

HINDUTVA

The truth behind



Iram Khalid

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Prof. Dr. Iram Khalid



Publisher: Sikh Heritage Education & Cultural organization of America

28290 S. Banta Rd, Tracy California 95304

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1st Edition 2025

+92 300 41 54 599

Written by:

Pro. Dr. Iram Khalid

Title:

Pro. Dr. Iram Khalid

Price:

Rs. 3000 / 15 \$

Printing and formatting:



Sulaikh bookmakers, Lahore.

+92 300 44 30 626

Printes:

Usama Bilal Printers, Lahore.

Published by:



Sikh Heritage Education & Cultural organization of America

28290 S. Banta Rd California

DEDICATION

The book is dedicated to all those who are struggling for humanity.

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Preface

Hindutva is a politicized ideological movement aimed at reinforcing Hinduism in contemporary India. It represents a critical socio-religious transformation, seeking to reshape Indian secular society through political violence. Hindutva operates on multiple levels, prioritizing the concept of Akhand Bharat (which never existed historically), promoting a vision of inclusive Hindu nationhood and nationalism, advocating for religious-centered nationalism, cultural homogenization, and upper-caste dominance. It follows a strict policy of "otherization" and employs violent means and religious terrorism, making Hindutva a significant source of violence in India. The Indian government has done considerable damage to society by saffronisation of education. The use of religious rituals in public political life and the increased role of extremist trends in education raise questions of integrity among youth. There is no conscious struggle against communalism in practice in India. Critical thinking and a scientific response to this situation are crucial for fostering public awareness.

The term "Hindutva" gained significant attention during the Babri Masjid case in the 1990s. There are two major perspectives on this term within India and the Indian diaspora. Some view it as a cultural concept, arguing that it is neither harmful nor discriminatory. For instance, Ram Jethmalani described it to the Supreme Court as being rooted in Indian culture, ethos, and nationalism, and argued that it is essentially non-communal. On the other hand, critics like Abdul Noorani argue that Hindutva aims at establishing Hindu dominance and "Hinduness." Many Hindus view it as a religious philosophy. However, the educated upper and middle-class Hindus generally reject the notion that Hindutva is a spiritual philosophy. Instead, they view it as a concept of Indian nationalism, one that does not incorporate non-Indian cultures like Islam and Christianity, and even Sikh identity, which has gained substantial support among native Indians.

In 1947, while many global powers were preoccupied with their interests, the subcontinent faced a significant resistance movement and was divided in the name of political rights. The struggle largely revolved around a political and identity crisis, with Muslims seeking a separate identity and Hindus, being the majority, wanting to control the entire region. After independence, Hindu leaders drafted the constitution, but the reality is that the Constitution of India does not fully reflect political wisdom and fails to safeguard the rights of minorities. The constitution was written and implemented, yet no Hindu leader criticized the document's shortcomings. New provinces can be created based on language, but not on religious identity or other humanitarian grounds. Although Hindu leaders have claimed that India is the largest democracy in the world, this democracy does not practice its values equally, particularly concerning minorities such as Sikhs, Muslims, Christians, Dalits, and others. This attitude began with Nehru and Gandhi and continues under the leadership of the BJP in the 21st century.

Modi's personality is deeply intertwined with his political methods, particularly his approach to practicing Hindu nationalism. This has sparked debate not only in academic circles but also among political observers. This ideology is not rooted in traditional Hinduism. Instead, it has led Indian society to a point where unity, acceptance, and religious harmony have been replaced by disapproval, division, and extremism. It is crucial to understand how Hindutva is weakening both the Indian Federation and Indian society. Rather than relying on emotional arguments, a scientific debate is necessary to shed light on the true face of India for the world. Keeping in mind the socio-political behavior of Indian society, one cannot deny the impact of Hindutva. Indian image, the character of Indian polity, and the overall Indian social fabric are damaged by this fault, which is causing a threat to the Indian federation from within itself. However, Indian leadership is not ready to accept.

Written in the context of the 2024 Indian Lok Sabha elections, the book serves as an ultimate guide to understanding the ideological basis of the incumbent political party, the Bhartiya Janata Party, and the impact of its regime on India's secular polity. Hosting a multitude of religious, ethnic, and linguistic groups, the Indian state has maintained a relatively secular and pluralistic outlook since independence, as envisioned by its founding fathers. However, with the rise of the Bhartiya Janata Party on India's political landscape, the outlook

of the world's largest democracy is transforming at an unprecedented pace. With an increased number of incidents of communal violence, controversial legal tools adopted to marginalize the minorities, a crackdown on the freedom of the press and media, and an unfiltered rhetoric of Hindu supremacy, the Indian state under BJP is transitioning into a Hindu Rashtra that is a far call away from what its founding fathers had envisioned for the state.

With the BJP in power after contesting one of the most polarizing elections in Indian history, several pressing questions have surfaced that this book aims to answer. As the saffron-colored party centralizes its election campaign and governance policies to transform India into a Hindu Rashtra or a Hindu nationalist state, it is essential to trace the roots of the ideological basis of the incumbent political party. The structure of the book is pertinent to answer the questions as they unfold sequentially. A brief and concise introduction provides an overview of the book's objectives and structure, followed by a chapter on its historical background. The chapter on historical background addresses questions about the foundational basis, key leadership, and the evolution of the Hindutva ideology over time. The chapter traces the trajectory from the emergence of Hindu religion in ancient times, to the initial development of Hindu nationalism by Marathas and Rajput under the Muslim rule that aimed at resisting the Mughal control that was perceived as foreign domination and proceeds forth to the culmination of Hindu nationalist identity on the pattern of European ideological framework of nationalism. The same chapter also answers the question of how the Hindutva ideology transformed into a political force strong enough to rise to power in Indian politics and even alter the secular outlook of the state.

While an increasing amount of literature is being produced that already indicates India's divergence from the secular values documented in its constitution, the next question addressed in the book concerns the Indian conceptualization of secularism and its comparison with the Western notion of secularism. With this comparison, the third chapter focuses on providing an in-depth account of the policies adopted by the BJP governments that have been aimed at promoting Hindu nationalism at the expense of the ethnic and religious minorities of India. The fact that factual details and evidence have been provided to elucidate the impacts of BJP policies affirms that the book is authentic enough to be used by the broader research community and academia and is not based on any propaganda. The facts and figures quoted in the third chapter have elucidated that the BJP has been successfully implementing its strategies to transform the Indian secular polity into a Hindu Rashtra, where minorities, if they existed, would have to adopt the Hindu culture.

As the policies of the BJP have been based on Hindu nationalism and cultural assimilation, it raises the question of whether there has been any resistance to the BJP agenda, or whether the minorities have readily accepted the Hindu dominance. The fourth chapter addresses this question by highlighting several socio-political resistance movements. These movements include the Khalistan movement of Sikhs, the resistance by Kashmiri Muslims, the insurgencies in Northeast India, and the Dalit Rights movement. Although some of these movements have historical origins that date back to before the BJP government, the fact that they have resurged indicates that the BJP's governance style has been contributing to an increased communal divide and discontent with the central government. Additionally, the rise of dissenting factions within a state points to increasing polarization of society, which might prove detrimental to the socio-political fabric of a pluralistic state.

To gather the perceptions of a mix of 133 Pakistani and foreign academicians and bureaucrats, a survey research method was employed using a self-developed questionnaire. Chapter 7 described the perceptions of participants who considered that Hindutva otherization would impact the 2024 elections in India. There were greater impacts on the secular fabric of India by mainly daunting Muslims residing in this country. A significant increase in violence, crime, and cruelty is perceived specifically for the minorities of India. There was a substantial increase in religious extremism and political polarization, and restrictions on freedom of expression were increased. The situation would worsen in the future because current laws were unable to curb this violence.

As increasing polarization can upsurge the domestic challenges faced by a government, it can also stain the image of a state at the international level in a globalized world. For a considerable period, India's global image

has been that of a multicultural, pluralistic, democratic, and secular newly decolonized state. Additionally, India's meteoric rise in the economic and technological landscape has set it as an exemplary model for the developing world. However, with the BJP exercising its Hindu nationalism, the increased number of incidents of communal violence has brought international criticism to India. The fifth chapter examines the case studies of controversial incidents, such as the Gujarat riots, the Delhi riots, and the Sikh farmers' protests, to address questions about India's international image.

With this background of the BJP's Hindutva and the increasing resistance to it, several critical questions have been surrounding the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. Some of these questions included: Will the BJP be able to win another term in office? Who will the Indian minorities vote for? To contest for a third term in office, will the BJP adhere to its previous election campaign strategy of instrumentalizing religious nationalism? Will the BJP be able to win the support of dissenting farmers? To answer these questions, the second-to-last chapter of the book offers a comprehensive analysis relevant to the 2024 Indian general elections. Ranging from election campaign strategies to overall voter turnout, and from the positions of different political parties in central Indian states to the influence of religion and caste dynamics on the voting pattern, the sixth chapter of the book provides an inclusive analysis of the recent Indian elections.

The book stands out from its contemporaries as it is the latest work that not only emphasizes the most recent developments in the Indian socio-political landscape, but also addresses the most ancient roots and origins of the development and evolution of the Hindu national identity. Additionally, the book adopts a multidimensional approach, rather than focusing solely on either the political dimension or the socio-cultural aspects, it considers developments in both socio-cultural and political realms. Furthermore, the domestic and international implications of the governance policies of the incumbent BJP government have been discussed in detail. To conclude, the book is a worthwhile read for students, academics, policymakers, political analysts, and anyone interested in expanding their knowledge base about the implications of the BJP's government and a detailed analysis of the 2024 elections.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Asiya Mukhtar, who has made significant contributions not only to editing but also to research. I am also thankful to Dr. Jabbar for his assistance. Additionally, I wish to place on record my sincere appreciation to the Sikh Heritage Education and Cultural Organization of America for their support, which made it possible to uncover the true face behind the propagated image.

My family is always my strength—Khalid and the kids consistently support and encourage me in achieving my goals. I am grateful to Awais Ali Samad for his diligent work in editing and refining the draft to make it more comprehensive and eloquent.

Prof. Dr. Iram Khalid

Dean, Faculty of Behavior & Social Sciences,

Punjab University Lahore.

Book Reviews

Professor Iram Khalid is a rare academic professional known for her penetrating insights into the complex political landscape of India. Her "India Watcher" expertise is reflected in this superb book, "Hindutva: The Truth Behind."

She covers the complex topic both from historical and ideological perspectives, never excluding the role of Hindu leaders and their myriad ever-evolving evasive Hinduism with emphasis on raw politics. The Far-Right Hindu agenda cannot be brushed aside in favor of continuing myth-making Indian propaganda. The deteriorating human rights situation there requires constant vigilance at a global level.

Additionally, readers will learn of a radically different analysis of India's Constitution, which has escaped critical scrutiny since its inception in 1950. Is India secular and democratic? —Both terms must be reassessed from a Western angle. Please read this book and think about it carefully!

GB Singh

Colonel (Ret.) U.S. Army

In this groundbreaking book, Professor Iram Khalid addresses critically essential questions regarding current affairs in India and their global impact. He traces the history of the Hindu Nationalist (Hindutva) movement and uncovers the unconscionable actions of their current leaders. He explains what they believe, where they operate, and why the public should be concerned. Those unfamiliar with the dangers of Hindutva will find this book extremely illuminating. In contrast, those familiar with current human rights violations in India will find it a valuable resource to share with others. I highly recommend anyone with a mind toward justice read it.

Father Joshua Lickter

Executive Director, Assembly for Human Rights

Christian Priest, Anglican Free Communion Intl.

Chapter 1

Hindutva's Assault on Indian Identity: Transformation of the Biggest Democracy in the BJP Era

Introduction

With the stage set for the grand electoral contest for political power in India's upcoming tenure, the world is closely observing. As one of the largest democracies in the world, the multicultural, multilingual, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious state of India is set to enter the seven-phase general elections for electing the 543 members of the Lok Sabha, or the lower house of the Indian Parliament. With this backdrop, multiple questions arise at both the national and international levels. Will the Bhartiya Janata Party win again? Will the BJP gain an absolute majority? What would happen to the minorities of India if the BJP gets another term in office? Will the Constitution of India be amended if the BJP comes to power again? Will India wholly and finally part ways with the secular values and principles enshrined in the Constitution written by India's founding fathers? These questions have not only been a concern for the minorities of India, but also for the various human rights organizations, as well as other liberal democratic and secular states.

As reflected in the questions, a recurring theme is concern about the BJP coming to power. The problem arises because the Hindu nationalist right-wing political party, the Bhartiya Janata Party, has been in power since 2014, having won two consecutive elections in 2014 and 2019. In this decade of the BJP's rule, there have been commendable and remarkable achievements that have been somewhat overshadowed by some extremely controversial policies and decisions enacted. While India elevated its position from 11th rank in 2014 to the fifth largest economy in the world by 2024, there has also been rapid technological advancement, infrastructural development, complemented by a robust research and development sector. However, the other side of the picture narrates a grim story of critical polarization in which religious and ethnic minorities are pitted against one another leading towards increased intolerance, spiking rates of incidents of communal violence, marginalization of minorities and lower castes and eventually, the disruption of the very vibrant and dynamic socio-cultural and political fabric of the pluralist country.

While these developments represent a marked shift away from India's constitutional Secularism, they can be attributed to the rise of the Bhartiya Janata Party on India's political landscape. The BJP is a political faction and offshoot of the Hindutva-influenced Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) Parivar, which has instrumentalized religious nationalism for political gains. The term "Hindutva" first appeared in Bengal, notably in the novel *Anandamath* by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay in the 1870s. It later gained prominence in the 1890s, thanks to figures like Chandranath Basu and Bal Gangadhar Tilak, during a period of intense communal tension among different religious groups. Hindu responses to Christian missionary activities, such as the Shuddhi movement led by Lala Munshi Ram and the Sangathan movement by Arya Samaj (founded in 1875), were early manifestations of this ideology.

Lala Lajpat Rai noted that these movements were a reaction to the Tanzim and Tabligh movements, which aimed to spread Muslim ideology and provide training. He argued that the Khilafat movement, originally intended to support the Khilafat of Turkey, deviated into promoting Muslim ideology. In response, Hindus

initiated their Shuddhi and Sangathan movements through organizations such as the Arya Samaj and the Hindu Mahasabha.

During the World Wars, various semi-military parties and organizations emerged, inspired by Hitler's Nazi Party and Mussolini's Fascist Party in Italy. These included Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh semi-armed organizations, which used uniforms and weapons like the long bamboo stick (dand) of the RSS and the spade of the Khaksar movement, and they regularly marched in Indian cities.

The modern concept of Hindutva ideology was articulated by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar in his 1923 book *Essentials of Hindutva*, written while he was in London. He later reprinted it in India in 1928 under the title "Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu?" Hindu religious parties and movements initially used the term in response to the activities of Christian missionaries, and later, Muslim initiatives, such as the Khilafat movement. Thus, the origin of the word "Hindutva" can be seen as a reaction to the actions of missionaries and Muslim preachers in pre-independent India. According to their ideology, Muslims believe that their religion is distinct from Hinduism and that it is their top priority.

Savarkar described Hindutva as representing a common race (jati), a common culture (sanskriti), and a common nation (rashtra). He argued that all communities living in India share a common religion and land. However, he noted that Muslims and Christians, while belonging to the same Indian ethnic groups and regions, do not accept India as their holy land or motherland. Although Savarkar did not use the term "religion," this observation was noted by Christophe Jaffrelot. K.B. Hedgewar established the RSS in 1925, and he regularly met with Savarkar to plan for the future. Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar, known as Guruji, succeeded Hedgewar as the second Sarsanghchalak of the RSS. Golwalkar elaborated on Hindutva ideology in his books *We or Our Nationhood Defined* and *Bunch of Thoughts*. Major Hindu political and social organizations, such as the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS, began to incorporate this ideology into their rhetoric during India's independence movement. However, the popularity of the Indian National Congress during this period overshadowed these efforts, even for many years after independence. The ideology first drew widespread attention when an RSS zealot assassinated Mahatma Gandhi. Although the Congress government arrested many extremist members and maintained India's secular image, the ideology persisted. Hindutva ideology gained momentum with the Jana Sangh and the Janata Party, both of which claimed to embody a more authentic Indian identity compared to the Congress Party. They criticized Congress for being overly tolerant of Muslims, Pakistan, and the West. This rhetoric resonated with the Hindu public, helping the Janata Party Counter Congress's long dominance. In later years, as Pakistan underwent Islamization during Zia-ul-Haq's regime, India's BJP adopted a "less secular India" campaign.

The rise of Hindutva ideology became especially pronounced during the tenure of the current Indian Prime Minister, who used it to secure Hindu votes against Congress. The problem with any religious ideology is that when it gains popularity and strength, it tends to marginalize minorities and suppress differences. This pattern has been evident with Hindutva. The BJP's Gau-Raksha wings and other religious factions have acted against minorities, leading to increased hatred and intolerance. This has resulted in Hindu-Muslim riots in 1978 and 1979, the demolition of the Babri Mosque in 1992, the 2002 Gujarat violence, and incidents of Muslim lynching during Eid.

Prime Minister Modi's government has repealed Article 370 and passed laws such as the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC), which have been criticized for being biased against minorities. In 1988, there were 44 Muslim members in the Lok Sabha; today, their number is the lowest in the history of the parliament. A sharp decline has been observed in Muslim political activity, and the community is increasingly feeling alienated from their country. It has become common for Indian religious leaders inclined towards Hindutva to threaten and mock local minorities. There is little positive news about Muslims or Pakistan in the media; instead, reports of Islamophobia are frequent. Indian anti-Muslim and anti-Pakistan propaganda has also penetrated social and news media in Europe and North America.

The prominent Indian film industry has not been immune to this ideology. An increasing number of historically inaccurate, anti-Muslim films depict Muslims as terrorists and cruel individuals. Investigative reports from Indian courts and reform commissions have noted a decline in morale and economic conditions within the Muslim community. The Indian diaspora, especially in the USA, has also been targeted by pro-Hindu parties like the RSS for funds and support.

Although Hindutva has gained prominence on the Indian political landscape since the rise of the BJP to power, it is still not a new phenomenon. The roots of Hindutva ideology can be traced back to the pre-partition writings of V.D. Savarkar, who encapsulated in his writings the concept that the land of India intrinsically belonged to people of the Hindu religion and culture. Over the decades, the ideology has led to the creation of organizations such as the RSS and political parties like the BJP, while also influencing numerous policies, including the CAA and anti-conversion laws. The same ideology has also been held responsible for some of the most violent incidents that have placed a question mark on the human rights record of India, such as the Gujarat riots and Delhi riots more recently.

Written in the context of the 2024 Indian Lok Sabha elections, this book attempts to trace the past trajectory of the evolution of Hindutva ideology from a simple thought process to organizational development and, ultimately, policy-making at the governmental level. Delving deep down into the foundation of the ideology, this book analyzes how Hindutva transformed into a political force in the post-partition era. Juxtaposing it with India's constitutional Secularism, the book evaluates how the rise of the BJP has led to a considerable departure from what the founders of India had envisioned for it. While the abandonment of Secularism has been strongly felt by the Indian minorities who have become increasingly vulnerable to marginalization and suppression, the concerns have been voiced by many of the international media houses, representatives of states, as well as human rights organizations. The significance of the book also derives from the fact that it provides an extensive and intensive analysis of the Lok Sabha elections of 2024 while highlighting the significant trends of voter turnout for political parties, the position of major Indian political parties in larger states, the patterns of rural and urban voting and the impact of religion and caste on the vote share of the dominant political parties.

Descriptive and analytical research methods have been employed for this manuscript. For the historical background, a descriptive research method was employed, drawing on qualitative data from books, news articles, journals, and other academic sources. Analytical techniques have been used to compare and contrast the secular values of the Indian Constitution with the Hindutva-led values of the BJP. Additionally, the book assesses the impact of the BJP's policies on India's international image. Last but not least, by consulting quantitative and qualitative data from official websites, such as those of the Election Commission of India, news websites, and articles by political analysts, an analysis has been constructed regarding the 2024 elections. As qualitative data has been an essential resource for this book, an extensive literature review has been conducted, some of which is shared below.

The discussion of Hindutva and its influence on Indian politics cannot be complete without referring to the foundational text of the ideology by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar. The book 'Essentials of Hindutva', composed in 1923, provided the base for the culmination of Hindu nationalism in India. According to Savarkar's perspective, there were several prerequisites for qualifying as a citizen of Hindustan, which included a common fatherland, sharing common blood or the jati race, and an extraordinary reverence for the Sanskriti civilization. Additionally, another seminal text by V.D. Savarkar is 'Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?', in which he asserted that Hindutva is not synonymous with the Hindu religion, as the former represents a cultural and national identity.

The French scholar Christophe Jafferlot has done extensive and intensive research on the evolution of Hindutva and its impact on the Indian polity. One of the key works consulted by Jafferlot for this book is 'The Hindu nationalist movement and the Indian politics', written in 1996. Jafferlot has delved deeply into the historical development of Hindutva ideology and its transition into an organizational framework under the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, led by K.B. Hedgewar, in 1925. Closely linked to the Brahmo Samaj and the Arya Samaj, the RSS played a pivotal role in disseminating the Hindutva ideology at the grassroots level through mass

mobilization and cultural activism. Later, by leading to the creation of the Bhartiya Jana Sangh and the Bhartiya Janata Party as its political offshoots, the RSS has been able to leave its imprint on India's political landscape.

The close interrelation between RSS and BJP has been discussed extensively in multiple pieces of literature, including the books 'The Brotherhood in Saffron' and 'The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India' by Walter Anderson, Shridhar Damle, and Thomas Bloom Hansen, respectively. These books examine how the BJP has leveraged the organizational structure of the RSS to strengthen its support at the grassroots level for the political movement. Additionally, the author Thomas Hansen has remarked on the demolition of the Babri mosque by RSS and BJP affiliates as a turning point in the political course of the BJP. As the BJP leader Lal Krishna Advani had organized a Rath Yatra to mobilize support for the construction of Ram Mandir at the disputed site, the Yatra also served the political purpose of amassing public support. Although the demolition of Babri Masjid had unleashed a wave of communal riots in 1992, almost three decades later, the inauguration of Ram Mandir has been a key component of the election campaign of the BJP in 2024.

The political implications of Hindutva have been discussed in the book 'Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life in India' by Ashutosh Varshney. While discussing the impact of the Hindutva policies of the BJP, Ashutosh highlights how the political actions of the BJP have resulted in the exacerbation of religious tensions. The preferential treatment of Hindus by the BJP has marginalized the religious and ethnic minorities by fostering a culture of intolerance. In addition to the political impacts, there have also been severe social impacts that encompass cultural and legal aspects. Martha Nussbaum has authored the book 'The Clash Within: Democracy, Religious Violence and India's Future' to assess the cultural implications of Hindutva. According to the author, the spread of Hindutva ideology has a corrosive effect on the pluralistic ethos of the Indian state as it emphasizes the creation of a monolithic Hindu identity. In the article, 'Hindu Nationalism: A Punitive Political Ideology of the Modern State of India', authors Safdar and Mushtaq highlight the divergence between the two political wings in India, with the right wing adhering to the Hindutva ideology and the left wing advocating for Secularism. The BJP government in India has been trying to enforce cultural assimilation and Hindu nationalism. Through policies of saffronization, the BJP has been altering the curriculum to glorify a Hindu past while minimizing the contributions of ethnic and religious minorities.

The increasing prominence and strength of Hindutva have affected the international perception of India. In the chapter 'India and the World: The Modi factor', Kapur discussed the impact of Narendra Modi's Hindutva on the foreign relations of India. According to Kapur, while the economic development, technological advancement, and the active foreign policy initiatives of the Modi regime have improved the international prestige of India, the Hindutva-led policies of the BJP government have led to violations of human rights and increasing intolerance, which has garnered international criticism. To support this argument, multiple reports from Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have been quoted that have documented the increase in communal violence.

With extensive literature review and consultation of qualitative and quantitative data, the book is structured as follows:

The second chapter begins by discussing the ancient roots of Hindu identity, which can be traced back over 12,000 years, when Hinduism started evolving as a myriad of myths and rituals. Providing a quick time lapse of the development of Hinduism in the ancient era, including the pre-Vedic and Vedic ages, the chapter provides a brief account of the 'Golden age of Hinduism' as the incumbent government of the BJP in India recurrently refers to it. The chapter discusses the development of Hindu nationalism and Hindu identity under the Muslim rule in India, because, as a part of the saffronisation campaign of the BJP, the Muslim rule is only projected as the root cause of all evils in India. As the Muslim rule was succeeded by the colonial rule of the British government, Hindu nationalism became focused on an anti-colonial struggle intertwined with the efforts to create a Hindu Rashtra- or a state that is predominantly for the Hindus. Numerous significant developments of the age, including the conceptualization of 'Hindutva' by V.D. Savarkar and the organizational development in

the form of Arya Samaj, not only consolidated a Hindu national identity but also set it against the Muslims, with whom the Hindus had been sharing the subcontinent for more than four centuries. As the organization framework for Hindu nationalism strengthened under the RSS, the chapter discusses the transition of Hindutva from a social and ideological force into a political one. With the development of the Bhartiya Jana Sangh and its transformation into the Bhartiya Janata Party, this chapter sheds light on multiple policies and incidents related to the radical, Hindutva-influenced transformations in the modern Indian political landscape.

An examination of the most recent history of the past decade in India might illustrate the state as a Hindu nationalist one, in which a populist leader has capitalized on the Hindutva ideology to gain and retain political power, not only once but twice. However, it is noteworthy that, according to the Indian Constitution, India is supposed to be a secular polity. The third chapter presents a debate on the Western concept of Secularism, as outlined in the Indian Constitution, and how the Hindu nationalist party, the BJP, attempts to shape the definition of Secularism to its advantage. Comparing and contrasting the election campaigns of two BJP leaders, Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Narendra Modi, the chapter highlights the position of these leaders in maintaining a balance between constitutional Secularism and Hindutva ideology. Additionally, several Hindutva-influenced policies adopted by the BJP government, such as the Citizenship Amendment Act, the Saffronisation of the educational curriculum, the revocation of Article 370, anti-conversion laws, and the Ayodhya verdict for the Ram Mandir, have been deliberated.

With the strengthening of Hindutva ideology on the socio-political landscape of India, there has been a visible and considerable surge in the minority movements, including the Dalit rights movement, the re-ignition of the Khalistan movement, and the unrest in Kashmir. Providing a detailed account of the multiple socio-political movements in India, the fourth chapter highlights the reaction of minorities to the Hindutva nationalism promoted by the BJP. The first insurgency discussed in the chapter is the Khalistan movement of the Sikhs that dates back almost to the pre-partition era. Despite the claims of a distinct culture and language, the Sikhs were unable to achieve the cause of separate statehood and had to agree to being accommodated within India. While the Khalistan movement among Sikhs gained momentum during the reign of Indira Gandhi, it lost its momentum over the decades, only to regain it with the ascent of the BJP to power and its efforts at cultural assimilation.

Additionally, the practically anti-farmer policies of the Hindutva government have also sparked a violent reaction from the Sikh community. Similarly, the seven distinct states of northeastern India have also expressed signs of discontent and resistance against the BJP government. While the seven states had not been under the direct colonial rule of Britain, they claim a distinct history, culture, and ethnicity, owing to which the Hindu nationalism agenda of the BJP fails to resonate with the public of Northeastern India. The unabashed anti-Muslim rhetoric of the BJP, combined with actions such as the revoking of Article 370 and the CAA, has also instigated members of the Muslim community to resist against the BJP. The most recent case of Muslim resistance in India is evident in the rise of the Popular Front of India and the Social Democratic Party of India (SDPI). All of these insurgencies and resistance movements point towards one shared conclusion: that the Hindutva ideology of the BJP has failed to assimilate all the socio-cultural groups under one umbrella of Hindu nationalism.

The scholarship on resistance against Hindutva is not matched in size by the research on the origin, working, and implications of Hindutva. Except for a few notable studies, academic research on opposition and resistance to Hindutva is scarce. However, scholars have widely studied nationalism among Indians abroad. 'Diaspora nationalism', 'transnational Hindutva', and 'Long-distance nationalism' (coined by Benedict Anderson) are some of the terms used for it. The following are some studies on transnational Hindu nationalism:

Jaffrelot and Therwath (2007) study the Indian diaspora and its connection with the Sangh Parivaar. They posit that the network of Hindu nationalist organizations was replicated outside India, and nationalism and the organizational structure were "exported" by an organization located in India: the RSS (Jaffrelot & Therwath,

2007). They argue that two factors were pivotal in the spread of Hindutva ideology abroad: a favorable local environment for ethnic mobilization in the host

countries and the presence of a powerful central organization in India. In a later study on the same topic, they contend that the Sangh Parivar replicates the militaristic expressions overseas, such as a uniform, flag raising, and training sessions, with Western Muslims as their primary target (Jaffrelot & Therwath, 2012). They note that these militaristic organizations work under the guise of charitable and not-for-profit organizations. Hindu nationalism spread because Hindus have formed communities across the world that they consider "fragments of India abroad" and that they seek to protect at any cost (Jaffrelot & Therwath, 2012, p. 344).

Therwath (2012) conducted a web analysis of Hindutva groups, which she termed 'cyber-Hindutva'. She argues that the online activities of Hindu nationalists are mainly based in the USA, where there is a substantial Indian diaspora. She finds a striking difference between the online content on the websites of these organizations and their on-the-ground activities. This is probably to avoid restrictions in societies abroad (Therwath, 2012). In her conclusion, she argues that Hindutva groups are based in the US and are led by conservative men who have an ideological affinity with Jewish extremists because of their shared Islamophobic sentiments.

Sundaram (2022) discusses the radical response of the Hindu Right groups to an online conference in the US titled "Dismantling Global Hindutva". The conference was sponsored by more than 53 universities (primarily American) and sought to highlight the alarming increase in Hindutva globally and its alignment with fascist ideology and authoritarianism. The backlash it faced was unprecedented. The conference organizers received violent threats from pro-Hindutva organizations such as the Hindu American Foundation (HAF) and the Coalition of Hindus in North America (CoHNA). Sundaram concludes that the Hindu nationalist groups have equated Hindutva with Hindu identity politics and use the "US social justice frameworks" to falsely label discussions on Hindutva as Hinduphobia, essentially playing the victim card for ulterior motives (Sundaram, 2022).

Below are some studies that discuss both Hindu nationalism and the resistance to it:

Kim (2023) has studied both Hindu nationalism and the resistance to it in the USA, although she dedicates a small portion of her work to the resistance. She argues that Hindu nationalism has become increasingly global in scope. Hindu nationalists in the USA have repeatedly taken advantage of multiculturalism in the USA to gain recognition. They deliberately identify groups and individuals, for example, university professors and non-practicing Hindus, whom they perceive as anti-Hindu, to claim that they are victims (Kim, 2023). Kim argues that recently, the argument of Hinduphobia has been constantly used by nationalists, and its definition has been widened to claim marginalization, but with a motive to strengthen nationalism. The notion of Hinduphobia is used to target sane voices. Kim uses the term 'counterpublics' to describe the people resisting Hindutva. She contends that the people resisting Hindu nationalism in the US are from diverse backgrounds and use different types of methods. These organizations often form coalitions to achieve a specific objective, for instance, the anti-caste discrimination bill in Seattle in 2023. She notes that the difference between the nationalist groups and anti-Hindutva groups is that the nationalists distance themselves from Indian political parties and politics. At the same time, the progressive activists situate their struggle in a global context and advocate for both local causes and beyond. She concludes that the study of anti-Hindutva activism is important, as it will "open new analytical fields for examining the diversification of transnationalism surrounding Hindu nationalism" (Kim, 2023, p. 11).

The 2023 dissertation by Poojit Hegde is a well-focused study directly examining anti-Hindutva activism in the United States. She lists anti-Hindutva organizations based on faith, caste, and region. In particular, she studies three organizations: Ambedkar King Study Circle (AKSC), Hindus for Human Rights (HfHR), and the Indian American Muslim Council (IAMC) (Hegde, 2023). She discusses the forms and scope of resistance exhibited by these organizations and argues that they resist Hindutva in both India and the US. While the struggle against Hindutva in India represents a historical legacy of mobilizing diaspora communities, the struggle in the US highlights differences within the diaspora. Hegde lists the methods used by activist organizations. She argues

that the AKSC uses meetings, conferences, and study circles to highlight and theorize caste oppression in India. The HfHR utilizes communication with the government through congressional briefings and specific digital initiatives, such as podcasts, videos, and conversation series, to counter Hindutva. The IAMC utilizes publishing reports, policy work, and creating videos to highlight violence against minorities in India.

Audrey Truschke studies pro-Hindutva organizations in the US. In the introductory paragraphs, she notes that "under Modi's leadership since 2014, India has morphed from the world's largest democracy into the world's second-largest authoritarian state" (Truschke, 2022, p. 1). She contends that the Hindu Right groups pressurize liberal values and institutions in the US and attempt to influence policy and even control academic discourse and educational materials. She details the Hindu Right network in India and abroad, describing how the Sangh Parivar is a closely knit web of organizations, each working in its way to carry forward the ideology of Hindutva. Truschke describes in detail how these groups are involved in militancy, how their student wings promote Hindutva on campuses, how they maintain an online presence to attract wealthy conservative individuals, and most importantly, how funds raised in the name of charity are transferred to India and used for promoting Hindutva. She further describes the modus operandi of these organizations in the US as indoctrinating children, controlling the contents of children's textbooks, targeting and harassing academics for anti-Hindutva scholarly work, and engaging in propaganda, lobbying, and fundraising to support Hindutva. In her conclusion, Truschke hints toward anti-Hindutva resistance in the US and mentions civil society and student organizations that oppose Hindutva in different ways. She notes that resistance to Hindutva is a "proportionate response" to the growing power and appeal of Hindutva. However, as she rightly notes, the topic needs detailed scrutiny (Truschke, 2022, p. 12).

Nisha Thapliyal is one of the scholars studying anti-Hindutva activism overseas. One of her papers discusses online anti-Hindutva resistance among the Indian diaspora in Australia. They note that Indian migrants are one of the most "digitally active and politicized" (Thapliyal et al., 2022, p.1). They discuss how anti-Hindutva activists in the USA and UK oppose Hindutva on different occasions, such as any major violent incident or the visits of Modi. These activists utilize social media platforms and websites to document and archive their anti-Hindutva activism. The authors explain that digital activism against Hindutva in Australia is in its early stages and includes advocacy and meetings with government officials, such as those conducted by The Humanism Project (THP). The activism also includes educational and awareness programs, calling out fake news and Hindutva-supportive accounts on social media, and supporting academics targeted by pro-Hindutva organizations. The efforts led to the deportation of an anti-Sikh violence perpetrator in 2021. Thapliyal et al. (2022) conclude that anti-Hindutva activism should be studied within its historical context of supporting liberal values, and its educational aspect should also receive attention. In another paper, Thapliyal discusses how anti-Hindutva activists engage in knowledge production and expose the financial networks of Hindutva in the US and the UK (Thapliyal, 2023).

Biswas (2022) also studies anti-Hindutva activism and counternarratives to Hindutva in the US. She argues that the ban on Modi's entry into the US was due to the protests and advocacy of anti-Hindutva organizations in the aftermath of the 2002 violence against Muslims in Gujarat. Anti-Hindutva organizations capitalize on singular events such as the Gujarat violence and the anti-CAA-NRC protests in 2019 to mobilize against Hindutva. They use these events as political opportunities. However, these reactions are not "opportunity-based"; instead, they are due to a broader commitment to secular and democratic ideas (Biswas, 2022, p. 1117). Biswas also discusses the impact of the anti-Hindutva efforts, such as the city council resolution in Seattle against rising authoritarianism in India. She notes that such efforts signal to the Indian government that the diaspora is not unified. She concludes that anti-Hindutva activists are aware of their marginal position in the face of the regime's popularity in India; however, they actively form coalitions, seek out spaces for intersection, and exhibit a form of nationalism based on democracy, equality, and constitutional rights (Biswas, 2022).

Research on critical feminist resistance to Hindutva is also limited. Except for a few pertinent studies, this research area is under-analyzed. The following studies focus on the inherent aspects of Hindutva and feminism:

Sen and Jha (2024) explore the misogyny and anti-feminism inherent in the Hindutva ideology. They describe how the supporters of Hindutva target women with rape threats, deep-fake videos and memes. They attack their autonomy by labeling them as immoral and rendering their political opinion of zero value. By using these tactics, the misogynist Hindutva supporters silence women on digital media (Sen & Jha, 2024).

Singh and Parihar (2023) examine the divergent perspectives of Hindutva populism and feminism on the issue of women. They argue that Hindutva populism and feminism are in a fundamental clash with each other regarding the identification and solutions of problems and the role of the state. Naaz (2023) discusses that Hindutva ideology envisions a controlled heterosexual, cisgender sexuality, a domesticated Hindu woman committed to family and Hindutva values, and a militarized Hindu masculinity to protect the Hindu nation, all of which are the essential attributes of an anti-feminist narrative. The Hindu Right employs strategies like the glorification of women's unpaid domestic labor, presenting feminism as a Western conspiracy, and silencing feminist voices through harassment and intimidation (Naaz, 2023).

Soherwordi (2013) argues that the relationship between women and religious politics in Hindu nationalism creates both opportunities and challenges for women. Hindu nationalism portrays women as keepers of religious beliefs and purity. This role both empowers and restricts them. He argues that Hindu nationalism aims to make politics more Hindu and Hinduism more militant (Soherwordi, 2013). According to him, the image of endangered Hindu women has been used to incite violence against Muslims. This mobilization is part of the Hindutva agenda. Hindu nationalist organizations, often led by men, use women to further their ideological aims, thus limiting true gender equality and liberation. Indian feminists argue that the empowerment of women by Hindu nationalism is superficial and does not challenge deep-rooted gender inequalities (Soherwordi, 2013).

Hindutva feminism, the idea of incorporating women into Hindutva and making them a part of the attacks on minorities, is another interesting topic that has received considerable attention from scholars. Rothenberg (2023) examines how middle-class Rajput Hindu women in Jaipur form a political identity that combines global gender development ideas with Hindu nationalist beliefs. This "Hindutva feminism" supports traditional Hindu patriarchy, portrays Hindu women as central cultural figures, and justifies violence against Muslims and other minorities to maintain Hindu dominance (Rothenberg, 2023). Other works examining Hindutva feminism are Narula (2018), EPW Engage (2021), and G. Singh (2023).

Below are some studies directly addressing feminist anti-Hindutva resistance:

Wilson (2023) contends that Hindu supremacism and Hindutva perpetuate gender and caste violence, coercive reproductive policies, and the exploitation of marginalized communities. She argues that resistance against Hindu supremacism includes the struggles of Adivasi women, Kashmir's feminist movements, and the iconic Shaheen Bagh protests, which challenged Islamophobic and gendered laws. Adivasi women resist gender violence and corporate exploitation in mining regions. In Kashmir, feminist resistance challenges military occupation and violence. The Shaheen Bagh protests, led by Muslim women against discriminatory laws, exemplify powerful resistance by creating inclusive spaces that break traditional boundaries (Wilson, 2023).

Kadiwal (2021) discusses several ways in which women, particularly Muslim women, are resisting Hindutva in India. She argues that the anti-CAA-NRC protest sites, such as Shaheen Bagh, provided a platform for Muslim women and students to voice their dissent against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC). These protests created a space where women could challenge dominant power structures and narratives. The protests countered stereotypes about Muslim women, portraying them as active participants in defending democratic values (Kadiwal, 2021). She notes that the protests were a form of "public pedagogy," where women and students educated the public about their rights and the need for equality and

justice (Kadiwal, 2021, p. 12). By participating in these protests, women disrupted the BJP-Hindutva's attempts to enforce a vigilante idea of citizenship based on religious and caste supremacy. Kadiwal notes that the protests were nonviolent and intersectional, bringing together women from different backgrounds to stand against fascism and support constitutional values. Women of different ages and from different backgrounds used the Constitution as a shield against hate and polarization. The protests framed the new citizenship legislation as an attack on the idea of India, with Muslim women positioned as defenders of this idea (Kadiwal, 2021). Kadiwal highlights how women, especially Muslim women, are resisting Hindutva through nonviolent protests, public education, and a reimagining of citizenship and national identity.

In another paper, Kadiwal (2023) argues that the anti-Muslim violence in India is intertwined with casteist and patriarchal structures. Islamophobia is seen as an extension of caste and gender-based oppression, with dominant-caste Hindus portraying themselves as pure and Muslims as pollutants. She notes that critical feminists in India play a crucial role in naming and exposing oppression, particularly in the context of casteism and Hindutva politics. Kadiwal draws reference to the Shaheen Bagh protests again, arguing that the protests were notable for the prominent role of Muslim women. Muslim women, traditionally not seen as vocal in public protests, organized and led one of the largest and longest protests in India's history. This was a substantial pushback against the government and societal norms that often patronized or oppressed them (Kadiwal, 2023). The protests demonstrated how Muslim women and critical feminists were taking up public spaces that had been historically withheld from them. They were not waiting for elite approval; instead, they were actively creating their platforms for resistance and dialogue.

Piedalue (2019) explores how grassroots women's organizations in Hyderabad, India, and Seattle, USA, address the marginalization and violence faced by Muslim communities. She introduces the concept of "slow nonviolence," which involves long-term, incremental change to counter structural violence. She argues that these organizations utilize everyday actions as political tools to challenge dispossession and foster more equitable relationships, while adapting their methods to different contexts and communities (Piedalue, 2019).

The enforcement of the radical Hindu nationalist policies that have openly discriminated against the religious and ethnic minorities of India and have also led to an intensification of socio-political resistance movements has been closely observed by the global community. While India has maintained an international reputation as one of the fastest-growing economies and the largest democracy in the world, with a vibrant cultural heritage, the rise of the BJP in India's political landscape has somewhat perplexed the country's international image. The fifth chapter highlights the impact of the Hindutva ideology on India's secular image in global politics. By examining the responses of international media, human rights organizations, and liberal democratic states worldwide to some of the communal violence incidents under the BJP regime, the chapter discusses the challenges to India's secular, pluralistic, and democratic image on the global stage. The role of the Indian government in maintaining a delicate equilibrium between enforcing its Hindutva ideology and maintaining a secular, democratic, and inclusive outlook on the international stage is also evaluated. Lastly, the chapter sheds light on the role of the Indian diaspora in projecting a vibrant and positive image of their home country.

