



Rise of Hindutva in India and Its Implication on Indian Democratic Project

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Its Implication on Indian Democratic Project**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| Table of Contents | i |
| Chapter | |
| 1. Introduction | 1 |
| 2. History of Hindu Ultra-Nationalism in the Sub-Continent | 4 |
| 3. Rise of “Hindutva” as a Political Power in India | 25 |
| 4. The Decline in Democratic Values in India | 41 |
| 5. Conclusion | 61 |
| Bibliography | 70 |

RISE OF HINDUTVA IN INDIA AND ITS IMPLICATION ON THE INDIAN DEMOCRATIC PROJECT

INTRODUCTION

In the present world order, democracy has a significant currency. Democratic countries are viewed as trustworthy and creditable and enjoy better diplomatic and economic relations with other democratic countries. India, as the most populated country has been branded as the world's largest democracy and millions exercise the right to vote during Indian general elections. The origin of the democratic norms in India can be traced to the British colonial rule which gave institutions and a framework for a so-called secular polity. It effectively maintained the integrity of the country despite having a religious, ethnic, and linguistically diverse populace. After independence, the trajectory of Indian polity towards an egalitarian and modern society was evident through its secular constitution and vibrant civil society regardless of many economic, social, and political challenges.

Of late, the growth of ultra-nationalism in India is changing the outlook of the country and challenging its democratic credentials. Accentuating religious fault lines, the right-wing ultra-nationalists in India have seized the social and political space, dragging the country towards an ethnic and electoral democracy only. With the rise of Hindutva - a right-wing extremist philosophy, religious minorities are particularly facing the brunt of the Hindu nationalistic onslaught. Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the incumbent political party is leading the charge to shape the country in reflection of Hindutva ideals which threaten the democratic progression of the country. Therefore, it is pertinent to research and analyse *the rise of Hindutva in India and its implications on the Indian democratic project*.

With Hindutva emphasizing the primacy of Hindu culture and religion in India, other religious minorities, and secular voices, are increasingly being marginalized and excluded from mainstream society. Evidence points towards the restriction of freedom of expression to limit criticism of Hinduism and its political leaders and the persecution of writers, journalists, and activists by state and non-state actors. Violence and vigilantism against religious minorities particularly Muslims have increased manifold with a rise in hate crimes, mob lynchings and communal violence. The systematic indoctrination of its people with Hindutva ideals has limited space for dissent and criticism and the state has repeatedly used police force, sedition laws, and other means to quash dissenting voices. The state institutions like the judiciary and the police have been made toothless to support the BJP-led transformation of India into a Hindu-only state. With the elaborate use of legislation, social movements, and indoctrination of the populace *the rise of ultra-nationalism in India is negatively affecting the democratic project and taking India towards illiberalism*.

The present form of Hindutva can be traced to the early twentieth century when the colonial British became willing to extend limited political powers to native Indians. Hindu nationalists, mostly upper-caste Hindus, who had been under British rule for more than a century and Mughal rule before organised themselves to protect Hindu interests. They projected Hindus as a dying race, soon to be overcome by other religions and cultures despite having numerical superiority in India. The British colonist used this narrative to further the "divide and rule" policy, fragmenting the society on religious lines. As soon as the British left, these ultra-right-

wing organizations found more space as the nascent state was preoccupied with addressing its teething issues. A political wing of these organizations, BJP was created to gather political capital and actualize their agenda. While inciting hate and violence against other communities and playing on the religious sentiments, BJP rose to power and soon became indomitable in Indian politics, without any worthwhile challenger. While in power, BJP enacted laws and took actions which were contrary to democratic norms and values. Notable amongst these are the Citizenship Amendment Act, Abrogation of Articles 370 and 35(A), construction of the Ram Temple over a 16th-century mosque, invoking emergency laws, restricting freedom of expression and manipulation of Indian state machinery including the judiciary.

These changes are not only altering the democratic makeup of the country but also threatening regional peace and stability. The international community's interest in India as an economic power and a bulwark against China in the US-China competition provides BJP leadership with ample leverage to affect their ideological agenda locally. These seminal changes in India cannot be brushed aside and it calls for deliberate research to inquire about its historic linkage, current makeup and likely future trajectory to conclude that prevalent Hindutva philosophy is negatively affecting the democratic project of India.

CHAPTER 1

HISTORY OF HINDU ULTRA-NATIONALISM IN THE SUB-CONTINENT

Over the last few centuries, the history of the Subcontinent has remained dynamic and tumultuous. It has witnessed several social and religious changes that have shaped the current edifice of the country. These changes have influenced the social fabric of society, and some argue that India is a melting pot of religious ideas and beliefs. India has always remained a place of several nations, religions, and cultures that have managed to live together for centuries. Some have managed to assimilate with the majority religion and culture, but few have maintained their distinct identity despite close interaction. In the last millennium, the predominant religion of the majority in the Indian Subcontinent has remained Hinduism with a history dating back to 1500 BCE. Hindu texts have been found as early as 1200 BCE. Over the centuries, Hinduism absorbed other regional religions like Buddhism and Jainism, but Abrahamic religions remained apart.

One of the important tenants of Hinduism has been the caste system, manifested in a social hierarchy based on the belief that an individual is born in different social classes or castes, with birthright privileges, responsibilities, and limitations. The four major castes in the Hindu religion are:

- **Brahmins:** This caste includes priests and clerics, who are traditionally responsible to maintain religious authority, thus being at the top of the social hierarchy.
- **Kshatriyas:** It is the caste of warriors and military kings, who have military and political power and work with the guidance of Brahmins.
- **Vaishyas:** These are the businessmen, merchants, traders, and money lenders, who engage in commerce.
- **Shudras:** This caste includes labourers and servants, who traditionally perform manual and menial tasks.
- Outside of these four main castes are the Dalits, often referred to as "untouchables" who are considered to be the outcaste – born out of their crimes committed in their previous lives and are subject to significant discrimination and social exclusion¹.

It can be argued that most religions in their fundamentals may struggle to pass the test of inclusivity and diversity within themselves. However, the Brahminical values and the Hindu traditional social order have established a particular place for every individual. Deendayal Upadhyaya, in his book *Integral Humanism*, argues that “society is ‘self-born’” and forms an “organic unity” inherited from a caste-based antiquarian arrangement that should not be disturbed: “In our concept of four castes, they are thought of as an analogous to the different limbs of Virat-Purusha.² ... These limbs are not only complementary to one another but even

¹ Zwart, Frank de. “*The Logic of Affirmative Action: Caste, Class and Quotas in India.*” *Acta Sociologica* 43, no. 3 (2000): 235–49. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4201209>.

² The primeval man whose sacrifice, according to the Rig Veda, gave birth to society in the form of the varna vyavastha.

further, there is individuality, unity. There is a complete identity of interest, identity of belonging.”³ This social harmony is necessarily hierarchical, as evident from the metaphor of the body inherent in the Virat-Purusha (where the Brahmin comes from the mouth whereas the Shudra was born from the feet), but it should not be disturbed by outside forces—at least, not by the state, a traditionally weak institution for Upadhyaya.⁴ Therefore, the classification and categorization of human beings is a religious fact in Hinduism, creating a society where not everyone can be considered equal – a challenge to democratic ideals.

Islam was introduced in Sub-continent in the early 9th century. Through saints and scholars, it attempted to change the existing social order. When the Muslim Sufi saints who travelled across the lands preached Islam in the sub-continent, only the low-caste Hindus dejected by their social structure embraced Islam in mass. Therefore, initial Muslims in Sub-continent were mostly “dalits or untouchables” who were eager to change their social standing⁵. Despite converting to Islam, they continued to struggle to break the existing social order and continued to remain outcasts, being the same people with different beliefs. Hence, it became a facet of the social psychology that Muslims are old Dalits and thus warrant similar treatment. Later with the invasion of Muslim rulers, all classes of Western India socially and religiously transformed and converted to Islam shunning the established Hindu social construct.

Alternatively, in the 15th century, Sikhism emerged as another religion in the Punjab region assimilating with Islam and rejecting the Hindu caste system. Although it would be difficult to compare modern standards of democracy with any religion; it may be an added challenge for Hinduism due to ingrained exclusion in religious teachings. Therefore, a religious society, which is bound within the constraints of religious exclusion would struggle to assimilate the tenants of democracy like equality and freedom for all.

The Mughal Era

The Mughal rule (15th to 19th century) of the Sub-continent added another dimension to the social and religious order of the Sub-continent. They made a visible attempt to bring all castes and religions at par with one another to create a balanced society. The Mughal rulers were characterised by religious tolerance and inclusiveness. They often appointed people from different religions and ethnicities to high positions in the administration. Famous Hindu ministers like Raja Jai Singh, a Hindu by religion served under the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan; he made his name in history as an effective administrator and a wise counsel. During the reign of Jalaluddin Muhammad Akbar (1556-1605), who is widely regarded as one of the greatest Mughal emperors, several high-ranking Hindu officials were appointed to key positions in the imperial court. One of the most notable examples was Raja Todar Mal, who served as the finance minister of the Mughal Empire and was responsible for introducing a new system of revenue collection known as the "zabt" system. Akbar's policy of religious tolerance extended beyond just the appointment of Hindu officials. He also abolished the tax on non-Muslims, opened government positions to people of all religions, and established a new religion called Din-i-Elahi

³ D. Upadhyaya, *Integral Humanism* (New Delhi: Bharatiya Jana Sangh, 1965), 43.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 62

⁵ Soutik Biswas, “*Why are many Indian Muslims seen as untouchable?*”. BBC (10 May 2016): <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-36220329>

that combined concepts of Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism⁶. Despite severe backlash from conservative Muslims in his attempt to assimilate all religions, Akbar tried to create a society where everyone is treated equally. To display his intent of assimilation, he married a Hindu princess as well. Therefore, it can be concluded that the brief period of Muslim rule in the Subcontinent tried to bring together different religions and create a more equal society. The Mughal rulers were willing to sacrifice their values based on Islam and evolved to develop inclusivity and equality. However, their short stint and deliberate approach while walking on a tightrope to avoid offending religious conservatives at both ends did not assist in changing the social order quickly enough.

Role of Colonialism in Promoting the Religious and Caste Divide

The British East India Company took control of a major region of the Subcontinent in 1757 when they defeated Nawab of Bengal at the battle of Plassey⁷. After their occupation, their lack in numbers forced them to seek support from the local populace and create the British India Army. They influenced the native chieftains to provide manpower for the Army through treatise, security pacts, threats, or subterfuge. Hindu rulers who resented the seat of the Mughal emperor in Delhi were more eager to join with the British and therefore the initial native army was predominantly Hindu, thus enabling the British to maintain military power. With European weapons and native troops, the British became an insurmountable force in the Sub-continent. To cement their grip on power, the British followed a policy of "divide and rule," where they intentionally created and exacerbated divisions among the Indian population to maintain their control over power. British took over the rule of the Subcontinent from Muslim rulers, therefore, it was difficult for them to trust Muslims, hence Muslims were relegated to the fringes of society. Furthermore, the caste system prevalent in India naturally supported the colonial rule as it gave rights and exclusion to a specific group based on inherent superiority. Most of the Hindus in the society believed themselves not worthy of rule as they were born in a low caste whereas high caste Hindus were contented to support the foreigners against previous Muslim rulers. The ground was naturally set for a long colonial rein. The British confirmed their rule by promoting communalism, which involved dividing the Indian population along religious lines. They created separate castes for different occupations and assigned different levels of status and power to each caste⁸. This reinforced the existing caste hierarchy and prevented people from different castes from coming together to challenge British rule. In addition to promoting division, the British also used religion and caste to justify and legitimize their rule. They portrayed themselves as a civilizing force that was bringing order and stability to a chaotic and backward country. They argued that they were necessary to protect the Hindus from the Muslims and vice versa. When the political reforms were conducted, the British encouraged separate electorates for Muslims and Hindus, which further entrenched religious divisions and sowed the seeds for future conflict between the two communities.

⁶ Ain-e-Akbari, English tr. by Colonel H. S. Jarrett. The Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta. 1948, <https://web.archive.org/web/20180714022016/https://persian.packhum.org/persian/main?url=pf%3Ffile%3D00702050%26ct%3D0>

⁷ Campbell, John; Watts, William, "*Memoirs of the Revolution in Bengal, Anno Domini 1757*", World Digital Library (1760).

⁸ Gupta, Dipankar, "*Review of Communalism and Nationalism in Colonial India, by Gyanendra Pandey*". Economic and Political Weekly 28, no. 8/9 (1993): 339–41. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4399431>.

Some may argue that the British gave the Sub-continent the three basic tenants of democracy: a free press, an incipient parliamentary system, and the rule of law⁹. In further examination, it becomes evident that these developments were primarily to serve the British colonial interest rather than a genuine desire to improve the lives of the natives. For the free press, British newspapers began printing in India in mid eighteenth century. The first four papers started in the Company capital of Calcutta, “The Calcutta Gazette” in 1784, “The Bengal Journal” and “The Oriental Magazine of Calcutta” in 1785, and “The Calcutta Chronicle” in 1786¹⁰. These newspapers served a small European community and provided useful, if not always accurate, information about the arrivals and departures of ships and developments in the governance of the colony¹¹. These papers helped establish newspaper culture in British India, and although none of these original papers survived, the press as a dissemination means of information stayed in Subcontinent. When natives started using the press to inform the local audience, Lord Wellesley (Governor General of India), introduced the Censorship of the Press Act, 1799, which brought all newspapers in India under the scrutiny of the Government of India prior to publication. This Act was later extended in 1807 to cover all kinds of publications - newspapers, magazines, books, and pamphlets. Lord Lytton brought in a Vernacular Press Act in 1878 to regulate the Indian language papers. As a result, publications deemed obstreperous were closed using these laws. The editors of Indian World, Bengal Gazette and Calcutta Journal were even arrested and jailed in England for their criticism of Company officials and policies¹². Remnants of such colonial laws are still visible in the constitutions of the free countries as they provided government authority to manage media. Therefore, the British gave the means to disseminate information which were already becoming common across the globe; however, when they felt threatened by it they controlled information through laws and the use of government machinery.

The British parliamentary system was the model Subcontinent was made to emulate despite vast differences between Britain where an MP was elected by few thousand to India where millions were supposed to vote for a parliamentarian. In the Subcontinent, political leaders and parties had to resort to pageantry to offer a spectacle to the populace to garner votes. Even in the present times, direct interaction, or connection of elected leaders with the common man is difficult to manage due to the large number of the electorate. The system forces the politicians to maintain a display to awe the voters and put a continuous effort to retain power rather than govern. Lately, with India transitioning to a single-party state with an authoritarian leader, the use of rhetoric and political pageantry is becoming more evident (more on it in Chapter 3).

