



RESEARCH PAPER

Rise of Hindu Nationalism in Contemporary India: An Analysis of Muslim Marginalization

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to delve into the gradual rise of the Hindu nationalism its effects on Indian Muslims in contemporary era. Historically, Nationalism has been crucial element in changing the socio-political dynamics of the South Asian region. India emerged as a secular state after its independence from colonial powers. It became the largest democracy in the world. Almost after three decades Bahartiya Janta Party (BJP) emerged as a Hindu Nationalist party. It paved its way by igniting the Anti-Muslim hatred and Hindu nationalist sentiments. This Hindutva tide affected all the minorities existing in India especially the Muslims through its different movements and policies. Gujarat riots, Ayodhya dispute and Ram Janmabhoomi incidents have been taken into account as case studies to get deeper insight. Moreover, the recent election campaign of BJP and its propagation of Hindutva doctrine to win elections is also examined. Qualitative research methods have been used to assess and analyze the data. This study can provide insights for policymakers, educators, minority rights activists and individuals seeking to navigate the rise of Hindu Nationalism and its impacts on Muslims

Keywords: BJP, Hindu Nationalism, Hindutva, Indian Muslims, Muslim Marginalization

Introduction

Nationalism has been a strong force of political expression in the World. The emergence of nation is because of some commonality either of religion, ethnicity or language. Nationalism has gone through many fluctuations and it cannot be described by a single idea or definition. India is the second largest country of the world having multi-ethnic and religious diversity. The founding fathers Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru believed that this diversity can be held together only through pluralist democracy. So, India emerged as a secular state after its independence. Hindu nationalists disliked this notion. They wanted India as a pure Hindu state. It is said that it was Hindu nationalist who assassinated Gandhi almost after a year. Gandhi's death sidelined this debate, secularism and democracy prevailed in the meanwhile. (Frayer, 2019)

Since the formation of Bahartiya Janta Party (BJP) in 1980, as a Hindu nationalist party, it promoted Hindu Nationalism. It gained power in 1998 by projecting its ideology of Hindutva (Yaseen, Muzaffar& Aslam, 2022). This ideology was not synonymous with a religious one but a national-cultural ideology. But its practical implementation seems contradictory. India elected a Hindu nationalist Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2014 and 2019 in decisive sweep proclaiming Hindu nationalism proudly. So, the rise of these nationalistic trends forced the secular parties of India to come up these nationalistic elements to appeal their voter bank. (George, 2022)

India is the home to more than two hundred million of Muslims living as a minority in a Hindu majority country. It is the largest Muslim population to exist in the world. Despite constitutional provisions Muslims have been encountered to severe discrimination from the British Colonial era. This discrimination intensified under the administration of Narendra Modi-led Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). It made the life of an average Muslim in India almost unbearable. (Mohan, 2022) Worsening of communal violence, discriminatory citizenship laws, oppression, religious persecution are some of the problems that are faced by Indian Muslims

Literature Review

Safran, (2008) Defines nationalism and outlines the three factors language, ethnicity and religion that are significant commonalities among nations. It compares all three taking their application into account and stresses which of the three is best for effective nationalism. He states historical facts and their evolution over time. (Mylonas & Tudor, 2021), debates how nationalism became irrelevant for a half century and how it resurged on global scale as full fledge movement. Moreover, it takes into consideration the research gaps regarding nationalism and lack of its philosophical interpretation. They lay stress on a comparative, cross-regional and comparative research on nationalism. (Savarkar, 2023) This book primarily addressed the ideology of Hindu nationalism. He defined Hindutva as a broader term not merely confined to religion but also with the land, culture and language (Hindu, Hindi, and Hindustan). He claimed that anyone who lives besides the Indus River or his ancestors are affiliated with the Indian Territory is a Hindu. Moreover, he states that Christianity and Islam are foreign religions on land of Hindustan. If the followers of these religions come under the cultural umbrella of Hindus, they can be considered among them. (George, 2022) Examines how religious nationalism has been used to spread propaganda of hatred to push the three democracies i.e. United States, Indonesia and India away from their founding inclusive ideologies. He also argues that discriminatory laws and inequality arms hate spin agents to backfire and take revenge. (Leidig, 2020) Has investigated the origin of Hindu nationalism in India and spread of Hindutva by BJP. Also, the right-wing extremism of India as well as West have been compared. This article gives a summary of Hindutva. It also gives us ways to contribute towards the conceptualization of transnational manifestations of the right-wing extremism. The election campaigns of BJP in 2014 and 2019 are analyzed and how the Hindutva ideology disseminated after Ayodhya incident and Gujarat riots of 2002 became widely acceptable. The success of BJP in the elections of 2019 was due to its strong commitment to its ideology and public support. (Malji, 2023) Tracks rise of the Hindu Nationalism in constitutionally secular India. But for the past three decades the nationalist party BJP has secured the support of the masses through mainstreaming Hindutva. Besides that, potential threats and responses from the regional and global level are also considered.

