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## Hindutva, Neoliberalism and the Reinventing of India

By Kalim SIDDIQUI <sup>†</sup>

**Abstract.** The 2014 parliamentary election in India reduced Congress party to merely 44 seats in the lower house, big blow for a party whose history is integral the country's founding narrative. In the last parliamentary election the Congress party polled only 19.3% of the votes declining from 28.6% in 2009, while on the other hand the main right wing party i.e. BJP won 282 parliamentary seats and 31% of the national votes. The extreme right-wing organisations have undoubtedly become the central pole of Indian politics. Moreover, its recent success in Uttar Pradesh provincial election, which is one of the most populated province with 215 million inhabitants, is the strongest evidence yet of the broader shift to the right and the BJP's victory in UP state strengthens this shift. This paper intends to study the recent rise of extreme right-wing Hindu organisations in India. Most prominent among these organisations are RSS, BJP, VHP, Bajang Dal and Shiv Sena. However, all of them work together under the philosophy of Hindutva (i.e. Hindu-ness) and are rabidly anti-minority in their stance. The aim of this study is to highlight the recent rise in extreme right-wing Hindu organisations and to examine their ideas and philosophy regarding Indian history and culture. It is also useful to set this against a global context in which divisive and ultra-nationalist forces are on the rise within Europe and Donald Trump has assumed the US presidency. The study argues that the adoption of neoliberal economic policy in 1991 has increased GDP, but hardly any expansion in employment, which is known as 'jobless growth'. The study also finds the far right encroachment into India's liberal institutions and it seems that Indian polity is undergoing a historically unprecedented change with extreme-right to dominance into vast areas of ideology, economy and culture.

**Keywords:** India, Hindutva, Neo-liberalism, Secularism and minorities.

**JEL.** N30, N35, N40.

### 1. Introduction

This paper examines the socio-economic basis of right-wing political activism by Hindu organisations in India. Most prominent among these organisations are RSS, BJP, VHP, Bajang Dal and Shiv Sena. However, all of them work together under the philosophy of Hindutva (i.e. Hindu-ness) and are rabidly anti-minority in their stance. Since the BJP (Bhartiya Janata Party) came to power in India in 2014, its ministers and senior party leaders have been coming out in support of the *Hindu rastra* (Hindu nation). They have stepped up their campaign against mixed-marriage with Muslims and have sought to rewrite textbooks to reflect the ideas of the RSS (RastriyaSevak Sangh, literally the Association of National Volunteers) (Sen, 2015). This study intends to analyse the ideas and philosophy of the RSS on the basis of the organisation's publications and public statements made by its leader.

The aim of this study is to highlight the recent rise in extreme right-wing Hindu organisations and to examine their ideas and philosophy regarding Indian history and culture. It is also useful to set this against a global context in which divisive and ultra-nationalist forces are on the rise within Europe and Donald Trump has

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assumed the US presidency. Therefore, it is important to study Hindu nationalists whose divisive views are well known. In the past Hindutva organisations have campaigned against minorities and have also often been found to have been involved in violent attacks against them and in propagating false information to create further misconceptions about these groups. For this reason, minorities in India feel insecure. (Sen, 2015)

The 2014 parliamentary election reduced Congress party to merely 44 seats in the lower house, big blow for a party whose history is integral the country's founding narrative. In the last parliamentary election the Congress party polled only 19.3% of the votes declining from 28.6% in 2009, while on the other hand the main right wing party i.e. BJP won 282 parliamentary seats and 31% of the national votes. The extreme right-wing organisations have undoubtedly become the central pole of the Indian politics. Moreover, its recent success in Uttar Pradesh provincial election, which is one of the most populated province with 215 million inhabitants, is the strongest evidence yet of the broader shift to the right and the BJP's victory in UP state strengthens this shift.

The BJP is the political front of the RSS and most of the BJP leaders, including the Prime Minister Narendra Modi, have been members of the RSS. Even before becoming Prime Minister, Modi had reaffirmed his commitment to Hindutva: "The nation and Hindus are one. Only if Hindus develop will the nation develop. Unity of Hindus will strengthen the nation" (*Organiser* February 11, 2007 cited in Noorani, 2015). BJP and RSS are fully committed to the ideology of Hindutva, which is deeply rooted in hatred of India's religious minorities, particularly Muslims and Christians. At present, the RSS has millions of members spread throughout most parts of India with more than 50,000 *shakhas* (branches). It also runs thousands of schools where young minds are poisoned with hate against Muslims. In Uttar Pradesh State alone, there are some 20,000 RSS-controlled *shishumandir* schools which teach that the Muslims and Christians are unreliable people stirring up hatred against both Muslims and Christians, with children being taught that both these groups are foreigners and outsiders. (Oza, 2007)

This study is important because the RSS is too politically significant to be ignored and since its political wing has come to power i.e. the BJP attacks against Muslims have risen sharply. Cultural issues such as cow slaughter and the building of a Ram temple at Ayodhya have been raised again by the RSS as a means of dividing communities and keeping Muslims in a state of constant fear and insecurity. The RSS/BJP also claims that mosques at *Kashi* (also known as Varanasi) and *Mathura* are disputed places of worship.

Since the BJP came to power in May 2014, religious minorities have begun to feel more insecure and vulnerable. Even government ministers and members of parliament have openly aired communalist (i.e. reactionary and divisive) sentiments, making hate speeches and inciting violence against minorities. In a recent public meeting, the BJP Member of Parliament Sakshi Maharaj is reported to have said that "Good days have come; now those with four wives and 40 children should not be allowed in the country" (cited in Vijayan & Gabriel, 2015: 22). The BJP leaders continue to spread false information about Muslims. They are also threatening to launch a *ghar-wapsi* (return home) programme, i.e. enforced conversion of religious minorities back to Hinduism. As London based Economist (2015) commented:

The BJP's election victory last year was attributed to its promise of competence and good governance. It persuaded enough voters that the Hindu-nationalist part of its agenda and the shadow over [...] past allegations of his [Modi's] complicity in anti-Muslim violence in the state of Gujarat in 2002 were marginal. Now many worry that Hindu nationalism is a pillar of Mr Modi's vision, after all (Economist, 2015:71).

The BJP's *ghar wapsi* (return to your home) campaign seems to be a contemporary version of the Shudhi (purification) movement. Swami Dayananda, who started Arya Samaj in 1875, organised Shudhi rituals and was seen as the

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architect of Hindu revivalism. The Arya Samaj attempted the reconversion of untouchables (now known as Dalits) who had become Muslims or Christians in Punjab. For Swami Dayananda, the Hindu Varna system was a model for social cohesion to which each caste should adhere, including Dalits, after they underwent the process of Shudhi (Jaffrelot, 1996).

The problem of communalism<sup>2</sup> in India can be understood as a problem of community relation between Hindus and the Muslim minority. Prejudice and violence amongst India's religious communities did not decline after the creation of Pakistan and independence (Siddiqui, 2013). If anything, the task of reassessing this situation and looking for a deeper understanding of it is even more important than it was previously. In the Indian context, communalism is defined as the 'political use' of religion. The paper seeks to examine why religious identity in India became so politicised in the late 1980s. Communalism is very much a ruling class politics, as it reflects an underlying relationship between class and power relations. The struggle against communalism should be linked with a much wider struggle against the existing social order, as Singh (1990:19) stresses that, "Communalism in contemporary India, as ideology and practice, is above all an aspect of the politics of the ruling classes in a society with a massive feudal-colonial inheritance, deep religious divisions, and undergoing its own, historically specific form of capitalist development".

Also we should not ignore the fact that since the 1980s socio-economic changes have taken place in the northern Indian cities, where a sizeable Muslim population live and work in handicrafts and small-scale industries. Some members of this community have migrated to the Middle East where the demand for their products has increased since the oil boom in that region. These developments have disturbed traditional patterns in which Muslim artisans were dependent on Hindu traders, both to sell their finished products and to provide them with the capital they needed. The fact that some Muslim artisans have become independent entrepreneurs certainly exacerbated the antagonism between Hindus and Muslims. The local Hindu elites saw this changing situation as a threat and religion was used as a convenient tool with which to mobilise people (Hasan, 1988).

However, despite these economic improvements for some Muslims in a few urban centres, socio-economic conditions for the vast majority of Muslims have deteriorated. For example, the Justice Sachar Committee Report found that socio-economic conditions for the Muslim community in India are abysmally low, marginally above that of Dalits and worse than backward castes. The Sachar Committee Report clearly indicates that Indian Muslims suffer 'socioeconomic deprivation'. The Report particularly highlighted the under-representation of Muslims in government administrative services, police, and education, and their low levels of access to health facilities (Noorani, 2014). This under-representation seems to be a conscious effort by the government to deprive them and exclude them from the government's beneficial social and economic policies fearing that Hindu extremists might see this as appeasement of Muslims (Oza, 2007).

For example, the Hindutva bogey of Muslim appeasement has no factual basis, as socio-economic indicators show that Muslims are far below the national average; and in education and health specifically, this community's performance is the worst, but the government has taken no steps to address this. The BJP government totally disregards such facts and common sense but they continue to be touted in RSS *shakhas* and *boudhikbaitaks*. Whatever Prime Minister Modi says about Muslim appeasement is the result of his being a 'Hindu nationalist' and having been groomed as a political leader by Guru Golwalkar, the second supremo of the RSS, also referred to as the 'Guru of Hate' (Noorani, 2015).

<sup>2</sup>Communalism is an extreme right wing politics, which is based on the idea that religion is the principal basis of the organising society.

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Narendra Modi had only been Chief Minister of Gujarat for four months when the Godhra train incident occurred in February 2002, and this killing of dozens of Hindus triggered anti-Muslim violence. He had been dispatched to replace the sitting BJP Chief Minister, in order to stem the slide in support. Before that, Modi had been a party strategist, but had never been fielded in electoral politics and had no experience of governance. The BJP has long been accused of encouraging religious conflicts in Gujarat state to win votes. Paul Brass (2006a) observed that in 1990-91 the BJP and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) played a significant role in deliberately instigated violence in north India. In 1990, the BJP President L.K. Advani went on a Rathayatra (a "chariot" procession) across several states, triggering riots in its wake. Using religious mobilisation for political ends, the BJP went from practically no presence in the Indian parliament in 1984 to becoming the second largest party by 1991. However, the manipulation of incidents of violence for electoral gain is not unique to the BJP. Brass found that it was already a central feature of Indian politics by the 1980s, with Indira Gandhi adept at the "politics of crisis" (Brass, 2006a).

At present, India faces an immense threat from fascism in the guise of Hindu nationalism. The ideology of Hindutva has received widespread coverage in the press in recent years, but it is a crude attempt to camouflage upper-caste Hindu groups, who have used religion as a tool to maintain their hegemony over the vast majority of the Indian people. In terms of their everyday experience, there is virtually nothing which would be common to all Hindus and to talk about one single 'Hindu community' is misleading. Brahminical revivalism began in the 8th century to the establishment of the Sultanates by the 12th century, the hegemonic cultures in India were Maurya (Buddhist) (5th century BCE-8th century CE), the Sultanates (1206-1526), the Mughals (1526-1757) and the British (1757-1947). Most Buddhists were converted to Hinduism and yet we are told that Hinduism is very tolerant religion. During British rule, in the census the tribal peoples were put into a separate category as following an 'animistic' religion; however, after independence this category disappeared from government records by the time of the 1951 census, and tribal peoples who had not converted to Christianity were recorded by the government as Hindus (Singh, 2015).

Also we should not ignore the fact that since the 1980s socio-economic changes have taken place in the northern Indian cities, where a sizeable Muslim population live and work in handicrafts and small-scale industries. Some members of this community have migrated to the Middle East where the demand for their products has increased since the oil boom in that region. These developments have disturbed traditional patterns in which Muslim artisans were dependent on Hindu traders, both to sell their finished products and to provide them with the capital they needed. The fact that some Muslim artisans have become independent entrepreneurs certainly exacerbated the antagonism between Hindus and Muslims. The local Hindu elites saw this changing situation as a threat and religion was used as a convenient tool with which to mobilise people (Hasan, 1988).

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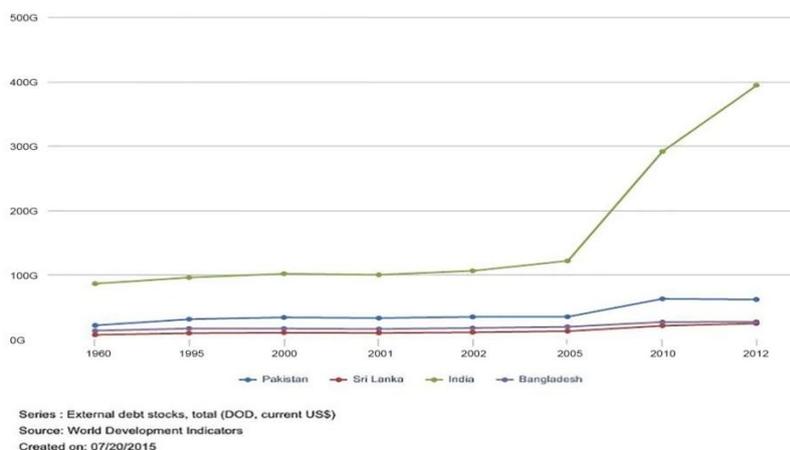
## 2. Economic Crisis and Neoliberal Reforms

When India gained independence, the industrial bourgeoisie supported the Bombay Plan as a blueprint for India's modernisation with active state intervention in the economy, especially in key areas such as infrastructure and education. Public investments were also seen necessary to build irrigation, electricity, and steel industries, a policy known as 'import-substitution industrialisation'. However, the deepening crisis in the late 1960s in the form of slowing growth rates, rising deficits and external debts (see Figure 1) led to the progressive de-regulation of the Indian economy with the aim of spurring growth and expanding the narrow growth market (Siddiqui, 2014a).

The 1980s witnessed the coming to maturity of India's bourgeoisie, who was initially sceptical towards foreign capital and competition. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Indian ruling elites also started to look for closer integration with global capitalism. By the late 1980s levels of public debts rose to unprecedented levels (see Figure 1) and also India experienced then sharp decline in exports and balance of payments crisis. To resolve it, the government decided to approach international financial institutions including IMF (Siddiqui, 2015a). An IMF loan was sought in 1991 and, in return, India was asked to make changes to its economic policy and the country has to adopt neoliberal policies also known as 'Structural Adjustment Programmes'.

With the adoption of neoliberalism, the Indian economy was opened up, imports were liberalised and taxes on capital were reduced. As a result, in the period from 1991 to 2001 GDP growth increased by 5.7% annually (see Figure 2), which shows no significant increase over that of 1980s. With the adoption of neoliberal economic reforms, the inflows of foreign capital have rapidly increased in India (Siddiqui, 2017).

As a result, in the period from 1991 to 2001 GDP growth increased by 5.7% annually (See Figure 2), which shows no significant increase over that of 1980s. With the adoption of neoliberal economic reforms, the inflows of foreign capital have rapidly increased in India as shown in the Figure 3. The consumers price have risen sharply, however, since 2010 it has slightly declined (as shown in Figure 4). More disturbing is that since 1997, the agriculture and manufacturing sectors, which account for more than four-fifths of India's workforce, have only grown 2.3% and 4.5% respectively, compared to the 11.5% increase in the financial services per year (Siddiqui, 2015b).



**Figure 1.** External Debt Stocks, (in current \$ US)  
 Source: World Development Indicator (2015) The World Bank.

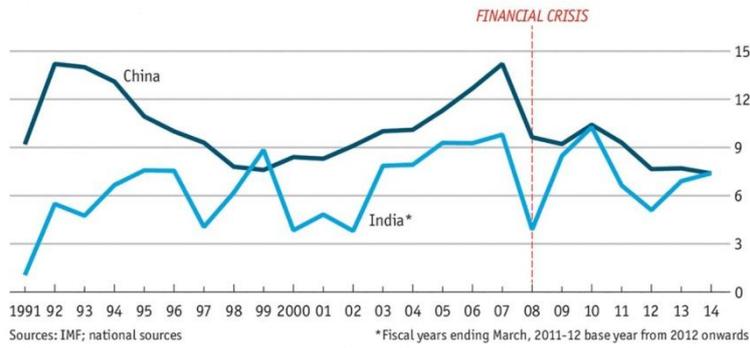


Figure 2. GDP annual growth in India and China, 1991-2014 (in %).

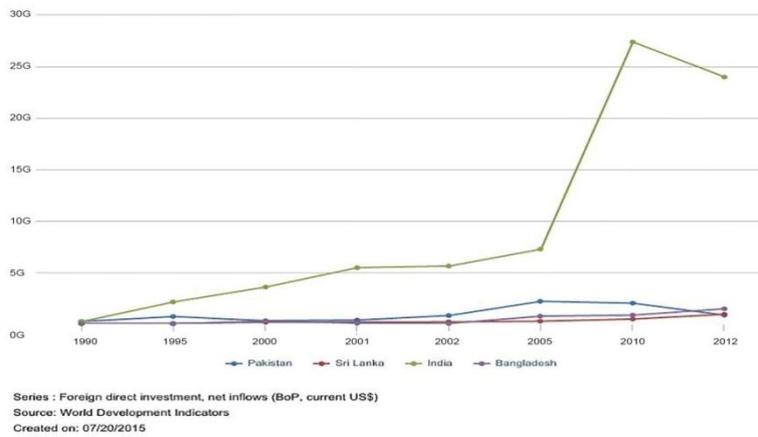


Figure 3. Foreign Direct Investment, net inflows (BoP, current US\$)  
Source: World Development Indicator (2015), Washington DC: The World Bank.

