

Hindutva and Indian Nationalism: Examining the ideological foundations and political implications of Hindutva

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Abstract:

This paper explores the ideological foundations and political implications of Hindutva, a form of Hindu nationalism that has significantly influenced contemporary Indian politics and socio-cultural dynamics. The study delves into the historical development of Hindutva, tracing its origins to the 19th century anti-colonial movements and the establishment of the Hindu Mahasabha in 1914. Key figures such as Vinayak Damodar Savarkar and Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar played pivotal roles in shaping and propagating Hindutva, emphasizing a unified Hindu identity and advocating for Hindu cultural dominance. The research methodology involves interpretive, analytical, and comparative approaches, utilizing primary and secondary sources from renowned libraries and online resources. The paper examines the impact of Hindutva on India's political landscape, particularly under the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, highlighting the resulting societal divisions and controversies. Critics argue that Hindutva's majoritarian approach undermines secular principles and marginalizes minority communities, leading to significant debates about religious freedom and the essence of Indian identity. This study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of Hindutva's evolution, its role in redefining Indian nationalism, and its ongoing implications for India's diverse society.

Keywords: Hindutva, Hindu nationalism, Indian politics, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar, Bharatiya Janata Party, Narendra Modi, secularism, religious freedom, Indian identity

Introduction:

India is a nation distinguished by its multifariousness in culture, language, race, and religion. Additionally, it holds the distinction of being the most populous democracy on the planet. After the British authority ended in 1947, Pakistan was established as a theocratic state with the purpose of serving the Muslim population of the subcontinent. On the other hand, India was founded as a secular and democratic nation.

Presently, India is formally recognized as an autonomous, socialist, secular, democratic nation, in contrast to Pakistan's designation as an Islamic republic. The Indian population is a diverse amalgamation of many ethnic groups, languages, and traditions, which mirrors the essentially heterogeneous nature of the nation. Historically, the Indian subcontinent was not a cohesive entity, but rather a conglomeration of various substantial and minor princely realms and provinces.

In Indian politics, there has been a noticeable trend towards the concept of Hindu nationalism, or Hindutva, despite the country's commitment to pluralism and secularism. Hinduism, originating on the Indian subcontinent, has historically exerted significant influence as a religious and cultural phenomenon. Nevertheless, Hindutva has arisen as a unique political ideology that promotes the supremacy of Hindu

cultural values in Indian culture. The idea, commonly known as Hindu nationalism, was conceptualized and refined from the 1870s to the 1920s, eventually taking shape as a distinct doctrine in the early 1920s. Hindutva's ascendancy has gained significant traction in contemporary Indian politics. It embodies a movement that aims to redefine the Indian national identity based on Hindu cultural and religious standards. The evolution of Hindu nationalism in the 20th century, especially from the 1920s onwards, has been characterized by a range of social, political, and cultural changes. This essay seeks to investigate these advancements, analyzing the evolution of Hindu nationalism and its influence on present-day Indian culture. (Banik, 2022)

Research Objectives

- To study the historical development and ideological foundations of Hindutva, examining its origins, key figures, and influences from other political movements to understand its evolution and impact on Indian nationalism.
- To study the contemporary effects of Hindutva on India's political and socio-cultural landscape, including its influence on policy-making, societal divisions, and the tension between Hindu nationalism and secular principles.

Research Methodology

The researcher had to overcome a number of obstacles in order to carry out this examination. There was extensive usage of other significant research results that were pertinent to the subject of the study's title. Additionally, it involved making judgements, setting review time restrictions, selecting publications with Hindutva and Indian Nationalism: Examining the ideological foundations and political implications of Hindutva, and assessing journals for data collection and processing. The researcher will use interpretive, analytical, and comparative approaches for the present research project. We'll gather data from a number of renowned libraries. The focus will be on thoroughly reviewing the main and secondary materials that are accessible. Websites and other online resources may be used as data-collecting tools.

