

## **The Strands of Religious Populism and Otherization of Muslims in India**

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### **ABSTRACT**

India; a constitutionally declared secular state and home to almost 200 million Muslims (third largest Muslim population in world and largest Muslim population as a minority group) is merely becoming a Hindu state. The Hindutva inspired state-centric discourses of national identity are perceptibly reflecting the process of othering of Indian citizens on the bases of their religious beliefs. The ‘othering’ of Muslims is largely politically and culturally constructed by exclusivist imagination of a ‘Hindu Rashtra’(State) while gradually paving grounds for denial of equal rights to all Indian citizens. Since Bharatiya Janata Party’s (BJP) rise to power and its persistent political appeal to masses through religious populism, the otherization of Muslims is reinforced by anti-Muslim narrative. This led to many among the Indian society to view Indian Muslims with distrust. This research identifies that in the backdrop of existing Islamophobic discourses in Indian society, the emergent religious populism of right-wing politics as an electoral force is vigorously creating the classes of citizens primarily identified by religion. In Indian society, certain groups are already marginalized due to differentiation of caste and socio-economic inequalities which makes their power claims irrelevant to public policy. Now Muslims; a significant minority of Indian state are suffering due to deliberate policies of ruling elite to construct a worldview of observing them as ‘evil’ others. This has gradually transformed not only the plural nature of India society but has also made Indian state; a party to conflict and largely reshaping the idea of nationhood on the bases of religious othering. This is an apparent key threat to Indian secularism, the democratic credentials of State and its diverse society which can be disadvantaged to the Indian political and constitutional paradigm of holding together.

**Keywords:** **Hindutva, Islamophobia, India, Identity, Muslim, Othering, Religion, Right-Wing Populism.**

### **Introduction**

Since the advent of globalization and emergence of transnational and non-state actors, there is resurrection of violent ethnic conflicts in different parts of the world. Religion at times served to become an important ethnic identity maker while creating several categories primarily leading to intense othering on the bases

of religious faith. In the backdrop of 9/11 terrorist attacks, observing Political Islam as a key threat to the western culture and democracy led to accelerate the worldwide challenge of Islamophobia where followers of a particular faith are viewed as inevitably belligerent 'others'. In more recent developments in different parts of the globe, populist political leadership started referring to religious terminologies and language while highlighting their religious identities to enhance mass support to their standings in national politics as well as to assert some of the foreign policy narratives.

Populism is the contemporary political jargon to denote the opposition between the perceived 'others', primarily identified as 'us' and 'them'. The emergent populist politics in various parts of the world including democracies and authoritarian states provide varying trends of nationalism which led scholars to develop its categorizations on the bases of their case studies in different regions.<sup>i</sup> Most part of relevant literature on populism articulates that "populism is confrontational, chameleonic, cultural bound and context-dependent" (Arter, 2010, 490). Populism can be generally understood in vertical and horizontal dimensions. The vertical dimension represents the opposition between the "The people" (The common man) and allegedly corrupt and self-interested "Elite". Whereas, horizontal dimension illustrates the opposition between the 'insiders' and 'outsiders' while highlighting the othering between the 'the people who share way of life as us' and those who impend that way of life. This leads to view these 'others' in a state as 'internal outsiders' even if they are citizens but are not seen as belonging to the conceptualization of respective nation (Brubaker 2017:1191-2).

The addition of religion into right-wing populist politics helped populist leadership to conveniently construct the image of people's enemies either as 'elite' or 'others' of a particular group which poses alleged threat to their righteous community. The religious sentiments largely associated with divine purposes aid populist leaders to mobilize the communities of similar faith irrespective of their individual, ethnic, regional or racial identities in support of populist narratives. It has been noted that right-wing populism is generally nationalist in its orientations however usage of religious conceptualization to the populist strands facilitates populist leaders to delineate their respective virtuous community in broader civilizational and cultural aspects. Moreover, religious populism has been invented and used by right-wing populists to suppress the political and socio-economic claims of religious minorities within their national boundaries. The right-wing populism infuses ethno-nationalism with certain religious identity while pronouncing exclusionary narratives (Yilmaz & Morieson, 2021:3). Populism generally shapes two key threats to democratic and plural states; first it leads to view political rivals as enemies and secondly, it requires the subordination to a charismatic political figure (de la Torre, 2019: 68). The inclusion of religion into populist strands not only provides legitimacy to the antagonistic populist claims of right-wing leaders but also makes them immune to criticism and questioning the credibility of their populist stances through a large number of religiously blind followers. The populists generally view religion as a source of belonging rather

