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Rise of Hindutva Ideology, and its Impact on Indian and Regional politics 2014 -2025

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Abstract
This study investigates the influence of Hindutva, a powerful and potent ideology of Hindu nationalism, on Indian politics. It examines the historical construction of Hindutva and its conceptual development, the political basis of this concept, and its current expressions. Hindutva's uptake has been accompanied by concerns about the potential for intercommunal conflict as well as the potential for multicultural values to be lost in nations that have significant Indian populations and the Russian organization, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). While the Hindutva movement has certainly helped in a consolidation of Hindu political power and ensured multiple electoral triumphs for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), it has also caused serious concerns regarding the erosion of the constitutional principles of inclusion and secularism in India. It is argued in the paper that the growing influence of Hindutva has led to an observable increase in religious intolerance and minority groups' marginalisation and polarization of Indian society, impacting its foreign policy with regional states especially Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal. The design of the study was qualitative research with neorealist theory as the lens to analyze it. The paper provides a more nuanced understanding of the development of the ideology, its ideological bases, and the way it manifests at the present time, thereby highlighting the extent to which Hindutva has become an integral part of Indian politics and its implications for India's pluralistic democracy.

Keywords: *Secularism, Hindu nationalism, Hindutva, Democracy, Pluralism, Minority rights, Nationalism, Democratic institutions, Indian politics, RSS, BJP*

Introduction

India is a federal parliamentary democratic republic with a high degree of language, religious and cultural diversity. Despite this diversity, however, communal peace has not yet been sustained, and incidents of communal clashes, many times triggered by entrenched religious and ethnic tensions, have disproportionately happened among the country's largest minority community – the Muslims. The Hindutva ideology propagated by Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and its political arm the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have been the root cause of these tensions. Hindutva seeks to merge the other religious identities into a singular Hindu identity and, on the ground at least, is inhospitable to religious and cultural diversity, focused instead on building a Hindu state that violates the norms of coexistence that were part of India's founding constitutional settlement. These events that have been linked to the ideological project – the Babri demolition, the repeal of Article 370 and the on-going trend of hate speech and hate crimes – have not only created communal tensions but have also raised a host of questions regarding the democratic character and human rights record of the Indian state. The phenomenon of Hindutva in India today has become one of the most significant political phenomena in the 21st century in South Asia. Indian politics has witnessed a significant shift since 2014, with a refocus on national interests, a shift towards centralization of ideology, and the consistent victory of one

political party. It has also led to a significant impact on the wider South Asia landscape, influencing regional dynamics, security issues, and diplomatic engagements (Ashfaq, 2024).

The regionalisation of Hindutva has also impacted the Indian neighbourhood policy in how it treats Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Indian regional strategies have become more and more dependent on the domestic political discourse, especially on border security, immigration, citizenship and counterterrorism. This has made it increasingly hard to keep the distinction between India's foreign policy goals and its domestic political needs, especially when it comes to managing conflict and regional foreign policy. South Asia has now become more politically attuned to Indian domestic affairs, and especially to the concerns of Indian neighbours, which also have significant religious and ethnic minorities (Qamar, 2021).

Hinduism is a pluralistic old religion that began over four thousand years ago in the Indian subcontinent. It has no single founder, central doctrinal authority or dogma, and is instead open to all beliefs and philosophies, including Vedanta, Samkhya and Yoga, with its principles of Karma, Dharma and Moksha. It emerged in the order of Vedic faith with the influence of Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism and flourished till the Mughal rule. The rigid classificatory framework, however, that British colonialism imposed on Hinduism compelled it into a structure that was more hierarchical than it had ever been before, and Hindu reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Vivekananda and Dayananda Saraswati focused on rationalism, education, and spirituality appropriate to a modernizing India. Today, Hinduism is more usually linked to the inclusion of a secular nationalism, which provides the spiritual backbone of the multicultural India envisioned by the Constitution for most citizens (Khan et al., 2017).

Hindutva, meaning the 'Hindu-ness' is a political ideology which imagines India as a Hindu Rashtra (Hindu nation). It foregrounds the cultural and political primacy of Hindu as a constituent of Indian nationalism. The ideology is not the same as Hinduism as a religion; it rather is a socio-political agenda to transform the constitutionally secular India into an ethno-religious country. Thus, Hindutva has to be understood in the context of wider structural shifts in Indian politics and society, rather than merely its historical and ideological precedent. Political mobilisation in India has become entirely different in the 1990s under the impact of economic liberalisation, fast urbanization, proliferation of mass media and digital communication. These changes enabled the propagation of ideas like Hindutva to a far larger audience and change the nature of political identity construction. Television, social media, and well-coordinated political messaging have helped to forge public opinion around a nationalist agenda, and to amplify identity politics more generally. Part of the reason is the nature of the electoral competition itself. Indian elections are increasingly dismantled by emotive appeals rooted in 'historical grievance', national pride and personality rather than by developmental pledges and patronage politics. Hindutva provides an alternative story of the nation and a new vision of Hindu unity transcending caste, class and geography (Badri, 2020). It has allowed for a wider political mobilization at a pan-Indian level, including the mobilization of voters who feel they are victims of globalisation, economic inequality, or rapid social transformation (Babar, 2024).

