Demystifying Hindutva's Political Game: Constructing Muslims and Islam as Perpetual Threats in India

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Abstract:

The study examines the role of Hindutva ideology in inciting Islamophobic and anti-Muslim narratives in India thereby instilling inter-communal hatred and instability in the state. The research design adopts correlational approaches. The findings are extrapolated by analyzing the quantitative and qualitative data collected for the study. Using social constructivism as a theoretical framework, the study investigates how ideational factors, propagated by Hindutva through the creation of 'us versus them' narratives or 'myths' constructing threats to Hindus, contribute to the dissemination of anti-Muslim and anti-Islamic sentiments within Hindu society. The outcome is the socio-political xenophobic phenomenon i.e., Islamophobia that eroded the Indian social fabric by exacerbating inter-communal hostilities.

Key Words: Hindutva Ideology, Islamophobia Political Agenda, Constructing, Perpetual Threats, India

Introduction:

One of the most visible religio-political bonds in modern international society exists in the form of 'religious nationalism'—a phenomenon prevalent at both local and global levels. This study focuses on religious nationalism in India while emphasizing primarily on

Hindutva- a Hindu nationalist ideology generating the prevailing Hindu (religious) nationalism in India. Throughout history, political movements have often justified their actions through religious beliefs, they've mobilized masses and have claimed so-called 'Holy lands' in the name of religion. Since its inception, Hindutva has employed such justifications in India. What it has done in effect, as the research aims to investigate, is that it has vilified the others' religion i.e., primarily, Islam.

In the row of countries promoting Islamophobic narratives, India tends to assume a lead. The research aims exclusively on India while exploring the role of Hindutva in inciting anti-Islamic and anti-Muslim sentiments among Hindus in India.

To find this relation, the research uses qualitative research method and follows correlational approaches. The nature of the study is descriptive and analytical. In terms of data collection, both primary and secondary data are gathered and analyzed.

With regards to primary data collection, apart from direct observation, the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews from professionals in both India and Pakistan. As far as secondary data is concerned, the study analyzes data from journal articles, books, magazines, newspaper articles and archives.

Historical Background

"Hindutva is not a word, but a history……."

~ SD Savarkar (1923, p.3)

The roots of preponderant Hindu nationalism in form of a separatist, extremist, fascist or right-wing ideology, Hindutva, can be traced back to the pre-nationalist ideologies of Hindus in India. The Indian history witnesses' different forms of nationalism primarily which can be categorized as:

i. Indian nationalism (State nationalism; referring to the Gandhian and Nehruvian idea of (secular) Indian nation)

ii. Hindu and Muslim nationalism (Ethnic and Cultural Nationalism; referring to Hinduism and Savarkar's nationalism in case of Hindus, and Muslim separatism in case of Muslims)

To understand the background of Hindutva, researcher explores the history of Hindu nationalism. Nationalism is an outcome of some process involving the social and intellectual (Kohn, 1939) elements realized at a particular point of history in a certain way. The development of Hindu nationalism fits best in the frame provided by Kohn especially when

longitudinal study of the subject is conducted. By combining Kohn's idea of nationalism and the ideology-building strategies of Hindu nationalism, explicated by Jaffrelot (1993) by using an approach of "strategic syncretism", researcher looks into the development of Hindu nationalism.

Hinduism, a mere religion to Hindus in India developed into neo-Hinduism in nineteenth century, when socio-religious reforms were introduced for the invention of the traditions which reflected some Christian or Islamic precepts. Brahmo Samaj, started in 1828, followed by Arya Samaj which began in 1875 are credited for being the monotheistic Hindu reformist movements initiated in the era of development of pre-nationalist ideologies as an outcome of syncretism (as the reforms incorporated some Christian and Islamic laws into Hinduism) which remained strategic in nature (because of depiction of incorporated beliefs as they were originated from Hinduism itself).

The evolution of Hindu nationalist ideologies is essentially hypothesized to be the response to perception of threat from others. For example, in era of development of pre-nationalist Hindu ideologies, Christian missionaries, Christianity and, to some extent, Islam were the threats which stimulated Brahmo Smajh and Arya Smajh movements. Later, under Arya Smajh, Shuddi movement started which was followed by Hindu Sangathan where both claimed to be the response to threat largely posed by Muslims or Islam. Hitherto, this remains a question answered with varying perspectives leading to different conclusions, whether the threat existed as a source for development of nationalism or this is the nationalist agenda to create threat or make Hindus perceive others as threat (detail in section *1.3*).

