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How Hindu Nationalism has Influenced Indian Politics of Recent Years?

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Abstract

This research paper examines the growing influence of Hindu nationalism on Indian politics, particularly under the leadership of the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), which advocates for the ideology of Hindutva. The paper explores key policies and actions taken by the BJP, such as the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), the push for a Uniform Civil Code (UCC), the abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir, the criminalization of triple talaq, and cultural changes like the promotion of traditional attire in convocations and the imposition of a beef ban. These measures reflect the BJP's vision of transforming India into a Hindu-majority state, but they have sparked significant controversy and opposition, particularly from religious minorities and secular groups. The research analyses how these policies have reshaped political narratives, electoral strategies, and societal divisions, challenging India's democratic and secular values. It assesses the implications for national unity, religious freedom, and India's identity as a diverse, pluralistic society. Ultimately, the paper highlights the ongoing debate over the role of Hindu nationalism in Indian governance and its impact on the country's political and social fabric in the 21st century.

Keywords: Indian Politics, Hindu nationalism, Narendra Modi, Bhartiya Janta Party, CAA, NRC, Paanch Pran, Sarkarism, Triple Talaq, Cow Slaughtering, Rastriya Seva Sanga.

Introduction

Politics of India works within the framework of the country's constitution enforced on 26 January 1950 after it got freedom from British rule. India is a parliamentary secular democratic republic in which the President is the head of state and the prime minister is the head of government. The term 'Secular' was incorporated by 42nd amendment in 1976 declaring Country as secular although its essence was secular in nature from time immemorial and government follows this principle from general election held in 1951 by every party who won the election. The latest Lok Sabha election conducted in 2024 brought NDA (National Democratic Alliance) in which Bhartiya Janta Party, a rightist party, in power to run the government. This party/alliance had also won the general election held in year 2019. This research paper is going to talk about the ideology of Bhartiya Janta party when it won elections in 2014, how they are working to make India recognized as Hindu Rashtra and what are the action taken towards it by the right-wing party.

Hindu Nationalism

Today, Hindutva (meaning "Hinduness") is a dominant form of Hindu nationalist politics in India. As a political ideology, the term Hindutva was articulated by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar ^[1] in 1923. The Hindutva movement has been described as a variant of "right-wing extremism" and as "almost fascist in the classical sense", adhering to a concept

of homogenised majority and cultural hegemony. Some analysts dispute the "fascist" label, and suggest Hindutva is an extreme form of "conservatism or "ethnic absolutism". Some have also described Hindutva as a separatist ideology. Hindutva is championed by the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP)'s ideologue, the Hindu Nationalist volunteer organisation Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).

Professor Benoy Kumar Sarkar coined the term Hindu Rastra ^[2]. In his book named *Building of Hindu Rastra* presented the idea of structural of Hindu state and directives for the socio-economic and political system of the Hindu state. He is deemed the pioneer ideologue of Hindu Rashtra. Many people identify his philosophy as 'Sarkarism'. Savarkar was one of the first in the twentieth century to attempt a definitive description of the term "Hindu" in terms of what he called *Hindutva* meaning Hinduness. The coinage of the term "Hindutva" was an attempt by Savarkar to de-link it from any religious connotations. He defined the word Hindu as: "He who considers India as both his Fatherland and Holyland". He thus defined Hindutva ("Hindu-ness") or Hindu as different from Hinduism. This definition kept the Abrahamic Religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) outside its ambit and considered only native religious denominations as Hindu. Savarkar had made it clear that Hindutva is not the same thing as Hinduism and it does not concern religion or rituals but the basis of India's national character. Savarkar also defined the concept of Hindu Rashtra/ Hindu Polity.

The concept of Hindu Polity called for the protection of Hindu people and their culture and emphasised that political and economic systems should be based on native thought rather than on the concepts borrowed from the West. While the RSS represented the extreme version of Hindu nationalism, the moderate version arose during the 1970s and found wider acceptance among India's middle classes. The emergence of Jana Sangh as the leader of the new incarnation of BJP in 1980 was a part of the 'revisionist' ideological posture that was a clever and subtle departure from the militancy/hardline of RSS. Although it maintained a complete repudiation of Nehru's concept of Indian national identity, the BJP recognized his successes in balancing competing political forces.

The BJP reinvigorated has raised criticism of Nehru's policies by claiming that: 'India is Hindu', as expressed by the term 'Hindutva'. The Hindutva oriented assertions claimed that Islam and Christianity are alien to India, and argued plurality and for unity with the slogan 'one nation, one culture and India first'. The call of the Hindu right found response particularly from urban middle class, which led to the rise of BJP in 1990s. Thus, the 1990s represented an era in which the competing ideologies of Hindu fundamentalism and neoliberal economic policies became fused and found resonance within an influential sector of India's polity.

