

## Identity Faith And The Constitution: Negotiating Religious Freedom In Contemporary India

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### ABSTRACT

Religion and faith in modern India are the subject of this study. Instead of aiming to separate religion from state power, it investigates how the Constitution does so. A political science perspective is used to explore how religious beliefs affect political involvement, voting behavior, governance, and public discourse in India. The public considers the Constitution as a democratic framework that controls religious expression rather than a codification of laws. Examining major political events like the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), Sabarimala, and Ayodhya, the study shows how faith-based issues are exploited for political reasons and to mobilize large numbers of people. It shows how Hindutva has become a major intellectual movement that impacts state symbols, voting patterns, and policy by blending religious and nationalist ideals. The political effects of court rulings on power, public narratives, and majority-minority relations are analyzed. Religious issues are more than private or legal; they affect India's politics. Queer rights, citizenship, social inclusion, and faith-based politics affect these issues. The majority's political practices and non-religious people's democratic ambitions are always at odds. The paper contends that religion as a dynamic political factor in constitutional governance and modern power structures is necessary to comprehend Indian democracy.

**Keywords:** Religion and Politics, Faith-Based Mobilization, Hindutva, Secularism, Indian Democracy, Constitutional Governance, Political Identity, Citizenship

### INTRODUCTION

Given that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has been victorious in three successive elections in 2014, 2019, and 2024, there has been a significant change in the political landscape of India. These results not only reflect a more deep shift in the link between religion, political power, and government, but they also demonstrate that the attitudes of voters have changed. Since the election of Narendra Modi as Prime Minister, religious symbols and the concept of national identity have been given a greater place in political discourse and the formulation of policies. As a consequence of this, the differences that are often made between democratic politics and religious political beliefs have become less clear [1]. Stories from Hindu culture serve as the foundation for Modi's public image and their vocabulary in political discourse. Both the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which was the party that founded the BJP, have political beliefs that are comparable.

As a holy site (punya bhoomi) and a homeland (matri bhoomi), India is considered by the RSS to be a place of great significance [2]. The concept of Hindu nationalism has been linked to this dual identity for a very long time. These ideas are put into reality in the political arena by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Ancestors of the Bharatiya Jan Sangh and the Janata Party are the Bharatiya

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Janata Party. This translation, when seen from the viewpoint of political science, reveals how cultural nationalism is interwoven with politics and government, going beyond a simple religious revival.

The term of "Indian" is broadened to include all individuals by the Hindutva movement, which is a nationalist movement that places an emphasis on Hindu culture [3]. Hindutva has been elevated to the status of a major political ideology with the assistance of the RSS, the Sangh Parivar, and other elements of the Indian diaspora. This has had an impact on the tactics and platforms that political parties have adopted, as well as the efforts that they have made to win over people [4]. This initiative tries to recreate the Indian nation-state via the process of cultural unity, which is in contrast to the heterogeneous population that constitutes India's open democracy. It is clear that this way of thinking is reflected in the way that the BJP approaches governance [5, 6]. Symbolic gestures made by the state are included in addition to newly implemented policies. The "One Nation, One Election" program, publically sponsored religious gatherings, and the promotion of Sanskrit and Hindi are all instances of cultural identity in modern political narratives [7]. Other examples include the expression of "one nation, one election."

Those who advocate for Hindutva believe that it facilitates the development of national unity and cultural pride. People who are opposed to the effort claim that it is too focused on the majority and might potentially marginalize religious groups, which would result in less diversity. Examples of politically problematic developments include campaigns to protect cows, legislation that prohibits conversion, and measures to promote ghar wapsi. [8, 9] Voting patterns, public discourse on politics, and social cohesiveness are all examples of things that have been influenced. The concept of religious identity is used in a strategic manner in discussions about citizenship and the government. This is shown by the fact that Christians and Muslims are not allowed to participate in political activities, whereas Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs are allowed to participate in some aspects of a larger Hindu identity [10]. The fact that these developments have occurred demonstrates that religious belief is more than just an opinion; it is a strong political force in its own right.

When seen from this perspective, disagreements about religious institutions like as the Sabarimala temple and the Haji Ali shrine, as well as their internal administration, are not just issues of law but also of political philosophy. These disagreements revolve around concerns of membership, leadership, and representation [11]. According to the research that has been conducted in the field of political science, the concept of religious liberty in India need to be seen not just through the framework of constitutional law, but rather in the context of political participation and social inclusion [12]. An example of this would be the anti-exclusion principle, which may be used as a political lens to investigate the ways in which members of a community that is both religiously and philosophically diverse are permitted access to public places, resources, and legal protections.

