



THE POLITICS OF HINDUTVA: A LOOMING CHALLENGE FOR SECULARISM IN INDIA

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Abstract

India is renowned across the world due to its various distinctions and rich diversity. The 42nd Amendment Act of 1976, also known as the Mini Constitution of India, confirms that the country is secular with no state religion. However, this unique tapestry of cultural and religious diversity faces substantial challenges, particularly with the rise of Hindutva politics. This ideology has significantly challenged the secular framework of contemporary India. This research study examines the intensifying influence of Hindutva on the political and social spheres of India, analyzing its implications for the country's secular framework. Rooted in the ideological basis laid by Savarkar and institutionalized through political organizations such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Hindutva advocates for India as a Hindy Rashtra or Hindu nation, challenging the secular values enshrined in the Indian Constitution. This research investigates how Hindutva has shaped political discourse, policy formulation, and societal dynamics in present-day India. Through a comprehensive analysis, this study explores the strategic alignment of Hindutva with educational reforms, media narratives, and economic policies to consolidate political power. Despite achieving electoral success, Hindutva's promotion of Hindu nationalism has heightened communal disturbances and sparked debates on religious diversity and minority rights. Critical events like the Ayodhya controversy and the Babri Masjid demolition highlight how Hindutva ideology has a polarizing impact on the socio-political landscape of India. In order to address the impact of Hindutva ideology, the Indian state must reassert its



commitment to secularism, which includes bolstering democratic institutions, defending pluralistic ideals, and promoting intercommunal communication. Upholding the constitutional principles of equality and religious freedom while negotiating the complex web of cultural diversity is necessary to preserve secular values in India.

Keywords: Bharatiya Janata Party, Constitution, Hindutva, India, Secularism

Introduction

India is renowned across the world due to its various distinctions and rich diversity. With more than 1.4 billion people living in 28 states and 8 Union territories, the country embodies a dynamic mosaic of different racial and religious backgrounds, languages, traditions, customs, and civilizations. With its historical legacy and national identity, the diversity of India is a product of centuries of interactions between various migrants, indigenous communities, and conquerors. From the colorful celebrations of Holi, Diwali, Eid, and Christmas to the complex rhythms of classical music and dance, each region of India highlights its own customs, values, traditions, festivals, and artistic expressions. Indian architecture showcases a rich array of cultural influences, encompassing ancient temples, Mughal-era monuments, colonial-era buildings, and contemporary structures. It is a polyglot paradise where languages change every quarter of a hundred kilometers. Due to cultural diversity, none of the languages is given the status of the Indian National language. The Eight Schedule of the Constitution of India recognizes 22 languages as official languages (Manishsiq, 2023), with hundreds of dialects spoken across the country, each contributing to the country's heritage and linguistic richness. To further promote and preserve linguistic diversity, each Indian state is free to choose its own official language. India is a multi-racial country as well. These races include Indo-Aryans, Dravidians, Negroids, and Mongloids, among others. One of the oldest races in India are the Dravidians, who are mostly found in South India.

In India, multiculturalism is also characterized by religious pluralism. Major religions like Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism originated there, and substantial numbers of Muslims, Christians, Parsis, Jews, and other religious communities call it home. The countless temples, gurdwaras, mosques, churches, and synagogues that dot the Indian landscape are symbols of peace, harmony, and tolerance, reflecting this diversity. The population of India also comprise a wide range of ethnic and tribal cultures, each with own languages, values, traditions, customs, and ways of life. Through their wealth of knowledge and distinct customs, these communities strengthen its social fabric and enhance the nation's cultural mosaic. A highly stratified social structure called the caste system exists in India as well. This structure has shaped cultural traditions, economic opportunities and social interactions for millennia, having a substantial impact on Indian society. The caste system prevalent in India is based on five primary divisions: four caste groups, known as Varnas (the Brahmins (priestly class), the Kshatriyas (the warrior or ruling class), the Vaishyas (the merchant or agricultural class), and the Shudras (the laboring class)), and one outcaste group, referred to as Panchama Varna (the Dalit or "Scheduled Castes"). This system has influenced



different aspects of Indian life, including education, religion, economics, and politics. The Constitution of India, adopted in 1950, prohibits caste-based discrimination and promotes affirmative action for disadvantaged groups such as Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs). The status of India as a secular state is enshrined in its constitution, which mandates equal treatment of all ethnic and religious communities by the state. However, this rich tapestry of religious and cultural diversity faces significant challenges, especially with the rise of Hindutva politics. This ideology has increasingly influenced India's political landscape.