In recent years government fully supported the hard-line ideology to justify Hindustan as a Hindu state at the government level. The Hindu leaders passed unheard able remarks in their speeches against Muslims to support the Hindutva ideology.

Objective

The objective of this research is to examine the influence of Hindu nationalism on Indian politics in recent years. It aims to analyze how this ideology has shaped political narratives, electoral strategies, policy decisions, and public discourse. The study seeks to understand the implications of Hindu nationalism for democratic values, secularism, and societal cohesion, providing insights into its role in redefining India's political landscape and governance priorities.

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative methodology, analyzing political speeches, party manifestos, parliamentary debates, and media coverage to trace the influence of Hindu nationalism on Indian politics. Secondary data from scholarly articles, government reports, and public opinion surveys provide additional insights.

How Government Promoting Hindu Nationalism

1. Citizenship Amendment Act

The elements of a state-population, territory, sovereignty, and government-form the foundational framework of any political entity recognized as a state under international law. Among these, *population* is particularly crucial, as it refers to the people residing within a defined geographical area. However, simply living within a state's boundaries does not necessarily confer citizenship, which is a legal status granting individuals specific rights, responsibilities, and allegiance to the state.

The Indian Constitution, under Article 5, outlines the criteria for determining citizenship at the time of its commencement on January 26, 1950. These criteria are as follows:

- i). **Birth in Indian Territory:** Any person born within India's territorial boundaries was recognized as a citizen.
- ii). **Parentage:** Citizenship was also granted to individuals if

either of their parents was born in Indian territory.

- iii). **Residency:** A person who had ordinarily resided in India for at least seven years immediately preceding the commencement of the Constitution was eligible for citizenship.

These provisions were designed to establish a clear and inclusive definition of citizenship in the newly independent nation, acknowledging ties through birth, lineage, or prolonged residence.

Recently, the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 (CAA) was passed by the Parliament of India on December 11, 2019. The Act amended the Citizenship Act of 1955, providing an expedited path to Indian citizenship for religious minorities—specifically Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis, and Christians—from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan who arrived in India on or before 2014 due to religious persecution. Notably, the law does not extend this provision to Muslims from these countries. While this step was in favour to provide protection to minorities from neighbouring states, it also led to demonstrations in Delhi, Assam and other northeastern states opposing granting Indian citizenship to any refugee or immigrant, regardless of their religion, fearing it would disrupt the region's demographic balance. These protests have been ongoing since the 1970s, with local communities expressing concerns that the new law could undermine their political rights, culture, and land. They also fear that the law may lead to increased migration from Bangladesh, potentially violating the Assam Accord—a prior agreement between the state and the central government that addressed the issue of migrants and refugees. Yet CAA aims to provide a dignified sanctuary to individuals who have fled religious persecution in neighbouring countries without excluding lawfully resident Indian residents of any faith.

2. Uniform Civil Code

A UCC seeks to provide a uniform set of laws governing personal matters like marriage, divorce, inheritance, and property for all citizens, irrespective of their religious beliefs or community affiliations. In essence, it calls for the unification of personal laws that currently vary among different religious communities in India, including Hindus, Muslims, Christians, and others^[3]. The idea of UCC came in light when Britisher's followed "non-interference" or "non-regulation" towards the religious and personal laws which allowed Indian citizens to practice their own respective religion. This leads to introduction of Hindu Code bill in 1960's by then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru which talked about bringing reforms in Hindu personal laws which included marriage, property and divorce. This was criticised by many people at that time. If you see article 44 of our constitution that states—"the state should work towards establishing a uniform civil code (UCC) for all citizens of India"^[4]. This shows the framers of constitution knew how India is a diverse country where people follow various religion and culture, so they decided to approach the modern and unified way to make people come under one law.

A very famous case on UCC was of Shah Bano case in 1985 which talked about a Muslim lady wanting maintenance from her husband after divorce and the judge favoured her right to maintenance under Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code, irrespective of her religion. This case highlighted the reforms needed in Muslim personal laws. Goa became the first state of India which had implemented UCC after it became free from Portuguese rule in 1961. Not only in India

but other countries like turkey and Tunisia follows has successfully implemented UCC without hurting their religious laws and sentiments. The people of India have criticised it on the religious grounds. They have said how it was against their freedom of religion and freedom to manage religious affairs. In our constitution, article 25 talks about individual's right to religious freedom, ensuring that personal laws based on religion can exist. And article 26 talked about the right to manage their religious affairs, including establishing institutions for religious and charitable purposes.

3. Article 370

The roots of Article 370 trace back to the partition of British India in 1947, which led to the creation of India and Pakistan as two separate nations. Jammu and Kashmir, a princely state ruled by Maharaja Hari Singh, faced the dilemma of choosing between India and Pakistan. The majority of its population was Muslim, while the ruler was Hindu. Initially, the Maharaja sought to remain independent, signing a standstill agreement with Pakistan to maintain trade and communication.

