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on India's Politics and Society**

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Introduction

The Indian political leadership during initial years of independence promoted its image as a secular and a democratic country. Pluralism, socialism, secularism and democracy were once considered as the hallmarks of the Indian society. 'The Nehru Consensus' earned India the status of a democratic secular state. It professed the idea of 'Mother India' as a place where people from various castes, creed and religions can live freely.¹ The Indian leadership by adopting such policies tried to negate the idea of Hindu-Muslim divide (as reflected in the *Two Nation Theory*), which was the bastion thought of Pakistan Movement. In fact, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru propounded for the first time the policy of Non-Alignment on September 7, 1946. He declared, "We propose as far as possible, to keep away from the power politics of groups, aligned against one another, which have led in the past

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to World Wars and which may again lead to disasters to even vaster scale.”²

This concept brought India and countries of Commonwealth on same page. This also enabled India to lead from the front in marshalling countries with creed to various beliefs under one platform.³ This notion of leadership and secularism helped India become a Guest of Honour at the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) as well.⁴

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was created in the 1980s. The party's emergence was largely supported by Hindu nationalist organisations such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Bajrang Dal, Shiv Sena and Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP).⁵ The involvement of Hindu nationalist forces in the corridors of country's politics reflected their desire for constitutional power and a strong will towards Hindu India. In the words of Fascism scholar Robert Paxton, “For Hindu fundamentalists, their religion is the focus of an intense attachment that the secular and pluralist Indian state does not succeed in offering. In such communities, a religious-based fascism is conceivable.”⁶ This interpretation confirms the vulnerability of BJP's rise in Hindu India. At present, the BJP is in power in India (in its second term). The BJP leader, Narendra Modi, is the same man who as Chief Minister of Gujarat (2002) ‘abetted’ the killings of Muslims. Modi's election to the Prime Minister's office furthered the impression that the inhumane treatment toward the minorities, especially Muslims, did not essentially create any obstacle on the path of assuming the high office. The courts too, were silent and enabling Modi to establish his government on Hindu democratic grounds. The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) clearly signaled Modi's anti-Muslim

stance.⁷ The BJP government's Hindu centric policies have additionally reinforced the insecurities among the Muslim populace of India. The Muslims of Bihar⁸ and Assam⁹ despite being natives face identity crisis and their nationalities are being questioned in India. The implementation of National Registry of Citizens (NRC) intended at targeting illegal immigrants, resulting in further singling out the Muslims.¹⁰

Seeing the BJP led Hindu nationalistic politics and its impact on the country's foreign policy outlook, India by abrogating Article 370 (on August 5, 2019) sealed the fate of nine million Kashmiris as stateless citizens in India.¹¹ The scrapping of Article 370 implied the simultaneous elimination of Article 35-A. Furthermore, the Modi government's decision to demote the status of Jammu and Kashmir into two Union Territories (Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu & Kashmir-IIOJ&K and Ladakh) is to bring the Muslim majority Kashmir valley under the direct control of New Delhi. BJP has described the move as "correcting a historic mistake of the first government of India under the leadership then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru."¹² With the revocation of the Article 35-A, IIOJ&K has been opened for non-Kashmiris, in particular Hindus to settle in the area.¹³ This amounts to bringing demographic changes in the state of Jammu and Kashmir and to construct a new Kashmir as an Indian territory.¹⁴ The forceful measures by India to control the eight million Kashmiris has led to a deep humanitarian crisis. The worst sufferers of the inhumane acts are the infants, children, women and old people living in valley.¹⁵ Under the draconian laws operative in IIOJ&K, people have been shipped to jails all over India, showing the true face of Indian democracy and secularism.¹⁶ The BJP's actions in occupied Jammu and Kashmir are similar to Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh

(RSS), the paramilitary organisation, which was behind the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi.¹⁷

Indian Society and Politics: From Indian Nationalism to Hindu Nationalism and Hindutva