### *The Strands of Religious Populism and Otherization of Muslims in India*

than practicing the belief as arrayed religious civilizations, traditions and identities help them to demarcate that who can be or cannot be included into their category of 'The people'.<sup>ii</sup>

Populistic politics generally has been characterized by insecurity while in many cases, additional use of religious references transformed it into a more antagonistic, rigid and violent 'otherization' as evident in many states in Europe and Asia. In the backdrop of emergent global populist trends, in many South Asian countries, violence prone societies with authoritarian state structures provide a dreadful picture of religious hate. In South Asian milieu, religion often becomes a matter of social concerns and serves as one of the key source of public policy formulations. Moreover, populist nationalism in South Asian states seems more complicated and intense than European case studies due to lack of political institutionalization of democratic practices, existed authoritarian governance structures, prevalence of political instability, critical socio-economic inequalities, and fragmented societies largely divided on acute ethnic, linguistic and religious differences. Moreover in South Asian countries, role of charismatic political, religious leaders and religion into politics is quite evident to (De) construct the identities and mobilization of violence to support their political claims as well as to nullify the rights of perceived 'others' or to discard their due share in political power. The case of religious populism appears more evidently in India than other South Asian states as Indian politics is currently hostage of populist re-imagination of nationhood based on religion and cultural domination of Hinduism.

In India and Pakistan<sup>iii</sup>, civilizational superiority is the key component of populist oratory where religion significantly helps to assert these narratives by appealing most sections of these societies. This more often justifies violence while legitimizing the strands of populist leaders about what state ought to be. Pakistan came into existence with an idea of having a separate state for the Muslims of Sub-Continent however most of Muslim political elite at that time were not in favor of enforcing theocracy. In the initial years of Pakistan, political debate centered the question of declaring the new state being Muslim or secular. Comparatively a small portion of religious minorities residing in Pakistan facilitated the process of constitutionally pronouncing it an Islamic state. Though, this was not the case in India as it consisted of countless races, ethnic groups, home to many religions and cultural traditions. The inevitability of declaring India as a secular state is evident by renowned Indian politicians Shashi Tharoor as he expounds that "Many observers have been astonished by India's survival as pluralist state. But India could hardly have survived as anything else. Pluralism is a reality that emerges from the very nature of the country; it is a choice made inevitable by India's geography and reaffirmed by its history" (1997: 9). However during the last two decades, secular values of Indian state are overshadowed by making frequent references to Hindu nationalism through state discourses and its recent political rhetoric of populistic orientations largely targeting Muslims as hateful 'other' at highest levels of Indian government.

## **Research Questions**

The underlying research while incorporating qualitative method, proceeds with descriptive and analytical approaches to answer following research questions.

- Is Islamophobia in India, a by-product of Hindu Nationalism?
- How strands of religious populism in India are built on Islamophobic discourses?
- How religious populism in India is facilitating the idea of Hindu Rashtra while constraining the secularism in India?

## **Is Islamophobia in India a by-Product of Hindu Nationalism?**

The emergence of Hindu nationalism and Islamophobia as its inevitable outcome in India cannot be exclusively attributed to BJP's onset to political power in 2014. Religion remained one of the key ethnic identity maker of Indian society for centuries. However, the history of religious hate against Muslims in India dates back to pre-independence era. The ascendancy of Muslims especially during the Moghul era and later political struggle driven by religious identification under the British rule built the notion of well-armed and powerful 'Others' for many among Hindus. This gradually led to form a militant identity of Hinduism (Battaglia, 2017: 1). The insecurity was reflected by the political mobilization of Hindutva by political claims of V.D. Savarkar and Golwalkar<sup>iv</sup> respectively in 1923 and 1939. Savarkar while outlining the political vision for India, defined the exclusionary conception of Hinduism and linked it to the recognition of India as a holy land in a hugely influenced pamphlet 'Who is Hindu'. His conception of Indian nationhood was defined exclusively from racial stand view of Hindus as posterities of ancient Aryans while idea of an Indian nation was articulated in terms of a unified geography. This excluded Muslims and Christian (they currently constitute almost 17 percent of Indian population) of United India from the perceived Hindu nationhood as their holy places reside in Middle East; outside the geo-political spaces of India. Savarkar also propagated that Muslim invaders since 10<sup>th</sup> century were prime cause to weaken and pollute Hindu nation (Siyech & Narain, 2018:183-4). In a related manner, Golwalker straightforwardly disclosed his exclusionist Hindu nationalism while pronouncing that "the non-Hindu ... must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect or revere Hindu religion... Or [they] may stay in the country wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges" (Marshall, 2004).