Hindutva (Hinduness) is a political ideology that seeks to establish the hegemony of Hindu values and culture in India. This term was first coined by V.D. Savarkar, an Indian ideologue, intellectual, and anticolonial nationalist leader, in his 1923 booklet "Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?" In his work, he describes Hindus as not only a nation bound by the same culture but also by blood, history, geography, and country. Savarkar's ideology posits that Indian Christians and Muslims are the progeny of converts from Hinduism. It is essential for both communities to accept Hindu values and shed their bigotry in order to become part of the Indian nation (Iwanek, 2019). According to Ashoka Mody (2024), Savarkar proposed an audacious Hindu-centric Indian nationalism, dividing the world into friends and enemies. Friends were those with Indian roots through ancestry and devotion to the Fatherland, while all others were deemed enemies. In 1925, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) became the militant wing of Hindutva. Hindutva gained substantial traction with the formation of the RSS in 1925 and later the Bharatiya Janata Party in 1980.

The rise of Hindutva ideology has significantly challenged India's secular framework. Secularism, which always advocates for the separation of state and religion, has been a cornerstone of the political framework of India. The 42nd Amendment Act of 1976, also known as the Mini Indian Constitution, confirms that India is a secular country with no state religion. This article examines the emergence and influence of Hindutva ideology on Indian politics, exploring its implications for secular principles and the challenges it presents. During the BJP's tenure under Narendra Modi's leadership, several new policies and legislative measures reflecting Hindutva ideals have sparked controversies and debates. These include the contentious Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) of 2019, the Supreme Court's verdict on the Ayodhya dispute that allocated land for a Hindu temple, and various initiatives promoting Hindu cultural values. These developments have raised concerns about the erosion of pluralistic values, potential impacts on democratic institutions, and the marginalization of religious minorities.

The societal implications of the rise of Hindutva ideology are profound, encompassing social polarization, cultural homogenization, and increased incidents of communal violence. In response, various segments of Indian society, including intellectuals, political parties, and civil society organizations, have resisted and criticized Hindutva-driven policies, advocating for a return to inclusive and secular governance in India. While the Indian judiciary has occasionally intervened to uphold secular doctrines, its role remains contentious and influenced by political dynamics. Addressing the growing challenge of Hindutva politics requires concerted effort from all units of



society to uphold the values of inclusion, harmony, tolerance, and secularism embedded in the Constitution of India. This ideological contest will eventually shape the future of democracy in India and its commitment to pluralism.

Research Questions

- 1- What are the ideological foundations of Hindutva?
- 2- How does Hindutva ideology manifest in modern Indian politics?
- 3- What challenges does Hindutva pose to the secular fabric of India?
- 4- How can India tackle the rise of Hindutva while maintaining its commitment to secular principles?

Research Objectives

- 1- To analyze the ideological fundamentals and historical evolution of Hindutva.
- 2- To examine the current manifestations of Hindutva in the politics of India.
- 3- To evaluate the influence of Hindutva on secularism and democratic principles.
- 4- To identify some strategies for safeguarding secularism, and upholding democratic values amidst the influence of Hindutva ideology

Literature Review

In the complex socio-political landscape of modern India, Hindutva ideology, rooted in Hindu identity politics and cultural nationalism, poses a major challenge to the foundational principles of secularism enshrined in the Constitution of India. The assimilation of comprehensive studies is crucial for a nuanced exploration of the intricate dynamics influencing the interplay between secularism and Hindutva in India. Within this scholarly context, existing literature thoroughly examines specific facets, offering valuable insights into these complex relationships. In India, the evolution of Hindutva reflects a transformation from a cultural and political ideology to a dominant force shaping socio-political narratives. The historical foundation of Hindutva is deeply intertwined with the independence struggle of India and subsequent nation-building efforts. Christophe Jaffrelot (2007) observes that the initial advocates of Hindutva ideology aimed to create a unique Hindu identity in response to perceived threats from colonial and Muslim influences. Jaffrelot's comprehensive historical analysis demonstrates how Hindutva ideology has transitioned from a cultural movement into a political force. This transformation is characterized by the strategic employment of religious symbols and narratives to unite Hindu communities and garner political support. Sajib Kumar Banik's research, "The Development of Hindu Nationalism (Hindutva) in India in the Twentieth Century: A Historical Perspective," delves deeply into the historical evolution of Hindutva within India's complex socio-political landscape. Originating as a political ideology introduced by V.D. Savarkar in 1923, Hindutva has emerged as a dominant force in shaping Indian politics, particularly gaining prominence since the 1980s. Despite its roots in Hinduism, Hindutva functions more as a politico-ideological framework similar to political Islam, raising concerns due to its varied interpretations and the influence of different leaders throughout the 20th century. Banik's analysis illuminates a nuanced understanding of Hindutva's



evolution, highlighting its adaptation and impact within India's diverse societal framework.