Common Origin of Hindutva

The inception of Hindutva's intellectual evolution may be traced back to the 19th century when it emerged as an anti-colonial movement aimed at opposing British authority in India. Early intellectuals, who were influenced by European professors, believed that Indian culture was superior in terms of language and race, asserting its Aryan origins. In 1909, the British implemented a system of distinct electorates for Hindus and Muslims, which restricted voting rights to candidates belonging to their respective religious groups in local elections. This approach created a divided environment that was favorable for the promotion of religious identity politics. Hindu elites established organizations, known as Hindu sabhas, which eventually led to the establishment of the Hindu Mahasabha in 1914. This organization promoted emotions against the British rule and the Muslim community. The dissemination of the notion of 'Hindu consciousness' occurred through the distribution of printed materials, which aimed to foster a collective sense of national identity focused around Hindu symbols and customs. These materials also portrayed Muslims as 'foreigners' and 'invaders' who were linked with the British colonial forces. ("Hindu Natl. Orig. Ideol. Mod. Myth.," 2001)(Jaffrelot, 2007)

In the 1920s, proponents of Hindutva drew inspiration from Fascist Italy, specifically applauding the transformation of society achieved by Mussolini's dictatorship through militarism. They viewed this as an attractive alternative to democracy. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) was founded in 1925 by

Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, who drew inspiration from Vinayak Damodar Savarkar's 1923 work *Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu?*. This treatise defined the nation based on the ethnic Hindu identity and geographical affiliation. This worldview emphasized a shared lineage rooted in Hindu culture. (Eatwell & Goodrick-Clarke, 1999)(*Ideologue of Hindutva*, 2022)(Casolari, 2000)(D'souza, 2000)

In 1931, Hedgewar's guru, Balakrishna Shivram Moonje, traveled to Europe, where he had a meeting with Mussolini in Italy. Moonje studied the arrangement of Italian youth forming groups for physical and paramilitary instruction, which had an impact on the formation of the RSS's shakhas, or units, that still provide training to volunteers in physical exercises and selective teachings from ancient Hindu texts. These volunteers undergo indoctrination into the Hindutva ideology and are then allocated specific positions in social support services.

In the late 1930s, Italian authorities in India forged alliances with Hindutva leaders, engaging in activities such as promoting the Italian language and disseminating Fascist ideology. The Hindu Mahasabha openly endorsed the Third Reich, establishing connections between the Aryan philosophy of Nazism and the Hindutva movement. Savarkar, the leader of the Hindu Mahasabha and closely associated with the RSS, commended Germany's treatment of Jews as a paradigm for India's Muslim community. RSS chief Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar espoused a more radical position, contending that Hindu identity was inherently tied to race and lineage, a perspective that bore striking resemblance to the racial ideologies propagated by Nazi Germany. This viewpoint was expressed in his 1939 publication titled *We or Our Nationhood Defined*.

“In India, individuals belonging to foreign races are required to assimilate by adopting Hindu culture and language, showing respect and reverence towards the Hindu religion, embracing the glorification of the Hindu race and culture, and relinquishing their distinct identities in order to merge into the Hindu race. Alternatively, they may choose to stay in the country but must accept complete subordination to the Hindu nation. They should refrain from asserting any entitlements or special advantages, including fundamental rights of citizenship. They should not have any alternative.” (Kalhan, 2023)

Core Principles and Beliefs

Hindutva, which refers to "Hindu-ness," is a political ideology that aims to establish India's cultural and national identity as inherently connected to Hinduism. It promotes the establishment of a predominant Hindu influence in the country, asserting that Indian culture and identity are deeply based in Hindu traditions. The fundamental tenets of Hindutva encompass: Cultural Nationalism: This principle asserts that Indian culture is substantially same to Hindu culture. It advocates the notion that the national identity and values are more effectively portrayed through the perspective of Hinduism, therefore presenting India as a Hindu nation. Hindutva seeks to establish a cohesive and uniform Hindu identity, typically prioritizing this unity over other religious and cultural identities. The concept promotes the integration of different cultures into a unified Hindu identity, often marginalizing or expelling individuals who do not conform.

Revivalism is a prominent feature of Hindutva, focusing on the restoration of historic Hindu traditions and ideals. This revivalist approach aims to reestablish a connection between contemporary Indian society and its perceived illustrious history, frequently portraying ancient Hindu traditions and beliefs in a sentimental and idealized manner. Proponents of this revivalist viewpoint aim to restore the authentic spirit of Indian culture and counteract the influence of non-Hindu influences.

