

Research Article

## Socio-political Dynamics of Hindutva: Evolving Narratives and Implications

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### Abstract

In World and particularly in South Asia, violent extremism is associated with Muslims only. Quite the reverse, the Hindu extremism or Saffron terror in India is easily ignored. Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s rule under Narendra Modi for the second time has unleashed the political face of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and Hindu fundamentalism. This paper examines historical development of RSS led Hindutva in relation to broader sociopolitical dynamics. It also attempts to provide an alternative point of view by concentrating on the rise of Hindutva and how its consolidation of political power in India has an impact on social development of South Asian people. First and foremost, the paper establishes Hindutva terrorism as a legitimate threat to regional political environment and people living in it. . Due to the fact that anti-Muslim and anti-Pakistan sentiments are at the heart of Saffron terror, Pakistan must take counter-measures and raise awareness among regional and international leaders about the increasing influence of Hindu fanatics in the Indian society. Ultimately, the paper concludes that Hindutva violence and politics in nuclear-armed India is becoming permanent, and as a result, it will remain to have a significant influence on South Asian societies in the foreseeable future. In order to study and analyze this subject, both the qualitative and quantitative research techniques - including interviews and statistical charts - have been used

**Keywords:** Hindutva, South Asia, RSS, India, Sociopolitical Dynamics, Implications

### Introduction:

Recently, the world has witnessed new waves of far-right extremism, particularly in Europe and the United States (US). Academically, there are no universally accepted definitions of the terms "terrorism" and "violent extremism." So, there are significant violent trends in Hindu extremism that have gone largely unnoticed by the rest of the world. Islamophobia, white supremacism, political and religiously motivated hate crimes, and other forms of extremism are all components of mainstream violent extremism. When it comes to electoral politics, far-right political parties have only managed to win a few seats in European elections; however, in 2014, India was dubbed as the "first of the great democracies to fall to populism,"<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Aatish Taseer, "Can the World's Largest Democracy Endure Another Five Years of a Modi Government? *Time*

as the far-right BJP came to power. Known as "Hindutva," the party won a landslide victory for the second time in 2019 on the basis of a purely communal and ultra-nationalist agenda. Technically, the term Hindutva is used to unite people in India who believe that India is a "holy land."<sup>2</sup> In accordance with this definition, only Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, and Jains have the right to refer to themselves as "Hindu," whereas Muslims and Christians are barred from using the term "Hindu." The definition calls for the conversion of Muslims and Christians to Hinduism, or the deprivation of their citizenship if they do not convert. According to Dr Maya Tudor<sup>3</sup>, India's recent political trajectory demonstrates how mainstreaming of fixed national identities caused democratic decline in India. Hence, the Hindu nationalism has become the fundamental currency of India's politics and the very possibility of dissent is becoming so small because dissent against the government is labelled as anti-national. She further says that in India, a democratic institution has been eroded by a political leader who defines the nation in terms of a fixed and polarizing identity.<sup>4</sup> The first part of the paper unpacks the rising threat of Hindu extremists in Indian politics and society. It also analyzes, consolidation of extremist political power in India and its sociopolitical impacts for major South Asian powers in general and their people in particular. It explores the symbiotic relationship between RSS and BJP and how the two complement each other in reshaping the social and political outlook of India. The paper, at the end, also proffers a set of policy recommendations to navigate the ongoing developments, at sub-regional level, and adoption of appropriate options. The research questions discussed include:

1. How institutionalization of RSS led Hindutva has become synonymous with Indian nationalism?
2. What are the sociopolitical implications of Hindutva ideology for regional and social stability?

### **Research Methodology**

This study utilized qualitative and quantitative research models including inductive and deductive research techniques. For primary data, interviews and first-hand official statistics have been included. Statistical charts have also been made part of the research to draw timelines and frame data in a chronological order. Moreover, the secondary data, such as newspaper stories, research journals, magazines, relevant books, and reliable websites, form the basis of this study. Scholarly publications, official records, and stories from state-run media outlets provide the bulk of the information for this study, all of which point to the evolving nature of socio-political dynamics of Hindutva and its implications.

### **RSS and BJP-Two Sides of the Same Coin**

The Hindutva philosophy and the overwhelming victory of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the 2014 and 2019 Indian Parliamentary Elections has sparked a new discussion among political philosophers and fed them to reflect on their own positions. Technically, the BJP is broadly viewed as the political arm of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangha (RSS), and from 1998 to 2004, the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA), which consisted of a coalition of several political parties, served as the nation's government. RSS was basically founded by Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar in 1925. He was a Brahmin and his core ideology was 'the revival of Hindu supremacy in India', which had been lost due to a thousand years of foreign occupation.<sup>5</sup> Since its establishment, the RSS's headquarters is in Nagpur. Dr. Hedgewar

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*Magazine*, May 9, 2019, [https://time.com/5586415/india-election-narendra-modi-2019/?xid=time\\_socialflow\\_twitter&utm\\_medium=socialflowtw&utm\\_source=twitter.com&utm\\_campaign=time](https://time.com/5586415/india-election-narendra-modi-2019/?xid=time_socialflow_twitter&utm_medium=socialflowtw&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=time)