The political success of Hindutva (Hinduness) is largely due to its capacity to mobilize significant segments of the Hindu population. Thomas Blom Hansen (1999) examines this in his ethnographic study, concentrating on the BJP's rise and its grassroots initiatives. Hansen contends that Hindutva's allure stems from its ability to express the concerns and ambitions of the Hindu middle class, effectively converting cultural identity into political leverage. This mobilization is supported by a network of affiliated organizations, known as the Sangh Parivar, which are instrumental in disseminating Hindutva ideology and coordinating political actions. A particularly contentious aspect of Hindutva politics is its link to communal violence. In his book "Votes and Violence", Steven I. Wilkinson (2004) offers an in-depth analysis of the connection between communal violence and electoral politics. Wilkinson asserts that political actors, including those associated with Hindutva, strategically use violence to solidify their support base by polarizing communities along religious lines. This tactical use of violence not only disrupts social cohesion but also directly threatens India's secular foundation. The rise of Hindutva has profound implications for secularism in India, as it aims to reshape the country's identity based on religious lines. Neera Chandhoke (2014) argues that Hindutva challenges the core principles of Indian secularism, which advocate for the equal treatment of all religions by the state. Chandhoke's analysis reveals how Hindutva proponents attempt to elevate Hinduism in public life, thereby undermining the secular framework that is integral to India's democratic ethos. This shift is reflected in policies and rhetoric that promote a majoritarian vision of the nation.

In recent years, the political landscape of India has been profoundly shaped by the ascendance of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) under Narendra Modi's leadership. Pradeep K. Chhibber and Rahul Verma (2018) examine the BJP's electoral strategy, which adeptly balances economic development with the advancement of Hindutva agendas. Their research reveals that, although economic issues are significant, religious and cultural identity politics play a critical role in rallying voter support. This dual approach has allowed the BJP to consolidate its status as the preeminent political force in India, sparking concerns about the future of secularism. The media also exerts a substantial influence on public perception of Hindutva and its implications for secularism. Arvind Rajagopal (2001), in "Politics After Television," examines how television and other media have played a pivotal role in promoting Hindutva ideologies. The depiction of Hindu nationalism across different media platforms has popularized and normalized Hindutva narratives, shaping public opinion and influencing electoral outcomes. This media-driven influence underscores the intricate dynamics between the secular fabric and Hindutva politics of Indian society.

Another critical aspect of Hindutva's influence is seen in educational reforms. Krishna Kumar (2001) discusses in his work "Prejudice and Pride" how educational policies and curricula have been used to promote Hindutva ideologies. These reforms purpose to instill a sense of Hindu pride and nationalism among young students, thereby shaping future generation's worldview. The implications of such ideological indoctrination are significant, as they challenge the pluralistic and



secular principles of the Indian education system. The judiciary has played an important role in the realm of Hindutva politics. In his work “Ayodhya and After: Issues Before Hindu Society,” Koenraad Elst (1991) explores how legal conflicts, especially those concerning the Ayodhya dispute, have shaped and been shaped by Hindutva ideologies. The legal and rulings procedures frequently mirror the challenges of balancing secular principles with accommodating the views of the majority. The legal tactics employed by advocates of Hindutva underscore the intricate interplay of religion, law, and politics in modern-day India. Hindutva’s impact extends beyond India’s boundaries, exerting a significant influence on the global Indian diaspora. In “The Hindu Diaspora: Comparative Patterns,” edited by Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen (2000), some authors analyze the dissemination of Hindutva ideologies among Hindu communities outside India. The book explores how diasporic backing for Hindutva holds both political and financial ramifications, strengthening the ideology’s global footprint and sway. This international dimension adds additional layers of complexity to the hurdles Hindutva presents to secularism in India.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for analyzing “The Politics of Hindutva: A Looming Challenge for Secularism in India” explores the intricate relationship between identity politics and secularism within India’s multifaceted socio-political landscape. In India, secularism, rooted in the Constitution and shaped by its historical trajectory, aims to ensure equal treatment of all religious groups and uphold the principle of religious neutrality in state affairs. However, this ideal often contends with the pervasive influence of identity politics, especially amidst the rise of Hindutva ideology. However, this ideal often contends with the pervasive influence of identity politics, particularly the rise of Hindutva ideology. Hindutva, a nationalist ideology, seeks to define Indian identity primarily in Hindu terms and has garnered significant political influence in recent decades. It promotes the idea of political, social, and cultural unity among Hindus, frequently at the expense of secular principles and the interests of religious minorities. The theoretical framework explores how Hindutva intersects with shaping voter behavior, electoral politics, and influencing policy decisions that impact communal harmony and religious freedom.