Most Hindu organizations emerged in twentieth century in agitation of British rule along with other nationalist movements. One of these Hindu organizations is Sangh Parivar, established with the aim of preponderance of Hinduism in Indian culture, politics and society. In 1925, Keshav Hedgewar; a follower of Savarkar founded the central organization of Sangh Parivar as Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (R.S.S) whose primary agenda is to reshape India as a Hindu state. Since its existence, R.S.S not only remained intolerant towards non-Hindus but was in

### *The Strands of Religious Populism and Otherization of Muslims in India*

conflict with other sections of Hindu community for being soft on Muslims.<sup>v</sup> Muslims were viewed by most Hindu nationalists as a key threat for being 'foreign body' and great hurdle for transforming Indian society into a Hindu society (Jaffrelot 1996, 55).

The emergent otherization of Muslims was further fueled by linking it to a perceived civilizational battle between Hinduism and Islam by repeatedly calling period of Muslim rule as barbarous and oppressive. These uncertainties of Muslim community in United India led them to formulate a separate political party; All India Muslim League. One of the key Muslim leaders; Jinnah in his early political experiences was not much convinced by the idea of a separate nationhood for Muslims. However, he gradually approved of the widespread belief that neither Muslim would be safe in United India nor they will be treated equally. The religious animosity between Hindus and Muslims intensified during last years of independence movement in United India and led to extreme bloodshed in the course of partition. The partition of United India in 1947 also led to shape 'Muslim Problem' in India. The establishment of Pakistan as separate state for Muslims of Sub-Continent not only shattered the Hindu idea of 'Akhand Bharat' (Undivided India) but also confirmed Muslims as 'evil others' in political oratory and imaginations of Hindu nationalists. In post-independence era, Hindu nationalist discourse centered on opposition of Pakistan and viewing it as an ultimate enemy while looking at Indian Muslims with suspicion for allegedly supporting Pakistan due to commonality of their religious faith.

In the initial decades of Indian state, leftist political leadership specifically Nehru largely believed that modernity and pluralism will gradually overcome the influence of religious sentiments over Indian politics and society. On contrary, Hindu nationalists asserted that Hinduism was the core of Indian civilization while repelling the secular identity of Indian nation. Hindutva is articulated as an expression of nationalism which includes the politics of imaginations leading to cultural transformation, social mobilization and most importantly characterized by 'ontological insecurity' which engenders fear and violence against the significant 'others' (Anand, 2011). In the backdrop of this nationalist paradigm based on nature of religious faith, Muslim became disadvantaged section of Indian society due to apparent otherness, exclusion, restriction in pursuance of equal access to political, economic, social rights and fundamental freedoms.

### **How Strands of Religious Populism in India are built on Islamophobic Discourses?**

Despite the fact that majority of Indian population belongs to Hindu faith, the political expressions of Hindu nationalism were not perceptible before the decade of 1980s. As a part of Hindu militant agenda of Sangh Parivar, Vishnu Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Bajrang Dal were founded respectively in 1964 and 1984. Bajrang Dal became a key source of attacks on Muslims and instigating mob violence in India. VHP started uniting Hindu groups through extensive propaganda

and hate campaigns. VHP radicalizing Hindus by believing that religious conversion of indigenous people by Christians and population explosion of Muslims are great concerns and threats for them. BJP who first formed a coalition government at Center in 1998 is a political wing of Sangh Parivar and diligently attached to radical organizations like VHP, Bajrang Dal, R.S.S etc.<sup>vi</sup>

The transformation of Hindu nationalism as a political force became significantly evident in 1992 when almost three lac Hindus were mobilized through R.S.S rally to demolish Babri mosque to materialize the imagination of a Hindu temple (Kinnvall, 2019:289). For most years of its existence, Bajrang dal remained either banned or confined to secure limited support from certain sections of Indian society. However since 2014, this militant group became quite powerful in the terms of its influence while getting legitimization of its social, religious and political narratives comparatively from the broader section of Indian society. The key reason is political backing of Bajrang Dal by BJP who is ruling India since 2014. It has been reported that this led to significant increase in the tendency of hate crime in India (The New Yorker, March 5, 2019).

