularism. In hindsight, Congress downfall since the 1980s adversely changed the fate of Indian politics by allowing BJP to become a political contender supported from all strata of Indian society. Rise of Hindutva did not emerge in vacuum unlike serious neighboring society where extremist ideologies were "alien", artificially imposed through state-policies, such as Pakistan. Mainstream religious beliefs culturally evolved in India but the interesting aspect was the deep-seated belief in a secular political framework. Hindu population did not borrow ideas under external influences

but they existed already yet subdued under political ideal of a secular state. What BJP and prior to that VHP did was to convince the population to reclaim their identity and express it forcefully.

The analytical outcome of this work suggests that new generations should give up romanticizing the Indian secularism of past since secular India run by political elites contained the possibilities, as discussed in this article, for emergence of extremist Hindu nationalism. Therefore, modern activists struggling to restore secularism should critically comprehend the kind of value systems required to avoid reproducing an antithesis which would increase their dismay. BJP deems religious freedom for minorities, a privilege not a democratic or constitutional right. Hindutva politics thrives on polarization rather than reconciliation driven by sabre-rattling against the fear of enemy ignoring poverty, disease and lack of education in India. In 1963, Donald E. Smith contended in his book while expounding on Indian secularism that "democracy and secularism are tightly held together by logic. If India abandons one, the other will go."[44]

Hindutva extremism has no ramifications for international politics but may prove to be a serious miscalculation if Muslim victimization within India invites a backlash from neighboring countries. Since moderates are steadily being phased out of Indian politics allowing hardliners to set the stage for discourse. Abrogation of the special status of Kashmir and Assam Citizenship Amendment Bill (2019) are the laws targeting Indian Muslims that may entail radicalization or indigenous insurgency. Nuclearized relationships in the strategic equation would complicate matters as the political sphere in the region is disarrayed with religiously driven nationalism. India, as a secular state, has become 'Hindustan, a home of Hindus only' demonstrating colonial characteristics where consent and dissent, two keywords are suppressed. Kashmir and Assam are not a simple question of territorial integrity or entitled citizenship rather grave human-rights concern. Reelection of staunch Hindu nationalists (2019) denotes that Indians not only support the tapered Hindu vision presented by Hindutva forces but demands for a more tapered vision.

References

1   Corbridge, Stuart and John Harriss. 2000. *Reinventing India*. Cambridge: Polity Press.182-183.

2   Jaffrelot, Christopher.2005. *The Sangh Parivar*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

3   Jaffrelot, Christopher. 1999. *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics: 1925 to the 1990s: Strategies of Identity-building, Implantation and Mobilisation*. India: Penguin Books, 33.

4   Ibid., 16-17.

5   Nandy, Ashish. 1999."The politics of secularism and the recovery of Religious tolerance." In *Mirrors of Violence*, 76-77. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, 76-77.

6   Ibid., 194-195.

7   Ibid., 135-158.

8   Chatterjee, Partha. 1993. The *Nation and its Fragments*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 88-103.

9   Hansen, Thomas Blom. 1999. *The Saffron Wave*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press,55.

10 Ibid., 38-54.

11 Ibid., 57.

12 Nany, "Politics of Secularism,"79-82.

13 Chatterjee, *The Nation*, 103.

14 Bose, Sumantra. 1997. "Hindu Nationalism and the crisis of the Indian state," In   *State and Politics in India*. New York: Oxford University Press, 106-107.

15 Ibid., 85-89.

16 Ibid., 111.

17 Ibid., 119.

18 Rajagopal, Arvind. 2001. *Politics after Television: Hindu Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Public in India* .UK: Cambridge University Press,35-55.

19 Grogan, Courtney.2018. "Hindu nationalists trample Papal Image, Call for Christian-free India." *Catholic News Agency,* June 5, 2018. www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/hindu-nationalists-trample-papal-image-call-for-christian-free-india-63879**.**

20 Zyskowski, Kathryn. 2013. "Pogrom in Gujarat: Hindu nationalism and anti-Muslim violence in India." *Contemporary South Asia* 21, no. 3: 354-355. DOI: 10.1080/09584935.2013.827443.

21 Grogan, "Hindu nationalists trample Papal Image, Call for Christian-free India."

22 Ibid.

23 Radhakrishnan, Shivani. 2018."In India, right-wing Hindu groups are recycling Britain's colonial ideas about religion." *Washington Post*, January 29, 2018. www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2018/01/29/in-india-right-wing-hindu-groups-are-recycling-britains-colonial-ideas-about-religion/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.f3c3 146be70c.