At its core, the framework examines the historical evolution of secularism in India, tracing its roots from the freedom struggle to its establishment in the Constitution as a guiding principle for governance. It contrasts this with the contemporary landscape, where identity-based politics, fueled by communal rhetoric and mobilization, increasingly shapes policy directions and determines electoral outcomes. This shift poses a significant and conflicting challenge to the inclusive vision of secularism, as it exacerbates social divisions along religious lines and undermines the principle of equal citizenship. The framework also explores how these dynamics impact minority rights and democratic governance, analyzing the politicization of religious identity and its effects on public discourse, social cohesion, and the functioning of democratic institutions. By examining these complexities, the framework aims to illuminate the ongoing tension between identity-based politics and secular ideals in India, emphasizing their broader implications for the democratic ethos and the nation's pluralistic fabric.



Methodology

The research methodology for studying “The Politics of Hindutva: A Looming Challenge for Secularism in India” involves a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach to thoroughly explore the ideological impacts and socio-political challenges associated with Hindutva ideology. This methodology primarily involves a descriptive and explorative review of existing literature. Data is meticulously gathered from different secondary sources, including academic journals, scholarly articles, books, government reports, magazines, newspapers, seminar presentations, and conference papers. This extensive spectrum of sources ensures a well-rounded understanding of the topic, encompassing cultural, political, historical, and social dimensions. The first phase of the methodology involves extensive data collection from diverse and reputable secondary sources. Academic journals and scholarly articles provide empirical and theoretical insights into the rise and influence of Hindutva.

The initial phase of the methodology involves extensive data collection from diverse and reputable secondary sources. Scholarly articles and academic journals provide theoretical and empirical insights into the emergence and influence of Hindutva. Books, both academic and non-academic, offer in-depth coverage of the cultural, historical, and political contexts of secularism and Hindutva in India. Newspapers and magazines are essential for capturing historical and contemporary public discourse and media representations. Seminar presentations and conference papers contribute to discussions on emerging themes and trends relevant to the study. Subsequently, the collected data undergoes a thorough and systematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes pertinent to the research topic. The analysis primarily employs thematic analysis to identify and examine key themes such as the rise of Hindutva in India, its impact on secularism, and the challenges faced by religious minorities. Additionally, a critical evaluation of the data sources is conducted to ensure their validity and reliability. This critical assessment involves verifying the authenticity of the sources and cross-referencing information, which are essential for maintaining the credibility and accuracy of this study's findings. The subsequent presentation of findings is organized in a coherent and clear manner, emphasizing the implications of Hindutva politics on secularism and the broader socio-political landscape of India.

Findings and Discussion

Hindutva, the foundational ideology of Hindu nationalism, has emerged as a substantial force shaping the socio-political landscape of India. Originating from the work of V.D. Savarkar and articulated through political organizations such as the RSS, Hindutva advocates for a political and cultural revival of Hindu identity. Politically, it finds expression through the BJP, which has significantly shaped governance since the late 20th century. The rise of Hindutva politics presents a profound challenge to India's secular ethos, which is enshrined in the constitution and emphasizes the neutrality of the state and religious pluralism.

Historical Evolution of Hindutva Politics

The historical evolution of Hindutva politics is a critical factor in understanding its significance in



Indian politics. This ideological movement, rooted in Hindu nationalism, traces its origins to the early 20th century, particularly through the influential work of V. D. Savarkar. In his work, “Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?” Savarkar laid out the foundational principles that would later shape India’s socio-political landscape. Savarkar’s articulation of Hindutva ideology was a response to the dual challenges of British rule and the perceived threats from minority religions, particularly Christianity and Islam. He described Hindutva as not merely a religious identity but a political and cultural one, emphasizing a collective memory and shared heritage among Hindus. This concept was designed to promote a sense of pride in their cultural and historical legacy and forge unity among Hindus (Savarkar, 1923). The idea of Hindutva (Hinduness) gained further momentum with the formation of the RSS in 1925 by K. B. Hedgewar. Under Hedgewar’s leadership, the RSS sought to operationalize the vision of Savarkar by building a cohesive and disciplined Hindu society. The organization engaged in different socio-cultural activities, including organizing social services, running schools, and promoting ideological and physical training among its members (Andersen & Damle, 2019).