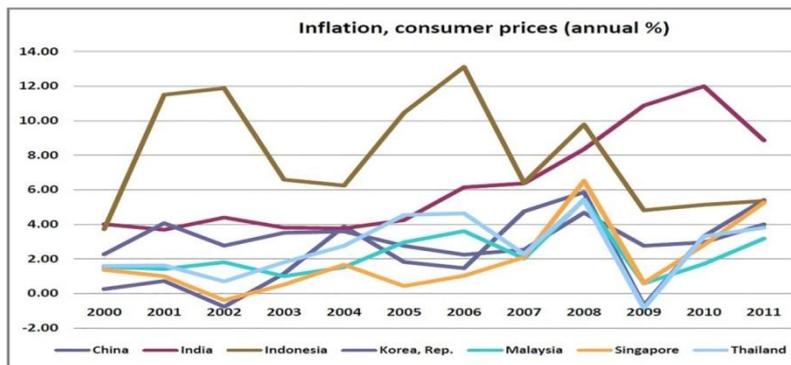
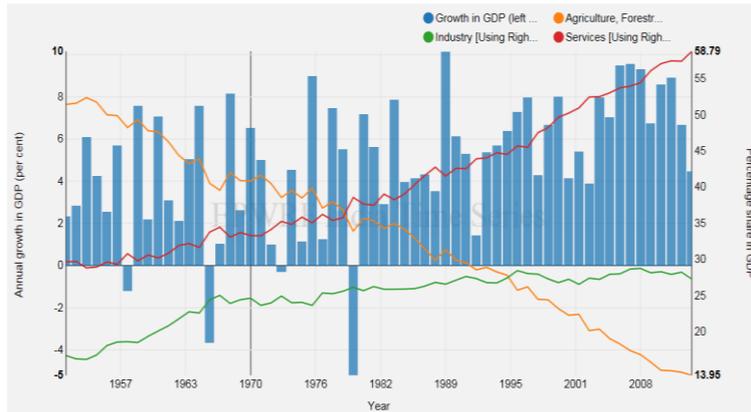
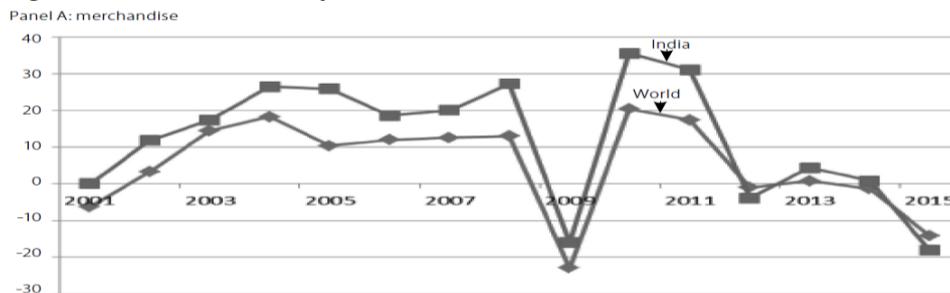


Figure 4. Inflation, consumer prices (annual %)  
Source: IMF, national sources.

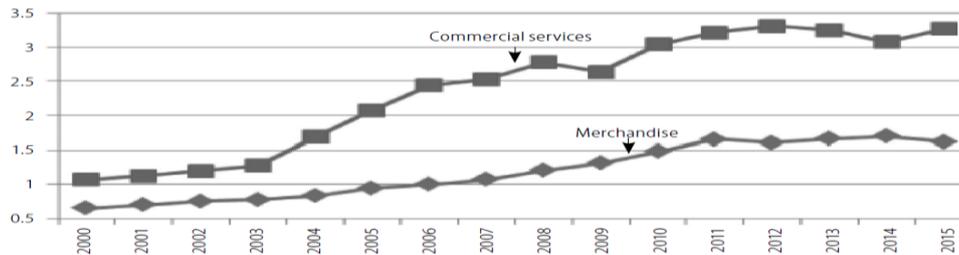
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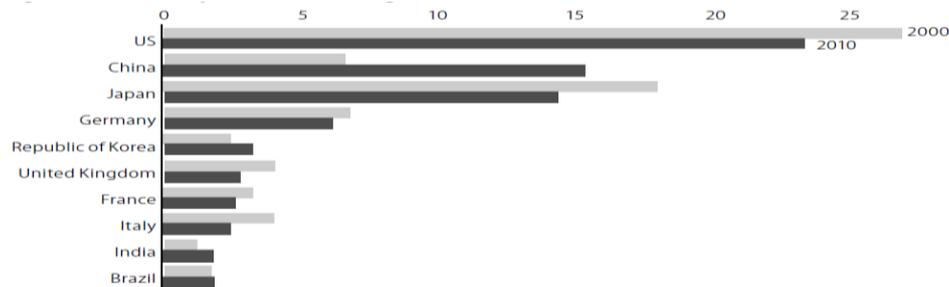
**Figure 5.** Growth and Sectoral Share in GDP (2004-05 series) at constant prices  
**Source:** Economic and Political Weekly, EPWRF India Time Series Database, [Retrieved from].



**Figure 6.** Annual Merchandise Export Growth Rate of India and the World from 2001 to 2015  
**Source:** Nagaraj, (2017:63).



**Figure 7.** India's Share in Global Trade  
**Source:** Nagaraj, (2017:62).



**Figure 8.** World's Top 10 Manufacturing Nations, 2000-2010  
**Source:** UNIDO's International Yearbook of Industrial Statistics, 2012.

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More disturbing is that since 1997, the agriculture and manufacturing sectors, which account for more than four-fifths of India's workforce, have only grown 2.3% and 4.5% respectively, compared to the 11.5% increase in the financial services per year (see Figure 5) (Siddiqui, 2015b). Within the primary sector, agriculture continues to account for 50% of the workforce, even though its share of GDP is now around only 10% (see Table 1). For the last two decades, agrarian crisis across many parts of the country has impacted adversely on the farmers and rural workers. Services activities recently include advance services, which accounts for more than 60% of the GDP (Siddiqui, 2016a). We have had two years of the Modi government, if we assess back to what has changed. On the economic front, it is clear that very little has changed for the majority of the population. Investment rates are still down, unemployment has increased and rural real wages are falling, and material insecurities of crucial groups such as farmers and informal workers are actually increasing. In order to improve on these indicators, the government would require a drastic change of economic policy direction, which seems unlikely from the Modi government.

**Table 1.** *Structural Change in the Indian Economy*

Period (3-years average)	Investment rate	Percent of GDP		
		Share of primary sector	Share of secondary sector	Share of tertiary sector
1950-52	15.5	59.0	13.4	27.6
1960-62	19.4	53.1	17.3	29.6
1970-72	23.8	46.6	20.4	33.0
1980-82	22.0	41.3	21.8	36.9
1990-92	26.0	34.4	24.0	41.6
2000-02	26.2	26.1	24.7	49.2
2008-10	30.2	17.9	25.3	56.8
2012-14	31.4	12.8	26.4	60.6

**Source:** CSO, National Accounts Statistics, various years, Government of India, New Delhi.

The government has not paid much attention in recent decades to demand-side constraints, mainly focusing on supply-side constraints to alter the slow rate of industrialisation on the recommendations of the IMF and World Bank. We should not ignore the changing nature of the composition of both Indian and foreign markets. The reasons for the slow growth of industries could also explain lack of job creation. The sectoral shift in favour of services and economic liberalisation means the further opening up of Indian markets has led to the increase in imports of goods especially for the richer sections of society. As shown in Figure 6 that the annual merchandise export growth Rate of India has risen. However, it is very much associated with the world's economic growth and demands. India's Share in global trade has risen, (Siddiqui, 2016b) but the country is still at the bottom of the world's top ten manufacturing nations, just slightly above Brazil. (See Figure 7 and 8) Increased reliance on exports would mean Indian industries have to produce goods that are in demand on the world market, manufactured using modern technology, which is often labour-saving. Increasing reliance on MNCs, which employ capital saving technology and high import intensity of domestic manufacturing, reduces the employment elasticity of growth.

During the second term of the Congress Party government, the economic crisis increased. At an aggregate level, the GDP growth rates sharply declined from 8.6% per annum in 2009-2010 to 4.7% in 2013-14 (Siddiqui, 2014b). The fiscal deficit also rose to new heights. In addition, the rate of inflation remained at very high levels of over 10% per annum for the period 2010-2014 whilst unemployment also remained high. Moreover, a large number of financial scams linked to the Commonwealth Games, 2G frequency allocations, and the coal scams further tarnished the government's image. Since the adoption of neoliberal reforms, India has undergone substantial transformation. The nature of exploitation has changed and some sections of society have become relatively affluent, while many others have faced dispossession and joblessness. The right-wing Hindu organisations were

able to channel this discontent among the people and as a result the BJP led by Modi came to power in May 2014 (Siddiqui, 2016c).

However, neoliberal policies to deliver growth are already exhausted. Providing a further dose will hardly provide any new impetus. In the recent past i.e. in 2008 with the advent of the global financial crisis, a number of measures helped to restore growth temporarily, including the provision of loans for housing and consumer goods to boost middle-class demand (Siddiqui, 2014c). But this has its own limitations bringing the risk of credit bubbles and balance of payments difficulties given the high import content of middle-class consumption.

The neo-liberal policy was adopted in India in 1991, which was fully supported by the mainstream economists and international financial institutions. As T.N. Srinivasan noted, "They [the reforms] were solidly based on an understanding of what went wrong with Indian development strategy since 1950 that delivered neither rapid growth nor appreciably greater equity" (Srinivasan, 1993: 258). Similar views were expressed by Jagdish Bhagwati who identified the three main policy factors that stifled India's growth and efficiency as: "extensive bureaucratic controls over production, investment and trade; inward looking trade and foreign investment policies, and a substantial public sector, going well beyond the conventional confines of public utilities and infrastructure" (Bhagwati, 1993:48).

Others, such as Joshi and Little argued that India's industrial policy was responsible for its persistent fiscal deficits and periodic balance of payment crises. In their opinion, "India's control system was not only micro-economically inefficient but macro-economically perverse". (Joshi & Little, 1994:3) It seems that the proponents of neoliberalism are only focused on GDP growth rates, ignoring human developmental and other socio-economic issues facing the Indian population.

A large section of the domestic bourgeoisie in India would, who also like to go along with the idea of being junior partners of international finance capital. I do not want to go into the question of whether the bourgeoisie is comprador or not. When I refer to their desire to be junior partners, I am not claiming that this has been and always will be an intrinsic characteristic of the bourgeoisie; I am simply saying that at this juncture in Indian history, a large section of the Indian bourgeoisie would like to go along with the US imperialists.

Since the adoption of neoliberal policy has accentuated relative inequalities, repeated communal violence has segregated communities and ghettoised the Muslim community in cities like Ahmedabad, Bhopal, Mumbai and so on. Neoliberal and corporate-led growth, with a heavy reliance on market forces for employment and welfare, have displaced the earlier policies of state-sponsored equity and created increased insecurities and tensions that scapegoat vulnerable minorities, tribal peoples and Dalit, all of whom have become easy targets for collective violence. Government statistics confirm that most of the casualties in the riots were Muslims and they suffer far more in terms of property loss than those who are members of the dominant majority (Lokhande, 2015). Whenever neo-liberal economic policies have been pursued in the developing world, they have always been accompanied by divisive political forces.

Neo-liberalism focuses excessively on growth and overlooks other crucial elements like inequality, unemployment and poverty. There is a need to bring growth with equity and to ensure a regime of human rights that is committed to justice, equality and fraternity for all.

India's agriculture, manufacturing, and exports are all showing a downward trend, while misery and unemployment is growing and the demographically young India is moving towards increased economic and social insecurity. Economic deterioration and rising unemployment made rampant by globalisation has provided the right conditions for chauvinistic mass mobilisation. Fascism requires a period of economic crisis as a necessary condition for its mass growth. A re-colonised economy serving the interests of the advanced capitalist countries is sure to cause widespread frustration. In recent years, the take-over of the nationalist

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space by fascist forces has left the Indian constitution and the judiciary vulnerable to cynical distortion and manipulation. Even the Congress Party is now less interested in confronting the Hindutva forces head on. In the former colonies nationalism originally emerged as a result of people transcending narrow sectarian and cultural barriers in their struggle against imperialism. However, the calculated invisibility of new forms of imperialism has rendered the whole political space ambiguous and utterly chaotic.

In the name of economic reforms, Modi's government strategy seems to be to cut subsidies, increase regressive taxes and capital expenditure and privatise public sector banks and state-owned enterprises such as the Indian Railways. It has also undertaken capital expenditure projects such as setting up smart cities. All these measures will certainly accelerate the process of handing the Indian economy over to the big corporations, who financed him and supported his rise to power. By taking these policies measures, India surrendering its sovereignty to global finance capital.

It would be useful to briefly discuss neoliberalism here. Neoliberalism can be said to follow specific economic policies that may not be in the interest of the majority of the Indian people, but in the interests of finance capital (Siddiqui, 2012). Neoliberalism insists on cutting fiscal deficits because it wants to reduce the capital expenditure of the state. This is based on the deeply flawed premise that the private sector will take the burden off the state, especially in a developing economy like India. Under neoliberalism, the market is assigned the supreme role and the state abdicates responsibility especially for tackling the enormous growing inequalities and making economic policies subservient to international finance capital (Girdner & Siddiqui, 2008). Development is defined merely as an increase in growth rates achieved by "encouraging" inflow of foreign capital by multinational companies. Such pro-foreign business policy also requires facilitating corporate takeovers of domestic businesses, lands and mineral resources from rural people (Siddiqui, 2014a).

The term 'neo-liberalism' has been widely used by academics to characterise contemporary capitalism. However, it is often not clearly defined or well understood. Once the supremacy of the market is restored, then the source of power is not driven by the state but by the market and the corporate sector. Despite the belief among neoliberals that the state should withdraw from the economy, it has, in fact, always played an important role in capitalist economies, since the market relations of capitalism depend on the protection of property rights, which was considered to be a key function of the state (Girdner & Siddiqui, 2008). The term 'neoliberal' dates back to the 1930s, when some European and North American academics used it to revive liberal ideas. Neoliberal capitalism received new recognition with the deepening economic crisis in the 1970s. After Margaret Thatcher became British Prime Minister in 1979 and Ronald Reagan became US President shortly after in 1981, both leaders extended their support for neoliberal ideas and began to introduce these as policy measures. In fact, in both US and UK support for neoliberalism occurred after the dramatic hike in oil prices in the 1970s and 1980s, which resulted in the accumulation of a large amount of liquidity in the banks. International financial institutions were desperately looking for ways of investing this capital and chose to lend it to the developing countries, which were earlier thought to represent too big a risk. A number of scholars have discussed neoliberal capitalism since it was officially recognised as a policy solution in the West and later extended to other countries (Harvey, 2005; Stiglitz, 2010).

Neoliberalism has dominated the advanced economies and the rest of the world since the 1980s. It advocates a minimal role for the state and strongly favours private property and a free market (Siddiqui, 2012). Neoliberalism, also referred as the 'Washington Consensus', was imposed in the developing countries by the powerful global financial institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank and also received full support from governments in the developed countries. Neoliberal ideas are based on very individualistic human interests, in a society where human

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welfare is dependent on the freedom to choose, and the market facilitates and allows individual choices to run the economy. These ideas were first promoted with the publication of Frederick Hayek's book *The Road to Serfdom* in 1944 but then Keynesian ideas gradually became more acceptable to the governments in Western Europe and North America.

However, during the 1970s economic crisis, these Keynesian policies were replaced by neoliberal economic policies when Milton Friedman revived Hayek's ideas that the 'free market' would assure optimal performance, providing economic growth, technical progress, efficiency and welfare, and ultimately it would be able to secure individual liberty. Friedman (1962) asserted that the 'free market' naturally maintains full employment and an optimal rate of growth and that any state intervention to promote these goals is unwarranted and will only worsen economic performance in the long term. By focusing on individuals' ethics and behaviour, Friedman laid the intellectual foundations for a conservative, anti-Keynesian and anti-state policy framework. In the 1980s his academic works were used by Thatcher and Reagan to attack Keynesian policy and "roll back the state". The term had been widely used in the 1970s in critiques of Chile's economic policies under General Pinochet and, with Friedman's guidance neoliberal policy was launched there following the military coup.

Ha-Joon Chang (2014) notes:

The liberal golden age of 1870-1913 was thus as liberal as we think. It was getting less liberal in the core capitalist countries, in terms of both domestic and international policies. Liberalization happened mostly in the weaker countries, but out of compulsion rather than choice—through colonialism and unequal treaties. In the only peripheral region that experienced rapid growth during this period, namely Latin America, there was a vast increase in protectionism following the expiry of unequal treaties (Chang, 2014:72).

He further observes that,

Colonialism often meant the deliberate destruction of existing productive activities in the economically more advanced regions. Most importantly, in 1700, Britain banned the import of Indian cotton textile (especially calicoes) [...] in order to promote its own textile industry, dealing a heavy blow to Indian cotton textile industry. The industry was finished off in the mid-19th century by the influx of exports from the mechanised British cotton textile industry. As a colony, India could not use tariff and other policy measures to protect its own producers against British imports. In 1835, Lord Bentinck, the Governor-General of the East India Company, famously reported that 'bones of cotton weavers are bleaching the plains of India' (Chang, 2014:56).