With all eyes on India and widespread apprehensions about another possible regime led by the Bhartiya Janata Party, the Hindutva-inspired BJP has won the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. Conducted in seven phases from mid-April to the beginning of June 2024, the 2024 Indian general elections have been labeled as one of the most polarizing elections in India's history. The second-to-last chapter opens with a detailed account of the BJP's election campaign and a brief account of the campaigns of its opponent political parties. The next section of the chapter proceeds to illustrate the voter turnout for the 2024 electoral contest, while also deliberating on the number of seats won by each party in the lower house of the Indian Parliament. The chapter also provides an insight into the comparative situation of different political parties in the central states of India, including Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu. Last, but not the least, by highlighting the impact of rural and urban setting, the role of religion and the influence of caste on the electoral results manifests that the claims about polarization were not only valid in case of the election campaigns but have also been proven correct in the positions of political parties in the Lok Sabha.

Chapter 2

Historical Perspective of Hindutva

Introduction

The term Hindutva has gained popularity with the rise of the Bhartiya Janata Party in India's political landscape. The main aim of Hindutva ideology is to portray Hindu nationalism as Indian nationalism. This has involved the use of multiple tactics, including generalizing the issues faced by Hindus to the whole population of India, the use of religious symbolism, political mobilization, and mass socialization. To trace the development of Hindutva, the chapter divides the development of Hindu nationalism into three phases: the first phase covers ancient and medieval history, the second phase is that of the colonial era, and the third phase is that of the post-partition time. From tracing the ancient roots of Hinduism, the chapter proceeds to discuss the development of Hindu identity under the Muslim rule of the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal dynasty. Subsequently, the role of European ideas of nationalism is discussed in the consolidation of the basis of Hindu nationalism in India. The contributions of scholars such as V.D. Savarkar and leaders like Ram Mohan Roy and Bal Gangadhar Tilak are evaluated in the strengthening of the Hindutva ideology during the colonial era. By focusing on the organizational framework of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, this chapter elaborates on the transition of Hindutva from a mere theoretical ideology to an organizational force. Lastly, but not least, by examining the formation of the Bhartiya Jana Sangh and the Bhartiya Janata Party, the chapter explores how Hindutva has evolved into a significant political force that has been shaping India's socio-political landscape.

Ancient Roots of Hindu Identity

The roots of Hindu identity can be traced back to approximately 12,000 years ago, when Hinduism, as a religion, emerged as a blend of multiple myths and rituals. In contrast to the revealed Abrahamic religions, Hinduism never had a single unified text, nor an ordinary prophet to refer to. One of the earliest sources of origin of Hinduism is found in Tantrism, which includes exorcism and worship of multiple gods. The emergence and development of the Indus Valley Civilization, approximately 4500 years ago, also introduced new concepts to Hinduism. As the Indus Valley civilization lasted for about 700 years before being wiped out, it contributed to the innovation of worshiping both male and female gods for fertility, as well as trees, plants, and animals. With the influx of Aryan invaders 4,000 years ago, a new element of the Sanskrit language was added, contributing to the formation of Hindu identity. Over time, the Hindu identity was fostered in various regions of the subcontinent, centered around multiple regional gods, with distinct temples and unique practices and rituals. For instance, in Bengal, Kali or Durga is the most revered god. In Maharashtra, Ganesh holds a special place among the people, while in Tamil Nadu, Murugan is the most worshipped god (Ramachandran, 2018c).

The Hindu identity in the Vedic times (1500 BCE- 500 BCE) was consolidated around the worship of over 70 different deities, the most popular of which was 'Agni'- the Fire god. The Vedic era also witnessed the composition of the Rigveda, one of the four key texts of Hinduism, which includes Sanskrit hymns praising deities and rituals (Witzel, 1997). The emergence of the Mimamsa strand in Hinduism introduced various forms of yoga for individuals who wish to take 'sanyas' at an early or later stage in life. Between 500 BCE and 300 BCE, the Hindu identity was divided between groups of Brahmins who fought over the correct path to

salvation. Between 300 BCE and 200 BCE, the Upanishads were written, comprising 108 parts and eight basic principles of Hindu philosophy. The Hindu identity also had its offshoots in the form of Buddhism and Jainism. Another feature of Hindu religion and Hindu identity was added between the 9th and 2nd BCE, when the Ramayana and Mahabharata were written and added as key Hindu texts, comprising epics, folk tales, and fictional stories of princes, kings, and queens (Ramachandran, 2018a).

The period of the Gupta Empire, spanning from the 2nd to the 6th centuries CE, is often referred to as the 'Golden Age of Hinduism'. However, it was still full of internal turmoil, chaos, frequent wars, and even religious conflict. One of the most significant developments in the formation of a somewhat unified Hindu identity was the Bhakti Movement of the 6th century CE. It originated in South India, specifically in Tamil Nadu, and emphasized religious devotion and a personal relationship between the deity and the devotee. Even in Tamil Nadu, the Hindu identity under the Bhakti movement was not a unified and coherent one. There were two parallel groups in Tamil Nadu- the Nayanmars and the Alvars. While it originated from Southern India, it spread across the entire region. However, the arrival of the Bhakti movement's influence in northern India coincided with the advent of Muslim rule in the subcontinent (Ramachandran, 2018).

Table 1. *Phase One of the Evolution of Hindutva*

Era	Organization and Leadership	Events
Antiquity and Pre-Historic	Indus Valley Civilization	Worship of Multiple gods, such as gods of fertility, trees, plants and animals
	Aryan Invasion	Development of Sanskrit language
	Vedic Era	Composition of Rigveda Worship of fire god 'Agni'
	300-200 BCE	Upanishads composition
	9th-2nd BCE	Composition of Ramayana and Mahabharata
		Mauryan Empire- Rise of Ashoka
	2nd – 6th CE- Gupta Empire	Golden Age of Hinduism The Emergence of <u>Bhakti</u> movement in 6th CE
Muslim Rule	Delhi Sultanate	Absence of a unified religious or nationalist identity
	Mughal Sultanate	Revolts and Rebellions by <u>Rajputs</u> and Marathas
		Rise of Shivaji and his revolt against Mughal Empire
		Efforts to establish a Hindu Empire by Marathas

The table above summarizes the early developments of the Hindu religion and the foundations of Hindu identity. Since Hinduism is not a revealed religion, it has evolved without a single text or a single prophet. Over time, myths, worship practices, and religious texts evolved to shape the Hindu religion, which would later form the basis of Hindu identity. During the Delhi Sultanate, Hindus from different regions of India lacked a unified sense of nationalism. During the Mughal rule, Hindu nationalism began to emerge gradually in the form of Rajput and Maratha resistance movements.

Hindu Identity under the Muslim rule in India

The interaction through trade between the Arabs and the inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent predates the advent of Islam, as Arab traders had begun coming to the region as early as the 2nd century CE. In the Indian subcontinent, Muslim invaders came through two routes: one, through Sindh, used by Arab invaders, and the other, through North-Western India, used by Afghan and Turkic invaders. The first recorded invasion of Muslims in history was that of Umayyad military leader Muhammad bin Qasim, who invaded Sindh, confronted Raja Dahir, and laid the foundations of Islamic rule in India (Gabrieli, 1965). In southern India, the spread of Islam did not bring forth any Hindu-Muslim conflicts. The Hindus, particularly, did not sense any threat to their religious identity due to the spread of a religion that was almost alien to the region. In northern India, however, the spread of Islam took a different style.

Delhi Sultanate and Hindu Identity

The establishment of the Delhi Sultanate was preceded by multiple plundering attacks of Mahmud Ghaznavi on the Somnath temple. While many modern-day historians have referred to these attacks as the cause of Hindus' apprehension against Islam and other foreign invaders, another Indian historian, Romila Thapar, provides an alternative perspective. According to Thapar, while there is no denying that Mahmud Ghazni did invade India and plunder the Somnath temple, she asserts that the purpose was solely economic and financial instead of being the spread of Islam or any threat to Hindu communal identity. The limited mention of the Ghazni raids in Jaina and Sanskrit sources further establishes the fact that Mahmud had neither divided the society nor traumatized the Hindus in any way. Additionally, Romila Thapar sheds light on a much-ignored aspect of history by the Hindutva nationalists, which indicates that the temple was recurrently and frequently raided by Hindu rulers and Hindu robbers for the booty- hence Mahmud's raids cannot be considered as an actual traumatic event that could have laid the basis of anti-Muslim sentiment in the region (Mitra, 2011).

During the 600-year rule of the Muslim Delhi Sultanate, succeeded by the Mughal dynasty between 1200 and 1800 CE, millions of people converted to Islam. With the rapid spread of Islam, the practice of the Vedic religion declined as many of the lower-caste Hindus, exhausted with the caste-based discrimination, chose to adopt the new religious ideology that, despite being foreign to them, was attracted to the message of equality of all human beings.

Mughal Dynasty and Hindu Nationalism

As the Mughals established their dynasty in 1526, being apprehensive of an Afghan invasion, they had generally adopted reconciliatory policies with the Hindus. While the Mughals entered into interfaith marriages with the Rajputs, many of their courtesans were also Hindus. While the Hindu Muslim collaboration peaked in the reign of Akbar, who created a new religion with a blend of rituals and practices from Islam and Hinduism, the Hindu identity could still not be revived strongly as many of the Brahmins had given up the practice of Mimamsa religion and thus lost the ability to revive it (Ramachandran, 2018b). One of the elements of Hindu resistance to Muslim rulers came from the Rajputs, who had maintained their independence in the Delhi Sultanate but had been defeated and subsequently incorporated into the Mughal nobility. On one hand, Akbar had made marital alliances with the Rajputs, while on the other hand, he had defeated the Rajput Mewar through the sieges of Chitor and Rathambor. The Rajputs reemerged as a Hindu challenge to the Muslim Mughal Empire during the reign of Aurangzeb, who reimposed the jizya tax on Hindus and placed limits on the lands from which the Rajputs were allowed to collect land revenues. Ultimately, the Rajputs rebelled against the Mughals in 1679 when Aurangzeb's son, Akbar II, was supported by the Rajputs against his ruling father. Although the rebellion was unsuccessful, the Hindu rebellion of the Rajputs continued for more than a generation. Another significant Hindu opposition to Mughal rule came from Shivaji, one of the most revered personalities in the modern-day Hindutva tradition. Belonging to the Deccani plains, Shivaji Bhonsle played a

significant role in pitting the Hindu identity against the Muslim ruling Mughal identity. Having built a guerrilla force that recurrently clashed with the Mughal army, he gradually rose to the position of ruler and himself in an elaborate Vedic ritual that garnered the support of thousands of Hindu pandits. Although his successor, Sambhaji, had failed to overthrow Aurangzeb Alamgir, the Marathas remained a constant irritant for the Mughals and had significantly weakened the Mughal Empire. Later in the 1680s, the Hindu Jat peasants from South Agra also began plundering Mughal supply trains used to fight against the Marathas in the Deccan (Walsh, 2006).

The Mughal rule began to lose its power as the successors of Aurangzeb, Alamgir, began fighting amongst themselves, which led to a loss of control over the government. By the 1750s, the Mughal Empire had largely disintegrated, with many regions having broken away from its centralized authority and control. Four Maratha families began dominating different regions, including Baroda under the control of the Gaekwar dynasty, Indore under the Holkars, Sindia under the Gwalior, and Nagpur under the Bhonsle family. The Maratha hopes of installing their candidate on the throne of India were dashed in the battle of Panipat in 1761 when Afghan forces extended their help to destroy the Marathas. Any hopes and aims of consolidating a Hindu nationalist government based on a Hindu identity ended in the mid-eighteenth century, as the decline of Muslim Mughal rule coincided with the European colonial presence in the Indian subcontinent (Poole, 1903).

Emergence of Hindu Nationalism in the Colonial Era

During the colonial era, Hindu nationalism emerged in the form of Hindu mobilization. This effort to create a unified Hindu identity and then mobilize it emerged as an ideological response to European colonization. This gave birth to a strand of Hindu mobilization, known as 'neo-Hinduism' in the nineteenth century. As the East India Company established a stronger foothold in Bengal, it began utilizing the services of many locals, thereby increasing interaction between the colonizers and the colonized. As the compradors and the local literate people – usually Brahmans extended their services to the British, a new elite class of white-collar workers trained by the English masters emerged that became known as 'bhadraloks'. The bhadralok intelligentsia had a two-pronged reaction to British colonization. On the one hand, some people were inspired and in awe of the scientific, technological, socio-cultural, and political advancements that the British had achieved. On the other hand, many local intelligentsia members considered European progress a threat to the Indians. As a result of these mixed sentiments, neo-Hinduism emerged, in which proponents sought to adopt elements of British culture, not to erase their civilizational roots, but to revitalize and rejuvenate the Hindu national identity along the lines of the Western concept of nationalism.

The table below summarizes the development of Hindu nationalism during the colonial era.

Table 2. *Phase Two of the Evolution of Hindutva*

Era	Organization and Leadership	Events
Emergence of Hindu Nationalism in the Colonial Era	Early 19 th Century	Creation of Brahmo Samaj by Ram Mohan Roy Emphasis on an egalitarian Hindu identity with nostalgic references to the golden Vedic era Criticism and opposition to Christian missionaries Creation of Arya Samaj by Dayananda Saraswati Highlighting the moral and spiritual superiority of Hindus as compared to the Western colonizers Emphasis on the perfection of Sanskrit language Shuddhization Creation of Hindu Mahasba movement by Lala Lajpat Rai

Aryanization of Hindu nationalism
Glorification of Shivaji, Marathas and Rajputs for resistance and rebellion against foreign invaders
Use of Spencer's evolutionary theory to highlight the racial superiority of Hindus
Bengal Partition and Hindu Opposition to it
Morley Minto Reforms and Separate electorate for Muslims- Hindu opposition
Publishing of V.D Savarkar's 'Essentials of Hindutva' and emergence of Hindutva ideology
Distinction between the native and foreign religions
Villainization of Muslims and Muslim rule as the root cause of devastation in India
Formation of K.B. Hedgewar's RSS
Struggle for the creation of a purely Hindu Rashtra
Shivaji presented as a heroic figure for using violent tactics to overthrow foreign rule
Communal riots between Hindus and Muslims
RSS leadership with Golwalkar
Inspiration from Nazi ideology
Suggestions for forceful cultural assimilation and racial homogeneity

One of the most prominent leaders of the reformation, who contributed to Hindu revivalism, was Ram Mohan Roy, who laid the foundation of the Brahmo Samaj in 1828. As an eminent Brahmin from Bengal, working closely with the East India Company, Roy viewed the British presence in India as a favorable opportunity for the region's development. Despite struggling for Hindu revival, he was critical of some of the Hindu practices, including sati. He also acknowledged the due reason for the stigmatization of Hindu practices such as polytheism, discrimination against women, and the caste system by the British people. However, he asserted that such derogatory practices were later additions in Hinduism, and the religion in its original essence did not preach such discrimination amongst the creation of God. He further went forth to claim that the Hindu religion was more monotheistic than Christianity, which believed in the Trinity. Ignoring the idol worship and the existence of a plethora of regional Gods, he made the claims that Hinduism was monotheistic and egalitarian, as it believed in one God, Brahma. Roy referred to the Upanishads as the source of all egalitarian teachings, including the pantheistic thought that every human is an "atma" that is part of Brahma; thus, illustrating a direct connection between the creator and the creation. While emphasizing revival and reformation, Roy was highly critical of the religious conversion missions of the Western missionaries. To prevent the Hindus from being inspired by the Christians, he participated in multiple public debates. He highlighted the glorious past of "the Golden Vedic age" to support his claim that Hinduism was far superior to Christianity.

The Brahmo Samaj movement not only survived the death of Ram Mohan Roy in 1833 but also spread to other parts of India while attracting many followers from different regions who continued the legacy of Roy. One such reformist and revivalist was Dayananda Saraswati, who laid the foundation of Arya Samaj. As a Gujarati Brahmin who had adopted Sanyas in his life, Dayananda met Keshan Chandra Sen, the Brahmo Samaj leader, in 1873 in Calcutta. As a recent returnee from Britain, despite being critical of India's moral decay, Sen upheld the claim that, despite being technologically regressive in comparison to Europe, India still maintained a spiritual superiority. Capitalizing on the works and legacy of Roy and Sen, Dayananda added a few more elements in the consolidation of Hindu identity in the region. While the previous leaders had taken pride in referring to the 'Vedic golden age', Dayananda emphasized the sociocultural superiority of the Hindus. Depicting Aryan society as the one with the most progressive and egalitarian values, he claimed that the sacred land below the Himalayas belonged to the most superior people in the World-Aryans.

Additionally, he referred to Sanskrit as the mother of all languages and propagated that this perfect language had been endowed upon the Aryans by God. He also justified the caste system of the Hindu religion through a

somewhat functionalist approach, where he asserted that the caste-based social system existed to ensure an equal, just, and merit-based division of labor, rather than a hereditary hierarchical discrimination. Taking inspiration from the baptism rituals of Christianity, Dayananda initiated the practice of "Shuddhization," a purification procedure for Hindus who sought to revitalize their faith. However, the Shuddhization was more active in Punjab, where the lack of numerical superiority instilled a sense of vulnerability amongst the Hindus. Hence, the Shuddhi movement in Punjab was mainly targeted towards converting Sikhs and Muslims to Hinduism (Jaffrelot, 2007).

At the turn of the century, Lala Lajpat Rai emerged as one of the leaders associated with the Arya Samaj, having previously been part of the Brahmo Samaj, and played a key role in shaping the concept of Hindu identity. Lajpat Rai's position oscillated from being a radical and extremist conservative Hindu nationalist, who otherized all non-Hindu groups, to one who had links with both Gandhi and Jinnah and asserted that Hindus and Muslims did not have conflicting interests. In the late 1880s, Lajpat Rai wrote Open Letters to Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, openly criticizing him for propagating the view that Hindus and Muslims had conflicting and incompatible interests. Many of Lajpat Rai's opinions will find their place in VD Savarkar's Hindutva ideology. For instance, even though the word "Hindu" had not been used in ancient Hindu literature, Rai traced the origin of Hindu nationality to the Aryan Vedic period. While criticizing the Buddhist period for selfish priesthood and excessive rituals, he appreciated the Marathas and Rajputs for their struggle to throw off the foreign yoke of the Mughals, for laying down the basis of a Hindu nationalist empire. Since European philosophical ideologies dominated the intellectual landscape of the modern world, Rai's work also drew inspiration from European scholars, most notably Herbert Spencer. Spencer's evolutionary ideas emphasized the importance of "survival of the fittest" over time. One of Rai's articles, stressing the superiority of Hindus, posed a question that he believed had haunted the Hindus: how could the Hindu race have been subdued and overcome by people who did not match their moral, spiritual, and even intellectual superiority? However, the fact that the Hindus had existed despite the "twelve centuries of Islamic propaganda" and "another hundred years of evangelical work" by the Christians manifested that the functional fitness and racial superiority of the Hindus (Bhatt, 2001).

Developments in the Early 20th Century

The realization of a distinct Hindu national identity was strengthened with the political developments in the subcontinent in the early 20th century. The rapprochement between Indian Muslims and the British colonial government, which came long after the War of Independence of 1857, was frowned upon by the Hindus. On one hand, while the partition of Bengal in 1905 was cherished amongst the Muslim population, it aroused violent resentment among the Hindus. Furthermore, the creation of the All India Muslim League as a distinct political organization focused on the protection of rights and representation of Muslims irked the Hindus, who kept on asserting that the Indian National Congress represented the interests of "all" Indians. The rights of separate electorate granted to Muslims through the Morley-Minto Reforms and the shifting of the capital of British India from Calcutta to Delhi (the former seat of Mughal power in India) alarmed the Hindus as if the British were being too lenient with the Muslims. The intense socio-political unrest between 1905 and 1911 ultimately led to the reversal of the partition of Bengal.

Bal Ghandhar Tilak is another key figure of the Indian independence and anti-colonial movement, who played a pivotal role in constructing the Hindu national identity in stark contrast to the Muslim identity. For instance, in Poona, some of the Hindus had traditionally attended the Muharram rituals. To prevent Hindus from doing so, Tilak introduced a public-level celebration of Ganesh, which had previously been a family-level affair for Hindus. After this ritual began, almost no Hindus ever participated in or attended the Muharram rituals. Tilak also laid the foundation for justifying militancy and the use of violent means against the British as well as the Muslims. By paying excessive attention to Shivaji through the renovation and reconstruction of his monument, Tilak referred to an example of how Shivaji had killed the general of Aurangzeb, Afzal Khan. Such teachings led to an increased number of Hindu-Muslim communal riots as well as a growth in the number of protests

against the restriction of music outside mosques and the growth of militant cow-protection societies (Bhatt, 2001a).

Britain's engagement in the First World War created a fertile environment for reconciliation of relations amongst the Hindus and Muslims as they momentarily collaborated to pressurize the colonial government into giving at least some extent of self-rule/ satyagraha. Inter-faith cooperation was manifested in the Lucknow Pact of 1916, as well as the Khilafat Movement. Even though the protection of the Caliphate was a concern of the Muslims, Gandhi participated while linking it with the boycott campaign and the satyagraha. The Hindu-Muslim unity proved to be short-lived as it was soon obstructed by the Moplah uprising, where some Muslim peasants had rebelled to proclaim Caliphate and forcefully converted some Hindus to Islam. With this, Gandhi disassociated from the Khilafat movement, and Hindu nationalism also took a sharp political turn (Banik, 2021).

VD Savarkar's Conception of Hindutva

The term "Hindutva" was coined by VD. Savarkar in 1923, when he published his first book, "Essentials of Hindutva" - a text that would be considered foundational for the Hindu nationalist creed. Savarkar begins the book by highlighting the significance of "names" and the contextual meanings they represent. For Savarkar, Hindutva is not synonymous with Hinduism, as the latter is only a sub-part of the broader former term. Hindutva encompasses all aspects of the Hindu race's entire being (Savarkar, 1923). In his subsequent book, "Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?", he clearly describes the distinct characteristics of a Hindu and Hindutva. A Hindu has three characteristics: he considers India to be his motherland (matrabhumi), the land of his ancestors (pitrbhumi), and the holy land (punyabhumi). Hindutva, on the other hand, comprises three essentials: a nation (rashtra), a common race (jati), and a common culture (sanskriti). As Jafferlot summarizes it, Hindutva's main pillars include geographical union, cultural affinity, and racial homogeneity. Savarkar creates a unique kind of religious discrimination by accepting Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism along with Hinduism as parts of the Hindu nationality, while strictly abandoning Christianity and Islam as the religions of foreign intruders. Savarkar's work is a significant attempt towards the 'saffronisation' of Indian history. Tracing the history back to the Vedic times and referring to the people of the Indo-Gangetic Plain as the "Sindhus" (from which the word "Hindu" is derived), Savarkar's story of pre-Islamic India is one of absolute harmony, coexistence, and prosperity. Apart from a brief and negligible critique of Buddhism, the main culprits for devastation in India are the Muslims. To quote Savarkar, "the day Mahmud of Ghazni crossed the frontier line of Sindhustan was the day the conflict of life and death began. By using such speech codes, Savarkar significantly securitizes the issue while pointing out Islam and Muslims as existential threats to Hindutva. Furthermore, by glorifying Shivaji, continuing with the tradition of Lala Lajpat Rai, Savarkar also establishes the permission of the use of extraordinary means such as military tactics and violence to deal with the existential threat.

Development of Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh

While Savarkar had not laid out an action plan for dealing with the existential Islamic threat and for organizing the Hindu nationalist movement against all foreign threats, the task was accomplished by Keshav Baliram Hedgewar. Savarkar's book had inspired Hedgewar enough to lay the foundation of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh in 1925 in Nagpur. To spread the Hindutva ideology and instill physical strength in its young members, the organization evolved into one of the most significant Hindu nationalist movements. Based on a militant form of Hindu nationalism, RSS's main aim was the creation of a purely Hindu nationalist state. Under the leadership of Hedgewar, the RSS remained distant from the Indian independence movement and refrained from participating in anti-British activities. The independence movement aimed for an all-inclusive India, whereas the RSS aimed for a purely Hindu India.

Additionally, RSS also contradicted Gandhi's ideology of ahimsa and non-violent resistance while emphasizing the use of violent tactics. After the death of Hedgewar, RSS was led by M.S. Golwalkar, who was more rigid in keeping RSS aloof from the Quit-India or the Indian independence movement. Golwalkar was a strong proponent of cultural nationalism and a staunch critic of modern territorial or civic nationalism, as he

asserted that the Hindu nation was not conceptualized merely in terms of economic or political rights. However, instead, it was inherently a cultural concept of the nation. For creating a culturally pure Hindu nation-state, he strategized cultural assimilation by claiming that if non-Hindus wanted to be a part of India, they must remain subordinated to the Hindu nation, and must either adopt Hindu culture, religion and language or at least hold in high reverence the Hindu race and culture (Golwalkar, 1939). Golwalker had also been inspiring and influenced by Adolf Hitler's Nazi ideology as he was captivated by the way racial pride was being demonstrated in Germany. He also claimed that Germany's example of forceful assimilation of other races and cultures into one unified whole had important lessons for India to learn from.

Hindutva in the post-Independence Era

For the attainment of the goal of creating a pure Hindu nationalist state, the RSS had organized itself into an intricately complex yet organized hierarchical structure that extends from the grassroots level to the national level. At the basic level, there are "shakhas" or branches, with each one consisting of a group of 50-100 people. These meet regularly, usually on a weekly or even daily basis, and engage in physical, cultural, and intellectual activities such as arts programs, doctrinal speeches, and military training. In intellectual meetings, they are conditioned to associate with the RSS identity and the red-colored flag. One of the targets of these "shakhas" is to attract the youth by activities such as kabaddi that display physical strength and competitiveness while also indoctrinating a strong sense of purpose. Multiple "shakhas" of a city are combined to create a "nagar", with each nagar having its own Nagar Pracharak, a kind of teacher and motivator. Coming under the Zilla pracharak, the nagars are also responsible for managing the monetary affairs in their cities. One of the most significant components of the RSS's structure is the 'Pracharak' - a propagandist who has dedicated their life to the cause of the RSS. At the national level, the RSS has both a legislative and an executive body. The Akhil Bharatiya Karyakari Mandal is the All-India Executive Board responsible for the practical implementation of strategies, programs, and policies created by the Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha, the legislative body or All-India Representative Council. Above these are the Sarsanghchalak, the chief of the organization, whom the Sakaryavah assists, the elected general secretary. To indoctrinate Hindu nationalism among the masses and entirely reconstruct the entire Hindu society according to the Hindutva parameters, the RSS has organized its Sangh Parivar with seven components. The seven components/ aspects of Sangh Parivar are shown in the image below:

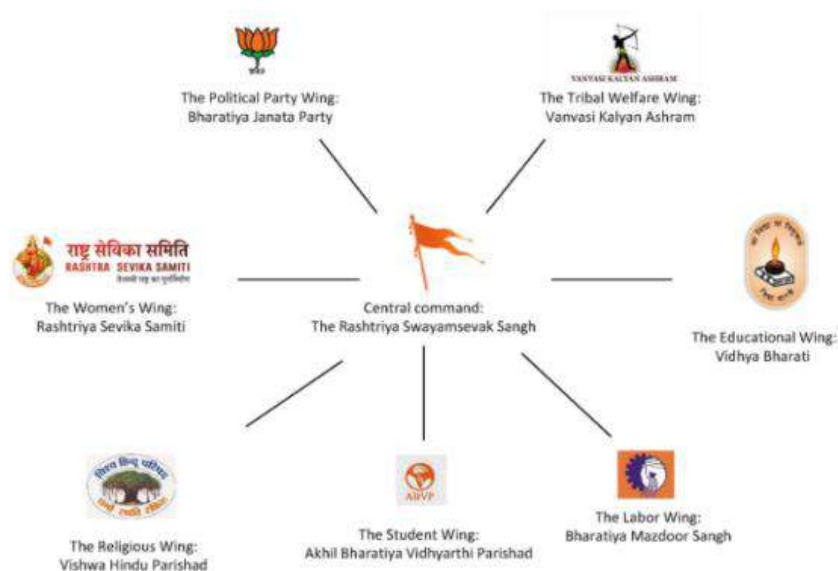


Figure 1. Components of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh

Source: (Upadhyay, 2022)

The first component of RSS was created in the pre-independence days in 1936 by a woman named Laxmibai Kelkar. To ensure that women in India also contributed to the Hindutva movement, Laxmibai led to the creation of the Rastriya Sevika Samiti as the women's wing of the RSS. The second component, created soon after independence in 1948, was the Akhil Bhartiya Vidhyarti Parishad. The ABVP was created to influence university students with Hindutva ideology and to prevent them from being influenced by leftist communist ideals (Jafferlot, 2010). With a similar aim of influencing the mindsets of the younger generation, RSS established a separate educational wing named Vidya Bharti. While the first school under Vidya Bharti was established in 1946, its growth was hindered by the ban on the RSS during the post-independence period. However, with the ban lifted, a mandir school was established in Gorakhpur in 1952, known as Saraswati Sishu Mandir (Nair, 2009). The third component was the political one, which led to the creation of the Bhartiya Jana Sangh, established in 1951. The Bhartiya Jana Sangh, however, would transform into the Bhartiya Janata Party a few decades later, as will be discussed in the next section. The fourth component was the Tribal Welfare Wing, known as the Vanasi Kalyan Ashram. The primary objective of VKA was to counter the growing influence of Christian missionaries in the tribal areas. In addition to its welfare activities, it also included a program aimed at the re-conversion of the Hindus who had recently converted to Christianity. The Bhartiya Mazdoor Sangh, established in 1955 as the labor wing of a labor union, was created in response to the burgeoning threat of growing communist influence in India, which appealed to and attracted the working classes of India. As India was also an agricultural country, the farmers were a significant component of the population, about whom it was felt necessary to integrate them within the RSS structure. Hence, the Bharatiya Kisan Sangh was created in 1979 as the sixth component of RSS. Lastly, but not least, the seventh component of RSS was the Vishva Hindu Parishad. Founded in 1964 by M.S. Golwalkar, the VHP serves as the religious vanguard, with its primary objective being 'to consolidate the Hindu society and protect the Hindu Dharma'. With this aim, the Vishva Hindu Parishad has constructed and renovated temples all across India while also raising its voice against the cow slaughter (Jelen & Wilcox, 2002).

RSS and BJS on the Political Landscape of India

While the RSS had remained aloof from the Indian independence movement, many of its prominent leaders, including V. D. Savarkar, had vehemently opposed partition, asserting that India must always remain 'Akhand Bharat'- the United India. In the annual session of the Hindu Mahasabha, Savarkar had stated that 'from Kashmir to Rameswaram and from Sindh to Assam, India must remain one and indivisible' (Sampath, 2019). Additionally, the fact that Pakistan was created as a Muslim nation instigated the Hindutva nationalists to demand that India must be a Hindu nation-state. When Jawaharlal Nehru steered India towards a secular outlook, and when Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi went on a hunger strike with the demand that payments to Pakistan must be released, a Hindutva nationalist, Nathuram Godse, associated with the RSS, assassinated Gandhi in January 1948 (The Guardian, January 31, 1948). Gandhi's assassination acted as a watershed moment that made a mark on the Indian historical and political landscape to ensure that radical Hindu nationalism was here to stay. The table below summarizes the third phase of Hindutva's evolution, which began in the post-independence era and continues to date.

Table 3. *Phase Three of the Evolution of Hindutva*

Era	Organization and Leadership	Events
Post-Independence	1948	Opposition to Nehru’s proclamation of India as a secular state Opposition to Gandhi’s stance of releasing payments to Pakistan Murder of Mahatma Gandhi

1952	Creation of Bhartiya Jana Sangh as the political wing of RSS, he resigned in opposition to Liaqat-Nehru Pact which was to safeguard minorities
1953	BJS leader S.P. Mukherjee's opposition to Article 370 granting autonomous status to Kashmir Opposition to Nehru-Noon Pact over the distribution of Opposition to the settlement of Rann of Kutch dispute
1977	Opposition to Congress over corruption and electoral malpractice
1980	Creation of Bhartiya Janata Party while incorporating Shiv Sena
1984	Beginning of Ram Jannabhoomi campaign and improved electoral position of BJP
1990	Beginning of Rath Yatra by L.K. Advani
1992	Demolition of Babri Mosque and subsequent communal riots
1998	Electoral victory of Atal Bihari Vajpayee- India elects a BJP Hindutva leader
2002	Gujrat Riots
2004-2009	Saffron Terrorism
2014	Narendra Modi of BJP elected as Prime Minister

As a result of Gandhi's assassination, the RSS faced a ban in 1948, due to which its membership and prominence in the public sphere were eclipsed. In response to the restrictions it faced, there was a realization that the RSS needed to transform into a political organization, hence laying the foundation for the BJS in 1951. The Bharatiya Jana Sangh was established by Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, who consulted with Shri Gurujee Golwalkar to decide upon matters such as assigning the saffron flag and Deepak sign as representative symbols for the new political party. The first general elections contested by the BJS were those of 1951-1952, in which it won 3.06% of the seats in the Lok Sabha and became recognized as a national political party. The 1952 elections were won by the Indian National Congress, which secured 364 out of 489 seats. As the Delhi Agreement, also known as the Nehru-Abdullah Pact, was signed in 1952, granting Kashmir autonomy and special status under the Indian Constitution, the BJS became highly alarmed. As Kashmir was allowed to have separate flags and a constitution, the BJS strongly protested against it. In the year 1953, S.P. Mukherjee decided to go to Kashmir and observe a hunger strike as a protest against Article 370 and the ruling that mandated Indians to carry ID cards in Kashmir and prohibited them from permanently settling in the disputed territory. While illegally crossing the check-post to Kashmir, Mukherjee was arrested and died as a detainee (India Today, August 5, 2019). In the subsequent years, BJS continued to focus on issues that would somehow reinvigorate the Hindu identity, such as the struggle to regain the status of temples, the protection of cows from being slaughtered, and evoking the distinct status of Kashmir (The Wall Street Journal, December 10, 2012)

Inclining towards the leftist or communist side, Congress released its five-year economic plan, which included an extensive budget to cover developmental areas such as communications, agriculture, energy, and irrigation. BJS strongly opposed such plans and called for a Swadeshi plan of its own. The electoral performance of BJS improved in the 1957 elections, as it secured 5.93% of the seats in the Lok Sabha. However, it still could not come close to parity with Congress, which was leading with a whopping number of 371 out of 494 seats. Another source of the rift between BJS and Congress emerged with the conclusion of the Nehru-Noon agreement (between Pakistani Prime Minister Feroze Khan Noon and Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru) to resolve a boundary dispute between the two states, which would also include the division of the Berubari Union (Kumar, 2024). BJS considered this as a 'heinous blot detrimental to India's national interests' as Nehru had agreed to 'transfer a portion of its motherland' to Pakistan (A.B.P.S. 1959: Nehru-Noon Pact, 1960). As a result, BJS organized nationwide protests.

BJS showcased an even improved performance in the 1962 elections by securing approximately 6.44% of the votes. The Rann of Kutch dispute of 1965 became another cause of friction between BJS and Congress. The Rann of Kutch is a low-lying marshland between the Indian state of Gujarat and Pakistan's Sindh. As the territory had disputed claims of both India and Pakistan, the skirmishes of early 1965 were almost about to escalate into a full-fledged war before the British Prime Minister proposed a ceasefire. Later, with the arbitration of the International Court of Justice, India received 90 percent of the territory, while Pakistan gained a mere 10 percent (Kureshi, 2009). The BJS, however, was highly disappointed with the gains as it started widespread protests with the slogan 'Fauj na haari, qoum na haari, haar gai sarkaar'.

The 1967 elections witnessed an increased presence of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh in the Lok Sabha, as it won 35 seats after securing approximately 9.31 percent of the votes (Mohan, 2014). Despite Congress coming into the limelight after Indira Gandhi assumed the leadership of the INC, it could not simply resist the growing prominence of the BJS. One of the reasons for the growing popularity of BJS and a slight decline in the electoral performance of Congress was that India was facing economic strain due to the two subsequent wars it had fought with China and Pakistan in 1962 and 1965, respectively. Furthermore, a new vigor was added to BJS in 1968 as Atal Bihari Vajpayee assumed its leadership. Being highly popular, there were regular chants for Atal Bihari claiming "Pradhan mantri ki agli bari, Atal Bihari, Atal Bihari" (Naqvi, 2018). However, Atal Bihari's popularity could not help the BJS win the 1971 elections, as Congress, under the leadership of Indira Gandhi, swept the electoral landscape clean, winning 342 out of 518 seats. One of the main reasons for Congress's impressive electoral victory was the 'Gharibi Hatao' program, directed at poverty alleviation, which widely appealed to the poverty-stricken masses. However, Congress's performance was soon to be eclipsed due to several reasons, the most prominent being charges of corruption and electoral malpractice (BBC News, June 12, 2017). During the same reign, movements surfaced that became critical challenges for Congress. One such movement was led by the ABVP, the student wing of the RSS, which revolted and protested against the policy failures of the Congress, resulting in famine, by mocking the slogan 'Gharibi Hatao' with the chant 'Gharib Hatao'.

As BJS filed a petition in the Court against Indira Gandhi's invalidation of the electoral contest, a state of emergency was declared in 1977, and democracy was halted. The 1977 elections, held during the state of emergency, were the first instance in the history of independent India where Congress was wiped out of power by the Janata Alliance. The Janata Alliance was formed through the collaboration of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, Bharatiya Lok Dal, Praja Socialist Party, and the Indian National Congress (Organization) (Free Press Journal Archives, June 26, 2019). However, soon after winning the elections, a debate over dual membership surfaced, and the alliance further weakened after pressuring BJS to quit the RSS.

Formation of the Bharatiya Janata Party

This led to the creation of the Bharatiya Janata Party in 1980 under the leadership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee and L.A. Advani. While RSS generously sent its members to join the BJP, the party was also joined by Shiv-Sena, an organization known for its staunch pro-Hindu and anti-Muslim agenda as well as for the militant activities against Muslims. As a newly created political party, the BJP had to consider the guiding principles for the organization—whether it would continue with the RSS-influenced agenda of the BJS or experiment with something new. The BJP, in its initial years, chose the latter option and outlined five basic principles, including Nationalism, democracy, Gandhian Socialism, positive Secularism, and value-based politics. Highlighting integral humanism as its central philosophy, the BJP proposed an agenda for the 'development of all' by raising the slogan 'Sab ka saath, sab ka vikas' (Press Trust of India, 2021).

However, this moderate and inclusive approach failed to appeal to the masses, as the BJP only managed to win two seats in the Lok Sabha in the 1984 elections, the lowest in comparison with its predecessor organization. The electoral failure, combined with a change in leadership from Atal Bihari to L.K. Advani, led to a significant shift in the party's ideology and posture. As the president of the BJP, Advani became the political leader of the

Ram-Janmanbhoomi campaign. The religious wing of the RSS initiated the Ram Janmabhoomi campaign, the Vishva Hindu Parishad, as it demanded the construction of a Ram temple at the site of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh. The dispute arose as the VHP asserted that the site of birth of one of the Hindu deities, Ram, had been consecrated by the Mughal emperor Babar in 1527-1528 to lay the foundational stone of the Babari Masjid. Making the Ram Janmabhoomi a central part of the 1989 electoral campaigns, the BJP showcased its most impressive results in history by securing 86 seats in the Lok Sabha.

BJP's popularity and membership began surging at a fast pace after the 1989 elections. With the aim of further increasing the support of the BJP, its leader, Advani, initiated the Ram Rath Yatra- the Ram Chariot journey across India. While the depicted aim was to educate the Hindus and mobilize support for reclaiming the Ram Temple, another aim was to amass political support and strengthen the BJP's position on the political and electoral landscape of India. The efforts proved to be fruitful, as the BJP won 120 seats in the Lok Sabha, having secured over 20 percent of the vote share. The strengthening position of the BJP has coincided with the declining electoral performance of the Congress, which managed to attain only 232 seats in the Lok Sabha —a minimal number compared to its past results.

Ram Janmabhoomi Campaign and Rise in Popularity of the BJP

Encouraged by the improvement in the BJP's position in the electoral landscape and aware of the crucial role Hindu Nationalism and the Ram Janmabhoomi issue played in the BJP's electoral win, L.K. Advani and RSS leaders sought to further capitalize on the issue. In December 1992, when VHP leaders and RSS members visited the site of Babri Masjid or the Ram Janmabhoomi with over a hundred thousand Hindu Yatris who visited the place to pay their homage to the supposed birthplace of Ram, the crowd turned violent and attacked the mosque. As one of the members of the crowd slipped inside the mosque and raised a saffron flag on its top, it was seen as a signal to attack, and within hours, the mosque was razed to the ground. As a result, communal riots between Hindus and Muslims broke out, leading to the deaths of over 2000 people (Lodhi, 2024).

The 1990s witnessed low-intensity political turmoil at the Lok Sabha level, as neither the Congress nor the BJP was able to secure a clear majority in the elections, resulting in the formation of hung parliaments. In the 1996 elections, the BJP won 161 seats, a considerable improvement over its past performance; yet, this was insufficient to form the government alone. The BJP-led minority government could not survive more than thirteen days. In the 1998 mid-term elections, the BJP won the highest number of seats in its history — 182 — but once again could not decisively form the government. Finally, for the 1999 elections, the BJP created the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), which won the elections, and Atal Bihari Vajpayee became the Prime Minister of India for the next five years, until 2004.

Hindu Nationalism in the 21st Century

Gujarat Riots

After the Ram Yatra Campaign and the demolition of the Babri Mosque, the Gujarat riots of 2002 marked another milestone in the militarization of the Hindutva project, as well as a massive desensitization of the public to violence committed against ethnic minorities of India. The Gujarat riots broke out as it was alleged that Muslims had set an express train on fire, even though the source of the fire was coming from inside the train. Violence broke out as Hindus, seeking vengeance, gang-raped Muslim women, looted their houses, and engaged in mass killings of Muslim men (Shamdasani, 2009). When the Gujarat riots broke out, Narendra Modi was the chief minister of Gujarat, and as a consequence, he was denied an American visa. However, in the domestic arena, there was no reaction against Narendra Modi. More alarmingly, according to the study of National Elections in 2004, there was only a minuscule 7 percent of the respondents who considered that the Gujarat riots should be blamed on the Hindu extremists (Palshikar, 2016). This indicated that not only had the

Hindutva agenda gained massive acceptance, but it also revealed that the population would be more willing to accept and support a political party that vouched for such an agenda.

