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**From Hindutva to Moditva:  
Growing Religious Fanaticism in Indian Politics**

Assad Jabin<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:**

This article aims to explore the evolution and development of Hindutva in Indian politics. Hindutva, a Hindu nationalist ideology, has had significant political influence over the last few decades. Since its inception in the early 20th century, the doctrine of Hindutva as a political ideology has evolved and developed over time. The analysis of the Hindu nationalist organizations and political parties like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, Bharatiya Jana Sangh, Janta Party, and the Bharatiya Janata Party indicates the evolution of Hindutva in mainstream politics in India. The Hindutva doctrine asserts the hegemony of Hindu culture and values in India. The paper also explains how Hindutva has an influential role in Indian politics, for instance, its role in shaping public policies, Hindu nationalism, and cultural identity. However, the secular and democratic environment in India poses dire challenges to the rise of Hindu nationalism in the country. This paper explores the evolution and development of Hindutva in Indian politics. Moreover, it will concentrate on how Hindutva has shaped the political landscape of India. In general, this research work traces the historical origin of the Hindutva doctrine and its evolution and development in Indian politics.

**Keywords:** India, Hindutva, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, Bharatiya Janata Party, Hindu nationalism, communal politics

**INTRODUCTION**

Hindutva is a political ideology that seeks to establish India as a Hindu nation, and its development has been a significant force in Indian politics since the early 20th century. The doctrine of Hindutva emphasizes consolidating the historical, political, cultural, and national aspects of Hindus along with the religious one to define the Hindu nation. The ideology seeks to define Indian culture in terms of Hindu values. It also aims to combine the geographically based religious, cultural, and national identity of Hindus into one form. The term Hindutva was coined by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar in his book *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* in 1923 (Savarkar, 1923). The second edition came

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<sup>1</sup> Director, Research & Publication, Shaybani Foundation Islamabad, Pakistan.  
Email: assadjabin007@gmail.com

up with the title *Essentials of Hindutva* in 1928. He explained in this book, that three essentials of Hindutva namely Rashtriya, Jati, and Sanskriti could be translated into a common nation, race, and culture respectively. The political development of Hindutva can be traced back to the early 20th century when the Indian nationalist movement was gaining momentum. Savarkar and other Hindu nationalists believed that India's cultural and political identity was tied to its Hindu heritage and that Hindus should be at the forefront of the nationalist movement. The evolution and development of Hindutva have a close association with the political history of India. After the partition of the sub-continent in 1947, the Hindu nationalist movement gained momentum and in 1951, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) laid the foundation of a Hindu nationalist party known as Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS). Later, in 1980 it became Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The BJP then emerged as a strong political party and has an influential role in the mainstream political landscape of India. The BJP used Hindu ideology to mobilize its supporters to become a strong political force in India. The party raised the issue of the Ram Temple to attract the Hindus for electoral gain in the general elections in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. The electoral success of the BJP has led to normalizing the status of Hindutva ideology in the socio-political environment of India. The anti-Pakistan rhetoric and anti-Muslim sentiments were spread by the Hindu nationalists to gain power. The abrogation of the special status of Jammu and Kashmir and the Citizenship Amendment Act 2019, reflected the evolution and development of Hindutva in Indian politics. Since its inception, the nature and inclination of Hindutva was apolitical and concentrated on the cultural aspects of Hindus. However, the socio-political challenges diverted the focus of Hindu nationalists from apolitical nature towards political participation. The political development of Hindutva has significant implications for India's democracy and secularism. Understanding its history and current manifestation is essential to comprehend contemporary Indian politics.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

For this research work, the qualitative method has been used with a concentration on historical and analytical approaches. This study explores the political development of Hindutva India since its emergence in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It focuses on the evolution of Hindutva from a social domain to a political sphere in India. It also concentrates on the factors that indicate the influential role of Hindutva in the Indian political sphere. Primary and secondary sources have been analyzed to examine the evolution and political development of the Hindutva doctrine in India. The data has been collected from research papers, books, and archival records.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The notion of Hindutva emerged with the rise of modernism in the colonial period. However, colonialism persuaded Hindus to assimilate their religion with modernism. As a result, they started many religious and socio-political movements. Whole volumes have been written about Hindu nationalism and Indian nationalism. The growing influence of Hindutva ideology in the Indian political sphere has marginalized the minorities in India. Exclusivity, marginalization, and human rights violations threaten Indian democracy. Joseph Tharamangalam in the article titled Moditva in India: A Threat to Inclusive Growth and Democracy explained that Modi's regime has an aggressive attitude toward Muslims. The future of democracy and inclusive society in India has been under threat since Modi became the prime minister of India (Tharamangalam, 2016).