As an advocate of Hindutva, BJP primarily pronounces Indian culture in the terms of Hindu values. The otherization of Muslims in India is very much linked with the way, Hindutva defines Muslims. The otherization projected by Hindu nationalism makes many identities in India irrelevant to Indian nation while viewing them as inferior and contemptable including low caste Dalits, feminists, liberals, Christians and specifically Muslims (Waikar, 2018:162). One of the underlying reasons of expression of othering against Muslims is fear of Hindu fundamentalists regarding alleged 'love Jihad' by Muslim men. Hindu radicals view inter-faith marriages in India threatening to their conception of Indian nation virtuously Hindu. Their hatred and disapproval seems more perceptible when in such marriages, a Muslim man marries a Hindu woman. The assumed 'Love Jihad' is an outcome of Islamophobic conspiracy theory which accuses Muslims for deliberately enticing Hindu women into marriages for the sake of their conversion into Islam to allegedly increase Muslim population in India.

The 'love Jihad' campaigns against Muslims existed long before India emerged as an independent state. The idea of anti-conversion laws was floated by U.N. Mukherjee in 1909 in his book 'Hindus: A Dying Race' (Datta, 1993:1305). In the backdrop of escalating religious strains in United India during 1920s and 1930s, Hindu nationalist groups in northern India accused Muslims for kidnapping Hindu women while demanding the recovery of Hindu wives of Muslims. The said issue was even debated in Parliament of colonial India (BBC News, December 8, 2020). However, with the passage of time, antagonism towards Muslims in general and particularly campaigns against inter-faith marriages involving Muslim men have become forceful since BJP arrived in power and used the issue for political polarization and electoral gains. Furthermore, digitalization of communications channels like social media platforms and Whats App messaging facilitated the Islamophobic propaganda through spreading the alleged stories of 'love jihad'. The anti-conversion laws already existed in eight Indian states<sup>vii</sup> though these were

### *The Strands of Religious Populism and Otherization of Muslims in India*

not applicable to inter-faith marriages. Under the BJP governments, some of the Indian states like Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh<sup>viii</sup> introduced laws to police the personal lives of Indian citizens by assuming the right to intervene into marriages on the bases of their religious faith. The Islamophobic narratives and otherization of Muslims has a civilizational patriarchal trait where marriage of Muslim women with Hindu men are generally accepted and portrayed as romance by Hindu organizations however converse to these gender positions in a relationship is illustrated as forced marriage, rape, abduction and luring of Hindu women by Muslim men.<sup>ix</sup> The idea of enforcement of superiority of Hindu civilization, cultural nationalism, social, economic and political primacy over other cultures and religions is the driving force of religious populism of BJP.

The BJP extensively incorporated communal rhetoric in politics and targeted those sections of society who consume beef meat (largely Muslim, untouchables & Adivasi). This led to shape the trends of violent campaign against Muslims which often ended with up mob lynching of the Muslim offenders of the Hindu belief which pronounces that cows are holy.<sup>x</sup> The pandemic was also politicized under BJP by reinforcing the anti-Muslims discourses to call Muslims as carriers of the disease and then identified them responsible for spreading the virus of covid-19. The Muslims were constructed as enemy and ‘evil others’ when the rumors spread about origin and intentional infection of disease allegedly by members of ‘Tablighi Jamaat’ (Islamic Group) and legitimized by some of the state’s institutional actors. The legitimization of such anecdotes included formally lodging First Information Report (FIR) by Delhi Police Crime Branch on March 31, 2020 against Maulana Saad Kandhlawi; an associate of Tablighi Jamaat and great son of its founder for violating the ‘Epidemic Diseases Act’ and instituted social distancing protocols of government. This criminal case was filed by stating that he “deliberately, willfully, negligently and malignantly” putting the public’s health at risk”. Moreover, Ministry of Foreign Affairs blacklisted those foreigners who were member of this Islamic group and prohibited them to engage into any activity of Jammat. Additionally, a daily column was dedicated to Covid-19 in Tablighi Jamaat in daily briefing of Indian government (Prasad, 2020: 297). Muslim businesses were boycotted across India. For instance; in Punjab State, Sikh temples warned on loudspeakers not to buy milk from Muslim dairy farmers due to potential infection from them (The New York Times, April 12, 2020). During pandemic, Muslims volunteers distributing food items were also named as ‘coronavirus terrorists’ and often beaten.