<sup>2</sup> A. G. Noorani, "What is Hindutva?" *Dawn*, December 10, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> In discussion with Dr. Maya Tudor, Associate Professor of Government and Public Policy in the Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford, on June 1, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Walter Andersen, "The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh: Early Concerns", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 7 Issue

was an active member of Indian National Congress. However, he was staunch critic of Gandhi over his stance on the Indian Muslim Khilafat issue.<sup>6</sup> He had serious concern over the fact that the ‘cow protection’ was not on the Congress agenda. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Bajrang Dal – two affiliated extremist organizations of RSS are practical manifestations of Dr. Hedgewar’s ideology. Throughout history, the RSS has experienced various ups and downs. The history of the organization can be divided into three major phases. The first phase starts from 1925 and ends in 1948 when the organization was primarily kept itself focused on spiritual training to youngsters of Hindu religion. The second phase starts in 1948 and ends in 1980 when the RSS had witnessed its darkest period of history and faced a nationwide ban by the Congress government owing to killing of Gandhi by an ex RSS associate Nathuram Godse. During this phase, the RSS faced problems of fund raising, lack of popularity among masses and a perpetual threat of being proscribed by the Congress government. The third phase started in 1980 till to date when the RSS witnessed a sheer expansion in popularity among masses, rise of funding channels and expansion of its political-wing’s presence in Indian parliament, which has ended its perpetual fear of being proscribed by the government. Today, in its operational capacity the RSS of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is radically different from the RSS of 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>7</sup> In fact, the RSS of today is much stronger with presence of its active members in almost every Indian civil and military bureaucracy.<sup>8</sup>

RSS has grown from a small non-governmental organization in the early 1990s to one of the world's largest, with an estimated 1.5-2 million regular participants in about 57,000 local daily meetings (known as shakhas) held across 36,293 different national offices.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, without a thorough understanding of the RSS, it is impossible to fully comprehend present Indian political and security behaviour. The factors that led to the RSS’s formation, the RSS’s impact on Indian political culture, and the RSS’s connection with and influence over the BJP will all be discussed in this part.

This political party is the result of a philosophy approach known as "Integral Humanism," which was introduced by ‘political philosopher Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya in 1965’<sup>10</sup> and is based on the principles of humanism. A harmonious society is sought to be established through the philosophy, which distinguishes the Indian political system from other predominant systems such as Communism and Capitalism. After a brief period of experimentation, the BJP settled on Gandhian Socialism<sup>11</sup> rather than the “Deendayal Upadhyaya-crafted principles of Integral Humanism”<sup>12</sup>, though it did not dismiss Upadhyaya's ideological statement as being unworthy of consideration. The Integral Humanism movement supplanted Gandhian Socialism as the official philosophy of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in 1985. Political ideologies such as Integral Humanism, for example, are implicitly systems of intellectual thought that reflect the needs of particular social groups. In this context, the question is whether the BJP actually put Integral Humanism into practice during its tenure in government or whether Integral Humanism was merely a political programme. The implementation of Hindutva by the BJP is anti-minorities rather than its propagated

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11,1972, pp. 589–597

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 591-592

<sup>7</sup> Mr. Asghar Ali Shad, Senior Expert on Indian Political Affairs and former Senior Research Fellow (SRF) at IPRI in discussion with the author on June 15, 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Figures from the RSS general secretary’s annual 2017 report, Figures available at, <http://rss.org//Encyc/2017/3/23/rss-Annual-Report-2017-English.html> (accessed 16 June 2020).

<sup>10</sup> Ansuiya Nain, Sanjeev Sharma, “Integral Humanism of Deen Dayal Upadhyaya and its Contemporary Relevance”, *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, March 2018, Volume LXXIX, No, 1, available at [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342305382\\_Integral\\_Humanism\\_of\\_Deen\\_Dayal\\_Upadhyaya\\_and\\_its\\_Contemporary\\_Relevance](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342305382_Integral_Humanism_of_Deen_Dayal_Upadhyaya_and_its_Contemporary_Relevance).

<sup>11</sup> Sumanta Banerjee, “Civilizing the BJP”, *The Economic and Political Weekly*, July 16, 2005, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4416896?seq=1>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

concept of Integral Humanism.

The RSS, according to Indian authorities, is now the most influential non-governmental organization (NGO). RSS President Mohan Bhagwat's yearly address serves as a policy statement for the BJP and other RSS-affiliated organizations. Every year in September, this speech is delivered. Bhagwat's speech on September 30, 2017, in which he emphasized the importance of small businesses, dealers, and burden bore by self-employed persons as a result of the Goods and Services Tax (GST), prompted the Modi-led BJP government to make significant GST adjustments in November 2017.<sup>13</sup>

Religious minorities in India are regularly threatened by the RSS and its affiliates' operations throughout the country. If the RSS succeeds in separating India into religiously different groups, India's national security may be jeopardized. This shows that the Shiite faith is more popular than the lesser-known Deobandi and Bareilvi faiths.

People in India are drawn to the RSS because of its frequent use of ultra-nationalistic rhetoric. This has had a negative impact on the politics of the nation. Many political parties and their leaders are afraid of displaying that they are strong, committed organizations that want to help Indian businesses and interests develop and protect their interests overseas. The "*New Nationalism in India*"<sup>14</sup> has compelled Congress and other relatively liberal political parties to adopt tougher approach on regional security matters especially against Pakistan and China.<sup>15</sup>

Because of its vast following, the RSS is a valuable resource for learning about Indian public behaviour, popular trends, and public aspirations. Individuals such as RSS Chairman Mohan Bhagwat have advocated for a 100% turnout in the elections next year. According to the Jan Jagran Abhiyan, volunteers from the Sangh were also involved in the campaign to enhance voter participation and promote awareness about the importance of voting on national issues (public awareness mission). The RSS serves as the BJP's eyes and ears, while the BJP writes or changes Indian laws to reflect the RSS's worldview.