However, Hayek completely ignored the important role state played in laying down the foundations of industrialisation and overall economic development in the West during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and also during the post-war reconstruction and more recently in Japan and South Korea. More than three decades of neoliberal policies has weakened the trade unions, which were once a powerful countervailing force to challenging the rule of capital in the West. Moreover, it seems that a number of factors have led to attacks on the bargaining power of labour which is undermining national sovereignty. These include the adoption of neoliberal capitalism since the early 1990s and its inability to create more employment, while generating irreversible inequalities and increased globalisation. This policy has led to a situation, where a tiny minority has increased their wealth, while the majority have not witnessed any improvement in their living conditions. As Komlos (2016) notes,

The concentration of wealth in the United States has assumed obscene proportions with just 3 percent of the population owning half of the country's total wealth. It goes without saying that such enormous wealth enables the elite not only to engage in conspicuous consumption that makes the rest of the population feel inferior but also enables them to "buy" economists as well as politicians (Komlos, 2016:492).

Hayek failed to take into account the possibility of this concentration of wealth and power, which could pose a threat to freedom and democracy. The free market that he advocated has led to the dramatic concentration of economic power in the

hands of the corporate and powerful elites. Moreover, in a highly competitive globalised world, the state needs to assist people by providing the necessary support for health and educational opportunities that are the absolute prerequisite for acquiring the skills that are needed in order to succeed in a highly competitive labour market.

The neo-liberal period has also been linked with the rise in globalisation and financialisation. Since its inception, capitalism has shown a tendency to expand into new territories but more recently its global spread has increased significantly via international trade and economy. As Epstein (2005:3) notes, in the era of neoliberalism, capitalism is reflected in the “increasing role of financial motives, financial markets, financial actors and financial institutions in the operation of domestic and international economies”.

Neoliberalism has been defined as a contemporary form of capitalism, which is associated with a specific set of policies, differentiating it from the regulated form of capitalism, known as, that dominated during the period from 1945 to the mid-1970s in the developed capitalist countries. Neo-liberal capitalism broadly refers to a particular institutional form of capitalism in which the financial sector plays a key role, operating under a new set of rules that includes deregulation and capital liberalisation. As Kotz has emphasised,

The concept of neoliberal, or free-market, capitalism does not mean that the state plays no role in the economy. Market relations and market exchange require a state, or state-like institution, to define and protect private property and to enforce the contracts that are essential feature of market exchange [...]. The maintenance of a strong military is fully consistent with the neoliberal view of the proper role of the state. The meaning of “free-market” in this context is that the state role in regulating economic activity is limited, apart from the preceding essential state functions, leaving market relations and market forces as the main regulators of the economic activity – but of course operating within a framework provided by the state. (Kotz, 2015:9)

For the last three decades, the role of finance and financial institutions in the economy has changed radically; financial market activity has increased, the value of financial assets has risen sharply and foreign exchange transactions have grown much faster than the volume of international trade. The institutions of neoliberalism have greatly expanded the role of market relations and market forces. There has been a shift from the post-war social democratic consensus of capital-labour compromise to the domination of labour by capital. As Kotz (2015) observes: “[Neoliberal capitalist policies] obviously are related to this change in the capital-labour relation – particularly the marginalisation of collective bargaining and the casualization of jobs – for some others the connection to the increased power of capital is not so obvious” Kotz (2015:43).

### 3. Religious Rivalry in the Colonial Period

Communalism is often viewed as the product of religion when in reality it is the product of competitive politics. The increased oppression by the colonial rulers led to the religious communities both Muslims and Hindus especially in the late 19th century moved towards religious revivalism. Bagchi (2010) argued,

There were two different paths to Muslim revivalism taken in Uttar Pradesh and Bengal. In Uttar Pradesh, while Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan of the Aligarh movement wanted the Muslims to follow Western education and gain equality in the sphere with the Hindus, the founder of Deoband School wanted Islam to be purged of its supposedly impure accretions from local practices, and thereby resist from cultural onslaught of colonialism... Both cases were ashraf initiatives, but they were able to convince many poorer Muslims of the need to forge a separate Muslim identity. In Bengal the movement for purifying Islam and properly Islamicizing the illiterate Muslims masses in difficult terrain... was conducted by itinerant preachers movement among the peasantry... Faced with the rise of a Congress-led nationalism under mostly Hindu leadership, the colonial rulers began to favour Muslim separatist tendencies... In the case of Bengal, the background

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of later success of the movement for partition of the country owed much to the discontent of the impoverished Muslim peasantry who saw mostly Hindu zamindars as their main enemy... The rise of Hindu fundamentalism, for example, expressed in the so-called cow protection movement... (Bagchi, 2010: XXI).

Cow protection issue was often raised by the Hindu landlords and merchants in order to undermine poor peasants and tenants demand for better land rights.

It would be unfair to simply place all the blame for religious violence on British colonial rulers. However, divisions between Hindus and Muslims were aggravated during the colonial period when Muslims constituted about 25% of India's population. During the 1930s, difficulties arose regarding how to share political power in provincial governments and government jobs between Hindus and Muslims. This could not be resolved to the satisfaction of these two communities and as a result differences and tensions between the two communities widened. Religious issues such as cow slaughter and playing music in front of mosques became important conflict issues. This was deliberately done by the Hindu extremists to antagonise Muslims. (Engineer, 1995; Chandra, 1984)

The anti-colonial movement was massive in terms of popular participation, in the hopes of a more egalitarian society, but in practice did not go far enough to resolve caste and class contradictions. Instead it found it convenient to mobilise people on the basis of caste and religious identities. Episodes of religious violence were not witnessed in the pre-colonial period in India, only during British rule, and their intensity increased during partition in 1947. Moreover, the colonial government manipulated religious sentiments to their own advantage, as Chandra (1984) notes:

Communalism was an expression of and deeply rooted in the interests, aspirations, outlook and attitude and psychology and point of view of the middle classes in a social situation characterised by economic stagnation and the absence of a vigorous struggle to transform society—the communal question was a petty bourgeois question par excellence. (Chandra, 1984:40-41)

After India had been occupied, the British colonial rulers introduced three major changes in the land revenue policy of the earlier rulers such as Alauddin Khilji and Emperor Akbar. Under the Mughal rulers, if a peasant had access to, say, 100 acres but only cultivated only 50 acres, he was then only asked to pay revenue on the actual amount cultivated i.e. 50 acres. However, the British colonial rulers drastically changed the basis of levying revenue from the land cultivated to the land owned. Under the British, peasants had to pay for the entire 100 acres of land, whether it is cultivated or not, and revenue was collected on the basis of land owned (Bagchi, 2010).

Another difference witnessed was that under the Mughal system, revenue was collected from the peasantry after the crop was harvested, but whereas the British changed this to before the harvest, which meant that peasants were forced to borrow money in order to pay their rent. By introducing these changes the British were able to raise revenue, but indebtedness among the peasantry increased. Another major policy change which occurred was that under the Mughals, concessions were available in the case of crop failure, but the British discontinued such practices. In addition the Mughals re-invested some part of the collected revenue in the community, but under the British the entire revenue was either used to finance colonial wars taking place elsewhere or was repatriated to Britain (Bagchi, 2010). As a result impoverishment increased, leading to increased inter-religious rivalry among people.

During the Mughal period, only peasants could acquire the land of another peasant. But this practice was changed by the British, who allowed anyone who had the money to do so to buy land and displace peasants. As a result, due to rising indebtedness, large amounts of land passed into the hands of money lenders and traders. Later on de-industrialisation took place in India, which led to the de-urbanisation of India's cities and as a result of India's declining textile exports, the

urban population moved to the villages and thus agriculture was overburdened (Siddiqui, 1990). Moreover, the British colonial government played an important role in promoting sectarian consciousness and communalism in order to 'divide and rule', especially after the 1857 Mutiny. Then the colonial government began dealing with the two communities i.e. Hindus and Muslims separately. Hasan (1982:26) notes: "The introduction of separate electorates was one of such favours. It was also seen as a counterpoise to the growing strength of the anti-colonial movement. The principle of communal representation inevitably leads to the creation of political camps organised against each other and teaches men to think as partisans and not citizens".

British rule had proved to be oppressive for both Hindus and Muslims. Moreover, British colonialism had impacted on Indian people in various ways. For instance the poverty, misery and indebtedness of the peasantry were increased. Dadabhai Naoroji estimated and examined the causes of poverty in the last decade of the 19th century in India. His findings were used by Indian nationalist leaders as an economic critique of British rule in India. Naoroji attempted to demonstrate statistically that poverty of India was attributed to specific imperial institutions and policies (Siddiqui, 1990). Summarising Naoroji's conclusions, Sarkar (2008:433-434) argues that this 'drain of wealth' to Britain was the result of the "remittances of government funds and profits of private British capitalists, excessive revenue pressures, an alleged destruction of indigenous handicrafts, hindrances to nascent Indian industries etc."

Moreover, the publication of Dadabhai Naoroji's work provided the logical explanation for India's mass poverty to the anti-colonial movement in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Later, a number of studies by scholars known as the 'economic nationalists', such as R.C. Dutt, G.V. Joshi, and others presented a critique colonial rule by exposing the scale and mechanism of British colonial exploitation (Siddiqui, 2014a). This exposure of imperial Britain's exploitation naturally raised the question of an alternative economic model for India which the early nationalists largely failed to provide. But the freedom movement needed to embrace all sections of society and their opinions. Since the majority of the people relied upon land for their livelihood, as the leader of independent movement, the Congress Party adopted a specific policy towards questions of land and labour, in its Karachi Resolution in 1931, supporting land and tenancy reforms, state control of major industries and labour rights. As a result, Indian nationalism was boosted and Congress Party was transformed into a mass party, in which all classes of people could feel that they had a share.

Economic relationships of this type began with the European onslaught on the peoples of the Americas, Africa and Asia led by Columbus and Vasco da Gama at the end of the 15th century. In South Asia, colonialism began with the East India Company's victory at Plassey in 1757. A war of independence and large-scale resistance began in East India and in Delhi, but the opposition to foreign occupation still remained regional in India, and even in 1857, more than half the country continued to be unaffected and did not take part at that time in the first war of independence. It now seems lack of participation by the masses was mainly due to poor organization and coordination at the regional level. Nearly half a century later, the frequent occurrence of famines and starvation followed by World War I and the Great Depression led to the deepening imperialist crisis extending to colonies like India (Bagchi, 2010).

It seems useful to briefly discuss the development of modern businesses in India, especially in the 20th century. Indian businesses are embodiments of pre-industrial forms of capital accumulation through money lending and trading. During the two World Wars and the Great Depression they had more freedom in the sense of setting up industries and had capital accumulation including black marketing and swindling in government contracts. British interests were more diverted towards railways, engineering, jute and tea plantations (Tyabji, 2015). Levkovsky (1966) also argues that development of businesses in India under

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British rule was very different from that in West European countries. Unlike in Western Europe, in India, the emergence of industries did not follow a transition from independent artisans to manually operated manufacturers to modern power-driven factories. In India, manufacturers were closely linked with the merchants' and usurers' capital. For a relatively long period, manufacturers continued to engage in money lending and trading along with industrial operations (Levkovsky, 1966).

In fact, merchant and usury capital and industrial capital are distinct forms of capital that employ different methods of accumulation. Merchant capital generates profits through buying and selling commodities, usury capital makes profits through the interest on loans advanced by money lenders, while industrial capital on the other hand makes profits by buying raw materials and employing workers and producing manufactured products and innovations of new products. In the West European countries, with the expansion of industries the importance of industrial capital increased over time, while the merchant capital operation declined relatively. The usury role also declined over time with the decline of peasant-based agriculture. However, contrary to this, in India it did not happen, as Tyabji (2015) observed:

The existence of a class of businessmen does not automatically mean the existence of a group of industrially oriented entrepreneurs, because the development of industries is not necessarily the only money-making activity available to these businessmen... In the Indian case, colonialism and 'arrested development' formed the context within which emerged the group of businessmen responsible for managing industrial ventures after independence. They were part of an imperfectly formed group of industrialists possessing characteristics that reflected their background of engagement in non-industrial activities; activities which they continued to be involved, even as they acquired control over industrial companies (Tyabji, 2015:102).

### 4. The Ideology and Philosophy of the RSS

The RSS was founded by K.B. Hedgewar in Nagpur in 1925 and B.S. Moonje was also among its founder (Noorani, 2000). All founders of the RSS were from the Brahmin castes of the Maharashtra. It is very interesting to mention here that in mid-1920 in Nagpur town a minor conflict took place between Muslims and Hindus due to the playing of loud music in front of a mosque. On this incident, Hedgewar and Moonje, who were both member of *Hindu Mahasbha*, actively participated and held protests on this issue. This is how the incident was described in Hedgewar's biography:

Because of the in-built fear of Muslims among the Hindus, the band troupes sometimes shirked to play before the mosque. On such occasions Hedgewar himself would take over the drums and rouse the dormant manliness of Hindus (Despande & Ramswamy, 1981:71 cited in Bhatt, 2001:117).

*Hindu Mahasabha* (hence *Mahasabha*) is another rabid anti-Muslim organisation which has been working closely with the RSS. V.D. Savarkar was the president of the Mahasabha in 1937-42. He tried to define nationalism on the basis of identity through stigmatisation and 'threatening others'. Savarkar, the icon of 'Hindutva', wrote clemency letters to the British colonial authorities from Andamans. The RSS is firmly established as an anti-minorities political group viewing the Muslim community in particular as 'threatening others'. According to him, Hindutva rests on three attributes: namely, geographical unity, racial features and common culture. His social and cultural characteristics stemmed from the mythical reconstruction of the so-called Vedic Golden Age. Savarkar wanted to see Muslims and Christian living in India as subordinates as according to him they represented 'others', who had converted few generations ago and he suggested they should be made to convert back to Hinduism (Savarkar, 1989).

Members of Mahasbha began as a pressure group within the Congress party. As a result of differences, its members were excluded from the Congress party in 1937

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on accounts of communalist activities, but some important Mahasabha leaders continued to be part of Congress Party as Madan Mohan Malviya also happened to be the founder of Banaras Hindu University. P. Tandon, who was the leader of the Congress Party in UP state, openly opposed to providing any recognition or preservation of a specifically Muslim Indian identity. He said:

They [Muslim] should accept Indian culture. One culture and one language will pave the way for real unity. Urdu symbolises a foreign culture. Hindi alone can be the unifying factor for the diverse forces in the country (National Herald, 15th June, 1948, p.7, cited in [Jaffrelot, 1996:97](#)).

Savarkar's ideas on religious minorities initially influenced the RSS. On Hindus, Savarkar (1989) argues:

Hindus are bound together not only by the ties of the love we to bear for a common fatherland and by common blood [...] but also by the tie of the common homage we pay to our great civilisation – our Hindu culture, [...] language, Sanskrit, which has been the chosen means of expression and preservation of that culture, of all that was best and worth-preserving in the history of our race. (Savarkar, 1989: 92)

According to Savarkar (1939), Muslims and Christians are not part of his concept of 'nation' because of their cultural differences.

Their [Muslims and Christians] holy land is far off in Arabia and Palestine. Their mythology and Prophets Ideas and heroes are not the children of this soil. Consequently their names and their outlook smack of foreign origin." (Savarkar, 1989:113) When Savarkar took over as president of the *Hindu Mahasbha*, further close cooperation were developed between the two organisations i.e. RSS and *Mahasbha*. Even before him from 1926 to 1931 Hedgewar had been secretary of the *Hindu Mahasbha*. In 1939 at the 21st session of the *Hindu Mahasbha*, Savarkar compared the Muslim question in India with the Jewish 'problem' in Germany: "...the Muslims are on the whole more inclined to identify themselves and their interests with Muslims outside India than Hindus who live next door, like Jews in Germany (*Bombay Chronicle*, 29 December 1939, cited in [Casolari, 2000:224](#)).

Golwalkar took over leadership of the RSS in 1940 and remained head of the organisation until his death some three decades later. Golwalkar said that only one 'race' (i.e. Hindus) constituted the nation in India. Golwalkar's book was published before the Muslim League Lahore Resolution (1940) in acceptance of two-nation theory ([Golwalkar, 1939](#)). He always emphasised that Hindus alone, as the privileged community in India, should rule the country. He did not approve of democracy which he thought of as being alien to the Hindu ethos and extolled the *code of Manu*, whom he admires 'as the first greatest and the wisest law giver of mankind'. On the question of non-Hindus, Golwalkar declared:

The non-Hindu in Hindustan must either adopt the Hindu religion [...] or may stay in the country wholly subordinate to the Hindu nation claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment, not even citizen's rights". According to him: "in Hindustan exists and must need to exist [sic] the ancient Hindu nation and nothing else but the Hindu nation. All those not belonging to the national, i.e. Hindu race, religion, culture and language, naturally beyond the pale of real 'National' life... so long, however, as they maintain their racial, religion and cultural differences, they [minorities] cannot but be only foreigners. ([Golwalkar, 1939:45-46](#))

Furthermore, the British colonial officials never considered the RSS to be working against their interests. Neither Hedgewar nor Golwalkar joined the anti-colonial movement, opting instead in favour of 'character building' tasks. ([Bhatt, 2001](#); [Anderson & Shridhar, 1987](#)) Also L.K. Advani, leader of the BJP, narrates:

I joined [RSS] about the same time [1942] as the 'quit India' movement. I joined a couple of months earlier but my motivation was the conviction that India would never attain independence by the methods the Congress was commanding. Much more was needed and the RSS approach used to be that unless we first build, form a nucleus of people willing to sacrifice their life for the country India would not become independent. (Interview with Advani on 11 February 1994, cited in [Jafferlot, 1996:72](#))

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Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy in the 1930's inspired the RSS leaders especially their dream to build an authoritarian and disciplined organisation as the Nazis had done. While supporting Nazi Germany for racial purity and national building, Golwalkar (1939) said:

To keep up the purity of the race and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging their country of the Semitic race – the Jews. Race pride is its highest has been manifested here. Germany has shown how well-nigh impossible it is for the races and cultures, having differences going to the root, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us, in Hindustan to learn and profit by (Golwalkar, 1939:37).

