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GSSSR

GLOBAL STRATEGIC & SECURITY STUDIES REVIEW

VOL. IX, ISSUE II, SPRING (JUNE-2024)

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Article Title

Rise of Hindutva and the Security Architecture of South Asia

Abstract

The rise of Hindutva ideology is likely to alter secular India into a parochial Hindu nation by inducing a wave of militant nationalism across the state, which can potentially imperil the peace of South Asia. The aim of the study is to evaluate India's hegemonic stance, analyzing medieval and contemporary factors behind the surge of Hindu nationalism. It seeks to comprehend the core principles of Hindutva ideology through in-depth historical scrutiny, aiming to demonstrate its origins rooted in religious intolerance. Elaborating on the institutionalization of Hindutva ideology by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government, this paper comprehensively explains the erosion of democratic and secular institutions, the upsurge in communal violence, constraints on dissent, and the enactment of discriminatory legislation, ultimately characterizing India as an electoral autocracy (Biswas, 2021). Employing the theoretical framework of instrumentalism, the paper highlights the ramifications of extreme right-wing politics on the Indian polity.

Keywords: India, Hindutva, BJP, Nationalism, Pakistan, Extremism, Terrorism, Communal Violence, Regional Implications

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Citing this Article

05	Rise of Hindutva and the Security Architecture of South Asia				
05	**Author**	Ahmad Ali Fajar Nadeem Mehwish Tufail	**DOI**	10.31703/gsssr.2024(IX-II).05	
Pages	55-67	**Year**	2024	**Volume** IX	**Issue** II

Referencing & Citing Styles	APA	Ali, A., Nadeem, F., & Tufail, M. (2024). Rise of Hindutva and the Security Architecture of South Asia. *Global Strategic & Security Studies Review, IX*(II), 55-67. https://doi.org/10.31703/gsssr.2024(IX-II).05
	CHICAGO	Ali, Ahmad, Fajar Nadeem, and Mehwish Tufail. 2024. "Rise of Hindutva and the Security Architecture of South Asia." *Global Strategic & Security Studies Review* IX (II):55-67. doi: 10.31703/gsssr.2024(IX-II).05
	HARVARD	ALI, A., NADEEM, F. & TUFAIL, M. 2024. Rise of Hindutva and the Security Architecture of South Asia. *Global Strategic & Security Studies Review,* IX, 55-67.
	MHRA	Ali, Ahmad, Fajar Nadeem, and Mehwish Tufail. 2024. 'Rise of Hindutva and the Security Architecture of South Asia', *Global Strategic & Security Studies Review,* IX: 55-67.
	MLA	Ali, Ahmad, Fajar Nadeem, and Mehwish Tufail. "Rise of Hindutva and the Security Architecture of South Asia." *Global Strategic & Security Studies Review* IX.II (2024): 55-67. Print.
	OXFORD	Ali, Ahmad, Nadeem, Fajar, and Tufail, Mehwish (2024), 'Rise of Hindutva and the Security Architecture of South Asia', *Global Strategic & Security Studies Review,* IX (II), 55-67.
	TURABIAN	Ali, Ahmad, Fajar Nadeem, and Mehwish Tufail. "Rise of Hindutva and the Security Architecture of South Asia." *Global Strategic & Security Studies Review* IX, no. II (2024): 55-67. https://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gsssr.2024(IX-II).05

Title

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Contents

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Introduction

The dramatic rise of Hindutva ideology in India is having an overarching impact on India's socio-cultural landscape and its polity. India is the world's largest democracy which asserts to be secular, one where all religions coexist. However, the ongoing violence against religious minorities and shrinking space for dissent in the state is proving otherwise. According to the Human Rights Watch 2022 report, restrictions on following one's religion and the number of social hostilities towards targeted minorities in India have drastically increased under the Modi regime (Humans Rights Watch, 2022). Moreover, Paris-based Reporters Without Borders (RSF) ranks India 150th out of 180 states on the Press Freedom Index 2022, down from 142 out of 180 in 2021 (Reporters without Borders, 2022).

The growing tide of militant nationalism, which is further deepening the communal divide within the state, is an aftermath of the institutionalization of Hindutva ideology (Gettleman, 2019). The

Hindutva ideology primarily emphasizes the creation of a Hindu *Rashtra* (nation), thereby it's a Hindu nationalist ideology. Hindutva asserts that to be Indian is to be a Hindu and that a secular India has been discriminatory against the majority of Hindus. The assassin of Mahatma Gandhi, Nathuram V. Godse, was also inspired by Hindutva ideology. He shot Gandhi as he believed that Gandhi's policies were favorable to Muslims in India and destructive to the Hindu majority. Godse was a member of RSS, an extreme-right paramilitary political wing, which was banned for a short time after Gandhi's murder; however, it is now actively involved in Indian politics and has strong ties with BJP (Reporters without Borders, 2022). All the Hindu nationalist organizations present in India are collectively referred to as Sangh Parivar and BJP is the political front of these organizations.