Relationship with Hinduism

While Hindutva is heavily influenced by Hinduism, it is crucial to differentiate it from the wider religious components of Hinduism. Hinduism is a religion known for its wide range of beliefs, rituals, philosophies, and practices, which contribute to its variety and pluralism. The nature of it is naturally inclusive, accommodating a broad spectrum of interpretations and expressions, encompassing devotion to diverse deities as well as atheistic ideas within its framework. On the other hand, Hindutva is a political ideology that aims to utilize Hindu identity as a basis for achieving national cohesion and political power. It frequently entails a stricter and standardized interpretation of Hindu culture and history, with the goal of creating a unified national identity centered on Hinduism. While Hinduism embraces diversity and adaptability, Hindutva tends to advocate for a uniform and standardized interpretation of Hindu culture, sometimes disregarding the religion's intrinsic variety.

Hindutva proponents often highlight specific elements of Hindu history and cultural legacy, occasionally in a biased manner, with the aim of cultivating a feeling of pride and solidarity among Hindus. This encompasses the exaltation of ancient Hindu civilizations and the depiction of Hinduism as a coherent, cohesive religion that has endured and been practiced regularly for thousands of years. This depiction frequently ignores the intricate and dynamic character of Hinduism, which has been molded by various regional, linguistic, and philosophical influences. Furthermore, the emphasis of Hindutva on utilizing Hindu identity as a political instrument can occasionally result in the exclusion or marginalization of non-Hindu people and perspectives. The ideology's focus on a cohesive Hindu identity might overshadow the inclusive nature of Hinduism, which historically embraces a diverse range of beliefs and practices. While Hindutva may attempt to associate itself with Hinduism, it frequently deviates from the religion's fundamental tenets of tolerance, acceptance, and diversity.

Notable Ideologues and Texts

1. Vinayak Damodar Savarkar: Vinayak Damodar Savarkar is widely recognized as the progenitor of Hindutva, playing a crucial role in developing and expressing the fundamental concepts of this philosophy. Savarkar's 1923 pamphlet, titled "Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?", elucidated the fundamental tenets that delineate Hindutva, with a particular emphasis on the notion of Hindu identity as a cohesive influence for the Indian country. He contended that Hinduism encompassed not just religious faith but also cultural and territorial aspects. Savarkar's paper presented a detailed plan for the Hindutva movement, which aimed to create a nation-state that revolves around the principles and customs of Hinduism. His thoughts have had an enduring impact on future generations of Hindutva intellectuals and advocates.

2. Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar: Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar, a prominent member of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), played a pivotal role in advancing and disseminating the ideals of Hindutva. Golwalkar, a prominent figure in the RSS, extensively expounded upon the principles of the ideology through his writings and speeches, placing significant emphasis on the necessity of a robust and united Hindu country. He contended that India ought to be a Hindu Rashtra (Hindu Nation), whereby Hindus occupy a prominent position, and other communities are expected to integrate into the prevailing Hindu culture. Golwalkar's perspectives frequently surpassed those of Savarkar, particularly in his insistence on the racial and cultural integrity of the Hindu population. His seminal publications, such as *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, expressed a perspective of India that emphasized Hindu cultural dominance and aimed to exclude or dominate other religious communities.

3. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) is a Hindu nationalist organization. The RSS plays a crucial role in advancing and spreading the philosophy of Hindutva. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), established in 1925 by Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, is a voluntary organization that promotes the

cultural and social cohesion of Hindus in India. The RSS carries out operations through its widespread network of affiliates, called shakhas, with the goal of fostering a strong sense of pride in Hindu history and advancing the principles of Hindutva. The organization's primary areas of emphasis are character development, community service, and physical conditioning, frequently achieved through paramilitary-style exercises. The RSS has had a substantial impact in shaping the political environment of India, exerting influence over various political figures and parties, particularly the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). With its activities and outreach programs, this group has become quite prominent in India. It advocates for Hindu nationalism and has a significant impact on the socio-political discussions in the country. **(Nayak, 2023)**

Hindutva and Indian Nationalism

- Definitions and Intersections

Hindutva is a political ideology that highlights the cultural and national identity of India as inherently linked to Hinduism. The ideology promotes the idea of establishing a predominant Hindu presence in the country, asserting that Indian culture and identity are fundamentally based on Hindu traditions and values. This philosophy aligns with Indian nationalism by arguing that the authentic essence of Indian identity is rooted in Hindu heritage.