Historical Background

Hindu nationalism, also known as Hindutva, has a significant historical foundation in India, emerging from a long-standing pileup of grievances. The political philosophy of 'Rajamandala' as articulated by Kautilya's Arthashastra focused on alliance-building and realpolitik and established the foundations for later understandings of the concept of national identity and security. The memory of Muslim rule, especially the later Mughal rule and the rule of Aurangzeb and other Mughal emperors, is interpreted in Hindutva discourse to have generated a lot of resentment among Hindus, and the demolition of the temples like the attack on the Somnath Temple by

Mahmud of Ghazni is considered as the proof of religious intolerance that continues to harden the attitude of the Hindus towards the history of Muslim rule (Gurikar, 2022).

The philosophy of the Hindu Mahasabha had a formative influence on the RSS, especially through the words of V.D. Savarkar, who declared the concept of Hindutva of integration of the Hindus both for cultural and anti-colonial reasons. The crystallisation of the Hindutva ideology should thus be placed not just in the context of pre-colonial grievances and initial organisation but also in the context of the structural changes brought about by the British colonial administration. Previously fluid social boundaries were reinforced by colonial governance practices, such as census classification, communal electorates and the legal recognition of religious identity, into rigid categories of communities. In effect the British policy of 'divide and rule' strengthened the religious identity of both Hindu and Muslim elites, effectively institutionalizing it as a political tool. The structures of these colonial era buildings gave rise to the ensuing Hindu nationalist discourses of historical victimisation and demographic anxiety that remain a part of Hindutva politics even today (Gopinath, 2022).

Research Objectives

To explore the effect of Hindutva ideology on Indian domestic politics since 2014.

To analyze the effect of Hindutva ideology on the states of the region since 2014.

Research Questions

What are the implications of the Hindutva ideology for the domestic politics of India?

How Indian policies are influenced by the Hindutva ideology in the region?

Problem Statement

With respect to centre-state dynamics, political polarization, party and electoral dynamics, and the viability of pluralistic political norms, Hindutva, a Hindu-nationalist ideology, has had a pervasive impact on the Indian political landscape over the past few decades. Despite the frequent victories of the BJP, there is still little consensus on the impact of ideological majoritarianism on the Indian electoral landscape – either in terms of political stability or on the possibility that it might pose a threat to democratic inclusivity. There is also a lack of sustained study on the impact of Hindutva-based discourses on voting behavior in various regions, social classes and time periods in the country. The ideological shift taking place in India has been linked with the changing geopolitical scenario of South Asia such as rise in bilateral tensions, changing neighbourhood policy and heightened interest of other countries towards India's domestic political development at the regional level. However, very little theoretical or empirical research on the link between regional political processes and internal ideological crystallization has been done. Lack of an overarching model to tie together the three processes of domestic ideology, electoral behaviour and regional politics hinders complete understanding of the shifting regional role in India. This study is aimed at understanding the nature of the forces that brought about Hindutva and shaped the current Indian political scene.

Significance of the Study

Pakistan has raised the issue at the United Nations, arguing that India is violating international norms and trying to change the demography of Kashmir by promoting the settlement of Hindus. This has only exacerbated conflict between the two states, as well as worsening bilateral relations, and causing a state of geopolitical tension that persists to this day. Bangladesh-India ties have also been problematic since the advent of Hindutva as a governing ideology. Bangladeshi leaders have condemned the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), alleging that Muslims are being denied an accelerated citizenship programme, and fear that legislation such as this would further fuel persecution of Muslims and fuel communal tensions in the region. Western democracies, such as the European Union and the United States have voiced concerns

about the decline in India's secular structure and communal violence during BJP rule. The impact of the CAA and the National Register of Citizens (NRC) has been addressed in the European Parliament, where there has been worry about potential discrimination against Muslims, while the United States Congress has held hearings on religious intolerance in India, as Indian officials label such issues as internal affairs (Zaman & Khan, 2023).