The party which embodies Hindutva first came to power at national level in 1996, for just 13 days; then for 13 months in 1998-1999;¹⁸ and then again for the third time from 1999 to 2004. Whereas, in 2014 it swept the national landscape – a death blow to erstwhile secularism.¹⁹

The struggle of Hindu nationalist political parties towards constitutional empowerment has brought in religion as a political and social factor in India. Whether, it has strengthened the country's political credentials or it has made India a Hindu democracy is a debatable issue. India's democracy and its secular character are often cited as tools of pragmatism. There is, no doubt, that the democratic institutions in India are well-established and the political culture does not entirely revolve around dynastic politics. The Modi's rise to power reflects that to be Prime Minister one does not need to be from an elite political background. Modi's win additionally, also reflects an empowerment of the middle class. Another perspective to view Indian politics is the role of religion as a driving force behind its political apparatus. Hindus look up to Narendra Modi as a staunch proponent of ideological outlook, as he has made faith an integral part of politics. Thereby, Prime Minister Modi's election is the outcome of a combination of social and religious factors.

The narrative of Hindu insecurity was a political trap for the Hindus of India, as much as it was an issue for the Indian Muslims, who had made a place for themselves in the body politic as

intellectuals and compassionate members of a multiethnic state. The BJP slogan invoked the concept of 'rule and decorum' by the majority. This is where Secularism failed, and succumbed to the highhandedness of state-centric majoritarianism. The concept turned so draconian that in no time it called for changing the very fabric of Indian nationalism. Many so-called intellectuals in India now openly endorse a new curriculum based on and driven by faith. They have drawn 'politico-ideological' maps of Greater India – an apparent recourse to *Akhand Bharat* – wherein the geography of India would include Bhutan, Afghanistan, Nepal, Pakistan and Bangladesh, apparently a reminiscence of Ashoka the Great's rule.²⁰ The only difference, however was that Ashoka promoted Buddhism. Today, as Modi and his inner coterie call for recourse to Shivaji cult, it is the historic invincibility that dominates their mindset – ignorant of the fact that it comes at the cost of pluralism in multilingual-polarised India.²¹

In the 2014 Indian election, BJP's Hindu ideology outmatched the secular principles of Congress. Rahul Gandhi's cultured outlook and moderate thinking could not withstand Modi's rhetoric and extremist views. Ashish Nandi who interviewed Narendra Modi in the 1990s, wrote that "I still remember the cool, measured tone in which he elaborated a theory of cosmic conspiracy against India that painted every Muslim as a suspected traitor and a potential terrorist."²² Prime Minister Narendra Modi previously as the Chief Minister of Gujarat is blamed for the death of 2,000 Muslims in India. The Supreme Court verdict (in April 2004) called Modi "one of the modern-day Neros." Modi faced criticism by the West for the Gujarat massacre. During his visit to England in August 2003, protestors called him as "Narendra Modi: The butcher of Gujarat."²³

Who is Narendra Modi?

“Modi defines his life through ideas of Hindutva. Modi is for Hindu supremacy – an India for Hindus as full citizens – through the vehicle of BJP politics.”²⁴

In an interview with the *Washington Post* in 2008, the then Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi uttered, “Why even talk about 2002? We are almost in 2008. It’s the past. What does it matter? My focus is only on development. It starts with development. It ends with development. And that is what I will talk about.”²⁵

Narendra Modi today is the Prime Minister of India, the country which had once been once ruled by Gandhi and Nehru, and visionaries like Ambedkar. Modi has had a history of hatred towards the Muslims of India. He had been in lead roles in organising of mobs of hate that demolished the Babri Masjid. He also presided over the pogroms of Muslims in Gujarat. And, it was not without a reason that several countries including UK²⁶ and the US had banned provision of visa to him.²⁷ The irony is that despite Modi’s hatred towards Muslims of India, he has been twice elected as Prime Minister by the Indian people.²⁸ Likewise, Modi as Prime Minister has been welcomed in the West as head of a democratic secular India. “The Prime Minister of India will be welcomed to the United States. As head of government, Mr. Modi would be eligible for an A-1 visa,” said the US State Department’s spokesperson Jen Psaki.²⁹ President Donald Trump termed Prime Minister Narendra Modi a “tremendous leader”.³⁰ Modi’s support in India and abroad reflects the fundamental tenets of ‘realism’ that it is the ‘convergence of interest’ which determines the likes and dislikes of people and political actors, whilst principles of

democracy, secularism and humanity have no weightage, other than academic purpose/ or moral speeches.