The powerful RSS of the Bharatiya Janata Party proved its power over the governing party by choosing Modi as prime minister. He was a member of the RSS and worked as the chief editor of the RSS' propaganda magazine, Panchjanya.<sup>16</sup> This diary was created by the RSS. For the same reason, former BJP President L.K. Advani worked as an assistant editor for the RSS periodical "Organizer" for a long time.<sup>17</sup> The RSS also chooses the leaders of the BJP's political and administrative bodies.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Col (R) Muhammad Hanif, Indian Foreign and Domestic Policy Expert and former Research Fellow at IPRI in discussion with the author on 20 June 2020; Soumya Gupta, 'What the Revision in GST Rates Means for Consumers', LiveMint, 12 November 2017, <http://www.livemint.com/Companies/6yNnNILs0kTeseNGKmhINO/Whatthe-revision-in-GST-rates-means-for-consumers.html> (accessed 19 June 2020).

<sup>14</sup> The term refers to a populist approach by majority Hindu Indians who demand surgical strikes against Pakistan whenever there is a terrorist attack happens in India.

<sup>15</sup> Economic Times, "The opposition party also demanded an apology from the ruling BJP for "doing cheap politics" on the issue", August 28, 2019. <https://stopcensoring.me/index.php?q=oavXqKRuZJHGxqei9KcydeipZvXZZ2jyp-U2JmJy9hnmmtKIYKka2dSSqKOKzqfPqxqI9KbYaPHqpzTnmXJ1Kee1Z2kp2LVzcSlp2XVINHMrKyX0mSapNhl9aRnc3Op56QqpKcqs6OypminM2c2ZCnmaPJZ2jK6aY2Jmqz9SnZNCnp5mZj8rRZammIJTY16KbosmqnKTdZwqUaG2dnXFrkZuep3TI09KlcaXJpQ> (accessed June 23, 2020)

<sup>16</sup> Walter Anderson and Shridhar Damle, *Messenger of Hindu Nationalism: How the RSS Reshaped India*, (Hurst & Company, London: 2019), 25.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> D.K. Singh, "Why RSS has chosen to remind Modi-Shah of its key role in BJP's big election wins", The Print, July 15, 2019, <https://theprint.in/opinion/why-rss-has-chosen-to-remind-modi-shah-of-its-key-role-in-bjps-big-election->

The BJP out of 4,033 holds 1,433 legislative assembly seats throughout India: providing them with a share of 35 per cent across India. As a result of this representation, they have managed to form complete or coalition based governments in nearly 17 state legislatures: out of these it has outright majority in 10 states. At the same time, it has around 12 Chief Ministers. These states include, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Goa, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Manipur, Uttar Pradesh, Uttara Khand and Tripura.

Since 2019, India under Modi has introduced some repressive measures aimed at diluting fundamental rights of Indian Muslims and other unprivileged groups in India. The introduction of National Register of Citizens (NRC), which excludes almost a million Muslims from citizenship register. The introduction of the Citizens Amendment Act (CAA) sparked a wave of resentment and protests against the Central government throughout India. The protests became prominent not only from Muslims, the famous Shaheen Chowk protest in New Delhi, but also Dalits and other factions from India. The government, under Modi, has also revoked the special autonomy, which Indian occupied Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) was previously extended. On August 5, 2019, India revoked the special status of Jammu and Kashmir, in tandem with the revocation of the Article 35-A, which prohibited non-Kashmiris from claiming residence or domicile of the occupied territory. These provisions barred India from directly manipulating the demography of the occupied territory by settling the Indian population inside the valley or the occupied territory. All that now remains under threat due to the draconian and unilateral steps of the Modi government. It has also issued domicile laws, which will allow Indians, and also Hindus to reside, settle and buy property in IIOJK. Eventually, it sets the foundation of the Israeli model in IIOJK: working towards changing the demography and occupation of land by Indians. Later, in 2020 and 2021, BJP also made the push towards replacing the farmer laws claiming that it was empowering the farmers to get the right price for their agricultural produce and sell their product anywhere they feel comfortable. Critics and farmers feared it would only place farmers at the mercy and monopoly of select-few cartels controlling, unilaterally, the produce prices. However, the farmers stood against the farm laws by BJP government and won.

### Timeline:

To assess the ingress of Hindutva into contemporary Indian politics, it is pertinent to skim through Hindutva's historical evolution. For this purpose, the following timeline provides the better understanding of evolution of Hindutva in Indian politics and society:

- "During World War II, Savarkar enthusiastically encouraged young Hindus to enlist in the British Army in order to bring his vision of militarised Hinduism to fruition."<sup>19</sup>
- A specialised military training school (Bhonsle Military School (BMS)) was also advocated by Savarkar, according to B S Moonje, a close associate in the Hindu Mahasabha who started the project in the 1930s and was a close associate of Savarkar.<sup>20</sup> "Shadow Armies (2017)"<sup>21</sup> by Dhirendhra K Jha's offers captivating accounts about the role of BMS in preparing a new cohort of violent Hindu fanaticss who are well-versed in the use of modern weaponry and the art of mob violence in an organised manner.<sup>22</sup>

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wins/262928/ (accessed June 18, 2020)

<sup>19</sup> Neil Hemani, "Azad Hind: Radical Indian nationalism in Nazi, Germany during World War Two", Undergraduate Thesis, Department of History, Columbia University, April 2020, [https://history.columbia.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2020/05/Hemani-Neil\\_SNR-Thesis\\_web.pdf](https://history.columbia.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2020/05/Hemani-Neil_SNR-Thesis_web.pdf).

<sup>20</sup> Subhash Gatade, "75 Years of Bhonsala Military School: Militarising Minds, Hindutvaing Nation," The Milli Gazette, March 27, 2012, <https://www.milligazette.com/news/4-national/3425-75-years-of-bhonsala-military-school/>, (accessed on June 2, 2021).

<sup>21</sup> Dhirendra K. Jha, *Shadow Armies: Fringe Organizations and Foot Soldiers of Hindutva* (New Delhi: Juggernaut Books, 2017).