In India, Hindutva has come into existence under the BJP and changed regional politics to their favor and their disadvantage. Better-informed groups have reported restrictions on democratic freedoms, increasing polarization in society and discrimination of minorities, including Freedom House, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. India has been rated as 'partly free' by Freedom House, which is pressuring the government to adhere to democratic principles. Amnesty International has documented the use of legislation to curb dissent and the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has recommended sanctions against individuals whose actions have been linked to religious persecution. These comments in total highlight the need for a more fundamental change in the system if India's pluralistic and democratic character is to be safeguarded in the face of the spread of Hindutva. The globalisation of Hindutva also highlights the adaptability and borders-crossing nature of the ideology. While it has proven to be useful for parts of the Hindu community to assert their identity and participate in politics in the diaspora, the key to the appeal of Hindutva is its focus on a single Hindu identity that supersedes regional and sectarian divisions (Shahid et al., 2022).

Literature Review

The scholarship on the politics of Hindutva comes together around the core of the ideology in party politics and electoral politics. In combination, academic articles, political commentaries and historical studies offer a good account of how Hindutva emerged in Indian politics and how it is implemented. These sources shed light on the methods employed to secure electoral victory and show how the ideology continues to reshape the internal party dynamics, especially within the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). This section synthesises the specific characteristics of the literature to pinpoint the main drivers of the consolidation of Hindutva in Indian politics, the nature of electoral contestation and the wider impact of that contestation on the socio-political system in India.

BJP and RSS

Hindutva has contributed immensely to the articulation of historical grievance as a post-colonial political agenda of forming India as a Hindu nation. The BJP has successfully gained the support of Hindus by invoking Hindutva as a political tool, mobilising its policy agenda to the larger project of cultural nationalism, and mobilising a large portion of the Indian electorate along the way. But this has also led to an escalation of communal tension as a result of its marginalisation of the non-Hindu communities. The RSS also has a high control over education reform and social programming aiming to 'saffronise' education and propagate narratives in line with Hindutva. The RSS-BJP nexus also has raised concerns about the secular fabric of India being eroded and a higher possibility of legislation which will benefit the Hindu community and give a setback to minorities. This change in the policy orientation of inclusivity towards one of greater exclusionist politics is reflected in policy measures like the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) which has been more than liberal with its emphasis on the Hindu identity.

The penetrative impact of Hindutva in the Indian political system

The impact of Hindutva on the Indian political scene has been pronounced, and has led to a noticeable move towards hyper-nationalism and against the secular ideals which have historically underpinned the Indian state. This change has been aided significantly by the organisations affiliated with the Hindutva ideology such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh

(RSS), Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Bajrang Dal which have influenced society, policy, and communal relations in India. The RSS is still the main body disseminating the ideology of a Hindu nation and it has a large network of affiliates which are active in the areas of community service, cultural activities and educational programmes aimed at fostering a feeling of Hindu identity among various groups. For example, the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) is worried about student activism in the educational institutions and is instrumental in establishing the Hindutva discourse in them. This has been a mobilisation from below and has helped in building loyalty to Hindutva among younger generations and their feeling of Nationalism (Gurikar, 2022).

The practical aspects of Hindutva have been especially well visible in the state of Karnataka, where local governance has been increasingly tainted by Hindu-inspired policies. The state government has organized festivals for Hindu religious festivals, and has been less forthcoming or even oblivious of festivals observed by minority communities, further deepening communal tension and rising incidents of violence against Muslims. The tensions observed in this context are normalised and are a part of a larger phenomenon of hyper-nationalism in which allegiance to Hindu identity takes precedence over communal peace. The VHP has been at the heart of mobilising the supporters of Hindutva and cultural mobilisation, and has taken up the task of reclaiming places that are seen as historically important for the Hindus. One of the most significant of these was the Ram Janmabhoomi movement which championed the building of a temple at the disputed site in Ayodhya. Though it led to significant communal violence, this movement was inspiring for many Hindus, and it is a fact that Hindutva mobilisation can easily trigger inter-communal conflict. The issue of Ayodhya remains a strong emblem of the ideological battle between secularism and Hindutva. The Bajrang Dal, on the other hand, represents more violent aspects of the Hindutva movement; it has, through confrontational tactics, repeatedly attacked minority communities, particularly Muslims and there has been a significant uptick in violence associated with Bajrang Dal activists since 2014, particularly in BJP-ruled states. The group's activities also show a wider social acceptance of hyper-nationalist attitudes, where violence is justified as being in the service of Hindu interests (Edward T.G. Anderson, 2023).

The CAA is an illustration of the outcomes of Hindutva policies in the policy-making process. The 2019 CAA also provides a pathway to citizenship for non-Muslim refugees from neighbouring countries, but expressly bars Muslims, leading to protests and criticism that the CAA is a form of institutionalisation of religious discrimination contrary to the secular constitutional order of India. The digital world is also an important space for popularizing Hindutva ideology, where the spreading of divisive narratives on minorities can be done at a much faster pace through social media. According to research, the hate speech against Muslims has increased significantly around significant political events and it has been documented that hate crimes against Muslims have increased since 2014, mainly from the anti-Muslim organizations associated with the RSS and BJP (Rasheed, 2022).