The assertiveness of Hindu nationalism in politics has further widened the divide with the Muslims and other minorities. India's Opposition Leader, Rahul Gandhi once remarked, BJP only wants to divide people, make people fight each other.³¹ BJP's political ascendancy is inevitably linked to Hindutva and, of course, anti-Muslim rhetoric. These two elements have been the corner stone of party's election manifesto. During election campaign in 2014, Modi called Kerala with substantial Muslim population a nursery of terrorism, and threatened illegal Bengali Muslim migrants.³² BJP-led Hindu nationalism has reinforced polarisation in the politics of India.³³ The drivers of Hindutva ideology are to promote the Hindu elite status and to push back the minorities to subservient positions. This shows that the proponents of Hindutva are mostly driven to see the Indian society divided on religious lines with Hinduism being at the top. This may get votes and political dividends however, at the cost of weakening the democratic polity of India and its secular character. The dangers of Hindutva ingress in India were described by India's pristine scholar, A.G. Noorani, as he says, "It splits the nation into 'us' and 'them' and discards Indian nationalism in favour of Hindu nationalism."³⁴

Hindutva

The term "Hindutva" was initially coined by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar. Savarkar was an advocate of Hindu militarism and was opposed to Gandhi's non-violence movement. Savarker was also jailed during the British rule for his rebellious posture. In his book titled Hindutva Ideology Developed-1920 and Hindutva:

Who is a Hindu-1928: Hindutva is regarded as “a collective Hindu identity for Bharat (India).” Hindustan, on the other hand is described as Hindu’s *pitribhoomi* (fatherland) and *punyabhoomi* (holy land).³⁵ Savarker’s coining of term Hindutva at a time when Britain was in power and there was an influence of Muslims in subcontinent shows that Savarker tried to limit the influence of Christians and Muslims over Hindu identity. These two religions, in particular Islam attracted the lower caste Hindus. Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) leader Kailash Chandra wrote in *Vishwa*, “Christian missionaries and later Muslims tried to destroy the caste system.”³⁶ Thereby, the fear to loose political elitism was the compelling force behind the drivers of Hindutva ideology.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the Father of the Indian Constitution, defined Hindutva as a menace to liberty, equality and fraternity, referring to it as incompatible with democracy.³⁷ The ingredients and salient features of RSS are, inspiration from the Nazi theory of racial superiority, recourse to Xenophobia – wherein one state encroaches more land from neighbours – an apt policy these days of India for Bengal and other Muslim states; and last but not least it breeds intolerance and terrorism in society.

The Sangh Parivar and its affiliates brought Hindutva on the front stage as a religious force to attain political objectives. The idea of ‘Hindu nation’ was promoted; ‘Rama’ was regarded as the common historical founder, and Ayodhya was declared as the Hindu religious city.³⁸ The Sangh Parivar advocates the social and political principles of Hindutva ideology. Hindutva advocates and campaigns for a sole Hindu state in India, termed as *Hindu Rashtra*. Thus, the new ideologue says, “Our one supreme goal is to bring to life the all-round glory and greatness of Hindu Rashtra Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh.”³⁹ BJP, the ruling party in India is

the “prominent political branch of Sangh Parivar”, and is also the modern political manifestation of Hindutva ideology.⁴⁰ Seeing BJP’s political journey to the corridors of power, Hindutva has been central to the party’s ideological orientation.⁴¹