However, in October 1947, tribesmen supported by Pakistan invaded J&K. Facing an imminent threat, the Maharaja sought military help from India. India agreed on the condition that J&K accede to the Indian Union. On October 26, 1947, the Instrument of Accession was signed, granting India control over defence, foreign affairs, and communications while allowing J&K autonomy in other areas.

During the drafting of the Indian Constitution, J&K's special circumstances required a distinct constitutional provision. Article 370 was introduced as a temporary measure to acknowledge the unique relationship between J&K and the Indian Union. This provision was negotiated between Sheikh Abdullah, the then-Prime Minister of J&K and leader of the National Conference, and Indian leaders, including Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru.

Article 370, incorporated into the Indian Constitution under Part XXI ("Temporary, Transitional and Special Provisions"), came into effect on January 26, 1950. Article 370 embodied six special provisions for Jammu and Kashmir:

- i). It exempted the State from the complete applicability of the Constitution of India. The State was conferred the power to have its own constitution.
- ii). Central legislative powers over the State were limited, at the time of framing, to the three subjects of defence, foreign affairs and communications.
- iii). Other constitutional powers of the Central Government could be extended to the State only with the concurrence of the State Government.
- iv). The 'concurrence' was only provisional. It had to be ratified by the State's Constituent Assembly.
- v). The State Government's authority to give 'concurrence' lasted only until the State Constituent Assembly was convened. Once the State Constituent Assembly finalised the scheme of powers and dispersed, no further extension of powers was possible.
- vi). Article 370 could be abrogated or amended only upon the recommendation of the State's Constituent Assembly^[5].

Simultaneously, article 35A was also introduced on the same caricature built by article 370, giving importance to the following-

- a) Defining the classes of persons who are, or shall be, permanent residents of the State of Jammu and Kashmir; or

- b) Conferring on such permanent residents any special rights and privileges or imposing upon other persons any restrictions as respects
 - i). Employment under the State Government;
 - ii). Acquisition of immovable property in the State;
 - iii). Settlement in the State; or
 - iv). Right to scholarships and such other forms of aid as the State Government may provide, shall be void on the ground that it is inconsistent with or takes away or abridges any rights conferred on the other citizens of India by any provision of this part^[6].

On August 5, 2019, the Indian government, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, announced the abrogation of Article 370. This decision was executed through a Presidential order and a resolution passed in Parliament. The government argued that the special status of J&K had hindered its development, fostered corruption, and facilitated terrorism.

The abrogation involved two key steps:

- i). The Presidential order of 2019 amended Article 367 of the Constitution, interpreting "Constituent Assembly" to mean "Legislative Assembly of the State." Since J&K was under President's Rule at the time, the central government acted on behalf of the state legislature.
- ii). Parliament passed a resolution recommending the abrogation of Article 370 and the reorganization of J&K into two Union Territories-Jammu & Kashmir with a legislature and Ladakh without one.

While there was a sweeping wave of support for the abrogation of article 370 and 35A, yet there were instances that channelized their disagreement on grounds such as the dilution of protection for local residents, particularly concerning land ownership and employment opportunities, potentially altering the region's demographic and cultural identity.

4. Triple Talaq

Among Indian Muslim's triple talaq has been prevalent for centuries although it has been a subject of controversy and debate. A man who's been married for years could end his marriage instantly by uttering triple talak. In famous case of Ms. Shayara Bano in 2017 which made supreme court declare instants triple an unconstitutional and violation of fundamental rights of Muslim women. It is also inappropriate to bring a matter like divorce which falls into a "civil jurisdiction" to a "criminal jurisdiction" by making it a punishable offence (sec.4). Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, 2018 was introduced by the Minister of Law and Justice, Mr. Ravi Shankar Prasad in Lok Sabha on December 17, 2018. Section 3 of the Bill provides that any pronouncement of talaq by a Muslim husband upon his wife, by words either spoken or written or in electronic form or in any other manner whatsoever shall be void and illegal. Section 4 imposes on the Muslim husband who pronounces triple talaq a punishment with imprisonment for a term of three years and also fine.

However, three of India's neighbouring countries-Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka-are among the 23 countries worldwide that have banned triple talaq. IN Pakistan, triple talaq was abolished when it issued its Muslim Family Law Ordinance in 1961⁷. But the bad side of triple talaq can no longer break the marriage or harm the wife, therefore, it is inconsequential. But the Bill punished the husband of Muslim married women for saying triple talaq with imprisonment of

three years and fine. Muslim divorce is completed, if not revoked expressly or impliedly after the 3 months of the pronouncement of talaq when iddat expires. So, it is obvious that the marriage will end when the husband is sent to jail for 3 years. The imprisonment of husband especially because of the complaint of the wife or her relatives for three years creates a situation in which enmity and irreconcilable differences between the husband and wife will be increased and the cordiality between them will be diminished that the probability of revoking his talaq will be almost impossible. Thus, the Bill instead of empowering the married Muslim women, it will victimize her by creating a hopeless situation for her to save her marriage.

