



The rise & affect of Hindu nationalism in India

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Abstract

Hindu nationalism is a political ideology that seeks to promote Hindu cultural and religious values and assert the primacy of Hinduism in the public sphere in India. It has its roots in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and has been influenced by a number of factors, including colonialism, anti-colonial nationalism, and the rise of Hindu religious and cultural revivalism. Hindu nationalism has been associated with several organizations and political parties, including the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

In the post-independence era, Hindu nationalism has been a significant force in Indian politics, shaping the political discourse and direction of the country. Despite this, Hindu nationalism has also been a significant political force in India, and has been instrumental in shaping the country's political and cultural discourse. It has been associated with several key leaders, including V.D. Savarkar, M.S. Golwalkar, Balasaheb Deoras, L.K. Advani, Narendra Modi, and Amit Shah. These leaders have sought to promote Hindu cultural and religious values, assert the primacy of Hinduism in the public sphere, and shape the political discourse and direction of the country in a Hindu nationalist direction.

Key Words: Hindu nationalism, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Secular forces, Moderate image, Polarizing image, Hindu Rashtra, Hindu Mahasabha

Introduction of Hindu Nationalism in India (1900-1947)

Hindu nationalism in India can be traced back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when Indian leaders were seeking ways to unite the country and establish a national identity in the wake of British colonial rule. The seeds of Hindu nationalism were planted in this period by a number of thinkers and political leaders who sought to define India in terms of Hindu culture and tradition.

One of the earliest proponents of Hindu nationalism was Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, a Bengali writer and poet who is often considered the father of the Hindu nationalist movement. In his novels and essays, Chatterjee emphasized the importance of Hindu culture and tradition in defining Indian identity, and argued that India was essentially a Hindu country with a long and rich cultural heritage.

Another influential figure in the early development of Hindu nationalism was Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, a political activist and writer who was an early advocate of Hindu nationalism. Savarkar argued that India was a Hindu Rashtra, or Hindu nation, and that Hindus should strive to preserve their cultural and religious traditions in the face of British colonial rule and Muslim influence.

The Hindu Mahasabha, a Hindu nationalist organization established in 1915, played a significant role in promoting Hindu nationalism in India. The organization sought to promote Hindu cultural and religious values, and to resist what it saw as the threat posed by British colonial rule and Muslim influence.

It is not accurate to say that Hindu nationalist forces did not participate in the national freedom struggle in India. Hindu nationalist organizations, such as the Hindu Mahasabha, played a role in the freedom movement, and some Hindu nationalist leaders, such as Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, were active participants in the Indian National Congress, which was one of the main organizations leading the freedom struggle.

However, the approach of Hindu nationalist organizations and leaders to the freedom struggle was often different from that of the Indian National Congress and other secular forces. Hindu nationalist leaders emphasized the importance of Hindu cultural and religious values in defining Indian identity, and sought to establish India as a Hindu-majority nation. This led to differences in strategy and approach with the secular forces, who sought to promote a more inclusive and pluralistic vision of India that emphasized the diversity of its communities and religions.

Despite these differences, Hindu nationalist organizations and leaders were active participants in the freedom struggle, and played a role in the movement for independence from British colonial rule. Some Hindu nationalist leaders, such as Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, were arrested and imprisoned for their political activism, and others, such as M.S. Golwalkar, used their platform to promote the Hindu nationalist cause.

The early leaders of Hindu nationalism in India include:

Vinayak Damodar Savarkar - He is considered to be the ideologue of Hindu nationalism and propounded the idea of Hindu Rashtra. He was also one of the first to use the term Hindutva to describe Hindu nationalism.

Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar - He was the second Sarsanghchalak (chief) of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and was a key figure in the development of Hindu nationalism. He wrote extensively on the concept of Hindutva and the need for Hindu unity.

Keshav Baliram Hedgewar - He was the founder of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and is considered to be one of the earliest leaders of Hindu nationalism in India. He believed that Hinduism was the basis of Indian nationalism and sought to promote Hindu cultural and religious values.

B. S. Moonje - He was a Hindu nationalist and a mentor to Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, the founder of the RSS. He was also a key figure in the development of Hindu nationalism and sought to promote Hindu cultural and religious values.