<sup>22</sup> Dhirendhra K. Jha's, *Shadow Armies* (New Delhi: Juggernaut Books, 2017).

- In 1965, Bharatya Jana Sangh, a right wing political party with quite robust relations to the RSS, passed a resolution that “Akhand Bharat will be a reality, unifying India and Pakistan.”<sup>23</sup>
- The Hindutva ideology of BJP supported the controversial building of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya. It is built on the site of the Babri Mosque. In 1977, it was able to form a government with a large majority, and it did so again in 1980s, which resulted in communal riots. Later, the party's defeat in the Indian Elections of 1984 resulted in a shift in its ideology toward a policy of more hardline Hindutva and Hindu Fundamentalism, which it has maintained ever since. Accordingly, the BJP established itself as the political arm of the fundamentalist movement by controlling Hindu symbols and preying on inter-religious qualms as well as by exploiting Hindu symbols. Using strength of this drive, BJP rose to power in 1989 and went on to form governments in several states. Lieutenant Colonel Purohit of the Indian Army, who was also a founding member of Abhinav Bharat, the terrorist organisation that was responsible for the Malegaon attacks, was killed in a terrorist attack in September 2007.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, “Ajmer Sharif (2007)”<sup>25</sup>, “Mecca Masjid (2007)”<sup>26</sup> and “Samjhota train bombing (2008)”<sup>27</sup> spoke about his idea of Akhand Bharat and making India a Hindu Rashtra in a meeting took place in Deolali.<sup>28</sup>
- Gujarat has been led by Narendra Modi as its Chief Minister for three consecutive terms, and he continues to do so. He is accused of instigating and condoning violence during the episode of Gujrat violence in 2002, and he is the NDA's prime ministerial candidate for the 2014 General Elections.<sup>29</sup> His attitude toward incidents of communal violence was and continues to be unrepentant. "What I have done is the reason why Gujarat is progressing," he said in a response to a journalist from Time Magazine.<sup>30</sup> His involvement in the events of 2002 has been the subject of intense debate for years.
- Terrorism committed by Hindu groups against the country's Muslim, Christian, and secular communities has increased dramatically during previous years, with a sharp increase in the number of attacks since 2014. In spite of this, the policy and scholarly discourse on terrorism continues to be overly focused on the “Islamist” variation of violent extremism. Domestically, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) refuses to acknowledge the reality of saffron terrorism and labels any suggestion of this nature as patently anti-Indian. As soon as the Congress issued a warning about the threat in 2010, the BJP accused the party of "defaming" Hinduism by coining the term "saffron terror" and demanded that Sonia Gandhi and his son Rahul Gndhi must apologize. The amount of pressure and fear of losing the support of increasingly radical constituencies was so great that Congress was forced to backtrack on its original statement on immigration. One year before the Indian Elections of 2019, a Congress spokesman stated that "neither its president Rahul Gandhinor any other party functionary has ever used the term "saffron terror,"<sup>31</sup> and that the party's

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<sup>23</sup> Integration by propaganda: Meetings on “Akhand Bharat”, 27 Aug 2019, <https://sabrangindia.in/tags/akhand-bharat>.

<sup>24</sup> Rahul Tripathi, “Who is Lt Col Purohit? How is he linked to Malegaon and other blast cases?” *Indian Express*, August 22, 2017.

<sup>25</sup> Kailash Kumar Chatry, “Understanding the Religious Nature of Terrorism in India: Four Case Studies with an Analysis for Proposals and Resolution,” *Department of Theology and Religion, University of Birmingham*, October 17, 2012.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Payal Saxena, The Colonel in his Helmet, *The Week*, March 28, 2010, available at <https://www.theweek.in/webworld/features/society/the-colonel-in-his-element.html>.

<sup>29</sup> “India Gujarat Chief Minister Modi cleared in riots case,” *BBC*, April 10, 2012, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-17664751>, (accessed on June 02, 2021).

<sup>30</sup> Surjit S Bhalla and Ajit Kumar Jha, “Highway to growth,” *India Today*, January 04, 2017.

<sup>31</sup> Marium Fatima, Ghulam Ali Murtaza and Arshi Saleem Hashmi, “*Rise of Right-Wing Indian Nationalism:*

opponents were making "baseless allegations" about the party in this respect. There is not any a video or a sound clip in which Rahul Gandhi or any other member of the Congress is heard using the phrase "Bhagva aantankwad" or "Bhagva atankwad" (saffron terror).<sup>32</sup> There is no such thing as saffron terror," says the author. Already, the damage had been done; the BJP had successfully stigmatized the Congress as an anti-Hindu force, which enabled the former to win an overwhelming majority in the parliamentary elections held in April this year.

- Later in December 2015, following Modi's surprise visit to Pakistan, "BJP national secretary Ram Madhav"<sup>33</sup> declared that, as a member of the RSS, he continues to believe in the concept and that "one day [Pakistan and Bangladesh] will once again come together through popular goodwill and Akhand Bharat will be created."<sup>34</sup>

- The prospect of a Greater India multiplying the Muslim population by uniting 200 million Muslims in Pakistan, 150 million in Bangladesh, and 36 million in Afghanistan with 200 million Muslims in India has prompted some in Hindutva circles to reconsider their idea of Akhand Bharat. Both the BJP and the RSS, according to Dhamija, have abandoned the goal entirely. Akhand Bharat is not mentioned in either group's mission statements. This may be true in the case of the BJP, which tacitly distances itself from any Sangh statement regarding Akhand Bharat, but the RSS is pursuing the idea religiously, as evidenced by official propaganda material and public statements issued by the organization's leadership. In terms of anti-Muslim violence, a joint report by the Mumbai-based Centre for Study of Society and Secularism and the United Kingdom-based Minority Rights Groups International (MRG) notes that over 700 outbreaks of communal violence occurred in India in 2017, killing 86 people and injuring 2,321 others.<sup>35</sup>

