



Panel Discussion

India: A Hindu State?

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A Panel Discussion was arranged by the Institute of Regional Studies at its premises On 12th January, 2021 on a significant topic “India: A Hindu State?”.

Ms. Maryam Mastoor, a Research Analyst from IRS inaugurated the session and presented the transcription.

India has now become a state where minorities live in fear, where minorities are not given basic human rights, where the entire state machinery is working on either the suppression or complete exclusion of the unwanted. BJP is vigorously moving towards 'Hinduization' of not only its territory but its national perspective. We all know that how India has 'captured' Kashmir, and how miserably Dalits, Christians and Muslims are living in India. Now cows are more sacred and have more rights in India than humans, or if I am not wrong, Muslims. Interestingly, the great incredible India has also introduced 'cow science' to honor the animal.

*SO the question arises that; **India has become a hindu state? Or not?***

Following renowned scholars from academia participated in the panel discussion.

***Dr. Shaheen Akhtar** a Professor at National Defense University, Islamabad, She is PhD degree in International Relations from Quaid-i-azam University having extensive Research experience at her credit.*

***Dr. Asma Shakir Khwaja** is an Associate Professor at National Defense University, Islamabad. She has a distinguished career in academia with more than a decade long teaching, research and administrative experience. She received her Doctorate in South Asian Studies from the Institute of South Asian Studies, Germany.*

***Dr. Muhammad Mujeeb Afzal**: has extensively worked in Hindutva Politics of India. He has written a book on BJP and the Indian Muslims. He is a frequent participant on various national and international conferences on India. Currently he is teaching at School of Politics and International Relations, Quaid-i-azam, University Islamabad.*

The seminar was attended by students, scholars and think tank representatives besides Pakistani Ambassadors.

Dr. Shaheen Akhtar

Keeping into consideration the trend of populist democracies round the globe, Dr. Shaheen Akhtar particularly discussed the shift from secular nationalism to Hindu nationalism. She

maintained that BJP has always been active with illiberal ethos, values and conception of nationhood. Many BJP leaders drive their aspirations from RSS and talk about the adoption of muscular polity towards Indian Muslims as well as Pakistan for last 70 years in different forms from BJS to BJP.

Dr. Akhtar seemed concerned about the consequences that India has to really face because of this illiberal agenda running through BJP. There have been racist narratives running in the Indian nationalism. In this regard, Dr. Akhtar has discussed two versions of Hindutva at the moment; Soft Hindutva and Hard Hindutva. She symbolized Soft Hindutva by the movement lead by Sushma Swaraj Jaitley and L. K. Advani who were taking lead into Ram Janmabhoomi movement. She explained the hard Hindutva by quoting the example of Ram Temple, abrogation of Article 370 or uniform civil code.

Dr. Akhtar added that the abrogation of Article 370 and 35A opened the doors for Hinduization of Kashmir state while destroying the identity of Kashmiri Muslims. It certainly raises the questions that; What would happen now instead either a BJP government from Jammu will control the valley totally dismantling political space or it will be like integrating Jammu into the mainland which is trend right now or the government is trying to bring all non- Muslims to Kashmir. Whatever the scenario, it is really alarming.

She also highlighted the Citizenship Amendment Bill as genocide against the Muslims of northeastern India in Assam and Kashmir and these are they only Muslim States that ensure secularism in India. She added Ram temple in Ayodhyaon demonstrated the victory of Hindutva forces and vision. In a nutshell, the trend is consolidating the structures, renaming the monuments, social sanskritization and bringing the ideology of Hindutva as an instrument by BJP to ensure control over Indian polity.

Dr. Asma Shakir Khawaja

Dr. Asma highlighted academic perspective and presented some striving background and dilemma associated with Hindutva ideology. She mentioned that British gave that sense of pride when they termed everyone living in subcontinent as Hindu. She added majority of south Asians were migrants and not natives. She explained Hindu thought process or Hinduism as a rule of governance adding that the Hindu nationalism under the concept of 'us vs. them'. 'Us' were the

invaders whereas 'them' were all others that were thought to be inferior. The claim of Hindutva nationalism stands false because if South Asians belong to anyone that would be native-Dravadians.

