



RESEARCH PAPER

Hindutva: A Blind Faith

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ABSTRACT

Hindutva is an extreme-wing policy, it's grounded in Hindu religious and nationalist beliefs. It considers Muslims and Christians as 'others', and it rejuvenates its own Hindu religious myths. Under the BJP reign, the meteoric rise of Hindu nationalism has jolted India's secular democracy and pushed India out of its secular federative lines. Their policies are deified under the ideology of RSS, the rightists desire to assert a Hindu *Rashtra*, under a Hindu rigid constitution. It has given rise to religious violence and divergence from the actual roots of Hinduism. The saffronization movement had cost severe damage to its multi-faith society and secular diversity. The study is historical in nature, it follows a qualitative research approach and with a focus on the descriptive method. It further addresses the political implications of Hindutva in India, following the extremist policies of BJP during Mod's regime, and it also sheds light on the politicization of religion for greater political gain, under which India's democracy has declined to electoral autocracy.

Key words: BJP, Electoral Autocracy, Hindu Nationalism, Hindutva, Extremism, RSS, Secularism

Introduction

In 1947 Pakistan was carved out as a Muslim country, led by Muhammad Ali Jinnah. Whereas India followed secularism as part of its constitution under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru. Secularism was enriched under the Indian Constitution, which enshrined a secular nation where every person of whatever faith has equal status. The followers of RSS ideology didn't support constitutional secularism. "People of India are the Hindu people. So, there should be a Hindu constitution for a Hindu *Rashtra*, a Hindu nation" (Kumar, 2020). The RSS' rigid followers identified Gandhi as the author of partition and somebody who appeased and supported Muslims, and it should be targeted in support of Hindutva. In 1948, RSS member Nathuram Godse assassinated Gandhi to avenge the creation of Pakistan. Godse underwent a lengthy trial and was subsequently hanged. According to RSS; "when Nathuram Godse saw that all the decisions taken by Gandhi were going against the Hindus and nothing was in the favour of Hindus, that was when Nathuram Godse felt that if Gandhi stays alive, it will be harmful for India and Hindu society" (Masood & Muzaffar, 2019 & Mukherjee, Mukherjee, & Mahajan, 2008). The RSS ideological followers celebrated Mahatma Gandhi's killing so gleefully. This incident outraged the government of India that led Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel [the home minister] to ban the RSS for two years. Later, the ban was lifted with the confirmation that RSS will not take part in any political activity and remain purely a cultural organization. Despite the ban, RSS' Hindutva ideology grew over the years into the biggest volunteer organization in India (Balasubramanian & Venkatraman, 2020). The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh did not recognize the national flag of India for the next 52 years. RSS never wanted the country to be partitioned in 1947. Even today, RSS goal is to achieve Hindu *Rashtra* by otherizing all non-Hindu religious peoples and uniting those parts of India that broke away (Anees, 2019).

Hindutva: Religious Extremism

December 6, 1992, more than 150,000 extremist Hindus surround the historic *Babri* Mosque in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh. They were led by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh

(RSS), a paramilitary, right-wing volunteer organization. Outnumbered, security officials' watch as the Hindu mob goes violent in an attack that lasts for six hours. Citing contested archaeological findings, the attackers claim the mosque was built over the birthplace of the Hindu deity, *Ram*. The 500-year-old historic mosque was turned into rubble. The then Prime Minister of India *P. V. Narasimha Rao* called the attack 'an open war on the secular fabric of India.' "It could not have been spontaneous. I'm quite sure that it was pre-planned" (Ganguly, 2003). This business of undoing 500 years of history to restore a glory that goes back, perhaps, 2,000 years, and this kind of talk is, again, something that has witnessed the radicalization of history against a minority community (Tharoor, 2000). A muscular form of Hindu nationalism, or *Hindutva*, backed by the RSS, emerges from the ashes of the *Babri* mosque. The classic *Hindutva* scenario is based on the concept of otherization. *Hindutva* is not Hinduism, it uses Hinduism as a political tool for implementing a strategy, transformation or mobilization (Khan S. A., 2016). *Hindutva's* impact is felt 10 years later when the Indian secular soul is violently shaken once again by the religious extremists.