There is abundant literature on the rise of Hindu nationalism in India and its implications for secular democratic norms of India. There is a significant gap in the literature regarding the challenges and experiences faced by Indian Muslims under BJP. Though BJP is anti-Muslim and it have led to a surge in the rise of Islamophobia. Very few researchers have worked on it. Hence, this research have been conducted to cover the literature gap regarding Muslim Marginalization, their experiences under BJP through case studies and by addressing contemporary challenges faced by Muslims.

Material and Methods

Qualitative research methods have been used to assess and analyze the data. Extensive literature has been reviewed to fetch diversified material. This research is analytical in nature. Data is assimilated through various sources. Books, official reports and journal articles being the primary sources of data. Whereas secondary sources are academic papers, newspapers and other sources. A few events have been taken into account as case

studies to get deeper insight into the subject. Therefore, in-depth study was conducted to examine and analyze the historical documents and to find its link to the contemporary challenges.

Results and Discussion

Hindu Nationalism and the rise of BJP

In the late 19th century Hindu nationalism gained widespread recognition. It came out as the Hindu revivalist movement which aimed to modernize Hinduism, which is relatively a religious term than Hindu nationalism or Hindutva. This ideology of Hindu nationalism was primarily addressed in the early 1920s by V. D. Savarkar in his book *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* He defined Hindutva as a broader term not merely confined to religion but also with the land, culture and language (Hindu, Hindi, and Hindustan). He claimed that anyone who lives besides the Indus River or his ancestors are affiliated with the Indian Territory is a Hindu. Moreover, he states that Christianity and Islam are foreign religions on land of Hindustan. If the followers of these religions come under the cultural umbrella of Hindus, they can be considered among them. (Savarkar, 2023)

RSS- the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (National Patriotic Organization), an all-male organization established in 1925 by Keshav Baliram Hedgewar. Hedgewar was under the influence of Savarkar. RSS is dedicated to propagation of Hindutva. According to the ideology of RSS the minorities of India must not have any problem in accepting Hindutva doctrine, but if they do not accept that, then they are traitors. On one hand RSS served as civil force of volunteers aimed to help people amid natural disasters and on the other hand, it is a force of Hindu militants always ready to become violent on any event. Moreover, this organization was against partition of the sub-continent. Its militants committed massacres and were involved in communal riots amid migration and separation of the Sub-continent into India and Pakistan. It is the aim of Hindutva to restore (Akhand Bharat) the Undivided India. (Leidig, 2020)

The most prominent manifestation of this Hindutva doctrine or Hindu Nationalism can be seen in the Mahatma Gandhi's alleged assassination by a member of RSS. Because Hindu nationalists considered him to be secular who was in favor of minority rights. (Jha, 2023) It was propagation of Hindutva that paved the way to dethrone the Gandhi-Nehru dynasty and the Indian National Congress (INC) that remained dominant political party for more than fifty years in Indian Politics.