5. Convocation Day Outfit

Every academic student once completing their studies are given an official farewell by their respective college/universities. It's called convocation when the college or university officially hands you your degree. In that occasion, students wear black silk cape with black mortarboard. This custom of wearing black silk cape has been existed in European countries.

And when south Asian nations got colonized by them, they made this custom follow everyone. But this got changed when our Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a speech on Independence

Day in 2022 which talked about Panch Pran. Panch Pran or "five resolutions" talks about the future of India in the next 25 years. One of them states elimination of colonial rule from our education and culture and promotion of our local handicraft.

The ministry of health and family welfare had asked AIIMS, institution of national importance and other government run institutions to give up black robes and caps and instead wear traditional Indian outfits to promote local handicraft.

India isn't the only country which has thought to bring change in its convocation outfit. Japan doesn't follow the black robe and black cap for graduation. Instead, the male students wear black suits and the female students wear kimono, Hakama or any formal dress. Filipinos take pride in adorning themselves with traditional Filipino garments like the Barong, Terno, and the increasingly popular modernized Filipiniana as they stride across the stage during graduation ceremonies [7]. Even though many institutions have accepted the change, the students have raised voice against this and mentioned how they have got the right to choose what to wear for their convocation day.

6. Beef Ban in India

In India for a long-time cow's have been considered holy in Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism. In the religious text book of these religion, they have interlinked the cow with the Holy God. And cows are also considered a fundamental financial need for the rural people. In our constitution, Article 48 mentions-"Organization of agriculture and animal husbandry-The state shall endeavour to organize agriculture and animal husbandry on modern and scientific lines and shall, in particular, take steps for preserving and improving the breeds, and prohibiting the slaughter, of cows and calves and other draught cattle." This was followed with a famous case of Mohd. Hanif Quraeshi v/s state of Bihar (1959) which was filed on whether cow slaughter was considered valid or not. The court had considered it valid.

This was not the only action taken by our constitution regarding to stop cow slaughter. In the seventh schedule of

our constitution, entry 15 of state list mentions-"Preservation, protection and improvement of stock and prevention of animal diseases, veterinary training and practice" [8]. This proves that the beef ban was done not only in religion respect but also to protect people from diseases which they might carry. Every state has different laws to control slaughter like in Tamil Nadu, cow slaughtering is banned, if not followed Rs 1000 fine and jail up to 3 years. In Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, one will face Rs 1000 fine and 6 months jail time while in Gujarat one could face up to Rs 50,000 and 7 years of jail time [10].

There are also states which haven't banned cow slaughter like Kerala, West Bengal, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Meghalaya [9]. Not only in India but there are some other countries which do follow beef ban. Sri Lanka [10] was the first country to take action on cow slaughter in South Asian countries. Many people of our country have agreed with the actions taken by the government but there are also people who have criticized it. There should be freedom to choose whether to worship or consume but law of the land i.e. the constitution should be placed on higher pedestal.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the rise of Hindu nationalism and its influence on Indian politics has been a transformative and contentious issue in recent years. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), with its ideological foundation rooted in Hindutva, has pursued policies that aim to reshape India's sociopolitical landscape in line with Hindu cultural values. The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), the call for a Uniform Civil Code (UCC), the abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir, and the criminalization of triple talaq are key examples of how this ideology has been translated into policy and law.

While these actions reflect the BJP's vision of a Hindu-majority nation, they have also sparked debates and protests, particularly among marginalized communities, religious minorities, and those who value India's secular and pluralistic traditions. The introduction of the CAA, for instance, has raised concerns over its potential to alter the demographic balance in the northeast, while the Uniform Civil Code is seen by some as an infringement on religious freedom. Similarly, the abrogation of Article 370 has led to questions about the protection of local identities and autonomy in Jammu and Kashmir.

Furthermore, the government's stance on cultural symbols, such as the call for traditional attire in academic convocations, and the imposition of a beef ban, reflect broader efforts to assert Hindu cultural hegemony, which some see as a return to indigenous values, while others perceive it as a form of cultural coercion. These policies and their implementation have significant implications for India's democracy, its commitment to secularism, and its ability to foster national unity amidst diversity.

Ultimately, the influence of Hindu nationalism on Indian politics continues to evolve, raising important questions about the future of India's identity, its political discourse, and the inclusivity of its governance. The impact of these policies on the nation's democratic principles will continue to be a subject of debate, as India navigates the complex interplay between religion, politics, and culture in the 21st century.

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