Not to mention, the split of development of Hindu nationalism into multiple stages reveals the presence of different contexts in each stage of which one expects diversity as regards the raised question. The reforms brought in nineteenth century were made on perception of threat from West. However, neither the threat nor the reforms were eternal as witnessed by extension of Aryan believe in merit-based v*arna system* and the reformation in Hinduism which transformed into revivalism when Dayanand, the founder of Arya Samaj, started a revivalist movement of "purification" or "Shuddhization" (for reconversion) i.e., Shuddi movement which primarily targeted Muslims in India. At that point, the perceived major threat was "Muslims" or "Islam". From reformation to revivalism, Hinduism had covered the journey in nineteenth century.

The first quarter of twentieth century rekindled Hindus' revivalist aspirations where the decade of 1920s led them up to the climax from where the predominant Hindu nationalist ideology, Hindutva, emerged. Soon after Muslim League received confidence of getting a

separate electorate from Lord Minto, in 1907, *Hindu Sabhas* was created to preserve the interests of Hindus. With a pure fundamentalist ideology, it expanded and became a pressure group named *Hindu Mahasabha* within Congress in 1915. The group remained critical of Ghandi's decision to join hands with Muslims in Khilafat Movement in 1920s. Particularly after Mopla uprising (1921), when communal riots gained momentum in the sub-continent, *Hindu Mahasabh*a categorically defined "all Muslims and their unity" as threat to Hindus.

It is important to observe that the nationalist ideologies kept on developing and their evolution, backed by reformation and revivalism was portrayed to be the response to the perceived threat. The question of "threat", and controversy over its 'perception' or 'creation', its eminence or degree of its existence, and the point of generation of response (whether in anticipation or after getting experience) is of high relevance.

Nonetheless, declaring Muslims (united under the Islamic flag) as threats to Hindus, led to the initiation of a movement i.e., Sangathan in 1921 which worked along with the previously started anti-Islamic movement i.e., Shuddhi for purification, unification and integration of Hindus for formation of a giant Hindu family against Muslims. In the following years, questions of Hindu, Hinduism and Hindu unity were raised and answered by VD Savarkar-father of Hindutva who later led *Hindu Mahasabha* as an independent political party in India. Savarkar declared *"Hindu, Hindi and Hindustan"* (Jaffrelot, 2007) as motto of Hindutva while describing Hindutva's essentials in his book Hindutva: Who is a Hindu? This is where the concept of Hindutva came into being.

The concept of Hindutva

Hindutva, its objectives and execution of its agenda have become centre of debate in academics and politics. An ideology that emerged back in twentieth century in the subcontinent has today imposed numerous questions on Indian secularism, democracy or pluralism as the use of violent means to pursue its prejudiced agenda is consistently rising. The concerns are raised about implications for the minorities in India as Hindutva is not just about Hindus but it is the non-Hindus especially Muslims constituting approximately 15% (Kramer, 2020) of the total population in India who are the real targets.

The emergence of Hindutva explicitly as an ideology date back to 1923, followed by its concrete practice in 1925 when the largest organization based on the Hindutva ideology i.e., Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) came into being. Hindutva as first defined by V.D Savarkar in his book "Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?" is an idea encompassing *"all the departments of thought and activity of the whole Being of our Hindu race" (Savarkar, 1923, p.4)* where a Hindu is defined, in context of territory, race, culture and religion, as a person

who belongs to "Baharatvarsha" or Hindustan, Hindu race (jati) and Hindu civilization.

Savarkar's concept of Hindutva revolves around 'Hindu-ness', in fact, in other words, Hindutva is the Hindu-ness of Hindus which reflects from their thoughts and their deeds. The very idea of Hindu provided in Savarkar's book marginalizes the minorities in India and presents them as "threatening others" as, to Savarkar, Hindustan being the land of Hindus needs to be dominated by the Hindus bringing homogeneity in the state.