RSS expanded its position to 'a Family of RSS' termed in Hindi as "Sangh Parivar". It has multiple organizations working under the umbrella of its ideology. The main motive of RSS is to revive Hindu tradition and culture. Primarily, RSS remained apolitical in the post-partition era, but its different wings worked tirelessly in different fields to promote its agenda. Many times, RSS has been banned by the Indian government for its alleged involvement in communal riots. (Raikar, 2024)

INC remained dominant in Indian politics for almost half a century, and it preserved its commitment to the secular norms as a central feature. No other political party was able to compete INC for almost five decades but then BJP rose. (Malji, 2023) The main grievance of RSS is that INC made India secular republic and is too adaptable for Muslims and other minorities. Moreover, it recognizes Muslim personal laws of marriage and inheritance. Sangh Parivar vows to get formal equality among citizens of India. Also, to remove the policies aimed at protecting rights of minorities. But in practice RSS possess a historical record of extreme intolerance, religious discrimination as well as physical violence. RSS with its commitment to promote Hindu Nationalism established Bahartiya Jan Sangh (Indian People's Association; BJS) in 1951 under presidentship of S. P. Mukherjee. This party was involved in electoral campaigns and movements like "Save Kashmir". (Sangh, 2015) To

tackle inter party differences and make the party's image less extremist with more moderate approach Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Lal Krishna Advani and other leaders reorganized the BJS to establish BJP in 1980. Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is also a political wing of 'Sangh Parivar' or RSS and the only political party from this platform to contest elections. BJP is traditionally right-wing extremist political party that rose to power by propagating Anti-Muslim hatred and Hindutva. The BJP enjoyed its first electoral victory in the local elections. The rise of BJP and its escalating popularity was not a coincidence. Because it was directly proportional to the increasing tensions between the two groups. (Leidig, 2020)

Coalitions led by BJP had some brief moments of power in 1996 and 1998, then from 1999 a full five-year term began. BJP is often criticized considering the fact that it had only two seats in the Indian parliament in 1984 but after the demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992 it gained popularity and gradual national recognition. The rise of BJP to power was mainly done by the mass mobilization of RSS members and with public support and then.

Hence, the BJP evolved through BJS. BJP mainstreamed Hindutva to gain widespread recognition and seats in the parliament. BJP projects Muslims as an internal threat as well as an external threat.

Case Studies of Muslim Marginalization

Following two incidents of Muslim marginalization have been taken into account to understand the tactics used by BJP to gain dominance and its space in Indian political landscape.

The Ayodhya dispute and the Ram Janmabhoomi movement

In 1984 the VHP (Vishva Hindu Parishad/ World Council of Hindus is one of the wings of RSS) started the Ram Janmabhoomi movement in order to demolish the Babri Mosque built during the Mughal era of Zaheeruddin Babar in Ayodhya. It is alleged to be the birthplace of Rama and the mosque was built atop the former temple of Ram. BJP joined this movement in 1989. (George, 2022)

L. K. Advani the then BJP president launched a political rath yatra ("chariot tour") in 1990. It was a 10,000-kilometer expedition across the north of India to Ayodhya where the Babri Mosque was built. Their goal was to rebuild a new temple on Ram's birthplace. They were arrested before they reach their destination and could do any damage. The Babri Mosque was demolished on 6th December 1992, by a militant mob of the Hindu nationalists. This crucial event led to more violence across India by spread of the communal riots. This massive violent event left the authorities with no other choice but to take a step aside from the sacred site when up to 200,000 militants descended on it. Although the aggressors were initially categorized as a furious mob, but it was later revealed by the journalists that leaders of Sangh Parivar were the coordinators of the group and that violent attack. The BJP had to face severe backlash by the public. Besides that, the doctrine of Hindutva and Hindu majoritarianism rose to prominence making the Muslims become marginalized and deprived of their sacred site. The BJP successfully cashed this incident and became the single party to have majority in the Lower House-Lok Sabha in the elections of 1996. (Raikar, 2024)

This incident led to religious polarization, communal tensions, and rise of Hindu nationalist sentiment. Many violent events took place amid these tensions. Thousands of Muslims were killed, displaced while homes, businesses other mosques and Muslim properties were damaged. Besides that, The Supreme Court verdict, while attempting to resolve the dispute, reinforced Muslim marginalization and exclusion from the religious site that was once legally the possession of Muslims. After decades of communal tensions the Ram Temple have been consecrated on January 22, 2024.