British pride themselves on giving the “rule of law” to uncivilized barbarians in India. Kipling would boast eloquent on the noble duty to bring law to those without it.¹³ It is astounding to see that the British laid down the law and then derived legitimacy from it. Laws before the colonial enterprise were crafted after a painstaking consensus of various cultures and civilizations which were rubbed off by Lord Macaulay with the avowed purpose of 'legislating

⁹ Taroor, Shahi, “*The Inglorious Empire*”, Scribble Publisher, 2017, page 75.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, page 76

¹¹ *Ibid.*, page 77

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Rudyard Kipling, “Poem White Man’s Burden”, The Times London, (4 Feb 1899), New York Sun (5 Feb 1899).

for a conquered race, to whom the blessings of our constitution cannot as yet be safely extended¹⁴. The penal code enacted in 1861 is still largely enforced by the independent states as it provides the ruling class with a system to coerce the locals; grudgingly by the populace as a colonial legacy but kept by the ruling elite as it empowers them.

The British only started conducting political reforms when its colonial power was receding and they wanted to retain control through puppet authorities, loyal to the colonial overlords and maintain some semblance of legitimacy. During the exercise of allowing Indians to organize politically, apart from political parties, various cliques were also able to form. Amongst them were the conservative Hindus whose ideologies stemmed from orthodox Hindu scriptures.

Hindu Ultra-Nationalist Movement

“Hindutva” a political ideology, initially articulated by VD Savarkar, co-creator of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) is a specimen of right-wing extremism and fascism in the classical sense¹⁵ and adheres to a concept of homogenous majority and cultural hegemony.¹⁶ VD Savarkar was a British-educated lawyer who remained the leader of Hindu Mahasabha (officially Akhil Bharat Hindū Mahāsabhā, 'All-India Hindu Grand Assembly'), a right-wing majoritarian political party that professed the idea of “Hindu-ness”. Since his childhood, he was prejudiced towards other religions in India. In his own writing, he narrates that at the age of twelve, he was the prime instigator to take his fellow students to attack his local village mosque, stating “We vandalized the mosque to our heart's content”, and on encountering Muslim boys, he and his pals wielded knives to chase them away.¹⁷ In contrast to Mahatma Gandhi’s freedom struggle of non-violence and taking along all the minorities of India, Savarkar was inclined towards violence and creating a Hindu-only state. He wrote the ideological epigraph “Essentials of Hindutva” in 1923 with the theme of “qualities of being a Hindu” and an aspiration to create a “Hindu Rashtra” (Hindu State) stretching across the complete subcontinent.

"We Hindus are bound together not only by the tie of the love we bear to a common fatherland and by the common blood that courses through our veins and keeps our hearts throbbing and our affections warm, but also by the tie of the common homage we pay to our great civilization - our Hindu culture"¹⁸

This ideological construction of Savarkar’s Hindutva is based primarily on an ethnic myth defining the Hindus—in the wake of the Arya Samaj—as descendants of the first Aryans to have inhabited the subcontinent.¹⁹ Savarkar even claimed that Hindus “have in their veins the blood of the mighty race incorporated with and descended from the Vedic fathers.”²⁰ This ethnic

¹⁴ Taroor, Shahi, *The Inglorious Empire*, Scribble Publisher, (2017), page 75.

¹⁵ Leidig, Eviane, "Hindutva as a variant of right-wing extremism". *Patterns of Prejudice*, 2020, 54 (3)

¹⁶ Patnaik, Prabhat, "The Fascism of Our Times", (JSTOR, 1993), 69–77.

¹⁷ Ahuja, Rajesh. "Article, The Economist "The Man Who Thought Gandhi a Sissy; Savarkar, Modi's Mentor." 413, No. 8918 (2014): 56." *Hindustan Times*, December 24, 2010.

¹⁸ Savarkar, “*Essentials of Hindutva*” retitled “*Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu*”, Fifth Edition, 1969, p91, p108.

¹⁹ For further detail, see Christophe Jaffrelot, “The Idea of the Hindu Race in the Writings of Hindu Nationalist Ideologues in the 1920s and 1930s: A Concept between Two Cultures,” in *The Concept of Race in South Asia*, ed. P. Robb (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 327–54.

²⁰ V. D. Savarkar, *Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu?* (Mumbai: Asia Publishing House, 1962), 85.

nationalism is territorial as well, given that Vedic India is indissociable from the sacred land where the holy rivers flow (starting with the Ganges) and on which only the traditional rituals are effective.²¹

In 1925, Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, a member of Mahasabha gather like-minded people within the organization and created a paramilitary force Rashtriya Sawak Sang (RSS, National Volunteer Organisation) in Nagpur, modelled some say on the British Army. The organization was based on the ideological epigraph provided by VD Savarkar, and he remained the biggest influence on the outfit. RSS soon became the largest non-governmental group of like-minded people. High-caste Hindus joined the organization in mass. The RSS member wore khaki uniforms and could gather for dawn callisthenics.²² The organization struck the right chord within high-caste Hindus as they perceived themselves as the rightful ruling class of India and principal sufferers from British occupation and earlier Mughal rule. The organization recruited people from all age groups and indoctrinated that with discipline and passion for Hindu nationalism.

Apart from Savarkar, another Hindu nationalist has a strong and influential impact on how RSS functioned. Madhav Sadashivrao Golwalkar (19 February 1906 – 5 June 1973), popularly known as Guruji was the second Sarsanghchalak ("chief") of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)²³. He gave the concept of "Hindu Rashtra" or pure Hindu state in the Subcontinent which later evolved into the concept of "Akhand Bharat", professing India to be racially pure extending from Afghanistan to Myanmar.^{24 25} When he joined RSS, he was made in-charge of the "All-India Officer Training Camp" due to his organizational abilities. He translated Savarkar's book in Marathi language which was widely spoken in Southern India. During the translation of Savarkar's book, Golwalkar added pro-Nazi ideas.²⁶ Jyotirmaya Sharma, in his book *Terrifying Vision: M.S. Golwalkar, The RSS and India*, mentions that M.S. Golwalkar, in his mental universe defined two enemies to the Hindutva ideology: politics and the Muslims²⁷. M.S. Golwalkar referred to Christians and Muslims as "internal threats" and praised Nazi Germany as an example of "race pride" from which India could learn.²⁸ RSS's goal is to redefine India according to its Hindu majority faith, bring Hindu scripture into Indian law and

²¹ Christophe Jaffrelot, "From Holy Sites to Web Sites: Hindu Nationalism, from Sacred Territory to Diasporic Ethnicity," in *Religions, Nations, and Transnationalism in Multiple Modernities*, ed. Patrick Michel, Adam Possamai, and Bryan Turner (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2017), 153–74. Regarding the "sacred geography of India," see Diana L. Eck, *India: A Sacred Geography* (New York: Three Rivers, 2012).

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Jaffrelot, Christophe, "*The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics*", (1996), C. Hurst & Co. Publishers.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Rajeswar, Yashasvini, Amore, Roy C, *Coming Home (Ghar Wapsi) and Going Away: Politics and the Mass Conversion Controversy in India*.

²⁶ Jha, Devendra K "Guruji's Lie the RSS and MS Golwalkar's undeniable links to Nazism". *The Caravan*. (31 July 2021).

²⁷ Kulkarni, Sudheendra. Book Review on "*Terrifying Vision: M.S. Golwalkar, the RSS and India*". (April 2007). <http://www.esamskriti.com/essay-chapters/Terrifyingvision-M-S-Golwalkar,-the-RSS-ad-India--1.aspx>.

²⁸ Amjad Javed, "*The Great Transformation: How is RSS transforming India into a fascist regime?*" 2020, <https://www.globalvillagespace.com/how-is-rss-transforming-india-into-a-fascist-regime/>

strip Indian Muslims and other minorities of equal rights, or even expel them.²⁹ According to Ramachandra Guha's book *Makers of Modern India*, Golwalkar saw Muslims, Christians and communists as the biggest threats to the creation of a Hindu Rashtra. Golwalkar has been criticized for similarities in ideas with those of the Nazis.³⁰ For instance, Golwalkar's book *We, or Our Nationhood Defined*, published in 1939, mentions:

"To keep up the purity of the nation and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of Semitic races – the Jews. National pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has also shown how well-nigh impossible it is for races and cultures, having differences going to the root, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by."³¹

The RSS maintained its anti-Muslim stance from 1925 till the partition of British India and played its role in anti-Muslim riots in the 1930s and during the partition days³². This understanding and perception by the RSS leadership defined the role and nature of the RSS. The strong linkages to Hindutva ideology not only aroused nationalistic fervour to undo the partition of British India but also took a communal stance, targeting Muslims of British India³³. From 1925-1947, the RSS remained an apparently non-political entity which can be attributed to the conception of the RSS's role by its leaders like M.S. Golwalkar, who viewed politics as the enemy which threatened the very existence of the RSS³⁴. During this time, British colonists were attempting to socially overhaul the society, "civilizing the unwashed barbarians" and increasing the role of Indians in local legislation under the Government of India Act 1919.³⁵ Nevertheless, this opportunity was utilized by RSS to engage and influence political leaders through a network of Swayamsevak (volunteer) and affiliated organizations. These groups of volunteers started to work at the grassroots level to promote Hinduness. They organized various religious festivals, religious processions, and community services for Hindus and used such events to propagate their ideology. They were fanatically loyal to their organization and ideologues. When in 1930, Gandhi launched Salt Satyagraha, an act of civil disobedience against the colonial British, RSS members did not participate in the movement as an organization. Some argue that the prime reason for RSS's non-participation in political movements of the Indian Congress under Gandhi was non-violent and RSS considered them unworthy of achieving any effects due to a lack of requisite aggressiveness. Similarly, RSS did not form part of the civil resistance movements against the British in 1938 as well³⁶. The RSS displayed its orientation as a militant force to

²⁹ Luran Frayyer, Furkan Iltaf, "*The Powerful Group Shaping the Rise of Hindu Nationalism in India*", <https://www.npr.org/2019/05/03/706808616/the-powerful-group-shaping-the-rise-of-hindu-nationalism-in-india>,

³⁰ Guha, Ramachandra, "*Makers of Modern India. India*", (2013) Penguin Books.

³¹ Golwalkar, M. S. "*We, or Our Nationhood Defined*", (1939), Nagpur: Bharat Publications. pp. 87–88.

³² Levy, Guenter "*Militant Hindu Nationalism: The Early Phase*" (research project, University of Massachusetts, 1967), <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/654932.pdf>

³³ Levy, Guenter "*Militant Hindu Nationalism: The Early Phase*" (research project, University of Massachusetts, 1967), <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/654932.pdf>

³⁴ Kulkarni, Sudheendra. Book Review on "*Terrifying Vision: M.S. Golwalkar, the RSS and India*". April 2007, <http://www.esamskriti.com/essay-chapters/Terrifyingvision~M-S-Golwalkar,-the-RSS-ad-India--1.aspx>.

³⁵ East India (Constitutional Reforms: Draft Rules Under the Government of India Act, 1919, as Approved by the Joint Select Committee): Draft Electoral Rules for the Indian Legislature 1920.

³⁶ Editor. "RSS and Freedom Struggle: Salt and Forest Satyagraha <https://www.News Bharati.Com/Encyc/2022/8/7/RSS-and-Freedom-Struggle-Salt-and-Forest-Satyagraha.Html>."

achieve an extreme path and peddled a narrative of the “Hindu right” for the Subcontinent under British Colonial rule. Despite not having a direct political role, RSS provided opposition to established political parties like the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League during their struggle for independence³⁷.

Some argue that Hindu Nationalism was a reaction to the Pan-Islamic movement in India after the First World War. In support of the Ottoman Empire which was considered as the last bastion of Islamic political enterprise, Muslims in India mobilized in 1919 to defend the Caliphate at Constantinople, which was threatened to be dismantled by the victors of World War I, primarily the British. A few Muslim religious theologians declared British India as “Dar-ul-Harb” (House of War) and advised Muslims to migrate away from India to land with a Muslim ruler. Muslim League, the political party of Muslims of the Sub-continent also protested and launched a civil disobedience movement against the British. Witnessing the united stand of Muslims of the Sub-continent, Hindu intelligentsia, who were in a constant sense of inferiority as they amounted to seventy per cent of the population but were not organized felt the need to form an organization to protect Hindu interests³⁸. The sentiment of vulnerability was accentuated by the census results as well which pointed towards a decrease in the Hindu population from 74.3 per cent in 1881 to 68.2 per cent in 1931 prompting them to declare Hindu religion as a “dying race”.³⁹ These historic aspects can be attributed to the formation of Hindu nationalist organizations in India. It is also worth mentioning that the largest group usually dictates society’s direction and aspiration. For a group which enjoyed a considerable majority, feeling vulnerable and organizing to defend their rights against a minority is an extraordinary feat which can be attributed to the British “divide and rule” policy where every group feared the other and the British were the only guarantors of security.

Hindu Nationalism at the Time of Partition of the Sub-continent

The partition of the Subcontinent, which created two separate nations i.e., Pakistan and India, was a traumatic event for many Hindu nationalists. This event, along with the violence that ensued, reinforced the belief among some Hindus that they needed to assert their cultural and political identity forcefully. When Mahatma Gandhi advocated non-violence and the provision of a due share in resources to Pakistan at the time of partition, RSS vehemently rejected it. Therefore, an RSS member, Nathu Ram Godse killed Gandhi on the pretext of being too soft on Muslims and Pakistan⁴⁰.

After independence, RSS started to expand and set up specialized affiliates to enhance its presence in different segments of society. RSS established a student union Akhil Bharatiya

News Bharati, August 7, 2022. <https://www.news Bharati.com/Encyc/2022/8/7/RSS-and-Freedom-Struggle-Salt-and-Forest-Satyagraha.html>.

³⁷ Bose, Anuja. “*Hindutva and the Politicization of Religious Identity in India*”, Journal of Peace, Conflict and Development, Issue 13, (February 2009). www.peacestudiesjournal.org.uk_1

³⁸ Jaffrelot, Christophe and Cynthia Schoch. 2021. *Modi's India: Hindu Nationalism and the Rise of Ethnic Democracy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. doi:10.1515/9780691223094.

³⁹ Indus, s.v. “Census India 1931: Religion,” last modified July 27, 2016, 21:20, http://indpaedia.com/ind/index.php/Census_India_1931:_Religion.

⁴⁰ Jeevan Lal Kapur, *Report of Commission of Inquiry into Conspiracy to murder Mahatma Gandhi*, 1970, By India (Republic). *Commission of Inquiry into Conspiracy to murder Mahatma Gandhi*, Ministry of Home affairs.

Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP, Indian Student Association), and in 1955 a trade union, the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS, Indian Workers' Association). It further established Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram (VKA, Ashram for Tribal Welfare) in 1950 to restrict the working of Christian missionaries in the tribal areas of India which were perceived to conduct "denationalization" of indigenous people⁴¹. In 1980, a fragment of the student union Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP, Indian Student Association), organized to form another affiliate like Bajrang Dal as a youth movement to handle the security of RSS and provide "shock troops", to communal riots or protests. Myriad organizations have been created under the banner of "Sang Parivar", loyal to the ideology of Savarkar. Details of the current affiliations are attached in *Annexure A*.