The objective of this study is to investigate the ways in which the Hindutva movement use religious symbols in combination with current political techniques in order to exert influence over policy, voter participation, and national identity. This essay makes a contribution to the current discussion in contemporary India on the tolerance of religious beliefs, the cohesiveness of society, and the variety of democratic institutions by locating constitutional provisions within their political framework. The conventional conception of the Constitution as an unbiased arbitrator of religious and political issues is called into question by this study. Instead, the Constitution is seen as a controversial political framework that shapes the relationship between democracy, religion, and power.

## **OBJECTIVES**

1. To examine how India's connection between religion, faith, and politics is shaped by political practices.
2. To investigate how Hindutva, religious laws, and faith-based political activism affect minority rights, secularism, and social inclusion in the modern day.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This qualitative study examines how faith and religion affect Indian politics. Political science methods are used to study religious identities in democratic and constitutional situations. This study examines how constitutional provisions affect the power dynamic between the state, religion, and the people, not just the provisions themselves. Primary sources include Constituent Assembly constitutional debates, policy papers, and political declarations. Court verdicts like the Ayodhya and Sabarimala disputes have also shaped religious discussions. We investigate the items' symbolic political importance and how they affect legitimacy, authority, and national identity. Court verdicts are examined for their political influence on public discourse, state policy, and political candidate narratives, not for their intellectual merits. Secondary sources including books, journals, policy reports, and media studies assist contextualize political and religious movements. Case studies like the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), Hindutva ideology, cow protection laws, and "Love Jihad" show how religious problems influence government policies. The study examines how political people, groups, and organizations employ religious narratives using qualitative content analysis and discourse analysis. Political involvement, gender roles, minority rights, apolitical government, and democracy participation are thoroughly discussed. The study follows constructivism, which holds that religious identity changes with cultural and political variables. From this viewpoint, we may evaluate how Indian political leaders employ religious symbols and constitutional ideals to further their own goals within the secular, democratic, and constitutional framework.

## **RESULT**

### **Religion, Faith, and the Constitution as a Political Boundary**

The findings provide light on the relevance of religion and faith as current political aspects in India, which have an effect on governance, identity politics, and democratic involvement. Both Article 25 and Article 26 of the Constitution address issues that are related to religion. Despite the fact that they do not completely exclude religious speech, they do limit the settings in which arguments that are based on religion may be contested [13–15]. The Constitution is seen by political scientists as a collection of recommendations for the appropriate relationship between religion and state power, rather than as a document that attempts to maintain a tight separation between religion and state authority. This indicates that religious beliefs continue to have an impact on the attitudes of voters, the narratives used in elections, and the goals of policymakers.

### **Faith, Identity, and Electoral Mobilization**

Recent empirical developments in Indian politics indicate to the frequent use of religious identity as a political rallying cry. These developments have been based on a variety of different findings. It is common practice for politicians to use religious symbols and rituals in order to influence the choices and loyalties of people. The conflict surrounding Sabarimala is an example of a difficult topic that has received considerable support for contrasting narratives about tradition, modernity, and national identity. Politicians presented the controversy as including concerns of religious identity and political representation in addition to violations of the constitution. Competition between parties and the general public's view were both affected by this. In a similar vein, the fact that a large number of people gather at religious celebrations, processions, and the entry to temples is evidence that individuals use their religious beliefs to bring them together politically. Religion functions as a political rallying cry because it brings together people, interest groups, and ideological forces around shared religious narratives. These modifications provide evidence of this notion.

### **Judiciary and Religion as a Political Process**

Additionally, the analysis reveals that the courts' engagement in religious matters impacts politics in a secondary but significant way. Essential Religious Practices and other judicial conceptions influence political discourse by giving more weight to certain religious perspectives. In political science, courts are seen as components of broader power structures. The media's portrayal of news, public opinion, and electoral plans impact the courts' rulings and vice versa. So, the courts do more

than merely decide disputes; they shape national identity and the public's perception of judicial authority and reliability, which in turn impacts the political landscape.

## **Contemporary Religion and Faith in Indian Politics**

### **1. Citizenship, Faith, and Political Inclusion**

As seen most dramatically by the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), 2019 [16], religion has successfully made its way into the political arena in the context of disputes over citizenship. A conceptual movement toward connecting national identity with involvement in religion is shown by the integration of religious factors into laws pertaining to citizenship. As a result of the CAA, there were demonstrations, counter-mobilizations, and electoral divides, all of which are examples of how religious beliefs may impact political engagement. The advent of the NRC exacerbated contentious discussions that were already taking place about religion, minority rights, and democracy.

### **2. Religious Symbols, Memory, and Political Authority**

The choice of Ayodhya and the building of the Ram Mandir are two instances of how religious imagery is used in narratives about the state in order to strengthen the legitimacy of the administration [17]. As a result of these incidents, people's conceptions of the past and the significance of American identity are altered via the use of symbolic political activities. They are essential political players in democracies because of their capacity to create a sense of unity among followers, to suppress opposition, and to legitimate the opinions of those in power.