The first tenure of BJP (2014-2019) cultivated a soft wave of Hindutva in India as Modi's extreme nationalist supporters have been routinely terrorizing religious minorities across the state. Killings of Muslims and Dalits (lower caste Hindus), even on the suspicion of slaughtering, selling, or eating cows, have become more frequent in the past few years. The incidents of mob violence are more about identity politics than the sacredness of a cow; the issue of beef eating is maneuvered by Hindu nationalists against the "others" i.e., Muslims or Dalits (Jarvis, 2019).

The second tenure of BJP (2019-2024) has prompted the hardline rise of Hindutva. Soon after assuming power in 2019, Modi started pursuing its majoritarian agenda. By passing discriminatory laws like CAA and by abrogating articles 370 and 35 (A) which provided Kashmir its special status, the BJP has cultivated a hard phase of Hindutva in Indian polity and has further polarized the society. The discriminatory laws given by the BJP induced nationwide protests which were met with Hindu nationalist gangs who brutally attacked the peaceful protests leading to the death of more than 50 people. Lately, mob violence/lynching has been mainstreamed by Hindu nationalists and India's police have been found complicit in such violent incidences (Malik, 2020). The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) also designated India a state of particular concern because of the ongoing human rights violations by militant Hindu nationalistic forces in the state (USCIRF, 2020). Since the BJP assumed power, paramilitary organizations like RSS have also grown to be stronger than ever. Hate crimes, a de facto ban on cow slaughter, and mob animosity against Muslims and other minorities are increasing to alarming levels (Fact Checker 2018).

India is the core state in South Asia and the rise of militant nationalism can have serious implications for South Asian security architecture. The institutionalization of Hindutva ideology is affecting the foreign policy of India as it is developing more aggressive postures towards its neighbors. The aggressive posture of India pushes South Asia into a more challenging position in terms of crisis management. If India aligns with extremism, then it can have a disastrous impact on South Asia as it is already a conflict-prone region.

The Rise of Hindutva Ideology in India: Key Drivers

Ideological Development of Hindutva in the Colonial Period

The philosophy and ideology of Hindutva are based on the primordial construct of Hindu identity in the colonial period. Hindutva negates the coexistence of diverse religious communities in the past and believes that the Subcontinent was a progressive Hindu region until foreign invasions by different religious identities took place (Ahmed, 2020). The post-colonial Hindu nationalist movements revolved around ethno-religious politics to mobilize populations to fight imperial rule and achieve independent India. The oppressive imperial rule and competitive politics created rivalry between religious communities (Adas, 1971). The sectarian consciousness created was manipulated by anti-colonial movements to serve the interests of powerful groups, for instance cow slaughter issue was raised by Hindu Landlords to undermine poor Muslim tenant's demand for better land rights (Siddiqui, 2017).

The extensive Imperial legacy of the subcontinent has affected the overall structure, character, and geography of the region. Contemporary religious, ethnic, and cultural fault lines find their roots back to the historic British Empire. The chauvinist version of the Hindu community was propagated in the 1920s by nationalistic ideologues like Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, the founder of Hindutva, who characterized Hindu identity by three elements i.e. *Jaati* (race), *Rashtra* (territory), and *Sanskrit*

(culture) (MISRA, 1999). V.D Savarkar equates Hindu nationhood with Indian nationhood and justifies violence to protect the Hindu nation. Nationalism and religion were tied together for the purpose of fighting colonial rulers. Nationalism is a subjective term that can be a political ideology or a belief that strengthens a group's identity by inducing "us" vs. "them" sentiments. Henceforth the instrumental use of religion not only created religious rivalry but also wrecked India's composite culture (Huang, 2019).

The religious communities who did not belong to the Hindu race were classified as "internal threats" by a prominent Hindutva ideologue Madhav Sadashiv Golwalker; in his book *Bunch of Thoughts* Muslims, Christians, and Communists are deemed a threat to the Hindu Rashtra (Hindu nation) (Badri, 2020). M.S. Golwalkar further argues that the religious minorities living in Hindustan should either embrace Hinduism or leave the country and live in the foreign land where they belong. In the post-colonial era, Hindu nationalism was divided into two schools of thought: Gandhi and Savarkar (Bhosale, 2009) Contrarily, Gandhi saw Indian nationalism as neutral to class and religion, he saw 'Indians' as the primary element for one nation or Praja, perhaps he believed in a civic national identity. Congress was divided into moderate and extremist wings by the Hindu revivalists; the moderate wing was led by leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi, whereas the extremist wing was led by B.G Tilak, Lajpat Rai, and many other extremist figures who were blending Hinduism with Nationalism to mobilize masses.

This aggressive nationalism was emerging in India under the influence of fascism and Nazism in Italy and Germany, respectively. The 1920s Fascist movements had considerable influence on Hindutva Ideologues and their organizations i.e., Hindu Masabha. Militant social movements in Fascist Italy were appealing to the Hindu nationalistic fanatics. The RSS, a paramilitary group, was soon founded by Keshav Baliram Hedgewar in 1925; it started to indoctrinate its cadre into the Hindutva mission, a mission to create a Hindu Rashtra. The mentor of Hedgewar, B.S. Moonjee, also met Mussolini on his tour to Europe where the paramilitary training of young recruits appealed to him which later influenced RSS. The transnational link-up of Hindutva in the 1930s, with fascism and Nazism in Europe, provides empirical evidence of how

Hindutva is premised on the concept of militant nationalism.