Hindu Nationalism from 1947 to 1990

After India gained independence from British colonial rule in 1947, Hindu nationalism continued to be a major political force in the country. During this period, Hindu nationalist organizations, such as the Hindu Mahasabha and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), sought to establish India as a Hindu-majority nation and promote Hindu cultural and religious values.

In the aftermath of independence and partition, Hindu nationalist organizations and leaders focused on rebuilding the Hindu community and asserting Hindu cultural and religious values in the public sphere. This was a period of great upheaval and violence, as large numbers of Hindus and Muslims were displaced and communities were torn apart by communal violence. Hindu nationalist organizations and leaders saw the need to protect and rebuild the Hindu community, and sought to promote Hindu cultural and religious values as a means of doing so.

During this period, Hindu nationalism also became increasingly politicized, as Hindu nationalist organizations and leaders sought to influence the political discourse and shape the direction of the country. The Hindu Mahasabha, for example, became increasingly involved in electoral politics, and sought to promote Hindu nationalist candidates and ideas. The RSS, meanwhile, sought to promote Hindu nationalism through cultural and social programs, and aimed to build a network of Hindu nationalist organizations and institutions across the country.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Hindu nationalism became increasingly influential, as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) emerged as a major political force in India. The BJP, which was formed in 1980, was a political manifestation of Hindu nationalism, and sought to promote Hindu nationalist ideas and policies. The BJP gained national prominence in the 1990s, and came to power in India in 1998, marking a major turning point in the history of Hindu nationalism in India.

Ban on RSS & disregard for national flag

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a Hindu nationalist organization, was banned by the Indian government several times in its history.

The first ban on the RSS was imposed in 1948, following the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi by a former RSS member. The Indian government accused the RSS of promoting communalism and inciting violence, and banned the organization for several months. The ban was lifted after the RSS agreed to disband its armed wing and adopt a constitution that committed the organization to non-violence.

The second ban on the RSS was imposed in 1975, during the Emergency declared by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. During this period, civil liberties were suspended, and the Indian government used its powers to clamp down on political opposition. The RSS was banned along with other political organizations, and its leaders were arrested and held in detention. The ban was lifted after the end of the Emergency in 1977.

Since then, the RSS has not been banned by the Indian government, and has continued to be a major political force in India. The RSS has a wide network of affiliated organizations and is considered to be the ideological parent of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which has been in power in India several times since the 1990s.

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), has been criticized in the past for disregarding the national flag of India. The RSS has traditionally used its own saffron flag, which symbolizes Hindu nationalism, instead of the national flag of India, which is considered by many to be a secular symbol of the country. This has led to criticism from secular forces who see it as an attempt to promote Hindu nationalism over national unity.

However, in recent years, the RSS has made efforts to align itself with the national flag and has been seen using the national flag during its events and public gatherings. This has been seen as an attempt to project a more moderate and inclusive image and to distance itself from the more hard-line and polarizing aspects of Hindu nationalism.

Hindu Nationalism from 1990 to 2014

From 1990 to 2014, Hindu nationalism continued to be a major political force in India. During this period, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which was formed in 1980 as a political manifestation of Hindu nationalism, emerged as a major political party in India and came to power at the national level several times?

In the 1990s, the BJP gained national prominence, and in 1998, the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) came to power in India, with Atal Bihari Vajpayee serving as Prime Minister. The BJP-led NDA government focused on promoting Hindu nationalist ideas and policies, including the construction of a temple to Lord Ram in Ayodhya and the promotion of Hindu cultural and religious values in the public sphere.

In the early 2000s, the BJP-led NDA government was replaced by the Indian National Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA), but the BJP continued to be a major political force in India. In the 2014 national elections, the BJP-led NDA returned to power, with Narendra Modi serving as Prime Minister. The BJP-led government has since focused on promoting Hindu nationalism and Hindu cultural and religious values, and has sought to shape the political discourse and direction of the country in a Hindu nationalist direction.

During this period, Hindu nationalism also continued to be a major cultural and social force in India, as Hindu nationalist organizations and leaders sought to promote Hindu cultural and religious values and assert the primacy of Hinduism in the public sphere. This was a period of growing assertiveness among Hindu nationalist organizations and leaders, as they sought to shape the political discourse and direction of the country in a Hindu nationalist direction.