She disagreed that BJP highlighted Hindu nationalism and prior to this India was a secular state. India was never been a secular state. She defended her claim with justified arguments. If secularism would be existing then Quaid-i-azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah would never have left Congress and joined Muslim League; Sir Syed Ahmad Khan would never had written the Risala Asbab-e- Baghawate Hind and Hindus would never been disengaged after war of independence 1857 while supporting British.

She opined that it is significant to reframe the idea of jumping and drowning into the false perceptions about different political parties. Prior to BJP, Kashmir was occupied by the Nehru led Congress. Sikh massacre 1954 and 1983 were also done by the Congress leadership. In Gujrat Massacre, Modi was the Chief Minister but Congress had the government in the center and Indira Doctrine that India would invade any country if they would feel threats are some examples to validate the claim.

According to Dr. Khawaja, Modi is less diplomatic than congress leadership. His political dividend based on hatred against Pakistan and Hindutva offered him victory in the elections. He has abrogated Article 370 and passed Citizenship Amendment Act (2019) without the consent of concerned affectees in Indian constitution which made Indian constitution discriminatory.

Dr. Khawaja further talked about the concept of kurukshetra that is the holy war against others-the imported religions of which RSS is training their youth for last 90 years. She added, for Pakistan, Hindutva ideology is really important to understand. Why? Because the so called largest democracy is drifting into authoritarianism and just imagine if a state as big as India and as aggressive as India turns into authoritarian regime what would be the regional consequences? Modi's radicalism resulted in the social polarization on the basis of religion and caste.

Dr. Khawaja concluded that Modi's Hindutva is a symbol of patriarchy, a symbol of maximization of power and disrespect for other independent countries of the region. Kashmir is a feather in Modi's crown, she added. He stubbornly claims that he believes in the expansion of

India on Hindutva doctrine. So, Hindutva inculcates permanent security dilemma in the regional states.

Dr. Muhammad Mujeeb Afzal

According to Dr. Mujeeb all nationalism are based on myths. It is not that they are true or needed to be proved. Simply if the followers accept them, believe them and follow them those nationalism are true and start affecting human behavior especially their in- group behavior. He argued that there is not one myth of nationalism but competing myths of nationalism in India like anti- colonial nationalism, communal nationalism and nationalism based on region, localities caste and creed. They all are competing to define and re- defines India to build its cognitive discourse. All these categories were constructed during the period of Raj.India evolved over the period of centuries to centuries.

Dr. Mujeeb further added that Secularism is just rhetoric by a group of elite who are ruling mostly at the center whereas the whole Indian society is fragmented into blocs at casting level based on communities and ethnicities. This is the reason why Congress party has effectively exploited the Hindu symbols like pro- Hindi concept, cow politics and refusing number of Muslim demands. The situation completely negates the concept of inter faith harmony. According to him the biggest challenge India is facing currently is the incorporation of modernity and equalitarianism with Hindutva ideology.

Question/ Answer Session:

The discussion revolved around the impacts of Hindutva Doctrine on the important segments of the society. Answering to the questions like: “contradiction and intra contradiction in Hindutva doctrine primarily related to internal contradiction within Hindu religion” and “Future of proclaimed Democracy and secularism in India” – the speakers jointly held that discriminatory approach on the part of ruling elites in India is not a new tradition. Principally, every cast is important, every religion is respectable, every culture has norms and multiculturalism is a beauty of the society. And state is responsible to safeguard the religious and cultural beliefs and trends of all the segments of the society. It is the constitutional obligation of any state with such fabric of the society to maintained harmony amongst all but the case is brutally reverse and discriminatory.

Answering to the second question speakers highlighted and forewarned 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 congress are two sides of the same coin when it comes to protect the Hindu identity of India. 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. India's persistence in imposition of Hindutva Doctrine at any cost would certainly attract the global criticism and support from the international community counterparts from around the globe. It's the play with the heat of which India should foresee and abstained.

Conclusion:

Mr. Aarish U. Khan, Research Analyst at IRS gave the concluding remarks. By giving different examples of election victory of BJP he discussed Dr. Akhter concept of Hindutva that India has crossed a fine line of Soft-Hindutva and heading towards more rigid and introvert brand of Hinduism which is detrimental to its constitutional democracy. The BJP has actually provoked the sentiments of Sikhs, Muslims and other minorities based in India.