February 27, 2002, a train attack in Godhra led to the death of 58 Hindu pilgrims. There was a set of '*karsevaks*' or voluntary labour, who went from Gujarat to Ayodhya. They were attacked on their return during an ongoing riot. The whole train bogie was burnt and more than 50 Hindus were killed. This unfortunate incident sparked the fire of communal violence across the state of Gujarat that led to massive crises and more than 1,000 people, mostly Muslims, died in the massacre. The government remained inactive and indifferent. The then Chief Minister of Gujarat, Narendra Modi was heavily criticized due to his government's slow response. BJP felt that it was best to let that anger run its course and the administration was told not to protect Muslims (Varadarajan, 2002). A horrific set of violent events happened, and they were done with official sanctions headed by none other than Narendra Modi (Mishra, 2021). [In 2005, Narendra Modi was denied US visa due to the massive killings of Muslims in the Gujrat riots].

The saffronization [A right-wing strategy that aims to promote a Hindu nationalist agenda] of Indian politics takes a transnational turn two years later, on February 19, 2007. A train traveling from India to Pakistan explodes, killing 40 Pakistanis amongst others. RSS terrorist, Swami Aseemanand, claims the attack under the ideology of 'a bomb for a bomb' against every Islamist terror attack (Puniyani, 2015). *Hindutva* followed a rigid policy and hard narrative against the Muslims in India under covert political agenda. Narendra Modi was clarified in 2012 by the Supreme Court of India against the Gujrat riots allegations.

However, Narendra Modi's popularity reached its climax in 2014 when he was elected as the Prime Minister of India (Dhattiwala, 2012). As a lifelong RSS member, Modi's campaign was backed by six-million-strong RSS members, India's largest volunteer organization. Uniformed cadres are known as *swayemsevaks* (Sarkaryavah, 2019).

The Struggle for a Hindu Rashtra

Hindutva is a politicized movement that asserts the reinforcement of Hinduism in contemporary India. It's a critical socio-religious radical transformation to reshape Indian secular society through political violence. *Hindutva* is operating in multi-layered and overlapping lengths, it prioritizes the notion of '*Akhand Bharat under a Hindu Rashtra*' and it preaches for inclusive Hindu nationhood and nationalism, religion-centered nationalism, cultural homogenization and upper-caste hegemony. It follows a rigid policy of otherization and polarization [against Muslims, Feminists, Dalits, Liberals and Seculars].

Nonetheless, *Hindutva* is challenging the very basic social structure based on secularism in India, which was seeded by Nehru in post-partition politics. Thapar argues that indeed, far from being a cohesive religion, what is today referred to as Hinduism has been defined as a 'conglomeration of sects. Indian society is closed stratification system because any individual born in one caste is bound to oblige its customs, rituals, and behaviors towards people belonging to the same caste as well as people belonging to

different casts. The term 'secularism' is considered as a separation of religion from the state by right-wing activists, or, it advocates inclusiveness and tolerance among all the ethno-religious minorities in India. "The Hindutva judgment did not draw any logical conclusion from secularism. Instead, they kept debate open by estimating Hindutva to be synonyms with nationalism/Indianisation/*Rashtriyata*" (Saxena, 2015). On the contrary, Hindutva advocates for the resurgence of Hindu nationhood, it is an ideology premised on otherization, the concept of 'otherization' that inferiorizes several identities, such as Dalits liberals, Christians, feminists and above all Muslims. Hindutva is a threatening challenge to the internal structure of India, the boundaries of the nation, for fundamentalist movements like Shiv Sena, must keep out many threats, from Islam to contagious liberalism (Yaseen, et al. 2022). Religious minorities have been feeling more vulnerable and threatened RSS/BJP, and Hindutva is demanding self-erasure from the minorities as a price of being part of the Indian nation. Ilaiah argues that if the violence is justified against Muslims now, it was spiritually justified against the *Dalitbhujans* in the history of India. Tharoor (2019) elucidates the problem that many of us have with Hindutva is not the Hindu aspect of it, it is the non-Hindu aspect of it, which involves a violation of the principal Ahimsa [non-violence] and Satya [truthful in one's thought, speech and action], a violation of all the notions of acceptance and the coexistence.