The social service organizations like Seva Bharti carry out social welfare activities under the guise of offering services to the community but this is said to help to maintain the position of the Hindu community in relation to that of other religious communities, while their hidden agenda is to propagate their ideology. All these currents of ideology can be seen in the cultural practice and the legislative policy in case studies like that of Karnataka and national policy like that of CAA, which present a serious threat to the democratic ethos of India and have been supported and opposed in various parts of the country (Thameem Ushama, 2020).

The ins and outs of Hindutva and Party Politics.Vajpayee and Modi on Hindutva in Party Politics.

The impact of Hindutva on Indian party politics has been significant, especially for the BJP. Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Narendra Modi were among the leaders most responsible for embedding Hindutva into mainstream political discourse, with their leadership styles having very different approaches to this integration of Hindutva into governance. The credit for softening the public image of Hindutva goes to Vajpayee, who as PM (1999-2004) stressed economic development and nationalism, while avoiding to address the contentious issues of religious identity and national character, without disowning hardline elements of the BJP. In 1998, the BJP had capitalized on the occasion of Pokhran II nuclear tests, and in 1999, it had given a positive boost to its nationalism through the Kargil War, emphasizing territorial integrity and patriotism as its main points of nationalism, but not religion itself. Vajpayee's efforts, however, weren't without their difficulties since the Gujarat riots in 2002 proved to be a challenge for the Congress government and to Narendra Modi, who at the time was the Chief Minister of Gujarat, and Vajpayee's rhetoric and condemnation of the violence did not sit well with his party base, which was becoming more communal (Hari, 2019).

When Narendra Modi was elected as the Prime Minister in 2014 it was a turning point for BJP towards Hindutva. Whereas while Vajpayee has doggedly fought this notion, Modi has been far more ready to adopt Hindutva as part of the electoral strategy and governance. His government has managed to stir up more sections of voters by putting on the agenda topics that appeal to Hindu identity. The decision to end the special status of the state of Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370 in August 2019 is one of the most significant policies of the Modi government pertaining to its Hindutva agenda. The government justified this action as an essential step towards national integration and regional development; it was popular among the nationalists, who resented the region as being historically disputed and mostly Hindu. The decision changed the status of Jammu and Kashmir from a state with special status to two federally administered territories, thus giving central government greater control over a Muslim dominated area. BJP termed the move as a long pending need and Home Minister Amit Shah had said that Article 370 had created obstacles for the development of democracy in the State of Jammu and Kashmir. The critics on the other hand had said that the main agenda of the legislation was to change the demographic status of the region by allowing the non-Kashmiris to own land in the region (Dr. Shujaat Hussain, 2022).

Polarised Politics in India

Hindutva has firmly established itself in the political heartland of North and Western India, and enjoys solid backing among the Hindu community. The party has successfully leveraged religious sentiment and culture to win votes in Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, among other states. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath of Uttar Pradesh, for instance, has been bold to introduce Hindu religious theme into governance and in doing so has acted on the BJP's long electoral tradition of claiming to be the savior of the interests of the Hindu community, a stance that it has been able to pull off in states where Hindu nationalist sentiment is high. Gujarat also provides a telling example of the political infiltration of Hindutva; it is not only the birthplace of the Hindutva ideologue Vinayak Damodar Savarkar but it was also the state in which the Chief Minister of the state, Narendra Modi, during the Communal Riots of 2002. The celebration of Hindu festivals and cultural events have become an important political event in Gujarat, making Hindutva a central part of the state's political culture.

However, South India has been much more resistant to Hindutva. The state's tradition of secularism has given rise to opposition from Dravidian parties, including the DMK and AIADMK that are against Hindutva and want social justice and anti-caste politics ensuring that the BJP has been facing repeated electoral defeats in Tamil Nadu. In the past, BJP has observed little growth

in Kerala because of the high literacy rate and religious diversity in the state, while the United Democratic Front (UDF) and the Left Democratic Front (LDF) have promoted secularism and communal harmony in the state, the latter state being known as the "land of temples" (None Shireen Mushtaq et al., 2024).