Besides these Islamophobic discourses, party officials of BJP called Muslims ‘human bombs’ which provoked series of fierce attacks on Muslims including physical harm and public humiliation.<sup>xi</sup> The relentless propaganda of some of the Indian TV channels<sup>xii</sup> under the influence of Hindu nationalism, fake news, misleading usage of old videos on social media showing Muslims licking plates (primarily the intent of this act was not wasting food) and irresponsible statements by members of ruling party provoked incidents of persecution of Muslims. The trending of hashtags on Indian twitter like ‘CoronaJihad, bio terrorists’ and ‘total

boycott of Muslims<sup>xiii</sup> while infuriating violent islamophobia inferred that Muslims were using deliberate spread of virus as part of a ‘holy war.’<sup>xiv</sup> This led to view Muslims; an existential threat to India while making them target of hatred and contempt on social media. This apparently provided that in the backdrop of religio-populist oratory of BJP and its resultant communal disharmony, Hindu nationalists need just a small reason to violently attack and lynch Muslim citizens of India.

### **How Religious Populism in India is Facilitating the Idea of a Hindu Rashtra While Constraining Secularism in India?**

The idea of secularism in India is not meant to discard Hinduism but to accommodate religious minorities. However, the process of accommodating religious minorities through secularization of Indian state is viewed by many among Hindus, primarily offending to their religious beliefs and contrary to the equality of laws for all Indian citizens, for instance; allowing Muslim the slaughtering of the cows and avoidance of uniform civil code. They largely believe that Indian secularism is an irrational approach of appeasing the minority at the cost of majority Hindus. It has been argued that India is not a secular state in western conceptualization of secularism as Indian constitution does not incorporate the idea of strict separation of religion from politics as envisioned by Nehru, however provides the notion of respecting all religions equally. As a part of its colonial legacy, Indian state intervened into certain matters of religion related to public interests rather than complete separation of politics from religion. Conversely Indian state established a principled distance from institution of religious significance (Chaudhry, 2019:103).

The key reason of contestation of Indian secularism is the divergent path of Indian society where religious othering remained a significant feature throughout the years which was not at all faded out by constitutional secularism of Indian state. In 2017, PEW research center poll revealed that, almost 88 percent Indians have favorable view towards Narendra Modi while approximately 69 percent held a ‘very favorable view’. BJP’s populist oratory and otherization of Muslims significantly enhanced its vote bank from 31.4 % in 2014 to 32.2 % in 2019 (Islam, 2020). It has been noted that in parliamentary elections of 2019, Indians merely ‘did not elect a government but participated in the birth of India as a Hindu nation with a Hindu state’. BJP secured approximately 44 percent of Hindu vote; a large portion which was never achieved before by a right-wing party in India (Chandra, 2019).

The religious populist discourses emergent at power center of Indian politics are transforming it into a majoritarian state from a liberal democracy. Under the BJP government, Indian state is getting involved into non-secular practices. Many of BJP policies are contentious to Article 25 of Indian Constitution<sup>xv</sup> which provides the right to every Indian citizen to “profess, practice and propagate” any religious belief of choice. The laws formulated under BJP rule unfavorably

*The Strands of Religious Populism and Otherization of Muslims in India*

impinged the fundamental rights of voluntary adoption of any religious faith.<sup>xvi</sup> Former Delhi High Court Chief Justice; A.P. Shah expounded that 'Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Ordinance' violates the freedom of conscious guaranteed by Article 25. It also infringes the right to liberty and life assured by Article 21(The Wire, January 31, 2021). Moreover, Indian Constitution does not consider social consent for validating personal decisions.

Furthermore, assertions of Hindu nationalism by BJP are largely conflicting to Article 14 which stimulates the equality before law and equal protection of law to all Indian citizens. The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA)<sup>xvii</sup> was passed in 2019 which firmly made religion one of the decisive factors for qualification of Indian citizenship. This policy potentially threatens to declare almost two million residents (mostly Muslims) of Asaam; North-Eastern state as illegal immigrants as Modi government intends to house them in camps. The anti-Muslim state discourses under BJP are leading Indian society to view Muslims as intruders. This President of BJP and India's home minister; Ameet Shah undertook to renovate India as a pure Hindu state at several occasions while stating that "I am assuring you that each and every infiltrator in India will be shown the door". However in the backdrop of CAA, he addressed immigration concerns while saying that "[But] I today want to assure Hindu, Sikh, Jain, Buddhist and Christian refugees, you will not be forced to leave India by the Centre." His respective statement clearly excluded Muslims and provided a message that in India, immigrants are welcome as long as they are non-Muslims. Such political oratory illustrated Muslims as infiltrates while followers of other religious faith are viewed as refugees.