Hindutva and Media Propaganda

A sharp rise in *Hindutva* ideology has fueled a battle of narratives across India. Some newsrooms have chosen to operate along ideological differences (Chaudhary, 2019). 5 prominent news channels of India- Zee News, *Aaj Tak*, India TV, News 18, and *Sudarshan News*, dominated the television rating point (TRP). Zee News's talk show '*Taal Thok Ke*', in which they criticized Pakistan in 12 out of 50 programs. They attacked the Congress party in 19 programs, supported Modi in 13 programs, and brought up the Rama Temple controversy in 4 programs. Moreover, they discussed the PMC bank and the floods in Bihar in just one program (Alkawaz & Khan, 2020). The statistics show that out of 50 programs, only 2 programs were addressing the common man's issues, rest were political supported by the BJP agenda. The India TV News, the talk show is known as '*Kurukshetra*', in the last 30 programs out of 50 they criticized Pakistani policies, they attacked the opposition in 11, they supported Modi's agenda in 11, and they discussed the Chandrayaan mission in just one program (Jeeson, 2015). Consequently, just one out of the 53 discussions was in support of the public. The debates on News 18 are conducted by Amish Devgan, in which he attacked Pakistan in 18 programs, attacked the opposition in 25 programs, praised Modi in 7 programs, and highlighting the *Ram mandir* in 5 programs (Basu, 2020). The debates in *Aaj Tak* are conducted by Rohit Sardana. The story remains the same there too, but his strike rate is slightly better. Out of the last 44 programs, he has raised an issue of importance in only 4 programs. In most cases, a relatively similar topic is being covered by each of these leading news networks. Their concern is more about Pakistan rather than focusing on their internal issues (Fatma, 2019).

Sudarshan News is a Hindu nationalist news network that operates from Noida. Suresh Chavhanke is its chairman and editor-in-chief. The RSS ideologue hosts '*Bindas Bol*', arguably, India's most controversial TV show. Its inflammatory content was dubbed insidious, rabid and divisive propaganda by the Indian Supreme Court. It has been discovered that *Sudarshan News* has been broadcasting false information on many occasions (Sikander, 2012). Chavhanke was taken into custody in April 2017 on charges of promoting racial animosity between Hindus and Muslims. In the year 2019, the channel uploaded an old clip that had been altered to include slogans calling for the killing of RSS workers. On August 2020, the news was reported by *Sudarshan News*, about the 'UPSC *jihad*', when Muslim students accessed the Indian administrative departments, (Jaiswal, 2021). It is obvious from the channels advertisement that *Sudarshan TV* is under government support. The channels which are aligned with government policies get all the needed support, and they enjoy undue protection despite the clear violations of the broadcasting laws.

Resultantly, India's position on the Press Freedom Index has dropped to 142 out of 180 nations; this place India four points behind South Sudan and three spots behind Myanmar (Mukherji, 2020).

In recent years, the government has maintained tight control over the media, particularly the online and broadcasting franchises. Social media abuse in India has made matters worse. Facebook allegedly allowed RSS accounts to spread hatred against Muslims in India. Narendra Modi and the RSS have used *Hindutva* to polarize society, to divide and to divert the attention of the people. This is very clear and this has been the agenda of the *Sangh Parivar* from the start and the fact that Modi is in power today and that he had won a second election is testimony to his ability to convince a major section of the people that they should support him (Girija, 2020).

Religious Conversions

The *Sudarshan News* runs a campaign '*Love Jihad*', which is a conspiracy belief that Muslims are wooing Hindu women of conversion and ultimately national dominance. Such television campaigns are watched by millions across the rural countryside. These sections of the media have played a terrible part in promoting what would be called 'outright fascism'. They are fascists sitting in their studio, profiling people, making it an issue of 'us vs them', and using every communal and every Muslim perspective to have a story. However, the campaign had a great impact on minorities living in India, in particular, Muslims. In India's most populous state, Uttar Pradesh, the Hindu nationalist BJP government has endorsed the fight against '*Love Jihad*' (Nielsen & Nilsen, 2021). In 2020, the Uttar Pradesh legislature approved the Ordinance for the Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion. Therefore, no one can change their faith for the sake of getting married, however there is an exemption to this rule. If someone is interested in doing so, they can give the government a prior notice of sixty days to convert, the government will authorize it, and the individual will then be able to convert while getting married (Verma & Rawat, 2022).