The description of Hindu and Hindutva was made to the core and it was clarified from Savarkar's teachings that a Hindu has Hindutva inherited in him as he belongs to i) Pitribhu (father-land): Hindu nation and Hindu race (jati) and ii) Punyabhu (Holy-land): (because of) Hindu/Indic culture or civilization (Sanskriti). The belonging to: Hindu nation, Hindu race and Hindu culture or civilization was declared as the *'essentials of Hindutva' (Savarkar, 1923)*. Viewing these essentials, Clarke (2002) demonstrates that Hindutva seeks to bring homogeneity in India by circumscribing the practice of only Brahmans culture or civilization in the state.

The association of religion with territory is not surprising, in fact, history bears the separation of Pakistan from India, partition of East Timor and Indonesia, the split of Sudan into south and north and likewise that of Ireland, on religious grounds. The problem in case of Hindutva is about marginalizing minorities and permitting the practice of only Indic religions i.e., Hinduism, Bhuddism, Jaisnism and Sikhism, in India, which is also referred as a belief advocating Hindu fundamentalism in comparison with that of Christian and Islamic fundamentalism (Sharma, 2020).

However, either it is the religious composition of India which is the biggest hindrance to what Hindutva has always dreamt of, or it is the religious composition of India what Hindutva is intended to revise, this remains a matter of discussion. Specified in relation to Islam, several questions emerge out of it: i) Whether it is the Islam that hinders the objectives of Hindutva, ii) is it the presence and practice of Islam in India, that has given birth to Hindutva ideology, or, iii) It is Hindutva which hinders the practice of Islam in India. The things become perspicuous when the "idea of threat" is inquired in development of Indian nationalism especially that of Hindutva.

Islam and the Question of constructed threat

Understanding of the 'threat' in development of Hindutva or overall Hindu nationalism in India provides the backbone of the chapter. Throughout the development of Hindu nationalist ideologies, the contexts were distinct, the centre of socio-religious reforms

were different, the agenda development in multiple stages remained diverse, the only persistent element was "the presence of threat" which is considered to be a driving factor behind the development of various Hindu nationalist ideologies including Hindutva. Besides this, the threats kept on changing but the one that remained round the clock, the one that remained the constant threat as well as target is "Islam".

While describing the homogenizing aspirations and concrete efforts put for the execution of Hindutva agenda in India, Akhtar & Babur (2021) argue that the Hindutva ideology has "constructed" Muslims or Islam as internal threat to Hindus. The matter is that the objection of Muslims to become Hindus and their aspirations of retaining their Islamic identities are indigestible to Hindutva. The question is of how.

By giving an idea of "self" and creating boundaries to the definition of united "self" (Hindus), Savarkar generated the concept of "threatening others". These threatening others / threats, as indicated earlier, varied with contexts throughout the development of Hindu nationalism. Most of the scholars differentiate between the threats by demarcating the eras as i) era of colonialism when the Christian missionaries, Christianity, Islam and Muslims along with the Sikhs to some extents were considered as threats to and targets of Hindu nationalist ideologies, and ii) post-colonial era marked by partition of India and Pakistan, when Islam became the most serious threat to Hindus because of the resistance posed by Muslims to Hindutva's agenda of homogenization. However, some writings reveal that Islamophobia and association of threat with Islam and Muslims lies in the very beginning of development of Hindu pre-nationalist ideologies. Some literature digs the roots of Islamophobia in emergence of Hindutva as an ideology that explicitly defined Muslims and their unity under Islam as the threat to Hindus. Nevertheless, one cannot deny the fact that Islam remained the defined threat throughout and down to the time, it is the utmost target of Hindutva.

"You can negotiate over your political identity, you can negotiate over your personal identity, but when you make religion, politics as part of your identity kit, that makes it a very nonnegotiable construct. So, when the people who are ultra-Hindu, ultra-radical in their religion and they are the perpetrators of Hindutva ideology, which means that get rid of anyone who does not belong to the Hindu religion and the concept of not cooperating, not coexisting, not having inclusivity makes this chemistry extremely dangerous and people as a result of that, those coming from other religions face persecution. They not only face persecution, they face hatred, they face all things negative which are part of this particular aspect where to perpetuate the ultra-nationalistic religioistic notion, you are trying to

actually finish other thought processes that coexist."