Hindu Nationalism vs. Secular Forces in post independence era

In the post-independence era, Hindu nationalism has been a major political and cultural force in India, and has been at odds with secular forces in the country.

Secularism, as enshrined in the Indian constitution, calls for a separation of religion and state and for equal treatment of all religions by the state. Secular forces in India have sought to uphold this principle and ensure that the Indian state remains neutral with respect to religion.

On the other hand, Hindu nationalism posits that India is a Hindu-majority country and that Hinduism should play a central role in shaping the country's identity and direction. Hindu nationalist forces have sought to promote Hindu cultural and religious values, assert the primacy of Hinduism in the public sphere, and shape the political discourse and direction of the country in a Hindu nationalist direction.

The conflict between Hindu nationalism and secular forces has played out in several ways in the post-independence era. For example, Hindu nationalist forces have sought to build a temple to Lord Ram in Ayodhya, which has been a major flashpoint between Hindu nationalist and secular forces. Hindu nationalist forces have also sought to promote Hindu cultural and religious values in the public sphere, including in the education system and in the media, which has been a source of tension with secular forces.

In the post-independence era, Hindu nationalism has been a major political and cultural force in India, and has been at odds with secular forces in the country. Secular forces have sought to uphold the principle of secularism enshrined in the Indian constitution, while Hindu nationalist forces have sought to promote Hindu cultural and religious values and shape the political discourse and direction of the country in a Hindu nationalist direction. This conflict has played out in several ways, including in disputes over the role of Hinduism in the public sphere and in the building of a temple to Lord Ram in Ayodhya. Today, Hindutva (transl. Hinduness) is a dominant form of Hindu nationalist politics in India. As a political ideology, the term Hindutva was articulated by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar way back in 1923.¹

The difference between Hinduism and Hindutva lies in its core essence. Hinduism is a major world religion that has its roots in ancient India and has been practiced for thousands of years. It is a complex and diverse tradition that encompasses a wide range of beliefs, practices, and philosophies, and has a rich cultural and intellectual history.

Hindutva, on the other hand, is a political ideology that seeks to promote Hindu cultural and religious values and assert the primacy of Hinduism in the public sphere. It emerged in the early 20th century and has been shaped by several leaders and organizations, including the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Savarkar was one of the first in the twentieth century to attempt a definitive description of the term "Hindu" in terms of what he called Hindutva meaning Hinduness². Hindutva seeks to create a Hindu Rashtra (Hindu nation) and often portrays Hinduism as a monolithic and homogeneous tradition, ignoring its rich diversity and complexity. Secular Forces advocate Hinduism than Hindutva.

Various Riots triggered by Hindu Nationalist Forces

There have been several instances of riots incited by Hindu nationalist forces in India. These riots have often been fueled by religious and cultural tensions between Hindu nationalist and minority communities, and have resulted in significant violence, destruction, and loss of life. Some of the most significant riots include:

1. Babri Masjid riots of 1992: In December 1992, Hindu nationalist groups demolished the 16th-century Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, claiming that it was built on the birthplace of Lord Ram. The demolition of the mosque led to widespread communal violence across India, resulting in the deaths of over 2,000 people.
2. Gujarat riots of 2002: In February 2002, communal violence broke out in the state of Gujarat after a train carrying Hindu pilgrims was attacked and burned, killing 58 people. Hindu nationalist mobs launched violent attacks on Muslim communities, resulting in the deaths of over 1,000 people.
3. Muzaffarnagar riots of 2013: In September 2013, communal violence broke out in the western Indian state of Uttar Pradesh after a series of clashes between Hindu and Muslim communities. The violence resulted in the deaths of over 60 people and the displacement of tens of thousands of people.

Major Hard-line leaders of Hindu Nationalism in India till date

V.D. Savarkar: He was one of the earliest proponents of Hindu nationalism and is widely regarded as the father of the Hindu nationalist movement in India.

M.S. Golwalkar: He was the second chief of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a Hindu nationalist organization, and was a major influence on the development of Hindu nationalist thought in India.