RSS, the ideological mother of the incumbent BJP government in India, as an auxiliary of Sang Pariwar remained at the forefront and continued to exert its influence through violent means after independence, especially against those they consider a threat to a "Hindu Rashtra" (Hindu Country) i.e., Muslims and Christians. Their modus-operandi was to inflict mass punishment on minority communities through social unrest. These organisations have maintained an active part in starting a communal riot as "justifiable retaliatory acts by Hindus in self-defence"⁴². But virtually every single officially appointed judicial commission to probe into the cause of riots in different parts of the country has found the RSS and other majoritarian communal outfits guilty. Some excerpts of such reports are as follows:

- **Report of the Justice Jagmohan Reddy Commission of Inquiry Investigating the Ahmedabad riots of 1969:**

"There was not only a failure of intelligence and culpable failure to suppress the outbreak of violence but (also) deliberate attempts to suppress the truth from the Commission, especially the active participation in the riots of some RSS and Jana Sangh leaders."⁴³

- **Report of the Justice DP Madon Commission of Inquiry into the Communal Disturbances at Bhiwandi, Jalgaon and Mahad of 1970:**

".....In his report to his superiors, the SP, Thane district has stated, "I found that a section of Hindu elements, particularly the RSS and some PSP men, were bent upon creating mischief. Their idea in accompanying the procession was

⁴¹ Christophe Jaffrelot, "India: The Politics of (Re)conversion to Hinduism of Christian Aboriginals," in Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion, vol. 2, ed. Patrick Michel and Enzo Pace, (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2011), 197–215.

⁴² Brinda Karat. "The RSS Goal of Hindu Rashtra" Communist Party of India (December 2015): 2-3 Document (paperzz.com)

⁴³ Pingle Jagamohan Reddy; Nusserwanji K Vakil & Akbar S Sarela (1971), "Report: Inquiry into the communal disturbances at Ahmedabad and other places in Gujarat on and after 18th September 1969". Commission of Inquiry on Communal Disturbances at Ahmedabad and at Various Places in the State of Gujarat on and after 18 September 1969, Home Department, Government of Gujarat. p. 180.

not so much to pay respects to the Great Shivaji but to establish their right and, if possible, to provoke and humiliate Muslims⁴⁴.”

- **Report of the Commission of Inquiry, Tellicherry Disturbance, 1971, Justice Joseph Vithyathil:-**

"In Tellicherry the Hindus and Muslims were living as brothers for centuries. The 'Mopla riots' did not affect the cordial relationship that existed between the two communities in Tellicherry. It was only after the RSS and the Jana Sangh set up their units and began activities in Tellicherry that there came a change in the situation. Their anti-Muslim propaganda, its reaction to the Muslims who rallied round their communal organisation, the Muslim League, which championed their cause, and the communal tension that followed prepared the background for their disturbances."⁴⁵

- **Justice Venugopal Commission of Inquiry into the Kanyakumari riots of 1982 (prolonged confrontation between Hindus and Christians):**

“The RSS adopts a militant and aggressive attitude and sets itself up as the champion of what it considers to be the rights of Hindus against minorities. It has taken upon itself to teach the minorities their place and if they are not willing to learn their place to teach them a lesson. The RSS methodology for provoking communal violence is:

- Rousing communal feelings in the majority community by the propaganda that Christians are not loyal citizens of this country.
- Deepening the fear in the majority community by clever propaganda that the population of the minorities is increasing and that of the Hindus is decreasing.
- Infiltrating into the administration and inducing the members of the civil and police services by adopting and developing communal attitudes.
- Training young people of the majority community in the use of weapons like daggers, swords, and spears.

⁴⁴ D.P. Madon, “*Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the communal disturbances at Bhiwandi, Jalgaon and Mahad in May*”, High Court, 1970.

⁴⁵ Justice Joseph Vithyathil, “*Report of the Commission of Inquiry, Tellicherry Disturbance*”, Tellicherry Government, 1971.

- Spreading rumours to widen the communal cleavage and deepen communal feelings by giving a communal colour to any trivial incident.”⁴⁶
- **Liberhan Commission.** The Ayodhya dispute is a long-standing legal and political conflict over a site in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, where a mosque was built in the 16th century on top of what is believed by some Hindus to be the birthplace of the Hindu god Ram. The dispute has been a major flashpoint for Hindu-Muslim tensions in India and has been used by some Hindu nationalist groups to mobilize support for their cause. In 1922, in a most glaring incident of hatred against Muslims, Babri Mosque in Ayodhya was destroyed by RSS-Bajrang Dal workers. Later federal government formed a commission to inquire about the incident. The commission led by Justice M.S. Liberhan submitted its report 16 years later in 2009, declaring that the demolition was “neither spontaneous nor unplanned” as claimed by the Sangh Parivar. Various BJP leaders like LK Advani, Rajnath Singh, Kalyan Singh etc. were found guilty of the conspiracy by the Commission. These individuals later were federal ministers of the BJP governments. However, in all these years not a single political leader responsible for the crime of the demolition of the masjid, has been punished.

There are numerous other terrorist acts perpetrated by members, or alleged members, of Hindu nationalist organisations like Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) or Abhinav Bharat which points out their ideology of hate and prejudice against other minorities in India. Notable among these are:

- **Killing of Graham Staines - 1999.** In January 1999, a Christian missionary and his two sons were burned to death in January 1999 by a gang of Bajrang Dal activities. The missionary Graham Staines was killed when he was preaching Christianity to the Hindu community. In 2003, a Bajrang Dal activist, Dara Singh, was convicted of leading the gang that murdered Graham Staines and his sons and was sentenced to life in prison.⁴⁷
- **Gujarat Riots - 2002.** In 2002, when current Prime Minister Narendra Modi was the chief minister of Gujrat, communal riots took place, where the majority of victims were Muslim.⁴⁸ During these events, thousands of Muslim men, women and children were killed, their shops burnt, and mosques destroyed. These events have been attributed largely to "foot soldiers" of the Hindutva movement.
- **Samjhauta Express Bombings - 2007.** On 18 February 2007, twin blasts shook two coaches of the Samjhauta Express in which Sixty-eight people were killed in the

⁴⁶ Sabrang “*Communalism Combat*”, August 2004, Anniversary Issue (11th), Year 11, No.100, Cover Story 12.

⁴⁷ Report of the Justice D.P. Wadhwa Commission of Inquiry: Judicial Commission or Injudicious Cover Up? 1999.

⁴⁸ The Kashmir Monitor. “The Communalists and Kishtwar.” - The Kashmir Monitor,” n.d. <https://www.thekashmirmonitor.net/?s=The+Communalists+and+Kishtwar.%22+>

ensuing fire and dozens were injured. The attacks have been allegedly linked to Abhinav Bharat, a Hindu fundamentalist group. In November 2008, it was reported that the attacks were linked to Prasad Shrikant Purohit, an Indian army officer and member of Abhinav Bharat. In an elaborate scheme Purohit as part of the intelligence agency developed sources within extremist organizations and arrange for the financier and executers of the attack. On 8 January 2011, Swami Aseemanand, a worker of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), confessed that he was involved in the bombing of Samjhauta express.⁴⁹

- **Ajmer Dargah Attack – 2007.** On 11 October 2007, outside the Dargah (shrine) of the most renowned Sufi saint of Sub-continent, Moinuddin Chishti in Ajmer, Rajasthan, a blast occurred which was carried out by the RSS.⁵⁰ On 22 October 2010, five accused were arrested out of which four belonged to the RSS. Swami Aseemanand, in his confession, implicated the then General Secretary Mohan Bhagwat for ordering the terrorist strike.⁵¹
- **Malegaon Blasts – 2008.** On 29 September 2008, three bombs exploded in the States of Gujarat and Maharashtra killing 8 persons and injuring 80. During the investigation in Maharashtra, a Hindu group was alleged to have been involved in the blasts. Three of the arrested persons were identified as Sadhvi Pragya Singh Thakur, Shiv Narayan Gopal Singh Kalsanghra and Shyam Bhawarlal Sahu.⁵² On 28 October, the Shiv Sena, came out in support of the accused saying that the arrests were merely political in nature. An Army officer Prasad Shrikant Purohit was also accused of being involved in the blast.⁵³ His counsel alleged that he was being falsely framed for political reasons because he has intelligence data of a sensitive nature pertaining to the operations of Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI).
- **Mecca Masjid Bombing – 2007.** The Mecca Masjid bombing occurred on 18 May 2007 inside the Mecca Masjid, a mosque in Hyderabad. Fourteen people were reported dead in the immediate aftermath. The National Investigation Agency, Central Bureau of Investigation and Anti-Terrorist Squad (India) questioned former members of the RSS.⁵⁴ On 19 November 2010, the Central Bureau of Investigation produced Swami Aseeman and before the court in connection with the

⁴⁹ Jazeera, Al. "Samjhauta Express Blast Case: Court Acquits Four Accused." News | Al Jazeera, March 20, 2019. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/3/20/samjhauta-express-blast-case-court-acquits-four-accused>.

⁵⁰ Express Web Desk. "What Is the Ajmer Dargah Blast Case?" The Indian Express, March 24, 2017. <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/what-is-the-ajmer-dargah-blast-case-4580300/>.

⁵¹ Online, Ie. "Aseemanand Links Bhagwat to Terror Attacks: Report." The Indian Express, February 6, 2014. <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/aseemanand-links-bhagwat-to-terror-attacks-report/>.

⁵² Correspondent, Ht. "Arrests of 'Hindu Terrorists' Embarrasses BJP." Hindustan Times, October 28, 2008. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/delhi/arrests-of-hindu-terrorists-embarrasses-bjp/story-4RGtmNZMcqxyDl5K6snTZK.html>.

⁵³ Agencies. "Malegaon Blast: ATS Says Purohit Main Conspirator." The Indian Express, January 20, 2009. <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/malegaon-blast-ats-says-purohit-main-conspirator/>.

⁵⁴ Ahuja, Rajesh. "Mosque Blast: RSS Man Grilled." Hindustan Times, December 23, 2010. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/delhi/mosque-blast-rss-man-grilled/story-chh7CdfqPw1dghYeF9a8NM.html>.

Blast. But later he has retracted the confession citing the mental and physical pressure to provide that confession.⁵⁵

In India, social and political environment has evolved overtime into a complex mosaic due to unique history and influence of religion. But with time it has become evident that the social fabric has increasingly become hostile towards minorities. Ultra-nationalism has seeped into the national psyche and right-wing political parties are reaping the dividends of this change. In this chapter, a background has been provided to analyse various facets of history and how ultra-nationalism found traction in Indian society. It seeks to explain the challenges due to the colonial experience of in the Sub-continent and the grievance of high-caste Hindus in India who believe themselves to be the aggrieved party due to centuries of British and Muslim rulers despite being the natives of the land. It further explains the evolution of RSS into a militant force and its actions over the years. In the next chapter, the rise of the BJP will be analysed which is the political wing of RSS and India's retreat from democracy to a single-party authoritarian state with limited liberties.

⁵⁵ Editor, "Swami Aseemanand takes back confession, says he was "coerced"", MSN News, 3 April 2011.

CHAPTER 2

RISE OF “HINDUTVA” AS A POLITICAL POWER IN INDIA

The rise of Hindutva in India can be traced in parallel to the popularity of BJP. It is fascinating to see how a political party can transform the national discourse. Hence, a factual and historic appraisal of BJP is warranted in this study to analyse the root cause of ultra-nationalist behaviour of Indian leadership and predict the future course of Indian democracy. These historic facts are provided with minimum commentary as they tell a tale on their own – how the environment shifts to the decisions and action of political leadership and alter the compete makeup of the society.

Origin of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)

After the departure of British colonialists from the Sub-continent, right-wing ultra-nationalist Hindu groups in India had to contend for their relevance. It was feared the Congress who was the most popular national political party and played a predominant role in independence movement would drive the national discourse towards secularism. Hence, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) leadership felt the need to exert influence in the political domain as well. Their decision to join politics was also driven by the circumstances around the killing of Mahatma Gandhi. Nathuram Godse, the killer of Gandhi was allegedly a member of RSS and remained under patronage of V.D. Savarkar.⁵⁶ During Godse’s trial, he echoed Savarkar’s reservations against Gandhi and his theme that Gandhi had a weak stance against Muslims and Pakistan.⁵⁷ In response, the Congress government decided to outlaw RSS and arrest a large number of RSS zealots. RSS leadership felt isolated in a political system which was largely controlled by the Congress with secular credentials. RSS had realized that the political power which provided authority over state institutions and influence over judiciary was paramount to counter the secular Congress.

Therefore, “Bharatiya Jana Sangh” (BJS) a political wing of RSS was founded by Syama Prasad Mukherjee in 1951⁵⁸. He was a member of the Congress party and remained as a Minister in the Cabinet of Jawahar Lal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India. He resigned from the cabinet to protest against Nehru’s signing a pact with Prime Minister of Pakistan, Liaquat Ali Khan allowing refugees to return and dispose off their properties and return abducted women and looted valuables during the riots following the independence. The pact also confirmed the protection of minority rights in both states and unrecognised forced conversions⁵⁹.

In response to Nehru’s “fraternization” with Pakistan and Muslims, Syama Prasad Mukherjee left the Congress and founded BJS with RSS support to protect India’s “Hindu

⁵⁶ His brother, Gopal Godse, claimed that Nathuram never left the RSS. Arvind Rajagopla interview with Gopal Godse, Delhi, November 10, 1990. <https://sabrangindia.in/article/gopal-godse-nathuram-did-not-leave-rss>

⁵⁷ Jaffrelot, Christophe, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics*. (C. Hurst & Co. Publishers, 1996), 31.

⁵⁸ Noorani, A. G, *Foreign Policy of the Janata Party Government*. (Asian Affairs. 5 (4), March–April 1978 216–228) doi:10.1080/00927678.1978.10554044. JSTOR 30171643.

⁵⁹ Ministry of External Affairs, India, *Agreement Between India and Pakistan regarding Security and Rights of Minorities (Nehru-Liaquat Agreement)*, (8 April 1950), <https://mea.gov.in/TreatyDetail.htm?1228>.

cultural identity” and counter the Congress party’s “policy of appeasement” of Muslim⁶⁰. The RSS provided the skeleton team of its leading volunteers and full-time workers to the Jana Sangh to get the new party off the ground. In 1952 in the first general elections, the nascent Jana Sangh could only win three Lok Sabha (National Assembly) seats and it maintained a minor presence in parliament until 1967. When Prime Minister of India, Indra Gandhi declared an emergency in 1975, anti-Congress parties got an opportunity to join and present a united front and formed the “Janata Party” (people’s party). In 1977, the BJS provided this Janata party with the largest number of MPs which was instrumental in securing a majority in the elections. The underlying logic for this strategy of integration clearly consisted in shaping the political system from within.⁶¹ The aim was to create an eco-system and a political culture that combined Hindu ultra-nationalism with the Hindu “traditionalism” of former members of the Congress under the leadership of Morarji Desai, who later become prime minister. BJS had realized that they would not be able to see the avenues of power without a coalition but did not agree to compromise on their hardcore Hindutva ideology.