      (Dr. Salma Malik, personal communication, July 12, 2023)

Islam, the second-largest religion in India, has invariably been targeted by Hindu nationalism based on the idea that it threatens Hindus. Savakar's concept of Hindutva, by handing over Hindustan to Hindus had not only proposed the homogenization of the state by creating an identity of self for Hindu *nation* but it asserted the "Muslims" as outsiders arguing that *"their holy-land is far-off in Arabia or Palestine" (Savarkar, 1969, pg. 113)*. Muslims in his entire work were presented as invaders in the sub-continent who were the most threatening of all the "others" in India.

There is a hot debate over the construction of threat, stigmatization of Muslims in India and discourses over Islamophobia instigated by Hindutva. While providing the logic, most of the times scholars either don't attempt or they fail to draw the sketch of (though episodic but) peaceful communal relations in pre-partition era and likewise, these were overlooked by Hindutva in the course of its inception. The hostility among the Muslims and Hindus (communities) was not backed by the religion only, many a times, the drift caused among the communities had political roots. The religion remained a factor of separation but it wasn't the only. Despite having differences and communal instability, Hindus and Muslims lived together for centuries. By digging deeper into the communal relations, researchers find the scattered episodes of cooperation existing between the classes within communities.

To begin with, it was the "Muslim unity under Islam" that was blamed for instilling fear among Hindus but when the communal relations are investigated through 'power sharing formula' as done by Engineer (2004), it discloses that religion was not the main origin of only Hindu-Muslim disunity at communal level, rather there were some points where the harmony between the elites of both communities existed with a degree even higher than that of which existed between the classes within the same community. To him, this is the quest for power which induced communal hostilities in India.

While looking into the construction of threat by Hindutva, the researcher emphasizes on the theory of social constructivism which argues that reality is mediated, it is socially constructed based on ideas and experiences which the actors obtain through interaction. The interacting actors give identities to each other which reflects how they perceived them and later the constructed realities are demonstrated in an actor's attitude towards other.

In subcontinent, both Hindu and Muslim communities had interacted with each other

for centuries. Both communities had immense differences major being about their religion. The constructivist school of thought believes that the type of interaction between the actors defines the identity they give to each other. The founders of Hindutva ideology gave Muslims the identity of "threatening others". But the question is: 'how compatible this identity was with the interaction between the communities?' to answer of which the researcher, as in the following section, finds that Hindutva deliberately disregarded the good episodes of interaction among the communities. As far as giving the self-identity was concerned, Savarkar played well by first defining a Hindu, and then identifying all the Hindus as a nation, in fact the only nation that deserves to live in Hindustan.

To understand the construction of Islam as a major threat, first, the researcher investigates the cooperative aspect of interaction and the healthy relations between both communities depicting the points of Hindu-Muslim cooperation vis-a-vis the will for inter-communal unity which were ignored by the founder and proponents of Hindutva. It is to be noted that the then interaction between Hindu and Muslim community could not be regarded as wholly bad if not good, as, there existed a mutual interest of both communities i.e., to expel the common aggressor (the British) out of the subcontinent, based on which they cooperated with each other applying Kautilya's idea that your enemy's enemy is your friend. These episodes of cooperation also indicate that both communities surpassed their religious differences under political umbrella, indicating, the lower intensity of (or subordinated) threat based upon the religion, if existed (as explained in section 1.3.i.).

Second, the researcher investigates the degree of the Muslim's intra-communal unity under the auspices of Islam which was not only constructed as the major threat to Hindus rather a message to all Hindus across the subcontinent to get united in a Sangh against the united Muslims. For execution of the proposed agenda, immediately (in 1923) a movement i.e., Sangathan was initiated. However, researcher finds that intra-communal harmony in Muslims was not as strong as presented in following sections.

i. Status of inter-communal harmony:

Engineer's (2004) idea about dispute over politics seems to have real grounds which are mostly overlooked by scholars while dealing with the subject of Hindu Nationalism. As far as the harmony between the elites of both communities is concerned, one can see Jinnah-Ghandi relations in Congress backed by the vision of Hindu-Muslim Unity. For almost twenty-four years, Jinnah remained a member of Congress. Ghandi viewed Indian nation as secular and aspired to make "secular India" at one side and Jinnah, was the ambassador of Hindu-Muslim Unity at other. The Hindu-Muslim Unity was appraised for being an

important tool to counter the common aggressor i.e., British.