The influence of RSS extended into the political arena with the establishment of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh in 1951, which later evolved in the BJP in 1980. The BJP arose as the main political arm of the Hindutva movement, striving to transform its ideological goals into policy and governance. The party’s rise was notably characterized by its ability to blend cultural nationalism with economic development agendas, thereby appealing to a wide voter base (Jaffrelot, 1998). A pivotal moment in the history of Hindutva was the Ayodhya dispute, which centered around the Babri Masjid and the claim that it was built on the birthplace of the Hindu deity Rama. The demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992 by Hindu activists, mobilized by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and supported by the BJP, led to widespread communal violence. This event highlighted the potent mix of religious fervor and political mobilization that characterizes Hindutva (Jaffrelot, 2007).

The electoral strategy of BJP, particularly under the leadership of Narendra Modi (current Indian Prime minister) has further cemented the Hindutva’s role in Indian politics. Modi’s tenure as Indian Prime Minister, beginning in 2014, has been marked by strategies and policies that emphasize Hindu identity and cultural heritage. This includes initiatives such as cow protection law, promoting yoga, and the abrogation of Article 370, which granted special status to the Muslim-majority state of Jammu & Kashmir (Chhibber & Verma, 2018).

Furthermore, the historical evolution of Hindutva ideology includes its impact on educational reforms. The Bharatiya Shikshan Mandal (BSM), an affiliate of the RSS, has been active in promoting changes in school curricula to emphasize Hindu history and culture, often at the expense of pluralistic and secular content. This ideological influence in education aims to shape the worldview of future generations, embedding Hindutva values from a young age (Kumar, 2001). The historical journey of Hindutva ideology from a cultural movement to a potent political force underscores its entrenched presence in Indian society. The principles articulated by V.D. Savarkar, propagated by the RSS, and politically implemented by the BJP continue to shape the discourse



on nationalism, secularism, and identity in contemporary India.

Political Mobilization and Organizational Structure

The rise and sustained impact of Hindutva ideology in Indian politics can be attributed to its effective mobilization plans, particularly among the Hindu middle class. According to Thomas Blom Hansen (1999), Hindutva's appeal stems from its promise of empowerment and cultural revival, addressing the perceived grievances of the Hindu majority in India. He further explains that the Hindu middle class, feeling marginalized by economic reforms and socio-political changes, finds solace and empowerment in Hindutva's assertion of Hindu cultural identity. This narrative has played a crucial role in rallying support for Hindutva-aligned parties like the BJP, which has effectively utilized these sentiments to expand its political footprint across different Indian states (Hansen, 1999).

Central to the organizational and dissemination strength of Hindutva is the Sangh Parivar, a robust network of Hindu nationalist organizations. At its core is the RSS, founded in 1925 by K. B. Hedgewar. The RSS serves as the ideological fountainhead of Hindutva, advocating for the unity of Hindus and cultural nationalism. The organization functions through a hierarchical structure of shakhas (local branches), where Swayamsevaks (volunteers) undergo training in Hindutva ideology and organizational discipline. Additionally, the Sangh Parivar includes affiliated bodies such as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), which collaboratively promote Hindutva principles through various means, including social welfare activities, electoral campaigns, and mass mobilization. This coordinated effort has been essential in expanding the influence of Hindutva ideology across diverse segments of Indian society, consolidating political support, and fostering a unified Hindu identity among their followers (Jaffrelot, 2007).

Communal Polarization and Political Strategy

Political actors, especially those aligned with Hindutva, strategically manipulate communal tensions to strengthen their political positions and polarize people along religious lines. This manipulation of violence serves multiple political purposes, such as marginalizing opposition, consolidating a loyal voter base, and reinforcing communal identities that support the Hindutva narrative. Electoral incentives drive political actors to exacerbate or instigate communal conflicts, particularly in areas where electoral competition is fierce and margins are slim. By heightening communal disturbances, these actors mobilize their core supporters and deter potential voters from backing rival parties, thereby skewing electoral outcomes in their favor. This strategy is evident in several instances of communal riots that align with election cycles, indicating a deliberate use of violence for political gains. The response of the state to the communal disturbance is often influenced by political calculations. For instance, in constituencies where the ruling party gains from polarization, law enforcement agencies are directed to take a passive approach, enabling violence to escalate and thus serve the incumbent's political interests. This strategic inaction highlights the complicity of the state apparatus in fostering communal discord for political advantage (Wilkinson, 2004). The deliberate provocation of communal riots aims to divert



attention from social and economic issues, channeling public frustration toward communal divisions instead of addressing underlying systemic concerns (Jaffrelot, 2003).