BJP's performance on the electoral landscape dwindled in the elections of 2004 and 2009 as the United Progressive Alliance UPA I and UPA II won under the premiership of Sonia Gandhi and Manmohan Singh. Under their leadership, extensive welfare projects, including subsidies and rural paid schemes, were launched. As the Congress continued to focus on the plight of rural people, poverty alleviation, and issues of underprivileged classes, minorities, and scheduled tribes, the upper and middle classes, as well as the upper-caste Brahmins, felt neglected, unheard, and underrepresented. As a result, these strata of society became more prone to supporting the BJP. Additionally, as Congress was inclined towards the minorities, it was recurrently accused by the BJP and RSs of being anti-state. The 2004-2009 regime of Congress also witnessed a sharp incline in Saffron Terrorism (a term used to indicate radical and militant attacks by Hindu nationalists) (Jahangir & Mehmood, 2023). Notable incidents included the bombing of the Jalna Mosque in 2004, the destruction of the Hamidia mosque in 2006, the bombing of the Samjhota Express in 2007, followed by the target killings of Muslims, the Mecca blasts of 2007, and the Ajmer Sharif Dargah blast in 2008. Almost every one of these Hindu terrorism cases included either an ex-member of RSS or an associate of Abhinav Bharat- the student wing of RSS.

The Ascent of the BJP and Narendra Modi in the elections of 2014 and 2019

The decades of struggle by the RSS and BJP finally paid off when Narendra Modi, representing the BJP and backed by the RSS, became the Prime Minister of India after contesting the 2014 elections. While the election campaign mainly portrayed the BJP as a developmentalist political party, it did not disassociate from its Hindutva agenda. Despite claiming that the BJP would focus on democracy and inclusivity, there were many instances in the election campaigns that gave primacy to the Hindus while marginalizing the minorities of India, particularly the Muslims. For instance, in the blame game rhetoric when the Congress and UPA alliance was to be degraded, Narendra Modi referred to Sonia Gandhi and Manmohan Singh as the 'Delhi Sultanate' and 'Rajiv Gandhi' as a Shahzada. These terms were used in a derogatory sense to indicate the corrupt rule of Muslims and also to blame these politicians for being inclined towards the Muslims. To clearly and openly manifest his own Hindu identity, Shri Modi used to wear saffron-colored kurtas, took along a Yogi or pandit, such as Baba Ramdev, with him on election rallies, and also frequently paid homage to the deities. Furthermore, to distinguish between the Muslim and Hindu attendants of the rallies, he frequently threw caps and veils in the crowd. To please the Hindus, Narendra Modi also visited the Kashi Vishwanath temple and claimed that he had come so far only to gain the protection of Baba Vishwanath.

Chapter 3

An Analysis of Indian Secular Polity

Introduction

The Bhartiya Janata Party is one of the largest and most influential parties in India's political landscape. Through a complex interweaving of ideological zeal, religious fervor, strategic maneuvering, and governance, the party has been able to shape India's socio-political landscape. This chapter begins by delving into the ideological foundation of the BJP and its practical impact on the Indian polity, which was once conceptualized as secular. By examining the role of different leaders in shaping the party's policy perspectives, a primary focus is on determining the BJP's stance on Indian Constitutional secularism. While analyzing the BJP's interpretation of Secularism, the chapter discusses both the critique and the defense of the BJP's perspective. Next, the electoral campaigns of the two Prime Ministers from the BJP, Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Narendra Modi, are compared to determine their inclination towards either Hindutva or constitutional Secularism. The chapter also highlights the governance policies as well as the Hindutva-influenced policies adopted under the BJP's regime, which indicates a significant divergence from Secularism. Ultimately, the chapter offers a comparative analysis of Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Narendra Modi's ability to integrate the BJP's ideology into the socio-political fabric of India.

Foundational Principles of BJP

Hindutva and the political ideology of India: The Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), the successor to the Bhartiya Jana Sangh, has its ideological roots in the Hindutva ideology, which Vinayak Damodar Savarkar promoted during the pre-independence era. Writing in 1923, V.D. Savarkar has explicated a clear-cut division between Hinduism and Hindutva —the former being a religion and the latter being a comprehensive socio-cultural, ethno-political, and explicitly nationalistic concept that aims to uphold the civilizational superiority of the Hindu race.

On the ideological groundwork laid by V.D. Savarkar's conceptualization of Hindutva, the more radical and practical organizational struggle manifested in the form of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), created by Hedgewar in 1925. RSS strongly and ambitiously propagates the idea of the creation of a Hindu Rashtra (a Hindu nation or Hindu state). The Hindu Rashtra does not necessarily refer to a theocratic state; instead, it focuses on the development of a politico-cultural entity where the Hindu race, Hindu culture, Hindu religion, and Hindu language (Sanskrit, as stressed by Savarkar) must be given paramount importance.

According to the ideologies of Savarkar and Hedgewar, cultural or ethnic Nationalism is given primacy over civic Nationalism. As mentioned by M.S. Golwalkar, one of Savarkar's and Hedgewar's contemporaries, for the creation of a pure Hindu Rashtra, if non-Hindus wanted to be part of India, they must remain subordinate to the Hindu Nation. They must either adopt Hindu culture, religion, and language or at least hold in high reverence the Hindu race and culture (Golwalkar, 1939). This also includes the promotion of traditional values and customs that had been integral to the Hindu heritage of India. By adopting Hindutva as its political ideology, the BJP has sought to unify the diverse ethnic cultures present in India, where ideological factors play a dominant role. The BJP strategically promotes national unity by prioritizing Hindu culture, identity, and traditions. This approach reflects the party's vision for national identity and cohesion, aligning with its broader goals. Hindutva, in this context, serves as a means of articulating cultural, ideological, and religious identity.

Constitutional Values and Policy Positions of the BJP

Despite the heavy influence of Hindutva ideology on the ideological principles of the BJP, the party claims commitment to the Indian constitution, which is inherently secular. Although the party employs the rhetoric of democracy, Secularism, and social justice, its understanding and interpretation of these concepts differ starkly from the mainstream interpretation.

National Security and Nationalism: From the vigorous and robust stance that the BJP holds regarding national security, it can be easily interpreted that it adheres to the realist Hobbesian interpretation of world politics, where self-help is crucial in an anarchic situation that could transform into a 'war of all against all' at any time. While making specific references to Pakistan and China, the BJP vouches for a robust defense and hands-on

foreign policy. For the preservation of India's sovereignty and territorial integrity, the BJP also emphasizes creating a strong national identity by improving border security, bolstering defense capabilities, and projecting India's interests on the global stage.

On the economic front, to make India a global power, the BJP focuses on policies such as liberalization, technological advancement, infrastructure development, and market reforms. The evidence of this aim can be seen in initiatives and programs such as 'Make in India' and 'Digital India'. At the core of these policies lies the belief that an economically prosperous and self-sufficient India can more strongly protect and promote its cultural and nationalistic values.

With cultural supremacy and cultural Nationalism at the core of its ideological grounds, the BJP has a vigorous cultural policy that aims at the promotion of the Indian language, culture, customs, and traditions. Being critical of the role of foreign invaders, primarily Muslims who have been recurrently accused of marginalizing the Hindu culture and heritage, the BJP extensively focuses on the adoption of cultural policies directed at the celebration of Hindu heritage. A notable example in this regard is the construction of the Ram Temple after the demolition of the Babri Mosque. Other policies include promoting the Sanskrit language and celebrating Hindu festivals at the national level.

Although the BJP claims to design policies directed at social justice and welfare, many of these are reflective of Hindutva principles. For instance, the cow protection policies, promotion of yoga and Ayurveda, as well as abrogation of Article 370, which had granted a special autonomous status to Kashmir. Such policies reflect the fact that the BJP is not willing to tolerate and accept diversity on its socio-political landscape and aims towards cultural assimilation by integrating marginalized communities into the national mainstream from a socio-cultural perspective.

Key Figures of the BJP and Influence of their thoughts on Constitutional Values

As the BJP transitioned from the BJS, many political leaders have played a key role in shaping its ideological and strategic trajectory by incorporating Hindutva into the party's political agenda. Three political leaders have been particularly critical in this regard: Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Lal Krishna Advani, and Narendra Modi.

1. Atal Bihari Vajpayee: As the co-founder of the Bhartiya Janata Party in 1980, Atal Bihari Vajpayee initially gained recognition for his moderate stance and willingness to build coalitions. With a moderate approach, Vajpayee attempted to strike a balance between the radical Hindutva ideology and the secular constitutional framework of the Indian democratic polity. Despite initially failing to garner political support, the BJP rose to prominence under the leadership of Vajpayee, who served as Prime Minister of India between 1998 and 2004. Efforts to modernize the Indian economy, improve relations with regional neighboring states, and promote social harmony have been key features of Vajpayee's tenure. Accredited for leading the BJP towards a more centrist position on the Indian political landscape, Vajpayee believed that the only way to achieve national unity was through inclusive governance. Due to this, the BJP was able to secure support beyond its traditional Hindu voters and foster the National Democratic Alliance to establish a stable government.
2. Lal Krishna Advani: As the other co-founder of the BJP, Lal Krishna Advani's approach had been in stark contrast with that of Vajpayee, as he had also been critical of Vajpayee's moderate and inclusive approach at times. L.K. Advani played a crucial role in raising the party to prominence in the 1990s by leading the Ram Janmabhoomi campaign. Through his Rath Yatra journey in 1990, which also resulted in the demolition of the Babri mosque, Advani galvanized the radical Hindu nationalist base of the BJP. The aggressive Hindutva nationalism stance amassed support from grassroots levels and transformed the BJP into a formidable political force at the national level.
3. Narendra Modi: Prior to becoming Prime Minister twice in the aftermath of the elections of 2014 and 2019, Modi had been the Chief Minister of Gujarat when the Gujarat riots broke out in 2002. From his electoral campaigns to governance policies, Narendra Modi's approach has been marked by an assertive

foreign policy, characterized by a specific anti-China and anti-Pakistan narrative, which explicitly contrasts with Secularism, assertive Hindutva nationalism, and economic reforms. Modi's ascent to power is often ascribed to his ability to connect with the masses, as he has repeatedly portrayed himself as the 'Chowkidar' or the guard of the Hindu Nation, or the 'Chaiwala' tea stall person, in order to make sure that he resonates well with the masses. Modi's supporters have also cherished him for his governance model, 'Modinomics', which focuses on economic liberation and social welfare. His aim of making India self-reliant is manifested through his 'Make in India' initiative, whereas prominent social welfare initiatives include programs of financial inclusion, such as Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana. The assertive foreign policy and national security ambitions of Modi are visible through his actions, such as revocation of Article 370, which had granted an autonomous status to Kashmir, and also in carrying out surgical strikes against Pakistan.

Influence of RSS ideology on the Bhartiya Janata Party

As discussed earlier, the BJP is the successor to the BJS (Bharatiya Jana Sangh), which was the political wing of the RSS. Hence, as the ideological parent, RSS has an almost direct influence on the party's vision and policies. The fact that RSS can work at the grassroots level while maintaining a strict discipline and an efficient organizational structure has played a key role in the electoral success of the BJP. The other affiliated components of RSS, included in the Sangh Parivar, such as the religious wing, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, also play a key role in ensuring that the BJP remains the primary proponent of the Hindutva ideology on India's political landscape. The prime importance of Sanskrit language, celebration of Hindu festivals on national scale, the frequent visits of BJP's leaders to pay homage to different temples, reclaiming of history that adheres and suits to the Hindu Nationalism, policies that marginalize other religion such as Islam and Christianity have all their roots in the fact that RSS has a non-negligible influence on the BJP.

BJP's Stance on Indian Constitutional Secularism

Coined by the British reformer George Jacob Holyoake, the term 'secularism' has been used in multiple connotations in multiple contexts. The growing alienation between religion and state institutions, the general decline in religious practice, and the decreasing affiliation of people with religion have all been interpreted as manifestations of Secularism (Copson, 2019).

In the case of India, the framers of the constitution did not strictly adhere to the Western notion of Secularism, which prescribes a rigid separation between religion and the state's institutions. Instead, Secularism, as envisioned by Nehru and other contributors to the constitution, focused on providing equal respect for all religions and fostering values of tolerance and religious pluralism. As per the Constitution of India, the state would not give precedence to any particular religion at the expense of others, and that religious freedom would be ensured for all citizens.

BJP's interpretation of the Secularism of the Indian constitution is based on the lens of ethnic Nationalism dominated by the Hindutva ideology. For the BJP, the only acceptable form of Secularism would be the one that cherishes and promotes the Hindu civilizational and cultural heritage. This version of Secularism is not only in contrast with Western or commonsensical understanding of Secularism, but it is also in contradiction with the constitutional values of India, as promoted by the Indian National Congress and its leaders (Jafferlot, 2019). The BJP government accuses its preceding governments of practicing 'pseudo-secularism' in which Indian minorities were favored at the expense of the Hindu majority population.

Criticism of the BJP's Approach to Secularism. A primary critique of the BJP's version of Secularism is that it promotes majoritarianism. By practically extensive measures for the promotion of Hindu rituals, religion, and customs, the minority religious communities, particularly Muslims and Christians, are marginalized. This also

contradicts the constitutional Secularism that has emphasized freedom of religion and the protection of rights of all religious groups in India, thus laying the groundwork for another critique of the BJP's version of Secularism.

Another criticism of the BJP's understanding of Secularism comes from the fact that it has increased religious polarization by aggravating the religious divide in India. This has been evident through multiple examples such as: the demolition of Babri Masjid and the construction of Ram Temple after the Ram Janmabhoomi movement, the communal riots that targeted Muslims in Gujarat in 2002, and the Citizenship Amendment Act that practically alienated Muslims by fostering a sense of exclusion (Anderson & Damle, 2018)

Defense of the BJP's Approach to Secularism. Based on Benedict Anderson's approach that 'nations are imagined communities', the proponents of the BJP's Hindutva shade secularism claim that in order to preserve the national unity and integrity, it is mandatory to promote the cultural heritage of the majority population of India. They argue that tracing the roots of Hindu culture in ancient Indian civilization is the only way to strengthen the national identity. Any attempts at cultural and religious pluralism might result in the disruption of India's socio-cultural and political fabric.

Another argument is that such policies act as a remedy for the past grievances and historical injustices committed against the Hindus. Not only did the previous governments give preferential treatment to the minorities at the cost of the Hindu interests, but this had been a prevalent practice for centuries when the Muslim invaders expanded their empires and enslaved the Hindus in their very own territory. The preferential treatment given to Hindus and the promotion of Hindu cultural symbols is just a method to settle the scores of the past.

By pointing towards the inclusive developmental agenda under the slogan and initiative of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas" (Development for All), BJP supporters also deny that the political party has any discriminatory agenda. Such initiatives are a testament to the fact that the party is focused on social welfare and economic progress that benefits all, irrespective of cultural, religious, or ethnic differences. This, according to BJP's supporters, is practical Secularism.

The Bhartiya Janata Party quotes judicial decisions that have endorsed the actions or policies of the BJP as a defensive argument against the blame of undermining Secularism. Since the judiciary is regarded as the guardian of the constitution, when the judiciary approves of the actions of the BJP, it implies that nothing beyond or against the constitutional limits is being done. Notable decisions in this regard include the Court's approval of the construction of the Ram Temple and its support for the abrogation of Article 370.

The BJP's approach to Secularism is distinct, as it fuses the strategies of modern governance with cultural and ethnic Nationalism. Despite widespread claims of non-discrimination and respect for all religions, on a practical level, the party focuses on the promotion of Hindu culture and religion, which has many times resulted in marginalization of the minority communities as well as communal polarization. This, however, is defended by the party with claims that it is necessary for national unity, addresses historical grievances, and promotes inclusive economic development.

Comparison of Atal Bihari Vajpayee's election campaign and Narendra Modi's

Atal Bihari Vajpayee's election campaign had been characterized by a moderate stance in politics, which contributed to a successful coalition. Vajpayee had realized the fact that a radical Hindutva stance only appealed to a radical nationalist Hindu section of the society, while alienating all the moderate Hindus as well as the religious and ethnic minorities of the state. Hence, he claimed that the values of the BJP were based on Gandhian socialism, democracy, integral humanism, and positive Secularism. Initially, this narrative had not been able to secure widespread support for the BJP in the 1980s; however, Vajpayee managed to rise to power

by 1998. Vajpayee's election campaign, as well as his political style, focused on good governance and inclusive policies that promised development for all. The moderate approach of Vajpayee not only expanded the BJP's voter base but also facilitated the creation of a successful political coalition in the form of the National Democratic Alliance, which ruled India between 1999 and 2004 (Yadav, 2004). From his election campaign to his term in office, Vajpayee was known for keeping the hardliners at a distance and ensuring that his closest allies shared his moderate political approach. However, for this reason, RSS has made multiple attempts to remove him from power (Nag, 2018).

Electoral Campaign of Narendra Modi

For the 2014 elections, the main emphasis of Narendra Modi's electoral campaign was on the developmental agenda. Providing the comparison of the state of Gujarat (where Narendra Modi had been the Chief Minister) with other provinces of India, the BJP candidate presented himself as the 'Vikas Purush' or the Development Man. Slogans such as 'Sabke Saath, Sabke Viaks' highlighted the goal of bringing development for all in India. While criticizing the previous Congress government for its ignorance towards the lower castes and rural areas of India, Modi put forth an ambitious plan, the 'Rurban Mission', which connoted the development of rural areas at par with urban areas. For this, the slogan 'Aatma hoga gaon ki, aur suvidha hoga Shahar ki' was raised. Another ambitious developmental agenda had been to digitalize India. The excessive use of technology in the election campaign served as a preliminary practical manifestation of the fact that the BJP had both the aim and the capability to implement its digitalization program. Using technology, he had been able to communicate with more than two localities at the same time, as a result of which his 12 speeches had a maximum reach of over 1,350 localities. Additionally, for critically remote areas, recorded videos were displayed on large LCD screens, known as the 'NaMo Rath'. Twitter had also played a significant role in the 2014 election campaign, with Modi reportedly making more than 40,000 tweets in a single day. This excess began to be referred to as multimedia carpet bombing. While the Hindu nationalist and anti-Muslim, anti-Pakistan, and discriminatory narrative had been present in the election campaign of 2014, it had mainly been blanketed by the developmental agenda.

The election campaign for the 2019 elections that led the BJP towards a landslide victory was more boldly Hindu nationalist and more bluntly anti-Muslim and anti-Pakistan. There was an increased number of visits to the hills, caves, temples, and the Ganga River as part of his saintly politics (Rai, 2023). Additionally, as many of the promises made in the 2014 campaign remained unmet, the 2019 election campaign of Narendra Modi targeted the grassroots level by launching numerous pro-poor economic programs. These included the Swachh Bharat - Clean India drive, which installed toilets in numerous homes, and the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwal Yojana - a program to distribute cooking gas cylinders among the underprivileged people (Jafferlot, 2007). Furthermore, a central and non-negligible part of Modi's 2019 election campaign was the focus on defense and security issues. Following the Pulwama attacks in early 2019, Modi prioritized the defense campaign and labelled himself as the 'Chowkidaar' or the watchman of the Nation (The Hindu, 2019). The 2019 Manifesto claimed that under the Modi government, India would be prioritizing itself by making a section 'Nation first' in the manifesto. BJP also took a jibe at the Congress for not attacking Pakistan in history. There were also references to the abrogation of Article 370 and the enactment of the Citizenship Amendment Bill.

Furthermore, there had been multiple speeches in which the statements and comments instigated communal hatred. For instance, a chief minister from UP, while holding a derogatory view of Congress, asserted that under Congress rule, there was no electricity on Holi or Diwali. However, electricity was always available on Eid and Muharram (The Indian Express, July 11, 2024). Even the entertainment industry was not exempt from campaigning for the BJP, as multiple movies with a pro-Hindutva agenda were released. For instance, the movie 'Accidental Prime Minister' was designed to mock the Congress leader Manmohan Singh. Similarly, the movie Uri was launched soon after the Uri attacks to glorify and glamorize the role of the Indian Armed Forces, whereas the movie Thachkeray depicted the rise to power of Bal Thackeray, the person who led the formation of Shiv Sena, a militant Hindu group in Maharashtra (Sharma, 2019).

Major Political Decisions of the BJP and Their Impact on the Indian Polity

Economic Reforms and Liberalization

Under the BJP regime of Atal Bihari Vajpayee from 1998 to 2004, significant efforts were made to introduce market liberalization reforms, including privatization, deregulation of the economy, and efforts to attract and increase foreign direct investment. Initiatives such as the privatization of state-owned enterprises and the construction of the National Highway were aimed at modernizing India's infrastructure (Sharma, 2018). While the upper-middle class of society celebrated these reforms, they also garnered harsh criticism for exacerbating economic inequality and for failing to address agrarian distress in the rural areas (Mukherji, 2014). To sum up, Vajpayee's economic policies had a mixed impact, leading to economic growth on one hand, while increasing socio-economic inequality in the state.

Narendra Modi's premiership of India has also been based on the principles of neoliberal economics, which have aimed to maximize foreign investment in the country. Under the 'Make in India' program, foreign companies have been encouraged to establish their manufacturing plants in India to transform the country into a global manufacturing hub. Additionally, the GST (Goods and Services Tax) initiative was introduced in 2017 to unify and broaden India's scattered tax base. Similarly, the Digital India initiative was introduced to ensure that government services are available to the people electronically. While this had promoted digital literacy on one hand, it also boosted the production of electronics in the state.

The claim that Modi's policies have energized India's economic growth while also enhancing the country's position on the global economic landscape will be an undisputed one. However, the implications at the domestic level have been mixed once again. Modi's economic policies have been criticized for a variety of reasons, including the failure of implementation, rising unemployment, and agricultural distress (Subramanian, 2017).

Nuclear Tests and International Relations

Atal Bihari Vajpayee is the Indian Prime Minister who was credited with conducting the nuclear tests in Pokhran in 1998, and subsequently impacting the international standing of India. The immediate impact of the tests came in the form of international sanctions. However, this soon led to a strategic dialogue and collaboration with the major powers of the world, such as the USA. Consequently, the Indo-US Civil Nuclear Agreement was signed in 2005, which dramatically improved India's energy security and strategic posture (Tellis, 2001). One week after the nuclear tests by India, Pakistan followed suit. Recognizing that the attainment of nuclear power by regional adversaries could lead to Mutually Assured Destruction, Vajpayee pushed for diplomatic negotiations with Pakistan, which culminated in the Lahore Declaration and the beginning of the Lahore-Delhi Bus Service. While the Confidence Building Measures with Pakistan soon failed with the onset of the Kargil war, the strong defense showcased by the Indian Armed Forces during the BJP's reign garnered massive support. One of the narratives is that the strong posture of India under the Vajpayee regime during the Kargil war was a decisive factor in his victory in the 1999 elections.

Narendra Modi has continued with the diplomatic legacy of pursuing a proactive foreign policy. To make India a global power, the Modi regime has sought to improve relations with global powers. These efforts include initiatives such as the 'Act East Policy', which focuses on improving ties with the states of Southeast Asia. Additionally, India has also become part of strategic partnerships, such as the Quad Alliance, alongside Japan, the United States, and Australia. However, in the case of Pakistan, Modi's policy has been in contrast to that of his predecessor, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, of the BJP. From blaming Pakistan for the Pathankot airbase attacks of 2016 to galvanizing public support by fueling an anti-Pakistan narrative after the Pulwama attacks of 2019, Narendra Modi has adopted a more aggressive stance in the case of Pakistan.

Despite the considerable differences in their approaches, both Prime Ministers from the BJP have sought to enhance India's position in the global political landscape. While Vajpayee focused on nuclear and strategic independence combined with efforts of reconciliation, Modi has pursued a multi-pronged strategy that seeks collaboration with global powers while maintaining a hardline stance with its regional neighbors.

Hindutva Influenced the Internal Policies of the BJP

Reformation of Curriculum: Saffronisation

RSS has been aware of the fact that education has the power to influence the minds and hearts of the younger generation, thereby leading to a lasting impact. Saffronisation indicates the re-narration of Indian history while glorifying the Hindus and undermining the contributions of other races and religious and ethnic minorities in India. The elements of saffronisation have been evident in the works of Lala Lajpat Rai and V.D. Savarkar, where they held the Muslim invaders responsible for the decline of the Hindus. In more contemporary times, Saffronisation has been evident in curriculum changes in states where the BJP came into power, and eventually, for the whole of India. As soon as the BJP came to power in the late 1990s, the government-run rural schools were given over to the governance of Vidhya Bharati Educational Trust. In the RSS-controlled schools, the Sankriti Danyana textbook is taught, which puts forth the notion that Pakistan is an enemy state created by the Muslim invaders who had disrupted the peace of the Hindus of India. Additionally, these books also highlight the 'negative aspects' of Gandhi's non-violence movement while glorifying Hitler and the Nazis for their achievements in Germany (Biswas, 2020).

Since education in India is mainly under governmental control, RSS's efforts to influence the curriculum have been facilitated by the rise of the BJP at the national level. RSS has sought to rewrite and restructure the books written by NCERT by claiming that the department had previously written pseudo-secular books. For this purpose, a separate committee was created by RSS with the purpose of 'Indianizing the educational system of India'. Under this committee, there has been a significant change in the educational curriculum of Rajasthan, where V.D. Savarkar is portrayed as a hero, and many references to the contributions of Gandhi and Nehru are omitted. In the case of Maharashtra, the chapters of Mughal history and Muslims in India have been purposefully removed from the history textbooks for grades VII and XI (Ganapatye, 2017).

A significant manipulation has appeared in the form of reducing the time duration of Muslim rule in India by approximately 5 centuries. This has been coupled with maligning the Muslim rule as a 'period of struggle' and denying any contribution of Muslims in the development of the subcontinent. Not only the social science books, but even the science books have not been able to escape the saffronisation at the hands of the BJP and RSS. The science books composed in the BJP era of 1999-2004 by NCERT attributed almost all the important scientific discoveries to the Vedic era (Westerfield, 2019).

National Register of Citizens- the Case of Assam

The concept of NRCs is not an innovative one in India, as the National Register of Citizens has served as a database for demographic information regarding all Indian citizens. The purpose of maintaining NRCs is particularly to exclude illegal migrants.

For the first time, the NRC was created in 1951 in India after the national census. For decades, the NRCs had never been updated until 2013, when the Supreme Court ordered Assam to update its NRC after a petition was launched against the illegal immigrant settlement in Assam. In Assam, there had been a longstanding anti-immigrant sentiment after a large number of Bengali refugees entered the province while escaping the liberation of East Pakistan in 1971. The Assamese had been highly concerned that these people posed a threat to Assamese culture and ethnic identity. According to the court orders, to be included in the NRC, the citizens had to provide 'documentation of their ancestors living in India before 1971- the year of secession of Bangladesh.

Following the presentation of the new final NRC in August 2019, approximately 5 percent of Assam's population (about 1.9 million) was excluded from citizenship (Menon, 2023). The ones omitted from the list comprised 50 percent Muslims and 50 percent ethnic Bengalis. If people fail to produce the necessary documentation, such as birth certificates, land ownership or tenancy records, passports, or refugee registration certificates, they might be sent to detention camps. According to the United States Commission for International Religious Freedom's 2019 issue brief, for many families, producing the document was a significant challenge due to numerous factors, including illiteracy, a lack of monetary resources to file legal claims, and inadequate record-keeping by the family. While over 1000 people had been sent to detention centers, more had been under construction under the Modi regime. However, a notable aspect in this regard is that Hindus had been unconditionally included in the NRC, even if their names had never been initially present (Akins, 2019). While plans had been made to implement it nationwide, they have not been put into practice since 2021.

Citizenship Amendment Act

Another of the Hindutva-led BJP's exclusionary policies that aim at reforming the Hindu nationalist identity of India by excluding other identities, particularly that of Muslims, has been the Citizenship Amendment Act. In December 2019, the Citizenship Amendment Law was passed in India, which was directed at granting nationality to the oppressed minorities of neighboring countries, except Muslims. With this provision, the previous Citizenship Law of 1955 was amended, guiding a path towards the attainment of Indian citizenship by persecuted minorities of six religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Christianity, Jainism, and the Parsi religion, from Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh. With a clear indication, the Act makes no references to Muslims. Previously, Indian citizenship could be attained by having a total of six years of residency in India, with the last 12 months of continuous presence in the state, without any discrimination on the basis of religion. The Act was implemented after being ratified in December 2020.

In response to the criticism for violating international human rights, the BJP responds by asserting that it aims to give protection to the oppressed and persecuted. Since Bangladesh, Afghanistan, and Pakistan are all Muslim countries, Muslims supposedly do not need India's protection. However, while excluding Muslims, India has also excluded some Muslim sects facing persecution, such as Hazaras in Afghanistan, Shias from Pakistan, Tamils from Sri Lanka, and Rohingya people from Myanmar.

While Amnesty International has criticized the CAA for violating the international human rights law and for enabling religious based discrimination, Delhi's former high court chief justice had remarked that CAA was a blatant violation of the Indian constitution that emphasized Secularism and non-discrimination based on religion by providing equal respect and rights to all (Thapar, 2019).

Anti-Conversion Laws, 'Ghar Wapsi' and Love Jihad

Even though Article 25 (1) has explicated the freedom of conscience and right to profess, practice, and propagate religion for every citizen of India, the current policies of the BJP government are a blatant violation of this constitutional provision. Under the BJP regime, 12 out of 28 states of India have adopted anti-conversion laws, particularly refraining people from converting to Christianity or Islam. While the BJP sympathizers claim that the purpose of anti-conversion laws is to prevent forceful conversions by fraud, deceit, allurement or coercion, the vague language of the legal principles has also hindered the voluntary conversions to religions other than Hinduism. According to the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom report of 2020, the vague and unclear language of these laws has provided the basis for the arrest of many Muslim and Christian preachers.



Figure 2. *"Love Jihad": Unmasking an Indian conspiracy theory* is a 12-minute report by the FRANCE 24 Observers team.

Additionally, the BJP leaders have coined the phrase 'Love Jihad' as an illusory concept that Hindu women are lured into marriage by Muslim men and then are forcefully converted to Islam. The Indian state of Uttar Pradesh has also criminalized interfaith relations by passing a law in November 2020. An ordinance entitled 'The prohibition of unlawful religious conversion ordinance' makes it mandatory to seek the approval of district authorities before any religious conversion. Any act of defiance of this and any effort at forceful conversion may lead to up to ten years in prison. Theoretically, these strategies are all forceful religious conversions. However, the practical implementation of it has particularly targeted Muslim men who have relations with Hindu females. As BJP leader Chavhanke claimed, there is "proper proof of love jihad", referring to the Hindutva conspiracy theory that Muslim men lure Hindu women into marriage as part of an organised campaign to make India an Islamic state.

"I have proof of everything I said," he added, though a glance at *Sudarshan News's* programming might give you an idea of what passes as "proof" for Chavhanke.



Figure 3. *The BJP's next mission: eradicating 'love jihad' in India* - World - DAWN.COM

While there have been strict anti-conversion laws, the forceful conversions to Hinduism are unashamedly exempted from them. Ever since the BJP came into power in 2014, RSS and the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) have launched a campaign of 'Ghar Wapsi'- a program of religious conversions to Hinduism. As claimed by the BJP and its allies, the conversions to Hinduism are actually 'reconversions', since the native religion of the subcontinent has been Hinduism; and Islam and Christianity were just brought by foreign invaders (Rajeshwar & Amore, 2019). This process is viewed as 'purification' or Shuddhization, in which people are helped to return to their 'true religion of their ancestors'. Programs of conversion to Hinduism have been openly taking place in almost all the provinces of India- from Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Punjab, Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Gujrat, Kerala and Tamil Nadu and have resulted in the conversions of thousands of people to Hinduism (Bhabhani, 2015; Roy, 2017).

Cow Protection Laws

While most of the Dharmic religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism, practice veganism, cows are given a sacred status in Hinduism—movements to protect cows and put an end to beef consumption date back to pre-independence times. Under colonial rule, these movements could never have influenced any governmental legislation; however, they resulted in communal riots between Hindus and Muslims. After independence, RSS and its affiliates made considerable efforts to outlaw cow slaughter and the consumption of beef in India. While no unified policy was created at the time of independence to ban or prohibit beef consumption, Article 48 of the Indian Constitution prohibited cow slaughter. Although the implementation had differed in various provinces of India, the issue gained prominence again with the rise of the BJP to power in 2014. Keeping aside the cow vigilantes, BJP's leader Narendra Modi himself couched for cow protection in his election campaign of 2014. The twice-incumbent prime minister had also taken a jibe at the Congress government for allowing the export of meat for economic purposes. Two-thirds of India's 28 states, primarily governed by the BJP, have outlawed the sale and consumption of beef (BBC, 2023).

While the ban on cow slaughter can also be considered a violation of human rights, as followers of Abrahamic religions consume beef, and cow sacrifice is also a Muslim ritual for the Eid-ul-Adha, a more pressing issue in the case of India is the rise of cow vigilantes or the cow protection mobs. These mobs take the law-and-order situation into their own hands by public beatings and, in many cases, murdering the suspects of cow slaughter. According to the Documentation of the Oppressed Database, there have been over 206 cases of cow vigilantism in which more than 805 people have been killed, most of them being Muslims (MN, 2023). In these cases, the Indian police have not played any commendable role, as can be deduced from the reluctance to file an FIR in most cases due to their own beliefs, biases, and political pressures.

Revocation of Article 370

The Himalayan region of Jammu and Kashmir has been the site of a protracted conflict between the neighboring states of India and Pakistan since its independence in 1947. A Muslim majority area governed by a Hindu ruler with a critically crucial geostrategic location and the origin of the primary water resources for Pakistan and the Indian Punjab, Kashmir has been the region over which both the regional states have contested in multiple wars and still refuse to give it up. The roots of Article 370 can be traced back to the colonial era when Kashmir was recognized as an autonomous princely state and was provided the option to either join one of the newly independent states. As Pakistan wanted Kashmir to be a part of its territory based on religious affinity, the Indians were unwilling to let go of another part of their 'motherland'. However, as the conflict over Kashmir erupted in 1947, Maharaja Hari Singh of the princely state signed the instrument of Accession and gave it to Nehru. This Instrument of Accession was formally incorporated into the Indian Constitution in the form of Article 370. Article 370 had endowed the state of Jammu and Kashmir with a special constitutional status, ensuring its autonomy. Under the article, Kashmir was allowed to form its constitution, have its own flag, and define its laws, except for finance, defense, and foreign affairs. Later, in 1954, a Presidential Decree was issued, which was incorporated as Article 35A under Article 370, acting as the permanent resident law. According to

Article 35A, Kashmiri residents are granted special property rights, while barring all non-residents from purchasing property, establishing permanent settlements, and seeking government jobs and scholarships in the region. While the IOK's residents can have the dual nationality of Kashmir and India, Indian citizens have no right to gain Kashmiri nationality. Additionally, the law also prohibited the marriage of Kashmiris with non-residents of the region,

The RSS, indoctrinated and the predecessor of the BJP, the BJS, had been staunchly opposing the autonomy of Kashmir. The BJP leader, S. P. Mukherjee, protested by raising the slogan 'Ek Desh me do vidhan nahi chalayin gay', which meant that one country cannot have two constitutions. The BJP leaders have upheld this narrative over the decades. During the 2019 election campaign, BJP leader Narendra Modi had voiced his ambition to annex and incorporate Jammu and Kashmir within the Indian Union by repealing Article 370. Once the elections were won, the BJP proved that its claims regarding Kashmir were not a mere eyewash to amass public support; instead, it practically implemented its decision to revoke Article 370. Immediately after coming to power, the BJP government tightened the security of Kashmir while imposing a complete communication cut-off. As the political leaders were put under house arrest and the tourists were directed to evacuate the valley, the Modi government abrogated Article 370 and usurped Kashmir into the Indian Union. For this, the BJP leader, Amit Shah, has justified by raising the slogan 'Ek Pradhan, Ek Nishan, Ek Vidhan', which means 'one leader, one symbol and one constitution (ETV Bharat, 2023).

The abrogation of Article 370 has numerous potential implications, the most significant being the possible changes in the demographic composition of Kashmir. With the change in status of Kashmir from an autonomous entity to one of the states of India, Indians are no longer required to have a passport and a visa to visit Kashmir. Furthermore, the Indians are allowed to buy property, establish their businesses, and even permanently settle in Kashmir. Since 2020, over 25,000 domiciles of Kashmir have been granted to non-Kashmiris by the RSS and BJP authorities under the 'Jammu and Kashmir Grant of Domicile Certificate 2020'. Additionally, as massive investments and business settlements will be made in Kashmir by Indian Hindus, the Kashmiri Muslims will be outnumbered. In such a situation, even if a plebiscite were conducted, it would likely favor complete union with India, thus fulfilling the RSS's mission of creating the Akhand Bharat, a Hindu Rashtra (Farooq & Javaid, 2020).

'Corona Jihad'

As the whole world was caught up in the struggle against COVID-19, in India, this meant another exacerbation of communal violence against Muslims. Muslims were accused of being the carriers of the virus as the news spread that several attendees of Tablighi Jamaat had tested positive for the virus. While some foreign Muslims had come to attend the mass missionary movement, the Tablighi Jamaat was accused of organizing the event in the middle of a crisis to wreak havoc on the Hindus. The government's role in aggravating the communal divide was evident in the creation of a separate column in daily reporting for cases relevant to the Tablighi Jamaat. Very soon, the whole of the Muslim community became subject to physical, verbal, and psychological abuse as the local public remained incapable of distinguishing between the Muslims and the participants of Tablighi Jamaat's event (Apoorvanand, 2020). The narrative became popular overnight as it was fueled by the Hindu extremists as well as the BJP's governmental officials. The BJP leaders labelled this as 'Corona Terrorism' and 'Corona Jihad', and the Border Security Forces asserted that people from specific communities, such as Muslims, try to infiltrate the borders of India to spread the virus (Bajoria, 2020). This constructed narrative of accusing Muslims of the spread of the virus securitized the matter to the extent of the legitimacy of the use of extraordinary means, such as the use of violence, to deal with the presumed threat. In this situation, there have been multiple cases, including the viral video of Muslim men being beaten in Harewalis village. At the same time, their attackers yelled, 'Did you plan to spread the coronavirus?' In another instance, a Muslim woman named Ambreen Khan was assaulted while her assailants screamed at her to 'go back to Pakistan' (Yasir, 2020).

Such incidents had intensified to the level that the World Health Organization had to raise the caution by stating that it was critically important that the COVID-19 cases not be discriminated against or profiled based on

religious, ethnic, sectarian, or racial lines. However, the fact that a particular religious identity had been targeted in India for something that was a global calamity indicates the Otherization policy of India for its religious minorities. Furthermore, the fact that it was not just a public or an extremist narrative, but rather a government-owned and government-entertained narrative, elucidates that the practice and policy of Otherization has become a top-down approach in India.

Ram Temple and the Ayodhya Verdict

BJP's leader L.K. Advani had played a key role in giving hype to the Ram temple and Babri Masjid clash by leading the Ram Janma Bhoomi movement and organizing the Rath Yatra that had resulted in the demolition of Babri Masjid and the outbreak of communal riots. The dispute had remained unresolved, as the Hindus claimed that the Babri Masjid had been constructed by the invading forces of Mughal Emperor Babur in the 16th century at the same site where the Hindu god Ram was believed to have been born. As the mosque was demolished in 1992, there was a significant increase in the number of Hindu worshipers who visited the disputed area. In 2010, however, the Allahabad High Court made a decision stating that the disputed land should be divided between the Hindus and the Muslims, while affirming that the site had been the birthplace of Ram. This judgment erupted a volcano of critique that claimed that Indian constitutional secularism had been completely eroded. As the BJP came to power again in 2019, the Supreme Court of India delivered its final verdict in November 2019. According to the Supreme Court's verdict, the temple should be returned to the Hindus, while the Muslims would be given an alternative piece of land.

The construction of the Ram Temple was initiated soon after the Supreme Court's Verdict. The temple was inaugurated in January 2024 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, during the peak of the 2024 election campaign. The BJP government hyped the inauguration ceremony on a national scale, as it was star-studded with notable figures from Bollywood, prominent cricketers, and distinguished business tycoons. While the temple was given a flower shower, saffron-colored flags with images of lord Ram and banners with pictures of Narendra Modi had been displayed all across the city. Massive screenings were held in cinemas as well as in town squares in metropolitans like Delhi (Pandey & Limaye, 2024). While the temple's inauguration has been pivotal for Narendra Modi's electoral campaign and the BJP, Modi's address to the gathering of over 7,000 devotees implied the beginning of a new era with 'New India'. Several phrases in his speech indicated that the 'New India' would exactly resonate with the Hindutva ideals. As Prime Minister Modi suggested 'Ram is not a dispute; Ram is a solution, It might well be understood that his vision for India would include finding solutions from Hinduism. Additionally, as the tall-standing Ram Temple was referred to as the emblem of India, its inauguration has been described as a cultural awakening. Moreover, as Narendra Modi, the incumbent Prime Minister and leader of one of India's largest political parties, participated in the puja, it indicated a sharp contradiction with the secular image of India, as well as its secular constitutional values.

Significant Challenges in Balancing Secularism and Hindutva

The RSS-influenced BJP has been working to enforce the principles of Hindutva in a state that lacks cultural, religious, and ethnic homogeneity. Significant challenges arise in a pluralist society that has been undergoing a process of cultural assimilation. Such actions have the potential to aggravate the communal divide, deviate from a secular constitution, elicit political backlash, attract international criticism, and compromise national prestige at the global level.

Maintaining Social harmony

One of the primary challenges in balancing the Hindutva ideology with constitutional secularism has been the near failure to maintain harmony, tolerance, and coexistence in a pluralistic and diverse society. Excessive emphasis and promotion at the national level of Hindu religious and cultural traditions can lead to growing sentiments of exclusion and discrimination in the minority communities. Such actions can lead to social unrest

and communal tensions that might also culminate in high-intensity intra-state conflicts and communal riots. The protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act, the Gujarat riots, and the assaults in response to the 'Corona Terrorism' narrative are all the practical manifestations of growing radicalism and increasing communal violence in India.

Adherence to the Secular Constitution

The burgeoning Hindutva ideology has often collided with the Indian constitution, which is secular and promotes values of equality, tolerance, and non-discrimination. Multiple policies of the BJP, such as the case of NRC in Assam, the CAA, and the anti-conversion laws, discriminate against particular religious minority communities at the expense of majoritarian interests while also blatantly violating the principles of the Indian Constitution.

Political Backlash and Electoral Strategy

Except for Atal Bihari Vajpayee, BJP leaders have consistently instrumentalized the Hindutva ideology to garner political support. Recurring use of religion in its electoral campaign, such as the recent inauguration of the Ram Temple just before the elections, has made the BJP successful in securing its vote bank with the radical Hindu nationalists. However, the continuation of such policies will come in the form of increasing alienation of the minority communities and even the moderate, non-radicalized Hindus.