The war of 1857 also witnessed Hindu-Muslim cooperation (though short-term) against British Raj. Mazhar ul Haque, called by Raza (2013) as 'an icon of communal harmony' devoted all his life to unite Muslims and Hindus. The man developed provincial League of Bihar in 1908 in collaboration with Ali Imam to keep the Hindus and Muslims in the province, united and he proved to be successful in this regard. Further, Lucknow pact (1916) is considered as an exemplar of Hindu-Muslim Unity. In case of Khilafat movement (1920), Hindus cooperation with Muslims was based on Ghandi's idea and non-cooperation movement enfolded both Hindu and Muslims. Ghandi's objection to join War Conference initiated by Viceroy in Delhi had also the reason that Ali brothers (who had taken lead in Khilafat movement) were not invited (Shukla, 2002). Hussain Ahmad Madani's book titled "Mutahhida Qaumiyat aur Islam" (Composite nationalism and Islam, written in 1938) is also an expression of will for united India.

Along these lines, it is demonstrated that the Hindu-Muslim relations were not sore from head to toe based on their religion, in fact, political cooperation or will for it, over and over, surpassed the religious differences between the Hindu and Muslim communities in India. However, the current literature barely highlights the points where Hindus and Muslims were united. It is argued that in the presence of Islam and Hinduism in India, under political objectives, both Hindus and Muslims expressed cooperation. In short, in that case, Muslims were not an actual threat to Hindus rather the threat was defined by both of them together.

This also needs to be considered that these episodes of cooperation didn't take place at a certain time in history rather they were scattered in different decades, showing dynamism in communal relations throughout. In addition to this, sometimes, framing of uprising driven by causes other than religious (such that it was perceived as religious), led to manipulative construction of Islam as a threat which used to be retaliated via religious response towards it. For example, Moplah uprising of 1921, as most of the scholars claim, occurred because of the economic frustration of the "oppressed peasants" against the landlords and the British government where peasants were Muslims and landlords were mostly Hindus. It was deliberately perceived by Hindu nationalists as "a religious dispute where Muslims gathered against Hindus" and in response, Shuddi and Sangathan movements (both were religious moves) were started.

ii. Intra-communal divisions:

There were explicit divisions within Hindus in the subcontinent. For uniting Hindus into a single Hindu community, the ideology of Hindutva declared "Muslim unity under

Islam" as an eminent threat to Hindus. However, it is crucial to investigate whether this threat existed with the intensity portrayed or it was a mere myth. There were the times when an idea presenting elite Muslim's vision was not supported by the other Muslims in sub-continent. For instance, when Sir Syed Ahmed Khan started Aligarh movement for harmonizing relations between Muslims and British government, Deoband movement was initiated by another group of Muslims within a year to oppose his move. Sajjad (2014) also explores the resistance of Bihari anti-separatist Muslims towards the Two-Nations Theory and disunity prevailing among the Indian Muslims (even today, referring to the movements like All India Backward Muslim Morcha and Pasmanda Muslim Mahaz) despite the Hindu supremacist's agenda of suppressing them.

Even while looking back to the time when Hindutva emerged, it is found that Muslims were not as united as they were considered or presented by the father of Hindutva. Groups within Muslim community existed like *"Nationalist Muslims* (envisioning Muslims as a nation)*, Congress Muslims* (Idealizing Hindu-Muslim unity)*, Khudai khidmatgar* (More inclined towards the their ethnicity and linguistics i.e., Pashtoons but they were willing to join hands with Congress Muslims) *and Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Hind* (a group established on Deobandi school)*"* and they were not united as the only Muslim community or nation in 1920s-exactly the time when Savarkar built the whole concept of Hindutva (Suleman, 2014). This demonstrates that it was deliberate exaggeration of Muslim unity to Hindus to make them feel threatened and get united under the ideology of Hindutva.