Transnational ideological ties to Europe also continued during the rise of the Nazis regime in Germany. V.D. Savarkar's teachings are impressed by Germany's response to the Jewish minority and recommend adopting it as a solution for the "Muslim problem" in India (Leidig, 2020). Moreover, M.S. Golwalkar, the second chief of RSS, also argued that being a 'Hindu was a matter of race and blood'- an idea of racial purity inspired by Hitler. V.D. Savarkar presented "Hinduism" and "Hindutva" as different concepts as according to him Hindutva unlike Hinduism doesn't only comprise religious history but the complete history of the Hindu nation (Katju, 2011). Such concepts left out the Muslims, Christians, and other religious minorities who were not part of the Hindu race. These discussions show the jingoistic construct of Hindu identity which is shaping the extreme Hindu right politics today in India.

Medieval Key Drivers

Repercussions of Hindutva Politics on India's Secularism

The reincarnation of Hindu Nationalism started under the umbrella of Sangh Parivar shortly after India's independence, as a strategic political move. Many far-right Hindu leaders continued spreading animosity towards minorities in India. Meanwhile, Hindutva Ideologues continued to represent Hinduism, through Hindutva movements, a suitable replacement for the Western concept of democracy and secularism which was inherited by India from British colonizers. It was a challenge for Hindutva ideologues to stay politically relevant after the creation of India as the INC, formed back in 1885, was quite popular and soon started participating in the political discourse of the newly formed democratic state. Therefore, the extremist Hindu factions soon initiated majoritarian Hindutva politics to gain popularity among the masses.

The popular Hindutva cases of the late 1990s, for instance, were inadequately dealt with by the Supreme Court. The Manohar Joshi's case was dealt with by the Supreme Court when Joshi was accused of misconduct in the 1990 election as he promised a "Hindu Rashtra" to its voters in Maharashtra; however, the court deemed Joshi's statement as an expression of hope. Hence this ruling became

warring to the pluralistic tendencies in India (Nauriya, 1996). The extreme Hindu right in India has basically manipulated secularism by creating insidious inroads in the three basic principles of secularism i.e., equality, tolerance, and freedom of religion (Christophe, 2014). There have been various cases involving representatives from BJP and Shiv-Sena who were accused of violating the People Act 1951, which elaborates on the conduct of elections in India, but the court failed to understand the political agenda behind it and vindicated Pseudo-Secularism. The culprits were indicted for spreading religious hatred in their election campaigns and using religion as a tool to gain votes; however, the court concluded that Hindutva simply represented "a way of life in the subcontinent" (Cossman, 1996). This verdict served as the basis for the Hindu right to fearlessly stick to their nationalistic political rhetoric and continue targeting minorities.

Misinterpretation of History

In conjunction with the appropriation of secularism in India, the Hindu right fractions also misinterpreted history to lay the basis for brute majoritarianism in the days to come (Jaffrelot, 2019). One such example is depicting Mughal emperor Aurangzeb as an extremist Muslim ruler who destroyed Hindu temples, yet the research proves that he protected many Hindu and Jain temples and was more driven by political motives than religious ones (Truschke, 2017). RSS, from the beginning, is trying to portray the Mughal era as a period of Hindu oppression. Misinterpretation of Mughal history by Hindu nationalists became a reason for the Babri Masjid dispute in 1992. The history was re-constructed to meet political needs when Mughal Emperor Babur was accused of destroying the ancient Hindu temple, of huge historical importance as it is "Ramjanambhumi," the birth of Lord Ram, and building a mosque at that location (Narain, 2006). The militant Hindus, mainly from RSS and BJP, destroyed the mosque at Ayodhya in five hours and a religious shrine became a place of political theater. It was a symbolic move of bringing back Hindu "pride" and "culture" by the BJP to gain popularity as a major Hindu political party (Mittal, 2013).

Current Key Drivers
Polarization of the Society

In the 21st century, the sudden rise in the popularity of right-wing leaders has been witnessed globally; leaders like Narendra Modi tend to work for victims of economic exploitations but once in power blame the "others" to provide a simple solution to complicated structural issues in order to wield great influence (Kaul, 2017). In the Indian context, the "other" parties are the Muslims and various minorities which are suffering at the hands of the BJP and its paramilitary group. The BJP has been governing New Delhi since 2014 by using. Modi has restyled India by intimidating journalists, and Sikh farmers, attacking minorities, especially Muslims and Dalits, and mainstreaming Hindutva. From once being the world's 'largest democracy', India has been downgraded to 'partial free democracy' by Freedom House's annual report, 2020, and to an 'electoral autocracy' by Sweden-based V-Dem Institute report.