Thomas Blom Hansen in his book *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in India* discussed Indian politics entered the 21st century, dominated by the BJP. The book explains how Hindu nationalism shifts from the peripheries of the state to the center stage. The strategies of the Hindutva movement in the political discourse like the mode of governance and political tactics, made it succeed in organizing the Hindu nation in the transitional phases of today's politics. (Hansen, 1999). Chetan Bhatt in his *Hindu Nationalism: origins, ideologies, and modern myths* critically analyses the ideological foundation of Hindu nationalism and explains how the intellectual and historical perspective potentially contributed to the rise of Hindutva. The analysis of revivalist movements of Hindu nationalism discusses efficiently and explores the contribution of the Hindu nationalist organization, RSS to the socio-political environment of India. (Bhatt, 2001). Walter Andersen. and Shridhar D. Damle, have articulated briefly in their work titled *Messengers of the Hindu Nationalism: How the RSS Reshaped India*, that RSS has changed its policymaking choices due to the socio-economic changes in India. The RSS-BJP nexus has compounded the economic development and Hindu cultural identity as the agenda of Hindutva. Hindu identity and economic nationalism were the employed strategies in the election campaign. Such a tactical approach reflects the quest for a homogenous Hindu society. (Andersen & Damle, 2019).

#### **THE FORMATION AND GROWTH OF RASHTRIYA SWAYAMSEVAK SANGH (RSS)**

The followers of Hindutva needed a platform where they could perform their activities in an organized manner. A staunch proponent of Hindutva and follower of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, Keshav Baliram Hedgewar laid the foundation of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in 1925 (Sharda, 2020). In the beginning, it was a socio-cultural and non-political organization. The organization aimed to train its members who will be actively committed to the cause of Hindu nationalism in India. Savarkar convinced Hedgewar that when the British left, Hindus would subdue Muslims, which eventually inculcated anti-Muslim sentiments in his mind. RSS and its leaders did not have religious interests instead, they focused on the promotion of Hindu culture (Sharda, 2020). Moreover, they emphasized the unity among different Hindu castes and used to show respect towards Hindu symbols (Jaffrelot, 1996). They joined and initiated different movements across the country. They tried to influence the people to accept the Hindutva ideology to tackle future challenges when the British left. Eventually, on 19 September 1929, Congress launched a movement in the name of Purna Swaraj to gain independence from the British. Hedgewar restrained its followers from joining the movement and raising their own Saffron flags. The RSS members asserted to Hindus through the Shuddi movement (Hasan, 1944).

Following the demise of Hedgewar in 1940, Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar succeeded as the new head of RSS. He was a devoted student of Savarkar and Hedgewar and a strong supporter of Hindutva. He used all his energy to introduce the people to Hindutva ideology and make them strong supporters of Hindu Nationalism. He kept the organization away from political activities. He added that a nation could not be built if there is an increased influence of foreign elements within it. In his manuscript, *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, and the anthology of his articles, *Bunch of Thoughts* Golwalkar explained that India was the holy land of Hindus. He added that Hindustan is the land that belongs to Hindus, and they have the right to flourish here alone (Golwalkar, 1968). He explained that Hindus are a nation with having distinctive culture, a common language, a common outlook, and a homeland with natural demarcations (Golwalkar, 1945). The national regeneration

of Hindus is crucial and stressed it over his three-decades-long tenure as the head of RSS. The work of Vaibhav Purandare reflects that Golwalkar was a strong Hindu revivalist than Savarkar and states that Savarkar was more social reformer than a Hindu revivalist (Purandare, 2019). Golwalkar took Hindutva in the fundamentalist direction. He rejected the idea of territorial nationalism and asserted that territory is not a nation; people make a nation. In the context of India, he assumes Hindus are the people who will constitute a Hindu nation. He explained that culture plays a vital role in making a nation and passionately advocates cultural nationalism. In his work, *We or Our Nationhood Defined* he described Hindutva as a cultural identity and Hinduism as a portion of national Hindu culture. However, Savarkar assumed culture is the product of our religion. Hindutva was then seen as an ideology that emphasized the hegemony of Hindu values and the Hindu way of life in the political environment of India. It principally aims to define Indian culture in terms of Hindu culture and norms. The efforts of the RSS were intensified as Golwalkar became the head of the organization. He sent the RSS volunteers to different parts of India to expand its network. The relationship between Hindus and Muslims deteriorated in 1946 which paved the way for achieving the aim of the Muslim League in the Indian sub-continent (Hasan,1944). Following the partition of the subcontinent in 1947, Golwalkar mourned the incident and blamed Gandhi for his effort to bring Hindu-Muslim unity. The RSS participated in the cause of Hindu refugees in the post-partition turmoil. The socio-political dynamics were aggravated when one of the RSS sympathizers, Nathuram Godse, assassinated Mahatma Gandhi on 30 January 1948 (Andersen & Damle, 1987). In retaliation, the Indian government banned the RSS and alleged it for communal orientation. Golwalkar, the head of the RSS, and other leaders of the organization were arrested. The Congress government forced the RSS to reorient its organizational structure that clearly defines the hierarchy of the organization. The RSS leadership accepted all the conditions and agreed to adopt a socio-culture outlook. It also agreed to show allegiance to the Indian constitution. Eventually, the Indian government lifted the ban on the RSS by August 1948 and the detainees were released (Andersen & Damle, 1987). The organization learned a bitter lesson from its experiences during the ban. The detention and harsh treatment by the Indian government impacted the RSS's overall thought process.