- Between 2015 and 2018, over 46 Muslims were lynched by "Cow vigilantes."<sup>36</sup> Between January 2014 and March 2018, there were 1,620 reported incidents of violence against Christians.<sup>37</sup> The RSS demonizes Indian Christians as "Pope's soldiers" who use "violence and barbaric means to decimate all those who do not practice Roman Catholicism."<sup>38</sup> Hindu organizations have recently targeted rationalists as well. The assassinations of Narendra Dabholkar, Govind Pansare, MM Kalburgi (a scholar and writer), and Gauri Lankesh are among the most notable cases. All of these incidents point to Hindutva groups as the source of suspicion, as they were on the lookout for them because they were allegedly hurting Hindu sentiments.

- During Modi's tenure from 2014 to 2017, communal violence increased by 28%.<sup>39</sup>

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*Implications for South Asia,* Margalla Papers XXIII, no. II (2019): 14-27.

<sup>18 32</sup> "Neither its President Rahul Gandhi nor any other party functionary ever used the term "saffron terror", India TV News, <https://www.indiatvnews.com/news/india-neither-rahul-gandhi-nor-any-party-functionary-ever-used-saffron-terror-term-congress-after-mecca-masjid-blast-case-verdict-437857>, (accessed on June 02, 2021).

<sup>33</sup> "One day, India, Pak and Bangladesh could reunite as Akhand Bharat: Ram Madhav," Indian Express, December 27, 2015.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> "A Narrowing Space: Violence and discrimination against India's religious minorities", Minority Rights Group International, June 2017, London, [https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/MRG\\_Rep\\_India\\_Jun17-2.pdf](https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/MRG_Rep_India_Jun17-2.pdf)

<sup>36</sup> "India: Vigilante 'Cow Protection' Groups Attack Minorities," Human Rights Watch, February 18, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/02/19/india-vigilante-cow-protection-groups-attack-minorities>, (accessed on June 04, 2021).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Eliza Griswold, "The Violent Toll of Hindu Nationalism in India", The New Yorker, March 5, 2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/on-religion/the-violent-toll-of-hindu-nationalism-in-india>

## Coalescing Hindutva Terror with Politics and Society:

Currently, the world's largest democracy is governed by a right-wing extremist party. Since its inception, Hindutva ideology has emphasized the use of force. The RSS's institutional penetration enables it to shape and influence Indian policies on a range of issues, from education to national security. The Hindutva movement in India entered a consolidation phase following the BJP's second consecutive victory. Its ideological agenda is set by the RSS, "which was banned in India three times (1948, 1975, and 1992) for its links to terrorism and communal violence."<sup>40</sup> The previous phase (2014–2019) was marked by a concerted effort to institutionalize an ultra-conservative brand of Hindu nationalism consistent with the RSS's vision of a "Akhand Bharat that theoretically extends from Pakistan to Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Myanmar, and Indonesia."<sup>41</sup> The RSS's influence was evident in Modi's first cabinet, which included nine (out of 19) RSS ministers and at least a dozen additional state ministers who were not full-time RSS pracharakas but were affiliated with the Sangh through its students' wing, Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP). Important positions such as National Security Advisor have also been filled by individuals with strong Hindutva ties. Since 2014, "Ajit Doval, Modi's National Security Advisor (NSA), has been openly aligned with the RSS and served as director of one of the Sangh's eight think tanks charged with shaping the BJP's policies."<sup>42</sup> Shaurya Doval, Doval's son, co-founded India Foundation with prominent RSS leader Ram Madhav.<sup>43</sup> The think tank is widely believed to be the primary driving force behind the BJP's high-profile policy initiatives. Today, Hindutva supporters shape Indian policy through "eight RSS-funded think tanks (Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF), India Policy Foundation (IPF), Forum for Integrated National Security, Syama Prasad Mookerjee Research Foundation, Forum for Strategic and Security Studies, Public Policy Research Centre, and Centre for Policy Studies), which have unfettered access to the country's strife-torn economy."<sup>44</sup> In addition, RSS has been able to shape and influence Indian policies on a wide range of issues, including everything from education to national security. In terms of political, social, and institutional power, the most concerning aspect of the consolidation of far-right Hindus' political, social, and institutional power may be the possibility that it will hover the symmetry in the state-community relationship across various religions and castes.

Furthermore, Dr Khurram Iqbal, Acting Dean, Department of International Relations, National Defence University, Islamabad was asked: 1. Why there is an apparent lack of a cohesive counter narrative by the Indian political parties i.e., the Communist Party of India, to challenge BJP's Hindu Nationalist agenda? 2. Why the Centre-left Indian National Congress is lethargic in joining a political response towards BJP's ideological extremism? According to him, "What disappoints is the reaction of the secular camp to RSS and BJP's actions in India. Its response can be described as empty assertions against the victory of political Hindutva. Rahul Gandhi's tweets trying to seek some sort of self-righteous, even metaphysical, solace by portraying Ram as opposed to the politics of hate and injustice; the Communist Party of India (Marxist)'s statement lamenting that the bhoomi puja should not have been made into a political event; and Priyanka

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<sup>40</sup> Kailash Kumar Chatry, "Understanding the Religious Nature of Terrorism in India: Four Case Studies With an Analysis for Proposals and Resolution."

<sup>41</sup> Vivek Singh, "Akhand Bharat – Concept based on truth," The Hills Times, September 07, 2020, <https://www.thehillstimes.in/featured/akhand-bharat-concept-based-on-truth/>, (accessed on June 04, 2021).