A large number of arrests have been made since this law went into effect in Uttar Pradesh. In December 2020, a Muslim man reported that Siddharth, a Hindu guy, had abducted his 22 years old daughter Alisha. The police conducted an inquiry and determined that this marriage occurred prior to the new law's implementation. The young lady states that she is an adult and her marriage is based on her free decision (Staff, December 2020). After the girl's statement, the police did not open an investigation into the alleged kidnapping. However, later, there was another case in Muradabad that was exactly the opposite of this case in terms of the roles. Pinky, who is from the Hindu religion wedded Rashid, who is from the Muslim religion. During the marriage registration, some members of the *Bajrang Dal* abducted them and carried them to the police station against their will. Again, the girl claimed she is an adult and that she entered the marriage of her own free will, and the marriage occurred before the new law implementation. In spite of this, Rashid was apprehended by the police, and when the case was brought before the court 15 days later, the judge ruled that Rashid should be released from custody on the grounds that the girl had made it abundantly obvious that neither forced conversion nor kidnapping had taken place. That she got married happily, but within those 15 days, Pinky was taken to a women's shelter against her will, where she had a miscarriage after five days (Sharma, 2020).

In a recent survey study issued by the Pew Research Center, it is found that the issue of religious conversions has overtaken other critical issues such as poverty, the economic depression, global warming, and ecological catastrophe. Nearly thirty thousand Indians were interviewed under the 'large-scale survey' on religion, caste, and national identity. The survey was comprehensive, and the results were fascinating. However, only religious conversions are examined in this particular study. During the year 2019 and the beginning of 2020, researchers in India conducted in-person interviews, in which 17 languages were used, throughout 26 states and 3 union territories (Birdsall & Beaman, 2020). In light of this,

84% agree that a genuine Indian is someone who shows tolerance and respect for all religions. In fact, 80% of respondents agreed that respect for other religions is essential to living a fully authentic life, regardless of whether one identifies as Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, or Christian (Evans & Sahgal, 2021).

One further surprising finding from the survey was that 80% of Muslims and 70% of Hindus oppose interracial marriage. A large portion of Indians practice religious tolerance and respect for those of different faiths, which is admirable; but many Indians are still afraid that their children would encounter 'cultural issues' if they marry outside their religion. According to the findings of the poll, individuals were questioned regarding the religion they followed when they were younger in addition to the faith they adhere to today. The majority of respondents (98%) had the same response for both questions. Therefore, it is clear that religious conversion is an extremely unusual occurrence in India. In contrast, the remaining 2% of the population is not a substantial figure in a country that has a total population of 1.3 billion people. According to the data, whereas just 0.7% of former Hindus have converted to another faith as adults, 0.8% of former non-Hindus have adopted Hinduism (Froystad, 2021). As a result, the findings of the survey indicate that a greater number of individuals are choosing to become Hindu rather than abandoning their previous religious affiliations.

This massive plot to convert people from one religion to another, which is sometimes referred as '*Love Jihad*' on news networks and social media platforms. Either this strategy has been exposed as a complete scam in the past 20 or 30 years, which would explain, we are observing something that is diametrically opposed that much people are turning to Hinduism than adopting Islam. It is being completely manufactured for instilling fear among the public for political gain (Punwani, 2014). It should be accepted that some people willingly change their religion, and secondly, some groups are spreading hatred and division among different religious sects for their interests and political supremacy.

Cow Protection Laws

Several BJP-ruled states have introduced stricter cow protection laws, which are extremely troubling for Muslim cattle traders. Due to the strict cow protection laws, the *Gaurakshaks* are on the rise [cow protection volunteers across India]. It was estimated that over fifty people would lose their lives to lynching or mob violence between 2016 and the end of 2020, all because of the suspicion of cow slaughter or trading. It was directed basically at Muslims, portraying them as beef eaters and cow slaughterers. So, it is not a communal riot as the government would proudly claim, but it is certainly an atmosphere of hate that affects individuals and leads to lynchings (Nakamizo, 2020).