The Modi regime came to the forefront after two unimpressive and corrupt tenures of INC. With time, economic growth broke down old voting patterns in India. Modi presented himself as a common man and inspired people by his governance in Gujarat, where he created several manufacturing jobs. Modi's tech-savvy election campaign also attracted votes of India's youth. According to a survey, released by Delhi-based Think Tank CSDS, one-third of people voted for BJP because Modi was the candidate for prime minister. However, right-wing leaders like Modi after coming into power often use the national security mantra, and their policy pivots around internal and external security issues instead of economic issues. Soon after assuming power Modi opted for soaring nationalism across the state. Modi's supporters are of the view that this new government is reviving Hinduism which is the core of Indian society. The wave of majoritarianism is on the rise as the Hindutva family, Sangh Parivar, enjoys the full support of the BJP government. Minorities, especially Muslims and Dalits have been dehumanized which is leading to a spike in mob lynching cases.

Institutionalization of Hindutva Ideology

Communal rhetoric employed by the BJP has led to a paradigm change in India's policy-making structure. The reckless CAA is marginalizing Muslims in India and evincing how Hindutva has been institutionalized. CAA was passed in the upper house of parliament in December 2019 and prohibits

illegal immigrants from gaining Indian citizenship. However, it is discriminatory towards Muslims the bill divides the immigrants into religious categories and its main purpose is to delegitimize Muslim citizenship as it only provides routes to citizenship to Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi, and Christian from Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh, hence bluntly enshrining religious discrimination. CAA soon caused massive protests nationwide, in which many peaceful protestors were arrested. Soon deadly violence erupted in Delhi during an anti-CAA protest (Agrawal, 2020). The 2020 communal riots in India, commonly known as the Delhi riot, left more than 50 dead and hundreds injured (Dawn). Examples like CAA perfectly depict how the far-right Hindutva ideology has been institutionalized in India by the BJP. Conclusively Institutionalization of Hindutva is a salient key driver behind its practical manifestation today.

Hindutva Ideology: A Militant Form of Nationalism

A Growing Tide of Militant Nationalism

Nationalism generates identity politics. Mainly the political aspects of a group's identity and the power relation between majority and minority groups are analyzed in the discourse of identity politics (Ghosh, 2014). Kauffman defines identity politics as a belief that takes identity- its expression and affirmation- as the core of political work (Bernstein, 2005). Identity-based politics to bring social justice in society has been used instrumentally by right-wing leaders of the dominant identity group to give an aura of legitimacy to acts that otherwise be considered tyranny. There has been a systematic effort by Hindutva fanatics to define the national identity of India using religion and culture. Although Nehru and Gandhi strived to develop an inclusive form of national identity in India after 1947, the religious forces in the state gradually made 'Hinduism' salient in defining the national identity of India.

While defining the community of insiders through imaginary lines, a useful community of 'outsiders' is also created which usually serves as a mainstream target of harassment and marginalization. In the case of India, the process of formation of a homogenous Hindu Identity at the core of the state has been intensified under the populist regime of Modi. The allies of the Modi regime rely on the use of brute force and extreme

narrative in its ploy of identity politics. The useful community of 'others' in India is mostly Muslims and Dalits. The 'outsiders' or 'others' of society, who feel excluded from the national identity, more often try to seek autonomous identity on the fringes of the state. Hence the states in which politicians employ identity politics carry a high risk of communal violence.

India is a Hindu majority state, but the minorities are also in millions, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, and immigrants from neighboring states are living in India. The Indian constitution entails the principle of equality before the law for everyone within the Indian Territory. On the contrary, the ruling party BJP has been passing discriminatory laws like the CAA. CAA supporters in India argue that Muslims are not persecuted minorities in South Asia and that CAA is only to offer citizenship to minorities who have been persecuted. If this is the case then Rohingya Muslims are being massacred and persecuted in Sri Lanka, perhaps CAA is merely a part of Identity politics. Moreover, along with the CAA, the NRC is also being implemented across the state as an exercise to identify the legal citizens of India (Kumar, 2019). Hence, a Muslim immigrant who has been living for a decade or so does not qualify for Indian identity, but a Hindu or Christian immigrant stands a chance. The NRC was already a failure when applied in Assam as millions of people were not qualified for citizenship. This is just another example of injustice and militant nationalism in India in which BJP leaders and Hindutva factions were involved. Many Muslims were attacked and killed during the protests against CAA. The Delhi police officers were complicit in the violence according to an Amnesty International report, yet not a single investigation has been opened against them (Amnesty International, 2020).

The involvement of police in serious human rights violations has become a major challenge before the Indian legal system. The role of police in communal violence is prominent when the intolerant parties assume power. Although all the Indian regimes had some sort of connection with the intolerant religious faction of the state, Congress was a mild case of RSS while BJP is the political progeny of RSS, perhaps the most intolerant regime. Justice is denied when the state police do not provide protection to victims and are complicit in the killings. Indian police have seldom interrupted the functioning of terror groups like RSS in India.

RSS is the source of Hindutva ideology in India and has an overwhelming influence over the political and legal structure of the state.