<sup>42</sup> Praveen Donthi, "How Ties With The Think Tanks Vivekananda International Foundation and India Foundation Enhance Ajit Doval's Influence," Carvan, November 05, 2017, <https://caravanmagazine.in/vantage/vivekananda-international-india-foundation-ajit-doval-influence>, (accessed on June 05, 2021).

<sup>43</sup> Swati Chaturvedi, "Exclusive: Think-Tank Run by NSA Ajit Doval's Son Has Conflict of Interest Writ Large," The Wire, November 04, 2017, <https://thewire.in/politics/exclusive-think-tank-run-nsa-ajit-dovals-son-conflict-interest-writ-large>, (accessed on June 05, 2021).

<sup>44</sup> Charu Kartikeya, "8 RSS think tanks that are competing for intellectual space in Delhi," Catch News, February 13, 2017, <http://www.catchnews.com/india-news/eight-rss-think-tanks-that-are-competing-for-the-intellectual-space-1440703010.html>, (accessed on June 05, 2021).



Gandhi Vadra's statement, and the response of most other political leaders, which celebrated the act in the hope that it will be used as an occasion to promote harmony and cultural affinity is not going to worry BJP. BJP will celebrate, and rightly so, the construction of the Ram temple and other achievements as the biggest political success of its larger ideological project. It is also naive to expect that the BJP will not use the Ram temple issue for future political gains. The BJP is not concerned about whether its opponents think of its actions as justifiable or not. What matters for the BJP is the view of the majority, which as of now, appears firmly with the party."<sup>45</sup>

### Potentialities of Hindutva:

The evaluation of capabilities is required in order to determine "the quality and quantity of fighters, the pool of potential recruits, training facilities, financial status, and weaponry available to the organization."<sup>46</sup>

S.No	Capabilities	Organization	Creation	Mode of Action
1	Recruitment	BMS	Year: 1930 Leader: Moonje Supervisor:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Firearm Training</li> <li>● Indoctrination</li> <li>● Col. Prohit imparted training at BMS.</li> </ul>
			Central Hindu Military Education Society (CHMES)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Training of pilots</li> <li>● A School in Nasik to train female fighters</li> </ul>
2	Women Wing	Durga Vahini (The Army of Durga)	Vishwa Hindu Parshad (VHP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Combat training to radical Hindu women</li> <li>● 15-20 Days training camps for all</li> </ul>
3	Children Wing	"Hindu Swabhimani"	Durga Vahini members, UP By Parminder Arya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● "Holy Army" (Dharma Sena) of 15000 soldiers</li> <li>● Training children as young as eight</li> <li>● 6 months indoctrination</li> </ul>
4	Link with the Indian Army	BMS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Lt. Col Purohit</li> <li>● Col Aditya Dhar</li> <li>● Major Parag Modak</li> <li>● Major Ramesh Upadhyaya</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Collusion with violent Hindu supremacist organizations</li> <li>● Terrorist attacks</li> <li>● Revival of Hindu kingdom in Nepal</li> </ul>
5	Emergency Mobilization Force	25000 Hindu seminaries	RSS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Instigating Communal Disturbance</li> </ul>
6	Transnational Linkages	Bodu Bala Sena	RSS Golwalker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Propagation of True Nation Concept</li> </ul>

<sup>45</sup> Author in discussion with Dr. Khurram Iqbal, Acting Dean, Department of International Relations, National Defence University on June 8, 2021.

<sup>46</sup> The data is taken from different online sources.

## **Sociopolitical Implications:**

India embodies all of the factors that contribute to the creation of an overall environment favourable to the growth of Hindutva. The victory of Sadhvi Pragya Singh Thakur (major accused in a chain of terrorist attacks) on the BJP's ticket, legal impunity for those involved in Hindutva terror, Hinduization of India's security apparatus and educational system, and shrinking space for a candid discussion in media and academia all show that India is either evolving into or is on the verge of becoming a Hindu Rashtra (a Hindu nation). This evolutionary rise of Hindutva raises a slew of questions about the South Asian security environment, particularly in light of recent events. The institutionalization of Hindutva not only has an impact on Indian foreign policy, but it also has an impact on the regional security paradigm, which is particularly relevant for Pakistan.

BJP's offense for Muslim community of India and Pakistan has a substantial influence in its ideology. Globally, the BJP has been active in deploying anti-Pakistan rhetoric and labeling Islamabad as a state sponsor of terrorism. Revelations by EU Disinfo Lab are enough to prove anti-Pakistan propaganda by India. On the subject of Pakistan, successive BJP led governments have pursued political, economic and military policies which have largely been consistent with the notable exception of the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government's rapprochement towards the Nawaz Sharif government from 1998-1999.<sup>47</sup> On August 5, 2019, the illegal annexation of Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir and the revocation of its special status under Article 370 of the Indian constitution is one of the steps which spoiled relations between India and Pakistan.

The trading ties between India and Pakistan continue to be held hostage to deterioration in overall relations with mostly limited to essential perishable goods. On economic front, the BJP has not specifically targeted Pakistan by lobbying for economic sanctions however, it continues to have reservations over projects such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), what it considers are illegal investments in disputed territories such as Gilgit Baltistan (GB). While promoting 'Make in India' campaign, the BJP has eschewed protectionism in favour of free market principles.

On military front, a war has been avoided due to the realities of the conventional as well as strategic military balance between India and Pakistan. Surgical strikes, however, are evidence of the BJP's objective of taking pre-emptive measures against Pakistan if cross border terrorism continues to emanate from its soil. However, the BJP's incurable obsession with Pakistan and fake terrorism acts to implicate Pakistan are well known by the outside world. The RSS indoctrinated and diehard Hindutva votaries like Ajit Doval have been the open proponents of an asymmetric war with Pakistan on all fronts. Doval is on record as having explained that asymmetric war as, "a low cost sustainable offensive with high deniability aimed to bleed the enemy to submission."<sup>48</sup> Indian national defence policy, which includes modernization of the armed forces of the state and a robust nuclear deterrent, is supported by the ruling party, according to media reports. India's deterrence capabilities have been strengthened as a result of a large Indian defence budget and investments in naval components and the country's space programme.