Hindutva and India’s Politics and Society

The Hindutva ideology, led by the Hindu elite, intentionally portrays minorities as a threat. This certainly puts a question mark on the secular character of India. Staring from the demolition movement of Babri Masjid back in 1992 to Gujarat riots in early 2000, this communal violence has been exploited by the Hindu nationalists to provoke the anti-Muslim sentiment. This Hindu-Muslim rivalry has acted as a political tool to win support in country’s elections.⁴²

It would be interesting to analyse as to ‘how and why’ Hindutva and Narendra Modi’s BJP triumphed in an egalitarian society like that of India!⁴³

The reason is primarily academic. It boasted itself as a theory meant for nation-building in a traumatised caste-based environ. Secondly, it made inroads politically with a tongue-in-cheek, as it castigated the freedom leaders and dubbed them, especially Muslims, as people who undermined the rights of Hindu majority.⁴⁴

Lastly; the ideology touched the conscience of many abroad who funded it wholeheartedly.⁴⁵ Prime Minister Modi’s Manhattan speech on President Obama’s invite, and the sprawling arrangements made by NRIs (Non-Resident Indians) are a case in point.

Shashi Tharoor, a politician and former diplomat, says, “Hindutva has nothing to do with Hinduism as a faith or a religion,

but as a badge of cultural identity and an instrument of political mobilisation. Hinduism is a religion without fundamentals – no founder or prophet, no organised Church, no compulsory beliefs or rites of worship, no single sacred book. What we see today as Hindutva is part of an attempt to ‘semitise’ the faith – to make Hinduism more like the ‘better organised’ religions like Christianity and Islam, the better to resist their encroachments.”⁴⁶

Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s constitutional acts like the Citizenship Amendment Act-CAA (December 2019) refers to Hindu elitism. In fact, it is an elevation of Hindutva ideology. According to the impugned law (CAA), Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jains, Parsis and Sikhs from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan are entitled for Indian citizenship. By stressing on religious identity of foreign nationalities, as a precondition to be eligible for citizenship, India has by law declared faith as an instrument in policymaking. This negates secularism. The Act has drawn a line between Muslims and non-Muslims, the latter being offered fast-track citizenship. The denying of Muslims fast-track citizenship will further marginalise the Muslim community in India and it will impede their social growth. The dangerous aspect of CAA is the outright singling out of Muslims. The All India Majlis-e-Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen (AIMIM) has duly protested against the new citizenship act.⁴⁷ Besides, protests against the Act being carried out in other parts of the country resulted in the killings of 42 people in the national capital.⁴⁸ The Indian Union Muslim League has termed the Act to be in conflict with the secular character of the Indian constitution.⁴⁹ The Chief Ministers of New Delhi, West Bengal, Punjab, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh have also opposed the new citizenship law.⁵⁰ West

Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee remarked that Modi wanted to divide the nation.⁵¹

On January 10, 2020, the BJP government notified the implementation of the CAA. Immediately, after the notification, the Uttar Pradesh government shared a list of 40,000 illegal migrants for grant of citizenship.⁵² Under the CAA, a person (as identified by the impugned law) is entitled for nationality if he/she has lived or worked in India for six years. Previously 11 years were mandatory to apply for citizenship.⁵³ Many believe that the new law extends nationality to illegal migrants on the basis of their faith. The concern is that with more people having nationality, the locals of the area might be deprived of their rights – in terms of jobs and resources. The objection over the CAA is to secure the indigenous rights, and the fear that the same may be undermined at the hands of new entrants. It could lead to tougher living conditions. In view of the opposition to CAA, other than Muslims, there seems to be resentment throughout the country. The prime factor is social security. However, despite the disapproval and dismay of a sizable population, the political leadership of BJP is bent upon furthering the Hindutva credentials by hook or by crook.

