

Origin of “Hindutva” and Its Reflections in Modi’s Doctrine

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ABSTRACT

There are some countries that are recognized by the name of their religions and India is one of them. India is the mother of Hinduism. She is the only major country with Hindu identity. Its majority of the population is the Hindus. The Hindus maintained their identity despite facing different Muslim and Charistian ruling identities. “Hindutva” is the basic policy of many Hindu nationalists. This ideology is followed by different ethnic, religious and political groups in India. Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) is also highly inspired by Hindutva. This article is an attempt to provide a glimpse of Hindutva policy in India with special reference to current ruling government of Modi. The current study is based on secondary analysis in which the data are collected from different books, research reports and articles. This article will also point out the relations of India with its neighbors and its foreign policy.

Key Words: India, Hinduism, Hindutva, BJP, Modi, Foreign Policy

Background

Hinduism is a faith/religion which is difficult to define as a whole unified religion because it consists of amalgamation of different sects and faiths. Its followers (Hindus) have diverse practices and religious beliefs divided on regional, ethnic and linguistic bases. They worship different gods with different preferences to religious texts as a regional subgroup including different festivals based on preference of their region, state and locality. Such plural nature of this belief raises the question on common grounds of their Hindu nationalism and they answer that with the ideology of Hindutva (a unique concept based on the idea of polytheistic pluralistic religion). Hindutva is commonly characterized as a Hindu nationalist (right-wing religious) movement which is considered as self-contradictory phrase by some scholars. The philosophy of Hindutva is advocated by the “Sangh Parivar” a fusion of socio-political organization and in present time the most prominent political branch of this family is BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) (Mohapatra, 2016).

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It is important to comprehend the origin and evolution of this ideology and its political platform BJP to understand the influence of this ideology over national policies of India and its impacts on Indian neighbors.

Brief Historical Overview

Swami Dayananda, founder of Arya Samaj with the claim of expert interpreter of Vedas promoted the belief that actual superior Aryan race originally came from the Tibetan area are the Hindu people. All the Hindus living within the Indian subcontinent were of superior race and despite foreign invasions this superior race survived. Vinayak Damodar Sarvarkar (revolutionary of pre-independence era--- anti-thesis of Gandhian non-violence) played influential role in the support of militaristic movement in India and coined the term Hindutva. He faced imprisonments due to his ant-British attitude for crimes against the King of England (1910-1922 in the Andman Islands and 1922-1937 in Ratnagiri Maharashtra) and wrote his landmarks books during imprisonment that serve as a foundation for the Hindutva movement (Bhatt, 2001). "Hindutva: Who is a Hindu" was his most influential book published in 1928 in which Sarvarkar defined Hindutva ideology and differentiated between Hindutva and Hinduism (McKean, 1996).

To fight back against two threatening factors; to counter increasing foreign influence including British and fear of annexation by minorities were primary motivation behind the ideology of Hindutva evident from the text of Sarvarkar's speech in which he urged his followers to fight against external influences (to make 100% Indians---true Hindus).

Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar (a Hindutva leader) opinion over foreigner's presence in India is quoted below.

"The foreign races in Hindustan must adopt the Hindu culture and language--- must learn to respect and hold in worship the Hindu religion, must entertain no ideas but those of glorification of the Hindu race and culture and may only stay in the country wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation claiming nothing, not even citizen's rights."
(Golwalkar, 1939)

The Hindu Fundamentalist Organizations

Culture and religion are interchangeably used by the scholars in case of Hinduism making popular term "Cultural Nationalism" and the Hindu culture of region is Brahminical male culture. Native inhabitants of the region who don't pledge to Hindu religion hence culture is Hindu cannot claim belongingness to Hindustan. There are various right-wing Hindu organizations functioning under various names in India such as The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS established in mid-

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1920s), the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP established in 1964 and the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP established in late 1970s-----successor to Jan Sangh). Despite separate structure, work patterns and constitution, they support each other which resulted in Hindu electorate to back BJP in electoral process and parliament under all circumstances due to their same overlapping ideologies and agendas. RSS played a parenting role in politics and divided its parivar (family of organizations) as cultural RSS, religious VHP and political BJP on the basis of nature of work (Katju, 2003).

The Construction of Hindu Identity

Hinduism widely recognized as the notion of loose amalgamation of beliefs and practices for many years but to change this term to create Hindu religious identity VHP took a task to create a notion of syndicated Hinduism through searching historical founder (Rama), preachers in Indian Diaspora, among Dalits and Tribes and Ayodhya’s reference as Hindu Vatican (tried to pattern it on Christianity and Islam) (Thapar, 2003). There were also efforts to annul the caste system and other contradictory practices within Hinduism but violent activities over lower castes blown up the myth of tolerant Hinduism. VHP representative, Kailash Chandra writes in Hindu Vishwa that Christian missionaries tried to break away the tribal and out castes of Hindu society and then this task was undertaken by the Muslims (Chandra, 1990). But they cleverly included the large number of followers of Buddhism and Jainism in the fold of Hinduism although these religions evolved in reaction to the caste system violence. During Dr. Ambedkar’s struggle there were number of Dalits converted into Buddhism but these right wing supporters name them as Hindu as a claim that these philosophies (Buddhist and Jains) emerged within Hindu society (Katju, 2003).