It supported the full integration of J&K into India in 2019. Pokhran-II, Indian nuclear weapons tests, the Kargil War, the 2001-02 Stand-off, and the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), which targets Indian Muslims, are all consequences of the BJP's divisive policies against Muslims. Two weeks after the attack

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<sup>47</sup> The Lahore Declaration was signed between the PML N and BJP governments which focused on an array of confidence building measures in 1998. [https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/IN%20PK\\_990221\\_The%20Lahore%20Declaration.pdf](https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/IN%20PK_990221_The%20Lahore%20Declaration.pdf)

<sup>48</sup> Falak Jawad, "Militant Hindutva and Pakistan," Center for Strategic and Contemporary Research" September 17, 2016, <https://cscrc.pk/explore/themes/defense-security/militant-hindutva-pakistan/>. (Accessed June 27, 2020)

in Pulwama, India launched an air strike across the Line of Control in Pakistan's Balakot. As a result of Pakistan's retaliation, tensions between the two nuclear-armed rivals grew increasingly heated.<sup>49</sup>

The RSS leadership's definition of Hindus has been broadened in a clever attempt to subtly woo Christians and Muslims as long as they subscribe to what "Upadhyaya in Integral Humanism described as national soul."<sup>50</sup> Hindu national soul is a nebulous concept and is used for reconversion of non-Hindus to Hindus. Minorities such as Christians and Muslims are reportedly opposed to the BJP government and "a CSDS survey has shown that Dalit support for BJP has declined from 33% in May 2017 to 22% in May 2018."<sup>51</sup> When religion starts driving national policies and that too a religion steeped in myths, prejudices, and notions of human inequality the policies take a jingoistic flavor resulting in conflict in violence both within and out of a nation embracing retrogressive ideology.

On the subject of Indian Muslims and Pakistan, the BJP continues to take lead from its parent organization, the RSS which views Pakistan as an illegitimate and rogue state which is responsible for exporting terror and Islamizing what is predominantly a Hindu nation. History is replete with examples of how Pakistan and the Indian Muslim population are viewed with considerable hostility and suspicion by both the RSS and the BJP. The trend is largely consistent with the current political arrangement in India and bodes ill for any future reconciliation prospects between the two nuclear armed neighbors or the Hindu and Muslim communities in India, which is critical for sustainable peace in South Asia.

As a result, Pakistan is extremely concerned about the country's rising power. They understand that when strong leadership is present in both countries, détente will progress more quickly. The proponents of dialogue between India and Pakistan are well aware of this fact. The current leadership, on the other hand, appears to be blurring the lines between opposing viewpoints on the revival of Hindutva politics. When considering Integral Humanism, it is necessary to consider the time and place in which it was first articulated, as well as the generation that articulated it. Truth and non-violence are the two most important principles of Integral Humanism for the advancement of society. It is impossible to seek and discover truth unless one practices nonviolence. As a result, it needs implementation to current issues in an articulate and consistent manner i to promote peace and security.

### **Achilles' Heel of Hindutva**

If the RSS and the Sangh Parivar wish to spread Hindutva theory across South Asia, they must solve a number of difficulties first. In India, the caste system would be the first major hurdle to a homogenized form of Hindu nationalism. It is possible that upper-caste Muslims would be wary of lower-caste Muslims and new converts to Islam. This might lead to increased conflict inside the RSS between diverse groups of people.

Furthermore, reconciling the country's secular constitution with the Hindutva goal will be challenging. The secular rule of the Indian Federation keeps a country with a varied people stable. This organization has often attempted to change India's constitution to make it less secular than it is now. People in India are becoming more Hindutva-friendly, a trend that is slowing yet continuing. India's federal government would be quite concerned if this split occurred. There would be a lot of tension between ethnic and religious groupings.

Affiliates like the RSS-affiliated Swadeshi Jagran Manch (SJM) have left-leaning economic principles that go counter to the BJP government's pro-globalization stance. One of the reasons why the government

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<sup>49</sup> Frank O'Donnell, "Stabilizing Nuclear Southern Asia", *Asian Security*, DOI: 10.1080/14799855.2019.1620207 (accessed 23 June 2020)

<sup>50</sup> Anderson and Shridhar Damle, *Messenger of Hindu Nationalism: How the RSS Reshaped India*, 238.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 240.

opposes globalization is because of this. This might be a separate problem. When the BJP's populist and pro-farmer policies meet with the government's pro-business policies, divisions and political conflict are almost certain, but this is not the only reason.

Another challenge is the integration of Muslim and Christian communities that constitute 14.2 percent and 2.3 percent of the Indian population, respectively.<sup>52</sup> These are the only two communities that gave more votes to Congress. "Since the leadership of Madhukar Deoras the RSS has a cultural nationalist view that now includes Muslims and Christianity."<sup>53</sup> The alienation of Kashmiri Muslims through revocation of special status of State of J&K would also complicate their relation with the federation.