Citizenship Act (CAA)

India's march to Hinduise its secular constitution took another turn in 2019 when the Citizenship Act was amended by the BJP government. Following the passage of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), all oppressed minorities entering India were automatically granted Indian citizenship except for Muslims. It marked the first time in Indian legislation that religious affiliation was explicitly utilised to determine who may become a citizen. This is very clear and they are trying to pursue that agenda at breakneck speed because perhaps, they have realized that they may not win another election (Khan T., 2020). Protests erupted across Delhi, demanding the amendments be repealed. Protesters from all walks of life blocked roads to voice their concerns. Amid this tense environment, BJP lost the election in Delhi. BJP's Kapil Mishra called for Delhi police to clear the roads of anti-CAA protesters (Gandbhir, 2020). Tensions in North East Delhi broke over on February 24, 2020, after Mishra issued an ultimatum. Violence, looting, and looting by Hindu mobs occurred in waves. Shootings, slashings with repeated attacks, and violent incidents resulted in the deaths of 53 persons, with two-thirds of those massacred being Muslims. One thousand Muslims took refuge in a rescue center on the outskirts of Delhi, and between one hundred and one fifty stores were looted or damaged. Muslims were victimized by the

political elites and the state apparatus in the name of religion. Lawyer Mehmood Paracha took up the case, he is now representing many Muslims killed or injured during the Delhi violence. The police threatened the victims not to name RSS and BJP office-bearers, or police officers who were directly involved in the violence. As expected, out of 700-odd FIRs, 95% to 96% did not name anyone (Kabir, 2020).

As part of the Citizenship Amendment law, states are now charting a National Register of Citizens (NRC). In the state of Assam, even long-term migrants from neighbouring states, Bangladesh now have to prove their citizenship in a long and elaborate process. For NRC, only two documents are required. The first is any document prior to 1971, which can be any document with that cut-off date [it can be a land document or a voters list]. The second document is any document of the concerned person, to prove the linkage with the father [it could be a birth certificate or a school certificate with the father's name]. These two documents would have sufficed, but with regard to the Foreigners' Tribunal, these two documents are not sufficed. They need a proof of the continuity of citizenship. These two documents are required only for the name to be there in the NRC, but proving a person's citizenship before the Foreigners' Tribunal is a cumbersome procedure. However, it is a predominantly anti-Muslim exercise, illegal Hindus who can't prove their ties to India will still be granted Indian citizenship, whereas, Muslims who can't be deported. Ultimately, a major portion of the two million residents of Assam excluded from the list was Muslim. Many indigenous Muslims are being booked under the Foreigners Act (Sharma C. , 2021). The fabric of secularism is being targeted. Foreigners' Tribunals are sending thousands of illegal Muslim migrants to be locked up across six detention camps set up by the government. The Matia Detention Centre in Assam is one such facility, with a capacity to house 3,000 declared foreigners, it's a transit facility before illegal Indians are sent back to Bangladesh. 36-year-old Simron Nishah's husband received a notice in 2019 summoning him to a Foreigners' Tribunal in Guwahati. Her husband, Sohikul Islam, was jailed on suspicion that he was a foreigner residing illegally in India. Their family had migrated from Bangladesh to India before 1971, but since then, had been naturalized and registered as Indian citizens. Despite months of legal procedures, her husband was declared as a foreigner and locked up in a detention centre. Human rights campaigners and civil society organisations have long voiced concerns about inhumane treatment in the prison centres. Since 2009, reportedly 29 "claimed outsiders" have died while being held in prison (Tiwari & Singh, 2021).

Suspension of Kashmir Status

The struggle for Kashmiri nationalism has deep historical roots under British rule. The entire region was known as the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. It had a Muslim majority population over a Hindu ruler. In 1947 Colonial rule ended and Hari Singh signed the Instrument of Accession India, allowing Indian troops to be airlifted to Srinagar. India was in control of about two-thirds of Kashmir. Pakistan never recognized even the authenticity of this Instrument of Accession and claim that it was signed under duress by the Indian authorities and it has no legal value. We now often referred to simply as the Kashmir conflict had begun (Bhatnagar & Chacko, 2019). The United Nations intervened one year later brokering a ceasefire that established the line that still divides India and Pakistan.

The Indian Constitution adopted in 1950 granted the former princely state special status under article 370 of the Charter. Article 370 give's a special semi-autonomous status, the Indian-administered Kashmir had its flag, legislative assembly and chief minister. In addition to this Article 370, another article, known as Article 35A, identified Kashmir's long-term residents (Srivastava, 2019). Related articles forbade outsiders to settle in buy land hold local government jobs and win scholarships. Accordingly, the Indian-administered Kashmir meant that Kashmir is for Kashmiris (Sodhi, 2021).