International Image

Due to the narratives and policies adopted by the BJP, it has repeatedly come under international scrutiny. For instance, after the Gujarat riots of 2002, the then Chief Minister of Gujarat and leader of the BJP was denied a visa to the USA (Mogul, 2023). Similarly, after coming to power, when Prime Minister Modi paid a visit to Britain in 2018 for a Commonwealth meeting, there were noisy demonstrations and protests alleging him to be a 'butcher, killer and terrorist' (Khan, 2018). The discrimination after the NRC case in Assam and the assault on Kashmiris after the revocation of Article 370 have come under international scrutiny and criticism by human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch (The Express-Tribune, December 11, 2023). Such instances can tarnish the international image of India- hence it would be critically important to balance between the Hindutva ideology and secularism.

Comparison of Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Narendra Modi's Success in Connecting the Hindutva Ideology of the BJP

With his moderate approach to Hindutva and a slight centrist inclination towards positive secularism, Atal Bihari Vajpayee had successfully made the BJP connect with a broader voter base. The focus on good governance, inclusivity, and economic liberalization enabled the BJP to garner support beyond its traditional Hindu radical base. Remembered for its political stability, economic growth, and diplomatic achievements, Vajpayee's regime is credited with integrating the ideological framework of the BJP to resonate with India's pluralistic socio-political fabric.

On the other hand, while Narendra Modi has also been successful in connecting the BJP's Hindutva ideology with India's socio-political base, his approach has been in marked contrast to that of Atal Bihari Vajpayee. From his electoral campaign to his practically implemented and adopted policies, Modi has been positioned on the far-right wing of India's political landscape. Due to his saintly politics and radical Hindutva narrative, his regime has witnessed sharply escalating communal polarization resulting in the marginalization of the minorities and the decline of constitutional secularism.

Conclusion

The Bhartiya Janata Party, with its roots in the writings of Savarkar and the organizational force of RSS, has been a non-negligible force that has shaped the Indian political landscape. This chapter opened with the exploration of the foundational principles of the BJP in the pre-independence works of V. D. Savarkar, Hedgewar, and M.S. Golwalkar. An assessment of these principles has made it evident that the BJP will adhere to a politics of cultural, ethnic, and religious nationalism.

The following section highlights the relationship between the Indian Constitutional Secularism and the ideological base of the BJP. While the BJP claims to adhere to constitutional values, its comprehension and interpretation of secularism are in marked contrast to those of the constitution. While the Indian constitution upholds the freedom of religion and equality of respect for all faiths, for the BJP, the only acceptable form of secularism is the one that celebrates the Hindu identity, religion, and cultural heritage.

A comparative analysis of the two leaders of the BJP who rose to the positions of Prime Minister of India, Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Narendra Modi, is presented in the second section. While Vajpayee, despite belonging to the BJP, adopted a more moderate and inclusive stance in his election campaigns, Modi's electoral campaigns have been based on galvanizing the radical Hindu support by repeatedly adding on anti-Muslim, anti-Pakistan narratives. Additionally, the excessive promulgation of the Hindu religion, culture, and traditions in the election campaigns has alienated and 'otherized' all the minorities of India, including the Christians.

On the economic front, both leaders had adopted somewhat similar policies to bolster India's economic development. However, they differed significantly in their approach to foreign relations. Apart from the Kargil war, Vajpayee had been lauded for seeking reconciliation with Pakistan in the Lahore Declaration. Narendra Modi, on the other hand, has sought diplomatic collaboration and strategic alliances with major global players while maintaining a hardline stance with India's regional neighbors, particularly Pakistan and China. However, particularly under the Modi regime, a plethora of socio-political policies have indicated how the BJP adheres to its tweaked interpretation of secularism. Abrogation of Article 370, National Register for Citizens case in Assam, Citizenship Amendment Act, anti-conversion laws, creation of Ram Temple by demolition of Babri Masjid, and spike in hate-crimes due to cow-protection policies and narratives such as 'Corona Jihad' have all indicated that India under BJP is transforming into a majoritarian state against the constitutional values of secularism.

In conclusion, the BJP has undergone a long journey that began with its ideological conception in the pre-Independence era and has reached the point of practically implementing its policies as the largest political party on India's political landscape. In this journey, however, it has to deal with the complex task of balancing its radical Hindu nationalism with the constitutional secularism of India. While it has deviated from the secularism of the constitution, it has repeatedly come under criticism on both the domestic political front and in the global civil society. Despite these challenges, the BJP remains a significant presence in the Indian socio-political landscape.

CHAPTER 4

Popular Resistance to Hindutva: Contemporary Socio-political Movements in India

Introduction

This chapter discusses the contemporary sociopolitical movements in India that challenge the ideology and political dominance of Hindutva. Hindutva, the driving force behind the Hindu nationalist agenda, has dramatically shaped the Indian political arena, especially since the BJP came to power in 2014. This nationalist agenda has often been promoted at the cost of marginalizing minority communities. Notably, the policies of Hindutva and the efforts for the 'Hinduization' of India have been met with strong resistance. This chapter will examine these resistance movements, highlighting their historical roots, current dynamics, and socio-political implications. Specifically, the Khalistan movement, the Kashmir conflict, Dalit activism, insurgencies in the Northeastern regions, and the burgeoning online resistance to Hindutva will be examined. The goal of the chapter is to provide a comprehensive understanding of how diverse groups in India confront and counteract the Hindutva narrative. The struggle by diaspora, digital struggles added by women, are now a challenge to Hindutva.

By integrating these diverse perspectives, the chapter explains the diversity of resistance movements in India and their impact on the nation's socio-political fabric.

The Khalistan Movement

a) Historical Background:

The Khalistan movement is a notable sociopolitical phenomenon in India's history. Khalistan movement symbolizes the struggles of the Sikh community for identity, autonomy, and justice. Although the idea of a separate Sikh state was essentially dormant until the late 20th century, it was preceded by a series of political, economic, and ideological grievances that simmered for decades. The seeds of Sikh nationalism and the desire for greater autonomy can be traced back to the early 20th century, within the larger context of the Indian nationalist movement against British colonial rule (Dhillon, 1974). Prominent Sikh leaders who were wary of their minority status in a Hindu-majority state initially expressed concerns about the protection of their rights in independent India. Their apprehensions led to early discussions about a potential Sikh homeland (Dhillon, 1974). However, due to the lack of organizational strength to pursue secession, they eventually opted to join the Indian Union as they were reassured by promises of protection and civil liberties from leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru (Dhillon, 2007).

The initial acceptance of the Indian Union did not completely quell Sikh aspirations for greater autonomy. After the Partition of India in 1947, which saw massive relocation and turmoil, the Sikh population in Indian Punjab grew from a small minority to a more substantial proportion, around 35% (Dhillon, 2007). The primary Sikh political party, the Akali Dal, began advocating for a Punjabi-speaking state to ensure a Sikh majority and secure political leverage. This movement faced resistance from the central government, which feared it might fuel communal tensions. Despite these fears, the Punjabi Suba movement succeeded in 1966, and a Punjabi-speaking state was formed, albeit with only a slim Sikh majority. This partial victory did not translate into assured political power for the Akalis, who then resorted to agitational politics to highlight the community's grievances (Kapur, 2023).

Economic factors further fueled the discontent. The Green Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s brought significant technological advancements to Punjab's agriculture, resulting in a substantial increase in productivity. However, the benefits were unevenly distributed, with wealthier farmers and Hindu merchants reaping more rewards than the poorer Sikh farmers (Sebby, 2010). This disparity, coupled with issues such as the unfair distribution of river waters to neighboring states, exacerbated the economic grievances. Additionally, the influx of wealth meant a dilution of traditional Sikh practices among the richer Sikhs, which exacerbated fears of cultural and religious assimilation into the Hindu majority.

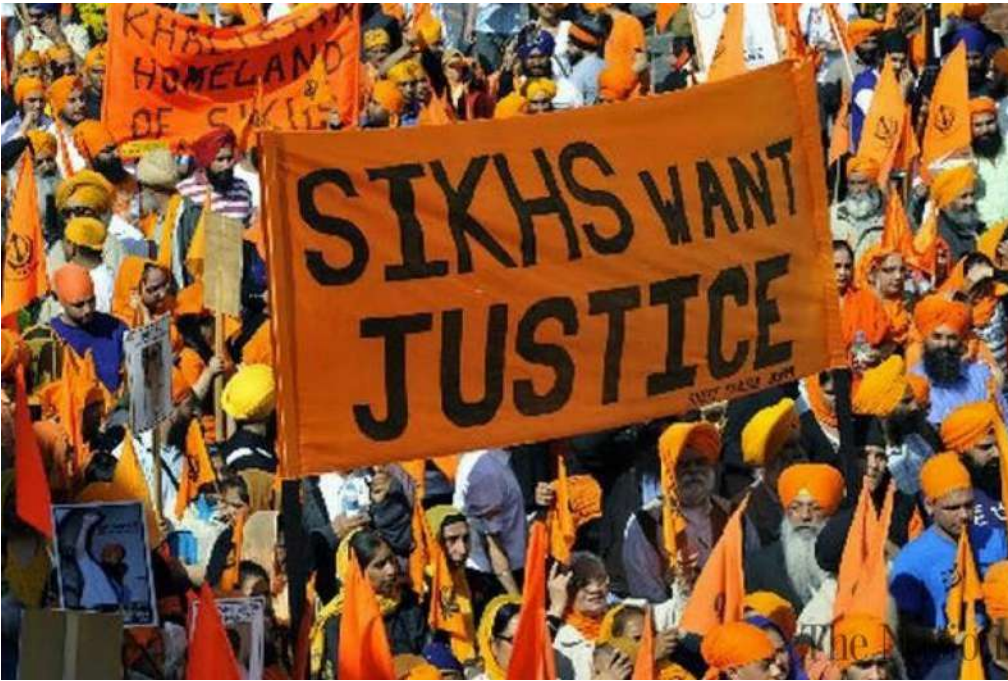


Figure 4. *Sikhs for Justice asks Hindus from India to leave Canada*

Source: Accessed on August 2, 2024 from MuslimMirror.com

The Akali Dal articulated these grievances in the Anandpur Sahib Resolution of 1973. It demanded greater autonomy for Punjab along with demands for addressing both economic and religious concerns. However, it was the central government's response, particularly under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, that escalated the situation. To counter the Akali Dal's influence, Gandhi supported Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, a radical preacher advocating for a return to orthodox Sikhism (Dhillon, 2007). This move backfired as Bhindranwale's rhetoric and actions increasingly resonated with the marginalized Sikh farmers. This turned his cause into a potent separatist movement.

The situation deteriorated rapidly and culminated in Bhindranwale's occupation of the Golden Temple complex, the holiest shrine in Sikhism. In June 1984, Indira Gandhi ordered Operation Blue Star, a military action to remove Bhindranwale and his followers from the temple. The operation was a watershed moment; it left hundreds dead, including Bhindranwale, and deeply traumatized the Sikh community (Siraj et al., 2023). The desecration of their holiest site caused widespread outrage and led to Gandhi's assassination by her Sikh bodyguards later that year. The assassination triggered horrific anti-Sikh pogroms, particularly in Delhi. Thousands of Sikhs were killed with the complicity of Congress Party members and the police (Singh, 2014).

These events transformed the Sikh community's perception of the Indian state and turned many into supporters of the separatist cause. The next decade saw Punjab engulfed in violence, militancy, and severe state repression. The Khalistan movement, thus, was not merely a quest for a separate state but a response to profound political, economic, and cultural grievances that were exacerbated by the state's actions.

Opposition to Hindutva is inherent in the Khalistan movement. Hindutva promotes the idea of India as a Hindu Rashtra (state), which directly contradicts the Sikh aspiration for a distinct cultural and political identity. The movement's struggle to demand recognition and autonomy automatically means resistance to any form of majoritarian dominance. This makes it an important counterpoint to the Hindutva narrative that seeks to homogenize India's diverse religious and cultural spectrum.

b) Contemporary developments:

The Khalistan movement is a separatist movement seeking the establishment of an independent Sikh state, Khalistan, in the Punjab region of India. The movement has witnessed a resurgence in recent years. The Hindu nationalist government of the BJP has been particularly antagonistic towards this movement and has implemented strict measures to curtail its activities.

In recent years, the Khalistan movement has experienced a resurgence, mainly due to the policies and actions of the current Indian government (Shaukat, 2021). The BJP's emphasis on Hindu nationalism, at the expense of minority rights, has created a climate of fear and resentment among Sikhs (Swain, 2018). The party's Hindutva agenda has alienated various minority communities, including Sikhs. This marginalization has created discontent and reignited separatist sentiments among Sikhs, both within India and in the diaspora. The government's crackdown on dissent, including the arrest of journalists and activists under draconian laws like the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), has further alienated minority communities and strengthened separatist sentiments. The BJP's stance on minority rights and its aggressive policies, such as the revocation of Kashmir's special status, anti-Muslim violence, and the introduction of the Citizenship Amendment Act, have also contributed to the feeling of disenfranchisement among Sikhs. The perception of India transforming into an authoritarian state under BJP rule reinforces the narrative of oppression and justifies the separatist aspirations of the Khalistan movement.

The 2021 farmer protests marked a significant turning point, demonstrating the growing disaffection of Sikh farmers in Punjab (Sodhi & Bawa, 2024). These farmers viewed the agricultural reforms as detrimental to their livelihoods, which caused large-scale protests. The BJP government's harsh response to these protests further alienated the Sikh community. The protests not only highlighted the grievances of the Sikhs but also brought international attention to the issue. Prominent figures, such as Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, expressed support for the protesters (Kuchay, 2020). This international solidarity has emboldened the Khalistan movement, providing it with a larger platform and increased visibility.

One of the notable figures in the recent revival of the Khalistan movement is Amritpal Singh, a popular Sikh preacher who has recently gained a significant political foothold. Amritpal Singh was arrested in 2023 under the National Security Act, which sparked widespread protests and drew attention to the Indian government's crackdown on political dissent (Hameed & Shibli, 2023). His detention without charge for up to a year showed the government's hardline approach towards separatist activities. His popularity and the government's reaction to his activism show the growing support for the Khalistan movement among Sikhs who feel increasingly oppressed under the current regime. Amritpal Singh has secured a victory in the recent Lok Sabha elections. It has strengthened his position as a key leader in the movement. His election victory will galvanize further support and demonstrate the political foothold the Khalistan cause has gained within Punjab.

Except for sporadic activities, the Khalistan movement remains largely quiet and quiescent within India. However, it continues to thrive among the Sikh diaspora, particularly in countries like Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom. (Jathol, 2019). This revival is evident from a range of activities, from organizing referendums to lobbying for political support. Khalistani activists have been vocal and active in various ways. They are keeping the movement alive on the international stage. One notable activity is the organization of unofficial referendums, such as those conducted by Sikhs for Justice (SFJ). These referendums seek to gauge support for an independent Khalistan (Bhattacharyya, 2023). The referendums, though lacking legal standing, draw considerable media attention and international awareness to the cause. Other activists include holding rallies and commemorating key events, such as the anniversary of Operation Blue Star. These activities not only keep the issue in the public eye but also attract support from various human rights organizations and political entities.



Figure 5. *Indian Sikh Organizations hold Placards in Support of Khalistan*

The Indian government's response to these activities has been notably harsh. It has been employing measures both domestically and internationally to curb these efforts. Within India, authorities have conducted widespread crackdowns. They have targeted activists and community leaders with accusations of terrorism and sedition (Mogul, 2023). Such measures create a climate of fear among those suspected of supporting the Khalistan cause. Internationally, India's tactics to suppress the movement have included leveraging diplomatic pressure and intelligence operations. India's diplomatic missions have been actively engaged in countering Khalistani propaganda. They have exerted pressure on foreign governments to curtail the activities of Khalistani groups by citing terrorism concerns. Indian spy networks have been accused of targeting Khalistani activists abroad, leading to several high-profile incidents. The assassinations of Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Canada, Paramjit Singh Panjwar in Pakistan, and Avtar Singh Khanda in the UK are attributed to covert Indian operations (Fair, 2023). These extraterritorial actions have also caused diplomatic friction, particularly with countries hosting substantial Sikh populations.

The international dimension of the Khalistan movement also presents both opportunities and challenges. While support from the Sikh diaspora provides moral and financial backing, it also complicates diplomatic relations with India. Countries like Canada, which have larger Sikh populations, find themselves in a delicate position. They struggle to balance domestic political considerations with international diplomatic pressures. The involvement of foreign intelligence agencies and the subsequent diplomatic fallout, as seen in the Nijjar case, show how states face the dilemma of balancing local and global politics.

The BJP's narrative frames the movement as a significant threat to national security, despite statistical evidence to the contrary. For instance, data from the South Asia Terrorism Portal indicates that Khalistan-related violence has been minimal compared to other forms of terrorism in India (Fair, 2023). This disparity between rhetoric and reality shows the government's strategy of using 'the Khalistan bogeyman' to justify its policies and actions against the Sikh community.

The BJP has failed to garner electoral support in the state of Punjab. Despite efforts to co-opt Sikh religious symbols and leaders, the party remains unpopular in the state (Arshi, 2024). The perception of the BJP can

explain this political isolation as an external oppressor, rather than a legitimate representative of the Sikh community's interests. The historical grievances related to the 1984 anti-Sikh riots and subsequent human rights violations are still a bone of contention. These grievances add to the sense of injustice and the demand for a separate Sikh state.

The activities of the Rashtriya Sikh Sangat in Punjab also merit examination. The Rashtriya Sikh Sangat, founded in 1985, is an organization affiliated with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) that aims to promote the concept of a shared heritage between Sikhs and Hindus. This ideology is based on the RSS's vision of a Hindu Rashtra, which claims that Sikhs are not a separate religion but rather a part of the Hindu community (Dogra, 2017). The Sangat's activities have frequently been a source of tension in Punjab.

The Sikh community has historically resisted the RSS's efforts to merge Sikh identity with Hinduism. In the 1980s, the RSS established the Rashtriya Sikh Sangat to counter Sikh separatist sentiments by promoting the idea that Sikhs and Hindus share an inseparable bond. This narrative directly contradicts the distinct religious identity that Sikhs have maintained since the formation of the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699. The Sangat's pamphlets and publications assert that British colonialists artificially created the Sikh identity and that Sikhs historically viewed themselves as Hindus (Dogra, 2017).

The RSS's second chief, MS Golwalkar, labeled Sikhs as communalists disrupting Hindu unity. This perspective has influenced the activities of the Sangat (Bal, 2019). For instance, in the 1990s, during the BJP's alliance with the Akali Dal in Punjab, the Sangat passed a resolution advocating for the construction of a Ram temple. This move did not resonate with Sikhs but reflected the RSS's ideological goals (Bal, 2019).

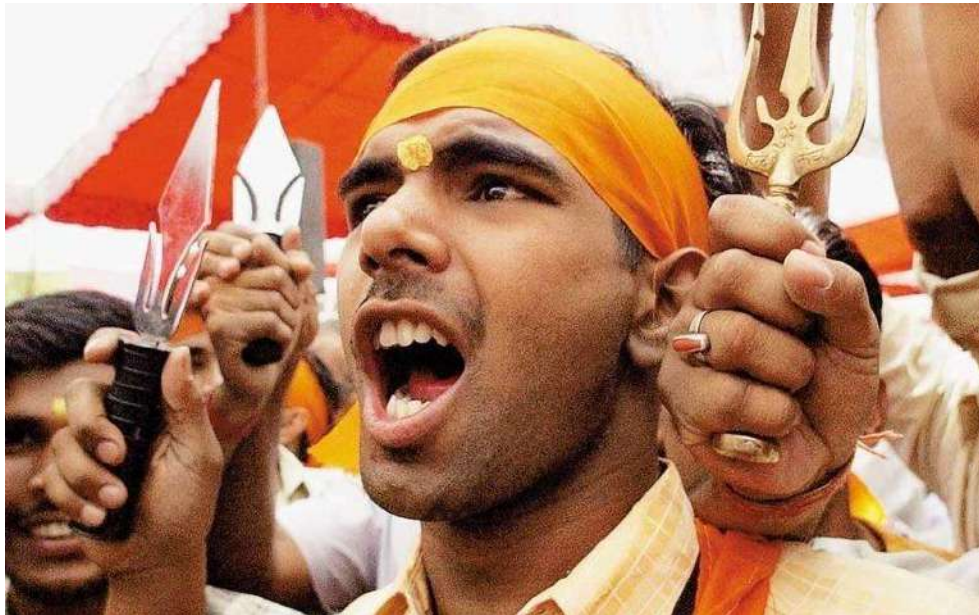


Figure 6. RSS featured as 'threat group' on US-based Terrorism Watch list

Source: islamtsf.files.wordpress.com

The Akal Takht, the highest temporal authority in Sikhism, has consistently opposed the initiatives of the Sangat. In 2002, the Sangat's plan to recite the Sikh holy scripture, the Granth Sahib, in Hindu temples was vehemently criticized by Sikh institutions. The plan was canceled due to this resistance (Bal, 2019). The Takht labeled the Rashtriya Sikh Sangat as an anti-Panth organization and warned Sikhs against supporting it.

Despite these setbacks, the Sangat continued its efforts, albeit with reduced activities after 2009 when Sikh hardliners assassinated its leader Rulda Singh (Dogra, 2017). The Sangat renewed attempts to revive its presence in Punjab after the BJP came to power in the center. Mohan Bhagwat, the chief of the RSS, has taken a personal interest in these activities. This has led to further friction with the Akal Takht and Sikh organizations (Dogra, 2017).

The RSS's ghar wapsi program, which aims to reconvert Christians to Hinduism or Sikhism, has also been a point of contention. In Punjab, this program has targeted Scheduled Caste Christians. The RSS has threatened them with the loss of benefits if they do not convert (Dogra, 2017). This has angered the Akali Dal, which had successfully brought many Christians into its fold. The RSS's activities, seen as encroachments on Sikh religious autonomy, have prompted sharp responses from both moderate and radical Sikh factions.

The BJP's alliance with the Akali Dal has been strained by the RSS's actions through the Rashtriya Sikh Sangat. Key Sikh leaders and institutions have boycotted the Sangat's events, such as celebrations of Guru Gobind Singh's birth anniversary. It reflects the deep-seated mistrust between them. The continued efforts of the Sangat to assert a Hindu identity over Sikhism threaten to unsettle the fragile peace in Punjab.

The BJP's policies and actions have inadvertently breathed new life into a movement that had largely subsided in the 1990s. The Sikh community's response to marginalization and the aggressive stance of the Indian government creates a volatile environment that fuels separatist sentiments. The resurgence of the Khalistan movement is not merely a historical relic but a living, evolving phenomenon. The movement's future will likely depend on how the Indian government addresses the underlying issues of minority rights and political representation, as well as the international context in which these struggles play out.

c) Socio-Political Implications:

The resurgence of the Khalistan movement carries implications for India on both domestic and international levels, especially in a scenario where Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have failed to secure a majority in parliament. This political shift could lead to a variety of outcomes and impact the country's internal stability and its global relations.

Domestically, the BJP's failure to maintain a majority could lead to the formation of a coalition government, which might be less cohesive and more vulnerable to regional and separatist pressures. The Khalistan movement could gain impetus in the context of political fragility. A weakened central government may struggle to maintain a firm stance against the Khalistan movement. This may lead to increased activism and possibly even violent confrontations within Punjab. The lack of a unified policy could also result in inconsistent responses to separatist activities, which further complicate the situation.

The rise of the Khalistan movement in this context could further polarize Indian society. Sikh grievances would likely resurface with greater intensity if the majoritarian policies of the Modi regime continue. This polarization might not be confined to Punjab alone but could spread to other parts of the country with considerable Sikh populations, such as Haryana, Delhi, and Maharashtra. The increased visibility and activity of Khalistani groups might embolden other separatist movements within India, such as those in Kashmir and the Northeastern states.

Economically, instability in Punjab, which is one of India's most prosperous agricultural states, could have far-reaching consequences. Disruptions caused by protests, strikes, or violence could affect the supply chains, particularly in the agricultural sector. A region in turmoil could also deter both domestic and international investment.

On the international front, the implications are equally complex. India's global image as a stable and rapidly growing democracy could be tarnished. Countries with significant Sikh populations, such as Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States, may experience increased activism and pressure from their Sikh communities

to support the Khalistan cause. Diplomatic relations could become strained, particularly if India continues to mishandle the situation or violate human rights in its response to the movement.

India's foreign intelligence service, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), has reportedly increased its operations in the West. It has been conducting non-kinetic operations, such as intelligence collection and influence campaigns (Miller et al., 2024). The reaction of the international community to RAW's alleged activities, such as the targeted killing of Khalistani leaders abroad, could influence India's diplomatic relationships and security cooperation with Western nations. However, strategic interests, particularly in countering China, could prevent long-lasting ruptures in these relationships.

The impact of the movement on India's relations with the West is evident from the increased security measures at Indian diplomatic missions and the resistance of Western governments to crack down on the Khalistan movement. This resistance has frustrated India and may lead to a shift in its approach to dealing with the movement abroad. This might involve more covert operations if diplomatic measures prove insufficient. Moreover, the resurgence of the movement could influence India's foreign policy. For instance, India might adopt a more aggressive stance towards countries perceived as supporting Khalistani elements, which could hurt trade and diplomatic relations.

The failure of Modi and the BJP to secure a majority might also lead to a recalibration of their strategies. The BJP, known for its strong stance against separatism, may have to soften its approach if it forms part of a coalition government. A more inclusive and dialogic approach might help address some of the underlying issues fueling the movement; however, such a transition would require political will and consensus-building, which may be challenging to achieve in a fragmented parliament.

Furthermore, the movement's impact on the Indian diaspora cannot be overlooked. Sikh communities abroad are already actively promoting the cause, and a failure by the Indian government to address their concerns could lead to increased international lobbying and protests. This activism can shape global perceptions and policies towards India, influencing everything from immigration policies to trade agreements.

Insurgencies in the Northeastern regions

a) Historical background

Northeast India, an isolated hill-forest region, has long been one of the most troubled areas in South Asia. This region comprises the seven sister states—Assam, Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, and Tripura. The region spans almost 225,000 square kilometers and shares borders with China, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Myanmar (Goswami, 2010). Its strategic importance is undeniable due to these extensive borders. However, since India's independence in 1947, Northeast India has been plagued by continuous insurgencies. These insurgencies in different states have different underlying causes, including ethnic cleansing, cultural differences, economic deprivation, and political disenfranchisement.

During the colonial era, most of these states, except Assam, were never directly ruled by the British Empire. This isolation contributed to the distinct cultural and political identities in these states. Following the British withdrawal from India, the newly independent Indian government sought to integrate the numerous princely states and autonomous tribes into the Indian Union. This integration process, particularly in the first decade after independence, was strongly resisted by the northeastern states (Sarmah, 2018). The residents questioned the authority of the central government. Next, various rebel, nationalist, separatist, and ethnic groups were formed. These groups were driven by a motive to preserve their distinct identities and opposed the centralizing efforts of the Indian government.



Figure 7. *File photo of Bajrang Dal members during a bike rally in Jammu, India*

Source: Nitin Kanotra/Hindustan Times via Getty Images

Thick forests and challenging terrain characterize Northeast India. This played an important role in sustaining insurgencies in the region. The geography provides an ideal environment for guerrilla warfare, which complicated the Indian government's efforts to establish control. Despite various measures, including political negotiations and military operations, the government has struggled to maintain complete authority in these states.

The insurgencies in Northeast India are not monolithic but consist of various movements. Each movement has its objectives and leaders. In Assam, groups like the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) and the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) have sought either greater autonomy or complete independence. In Manipur, organizations such as the United National Liberation Front (UNLF) and the People's Liberation Army (PLA) have been prominent. Nagaland has been influenced by the National Socialist Council of Nagaland factions, including the NSCN (I/M) and NSCN (K). These groups clash with each other as much as with the state.



Figure 8. Protesters hold placards during a demonstration against anti-Muslim violence and hate crimes in New Delhi

Source: AlJazeera accessed through <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/5/16/us-asks-india-to-check-continued-targeted-attacks-on-minorities>

Economic factors have also contributed to these insurgencies. The economic deprivation in the region, combined with a lack of development, has contributed to widespread dissatisfaction. The state's inability to provide adequate economic opportunities has heightened feelings of neglect and marginalization among northeastern communities (Brahmachari, 2019). Moreover, cultural differences between the northeastern tribes and the Indian population have heightened tensions.

The insurgent movements in Northeast India also challenge the ideology of Hindutva. Hindutva, which emphasizes a monolithic Hindu identity, conflicts with the diverse cultural and religious fabric of the Northeast. These states resist the homogenizing agenda of Hindutva (Hussain, 2023). The imposition of a singular national identity undermines the region's pluralistic traditions and instills resentment among its inhabitants.

Despite the longstanding violence and unrest, there have been recent efforts to address the insurgencies through political means. Reports indicate an improvement in the law-and-order situation in the region, with a decrease in insurgency-related incidents and casualties (Bhattacharyya, 2022). The Indian government's strategy involves a combination of development initiatives, security measures, and dialogue with groups willing to renounce violence and seek peaceful resolutions within the constitutional framework.

b) Contemporary developments:

The northeastern insurgencies in India represent an evolving challenge that has been there for decades. In recent years, there have been considerable developments in the status and activities of various insurgent groups in the region. The policies implemented by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government have influenced the situation. Despite some security improvements, the underlying issues persist, creating unrest, and the policies of Hindutva have exacerbated specific fault lines.

The current status of insurgencies in the northeastern states varies significantly. In Meghalaya, the security situation has improved, with no insurgency-linked fatalities recorded in 2022 and 2023 (SATP, 2024). The Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC) remains active, although negotiations with the government are underway. However, the group withdrew from peace talks in late 2023. Tripura has also seen a decline in insurgent activities, with just one insurgency-linked fatality in 2023 (SATP, 2024). The National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) and the All-Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF) are active but with reduced capacity.

Mizoram has been free from insurgency-related violence since 2015, though it faces rising incidents of weapons and explosives smuggling. Incidents of arms and ammunition recoveries have increased recently (SATP, 2024). In Arunachal Pradesh, there are instances of sporadic unrest, primarily due to insurgents from neighboring states using the region as a transit route. The state's indigenous movements are less of an issue compared to those in Assam, Nagaland, and Manipur, which affect the TCL (Tirap, Changlang, and Longding) districts along the Indo-Myanmar border (Sajjad & Rehman, 2019).

Manipur has experienced a severe surge in violence due to ethnic clashes between the Kuki and Meitei communities, which erupted in May 2023. This conflict has resulted in numerous fatalities and widespread displacement, with at least 186 insurgency-linked deaths reported since the clashes began (SATP, 2024). While there have been some improvements, the situation is volatile with occasional incidents of violence. Security forces and armed ethnic militias continue to police the ethnic borders within the state.

In Assam, the security situation has improved due to successive peace agreements despite some challenges. The United Liberation Front of Assam (Independent) (ULFA-I) is a notable threat. Despite the BJP government

signing peace agreements with various insurgent groups, including ULFA and the United National Liberation Front (UNLF) of Manipur, the effectiveness of these agreements is limited. For example, the framework agreement with the Isak-Muivah faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN-IM) has stalled due to disagreements over key issues, such as a separate flag and Constitution for the Naga people (SATP, 2024).

The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) remains a significant challenge in the region. The AFSPA grants extensive powers to security forces, including the right to shoot, kill, and arrest without a warrant (HRW, 2008). While intended to restore order, it has been a source of human rights abuses and alienation among local populations. The continued enforcement of the act in disturbed areas has exacerbated tensions and contributed to the cycle of violence and insurgency.



Figure 9. *The Hindu-nationalist agenda of the Bharatiya Janata Party is harming India's democracy*

Source: Straver, D. May 17, 2022, accessed through <https://www.politeiavu.com/post/the-hindu-nationalist-agenda-of-the-bharatiya-janata-party-is-harming-india-s-democracy>

A notable incident showing the detrimental impact of such policies was the December 2021 Indian government ambush of Naga miners. The ambush resulted in fifteen deaths and subsequent clashes with local villagers (Karmakar, 2021). This poorly executed operation undermined the central government's regional pacification efforts, and massive protests and demonstrations erupted across Nagaland. This incident set back counter-insurgency efforts in Nagaland for several years and highlighted the perils of AFSPA, which promotes rights violations and a culture of impunity.

The BJP's efforts to pacify the region through peace accords and economic development initiatives are viewed with skepticism. While the government boasts of signing multiple peace agreements, the implementation of these accords often falls short of expectations. For instance, the agreement with the Bodo groups promised direct funding to the Bodoland Territorial Council, but this has not been fully realized, which has created disillusionment among the Bodos (Silthou, 2024). Similarly, agreements with factions of ULFA and UNLF have not completely quelled insurgent activities, as not all factions are willing to lay down arms without significant concessions from the government.

The ethnic violence in Manipur also exposes the fragile nature of peace in the region. The BJP's handling of the situation has been criticized for being insufficient and, at times, partisan. The clashes between the Kuki and

Meitei communities highlight the deep-rooted ethnic divisions that exist in the state. The government's focus on short-term peace agreements, rather than addressing the root causes of conflict —such as ethnic identity, resource allocation, and political representation —has resulted in only temporary reprieves from violence (Silthou, 2024).

Equally troubling for India's pacification efforts is the BJP's discrimination against the region's minorities through religious discrimination. The Naga and Mizos are predominantly Christian, and Tripura has a sizeable Muslim population. The BJP has been criticized for its anti-Muslim rhetoric and recent increases in anti-Christian persecution (Booth, 2022). The passage of the Indian citizenship law in 2019, which distinguishes Christians and Muslims from Indians who adhere to religions originating in India, further alienates these communities. In October 2021, a campaign of violence in Tripura organized by a group close to the BJP against Muslims led to days of rioting (Booth, 2022). The government denied any violent outbreaks, yet multiple incidents of mob attacks against Muslims across India, apparently instigated by Hindu-supremacist groups aligned with the BJP, have been reported since mid-March 2022 (Shih & Gupta, 2023).

India's crackdown on a free press is also a misstep. Methods include tax raids, the withdrawal of broadcast licenses, and the arrest of journalists covering unrest in Tripura under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. The government has also turned against foreign NGOs. Amnesty International is one of the most prominent NGOs that left India following frequent government raids and harassment (Dhume, 2023). Such actions undermine the efforts to address the root causes of insurgency.

c) Implications:

The northeastern insurgencies in India pose profound implications for the country's internal political stability and the future of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his party. These implications can be analyzed in both the short and long term.

In the short term, the northeastern insurgencies threaten to destabilize internal political stability by fueling continuous unrest and violence in a region that is strategically important yet historically neglected. The resurgence of ethnic clashes, such as those between the Kuki and Meitei communities in Manipur, shows the volatility that can quickly escalate into widespread violence and displacement. These conflicts disrupt daily life, hinder economic activities, and create a climate of insecurity that can spread beyond the immediate region. It can affect neighboring states and potentially spark sympathetic movements elsewhere in India.

For Modi and the BJP, the immediate political implications include ruining their image as effective administrators who can ensure national security. The December 2021 ambush in Nagaland highlighted severe lapses in intelligence and operational execution. Such incidents undermine public confidence in the government's ability to manage internal security and can lead to increased criticism from opposition parties and civil society groups. The application of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) is a contentious issue, with its abuses promoting anti-government sentiments and human rights concerns. The BJP's hardline approach, such as the controversial enforcement of AFSPA and the imposition of Hindi language requirements, enrages the ethnic and cultural groups in the Northeast and further complicates peace efforts.

In the long term, the northeastern insurgencies could have profound implications for India's internal political stability. Continuous unrest and unresolved grievances are the primary obstacles to development and integration efforts.

For Modi and the BJP, there are many long-term political implications. The failure to effectively address the insurgencies could weaken the party's standing in future elections, both at the state and national levels. The

party's image as a unifying force capable of maintaining national cohesion could be damaged. This may lead to a more pronounced questioning of its governance model.

Moreover, Modi's failure to secure a parliamentary majority limits his ability to push through comprehensive policy reforms that could address the root causes of the insurgency, such as economic development, political autonomy, and cultural recognition. Without a majority, the BJP must rely on coalition politics, which requires compromises and can dilute the effectiveness of its policies. This political fragility could embolden insurgent groups and escalate their activities in hopes of extracting concessions or achieving their demands.

Muslim resistance and the Kashmir conflict

a) Historical background:

India is home to around two hundred million Muslims, which makes it one of the world's largest Muslim populations within a predominantly Hindu country. Despite constitutional guarantees of equality and secularism, Muslims in India have long faced systemic discrimination, prejudice, and violence. This historical trend has intensified under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), particularly in the Kashmir region (Maizland, 2024).

The roots of Hindu-Muslim tensions in India can be traced back to the British colonial era and the tumultuous Partition of 1947. The hasty and poorly planned division of British India into Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan resulted in one of the largest and bloodiest migrations in history. This period saw horrific communal violence, with hundreds of thousands killed and millions displaced. Partition left a legacy of distrust and hostility between Hindus and Muslims, which political and social events have periodically inflamed.

India's Constitution, adopted in 1950, promises equality and non-discrimination to all citizens. The preamble was amended in 1976 to explicitly describe India as a secular nation (Katrak & Kulkarni, 2021). However, the secularism envisioned by leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru has been undermined by rising Hindu nationalism. Hindu nationalist groups, inspired by colonial-era ideologues, have sought to establish India as a Hindu state, viewing Muslims as a foreign entity.

The BJP, the political wing of the Hindu nationalist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), came to prominence in the late 20th century by exploiting religious divisions. After the 2014 and 2019 electoral victories of the BJP under Narendra Modi, there has been a marked shift in policies towards Muslims. Modi, who has a controversial history regarding anti-Muslim violence, including the 2002 Gujarat riots, has pursued policies that explicitly marginalize Muslims (Maizland, 2024). These policies have included the revocation of Jammu and Kashmir's special status and the introduction of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which fast-tracks citizenship for non-Muslim immigrants from neighboring countries, while effectively excluding Muslims.



Figure 10. *A Muslim man holds up a poster during a rally outside the Indian Consulate General in Medan, North Sumatra, Indonesian Monday, March 2, 2020.*

Kashmir, the only Muslim-majority region in India, has been a flashpoint since Partition. The region was granted special autonomy under Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, which protected its unique status and reflected its contested history. However, in August 2019, the Modi government unilaterally revoked this special status. It split the state into two union territories and brought it under direct federal control. A severe crackdown accompanied this move on civil liberties, including widespread detentions, internet shutdowns, and restrictions on freedom of movement (Ellis-Peterson, 2019).

The revocation of Article 370 has exacerbated the already precarious situation in Kashmir. Indian authorities have carried out numerous human rights abuses, including arbitrary arrests, torture, and extrajudicial killings. The BJP government justifies these measures as necessary for national security, but in reality, these are attempts to suppress dissent and alter the region's demographic composition.



Figure 11. *Scenes of destruction at Bhajanpura in Northeast Delhi during the riots*

Source: Suraj Sing Bhatt, The Print, accessed through <https://worldfinancialreview.com/the-rss-hindutva-and-rising-attacks-against-muslims-in-india/>

Under the BJP's rule, anti-Muslim rhetoric and violence have surged across India. Muslims face discrimination in employment, education, housing, and political representation. Reports indicate that police and judicial biases prevent Muslims from obtaining justice (Chander, 2022; Neogi, 2022). The BJP has also enacted laws and policies that restrict Muslim religious freedoms, such as anti-conversion laws and bans on wearing hijabs in schools (Maizland, 2024).

High-profile incidents of violence, like the Delhi riots of 2020, where Muslims were disproportionately targeted, and the rise of vigilante groups attacking Muslims under the guise of cow protection, highlight the growing climate of fear (Neogi, 2022). The BJP's rhetoric and policies embolden these groups and legitimize anti-Muslim violence.

b) Contemporary developments:

The Muslim resistance against Hindutva in India, particularly in Kashmir, has its roots in a longstanding conflict between the Indian state and the Muslim-majority region of Kashmir. The rise of Hindutva ideology further compounds this struggle. The Muslim community in India, and especially in Kashmir, has adopted various forms of resistance to counter the threats to their identity, rights, and existence.

The current state of the Kashmiri struggle is due to a tense standoff following the Indian government's revocation of Article 370 on August 5, 2019. Kashmiris view this move as a step toward enforced colonization, reminiscent of settler colonialism tactics. The issuance of 430,000 domicile certificates to non-residents as part of the Modi settlers scheme aims to alter the region's demographic composition, which is illegal under international law (Ranjha, 2021).

These actions have profound implications for the Kashmir struggle. They signify an aggressive strategy to integrate Kashmir into the Indian mainstream, thereby undermining the region's unique identity and autonomy. Such policies are likely to increase regional tensions and potentially destabilize the security environment in South Asia. The Kashmiri response to these actions is manifested in both political and armed resistance. Their struggle is legitimized by various international legal frameworks that support the right to self-determination and armed struggle against occupation.

The Indian government's approach to Kashmir has been heavily militarized. Kashmir is one of the most militarized zones in the world. This militarization has caused widespread human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, torture, and arbitrary detentions (Raazia & Askari, 2022). Laws such as the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) and the Public Safety Act (PSA) grant sweeping powers to security forces, creating an atmosphere of impunity and fear. These measures have not only increased the suffering of the Kashmiri people but have also strengthened their resolve to resist.

Kashmiris have employed a variety of strategies to resist Hindutva and Indian state policies. The use of social media has become an important tool for mobilization and raising awareness about their plight. Young Kashmiris, in particular, have taken to platforms like Twitter and Facebook to share their stories, document abuses, and connect with a global audience (Hussain, 2023). This digital activism has helped counter the mainstream narrative that portrays the Kashmiri struggle in a negative light. It has also enabled the Kashmiri diaspora to play an important role in advocating for their cause on international forums. Art and culture have also become important media of resistance. Kashmiri artists, musicians, and poets use their work to express their dissent and keep the spirit of resistance alive (Bhan et al., 2018). Poetry and literature from the region reflect the pain and resilience of the Kashmiri people, which serves as a form of resistance against cultural erasure.

Muslim resistance in India extends beyond Kashmir and encompasses various regions and forms of struggle. The rise of Hindutva has led to increased marginalization and discrimination against Muslims across the country. In response, Muslims have engaged in political mobilization, legal battles, and social campaigns to defend their rights and counter the politics of hate (Santhosh & Paleri, 2021). Organizations and activists have worked tirelessly to combat communal violence, hate speech, and policies that threaten their citizenship and identity. They have undertaken educational initiatives and awareness campaigns aimed at creating communal harmony and challenging the divisive narratives propagated by Hindutva forces.