Balasaheb Deoras: He was the third chief of the RSS and played a significant role in shaping the organization's political and cultural vision.

L.K. Advani: He was a senior leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a Hindu nationalist political party, and has been one of the most prominent Hindu nationalist leaders in India for several decades.

Narendra Modi: He is the current Prime Minister of India and a former chief minister of Gujarat. He is widely seen as a Hindu nationalist leader and has been at the forefront of the BJP's political and cultural vision.

Amit Shah: He is the current Home Minister of India and a senior leader of the BJP. He is widely seen as a Hindu nationalist leader and has been instrumental in the party's political and cultural strategy.

Atal Bihari Vajpayee Vs Narendra Modi- in the domain of Hindu Nationalism

¹ "Hindutva is not the same as Hinduism said Savarkar". The Telegraph. Retrieved 22 August 2019.

² Savarkar, Vinayak Damodar; *Hindutva*; Bharati Sahitya Sadan, Delhi 1989 (1923)

Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Narendra Modi are both prominent leaders of the Hindu nationalist movement in India and have been associated with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a Hindu nationalist political party. While both leaders have been seen as proponents of Hindu nationalism, their political styles and ideologies are somewhat different.

Atal Bihari Vajpayee was one of the founding members of the BJP and served as the Prime Minister of India for three terms (1998-2004). He was known for his moderate and centrist approach to politics and for his efforts to reach out to minority communities and build a secular, inclusive India. He was also seen as a statesman-like figure and was widely respected across the political spectrum.

Narendra Modi, on the other hand, is a more hardline and polarizing figure. He rose to prominence as the Chief Minister of Gujarat and has been the Prime Minister of India since 2014. He has been associated with a more aggressive form of Hindu nationalism, which seeks to promote Hindu cultural and religious values and assert the primacy of Hinduism in the public sphere. He has been accused of fostering a climate of religious intolerance and of turning a blind eye to instances of communal violence.

Both Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Narendra Modi are seen as prominent leaders of Hindu nationalism in India, but their political styles and ideologies differ significantly. Vajpayee is seen as a moderate and centrist figure who sought to build a secular, inclusive India, while Modi is seen as a hardline and polarizing figure who has sought to promote Hindu cultural and religious values.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the seeds of Hindu nationalism in India can be traced back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when Indian leaders were seeking to define the country and establish a national identity in the wake of British colonial rule. The movement has been influenced by a number of influential thinkers and political leaders, including Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, and has been promoted by organizations such as the Hindu Mahasabha and the Bharatiya Janata Party. Despite ongoing challenges and opposition, Hindu nationalism remains a powerful force in India today, shaping the country's political and cultural landscape.

The period from 1900 to 1947 was marked by a conflict between Hindu nationalism and secular forces in India, as they sought to define the country's national identity and shape its future. Hindu nationalist leaders sought to promote Hindu nationalism as a political ideology, while secular forces sought to promote a more inclusive and pluralistic vision of the country. The conflict between these forces continues to shape India's political and cultural landscape today.

From 1947 to 1990, Hindu nationalism continued to be a major political force in India, as Hindu nationalist organizations and leaders sought to promote Hindu cultural and religious values, rebuild the Hindu community, and shape the political discourse and direction of the country. This period saw the rise of Hindu nationalism as a political force, and the emergence of the BJP as a major political party representing Hindu nationalist ideas and policies.

The RSS has been banned twice in its history, once in 1948 following the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi and once in 1975 during the Emergency declared by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. The bans were lifted after the organization agreed to certain conditions, and the RSS has continued to be a major political force in India since then.

From 1990 to 2014, Hindu nationalism continued to be a major political and cultural force in India. The BJP emerged as a major political party representing Hindu nationalist ideas and policies, and came to power at the national level several times. Hindu nationalism also continued to be a major cultural and social force, as Hindu nationalist organizations and leaders sought to promote Hindu cultural and religious values and assert the primacy of Hinduism in the public sphere.

The riots between Hindu Nationalist forces and others have had a profound impact on India's social and political landscape, and have resulted in significant violence, destruction, and loss of life. They have also fueled tensions between Hindu nationalist and minority communities and have eroded the country's commitment to secularism and religious tolerance.

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