24 Misier, Amrita Baidjnath.2018.   "A Power Unveiled: Insights on the Politicization of the Taj Mahal." Department of International Relations, Master's Thesis, Leiden University Repository, 30-08-2018. http://hdl.handle.net/1887/64481

25 Visweswaran, Kamala, Michael Witzel, Nandini Manjrekar, Dipta Bhog, and Uma Chakravarti. 2009. "The Hindutva View of History: Rewriting Textbooks in India and the United States." *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* 10, no. 1: 101-12. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43134195.

26 Yadav, Anumeha. 2014. "Modi critics belong in Pakistan." *The Hindu*, April 19,2014.

27 Siyech, Mohammed Sinan and Akanksha Narain. 2018.   "Beef-related Violence in India: An Expression of Islamophobia." *Islamophobia Studies Journal* 4, no. 2 : 181-94. doi:10.13169/islastudj.4.2.0181.

28 Yhome, k. 2018. "Examining India's Stance on Rohingya Crisis." *Observer Research Foundation,* no.247:3-9.

29 Kinnvall, Catarina. 2019. "Populism, ontological insecurity and Hindutva: Modi and the masculinization of Indian politics." *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 32, no. 3, 283-302, DOI: 10.1080/09557571.2019.1588851.

30 Arora, Vishal. 2015. "R.I.P…. India's Influence in Nepal." *Nepal Foreign Affairs* November 25, 2015.

31 Jodhka, Surinder and Murli Dharn. 2003. "Cow, Caste and Communal Politics Dalit Killings in Jhajjar." *Economic and Political Weekly* 38, no. 3:174–176.

32 Swain, Ashok. 2017. "There is a Psychological Reason why Right-Wing Supporters are Openly uncivil, abusive and Misogynistic." *Outlook India*(blog), October 15th, 2017.

33 Anand, Dibeysh. 2011.*Hindu Nationalism in India and the Politics of Fear*.US: Palgrave Macmillan Publishers.23-37.

34 Swain, Ashok. 2017. "Why I am not celebrating Independence Day in Modi's India?" *Daily Opinion* (Blog), August 15th, 2017.

35 Biswas, Bidisha.2004. "Nationalism by Proxy: A Comparison of Social Movements Among Diaspora Sikhs and Hindus." *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 10, no 2: 269-295. DOI: 10.1080/13537110490467702.

36 Swain, Ashok. 2018. "Have Hindutva forces in India re-ignited the Khalistan movement overseas?" *Daily Opinion* (blog), January 14, 2018.   www.dailyo.in/voices/sikh-diaspora-khalistani-movement-kashmiri-militants-sikh-separatists-1984-anti-sikh-riots-genocide/ story/1/21732.html.

37 Swain, Ashok. 2018. "How Modi government is ensuring Kashmir becomes an international issue?" *Daily Opinion*, June 27, 2018.

38 Mohanty, Simple. 2018. "The New Wave of Mobilisation in Kashmir: Religious or Political?" *Social Change* 48, no 1:58-71. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0049085717743838.

39 Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights,*First-ever UN Human Rights Report on Kashmir calls for International Inquiry into Multiple Violations 2018.* www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx? NewsID=23198&LangID=E.

40 Swain, Ashok. 2018. "Is 'Jumla' Modi government's biggest contribution in 4 years?" *Daily Opinion* (blo), May 29, 2018.

41 Ahlawat, Dilbir and Lindsay Hughes.2018). 'India–China Stand-off in Doklam: Aligning Realism with National Characteristics." *The Round Table, The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs* 107, no. 5: 613-625, DOI: 10.1080/00358533.2018.1530376.

42 *Genocide Watch*, 22 August, 2019. https://www.genocidewatch.com/copy-of-current-genocide-watch-alert.

43 Lateef, Farooq.2019. "Is Modi spreading Hindutva Fascism to Sri Lanka?" *Colombo Telegraph* December 3, 2019. https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/is-modi-spreading-hindutva-fascism-to-sri-lanka/.

44 Swain, Ashok. "Why I'm not celebrating Independence Day in Modi's India." *The Nation*, August 20, 2019. Available at https://nation.com.pk/20-Aug-2019/why-i-m-not-celebrating-independence-day-in-modi-s-india (Accessed March 20, 2020).