The Gujarat riots of 2002 exemplify the intersection of communal violence and Hindutva politics. These riots were marked by organized attacks against the Muslim minority amid allegations of state involvement and deliberate instigation by leaders aligned with Hindutva ideology. The aftermath of these events witnessed a strengthening of support for Hindutva, notably benefiting the BJP in subsequent elections (Varshney, 2002). This pattern of violence followed by electoral gains underscores the efficacy of communal polarization as a political tactic. Politicians, local leaders, and criminal elements also collaborate to foment and sustain violence for political ends. These coordinated efforts illustrate the deliberate exploitation of communal tensions to achieve political aims (Brass, 2003). Communal violence erodes trust between communities, undermines long-term social cohesion, and perpetuates cycles of animosity and retribution. The persistent atmosphere of conflict and tension directly challenges India's secular ethos, which hinges on the peaceful coexistence of diverse religious groups. By exploiting religious differences for political advantage, proponents of Hindutva not only disrupt social cohesion but also pose a fundamental threat to the secular principles enshrined in the Constitution of India. This erosion of secular principles through political violence underscores the existential challenge posed by Hindutva to the democratic framework of India.

Impact of Hindutva on Secularism

Hindutva's dominance in Indian politics has brought about profound challenges to the secular fabric of the country. According to Neera Chandhoke (2014), Hindutva undermines the foundational principles of Indian secularism by prioritizing Hinduism in policymaking and public life. This shift towards majoritarianism is evident in policies and rhetoric that emphasize Hindu cultural identity at the expense of secular pluralism, potentially weakening inclusive India's democratic ethos. This privileging of Hinduism often results in governmental endorsement of religious practices, traditions, festivals, and symbols linked to Hindu culture, occasionally to the detriment of minority religions. Concurrently, the rise of Hindutva has coincided with a shift towards majoritarian politics, marked by legislative measures and policies increasingly aligned with Hindu nationalist sentiments. This trend manifests in contentious debates on issues such as religious conversions, family laws, and cow protection, where Hindu beliefs and practices significantly shape legislative agendas. Secular pluralism, a cornerstone of Indian democracy, advocates for the acceptance and celebration of religious diversity within a unified national identity. However, Chandhoke argues that Hindutva's promotion of a singular Hindu identity risks eroding this pluralistic framework by promoting a homogenized cultural identity and marginalizing religious minorities (2014).

Contemporary Political Dynamics under Hindutva Ideology

In recent years, under the leadership of Narendra Modi, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has strategically integrated Hindutva into its political agenda, fundamentally reshaping the landscape



of Indian politics. According to Pradeep K. Chhibber and Rahul Verma (2018), the BJP employs a dual strategy of combining economic development goals with Hindutva narratives to expand its electoral means. This approach has proven effective in attracting support from different segments of society, including urban middle-class voters and rural constituencies aligned with Hindutva principles. The BJP's governance has emphasized policies aligned with Hindutva, such as enacting laws concerning cow protection, promoting Hindu cultural practices, and revising historical narratives to align with Hindu nationalist perspectives (Jaffrelot, 2019). These initiatives have sparked debates over the prioritization of majoritarian interests over minority rights and secular principles.

Under Modi's leadership, the BJP has entrenched Hindutva ideology as a core element of its political identity. This has involved strengthening ties with affiliated organizations like the RSS, which play an important role in shaping party policies and disseminating Hindutva ideology at grassroots levels (Jaffrelot, 2019). Critics argue that by emphasizing majoritarian sentiments and foregrounding Hindu cultural identity, the BJP risks undermining the pluralistic and secular foundations enshrined in India's Constitution (Chandhoke, 2014). This shift raises concerns about the marginalization of minorities and their rights. Moreover, the BJP's adoption of Hindutva ideology has garnered international scrutiny, with concerns raised about India's secular credentials and implications for regional stability. Domestically, the consolidation of Hindutva has shaped media narratives, societal norms, and public discourse, influencing the contours of political debate and dissent within the country.

Legal and Political Symbolism

In India, the judiciary has been a central battleground for Hindutva politics, as prominently illustrated by the Ayodhya dispute. This historical dispute moves around the contested site in Ayodhya, revered by Hindus as the birthplace of Lord Ram and disputed by Muslims due to the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992. Beyond mere property disputes, this legal confrontation symbolizes profound religious and cultural identities intertwined within the Hindutva ideology. Elst's analysis in "Ayodhya and After: Issues Before Hindu Society" underscores how legal battles over religious sites like Ayodhya transcend mere property disputes and become powerful symbols within the larger context of Hindu nationalism, influencing societal cohesion and the secular governance framework of India. The judiciary's role in adjudicating these disputes has been crucial, balancing between secular principles enshrined in the Constitution and the accommodation of majority religious sentiments (1991).