RSS is an influential paramilitary Hindu nationalist organization that has 100 affiliate bodies across India. RSS is also the primary tool of the BJP against the Congress (Gahlot, 2015). It has helped the BJP gain popular support among the masses by exploiting the communal fault lines present in Indian society. RSS's mission is rooted in ultra-nationalism and in denouncing secularism in India that appeases Muslims (Frayer, 2020). After the murder of Gandhi, RSS was lurking but from the past three decades, it has rebounded and become more assertive than ever. RSS recruits' cadres and holds sessions to impart fighting skills so that they can fight the 'enemy'. At their training camps, RSS pictures of Bharat Maa are displayed along with the founding members of the RSS, K.B. Hedgewar and M.S. Golwalkar. Their uniformed cadres are known as 'swayemsevaks'.

Today RSS prominence is apparent in India as its political wing is in power and its longtime member Modi is the Prime Minister of the state. Right-wing leaders have nurtured an environment of intolerance which has resulted in a spike in communal violence. Moreover, the Hindu Nationalist Outfits have skillfully maneuvered a wave of militant nationalism by employing state power in aid of their political project. According to Human Rights Watch, the BJP has infiltrated state institutions like the police and the courts in a manner that militant nationalistic groups can now harass and attack communal minorities with impunity (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Since BJP's political ascendance, discrimination has been observed in law enforcement and legislative business of the government, for instance, the pronouncement of cow protection law, agricultural laws (Jeet Singh, 2021), the religious conversion law, the inter-faith marriage law, laws related to NRC, CAA, and the Babri Masjid verdict, and the unending violations in Indian administered Kashmir.

Humanitarian Crisis

Even during India's Covid-19 catastrophe, BJP politicians did not abstain from 'communalizing' the crisis. Tejaswi Suryan accused Muslims of corruption in bed allotment in a hospital in Bengaluru South and he questioned the hiring of 17 Muslim workers in the Covid-19 war room by asking

if this is a 'madrasah'(Swamy, 2021). Muslim workers were sacked but no evidence was provided to prove the accusations (Banaji, 2020). This event is a classic example of right-wing politics. Anger and grief were rising across the state as people were struggling to get basic things like oxygen, medicine, and hospital beds. Hate messages by Hindu extremists against the 17 names Tejaswi mentioned soon followed. These hate messages labeled these Muslim workers as 'murderers' who killed thousands of Bengalurians. This insensitive act was done to divert attention from the collapsing healthcare system of India. However, spreading rumors against religious minorities is not new in India. The Hindu nationalist myth of Love-Jihad has been ably employed for a decade by right-wing parties to mobilize support by suggesting that insidious outsiders in the state are seeking to prey upon our vulnerable women (Katju, 2020). Under the current Modi regime, an anti-conversion law has been passed after aggravating this issue to target innocent Muslim men and boys. Interfaith marriages are already rare in the Hindu-majority state of India. However, since the anti-conversion ordinance passed in November 2020, 86 FIRs against Muslim men have been registered in Utter Pradesh alone (Apoorvanand, 2021).

During the tenure of the BJP, incidents of mob lynching of Muslims and Dalits by Hindu vigilantes grew manifold. Communal polarization was apparent throughout the 2014 elections and has intensified ever since. Above all, what mainstreams Hindutva is the support of BJP government officials towards Hindu vigilantes. Support of the BJP is the reason why Hindutva vigilantes are turning savage and why the police's role is also under suspicion in BJP-dominated areas. According to Human Rights Watch, in eleven cases of lynching by Hindutva vigilantes, the BJP failed to enforce constitutional and human rights obligations (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Families who seek justice are fearful of the consequences as there is a strong link between cow protection cases and Hindu ultranationalist movements. In 2015, Muhammad Akhalq, for instance, on suspicion of slaughtering a cow for Eid was beaten to death by a Hindu mob; however, the union minister, Mahesh Sharma, called this tragic incident an 'accident' (Daniyal, 2019). This case soon gained popularity which led to the registration of FIR after nine months; however, the culprits were soon released on bail.

Furthermore, islamophobia, and prejudice against scheduled castes are on the rise in India. The following graph shows the increase in hate crimes against Muslims and Dalits. However, the incidents are not systematically recorded by the National Crime Bureau of India as there is an apparent data void (Banerji, 2018) as MHA also stopped sharing data on religiously motivated crimes after 2018. (Kancharla, 2020).