Organizations like the Popular Front of India (PFI) and its political affiliate, the Social Democratic Party of India (SDPI), have emerged as platforms for a confrontational response to Hindu nationalism. These groups emphasize Muslim unity and self-defense against Hindu nationalist threats. The leaders of these groups criticize traditional Muslim leaders for their passivity (Choukhar, 2024). PFI and SDPI advocate for a strong, confident stance against Hindu nationalism. They draw inspiration from historical figures like Tipu Sultan (Choukhar, 2024). They focus on grassroots mobilization and seek to empower ordinary Muslims to resist oppression and defend their rights.

PFI's public campaigns and cadre training emphasize awareness of constitutional principles and democratic rights (Emmerich, 2021). They use national symbols like the national flag and song to counter Hindu nationalist narratives that question Muslim loyalty to India. Legal support is another crucial aspect of their struggle. They assist victims of mob violence, discrimination, wrongful arrests, and media bias, thus appealing to young Muslims who face intimidation from Hindu vigilante groups and biased police (Emmerich, 2021). The PFI's involvement in social work—such as promoting education, participating in disaster relief efforts, and offering scholarships—further strengthens its community support (Siyech, 2021).

PFI and SDPI's assertion of self-defense as a constitutional right is an important aspect of their strategy (Santhosh & Paleri, 2021). They propagate the idea that resistance is not an offense and argue for individual preparedness and collective physical strength. This stance promotes standing firm and showing strength, a "muscular message" intended to deter attacks from Hindu nationalist groups (Choukhar, 2024). Their Freedom Parades and Unity Marches, where young men march in military-like uniforms, serve as public displays of strength intended to counter the RSS's influence.

Following the 2022 ban on the PFI, the SDPI has sought to distance itself from the PFI. SDPI aims to politically unite Muslims, Dalits, Adivasis, and other marginalized groups in Opposition to Hindu nationalism, striving to establish itself as a significant political force (Choukhar, 2024). Despite limited electoral success, SDPI's victories in local body elections indicate its growing grassroots influence. However, their association with violence may affect their alliances with mainstream parties.

A significant aspect of the Muslim resistance is the feminist struggle of Muslim women against the BJP's politics of hate. Muslim women have been at the forefront of various movements. They challenge both patriarchal norms within their communities and the external oppression imposed by the state (Kadiwal, 2023). They have actively participated in protests, organized rallies, and led public demonstrations at significant personal risk. The Shaheen Bagh protest in 2019-2020 is a notable example, where Muslim women spearheaded a peaceful sit-in against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC), highlighting the discriminatory nature of these policies.

The feminist movement among Muslim women is multi-dimensional and addresses issues such as gender violence, economic marginalization, and political disenfranchisement. They have formed alliances with other marginalized groups to build a broader coalition against the politics of hate and exclusion (Kadiwal, 2023). Their activism is not only about resisting Hindutva but also about asserting their agency and challenging the stereotypes and prejudices that they face as Muslim women. This dual struggle shows their resilience and determination to fight for justice and equality.

The challenges faced by Muslims in India, particularly in Kashmir, are immense. The state's repressive measures, coupled with the societal prejudice fueled by Hindutva ideology, create a hostile environment for resistance. However, the perseverance of the Muslim community in asserting their rights and identity is evident in their diverse forms of struggle. From armed insurgency to non-violent protests, from digital activism to cultural expression, and from feminist movements to legal battles, Muslims in India continue to resist the forces that seek to marginalize and oppress them.

The importance of recognition and support from the international community for these efforts cannot be overstated. Highlighting the human rights violations and advocating for a just resolution to the Kashmir conflict can amplify the voices of the oppressed. It is also essential to acknowledge and support the feminist struggles within the Muslim resistance, as they play a vital role in challenging both external and internal forms of oppression. The resistance of Muslims in India, especially in Kashmir, is a testament to their resilience and determination to fight for justice, dignity, and self-determination.

c) Implications and way forward for Kashmir:

The Kashmiri struggle against Hindutva comprises political, social, and cultural dimensions that reflect a longstanding resistance against oppression and colonization by the Indian state. The future of this struggle is deeply connected with the impacts of recent Indian policies and the evolving dynamics within the region and internationally.

The way forward for the Kashmiri struggle involves an approach that blends political engagement with sustained resistance. Politically, the struggle can draw on theories of political autonomy and independence, where the gradual shift of power from the dominant entity (India) to the subordinated region (Kashmir) can occur through democratic processes (Sheikh, 2022). This requires an active and strategic engagement in political dialogues coupled with leveraging international platforms to highlight their plight and garner support.

The resilience of the Kashmiri people is evident in their refusal to bow down despite severe restrictions and a communication blockade. Historical analyses of the independence movement suggest that periods of dormancy are temporary and often lead to renewed vigor in the struggle. The ongoing curfews and lockdowns have not diminished the will of the Kashmiri people; instead, they have reinforced their resolve to continue fighting for their rights.

The Hurriyat leadership, led by figures such as Mirwaiz Umer Farooq, advocates for a peaceful resolution to the conflict. They warn of severe regional consequences if the situation remains unaddressed. This stance shows the dual nature of the Kashmiri struggle, which balances armed resistance with political advocacy to achieve a sustainable and just solution. Social media is a powerful tool for raising awareness and mobilizing support. Coordinated campaigns can bring to the fore the injustices in Kashmir and create a global movement for change. Educating the masses on the effective use of social media for advocacy can multiply the impact of these campaigns.

Looking ahead, the future of the Kashmiri struggle will be more successful if it involves a combination of grassroots mobilization, international advocacy, and cultural resistance. Grassroots mobilization will be crucial in sustaining the momentum of the struggle in Kashmir. It will ensure that the local populace remains engaged and committed. International advocacy will be crucial in bringing global attention to the Kashmiri cause and pressuring international bodies and foreign governments to take a stand against India's policies in the region. Cultural resistance will continue to play a definitive role in preserving Kashmiris' identity and documenting the ongoing struggle against the occupation.

Dalit Rights Movement

a) Historical background:

The caste system in India has perpetuated one of the most entrenched forms of social inequality. Within this hierarchy, Dalits, also known as Scheduled Castes, have been subjected to severe discrimination and exclusion. The Dalit rights movement emerged as a powerful force to challenge this systemic oppression and fight for social equality (M.S. Singh, 2022).

The origins of the Dalit movement can be traced back to the early 20th century, with Dr. B.R. Ambedkar playing a pivotal role in its development. Dr. Ambedkar, born into a Dalit family, experienced firsthand the humiliations and barriers imposed by caste discrimination. His journey from a marginalized individual to a prominent leader expresses the struggle for Dalit rights. Ambedkar's contributions were multiple: he was a prolific writer, an astute political leader, and a tireless advocate for Dalit rights. His periodicals, such as *Mook Nayak* and *Bahishkrit Bharat*, became platforms for voicing the concerns and aspirations of Dalits (Singh, 2022).

Ambedkar's leadership was known for his insistence on education, agitation, and organization as tools for emancipation. He championed the cause of Dalit rights at various forums, including the Round Table Conferences in London. There, he demanded separate electorates for Dalits to ensure their political representation. The signing of the Poona Pact in 1932, led by Mahatma Gandhi, was a watershed moment, as it secured reserved seats for Dalits in legislative assemblies (Jyoti, 2023).

Ambedkar's most enduring legacy is perhaps his role as the principal architect of the Indian Constitution. He enshrined the abolition of untouchability in the Constitution and provided for affirmative action policies to uplift Dalits. His advocacy for Buddhism as an alternative to the oppressive Hindu caste system led many Dalits to convert in pursuit of spiritual and social liberation (Ghadage, 2020).

Following Ambedkar's death in 1956, the Dalit movement saw a resurgence with the formation of the Dalit Panthers in 1972. The Dalit Panthers were founded by young Dalit activists, including J.V. Pawar, Namdeo Dhasal, and Raja Dhale, in Mumbai and were inspired by the Black Panthers in the United States (Thakor, 2022). This organization emerged as a response to continued atrocities against Dalits and the failure of existing political structures to address their grievances. The Dalit Panthers used various methods, including protests, marches, and literary works, to highlight the plight of Dalits and demand justice.

The influence of the Dalit Panthers extended beyond Maharashtra. It inspired Dalit movements in other states and even abroad. However, internal divisions, particularly over issues like communism, led to the eventual disbandment of the Dalit Panthers (Thakor, 2022). Despite their relatively short existence, the Dalit Panthers left a lasting impact on the Dalit movement by asserting Dalit identity and rights with radical fervor.

In the political arena, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) emerged in 1984 under the leadership of Kanshi Ram. The BSP sought to unite not only Dalits but also other marginalized groups, which are collectively referred to as Bahujans. Kanshi Ram's vision was to transform this demographic majority into a political force capable of challenging the dominance of the upper castes. Under Mayawati's leadership, the BSP achieved electoral success in the state of Uttar Pradesh. However, this success was achieved with strategic alliances that sometimes compromised its ideological purity (Singh, 2022).

The decline of the BSP in recent years has created a vacuum in Dalit leadership, paving the way for new leaders like Chandrashekhar Azad and his Bhim Army (Verma, 2024). Azad, drawing inspiration from both Ambedkar and Kanshi Ram, has mobilized Dalit youth through direct action and grassroots organizing. The goal of his party, the Azad Samaj Party, is to carry the Dalit struggle from the streets to the legislative assemblies.

The Dalit movement, from Ambedkar's foundational efforts to the contemporary activism of leaders like Chandrashekhar Azad, reflects a continuous struggle for dignity, equality, and justice. While progress has been made, the movement faces challenges in mobilizing a diverse and divided Dalit community and transforming societal structures. The future of the Dalit movement depends on its ability to sustain momentum, adapt to new challenges, and achieve the vision of an egalitarian society that Ambedkar envisioned.

b) Dalit movement and the BJP:

The BJP has made considerable efforts to position itself as an inclusive political entity, with a particular goal of shedding its image as an upper-caste party. Since 2014, the BJP has strategically sought to bring Dalit-Bahujan sections into its fold by leveraging socio-cultural initiatives and invoking the legacy of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar (Wankhede, 2021). The BJP has repeatedly adopted narratives that emphasize Ambedkar's contributions to the nation and promise adherence to the constitutional mandate for social justice. Interestingly, it has resonated with some segments of the Dalit community. However, this purported inclusivity is frequently contradicted by the harsh realities of Dalit experiences under BJP governance (Wankhede, 2021).



Figure 12. *A rally in India regarding stoppage of violence against Indian Minorities*

Despite symbolic gestures towards Dalit inclusion, such as celebrating Ambedkar Jayanti (the birth anniversary of Ambedkar) and inaugurating projects in his name, caste-based violence and discrimination are on the rise. The rise in caste-based violence since 2014 suggests a disconnect between the BJP's rhetoric and its policies (Sadanandan, 2018). Reports of atrocities against Dalits, including social boycotts and physical assaults, have increased. This indicates a lack of genuine commitment to addressing the structural issues that perpetuate caste discrimination (Couderé, 2016). Additionally, aggressive actions by law enforcement against Dalit activists, who criticize the government, further add to their marginalization (HRW, 2018).

Hindutva's engagement with Dalits appears selective and instrumental. It is focused more on leveraging their support for electoral gains rather than genuinely transforming their socio-economic conditions. By framing hostile Dalit activists as anti-national or disruptive, the BJP creates a climate of public antagonism against them. The government strives to divert attention from the systemic injustices faced by Dalits.

The BJP's alignment with traditional upper-caste interests leads to policies that inadvertently reinforce caste hierarchies (Wankhede, 2022). The reluctance of the BJP to enforce laws against caste discrimination and its support for economic policies that do not adequately address Dalit poverty and unemployment reflect a more profound ambivalence towards the Dalit agenda.

The increasing crime rates against Dalits are particularly telling. For instance, the National Crime Records Bureau reported a surge in crimes against Dalits, including heinous acts such as the killing of a Dalit man in Uttar Pradesh for touching an idol and the death of a 9-year-old Dalit boy in Rajasthan for drinking water from a pot used by upper castes (Altaf, 2024). These incidents highlight the continuous threat Dalits face and the superficiality of the BJP's inclusivity claims.

The BJP's positioning as a champion of Dalit rights while simultaneously carrying on with a Hindutva agenda reveals a profound contradiction that has alienated many Dalits. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's claim that the majority of BJP workers come from Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes aims to portray the party as inclusive. However, historical and contemporary analyses suggest that the BJP, along with its predecessors such as the Jan Sangh and its parent organization, the RSS, predominantly attracts high-caste supporters who are keen on preserving their status and privileges (Sagar, 2019).

One confusing issue is the increase in the BJP's voter base among Dalits. The support of Dalits for the BJP, a party they once rejected for upholding caste-based discrimination, is antithetical (Pai & Kumar, 2023). The increase in support for the BJP, particularly among smaller sub-castes, can be attributed to a combination of the collapse of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and the BJP's strategic outreach efforts. Unlike regions with strong historical Dalit movements, such as Tamil Nadu, where Dalit parties have not achieved electoral success, the BSP in Uttar Pradesh (UP) emerged from Kanshi Ram's top-down approach to social transformation, utilizing state power. This difference made Dalits in UP more susceptible to shifting their allegiance once the BSP's influence waned (Pai & Kumar, 2023).

The BJP capitalized on the decline of the BSP by addressing the aspirations of smaller Dalit sub-castes who felt marginalized within the BSP's Jatav-dominated structure. The multi-pronged strategies of the BJP, including promises of development, welfare programs, cultural inclusion, and nationalism, resonated with these communities. The party's innovative use of market mechanisms, social media, and personalized campaigns further enhanced its appeal among Dalits (Pai & Kumar, 2023).

Moreover, the BJP's strategy of "new welfarism" played an important role in securing Dalit support. By efficiently delivering a range of essential goods and services, including bank accounts, cooking gas, toilets, electricity, housing, and free rations, the BJP positioned itself as a provider of immediate benefits to poorer sections, including many Dalits. This approach yielded quick electoral returns (Pai & Kumar, 2023).

Despite the BJP's efforts to present itself as an inclusive party catering to the Dalit-Bahujan sections, recent elections have highlighted setbacks in its outreach strategy. In the 2024 elections, the BJP adopted an ambitious "Ab Ki Baar, Chaar Sau Paar" slogan and aimed for a supermajority to enact constitutional changes. The slogan backfired and contributed to their loss of majority. This campaign rhetoric not only failed to rally the necessary support but also instilled fear among Dalits and other marginalized groups about potential threats to their constitutional protections (Sharma, 2022).

The Opposition successfully leveraged this fear and framed the BJP's proposed constitutional amendments as an attack on the very foundation of Dalit empowerment. Historically, the Constitution has been a vital instrument for Dalits as it has abolished untouchability and implemented reservations that have enabled social mobility and empowerment. The perceived threat by the BJP to this document made Dalit voters shift their allegiance towards the Opposition. In states like Uttar Pradesh, where the BJP faced significant losses, this fear translated into tangible electoral outcomes. The vote shares of the BJP among Dalits declined significantly, as many felt their source of social and political empowerment was under threat (Kapoor, 2024).

These electoral shifts show the fragile nature of the BJP's Dalit support base. The decline in Dalit support for the BJP, combined with the rising incidence of caste atrocities and the targeting of Dalit activists, showcases the contradictory relationship between Dalits and the BJP's Hindutva politics.

One form of the Dalits' protest against Hindutva is mass conversion to Buddhism. These mass conversions highlight the fears and frustrations of Dalits, who remain at the bottom of the traditional Hindu caste system. These conversions are not merely religious acts but powerful protests against centuries of exclusion and abuse (Pandey, 2022).

The emergence of new Dalit leaders signals a growing dissatisfaction with traditional Dalit politics. These leaders, who are from marginalized backgrounds themselves, articulate the aspirations of younger Dalit

generations and challenge the status quo. Their emergence signifies a potential shift in Dalit politics towards more assertive and independent forms of political engagement, which could pose a challenge to the BJP's dominance.

c) Challenges to the Dalit rights movement:

The Dalit rights movement in India faces significant challenges, both within the movement itself and from external forces. These challenges hinder the effectiveness and cohesion of the movement, affecting its ability to bring about substantial change.

One major internal challenge is the leadership crisis within the Dalit community. Various leaders vie to position themselves as the foremost representative of Dalit interests and draw parallels to Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. This competition has led to a lack of unity and a fragmented movement, with each leader prioritizing personal recognition over collective goals (Malik & Sarkar, 2019). This internal discord prevents the formation of a unified, Pan-Indian Dalit identity and dilutes the overall impact of the movement.

Another internal issue is the urban-rural divide among Dalits. Many educated, urban Dalits have adopted lifestyles and attitudes that align more closely with the dominant Brahminical culture (Malik & Sarkar, 2019). This creates a disconnect from their rural counterparts. This divide is exacerbated by a lack of interaction between urban and rural Dalits, with the former often forgetting the plight of the latter. This class distinction within the Dalit community undermines the solidarity needed for a strong, cohesive movement.

Externally, the Dalit movement faces severe repression from the state and dominant caste groups. When Dalit groups assert their rights or take political stances, they encounter harsh retaliation, including false charges and arrests. This governmental and societal repression is a strategy to suppress Dalit activism and maintain the status quo of caste-based discrimination and oppression.

Additionally, the Dalit movement struggles to form effective alliances with other marginalized groups. Although there is potential for a coalition that incorporates various oppressed communities, such as tribals, backward classes, and women, these alliances have not been successfully realized. The inability of the Dalit rights movement to integrate these groups has limited its scope and effectiveness in addressing the spectrum of social injustices.

Furthermore, internal tensions within the Dalit movement have hindered its ability to influence public policy effectively (Malik & Sarkar, 2019). Despite possessing valuable cultural and ideological resources, internal disunity within the movement has hindered the effective utilization of these assets to shape policy and advocate for Dalit rights on a national scale.

To overcome these challenges, the Dalit movement must work towards greater internal unity and stronger external alliances. It is crucial for urban and educated Dalits to reconnect with their rural counterparts and for the movement to embrace a broad coalition of marginalized groups.

Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort from Dalit leaders and communities to create a more inclusive and united front. Only through such solidarity and strategic alliances can the Dalit rights movement achieve its goals of social justice and equality in India.

Citizen Resistance to Hindutva: At Home and Abroad

a) Promotion of Hindutva on digital platforms and its implications:

The spread of online hate by the BJP and the Hindutva movement against Muslims and other minorities in India and abroad has implications for both virtual and real-world violence. This phenomenon, driven by the strategic

use of digital platforms and systemic legal measures, has caused increased intolerance and violence. Understanding the mechanisms of this hate campaign and its repercussions is crucial.

The BJP has leveraged social media to propagate its Hindutva ideology. This strategy includes a sophisticated IT cell in New Delhi, which coordinates thousands of volunteers and bots to flood social media with propaganda, disinformation, and hate speech targeting Muslims and other minorities (Shih, 2024).

The BJP government has instituted various legal measures to increase its control over cyberspace. The introduction of the Central Monitoring System (CMS) and the Information Technology Rules 2021 has augmented state surveillance capabilities. These measures have paved the way for extensive monitoring and censorship of digital communications (Pandey, 2023). This legal framework supports the BJP's strategy of digital authoritarianism, which suppresses the Opposition and amplifies Hindutva narratives.



Figure 13. *The treatment of an Indian Dalit woman in UP.*

Source: Accessed through <https://x.com/satnamkhalsa1/status/1818089705663332627>

The online hate propagated by the BJP and Hindutva supporters translates into real-world violence. The 2022 violence in Leicester, UK, is a pertinent example. Leicester, known for its diverse population, experienced unprecedented communal clashes between Hindu and Muslim communities in September 2022. The violence was precipitated by a cricket match between India and Pakistan, which served as a trigger for existing tensions caused by online hate campaigns. Social media platforms were flooded with inflammatory posts, videos, and messages from Hindutva supporters, many of which originated from India (Dutta, 2024). These digital provocations included false claims and rumors about attacks on Hindu individuals and properties, which were quickly shared and amplified by local and international networks. The rapid spread of these messages incited fear and anger within the communities, causing physical confrontations and street violence.

During the Leicester clashes, mobs vandalized properties, temples, and mosques, resulting in injuries and property damage. The violence was not just spontaneous but appeared to be organized, with groups mobilizing through online channels (Dutta, 2024). This incident highlights how digital hate can spill over into physical violence and affect not only India but also the diaspora abroad.

The implications of this intertwined digital and physical violence are profound. Firstly, the propagation of hate speech online creates an environment where violence against minorities is normalized. In India, this has resulted in numerous instances of mob violence, lynching, and targeted attacks against Muslims (Maizland, 2024). The digital campaign empowers individuals to confront and overcome these prejudices. They believe that they have state endorsement.

Secondly, the international spillover of such violence is detrimental to India's global image. The Leicester incident highlighted how domestic political strategies could incite violence in multicultural societies abroad. It also raised alarms about the role of social media platforms in enabling and amplifying hate speech. This calls for greater regulation and accountability of these platforms.

Several other cases also illustrate the link between digital hate campaigns and physical violence. The Delhi riots in 2020, for example, were precipitated by incendiary social media posts and speeches by BJP leaders, which incited violence against Muslims (Iyer, 2022). Similarly, the lynching of Muslims in Jharkhand and other states followed viral social media posts accusing them of various crimes (Khan, 2018).

In each case, the pattern is clear: digital hate, amplified by coordinated campaigns and supported by legal frameworks that suppress opposition, leads to physical violence. This not only endangers lives but also deepens societal divisions and undermines democratic principles.

In the 2024 elections, Modi and the BJP frequently used the term "Vote Jihad" to vilify Muslim voters. Modi accused them of manipulating electoral outcomes to undermine Hindu governance (Y. Sharma, 2024). This term, initially used by an opposition politician, was co-opted by the BJP to fuel communal tensions and polarize the electorate. The frequent use of this term was documented in a report by The London Story, which recorded numerous instances of the BJP's social media accounts carrying forward this rhetoric (The London Story, 2024). Such disinformation campaigns are designed to disenfranchise India's substantial Muslim population by painting them as a threat to national integrity.

To mitigate these issues, there is a need for robust international cooperation to monitor and counteract online hate speech. Social media companies must be held accountable for the content on their platforms, and stricter regulations should be enforced to prevent the spread of misinformation and hate speech. Additionally, community engagement and education are crucial in building resilience against divisive narratives and promoting social harmony.

b) Features of resistance

Hindutva ideology has elicited resistance both within India and among the Indian diaspora abroad. This resistance is multidimensional, comprising protests, legal challenges, digital activism, and community organizing aimed at countering the discriminatory policies and divisive rhetoric of Hindutva.

In India, the rise of Hindutva has sparked widespread protests and activism among citizens. Key moments include the "Award Wapsi" movement of 2015, where writers and artists returned awards to protest rising intolerance and attacks on free speech (Banerji, 2022). This movement highlighted concerns about assaults on intellectuals and government inaction in addressing communal violence. The Una protests in 2016 were another pivotal event, triggered by the brutal beating of Dalits under the guise of cow protection. These protests mobilized thousands against caste discrimination, with the protestors demanding justice and socio-economic reforms for marginalized communities.

Similarly, the suicide of Rohith Vemula in 2016 was followed by nationwide campus protests that exposed systemic caste biases in educational institutions and advocated for institutional accountability. The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) protests of 2019 symbolized resistance against discriminatory laws towards Muslims. Sites like Shaheen Bagh became symbols of peaceful resistance against marginalization and religious discrimination. These protests embodied opposition to Hindutva-driven policies that undermined India's secular

fabric (Sharma & Singh, 2023). On university campuses, creative resistance manifested through protest songs and screenings of banned documentaries. The campus protests promoted discourse on free expression and resistance against censorship (Syed, 2023).

Knowledge production in the context of resistance to Hindutva encompasses critical analyses, scholarly research, and media narratives that challenge the dominant narratives promoted by Hindutva proponents. Scholars, journalists, and activists engage in producing knowledge that exposes the historical roots, socio-political implications, and human rights violations associated with Hindutva ideology. For example, reports such as "The Foreign Exchange of Hate" have exposed financial links between Hindutva organizations and global donors, informing activists about their transnational dimensions (Thapliyal, 2023). This knowledge production serves to inform public discourse both within India and among the diaspora. It offers alternative perspectives that highlight the diverse impacts of Hindutva on marginalized communities, secularism, and democratic institutions. By documenting and disseminating information through academic studies, investigative journalism, and digital media, knowledge producers contribute to efforts aimed at countering the influence of Hindutva and advocating for social justice, pluralism, and inclusive governance.

Beyond India, the Indian diaspora has been actively contesting Hindutva through both online and on-ground activism. In the United States, organizations such as the Coalition to Stop Genocide (CSG) and the Alliance for Justice and Accountability (AJA) have played a pivotal role in organizing protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). These coalitions, including the Indian American Muslim Council (IAMC), Hindus for Human Rights (HfHR), and Equality Labs, mobilized thousands across several cities. Through their protests, they highlighted the discriminatory nature of the CAA and its implications for secularism in India (Hegde, 2023).

US cities, such as Seattle, have passed resolutions condemning the CAA, symbolizing local government opposition to India's Hindutva policies and drawing international attention (Hegde, 2023). Educational campaigns by organizations such as HfHR and IAMC provided critical analysis and dispelled myths about the CAA. These organizations served as informational hubs for activists and supporters.

Digital activism against Hindutva has been prominent in diaspora communities. Diaspora communities have leveraged platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp to mobilize, educate, and advocate against Hindutva ideologies and practices. During high-profile visits of Indian leaders like Narendra Modi to the US and UK, hashtags such as #AdiosModi and #ModiNotWelcome trended. These social media trends reflect widespread discontent and mobilization within diaspora communities.

Participation in digital activism against Hindutva is diverse, involving various groups and identities within the diaspora. The Dalit diaspora, for instance, plays a crucial role due to ongoing discrimination issues intersecting with Hindutva's nationalist agenda. Organizations such as the International Dalit Solidarity Network utilize digital platforms to advocate for the rights of Dalits worldwide. Overseas support amplifies marginalized voices and challenges systemic discrimination. Activists engage in digital surveillance to monitor hate speech and misinformation.

In Australia, nascent digital activism against Hindutva is gaining momentum through initiatives by organizations like The Humanism Project. These organizations focus on human rights abuses in India and collaborate with local politicians and community organizations to raise awareness and mobilize support (Thapliyal et al., 2022).

The diaspora's role in contesting Hindutva reflects a commitment to democratic principles, social justice, and human rights. This commitment transcends geographical boundaries to confront discriminatory ideologies and promote inclusive societies.

c) Impacts of the resistance:

The resistance against Hindutva, both within India and among the Indian diaspora abroad, holds the potential for profound impacts on multiple fronts.

The resistance has already exerted pressure on the BJP-led government in India. Widespread protests, such as those against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the anti-Dalit violence, have garnered international attention and condemnation. These movements have challenged the government's discriminatory legislative agenda. The passage of resolutions against the CAA in various cities abroad not only reflects global solidarity but also influences international perceptions of India's domestic policies. This pressure could lead to shifts in governmental approaches, emphasizing greater accountability and adherence to human rights standards.

Socially, the resistance has catalyzed a broader discourse on identity, inclusion, and diversity within Indian society. By amplifying these voices of the marginalized, the resistance promotes solidarity across caste, religious, and regional lines. It challenges the hegemonic narratives of Hindutva that seek to homogenize Indian identity. This social cohesion strengthens democratic values and pluralism, promoting a more inclusive vision of Indian society.

Internationally, the diaspora-led resistance has influenced global perceptions of India and its governance. Digital activism and media campaigns have highlighted human rights abuses and discriminatory practices associated with Hindutva ideology. Such awareness has prompted international stakeholders, including policymakers and human rights organizations, to scrutinize India's domestic policies more closely and advocate for adherence to international human rights and democratic norms.

The YouTube campaign by Dhruv Rathee played a crucial role in scrutinizing Narendra Modi's policies and actions, thereby influencing public opinion and potentially reducing his voter base. Through his platform, Rathee engaged in critical analysis and fact-checking of Modi's governance. He highlighted issues such as disinformation, racial discrimination, and social justice concerns (Rathee, 2024a; 2024b; 2024c). These videos not only reached a broad audience but also provided alternative perspectives that countered mainstream narratives aligned with the ruling BJP.

The cumulative effect of these efforts was evident in political outcomes such as the BJP losing its absolute majority in Parliament during the recent elections. The resistance movements mobilized voters disillusioned with Hindutva policies and rallied support for opposition parties advocating for pluralism and inclusive governance.

Overall, the impact of resistance against Hindutva extends beyond immediate policy changes or political outcomes. It reshapes narratives, challenges power dynamics, and strengthens democratic institutions both within India and in its diaspora communities abroad. By promoting solidarity, promoting social justice, defending cultural pluralism, and influencing international discourse, the resistance paves the way for a more inclusive and equitable future, grounded in democratic values and respect for human rights.

Conclusion

After a careful examination of the resistance movements within India, it becomes evident that these movements collectively represent a profound struggle for justice, equality, and democratic values against forces of discrimination, oppression, and authoritarianism.

Each movement has its roots in historical grievances, which are exacerbated by the current socio-political situation in India. The Khalistan movement is sustained by the quest for autonomy and recognition among Sikhs. Similarly, the Muslim resistance in Kashmir highlights the enduring struggle against state repression and for the right to self-determination. The insurgencies in Northeast India pose a challenge to India's ability to reconcile regional autonomy with national integration. Meanwhile, the Dalit rights movement confronts entrenched caste-based discrimination and seeks to forge unity amidst internal divisions and external pressures.

Examining these movements, the resistance to the Hindutva ideology emerges as a unifying force. It represents a collective endeavor to uphold secularism, pluralism, and inclusive governance against the backdrop of rising communalism and nationalist fervor. From protests against discriminatory laws to international advocacy that exposes human rights abuses, this resistance demonstrates the resilience of democratic institutions and the power of collective action in shaping India's socio-political fabric.

Looking forward, the future of Hindutva ideology in India depends on its ability to adapt to internal dissent and external scrutiny. The movements discussed here—through their resilience, unity, and strategic advocacy—have already exerted considerable pressure on the BJP-led government. They have challenged policies that undermine democratic principles, human rights, and social cohesion. The electoral setbacks faced by the BJP in various states, attributed in part to these movements, reflect a growing public disillusionment with divisive politics and authoritarian tendencies. Moreover, the global spotlight on India's internal dynamics, propelled by diaspora activism and international human rights organizations, amplifies the stakes for the BJP and its Hindutva agenda.

In response to these challenges, the BJP faces a pivotal choice: to continue down the path of exclusionary politics, risking further social division and international isolation, or to adopt an inclusive governance approach that respects diversity, fosters dialogue, and upholds constitutional values. The latter approach would not only strengthen India's democratic foundations but also enhance its credibility as an emerging global leader committed to human rights and pluralism.

The resilience and solidarity exhibited by these resistance movements offer a pathway forward—a vision of India where every individual, irrespective of religion, caste, or ethnicity, can live with dignity, equality, and freedom. It calls for a recommitment to dialogue, reconciliation, and justice across all sectors of society. The ongoing struggles against Hindutva and its manifestations are not merely about political opposition; they are about safeguarding the fundamental rights and aspirations of all Indians. They are about reclaiming the promise of democracy, social justice, and human dignity. As these movements continue to evolve and resonate both within India and globally, they remind us that the quest for a more just and inclusive society is a shared responsibility—one that requires courage, perseverance, and a profound commitment to the values that define a nation's people.

CHAPTER 5

Implications of Hindutva Ideology on the International Image of India

Introduction

India's ascent on the global stage, as a rapidly growing economy, strong democracy, and vibrant cultural heritage, has garnered massive attention. For decades since its independence, constitutional secularism has remained a defining feature of India's democratic polity. However, this has significantly altered with the ascent of Hindutva-influenced Bhartiya Janata Party to political power in India. While this has had profound implications for India's domestic socio-political fabric, as discussed in the previous chapter, it also has significant implications for India's secular image on the global landscape.

This chapter highlights the impact of Hindutva ideology on India's secular image in global politics. Briefly examining the historical context of Indian secularism, this chapter explores some of the foundational principles established by Jawaharlal Nehru. The following section highlights the evolution and challenges to the secular image of India, particularly with the emergence and rise of the Hindutva ideology in Indian politics. The chapter examines the international response to the influence of Hindutva on policies, highlighting the reactions of international media, democratic states, and India's neighboring countries. The role of the Indian government in maintaining a delicate balance between enforcing its Hindutva ideology and adopting a secular, democratic, and inclusive outlook on the international stage is also evaluated. The final section examines the role of the Indian diaspora as a bridge between India and the broader global community in projecting a positive image of the Indian government.

Historical Overview of the Secular Image of India

The origins of Indian secularism can be traced back to the foundational principles enshrined in the Indian Constitution. The independence of India from British colonial rule coincided with the arduous task of unifying a nation that was a diverse blend of cultures, ethnicities, religions, and languages—being fully aware of this critical task of not only creating, but also preserving the "unity in diversity", the framers of the Indian Constitution the leadership of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar aimed, to structure the constitution in a way that would promote national unity without sacrificing the pluralistic character of the state.

According to the Preamble of the Indian Constitution, India is destined to be a "sovereign socialist secular democratic republic." This decree was not only symbolic, but it has also been incorporated into multiple articles and provisions within the constitution. Whether it is the preamble of the Indian Constitution, the purpose remains the same: to ensure that the state practices absolute neutrality in terms of religion. While Articles 25 to 28 are directed at protecting the freedom of religion, the rights of cultural and ethnic minorities are guaranteed in Articles 29 and 30 of the Indian Constitution (Rudolph & Rudolph, 2001). The traumatic episode of the partition of the subcontinent, which unleashed an intense and immense amount of bloodshed and communal violence, had played a key role in steering India towards the constitution's commitment to secularism.

Nehruvian Secularism

Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India and a prominent leader of the Indian National Congress's struggle for independence, was a staunch promoter of secularism. He had played a crucial and non-negligible role in leading India on the path of secularism. Inspired by the European Enlightenment's feature of a clear-cut separation between religion and state, along with an emphasis on scientific and technological progress, Nehruvian secularism has been characterized by a scientific temper, objective rationality, and a clear division between religion and state. For Nehru, it was essential for India's modernization and progression to adopt and adhere to a secular approach that would ensure religious dogma would not impede the governance of the state (Gopal, 1980).

According to Nehru, secularism did not imply a complete decline of religion in society; instead, it prescribed that in no circumstances should religion be used as a tool of socio-political mobilization and turmoil. The Congress leader had been apprehensive of the potential of religious extremism to disrupt the political fabric and national cohesion. Under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru, India was able to maintain a delicate balance between respecting all religions while ensuring that no single one gained precedence in the socio-political landscape (Chandra, 2000). Multiple policies, programs, and initiatives have been implemented to institutionalize this secular approach, which has ranged from incorporating secularism into the constitution to promoting scientific education and land reform aimed at achieving social justice.

Early Perceptions of the Secular Image of India

The early years of Indian independence were marked by recognition and appreciation for Indian secularism. India was considered the benchmark for newly decolonizing states, as it was portrayed as a successful example of a recently decolonized state that managed to adopt a secular democratic structure despite its complex cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity, all while navigating historical challenges. Even though India had joined and started to lead the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) during the Cold War, it did not hinder Western nations from lauding India for its secularism. The Non-Aligned Movement was a collaboration of states that maintained their independence from their rivals, the United States and the Soviet Union. India's image as a secular, democratic, and progressive state played an instrumental role in its leadership of NAM, while advocating for racial equality and anti-colonialism (Gandhi, 2007).

Additionally, India's participation in numerous multilateral institutions, such as the United Nations, and its claims to support global peace have reinforced its image as a secular, progressive, and democratic nation. Indian leaders, such as Nehru and Gandhi, were celebrated and respected worldwide for their moral, ethical, and philosophical ethos, which was reflected in the Indian character.

Evolution and Challenges to the Secular Image of India

Despite all efforts to strongly inculcate the values of secularism in India's foundations, the secular image of India was unable to maintain its stature over the decades. The roots of religious extremism, cultural nationalism, and ethnic discrimination, with their pre-independence roots in the Hindutva ideology of V.D. Savarkar and Arya Samaj, began to erode the secular impression of India. As discussed in the earlier chapters, the Hindutva ideology promulgated by V.D. Savarkar and practically implemented by RSS emphasized an ultra-radical form of Hindu nationalism that advocated the opinion that Hindustan should only remain a land for the Hindus. While initially the ideology remained on the fringes in the early years of independence, it soon began to penetrate the Indian political landscape with the creation of the Bhartiya Jana Sangh (Jafferlot, 1996). The considerable political traction for the Hindutva ideology came with the ascent of the Bhartiya Janata Party to power in the 1990s.

The Ramjanmabhoomi movement that culminated in the demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992 acted like a watershed moment in India's transition from secularism to religious extremism. The demolition of the mosque, followed by the Hindu-Muslim communal riots, highlighted the potential of religious extremism to destroy the secular image of India by aggravating deep-seated religious tensions. With the rise of Hindutva in the Indian-socio-political landscape, a few questions have surfaced that probe the legitimacy of the Indian constitution. This rhetoric also raises a critical question: whether there is any practical relevance to the secularism mentioned in the constitution, or whether it is just an eyewash and a pacifier to appease India's minorities (Chatterjee, 1995).

Such developments have not gone unnoticed by the international community. To an extent, India's rapid economic growth and strategic significance have been able to overshadow the concerns regarding its secular credentials. However, the growing cases of religious extremism and communal violence have attracted global attention and criticism that point toward the erosion of secularism in the Indian polity. There have been multiple reports of incidents of extremism that have been highlighted and shared by human rights agencies and international media groups that significantly tarnish the secular image of India.

Nehruvian Legacy and the Continuation of Secularism

Despite the considerable challenges, Indian society and politics are still influenced by the Nehruvian legacy. Even the radical Hindutva-led governments of India have not been entirely able to evade the deeply ingrained ethos of secularism. These governments, particularly those of the BJP, have had to maintain a critically delicate balance between their own Hindutva inclinations and the secular commitments of India. Additionally, moderate intellectuals and civil society organizations have played a significant role in defending secularism. Women's

rights movements and minority protection movements are often used to frame the tolerant context of Indian society, which believes in peaceful coexistence among various religious groups. Furthermore, India's vibrant democratic political landscape, characterized by regular general elections, smooth transfers of power, and the active participation of diverse religious and ethnic groups, reflects the country's commitment to secular and democratic values.

Global Reactions to the Rise of Hindutva and Its Impact on the Secular Image of India

International Criticism of Hindutva

Diplomatic Reactions

The rise of Hindutva ideology, with its visible impact on the state's policies and subsequently the rights of religious and ethnic minorities of India, has garnered considerable international criticism. Particularly, the states with a strong profile of human rights protection have been more avid in expressing their concerns regarding India's shift towards radical religious nationalism. For instance, recurrent concerns have been voiced by the United Nations Commission on International Religious Freedom (UNCIRF) regarding the violation of human rights of religious minorities of India under the BJP regime. In the reports of UNCIRF, it has been repeatedly recommended to designate India as a "Country of Particular Concern" (UNCIRF, 2021)

While the issues of minority rights, religious freedom, and fundamental human rights are recurrently brought up in bilateral and multilateral diplomatic platforms, this has sometimes even led to a strain in diplomatic ties of India with other states. For instance, the Citizenship Amendment Act and the National Register of Citizens have been criticized by the US Congress, which considers these acts to be discriminatory against Muslims.

Human Rights Organizations

Even the non-governmental and considerably impartial organizations such as Amnesty International and the Human Rights Watch have not been able to restrain their criticism of the impact of Hindutva in eroding the secular values of India. Multiple reports have been prepared and published by Amnesty International that have highlighted the growing climate of intolerance, hostility, fear, and violence amongst the Indian religious minorities as a result of the increasing influence of Hindutva's principles on the policies of the state.

The Human Rights Watch has also criticized the BJP government for multiple discriminatory policies that have violated fundamental human rights. For instance, Meenakshi Ganguly, the deputy director for Asia, has asserted that the Indian authorities have been abusing the already persecuted victims of violence instead of holding the abusers accountable. The human rights organizations have also condemned the BJP government for raiding the office of the BBC and blocking the documentary in which the Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, was referred to as a failure to provide security to the Muslims (Human Rights Watch, 2024). Similarly, according to Amnesty International's reports, in 2022, India imposed over 84 internet shutdowns to control the spread of information. Additionally, with the introduction of the Information Technology Rules through the Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics, the government has expanded its control over social and digital media while curbing the public's freedom of expression (Amnesty International, 2023).

Support for Hindutva

Diplomatic and Strategic Interests

Keeping aside the religious extremism and violation of human rights, the fact that India has been emerging as a key player in global geo-economics, geopolitical, and geostrategic landscapes has been non-negligible. Hence, besides criticism, due to the convergence of strategic, political, and economic interests, the BJP is also able to garner some support for its radical Hindutva ideology. States with a larger diaspora of Hindu population, as well as the states seeking strategic ties with India, have often chosen to overlook the radicalism in the BJP regime by adopting a more neutral and supportive outlook. The Indo-Israel nexus is an interesting development in this regard. While focusing on the defense industry, agricultural development, and technological advancement, both states have fostered close and cordial bilateral relations. Additionally, the ideological affinity between both the far-right wing populist governments has also been a factor that has allowed the Israeli government not to highlight any concerns over religious extremism in India.

Another example is the populist regime of Donald Trump in the United States from 2016 to 2021. While many of the Hindu Americans had supported Donald Trump in the presidential elections, a havan puja was organized by the Hindu Sena for the electoral victory of Donald Trump. This Hindu support for Trump comes in exchange for several factors, such as Trump's appraisal of Modi's economic policies in his presidential speeches, holding and lighting a 'diya' before one of his addresses, and his loud and unfiltered opposition to Islam and Muslims. With his anti-Muslim anxiety, many Hindu nationalists feel relatable as they have themselves considered Islam and Muslims as a foreign threat to the security of the Hindu Rashtra (Adetunji, 2016). Similarly, in one of his speeches at a Diwali event organized by the Republican Hindu Coalition, Trump expressed his intention to take Indo-US ties to the next level, citing his close relationship with Hindus and Prime Minister Narendra Modi (The Hindu, 2022). An interesting thing to note here is that Donald Trump, a political leader of the country that champions liberal and secular values, is seeking relations with a regime that is blatantly obstructing secular values.