### **Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) and Political Representation**

Following the experiences during the period of prescription, the RSS emerged with a feeling of political representation. They had no assistance provided by the political forces during the hard times. They felt the need for active political representation in India that would support it in the future during hard times. Moreover, the Hindu Mahasabha had lost its credibility, which cooperated with the Indian National Congress for advancing the agendas of the Hindu community (Gordon, 2008). It failed to emerge as an influential Hindu political force in India. The RSS believed that for its survival, active political participation and representation are essential. Its leadership decided to develop a political party to participate effectively in Indian politics. Thus, Dr. Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, on 21 October 1951, with the support of RSS, established Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS). It was considered a major development of Hindutva and the RSS members were introduced to politics for the integration of Hindus. However, some dissimilarities were observed at the initial time within the newly established political party. The non-RSS members of BJS assumed that it was an opposition to Congress, while the RSS members considered it a way for promoting Hindu nationalism. Later, after the demise of Dr. Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, in 1953, the RSS got an

opportunity to lead the BJS. The BJS followed the philosophy of the RSS and struggled for Hindu nationalism in the mainstream politics of India. Initially, it was a major challenge for the party to promote Hindu nationalism in a secular state (Baxter, 1969). The BJS concentrated on its ideology and avoid any coalition with other political parties. Moreover, as a newly established political party, BJS was not able to compete with the Indian National Congress. In the general elections of 1951-52, BJS got only three seats in the Lok Sabha and thirty-five seats in state assemblies. This was an insignificant achievement and Mookerjee strived to influence the members of the opposition. He made a bloc comprised of thirty-two members called National Democratic Party under his leadership. It was the third largest group in Lok Sabha after Congress and Communist parties.

During the general elections in 1957, BJS still stuck to its strategy of exclusivism and Hindu nationalism to build a sense of equality in Hindu society. However, this time it focused on the promotion of the Hindu culture among the non-Hindus. The party won only four seats in Lok Sabha and forty-six seats in state assemblies. Later, in the 1962 general elections, it got fourteen seats in Lok Sabha and one hundred and sixteen seats in state assemblies. Due to such an unfavorable situation, BJS realized that it should revisit its exclusive strategy. Eventually, for the upcoming by-elections in 1963, BJS made an alliance with Socialist Party and the Swatantra Party against Indian National Congress. Nevertheless, BJS's agenda was more socio-economic than Hindu nationalism. It had also a divergent view on the socialist perspective of public ownership and favored the private owner on contrary. This alliance was also carrying on, in the 1967 general elections BJS got thirty-five seats in Lok Sabha and 268 seats in state assemblies.

The political workers of the BJS were concerned about the core ideology of the party, Hindu nationalism as the party was in alliance with other parties based on socio-economic agendas. Under the leadership of Upadhyaya, BJS emerged as the third-largest party in Lok Sabha. On 11 February 1968, Upadhyaya was assassinated on a night train. After Upadhyaya, Atal Bihar Vajpayee became the new president of BJS. In the 1971-72 general elections, BJS along with coalition parties defeated by Congress. However, BJS won twenty-two seats in Lok Sabha. Due to failure in electoral politics, it resided to influence through agitation. Jayaprakash Narayan (JP) launched a movement called the JP movement against the Congress rule. The social agenda of BJS was compatible with the philosophy of Jayaprakash Narayan. In addition, BJS also found a leader who has the potential to integrate it to counter Congress in the political sphere in India. The new President of the BJS, Lal Krishna Advani assumed that the JP movement was an opportunity to widen the scope of the party at a mass level. The JP movement announced a total revolution against Indira Gandhi's government which resulted in the emergency rule. However, the imposition of emergency in 1975 by the Indian government spoil the BJS's strategy to deepen its roots in the mainstream politics of India. The emergency aimed to hinder the rising influence of the JP movement. As a result, the RSS leaders along with the BJS and other opposition parties were arrested.