Finally, one cannot deny that the inter-communal divisions had always existed in India with varying intensities. Some scholars believe that these divisions became explicit and intense as a result of British divide and rule policy in the sub-continent. But it remains the fact that religion marked the disparity between the communities, yet they were (even if undesirably) managing to live with these differences. Niemeijer (1972) also acknowledges the rare episodes of Hindu-Muslim unity in the sub-continent and argues that there existed some Congress aspirations to build Hindu-Muslim unity since 1885 but the neo-Hindu revivalism introduced the trend of communalism in India.

The Hindutva Agenda

By the term "Hindutva agenda" researcher means the objectives which the founder, advocates, and activists of Hindutva aspire to achieve. It must be understood that the term doesn't comprehend the agenda behind (the development of) Hindutva.

It is hard to differentiate Hindutva's agenda from the Nazi's agenda except for the perpetrators and victims. Hindutva is a fascist ideology that seeks a solution to constructed

Muslim problem along the same lines as Hitler found a final solution to the Jewish problem (Holocaust). Scholars frequently highlight the confluence of Modi's Hindutva and Hitler's Nazism but besides the explored commonalities, the researcher analyzes another intriguing dimension of it.

Hindutva in terms of executing its agenda, grabs motivation from Nazism but as to produce an outcome, seeks inspiration from the victims of Nazism/Holocaust i.e., Jews, as far as the establishment of a nation-state is concerned. In this case, both Jews and Hindus have a common target i.e., Muslims, with the same agenda. i.e., the formation of a homogeneous nation and the establishment of a nation-state based on a similar claim i.e., the territory which is being religionized is their Holy Land which shall be recognized by their religion.

The previous part of the chapter highlights the deliberate targeting of Islam (in terms of the construction of threat in response to which Hindutva claims to get developed) by leaders and adherents of Hindutva. This section accentuates the "Hindutva agenda" challenge to which is the essential motive behind constructing Muslims or Islam as a threat to Hindus.

i. To establish and overpower Hindu Sangh

The notion of establishing a Hindu Sangh is embedded in the very concept of Hindutva provided by Savarkar and its execution is as old as the Hindutva itself. The term 'Hindu Sangh' means 'Hindu association' illustrating that only that individual can be a member of the association who is a Hindu. Savarkar should be credited for making a perfect plot before putting on the idea of establishing a Hindu Sangh. This perfect plot refers to the organization of Savarkar's book as he first sets the criteria to be a Hindu (which created the concept of others) and then comes up with an idea of developing Hindu unity. While defining a Hindu and considering Hindutva as inherited in every Hindu, Savarkar develops the bonds between the Hindus for their unity calling them 'the essentials of Hindutva'. To him, Hindus are knitted in a family because they share common blood meaning that they belong to a common race, and they together promote the Hindu Sanskrit and Sanskriti in Hindustan which is their holy land. Therefore, they shall develop a "Sangh" that protects and promotes Hindus' interests.

Starting from the initiation of Shuddhi and Sangathan movements to the establishment of RSS and its expansion till the attainment of political power by the Bharatiya Janata Party and the execution of its Hindu expansionist policies in India, Hindutva has kept on rising and expanding. The development in this regard is exceptionally rapid in both

vertical and horizontal respects. Horizontally, Hindutva expanded its basis (under RSS), affecting all aspects of life i.e., social, cultural, economic, religious, and political. RSS, the epitome of Hindutva, responsible for building "Sangh Parivar (Family)" is doing its best in promoting and executing the Hindutva agenda at all levels (which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter). Vertically, the proponents of Hindutva have attained enough power that they have the entire Indian state in their control. As indicated by Sajjad (2018), the current Indian government (Modi Sarkar), with the agenda of promoting the interests of the Hindu Sangh (which he is a member of i.e., RSS), has worsened the situation by inducing and nurturing communal violence, riots and split in India.

ii. To religionalize, Hinduize, or homogenize the Indian state

. The watchword of Hindutva: Hindu, Hindi, and Hindustan, well present the exclusive Hindutva ideology. Savarkar's teachings demonstrate that the preservation of the first two elements (as highlighted in the motto) depends upon the security of the third one. In other words, the idea is that to conserve or protect the Hindu nation and Hindu civilization, Hindustan must be secured (security, as Merriam Webster defines is, the freedom from fear, anger, and anxiety). In this regard, Hindutva defines "Others" especially "Muslims" as the source of insecurity of Hindustan and therefore, proposes Hinduization of Indian territory.