They also increased their influence over tribal and homogenized their culture within Hindu fold. Tribal faced the shock of loss of natural resources due to rising developmental activities in modern India and to make the underprivileged through forcing them to join mainstream (which has no place for them and their cultural practices). Hindu fundamentalists tried to civilize them to overpower their culture; call them as residents of jungle (Vanyasis) rather than original inhabitants (Adiyasis) as latter conflicts with their version of history that followers of Hinduism are not invaders and these right wing organizations are working with the aim of Hinduising people in these tribal hamlets. They also brainwashed the tribal children in Hindu temples and residential school to accept Hindu way of life. In last decade, the Christian organizations in tribal areas were attacked by these fundamentalists with the notion that even act of by choice conversion to any foreign religion and their preaching is attack on Hinduism (Shah, 2004).

Conflicting Nationalism

Mahatma Gandhi's non-violence philosophy, Jawaharlal Nehru's early governance and secular Indian National Congress supported very different nationalism (religio-ethnic plurality, democratic socialist economic ideals with secularism---known as Nehru Consensus) contrary to militant and exclusionist philosophy of Hindutva (had some local support). Nehru consensus remained very popular in early decades after India's independence (Hibbard, 2010). During 1948-1950, RSS faced banned due to violent activities and suspicious affiliation with Gandhi's death and thousands of its members got arrested and other members continued underground operations (Hansen, 1999). After its restoration, RSS started to grow through its offshoots with the focus of reshaping society under the principles of Hinduism and took less militant stance in the leadership of Golwalker (did not support involvement of RSS in politics) (Mohapatra, 2016).

The principles of Hindutva were incorporated to the verge in quest of a secular democracy for several decades, but this Hindutva movement was ignored by the dominant legislature of Nehru and Congress. It is clearly evident from the struggle of RSS-based political party began in 1951 which failed to demonstrate its electoral power and it appears like there is no place for Hindutva in new secular democratic India (Hansen, 1999). But BJP in 1980s and 1990s introduced the political banner of Hindutva ideology in Indian politics. BJP challenged one party dominant model reigned by the congress and emerged as first long term opposition party in 1990s. BJP revived with inclusive identity agenda and gathered popular votes to sue its economic policy characteristics rather than simply Hindutva policy platform. Despite the fact that BJP support to anti-Muslim violence rewarded it with electoral success in mid-1990s such as Babri Mosque demolition. But the most successful and influential political tool of BJP in 2002 and 2014 was economics which resulted in the declining violence as Mr. Modi's speech's during campaign avoided communal topics and adopted a moderate approach instead militant Hindutva (Mohapatra, 2016).

Modi and Pragmatism in Indian Foreign and Economic Policy

Jawaharlal Nehru's moral posturing and idealism faced rejection with the view that India's reliance on his policy faced major failures in foreign policy and fortification of sacked policies. Nehru's overlooking in material interests and in focusing on power contributed in the doubts over his policies. But the post-Cold war pragmatic policy faced warm welcome as it represents the idea of emerging on world stage as materially powerful state. After Narendra Modi's premiership (2014), this pragmatism in Indian foreign policy has experienced its revival and departure of past Indian idealistic notions of Nehruvian consensus. Modi's pragmatic foreign policy approach will bring out self-constructive institutionalized ideas but it is very difficult that he will always keep aside his belief of Hindutva and complete move from strong foreign policy points in past. But to grasp

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significant position as a power in world politics and to pursue economic growth, India would focus on pragmatic policies and will avoid moral claims in international relations, alliances and treaties. There is shift in gravity of Indian foreign policy from idealism to realism. Despite the zealous Hindu nationalist in prime minister in offices, Indian foreign policy derived by the preservative national security and economic growth which might be because of the past sixty years policy developed a bureaucracy and intelligentsia that see Indian foreign policy making entirely different from the lens of Hindu nationalism (Mohapatra, 2016).

The BJP emerged as worthwhile party due to its economic liberalization policy which becomes the major challenge for BJP to prove itself on economic front through effectiveness of pro-market policies. There is need to take effective measures to satisfy rural population to hold long power and become next congress with long dynastic rule but there are more chances of a changing norm of two-party system (switching power forth and back between the two---Congress and BJP). On ideological front, there are various events which may cause change in diversity of votes for BJP because of crackdown on anti-nationalist, beef ban and other such communal violence practices because BJP lost Bihar and Delhi’s local elections in 2015 and these results indicate a tough fight in next national elections.