With a coalition government, soon Jana Sangh displayed its intent and purpose openly by pitching three controversial bills. The first one aimed to ban cow slaughter, which was mostly consumed by minority Muslims and offered as a sacrifice to feed the poor during Eid-ul-Azha (Muslim celebratory festival). The second controversial bill curbed religious conversions, which they viewed are financially motivated by Christian missionaries. These bills were based on a “majoritarian inferiority complex” reflecting that the demographic decline of the Hindu majority will render Hindus a dying race⁶². Thirdly, they launched a campaign to rewrite history textbooks in their version which they felt did not appreciate enough the Hindu warriors and princes fight against Muslim invaders. The coalition partners and moderates within the party along with the secular constitution of India did not have the appetite to pass proposed bills by members of Jana Sangh. Through it sow a seed of discord between the hardcore BJP members and the moderate conservative MPs in the coalition.

The tussle between the party rendered hardliners to leave the party in 1980 and create Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). During the political tug-of-war, Golwalkar, the head of RSS revisited the policy and said at a Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) (World Council of Hindus) conference in 1979, “Hindus must now awaken themselves to such an extent that even from the elections’ point of view the politicians will have to respect the Hindu sentiments and change their policy accordingly.”⁶³ He asked the youth of VHP to spearhead the campaign to affect this “Hindu awakening”. BJP’s creation was to appeal to the hardliners among Hindus who believed that secularism was a colonial legacy and imposed on India artificially. They argued that if Pakistani Muslims can have a separate country where they can practice Islam as their state religion, why India has been denied the same despite having a Hindu majority? BJP was a reaction to “the forces of status quo”, a rebel to protect Hindus, against the secular parties who wanted to continue doing their ex-colonial masters’ bidding.

⁶⁰ Jaffrelot, Christophe, *Modi’s India Hindi Nationalism, and the Rise of Ethnic Democracy*, (Princeton University Press, 2016), 34

⁶¹ Jaffrelot and Anil, *India’s First Dictatorship: The Emergency, 1975–77* (London: Hurst, 2020).

⁶² Jaffrelot, Christophe, *Modi’s India Hindi Nationalism, and the Rise of Ethnic Democracy*, (Princeton University Press, 2016), 36

⁶³ Hindu Vishva Journal, Vol. 14, No. no. 7–8 (March 1979): 92.

The Rise of BJP as a Political Power

RSS needed an event which could propel BJP, which was effectively their political wing to popularity. In the mid-1980s, they focused their agitation against a 16th-century Babri Mosque which was named after a Mughal ruler, Zaheer-ud-Din Babar in the city of Ayodhya. RSS had claimed that the mosque was constructed over a Hindu temple and in 1949, Hindu nationalists proclaimed “a divine miracle” when one of them secretly placed an idol of Ram (a Hindu deity) in the mosque stoking religious fervour in the Hindu community.⁶⁴ After this false-flag miracle, the social environment became so tense that authorities had to close the mosque to placate the Hindu masses where Ram was having a sizable followership. In the 1980s, RSS in desperation for relevance, needed a political-cum-religious issue to seek popularity and reactivated the Ayodhya movement. The BJP convinced of the potential dividends of the Ayodhya issue became proactively involved. BJP became the chief proponent for the destruction of the mosque and the construction of Ram temple. They used religious symbology and anti-Muslim rhetoric to stoke religious fervor and appealed for political support on behalf of their gods. The strategy worked and the popularity of the BJP rose considerably from 2 seats in 1984 to 85 in 1989, the third-largest party in the country⁶⁵. With a sizable number of seats, BJP was able to be a dominant coalition partner of the government with the National Front Party under VP Singh. Now, in a partnership with the central government with a sizable number of MPs, BJP got an opportunity to dictate its terms. With previous lessons in mind, BJP realized that although they would face opposition to change the constitution or the law in the parliament, but they can use this opportunity to seek more popularity among the masses. To garner further political capital, BJP began a “Chariot Procession”, (Rath Yatra) throughout India to incite and mobilize Hindus to support the destruction of the Babri Mosque and the building of a Ram temple over it despite Indian Supreme Court ruling to maintain the status quo⁶⁶. The march was a harbinger of Hindu-Muslim political divide in the country and resulted in communal riots in various Indian cities. L K Advani in his book *My Country My Life*, writes:

“The choice of Somnath as the starting point of the yatra had a powerful symbolic value, made evident by repeated references to it as the target of Muslim tyranny against the Hindus...The intention was to contextualise Ayodhya in the historical lineage of Muslim aggression and then to seek legitimacy for Mandir (temple) movement by drawing a parallel. The parallel the Sangh Parivar drew was with the reconstruction of the Somnath temple.”⁶⁷

Advani carried Hindu symbols during his chariot march and gave speeches inciting violence against Muslims and emphasized the "Hindu society's alleged failure to protect its shrines from desecration by Muslim conquerors."⁶⁸ Somnath was a bastion of Hindus of Sub-continent which held a religious appeal against the Muslim invaders during the tenth and

⁶⁴ D. K. Jha and K. Jha, *Ayodhya: The Dark Night; the Secret History of Ram's Appearance in Babri Masjid* (New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2012).

⁶⁵ Historic Archive India "India: Parliamentary elections Lok Sabha, 1989". Inter-Parliamentary Union.

⁶⁶ Christopher Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Reinterpretation of Pilgrimage in India: The Limits of Yatra Politics, Nations and Nationalism* 15, no. 1 (2009): 1–19.

⁶⁷ Advani, LK, “*My Country – My Life*”, Rupa Publications Limited, 1 Jan 2008, 65

⁶⁸ Panikkar, K. N , *Religious Symbols and Political Mobilization: The Agitation for a Mandir at Ayodhya*, (Social Scientist, 1993), 21 (7/8): 63–78. doi:10.2307/3520346. JSTOR 3520346.

eleventh century. Shah Mehmood Ghazni, the founder of Ghaznavid empire originating from Afghanistan attacked the Somnath temple seventeen times to gather capital for his sultanate.

The leader of BJP for Rath Yatra, LK Advani was arrested before reaching Ayodhya and the police was launched to tackle the Hindu nationalists. As a result, dozens of people were killed which provided ample publicity to RSS and BJP cause. The ashes of the killed Hindus were marched in various cities of India as the “martyrs of the Hindu nation”, provoking more riots. After the arrest of Advani, BJP withdrew support from the coalition government and the country was hurled towards general elections. In the general elections of 1991, BJP continued using its anti-Muslimism and was able to win 119 seats in the centre emerging as the second-largest political party in the country⁶⁹. India National Congress was able to make a minority government leaving BJP in opposition.

The next year on 6 December 1992, VHP and BJP organized a rally in the vicinity of Babri Mosque. The rally was incited by the BJP leaders and soon it turned violent and overwhelmed the security apparatus. The group of Hindu nationalist extremists of VHP and allied organizations attacked the mosque and demolished it. BJP, which was governing, Uttar Pradesh, an Indian state took part in orchestrating the destruction of the mosque⁷⁰. The destruction of the mosque was followed by a Muslim massacre in the area.

Destruction of the Babri Mosque can be considered as a seminal event in the Indian political and social order. It marked the start to end secularism in India and showcased strength of Hindu nationalists over democratic institutions and state authorities. Disregarding court orders, central government powers, international pressures and Muslim sentiments, the mosque was demolished by RSS-BJP led mob with a lot of fanfare. The event charged Hindu nationalism and disrupted social cohesion of the country. Those who expressed reservations against what was happening in Ayodhya were branded as anti-national and anti-state as this event drew battle lines between those who wanted to be invested with the Hindutva future and who wanted India to be a secular state.

BJP capitalized on this event as they projected that the historic wrong committed by Muslims in tenth century was made right by the Hindu “Mahaveer” (great warriors) resulting into substantial political power. In the next general elections held in 1996, BJP won most of the seats but could not get a clear majority. BJP made a short-lived government under Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee as in two weeks the opposition formed a coalition and was able to secure a majority with H. D. Deve Gowda of Janata Dal as Prime Minister.

Despite having a numerical majority, the loss of power for the BJP was a turning point for their political thought and a time for introspection. L. K. Advani, one of the key leaders of the party noted that “Though we were the largest party, we failed to form a government. It was felt that on an ideological basis, we couldn’t go further. So, we embarked on the course of alliance-based coalitions.”⁷¹ However, in the next general elections (1998), when the coalition

⁶⁹ Government of India "1991 India General (10th Lok Sabha) Elections Results". www.elections.in.

⁷⁰ The Hindu, November 24, 2009, *Report of the Liberhan Ayodhya Commission of Inquiry—Full Text*, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/Report-of-the-Liberhan-Ayodhya-Commission-of-Inquiry-Full-Text/article16894055.ece>.

⁷¹ Interview with L. K. Advani in Outlook, October 25, 1999.

government collapsed, BJP was able to secure a parliamentary majority and form a coalition government. Atal Bihari Vajpayee was able to become the Prime Minister for a short period before one of the coalition partners, “All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam” withdrew its support.⁷²

With a sizable number of seats in the national assembly, and the inability to make a government made the leaders of BJP rethink and fine-tune their strategy. They had to find out a way to maintain a coalition government while maintaining their Hindutva credentials which made them reach parliament in the first place. After deliberating thoughts, BJP decided to play down their signature ultra-nationalist rhetoric publicly for the time being. Therefore, in 1998, BJP did not print their manifesto which contained the ideas of building a temple at Ayodhya, revoking the special status of Muslims in the northern Kashmir region and amending the civil code which provided provisions to Muslims according to Islamic law.⁷³ In 1998, keen to hide the Hindu extremist dimension, L. K. Advani emphasized the aim of “good governance” that any ideology could adapt to, “A large area of governance has little to do with ideology - any ideology - except the overriding principle of national interests. Indeed, good governance in most spheres of national life becomes possible only when it is de-ideologized and de-politicized.”⁷⁴

The Kargil war between Pakistan and India in 1999 came to the political aid of the BJP. BJP’s popularity increased when they were seen to push Kashmiris militants back from mountain heights in Kargil through US’s support and declared a win. The rhetoric BJP used against Pakistan and Muslims during the war found a more sympathetic ear among the domestic audience. The BJP highlighted the government's handling of the war as a major achievement, portraying the party as being tough on national security issues. The party also used slogans such as "Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan" (Hail the Soldier, Hail the Farmer) to appeal to patriotic sentiments and garner support. General elections were held few months after the Kargil war and the National Democratic Alliance led by BJP was able to secure for the first time an outright majority. The BJP lead coalition was able to rule India for the next five consecutive years. The rise in popularity of BJP over the years is illustrated in the graph below:

⁷² The Times of India. "BJP's one-vote defeat in 1999 was narrowest in history".
<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/bjps-one-vote-defeat-in-1999-was-narrowest-in-history/articleshow/3261721.cms>

⁷³ Space lacks for a full analysis of the BJP under the Vajpayee government. The interested reader can refer to Christophe Jaffrelot, “*The Hindu Nationalists and Power*,” in *The Oxford Companion to Politics in India*, ed. N. G. Jayal and P. B. Mehta (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 205–18.

⁷⁴ Lal Krishna Advani, Inaugural Address by Shri L. K. Advani, President Bharatiya Janata Party, National Executive Meeting, New Delhi: 11 & 12 April 1998 (New Delhi: BJP, 1998).

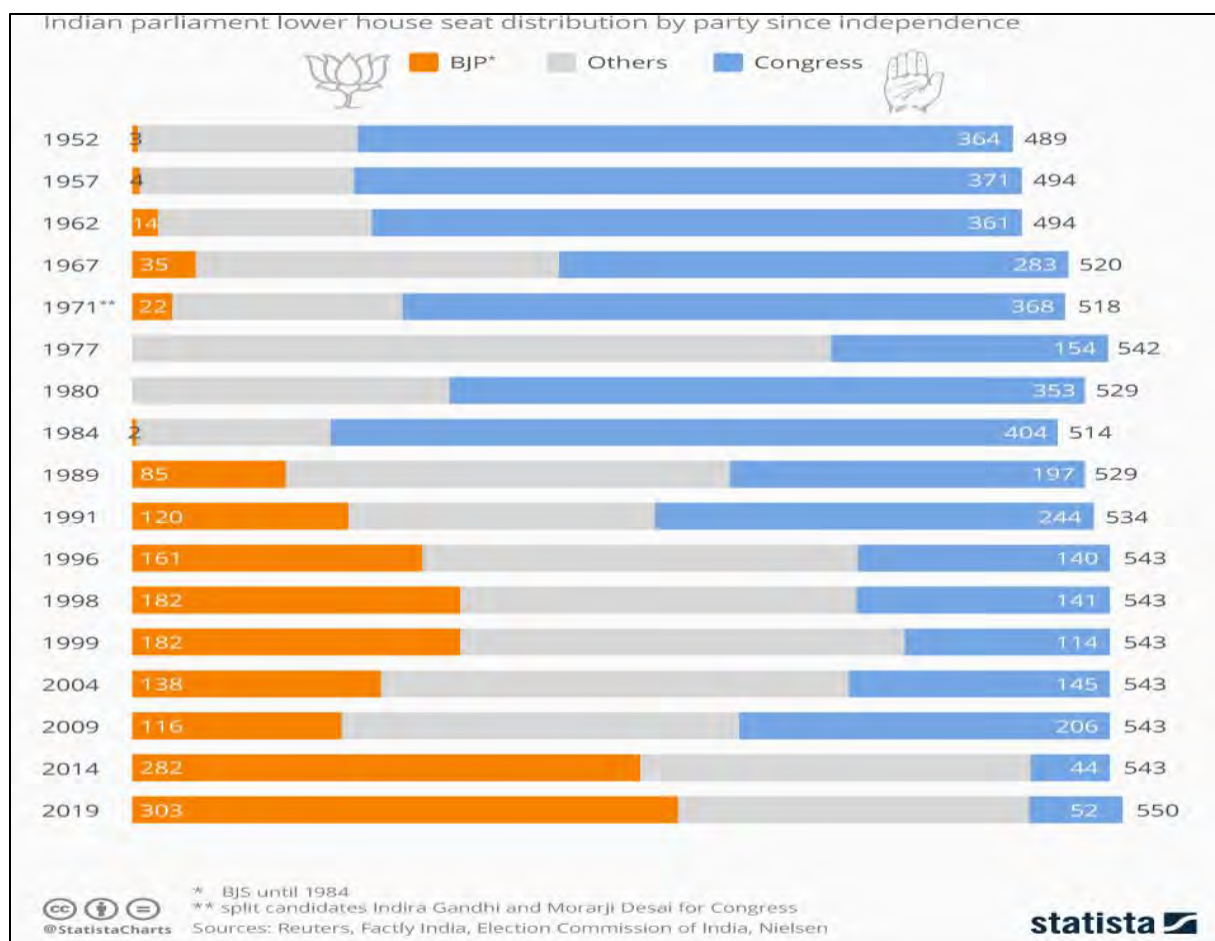


Chart 1 – Rise in popularity of BJP over the years in comparison with other secular political parties.