The Northeastern states also demonstrate how the promotion of Hindutva influences regional politics in ethnic and religious ways; for regions with substantial indigenous and Christian populations, promotion of Hindutva is seen as a danger to distinct ethnic and religious identities. The NRC and CAA brought together significant mass protests in Assam from among the indigenous communities who feared discrimination against them in favour of Hindu migrants, which were being opposed by Assamese regional parties like Assam Gana Parishad (AGP). The example of developments in Kashmir further illustrates how the imposition of a Hindutva ideology on a Muslim-dominated state, through the repeal of Article 370 in August 2019, has fueled feelings of alienation among Kashmiris and led to ongoing tensions and protest between Kashmiri Muslims and the Indian state (Chitranjali Negi Advocate, 2024).

Overall, Hindutva has created an intricate landscape of devotees and critics in India under the BJP. In the north and west, it has built a vote bank based on the religion of Hinduism and a sense of cultural identity. Southern states like Tamil Nadu and Kerala have been able to counter this trend by asserting secularism and regionalism, whereas ethnic issue sentiments in the Northeast have led to a resistance against Hindutva policies that are seen to be an attack on their cultures. Hindutva has therefore had a significant impact on the electoral politics of India as Vajpayee and Modi have used the ideology to galvanise the Hindu voters and to polarise the minority communities.

The removal of Article 370 in 2019 is another instance of how the Hindutva factor has influenced political choices that have increased polarisation, wooing Hindu sentiment and ignoring Kashmiri Muslim concerns, while instilling a general sense of threat among Hindu voters to the separatist forces. The CAA's exclusion of Muslim refugees, however, highlights the divisive impact of Hindutva on society, which also influences legislative politics. Apart from electoral politics, Hindutva has also infiltrated grassroots social mobilisation with the help of groups like the RSS, which has widespread networks for its dissemination and has helped re-inforce communal identity and normalising intolerance towards minorities.

This polarization has implications far beyond its current political results, threatening to undermine not just the democratic ethos of India but also its social cohesion, with minority rights increasingly under threat, and the secularism being eroded. However, the influence of Hindutva has significantly changed the trajectory of the India-Pakistan ties, and it has been observed that since BJP government came to power, Pakistan has been seen not only as a strategic rival of India, but also as a civilisational rival to India, as was done during the election campaigns and has been seen after incidents like the 2019 airstrike on Balakot. This civilisational perception shrinks the space for diplomacy, strengthens the hardliners' bargaining position inside Pakistan, gives validation to Islamist counter narratives and exacerbates the security dilemma in the region by focussing on identity politics over proper conflict management (Hasan, 2025).

Hindutva's revival has also started to be felt in Nepal's politics, in the sense that the debate on the nature of Nepal as a secular republic has undergone a transformation, as Nepali political leaders and monarchist groups have begun to advocate for the revival of the Hindu state in Nepal, which scholars attribute to the transnationalisation of the Hindutva discourse and its testing of the fragile secular settlement in Nepal.

Theoretical Framework

A welcome alternative to this ideological analysis is provided by Neorealism which posits that ideology plays no role in determining the behaviour of states but that it is shaped by the structure of the international system.A much more useful analytical approach to the emergence of Hindutva and its impact on the politics of the Indian subcontinent is provided by Neorealism which suggests that ideology is not the primary determinant of state behaviour but is rather determined by the structure of the international system. The South Asian international system is deemed to be anarchic and unstable, thus making it imperative that India, the strongest state in the South Asian region, must focus on relative gains, deterrence, and survival over everything else, according to the neorealist approach. India's foreign policy since 2014 has exhibited a remarkable degree of continuity in its strategic goals and approaches, with little evidence of significant shifts in ideology or doctrine.The foreign policies of the government since 2014 have been remarkably consistent in their strategic objectives and tactics, reflecting a lack of fundamental changes in doctrine or ideology, but rather a continuation of a long-standing practice of using Hindutva as a tool to justify realist calculations. Taking Pakistan more seriously, conducting cross-border operations, and having a toughled approach on Kashmir etc. is not a policy shift for India given the constant security threats it faces from Pakistan, but rather a structural shift. Continued military modernisation is also part of the same picture. Neorealist ideas of a regional hegemon's desire to maximise influence at a minimum of outside constraint are also reflected in the Indian approach of coercive diplomacy toward smaller neighbours and bilateralism over multilateral institutions like SAARC. With this, Hindutva ideology doesn't really redefine India's foreign policy goals but creates the political unity and internal legitimacy to allow the state to pursue security and power politics that neorealism would have predicted. Neorealism is thus an explanatory variable that is useful to account for the relationship between Hindutva ideology and the Indian regional politics as is observed empirically, which is characterized as durable, predictable and power seeking.