Diaspora and Political Influence

The Indian diaspora residing in countries like the USA, Canada, and Britain has been playing a critical role in shaping the international perspective on Hindutva. Multiple pro-Hindutva organizations, including the Hindu American Foundation and the Overseas Friends of BJP, have been actively lobbying to portray a positive image of the Hindutva movement. These organizations have adopted various methods to counter the criticism directed at Hindutva. One of the arguments is that Hindutva is only a cultural and ideological affinity that takes pride in the promotion of Hindu cultural heritage, instead of being an exclusionary religious movement. Another way to ward off the criticism is to emphasize the democratic character of Indian polity as well as the pluralistic nature of its social fabric. These pro-Hindutva organizations have also shunned NGOs, media networks, and other human rights organizations by claiming that they are engaged in biased reporting and misinterpretation of ground realities.

Media Representations of Hindutva

National Media

The Indian media has been highly polarized in its reporting of Hindutva and the BJP government's policies. Pro-Hindutva channels have been actively promoting a pro-government narrative since the BJP came to power. Digital Media houses such as Republic TV and Zee News have gained publicity for their reporting and analysis, which is highly inclined towards the BJP government and has been loud and clear in its snubbing of opposition groups and secular critics. These channels have emphasized inculcating Hindu nationalism using cultural revivalism (Chadha, 2017). On the other hand, independent media channels, including NDTV and The Wire, have been openly critical of the extremist and discriminatory policies adopted by the Hindutva regime. These media channels specifically highlight the issues resulting from the erosion of secular values, such as communal violence. Incidents such as the Delhi riots and the unrest after the NRC case of Assam are given extensive coverage and are framed as the consequence of Hindutva ideology (Sardesai, 2020).

International Media

The international media has recurrently raised concerns about the impact of Hindutva on the secular values and principles of India. Leading global media conglomerates such as the BBC, the Washington Post, The Guardian, and The New York Times have frequently published reports and articles that raise an alarm about the consequences of religious extremism in the form of declining democratic values and the deteriorating conditions of minority rights in India. The Hindutva-influenced BJP government has also been compared with the right-wing populist regimes in the contemporary era, as well as in the historical context, such as with that of Adolf Hitler (Gettleman et al., 2019)

However, despite these concerns, even global media outlets cannot overlook India's economic development and increasing geostrategic significance. Hence, while they commend India for its economic development and technological advancements, their analysis of India becomes highly intricate and complex. This complex reporting reveals the fact that with the rise of the BJP and Hindutva, the Indian socio-political and economic landscape has become one in which the economic prosperity and strategic interests can overshadow religious extremism and violation of human rights, as well as vice versa.

Public Opinion on Hindutva

Just as the national and international media remain divided in their impressions of the BJP, so too does the national and international public opinion.

National Public Opinion

At the national level, on the one hand, there are staunch supporters of the BJP who believe that the BJP is only reviving the Hindu culture and heritage after centuries of oppression and suppression at the hands of foreign invaders, ranging from Mongol Muslims to the Christian British colonizers. For them, the BJP is only settling the score and returning Hindustan to the native population, i.e., the Hindus. Supporters of Hindutva argue that the BJP is only promoting nationalism, which is a *sine qua non* for making India a strong power with the capability to assert its will over other states (Deshpande, 2019)

However, on the other hand, a wide range of social groups, including the minorities, seculars, liberals, and moderates, have been highly alarmed by the BJP Hindutva policies as they consider these to be an existential threat to the secular constitutional values as well as the pluralistic ethos of the state. They have recurrently raised concerns about the suppression and marginalization of minorities, the curbing of freedom of expression, and a divergence from the constitutional secular path (Varshney, 2020).

International Public Opinion

Several factors have played a significant role in shaping international public opinion, including media reports, the influence of diaspora communities' perspectives, and diplomatic interactions. The international public remains divided in its reactions to the rise of Hindutva, as these reactions are a complex interplay of critique and support. The criticism usually emerges with the increasing concerns over the erosion of secular values and the suppression of minority rights. At the same time, the support, on the other hand, comes from shared interests and the influence of diaspora in shaping the narrative about Hindutva.

In Western democratic states, a considerable segment of the public has expressed concern about the rise of Hindutva. This alarm has been caused by the increasing number of reports of religious intolerance, communal violence, and the curbing of fundamental freedoms by an authoritarian regime (Kurien, 2007). However, on the other side of the spectrum, there are population segments who consider the rise of Hindutva to be a practical manifestation and legitimate expression of cultural revival and national identity.

Hence, the secular image of India is continually under negotiation and contestation on the global stage. These diverse reactions to Hindutva accentuate the more complex challenges that India faces in balancing secularism, cultural pluralism, and the celebration of its rich cultural heritage. As India navigates these complex realities, its national cohesion and international reputation will depend on how it articulates a balance between the competing narratives.

Case Studies of Major Events Impacting the Secular Outlook of India

As discussed in the previous sections, the rise of Hindutva has a profound impact on India's secular national identity within the global landscape. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), along with its political offspring, the Bharatiya Janata Party, while focusing on the supremacy of the Hindu religion and culture, has led to the formation and implementation of policies that have culminated in incidents drawing international criticism. As some of the incidents have already been discussed in previous chapters, the following section analyzes the media coverage of global news sources, as well as the responses from neighboring states and Western democracies.

Case Study 1: Demolition of Babri Masjid 1992

Overview of the Incident:

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Babri Masjid was constructed in the early 16th Century by the founder of the Mughal Dynasty, Babur. While the mosque had been subjected to infrequent disputes amongst the Muslims and Hindus, the main incident took place when it was demolished by the RSS and its religious wing, Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), in 1992. The members of the RSS demolished the mosque while claiming that it was inappropriately constructed at the birthplace of the Hindu god Ram. As a result of the incident, communal riots broke out between the Hindus and Muslims in many cities of India.

International Media Coverage

The demolition of the Babri Masjid and the subsequent communal riots were given extensive media coverage at the global level. As reported by the American newspaper, The New York Times, the event was a 'political and religious earthquake' that jolted the foundations of Indian democracy and secularism (Burns, 1992). Likewise, the British newspaper, The Guardian, labelled the communal riots that followed the demolition as a 'significant blot on the secular fabric' of India. It also gave much hype to the over 2000 deaths, mainly of Muslims, that were the result of the communal violence.

Responses and Reactions from Major Democracies

Western democratic states, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, expressed grave concern over the event. As per the US State Department, the Indian government was strongly advised to protect its religious minorities while upholding the principles of secularism, which India had vouched for so long. The European Union also emphasized the need to take measures that would ensure the protection of religious sites, as well as the rights of minority religious communities.

Responses from Neighboring states

Two of the neighboring states of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, have been Muslim majority countries. While the ideological basis for the partition of the Indian subcontinent came from the Two-Nation Theory, the Ayodhya incident has reaffirmed the perspective of many Muslim Pakistanis that Muslims would not have been able to exercise religious freedom in a united India. The shared perspective in Pakistan had been that India had failed to curb the outbursts of Hindu militancy despite its efforts to keep a secularist outlook (Monshipouri, 1993). The government of Pakistan has overtly criticized India for its inability to protect the religious minorities. On the other hand, Bangladesh itself became the victim of the spillover effect of communal tensions, as there was an increased number of attacks on Hindu temples as a reaction to the demolition of the mosque (Gupta, 2011).

Case Study 2: Gujarat Riots 2002

Overview of the Incident

The Gujarat riots broke out in 2002 when Narendra Modi from the BJP was the Chief Minister of Gujarat. Violence and communal riots broke out when a train carrying Hindu pilgrims was burnt, resulting in the deaths of over 59 Hindus. Even though the sources of fire came from inside the train, indicating a technical malfunction, the incident was blamed on Muslims, leading to the outbreak of widespread communal violence. As the violence raged, there was excessive property damage to Muslims, and over 1000 people were killed, who were predominantly Muslims.

International Media Coverage

The Gujarat riots were widely condemned in the international media, and the Indian government faced a severe backlash for its flawed and mishandling of the situation. American Newspaper, The Washington Post labelled the incident as 'a horrific example of ethnic cleansing and ethnic violence'. Narendra Modi, the then Chief Minister of Gujarat, was also criticized for exacerbating the violence instead of bringing the situation under control (Chandrasekaran, 2002). According to the reporting of the BBC, the Gujarat riots were the systematic targeting of Muslims as well as the state's failure to protect its religious minorities (BBC, March 1, 2002).

Reactions from Major Democracies

Numerous dominant democratic states strongly condemned the Gujarat riots. The BJP leader and the then Chief Minister of Gujarat, Narendra Modi, was denied an American visa by the State Department in 2005 for his alleged role in exacerbating the communal violence and the atrocious violation of freedom of religion. The European Union also raised serious concerns, as numerous member states demanded justice for the victims and accountability for the officials whose negligence or involvement led to the tragedy.

Responses from Neighboring States

Pakistan, as the neighboring Muslim majority state of India, raised its voice on the international platforms and asked for an international scrutiny of the human rights record of India. The government of Pakistan claimed that the Gujarat riots were the practical manifestation and evidence of discrimination and violence against Muslims in India. Bangladesh, too, expressed its concerns, as such incidents had the potential to spill over from India to its neighboring states.

Case Study 3: Protests Against the Citizenship Amendment Act (2019-2020)

Overview of the Incident

The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), enacted in 2019, aimed to smother the path of acquisition of citizenship for the non-Muslim refugees from the neighboring states of India, including Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan. This sparked protests all across India as it was clearly directed at discriminating against the Muslims and also undermined the secular constitution of India that vouched for equal respect for all religions.

International Media Coverage

As the international media widely covered the protests against the CAA, it had profound implications for India's secular image. As reported by The New York Times, the Citizenship Amendment Act had been a 'turning point' in India's democracy as its secular values were eroded by discriminating against the Muslims, particularly (Gettleman, Raj, & Yasir, 2019). Additionally, while ascribing the status of being 'troubling', The Guardian asserted that the Act was a step towards religious discrimination by the government (Biswas, 2020).

Reactions of Major Democracies

Numerous democratic states have raised their concerns regarding the CAA and the subsequent protests. According to the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), the Act was a clear-cut violation of religious freedom. The USCIRF also recommended the imposition of sanctions against the Indian officials engaged in enacting the CAA. Furthermore, while condemning the CAA, the European Parliament has urged the Indian government to uphold its secular values and fundamental human rights, which include religious freedom (European Parliament, 2020).

Responses from Neighboring States

The neighboring states of India have had diverse reactions to the CAA. While Pakistan condemned the Act, its Foreign Office Representative Mumtaz Zahra Baloch remarked that the Act was highly discriminatory and was aimed at converting India into a Hindu Rashtra (Syed, 2024). Bangladesh, on the other hand, had initially been cautious in its reaction, claiming that the CAA was an internal matter of India, and trying not to offend India with its overt criticism. However, later on, it raised the concern that this Act would have profound implications on regional stability as it could push several Muslims to seek refuge in Bangladesh. Similarly, even the non-Muslim majority states such as Sri Lanka and Nepal have voiced concerns for the safety and protection of Tamil refugees and Gurkhas residing in India (Mazumder, 2024). The then-Afghan president, Hamid Karzai, asserted that there were no 'persecuted minorities in Afghanistan. Instead, Afghanistan has been subjected to war and conflict for so long that all of its religious groups, whether majority or minority, have been persecuted (The News Minute, January 21, 2020).

Case Study 4: Delhi Riots 2020

Overview of the Incident

The Delhi riots of 2020 were the subsequent episode of the CAA. The protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act began in 2019 and intensified in early 2020. In February 2020, some Muslim women staged a sit-in protest in Jaffrabad against the CAA, blocking a road. Kapil Mishra, a leader of the ruling BJP, gave an ultimatum to 'hit the streets' if the police remained unable to clear the road. Violence erupted almost immediately after the ultimatum was given as Hindu mobs attacked the Muslim protesters while chanting 'Jai Shri Raam'- a Hindu nationalist slogan meaning 'Victory to lord Ram'. Out of over 53 people killed, most of them were Muslims, who had been looted, slashed, shot, and sometimes even burnt (The Wire, March 6, 2020).

The communal riots also included four mosques set ablaze by the Hindu mobs. There had also been instances where police, instead of controlling the violence, supported the attacking Hindu mobs.

International Media Coverage

The Indian government, politicians, and the police had been subjected to widespread and intense criticism by the international media. The New York Times reported that the police under the command of the BJP stood back while letting the Hindu mobs slaughter Muslims. Similarly, an article in The Washington Post asserted that 'secularism was the casualty in Narendra Modi's regime'. A German Newspaper, Der Spiegel, claimed that the anti-Muslim stance and violence may harm India's secularist reputation abroad. Similarly, editorials in The Guardian and The Khaleej Times came with headlines: 'Modi stoked this fire' and 'Politicians stoked Delhi riots' respectively (Dawn, February 29, 2020).

Reactions from Major democracies

Many of the Western democratic states reiterated grave concerns over the Delhi riots. Appalled by the massive atrocities, the US State Department advised the Modi government to protect the fundamental human rights of all citizens. It further emphasized the significance of peaceful protest as a constitutional right as well as the importance of religious freedom (US State Department, 2020). Leaders of European states are urged to resolve the situation and crisis through dialogue, while firmly adhering to democratic principles and respecting all human rights equally without discrimination (European External Action Service, 2020).

Responses from Neighboring States

In continuity with its condemnation of the CAA, the Pakistani government strongly condemned the violence in Delhi while accusing the government of India of oppressing and suppressing the Muslim population of India. The then Prime Minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan, claimed that India's actions with its Muslim population were synonymous with the pogroms of the 19th and 20th centuries. He further claimed that international intervention was essential for the protection of the minority rights of Indian Muslims (News-Desk, 2020). The Bangladeshi government also raised concerns as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs claimed that there was a need for communal harmony and protection of the rights of minorities in India (Bangladesh Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020).

Case Study 5: Farmers' Protests and the Sikh Unrest in the BJP Regime

As the BJP government enacted three new laws for farmers without their consultation, it unleashed a wave of insecurity and uncertainty among agriculturalists, who felt more vulnerable to exploitation at the hands of the corporate sector. A significant portion of the farming population in Punjab belongs to the Sikh community. The long-standing record of the Khalistan movement, combined with the protests by Sikh farmers, unleashed a backlash by the BJP government against the Sikh community. As a result, several Sikhs have been killed and gone missing in the police agitations. Additionally, the matters have worsened to bring intense international criticism against India when a Canadian Sikh was allegedly killed by the BJP-backed intelligence (Mehra & Clarke, 2023). Instead of responding to the demands of the Sikh community and addressing their issues, the BJP government has chosen to brush the issue under the carpet by portraying the Sikhs as backed by Pakistan, only to worsen the matter (Hundal, 2021).

International Media Coverage

The farmers' protest and the international media have extensively covered the Sikhs' agitation. As per the reports of US-based The New York Times and UK-based The Guardian, the farmers' protests and revival of the

Sikhs movement have portrayed a significant challenge to the policies of the Modi government, while also raising concerns about the treatment of minority communities, particularly Sikhs in India. The BBC has also been critical of the government's response to protests and agitations, which have taken the form of internet shutdowns and police crackdowns.

Responses from Major Democracies

Most liberal democratic governments have responded to the situation by emphasizing the importance of dialogue while upholding the right to peaceful protests. Governments, such as those of the United Kingdom and Canada, with larger populations of the Sikh community in their respective countries, have emphasized the protection of the rights of minority communities. While intensely debating the matter, several MPs in the British Parliament have called for the protection of the rights of farmers and minority communities. Additionally, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau had expressed concern over the way the BJP government was handling the protests.

The matters between Canada and India had escalated to the point of a diplomatic stand-off between the two states. As Prime Minister Trudeau asserted that his government had found concrete evidence of Indian involvement in the assassination of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, who India had accused of being a part of the Khalistan Tiger Force, the Indian government simply denied it. As a result, while Canada removed two-thirds of its diplomats from India, the latter suspended visa services for Canada.

Reactions from Neighboring Countries

Neighboring countries of India, including Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal, have paid close attention to the farmers' protests and the rising unrest among the Sikh community of India. While expressing solidarity with the Sikhs, the Pakistani government has urged the Indian government to address the issues and pressing concerns. Similarly, the Bangladeshi and Nepali governments have encouraged India to adopt justice, fairness, and equality in its approach to the issue (The Express Tribune, February 5, 2021).

Indian Government's Efforts to Balance between the Hindutva-Influenced Policies and the Secular International Image

The Indian nation, since its time of independence, has been a rich blend of diverse religious, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. To ensure interfaith and intercultural harmony, a commitment to secularism was enshrined in the Constitution of India. However, the emergence and rise of Hindutva ideology on the socio-political landscape of India has seriously threatened the secular identity of India. The RSS, with its political wing, the BJP, and the religious wing, the VHP, has vehemently focused on the cultural dominance of the Hindu religion. Since coming to power, the BJP government has adopted various policies that have attracted scrutiny at an international level.

The concept of secularism in the Indian Constitution and as envisioned by its founding fathers differs significantly from the Western notion of secularism. Instead of directing a rigid separation of religion and state, the Indian constitutional secularism prescribes equality for all religious groups. To integrate the diverse, multiple religious groups into a web of national cohesion, Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, advocated for secularism and pluralism.

BJP's Strategies for Balancing between Secularism and Hindutva

Policies and Legislative Actions

Since coming to power in 2014, the BJP government has implemented multiple legislative policies that reflect the Hindutva ideology. Ranging from the revoking of Article 370 that granted special status to Jammu and Kashmir, to the laying down of foundation of Ram Mandir after the demolition of Babri Masjid and the enforcement of the Citizenship Amendment Act that discriminates against Muslim refugees from neighboring countries, these actions have indicated a radical religious nationalism amongst the members of Indian ruling party (Rajagopal, 2020). Although these actions are portrayed as critically necessary for addressing the security concerns of Indian, they have repeatedly come under intense criticism from moderates for undermining the secular credentials of India. Additionally, the BJP has promoted policies aimed at cultural revival, such as the Saffronisation of the educational curriculum, an emphasis on the Sanskrit language, and the introduction of Hindu religious practices (Sardesi, 2020). At the same time, the BJP supporters defend these actions by claiming that these are the efforts to preserve the cultural heritage of India; critics consider these as steps towards cultural and religious assimilation in a state that was supposedly secular.

Diplomatic Efforts

At the international level, the Indian government has employed a two-pronged strategy that combines assertion of its secular credentials on one hand and the promotion of the narrative of 'need to combat terrorism' on the other. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has frequently cited India's secular constitution, its democratic principles, and the credentials of a pluralistic society to frame India as the largest ideal secular democracy, an emblem of religious tolerance, at multiple global forums. On the other hand, Modi and other BJP leaders have justified the crackdown in Kashmir and the enforcement of CAA as crucial for the national security of India. Additionally, the BJP government has also been able to offset criticism by leveraging its economic relations and strategic partnerships. By strengthening its alliances with Western democratic states, India has sought to mitigate the implications of international criticism on its human rights record (Mitra, 2020).

Managing Domestic and International Media

By strategically using the national and international media, the BJP government has been actively trying to manage its impressive international image as a secular, pluralist, and humanist regime. At the domestic level, multiple media channels have been recruited to propagate a pro-BJP, pro-Hindutva, and pro-government narrative. Examples of such channels include The Republic and Zee News (Sardesi, 2020). At the international level, the government has been employing a dual strategy. On one hand, it is leveraging diplomatic sources and diaspora networks to shape the perceptions in order to project India as a secular and liberal democracy that is unduly subjected to biased reporting.

Role of Indian Diaspora

Shaping Perceptions

The Indian diaspora residing in countries such as Canada, Britain, the United States, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Australia has been playing a key role in shaping the perceptions of the global community about India and its politics. Acting as a bridge between India and the global community, the Indian diaspora is actively engaged in cultural diplomacy, influencing the way India is perceived internationally.

Lobbying

Diaspora groups have advocated both for and against the policies of the BJP government. Pro-BJP groups have been hosting rallies to demonstrate their support for the BJP's policies and actions. For instance, as Modi's

supporters organized a rally in Chicago wearing saffron tassels, and some other groups organized a car rally in Sydney where the cars were covered in saffron flags, such activities openly advocate for a pro-BJP narrative in the international community. Furthermore, such activities also normalize the implementation of Hindu nationalist policies in a state that was supposedly secular.

Conversely, some diaspora groups, supportive of moderate parties such as the Aam Aadmi Party or the Congress, have also been openly critical of the Modi government. For instance, as reported by The New York Times, there had also been growing concerns about a potential third regime of Narendra Modi, as his government had been notorious for marginalizing minorities, assassinations of separatists, and the jailing of opposition leaders (Yoon, 2024). At times, groups critical of the BJP government have also collaborated with human rights organizations to raise awareness and mobilize an international response against oppressive and discriminatory policies (Ghosh, 2020).

Impact on International Relations

The foreign relations of India can be affected by the lobbying and advocacy of diaspora groups. Multiple campaigns, organized by diaspora groups, have garnered attention to some critical issues in India and thus impacted India's relations with countries around the world. For example, as the Sikh community in Canada and Britain began strongly protesting against the oppression of farmers in India, a public debate began that led to diplomatic statements from both states (Trudeau, 2020; UK Parliament, 2020).

Cultural Diplomacy and the Exercise of Soft Power

The Indian diaspora also plays a significant role in India's soft power projection through cultural diplomacy. As the Indian diaspora organizes multiple cultural festivals, educational programs, and business ventures, these initiatives facilitate the promotion of a progressive and inclusive image of India abroad. Through such efforts, the scrutiny heightened as a result of the BJP government's discriminatory policies is counterbalanced to some extent (Varadarajan, 2020).

Conclusion

The secular image of India on the global stage, which had been constructed through its constitutional values and the role of India's founders, such as Jawaharlal Nehru, has been profoundly affected by the rise of the Hindutva ideology. This chapter has evaluated the role of the Indian government, particularly that of the BJP, in striking a balance between its Hindutva ideology and India's secular image.

Historically, India's adherence to secularism has been the foundational principle of its pluralistic social fabric and democratic political system. Nehru's concept of secularism, as enshrined in the Constitution of India, differs from the Western concept of secularism, as it emphasizes equal respect for religions instead of a rigid separation between religion and politics. However, the rise of Hindutva and the BJP on the political landscape has pushed secular values to the sidelines and has brought the Hindu cultural dominance to the forefront.

The Indian government has been navigating this complex situation strategically, creating domestic policies based on Hindutva ideology while attempting to avoid international criticism by raising concerns about its national security. Despite the efforts of the Indian government to ward off criticism by highlighting its economic growth, democratic polity, and geostrategic significance, it has still recurrently been scrutinized for violations of the human rights of its minority communities. Ranging from international human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, to liberal democratic states such as the USA and Canada, and the regional organizations such as the European Union have all condemned Hindutva-led incidents such as the demolition of Babri Masjid, the Gujarat riots, the Delhi riots, and the Citizenship Amendment Act.

While the Indian government itself has made multiple efforts to snub the criticism levelled against it by raiding the office of the BBC and by hindering the operations of Amnesty International in India, it also significantly relies on the Indian diaspora to further its cause. Through the use of cultural diplomacy tools and soft power projection, the Indian diaspora has played a significant role in shaping a progressive, harmonious, and inclusive image of India. Additionally, by organizing rallies and public gatherings, the pro-BJP diaspora has been trying to normalize the radical Hindutva-influenced policies of the Indian government in the sight of the international public.

Chapter 6

Hindutva and Present Indian Electoral Politics – An Analysis of 2024 Elections

Introduction

The 2024 Lok Sabha Elections in India mark a historic moment in the country's democratic journey, reflecting the complex dynamics of its political landscape that are intricately intertwined with issues of religion and caste. As one of the largest democracies in the world, the 2024 elections are a reflection of the country's commitment to its democratic ethos. While numerous socio-cultural aspects have been influencing the politics of India, the Hindutva-influenced Bharatiya Janata Party was poised to contest the elections for a third consecutive term in power.

As the BJP has been one of the most dominant factors in Indian politics, this chapter begins by examining the strategies employed by the party during its 2024 election campaign. Simultaneously, the election campaign tactics of the opposing political parties, such as the Indian National Congress, will be discussed briefly. By extensively utilizing data from newspapers, articles, surveys, and official websites, such as the Election Commission of India, the chapter provides a comparative analysis of the BJP's performance with its key competitors, including the Indian National Congress. Additionally, the performance of the BJP and other major political parties is also assessed in key states with the highest number of seats in the Lok Sabha, including Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Bihar. By highlighting the coalition strategies of both the BJP and the INC, the chapter provides a detailed analysis of the 2024 elections while also gauging the probable future trends in Indian politics.

BJP's Election Campaign for 2024

The meta-narrative of the BJP's electoral campaign centers on divisive communal rhetoric that creates negative anxieties, plays the blame game, and promotes unrealistic dreams rather than focusing on the actual results, emphasizing a developmental agenda (Shikar, 2024). One main result of the election campaign of the BJP is that it has extensively normalized the nationalist agenda of the Hindutva movement. Multiple eminent scholars and members of think tanks have shared concerns about the highly divisive and inflammatory rhetoric of Narendra Modi's election campaign. For instance, Milan Vaishnav of the Carnegie Endowment for Peace has

claimed that Modi's speeches have been shocking, as the language employed was not subtle; instead, it could be labeled as dog-whistling. Similarly, Rahul Verna from a Delhi based think-tank, Center for Policy Research found Modi's election campaign speeches to be contrary to the expectations as they contained almost no reference to a rising India story or any references to the developmental projects for the welfare of people; instead his speeches were focused on fear-mongering in the Indian society (Biswas, 2024).

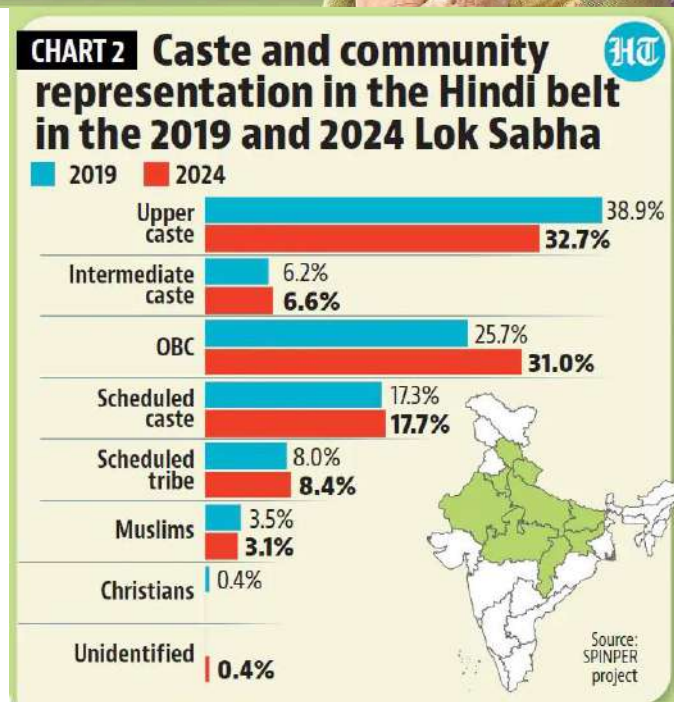
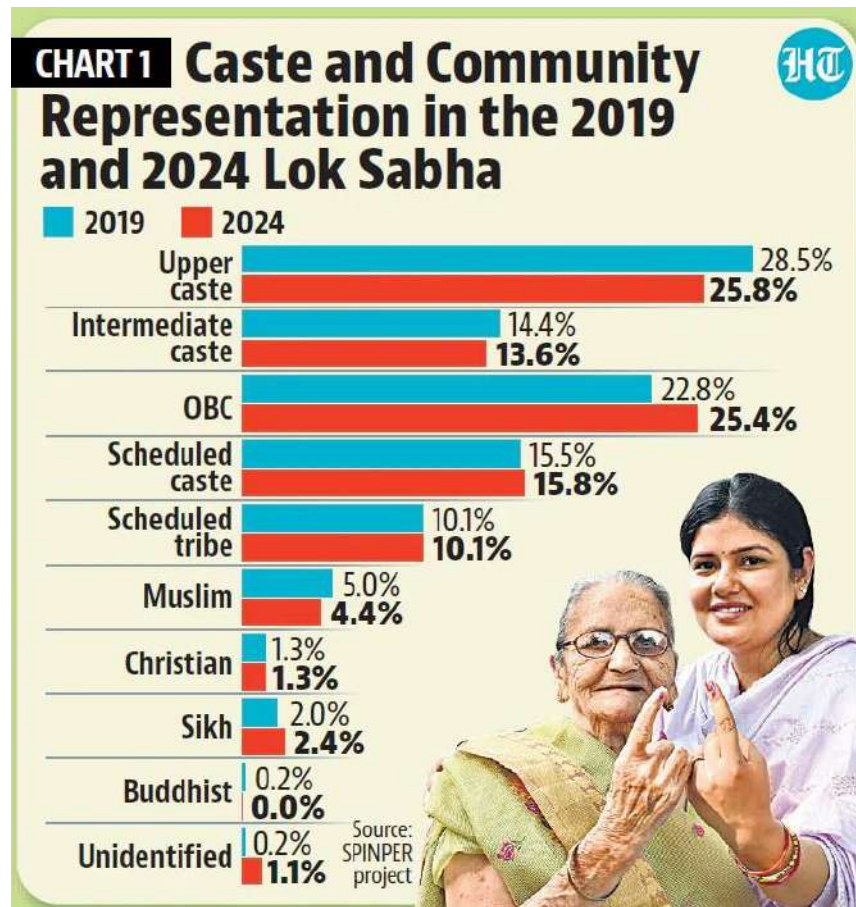



CHART 3 NDA/INDIA caste, community nomination and representation 

Candidates	Candidates		MPs	
	NDA	INDIA	NDA	INDIA
Upper caste	31.3%	19.2%	33.2%	12.4%
BRAHMIN	14.9%	10.0%	14.7%	5.9%
RAJPUT	7.0%	2.7%	8.7%	1.5%
OTHER UC	9.4%	6.5%	9.8%	5.0%
Intermediate caste	15.3%	14.0%	15.7%	11.9%
MARATHA	4.3%	3.4%	3.1%	5.0%
JAT	3.4%	3.3%	2.4%	3.0%
LINGAYAT	1.5%	1.1%	1.0%	1.5%
PATIDAR	1.5%	1.5%	2.4%	0.0%
REDDY	1.7%	2.4%	2.1%	1.5%
VOKKALIGA	1.1%	1.1%	1.7%	0.5%
OTHER IC	1.7%	1.3%	2.8%	0.5%
OBC	25.5%	26.9%	26.2%	30.7%
YADAV	2.3%	4.2%	3.1%	3.5%
KURMI	2.5%	2.7%	3.5%	3.0%
OTHER OBC	20.8%	20.0%	19.6%	24.3%
Scheduled caste	15.8%	17.6%	13.3%	17.8%
Scheduled tribe	10.0%	9.6%	10.8%	9.9%
Muslims	0.9%	7.3%	0.0%	7.9%
Christians	0.2%	2.7%	0.0%	3.5%
Sikhs	0.4%	2.2%	0.0%	5.0%
Buddhist	0.2%	0.2%	0.0%	0.0%
Unidentified	0.4%	0.4%	0.7%	1.0%

Religious Symbolism and Divinity

One important feature of the BJP's 2024 election campaign has been its extensive instrumentalization of divinity and religious symbolism to secure its voter base among nationalist Hindutva supporters. The key event in this regard has been the inauguration of the Ram Mandir. As it has been discussed in the previous chapters of the book (if possible, please add chapter number), the Babri Mosque and Ram Mandir have been issues of contention amongst the Hindus and Muslims since the pre-partition era. However, the problem was fueled when Lal Krishna Advani of the BJP initiated his Rath Yatra to reclaim the space of the Babri Masjid, as it was believed to be the birthplace of the Hindu deity Ram, also known as the Ramjanmabhoomi. The Rath Yatra had finally ended with the demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992, followed by communal riots between Hindus and Muslims. Approximately three decades later, in 2019, the Indian court decided to allocate the site of the Babri Masjid for the Ram temple and recommended allocating another space in the outskirts of the town for the construction of a mosque. After years of preparation and construction, the temple was scheduled for inauguration in January 2024, just a few months before India's general elections. For the inauguration of the temple, Narendra Modi observed an 11-day fast and slept on the ground to achieve spiritual awakening. The ceremony was extensively publicized, with many of the states being granted local holidays.

Furthermore, before the inauguration, the BJP, in collaboration with the RSS and VHP, had distributed Akshat —the rice stirred in ghee and turmeric — as an invitation to attend a prayer at a temple (Anas, 2024). Additionally, numerous prominent figures from the business community, industrialists, Bollywood actors, and cricketers attended the event, lending it extraordinary hype (HT News Desk, 2024). In his address at the Ram Mandir inauguration, the BJP candidate for the Prime Ministerial post, Narendra Modi, claimed that the foundation of a "New India" had been laid and that "Ram is not a dispute- Ram is the solution." These statements indicate the intended transformation of India from a secular state into a Hindu Rashtra in which

every solution might be derived from Hindu theology. The hype of the Ram Mandir inauguration had been intended to serve two purposes: to appeal to the religious sentiments of the Hindus by emphasizing "what Ram Mandir means for the Hindus of today, as well as to divert attention from the pressing economic problems smoothly.

In addition to the Ram Mandir episode, frequent visits to temples by prominent BJP leaders, including Narendra Modi, with full media coverage, have been a cornerstone of the BJP's election campaign. One important visit to the temple was to the Kashi Vishwanath Temple, where Modi stopped amidst a 28km long roadshow to offer prayers and perform pooja (Anand, 2024). Another incident of temple visit occurred at the Sri Raja Rajeshwara Swamy temple in Telangana. Similarly, in continuation of this religious symbolism policy, Narendra Modi has offered prayers and meditated for two days at the Bhagwati Temple in Kanyakumari, Tamil Nadu. This temple holds considerable symbolic significance as it is considered to be the same place where Vivekanand had the vision of a developed India during meditation. This is also the same place where the Hindu goddess Parvati meditated on one foot while waiting for lord Shiv (NDTV, May 30, 2024).

The frequent visits to temples have not only been limited to affirming the BJP's religious inclination at the domestic level; rather, these have also been instrumentalized to project India's rise as the rise of a Hindu nation in the global landscape. For instance, during the February 2024 election campaign, Narendra Modi was invited to Abu Dhabi to inaugurate a temple in Abu Mureikha (VOA, February 14, 2024). While the event manifested the convergence in relations of the Gulf states with India, as a Hindu nation instead of a secular democratic state, it also garnered positive feedback and massive support from the BJP Hindu loyalists.

Personality Cult of Narendra Modi

Another key strategy leveraged by the BJP for the 2024 elections has been the promotion of the Modi Cult. Obsessed with the personality of Narendra Modi, multiple slogans have been created to particularly glorify Modi and portray him as the Messiah that India needs. Some of these notable slogans include "Teesri Baar Modi Sarkar," meaning Modi's government for the third time, and "Modi hai to mumkin hai," which suggests that things become possible in the presence of Modi. Another frequently used tagline has been 'Modi ki guarantee' for some of the welfare projects, which include support for startup programs and housing facilities for the elderly.

Additionally, Narendra Modi himself has harnessed the blend of his personality cult with the divinity to amass public support. In addition to his frequent temple visits, Modi himself has ascribed some superhuman qualities to his being. For instance, in one of his speeches, Modi claimed that he used to believe that he was biologically born when his mother was alive. However, now, after the demise of his mother, he has become convinced that God had sent him because the amount of power and energy he had could not emanate from biological origins (Ashutosh, 2024).

Politicization of Religious and Cultural Festivals

As part of its strategy to maximize support from the Hindu voter base, the BJP has strategically aligned its election campaigns with major Hindu festivals, such as Diwali, Holi, and Navratri. By extensively expanding the celebrations and intertwining them with political messaging, the BJP aims to reach its message to the broadest public while reinforcing its identity as a Hindu nationalist political party.

For instance, in Uttar Pradesh, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, a close ally of Modi, directed the District Magistrates to organize temple events during Navratri and Ram Navami. While previously, BJP supporters had criticized leaders of opposition parties, such as the Congress, for attending and hosting Iftar parties during

Ramadan, they now seem to have no problem with state sponsorship of Hindu religious festivals (Chandra, 2023). Similarly, the Ram Navami festival, which was initially celebrated on a small scale privately, has been observed on a massive and extensive scale ever since the BJP came to power in 2014. Some senior BJP leaders have also remarked that the massive celebration of Ram Navami will lead to the consolidation of the Hindu identity, which will subsequently result in political gains, including increased voter support for the BJP (Press Trust of India, 2024). Additionally, the BJP has also organized street plays (nukkad natak) and flash mobs as part of its 2024 election campaign. According to the claims of BJP leaders, over 163 street play teams had been prepared to present more than 8,000 plays in Delhi in May 2024 (The Hindu Bureau, May 30, 2024).

Anti-Muslim Narrative

As discussed initially, the fueling of communal divide by fear-mongering and the creation of negative anxieties has been a keystone in the BJP election campaign. From championing their anti-Muslim actions, such as the Citizenship Amendment Act, to the critique of Congress for its alleged affiliation with Muslims, anti-Muslim rhetoric has been fervently employed by the BJP. While economic justice or "Nyay" had been a key focus of the election campaign of Congress, BJP leaders took a jibe at the opposition party by claiming that Congress wants to take away the wealth and property of Hindus and distribute it amongst the "infiltrators"- referring to Muslims. In one of the rallies, Modi asserted that the Congress would snatch away the Mangalsutars and the gold of the Hindu women and distribute them among the invaders (Politico, 2024). Additionally, by referring to Muslims as "people with many children, the BJP has also been creating a demographic scare amongst the Hindus of India (Venkatesh, 2024).

Similarly, in one of his rallies, Modi summoned the audience to choose between "Vote Jihad" and "Ram Rajya" carefully. He asserted that Congress had appealed to the Muslims to launch a "Vote Jihad' against the BJP; hence, the people had to decide whether they wanted Ram Raj (rule of lord Ram) or let Vote Jihad win (Rahman, 2024). Another prominent leader of the BJP, Yogi Adityanath, claimed that if Congress won the elections, Shariah or Islamic Law would be imposed in India.

Anti-Pakistan Narrative

The anti-Pakistan narrative has always been dominant in the election campaigns of the BJP. Back in 2019, the emphasis was on the Pulwama and Balakot attacks, followed by the narrative of "Ghar me ghuss k marain gay" (we will enter their homeland and will defeat them there). The 'surgical strikes' had allowed the BJP to capitalize on them by portraying the party as the defender of India's national security and sovereignty. Fast-forward to 2024, the BJP's narrative of Pakistan has focused on portraying the former as a weakened state, that despite being a hub of terrorism, is now weak, fragile, and incompetent to match India's standing in the global socio-political and economic landscape. Additionally, there have been repeated references to the revocation of Article 370, which led to the abolition of the special status of Jammu and Kashmir. The BJP has also clashed with its opposition parties regarding the Kashmir policy. When Rajnath Singh, the former Defense Minister of India, claimed that India did not need to use aggression for the annexation of Kashmir because the Kashmiri people would themselves prefer to be a part of India since they had witnessed the development of the state, opposition leader Abdullah disagreed. He claimed that Pakistan was a nuclear state that could drop atomic bombs on India in case of any attempts at forceful annexation of Kashmir. In response to this, Narendra Modi, in one of his speeches, used derogatory remarks about Pakistan while taking a jibe at the opposition alliance. Modi claimed, " Indigathbandh k neta kehty hain k Pakistan ne chooriyan nae pehni hain. Arre bhai to pehna dain gay chooriyan"- the leaders of the INDIA alliance claim that Pakistan is not wearing bangles. Oh brother, we will make them wear bangles (Balasubramaniam, 2024).

The Bhartiya Janata Party has also repeatedly used anti-Pakistan rhetoric as a defamation strategy against its leading opposition party, the Congress. A notable incident occurred when Fawad Chaudhry, the then Information Minister of Pakistan, retweeted a tweet of Rahul Gandhi by writing "Rahul on fire. BJP

overdramatized the situation by questioning whether the Indian National Congress and Rahul Gandhi intended to contest elections from Pakistan. Subsequently, Modi asserted that Congress was the disciple of Pakistan and that the Pakistan-Congress alliance had been exposed now (Hussain, 2024).

Social Media Campaign

With the rapid and impressive technological advancement, India has become one of the largest users of smartphones in the world. According to 2022 statistics, over two-thirds of India's population owned smartphones (Sheikh, 2024). In this situation, ignoring social media as a platform for an election campaign would have been a grave fallacy. While the 2019 elections were already known as the 'WhatsApp elections' due to the extensive use of WhatsApp for political messaging, numerous other social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, were strategically employed to further the BJP's cause.

The BJP has particularly engaged tech-savvy volunteer youth to further its election campaign on social media platforms. For instance, as reported by one of the BJP volunteers, each volunteer is part of approximately 400-500 WhatsApp groups, with 200-300 members in each, thus giving them a reach of 10,000-15,000 people each day. BJP volunteers have also reported that the party leadership sends them slogans and hashtags daily to share on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, to target over 100,000-150,000 people each day (Limaye, Menon, & Goodman, 2024).

The volunteers campaigning for the BJP are not limited to India. Approximately 3,000 volunteers have been associated with the BJP's election campaign through the 'Overseas Friends of BJP' group. The strategies employed by these overseas volunteers include disseminating the BJP's message through social media, encouraging people to vote for the BJP by making phone calls, and analyzing voter behavior through data analysis (Deccan Herald, 2024).

Mass Rallies and Grassroots Mobilization

In addition to the social media campaign, the BJP has also utilized its volunteers for grassroots mobilization during the election campaign. Besides the health programs and other welfare initiatives, Narendra Modi has advised volunteers to work hard at the grassroots level to ultimately achieve the slogan-based aim of "Ab ki baar, 400 paar" - securing more than 400 seats in the Lok Sabha. While addressing the volunteer youth, Modi advised them to act in a manner that reflects the ideology, values, and traditions of the BJP, as these volunteers are the face of the BJP to the ordinary person.

Furthermore, techniques such as mass mobilization, rallies, and road shows have also been employed by the BJP as part of its election campaign since the 1990s. Beginning with the Rath Yatra of Lal Krishna Advani, to the mass mobilization of half a million commoners and over 7,000 dignitaries for the inauguration of the Ram Mandir, rallies have been a key feature of the BJP's publicity tactics. Additionally, Narendra Modi has led over 206 rallies and road shows for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections (The Hindu Bureau, March 30, 2024).