Figure 1

Religion motivated Hate Crimes against Muslims and Dalits
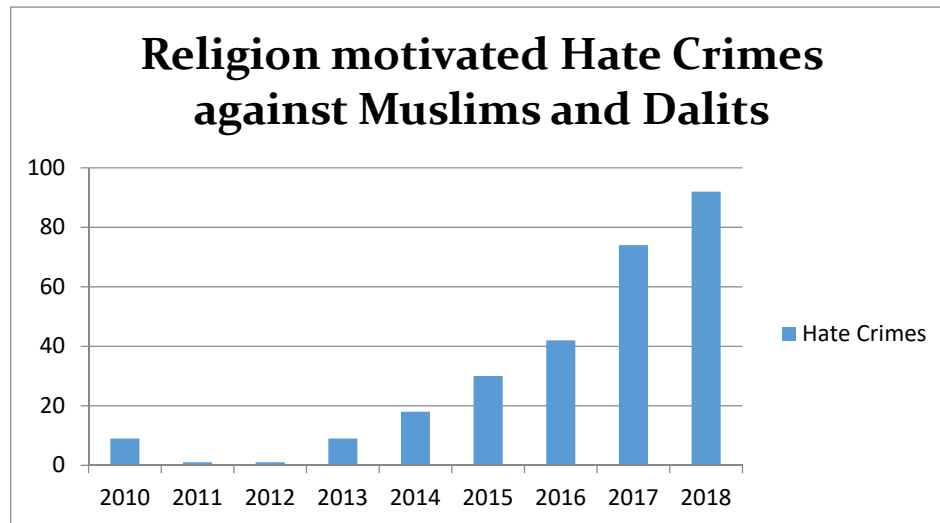
Source: Statista, India (Statista, 2019).

An in-depth interview was conducted with Dr. Saif ur Rehman Malik, Director of the India Study Centre (ISC) at ISSI, to get an expert opinion regarding the recent spike in communal violence in India amid the rise of Hindutva. Dr. Saif ur Rehman emphasized how intolerance has been the prime cause behind the spike in hate crimes and communal violence in India. His exact words are:

"Communal violence has continued in various phases since the independence of India, irrespective of the Congress government or BJP government. However, a spike in violence is observed in India today as RSS people have acquired respectable positions in Indian polity. They are using all the tactics to achieve their goal of Akhand Bharat. Today, the violence is not only against Muslims and Dalits but Christians and Sikhs have also been victims of Brahmin and ruling elites. The basic reason is the intolerant views and thinking of the ruling class. Their one-point agenda has remained that India is only for Hindus, hence they will go against any religion, creed, or caste. All the extreme things are emanating from Hindutva ideology. Modi, who was the Chief Minister of Gujarat, who then became the Prime Minister and then won another term, has used ethnic cleansing during all his tenures and he came very hard on the Muslims especially. The most important was his conduct in India illegally Occupied Kashmir (IIOK). Whatever is happening in India reflects the true face of Indian democracy. There is no respect for other communities in that country and we can see that in what happened to the farmer's movement in the recent past."

Case Study of Kashmir

Kashmiri people have been facing unprecedented lockdowns and unaccounted human rights violations since August 5, 2019. Indian government unilaterally abrogated Article 370 of the Indian constitution, which Article 35(A) is part of, thereby repealing the special status of IIOJK. Article 35(A) provided Kashmir, the only Muslim-majority state in India, with its local legislature which prohibited the settlements of outsiders in the region. It exempted the region from the Indian constitution and allowed the region's administration to legislate its own laws except policies related to finance, defense, and foreign affairs. Ripping off from Kashmir its special status was a significant move by India to take direct territorial control of Kashmir which is one of the most disputed regions of the world today.

Figure 1

Map of Jammu and Kashmir

Sources: BBC

The demographic structure of occupied Kashmir has drastically transformed since the revocation of Article 35 (A) as the Ministry of Home Affairs of India coupled the revocation with new 'domicile laws' for the region. The Modi government employed its security mantra to justify the revocation of Article 370, BJP officials claimed that this decision was simply taken to eliminate the separatist and militant outfits from the region, however, it is apparent now that this step is part of a grand plan of transforming India into a Hindu only state. The Modi regime has marked a new period of oppression and bloodshed. The new domicile laws made it easy for the non-Kashmiris to settle and hold government jobs in the region, completely reshaping the demography of the Muslim-majority region. Former Pakistani Foreign Minister, Shah Mehmood Qureshi, accused the Modi government of issuing over 1.8 million domicile certificates to the non-Kashmiris to undermine the plebiscite in accordance with the UNSC resolutions (Sajid, 2021). According to a local resident of Srinagar, "Kashmir is becoming the next Palestine" (Aljazeera, 2020).

The disastrous move of scrapping Article 370 has led to ethnic and religious cleansing of Kashmiri people by the Indian army and paramilitary groups. Hindutva regime is employing demographic and cultural terrorism as a tool of genocide in Indian-administered Kashmir (The News, 2021). Rape is being used as a weapon to retaliate against Kashmiri civilians; women are the worst target of the inhumane siege by armed Indian forces. According to critics, the aggressive policies of the Modi regime towards Kashmir are aimed at changing the ethnic composition of the region. Young Kashmiris are blinded by pallets shot by Indian paramilitary troops. The weapons used in Kashmir by India do not discriminate between combatants and non-combatants and cause excessive injury, thereby violating the UN's Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms (Khaliq, 2020). Yet India is producing propaganda movies like *Kashmir files* to conceal its acts of brutality.

Security Architecture of South Asia

South Asia is one of the most complex and dynamic regions of the world today. It comprises India at the center and Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Maldives, and Sri Lanka on its periphery. However, Afghanistan is also sometimes included in South Asia because of its geopolitical advancements in the region. South Asia is also one of the most densely populated regions which have endured one of the deadliest ethnic conflicts.