The rule of BJP led coalition from 1999 to 2004 was marred by a continuous retreat from democratic norms. The most glaring with the Gujrat riots of 2002 when Narendra Modi was the Chief Minister in which thousands of men, women and children were killed, their shops burnt, and mosques destroyed in a genocide of Muslims.⁷⁵ The state government, led by the BJP, was accused of not doing enough to prevent the violence and even being complicit in it. Gujrat also introduced anti-conversion laws, which made it difficult for people to convert to other religions.⁷⁶ The laws were seen as an attempt to promote Hindu nationalism and restrict religious freedom. The BJP government introduced the Gujarat Control of Organized Crime Bill, which was widely criticized for being draconian and giving the police sweeping powers to arrest and detain people without due process.⁷⁷ It can be further said that these prejudiced policies and actions against Muslims and minorities in India became easy to implement due to a permissive

⁷⁵ Kashmir Monitor, "The Communalists and Kishtwar.", 2013.

⁷⁶ Government of Gujrat, "Act No 22 of 2003 - Freedom of Religion Act – 2003", https://home.gujarat.gov.in/Upload/Gujarat%20Freedom%20of%20Religion%20Act2003_new_home_1_1_221015.pdf

⁷⁷ India Today, "Controversial Gujarat anti-terror law gets President assent on 4th attempt". 5 November 2019.

international environment to persecute Muslims after the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center. While the West embarked on military adventures across the Muslim World, many Muslims in other parts of the world were ostracized as sympathizers to the terrorists.⁷⁸ The West's "crusade"⁷⁹ against the Islamic world reduced the political risk of demonizing Muslims internationally⁸⁰ and RSS-BJP were eager to make most of this situation.

Although BJP continued to exert its influence to implement its ultra-nationalist policies, the government had to face strong criticism for its handling of issues related to economy, agriculture, and foreign policy. The BJP-led coalition lost the next general elections in 2004. Soon after the election, it became difficult for BJP to preserve the cohesion of its coalition as the BJP's political ambitions and realities on the ground had a difficult time assimilating. On one hand, BJP needed allies and it had to dilute its ideology to secure them, on the other hand, BJP stalwarts were prepared to lose partners for the sake of mobilizing the Hindu majority for a "Hindi Rashtra".

In the last decade, social media transformed politics around the globe. Effective use of technology and social media resolved BJP's political problem and provided it with a reach to infiltrate masses and create a clout which was difficult before. Narendra Modi, "the emperor of the Hindu Heart", a name given to him in wake of the worst anti-Muslim pogrom in Gujrat since independence, came forward as a populist leader who was going to change the national discourse.

The Phenomenon of Narendra Modi

Narendra Damodardas Modi was born in Northern Gujarat on 17 September 1950, to the Ghanchi family (officially categorized as low and backward caste) who are traditionally and socially tasked to produce and sell cooking oil.⁸¹ He was third in his sibling order out of six. His father traded oil and ran a tea shop, where Narendra also worked for some time as a child. He became member of locals RSS branch at the age of eight, as it was the only extracurricular activity in town.⁸² According to the biography penned by M. V. Kamath and K. Randeri, he aspired to renunciation very early on.⁸³ Modi completed his higher secondary education in Vadnagar in 1967, where teachers described him as an average student and a keen gifted debater, with an interest in theatre.⁸⁴ He preferred playing larger-than-life characters in theatrical productions, which influenced his political image.⁸⁵ In an interview he mentioned his early religious and nationalistic feelings, "I loitered a lot in the Himalayas. I had some influences of spiritualism at that time along with the sentiment of patriotism - it was all mixed. It is not

⁷⁸ Gallip Survey: *Understanding Anti-Muslim Sentiment in the West*.

⁷⁹ George W Bush referring Global War on Terror as crusade, 2001.

⁸⁰ Stephanie, Mitchell, *Muslim Americans reflect on the impact of 9/11*, Harvard Gazette, <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2021/09/muslim-americans-reflect-on-the-impact-of-9-11/>

⁸¹ Marino, Andy, *Narendra Modi: A Political Biography*. (HarperCollins Publishers India, 2014)

⁸² Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay, *Narendra Modi: The Man, the Times* (New Delhi: Tranquedar, 2013), 52

⁸³ M. V. Kamath and Kalindi Randeri, *Narendra Modi: The Architect of a Modern State* (New Delhi: Rupa, 2009), 17.

⁸⁴ Jose, Vinod K, "The Emperor Uncrowned: The Rise of Narendra Modi". *The Caravan*, (1 March 2012), 2-4.

⁸⁵ Mukhopadhyay, Nilanjan, *Narendra Modi: The Man, The Times*. (Westland, 2013), 82

possible to delineate the two ideas.”⁸⁶ It was a common narrative of RSS to merge Hindu religion with nationalism and Modi seems to be indoctrinated by RSS since his early days.

In the late seventies, RSS was facing difficulty to garner the support of lower castes Hindus, which could provide much-needed political power. Modi seems to be an ideal person to be brought to the forefront to appeal low-caste Hindus. In 1981, Modi was made “prant pracharak”, an administrative post in RSS to coordinate various Sangh Parivar components in Gujarat. As RSS organizer in Gujarat, Modi was the architect of a whole series of events known as *yatra* (pilgrimage), a word designating demonstrations in forms of processions. For instance, he organized the Nyay Yatra (justice pilgrimage), designed to demand justice for the Hindu victims of the Hindu-Muslim riots in 1985⁸⁷ - even though the minority community suffered many more deaths.⁸⁸

Modi’s social skills and organizational abilities were soon recognized by L. K. Advani (BJP president and a member of RSS), and Modi was reassigned from RSS to the BJP. In early 1980s, RSS realized that to affect a significant social change, political power was essential, therefore RSS remained a constant feeder organization to the BJP. Modi was deputed to the BJP in 1987, to take up the key post of sangathan mantri (organization secretary) at the head of the party’s Gujarati branch. In that capacity, in 1990s, it was Modi who was responsible for the Gujarati segment of Advani’s Rath Yatra. After getting sufficient exposure, the Ekta Yatra (unity pilgrimage), provided an opportunity to Modi to project himself nationally. In 1991, new BJP president Murli Manohar Joshi, led Ekta Yatra and the procession departed from Kanyakumari (southern tip of India) to Srinagar in the north to demonstrate the unity of the Indian nation. During this rally, he was accused of projecting himself and seeking the limelight.⁸⁹ In fact, during the Ekta Yatra, “not only was Modi accompanying Joshiji on his vehicle, but would, at every stop, address the crowds along with the BJP president.”⁹⁰

The BJP Gujrat Wing, under Modi as the chief administrator won the municipal elections in Rajkot in 1983 and after four years it won in Ahmedabad. The election campaign was conducted under the supervision and responsibility of Narendra Modi.⁹¹ In 1995, the BJP won the six municipalities in the state, a sign of its increasing appeal among Gujarat’s urban middle class, the party’s traditional electorate. But it also made inroads in rural areas, winning eighteen of the nineteen *zilla parishad* (district councils).⁹² In the same year, reaping on the success at municipality level, BJP won the majority of seats in Gujarat State assembly as well. The complete credit of BJP’s penetration within the populace and victory in Gujarat went to Modi. Despite, Keshubhai Patel, occupying the chair of Chief Minister of Gujarat, party members and the public considered Modi as the center of political power. Hence, Modi, who soon came to be known as “super chief minister,”⁹³. He took part in ministerial council meetings and even in

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁸⁷ K. Nag, *The NaMo Story: A Political Life* (New Delhi: Roli Books, 2013), 53.

⁸⁸ Ornit Shani, *Communalism, Caste and Hindu Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 71

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 71–72

⁹¹ Mukhopadhyay, Nilanjan, *Narendra Modi: The Man, The Times*. (Westland, 2013), 147.

⁹² A. Yagnik and S. Sheth, *The Shaping of Modern Gujarat* (Delhi: Penguin, 2005), 266.

⁹³ Mukhopadhyay, Nilanjan, *Narendra Modi: The Man, The Times*. (Westland, 2013), 202.

meetings involving the chief minister and senior civil servants, contrary to common practice.⁹⁴ Modi's being in the center of power in Gujarat became the de-facto kingmaker and he made sure that getting on his wrong side costed his political opponents sufficiently. When Keshubhai Patel's the main rival within the BJP in Gujarat against Modi's man Shankarsinh Vaghela, resigned on the grievance of not being picked to head the government, Modi made sure that neither he nor his loyal BJP cadre get any position in the new government. Shankarsinh Vaghela was expecting that his resignation will induce a rethink to finalize the lucrative positions of BJP members. Modi initiated a style of politics where there was no room for concessions. None of Vaghela's lieutenants was appointed to head any of the forty-two public agencies, and all positions were distributed as a reward to those members who remained loyal to Modi.⁹⁵ In an editorial for the local press, Pravin Sheth, Modi's former political science professor at the University of Gujarat, explained this attitude in the following terms: he "has a Hubris complex. In this state, he tends to believe that his level of understanding is more than anyone else."⁹⁶ The repercussions of his actions in Gujarat assembly were also glaring. Vaghela, as leader of a BJP forward faction, took his forty-seven local BJP elected officials who were loyal to him out. The government collapsed, and Vaghela with Congress support became chief minister. Some had argued that Modi's methods were too crude to preserve party unity and he was accused of dividing it through his strongarm tactics, resulting into internal split within BJP in Gujarat. This fiasco induced the BJP high command to exfiltrate Modi from Gujarat.⁹⁷ He was posted to Delhi in November 1995, as national BJP secretary in charge of Himachal Pradesh, a (small) golden parachute. In 1998, owing to a change in BJP president, Modi was promoted to secretary-general of the party. The states of Punjab, Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir, and Chandigarh were added to his portfolio, and he was also put in charge of the BJP youth wing, the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha.

While in Delhi, Modi connived to oust Keshubhai Patel from power. In his memoirs, Vinod Mehta, then editor in chief of *Outlook* magazine, recalls, "When he was working in the party office in Delhi, Narendra Modi came to see me in the office. He brought along some documents which indicated the chief minister, Keshubhai Patel, was up to no good."⁹⁸ Soon, Atal Bihari Vajpayee (party president) offered Modi to replace Keshubhai Patel, whose popularity was fast waning, which he did the fall of 2001. On 27 February 2002, three days after Modi was sworn in as Chief Minister Gujarat, he got the title of "Hindu Hriday Samrat" (the Emperor of Hindu Heart) in wake of the worst Hindu-Muslim pogrom in Gujarat, since partition.⁹⁹

Modi's rise to power from a humble background to the Chief Minister of Gujarat, is a story of rags to riches. The timing could not have been perfect for Modi when RSS and BJP were struggling for political capital and low caste Hindus could not relate to RSS or Sang Parivar due to their prejudice against low castes. Modi's oratory skills, organizational abilities and charisma gave a fresh breath to BJP and RSS. Modi's rise also marks the shift in Sang Parivar's though process where high caste Hindus were at helm of affairs and low castes were not included. Now

⁹⁴ Mukhopadhyay, 202; and Nag, *NaMo Story*, 61.

⁹⁵ Nag, *NaMo Story*, 62.

⁹⁶ Sheth, *Images of Transformation*, 57.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 64, 77-78

⁹⁸ Vinod Mehta, *Lucknow Boy: A Memoir* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2011), 209.

⁹⁹ Jaffrelot, Christophe, *Modi's India Hindu Nationalism, and the Rise of Ethnic Democracy*, (Princeton University Press, 2016), 47

low caste Hindus could relate to the BJP which provided substantial political capital. It also highlights the gradually RSS and BJP developed organizational structure where merit and on-ground performance was appreciated and rewarded instead of just the caste.

With hit and trial over four decades and learning and adapting on the way, the ultra-nationalists of India have found a way to the corridors of political power in India. They learnt that the democratic system left by the British gave them with exclusionary powers and influence. Starting from volunteer organization at the grass root level, rise of ultra-nationalists in India can be credited by their ability to adapt themselves along with their followership to meet their goals. They undertook compromises, diversified their base by incorporating low-castes Hindus and struck deals with other moderate political parties but remained loyal to the philosophy of “Hindutva”. While moving from fringe to center, they altered the social and political order of India.

Now, with BJP well entrenched politically, India is fast become a single party country in reflection of the ideologues. The unprecedented acts of savagery unleashed by RSS-BJP militants across India after their capturing the New Delhi, is a harrowing tale of how a country can spiral down towards a path of fascism. In the next chapter, the policies of BJP government will be highlighted which fulfilled the original “Hindutva” dream and their implication on the democratic project of India. Theses development not only affect the populace of India but has far reaching consequences to the region and beyond.

CHAPTER 3

THE DECLINE IN DEMOCRATIC VALUES IN INDIA

After the 2014 elections, and BJP became well-entrenched in the political system of India and challenges for democracy due to the institutionalization and normalization of the Hindutva ideology seem to increase multifold. Despite a façade of democratic values, some argue that PM Narendra Modi is slowly transforming India into an apartheid state creating internal fissures and defacing its democratic credentials.¹⁰⁰ The BJP-led Indian government is manifesting anti-democratic tendencies through various laws and actions, especially against Muslims and other minorities in India¹⁰¹. Frequent incidents of violence with the tacit approval of the government targeting religious minorities¹⁰², construction of the “Hindu Ram Temple”, after destroying a fourteen century “Babri Mosque”¹⁰³ and legislations in the Indian Parliament especially abolition of 370 & 35 A¹⁰⁴ are a few notable examples. Article “370 & 35 A” stripped Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK) of its autonomy and divided it into Union territories to affect demographic changes and deny locals the right to their lands, in contravention of the UNSC resolution. Enacting the Citizens Amendment Act (CAA) denying nationality to many Muslims residing in Assam for generations and putting them in holding facilities in Assam¹⁰⁵ can be construed as visible signals of declining democratic values as well. Furthermore, repeated episodes of communal violence in the name GharWapsi (converting Muslims and Christians to Hinduism) and BetiBachao (stopping Hindu women from marrying Muslim men) and lynching of Muslims on allegations of eating beef are also alarmingly increasing¹⁰⁶. These developments in India have eroded the secular values enshrined in the Indian constitution and the country seems to be moving towards ethnic nationalism. Alarmingly, Genocide Watch has warned that India is at an advanced stage to commit genocide against Muslims in their country¹⁰⁷. The list of actions and indicators of receding democratic values and India becoming the world’s largest ethnic democracy is exhaustive. Here, a few notable actions and events will be highlighted to support the thesis of the paper.

¹⁰⁰ Jamil, Mohammad. "India: An Apartheid State", Pakistan Observer, (2018), sec. 29

¹⁰¹ Prashant Waikar. *Reading Islamophobia in Hindutva: An Analysis of Narendra Modi's Political Discourse*. Islamophobia Studies Journal. Vol. 4(2), 7,8,9

¹⁰² Robert Frykinberg, *Hindutva as a Political Religion: An Historical Perspective, The Sacred in Twentieth-Century Politics*, 178-220, https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/9780230241633_10

¹⁰³ Shah, Pankaj. "VHP Celebrates 'Gita Jayanti' to Mark Babri Mosque Demolition." The Times of India, (2021), Bombay.