Modi’s Foreign Policy and Neighbors

There are always issues faced by the region in which smaller states have a powerful neighboring state (bigger in size and economy) such as India in South Asian region. To cater such powers foreign influential powers are cultivated such as China in present and United States in near past. China-US-Russia, all are facing tense relations with their neighbors such as India. India and Pakistan share a hostile history but recently Nepal is playing its China card through supporting her connectivity projects Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI) despite knowing Indian apprehensions and the new leadership (Prime Minister Increase Indian headache in near future). Despite good Dhaka-Delhi ties (under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina) there are some issues with India such as issue of illegal migrants including land boundary agreement and Dhaka’s support to BRI. Sri-Lanka has already Chinese submarines at its ports and is hub of the Chinese maritime Silk Road projects. Despite Indian Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement with India, Sri-Lanka has negotiation over Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with China. China also signed FTA with Maldives. Such rising influence of another powerful country in the region shows the mismanagement and miscalculations of Indian policies towards neighbors (Ranjan, 2017).

After coming in to power, Modi invited heads of SAARC member states to swearing in ceremony. Modi visited Nepal and Bhutan in 2014 to present a focused neighborhood first policy. His Bhutanese visit was termed by the media as charm offensive because Indian visit was an effort to check new formalizing ties between China-Bhutan including different deals option for Bhutan by India.

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During Modi's visit to Nepal his mantra warmed Nepal heart as he addressed the constituent assembly there. Different policy options were discussed including the electricity access to India by Nepal.

On Independence day in 2016, Modi's reference to a liberated Baluchistan to appease his political constituency; the issue of Uri attack in September, 2016; boycott of 19th SAARC summit by India and presence of the Indian spy Kalbhushan Jadhav worsened and complicated relationships between India and Pakistan (Ranjan, 2017).

Modi's agenda in his foreign policy was clearly evident with the development of bilateral relation with neighboring and border sharing states with Pakistan (Iran and Afghanistan) influenced Pakistan's position in the region such as planning to develop Chabahar port in response to development over Gwadar port to take share in international waters and counter Pakistan-China presence in international waters.

Discussion

In Indian politics, Hindutva approach revived in early 1990s and became the topic of discussion for scholars in the religious radical nationalism perspective. One popular scholarly perception about revival of Hindutva ideology has genesis in globalism because disrupting effects of globalism created gap for the extremist organization in political environment and equated it with radical regimes in Middle East. In global politics the resurgence of religious politics has become a trend such as group of conservative Christian in United States, revival of Hindutva in India and a group of conservative Muslim in Egypt (Kinnvall, 2006 & Hibbard, 2010).

Increased threat of minorities during 1980s and 1990s considered as a cause of reviving Hindu pride and identity, especially conversion issues in Meenakshipura (1981); violent riots in response to Sikh separatist movement in Punjab and frequent separatist demands in Kashmir encouraged Hindu nationalism. But the event paved the way and prepared political ground for rise of BJP was Ramjanambhoomi movement (to restore Babri Masjid as temple in Ayodhya). But the political approach of scholars gives different explanations such as congress decline (in 1970s especially in 1980s) created vacuum for another political power filled by the BJP as worthy opposition. There is another explanation that India has a sponsored-democracy where any party can get power with political patronage and ethnic parties in India has ability to cater political elites responsible for that patronage. BJP has all those skills to attract political patronage of elites (Mika & Singh, 1194; Chhibber, 1999, Chandra, 2004).

Despite diverse factors found in existing literature (as described above) are short-term factors identified by the scholars because BJP's economic policies is very important defining character behind the success of party and ideology of Hindu nationalism in long-term.

The fear of minorities in India rise after BJP assumed power which explains the cause of increased threat of minorities behind the revival of Hindutva. Minority

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fears get voice and reignited national debate over rising intolerance and communal violence in India. There were a number of activists from diverse professions raised their apprehensions in favor and in opposition to BJP and claimed that reason behind communal violence in India is religious diversity.

But there are two incidence of communal violence, have connections with Hindu Nationalist organizations and especially politically benefitted BJP. There were many incidents never turned violent despite the argument that Muslims and Hindus (old enemies) are existential threat to each other because there were no political supporters to exploit that situation in their favor in those circumstances. But BJP adopted communal violence as a political tool to boost their vote bank in the name of Hindu identity and portrayed minorities as existential threat to their identity which is clearly evident in case of Ayodhya movement (demolition of Babri Mosque in 1990s) and Gujrat riots in early 2000s (Hansen, 1999).

Despite the widely believed fact that BJP encouraged communal violence to receive electoral success at national level but after acquisition of political stage at national level, effects of violence begin to fade. Scholars believe that Mr. Modi adopted a moderate Hindutva ideology and hope that this trend of moderation will continue.

Conclusion

Modi’s assertive and accommodative foreign policy towards neighbors is mixture of realism and idealism principles, despite some scholars see his tactical policy as different or new but there are no remarkable shift in Indian regional policy and are continuous policy of predecessors rather than change.

The fundamental feature of the Modi Doctrine is India first based on strengthening national power with strategy of realistic commitment which doesn’t fit to a hard nationalist doctrine rather guided by the value “the entire world is our family”. The second important feature of his doctrine is building ties with neighbors (Neighborhoods). Thirdly he overcomes the hesitation history feature in Indian policy such as development of ties with Arab and Israel. Fourthly India shifted its policy doctrine as a rule maker rather than rule taker although developed ties with several major regional and global powers. Last but not least important feature of Modi’s doctrine is to engage Indian diaspora through strengthening ties with non residential Indians and Indian origin persons (community).

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