BJP has also strategized to mobilize its support amongst the Dalits and the Other Backward Classes (OBC) of India. By giving them an increased share of participation in the party and increased representation in the government, the BJP has been trying to gather support from the OBCs. While over 8000 conferences have been organized for the improvement in rights and status of OBCs, Narendra Modi has also highlighted his aspiration to increase the share of NEET seats for OBCs to at least 27 percent as an attempt to ensure that the Modi government will work for the inclusive development and welfare (Thakur, 2024).

Indian General Elections 2024

The General Elections in India were held in seven phases, spanning six weeks from April 19, 2024, to June 1, 2024, to elect members of the Lower House of the Indian Parliament, known as the Lok Sabha. While the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Indian National Congress were the major parties at the national level, both of them contested the election by forming coalitions with various regional parties.

Coalition Politics and Strategies

The Bharatiya Janata Party has been leading the National Democratic Alliance since its formation in 1998, serving as a key opponent of the Congress coalition. The alliance is an ideological affinity as well as a strategic maneuver of seat sharing for political gains in the Indian political landscape. Numerous regional center-right and right-wing parties are a part of the BJP-led NDA.

The Janata Dal (United) is the successor political party to the Samata Party, which was part of the NDA alliance when Atal Bihari Vajpayee led the BJP in the late 1990s. The party continued to align with the BJP after transitioning to the Janata Dal Union. However, with Modi's ascendance to the leadership of the BJP, the JD(U) broke away from the NDA and joined the Congress with its allies. Known for its flip-flop attitude in politics, the party again aligned with the BJP for the 2024 elections, with Nitish Kumar as its leader from Bihar.

Telugu Desam Party (TDM) from Andhra Pradesh has oscillated between Congress and the BJP-led alliances. Created in the 1980s, it initially sought backing from Congress. While it swung towards the BJP in 1999, it moved away after the Gujarat riots. Contesting the 2009 elections as an unaligned party, it again joined the BJP in 2014, only to diverge in 2018 over disputes regarding financial packages for Andhra Pradesh. The TDM became part of the BJP-led coalition for the 2024 elections and secured a comfortable win in the Lok Sabha from the state of Andhra Pradesh (Reuters, 2024).

Shiv Sena- Eknath Shinde- Led by Bal Thackeray, Shiv Sena was created in 1966 as a far-right wing radical Hindu political party that was extremely bold in its anti-Muslim rhetoric. Shiv Sena has been a long-standing ally of the BJP since 1989 and has formed coalition governments in Maharashtra. The party has been divided into factions since 2022, with one faction, Shiv Sena Eknath Shinde, siding with BJP and the Shiv Sena Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray joining the Congress-led INDIA alliance (Al Jazeera, June 5, 2024).

A relatively new addition to the NDA alliance is the faction of the National Congress Party, led by Ajit Pawar. Historically, the NCP had been an ally of the INC as a part of the United Progressive Alliance, owing to its secular ideals. However, breaking away from the main party, the Ajit Pawar faction has sided with the BJP, claiming that the developmental ideas of Ajit Pawar align with those of Modi (Joshi, 2024).

Other relatively minor political parties that have allied with the BJP include the Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) from Bihar and Nagaland, the Jana Sena Party from Andhra Pradesh, Apna Dal (Soneylal) from Uttar Pradesh, and the Janata Dal Secular.

The Indian National Congress has also been forming coalitions and alliances to strengthen its position in the Indian parliament. Initially, it formed the United Progressive Alliance in 2004, comprising left-wing parties, including the Left Front, the Samajwadi Party, and the Bahujan Samaj Party. The UPA was also known as the Mahagathband. The UPA was dissolved in 2014, only to be replaced by the BJP-led NDA. The Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance was created in July 2023 under the leadership of Rahul Gandhi from the Indian National Congress. The notable member political parties of the alliance include the Samajwadi Party from Uttar Pradesh, the All India Trinamool Congress from West Bengal, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam from Tamil Nadu, the Shiv Sena (Uddhav Bal Thackeray) from Maharashtra, the Rashtriya Janata Dal from Bihar, and the Communist Party of India (Anand, 2024). This alliance of 38 political parties has posed a formidable challenge to the Nationalist Democratic Alliance, led by the BJP, by securing 232 seats in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections (Aljazeera, June 6, 2024).

Voter Turnout

The table below highlights the voter turnout for 2024, comparing it with the rates of the 2014 and 2019 elections.

Table 4. *Voter Turnout 2024*

Election Year	Total Voter Turnout %
2014	66.4%
2019	67.1%
2024	65.79%

Source: (Bureau, 2014; ECI, 2024; Jain, 2019)

As the table above indicates, the total voter turnout for 2024 was comparatively low, at 65.79 percent. So far, political analysts have not been able to pinpoint a specific reason for the lower turnout. However, several reasons have been highlighted as the potential causes of the situation. These can include declining trust in the electoral process, disillusionment with the performance of political parties, and a lack of faith in politicians due to their alleged criminal records and their swiftly shifting loyalties among political parties. Additionally, the excessive polarization around issues of caste, creed, and religion may have also dismayed some eligible voters (India Times, 2024).

Overall Seat Distribution in Lok Sabha

The table below depicts the seats won by the BJP and its alliance, NDA, as well as the INC and its alliance, INDIA, in the 2024 elections, along with a comparison of the seats won by the parties and coalitions in the 2014 and 2019 elections.

Table 5. *Lok Sabha Seats Distribution as per the elections of 2024*

Election Year	NDA (BJP)	UPA/ INDIA(INC)	Other regional parties
2014	336 (282)	59 (44)	148
2019	352 (303)	90 (52)	101
2024	290 (240)	235 (99)	18
Total Seats in Lok Sabha = 543			

Source: (Batra, 2024; India Votes, 2014; Lokniti, 2019)

Despite its rigorous campaign with the slogan 'Abki Baar 400 Paar', the BJP had not been able to amass a majority single-handedly to form a government without any coalition or alliance. As it secured 240 Lok Sabha seats, it still fell short of more than 32 seats to create the government on its own. Additionally, the BJP's performance in the elections indicates a sharp decline compared to the 2014 and 2019 elections. On the other hand, the Indian National Congress, led by Rahul Gandhi, has demonstrated a commendable performance by securing over 40 more seats in parliament compared to its 2019 tally. Furthermore, while the BJP's NDA alliance has formed the government, the INDIA alliance, with a total of 235 seats, will be a strong opposition.

State-Wise Analysis

The following sections highlight the performance of the BJP and Congress, along with their allied political parties in the NDA and INDIA, in the states with the maximum number of Lok Sabha seats.

Table 6. *Election results for Uttar Pradesh*

Uttar Pradesh

Election Year	NDA (BJP)	INDIA (INC)	Other regional parties
2014	73 (71)	2 (2)	5
2019	64 (62)	1 (1)	15
2024	36 (33)	43 (6)	1
Total Seats of UP = 80			

(ECI, 2024; Tiwari, 2024; IndiaVotes, 2019)

As one of the largest states in India, with a lion's share of 80 seats in the Lok Sabha, Uttar Pradesh plays a pivotal role in determining the outcome of the upcoming government. Uttar Pradesh played a significant role in the BJP's electoral victories in 2014 and 2019. As depicted in the table above, it secured 71 and 62 seats in the two elections immediately preceding the 2024 contest. For the 2014 elections, the BJP garnered support by appealing to the Dalits and Other Backward Classes, offering an increased share of representation in the party leadership. The vigorous Hindutva rhetoric promoted by Amit Shah also contributed to filling the BJP's vote bank.

Additionally, the exuberant social media campaign of the BJP, with firm promises of development on the pattern of Gujarat, had smothered the path to electoral victory for the BJP in 2014. Combined with the Apna Dal in the NDA, the BJP had swept the state clean in Uttar Pradesh (Narayan, 2014). With a decline of 9 seats, the BJP managed to avoid any substantial loss in Uttar Pradesh in 2019, despite facing a coalition opposition in the form of the Mahagathbandhan, which combined the Bahujan Samaj Party, Samajwadi Party, and the Rashtriya Lok Dal.

The results of the 2024 elections have brought one of the most shocking and unexpected situations for the saffron party in Uttar Pradesh, with the BJP's seats reduced to almost half of what it had bagged before. This has raised multiple questions —the most important of which is: what went wrong for the BJP in Uttar Pradesh, considering that UP is the state that hosts Ayodhya, the constituency of the Ram Mandir. With the extensive pomp and show for the inauguration of the Ram Mandir, the BJP had been expecting a clean sweep in UP. The results, however, proved the situation to be otherwise.

While the BJP had repeatedly raised the slogans of 'abki baar, 400 paar', the slogan turned out to be counterproductive as Congress and its allies convinced the UP lower castes including the Dalits that in case BJP securing such a majority in the parliament, it would amend the constitution and strip away the constitutional rights of historically disadvantaged communities and minority groups (Kapoor, 2024). Additionally, the increasing rates of youth unemployment and the simultaneously mounting economic distress despite India's stature as one of the leading economies of the world have dismayed the public to rob the vote bank of the BJP. More surprisingly, the BJP also lost the Ayodhya constituency despite the Ram Mandir being the launchpad of its election campaign. While the inauguration of the Ram Mandir may have been a reason for some Hindutva nationalists to vote for the BJP, it was certainly not the case for the Ayodhya public. There had been simmering discontent amongst the Ayodhya public as many of the houses had been wholly or partially demolished to build

a wide road as the path to the Ram Temple. While the people had not been adequately compensated, the demolition of other heritage temples, such as Janki Shukla Mandir and the Dashrath Mahal, which were previously considered the birthplace of Ram, indicated an arrogance and apathy on the part of the BJP towards the locals, thus reducing their vote count (Sharma, 2024).

Table 7. *Election results for Maharashtra*

Maharashtra

Election Year	NDA (BJP)	UPA/INDIA (INC)	Other regional parties
2014	42 (23)	6 (2)	0
9	41 (23)	5 (1)	2
2024	17 (9)	30 (13)	1
Total seats of Maharashtra= 48			

(The-Economic-Times, 2024) (IndiaVotes, 2014 Lok Sabha election results for Maharashtra, 2014)
With the backdrop of rising discontent against the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance over corruption charges, the Modi wave helped the BJP attain a strong position in Maharashtra, enabling it to win 23 seats in the 2014 and 2019 elections. Its close affiliation with the radical Hindutva political party Shiv Sena had further strengthened its position to secure a total of 42 and 41 seats in 2014 and 2019, respectively. However, for the 2024 elections, Maharashtra is another unexpected setback for the Bharatiya Janata Party.

Several critical factors contributed to nearly wiping out the BJP in Maharashtra, including the rising dissent among farmers, the apprehension of Dalits, and the complexities involved in the Shiv Sena-BJP alliance. With a large part of Maharashtra being rural, agriculture has always been a decisive factor in Maharashtrian politics. With cotton, sugarcane, and soybeans as key products of Maharashtra, the farmers associated with these products have been badly affected by the government's agricultural policies. The central government's decision to impose a 40% tax on onions, combined with a ban on exports, had been highly unpopular among farmers in Maharashtra. Furthermore, previously, the BJP had been able to win popularity among Dalits by giving them increased representation within the party; however, it failed to do so for the 2024 contest. With Dalits comprising approximately 10.5% of Maharashtra's population, they have been a formidable voting bloc. For the 2024 elections, the Congress-led alliance succeeded in convincing the Dalits that, in the event of a BJP majority in the Central government, the constitution would be amended unfavorably for the Dalits and Other Backward Classes of India (Khapre, 2024).

Additionally, the BJP and Shiv Sena, led by Eknath Shinde, had been vehemently criticizing the leaders of the Maharashtra Congress for being under scrutiny by the Enforcement Directorate and the Central Bureau of Investigation. When the alliance itself included politicians such as Ashok Chavan, Ajit Pawar, and Yamini Jadhav, who had been accused of corruption, its strategy only backfired (Sayantani, 2024). Another obstacle to the Shiv Sena's electoral success was the rift between the two factions, which will be discussed in the next section.

Table 8. *Election Results for West Bengal 2024*

Election Year	NDA (BJP)	INDI (INC)	Other regional parties
2014	2 (2)	4 (4)	AITC= 34 Others= 2

West

(Chakraborty, 2024; India

Even though foundations of in West state had

2019	18 (18)	2 (2)	AITC=22
2024	12 (12)	30 Congress = (1) AITC = 29	0
Total Seats of West Bengal= 42			

Bengal

2024; ECI, Votes, 2014) ()

the RSS were laid Bengal, the become quite

neglected over the years in the BJP's election campaign focus. The BJP's presence in West Bengal almost diminished after the transformation from the BJS to the BJP until the early 1990s, when the BJP started to re-enter Bengal by participating in panchayat politics. Despite that, its organizational structure and vote bank remained almost negligible. By the late 1990s, the BJP's position had improved slightly, as it had formed a coalition with Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress Party, a staunchly anti-Left-wing coalition. The alliance, however, proved to be short-lived, as it ended in 2001. The BJP's performance in West Bengal plummeted sharply, as it managed to win no seats and could never secure more than 6 percent of the votes in West Bengal.

With this backdrop, the BJP's win on two seats in West Bengal was a commendable achievement for the party in 2014. Numerous factors contributed to the BJP's improved performance in West Bengal, one of which was the nationwide dramatic surge in Narendra Modi's popularity. Additionally, the RSS had begun to focus on strengthening its organizational structure to promote the Hindutva ideology by organizing over 1000 shakhas. The 2019 elections brought forth the unprecedented and impressive performance of the BJP, as it won 18 Lok Sabha seats from West Bengal after receiving 40.25% of the vote share. The improved performance of the BJP in the state can be attributed to several factors, one of which is the increase in religious polarization that has arisen with the increased participation of the RSS and VHP in Bengal's politics. While 30% of Bengal's population had been Muslim, the anti-minority and anti-Muslim rhetoric of the BJP and RSS had appealed to the Bengalis. Taking a jibe at Congress for its 'appeasement policies' towards Muslims, the BJP had assured the Bengali Hindus that the minorities would not benefit at the cost of Hindus. Furthermore, the saffron party had also benefited from the growing discontent among the rural population of Bengal against the proposed land reforms by the leftist parties (Hussain, 2022).

However, for the 2024 elections, West Bengal was another state where the BJP's performance had slumped, as it was able to secure only 12 seats, which was six fewer than in its 2019 election results. The decline in support for the BJP has been simultaneously marked by a substantial increase in support for Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress Party. AITC has been able to showcase an impressive performance by bagging 29 out of 42 seats in the Indian parliament. One of the key factors in Banarjee's success has been attributed to her portrayal as the defender of Bengal's interests against the central government, which had withheld the funds allocated for Bengal's development. On the other hand, despite personally campaigning in 19 rallies in West Bengal, Narendra Modi was unable to achieve a sizable victory in the state. A key reason for the BJP's diminished performance has been its over-reliance on communally divisive politics, as it hoped that the Citizenship Amendment Act, alienating Muslim minorities, would resonate among Hindus in West Bengal and be sufficient to secure over 35 seats for the party. Additionally, the party had not paid sufficient attention to creating local leadership in West Bengal; hence, its over-dependence on Narendra Modi and Amit Shah made the Bengalis feel even more alienated (Economic Times, 2024).

Table 9. Election Results for Tamil Nadu

Tamil Nadu

Election Year	BJP	DMK	INC	Other Regional Parties
2014	1	37	0	1
2019	1	23	8	6
2024	0	22	9	8

Total Number of Tamil Nadu seats in Lok Sabha= 39

(ECI, 2024; India Votes, 2014)

In southern India lies Tamil Nadu. As the state with the second-largest contribution to India's economy, Tamil Nadu is a hub of India's manufacturing industry and high-tech sectors. Hence, it is a relatively economically advanced and socially progressive state of India. However, it remains the same state where the Hindutva-influenced BJP has not been able to make any inroads. Although some BJP candidates had been contesting elections in Tamil Nadu since 1989, the party more seriously focused on its Tamil Nadu strategy after collaborating with the two regional parties, DMK and AIADMK, alternately for the 1999 and 2004 elections. Despite being in alliance with these regional political parties, the BJP had remained unable to establish a strong foothold on its own, as it could not win a single seat in the 2009 elections when it chose to contest them alone. Subsequently, for the 2014 elections, the BJP led the NDA in collaboration with multiple small regional parties, including the Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam, and Pattali Makkal Katchi. The results, however, remained disappointing, as the BJP managed to win only one seat, with the entire NDA alliance securing two seats (Tamilarasu, 2024). Subsequently, for the 2019 polls, the BJP forged a coalition with the AIADMK and contested elections in five seats, but remained unable to win even a single one. The NDA alliance managed to secure one seat, whereas an impressive majority of seats were won by the DMK.

As the BJP-AIADMK alliance was severed after the 2019 polls, the party decided to contest the 2024 elections independently, without any alliance. Tamil Nadu had been a focus of the BJP's south-India election campaign, as Narendra Modi personally held nine rallies in the state, in addition to numerous other top leaders of the party, including Amit Shah and Ranjith Singh. However, all efforts remain in vain as the BJP could not secure even one seat in Tamil Nadu. While the BJP's performance has declined in some other provinces as well, Tamil Nadu remains a unique case where the BJP has remained unable to enter, despite numerous attempts with diverse strategies, bringing us to the question of why this is so. For this, the answer is multifaceted. First of all, Tamil Nadu's public has been too closely associated with regional political parties, such as the DMK, to be carried away by the 'Modi wave'. Secondly, Tamil Nadu, being the more technologically advanced with a greater share of tax contributions in the Indian economy, has been discontent with the share of the government's developmental budget allocated for the province. Additionally, the Hindutva narrative of the BJP has not resonated well with the more educated and socially progressive population of Tamil Nadu. The people of Tamil Nadu have been more concerned that the religious zealotry of the BJP might disrupt the social harmony and relative peace of the province, which has maintained a global reputation as a safe and welcoming place for businesses and industries (Arasu & Pathi, 2024).

Table 10. *Election Results for Madhya Pradesh*

Madhya Pradesh

Election Year	(BJP)	(INC)	Other Regional Parties
2014	27	2	0
2019	28	1	0
2024	29	0	0
Total Seats of Madhya Pradesh= 29			
(India Votes, 2019; Tomar, 2024; Votes, 2014)			

Madhya Pradesh has proven to be one of the most astounding victories for the BJP, as it swept the polls by winning all 29 Lok Sabha seats in the state, leaving not even a single one for its opposition parties. Being home to several notable BJP dignitaries, including Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the BJP has managed to maintain a strong foothold in the state for numerous reasons, one of which is the popularity of the Hindutva narrative among the majority Hindu population of the province. However, the BJP leaders had not relied solely on Hindutva rhetoric for their election campaign; instead, a multitude of well-articulated points paved the way for the BJP's triumph in Madhya Pradesh. While the instrumentalization of the Modi cult has been a key component of the BJP election campaign, Madhya Pradesh has been focused explicitly, as a narrative has been built that the province holds a special place for Modi by chanting the slogan: 'Modi ke Mann mein MP, MP ke Mann mein Modi' (Tomar, five factors that helped BJP trounce Cong in Madhya Pradesh, 2023). Additionally, some welfare programs, such as the Ladli Behan Yojna, which provides financial assistance to women, and the Kisan Samman Nidhi, which facilitates farmers, garnered massive support for the BJP (Pandey, 2024). BJP also capitalized on the fragmented election campaign of Congress in Madhya Pradesh. For instance, while Narendra Modi personally addressed eight public meetings and held two roadshows, in addition to the multiple meetings held by Amit Shah, Ranjith Singh, and V.D. Sharma, the Congress, on the other hand, lagged, with Rahul Gandhi addressing only five rallies in combination with two other leaders (PTI, 2024).

Table 11. Election Results for Karnataka

Karnataka

Election Year	NDA (BJP)	INDI/ UPA (INC)	Other Regional Parties
2014	17 (17)	9 (9)	2
2019	25 (25)	2 (1)	1
2024	19 (17)	9	0
Total = 28			

In close resemblance to Tamil Nadu, Karnataka is also a southern Indian state with a strong economy and technological advancements, as it also hosts the Indian Silicon Valley. While for some time, it had been conceived that southern India might remain impenetrable for the Hindutva-influenced BJP, Karnataka has proven otherwise. Labelling Karnataka as the BJP's gateway to the South of India, it is essential to note that support from the OBCs has played a crucial role in opening the state to the BJP. Riding on the Modi wave, the

BJP's performance in the 2014 elections, where it secured 17 seats, was one of its best in the state. However, the 2019 elections were the ones where the BJP stole the show by bagging 25 out of 28 seats (Palshikar, 2024).

While the BJP has still maintained a strong foothold in the state of Karnataka, its performance has declined significantly compared to the 2019 election. One of the factors was the party's reliance on instrumentalizing religion and exacerbating the communal divide, rather than improving its governance and performance. As part of his divinity-based campaign, Narendra Modi's repeated use of 'Jai Bajrang Bali' in his campaigns failed to garner public support for him. On the other hand, as Congress advocated to ban the anti-Muslim and anti-conversion radical Hindutva organization influenced by the BJP and RSS, Congress was able to secure its support amongst the Muslim voters. Additionally, the Congress was able to capitalize on the BJP's neglect of OBCs. For instance, as the BJP marginalized Yediyurappa, a Lingayat leader who had consolidated the party from scratch in Karnataka, the BJP lost its support from the Lingayat community. Hence, the Congress, through well-managed strategizing, gained the support of Muslims, Dalits, Lingayats, and other OBCs, while reducing the BJP's share of the vote bank. Lastly, with the rich and diverse socio-cultural fabric of Karnataka, the meta-narrative of a single, unified Hindu religion and culture has not been highly cherished in the state for the 2024 polls. On the other hand, Congress's tactic of paying regard to local identity by registering local leaders paid it impressive dividends, increasing its seat share in Karnataka's Lok Sabha from 1 in 2019 to 9 in 2024 (Ashutosh, 2023).

Table 12. *Election Results for Bihar*

Bihar			
Election Year	NDA (BJP)	INDI/ UPA (INC)	Other Regional Parties
2014	31 (22) JDU=	7 (2)	2
2019	39 (17) JD (U)= 16	1	0
2024	30 (12) JD (U)= 12	9 (3)	1
Total= 40			
(ECI, 2024)			

Bihar, with its 40 seats in the Indian Parliament, Lok Sabha, also plays a decisive role in the verdict on the upcoming government. However, owing to its highly complex caste dynamics, the Bharatiya Janata Party has rarely contested in Bihar without a coalition. At the same time, the BJP's election campaign proved successful in 2014, as it secured 22 seats out of 40, with its alliance winning a total of 30. The performance of the BJP-led coalition, comprising JD(U) and LJP, helped it secure a total of 39 seats in the Lok Sabha. For the 2024 elections, the bereaved Nitish Kumar of the Janata Dal, who had previously been part of the INDIA alliance or the Mahagathbandhan, rejoined the BJP in the NDA coalition. Hence, despite winning only 12 seats in the Lok Sabha from Bihar, the BJP has been able to dominate the state, thanks to the allegiance of Nitish Kumar, who has proven to be a kingmaker in this case (Singh, 2024).

Influence of Caste and Religion on the Elections of 2024

The caste system of India is deeply ingrained and intricately intertwined in the socio-cultural and political fabric of India since the ancient times of the emergence of the Hindu religion. Despite all the economic progress and technological and scientific advancement, caste-based discrimination remains one critical aspect that India has been unable to shed. The support for this claim can be found in the statement issued by the Patna High Court,

which states, 'despite the efforts to eradicate the caste system from the social fabric of India, it simply refuses to be swept aside or washed away' (Mishra, 2024).

The 2024 elections differed considerably from those in 2014 and 2019, primarily due to the impact of caste-based politics. From the elections of 2014 and 2019, it could have been perceived that the Indian society had moved past the caste-based discrimination; however, it was more strongly engulfed by the radical religious nationalism in the form of Hindutva. However, the 2024 elections have proven the case otherwise, as caste has become a rallying point as well as a critical factor in the people's verdict for choosing the next government (Mishra, 2024).

Political analysts have claimed that the 'Mandal' and 'Kamandal' phenomena had encapsulated the Indian elections, making them a part of identity politics by rigorously instrumentalizing caste and religion for political gains. While 'Mandal' refers to caste-based politics, 'Kamandal' stands as the emblem of temple-based politics (Press Trust of India, 2024). The political parties have certainly not been ignorant of the influence of the caste-system, as many of them, including the Indian National Congress and the BJP, made sure to address the caste-based issues in their election campaigns. The India bloc, led by Congress, attempted to win the support of Other Backward Classes by promising to conduct a caste survey in the event of being voted to power. Additionally, the INDIA alliance also attempted to cut the vote bank of the BJP through an intense propaganda campaign that proclaimed that the BJP would alter the constitution to the disadvantage of the OBCs. On the other hand, the BJP tried its luck with social engineering by attempting to engulf the backward castes in the fold of Hindutva.

In the state of Uttar Pradesh, the Samajwadi Party from the INDIA alliance had rallied under the slogan of PDP (Pichde, Dalits, and Alpasankhyak) to win seats in the Lok Sabha (Pandey, S., 2024). Similarly, in Bihar, Tejashwi Yadav, a prominent leader of the Rashtriya Janata Dal, has raised the slogan of eradicating poverty and unemployment from 'MY BAAP', with MY BAAP referring to Muslim, Yadav, Bahujan, Agdaa, Adhi Abaadi (women), and Pichda and poor (Azad, 2024).

As the political analysts have labelled the 2024 elections as 'one of the most polarized ones' in the history of India for their explicit instrumentalization of caste-based discrimination for political gains, the polarization has not been limited to the election campaigns but has manifested strongly in the electoral results. According to the analysis by Hindustan Times, the Bharatiya Janata Party not only performed poorly in Scheduled Castes seats but also suffered significant losses in these seats, with a visible and considerable margin. For instance, in the constituencies of Bharatpur and Nagina, 26-year-old Sanjna from the INC and Chandrashekhar Azad won with margins of 50,000 and 150,000 votes respectively while defeating the BJP. Additionally, while the BJP had secured 46 out of 84 seats for the Scheduled Castes in 2019, it managed to acquire only 29 out of 84 seats in 2024 (Jyoti, 2024).

Influence of Religion

With the incumbent BJP exuberantly harnessing the radical Hindu nationalist Hindutva ideology for its election campaign, the minorities of India, including Muslims and Christians, have felt mainly alienated and inclined towards the other parties. BJP has remained in power for the last two terms and has enacted multiple policies, such as the Citizenship Amendment Act and the anti-conversion laws, that have practically discriminated against the religious minorities. As a result, a large chunk of minorities has not only refrained from voting for the BJP, but have also been apprehensive of another BJP tenure. On the other hand, a large number of religious Hindus have been highly passionate and vocal in their support of the BJP. For instance, as reported by the Pew Research Center, more than 49 percent of Hindus in India supported the BJP. The concern of OBCs that a two-thirds majority of the BJP in the parliament could lead them to alter the constitution is also shared by the religious minorities. Muslims and Christians have been apprehensive that the BJP could desecularize India and introduce further legal changes, such as the Uniform Civil Code, that could end all religious liberty in the state. As opined by A.C. Michael, a member of the Delhi state minority commission, the BJP has been adamant in the implementation of Golwalkar's ideology, in which he had asserted that if the foreign races wished to reside in

India, they must fully adopt the Hindu culture and lose their distinct identity. If they choose anything else, they may also choose to stay back in their own countries (Kaur, 2024). Amidst these rising concerns, Narendra Modi attempted to reconcile with Christians by organizing a Sneha Yatra, or a journey of love. However, such attempts have not been able to win the support of the Christians, as the practical policies of the BJP and their popular narrative remain blatantly extremist.

The influence of religion has been evident in the election results. In states like Uttar Pradesh, the Muslims have voted for the Congress-Samajwadi Party alliance to shift the balance away from the BJP. Similarly, in the state of Assam, where Muslims face considerable challenges emanating from Islamophobia, a majority of the Muslims voted for Congress, considering it more secular among the political parties. Similarly, in states like Kerala, Manipur, and Nagaland, the Congress party was also chosen by Christian voters. In West Bengal, with a sizable Muslim population, the Indian National Congress and the Trinamool Congress, both championing secularism, have been able to secure a larger number of seats compared to the BJP. The saffron-tinted Hindu nationalist party had also been rejected in the union territory of Ladakh, where Muslims and Buddhists are in larger numbers (Bhattacharya, 2024).

Rural Versus Urban Voting Patterns in the Lok Sabha Elections 2024

India has been a predominantly agrarian and rural state, but with a meteorically rising pace of urbanization. Although only 35% of India's population resides in urban areas, the UN estimates that over 675 million Indians will be living in urban metropolises by 2035 (Roy & Ranjan, 2024). For a country with a dynamically transitioning urban-rural landscape, it is crucial to understand the political inclinations of the public in various rural-urban scenarios.

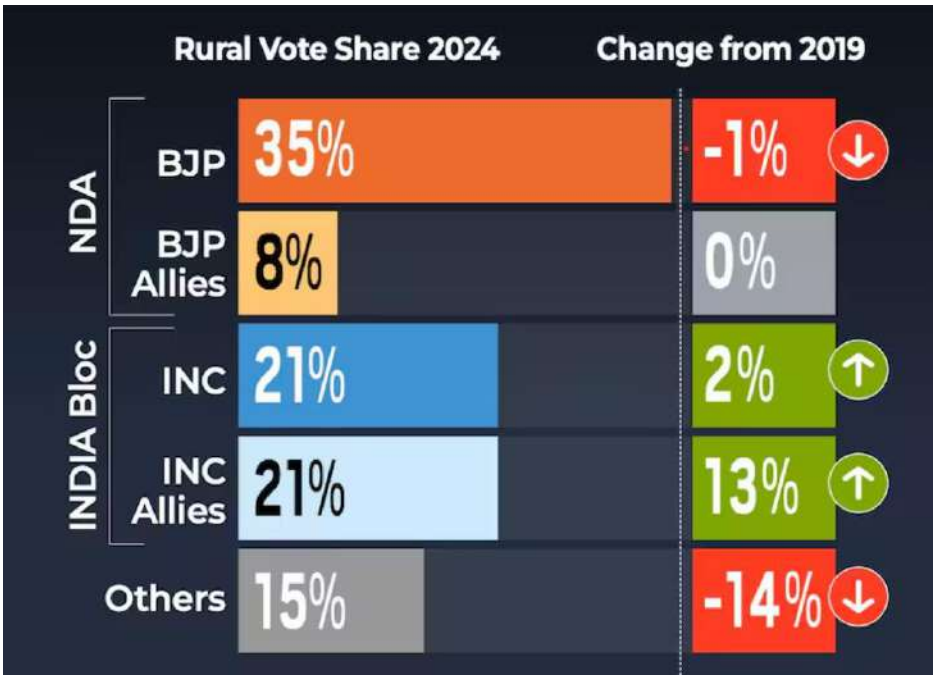


Figure 13. Rural Voting Patterns in Lok Sabha Elections of 2024

Source: (Economic Times, 2024) <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/elections/lok-sabha/india/bjp-wins-more-vote-share-in-urban-india-but-its-a-different-tale-in-the-rural/articleshow/110755949.cms>

The BJP, along with its allies in the NDA, has demonstrated a strong position in the metropolitan centers in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. Numerous urban cities, including Delhi, Bangalore, and Pune, have manifested this. In all seven constituencies of Delhi, the BJP has managed to win. The trend has also been reported in Bangalore (PressTrust, 2024).

On the other hand, rural areas have witnessed an improvement in the performance of INC and its allies, with a considerable decline for the BJP. As shown in the graph above, the BJP captured 35% of the rural votes, which, despite being the highest number of votes garnered by any party in rural areas, is still one percent less than the BJP's rural vote share in 2019. In the previous elections, the BJP secured a vote share of 39.5% in rural areas. On the other hand, as INC secured 21.4% of the rural votes, this demonstrated a sizable increase compared to its past performance (Singh, 2024).

The decline in rural support for the BJP is just the tip of the iceberg, indicating a deeper and more complex issue. As per the government collected data, there is growing discontent and acute frustration among the farmers, which is reflected by the spiking suicide rates of the farmers, as over 53,478 farmers committed suicide between 2018 and 2022. Despite Modi's promise to double the agrarian income, the farmers continue to live almost below the poverty line with a daily income of approximately INR 28 (Purohit, 2024). The situation became aggravated when the Modi government passed three agricultural laws without any prior consultation with the stakeholders. Although the policies were created to benefit the rural community, the plan backfired. As the farmers were allowed to sell their yield outside their provinces without paying taxes, they became concerned that it could undermine the guarantee of the minimum support price. Similarly, while agriculturalists were allowed to enter into direct agreements with potential customers, including wholesalers and retailers, they became alarmed as they felt vulnerable to exploitation by large conglomerates.

Additionally, the removal of specific products, such as onions, oilseeds, and potatoes, from the list of essential commodities increased the risk of black marketing and hoarding (Jain, Jadhav, & Kumar, 2024). Although the BJP government had repealed these laws, it took a year of intense protests and serious confrontation between the farmer community and the government. Additionally, the pent-up anger was unleashed in the form of staging protests against the BJP campaigners, and in some cases, even barring the BJP candidates from entering their villages. This discontent has been visibly reflected in the polls of 2024.

The 2024 Lok Sabha elections in India, which elected the 18th Lok Sabha members, are evidence of India's strong commitment to democratic principles. However, as many political analysts have proclaimed, these elections were undoubtedly one of the most polarizing in India's history. Ranging from the election campaign, the style of rallies, the raised slogans, the target audience of mass mobilization campaigns, to the verdict of final results, dramatically increasing polarization is one key takeaway for anyone closely observing the evolving political landscape of India.

The first section of the chapter highlighted the election campaign strategies of the main parties, primarily the BJP and the INC. From instrumentalizing divinity, to exacerbating the religious polarization, and from lashing out against Muslims to using derogatory remarks for Pakistan, Narendra Modi's election campaign has been considered alarming by many neutral observers, such as the BBC. While the BJP's campaign alienated the minorities of India, including the Muslims, Christians, and even Other Backward Classes such as the Dalits, these same groups have been the target audience of opposition political parties, mainly the Indian National Congress. This polarization of the election campaign eventually manifested itself in the form of the results of the elections, where the larger number of Muslims, Christians, and OBCs voted for Congress and its allies instead of the BJP. An in-depth analysis of the voting patterns of some states with the largest share of seats in the Lok Sabha reveals that while the BJP may have achieved a clean sweep in Hindu-majority states like Madhya Pradesh, in areas with larger sections of religious minorities, such as West Bengal, Congress and its allies have been more successful.

Additionally, in states like Maharashtra with larger populations of OBCs and Dalits, the BJP has faced serious setbacks as the INC has been successful in warning the lower castes that in case the BJP gets a dominant majority, it might alter the constitution to their disadvantage. Lastly, but not least, the failure of the BJP government to cater to the needs of the agricultural community, as well as to allocate its due share of national resources to states like Tamil Nadu, is also leading to two other forms of polarization. These include the rural versus urban polarization and the growing trend of regionalism. The government's failure to address real-life

issues cannot always be compensated for by religious fervor, as despite the immense hype surrounding the inauguration of the Ram Mandir, the BJP failed to win from the Ayodhya constituency.

Hence, while India can be commended for its strong democratic ethos where power is transferred from one elected government to another without much hue and cry, it certainly needs to address the growing polarization. While the founders of India had envisioned a secular state where all religions would be duly respected, the deviance from that path towards a radical Hindutva-dominated ideology cannot suit India, as it hosts a plethora of religions, ethnicities, creeds, and castes. Any radicalization can only lead to the disruption of India's vibrant and exuberant socio-cultural and political landscape.

Chapter 7

Data Analysis, Interpretation, and Discussion

The study aimed to explore the malignancy of Hindutva otherization through the casting impacts on the Indian federation during the 2024 elections and beyond. The perceptions of 133 participants were gathered using a self-developed questionnaire distributed online via Google Forms. The data were exported into an Excel sheet, coded, and then exported to SPSS version 25 to apply both descriptive and inferential statistics. The data were presented in the form of tables and figures, where appropriate, in the following paragraphs.

Demographic Information

The study participants were asked to provide their gender, country of residence, religious identity, and profession as demographic information to assess the impact of these personal variables on the opinions of participants regarding the malignancy of Hindutva otherization.

Gender of the Respondents

Figure 12 illustrates an almost equal distribution of gender participation in this quantitative survey, with males comprising slightly more than half of the study subjects (52.63%). In comparison, females account for 47.37% of the study participants. The research intentionally aimed to maintain equal participation, as gender is a significant predictor of perception regarding the research problem under study.

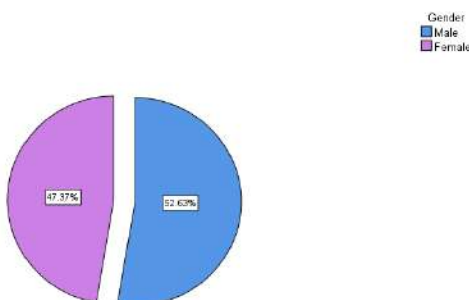


Figure 14. *Gender distribution of the participants*

Profession of the Participants

Figure 13 shows that a large majority (75.9%) are academicians, followed by 12.8% of study subjects who mentioned other professions not included in the questionnaire, such as students, bankers, legal liaisons, physicians, and military personnel.

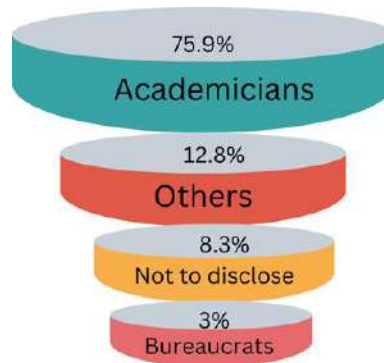


Figure 15. *Professions of participants*

However, a few of the study participants (8.3%) prefer not to disclose their profession, while only 3 percent of participants are reported to be bureaucrats.

Country of Residence

A large majority of study subjects (90%) are from Pakistan, while only a few (5.2%) are from foreign countries; however, 4.9% preferred not to disclose their country of residence.

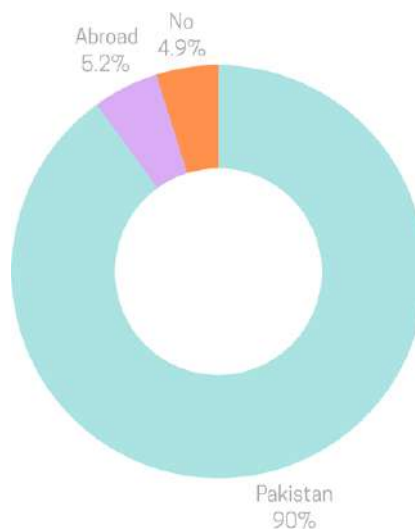


Figure 16. *Country of residence of participants*

Religious Identity of Study Subjects

Almost 98 percent of the study subjects are Muslims, whereas only 1.5 percent claimed that they are non-Muslims. However, 0.75 percent of the study subjects prefer not to disclose their religious identity.

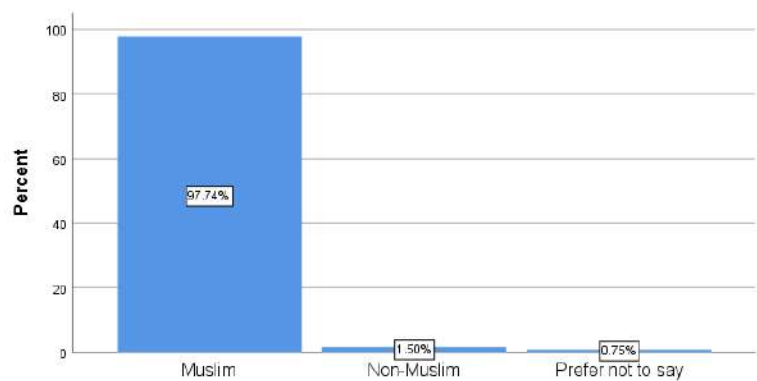


Figure 17. Religious identity of participants

Descriptive Analysis of Perception Regarding Effects of Hindutva Ideology

Table 13 represents the extent of belief about Hindutva ideology's promotion of the otherization of minority communities in India. The results showed that the majority of participants (n = 92, 69.2%) considered that the Hindutva ideology significantly promotes the otherization of minority communities in India, followed by 26 (19.5%) participants who considered the moderate impact of the Hindutva ideology.

Table 13. To what extent do you believe Hindutva ideology promotes the otherization of minority communities in India?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not at all	15	11.3	11.3	11.3
Moderately	26	19.5	19.5	30.8
Significantly	92	69.2	69.2	100.0
Total	133	100.0	100.0	

Whereas only a few (n = 15, 11.3%) think that there is no impact of Hindutva ideology on the promotion of otherization among minority communities in India.

Table 14 presents the perceptions of study subjects regarding the possible impact of Hindutva otherization on the 2024 Indian general elections. The results show that the majority of participants (n = 94, 70.7%) believe that the Hindutva otherization will have a significant impact on the 2024 general elections, followed by more than one quarter (n = 36, 27.1%) who somewhat likely consider its impact.

Table 13. How likely do you think Hindutva otherization will impact the 2024 Indian general elections?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not likely	3	2.3	2.3	2.3
Somewhat likely	36	27.1	27.1	29.3
Very likely	94	70.7	70.7	100.0
Total	133	100.0	100.0	

Only three participants declared that they did not consider the impact of Hindutva otherization on the 2024 Indian elections.

Table 15 presents the results of perceptions regarding the vulnerability of minority groups in India under the Hindutva otherization. It shows that a large majority of participants (n = 114, 85.7%) consider that Muslims are the most vulnerable to Hindutva otherization, followed by a few of them (n 16, 12%) who consider that other Minorites, including Sikhs, Buddhists, and Dalits, are most vulnerable.

Table 14. In your opinion, which minority group is most vulnerable to Hindutva otherization?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Muslims	114	85.7	85.7	85.7
Christians	3	2.3	2.3	88.0
Other minorities (Sikhs, Buddhists, Dalits, etc.)	16	12.0	12.0	100.0
Total	133	100.0	100.0	

Only 3 participants consider that the Christians are the most vulnerable to the Hindutva otherization.

The perceptions of the study participants were gathered through the question, 'Do you think that Hindutva otherization threatens the secular fabric of the Indian Constitution?' and are reported in Table 16. The results show that a large majority of study subjects (n = 114, 85.7%) consider it to have a significant impact. In contrast, only 17 participants indicated that it has some impact on the secular fabric of the Indian constitution.