The granting of citizenship of Indian state on the basis of religious faith is unconstitutional as Indian constitutions prohibits such discriminatory policies which provided only non-Muslim refugees a legal itinerary to become Indian citizens. Furthermore this policy is apparently prejudiced as it demonizes Muslims community in India just because of their religious faith. In 2020, in the backdrop of controversial CAA, worst communal riots were incited in New Delhi and triggered protests across India. BJP government did not bother the fact that islamophobia propaganda materialized the attacks on Indian Muslims. The BJP government's reluctance to address the predicament of Islamophobia was evident when violence erupted on February 23, 2020 in New Delhi and continued for next five days in Indian capital primarily causing death of 51 people.

The BJP government has a close relationship with Hindu nationalist movement as not only its prime leader; Modi is the lifetime member of R.S.S but the entire electoral campaign of BJP for 2014 elections was run with extensive coordination of Singh Parivar. The approach of BJP towards social and political dissent is not at all dissimilar to fanatic and extremist Hindu organizations whom the right-wing party is associated. In response to Shaheen Bagh sit-in; a non-violence resistance to the passage of CAA in South-Eastern Delhi, BJP's view of political dissent was callous. The chief minister of Uttar Pradesh; Yogi Adityanath expressed ruthless approach while suggesting that "If they won't understand

words, they'll understand bullets." Modi's ministers used to explicate that "Shoot the traitors to the nation!" at rallies (The Guardian, February 20, 2020). Many advocates of right-wing Hindu nationalism stayed free despite explicating extreme hate speeches while openly inciting violence against Muslims. However, a FIR was lodged against 15 anti-CAA protesters on the charges of disrupting law and order which led to their arrest. These protesters were accused of being the part of a 'large conspiracy' while instigating communal violence in North-East Delhi. Under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), lower court dismissed the bail pleas of protesters. Though, the populist and authoritarian orientations of BJP were highlighted as threats to Indian democracy, when Delhi High Court while issuing the bail orders of three protesters (two students of Jawaharlal Nehru University & one student of Jamia Millia Islamia), stated that "We are constrained to say, that it appears, that in its anxiety to suppress dissent and in the morbid fear that matters may get out of hand, the State has blurred the line between the constitutionally guaranteed 'right to protest' and 'terrorist activity'. If such blurring gains traction, democracy would be in peril." (The Wire, June 15, 2020).

## **Findings**

Muslims in India as the largest religious minority have long faced violence and abuse. The Islamophobic discourses and otherization of Muslim in India perceptibly persisted in Indian society prior to BJP coming to power in 2014. However anti-Muslim policies and religious hate crimes are now reinforced by religious populist oratory of BJP. The religious populism in India largely epitomizes the horizontal populism where religious minorities especially Christians and Muslims are viewed as outsiders. In imagination of exclusionary Hindu nationalism and its populist narratives, these minority groups do not fit into conceptualization of Hindu nation. Hindu nationalist movement and organizations are generally united by the shared belief that everything within the geo-political sphere of Indian state must be by lineage either of Hindu origin or completely surrender to Hindu cultural nationalism. The case study of India signifies fusion of three approaches of populism identified by scholars by viewing populism as an ideology, political style and political strategy.<sup>xviii</sup> Since nineteenth century, through establishing various Hindu organizations aiming to reshape culture and politics, Hindutva is providing the set of ideas about constructing the identity of 'the people' as Hindus by outlining the boundaries of being Hindu. The consistent use of religio-populist oratory through public speeches of Hindu fanatics, political elite of BJP and creating inflammatory and hateful texts, images, narratives is the political style of the right-wing party and organizations which help them to enhance their electoral gains while constructing the identity of assumed 'evil others'. The religious populist ideology of BJP with the populist oratory enabled them to mobilize people as part of their Hindutva strategy to transform Indian secularism into complete domination of Hindu conceptualization of state and

society in the backdrop of already created fear regarding religious minorities as hateful others.

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## Notes

<sup>i</sup> Mudde (2017) explains the broadly used category of populism as 'ideational approach of populism' while further expounding its variant as an ideological approach which is mostly found in European case studies. The ideological approach views society divided into two antagonistic & homogenous groups perceived as 'The People' & 'The Corrupt Elite' while claiming that politics should be according to the

will of people. See for details; Populism: An Ideational Approach. In *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*. (Ed) Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, Paul Taggart, Paulina Ochoa Espejo and Pierre Ostiguy. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Also See; Hawkins, K.A. Carlin, R.E. Littvy, L. & Kaltwasser, C. R. (2019) (Ed). *The Ideational Approach to Populism: Concept, Theory & Analysis*. Routledge.