Figure 2

Map of South Asia

Sources: Shutter Stock

The rise of emerging nationalist ideologies in the 21st century entails the potential to pose a cosmopolitan challenge. South Asia is the most vulnerable as it possesses all the ingredients to become a geopolitical nightmare. The region has a history of civil unrest. The identities here are still struggling to overcome the post-colonial crisis. This region is globalizing and making its mark in the global economy, yet it is also striving to protect its culture from homogenizing. Despite the shared history and culture, it's least integrated socially and economically. There have been religious extremist activities in the region and the nationalistic sentiments are also growing.

The Security architecture of South Asia is mainly dependent on the two nuclear and antagonistic pair of nations, Pakistan, and India. Pakistan and India are caught in a stability-instability paradox. India has bigger interests in the region as it is striving to be the regional hegemon whereas other states are struggling to stabilize their fragile economy. India's overarching ambition to establish itself as a strategic regional power is allowing it to expand its influence beyond the region. India's latest Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan, or Self-reliant India campaign is allowing it to establish a neutral posture on the international stage and increase its political influence. However, the increasing military potential of India is not proving to be supportive of South Asia's peace and prosperity. The region is facing traditional as well as non-traditional security threats and there is a lack of regional cooperation to effectively combat these threats.

The regional security architectures are important to comprehend the security concerns of the regional actors. State's security interdependence is patterned into the region and states are concerned about the intentions and capabilities of the surrounding states (2003, Fasih). India's hegemonic aspirations shape the security dynamics of South Asia. The arms buildup by India threatens the neighboring states, especially rivals like Pakistan. India has developed drones indigenously and has also purchased from states like Israel. According to the SIPRI Report, India's military spending accounts for nearly $76.6 billion, and is ranked the third highest importer in the world (SIPRI, 2022). The conventional might of India intensifies the stability-instability paradox between both nuclear rivals in the region. The presence of deadly arsenals, the never-ending arms race, and the aggressive postures of India are a question mark on the stability of South Asia. However, due to India's strong global standing today, the international community rarely questions India's role in South Asia's stability.

The militancy in South Asia finds its roots in intolerance, ethnic identities and grievances, right-wing politics, and regional competition. The instability in Afghanistan amid US withdrawal, the rising ethno-cultural nationalism in Nepal, the rise of Hindutva in India, militancy, and suicide bombings in Pakistan and Sir Lanka, all these events have wrecked the stability of South Asia. Amid numerous potent threats to the security architecture of South Asia, the need for improved security and socio-economic progress could not be higher today.

All the South Asian states rank very low on the UN's Human Development Index, the region's fragile socio-economic structure makes it vulnerable to both recruitment and violence (Sanderson, 2013). There is a web of violent extremist groups across the region. Sometimes states support an extremist ideology to wield influence, thereby supporting the violent organizations. Moreover, transnational connections are also a reason that contributes to the re-surfacing of terrorist organizations even when a state strives to annihilate terrorism. Law enforcement agencies or LEAs cannot succeed if militant outfits continue to get external support. In the current globalized era, the war on terrorism cannot be fought by one state, collective effort and a unified response are required.

Terrorism and South Asia

The emergence of the Hindutva mindset in the key state of South Asia can prove to be devastating for the whole region. The military and economic might of India make it the primary regional force. However, the hegemonic leadership of India is reluctant to accept the responsibility of being a key state in the region. The belligerent mindset of India has exacerbated its relations with the neighboring states. India's willingness to use brute force, its motivation to take aggressive unilateral actions, and its reluctance towards economic integration of the region are costing South Asia its peace and stability. The region has suffered from the menace of terrorism for decades and still faces the challenge of terrorism on national and transnational levels.

The economic and political structures of South Asian states have been undermined by security threats. Post 9/11 era marks an increase in terrorist attacks/insurgencies in this region. The concept of terrorism reemerged in the post-9/11 era and counterterrorism was mainly focused on South Asia and the Middle East. Terrorism. The USA led a war on terror in Afghanistan and collaborated with South Asian states, mainly Pakistan and to some extent with India. Savage attacks on civilians and security forces soon began posing a threat to the national security of Pakistan as it had to play the lead role in combating terrorism as the neighboring state of Afghanistan. Extremist sectarian groups like Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JD), and Jaish-e-Muhammad were strengthening their bases by exploiting the already fragile infrastructure and ineffective government to finance their movements.

In 2014, Pakistan launched a National Action Plan in response to the threat of terrorism in the country. Since then, there has been a decline in terrorism in the state year after year according to the country report (US State Dept, 2020). However 51% increase in terror activities has been observed since the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. India, on the other hand, has been instrumentally utilizing this whole scenario for its own national gain by making false accusations against Pakistan for terror financing. India uses this security mantra to hide its own terror campaign in IIOJK. In Kashmir, India has been consistently blaming Pakistan for supporting terrorist outfits, but civilians have been the heavy target of Indian paramilitary troops in the valley. Such discrimination and violence against minority groups induce grievances that can leave the public vulnerable to terrorist recruitment.