The abrogation of Article 370 followed by CAA, both are political developments one after the other targeted at Muslims. The targeting of one community reflects an unbalanced mindset. Muslims have widely protested against the law. This indicates that there are certain segments of society, which are critical of BJP's Hindu-centric policies. The presence of such segments in society is significant as it carries a balancing impact to the extremist outrageous polarised views. In one of the anti-CAA rally held in Bengaluru, an Indian girl raised the slogan 'Pakistan Zindabad'.⁵⁴

It proves beyond doubt that supporting a particular religion or community is an anti-thesis on the path of evolving a society on just lines. Rather, it provokes conflict of interest. The opposition to CAA by political figures like the Chief Ministers of various states (including New Delhi, West Bengal, Punjab, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh) is a positive sign, as it exhibits the genuine concern over the discrimination of minorities in India.

From Monroe Doctrine to Hindutva

*"Prime Minister Indira Gandhi who expected the neighbours to accept the reality of the power differential, that they will not and cannot be equals in their dealings with India and there is, therefore no harm in India showing its teeth from time to time."*⁵⁵

India is a dominating player in the South Asian region, trying to exercise control and influence over other countries.⁵⁶ Instances like the India's support to Tamil separatist movement in Sri Lanka prove India as a spoiler in the region. In the period from 2000s onwards, the South Asian politics continues to be conflict driven. The region's politics, in the wake of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is experiencing regional integration and trade cooperation. However, political environment, wherein India-Pakistan regional disputes coupled with India-China border tension are a challenge to region's well-being. India has been critical of CPEC despite the corridor's economic benefit to the region. India has tried to sabotage the development work in Balochistan, Pakistan; Indian spy Kulbhushan Jadhav was arrested from Balochistan.⁵⁷

The Jadhav Jaundice in India-Pakistan relations is worth analysing to interpret rising Hindu communalism in the region. Kulbushan Sudhir Jadhav *alias* Hussain Patel, a retired Indian

Naval Services officer, was hobnobbing in the southeastern coast of Chabahar for ulterior purposes. India acknowledged him as a legitimate businessman in the Iranian port city. However, a curious glance at media reports in India, immediately in the wake of Jadhav's arrest in 2016 in Balochistan, confirmed that he was a member of the Indian intelligence. But since then a silence of the lambs haunts Indian media, and the reports have been taken down. Surprisingly, a section of the Indian Press had also reported that Jadhav offered to spy for Indian intelligence several times between 2010 and 2012. This one way or the other gives credence to Pakistan's claims on the 'arrested asset'.⁵⁸

This proves that India's anti-Pakistan/ Muslim hatred is detrimental to region's peace and progress. The intolerance within the Indian society, purported by Hindutva forces, has taken the entire region by storm. The abrogation of Article 370 and 35-A have literally stripped the Muslims of IIOJ&K of their constitutional right to life.⁵⁹ An Indian academic Badri Raina sees the revocation of Article 370 as, "complete abrogation of democracy, unconscionable suppression of civil and democratic rights and terminal alienation of people."⁶⁰ A.G. Noorani the author of the book *Article 370: A Constitutional History of Jammu and Kashmir*, calls the Indian government's decision of abrogating Article 370 as unconstitutional.⁶¹ The situation in Occupied Jammu and Kashmir is worse than a war, the people are physically, psychologically and electronically isolated. The Indian move to transfer Hindus to Jammu and Kashmir has reinforced the insecurity for Muslims of the area. To change the demographic character of the occupied territory is a violation equivalent to torcher and killing. India is trying to suppress the Muslim identity of Kashmiris. Of course, all these acts reflect a

fascist mindset. Although India is a democracy and is home to a sizeable non-Hindu population, the unfortunate aspect is that the policies of hatred espoused against the Muslims of Kashmir have a history of prejudice. This biased policy inadvertently reinforces extremist tendencies, which is a direct threat to region's peace and security. India's prejudicial war against Muslims will not only further the communal divide, it will also polarise the society with extremist tendencies.