Coexistence is tough in India since Muslims and Christians make up 14.2% and 2.3 percent of the population, respectively. These are the only two places in the country that send the most people to Congress. Madhukar Deoras, the RSS's head, has led the organization toward a cultural nationalist position that now includes Muslims and Christians. If the Indian Ocean state's unique status is withdrawn, New Delhi may be unable to cope with Jammu and Kashmir in the future. This might put the federation under a lot of strain.<sup>54</sup>

### **Key Conclusions and Recommendations:**

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the popularity of Hindutva ideology throughout India. In the coming years, the RSS will work to further the consolidation of Hindu nationalism while simultaneously marginalizing Muslims and Christians in society. Hindutva terrorism as an instrument of Indian state policy not only serves to complement regional terrorism, but it also seeks to isolate neighbouring countries. The consequences of this ideology will be far-reaching. With a magnifying glass, the West tends to scrutinize Islamist militant militancy, while simultaneously downplaying other forms of extremism. In order to combat Hindu cultural violence against Muslims and other minorities, Pakistan must bring these acts to the attention of the international community through a variety of strategic communication channels such as UN resolutions, books, and articles published in highly regarded journals and newspapers, among others. Databanks containing up-to-date information on all developments related to the rise of Hindu nationalism in neighbouring India may be considered by government agencies or affiliated research centers, if funding can be secured. The atrocities and acts of deliberate exclusion of Muslim cultural identity that have taken place throughout India, including in Occupied Kashmir, should be brought to the public's attention. It is also hoped that this database will aid in raising public awareness both domestically and internationally.

With the nuclear weapons tests conducted by both India and Pakistan, the concept of total war has become less prevalent. As a result, the strategy of hybrid warfare is gaining traction in Indian strategic thinking today. The three primary objectives of India's hybrid warfare strategy against Pakistan are to damage or subvert, dispirit, and degrade the country's infrastructure. Hindutva ideology of confrontation will continue to serve as the guiding principle of Indian information warfare against Pakistan in the foreseeable future. Pakistani media outlets, think tanks, and government information channels must be fully mobilized if they are to triumph in the battle of narratives in the country. It is imperative that Pakistan's intelligence agencies have significant influence over some information channels, such as media houses and think tanks, in addition to motivating a large number of private television channels, in order to counter hostile propaganda against the country. Pakistan must also give top priority to protecting its critical communication and information technology infrastructure from a possible cyber-attack as part of hybrid warfare. Pakistan

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<sup>52</sup>Anderson and Shridhar Damle, *Messenger of Hindu Nationalism: How the RSS Reshaped India*, 242.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 243.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 130.

should actively pursue trade talks with India and other regional countries in order to cap its geostrategic dividends. Pakistan's past economic strangulations have been due to untapped potential of intra-regional trade and commerce. Border management and restrictions conundrum with Afghanistan trickled down trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan from US\$ 3 billion per year to US\$ 300 million per year. Instability in Afghanistan has also delayed projects such as TAPI, CASA, and East West trade corridor linking with Central Asia. Furthermore, India's investments in Chabahar Port and in Afghanistan to execute aims of Hindutva agenda has focused on denying any potential economic benefits to Pakistan. Therefore, it is need of the hour for Pakistan to revive intra-regional trade.

Pakistan should ramp up its efforts to project its soft power potential both at home and abroad. Though Pakistan would never be able to match the Indian resources and size yet an asymmetric response through a smart strategy remaining well within our resources should be capable of winning some support at international level. Organization of Pakistani diaspora and selective lobbying should create avenues through strategic communications to get our narrative abroad. Pakistani diaspora amongst influential countries such as USA, UK, and Europe should be properly engaged, motivated and if need be incentivized to get involved in projecting a positive image of Pakistan.

Pakistan must highlight the RSS ideology and its anti-Muslim designs at OIC as well as the think tanks in Islamic world to sensitize the Islamic countries especially the gulf monarchies about the deep seated antipathy of Hindutva ideologues and their political wing i.e BJP against the Muslim and Christian population because of their faith and religious values. A concerted effort through repeated reminders might find some resonance with the Islamic countries if the message of these nefarious designs and human rights violations is effectively packaged and disseminated.

The inter caste differences amongst Hindus and political alienation of Muslims and Christians offer exploitable vulnerabilities of RSS-BJP combine. These vulnerabilities should be exploited through a well thought strategy. The marginalized Hindu castes like Dalits and other scheduled castes should be focused upon by means of proselytization, and socio-economic incentives to create cleavages within the RSS manufactured Hindutva edifice.

A proper record of Indian atrocities against the citizens of 'Seven Sisters' and 'Red Corridor' should be catalogued and presented, by independent organizations, at international fora such as UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), UN General Assembly, UN Security Council (UNSC), major human rights organizations, INGOs, international legal fraternity and major media houses. Pakistan should engage Seven Sisters and Red Corridor states through covert warfare by focusing on fissures such as social polarization and unaddressed grievances of the citizens of 'Seven Sisters' and 'Red Corridor'.

Pakistan should also address valid concerns of its religious and ethnic minorities. This is the only way to keep these minorities away from the dragnets of Hindutva agenda. Therefore, Christian Churches in Pakistan could be expanded to include hostels for Indian Christian visitors along with residential compounds and dining facilities for Sikh visitors to Pakistan.

When it comes to international forums, it is past time for Pakistan to use its diplomatic offices to advocate for a comprehensive definition of terrorism that includes all forms of violence. This will aid in the fight against Islamophobia on a global scale, as well as in holding the Indian government accountable for its support for Hindutva terrorism, and it will improve Pakistan's image among Indian Muslims. Diplomacy should also be employed as the first line of Minority communities like Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, and Christians in India should be coopted through diplomacy and cultural integration. Religious tourism should be promoted between India and Pakistan to break the suffocating chokehold of RSS propaganda against Pakistan and Muslims on the minds of Indian population.

It is possible that the persecution of Muslims by Hindu fundamentalists in India will continue unabated, leading to a wave of Muslim migration towards Pakistan and Bangladesh. Because of the regional implications of this phenomenon, it should be included on the agenda of any future high-level regional forum on climate change.

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