Golwalkar was strongly influenced by J.K Bluntschili's works namely the theory of the state. Bluntschili argues that there is an advantage to having one single nationality:

The contacts between fascism and Hindu Nationalism were the attempt to militarise Hindu society and to create a militant Hindu mentality among Hindus [...]. At an ideological level, the most meaningful effect of the fascist influence is represented by the way in which Hindu nationalism developed its own concept of diversity, transforming 'diverse' people into enemies. Of course, the concept of the internal enemy is already implicitly contained in Savarkar's *Hindutva*. Nevertheless, the continuous reference to German racial policy and the comparison of the Jewish problem in Germany with the Muslim question in India reveals the evolution of the concept of the 'internal enemy' along explicitly fascist lines (Casolari, 2000:227).

There is clear evidence that the Hindu extremist organisations had links with the fascist parties in Europe (Casolari, 2000). B.S. Moonje visited Italy in 1930, where he met Mussolini; other *Mahasbha* leaders such as S.P. Mookerjee also established contact with Italian academic institutions. The RSS leader Golwalkar himself used the definition of nation put forward by German Nazi writer J.K. Bluntschili, namely:

It is a union of masses of men of different occupation and social status, in a hereditary society of common spirit, feeling and race bound together especially by a language and customs in a common civilisation which gives them a sense of unity and distinction from all foreigners, quite apart from the bond of the state. (Golwalkar, 1939:19).

On the question of authoritarian and secrecy within the RSS organisation Bhatt (2001) notes,

The RSS organisation structures promote an authoritarian institutional secrecy that conceal the internal workings of the organisation and conflict and dissension within it, particularly conflict among its leaders ... The RSS literature is also deeply imbued with a dense, carefully cultivated ideological language that inscribes its own political imaginary onto the realities it is ostensibly claiming to describe. One other factor relates to the RSS's description of itself as a 'non-political' organisation, an appellation that has permeated relatively objective studies of the RSS... for not participating in the anti-colonial movement and the conditions related to the lifting of ban on the organisation in the immediate post-independence period... [Despite that] the RSS has not refrained from active political interventions from its inception (Bhatt, 2001:116).

The RSS has always claimed that it is not a political but cultural and social organisation (Anderson & Shridhar, 1987). However, BJP leader and former Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh state Kalyan Singh contradicted, the above claim and he said: "I have spent a greater part of my life in this organisation [RSS] and I can say the right from the distribution of election tickets [to candidates] in BJP to selecting cabinet ministers, it is only the RSS which calls the shots. What else is political activity?" (Noorani, 2000:12).

Dictatorship, whether military or civilian, is one of the authoritarian forms of rule that seems to be necessary for capitalism at times when existing forms of rule either no longer sufficed or were seen not to suffice. Examining the rise of fascism in European, Rosenberg emphasises the popular base of fascism and that its social and ideological appeal had the support of state authority, helping it to rise to power.

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The state even overlooked the open use of “Storm-troopers” by fascists. Rosenberg argues,

The government and the ruling groups do not deploy the standard or regular state authorities against the opposition, but volunteer-corps are recruited from the mass of the population to handle this job [...] The activities of the storm-troopers of the fascist type are in complete violation of the laws. Legally the storm-troopers should be tried and sentenced to jail. But in fact nothing of the sort happens to them”. (Rosenberg, cited in [Desai, 2016](#): 22)

Fascist ideologies had been incubating in society long before the Hitler emerged. As in Indian situation Desai notes: “This also means that fascist ideologies are not easily separated from the ideas and ideologies that normally characterise right-wing politics in an age of popular politics and here too, Hindutva’s similarity with fascism is clear”. ([Desai, 2016](#): 21) The Hindu Mahasabha merged with the RSS in 1931, which gave the organisation a much-needed boost allowing it to spread into the Hindi-speaking states of the north. The RSS remained in the background. The Hindutva ideology of the RSS is based on an extreme communalist and sectarian ideology. As Christophe Jaffrelot ([1996](#)) detailed in his work on the Hindu nationalist movement, the RSS, in which Modi was a “pracharak” (i.e. activist), was built on the stigmatisation of “others”. ([Jaffrelot, 1996](#))

We should not forget that in Italy, the fascist ideology emerged out of nationalism, when the capitalist class became dissatisfied with the “liberal” politics and extended its full support to an anti-liberal ideology based on authority, centralism and violence. All these resonate with the current Indian situation. Hindutva rejects “Enlightenment rationalism”, singling out Muslims as “the enemy within” as happened with the BJP pogrom in Gujarat and other places in India, providing clear evidence of creeping fascism in India.

### 5. Views on Historical Events

The communalist and sectarian views on past historical events are defined by the RSS as true nationalism. It emphasises that India belongs to the majority community and has been formed by their history, religion and culture alone. Due to the differences with Mahatma Gandhi on these very issues Savarkar dismissed him as a ‘pseudo nationalist’ ([Savarkar, 1989](#)). The RSS uses religious consciousness to mobilise Hindus for their narrow political ends.

Hindu communalist ideology is derived from historical and political assumptions and is thus unable to stand up to scrutiny on the basis of logic and rationality. Therefore, it is important to discuss some important historical facts. It is very important to understand history on the basis of facts, and a rational and logical explanation of history and any distortion of these facts may lead to wholly misunderstanding past events in India. Communalism in India draws its sustenance from a selective interpretation of history seeking to construct an ‘imagined’ past to support its views. As Panikkar ([1997](#):73) explains, “The Hindu view highlights the glory of the ancient past and tries to appropriate its heritage, ignoring at the same time the rich contribution of the medieval period to the making of the composite culture of India.” Furthermore, on the notion of Hinduism as a homogeneous religion, Panikkar ([1997](#)) writes:

Did Hinduism as a coherent religion exist from ancient times? The early sources indicate that it did not; it was encompassed in a series of parallel systems, consisting of a large number of independent sects. These sects did not have a single source of origin. [...] The historicity of Hinduism is a relatively recent construction, undertaken in the 19th century as a part of reformist-revivalist movements. ([Panikkar, 1997](#): 73-74)

Similar points have been made by Romila Thapar. According to her, Hinduism has been practised in many ways, and the consolidation of this religion occurred after the Christian missionaries came to India, and Hindu reform movements began to consolidate against new challenges and tried to unify Hindus into one community ([Thapar, 1989](#)).

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Hindu extremists have been misleading the people on the issue of beef eating. They choose to forget that beef eating was common in ancient India, as Swami Vivekananda said on 2nd February 1900 in his talk on 'Buddhist India' in California, USA that 'Hindus on ceremonial and special occasions sacrificed bull and ate it. Beef eating was common among Aryans, during the Vedic period'. On the question of beef eating *Manusmriti* (Hindu religious book) in Chapter V provides details of different kinds of animals to be consumed. B.R. Ambedkar wrote a paper titled 'Did the Hindus Never Eat Beef?' where he quoted from the ancient Hindu scriptures that beef eating was prevalent in ancient India or Vedic India. Ambedkar concludes that "the Aryans of the Rig Veda did kill cows for purposes of food and ate beef". This is abundantly clear from the Rig Veda itself, as Rig Veda (X.91.14) narrates that "sacrificed horses, bulls, oxen, barren cows and rams...[were] killed with a sword or axe" (Ambedkar, 1990:323).

The RSS assumes that Hindu culture and Indian nationalism is Hindu nationalism. The selective approach to looking at the past and only taking into consideration the Hindu experience denies the composite culture and traditions of India. Therefore, the RSS's interpretation of India's past is incorrect. Such an approach ignores the complex historical processes by which composite culture developed in India. Cultural development must embrace various sources which have come from different religions such as Buddhism and Jainism and also from religious influences which came from outside such as Islam and Christianity. As Panikkar emphasises that, "Whether India developed as a melting pot of cultures or only remained a salad bowl is no more the issue. The crucial question is whether Indian culture is conceived as a static phenomenon, tracing its identity to a single unchanging source, or a dynamic phenomenon, critically and creatively interrogating all that is new" (K.N. Panikkar cited by Hamid Ansari, 2016).

Looking at India's history through the religion of its rulers emerged during the British colonial period, when for the first time James Mill divided Indian history into three periods: the Hindu, the Muslim and the British. Such interpretations suited British colonial rulers, who were keen to hold on their power on the basis of 'divide and rule'. Commenting on British colonial historiography, Harbans Mukhia notes:

History driven solely by the ruler's religious identity was the most significant change colonial historiography affected to the multifaceted explorations of the discipline in ancient and medieval India. Historical time, before that, was unfamiliar with the famous tripartite division of Hindu-Muslim-British periods introduced by James Mill's in 1818; some decades later, Elliot and Downson, in their massive eight-volume *History of India* as told by its own historians, reinforced the deadly effect of this scheme. The intent of the effort was never concealed: "To teach the bombastic babus the great relief British rule had brought them from the tyranny of the Muslim rulers" - this was divide and rule in its perfect form (Mukhia, 2016).

The religious-centred interpretation of history is wrong. To communalise historical events and characterise ruling class wars as religious strife is absolutely false. For example, the battle between Emperor Akbar and Maharana Pratap was purely for political power. There was no strictly religious division in the struggle, as both sides had the support of both Muslims and Hindus. The Rajput Hindu elites supported Emperor Akbar for territorial and political expansion. Similarly the battle between the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb and Shivaji and that between Tipu Sultan and Malabar local elites were the same; these were never considered religious wars. As Panikkar (1997) observes:

The Raja of Amber [who was a Hindu Rajput] sided with [Mughal emperor] Akbar against Maharana Pratap. Sultan Mahmud Lodi and Hasan Khan Mewati assisted Rana Sanga against Babur; and the Sultan of Jaunpur joined forces with a Hindu chieftain to fight against the Muslim rulers of Kapila. The history of India abounds with such examples. It should be obvious that medieval monarchs were influenced more by political compulsions than by religious considerations (Panikkar, 1997:75).

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It can be argued that this was the result of false information circulated by the East India Company officials and their supporters in their writings, paintings, and cartoons created war-like situation from 1780 to 1799. Kate Brittlebank found that Tipu's expansionist military strategy towards Kodavas and the Mangalore was largely due to their support for Britain as he was trying to weaken pro-British forces bordering the Mysore kingdom (Thapar, 2013).

The proponents of communalism argue that the entire medieval period of Indian history was dominated by the endless violence between Hindus and Muslims, a "civilizational clash", meaning that little scope for mutual adjustment and tolerance. The Hindu communal interpretations were rejected by Mahatma Gandhi, J.N. Nehru and Maulana A. K. Azad, who saw Hindu-Muslim unity as so very essential for India's future. The communalists rejected Emperor Akbar's policy reconciliation i.e. '*sulh-i-kul*' between the religious communities and simply portrayed him as foreign invader. They ignore any attempt of cultural rapprochement or even cordial interaction between the two communities. They rely on Elliot, a British academic, who deliberately wrote about Hindu-Muslim divide in Medieval India. Commenting on distortions of history, Iqtidar Alam Khan (2001) noted:

These vulgarized versions of communal interpretation are being disseminated aggressively through text-books and mass media all over the subcontinent. Total divorce from a critical reading of the source material and an attitude of hatred between communities are the two distinctive features of these versions which place them decisively beyond the pale of academic arguments. In contrast to communalists interpretations, in fact, during the medieval period Hindu-Muslim relations were harmonious, not ones of strife and confrontation, as claimed by the Hindu extremists. Both communities lived together peacefully without inter-community violence and bitterness. The integration between the two communities can be seen on the tombs of the Sufis i.e. *khanqas*. The Sufis provided a means of incorporating Hindu religious customs and beliefs into their mass prayers. However, such positive messages and practices have been conveniently ignored by the RSS and its affiliated organisations (Khan, 2001:18).

The RSS claims that in 1528 the Mughal King Babur destroyed a Hindu temple to build a mosque. This was based on a mythical story without any archaeological evidence to support the existence of a temple on the site of the Babri mosque. In 1949 after an idol of Ram was placed in the mosque, the district authorities found that some local Hindu extremists had been responsible. Soon after, the District Magistrate K.K. Nair was told by the provincial government to remove the idol. Nair ignored the government order leaving the administration shortly after to join the RSS. He was later elected in to the state legislative assembly on the BJP ticket (Gopal, 1991).

However, there is no mention in any historical text from that period of the destruction of a Hindu temple. For example, Abu Fazal in his book *Ain-i-Akbari* did not mention of any destruction of a temple of Ram at Ayodhya. Tulsidas the well-known devotee of Lord Ram and author of the holy book *Ramayana*, who lived during the Babur period, did not mention any such incident. It mentioned for first time by P. Carnegy, a colonial administrator, in his book in 1870. His main source was a local Hindu priest, who told him about the construction of Babri mosque on the temple of Ram. A few years later, this story was again narrated by another colonial district administrator H.R. Neville, whose source was Carnegy (Gopal, 1991).

Sarkar (1999) suggests that RSS claims of peaceful ancient Hindu rulers are far from historically accurate. Commenting on the so-called peaceful expansion, Sarkar (1999) observes:

Brahminical Hindu rituals, beliefs and caste disciplines have spread across the sub-continent and penetrated and sought to transform communities with initially very different practices and faiths. It has somehow become conventional to describe the processes here by anodyne terms like 'Sanskritisation' or 'cultural integration' but they really amount nevertheless

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what with other religious traditions would have been termed 'conversion' (Sarkar, 1999:1693).

Lack of unity amongst Hindus has been highlighted, as according to Dube (1965):

[Hindu religious textbooks] provide not one model but many models of Hindu religion [...] what we call Hindu philosophy is not just one school of thought, it is compendium of many systems of thought, recognising and advocating many divergent images of society and many different schemes of values (Dube, 1965:423).

There is rather a constant effort at identification with religious community, as well as, for Hindu majoritarian communalists, with nationalism. Consider for instance the very term 'Hindutva', which literally means no more than 'Hindu-ness', but has come to be a self-description, from the mid-1920s onwards, of a much more specific and narrow ideology. According to R.S. Sharma (1990):

The advent of such religions as Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam helped to reform and reorganise society and economy on healthier lines... But it has to be understood that every religion is the product of a certain type of social milieu [...] Buddhism emphasis on the protection of all beings in general and the cows in particular helped to promote agriculture (Sharma, 1990:3-4).

On the issue of plundering Hindu temples, Sharma emphasises that the causes of such actions must be explained. He further says:

In general the temples were relatively far wealthier than the mosques. In the early 11th century the Somnath temple had 500 devadasis, 300 barbers and numerous priests. It was endowed with as many as 10,000 villages. [...] It is because of accumulation of wealth in the temples that some Hindu rulers appointed special officers for destroying idols made of precious metal and seizing wealth for the treasury. Such was the case with Harsha who ruled in Kashmir at the end of the 11th century, and had appointed an officer whose function was concerned with that of uprooting of idols (*devotpatana*). The appointment of such officers and the measures recommended in the Arthashastra of Kautilya to raise money from the credulous people by superstitious devices will dispel the idea that members of the Hindu ruling class have been consistently tolerant towards their subjects (Sharma, 1990:8).

On the question of religious tolerance Kosambi argues that attitudes towards religious tolerance or otherwise in both ancient and medieval India were to a certain extent related to the availability of resources. A tolerant or eclectic attitude would become pronounced during a period of comparative prosperity but it would tend to recede into the background in a situation of scarcity and fall in revenues. As Kosambi (1962:29) observes, "With the Mughal prosperity at its height emperor Akbar could dream of a synthetic *Din-i-Ilahi*; Aurangzeb could only augment his falling revenues by increased religious persecution in the *Jizya* tax on unbelievers".

In the Mughal period, tolerance was seen to a prudent policy of governance and under the umbrella of *Sulh-i-Kul*, i.e. 'absolute peace'. Emperor Akbar's court is known for the *navratna* (nine gems), the nine courtiers of extraordinary talent assembled independent of their religion or caste. It was proclaimed that the King, like God, must favour all without discrimination. Under the Emperor Akbar the concept that state should not make the distinction between the subjects on the ground of their religion and it was not linked to loyalty. No special favour was given to any specific religion, the concept of *Sulh-i-kul*, which meant that all religion were roads one God. The policy of the state as institution was kept above to be seen as favouring to specific religion. This was a clear indication that the state presented itself as modern and secular and no special favours were granted to any one religion. Emperor Akbar considered himself to be the ruler of all, not just Muslims. Dara Shukoh's (Shahjahan's eldest son) fascination for the Upanishads and the Bhagvad Gita is well known.

Mughal emperors had Hindu generals in their army and as advisors. Among the nine distinguished advisors of the Mughal emperor Akbar, most were Hindus (Chandra, 1984; Kosambi, 1962). Not only Emperor Akbar but even Aurangzeb used it to win Rajput support. Recent research shows that the Mughal Emperor

Aurangzeb had issued jagirs and cash gifts for the maintenance of famous temples, namely, Someshwar Nath Mahadev temple located at Allahabad; Mahakaleshwar temple situated at Ujjain; Balaji temple at Chitrakut; Umanand temple at Gauhati; the Jain temple of Shatrunjai; and other temples and gurudwaras scattered over northern India Pande (2006). found that Aurangzeb ordered destruction of temples and mosques, for example, the Vishvanath temple at Varanasi and the mosque at Golkunda. The reasons have to be examined in proper historical perspective. The temple had become the centre of conspiracy against the state and similarly with the mosque. Pande concluded that Aurangzeb had ordered to raid the temple to rescue women members of the family of a Minister of Rajasthan who had gone there on pilgrimage (Pande, 2006).