The dispute resulted in a major conflict between the two arch-rivals, Pakistan and India have fought wars over the territory of Kashmir in 1947 and 1965 and a limited conflict

in Kargil-Ladakh in 1999. In August, 2019 the dramatic move by the Modi government altered the geopolitical scenario on the subcontinent (Malik, 2019). On August 5, 2019 Prime Minister Narendra Modi under the BJP government took a historic but highly controversial decision. The government stripped away Indian-administered Kashmir's special autonomy. The state has now been fully integrated into the Indian Union and all the special rights of residents of the states have been scratched. Modi government's Kashmir gamble pay off in the end or will it prove to be a historic blunder and push the two nuclear-armed nations to the brink of war (Gupta, 2020).

Prior to this act, Kashmiris' accents were not taken, the landlines and internet were shut off, and hundreds of troops were dispatched. The administration made these decisions without informing the people of Kashmir, thus the politicians in Kashmir were put under house arrest and the people were imprisoned inside their homes.

Congress leadership opposed Modi's move, describing it as a 'black day' for democracy. They insisted on the illegality and un-constitutionality of the matter. Despite all the odds the bill was enacted there was no controversy or discussions in the parliament. Another significant choice was made: Ladakh would become a distinct union region, and Jammu and Kashmir will become a distinct union territory. Its status declined from a state, union regions have significantly less democracy than a typical state. Compared to a regular state, the central government has more authority over a union territory. Jammu and Kashmir's democracy would now be further weakened (Rather, 2020). According to Prashant Bhushan, this was unlawful. This relates to cheating because the people were misled into believing that the mobilization of 10,000 troops was being made in response to a terrorist assault threat but there were no dangers. Thus, the people of Kashmir were kept in the dark (Masood, et al. 2020 & Bhor, 2019). Nobody paid attention to the people and democratically elected leaders of Jammu and Kashmir, a move that is equivalent to a dictatorship (Akbar, 2020).

Whereas, Pakistan argues that India's unilateral action goes against international conventions. The ceasefire line became the line of control after similar agreement of July 1972 and now India says that Jammu and Kashmir is part and parcel of the Indian Union (Ahlawat, & Izarali, 2020). Secondly, a large number of troops are present there, the presence of the army needs to be reduced gradually to normalize Kashmir, and to start economic development (Bukhari et al., 2021).

Electoral Autocracy

India has the world's second largest population, not only the world's largest population, but also the world's largest minority. India is also a melting pot of different cultures, languages and religions and is host to many waves or movements for sovereignty that have emerged in India. However, Indian secular constitution and democracy united all aspects of equal rights under the Indian Constitutions.

Sweden-based V-Dem Institute [varieties of democracy], in its latest report on democracy, labeled India an electoral autocracy (Hindle & Lindberg, 2020). There is a view which says that India will be a *Hindu Rashtra*, where minorities are welcome to stay, but it must be made clear to them that they are staying in a Hindu country. However, 200 million or 14% of India, are still Muslim. By 2060, Pew Research estimates that there will be more Muslims in India than anywhere else in the world (Lipka & Hackett, 2017). RSS has built close ideological links with members of the *Bharatiya Janata Party* and finally found a strong leader who embodied the same ideals as them.

Resistance against Hindutva

Hinduism is the largest religion in India. According to the 2011 census, 966 million people identify themselves as Hindu, representing 80% of the country's population. To win

this Hindu vote bank, some politicians have equated Hindutva with Indian nationalism, dividing the country between nationalists and anti-national forces. If you are a Muslim and you are called anti-national, and it is suggested that your loyalties are with Pakistan. It's therefore a way of reminding Muslims that this is Hindustan, and they are not native to this land (Deshmukh, 2021). In regards to religious freedom, the State Department of the United States was instructed to blacklist India by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom. It went on to say that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government encouraged Hindu nationalist policies, leading to structured, continuing, and grave abuses of religious freedom (Shani, 2021). In India, every denomination of every known and unknown religion in the world can exist and they can still practice their method of worship. Secularism is the actual characteristic of the country (Nath, 2022).