Table 15. Do you think Hindutva otherization threatens the secular fabric of the Indian constitution?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
No impact	2	1.5	1.5	1.5
To some extent	17	12.8	12.8	14.3
Yes, significantly	114	85.7	85.7	100.0
Total	133	100.0	100.0	

Only 2 participants denied that there is an impact of Hindutva otherization on the secular fabric of the Indian constitution.

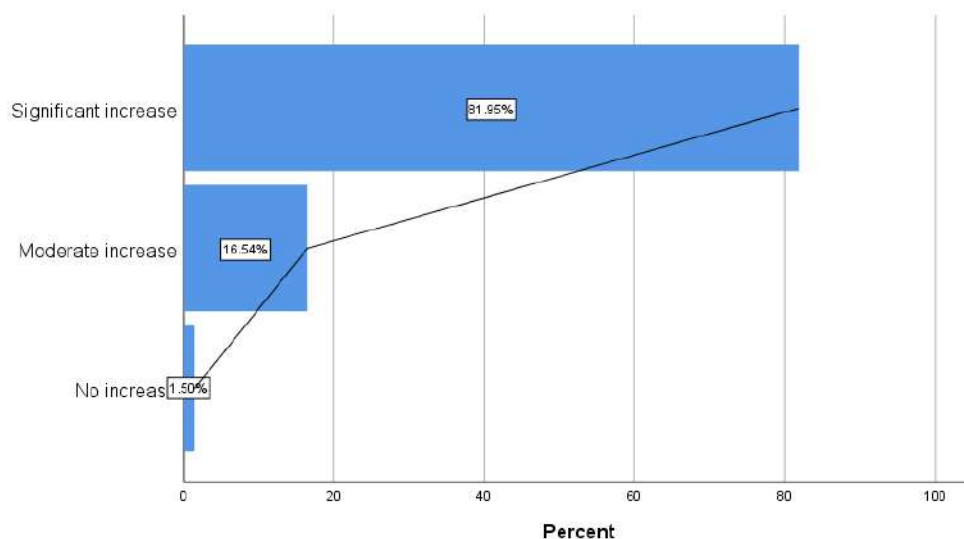
Table 17 shows the perceptions of participants regarding the role of mainstream media in perpetuating Hindutva narratives and otherization, and reports that the majority of them (n = 84, 63.2%) consider it highly complicit, followed by a few (n = 47, 35.3%) who consider it somewhat complicit.

Table 16. How do you assess the role of mainstream media in perpetuating Hindutva narratives and otherization?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not complicit	2	1.5	1.5	1.5
Somewhat complicit	47	35.3	35.3	36.8
Highly complicit	84	63.2	63.2	100.0
Total	133	100.0	100.0	

Only 2 participants consider that there is no complicity in the role of mainstream media in perpetuating Hindutva narratives and otherization.

Figure 16 shows the results of a survey regarding the beliefs of participants that Hindutva otherization led to increased violence and hate crimes against minorities. It found that a large majority of study subjects (81.95%)



perceived it as a significant increase, where only a few of them (16.54%) perceived a moderate increase. Only 1.5 percent consider that there is no increase in violence and hate crimes against minorities due to the Hindutva otherization.

Figure 18. To what degree do you believe Hindutva otherization has led to increased violence and hate crimes against minorities?

Table 18 represents the views of participants regarding the effectiveness of current laws and institutions in curbing Hindutva otherization and protecting minority rights. A large majority of the study subjects (n = 89, 66.9%) consider it ineffective, followed by little more than one quarter of the participants (n = 37, 27.8%) who consider current laws and institutions somewhat effective in curbing Hindutva otherization and protecting minority rights.

Table 17. In your view, how effective have the current laws and institutions been in curbing Hindutva otherization and protecting minority rights?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Ineffective	89	66.9	66.9	66.9
Somewhat effective	37	27.8	27.8	94.7
Very effective	7	5.3	5.3	100.0
Total	133	100.0	100.0	

Only 7 of the study subjects considered it very effective in this regard.

Figure 17 shows that a large majority of the study participants (81.20%) consider that there is a significant rise in Hindu nationalism and majoritarianism in India due to the Hindutva otherization.

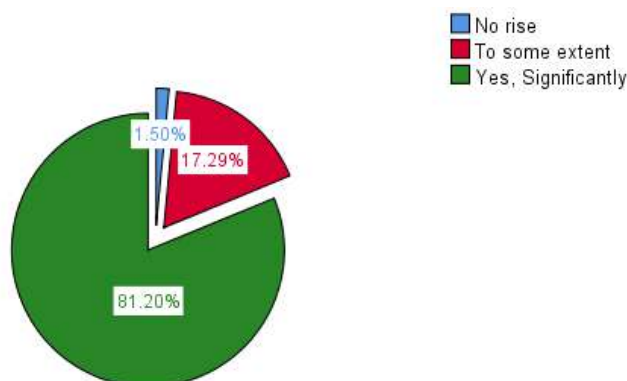


Figure 18. Do you think Hindutva otherization has led to a rise in Hindu nationalism and majoritarianism in India?

A few of them (17.29%) consider that, to some extent, Hindutva otherization is responsible for the rise in Hindu nationalism and majoritarianism in India. However, only 1.5 percent of the participants claimed there is no rise due to the Hindutva otherization.

Table 19 has been drawn to present the perceptions of participants regarding the role of Hindutva in otherizing and polarizing society, leading to social unrest in India. It reported that the majority of participants (n = 106, 79.9%) consider it very likely that Hindutva otherization will lead to further polarization and social unrest in India, followed by a few study subjects (n = 23, 17.3%) who consider it somewhat likely that Hindutva otherization is the reason for social unrest.

Table 18. How likely do you think Hindutva otherization will lead to further polarization and social unrest in India?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not likely	4	3.0	3.0	3.0
Somewhat likely	23	17.3	17.3	20.3
Very likely	106	79.7	79.7	100.0
Total	133	100.0	100.0	

On the other hand, only 4 participants do not consider Hindutva otherization as the cause of social unrest and further polarization in India.

The opinions of the participants regarding the primary drivers of the Hindutva otherization in India are presented in Table 20. It shows that more than half of the study subjects (n = 75, 56.4%) consider that religious extremism is the primary reason for the rise of Hindutva otherization, followed by a few (n = 42, 31.6%) who attribute it to political ideology.

Table 19. In your opinion, what is the primary driver behind the rise of Hindutva otherization in India?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Social and economic factors	7	5.3	5.3	5.3
Political ideology, religious extremism	9	6.8	6.8	12.0
Political ideology	42	31.6	31.6	43.6
Religious extremism	75	56.4	56.4	100.0
Total	133	100.0	100.0	

Only nine people consider that political ideology and extremism are contributing factors to this rise. In contrast, only seven persons consider that social and economic factors are responsible for the rise of Hindutva otherization in India.

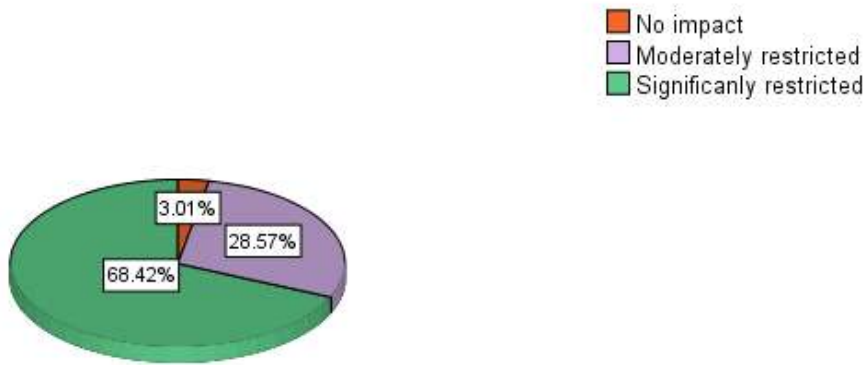


Figure 19. *To what extent do you believe Hindutva otherization has impacted the freedom of expression and dissent in India?*

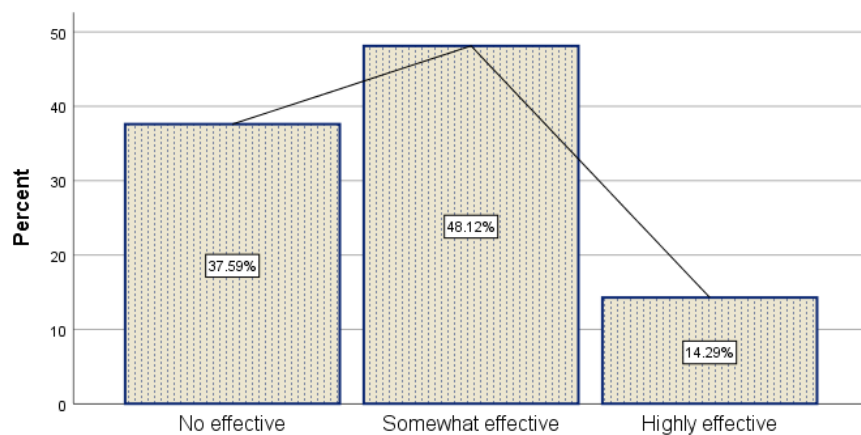
Table 21 shows the perceptions of survey participants that little more than half of the study participants (n = 69, 51.9%) consider that Hindutva otherization very likely will lead to a weakening of India's federal structure and centralization of power followed several participants (n = 50, 37.6%) who consider it somewhat likely.

Table 20. How likely do you think Hindutva otherization will lead to a weakening of India's federal structure and centralization of power?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not likely	14	10.5	10.5	10.5
Somewhat	50	37.6	37.6	48.1
Very likely	69	51.9	51.9	100.0
Total	133	100.0	100.0	

However, a few of the participants (n = 14, 10.5%) thought that the Hindutva otherization was unlikely to lead to a weakening of India's federal structure and centralization of power.

Figure 19 is presented to illustrate the perceptions of participants regarding the effectiveness of civil society organizations in countering Hindutva otherization and protecting minority rights. A little less than half of the study subjects (48.12%) consider it somewhat effective, while a high number of participants (37.59%) consider it ineffective. However, a few of the participants (14.29%) consider the role of civil society organizations highly effective in countering the Hindutva otherization.



The participants were asked to show their opinions regarding Hindutva otherization leading towards the brain drain of minorities and liberal thinkers from India, and the results were presented through Table 22. It shows that almost half of the participants ($n = 66$, 49.6%) consider that the Hindutva otherization among minorities causes moderate brain drain.

Table 21. *Do you think Hindutva otherization has led to a brain drain of minorities and liberal thinkers from India?*

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
No brain drain	15	11.3	11.3	11.3
Moderate brain drain	66	49.6	49.6	60.9
Yes, significant brain drain	52	39.1	39.1	100.0
Total	133	100.0	100.0	

Several study subjects, 52 (39.1%), consider that there is significant brain drain due to the Hindutva otherization. In contrast, a few of them ($n = 15$, 11.3%) believe that there is no brain drain at all in India.

Table 23 shows the results of perceptions regarding the impact of Hindutva otherization on India's international reputation and relations. A higher number ($n = 58$, 43.6%) consider that somewhat likely Hindutva otherization has an impact on India's international reput, followed by many of the participants ($n = 50$, 37.6%) who consider its impact very likely.

Table 22. *How likely do you think Hindutva otherization will impact India's international reputation and relations?*

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
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Not likely	25	18.8	18.8	18.8
Somewhat likely	58	43.6	43.6	62.4
Very likely	50	37.6	37.6	100.0
Total	133	100.0	100.0	

However, a few of the study subjects (n = 25, 18.8%) showed denial regarding the impact of Hindutva otherization on India's international reputе and relations.

Table 23. In your opinion, what is the most effective way to counter Hindutva otherization in India?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strengthening secular institutions and rule of law	56	42.1	42.1	42.1
Promoting interfaith dialogue and social cohesion	47	35.3	35.3	77.4
Empowering civil society and independent media	30	22.6	22.6	100.0
Total	133	100.0	100.0	

Table 24 shows that most participants (n = 56, 42.1%) consider strengthening secular institutions and the rule of law to be the most effective way to counter Hindutva otherization. Several study subjects (n = 47, 35.3%) thought that promoting interfaith dialogue and social cohesion is the most effective way of countering the Hindutva otherization. Whereas, a few of them (22.6%) consider that empowering civil society and independent media will help in countering the Hindutva otherization.

Figure 20 presents the results of questions asked of participants to gauge their perception of the economic and social impacts of Hindutva otherization in India. The results show that a large majority of the study subjects (n = 85, 63.9%) consider it to have a significant impact, whereas several participants (n = 41, 30.8%) consider its impact to be moderate.

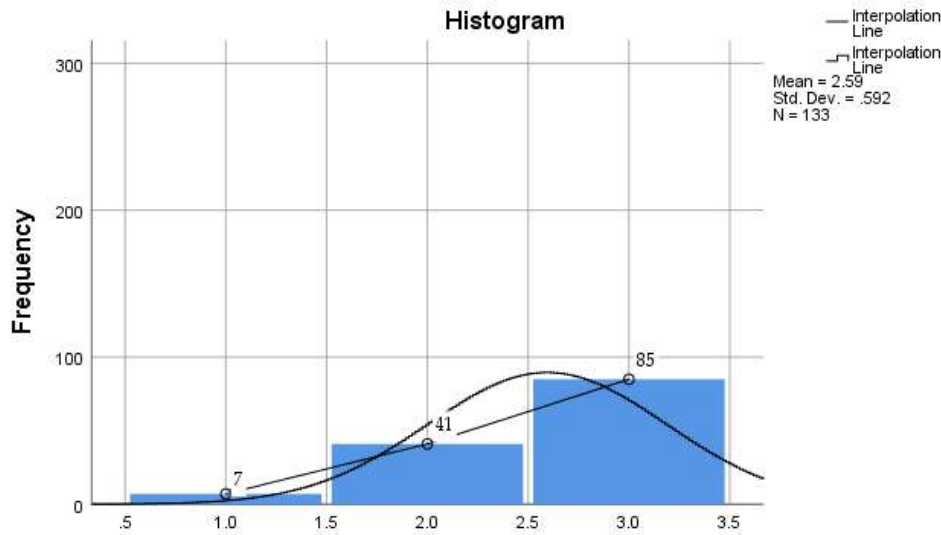


Figure 20. *To what extent do you believe Hindutva otherization has impacted the economic and social development of minority communities in India*

Only 7 participants showed their denial regarding any impact of the Hindutva otherization on the economic and social developments of minority communities in India.

Table 25 has been presented to show the perceptions of participants regarding Hindutva otherization as a cause of the rise in separatist movements and demands for autonomy by minority groups. It reveals that majority of study subjects (n = 62, 46.6%) consider somewhat likely the Hindutva otherization is the cause of it followed by a higher number of participants (n = 56, 42.1%) who consider not likely the Hindutva otherization as a cause of rise in separatist movements and demands for autonomy by minority groups. Conversely, a few participants (n = 15, 11.3%) do not consider Hindutva otherization at all as a cause of the rise in separatist movements.

Table 24. How likely do you think Hindutva otherization will lead to a rise in separatist movements and demands for autonomy by minority groups?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not likely	15	11.3	11.3	11.3
Somewhat likely	62	46.6	46.6	57.9
Not likely	56	42.1	42.1	100.0
Total	133	100.0	100.0	

Table 26 shows the results regarding the effectiveness of opposition parties in challenging the Hindutva otherization and protecting minority rights and found that most of the participants (n = 62, 46.6%) consider it somewhat effective followed by a higher number of them (n = 49, 36.8%) who believe it ineffective in this regard.

Table 25. In your view, how effective have the opposition parties been in challenging Hindutva otherization and protecting minority rights?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not effective	49	36.8	36.8	36.8
Somewhat effective	62	46.6	46.6	83.5
Highly effective	22	16.5	16.5	100.0
Total	133	100.0	100.0	

Whereas, several study subjects (n = 22, 16.5%) who consider the opposition parties as highly effective in challenging the Hindutva otherization and protecting minority rights.

Table 27 presents the results of participants' opinions regarding the Hindutva otherization, which leads to the weakening of India's secular and democratic foundations. It shows that a large majority of participants (n = 95, 71.4%) consider it significant.

Table 26. *Do you think Hindutva otherization has led to a weakening of India's secular and democratic foundations?*

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
No impact	10	7.5	7.5	7.5
To some extent	28	21.1	21.1	28.6
Yes, significantly	95	71.4	71.4	100.0
Total	133	100.0	100.0	

A few of them (n = 28, 21.1%) consider its impact to some extent. Still, only 10 participants believe that there is no impact of Hindutva otherization on weakening India's secular and democratic foundations.

Summary of the Analysis

The study was proposed to explore the malignancy of Hindutva otherization through the casting impacts on the Indian federation during the 2024 elections and beyond. The data were collected using a self-developed questionnaire, which was prepared with the assistance of relevant literature. It was administered online to collect data from 133 participants. The results showed that an almost equal number of males and females, as well as more academicians, Pakistanis, and Muslims, participated in the study. It found that participants considered that the Hindutva otherization promoted the otherization of minority communities in India, and there was a great chance of the impact of Hindutva otherization on the 2024 general elections in India. The Hindutva otherization will impact mainly Muslims, and it will have implications for the secular fabric of the Indian constitution. Participants considered that there was a significant increase in violence and hate crimes against minorities due to the Hindutva otherization. They believe current laws and institutions are ineffective in curbing the Hindutva otherization. They were of the view that the Hindutva otherization had a significant impact on the rise of Hindu nationalism and majoritarianism, and it would lead to further polarization and social unrest in India. They thought that the religious extremism and political ideologies were the main drivers behind the Hindutva otherization, and it had significantly impacted the freedom of expression in India. It would cause the destabilization of the federal structure and the centralization of power. The civil society organization had a mild role in challenging the Hindutva otherization, and most of the participants thought that it was causing a brain

drain of minorities. They were also of the view that it would harm India's international reputation and relations; however, strengthening secular institutions and the rule of law, promoting interfaith dialogues, social cohesion, and ultimately empowering civil society and independent media would help curb the Hindutva otherization in India.

Chapter 8

Conclusions and Discussion

Imprisoned at Ratnagiri, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar envisioned a fusion of religion and politics, in contrast to contemporaries like Dayananda Saraswati and Swami Vivekananda. After 1922, this vision of 'Hindutva' took many forms and spread across India, from the highly organized Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) to infiltrating mainstream political parties, such as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). This 'way of life' has long struggled to preserve the essence of 'Hindu' in Hindustan. The secularism that became Gandhi's guiding principle for a new republic was undermined by Nathuram Godse's version of orthodox Hinduism, a deviant yet deeply rooted in India's legacy. Over a century after Madan Mohan Malviya's vision for India, it seems that "Bharat" or "Hindustan" has been saffronized beyond recognition. The persecution of minority communities, public lynching by groups like the Bhartiya Gau Raksha Dal, and the erosion of India's secular foundations have skewed the country in favor of Hindus. In this new Hindustan, paramilitary political organizations are vying for power, vigilante justice is carried out through extrajudicial acts, and a more aggressive, Brahminical front now confronts Muslims, Sikhs, Dalits, Christians, and those classified as Other Backward Classes, Scheduled Castes, and Scheduled Tribes.

This is a crucial moment to examine and confront extremist ideologies worldwide. Hindutva poses a significant challenge, deeply ingrained in a large segment of the population. The Indian political system has incorporated this ideology into the social and political behavior of the general public. With the formation of the central government under Modi in 2014 and again in 2019, a nationwide saffronization campaign in education began, reaching its peak. Centralization, the role of the University Grants Commission (UGC), attacks on history, and the intertwining of rituals with education have provided a foundation for those loyal to this mindset. This process of socialization and communication has also influenced recruitment practices, further exacerbating an already challenging environment.

The 2024 Lok Sabha elections, despite being among the most polarizing in Indian history, have reinstated the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in government, though with a significantly reduced majority. As the BJP assumes power for a third consecutive term, serious concerns have been raised among Indian minorities, human rights organizations, international media, and neighboring states. These concerns stem not only from BJP leader Narendra Modi's highly polarizing election campaign, which discriminated against minorities by promoting majoritarian religious nationalism, but also from the party's previous two terms, during which its policies marginalized Indian minorities in the socio-cultural and political landscape. This situation is further exacerbated by the BJP's firm adherence to the Hindutva ideology and its close affiliation with the radical Hindu nationalist organization, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). After a brief introduction to the book in the first chapter, the second chapter proceeds to provide a detailed account of the development of the Hindu religion, the consolidation of Hindu national identity, and the emergence of the Hindutva movement in India. As described in the chapter, unlike the Abrahamic faiths, Hinduism neither had a single unified text nor an ordinary prophet to refer to. Instead, Hinduism developed over time as a mix of practices, traditions, rituals, myths, and folklore. From worshipping trees, fire, animals, and plants, the Hindu religion also did not have the concept of one indisputable god. From ancient Indian history, it can be inferred that almost every region of India worshipped and revered a different god, such as Durga in Bengal and Ganesh in Tamil Nadu. With a

diverse set of deities, there was also a lack of any common association or sense of religious nationalism. With the composition of religious texts, including the Upanishads, the Ramayana, and the Mahabharata, Hindus gained a relative point of common association. A form of religious nationalism began to emerge with the Bhakti movement in the 6th CE; however, it wasn't a unified or coherent one as different regions started to enhance their religiosity in association with other gods. Furthermore, the emergence of the Bhakti movement collided with the advent of Muslim rule in India.

Regarding the Muslim rule in India and its impact on Hindus and Hindu national identity, the chapter has established that the historical facts are very much in contrast to the saffronized version of Indian history. From the invasion of Muhammad Bin Qasim to the recurrent interventions of Mahmud Ghaznavi, to the establishment of Mughal rule in India, none of these developments can be attributed to wreaking havoc on Hindus. In Sindh, where bin Qasim led the first invasion of Muslims, the Hindus and Muslims had coexisted relatively peacefully. Similarly, while a hue and cry is created about Ghaznavi's raids on the Somnath temple, it is worthwhile to note that Hindu robbers had already carried out such looting attacks. Additionally, the Mughals, rather than devastating the land of Sindhus/Hindus, had extensively contributed to it through architectural construction, infrastructure development, defense of the subcontinent, and consolidation of the legal and political framework and even though many of the Mughal rulers including Akbar had sought reconciliatory policies with the Hindus, some of the Hindu factions such as Marathas and Rajputs resented the Muslim rule.

With the decline of Mughal rule and the rise of the British colonial empire, the Hindus who served and worked closely with the British gained exposure to the European ideas of nationalism. This led to the development of Hindu nationalist organizations such as the Brahmo Samaj, followed by the Arya Samaj. These movements upheld the claims of racial and spiritual superiority of the Hindu race while referring to the history of "the Vedic golden ages. As a result of the divide-and-rule policies of the British colonialists, the cleavages between Hindus and Muslims deepened enough to lead to communal violence. The Hindu nationalism became radicalized enough to resent any leverage that the Muslims might get from the British Raj, such as the partition of Bengal or the acceptance of Muslim demand for a separate electorate. Hindu radical nationalism gained a sound theoretical base in the works of V.D. Savarkar, such as "The Essentials of Hindutva," in which he claimed that Hindutva is distinct from the Hindu religion, as the former is a cultural nationalist conception that adheres to concepts like racial superiority, religious nationalism, and primordial affiliation. Another significant development came with the transformation of Hindutva from a mere ideology to an organizational force with the creation of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh in 1925. The RSS kept itself aloof from the independence movement led by more secular leaders such as Gandhi and Nehru while asserting that Hindustan should be a state for Hindus, and if any non-Hindus wanted to be a part of it, they needed to adapt to the Hindu culture.

In the post-independence era, the immediate yet most notable incident came in the form of Gandhi's assassination by an RSS affiliate. After being banned temporarily for being too radical and extremist, the RSS focused on making its presence on the political landscape of India. For this purpose, a political party named the Bhartiya Jana Sangh was established as the political wing of the RSS. Besides BJS, the RSS created other factions for social welfare and religious propagation to strengthen its presence at the grassroots level with the ultimate purpose of making India a Hindu Rashtra. Although the BJS had not been able to establish a significant presence in the Indian Lok Sabha, it still voiced its opinions. It mobilized support against the actions of Congress, such as granting autonomy to Kashmir or settling the Rann of Kutch dispute with Pakistan. The political position of the RSS affiliate strengthened as the party transformed from Bhartiya Jana Sangh to Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) and witnessed the rise of leaders such as Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Lal Krishna Advani. As the more moderate leader with a stance to uphold India's constitutional secularism, the BJP failed to garner massive support. The political force of the BJP was unleashed as L.K. Advani organized the country-wide Rath Yatra, galvanizing the public over the cause of creating the Ram Mandir at the disputed site of the Babri Masjid. Despite being a BJP leader, Vajpayee's policies had been more moderate, reconciliatory, and inclusive. The actual manifestation of Hindutva nationalism by the BJP has been evident in the regime of Narendra Modi since he took office in 2014.

The rise of Narendra Modi and the BJP on the political landscape of India, while firmly adhering to the Hindutva ideology of Hindu religious nationalism, puts a question mark on the Indian constitutional values that had prescribed for India to be a secular state. The third chapter examines the contours of secularism in the context of the Indian Constitution and then evaluates the link between the BJP's Hindutva ideology and Indian constitutional secularism. While the West has conceptualized secularism as a sharp separation between the church and the state, in the Indian context, secularism refers to the equality of respect for all religions and the freedom and liberty of Indian people to practice any religion of their choice. This also signified the Indian state's refusal to give precedence to any particular religion at the expense of others. The BJP, despite its staunch commitment to the Hindutva ideology, has never asserted any intention to defy the constitution. However, it does attempt to provide its interpretation of the secularism enshrined in the Indian Constitution. According to the BJP, the only acceptable form of secularism is the one that vehemently cherishes the Hindu culture and religion. While this approach has faced multi-faceted criticism for giving precedence to the Hindu culture, for marginalizing the religious and ethnic minorities, and for laying the foundations of communal violence, the BJP has its arguments in its defense.

The leaders of the BJP have defended their Hindutva-tinted approach to secularism by claiming that since nations are imagined communities, if religious and cultural pluralism were practiced in India, it would only disrupt the socio-cultural fabric of the Hindu nation. Additionally, the BJP supporters claim that the precedence given to Hindus is a kind of settling scores for the past injustices committed against Hindus. Lastly, they also claim that the economic growth and development being done by the BJP government is not restricted to the Hindus only; the fact that all religions and ethnicities can benefit from it is a practical demonstration of secularism. Comparing and contrasting the election campaigns of the two BJP leaders who have been prime ministers, Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Narendra Modi, the chapter establishes that Vajpayee's rather inclusive and modest campaign garnered less support compared to Modi's blatantly Hindutva-focused campaign.

A quantitative survey was conducted using a self-developed questionnaire, which was informed by the literature, to collect data from 313 participants (Chapter 7). The questionnaire was created in Google Forms to conduct online data collection. The participants strongly agreed that the Hindutva otherization would have a significant impact on India's 2024 elections. The minorities of India, specifically Muslims, were heavily influenced by the violence, cruelty, and injustice powered by the Hindutva otherization. It had increased Hindu nationalism and majoritarianism, and it would lead to further polarization and social unrest in India. The participants pointed out that religious extremism and the political ideologies of RSS were the main driving forces hampering freedom of expression, fueling religious riots, and hate crimes in India. The participants suggested that strengthening secular institutions, promoting the rule of law, and fostering interfaith dialogues could help normalize the situation.

The last section of the chapter discusses the Hindutva-influenced policies of the BJP as evidence that the Hindutva narrative is not limited to election campaigns, but also translates into practical policies with the BJP in power. A detailed account of policies such as saffronisation, the NRC case, the Citizenship Amendment Act, anti-conversion laws, the revocation of Article 370, and cow protection laws has been provided. Saffronization has been a policy of reforming the educational curriculum to glorify the Hindu history while subtracting any contribution of Muslims or other religious minorities in the development of India to match the Hindutva narrative. According to the NRC and Citizenship Amendment Act, the religious minorities, primarily Muslims, had to prove their citizenship of India by giving evidence of the residence of their forefathers in the state. Additionally, it has facilitated the religious minorities from the neighboring states of India, excluding Muslims, to be able to seek Indian citizenship. As per the anti-conversion laws, adopted under the fear of Love Jihad, where Muslim men supposedly trapped Hindu women to convert them to Islam, the process of religious conversions in India has been complicated. Under the BJP government, the number of cases of cow vigilantes has tremendously spiked as some of the states have outlawed the consumption of beef. The BJP government has also fulfilled the claim of one of its leaders, S.P. Mukherjee, who had claimed "Ek Desh me Do Vidhaan Nahi Chalin gay" – there won't be two constitutions in its own country by abolishing the autonomous status of Kashmir through the revocation of Article 370. Additionally, as Narendra Modi inaugurated the Ram Mandir at

the site of the disputed Babri Masjid, the Muslims of India have been successfully marginalized by the incumbent government.

While the BJP continues to enjoy support from its radical Hindu nationalist voter base, such policies have brought forth multi-dimensional challenges that range from the domestic level to the global and international stage. At the domestic level, the reaction to the Hindutva policies of the BJP has come in the form of socio-political resistance movements by Sikhs, Muslims, and the backward and other marginalized castes of India. The rise of movements such as the Khalistan movement, insurgencies in the Northeast, Kashmiri resistance, and the Dalit Rights movement all indicate that the minorities of India have been highly dissatisfied with the fascist policies of the BJP that have tried to make India a homogenous state through cultural assimilation. On the contrary, these movements manifest a struggle to uphold the values of liberty, justice, equality, and constitutional secularism.

Rooted in the past grievances, almost all of these movements have regained momentum as the socio-political dynamics under the BJP regime have exacerbated the sense of deprivation among the minorities. For instance, the Khalistan movement of Sikhs has been a long-standing quest for separate statehood for the Sikhs of the Indian subcontinent. Similarly, the struggle of Kashmiri Muslims has its roots in the unfair partition of the Indian subcontinent that left Kashmir as an unresolved issue. To date, the Kashmiri Muslims continue to struggle for their right to self-determination and to seek protection against the state's oppression. The persistence of insurgencies in northeast India reflects that the Indian state has failed to successfully integrate these states while preserving their autonomy and distinct ethnic identity. Similarly, the Dalit Rights movement depicts the historical injustices leading to unfathomable grievances of human beings who have been categorized into castes and classes as per the Hindu culture, which has also been endorsed in the legal frameworks of India.

One common unifying factor in all of these resistance movements is their collective struggle against Hindutva domination to uphold secularism, pluralism, and inclusive governance, in the face of increasing communalism and religious nationalism. These movements have not only exerted domestic pressure on the BJP government but have also tarnished India's secular and pluralistic image in the wider international community, affecting the BJP's electoral performance over the years. The fourth chapter examines the implications of Hindutva on India's international image. As the founders of India, including Jawaharlal Nehru, integrated secularism as a defining value of the Indian state, India's global image became that of a newly decolonized state that upheld the democratic and secular ethos. Additionally, as India became the leader of the Non-Aligned Movement, its advocacy for racial equality and anti-colonialism garnered immense international prestige and appreciation for the state.

However, the rise of the BJP and some of the incidents associated with it, such as the demolition of Babri Masjid and the Gujarat riots, not only altered the domestic socio-political landscape of India but also tarnished its secular image abroad. Consequently, numerous international human rights organizations, including Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the United Nations Commission on International Religious Freedom (UNCHR), have expressed concerns about minority rights in India. Similarly, many international media houses such as the BBC, The New York Times, and The Washington Post have excessively reported the atrocities committed in such incidents. The response of other states, including India's neighbors and global powers, varies from time to time. In most cases, neighbors of India, including Pakistan and Bangladesh, have criticized India for its minority rights violations as they fear the spill-over effect of inter-religious communal tensions. The response of major powers, such as the USA and the UK, varies based on the intensity of the issue, the nature of their geopolitical and geostrategic interests, and the political party in power. For instance, while Narendra Modi was denied an American visa in the 1990s for his alleged involvement in the Gujarat riots, under the leadership of Donald Trump, the US-India relations have peaked at unprecedented levels.

To balance its role between maintaining a secular image abroad and implementing the Hindutva policies at home, the BJP government has employed multiple tactics. These include strengthening diplomatic ties and promoting the narrative that all policies enacted in India are aimed at maintaining national security. Numerous

pro-Hindutva channels such as Zee News and The Republic have also been playing a crucial role in the justification of the actions of the Indian government. Lastly, but not least, the Indian diaspora, through its lobbying and cultural diplomacy, projects a positive, secular, and pluralistic image of India.

With the backdrop of increasing resistance movements and international scrutiny, the state of India held general elections to elect the 543 members of the Lok Sabha—the lower house of the Indian Parliament. As the fifth chapter provides a detailed analysis of the electoral dynamics, it also sheds light on the election campaign of the major political parties. From the extensive literature consulted about the election campaign of the BJP, it can be concluded that there were a few common themes, including: excessive instrumentalization of divinity and religious symbolism, the use of Modi's personality cult, and the excessive use of anti-Muslim and anti-Pakistan narrative. An essential aspect of the BJP's election campaign has been its focus on leaving no platform unattended, with equal emphasis on grassroots-level mass mobilization rallies and an ambitious social media campaign.

The result of the BJP's policies and its instrumentalization of Hindutva rhetoric has left the minorities and backward castes of India alienated and disillusioned from the Bhartiya Janata Party. This has resulted in a decrease in the number of seats and votes that the party has been able to win in the 2024 general elections. Despite its slogan-based ambition of securing more than 400 seats in the Lok Sabha, the party achieved its lowest number of seats since 2014. With a total of 240 Lok Sabha seats, the BJP has had to rely on its allied political parties of the National Democratic Alliance to form the central government. An in-depth analysis of the states with the most significant representation in the Lok Sabha has revealed some interesting facts. In states with an overwhelming Hindu majority, the BJP has swept clean, as it bagged all 29 seats in Madhya Pradesh. However, in states such as Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra, where developmental problems, including increasing rates of youth unemployment and rising farmer dissent, have been visible, the elections brought drastic results for the BJP.

Additionally, the Hindutva-influenced party also remained unable to make inroads in more progressive, educated, and inclusive provinces such as Tamil Nadu. The caste factor and religion also played significant roles in determining the positions of political parties in the Lok Sabha. For instance, the Indian National Congress had been successful in its social engineering attempt of convincing the Other Backward Castes (OBCs) that in the case of the BJP majority in the Lok Sabha, the constitution would be amended to the disadvantage of the minorities and marginalized classes. The attempt turned out to be successful as a large number of OBCs, Muslims, and Christians overwhelmingly supported Congress to increase its seat share to 99 in 2024 from 52 in 2019.

While India has been rising as a notable economic power on the global stage, its ascent is not without challenges and controversies. One of the greatest and multi-faceted challenges is adherence to the Hindutva ideology. This has complicated India's domestic socio-political landscape by increasing polarization and communal division, and it has also garnered international criticism and scrutiny. To address these challenges, the incumbent Indian government needs to adopt a multi-pronged approach that encompasses the social, political, economic, and international diplomatic landscape.

The most dangerous aspect of Hindutva is its infiltration into various socio-political domains, moving from the periphery to the center. Modi's rise to power has further intensified existing fault lines within India's social fabric. His aggressive personality, anti-Muslim sentiments, muscular policy measures, and jingoistic nationalism have only added fuel to the fire. Modi's ascension has been accompanied by calls for an authoritarian "Hindu state," marked by anti-Muslim and anti-Pakistan rhetoric. "Hindutva activists, cutting across different Sangh Parivar groupings, allegedly planned and executed a series of recent bomb blasts targeting mosques, primarily affecting Muslims." The concept of a "Hindu state" has its roots in pre-partition politics, with the idea of a "Home for Hindus" and "Greater India" as central agendas for the BJP and RSS. BJP politicians and advocates have long conflated Islam with Pakistan and patriotism with Hinduism. Modi's government is reshaping secular India into a principally Hindu nation through aggressive means. "India is not

currently a Hindu state, but it is becoming less secular; while it is far from becoming authoritarian, it is becoming a more illiberal democracy." The BJP government's strident ideology mirrors Pakistani anti-Indianism. It validates the two-nation theory, supporting the notion that Hindus and Muslims require separate countries to coexist in the subcontinent, much to Pakistan's approval. Although India has not ceased to be a secular democracy, the rise of Hindu communalism, erosion of independent institutions, aggressive nationalism, and misuse of laws to silence critics by both the BJP and non-BJP parties are reversing India's progress.

Meanwhile, Hindutva forces are employing four strategies to normalize religious violence, social conflicts, and economic marginalization in India: the politics of assimilation, co-option, dominance, and monopolization of narrative-making through the organizational network of the RSS. This combination of strategies helps divert attention away from issues such as poverty, inequality, and unemployment. The normalization of everyday violence by lynch mobs helps Hindutva forces mask their bourgeois hypocrisy and failures in governance. Thus, the BJP's current policy undermines the basic notion of Indian unity, threatening the country's cultural diversity and social cohesiveness. However, the rise to power under Modi's leadership has tarnished India's soft image, introduced ethno-religious intolerance, and shifted Indian polity from secular federative lines to a centralized, authoritarian, and religion-centered form of government. Consequently, significant changes in Indian policy are anticipated, both internally and externally, due to the damage already inflicted by aggressive measures. As domestic resistance to Hindutva grows and the ruling elite's hardline behavior promotes new forces, the Indian diaspora, youth, and female resistance are increasing. The Indian federation is under threat—not from external forces, but from within.

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Appendix

Transcripts

Dalit Death on May 26, 2024: [BBC](#)

On May 26, in Rajasthan, Radha Dawi's son Ramesh Kumar, a Dalit by caste, was beaten to death by some young people in his village. Ramesh was the breadwinner for his family with his brother. The reason for this murder is that Ramesh used to buy wine from another party. His family demands justice, to hang the perpetrators, and to give compensation to Ramesh's old mother. Police have taken some steps to ensure justice and have arrested four suspects and bulldozed their homes.

[Angus Scott](#): July 2, 24 - Sunak's Hinduism Clear

Conservative Party leader Rishi Sunak visited a temple in London before the elections. This is not the first time. There are enough shards of evidence that he is practicing, using, and showing more interest in Hinduism, eventually masking the rights of other minorities. The Sikh community has criticized Rishi's visit. During Rishi Sunak's tenure, there has been a rise in attacks against the Sikh community, with many fingers pointing to the involvement of the Indian government. The Sikh community has published its manifesto, focusing on its security issues. This visit is also being criticized by many as a dirty political move using religion for political purposes, while practicing and favoring one community over the other. There are intelligence reports that the Sikh community is under threat. But the conservative party, led by Rishi Sunak, has not taken a single step to show support and provide security to the British Sikh community.

Justice Delayed: Dalit Quest for Justice Continues, [the Activist](#), Dec 2023

In 2001, a Dalit named Balmiki Mehta, from Nawada (Bihar), bought land from a person of the upper caste Bhumihar. A few days later, when his two sons and a brother were preparing the land for harvesting, some people of the Bhumihar caste came, beat them brutally, and then gouged out their eyes. Balmiki's brother couldn't survive and succumbed to his injuries, while his sons lost their eyes. It has been 23 years since he has not received justice. During the initial days of this incident, some developments were made by governments; however, the constant transfers of officials dealing with the case made it impossible to solve. The Dalit, Balmiki, is still waiting for justice for the murder of his brother and the brutal torture of his sons.

Dalit Discrimination: Segregated Housing and Wells, [the Activist](#), 2023

Nawadiha, a village in the state of Jharkhand, has an old tradition still in practice that a person from a lower caste, Dalit, cannot touch or take water from the well. There's only one well assigned to them, five feet deep, which most of the time remains dry and dirty, but with any luck, it has water. Dalits live outside the village, separate from the rest of the community. They cannot live together with other castes. The fundamental right to water is denied to them, and they can only take water if the people of different castes allow them. Even with permission, touching the well is considered a serious crime. The same is happening in nearby villages. No action from the government, as the government is a silent spectator.

Caste-Based Violence: Dalit Groom Attacked During Wedding Procession, [The Lallantop](#), March 2024

A video went viral in which a bridegroom from Gandhinagar, Gujarat, was beaten while leading his Barat. The reason behind this action was that the bridegroom was from a lower caste, Dalit, and according to the perpetrators, no Dalit can ride a horse, but instead he should take his Barat by walking. The Police have arrested them and initiated an investigation.

Woman's Brutal Death in Rajasthan: Raped and Burned Alive, [Navbharat Times](#)

In Rajasthan, a woman was burnt alive while resisting rape. The accused called the woman and locked the room. When she resisted, he poured kerosene oil and set her on fire. Police have initiated an investigation, but the accused is currently absconding.

Underage Dalit girls raped and killed in UP: [India TV](#)

In Lakhimpur, UP, two underage Dalit girls were kidnapped, raped, and then hanged to a tree by four boys. The family accused the Police of not conducting a fair investigation. When this news spread, people took to the streets to protest. Seeing the situation spiral out of control, the Police assured the family of a thorough and fair investigation. Later, they captured and arrested the accused. Some politicians posted this incident on X, showing their concern for increasing violence against Dalits and women.

Indian government ordered killings in Pakistan, intelligence officials claim: [The Guardian](#), April 4, 2024

According to The Guardian, India has been involved in extrajudicial killings in foreign territories. The basic motivation came from Jamal Khashoggi's assassination, which was seen as the completion of objectives through other means. Raw took Russia's KGB and Israel's Mossad's model into their operational style after the Pulwama attack in 2019. In Pakistan, almost 20 people have been killed by unknown persons. Pakistan alleged India's involvement, which an Indian intelligence officer has now confirmed. India used two methods. First, by establishing sleeper cells in the UAE and paying money to the poor willing to murder. Second, by infiltrating ISIS and Taliban social media groups, inciting and encouraging the trial murders as a precondition for joining these groups. Pakistan chose not to publicize this matter to avoid the question of terrorists' presence on its soil. But the later assassinations of Sikh activists in Canada and the US and allegations by Western states of Indian involvement allowed Pakistan to voice its concerns. The Indian intelligence operator also confirmed the participation of Indian agencies in tackling the Khalistan revival in Punjab by killing those involved in activating this movement from abroad. Many political analysts are interpreting this behavior as part of an aggressive foreign policy by the BJP and Modi's leadership. According to them, India has adopted this behavior to project an image of a global power that can act anywhere in the world to fulfill its objectives.



Sikh Heritage Education
& Cultural organization of America
28290 S. Banta Rd California