¹⁰⁴ Prashant Waikar. *Reading Islamophobia in Hindutva: An Analysis of Narendra Modi's Political Discourse*. Islamophobia Studies Journal. Vol. 4(2):161-180. DOI: 10.13169/islastudj.4.2.0161 page 7,8,9

¹⁰⁵ Ranjona Banerji, “India’s detention camps for Muslims are blatantly Islamophobic – but you won’t hear condemnation from the west”, The Independent, (2019) <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/india-bjp-narendra-modi-muslim-detention-camps-assam-bangladesh-a9100886.html>

¹⁰⁶ Lauren, Frayer, “Spate of lynchings Target Minorities, especially Muslims, in India”, NPR Washington, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/08/19/752292498/spate-of-lynchings-target-minorities-especially-muslims-in-india>

¹⁰⁷ Fiona Neibart and Gregory Stanton, “Genocide Watch warning Report”, Dec 2020, <https://www.genocidewatch.com/single-post/genocide-warning-india>

Normalization of Violence against Minorities and Vulnerable Segment of Society

Dr David H. Ucko mentions in his book, *The Insurgent's Dilemma* that one of the theories of victory in irregular warfare is that of an extremist group who finds its way to power through legitimate political participation while remaining loyal to their core extremist ideology.¹⁰⁸ Although BJP-RSS may not ideally fit as an insurgent force, but parallels can be drawn with the Hindutva-influenced BJP, conceived from its ideological mother RSS as a hardline extremist / militant organization. It also resembles the Nazi Party of Germany which came to power through a democratic process but transformed the country on ultra-nationalistic lines and committed horrible tales of savagery and brutality.

The modus operandi of the BJP-RSS has included the use of violence to intimidate those who challenge their version of Hinduness, threatening the ideals of a functional democracy. In one of the most glaring examples of using violence as a political tool, the Gujarat massacre of 2002 provides ample testimony. Just three days after Narendra Modi became Chief Minister of Gujarat, clashes broke out in the Eastern District of Godhra, between Hindus and Muslims. A train carrying Hindu nationalists was returning from a demonstration in Ayodhya, and Hindus were singing their nationalist songs and chanting slogans, some of which were offensive to Muslims. They forced a Muslim family travelling with them to chant praises to their Hindu god and ordered Muslim shopkeepers at one of the train stations to shout the same slogan. Soon the situation escalated and as the train left the station, someone pulled the emergency chain in the middle of a Muslim neighbourhood. Riots ensued and fire erupted in the train killing fifty-nine persons, mostly Hindus.¹⁰⁹ The cause of the fire is disputed but the Muslims of the area were blamed for attacking the train. Soon after the incident, Narendra Modi arrived in Godhra and declared it as “a one-sided collective violent act of terrorism from one community.”¹¹⁰ Shortly militants wearing saffron headbands (trademark of RSS personals) brandishing swords, knives and small arms started systematically killing Muslims in various towns and villages in the area. Extreme brutal acts of savagery were committed including infanticide, rape, and murder. Police and law enforcement was visibly absent, probably on orders from the provincial government. As per accounts, the riots affected 151 towns and 992 villages and killed around 2000 persons, mostly Muslims¹¹¹. Communal riots under BJP government patronage became a regular occurrence in India and between 2016 to 2020, 3400 communal riots took place in which mostly Muslims were the victim community.¹¹² In 2020, dastardly riots were organized in the capital of India, New Delhi resulting in the killing of 53 persons mostly Muslims and the burning down of several mosques and Muslim properties. India was ranked fourth in the world in 2015 after Syria,

¹⁰⁸ Ucko, David H., 'Infiltrative Insurgency the Trojan Horse', *The Insurgent's Dilemma: A Struggle to Prevail* (2022; online edn, Oxford Academic, 22 Sept. 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197651681.003.0004>. Also, the author was a guest speaker for JCSP 249 and mentioned his idea in AJWS class / JCSP 49 on 14 April 23.

¹⁰⁹ Anil Dharkar, “Concerned Citizens Tribunal –Gujarat 2002, Crime against Humanity” Siddhi Offset, Mumbai, 12.

¹¹⁰ Ghassem-Fachandi, Parvis. “Front Matter.” In *Pogrom in Gujarat: Hindu Nationalism and Anti-Muslim Violence in India*, i–iv. Princeton University Press, 2012. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt7t0nz.1>. Page 59.

¹¹¹ Yagnik and Sheth, *Shaping of Modern Gujarat – Plurality Hindutva and Beyond*, Penguin Books, 2005, 282.

¹¹² <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/around-3-400-communal-riots-took-place-from-2016-2020-centre-101648611989880.html>

Nigeria and Iraq for the highest social hostilities involving religion.¹¹³ By 2019 it ranked at first spot in the world.¹¹⁴ President of the Genocide Watch, Gregory H. Stanton has raised the issue internationally about a possible genocide against the Muslims of India. He has advocated to for U.S. Congress to pass a resolution warning India of its risk for genocide. Hence the threat of violence against a particular community is serious which casts aspersions on the democratic makeup of the country.

The prejudice against other minorities has also been observed and the communal agenda of the BJP targets Christians and Dalits as well. Current period of BJP rule has witnessed a rapid rise in attacks against Christians and low-caste Hindus. One of the auxiliaries of Sang Parivar, the Bajrang Dal has been demonizing and terrifying Indian Christians from Karnataka to Uttarakhand.¹¹⁵ Their modus operandi includes violent attacks during the Christmas season when many Christians are gathered to celebrate the event. Hundred of attacks against Christians are reported annually in India which are aimed to remind the community of their place in society.¹¹⁶ The continuous violence against minorities has placed India as a Tier 1 country since 2020 by United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF).

The religious fault lines in India have exponentially increased under the incumbent rule. The frequent and unabated lynching of Muslims by Hindu mobs over allegations of eating beef or transporting cow (an animal considered holy to Hindus), is evidence of rising intolerance and a pervasive environment to exercise violence against the Muslim community.¹¹⁷ In these years, several muslim businesses have been boycotted,¹¹⁸ their localities have been bulldozed¹¹⁹ and places of worship set on fire. Sometimes open calls have been made for their genocide.¹²⁰

For a democratic society to work, the safety and security of all its citizens is paramount. Violence or its threat can undermine core principles such as the rule of law, freedom of expression, and the protection of human rights. A segment of society i.e., Muslims, Christians and low-caste Hindus have been made to feel threatened or intimidated by violence, suppressing their ability to participate in democratic processes such as voting, expressing opinions, or participating in public protests. Additionally, it has led to the erosion of trust in institutions such as the judiciary, law enforcement, and government. In addition, the violence perpetrated against minorities in India has been used as a pretext for the government to justify the suppression of

¹¹³ Malavika Murali, “Communal violence up 28% under Modi govt but short of UPA's decadal high”, business-standard, 2022, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/around-3-400-communal-riots-took-place-from-2016-2020-centre-101648611989880.html>

¹¹⁴ Pew Research Center, “Restrictions on religion in the world’s 25 most populous countries in 2019”, 2021

¹¹⁵ Neel Madhav, Alishan Jafri, “Why India is witnessing a spike in attacks on Christians, churches”, Al Jazeera, 2 Dec 2021

¹¹⁶ Haynes, Jeffrey, *Religious Transnational Actors and Soft Power*. Routledge. (23 March 2016).

¹¹⁷ Shok Sharma, “Outrage grows over attacks on Muslim cattle traders in India”, AP News, (26 July 2018), <https://apnews.com/article/business-religion-india-0450ff7f645c410faf937a9af80559c3>

¹¹⁸ ISWAJEET BANERJEE “Thousands protest 'bulldozer justice' against Indian Muslims”, AP News (June 15, 2022), <https://apnews.com/article/religion-india-arrests-islam-narendra-modi-5310432fcd614beb92d4d195fa19539>

¹¹⁹ Sheikh Saaliq, “In India, hate-filled songs are a weapon to target Muslims”, AP News, (22 April 2022), <https://apnews.com/article/religion-india-violence-hindu-muslim-bf516bc2fbc0834c5822901f46c5d716>

¹²⁰ Sheikh Saaliq, “Hindu monk jailed after calling for 'genocide' of Muslims”, AP News (17 Jan 2022), <https://apnews.com/article/religion-india-violence-be0c1873ca99ac285bd1ee45c3c2211d>

dissent and the restriction of civil liberties. They have used the threat of violence to justify repressive measures such as censorship, surveillance, and arbitrary detention.

Social Tolerance

Tolerance is one of the most important tenants of democracy. After Modi's re-election as the Prime Minister in 2019, he attempted to assure Muslims and minorities and declared that all citizens will be protected under his rule. This narrative did not proved to be durable as in the five years of Modi's first term in power, hate crimes against Muslims soared; data shows that some 90% of religious hate crimes in the last decade have occurred since Modi came to power.¹²¹ During the election campaign of the BJP, hatred against Muslims has remained their primary rhetoric. Incendiary songs and lyrics are sung at their political rallies and events, an example is as under:

The day the Hindus wake up, the consequence will be
That the skull-cap wearer will bow down and say victory to Lord Ram.
The day my blood boils, I wish to show you your place
Then I will not speak, only my sword will.
Whoever does not hail Lord Ram, send him to the graveyard.¹²²

Hate speech has become the staple of the BJP-ruled government, discrediting the secular democratic constitution. BJP has officially maintained that it does not discriminate on basis of religion but the evidence on the ground seems different. The list of hate speech by prominent personalities of the BJP is long but to give an idea of the genre of hate speech, following is being presented to support the theme of this paper:

- Amit Shah, incumbent Home Minister, and the president of BJP called Muslims immigrants "termites", which was also reported in US State Department Annual human rights report.¹²³
- Pooja Shakun Pandey, a senior member of the right-wing Hindu Mahasabha said in a political rally, "If 100 of us become soldiers and are prepared to kill 2 million (Muslims), then we will win ... protect India, and make it a Hindu nation,".¹²⁴

¹²¹ Rana, Ayub, "Religious Hate Crimes in India Surge in Modi's Second Term", Times Magazine (June 2019), <https://time.com/5617161/india-religious-hate-crimes-modi/>

¹²² Debasish Roy Chowdhury, "For India's Muslims, Eid al-Fitr Brings Little to Celebrate", Time Magazine, (May 2022), <https://time.com/6172901/eid-al-fitr-muslims-india/>

¹²³ Editor, "US State Department Red Flags Amit Shah's 'Termites' Comment on Migrants", The Wire (21 Marc 2019) <https://thewire.in/rights/us-state-department-india-amit-shah-human-rights-refugees>

¹²⁴ Rhea Mogul and Swati Gupta, "India's Hindu extremists are calling for genocide against Muslims. Why is so little being done to stop them?" CNN (14 January 2022), <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/01/14/asia/india-hindu-extremist-groups-intl-hnk-dst/index.html>

- Nurpur Sharma a prominent BJP leader insulted the Holy Prophet Muhammad on primetime TV (Times Now) in a debate on a Mosque dispute which sparked protests and religiously motivated crimes.¹²⁵
- Bajrang Muni, a prominent cleric associated with BJP-RSS, said he would kidnap and rape Muslim women publicly. The threat was met with loud cheers within the crowd while police present in the vicinity remained silent observer.¹²⁶
- On 7 May 2022, Bihar BJP MLA Haribhushan Thakur Bachaul said that Muslims should be set ablaze just as Hindus burn Ravana (devil) effigies during the festival of Dussehra. Earlier he had commented that Muslims living in India should be stripped of voting rights and treated as second-class citizens.¹²⁷
- In 2020, Sadhvi Deva Thakur, a senior member of the group, caused widespread controversy when she told news reporters that Muslims and Christians should undergo forced sterilization to control their population growth.¹²⁸
- In the annual Hindu religious gathering in Haridwar, referred to as “Dharma Sansad” (religious parliament) the hate speeches by RSS-BJP leaders called for the genocide of Indian Muslims in the style of the Rohingyas of Myanmar as well as an explicit call for the mass murder of Muslims.¹²⁹

With hate speech commonly expressed by people in power, little hope is left in the democratic project for 300 million Muslims residing in India. The environment has sapped the free and open exchange of ideas, where individuals are able to express their views and opinions without fear of retribution. Hate speech and violence being used to intimidate, marginalize, and discriminate against minorities and low-caste Hindus has silenced them and undermined the very foundations of democracy. The climate of fear, anxiety, and intolerance has led to the erosion of trust in institutions and the rule of law. As a result, civil society is breaking down, where groups are becoming more isolated and fragmented, and individuals become less willing to engage in public discourse. In India, it seems that it has become more difficult for individuals to engage in constructive dialogue and compromise, which are essential components of a healthy democratic society. Although legacy British Laws such as sedition regulations under Section 295A, to the Indian Penal Code, prohibit “hate speech”, but persecuting the case in the court of law, when public opinion is all charged up is challenging. This corrosive effect of hate speech on

¹²⁵ Geeta Pandey, "Nupur Sharma: The Indian woman behind offensive Prophet Muhammad comments". BBC News, (1 July 2020), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-61716241>

¹²⁶ Alok Pandey, Saikat Kumar Bose, “Sitapur Hate Speech: Hatemonger's Rape Threat to Muslim Women in UP Amid Cheers” NDTV, (8 April 2022), <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/on-camera-hatemongers-rape-threat-to-muslim-women-in-up-amid-cheers-2869943>

¹²⁷ Editor, ‘Muslims Should Be Set Ablaze Just as Hindus Burn Ravana Effigies on Dussehra’, The Wire, (8 May 2022), <https://thewire.in/communalism/muslims-should-be-set-ablaze-just-as-hindus-burn-ravana-effigies-on-dussehra-bjp-mla>

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*,

¹²⁹ Editor, “Hindutva Leaders at Haridwar Event Call for Muslim Genocide”, The Wire, (22 Dec 2021), <https://thewire.in/communalism/hindutva-leaders-dharma-sansad-muslim-genocide>

democracy is fast eroding the values of tolerance, inclusivity, and respect for diversity that are necessary for democratic societies to thrive.

Freedom of Speech

Freedom of speech is an essential pillar of democracy. It allows citizens to express their ideas, opinions, and beliefs without fear of censorship or repression. It grants individuals the right to express their creative and innovative ideas without fear of censorship. It also allows citizens to scrutinize government actions and hold public officials accountable for their actions. The Indian Constitution under Article 19(1)(a) guarantees the fundamental right of freedom of speech. Restriction on biased or misleading information has constitutional provisions and Indian Penal Code covers media crime to protect against disinformation.¹³⁰ BJP government through the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has maintained that media in India is free and without government influence.

