



Institute of Regional Studies

How to embed Modernity with Hindutva?

Islamabad 12 January 2021: Experts while speaking to the participants of a seminar opined that the future of democracy in India will continue to be overshadowed by the rising hyper-nationalists' sentiments in the country. They were of the view that both BJP and the Congress are two sides of the same coin when it comes to protect the Hindu identity of India. The seminar was organized by the Institute of Regional Studies organized on 'India: A Hindu State?', to discuss the future course of mainstream Hindutva policies and challenges for others. The panel of experts included Prof. Dr. Shaheen Akhtar from National Defence University, Islamabad, Dr. Muhammad Mujeeb Afzal, Asst. Professor from Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad and Dr. Asma Shakir Khuwaja, Associate Professor at National Defence University. Ms. Maryam Mastoor, Research Analyst from the Institute of Regional Studies was moderating the session.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr. Akhtar said that BJP is trying to impose its own version of Hinduism that is contrasting to what India has been selling a brand of so called 'largest democracy in Asia' for the last many years. While doing so, BJP has actually deviated from its original manifestation that is somehow accommodating to minorities in India, she added. While elaborating Dr. Akhtar apprised the audience that contemporarily two versions of Hindutva have been practicing in India, the one is Soft and the other is Hard-Hindutva. Under the Bajpai era, we have observed a kind of Soft-Hindutva, and now we are witnessing a harsh form of Hinduism in Modi's time. She went on saying that the demographic changes in Jammu and Kashmir, the construction of Ram temple, treatment with the minorities and the role of judiciary in overall developments speak about Hindunisation of Indian state and the society.

Dr. Khuwaja while elaborating the genesis of Hinduism argued that the Hindu brand which has become a pride for Modi's India, is actually given by the Britishers back in early 19th century. While disagreeing with secular ideology being practiced in the past she said that India has never been a secular state. The Hindu identity is based on 'us' and 'them' mindset in which us are the Brahmins and the others is low caste. There has been a continuous struggle by the Hindus to maximize their power by marginalizing the others, she said. Credit goes to Modi, who not only acknowledged the Hindu ideology but also turned it into a popular Hindu narrative today. Modi has created such an environment where rational voices are not audible, she added.

Dr. Afzal was of the view that it not unusual, nationalism as a philosophy is based on certain myths that emanates from cultural, ethnic, and religious sentiments. He argued that there is no one nationalism in India. One can easily find the traces of competing nationalisms in Indian society. Secularism, on the other hand, is just a rhetoric by the elite, he added. while describing the Indian society he said that there is secularism at the top but communalism at the bottom which is completely against the modernity and interfaith harmony. He further continued saying that India since 1947 is in process of defining and redefining itself and trying to build its own cognitive discourse. Today's biggest challenge for the Modi's India is how to incorporate popular equalitarianism and modernity with Hinduism, he added.

While concluding the session, Mr. Aarish U. Khan, Research Analyst at IRS said that India has crossed a fine line of Soft-Hindutva and heading towards more rigid and introverted brand of Hinduism which is detrimental to its constitutional



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democracy. The BJP has actually provoked the sentiments of Sikhs, Muslims and other minorities. The seminar was attended, besides Pakistani Ambassadors, by scholars, students, and think tank representatives.