<sup>ii</sup> For a detailed account of literature on populism & its relevance to different case studies, See; Ihsan, Morieson & Demir. (2021). *Exploring Religions in Relation to Populism: A Tour around the World*. 12:301. *Religions* <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12050301>

<sup>iii</sup> For a detailed discussion on role of religion as an identity maker in Pakistan, See; Falki & Bano. (2020). *New Ethnic Identity: Role of Religion and State of Identity in Pakistan*". *Journal of political Science*, Vol. XXXVII .PP.143-166. <http://ps.gcu.edu.pk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/10.-New-Ethnic-Identity-Role-of-Religion-and-State-of-Identity-in-Pakistan-by-Sadia-Mahmood-Falki-Dure-Shahwar-Bano.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> With reference to Golwalker's book, 'We or Our Nationhood Defined' it has been provided that he was much inspired by ideas of German Nazism of race & birth. He expounded that essence of people or nationhood lies in its civilization. See; Jaffrelot, C. (1996) *The Hindu nationalist movement in India*. New York: Columbia University Press. P.53.

<sup>v</sup> In 1948, Hindu political leaders; Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated by Nathuram Godse; a member of RSS for being responsible for dismembering India in 1947 and tolerant towards Muslims.

<sup>vi</sup> For an account on right-wing Hindutva, See; Leidig, E (2020). *Hindutva as a Variant of Right-Wing Extremism. Patterns of Prejudices*. Vol.54 (3). PP. 215-37. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2020.1759861>

<sup>vii</sup> These states are 'Arunachal Pradesh, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, and Jharkhand & Uttarakhand'.

<sup>viii</sup> Haryana & Karnataka are the states ruled by BJP & in row to implement such discriminatory laws. In February 2021, BJP politician & Cabinet Minister of Haryana; Anil Vij expressed government intention to draft an anti-conversion law. Uttar Pradesh currently ruled by BJP, is most populous Indian state where Muslim constitute one-fifth proportion to population. Under the 'Prohibition of Unlawful Religious Conversion Ordinance' promulgated on November 28, 2020, couples from different religious faiths have to provide a notice to District Magistrate, two months prior to their marriage. The District magistrate has the discretion to declare whether a religious conversion is through compulsion as in said case, while considering it a criminal offense, offending person can be denied bail and jailed for ten years. Despite the facts that respective Ordinance is applicable to all inter-religious faith marriages however on operational level, it targets Hindu-Muslim marriages due to the reason that under the Islamic Personal law, a non-Muslim have to convert to Islam to make the marriage religiously legitimate. See; Ganguly, S. (January 28, 2021). *The Problem with India's Love Jihad Laws*. *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/the-problem-with-indias-love-jihad-laws-152675>. Since the implementation of anti-conversion Ordinance in Uttar Pradesh, almost 86 people have been nominated in FIR while 54 are arrested. Out of 86 people booked, 79 are Muslims with accusations of enticing Hindu women while forcing them to change religion to Islam. See; Apoorvanand. (January 15, 2021). *India's Love Jihad Laws: Another Attempt to Subjugate Muslims*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/1/15/indias-love-jihad-laws-another-attempt-to-subjugate-muslims>

<sup>ix</sup> The Hindu activists agitated against airing of Netflix series; 'A Suitable Boy' by Mira Nair (an adoption of Vikram Seth's 1993 Novel) on plea that it encouraged 'love jihad'. A FIR was also lodged by a minister of Madhya Pradesh against the airing of film. See; <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/11/24/india-case-filed-against-netflix-over-temple-kissing-scene>

<sup>x</sup> From May 2015-December 2018, across 12 Indian states, almost 44 people were killed in this regard whereas 36 of these were Muslims. In the same period of time, approximately in 100 incidents of violence, across 20 states, 280 people were injured in the name of cow protection .Almost 254 incidents of hate crime against religious minorities were documented between January 2009- October 2018, in which 579 were injured & 91 killed. It is reported that 91 % of these hate crime were committed after May 2014 when BJP came into power & 61% incidents occurred in those states where BJP is in power. For a detailed analysis on cow protection related violence and BJP government response, See: *Human rights Watch Report, 'Violent Cow Protection in India: Vigilante Groups Attack Minorities'*. February 18, 2019. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/02/18/violent-cow-protection-india/vigilante-groups-attack-minorities>