### **Janata Party (JP)**

The close association of BJS and other parties in the JP movement further increases their bonds. It created bonhomie when elections were announced in 1977 and the emergency was lifted. BJS, Socialist Party, Bharatiya Lok Dal, and Congress(O) merged and formed Janata Party (Ruparelia, 2015). It was considered the most possible opposition unity to compete Indian National Congress in the upcoming general elections. The Janata Party secured an immense mandate and dreadfully



defeated the India National Congress. It got 298 seats in the Lok Sabha. In the contrast, Congress managed 154 seats in the Lok Sabha. For the first time, a non-Congress central government was formed in India. It was a significant achievement for the BJS among the founding parties of the Janata Party. BJS was criticized by intra-party leadership for its links with the RSS organization and for actively participating in communal rhetoric. They asserted that no dual membership would be permitted for the Janata Party membership. It was the BJS's strategy to merge and form the Janata party due to its ambition of a mainstream party. However, the internal conflict among party leadership led to the collapse of the Janata Party and the non-Congress central government ended. In 1980, general elections were announced and BJS contested elections and won thirty-one seats in Lok Sabha.

### **Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)**

The need for a new political outfit was crucial to the experiences of BJS in JP's movement, during the emergency period, its merger with the Janata party, and its interaction with Janata party leadership. All these experiences reflected the BJS's strategies devised in the socio-political environment to preserve its Hindu nationalist identity. Many times, the party leadership shows flexibility to compromise on its ideological stance to emerge as a mainstream party in Indian politics (Malik, Singh, 1992). The coalition parties only had a legitimate approach to the BJS's agenda in a time of necessity. On contrary, the Janata Party took a divergent position in dealing with the BJS. The dual membership controversy and the hostile approach of the Janata Party led the BJS and its devoted workers to take an alternative position for their ideology. They realized the need for a broader vote bank and an independent political party for the cause and representation of Hindu nationalism in India.

Moreover, the national political environment in India showed a decline in the secular notion, and Congress was trying to use Hindu communal symbols to promote their ideology. Essentially, Congress retained its socialist nature but adopted the strategy of economic liberalism for political purposes. Thus, Hindu nationalists assumed the 1980s political environment favorable to utilize the newly adopted policy of Hindu nationalism. Eventually, on 05 April 1980, the BJS emerged as a Hindu nationalist party called Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) (Hansen, 1999). The newly formed party announced that it was the continuation of the Janata tradition, which was popular among the public. It perceived the policy to sustain the party as mainstream in the political environment of India. BJP also denounced its link with the RSS, removed the word Sangh from the name of the newly established party, and announced that it was the continuation of the Janata party.

The BJP assumed the commonality between Gandhian economic policy and Upadhyaya's Integral Humanism. Thus, co-opted Gandhian Socialism to decentralize the economy. It opposed the secularism presented by Congress and emphasized positive secularism, where minorities will not be exploited for political achievements (Graham, 1990). It also recognized the diversity in Indian society. Moreover, certain principles were adopted as the foundation of national consensus, known as "Our Five Commitments". These commitments include nationalism and national integration, democracy, positive secularism, Gandhian Socialism, and values-based politics (Ghosh, 1999). The BJP also emphasized broadening its vote bank in the political sphere of India. It tried to attract people from other sections of Indian society who were not supporters of the BJP, like government servants, minorities, and all others from major portions of India. BJP instrumentalized Hindu

nationalism for mass mobilization to gain power. However, there was dissent among the BJP's leadership to interpret the policy of mass mobilization to achieve its goals. Atal Bihar Vajpayee and Lal Krishna Advani were representing different groups. The former was a liberal Hindu nationalist in his approach, while the latter was a pragmatic Hindu nationalist. The liberal group asserted that a hostile and aggressive approach would not extend the influence of the BJP in the political domain and would push the party to the periphery instead of the core politics of India. It also advocated a democratic process for the peaceful transformation of society. Furthermore, it also introduced the concept of Gandhian Socialism into the political ideology of the BJP to accommodate the minorities in the party owing to their apprehension about Hindu nationalism. However, with the defeat in the general elections of 1984-1985, the liberal approach lost its hold in the party and the pragmatic nationalists led the BJP. In 1986 Lal Krishna Advani became the new president of the party.