The Hinduization of Indian territory is justified on two grounds: first, as explained above, is the presence of a threat to Hindus from Muslims or Islam, and the second is the claim that Hindustan, as the name implies, is the land of Hindus so, their culture and civilization shall prevail in the territory. The Hindutva's aspirations regarding the Hinduization of India are akin to the Jews' claim of Israel (and Palestine) and their aspirations to establish a nation-state.

iii. To assert Hindu supremacy and establish Greater Hindustan

Hindutva seeks to develop Hindu supremacy in all realms like social, cultural, political and economic. The assertion of Hindu supremacy and the establishment of greater Hindustan are interrelated such that without the pursuance of the former, the latter is impossible to happen. Therefore, for securing the agenda, it is mandatory to first induce the 'sense of Hindu supremacy' in Hindus to stimulate a bottom-up response against Muslims (which has been done since Savarkar published his idea of Hindutva), and then, to adopt the supremacist policies as part of a top-down approach. Both steps are being followed strictly by the Hindutva activists. Dhillon (2023) calls the period of BJP's rule a "decade of state-sanctioned Hindu supremacy". Likewise, Shuja (2022) considers "Hindu supremacy" as a critical tool for marginalizing Muslims in India. The state has not let any chance go without

being benefited when it comes to humiliating, stigmatizing, and marginalizing the Muslims.

To recap, the Hindutva agenda revolves around prioritizing, uniting, and overpowering Hindus to build a homogeneous Hindustan (India). Of the sub-agendas based on targeting Muslims, the researcher analyzes some dominant ones including otherization and threat creation, stigmatization, marginalization, and Hinduization of Muslims. Moreover, Hindutva activists, leaders, and proponents have taken up various strategies employing the elements of both hard and soft power to execute the agenda.

Why Muslims or Islam?

Before indicating reasons for Islam being the target of Hindutva, Hindutva agenda is analyzed to understand the hidden politics. An analysis of the Hindutva agenda reveals the fascist objectives of the ideology. Hindutva dismantled the rare possibilities of Hindu-Muslim unity by dividing the Indian nation into 'us and them' (Noorani, 2021) leading to the climax of Hindu nationalism. The communal split was backed by constructing Muslims as a threat to Hindus and that was assumed as what made 'Islam or Muslims' the target of Hindutva. However, it bears no doubt that the Muslims were not a severe threat to Hindus as characterized by Hindutva rather, they were a threat to the Hindutva agenda. Even today, Muslims in India are not granted human rights what else is to be expected?

Islam is constructed as the major target because the very agenda of Hindutva seeks the death/absorption of minorities necessary to accomplish its objectives whereas Muslims, as identified by Savarkar, pose the major challenge to it. Devi (1939), while warning the Hindus about the Muslim threat and repelling them from aspiring for Hindu-Msulim unity, argues that the idea of finding common nationalism is a fallacy if expected to be seen on land that licenses the practice of more than one culture and civilization and based on the *"new national consciousness"*, a (nation-) state can only be established after the death of the previous civilization. Referring to this, Muslims being the largest Indian minority significantly dilute the Hindu civilization. Besides this, Hindutva targets Muslims or Islam because of:

1. Muslims' resistance to the Hindutva agenda of Hinduization and state homogenization.

2. The numerical strength of Muslims- the largest minority in India about which BJP has recently raised concerns referring to the uncontrolled Muslim population which may outnumber Hindus in India.

3. Universal aspirations of Islam framed as being brought true by "hypersexualized Muslims" (Anand, 2011) who are involved in "love jihad" (a term coined by BJP to alert Hindu women

from getting entrapped in Muslim love which intends to convert Hindu women to Islam decisively).

However, Hindutva is yet unsuccessful in justifying these threats, even to all non-Muslims in India let alone the Muslims. Former Indian foreign secretary, Saran (2022), analyzes that the current threat to the Indian state is not Islam nor Muslims rather it is the homogenizing agenda of Hindutva which seeks "stifling uniformity".

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