However, the rise of *Hindutva* has had a marked impact on Indian politics. Despite India's 200 million Muslim minority, just 22 Muslim politicians have been elected in the 545-strong Parliament. The reason why there are few Muslim candidates is because even the secular parties no longer find it feasible to support Muslim candidates, which was not the case before. Many non-Muslims or Hindus are unwilling to vote for a candidate who is a Muslim, they are not considering proportional representation. Fourteen states across India have failed to elect a single Muslim politician in the last 25 years (Santhosh & Paleri, 2021). Yet the Muslim community in Assam is trying to bring a change, activists are trying to win back the secular ideals of India. [27-year-old social activist, Ashraful Hussain, is a local politician. He is seen how Indian secular credentials have eroded with amendments to the Citizenship Act in Assam]. Ashraful called his group the *Samvidhan Saathis*, or Friends of the Constitution. His community work paid off. In 2021, Ashraful finally became a member of the Assam Legislative Assembly (Panigrahi, 2022).

Back in Delhi, a youth movement is taking root to change the narrative against *Hindutva's* divisive politics. Sanjay Rajoura, Varun Grover and Rahul Ram, who form the comedy collective *Aisi Taisi Democracy*, aren't afraid of highlighting India's democratic flaws. With press freedom under question, their online shows have become quite the rage amongst the youth of India. Their show has garnered millions of views on YouTube (Gogoi & Sarma, 2022). The trio wants to question what they see as a rise in intolerance and Hindu majoritarianism under Prime Minister Modi's government. But it's a matter of belief, and in a country like India, where a lot of people have been left behind in terms of education and development, India has a huge chunk of the population, who are willing to believe anything. Journalists like Munawar Faruqui, Kunal Kamra and Ravish Kumar, criticize BJP often and they are targeted by these people tagging them as anti-Hindu. Movements questioning power are slowly reviving India's multi-faith and multi-ethnic society. Such movements have cut across lines of identity, including caste, class, region, political affiliation and religion (Khan & Lutfal, 2021).

Conclusion

Hinduism and *Hindutva* are different terminologies with separate ideological narratives, but both are often used interchangeably. Hinduism promotes the ideology of the Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam or World Being One Family [equality in the world, tolerance] (Klostermaier, 2007). The religious tradition known as Hinduism is comprised of a large collection of writings. It's very flexible and accepting, and it provides adherents with a wide range of options for finding spiritual guidance and direction in life. We would argue is what Swami Vivekananda testified which is that "Hinduism is not just a religion of tolerance but of acceptance that one accepts difference one accepts others as they are" (Long, 2021). Thus, Hinduism is an inclusive faith it says always the worship is equally valid and that as Swami Vivekananda said just as "many rivers flow in different directions and ways to the same sea. So, also all ways of worship which ultimately the same divine being and therefore it doesn't matter what religion you practice" (Baier, 2019).

On the other hand, *Hindutva* is the opposite in many ways, it is not a doctrine of acceptance, it is not a doctrine of inclusion, it is instead a doctrine of exclusion (Ram-Prasad, 1993). That kind of philosophy got further enhanced by the RSS when Guru Golwalkar actually said that “*Hindutva* was about ensuring that India was a nation for Hindus alone and that people of all other religious identities would be excluded from it now” (Sharma J., 2007). The *Hindutva* doctrine aims to create a *Hindu Rashtra* in place of Indian secular Constitution. It would deny equality, freedom of worship, freedom of religion, and the right to propagate one’s religion to people of other faiths (Khan & Lutful, 2021).

The people outraging in the name of Hindu-phobia and issuing threats, are so selective. These people use slogans such as ‘*Har Har Modi*’, a slogan inspired by the ‘*Har Har Mahadev*’ slogan for Lord Shiva (Jaffrelot, 2015). Using a religious slogan, and twisting it to create a slogan for a politician. The simple fact here is that these people have nothing to do with the Hindu religion and they aren’t concerned about Hindu-phobia. These people are simply spreading the agenda of their political party by using Hinduism. Analytically, the truth is that an average Hindu has no problems with Islam, nor does an average Muslim have any problems with Hinduism. Indian famous politician Sashi Tharoor said that ‘everyone, in India, is not a melting pot. We are a *thali*; a *thali* is a big platter with several dishes in different bowls. Because each of the dishes is in a different bowl, it doesn’t necessarily flow into the next. But they belong together on the same platter, and they combine on your palate to give you a satisfying meal (Gupta, 2021). Whether secularism can maintain its hold as a defining ideology for the country will depend on BJP’s electoral success in the future. But the battle to redefine Indian nationalism through the prism of secularism and challenging Hindu majoritarianism has begun. *Hindu Rashtra* is not that needed as a safe and secure *Rashtra* for the people of India.

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