According to the definition of terrorism, the aggressive attacks by India fall under the domain of terrorism. Terrorism entails attacking civilians in part for a political or ideological purpose, Hindutva ideology and the political ploy of Brahmin elites serve as the core motivation behind India's attacks on the minorities within its own territory and in Indian-administered Kashmir. The purpose of attacking minorities is to intimidate them and compel them to surrender to Hindu supremacy in India. Moreover, Article 370 recognized Kashmiri nationalism and now that is inducing militant separatism in the region. India is a significant player in the international arena. Perhaps, many states turn a blind eye to brutal international law violations committed by India. This is also the reason why Islamic Terrorism is highlighted but Saffron terrorism goes unpunished. For instance, Genocide Watch has issued an alert of Indian Occupied Kashmir and calls upon the UN to stop the massacre (Stanton, 2019). But as said earlier, the strong international standing of India today allows it to meet its hegemonic ambitions.

Regional Implications

To further understand the implications, first, we need to analyze the level of threat posed to the security architecture. A Framework of 'Adversarial Threat Analysis' that is used in counterterrorism studies can be employed to gauge the urgency of an imminent threat. The intentions (ideology and historical evidence), capabilities (arms and ammunitions, financial backing), and opportunities (vulnerability of the target and security architecture

of the region) are scaled to analyze threats by a militant group (Iqbal, 2019). The Hindutva-inspired organizations vocally endorse the use of violence to protect Hindu culture from outsiders. These terror outfits foment hate, for instance, several reports prove the involvement of BJP and the Sangh Parivar in mobilizing support for violence that led to the recent unfortunate Delhi crisis (Sagar, 2021). Hence, Hindutva factions intend to train and mobilize people to achieve the goal of a Hindu Rashtra through political and violent means. The second component is about capabilities, and we have discussed above how India has been engaged in an endless arms race. On the domestic level, Hindutva organizations are not only providing defense training across the state but are also imparting weapon training in Hindu temples (Sudhakaran, 2016). The last component is the opportunity and India today is able to target the vulnerable communities present within its territories and in some cases beyond it. The security dynamics of the region are also vulnerable given the military might of a great power that has no intention of integrating the region for economic progress.

The 2019 Pulwama incident provides a good example of how India's aggressive posture can bring the region to the brink of a nuclear war. On 14th February 2019, a militant attack took place at Indian occupied Kashmir, killing 40 Indian soldiers. JeM took responsibility for the attack and soon tensions escalated between India and Pakistan. Pakistan denied India's allegations of the attack planned within Pakistan's territory and demanded proof of the allegations. The situation soon escalated as India chose to strike within Pakistan's territory deliberately creating new thresholds between both states. It claimed to target JeM camps, but Pakistan denied the presence of such camps. Pakistan also shot down an Indian jet and captured the pilot. This incident was the 5th major crisis between both states since both sides attained nuclear power. Pakistan returned the pilot as a goodwill gesture. However, during this incident, it was impossible to bring India to the diplomatic table.

This event affected the South Asian security structure as India provoked escalation and new thresholds were set. The institutionalization of Hindutva ideology is affecting foreign policy as India is developing more aggressive postures towards its neighbors. India's foreign policy to preserve its hegemony is exposing India as an aggressor in the region. This is also a major constraint to India's hegemony as the periphery states are threatened by the aggressive rise and India may not enjoy much political influence over the regional states. Apart from Pakistan, India also has long-standing border disputes with other states. Another good example of India's aggressive posture can be the Nepal-India border dispute. India recently built a road in the Kalapani region claimed by Nepal, in response Nepal handed a diplomatic note to the Indian ambassador in Kathmandu expressing displeasure (Wiley & Sons, 2016). The Kalapani region serves as a tri-junction between China, India, and Nepal, hence the dispute is salient for the geopolitics between both rivals, China and India. Changing strategic imperatives in the Himalayas are representing a worrisome stalemate between Nepal-India and Sino-India relations. Thereby, we can conclude that the hegemonic posture of India has grave implications for the peace and stability of South Asia.

Conclusion

The twenty-first century has been witnessing the rise of ultra-nationalism. India which has seen some rapid economic progress in the past few decades, also endured economic inequality. The right-wing politicians in no time exploited this situation to rise to power. The overwhelming support of the Indian people for the BJP came from their deepest desire for economic progression. However, Hindu supremacists after coming to power employed identity politics to stay in power as they do not aim to work for the betterment of the state, perhaps they aim to divide the nation based on the communal fault lines. Hence, they institutionalized the basic tenets of Hindutva ideology in turn saffronizing India's military and police, Indian judiciary, and Indian bureaucracy.

According to the definition of terrorism discussed in this paper, Hindutva terror groups today tick all the boxes to be labeled as terrorist outfits. India if it wants to regain its lost status of the biggest democracy should confirm a peaceful rise and should ensure regional integration and cooperation rather than wrecking the peace of the region. Despite the economic and strategic interests, the international community should take a firm diplomatic stand against India's violations of international laws in the valley of Kashmir and its human rights violations within its territory.

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