Application of Neorealism to Indo-Pakistan Relations

As argued by neorealism and its structural cousin, security, maximising power, and survival are the main concerns of the international system, which lacks a central authority. Hindutva has been operating as a legitimising device in the context of Indian-Pakistani relations where the Indian state is taking a more assertive stance against Pakistan while simultaneously sticking to the broadly neorealist line of reasoning. Indian policy towards Pakistan has switched sharply towards a policy of deterrence through punishment since 2014 as seen in the 2016 surgical strikes, the 2019 Balakot airstrikes, and suspension of composite dialogue and the abrogation of Article 370. In the Neorealist view, these reactions are not necessarily hostile towards a particular ideology but are rather reasonable reactions to a perceived threat to security. Hindutva, however, is inextricably tied to India's quest for relative power and regional dominance, thus reducing the domestic limits on the use of force by increasing public acquiescence to hardline policies. As a countermeasure, Pakistan has regularly resorted to the old method of Neorealism, such as nuclear deterrence and internationalisation of the Kashmir issue. In other words, while the tone and strength of India's policy towards Pakistan is influenced by Hindutva, the fundamental dynamics of rivalry (security dilemma, deterrence stability, power asymmetry) are all structurally driven (Mandahr, 2022).

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach using document analysis and case studies to examine the many impacts of Hindutva in Indian politics and elections. It includes a detailed study of the existing research on the political impacts of Hindutva, which includes policy papers, political manifestos and academic research. The socio-political and cultural aspects of the

consolidation of Hindutva are examined using a secondary source method, which means that academic journal articles, partisan publications, and political speeches are consulted. Through this, it is possible to detect the main themes, trends and patterns on how Hindutva influences the party politics of India as well as the regional politics.

Case studies cover specific instances where Hindutva ideology has played an important role in party politics, such as controversial political projects and crucial events, including the Ayodhya movement and the debate on the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). The case studies provide insights into the working of Hindutva by placing the ideology in a precise political context. The approach adopted in this study is twofold, first document analysis and second, case studies, which allows one to have a broad view of the effects of Hindutva and the findings are able to provide inputs to responses to the impact of Hindutva on domestic and regional politics in India.

Hindutva ideology and its influence on the Indian domestic politics

Indian nationalism is a trend that is slowly shifting to the political philosophy of Hindutva, which defines Indian nationalism in terms of Hindu culture and civilisation. While it was a cultural movement in the first half of the 20th century, Hindutva has gained significant traction in the political realm since the BJP came into power in 2014. Since then, Hindutva has become a formidable influence in India's domestic politics and is manifested in electioneering, governance, constitutional interpretation, minority relations, in federal politics, and in the workings of the democratic system. Hindutva has become a tangible reality in the form of a political and legislative agenda which has altered the internal political landscape of India.

Hindutva is a force which has altered the landscape of electoral politics in India by substituting religious and cultural identity as the basis for political mobilisation for socioeconomic factors. The BJP has been able to bring together the Hindu masses through symbolism, including Ram, temples and history. The Ram Mandir movement is an example of institutionalization of religious symbolism as a political tool that culminated in the construction and opening of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya. Increasingly secular and minority-oriented political narratives are being pushed to the margins of the election campaign, which is now defined as a clash between the nationalists and anti-nationalists, with opposition parties consequently having to take a 'soft Hindutva' stance otherwise they will remain politically irrelevant.

Effects on Civil Liberties and Democracy

In the past decade, elections have taken place regularly in India, but Hindutva has negatively impacted the quality of Indian democracy. Protest against the government through financial-regulation, anti-terror or sedition laws is now becoming the norm for civil society organisations, journalists, activists and students. Civic space is thus contracting and dissent is being criminalised, turning to electoral majoritarianism a liberal democratic pluralism.

Hindutva ideology has, therefore, completely reshaped Indian domestic politics by redefining nationalism, reconfiguring the electoral competitiveness, weakening secularism, marginalising minorities, consolidating power and changing the democratic norms. The polarization of society, increased tension of democratic institutions and challenge to the constitutional values of federal democracy and pluralism have been exacerbated by the ruling party's ideological consistency and its continuous electoral victory. It is unclear if Hindutva-based majoritarianism can ever coexist with democratic inclusion and constitutional values in India's domestic politics in the long run (The Politics of Hindutva in India, 2020).

The negative consequences of Hindutva ideology on India's foreign policy

The Hindutva ideology, which advocates for a "Hindu" concept of Indian identity in its relationship with neighbouring governments, has had a significant impact on the country's foreign policy. In keeping with Nehruvian ideals, India's foreign policy has been based on non-

alignment, secularism and a moral responsibility for regional stability. But it is a gradual shift that has been taking place under the Hindutva governments of the BJP, with a foreign policy that emphasizes cultural nationalism and strategic self-interest, yet has an underlying ideological dimension. This has had a significant impact on India's ties with its South Asian neighbors, especially Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. In the case of India, for example, the historical grievance and Hindu nationalist narratives have influenced its more assertive posture towards Pakistan, where a policy of pre-emptive measures and hard-line security measures is often preferred to diplomacy. Likewise, the emphasis on developing Hindu identity and cultural ties has been a strong feature of Hindutva policy towards Nepal, which has led to some conflicts regarding citizenship, border issues, and accusations of interference in Nepal's internal affairs.