However, for a government espousing radical ideals, freedom to speak about government policies, corruption, abuse of power, and other forms of wrongdoing becomes a challenge for the citizens. Various policies and actions of the incumbent government are stretching the constitutional provisions to their limits. In the year 2022, India fell to the 150th spot in Reporters Without Borders (RSF) 2022 World Press Freedom Index from last year's 142nd in a total of 180 countries, below Afghanistan and Burma.¹³¹ Although there are journalists and members of civil society who call on the government's policies of hate and division, but they are increasingly facing hostilities from the hardliners in the government and society. In a systematic takeover, allies of the Modi government have bought the mainstream media. For example, Gautam Adani, a Modi loyalist, and a controversial businessman acquired the largest media network in India, the NDTV in a hostile takeover. Adani has maintained that NDTV would remain independent. Adani owes his rise to power and fortune to PM Narendra Modi therefore his influence on the media outlet made several reputed journalists resign.¹³² The biggest competitor to NDTV in India is "Network 18" which was acquired by another billionaire who is also a beneficiary and an ally of Modi's government, Mukesh Ambani. He now owns more than 70 media outlets influencing a viewership of around 800 million people. These media outlets under their new management have restricted the space to voice dissent and have become the defenders of the Hindu nationalistic government while selling the majoritarian populist agenda. Furthermore, loyalists of the BJP have bullied editors into taking critical stories, hushed government bureaucrats and shifted from the common practice of filing defamation cases to lodging more-serious criminal complaints which put the accused in jail and fight his case for years in India's overburdened justice system¹³³.

¹³⁰ Central Government Act - Article 19(1) in The Constitution of India 1949

¹³¹ World Freedom Press, "RSF's 2022 World Press Freedom Index: a new era of polarisation", <https://rsf.org/en/rsf-s-2022-world-press-freedom-index-new-era-polarisation>

¹³² Shalu Yadav, "Press freedom in India has declined under the Modi government", NPR (3 April 2023), <https://www.npr.org/2023/04/03/1167041720/india-press-freedom-journalists-modi-bbc-documentary>

¹³³ Annie Gowen, "In Modi's India, journalists face bullying, criminal cases and worse", Washington Post (15 February 2018), https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/in-modis-india-journalists-face-bullying-criminal-cases-and-worse/2018/02/13/e8176b72-8695-42ab-abd5-d26aab830d3e_story.html

Journalists and news agencies who publish dissent against the BJP government are tagged as anti-state and become targets of online smear campaigns by radical nationalists. Their outlets also suffer economically by losing valuable advertising from the government. For instance, Rana Ayub, an investigative journalist (who was instrumental in sending Amit Shah (current Home Minister) to jail in 2010 for murder, extortion, and kidnapping¹³⁴) when published her book *The Gujarat File: An Anatomy of a Coverup*, was threatened with rape and murder and subjected to a smear campaign.¹³⁵ In another instant, when BBC broadcasted a documentary highlighting the role of PM Narendra Modi in the Gujarat massacre, their office in Delhi and Mumbai was raided by tax officials and the documentary was banned in India using emergency laws. The law also blocked the online dissemination of this documentary on various social media channels citing it as a propaganda piece lacking objectivity. BBC maintained that the documentary has been rigorously researched and according to the highest editorial standards.¹³⁶

Another item in the toolbox of India's BJP government is blocking access to the internet to restrict the flow of information and use it as a weapon of control the population of a certain area. In 2022, India was the world's leader in shutting down the internet 84 times, 49 of which were recorded in Indian-occupied Kashmir.¹³⁷ In its annual report, Amnesty International highlighted that Indian authorities are increasingly imposing unlawful and politically motivated restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly.¹³⁸ Amnesty International has elaborately catalogued government policies and acts that are detrimental to the freedom of speech and democracy in detail which speaks of the downward trajectory of free speech in India.

To analyse the trends being seen in India under BJP rule, it seems evident that controlling information is a means to actualise a Hindutva state where a common mental disposition exists. What it means to be an India has been defined by the BJP-RSS ideologues and those who threaten the ideals through their expression in any way is subjected to persecution by BJP-RSS loyalists and government authorities. Space for dissent and alternative opinion is fast shrinking and Hindu nationalism is being construed as being patriotic. With intimidation and threat of violence and government wrath, liberal voices are receding to the background. An ecosystem of BJP-RSS loyalists has been created which has become an exclusive group, leaving the minorities vulnerable. Minority opinions are becoming difficult to be heard or considered and their concerns against discrimination, injustice, and other forms of oppression are categorised as anti-state and unpatriotic.

¹³⁴ Editor, "Modi aide Amit Shah arrested, jailed in Sohrabuddin case", Indian Today, (26 Jul 2010), <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/modi-aide-amit-shah-arrested-jailed-in-sohrabuddin-case-79246-2010-07-24>

¹³⁵ United Nations Media Center, "UN experts call on India to protect journalist Rana Ayyub from online hate campaign" (24 May 2018), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2018/05/un-experts-call-india-protect-journalist-rana-ayyub-online-hate-campaign>.

¹³⁶ Editor, "BBC defends Modi documentary as 'rigorously researched'", National Herald, (20 Jan 2023), <https://www.nationalheraldindia.com/national/bbc-defends-modi-documentary-as-rigorously-researched>

¹³⁷ Niha Masih, "Governments shut down the internet more often than ever", Washington Post, (28 February 2023), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/02/28/internet-shutdowns-highest-india/>

¹³⁸ Amnesty International Report 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/asia-and-the-pacific/south-asia/india/report-india/>

Legislations

Democracy works for the people when good legislations protect the rights of the citizen and ensure that no one is considered above the law. It creates a level playing field while protecting the less privileged and marginalised segment of society. It helps ensure that government officials are unbiased and held accountable for their actions. The element of fairness is a critical aspect of legislation in a democratic country ensuring that laws are applied equally to all citizens, regardless of their race, gender, or socioeconomic status. It also encourages citizen participation in the democratic process by providing avenues for public input and feedback on proposed laws and policies.

Although various laws and regulations have been enacted which have helped the Indian economy and have taken thousands out of poverty. But for social changes, BJP government has sequentially moved towards a direction where the legislature is being used to undermine the tenants of democracy by creating laws which disproportionately target and discriminate against certain groups of people, particularly religious and ethnic minorities. For example, the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), passed in 2019, grants fast-track citizenship to non-Muslim immigrants from neighbouring countries, leading to accusations that it is discriminatory against Muslims. It fulfilled the BJP agenda of “detection, deletion and deportation”, of Muslim migrants in the Assam region. As a result, 1.9 million Muslims who had been residing in Assam for decades were declared illegal and rendered stateless. They are being put in detention camps to be deported out of India. Six of these detention camps are working across Assam and hold only Muslims.¹³⁹ The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) called for sanctions against the Indian Home Minister, Amit Shah, and other principal leaders who were deemed to be the bill's architect¹⁴⁰.

These measures have polarized society and stoke religious hate. For Assamese, the history of BJP in the blatant expression of racism and prejudice against Muslims was already evident through the *Jatiotabad* movement (ethnonationalism movement) and the merging of philosophies with xenophobic Hindu nationalism to exacerbate hatred towards Muslim minorities. As in the several places in the rest of the country, “us versus them”, mantra resonated in the Hindu majority leading to an easy victory for the BJP in the 2021 Legislative Assembly elections, marking their second winning term in the Assam state. The incumbent Chief Minister of Assam, Himanta Biswa from BJP has furthered the smooth saffronization, (the saffron colour is associated with Hindu nationalism) of the Assamese culture. The inclusion of an individual in the National Register of Citizens (NRC) which started after the Citizen Amendment Act (CAA) was based on religious lines, deepening the communal polarization and rendering Muslim minority populations in Assam stateless. The act and monopoly of declaring Muslims as stateless has been stated by the BJP leaders as a retribution for the defeat of Assamese by Mughals rulers and a legacy of Assam’s general Lachit Borphukan, who was able to inflict a single defeat on Mughals at the Battle of Saraighat in 1671. After this NRC / CAA as a legislative weapon, the

¹³⁹ Dutta, Prabhash K. "NRC and the story of how Assam got detention centres for foreigners". India Today, (27 December 2019).

¹⁴⁰ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, "USCIRF Raises Serious Concerns and Eyes Sanctions Recommendations for Citizenship (Amendment) Bill in India, Which Passed Lower House Today". (9 December 2019).

Assam government conducted a series of “anti-encroachment drives” to force Muslims from their lands.

Although, communal and nationalistic rhetoric has provided BJP considerable political clout in the region, but it has also divided the erstwhile peaceful North-Eastern region of the country into warring communities. BJP has been able to portray Muslims as the greatest threat to “Assamese” culture, merging their philosophies with xenophobia and getting political capital as a result.

Another issue which can potentially undermine the principles of secularism and equality that are enshrined in India's constitution is the contentious Uniform Civil Code. It proposes to replace personal laws based on religion with a single law, which could infringe on the rights of religious minorities. As several religions are exercised in India, civil laws were enacted under the Mughal rule and continued by colonial Britain providing individuals to exercise their religion. The laws pertaining to marriage, divorce, alimony, inheritance, and adoption have always remained distinct to different religious groups. BJP governments in the Centre and states have decided to implement a uniform civil code based on Hindu laws which will further Hindu domination and deny minorities to practice of their religion potentially demolishing their identity and rights. It was part of their election manifesto since the 1990s. Such laws which are enacted to reduce religious rights and strip a community of its cultural values can be regarded as a part of cultural genocide.

BJP-RSS’s desire to see India as a Hindu-only country has systematically taken away any semblance of cultural identity from the minorities. Muslims have been falsely accused of manipulating Hindu women into marriages and producing more children to establish domination.¹⁴¹ Despite government data showing that India’s religious composition has been largely stable since 1947 and the fertility rate of Muslims has declined from 4.4 in 1992 to 2.3 in 2020.¹⁴² To erase Muslim cultural heritage, the BJP government has expedited changes in the names of cities which were associated with Islamic heritage to Hindu-centric ones. In 2018, Allahabad has been changed to Prayagraj which references to a Hindu pilgrimage site. BJP government has changed the names of countless airports, railway stations, roads, and streets to reflect the Hinduness of India. The desire to alter the national discourse towards Hinduness made BJP to change the school curriculum in 2017 to National Curriculum Framework (NCF). As a guide it dictates the development of curriculum and emphasis on "Hinduness". It puts more emphasis on traditional Indian knowledge systems and history while emphasizing the contributions of Hindu leaders downplaying the role of Muslim leaders and reducing focus on critical thinking and scientific temper. It can be argued that this could lead to a narrowing of perspectives and a reinforcement of social hierarchies.

Another manifestation of prejudice against the Muslim community is the revocation of articles 370 and 35 A from the Indian constitution which provided autonomy to the people of

¹⁴¹ Sheikh Saaliq, “Interfaith love a risk amid India's Hindu nationalist surge”, AP News (29 November 2021), <https://apnews.com/article/religion-india-narendra-modi-1b630e78cd2c94c3a09fa5b51e9e4202>

¹⁴² Census of India 2011, <https://censusindia.gov.in/census.website/>

disputed region of Kashmir.¹⁴³ On 5 August 2019, through a Presidential order, these articles were removed, stripping the seven-decade-old autonomy of the predominantly Muslim region which provided Kashmiris with the right to have their own legislature, ownership and civic laws. These laws were formulated after the partition of the Sub-continent to maintain the status quo in the region to reach a resolution of the Kashmir dispute. However, BJP in their election manifesto highlighted this privileged position of Kashmiri Muslims as a threat to the Hindu identity of India. As the UN resolutions on Kashmir also call for a plebiscite in the region to allow its inhabitants to exercise the right of self-determination, this abrogation of the law will allow the BJP government to affect demographic changes in the region. Soon afterwards, the BJP government issued fake domiciles to around 3 million non-Kashmiris Hindus confirming their intention.¹⁴⁴ It has not only expressed the deeply engrained prejudice against the Muslim communities in India but has also added turmoil in an already volatile region. Kashmiri Muslims who considered themselves safe in their homes due to their numerical strength are now fearing similar treatment as other Muslims in a Hindu-majority region.

Justice System

In a democracy, impartiality of judiciary is one of the most important pillars which ensures protection of individual rights regardless of social, religious, and economic status. Justice system also maintains checks and balances against abuse of power and maintenance of law and order. India inherited its judicial system from the colonial British with many of the colonial provisions like the Indian Penal Code which came into force in 1862 and is still in effect. India had a history of an independent judiciary which ensured its secular makeup. Of late, assaults on the judicial system have compromised judicial integrity. Soon after BJP came into power in 2014 with a majority mandate, it expressed its desire to change the way judges are appointed in the higher Court of India. It enacted a bill which posited that the composition of the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) to be set up by the bill which was bound to affect the independence of the judiciary as it allowed the government to reject any judicial nomination on basis of national security.¹⁴⁵ The Chief Justice of India criticized the bill and passed a judgment quashing this constitutional amendment. A war of attrition between the judiciary and the government broke out and for the next three years, the BJP government did not appoint any judges to the higher courts putting immense pressure on the judicial system. By 2016, 45 per cent of judicial positions were vacant.¹⁴⁶ Despite the judiciary's frantic appeals, the government was not willing to budge. The judiciary ultimately surrendered, and BJP got their bill enacted in 2017. As a result, BJP government was able to reject any judge which they

¹⁴³ Editor, "Article 370: What happened with Kashmir and why it matters", BBC News (6 August 2019), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-49234708>

¹⁴⁴ Anadolu Agency, "Over 3 million fake domiciles issued to change IIOJK demography" Express Tribune, (10 Jun 2021), <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2304530/over-3m-fake-domiciles-issued-to-non-kashmiris-to-change-iiojk-demography>

¹⁴⁵ Express News Service, "On Day Govt Moves Bill, Chief Justice Speaks Up," Indian Express, (12 August 2014), <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/on-day-govt-moves-bill-chief-justice-speaks-up/>.