In Golkunda state, for example, a Muslim ruler, after collecting revenue of the state, did not pay his dues to the Imperial Authority at Delhi. He had buried wealth (gold and silver) and erected a Mosque over it. When Emperor Aurangzeb came to know about it, he ordered the demolition of the mosque. Recent researchers have refuted the charge against Aurangzeb that he was an anti-Hindu monarch and established that Aurangzeb did not make any distinction between temples and mosques so far as state administration was concerned. The last of the Great Mughals, Aurangzeb, was a pragmatic ruler who patronised Hindu institutions and employed more Hindus in his imperial administration than his predecessors. (Panikkar *et al.*, 2002; Pande, 2006).

Emperor Aurangzeb inherited a large empire, but adopted a policy to extend it further to south, which put great strain on the resources of both men and materials. His objective of unifying the entire country under one central authority may be justified in theory, but in practice it was disastrous. Not only it meant neglect of the northern and western provinces but also undermining local autonomy and not accepting to the Maratha's demand of greater regional autonomy led to further rebellion and discontent. When earlier Emperor Akbar was put to similar challenges, he conceded to allocating more powers to local chiefs and made alliances with Rajput chiefs. But Aurangzeb choose to crush the opponents and antagonise the former allies especially Rajputs weakened the empire and created a misunderstanding between Mughals and the Rajput elites, whose earlier military support was seen as one among the major factor of their past military successes. In fact, the Mughal rule in the periods of Akbar, Jahangir and Shahjahan were adhered to secular laws and rules to govern the country. There was never any incidence where the rulers used military forces against other religions, including Hindu. The stability was based on the non-interference with the people's religious beliefs and customs, and encouraging the friendly relations between various religious communities in India. Hindu chiefs were assigned key military posts and were accorded highest honours and their alliance with the Hindu Rajputs chiefs was visible manifestation of such policy. However, when Aurangzeb imposed jizyah (tax on Hindus) in 1679, it was seen as turning point in the history of Mughal rule in India. The peace and integration between religious communities continued and no animosity was observed, but such measures encouraged bigotry. Jizyah was a meaningless gesture and even it was opposed by the powerful section of the nobility including the emperors' sister Jahanara Begum. Shortly after the death of Aurangzeb's death jizyah was abolished. This method to collect extra revenue of the basis of religion is highly discriminatory and it harassed and alienated certain sections of Hindu, especially the merchants and financiers (Truschke, 2017; Khan, 2001).

The BJP state government in Rajasthan is trying to falsify historical events. For example, it has introduced books in state higher education institutions that portray Rana Pratap as having defeated Emperor Akbar at the Battle of Haldighati on June 18, 1576. This has sparked a controversy since the Hindutva, including the RSS, is portraying this battle as a Hindu-Muslim conflict, which was not the case since both armies were composed of a mix of Hindu and Muslim soldiers (Mander, 2016). While Islam Khan Sur, a descendant of Sher Shah Suri, and his contingent

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supported the ruler of Mewar, Emperor Akbar's army was led by Raja Man Singh of Amber. The Mughals were also helped by Shakti Singh, the brother of Rana Pratap. There is no evidence that Rana Pratap won the Battle of Haldighati and those who are now hailing him as a Hindu hero are repeating the British colonial administration's erroneous portrayal of medieval India as an unending conflict between Muslims and Hindus (Thapar, 2013).

The Mughal emperor, Akbar, who reigned from 1556 to 1605, was sympathetic towards Hindu culture and philosophy and he regularly engaged in debates with Hindu and Jain religious scholars. He attempted to establish a synthesis religion and wanted all religions to be respected. Emperor Akbar promoted intellectuals, musicians and religious scholars on a totally non-sectarian basis. Dara Shikoh, the son of Emperor Shahjahan, had a deep interest in Hindu philosophy, financially supporting the translation of the Upanishads into Persian.

In sharp contrast to the view propagated by the Hindutva organizations that India suffered 800 years of 'foreign rule'. The reality is that this was not the rule of one country over another. Muslim rulers settled down and married in India and made it their home. This was not the case under colonial rule when a large proportion of the nation's wealth was appropriated by the British rulers and transferred to the foreign country as a tribute. Moreover, India's markets and its economy were transformed to suit the occupiers' own national interests.

They ignore the fact that the Afghans and Mughals settled in India, intermarried locally (with Rajputs, for example), and invested their wealth back into India. In this respect, they were unlike the British who did not settle down in India or consider it to be their home country. The latter colonised India and transformed its economy to favour British merchants and industrialists, draining its wealth to support their own development of capitalism and industrialisation. During the British colonial period, famines were common and Indian industries were destroyed and it became a market for British manufactured products, impoverishing India. It is widely agreed among economic historians that in the immediate pre-colonial period India and China were the world's leading economies (Siddiqui, 2015a).

Despite the claims of the RSS that Muslim rulers' allegiance was to the holy city of Mecca, not a single Mughal ruler or their children or any other members of their families ever went there to perform Haj. They were close to Sufi shrines in India and often visited Sufi saints. In fact, most of these Sufi saints are highly revered by both Muslims and Hindus in India and have a common history, too. The RSS wrongly claims that Indian Muslims consider that "their holy land is far off in Arabia and Palestine". In fact, even Mughal rulers were influenced by Sufism. None of the Sufi saints went to Mecca or Medina and Sultans and the Mughals including Emperor Aurangzeb did not go to Mecca or Medina. Instead they frequently visited *dargahs* (tombs of saints) such as Muinuddin Chisti in Ajmer, Nizamuddin Aulia in Delhi, Salim Seikh Chisti in Fatehpur Sikri and they saw local Sufi saints as the protectors of their territory.

It is well documented that Emperor Aurangzeb donated several large plots of land to Brahmins in Varanasi for temples but this is not mentioned by the RSS leaders. The fact that the provincial ruler in Ayodhya, Nawab Safdar Jung (1739-1754), gave a grant to build Hanumagrahi temple is also conveniently ignored by the RSS, as it does not fit their mythical discourse in which Muslim rulers are always framed as oppressive.

The RSS is trying to revise school textbooks and to portray Muslim rulers as destroyers of Hindu temples, undermining the Islamic contribution to Indian history. They ignore Sri Aurobindo, the Hindu religious leader, who had very different view about Muslim rule in India. According to him,

[Muslim] domination ceased very rapidly to be a foreign rule [...] The Mughal Empire was a great and magnificent construction and an immense amount of political genius and talent was employed in its creation and maintenance. It was as splendid, powerful and beneficent and, it may be

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added, in spite of Aurangzeb's fanatical zeal, infinitely more liberal and tolerant in religion than any medieval or contemporary European kingdom or empire [...] (Sri Aurobindo, cited in [Sen, 1993:16](#)).

The Mughal emperor Aurangzeb has been portrayed by Hindutva as attacking Hindus and destroying their temples, without any factual evidence. In contrast to this disinformation, Audrey Truschke ([2017](#)), who has carried out research for several years on this issue, argues that,

Aurangzeb took actions that strike most modern people as abhorrent, such as destroying and desecrating select Hindu and Jain temples and reviving the *jizya* tax on most non-Muslims. But, alongside such actions, the king also protected most Hindu and Jain temples and increased the Hindu share in the Mughal nobility. Any historical legitimate explanation of Aurangzeb's state activities must explain why he protected Hindu and Jain places of worship more frequently than he destroyed them. Communal hate does not get us very far in this project, and so I posit that other factors such as political reprisals and morality concerns were at play in Aurangzeb's treatment of Hindu and Jain places of worship. Overall, Aurangzeb was far more driven by practical considerations of rule, the priorities of Mughal kingship, and a thirst for power, rather than hatred of Hindus ([Truschke, 2017](#)).

Truschke's book *Culture of Encounters* (2016) discusses the exchange between the Persian-speaking Mughal court and Sanskrit scholars. This all began with the invitation of Brahman and Jain intellectuals to Emperor Akbar's court in the 1560s, and a number of Hindu and other religious books were produced during the reigns of Akbar, Jahangir and Shahjahan. Important epics and historical texts were translated into Persian from Sanskrit, which certainly elevated the political position of the Brahman and Jain elites. On the basis of a substantial archive of Sanskrit materials, Truschke reveals a vibrantly multicultural Mughal court and refutes the RSS claim that Hindu culture was adversely affected by the advent of Muslim rulers including the Mughals ([Truschke, 2016](#)). Contrary to RSS claims, Truschke ([2016](#)) argues that Sanskrit language flourished at the Mughal court and that the Mughals favoured the promoting of diversity in India during their rule. For political reasons the RSS would like to erase the Mughals from Indian history. Commenting on the issue of Sanskrit during Aurangzeb's reign, she points out that it is unfair to ignore the reasons for the later backlash against this language. The main reasons were the increasing use of Hindi, even under Shahjahan's rule in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the fact that Aurangzeb came to power after defeating Dara Shikoh, who was known for his engagement in a series of cultural exchanges involving Sanskrit from 1640 until his death in 1659. Aurangzeb attempted to break from him and distinguish his rule from the previous heir apparent. Therefore, his decision seems to be more political than religious or cultural ([Truschke, 2016](#)).

This raises the issue of how much violence during the Mughal period was motivated by religion. The answer appears to be none. The Mughals acted violently towards their political foes but all the evidence suggests that in pre-colonial India there was no religious violence as was commonly the case in pre-modern Europe. Accounts by European travellers and more recent works by historians have emphasised that religious tolerance was prevalent during that period in India ([Truschke, 2016](#)).

India's greatness lies in its diversity and not in some invented Hindu past. Romila Thapar ([2013](#)) argues that:

The institutions that grow from religious associations are frequently mechanisms for gaining access to resources and power, encouraging the creation of dominant and subordinate communities, involving varying relationships of coexistence or confrontation. These situations of religious plurality remained characteristic of Indian society over many centuries. This was in part tied into the structure of caste society where caste clusters could define and adjust their religion to accord with social needs. ([Thapar, 2013: 6](#))

However, anti-colonial movements under the Congress Party had severe limitations. Its leaders were closely identified with narrow sectarian religious issues and were involved in cow protection societies and were also active in

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sectarian religious societies such as Arya Samaj and Hindu Mahasabha. The Congress Party also used religious symbols and consciousness to mobilise the people. In Maharashtra its leader Tilak employed Shivaji to mobilise the people and in Uttar Pradesh and Bengal the traders and landlords who formed the leadership of the Congress Party, took an active part in campaigns against cow slaughter and also encouraged revivalist thinking and came out strongly in favour of a social system based on the principles of Hinduism.

On 30th January 1948 Mahatma Gandhi was murdered by Nathuram Godse, a former member of the RSS who nonetheless maintained very close links with the organisation. As Christophe Jaffrelot (2016) argues:

Nathuram Godse's family claims that he remained an RSS worker till the end. His brother Gopal declared in 1994, "You can say we grew up in the RSS... Nathuram had become a *baudhikkaryavahak* [intellectual worker] in the RSS. He said that he (Nathuram) left the RSS... because [M.S.] Golwalkar and the RSS were in a lot of trouble after Gandhi's murder. But he did not leave the RSS [...]. People like Godse are not just products of organisations, but also of the atmosphere created by the hate speeches by members of these organisations. Hate speeches against Gandhi were all pervasive in 1947-48 [...] G.C. Narang, a Hindu Mahasabha leader from Punjab, Jugal Kishore Birla, another Mahasabha leader and the RSS leader M.S. Golwalkar. They denounced the government's "satanic" attitude (Jaffrelot, 2016).

After Gandhi's assassination, India's Home Minister Sardar Patel told the RSS leaders that in order to lift the ban on the RSS, they must have a written constitution, be committed to democratic procedures to renounce violence, and accept the constitution of India and the Indian flag (Jaffrelot, 1996). Patel wrote to S.P. Mookerjee on 18 July 1948: "As regards the RSS and the Hindu Mahasabha the case relating to Gandhiji's murder is sub judice and I should not like to say anything about the participation of the two organisations, but our reports do confirm that, as a result of the activities of these two bodies, particularly the former, an atmosphere was created in the country in which such a ghastly tragedy became possible" (Sardar Patel's Correspondence, vol. 6:323, cited in Noorani, 2015; also see Noorani, 2016a).

### 6. Secularism and Nationalism in India

Secularism is a universal value, applicable to peoples of all religious affiliations that treat them equally, irrespective of their individual beliefs. The idea of secularism is the notion of separatism of private and public domains of religion and state. However, some values are not openly articulated and refer to personal behaviour in everyday life in one's relationship with others, particularly with other religious groups. Other values are also very important including the right to practise one's faith freely, to work, to feel safe and so on.

Following independence, India chose a secular constitution with provisions for equality and safety for minorities. In the past, the existence of different religions, ethnic groups, languages and customs was welcomed and seen as a resource to build this commonality and never resented as a problem. The leader resisted the temptation of erasing differences to create oneness. As a country, it is inhabited by many different religious communities, and has a diverse range of languages and ethnic groups. It is very important to recognise the existence of this heterogeneous identity. Hinduism itself has a plural structure, not only due to its caste system but also to the various schools of thoughts and interpretations of this religion. In fact, defining Hinduism as a single religion is a comparatively recent development. The term 'Hindu' was originally applied by Persians and Greeks to a location, referring to those people who lived beyond the Indus River (Sen, 1993).

Communalisation of Indian politics and society has been on the rise since the 1990s, and public discourse is increasingly driven by prejudice and rumour rather than fact. It was believed that the government would protect minorities, and education and economic development would lead to the development of a secular

mind-set. This has proved to be a simplistic assumption. Although the word 'secular' was inserted into the Constitution in 1975, secularism still remains an embattled ideal in India. More significantly, as illustrated above, the government has not just measurably failed in protecting the rights of minorities, but also has been complicit in the violence against them (Basu, 2015).

The idea of a secular India, which is tolerant towards different religions, has been shaken by the rise of the Hindutva forces since the early 1990s. The extremist Hindu organisations are that have spearheaded mob violence in recent years have been demanding an end to Indian secularism, calling instead for the recognition of a Hindu state as defined by the founders of RSS (Brass, 2006b). They would like to see a radical departure from the idea of India as a modern secular, pluralist, and tolerant state among the community of nations, an idea that was central to the independence movement. In his prayer meeting held in Delhi on July 15, 1947, Mahatma Gandhi stated: "Hindus, Muslims, Parsis and Christians: all are Indian" (Alam, 2007). It is also clearly reflected in the constitutional and political structure of the country, despite its many weaknesses.

During the parliamentary elections of 2013 that brought the BJP to power in India, the idea of secularism was debated vigorously. Religion is a private matter and secularism appears to imply the tolerance of differences. It also implies the primacy of civil laws, which should be based on equal rights, and the duties and obligations of all citizens of India. In progressive societies, secular values in government policies relating to employment, health, education, and social justice must be aimed at the well-being of all communities. Commenting on the practice of secularism in India, Paul Brass (2006b) notes:

What is essential to understand in the Indian context is that all these fundamental values and practices are, in fact, denied to many, if not most people in everyday life in the country through caste discrimination, police misbehaviour and brutality and the consequences of extreme and grinding poverty. Moreover, they are often denied to whole categories of people, including caste and religious groups, particularly Muslims in post-independence India [...] But it is a contemporary fact in India that Muslims are discriminated against in most parts of the country in public employment, that their favoured language/script, Urdu, has been nearly eliminated from public instruction in north India, and they have suffered grievously in countless communal riots in which they have been attacked and killed by state police forces (Brass, 2006b:116).

Secularism is directed to address and to remove the religious strife between religious communities. However, the RSS has always been opposed to progressive, secular, democratic systems based on pluralism and built on values like equality, and cultural diversity. For instance, in the 1950s it campaigned against the Hindu reform code bill, and in the 1990s on the issue of job reservations. It has steadfastly and enthusiastically endorsed Hindu chauvinism and upper Hindu caste hegemony. Minorities are permitted to live within such a social system but only as long as they remain submissive to Hindu nationalism (Alam, 2007).

Hindutva organisations talk about "cultural nationalism" with its so-called "Hindu interests" as defined by RSS. Their inaccurate interpretations of past events are driven by a right-wing religious agenda in an attempt to eliminate the composite (i.e. diverse) culture of India. The notion of "nationalism" is also important for communal organisation i.e. Hindutva. Their entire focus is to extend the arguments in support of *Hindu Rastra* (i.e. Hindu nation). Unlike Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, Hinduism has neither a "book" nor a "church". In fact, according to the well-known India historian Romila Thapar (2013), until recently European and Arab travellers used to refer to the inhabitants of India as the "Hindu group of religions". The RSS would like to establish a Hindu *Rastra* in India that would be both theocratic and also authoritarian, with a small clique determining state policy and also deciding who is a true Indian and who is not.

For RSS, the anti-colonial movement and an independent India based on secular constitution was anathema. It was financed and supported by traders, merchants

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and also the Maharajas of the princely states and stayed clear of any opposition to British rule. Its leaders openly supported the Hindu caste system which is central to institutionalised discrimination. For them, an anti-colonialist movement that organised people on the basis of universal franchise, equal rights and land reform was seen as surrendering to religious and ethnic minorities and for that reason, Mahatma Gandhi had to sacrifice his life. In fact, RSS stands for 'counter-revolution' against democratic revolution (Brass, 2006a).

Although it helped to create a strong opposition to British rule it faced hostility from within, especially from the advocates of the "two-nation" theory based on religious identity, led by V.D. Savarkar and M.A. Jinnah. India was partitioned into two nations i.e. Hindu and Muslim. In his book *Modern India*, Bipan Chandra points out,

On 15 August 1947, India celebrated with joy its first day of freedom. The sacrifices of generations of patriots and the blood of countries martyrs had borne fruit [...] But the sense of joy [...] was mixed with pain and sadness [...] [For] even at the very movement of freedom a communal orgy, accompanied by indescribable brutalities, was consuming thousands of lives in India and Pakistan (Chandra, 1971:305-6).