The pragmatic nationalist group led by Lal Krishna Advani has different political and electoral strategies from the liberal Hindu nationalists. It perceived that the concept of Gandhian Socialism diverted the focus of the RSS members from the BJP and eventually led to the poor performance of the party in the 1984-85 general elections. This group aimed to project BJP as an alternative to the Congress and term Congress secularism as 'minorityism'. It also criticized Congress for the exploitation of minorities for political purposes and added that minorities had been distanced from mainstream politics in India. Moreover, this group presented the concept of 'positive secularism' against the Congress policy of minorityism (Jaffrelet, 1996). The concept of positive secularism explained that essentially Hinduism is a secular religion. Therefore, it adopted a policy that no religious community would be treated based on their respective culture and religious identity. Moreover, the party's leadership had a clear stance on the doctrine of Hindutva to restore the moral basis of Hindu nationalism. The BJP's application of a uniform civil code and the abrogation of the special status of Jammu and Kashmir enshrined in the Indian constitution under articles 370 and 35A. These were the strategies of the BJP for electoral gain in the upcoming general elections. The BJP also started working with the Hindu militant organization Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and tied its links with RSS to integrate the Hindu nation. The purpose of the close association of the Hindu organization was to create a massive vote bank to achieve victory in the general elections.

### **Ram Temple Issue**

Following the 1984-85 general election, the construction of a Ram Temple at Ayodhya was a rising issue in the socio-political environment of India. The VHP started a fundraising campaign to construct the temple. The Sangh Parivar started a direct Hindu mobilization consisting of the BJP, RSS, and VHP (Jaffrelet, 1996). It was the strategy of the BJP to join the direct Hindu mobilization for expanding its social and political influence. Under the leadership of Advani, the BJP aimed to preserve its Hindu nationalist identity and supported the construction of the Ram Temple at Ayodhya. The party leadership also participated in the Ram Shila movement, specifically for fundraising to construct the Ram temple. Moreover, BJP also raised the socio-economic issues of the people in rural areas. These were the electoral strategies of the BJP for the upcoming general elections in 1989. The division between the Hindu and Muslim communities sharpened due to the Hindu nationalist strategy of direct mobilization. The Ram Shila movement intensified the riots and furthered the hatred between the two Indian communities. BJP exploited the antagonism and eventually won 87 seats in the 1989 elections. BJP join the coalition government of Vishwanath

Pratap Singh. However, the coalition did not sustain and resulted in the BJP's disengagement from the government due to disagreement on the Ram temple and Mandal commission issues. BJP then decided to contest the next election in an independent position.

The Ram temple issue was at the top of the preferential list of the BJP and employed the strategy of direct mobilization. Advani led the demonstration of Hindu nationalists for the Ram Temple. It gained immense popularity among the masses and eventually expanded the BJP's vote base. BJP won 120 seats in Lok Sabha in the 1991 elections and emerged as the second-largest party in the parliament (Afzal, 2014). The position of the BJP strengthened politically and became an alternative to Congress. The change in its status from an opposition party at the periphery to one at the center aimed to replace the Congress required that the BJP should act responsibly to avoid any sort of agitation and communal violence. However, the highly mobilized Hindu nationalists especially the RSS members, the Bajrang Dal youth, and the VHP activists were less interested in understanding the compulsion of the BJP in Indian politics. They were gathered in the vicinity of Babri Masjid. The BJP leadership indulged in mass mobilization. On December 06, 1992, the highly mobilized Hindu nationalist mob attacked and demolished the Babri Mosque (Afzal, 2014).

After this incident, the socio-political situation worsened, and the government arrested the Hindu nationalist leaders and overthrew all the BJP governments in different states of the country. The demolition of the Babri Mosque undermined the political narrative of the BJP. The Ramjanambhoomi, Ram Temple construction, was used by the BJP as a tool for the upcoming election campaign. Some of the party leaders and workers did not support the demolition of the Mosque. They were against communal violence. To re-engage the despaired leadership and supporters of the party, BJP went on to employ the policy of agitation and demanded mid-term elections in the states. The Indian government forced the BJP to revisit its policy of agitation and violence. Therefore, BJP revisited its policy of agitation due to the aggressive response of the government (Afzal, 2014). It decided to limit the activities of aggressive groups like Bajrang Dal and VHP and to maintain party discipline. For regaining the lost image of the party, BJP tried to relieve the apprehensions of Indian Muslims about Hindu nationalism. The party leadership invited Indian Muslims to join their party which was secular in its essence. Thus, in the mid-term elections, the new strategy of the BJP was effective and established government in some states with the support of Muslim voters (Ghosh, 2000).