<sup>xi</sup> For instance; the national head of BJP's Information & Technology Division; Amit Malviya tweeted in April 2020 that "Delhi's dark underbelly is exploding! Last 3 months have seen an Islamic insurrection of sorts, first in the name of anti-CAA protests from Shaheen Bagh to Jamia, Jaffrabad to Seelampur. And now the illegal gathering of the radical Tablighi Jamaat at the markaz. It needs a fix!" See; <https://twitter.com/amitmalviya/status/1245083081305776128> .In a similar manner, local BJP leader; Kapil Mishra blamed Muslims in a tweet by stating that "Tablighi Jamaat people have begun spitting on the doctors and other health workers. It's clear, their aim is to infect as many people as possible with coronavirus and kill them". He suggested to treat members of Islamic group quarantined at Railway facility as terrorists. See Mishra's tweet on April 1, 2020; [https://twitter.com/KapilMishra\\_IND/status/1245359875598594051](https://twitter.com/KapilMishra_IND/status/1245359875598594051).

See also; <https://www.timesnownews.com/india/article/kapil-mishra-blasts-tablighi-jamaat-members-for-spitting-on-doctors-says-should-be-treated-like-terrorists/572681> .Furthermore,

<sup>xii</sup> Channels like Republic TV, India Today, ABP News, and Zee News flashed Islamophobic headlines like 'Save the country from Corona Jihad'. Arnab Goswami's lead story on Republic TV on March 31, 2020 insisted that Tablighi Jamaat was the super spreader of virus while blaming that Muslims were deliberately spreading disease & hate against lockdown. He instigated violence against Muslims while blaming that they abused Indian democracy. The infuriating comments below the video of this talk provide a glimpse of hate and suspicion against Muslims. See for the instance; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=564jIHlzfNE>

<sup>xiii</sup> These hashtags were circulated widely, with over 249,733 interactions on Facebook while reaching an approximately 170 million accounts on Twitter and dangerously spreading misinformation & fake news. Nazeer, A. (June 4, 2020). Indian Muslim minority experiences increased targeting & violence during Covid-19. Institute of Development Studies. <https://www.ids.ac.uk/opinions/indias-muslim-minority-experiences-increased-targeting-and-violence-during-covid-19/>

<sup>xiv</sup> It was pointed out by an independent India news-site 'The Wire' that many of accounts following these hashtags (illegal under Indian law) were followed by BJP ministers. See for the instance; <https://thewire.in/communalism/ministers-hate-accounts-twitter-follow-boycott-muslims>

<sup>xv</sup> For Article 14, 21 & 25 of Indian Constitution of 1949, See; <https://indiankanon.org/doc/631708/>

<sup>xvi</sup> In 2017, a bench of Indian Supreme Court comprised of 9 judges uphold the 'fundamental right of privacy' protected by Article 25 while considering marriage a personal choice & explicated that's it's upon an individual that how she exercises the constitutional liberty to make her personal choices. See; Panday, J. (August 28, 2017). India's Supreme Court Upholds Right to Privacy as a Fundamental Right- And Its's About Time. Electronic Frontier. Foundation. <https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2017/08/indias-supreme-court-upholds-right-privacy-fundamental-right-and-its-about-time> . This constitutional position was reiterated by SC in 2018 in 'Hadiya case' while emphasizing individual autonomy. See; Times of India, March 8, 2018. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/kerala-love-jihad-case-sc-sets-aside-kerala-hc-order-that-annulled-hadiyas-marriage/articleshow/63215330.cms>

<sup>xvii</sup> For a brief account of CAA, See; the Economic Times, December 13, 2019. Citizenship (Amendment) Act 2019: What is it and why is it seen as a problem. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/et-explains/citizenship-amendment-bill-what-does-it-do-and-why-is-it-seen-as-a-problem/articleshow/72436995.cms>

<sup>xviii</sup> See for the detail of three approaches & respective characteristic, Gidron, N & Bonikowski, B. Varieties of populism: Literature Review & Research Agenda. Working Paper Series. No. 13-0004. Weatherhead Centre for International Affairs, Harvard University. [https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/gidron\\_bonikowski\\_populismlitreview\\_2013.pdf](https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/gidron_bonikowski_populismlitreview_2013.pdf)