¹⁴⁶ U. Anand, "CJI to Government: Don't Blame Us for Delay, Look Within," Indian Express (23 July 2014), <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/cji-to-government-dont-blame-us-for-delay-look-within/>. The vacancies in the High Court jumped from 470 to 478 between July and August. M. Krishnan, "Judiciary Watch: 478 Vacancies in High Courts across the Country," Bar and Bench, August 6, 2016, <https://www.barandbench.com/news/judiciary-watch-478-vacancies-high-courts-across-country>.

deemed unsuitable for their designs citing national security concerns. Consequently, BJP as able to appoint their blue-eyed judges in the higher judiciary. After conquering over the judiciary, BJP was able to use this instrument of state to further its own interests. In 2019, the ruling of “demolition of Babri Mosque” was given in favour of RSS and Hindu nationalists were allowed to construct Ram Temple.¹⁴⁷ PM Narendra Modi victoriously laid the foundation stone of the Ram Temple at the site of Babri Mosque. Controversial rulings from the courts became frequent, challenging the essence of the rule of law and democracy. Notable rulings which go against the democratic norms but conform with the aspirations of the BJP government are, the case of against Aadhaar Act, the Whistle-blower Act, the challenge to 370 and 35 A and acquittal of various far-right Hindu militants who as murders and rapists like Babu Bajrandi, Jaydeep Patel and their cohort.¹⁴⁸ All 69 accused of murdering Muslims in the Naroda Gam massacre were acquitted by courts.¹⁴⁹

The implications of BJP’s loyalists in the judiciary are harrowing for the minorities in India and those who threaten the ideas of BJP-RSS. The creditability of courts has receded and the whole system seems to be riding the Hindutva bandwagon. In a blatant disregard for the system of justice in India, 42 per cent of members of the incumbent Council of Ministers of the Prime Minister have declared criminal records.¹⁵⁰

The Near End of Multi-Party System in India

Resonating with the Hindu religious sentiments, BJP-RSS has slowly and gradually occupied all the political and social space leaving crumbs for the other political groups. The Congress party, which was instrumental in gaining independence from British colonists, has lost its support base due to various scandals of nepotism and corruption, lack of strong leadership, internal disputes but most importantly ceding political space to BJP. Congress party has failed to provide a viable ideological alternative to BJP’s narrative. BJP has been able to convince a large segment of the Indian populace that the secular Congress is a remnant of colonial British who deliberately deprived them away from their Hindu roots and polity despite them having an overwhelming majority and the Congress is complacent in it. Currently, there is virtually no opposition to BJP’s rule in India. It provides unbridled power to BJP and with a system of political patronage and rent seeking, along with combining the ideas of Hindutva with patriotism, the future of any other moderate party seems bleak. Religious ideas in economically weak countries are hard to debunk and hold significant support. With BJP-RSS at the helm of religious authority, dethroning them and providing an alternative is a challenge which seems to be insurmountable for any political actor in India nowadays. With ingress in all social spheres of

¹⁴⁷ Vikas Pandey, “Ayodhya verdict: Indian top court gives holy site to Hindus” BBC News, (9 November 2019), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-50355775>

¹⁴⁸ Geeta Pandey, “Bilkis Bano: India PM Modi’s government okayed rapists’ release” BBC News, (18 Oct 2022), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-62574247>

¹⁴⁹ Reuters, “India Court Acquits 69 Hindus of Murder of 11 Muslims During 2002 Riots” US News, (20 April 2023), <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2023-04-20/india-court-acquits-69-hindus-of-murder-of-11-muslims-during-2002-riots>

¹⁵⁰ Editor, “PM Modi’s new Council of Ministers: 42% have criminal cases, 90% are millionaires”, Indian Express News, (15 July 2021), <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/pm-modi-council-of-ministers-criminal-cases-millionaires-7398120/>

society including educational institutes, the political position of BJP seems to be confirmed for times to come.

ANALYSIS

Civil Liberties Union for Europe has highlighted fourteen tenants of democracy. These are the essential components of a working democracy. Considering the evidence provided above, following can be concluded.

- **Participation of Citizens.** As, 80 per cent of Indians are followers of the Hindu religion, the current environment points out towards ethnic democracy in India where the largest ethnic groups are well protected and provided state support. Thus, democracy as a “rule by the people” is being exercised making India an electoral and ethnic democracy. Participation of minorities and secular parties in democratic exercise is also visible but they are slowly fading in the loud chorus of Hindu nationalism.
- **Equality.** Due to the politicization of religion, and saffronisation of politics the orthodox principles of Hindu caste and creed have been given a fillip by the incumbent political order. Hence, citizens who do not fall within the framework of hypothesised “Hindu Rashtra”, suffer inequality and prejudiced treatment not only by politico-religious groups but also by government departments. The divide is mostly on religious lines with Muslims, Christians and Dalits being the most affected, disenfranchising them from the Indian democratic project and pushing them to the fringes of society.
- **Accountability.** As the state apparatus including the judiciary is slowly being made compliant with the whims of the ruling party, the accountability of the political apparatus is becoming increasingly challenging. With many ministers in the federal cabinet with criminal cases registered against them and acquittal of murderers and rapists due to their affiliation with BJP-RSS, it seems like accountability will become difficult.
- **Transparency.** With efforts to control information and the use of colonial sedition laws and emergency laws, the right to information is also going towards a downward trajectory. Furthermore, a mainstream media outlet is also struggling to ensure unbiased journalism as both the main media groups in India have been bought by BJP loyalists. However, with the availability of social media, information is available albeit with an increased threat of violence towards the individual who calls on government policies.
- **Political tolerance.** With patriotism being synonymous with Hindu nationalism, political tolerance is receding at an alarming rate. Groups affiliated with political parties are being seen as inflicting violence against minorities and vulnerable segments of society without fear of accountability. The rise of hate speeches, the organization of social and political events to demonise minorities and frequent

spats of violence across the country speaks of a dangerous trend which cannot be construed to support the democratic principle of tolerance.

- **Multi-party system.** Although thousands of political parties are working in India and trying to carve out a political space for themselves; it is evident that BJP-RSS has risen as a saviour of Hindu nationalism and their narrative has resonated with most of the population. The secular parties are finding it difficult to counter this nationalistic narrative and are ceding ground. The largest secular political party in India is marred with internal discord, leadership challenges and loss of reputation hence it can be assumed that in the near term, challenging BJP politically will be a herculean task. With time, BJP will further entrench itself politically and without any worthwhile challenger.
- **Control over the Abuse of Power.** Although low-level functionaries of the government seem to be under effective checks and balances but in political space at the national level, evidence of control of abuse of power seems absent. With 42 per cent of ministers in the Federal Cabinet having a criminal record and Home Minister being a declared murderer, abuse of power seems to be the rule rather than the exception.
- **Freedom of Economy.** Economically, India is a free market, and its economic prowess has provided it sufficient leverage internationally. Considerable vibrant and educated communities especially in South India with strong business ethics and a culture of entrepreneurship have pushed the economy of India to grow leaps and bounds recently. Additionally, US-China competition and US's desire to see India as a bulwark against China in the region, has provided India with immense economic opportunities. However, the economic miracle seems to be confined to selected areas and groups as the economic inequality in the country is evident in the national economic statistics.¹⁵¹
- **Bill of Rights.** The secular constitution of India protects human rights as fundamental freedoms. However, the government's translation and exercise of these rights and freedom is wanting. Sufficient evidence has been provided in this chapter to prove the contention. Despite the realities on the ground, the inability of the BJP government to outrightly change the constitution also speaks about the constitutional durability and strength of the system. It remains to be seen for how long the system will provide a bulwark against BJP's desire to amend constitution in reflection of Hindutva.
- **Human Rights.** The current trajectory of events highlights that human rights are the most threatened tenant of democracy in India. Various international and governmental agencies across the globe have cited their concerns about human

¹⁵¹ Indian Brand Equality Foundation Report, "Indian Economy: Overview, Market Size, Growth, Development, Statistics", IBEF (Dec 2022), <https://www.ibef.org/economy/indian-economy-overview>

rights violations under the patronage of either the government or an associated organization of the ruling parties.

- **Free courts and Rule of law.** In 2022, India ranked 79 out of 139 countries on rule of law.¹⁵² It witnessed a deterioration in rule of law and a decline in human rights, civic space, timeliness of justice, and absence of discrimination. With the deterioration in rule of law and justice system, sustaining democracy is a challenge.
- **Free and Fair Elections & Accepting Election Results.** Charges of electoral fraud and use of unfair means are common after every election. However, elections in the country are considered sufficiently free and fair to declare a winner. Election results are also accepted by all parties albeit with reservations and lawsuits.

Keeping in view the status of different tenants of democracy in India, it can be safely concluded that India is facing challenges to confirm its democratic credentials. The erosion of the foundations of democracy and the authoritarian form of government in India is a concern for its neighbours and international observers. By 2021, Freedom House had classified India as “partly free”, and the V-Dem Institute called it an “electoral autocracy” under Prime Minister Narendra Modi.¹⁵³ The political environment of India is pointing towards successor of Modi to be the Home Minister, Amit Shah, or the Hindu cleric Yogi Adityanath. Both these personalities are the epitome of racial and religious hatred. With a constitutional limit to being Prime Minister for only two terms, India is heading towards a new era of hate and violence after Modi. When Hindutva mindset being further forced into the national psyche, the government in the center is likely to create and project more ideals of Hindutva to retain the attention of populace which provide substantial political capital.

¹⁵² World Justice Project Report 2022.

https://worldjusticeproject.org/sites/default/files/documents/India_2021%20WJP%20Rule%20of%20Law%20Index%20Country%20Press%20Release.pdf

¹⁵³ Soutik, Biswas “Electoral autocracy: The downgrading of India's democracy”, BBC News (16 Mar 2021), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-56393944>

CONCLUSION

India is passing through an unprecedented phase of social and political transition in its history. Its democratic and secular credentials are eroding with the rise of Hindutva influenced political parties and groups. BJP, the political wing of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) has secured political power through legitimate democratic process and like the Nazi party in Germany, it is peddling an ultra-nationalistic agenda. It has not only subverted democratic values in the country but has also accentuated religious fissures. The country's majority is being made to believe that Muslims, Christians, and other minorities are an existential threat to India, and they are required to present a united front against them. Ethnic and religious identities are being used to sow hatred within the society, alienating minorities especially Muslims and Christians. Minorities and secular segment of the society is being forced to assimilate to the ideals of Hindu nationalism or be subjected to intimidation or violence. Vigilantism and violence are becoming increasingly common and pushing minority communities to the fringes of society. The infiltration of right-wing ultra-nationalists in different segment of the government and the society has reduced space for dissent against the government policies and actions of its affiliated organizations. Frequent episodes of violence in the name GharWapsi (converting Muslims and Christians to Hinduism) and BetiBachao (stopping Hindu women from marrying Muslim men) and lynching of Muslims on allegations of eating beef are also alarmingly increasing¹⁵⁴. These developments in India have eroded the secular values enshrined in the Indian constitution and the country seems to be moving towards ethnic nationalism. Alarmingly, Genocide Watch has warned that India is at an advanced stage to commit genocide against Muslims in their country¹⁵⁵. An eco system of hate and prejudice has been crafted under the BJP rule to affect cultural and social changes in the country in reflection of Hindu ideals. The critical government functions are being conducted through a lens of religion. Judiciary and other law-enforcement agencies have been made toothless in front of Hindutva influenced organization and state apparatus. BJP has entrenched itself in the political space with no serious opposition at national level slowly turning the country into a single-party state. The trajectory towards which India has started to move projects challenges for Indian democracy requiring introspection by Indian political leaders to decide what type of India they want to see in the future.

¹⁵⁴ Lauren, Frayer, "Spate of lynchings Target Minorities, especially Muslims, in India", NPR Washington, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/08/19/752292498/spate-of-lynchings-target-minorities-especially-muslims-in-india>

¹⁵⁵ Fiona Neibart and Gregory Stanton, "Genocide Watch Warning Report", Dec 2020, <https://www.genocidewatch.com/single-post/genocide-warning-india>

Annex A**SANGH PARIVAR (AFFILIATED ORGANIZATIONS OF RSS)****a. Political Organisations**

- (1) All Jammu and Kashmir Praja Parishad, literally, "People's Council", a political party active in Jammu from 1947 to 1963.
- (2) Bharatiya Jana Sangh, literally, "Indian People's Association" a political party that existed from 1951 to 1977.
- (3) Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Indian People's Party (150 million, August 2019).

b. Occupational and Professional Organisations

- (1) Bharatiya Kisan Sangh, literally, Indian Farmers' Association.
- (2) Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, Indian Labourers' Association.
- (3) Bharatiya Railways Sangh, Indian Railways Workers' Association
- (4) Fishermen's Co-operative Societies.
- (5) Samskar Bharati, Organisation of Indian Artists.
- (6) Akhil Bharatiya Adhivakta Parishad, All India Lawyers' Council.
- (7) Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, All India Students' Council.
- (8) Akhil Bharatiya Shaikshik Mahasangh, All India Teachers' Federation.
- (9) National Medicos Organisation, Organisation of Medical Practitioners.
- (10) Akhil Bharatiya Poorva SainikSeva Parishad, (ABPSSP) All India Ex-Military Servicemen Council.

c. Economic Organisations

- (1) Swadeshi Jagaran Manch, Nativist Awakening Front.
- (2) VittaSalahkar Parishad, Financial consultants' association.
- (3) Laghu Udyog Bharati, an extensive network of small industries.
- (4) Sahkar Bharati, Organisation of co-operatives.

d. Social Services

- (1) Deen Dayal Shodh Sansthan, for the development of rural areas based on Integral Humanism.
- (2) My Home India - organization to promote nationalism and cultural assimilation between Northeast India and rest of India. Provide helpline to Northeast India people across the country.
- (3) Bharat Vikas Parishad, Organization for the development & growth of India in all fields of human endeavour.
- (4) Vivekananda Medical Mission, Socio-medical Services.
- (5) Seva Bharati, Organisation for service of the needy (founded in 1984)
- (6) Sabarimala Ayyappa Seva Samajam.
- (7) Sakshama, an organization working among the blind.
- (8) Nele (a part of "Hindu Seva Pratishthana"), Home for destitute Children.
- (9) Lok Bharati, National NGO's Front.
- (10) Seema Suraksha Parishad, Seemanta Chetana Mancha an organization working among the people of border districts.

e. **Religious Organisations**

- (1) Sahkar Bharati, Organisation of co-operatives.
- (2) Vishwa Hindu Parishad, World Hindu Council.
- (3) Bajrang Dal, Literally, Team/Crew of Hanuman.
- (4) Hindu Jagarana Vedike, literally, National Volunteer Association for men to protect the Hindus.
- (5) Dharm Jagaran Samiti, Organization for conversion of non-Hindus to Hinduism and their coordinating committee "Dharam Jagaran SamanvaySamiti".
- (6) Muslim Rashtriya Manch, National Front of Muslims.
- (7) Rashtriya Hindu Andolan, based in Maharashtra calls for the deletion of "secular" from the Indian Constitution.
- (8) Rashtriya Sikh Sangat, a socio-cultural organisation with the aim to spread the knowledge of Gurbani to the Indian society.
- (9) Hindu Rashtra Sena, propagating for the establishment of Hindu Rashtra.

f. News and Communication

- (1) Organiser Magazine.
- (2) Panchjanya (magazine).
- (3) Vishwa Samvad Kendra, communication Wing, spread all over India for media related work, having a team of IT professionals.
- (4) Hindustan Samachar, a multi-lingual news agency.

g. Think Tanks

- (1) Bharatiya Vichara Kendra, General Think Tank.
- (2) Hindu Vivek Kendra, a resource center for the promotion of the ideology of Hindutva.
- (3) Vivekananda Kendra, promotion of Swami Vivekananda's ideas with Vivekananda International Foundation in New Delhi as a "Public Policy Think Tank" with 6 Centres of study.
- (4) India Policy Foundation, a not-for-profit Think Tank.
- (5) Bharatiya Shikshan Mandal, a Think Tank on educational reforms.
- (6) India Foundation, a Think Tank.
- (7) Akhil Bharatiya Itihas Sankalan Yojana (ABISY), All-India history reform project.
- (8) Syama Prasad Mookerjee Research Foundation (SPMRF).

h. Overseas Organisations

- (1) Overseas Friends of BJP
- (2) Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh, literally, Hindu Volunteer Association overseas wing of RSS.
- (3) Hindu Students Council, Overseas Hindu Students' Wing.
- (4) National Hindu Students' Forum, Hindu student group in UK.
- (5) Sewa International, UK based Charity.
- (6) India Development and Relief Fund, USA based charity.
- (7) Rashtreya Bajrangdal (hanuman sena).

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