Prakash Shah (2005) explores how these judicial rulings navigate tensions between religious identity and secularism in Indian law amidst a diverse religious and cultural landscape. Neera Chandhoke (2015) also examines how Ayodhya rulings favoring majoritarian sentiments marginalize religious minorities and undermine India's pluralistic democratic ethos. Tahir Mahmood's studies on "Religious Freedom in the Secular State" delve into the societal impacts of Ayodhya-related judicial decisions, emphasizing their role in shaping communal harmony and



public discourse (Mahmood, 2003). Romila Thapar contextualizes Ayodhya's cultural and historical dimensions within legal debates, influencing interpretations of religious identity and cultural heritage (Thapar, 2014). Timothy Lubin (2009) provides comparative perspectives on how countries handle religious disputes, offering insights into global legal practices relevant to understanding India's approach to Ayodhya.

Educational Reforms and Hindutva Ideology

In India, educational reforms have been strategically employed to promote Hindutva ideologies, focusing on shaping the perspectives of younger generations. Kumar (2001) describes these reforms as aimed at instilling Hindu pride and nationalism among young students through a curriculum that emphasizes a Hindu-centric narrative. This approach challenges the traditionally pluralistic secular and principles of the Indian education system. The infusion of Hindutva ideologies into education reflects broader societal efforts to cultivate a nationalist identity rooted in Hindu heritage. Such initiatives not only influence social attitudes but also mold political beliefs among upcoming cohorts. This trend raises concerns about its impact on religious pluralism and secularism in India, transforming educational institutions into arenas for ideological indoctrination rather than spaces for diversity and critical thinking. These educational reforms form part of a larger strategy by Hindutva proponents to reshape India's political and cultural milieu. By institutionalizing a narrative that prioritizes Hindu identity, these policies contribute to a societal shift where nationalist sentiments increasingly overshadow secular values. Critics argue that such measures marginalize religious minorities and undermine the inclusive fabric of Indian democracy.

Media Influence and Public Perception

The media, especially television, plays an important role in shaping public perception of Hindutva in modern Indian politics. Media representations often promote and normalize Hindutva narratives, significantly influencing public opinion and electoral outcomes. This portrayal of Hindu nationalism in mainstream media is vital in gaining acceptance and spreading Hindutva ideologies, thereby reinforcing its political impact. Understanding the media's role in shaping public narratives and framing political discourse is essential for grasping the broader socio-political landscape. Media platforms, through news, coverage, social commentary, and entertainment, often amplify specific ideologies and narratives. This amplification can shift societal attitudes towards religious identity and secularism, fostering a more homogenized view aligned with Hindutva principles. The framing of news stories, choice of language, and selection of interviewees all contribute to how the public perceives and internalizes these narratives.

The rise of social networks and digital media has further extended the immediacy and reach of Hindutva messages. Platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter play a central role in rapidly disseminating Hindutva ideologies, engaging diverse demographics with targeted content. These digital platforms enable the swift spread of information, whether accurate or misleading, often bypassing traditional media gatekeepers. This facilitates the mobilization of support and reinforces Hindutva ideologies among a broader audience. Hindutva's portrayal in media also extends to



popular culture, including television series, films, and online content, which can overtly or subtly promote Hindutva ideals. By embedding these narratives in entertainment, the media influences the audience's perceptions on a more subconscious level, further entrenching these ideologies within society's fabric.

Political Strategy and Economic Policies

The integration of political strategy and economic policies is central to the BJP's promotion of Hindutva ideology. The BJP combines neoliberal reforms with traditional values, encouraging economic liberalization, foreign investment, and business-friendly environments to stimulate the building and growth of a strong middle class. Programs like "Digital India" and "Make in India" aim to close the urban-rural divide and foster a sense of inclusivity, aligning economic success with the goals of the Hindu middle class and broadening the BJP's electoral appeal. By strategically leveraging economic policies for electoral advantage, the BJP effectively addresses economic grievances and crafts a narrative of empowerment and cultural revival. The party uses digital platforms and social media to highlight its achievements, solidifying its image as a pro-development and culturally grounded entity. This strategy not only consolidates political support but also reinforces the Hindutva narrative by linking economic advancement with Hindu identity. As a result, the BJP shapes the broader discourse on identity, nationalism, and secularism in India, intertwining economic agendas with cultural nationalism and impacting religious and secular dynamics in the country.

Globalization and Cultural Identity

Globalization has significantly influenced cultural identity in India, altering economic, political, and social landscapes. The rapid integration of global markets, ideas, and technologies has transformed traditional norms and values, leading to greater consumerism, urbanization, and the rise of a globally aspirational middle class. Exposure to international media, lifestyle, and fashion trends has impacted perceptions of identity and heritage, offering opportunities for modernization while posing challenges to preserving traditional norms and values. This dynamic is evident in the hybrid culture presented by Indian media, which combines global influences with local traditions, enriching the cultural tapestry but also raising concerns about the erosion of authentic cultural expressions.