### **3. Faith, Morality, and Regulation of Private Life**

As shown by programs such as "Love Jihad" and the preservation of cows [18–20], religious morality is exerting an increasing amount of influence on the legislation that are enacted by the government. Through the implementation of these restrictions, marriage, nutrition, and social relationships are all transformed into political problems, and the government needs to be concerned about them. These types of actions have a significant impact on the majority of people's religious and spiritual views. Through the modification of people's political involvement and the dynamics of interpersonal relationships, they strengthen political power. Within this context, there is a more widespread pattern in which religion is used as a weapon to exert influence over both the state and society.

### **4. Hindutva as an Ideological Project**

According to the findings [21], Hindutva is a broad political movement that has an effect on the state of governance, the results of elections, and the formulation of policies in the nation. For the purpose of bringing its members together politically, organizations such as the RSS and the BJP make use of religious affiliation. Within the context of public events that are sanctioned by the state, such as church gatherings, building openings, and cultural celebrations, the merger of political and religious power becomes the norm. In light of this, questions have been raised about diversity and the participation of underrepresented groups [22].

### **5. Media, Technology, and the Expansion of Faith Politics**

The growth of digital media has led to an explosion in the popularity of news that is both political and religious in nature. The integration of religious and secular principles by politicians is accomplished via the use of cultural messaging, data-driven campaigns, and social media platforms [23]. In spite of the changes that have taken place in society, religious identity continues to have public relevance due to the intersection of religion, technology, and government. It is as a consequence of this that the views of voters are magnified, and democracy is altered. Data suggests that faith and religion in India are dynamic political forces that interact via the election process, the rule of law, and the authority of the state. This is the case because the data speaks to the reality that these forces interact. In spite of the fact that it creates some boundaries and allows for discussion, the Constitution does not exonerate religion from the influence of political considerations. On the

other hand, religious beliefs continue to have an impact on how individuals develop, the choices they make, and the degree to which they participate in political processes. Based on these data, it is clear that there are still individuals who are opposed to the political practices of majoritarianism and the principles of secular democracy. In addition to having a detrimental influence on gender parity and minority rights, this also has a negative impact on inclusive government.

## **DISCUSSION**

On the basis of the results, it is clear that the major objective of Articles 25 and 26 of the Indian Constitution is not to provide express guarantees but rather to control the political link between religious belief and governmental power. The purpose of these rules is not to assist ease the conflict that exists between religious freedom and other basic rights; rather, they provide a political arena in which questions of religion, equality, and claims made by the government are regularly argued and addressed.

According to the findings of the study, the way in which judges handle religious issues is more of a political process than a judicial procedure that is detached from politics. The anti-exclusion principle and the Essential Religious Practices (ERP) test are two examples of concepts that have an effect on the constitutional right to free expression, the credibility of politicians, and the arguments that take place about public policy. When it comes to the power dynamics that exist between people, religious groups, and the state, the court system acts as a check and balance.

At the same time as Hindutva has become more prominent, the political concerns in India have shifted from nationalism centered on minority groups to Hindustan. As a consequence of this change in ideology, the interests of the majority religious people are often emphasized. This has an effect on voting, governance, and public debate. This is the reason why people's religious beliefs play such a crucial part in the formation of their identities and in motivating them to become politically engaged.

It is possible that religious practices are the source of disagreements about women's rights, political participation, and democratic inclusion. This was shown in the Sabarimala case. Public rallies, party rivalry, and elections were all aspects that contributed to the situation. Getting to the temple or being religious were not the only concerns that were at play. Arguments based on religious beliefs have the potential to influence the power dynamics within a society as well as the degree to which the general public participates in political processes.

The results indicate that the use of religious allusions in political discourse has significantly increased as a result of cultural symbols, online venues, and activities conducted via social media. It is becoming more common for political actors to take use of online narratives and symbols in order to garner support, exert influence over public opinion, and strengthen their ideological stances. As we can see here, religion is able to adapt to the methods in which modern political debate is conducted.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study shows that India's religious views and practices are a passionately debated political matter that affects public discourse, political campaigns, and government. The Constitution allows politics to include religion. It prepares religious claims for management, conflicts, and political use. The interaction between constitutional laws, judges, and politicians illustrates the contradiction between religiously driven political activity and secular democracy. Hindutva has changed national identity, citizenship eligibility, and the idea of "Indian" as it has grown. This shows cultural nationalism in modern democracies. These changes emphasize Indian politics' diversity, minority rights, gender equality, and transparency challenges. Democratic accountability, constitutional norms, and political control are crucial to religious pluralism, according to study. To sustain India's secular democratic system, people must be politically active and blend their religious values with equality, diversity, and democratic involvement.

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