Impact on India's Foreign Policy towards Pakistan

Since the BJP came to power in 2014, Hindu nationalism and a Hindu-centric understanding of Indian identity have been a hallmark of Hindutva's impact on India's foreign policy towards Pakistan. In the past, India had to maintain a balance between regional stability, diplomacy and security concerns, but the emergence of Hindutva has affected the balance by focusing more on taking aggressive action, churning out rhetoric and paying more attention to domestic politics than to any diplomacy.

Hindutva ideology has created a more militaristic or security mindset in India's approach towards Pakistan and India has started giving more importance to the military capability and aggressiveness of the nation in the case of any perceived threat by the extremist groups operating from Pakistan. Recent instances include the airstrikes launched in wake of the Pulwama terror attack in 2019, the Uri attack response in 2016, surgical strikes across the Line of Control (LoC) and regular military actions in response to ceasefire violations. In addition, these acts have a symbolic significance, and they also bolster the nationalist discourses in line with the Hindutva ideology. (Sajjad et al, 2021)

In its interaction with Pakistan, India has also shifted to an ideologically charged narrative, which puts conditions on interaction if Pakistan takes any steps in the Kashmir issue, terrorism, and cross-border infiltration, while also portraying Pakistan as the sponsor of anti-Indian terrorism to assert its domestic policies and to marginalize it within forums like the United Nations and the G20.

Foreign policy also has its influence on the Hindutva ideology, and there is considerable overlap between foreign and domestic politics: the BJP's nationalist pitch resonates with an electorate more inclined to respond positively to an assertive policy towards Pakistan, especially in election times, with narratives that tend to connect Pakistani action with some threat to the Indian sovereignty or the Hindu identity. Following this, it is argued that such domestic ideological considerations have informed the decision for proactive military action, such as is seen in the Uri response in 2016, and in the Balakot airstrikes in 2019 (K Vikas Srivatsa, 2022).

Politics of minorities, Hindu Identity Projection and Cultural Diplomacy.

Hindutva's focus on a Hindu identity has also influenced India's soft power approach to the neighbouring states. To enhance cultural affinity, cultural and religious ties – festivals, pilgrimages, temple reconstruction – have been encouraged with a focus on Bangladesh and Nepal. This is a soft power approach which has also set a precedent of causing divisions in states where it is felt as interference in internal affairs such as Nepal's debate on border changes and citizenship laws. A policy that is hindutva oriented also takes precedence over the security of the Hindu minority in countries with significant Hindu populations like Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, which can be manifested as vocal advocacy or selective diplomatic pressure, with the effect of

strengthening Hindu relations but potentially weakening formal bilateral relations. All of these approaches are more ideological in nature than economic or security pragmatic.

Hindutva ideology also influences the role of India in a regional multilateral body like SAARC and BIMSTEC. India's approach is more security – and strategic – driven than cooperative regionalism – which explains its non-active role in SAARC processes – and the ideological bent is also clearly reflected in this. Hindutva ideology hence merges international and domestic political considerations since in the domestic arena the voters often seem to lean towards assertive and symbolic actions abroad that validate the nationalist credentials. In the case of Pakistan, border issues with Nepal, or assistance to the Hindu community outside Pakistan, policy decisions may be made with twofold goals: consolidating domestic political backing and achieving strategic goals at the regional level (Mahapatra & Plagemann, 2019).

The impact of Hindutva on the foreign policy is seen as having an ideological and strategic impact by scholars. The hybrid strategy gives India more cultural presence and assertiveness in the region, but it also runs the risk of creating conflict where India's moves are taken as hegemonic or intrusive by neighbouring governments. The tension indicates that the old approach to a "cooperative" and "secular" regional engagement is being transformed by domestic ideological priorities that are increasingly playing a more important part in the practice of regional diplomacy.

Discussion

One of the key conclusions of this research is the transformation of Hindutva from a cultural-nationalist movement into a strong political ideology that now defines India, and equips the BJP since 2014 with a coherent framework that integrates nationalism with religion and governance. This process of consolidation, through the conservation of Hindu identity across caste and regional lines, the re-negotiation of secularism as the assertion of the majority culture, and the re-understanding of national interest through the prism of civilisationalism, has been behind electoral triumphs and has placed religious symbolism and identity-based policy discourse within the institutional framework of the state, transforming Indian democracy from liberal-pluralist into majoritarian-nationalist, increasing polarisation and limiting the participation of minorities.