Following the 1993 elections BJP designed new policies for expanding its electoral base. It promised economic nationalism and raised voices for the economic challenges of the common man. It was perceived as a strategy to attract the poor class of Indian society (Afzal, 2014). Moreover, BJP also demanded the rights of Scheduled castes in government jobs. In the 1995 elections, the BJP strategy was helpful to gain more seats in the states' assemblies. Furthermore, on December 11, 1995, the Indian Supreme Court gave a verdict confirming the legitimacy of the Hindutva doctrine and described that it should not be assumed merely a religion but a culture and heritage of India (Ram, 1996). It was the authenticity of the Hindutva definition. BJP, then, expressed confidently its Hindu nationalist agenda and announced its manifesto for the 1996 general elections. It also promised the construction of the Ram Temple at Ayodhya. The manifesto included the implementation of a uniform civil code, abrogation of article 370, and banning the illegal Muslims Bengali migration.



The BJP was expecting victory in the 1996 general elections. The campaign was peaceful and there was no communal rhetoric. The provision of good governance and economic reforms were the main themes in the election campaign. The leadership tried to convince Muslims and presented them with a comprehensive plan to solve their issues. In the 1996 elections, the BJP secured 161 seats and became the largest party in Lok Sabha. Atal Bihari Vajpayee formed the government based on to ensure a majority in the Lok Sabha. However, it was a setback for the BJP when the regional parties and Left Front joined hands to form a government to keep Atal Bihari Vajpayee out of government.

### **BJP during Vajpayee's Era**

After the failure in the 1996 elections, BJP revisited its policy to reach out to the masses. It emphasized the issues faced by the public than resorting to Hindu nationalism. During the 1998 election campaign, BJP tried to reach out to Indian Muslims due to its electoral compulsion. The party also endeavored to realize Indian Muslims as a better option than Congress. However, some Indian Muslim leaders presented their reservations on the issue of the Babri Mosque. BJP's response seemed vague on these reservations. In the 1998 general elections, BJP won 180 seats and emerged as the national party in Indian politics. BJP in coalition with thirteen other parties announced Atal Bihari Vajpayee as the candidate for prime minister. As a result, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, a Hindu nationalist leader, secured 274 votes in the parliament and became the prime minister of India.

The rise of the BJP into power aimed to transform the composite and secular political structure through the guiding principles of Hindutva. It was a major challenge for the BJP to alter the constitution of India because it was in coalition with other political parties based on political expediency. In such a coalition, BJP made a compromise on its Hindutva ideology. The prime minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee belonged to the liberal and moderate Hindu nationalist faction and favored the policy of soft Hindutva. This policy aimed that a moderated approach would help BJP to be in the coalition government. The politics of compromise resulted in the public acknowledgment of Hindu narratives. The Sangh Parivar asserted to implement of the Hindu nationalist agenda based on the notion of Hindutva. It was anxious that the policy of political expediency would undermine the Hindu nationalist agenda like the implementation of a uniform civil code, the abrogation of article 370 of the Indian constitution about the status of Jammu and Kashmir, and the construction of Ram temple. However, the soft-Hindutva policy of the moderate faction of the BJP rewarded the members of the Sangh Parivar. They were appointed to key positions in the state's institutions. Therefore, they adopted the policy of soft Hindutva and avoided the Hindu nationalist themes.

The disagreement of the coalition parties with the BJP particularly on the issues of minorities put the leading party in trouble and consequently led to the end of the government at the center. The Congress in opposition failed to form a government. Therefore, the BJP with its coalition managed the caretaker government to preside over the elections to Lok Sabha. The BJP employed the strategy for the projection of the Hindutva agenda in the constituencies, where it was not in a strong position.

Atal Bihar Vajpayee was portrayed as the appropriate person for the office of prime minister. The charismatic personality of Atal Bihari Vajpayee in the Indian polity provided a favorable environment to attract a stable and diverse coalition, comprised of twenty-three parties named the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). The NDA announced a joint election manifesto with an emphasis on economic liberalization and encouraging foreign direct investments. It did not mention any Hindu nationalist agenda like the construction of the Ram temple, implementation of a uniform civil code, and the revoking of Article 370 (BJP Manifesto, 1999). It also helped the BJP to reach out to the Indian Muslim community through its allies. The incompetence of the Congress to ally gave the BJP leverage to perform effectively in the elections. Consequently, BJP was successful in achieving 182 seats in Lok Sabha in the 1999 elections (Mathur, 2019).