The British ruled India for 200 years, and they pitched one community against the other in order to control and weaken the anti-colonial movement. They succeeded in creating a feeling of anxiety among the minority community, particularly Muslims, that with the Hindu majority their well-being would be unsafe, both socially and economically. As a result, some Muslim community leaders demanded a seat quota in the provincial legislature and a separate electorate and the British acceded to their demands by Act of 1909. Around that period, Hindu Mahasbha and its leader, V.D. Savarkar, argued for Hindutva.

As Sushil Srivastava notes:

It is quite evident that no temple-mosque controversy was known in Ayodhya till the nineteenth century. Local stories were put into circulation and claims were raised over the places of worship in Ayodhya. The British played a significant role in strengthening the claim by providing the local stories with a historical basis (Srivastava, 1991:48).

Srivastava considers Mughal rule in India positively, especially their policies towards other religions. "Comparing Muslim rule with the preceding Hindu rule and the succeeding British rule [...] Muslim rule alone preserved the social fabric in India" (Srivastava, 1991:50). Another prominent historian, Sarvepalli Gopal, emphasised that:

There is again no conclusive proof that the mosque, built at the time of Babur, was on a temple site or that a temple had been destroyed to build it. It is true that the mosque incorporates pillars which have non-Islamic motifs; but the explanation for this may well lie in the employment of Hindu craftsmen in the building of mosques or incorporating of material from any derelict building in the vicinity which would have had a non-religious function or even being associated with non-Hindu sects (Gopal, 1991:11).

It seems that British colonial rulers deliberately attempted to falsify Indian history, as they wanted to portray the entire Mughal period as being oppressive towards Hindus, making it seem that British rule was better for them. Weeks before leaving India, the British divided the country into 'Hindu-majority' India and 'Muslim-majority' Pakistan. The partition resulted in the migration of nearly 15 million people and millions were estimated to have been killed in the violent communal clashes, following Partition in 1947.

The RSS aims to alter the teaching of Indian history and favour uncritical glorification of Hindu culture, overlooking caste oppression, subjugation and social inequality, while blaming everything wrong in India on Muslims and devaluing their contribution to the Indian nation. The RSS and the Hindutva forces have a single-issue agenda namely, to establish a Hindu *Rashtra* (Hindu nation). Consequently, no matter what the RSS or the BJP says, their basic agenda for education is to prepare the intellectual foundations of this Hindu *Rashtra* and they are making the changes in education policy as a preparation for that. For example,

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in history, the RSS suggests that the Aryans were in fact indigenous to India and that they went to other places from India, reflecting a sense of superiority of Indian culture over other cultures. Then this Aryan culture is being equated with the Vedic culture and is propagated as evidence of the superiority of the Hindu religion. They present an outlook which ignores that human civilization is based on give and take between different peoples and cultures. Their explanation ignores the evidence because assertions about the superiority of any particular culture have absolutely no empirical evidence. In the process they are also overlooking the multiple roots of Indian culture and in effect apotheosizing the Hindu religion.

Hindutva organisations believe that Hindus may have different cultures and languages, but they must be united. They consider Hindus to be members of a homogeneous community, who acknowledge a common religion, history, civil identity and law. The RSS blame Muslims for the partition of India. While two or three decades ago the Hindutva organisations represented a small section of Indian society, more recently they have become very important allowing the BJP to form a government at the centre and in many states in North, Central and West India. Indeed Hindutva views have been projected as the national culture and it appears that “unity in diversity” is no longer the rallying cry of Indian nationalism.

In pre-colonial India, the social forms of religious organisations and their articulations were historically different to those in Europe. For example, throughout the Middle Ages and up to the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, Europe witnessed a major conflict between the Roman Catholic Church and nation states for supremacy. The struggle between these two powerful major institutions to obtain supremacy is known as the state vs. church controversy. In fact, with the rise of Protestantism in Europe, in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, a bitter debate started between Roman Catholics and Protestants, which at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century war became a major war between these two sects that continued for three decades and affected the whole of Europe. Peace between the two powerful groups was finally restored with the signing of the Treaty of Westphalia.

British colonial rule in India in the 19<sup>th</sup> century brought about some important changes in Indian society and economy. It led to the introduction of bourgeois property rights, extensive trade, expansion of seaports, railways, telegraphs, and modern education. However, at the same time, local handicraft industries were ruined, causing de-industrialisation. Colonial modernisation was deeply exploitative, creating uneven development amongst different regions and sectors. In agriculture, it promoted monoculture and cash crop production, which undermined the local ecology and environment. Despite caste divisions, pre-colonial society lived side-by-side without competition, keeping local autonomy intact in the villages. After British rule, they began to lose this local autonomy, and at the same time new classes, such as industrialists and factory workers, emerged (Siddiqui, 2014a).

However, seventy years on since independence a different wind seems to be blowing, a wind hostile to everything that went into the construction of India as a secular state, where irrespective of religious beliefs, people are treated equally before the law of the land. It is the responsibility of Indian academics, and all secular and progressive people not to allow a biased and incorrect representation of India's image that may well destroy the essence of what we have inherited and the humanistic values we wish to add to that inheritance.

The Hindutva forces are now more visible than before and opportunistically using their ideologies for the purposes of political mobilisation, mixing Indian identity with a narrow sectarian religious identity. The RSS and other Hindutva organisations have accepted the British colonial interpretation of India's past, in particular their emphasis on religious antagonism that encourages communalisation and a divided society. This interpretation of history was promoted by the colonial administration to ‘divide and rule’ communities encouraging communal division of society (Thapar, 2013). The colonial interpretation of history was to exaggerate religious differences and antagonism encouraging communal division of society,

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without any evidence from the past. History was narrated and falsified to fit the interests of the colonial rulers, not to create harmony among the people.

V. D. Savarkar, who was not a religious person, but represented the religion-based, two-nation theory in pre-independence India. His major argument was that Hindus and Muslims constituted two different nations that were unable to coexist and were historically irreconcilable with each other. Having won independence, Indians heaved a sigh of relief that, despite Partition and the horrendous genocidal violence that accompanied it, the newly born Indian nation had decided to follow a course fundamentally at odds with the anti-national forces on both the Muslim and Hindu right.

Nationalism should be identified with a society and country, and it also needs to be a progressive nationalism of the 21st century, not one based on religion alone whether Hindu, Muslim or Sikh. On the issue of Hindutva's 'cultural nationalism' Romila Thapar said:

Nationalism is one basic concept that has to do with giving citizenship to all people living in a country and who are its nationals. It brings everyone together to build a society committed to human rights. [...] and abide by the same obligations to the state [...] Cultural nationalism does not mean differentiating between citizens on the basis of culture [religion] (Thapar cited in [Salam, 2016](#)).

It was the mass mobilization which really gave the freedom struggle a very different character. That mass mobilization was predicated on an agenda that went beyond simply getting rid of the British and included social emancipation, economic development, universal franchise, the abolition of caste inequalities, political democracy and all that the like of which the country had never seen.

Nationalism cannot be built on a religious identity alone, as mistakenly claimed by the RSS and other Hindutva organisations. Just like the British colonizers did when they established their rule in India, these organisations interpret Indian history on the basis of religious identity alone, using this as a means to 'divide and rule' the people of India. As Panikkar ([2004](#)) argues:

[Hindutva] takes a static view of cultural tradition, ignoring its inherent dynamism. One of the consequences of this attitude is the intolerance of different interpretations and conflicting representations for which the Indian cultural tradition is justly famous [...]. A marginal force until about 10 years ago, it [Hindutva] is now in a position to dictate the political and cultural agenda of the nation [...]. The decline of the Congress and the inability of the Left to emerge as an alternative provided the space for Hindutva to imbue such interventions with a political content. [...] Hindutva thus succeeded in integrating politics with culture. Hence cultural nationalism is the real shining motif of Hindutva. Given its exclusivist character, however, cultural nationalism is anti-democratic and anti-national. The existence of India as a nation is possible only with the rejection of cultural nationalism ([Panikkar, 2004](#)).

After independence, the weaknesses in the implementation of the land reforms and also failures to curtail the socio-economic powers of the landlords and money lenders gave further opportunities to obstructionist forces. Moreover, the reliance on traders and big land owners for political support compelled the government to compromise with the divisive communalist forces ([Siddiqui, 1997](#)). The deepening of economic crisis in the post-independent period created conditions in which community, caste and class rivalry and competition were aggravated. As Hasan ([1982](#)) notes:

Economic development in the post-independent period was retarded and slow; consequently, politics and mobilisation took place around individuals, factions, and communities rather than on issues of development and reforms. Hindus and Muslims have been interlocked in a competition for survival and advancement magnified against the backdrop of underdevelopment ([Hasan, 1982:30](#)).

During elections the Congress Party extended patronage to powerful individuals. This was seen as being convenient because Muslim electoral support

has depended on addressing their grievances and all efforts were sought to gain support of conservative elements such as the Imams for delivering votes. Unfortunately more than six decades of democratic process have not only failed to undermine religious and caste solidarity, but in fact in recent years such tendencies have strengthened.

In fact, in India where there is a mass poverty, violence has been the predominant route to power, and democracy has tended to increase political violence. The elites who wanted to remain in power found that scapegoating a minority a strategy that worked. It was not institutional weakness that explained the variations in state response to riots in India, but instructions given by politicians concerning whether or not to protect minorities.

### 7. The Rise of the BJP

Prior to the 1980s, the predecessor of the BJP, Jana Sangh, had very little popular support. In fact, the Hindu Mahasbha gave birth to the *Jana Sangh*, which is today called *BJP*. The BJP party had initially drawn its support mainly from upper-caste Hindus. V.D. Savarkar's and Golwalkar's elaboration of Hindutva provided the foundation for the RSS, which was later on transformed into the political party, which is now known as BJP (Corbridge & Harris, 2000; Graham, 1990).

The BJP rose to power at a remarkable pace; the two seats it had in 1989 had risen to 119 by 1996. It was then still a minority party in the lower house of the Indian parliament which has 543 members in total (Vanaik, 2001). The BJP benefitted from a political and ideological vacuum, situating itself as an alternative to the Congress Party, at a time when people were disillusioned with the Congress party as the government was consistently facing accusations of corruption. At a time of economic crisis and uncertainty, the concept of Hindu unity functioned as a means of social stabilisation. The BJP put itself forward as the defender of "Hindu society" and continued with its use of offensive propaganda against the Muslim community. A central element in this re-orientation was the Shah Bano case and the Ayodhya campaign. As Ahmed has observed regarding communalism, "as an aggressive kind of rightist nationalism [...] it takes advantage of the misery of the masses" (Ahmed: 2004:23).

The Supreme Court of India took a decision on the Shah Bano case which concerned maintenance for a divorced Muslim wife in her favour. This was seen by Muslim organisations as interference in *Shariah Law*, which being a divine, they believe is ordained by God and not to be changed. Without realising long term consequences, Muslim organisations organised protests and Rajiv Gandhi's government amended the law in their favour (Engineer, 1995) On February 25 1986, the Muslim Women's Bill was moved in Parliament to override the Supreme Court's ruling in the Shah Bano case. This provided new ammunition for right-wing Hindu organisations, who referred to this as 'appeasement' of Muslims and they mobilised Hindus against it. Under pressure to tackle Hindu grievances, Rajiv Gandhi's government opened the doors of Babri mosque at Ayodhya for Hindus to worship there (Girdner & Siddiqui, 1990).

Right-wing Hindu organisations appealed to those who had enough of the Congress Party's corruption, nepotism and inefficiency and were looking for an alternative. These organisations carefully projected themselves as the alternative to Congress misrule presenting and themselves as being principled, honest and disciplined. They even denied their communalist and fascist character, but not for long. In the late 1990s they projected Vajpayee as a 'moderate' and liberal leader. But he later admitted that this liberal stance had been dictated by political expediency.

In August 1990, the then Prime Minister V.P. Singh announced his government's decision to implement the Mandal Commission Report which recommended that 27% of government jobs to should be reserved for other 'backward castes'. The fear of losing the support of upper-caste Hindus, due to the

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Mandal Commission proposals These two above reasons seemed to be important reasons for the BJP's decision to mobilise Hindus and campaign to build Ram temple at Ayodhya. The BJP's political force remained confined to the north and western Indian states until the mid-1990s. As Jaffrelot (1996) observes:

Largely due to the stress it put on a *Sanskritised* culture, an upper caste (largely Brahminical) ethos which was more prevalent in North India and an anti-Muslim attitude to which South India was less receptive given the greater integration of Islam in this region... Up to the 1980s, in effect Hindu nationalism recruited most of its supporters among the urban upper caste, middle caste and the landed elite of North India (Jaffrelot, 1996:7).

Moreover, state-owned television aired weekly instalments of a serialisation of the *Ramayana* which glorified the past. This strengthened Hindus' religious sentiments and beliefs (Corbridge & Harris, 2000). People's frustration and grievances were fully exploited by the right-wing Hindu organisations and they were successful in exploiting the disillusionment of the people.

If anything can be learnt from the past experiences and policies then, it seems that Congress Party had been peddling soft Hindutva whilst the BJP peddled a hard-core version. The Congress Party felt if it antagonised both Muslims and Hindu right-wing extremists then it would not be able to win elections. The Congress Party did not have the will and determination to take on Hindu extremists and punish them for the crimes against minorities. Therefore, it appears to have put winning elections before its principles.

V.P. Singh's National Front coalition government came to power in 1989 and adopted an ambivalent policy towards Babri mosque. In order to consolidate his power and its electoral victory he showed his intention to implement the Mandal Commission's recommendations, which was supposed to increase the representation of lower castes in government jobs, traditionally the domain of the Hindu upper castes. As a reaction to this in August 1990 L.K. Advani launched his rath yatra (literally, chariot procession) through the northern Indian states, starting from Somnath temple in Gujarat and to end ending at the Babri mosque in Ayodhya. In each town that his procession passed through, communal riots and violence against Muslims flared up and community relations worsened, culminating in the demolition of the Babri mosque in 1992 (Vanaik, 2001; Graham, 1990), an act of destruction for which no one was prosecuted. As Bhatt (2001) observes:

The emergence in 1984 of an organised mass campaign by VHP for the building of a Ram temple on the site of the medieval Babri mosque in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh; secular protest against a Hindu nationalist defence of the self-immolation of the widow RoopKanwar in Rajasthan in 1987, [...] 'Communal violence', directed against Muslim and Sikh communities, increased dramatically in India during the 1980s (Bhatt, 2001:170).

The parliamentary election of 1996 was one of the most dramatic in the political history of India, when Hindu communalist organisations led by BJP and Shiv Sena emerged as the largest single bloc in the Indian parliament. With this campaign the party mobilised all corners of India with the aim of uniting Hindus, although it inflamed violence and undermined the harmony among the different communities (Siddiqui, 2009a). However, the BJP gained politically and won 161 seats in 1996 and then 182 seats in 1999. The RSS is the organisational strength of the BJP. The BJP senior leaders pledged their allegiance to the RSS. The relationship between BJP and the RSS was very close and as stated by former BJP leader Mr. A.B Vajpayee in 1997: "The post [of Prime Minister] may go tomorrow, but I will always remain a humble swayamasevak [RSS volunteer/activist]" (Noorani, 2000:4).

### 8. Communalist Attacks against Minorities

The socio-economic crisis worsened in India in the 1960s with the Sino-India war in 1962 and the India-Pakistan war in 1965. As a result, there was further slowing down of growth rates and food shortages, and the tensions between Hindus

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and Muslims re-emerged in the late 1960s. It is well known that in India communalist violence did not occur spontaneously and was rarely caused by religious animosity. Cultural and religious differences rarely led to the kind of organised attacks and large scale violence seen in recent years. Such differences may be exploited and heightened at the behest of political groups. In large urban areas the Muslim presence is resented not for religious reasons but becomes a source of tension due to competition in the job market. The limited opportunities caused by slow growth in the economy and higher levels of competition among communities can lead to increased frustration.

Right-wing Hindu organisations take advantage of this situation to create an environment of fear and jealousy among social groups. As Hasan (1982:33) observes: “The relative success and prosperity of Muslim businessmen in recent years was the cause of much antagonism in Moradabad. In the brassware trade, in particular, Muslims received extensive orders from West Asia which were perceived as an impetus to their trade and industry [...] now had sufficient capital to purchase sophisticated tools, to own property, to spend on education, and to initiate new ventures. All this generated hostility among Hindu traders”.

In 1962 during the Jabalpur riot, Congress Party local leaders were directly involved in the attack against Muslims but no action was taken against them. The 1969 violence between Hindus and Muslims also took place in Gujarat. A year later in Bhivandi riots some 300 Muslims were killed. The Justice Madan Commission Report clearly implicated Shiv Sena in taking part in attacking Muslims and burning their property while police quietly looked on or encouraged the attackers but no action was taken on the basis of the judicial report. The Ahmedabad Commission of Inquiry into the 1969 communalist violence led by Justice P. Jagmohan Reddy from the Supreme Court, notes: “The agitation has received the blessing of the local Jana Sangh workers [...] calling to sever all economic and social relations with the community that has attacked their religion viz. the Muslims”. The report by the Justice Vithayathil Commission of Inquiry on the Tellicherry disturbances in 1971 concluded: “I have no doubt that the RSS had taken an active part in rousing up anti-Muslim feeling among the Hindus of Tellicherry and in preparing the background for the disturbances”. Justice D.P. Madan, who led the Commission of Inquiry into the violent disturbances in Bhiwandi concluded: “the guiding spirit was Dr. Vyas [local Jana Sangh leader]”. (cited in Noorani, 2000:38). Justice P. Venugopal who led the Commission of inquiry into the communalist violence in Kanyakumari in 1982, wrote: “The RSS adopts a militant and aggressive attitude and sets itself up as the champion of what it considers to be the rights of Hindus against minorities” (Cited in Engineer, 1995).