The BJP's government's Hindutva political outlook has further deteriorated the relations with Pakistan. During the 2014 election, Modi's supporters announced that anyone who opposed the BJP should leave for Pakistan.⁶² BJP government has exercised restrained relations with Pakistan. The dramatic acts like Pathankot, Pulwama attack were staged to suspend the dialogue with Pakistan. In February 2019, there was an exchange of air fighting between the two countries.⁶³ All these developments depict a deteriorating relationship. However, the bottom line remains that still India views Pakistan with the prism of partition.

India is living through a contrast. The Constitution is still secularist in its essence. However, BJP's rise and its well-entrenching, manifests an ordeal for minorities and Hindus, alike. There was no dearth of people during the freedom struggle who out-rightly questioned the wisdom of Muslim leaders, especially of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, for making it a point that Hindu ideology would be self-centric and Muslims will soon face an identity crisis. Andrea Malji, an Assistant Professor at Hawaii Pacific University, Honolulu, USA commented at the Association of History and International Studies that "Nehru's commitment to secularism was his declaration that India could be a peaceful, multi-religious state. Jinnah maintained his doubts. With the

increasing popularity and success of the Hindu Nationalist Party, we will soon know whether Jinnah was correct.⁶⁴

Conclusion

Hindutva is a religio-political construct of Hindu extremist-mentality that was inherently reshaped under a jaundiced prism. It drew inspiration from Nazi vehemence, too, as that was the first practical policy-implementation of profiling on ethnic and religious grounds in Europe. Though there was no dearth of biased politicians and peer leaders in the freedom struggle for India from the British tutelage, and especially those who ceded to RSS doctrine, they couldn't realise their manifesto and their rise to the occasion for the simple reason that the subcontinent was multiethnic and pluralist to the core. That said, the vengeance took a toll in the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, who was shot by a RSS fanatic. Gandhi preached non-violence and had compassion for minorities; an antithesis of RSS.

With the passage of time, India whether it be under the Nehruvian principles of secularism ruled by Congress for more than five decades or the rise of fundamentalist BJP, its nomenclature of inter-faith relationship kept on changing – and for the worse. Money-boasting Hindu privileged class ruled the roost, and its instant and primary victims were low-caste Hindus themselves; the Dalits. Anti-Muslim profiling followed suit. It was all in contempt to Dr Ambedkar, a Dalit himself, and mentor of India's secular constitution. This was the beginning of religious and racial profiling in India and it slowly and gradually moved on to encroach upon Muslim rights. The demolition of Babri Masjid during the Congress rule and the Gujarat riots under Modi's rule has merely championed *Hindutva's* otherness mindset. Apart

from anti-Pakistan and anti-Muslim rhetoric and policies in principle, the Indian establishment made inroads to form and support organisations such as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to venom-spitting anti-Red China narrative, which of late came to include bashing of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). In its very prelude can be counted sabotage and interference in Pakistan' Balochistan province, which is a testimony of *Hindutva* in vogue. Nevertheless, Bangladesh and Nepal – two of India's once strategic neighbours – were also not spared, and policies with those respective countries, too, became a prologue of *Hindutva*. The ongoing cold shoulder relationship with Dhaka is another case in point.

Thereby, it can be argued that India's political orientation, of late, has been aggression and encroachment on civil liberties of its subjects. *Hindutva*, since it has unfortunately become the political order, has crippled India's identity as a secular and multiethnic state. Once it was a civilization of various faiths and creeds, but now *Hindutva* surge has marginalised it to the footnotes of a struggling nation-state. This new notion of *Hindutva* is at the same time busy in compartmentalizing the society on communal and extremist lines, and inadvertently the Hindu majority is also on the receiving end. Their enterprise, wisdom and far-sightedness are at the brink owing to politically-engineered biased fiefdom. This was proved on the foreign front too. The Indian policies in the IIOJ&K, and transgressions like Pulwama, are an external dimension and consequence of *Hindutva*. This neo-discriminatory doctrine, *Hindutva*, is proving to be an antithesis of India.

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