The BJP's performance in the elections proved its emergence of BJP in national politics. This time the BJP was the dominant party in the NDA with Atal Bihari Vajpayee as the prime minister of India. He was in a better position to run the government with its allies. The soft-Hindutva politics of the BJP was acceptable to the allies in NDA and acknowledged Vajpayee as the only leader of Hindu nationalism. Hindutva was legitimized in the public sectors of India during the Vajpayee regime. However, there were reservations among the stakeholders over the implementation of the hard-core Hindutva agenda. The allies in NDA perceived that BJP had a hidden Hindutva-based agenda and strongly objected to the issue that seemed incompatible with NDA policies. To relieve the apprehensions of the allies in the NDA, BJP declared commitment to the NDA's agenda.

The reiteration of the BJP with NDA's agenda was a temporary adjustment till BJP acquired the majority to form an exclusive government. The strategy of political expediency with other parties was perceived by Sangh Parivar like the experience it had with Janata Party. Therefore, to preserve the Hindu Identity, VHP raised the issue of the Ram Temple construction and asserted that BJP and NDA alliance was a hurdle to implementing its Hindutva agenda. However, the failure of the BJP in the state assemblies' elections, frustrated the Sangh Parivar as the ethnoreligious rhetoric did not gain any popular support to win the elections. The BJP advised the Sangh Parivar to wait for the general elections in 2004. This was the time when the assumption of ethnoreligious rhetoric had reached its limit and could not have any effective role to attract people to gain victory in elections. Thus, the policy of soft Hindutva was the only option available to BJP to follow in the future.

For the general elections in 2004, BJP employed the strategy to highlight the weakness of the previous Indian governments and projected the effectiveness and successful tenure of Vajpayee's government. The NDA election manifesto for the 2004 Lok Sabha elections emphasized on rights of Indian Muslims regarding education, employment, and economic well-being. BJP incorporated its Hindutva agenda of the Ram Temple issue, uniform civil code, and the abrogation of article 370 from the Indian constitution in its 'Vision Documents' but in the NDA election manifesto, BJP remained silent over its Hindutva agenda. The results of the 2004 elections to Lok Sabha were astonishing. Congress-led alliance UPA secures 219 seats in Lok Sabha while BJP-led NDA managed 185 seats in the Indian parliament (Chakravarty, 2019). The poor performance of the BJP in the 2004 elections was the result of the alliance strategy to depend on other parties for electoral politics.

## **Back in Opposition**

The BJP was back in opposition after its defeat in the general elections in 2004. It now intended to revisit its weak party policies regarding aging leadership and its links with the RSS and felt the need for a pragmatic political policy. The choice to either adopt socio-economic popularism or the Hindutva agenda was a major challenge for the BJP to attract the masses in its constituencies. Moreover, the BJP also failed to attract Indian Muslims through some favorable gestures. Meanwhile, Congress adopted a strategy to utilize secularism. It was a useful strategy because the rise of Hindu nationalism in Indian politics and the demolition of the Babri Masjid disappointed the Indian Muslims. Eventually, a major portion of the Indian Muslims joined the Congress and other secular political parties. This development gave an edge to Congress to perform efficiently in the general elections of 2009. The Congress-led alliance, the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) got 261 seats while the BJP-led alliance, NDA received 159 seats in the Lok Sabha. This setback for BJP led to a period of introspection within the party which sought to re-examine the core ideology and its strategies. Moreover, the BJP was unable to mobilize an effective alliance to rise and utilize popular issues like the allegations of corruption against the press and the rise in the price of commodities. The result of the 2009 general elections indicates that the Hindutva challenge to the secular political forces losing its grip. However, it does not mean that BJP will not resist Congress because it has wider socio-political support. The victory of Congress in the general elections pushed BJP into a hard political compulsion to meet the popular challenges. Congress adopted the policy of secularism on the pattern of the Nehru period.

The politics of communalism of the BJP was highly criticized by Congress. Rahul Gandhi raised the issue of communalism versus secularism in the elections campaign and that resulted in the victory of the Congress in the 2009 general elections (Kormireddi, 2009). After the electoral defeat in the 2009 general elections, BJP was destabilized and in a disarray. Eventually, the RSS came to its assistance and decided to bring its personnel from outside Delhi and reduced the influential role of L.K Advani in the party leadership. Nitin Jairam Gadkari, an RSS personnel elected as the new president of the BJP. During the period of Nitin's presidency suffered a decline in different regions in India due to the newly introduced party's constitution. However, in Gujrat, under Narendra Modi, Hindu nationalists enjoyed an overwhelming majority and less hostility to their ideological base. After the BJP's defeat in the 2009 general elections, Hindutva lost its grip on the masses due to the growing influence of secular forces in Indian polity. The Hindu nationalists resorted to opposing the Congress government. Following the global economic crisis of 2008-2009, Congress was marked by a decline in the masses. Meanwhile, the BJP capitalized on the Congress's declining status and was able to project itself as a better option for the prosperous future of India. Modi was chosen as the BJP's leader in the 2014 general elections in India. He portrayed himself as a potential opponent to the Congress government and stresses the Hindu nationalism and economic uplift of the country.