Since the mid-1980s, there has been a qualitative change in the nature of communalist threats and violence. There is a large body of evidence pointing to the fact that the RSS and its affiliated organisations have consistently played a leading role in organising and inciting communalist hatred and violence. Various Judicial Commissions of inquiry on communalist violence have pointed towards the RSS. For instance, the Judicial Commissions on violence in Tellicherry (1971), Aligarh (1978), Moradabad (1980), Sambhal (1980) blames the RSS for inciting violence towards Muslims. These towns have witnessed some improvements in conditions; the Hindu traders resented any small improvements in the living conditions of the local Muslims and RSS involvement worsened the situation among the communities. Moreover, in many instances, community bias among the district administration and police seems to be evident from most accounts which highlight that they not only aided and abetted the rumours against Muslims but also perpetuated atrocities against them. The bias could be seen in refusing to stop the mobs from looting and killing. There seem to be lack of will to uphold the law as the state government has often failed to pursue matters and take any action against those involved.

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In Ferozabad, the bangle industries were owned by Hindus, while Muslims worked largely as craftsmen. However, a small minority among the Muslims began setting up as independent producers, and became seen as business competitors and a threat by the Hindu traders; in 1972 riots took place which led to the burning of businesses owned by the Muslim community. Here it seems that class conflicts were concealed as Hindu-Muslim religious conflict.

After the demolition of the Babri mosque, a number of incidents of communalist violence took place between Hindus and Muslims in most parts of India. In cities such as Bombay, the police supported by BJP and Shiv Sena actively took part in attacking Muslims ([Srikrishna Commission, 1998](#)). The RSS and BJP succeeded in stirring up hatred amongst the people of Gujarat. The tribals, Dalits and low caste Hindus traditionally supported the Congress Party, but the BJP worked among these groups in introducing a number of welfare programmes to gain their trust and support. The BJP was able to successfully construct a unified Hindu identity and make them feel proud of being a Hindu.

The violence unleashed in the post-Godhra riots on 28th February 2002, after the burning alive of 58 innocent people on a train coach made common knowledge the complicity of state administration and police involvement in the attacks against the Muslim community. The violence continued for more than two months, with more than 2,000 Muslims losing their lives ([Engineer, 2002](#)). The worst attack against the Muslim community took place in 2002 in Gujarat in Naroda-Patia, which was a slum most of whose inhabitants were Muslims. In a mob attack by Hindus more than 100 Muslims were burnt alive in full view of the state police force. Women were raped before being burnt alive. Even pregnant women were not spared. In one particularly gruesome case a pregnant Muslim woman had her womb opened and the foetus was extracted and then burnt before she herself was burnt ([Engineer, 2002](#)). Narendra Modi was then Gujarat's chief minister was a bystander while his close party associates took an active part in planning and carrying out the attacks on Muslims.

The recent book *Splintered Justice* by Warisha Farasat and Prita Jha on riots in India presents a tiny fraction of the number of violent attacks that have occurred as part of communal disturbances (i.e. religious tensions) against Muslims there. The book provides detailed information about how such violence is handled by the police and local administration and is a devastating indictment of India's system of justice. The book also allows us to understand why rioters continue to behave as if there are no major consequences for engaging in such violence, highlighting the culture of impunity that shields many of the perpetrators, and sends a chilling message to society. Farasat & Jha (2016) examine two episodes of communal massacre, namely, Bhagalpur in Bihar state in 1989 and Gujarat in 2002. The authors conclude that the underlying cynical use of polarisation as a political tool played a significant role in both incidences in which local Muslim inhabitants were targeted. The riots continued for weeks and resulted in large numbers of adults and children being killed and in other atrocities, such as rape and maiming of victims, largely from the minority community. The length of time for which the riots lasted suggested at best inadequate efforts at control by the local government a significant degree of complicity by state officials ([Farasat & Jha, 2016](#)).

In the case of the Gujarat riots, the complicity of the BJP government, led by Narendra Modi, is well known. But at the time of the Bhagalpur riots was ruled by a Congress government. In both cases, the partisan role of the police was clearly noted. There is evidence of their indifference to desperate pleas for help from victims as the riots initially flared and then spread together with delays in filing First Information Reports (FIRs). Their inaccurate FIRs failed to implicate the perpetrators or underplayed the effects of the violence, which subsequently made the legal process for survivors difficult, if not impossible. Careless investigations by the police further weakened the legal case against perpetrators ([Farasat & Jha, 2016](#)).

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During his state election campaign in 2002, Modi was seen as a hero and with him the RSS/BJP found the "strong" leader they sought. The charismatic demagoguery of Modi was on full display in that campaign. Modi was ideologically groomed by the RSS before becoming leader of the BJP. He played with the emotions of the crowd skilfully, and stoked their prejudices with bone-chilling messages about "enemies of the state". His campaign was unabashedly against the minorities. He campaigned as though he was running against Mian Musharraf, the military ruler of neighbouring Pakistan, ignoring the Congress candidate who was actually his opponent. The manoeuvre blended aggressive Hindu nationalism with jingoistic patriotism for a potent, toxic mix. Given his campaigning skills, it was astonishing that the BJP had not fielded him in elections before. If such a politician had chosen to work for all citizens, he could have done much good, and Muslims would have voted for him too. But in 2002, Modi focused on winning the election. To ensure sufficient consolidation of the Hindu vote, he seemed prepared to write-off the Muslim minority altogether. He did not need, or want, their votes.

In his recent book *Hashimpura Retold* (2016), V.N. Rai presents harrowing first-person evidence of police brutality against Muslims in Meerut in Uttar Pradesh state. He narrates the events of May 22, 1987, when the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) carried out a massacre that so badly tarnished their reputation that remains to this day. Zulfiqar, Babudin and Kamruddin were witnesses to the gory killings of innocent young men who had been rounded up from their village by the PAC. The oldest men and boys were segregated from the young men and were eventually released after a warning and a volley of expletives; the younger men were not so lucky. They were hauled inside a truck, asked to sit on its floor, surrounded by PAC men and driven to the Upper Ganga Canal, a 90-minute drive from their village. Once the vehicle reached its destination, the men were pushed out one by one, shot and thrown into the canal, which was then in full flood. Most died on the spot, Rai narrates the story of those who survived, quietly exposing the prejudiced mindset of the PAC men who rounded up and shot them in cold blood. Rai presents their stories in their own words and shows glimpses of the mind set of common people keen to help the victims but worried for their own safety (Rai, 2016).

According to Zulfiqar:

"It was around 6:00 in the evening on May 22, 1987, when I went to the terrace of our house to offer *namaz*, [prayer] when some policemen came in. They brought me, my father and my two uncles outside our lane on the road where some 400 to 500 people were squatting. We were made to sit with them [...]. The PAC men divided the people into two groups. On the one hand were youngsters and on the other were old men and children. They left out the old people and kids, and whisked away many others, including my father and two uncles, in PAC trucks. The remaining forty-five physically strong people, including me, were ordered to board the last waiting truck [...]. The PAC men surrounded us in the truck in such a way that our view of the outside was blocked. After about an hour and a half, the truck turned towards a road running parallel to Ganga Canal in Muradnagar and came to a halt after about one and a half kilometres." (Cited by Salam, 2016b)

In another study by Rana Ayyub (2016) interviewed political leaders and administrative and police officials who were working in the local administration during the riots and analysed the reasons why such extreme violent and discriminatory acts occurred during the 2002 riots. G.L. Singhal, who was head of the Gujarat's Anti-Terrorism Squad, admitted his role in fake encounters and the extrajudicial murder (i.e. unlawful killing) of individuals from the Muslim community, commenting "Once you compromise, then you have to compromise with everything, yourself, your thoughts, conscience". (Ayyub, 2016:43) Ashok Narayan, Home Secretary for Gujarat observed,

I always felt bad so many people [Muslims] were killed in the riots [...] the Hindu community, their behaviour really shocked me [...] looting houses

shamefully, they used to come in cars and loot [...] [H]umans at their worst [...] Several times, ministers were on the roads inciting crowds. (Ayyub, 2016:97-98)

It is also relevant to cite Heredia's comparison of the treatment by the Gujarat government of the victims of the Kutch earthquake which took place in January 2001, and the "pogrom" in 2002:

The differential response [...] must be seen in the context of the different communities most affected by the two disasters. The earthquake victims of Kutch were largely the majority community [Hindus] and were far better treated than the refugees of the post-Godhra riots [Muslims] a year later, in the same state by the same government, where the minority community by far suffered the most. (Heredia, 2016:27)

In analysing the events in 2002, Ashutosh Varshney (2017) supports the use of the term "pogrom":

A pogrom is defined as a mob attack, either approved or condoned by authorities, against the persons and property of a religious, racial, or national minority. Gujarat 2002 fits this definition well. Dozens of eye-witness stories can be cited. The non-state organisations, most closely allied with the BJP Government, approved of violence. The VHP called it "the first positive response of the Hindus to Muslim fundamentalism in 1000 years". The RSS said: "Let the minorities understand their real safety lies in the goodwill of the majority," not in laws. [...] In short, it was not a case of the government trying to prevent massacres, but one in which the government looked the other way, and considerable abetting also took place. It was a pogrom (Varshney, 2017).

In 2002, the BJP also ruled the Central government with Vajpayee as Prime Minister, and rather than taking action, he blamed the victims for this heinous crimes, despite his image as the soft face of Hindutva as required in such a diverse country as India. In fact, he never got rid of his RSS roots, as Vajpayee has said at a VHP meeting in Stratton Island in New York: "RSS is my soul" (Engineer, 2002). Soon after the Gujarat pogrom that began on February 28, 2002, then Prime Minister Vajpayee spoke at the BJP's national executive meeting in Goa on April 12 and said publicly against the Muslim minority in such a communal partisanship, which is unthinkable in a democracy. He defended Narendra Modi, the man responsible for the 'Gujarat genocide' against the Muslim minority. Mr. Vajpayee said: "What happened after the Godhra incident is reprehensible, but the issue is, who started it?" Not the identified individuals of Godhra but the entire Muslim community "started it". He went to blame the community globally, "Wherever there are Muslims, they do not want to live with others. Instead of living peacefully, they want to preach and propagate their religion by creating fear and terror in the minds of others" (Noorani, 2016b).

The Gujarat pogrom in 2002 represented a new departure from previous attacks on Muslims in the state because of the extensive evidence of a large-scale pre-planned attack by the Hindu Right and of close collaboration amongst right-wing Hindu organisations, politicians and the police. This extensive planning and execution indicate that this was an attempt to annihilate Muslim businesses from the state. As Oza (2007:164-65) observes: "This extreme planning could only have been happened were this information collected and made available to Sangh [...] In the days after the most intensive violence was over, cities and towns emerged with completely destroyed homes, shops, and restaurants that often stood adjacent to places left untouched". In Gujarat state, the Muslim minority were overwhelmingly the victims of pillage, murder and terror, resulting in the deaths of more than 2,000 men, women and children. Women, in particular, were subjected to brutal acts of violence and were left largely unprotected by the security forces.

The riots in Bhagalpur in 1989 and Gujarat in 2002 are two glaring episodes of government complicity in communal attacks against the Muslim minority. Very often in the literature of communal violence, the state's role is seen in terms of its "failure" to protect the minorities. Farasat & Jha (2016) show the limitations of this approach. "Failure" would imply that the state's intentions to protect the minorities

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were defeated, whether due to institutional or procedural weaknesses, or other reasons. The authors argue that the state was a collaborator in the violence in Bhagalpur and Gujarat revealing its complicity at local government levels. There is a deep state-society nexus that sustains violence against minorities. In 1989 in Bhagalpur, the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, after reprimanding the Congress Chief Minister of Bihar, then caved in under communal pressure and revoked the transfer of the Bhagalpur police chief K.S. Dwivedi who had been charged with inaction during the riots. However, the denial of justice and reparations to victims is not simply a result of institutional failures; rather, the state sided with the rioters, indicating its complicity in the violence. This reflects the endemic institutional bias of the police and judiciary and suggests this was deliberate, systematic and planned.

An earlier study by Gyanendra Pandey on Hindu-Muslim riots in Bhagalpur notes that:

This round of violence began in the last week of October 1989; arson, looting, murder spread from the city to the surrounding countryside and dragged practically unchecked for several days [...] Given the scale of the “riots”, and the infamous role of the local administration in encouraging the attacks and suppressing the evidence, it is impossible to establish the “facts” of this occurrence [...] Possibly as many as a thousand people were killed in the course of violence, most of them Muslims, but estimates of the casualties still vary enormously. During the first days of the “riots”, trains were stopped repeatedly at different places in Bhagalpur and its neighbouring districts; from several of these, Muslims travellers were dragged out and lynched (Pandey, 1992:33-34).

During the 2002 riots in Gujarat, the conduct of Chief Minister Modi was very much like a partisan and a *pracharak* (activist) of the RSS. He even justified the genocide of Muslims in Gujarat by saying, “Every action has an equal and opposite reaction”. Under the BJP, state police had been politicised. As Chief Minister of Gujarat in 2002 Modi failed to protect the Muslim minority, his prime focus being to inflame anti-Muslim prejudices by manipulating the Godhra incident and its violent aftermath to consolidate the Hindu vote. The recently published data from the 2011 Census shows that Muslims represent the largest minority in India constituting 14.2% of its total population of 1.21 billion. But they are to be found at the bottom of most socio-economic indices facing a high level of destitution and disparity.

However, soon after the BJP victory in the Parliamentary elections in 2014, Ashok Singhal, the leader of the VHP, a sister organisation of the BJP stated, “Muslims [...] must learn to respect Hindu sentiments. If they keep opposing Hindus, how long they can survive?” (Quoted in Jha, 2014).

The last two decades have seen the systematic capture of socio-political and cultural space by communal and religious right-wing forces, represented this time by Hindutva. They have not only managed to win a popular mandate to rule India with the help of opportunistic alliances with “secular” parties, but have also unleashed a scathing attack on India’s religious and ethnic diversity in addition, extreme right-wing organisations like Hindutva are using a number of offensive and manipulative strategies to bring the lumpen proletariat and unemployed elements to isolate and attack minorities, particularly Muslims. In fact, since the late 1980s, the Hindutva forces consistently campaigned for the building of Ram Mandir, which finally led to the demolition of the Babri Masjid (mosque) in 1992, and also planned and executed the genocidal pogrom against Muslims in Gujarat in 2002 in the presence of both the police and the media.

The Gujarat riot confirms that bringing into focus the twin elements of mass participation and state complicity in communal carnage, leaving the victims with no recourse either to the collective wisdom of civil society or to the rule of law. The fact that social groups previously considered to be opposed to the Hindu Right, such as Dalits and Adivasis, played an active role in the 2002 riots, added to the complexity of the situation. The demolition of the Babri mosque took place when

the BJP was in power in UP state. The ominous truth is that India is becoming a fascist state where violence is encouraged by the main political forces in both local and central government with the active collusion of officials.

Another study by Paul Brass (2003) focuses on the riot-prone north Indian city of Aligarh in UP state where he has studied communal violence for nearly three decades. He found cynical manipulation of religious passions by some business owners, criminals and ill-intentioned politicians who focused on short-term electoral gains. According to him, these groups are complicit in the spread of misinformation and hate and that perpetuates riots. Brass analysed the occurrence of riots in Aligarh and tested his thesis that Hindu-Muslim economic competition acted as a source of conflict and riots. His research convincingly demonstrates that for several decades, violence has repeatedly occurred in five specific localities in Aligarh. In these localities, there is a visible presence of cultural/religious organisations, politicians and businesses that are willing to spread hate and mobilise people for violent attacks on their non-Hindu neighbours. Brass challenges the earlier theory that riots are spontaneous occurrences of mob anger, arguing that this communal violence in Aligarh is planned, orchestrated and institutionalized and that this explains its persistence (Brass, 2003).

Dalit and Muslim traders are attacked by so-called *guaraskshaks* (cow vigilantes). In 2016 BJP members publically flogged four Dalits in Una, a town in Gujara, for allegedly killing a cow and uploaded a video of this beating and humiliation of Dalits on social media. In fact, these Dalits were skinning a dead cow for leather as their ancestors have done for centuries to earn a small amount of money to eke out a living as they are not rich enough to own dairy farms and breed milch cows. The attackers claimed that they were carrying out their religious duty to protect cows and that their action was justified even if it meant taking the law into their hands. They were also apparently confident that both the local and central government would justify their actions. If such fascist volunteers of cow vigilantes (private army) are not restrained, they would undoubtedly be willing to hurt large numbers of Dalits all over India both physically and economically. In fact, the protection of cow is just recruited as another highly emotive symbol to control and subjugate the country's Muslim and Christian minorities and Dalits into submission and fear.

### 9. Institutional Bias

The Congress government failed to act decisively against communalists and despite regular occurrences of riots and attacks against minorities, especially Muslims over the course of nearly seven decades, no action has ever been taken against the perpetrators. The Government did set up Judicial Commissions whenever major violence riots took place to determine the causes and initiators of the riots. However, the government completely failed to implement the findings of these Commissions. Neither the Congress nor any other government has ever punished those who were guilty for these communal riots, despite them having been identified by the Judicial Commissions. There seems to be lack of will on the government side to protect minorities and side with the victims. This was also the case during the anti-Sikh riots which took place in November 1984 after the assassination of Indira Gandhi when more than 4,000 Sikhs were massacred. These attacks on the Sikh community were led by Congress leaders in Delhi and other Indian cities (Singh, 2015).

