

## Hindu Nationalism in India – An Overview

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### Abstract

*Hindutva, an ideology of Hindu nationalism, has precipitated violent hatreds between the Hindus and Muslims of India, as was evidenced in the recent rioting in the State of Gujarat, which was never seen before in history. The factors which led to the emergence of Hindutva are reviewed and the emptiness of the ideology exposed. It is imperative to critique Hindutva's communalist approach and make concrete efforts to discredit it. This paper attempts to find out the historical roots of Hindu Nationalism and to sketch a way forward to restore the democratic values as per the Constitution of India.*

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### Introduction

As per its Constitution, India is a secular democratic Country. Lately Hindu nationalism has started influencing the nature of citizenship and state in a very strong way. As Indian Nationalism developed during freedom movement, Hindu nationalism came as opposite of it. The origin of Hindu nationalism and also Muslim Nationalism can be traced to period of colonialism. During colonial period, when freedom movement was articulating the idea of Indian nationalism, the section of Hindus, from the kings of princely states and upper caste elite to begin with, kept aloof from freedom movement exercised the concept of Hindu Nationalism. Hindu nationalism is a political ideology and a category with a specific meaning which is the agenda of RSS-BJP.

### Historical roots of Hindu Nationalism

During colonial period the rising classes of industrialists, workers, businessmen and educated classes came together and formed different organizations, Madras Mahajan Sabha, Bombay Sabha, Pune Sarvajanik Sabha, etc. These organizations felt the need for an over arching political organization so went in to form Indian National Congress in 1885.

The declining groups of society and kings decided to join hands to oppose the all inclusive politics of Congress, which in due course became the major vehicle of the concepts of freedom movement. These declining sections were feeling hesitant due to the social changes. To hide their social fall, they projected as if their religion was in danger. They also did not like the standing up to the colonial masters, which had started

putting forward the demands for different rising social groups and thereby for whole India. National movement saw this country as 'India is a Nation in the making'.

As per declining sections and kings; not bowing down in front of the rulers is against the teachings of 'our' religion so what is needed according to them is to promote the loyalty to the British. They, Hindu and Muslim feudal elements, joined hands and formed United India Patriotic Association in 1888 which was lead by Nawab of Dhaka and Raja of Kashi. Later due to British artful schemes the Muslim elite separated from this association and formed Muslim league in 1906, while in parallel to this the Hindu elite first formed Punjab Hindu Sabha and then Hindu Mahasabha.

These communal formations argued for Muslim Nationalism and Hindu nationalism respectively. Hindu nationalists also developed the political ideology of Hindutva, articulated particularly by Savarkar in 1923 in his book 'Hindutva or Who is a Hindu?' (3) While Hinduism is a religion, Hindutva is a politics based on Aryan race, this land and elite Brahmanical culture. This was an enviable situation for British as such groups would weaken the rising national movement. On one side they quietly supported the Muslim League and parallel to this they handled Hindu Mahasabha-RSS with velvet gloves.

### **Hindu Nationalism and RSS**

Taking a cue from the ideology of Hindutva, RSS came up in 1925, with the path of Hindu Nationalism and goal of Hindu Nation. The values of rising classes embodied in the persona of Bhagat Singh, Ambedkar, Gandhi, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and many others mainly revolved around Indian Nationalism, built around the principles of Liberty, Equality, Fraternity and Justice. The ideology of Muslim League selectively drew from some Muslim traditions to assert the class, caste and gender hierarchy of feudal society. While Hindu Mahasabha and RSS had tomes like Manusmriti to talk about similar graded hierarchies of caste and gender. Muslim and Hindu communalists were not part of freedom movement as freedom movement was all inclusive and aimed at secular democratic values. Muslim and Hindu communalists drew from glories of Kings of the past and kept aloof from anti-British struggle. (4)

Gandhi's attempt to draw the masses in to anti British struggle was the major point due to which the Constitutionalists like Jinnah; traditionalists of Muslim League and Hindu Mahasabha further drifted away, and consolidated themselves after 1920s. The trajectory of Hindu Nationalism from the decade of 1920 becomes very clear, to be on the side of British to oppose the Muslim Nationalists and also freedom struggle. Same applies to Muslim League, as it regarded Congress as a Hindu party. The Freedom of the country and tragic partition led to Muslim Leaguers going to Pakistan while leaving

sufficient backlog to sustain Muslim communalism here. Hindu Nationalists in the form of Hindu Mahasabha and RSS gradually started asserting themselves, beginning with murder of Mahatma Gandhi, who surely was amongst the best of the Hindus of that century.

### **Present Rule**

Modi-BJP is part of Hindu nationalist ideology. They gloss over the fact that the large masses of Indian people, Hindus never called and do not call themselves Hindu nationalists. Gandhi was not a Hindu nationalist despite being a Hindu in the moral and social sense. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was not a Muslim nationalist, despite being a devout Muslim, being a Muslim scholar of highest calibre. During freedom movement also most of the people of all religions' identified with Indian Nationalism and not with religious nationalism as being projected by Modi and company. Even today people of different religions identify with Indian nationalism and not with religious Nationalism on the lines of Modi and his ilk. Hindu nationalism is exclusive and divisive, Indian Nationalism is inclusive; rooted in the issues of this world, and not the identity related ones. Unfortunately Hindu nationalists have been raising the pitch around identity issues undermining the issues of the poor and marginalized. The Indian Nationalism, the product of our freedom movement is being challenged by the Hindu nationalism in India, Buddhist Nationalism in Myanmar and Sri

Lanka and is a major threat to the process of democratization in those countries; Muslim Nationalism has wrecked havoc in Pakistan, and many other places.