## **Hindutva and the Rise of Narendra Modi**

There has been a wider emphasis on the promotion of the Hindutva agenda since Narendra Modi assumed power in 2014. Economic progress, national security, and the promotion of Hindu nationalism were the key elements included in the election campaign of the BJP. The doctrine of Hindutva, a guide to Indian domestic and foreign policy projects an aggressive policy posture. The shift in the domestic sphere in India hit the socio-political fabric of Indian society. The Indian

diversity and multicultural identity gradually transformed into Hindu nationalism and cultural identity. The rift between Hindus and non-Hindus widened in the wake of the growing domination of the RSS in the socio-political spheres. Communal violence and ethnonationalism have been at the top of the priority list of the Hindu nationalist agenda. The mutual relationship between Hindutva and Narendra Modi has been resonating in the socio-political spheres in India. Since in power, Modi has been trying to mainstream the Hindutva ideology in the political sphere in India. Modi's government has pursued several policies that reflect the influence of the Hindutva agenda. The pursuit of the Hindutva agenda like abrogation of the articles 370 and 35A to remove the special status of Jammu and Kashmir, and the Citizenship Amendment Act 2019. Furthermore, the construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya in the place of Babri Mosque was celebrated by the Hindu nationalists as a victory of the Hindutva agenda. The additional regional hegemonic aspiration of Modi's regime by making military agreements with global powers. Such initiatives reflect the Savarkar's imprints in the Indian security policy under Modi's rule. His zeal for the promotion of Hindu culture and values indicates the influence of Savarkar on Modi. He has also taken bold steps against extremism and terrorism which have solidified his base to support and promote the Hindutva agenda. Overall, there is a significant imprint of Savarkar on Modi that continues to shape the political development of the Hindutva doctrine in India.

## **CONCLUSION**

It has concluded that the doctrine of Hindutva has evolved politically in Indian Politics. The indicators of the political development of Hindutva are reflected from the formation of the RSS to the establishment of Hindu nationalist political parties, like BJS, Janta Party, and BJP. The evolution of the RSS from a sociocultural organization to participate in the mainstream politics of India is evident in the emergence of the BJP, a Hindu nationalist political party. Vowing to political conditions and the influence of domestic factors, the doctrine of Hindutva tactically evolved in the Indian political sphere. The political outfits of Hindutva relied on political expediency and made coalitions with other political parties to gain the power to achieve its Hindu nationalist agenda. Hindu nationalists, since inception, aimed to influence Indian society by introducing Hindu norms and values. However, the assassination of Gandhi by a Hindu nationalist perturbed the socio-political environment of India, which led to the ban of the RSS and its leaders' arrest. Eventually, they needed Hindu political representation in India and founded BJS to deepen its roots in Indian politics. The BJS experienced political expediency as a tool to emerge as a mainstream political party to pursue its Hindu nationalist agenda. The merger of BJS into the Janta Party was another strategy to gain political power in Indian politics. However, its failure in political coalition to achieve its Hindutva agenda, BJS dissolved, and the BJP was formed as the mainstream Hindu nationalist political party in India. The BJP adopted the policy of moderate politics. However, the failure in the general elections led them to agitational politics and resorted to violence to pursue Hindu nationalist agenda. However, Vajpayee adopted the policy of soft Hindutva. Ethno-religious rhetoric could not have any influential role in attracting people to gain victory in elections. On the other hand, promoting the Hindutva agenda has been accompanied by communal violence, the abrogation of the special status of Jammu and Kashmir, and the controversial Citizenship Amendment Act undermining the secular edifice of Indian democracy. Thus, it is essential to examine the role of Hindutva in shaping India's political landscape. To promote inclusiveness in Indian politics, fostering harmony among all stakeholders, regardless of religious beliefs and

cultural associations, is the need of time. To promote inclusiveness in Indian politics, it is imperative to cultivate harmony among all stakeholders, regardless of religious or cultural affiliations.

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