Regarding the issue of protection of religious minorities against discrimination and existing mechanism for accountability Singh (2015:51) has argued: "The National Commission for Minorities constituted as late as 1993 – more than 43 years after the formation of the Indian Republic in 1950 – remains a mere paper tiger without the power and institutional infrastructure to track systematic inbuilt bias against religion minorities [...] Hindu majoritarian bias, pervades the Indian constitution, bureaucracy, security forces, parliamentary institutions, judiciary,

prison, academic institutions, health services, media and cultural and art organisations”.

Further, on the question of institutional communalism Singh (2015:52) observes that: “Institutional communalism became evident in the Supreme Court decision to award the death sentence to Mohammed Afzal Guru, a Kashmiri militant who was secretly hanged on 9th February 2013. The bench deciding his case said that the death sentence was necessary in order to satisfy ‘the national conscience’, which is a surrender of legal reasoning to a structure of bias”.

Manisha Sethi (2013) also finds systematic bias in the workings of the intelligence agency and police in their dealings with members of the religious minority communities, particularly Muslims, who have found to be the victims of these government agencies during Hindu mob attacks: “In the case of terror attacks or communalist riots, if the police go after the perpetrators of violence, and they happen to be mostly Muslims, you cannot, in the name of secularism, expect the police to act in proportion of their population” (M.N. Singh, former Commissioner of Police, Mumbai, cited in Sethi, 2013).

Vrinda Grover notes that evidence collected shows there was clear Hindu bias in the working of the police and judiciary during the anti-Sikhs riots in 1984 in Delhi. The Congress government had protected the perpetrators of the violence and mass murders. The investigating agencies such as police, prosecutors and judiciary all collaborated to undermine justice (Singh, 2015). Further example of such bias could be seen in statements made by members of the judiciary, namely justice Sodhi, former Chief Justice of Allahabad High Court, revealed in the public meeting in Chandigarh that “no Sikh judge was trusted to deal with the Sikh terrorist cases” (Tribune, 2008, cited in Singh, 2015:52).

Police bias in Maharashtra state is not an isolated case. As Noorani (2014) notes: “A remarkable feature of the major riots which erupted in Uttar Pradesh state in 1972-73 was that they were not conflicts between the communities but cases of the PAC assaulting Muslims. Three of the riots – in Aligarh, Ferozabad and Varanasi during June 1972 – were due entirely to the Muslim protests on the AMU [Aligarh Muslim University] Amendment Act. Unchecked, the riots spread. In Nonari [a village in Azamgarh district] 72 Muslim homes were burnt down on November 15, 1972; in Sajni on December 12, about 100 Muslim homes were looted and 43 were burnt. Some of the worst riots in Uttar Pradesh took place in 1972 when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi held the Home portfolio”.

Amnesty International drew attention to extra judicial killings carried out by the PAC in 1987: “On 22nd May several hundred men from the Hashimpura area of Meerut were seen being taken away in several trucks by PAC members. Witnesses said most were taken to local police stations but several dozen in the first two or three trucks were reportedly taken to the bank of the Upper Ganga canal near Muradnagar, shot and their bodies thrown in the water... eyewitnesses said the bodies had been thrown in the canal by armed men in uniform” (Cited in Noorani, 2014). Furthermore, justice B.N. Srikrishna’s report on the Mumbai riots in 1992-93 notes the role played by the police: “The bias of policemen was seen in the active connivance of police constables with the rioting Hindu mobs on occasions, with their adopting the role of passive onlookers on occasions... This general apathy appears to be the outcome of the built-in prejudice in the mind of an average policeman that every Muslim is prone to crime” (Srikrishna, cited in Noorani, 2014).

A number of studies have been done on genocide in Gujarat (Ayyub, 2016; Lokhande, 2015) and have recounted how Muslims were subjected to bloodshed, arson, rape and destruction to of their property whilst the law enforcement agencies, headed by then Chief Minister Narendra Modi, not only allowed such atrocities to take place but, in fact, advised the police not to attempt to stop the Hindu mob attacking Muslims. The former Congress MP Ehsan Jafri and some 69 Muslim women and children were attacked by a Hindu mob in the Gulberg Society massacre (Engineer, 2002; Siddiqui, 2009b). To subvert justice public prosecutors

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were appointed to the investigation, who were known supporters of the RSS/BJP whilst judicial witnesses were pressurised not to give evidence. Fake encounter cases were also common in which Muslim youths were cold-bloodedly killed on fabricated charges. Under Mr Modi's watch things have been worse. And there has been no rehabilitation of the riot victims worth the name (Lokhande, 2015).

On recent judgement by the Gujarat High Court regarding Jafri murder case, Kuldip Nayar (2016) commented that:

I beg to differ with its judgment that the firing by Ehsan Jafri provoked the mob to kill him. I knew him and he was a staunch Congressman. The Gulbarg Society massacre was the doing of local Gujarati leaders hoping to parochialise the people... When Jafri was surrounded by the Hindu mob, he rang me up, seeking my help to rescue him from the frenzied crowd he had around him... Therefore, the Court's verdict that Jafri provoked the crowd is misplaced. It is a travesty of justice. But then the Bench is not to blame because it has to go by the evidence placed before it. The prejudiced police had neither done their job, nor homework thoroughly... The tragedy is that even the judges have now been taken in by the sordid job done by the police (Nayar, 2016).

As Harsh Mander (2016) points out about the bias in the India's legal system:

We have studied the aftermath of many communal massacres since Independence, and what binds them all is the pattern that few, if any, are punished for these crimes. This is the outcome of the communal bias or apathy of all arms of the criminal justice system: The police, prosecution, and courts; and the political, social and economic powerlessness of the victims of communal crimes. Among the survivors of these crimes - many of whom fight epic and hopeless battles for justice like the widows of the 1984 Sikh massacre or the survivors of the 2002 Gujarat massacre... The selectivity of or popular outrage and the application of the majesty of the legal system reveals a very troubling underlying majoritarian bias in society and law. A majority of those charged with terror crimes are religious minorities. While a majority of those charged with communal crimes are from the majority Hindu community, its victims are mostly religious minorities. If law and social outrage apply so differently when the minority is charged with hate crimes from when they are the paramount victims of mass hate crimes, then the promises of a secular Constitution - of equal treatment of all before the law - stands exposed, in tatters (Mander, 2016).

However, recently, on July 8, 2016 the Supreme Court of India has delivered a stinging rebuke to the government over the continuation of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA). The Supreme Court of India has said that the Armed Forces Special Powers Act of 1958, enforce in parts of the North-East and Jammu and Kashmir, cannot be an excuse for extrajudicial killing. It observed that if armed forces were permitted to kill citizens on mere allegation and suspicion that they are enemy of the state, not only the rule of law but democracy would also be in "grave danger". According to Supreme Court, whenever such allegations surface they have to be investigated regardless of whether the person is a dreaded criminal, terrorist or an insurgent. Extrajudicial killings have been going on for some time. The case in Manipur state in which the judgment of the Supreme Court has been delivered has a list of 1528 deaths in counter-insurgency operations from which the Court has seen details on 62 and these are suspected of extrajudicial killings by para-military forces. The Bill was passed in 1958 to deal with the Naga insurgency in Assam state, but later on was imposed in other parts of the Northeast, in Punjab and in Jammu and Kashmir. The law was based on the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Ordinance of 1942, issued during the Quit India movement. It also grants soldiers executive powers to enter premises, search and arrest without a warrant (Indian Express, 2016). Moreover, the Jammu and Kashmir's state assembly adopted a resolution on June 26, 2000, endorsing the in favour of state autonomy, and the resolution was forwarded it to the central government in New Delhi. The resolution urged restoration of the position as in 1952, before Sheikh Abdullah's

arrest on August 9, 1953. Expansion of the Centre's powers followed thereafter. Vajpayee, Prime Minister in 2000, rejected it (Noorani, 2016b; Siddiqui, 1991).

Since assuming power in May 2014, Narendra Modi's government and his BJP politicians have created an atmosphere of intolerance and hatred in India that has surpassed the worst expectations of his many critics (Siddiqui, 2014c). There has been an escalation of violence against Muslims and Christians, including the brutal lynching of a Muslim man in Dadri on suspicion of consuming beef. These events represent a direct assault on constitutionally protected freedom of speech and expression, and freedom of religion and belief. Intellectuals such as M. Kalburgi, G. Pansare and N. Dabholkar have recently been murdered in India. As a result, more than 50 writers have returned literary awards protest against the growing "intolerance" and to condemn the government's silence in the face of such crisis (Guardian, 2015). On the current scenario and deepening communal division and polarisation in Uttar Pradesh state, Hasan (2016) notes, "Ever since the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power at the Centre, polarisation on issues such as 'love jihad', 'ghar wapsi' and the beef ban have become a regular feature of political mobilisation in Uttar Pradesh and the country at large... Its impact can be seen from the fact that BJP leaders who were implicated in the violence were given tickets and they won their seats with large margins. For the first time, not a single Muslim candidate was elected to Parliament from the [UP] State even though Muslims constitute over 19 % of its population and over 30 % of the population in quite a few districts of Western Uttar Pradesh". Moreover, Amartya Sen emphasises, under Modi, government intervention in the nation's institutions "is more extensive, politically organised and connected with Hindutva movement [...]. Often enough, the person chosen for heading institutions of national importance has been exceptionally dedicated to promoting Hindutva priorities" (Sen, 2015, cited in Noorani, 2015).

### 10. Conclusion

The ideology of Hindutva has received widespread coverage in the press in recent years, but it is a crude attempt to camouflage upper-caste Hindu groups, who have used religion as a tool to maintain their hegemony over the vast majority of the Indian people. In terms of their everyday experience, there is virtually nothing which would be common to all Hindus and to talk about one single 'Hindu community' is misleading. Brahminical revivalism began in the 8th century to the establishment of the Sultanates by the 12th century, the hegemonic cultures in India were Maurya (Buddhist) (5th century BCE-8th century CE), the Sultanates (1206-1526), the Mughals (1526-1757) and the British (1757-1947). Most Buddhists were converted to Hinduism and yet we are told that Hinduism is very tolerant religion. During British rule, in the census the tribal peoples were put into a separate category as following an 'animistic' religion; however, after independence this category disappeared from government records by the time of the 1951 census, and tribal peoples who had not converted to Christianity were recorded by the government as Hindus (Singh, 2015).

This study found that the ideology of the RSS is based on hatred of religious minorities, particularly Muslims using this 'enemy', as a means to unite Hindus. Since independence in 1947 whenever the massacre of Muslims has taken place, the name of the RSS has been mentioned either in creating tension and disharmony among Hindus and Muslims, and/or taking part in these attacks on Muslims. Economic indicators highlight the plight and deterioration of the socio-economic conditions of Muslims in India. However, the RSS and its affiliate continue to oppose any policy measures to address these issues and to move towards inclusive development.

The Hindu Rashtra is being sought to be established by targeting Muslims, Dalits, Christians and other minorities and also by attacking the principle of one man, one vote, one value bestowed by the Constitution. The violent religious frenzy of the "gaurakshaks" (cow vigilantes) is a realisation of the RSS's Hindu

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Rashtra agenda. Hindu Rashtra is rooted in caste hegemony (Sen, 2017). As Dr. Ambedkar noted seven decades ago that, "If Hindu Raj does become a fact, it will, no doubt be the greatest calamity for this country. No matter what the Hindus say, Hinduism is a menace to liberty, equality and fraternity. On that account it is incompatible with democracy. Hindu raj must be prevented at any cost... they take every move to exclude the lower classes of Hindus from wealth, education and power... This attitude of keeping education, wealth and power as a close preserve for themselves and refusing to share it, which the high caste Hindus have developed in their relation with lower classes of Hindus, is sought to be extended by them to the Muslims. They want to exclude the Muslims from place and power, as they have done to the lower class Hindus" (Cited in Salam, 2016).

It is important to quote Dr B.R. Ambedkar's who once said that, "I do not want that our loyalty as Indians should be in the slightest way affected by any competitive loyalty, whether that loyalty arises out of our religion, out of our culture or out of our language. I want all people to be Indians first, Indians last and nothing else but Indians" (cited in Habib, 2017). Dr. B.R. Ambedkar had warned during the discussions on the adoption of the draft Constitution: "While everybody recognises the necessity of the diffusion of Constitutional morality for the peaceful working of a democratic Constitution, there are two things interconnected with it which are not, unfortunately, generally recognised. One is that the form of administration has a close connection with the form of the Constitution. The form of the administration must be appropriate to and in the same sense as the form of the Constitution. The other is that it is perfectly possible to pervert the constitution, without changing its form by merely changing the form of administration and to make it inconsistent and opposed to the spirit of the Constitution... Constitutional morality is not a neutral sentiment. It has to be cultivated." (Constitutional Assembly Debates, vol.7:38, Part VII)

Indian Muslims have not been involved in *Jehadi* movements, as London based *Economist* (2014) explains that "Indian Muslims have remained moderate in spite of reasons for some gloom: they endure lower levels of education, income, political representation or government jobs than the majority Hindus. It suggested that a shared history of over a 1,000 years, a tradition of Sufi Islam and a recourse to a democratic framework along with a watchful State have kept Muslims moderate." India's traditions are plural and flexible, and therefore we need to understand that the view that secularism is necessary and the views of religious unity put forward by the militant Hindu organisations led by RSS is profoundly mistaken.

The study have found that this contemporary form of fascism can be seen as a way of imposing the dictatorship of international finance capital on India while providing it with some kind of a mass base. The BJP plays a central role in this. This political group took no part in India's struggle for independence - none of its members went to jail or participated in any anti-colonial movement. This is not the case for the liberal bourgeois parties since due to their origins they have a very different mode of functioning that accommodates different kinds of voices. Therefore it is very difficult for them to work for the establishment of the rule of international finance capital, while the BJP can do this. At the same time, the BJP can provide a mass base for that kind of a regime by whipping up communal frenzy. The necessity of fascism in the contemporary juncture arises from the tension between the existences of a polity in which a mass base is necessary while at the same time we live in a globalised world where the rule of international finance capital dictates the terms. This tension produces fascistic tendencies in a developing country like India (Banaji, 2016).

At present, India faces an immense threat from fascism in the guise of Hindu nationalism. The process of uneven development and deepening socio-economic crisis has created conditions of backwardness and poverty, which in turn had created an opportunity for right-wing Hindu organisations to organise people on the basis of religion. The study finds that with the adoption of neoliberal economic policy, India is surrendering its sovereignty to global finance capital.

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The counterpart of that domination is the communalisation of education. It is not possible to claim that everybody is equal while maintaining domination by the elite without justifying this in terms which are necessarily anti-democratic. India cannot have a secular democratic education while continuing to sustain this as an exclusive privilege for the upper caste and class. As a result, Hindutva forces invest money in education and introduce indoctrination at school level. So, the more the state retreats from social welfare responsibility, the more it becomes possible for these communal forces to move in and propagate their belief in as truth, which is very narrow, sectarian and divisive.

Precisely at a time when the drive to communalise education has been intensified, two industrialists from the Prime Minister's Council for Trade and Industry have produced a report on education. The Birla-Ambani Report can be seen as an attempt to communalise education. If education is communalised and privatised as the Birla-Ambani Report prescribes, then education becomes a commodity which is an essential input for industry (Siddiqui, 2014d). Then there is no need for social scientists to critically question the structures. So I think the explicit advocacy of privatising education in the Birla-Ambani Report and the design to communalise education share a similar idea of what the education system should be namely, that education should produce obedient, disciplined servants of the established order who are competent technicians.

The RSS has a long term strategy to subvert intellectual spaces, capture institutions of higher education and research, not through logical debates and facts, but through violence and intimidation and often with the aid of the state machinery. The danger is that the authoritarianism is spreading across educational institutions. From control of syllabus to control of thoughts is conducted according to the wishes of the Hindutva, which is the real danger of fascism hanging over India. Fascism assumes different forms according to historical, social and economic conditions and national peculiarities. In India, fascism seems to be emerging under the garb of nationalism, which is causing havoc to India's constitution and democratic morality. If India would like to be part of the civilised world, its leaders should safeguard the rule of law and uphold the constitution and pluralistic values.

There is no doubt that the Modi government exhibits fascist tendencies. What we are witnessing currently in India above all is a powerful paramilitary organisation the RSS, who are shaping the outlook and policies of the government and then also there is the menace of both their cow vigilantes 'gaorashaks' and their youth group the ABVP (Akhil Bharatiya VidyartiPrashid). They are mimicking the Balillas in fascist Mussolini's Italy, bullying university students in Allahabad, Delhi and Hyderabad, those who raised question on caste discrimination or income inequality or about national oppression in Kashmir are being called "anti-national". They also have found an external enemy within the country i.e. Muslims and subjugating and despising them.

There seems to be a "fusion" of the interests of the business and the state, which is close to an explicit definition of fascism and all these are hallmarks of fascism in India. The fusion of neo-liberalism and Hindutva is being cemented with more support from big business.

Finally, the semi-fascist authoritarian right wing Indian government promises no prospects whatsoever to farmers, workers, minorities, tribal people and Dalits and provides illusory hopes to the majority of the people. The RSS is trying to divide the society along religious lines. This will shake the foundations of India's pluralistic character. These trends are dangerous, self-defeating and threaten India's security and well-being. The religion should not necessarily be an imperative for being a nationalist and composite culture and shared heritage and plurality should be acknowledged. The study also suggests that in order to preserve the secular and democratic basis of India's constitution and pluralistic culture of society, all liberal, secular, left and progressive forces need to unite to combat these fascist forces.

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