Amidst these changes, the Hindutva movement has positioned itself as a guardian of cultural identity, advocating for a revival of Hindu values and traditions in response to the perceived threats of globalization. Hindutva proponents argue that globalization promotes Western lifestyles and values, undermining the cultural fabric of Indian society. This narrative has gained traction among those who feel marginalized or alienated by rapid economic changes and cultural homogenization. By emphasizing a distinct Hindu identity, the Hindutva movement seeks to create a cohesive community that can withstand globalization's pressures. This tension between preserving cultural roots and embracing global modernity highlights the complex interplay of global and local influences in shaping modern Indian identity.



Conclusion

The emergence and consolidation of Hindutva ideology as a dominant political force in India present a substantial challenge to the country's longstanding commitment to secularism. Founded on the ideological principles of Savarkar and operationalized through influential organizations like the RSS and the BJP, Hindutva advocates for an India envisioned as a Hindu nation, or Hindu Rashtra. This vision starkly contrasts with the secular ideals enshrined in the Constitution of India, which emphasize state neutrality and religious diversity. Hindutva's political rise has been facilitated through a multifaceted approach encompassing media strategies, educational reforms, and economic policies. The BJP has successfully merged cultural nationalism with economic development initiatives such as "Digital India" and "Make in India," appealing broadly to voters. This strategic alignment has not only bolstered the BJP's electoral success but has also normalized Hindutva ideologies within public discourse. Nevertheless, Hindutva's ascent has been accompanied by controversy and heightened communal disturbances. Events like the Babri Masjid demolition in 1992 and subsequent Ayodhya dispute, along with instances of religious violence and intolerance, highlight the divisive impact of Hindutva politics on India's societal fabric. Addressing these challenges requires a reaffirmation of India's constitutional commitment to pluralism and secularism. It necessitates protecting the rights and dignity of all cultural and religious communities, fortifying institutions that uphold democratic values, and promoting dialogue across diverse groups. Preserving secularism in India demands concerted efforts to bridge societal divisions and cultivate a shared national identity that transcends religious affiliations. Only through such efforts can India navigate its cultural diversity while upholding its democratic principles and inclusive ethos.

Recommendations

- Intellectuals, civil society groups, and political parties should come together to demand that the government enforce legal frameworks that unequivocally protect minority rights based on secular values in the legal system as well as the constitution.
- Law enforcement agencies should strictly stop hate speech and violent acts. They should assure that if anyone is found to use provocative language to inflame religious tensions, it is dealt with and punished right away, regardless of his status.
- Initiatives that foster healthy and positive communication between different religious communities should be actively supported and promoted by religious leaders, media professionals, and educational institutions. In order to encourage peace, harmony, tolerance, and collaboration, they should start collaborative prayers, interfaith events, and educational initiatives. These initiatives will defiantly promote mutual respect and understanding as well as lessen misconceptions.
- Academic experts and researchers should strongly urge the government to enhance educational curricula by integrating teachings on religious pluralism, tolerance, and secular principles from an early age. This proactive approach aims to cultivate a more harmonious and inclusive society, promoting respect for different beliefs.



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- Leaders of different parties should advocate for inclusive governance that ensures meaningful participation and fair representation of all groups, especially minority communities, in decision-making processes.
 - Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), along with religious and cultural organizations, should launch public awareness campaigns emphasizing the importance of religious tolerance, unity in diversity, and secularism. They can use various media platforms to promote societal cohesion and reach a broad audience.
 - Government agencies, academic associations, and the media outlets should work together to protect academic freedom and encourage scholarly research that explores various perspectives on society, religion, and politics. They should ensure that academic institutions remain bastions of critical thinking and open discourse.
 - Political leaders of different parties should encourage constructive political discourse and cross-party collaboration that emphasizes inclusive governance and representation of different religious communities.
 - Youth should engage themselves in activities that promote inter-faith dialogue and secular values, thereby becoming ambassadors of peace and tolerance in their communities.
 - Media outlets should play a constructive role by encouraging stories of interfaith cooperation, harmony, and understanding. They can feature documentaries, programs, and articles that highlight the benefits of inter-religious discussions and challenge stereotypes.
 - International organizations should support national efforts to promote inter-religious dialogues through technical assistance, funding, and sharing best practices from around the world.
 - Civil society and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should urge the government to promote and safeguard India's rich cultural diversity, including its religious, linguistic, and regional traditions. They should celebrate pluralism as a core aspect of national heritage and identity.



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