The Hindutva movement has also had an impact on India's foreign policy, which has become more ideologically assertive and has taken a more rigid stance on issues of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and regional dominance while retaining its core tenets of structural realism and economic interest in foreign policy. This is reflected in India's emphasis on strategic autonomy, resistance to outside influence and the assertion of itself as a civilisational power, not a 'status quo'. Some of the findings of the study were that the Hindutva impact on Indo-Pak relations is clearly visible and is causing a great deal of damage to this relationship, for instance; talking about Pakistan as a civilisational threat eliminates flexibility in both the political and diplomatic aspects of India-Pak ties and fosters a mindset of punitive policy and coercive communication, making Kashmir a non-negotiable identity conflict.

In general, the Hindutva-based nationalism has created an assertive Indian attitude towards South Asia. Smaller regional states are faring that less cooperative and more intrusive mode of approach from India and are increasingly filling such strategic void with external powers, especially China, to reach their objectives of increasing their influence in the region at India's cost, a situation which has created strategic space for other countries in the region to assert their presence, with India's long-term aspirations for dominance in the region, remaining under threat.

Recommendations

The Indian state should put in place the policies for equal treatment of all the religions and should maintain secularism as a cornerstone of the Indian identity. The laws to protect the rights of minorities, to respect interfaith tolerance and religious discrimination as well should be given priority. Equitable access of opportunities and resources for all religious communities is one way the state can support the building of a more inclusive society in which diverse religious practices live in harmony. All this would help in easing communal tension and national unity to counter the Hindutva divisive narratives.

Enhancement of democratic institutions also is key. Greater autonomy for institutions like the judiciary and the Election Commission, would help to diminish the impact of majoritarian politics on governance. Improvements in judicial appointment systems and the strengthening of judicial protection should help to ensure the rule of law, and a means to make elections free and fair without external interference should help maintain checks and balances in India's governance system.

Encouraging interactions among communities can also be a way of bridging the divides created by Hindutva-accorded discourses. Community-to-community engagement can help build understanding and empathy between religious and cultural communities. Community engagement programmes, such as workshops, cultural exchange activities and collaborative civic efforts can help overcome misconceptions and prejudice, fostering a less divided society where shared humanity is paramount and identities are not used to divide. Considering the prevalence of misinformation, a media literacy programme should be introduced to empower citizens to assess news sources and identify the political bias. Responsible journalism would also be a tool to reduce the spread of polarizing stories and to foster a more critical citizen base that is difficult to manipulate.

Finally, improving civic education is crucial to developing a well-informed citizenry aware of its rights and responsibilities within a democratic polity. In sum, sustained investment in these areas provides India with its best chance to maintain its secular democratic character in the face of the political challenges of the present day.

Conclusion

In the India of the rise of Hindutva, identity politics are a new phenomenon, where religion is a key element of political discourse and social life. It has not only made Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) the focus of political discussion in India but also created significant worry about the future of secularism in India. The impact of Hindutva has been felt in both the domestic and regional politics of India, with communal lines being drawn in some of its provinces and India's foreign policy being influenced, as well as India's relationship with its South Asian neighbours. The Hindutva propaganda and activity has escalated the decades-old Kashmir issue, cross-border terrorism fears, and bilateral distrust between India and Pakistan. Domestic majoritarian narratives have also impacted relations with Bangladesh, including on migration, citizenship, and minority protection, and caused tension in what were comparatively friendly bilateral relationships. Religious nationalism has also affected the diplomatic relationship between India and Nepal and Sri Lanka, where the cultural footprint of India is sometimes seen as an intrusion upon the interests of the region and minorities. These inclinations have also had a spillover impact on regional multilateral organisations like SAARC and BIMSTEC, and India's continued rise of the Hindu nationalism can pose a threat to the peace and cooperation of the region, if India does not take steps to re-affirm the founding values and principles of these organisations.

Furthermore, Hindutva has had an impact on India's international relations, leading to concerns by foreign partners about backsliding in democracy and human rights and religious freedom. Striking a balance between its constitutional obligations for pluralism and the consolidation of

majoritarian politics domestically in India has been a theme of importance for human rights groups, civil society organisations and foreign observers alike. Overall, Hindutva is a multifaceted political, social, economic and diplomatic problem. Its implications will require reinforcing secular principles, ensuring inclusive policymaking, and protecting minority rights, as well as build upon constructive regional diplomacy for peace, stability and cooperative growth. In its absence, the ideology can exacerbate the rift within the country and hurt India's image as a responsible regional and international stakeholder**.**

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