The Gujarat riots (2002) and the role of Hindu nationalist groups

In 2002, the Gujarat riots erupted as a significant event that gained international attention to the India. These violent communal riots between the Hindus and Muslim lasted for several weeks. It resulted in thousands of deaths overwhelmingly of Muslims in the state. The atrocities of human rights violations, including torture, rape, assault and abuses were documented by International agencies such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. These organizations have reported the violence committed as a 'pogrom' and demonstrated the alleged involvement of state officials. The report also included the then BJP Chief Minister Narendra Modi of Gujarat, who had worked with the Sangh affiliates to plan and execute the attacks. They created the narrative against Muslims, projecting them a threat to the Hindu majority. This narrative worsened communal tensions in the 1980s and 1990s. Indian government conducted investigations thoroughly but it pardoned the state officials despite of their alleged involvement and its evidences. Narendra Modi was a leading activist of the RSS in his youth, he was resultantly banned to enter the United States of America and the United Kingdom, and several other European countries for the alleged involvement of him and his administration in the Gujarat riots. The 1998–2004 is the exception for BJP because it participated in the coalition of the national government. But before that it had only won local and state elections. Then in 2014, the BJP once again came into government but this time it secured a stunning majority. The major driving factor for its success at the ballot box was Narendra Modi the former Chief Minister of Gujarat. Moreover, this incident is the basis for which the then Chief Minister Narendra Modi is called to be the "butcher of Gujarat." (Malji, 2023)

Recent Election Campaigns of BJP and Propagation of Hindu Nationalism

Modi led BJP got landslide victory in the 2014 elections by propagating Hindu nationalism and anti-Muslim hatred. It led to the rise of Hindutva ideology and religious polarization of the society.

During the 2014' election campaign, Modi slightly linked Hindutva with the criteria of citizenship. He upheld ties to the socio-cultural practices and rituals of Hinduism by merging them with the voting behavior. Christophe Jaffrelot stated that "He (Modi) has associated himself with Hindu symbols and personalities. Besides wearing saffron clothes in some of the most important occasions of the election campaign, Modi visited many Hindu sacred places before his meetings." (Christophe Jaffrelot on Narendra Modi and Hindu nationalism., 2022) So, the use of these specific terms led to disseminate this narrative of Modi's Saffron politics.

RSS volunteers were very active in his election campaigns. Modi's campaign was aimed to present the Hindu nation as the best nation, and it pledged to restore '*Akhand Baharat*'. The revocation article 370-A of the Indian constitution regarding the special status of Jammu and Kashmir was one of the major steps to strengthen Hindu Nationalism and RSS's agenda of restoring *Akhand Baharat*. Sentiments of Muslims were severely harmed because this region was one of the Muslim majority area, and Muslims were abandoned of the constitutional status that was given to them after partition.

Modi gained an even greater majority in the elections of 2019 than in 2014. It was a proof that Hindutva has been indoctrinated among masses and they have successfully ignited anti-Muslim hatred. Hindutva and marginalization of Muslims have been legitimized and normalized. The revocation of 370-A was presented as the fulfillment of the Hindutva agenda in election campaigns of 2019. (Leidig, 2020) This level of political 'saffronization' seems to foresight, that India could be heading 'toward a Hindu state' in the upcoming years if it does not change its policies.