As Modi came to power in 2014 on the promises of ending corruption, controlling price rise, controlling violence against women, none of this came true. Instead the rising prices broke the back of common people. The demonetization increased the miseries of people as nearly 100 people died while standing in the queues to withdraw their own money, and later 99.7% of currency returned to the banks. The implementation of GST was tardy and increases the miseries of traders and others. The state started being more authoritarian to the extent that many felt it is moving towards 'elected autocracy' (18). The institutions of state, which are autonomous like Election Commission, Enforcement Directorate and CBI, started showing their partisanship to the ruling dispensation.

The overall atrocities against Muslims, Christians and dalits started going up. (19) The Muslims were targeted in the name of cow-beef. Nearly 100 people died after 2014 in mob lynching. Of these over 80% were Muslims and remaining were dalits. The campaign to stop interfaith marriage took the form of intensifying the attacks on interfaith couples where the girl happens to be a Hindu. New legislations are being brought in the name of freedom of religion. These aim at preventing conversions away from Hinduism, while conversion to Hinduism, in the name of

GharWapasi (Return Home) is going on. Many a prayer meetings have been attacked on the pretext that conversion to Christianity is going on. Sub radar violence against Christians is an ongoing phenomenon.

The tedious and painful exercise of NRC (National Register of Citizens) in Assam was undertaken on the premise that nearly 50 Lakh Bangladeshi infiltrators have entered Assam. People were to submit their papers related to citizenship. At the end of the whole exercise 20 Lakh people were found to be without papers. Of this 12.5 Lakh were Hindus and remaining Muslims. In major violation of Indian Constitution Citizenship Amendment Act was brought in. This gives citizenship to persecuted minorities in neighbouring countries. All are eligible for citizenship barring Muslims as per this law. The response to this came in the form of massive ShaheenBagh movement. In city after city Muslim women did the sit in's, which went on in a peaceful way (20). To disrupt this great democratic movement for withdrawal of CAA, the Delhi violence was orchestrated. In this violence 50 people lost their lives of which 2/3<sup>rd</sup> were Muslims. The major damage was done to the Muslim properties.

The communal forces are always in collusion with the big Corporate. Three new farm laws have been brought in. These laws are totally opposed by farmers as it makes them vulnerable in the hands of big corporations eyeing the agricultural sector. Huge protests are on in Delhi. Government is impervious so

far and building barricades of nails and concrete wall to prevent farmers from entering Delhi to voice their protests. (21)

The agenda of Hindu nationalism is multifold. At one level it wants to put the religious minorities, Muslims and Christians on the margins. Dalits and women are deprived of affirmative action and status quo of their social situation is maintained. The civic norms have been shelved and social activists working for the cause of Adivaisis and Dalits have been labled as Urban Naxals and put behind the bars without any proper or expeditious process to give justice to them. In a as Jean Dreze points out that Hindu nationalism is a revolt of the upper caste male against the values of equality due to which dalits and women are marching towards equality. (22) In revised edition of book on Partition Ambedkar strongly opposed the formation of Pakistan in the name of Islam. His argument was that if Pakistan is formed in the name of Islam, the path of Hindu Raj will be facilitated and Hindu raj will be a great calamity for dalits.

### **Way Forward**

Struggle for restoration of democratic values is a big task in current times. The misconceptions against minorities have been constantly propagated through multiple channels and have become the part o social thinking to a large extent. The hatred against these sections is widely prevalent; it is this hatred which forms the ground on which violence can be orchestrated. This violence in

turn leads to polarization and coming of communal forces in seat of power. Communal forces in power in turn strengthen the RSS, the organization working the agenda of Hindu nation.

A multilayered struggle to counter the misconceptions against religious minorities is the core task. This needs to be supplemented by building the bridges of love and amity between different religious communities. The social movements for defense of human rights need to be supported and a platform of social issues has to work for the values of Indian Constitution, where fraternity, equality and justice have to accompany the liberty. Tasks are immense.

### **Conclusion**

This study finds that the ideology of the RSS is based on hatred of religious minorities, particularly Muslims using this ‘enemy’, as a means to unite Hindus. Since independence in 1947 whenever the massacre of Muslims has taken place, the name of the RSS has been mentioned either in creating tension and disharmony among Hindus and Muslims, and/or taking part in these attacks on Muslims. Economic indicators highlight the plight and deterioration of the socio-economic conditions of Muslims in India. However, the RSS and its affiliate continue to oppose any policy measures to address these issues and to move towards inclusive development. The process of uneven development and deepening socio-economic crisis has created conditions of backwardness and poverty,

which in turn had created an opportunity for right-wing Hindu organisations to organise people on the basis of religion. The study finds that with the adoption of neoliberal economic policy, India is surrendering its sovereignty to global finance capital.

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