Now in 2024's election campaign BJP has took Anti- Muslim hatred to another heights. Ayodhya dispute is a long religious conflict between Muslims and Hindus. The consecration of Ram Temple in Ayodhya is one of its greatest work of Hindutva to gain mass support. BJP have always used this issue as a tool to get votes. Recently, before the 2024 election campaigns in India, Ram temple was consecrated, and many Bollywood actors and public figures were invited. Hence, it can also be considered as another way to gain majority of votes by igniting Hindu nationalism and anti-Muslim hatred. BJP aims to get 400 plus seats in this national election. BJP on its Social media platforms posted a video that says: *"Abki baar 400 paar is the absolute need of the hour. If the Congress party comes in power, it will snatch all wealth of non-Muslims and distribute it to Muslims - their favourite community. It is a fact that once Manmohan Singh said that Muslims have the first claim on our resources. If you're a non-Muslim, INC will snatch away your wealth and distribute it to Muslims. Narendra Modi knows of this evil plan! Only he has the strength to stop it."*

Mr. Modi while addressing at different cities during his election campaign had said that the Congress would redistribute the nation's wealth among "infiltrators" and "those who have more children" if voted to power, mocking Muslims.

Muslim Marginalization under BJP

Muslim minority of India is marginalized group from every aspect be it religious, social, economic, political or educational. Muslims in India have to face discrimination, exclusion, biases, limited access to education and employment, underrepresentation in political institutions and decision-making processes. Controversial laws aimed at strengthening Hindu nationalism have been enforced to promote Hindutva and suppress Muslims leading to their vulnerability. Muslims have limited access to resources and opportunities but have increased exposure to violence and discrimination. Moreover, Indian media is somehow state controlled, and it also spreads anti-Muslim hatred through its negative portrayal of Muslims and propagation Hindu nationalism.

The Citizenship Amendment Act 2019 (CAA) was introduced that stated that all undocumented migrants from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan to access the Indian citizenship if they claim that they are not Muslims. This attempt is aimed at marginalizing Muslims. It extended crises beyond refugees and migrants to the entire population to differentiate between different types of aspiring citizens, specifically Hindus versus Muslims. This was also assisted by the introduction of a NRIC-National Register of Indian Citizens. These kind of policy discourses are likely to subject Muslims to prove their authenticity and prove their citizenship by high standard demands.

Moreover, Indian government has passed strict laws to prohibit cow slaughter and beef consumption. Many Muslims have been lynched by Hindutva mobs on the allegation of beef consumption. Besides this many cities and road that were on the names of Muslim rulers of Mughal Empire have been replaced by Hindu leaders. Hence, Hindutva doctrine is decisive in policy making structure and shaping of public discourse.

Conclusion

BJP rose to power in order to tackle pseudo-secular Nehru-Gandhi dynasty. It had somehow extremist views regarding Hindu nationalism, on the other hand INC promotes moderate nationalism. BJP challenged the secular democratic norms of India. Modi at many times criticized democracy for being the rule of elite class. Later on, after indoctrinating his agenda of nationalism he became Prime minister. It is evident that Modi himself is the product of democracy.

In conclusion, the rise of the Hindu nationalism in the contemporary India has led to the marginalization of the Muslim minority, perpetuating a vicious cycle of exclusion,

discrimination, and violence. The phenomenon of cow vigilantism, Ayodhya dispute, Gujarat riots were fueled by religious nationalism, has further intensified the situation, leading to a surge in hate crimes and mob violence against Muslims. This research highlights the urgent need for policy reforms, education, and awareness campaigns to address the root causes of this marginalization and promote inclusive development, social cohesion, and human rights for all citizens, regardless of their religious identity. Moreover, SDG-10 is "Reduce inequality within and among countries" So, if the marginalization of Muslims continues this goal will not be achieved. Hence, it is the need of the time to reduce inequality based on religion in India.

Recommendations

- There is a need for inclusive political and social narratives to counter Hindu nationalist sentiment.
- Promotion of interfaith dialogue and reconciliation to combat communal polarization.
- Social cohesion, policy reforms and legal advocacy is required to bring positive change.
- Implement programs addressing socioeconomic disparities, promoting access to education, employment, and economic opportunities.
- Strengthen legal protections against discrimination and hate crimes, ensuring effective investigation and prosecution.
- International organizations should stress on SDG-10 to reduce inequality within India.

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