Indian nationalism is a comprehensive idea that aims to establish a cohesive national identity that surpasses divisions based on religion, culture, and language. This variant of nationalism originated during the fight for independence from British colonial domination and sought to foster a unified feeling of national identity among the heterogeneous populace of India. Hindutva can be regarded as a form of Indian nationalism, although it is more restrictive in its delineation of Indian identity, emphasizing Hindu cultural and religious aspects in particular. **(Baber, 2000)**

- Contrast with Secular Nationalism

Secular nationalism in India is based on the notion of secularism, which promotes the division of religious matters from governmental activities. The principle asserts that all individuals, irrespective of their religious convictions, should get equal treatment under the legal system, and that the government should not show preference towards any specific religion. The Indian Constitution upholds this type of nationalism, which was advocated by prominent figures such as Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru.

Hindutva aims to integrate religion and politics, promoting a society where Hindu principles and culture hold the highest influence. Hindutva's emphasis on Hindu identity frequently generates conflict with secular nationalism, as it can marginalize non-Hindu minorities and question the nation's secular basis.

Key differences:

Inclusivity: Secular nationalism is a comprehensive ideology that seeks to bring together all individuals within a nation, irrespective of their religious beliefs. Hindutva, on the other hand, is characterized by its exclusivity and its focus on the Hindu identity. **Function of Religion:** Secular nationalism advocates for the division of religion and state matters, whereas Hindutva incorporates religion into the political and cultural fabric of the nation. **(Kotin, 2015)**

Political Implications of Hindutva

- Role in Indian Politics

The ideology of Hindutva has exerted a substantial impact on Indian politics, mostly via the endeavors of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its associated groups such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). This ideology prioritizes the establishment of a cohesive Hindu identity and cultural nationalism,

with the aim of advocating for and safeguarding what it perceives as fundamental Hindu values and traditions. Consequently, Hindutva has played a pivotal role in mobilizing India's Hindu majority by uniting them via a common cultural and religious identity. This influence has played a crucial role in the BJP's ascent to political dominance, allowing the party to enact policies that are in line with Hindutva ideas. These policies frequently center on the promotion of Hindu cultural traditions, the revision of historical narratives, and the prioritization of concerns relevant to the Hindu population. As a result, Hindutva has fundamentally altered the political environment in India, strengthening the significance of religion in public discussions and decision-making processes.

- **Influence on Political Parties and Policies**

The impact of Hindutva on political parties, specifically the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), is substantial and widespread. The BJP frequently aligns its policies with Hindutva principles, emphasizing the promotion of Hindu cultural values and giving priority to topics that connect with the Hindu majority. Some notable instances are the strong support for building the Ram Temple in Ayodhya and the enactment of laws that are seen as safeguarding Hindu interests. This alliance has not only strengthened the political backing of the BJP but has also resulted in a more extensive transformation in India's political conversation. The growing influence of Hindutva has led to the marginalization of minority communities, as policies and language increasingly align with conservative and nationalist viewpoints. This transition has fundamentally altered the political landscape of India, highlighting a more unified cultural identity and exerting a significant impact on the priorities and behavior of the political elite.

- **Impact on Social and Cultural Policies**

The influence of Hindutva on India's social and cultural policies has been significant, leading to efforts to rejuvenate and advocate for Hindu traditions and customs. The impact of this influence is clearly seen in the modifications made to school curricula, which now place a stronger focus on Hindu history and culture. This reflects a deliberate attempt to match educational content with the principles and values of Hindutva. Furthermore, legislative acts are influenced by this worldview, as seen by legislation such as the prohibition of cow slaughter, which carries religious significance in Hinduism. These regulations frequently give priority to Hindu cultural and religious standards, occasionally disregarding minority rights and traditions. Moreover, the propagation of a more standardized and exclusive notion of Indian identity under Hindutva has resulted in heightened communal tensions and instances of violence targeting minority communities. These acts and regulations highlight a wider cultural change, where the promotion of a dominating Hindu identity is increasingly shaping state policy and society norms, often resulting in a polarized and divided social environment. (Chakraborty, 2022)

Controversies and Criticisms

- **Accusations of Majoritarianism and Exclusion**

Allegations of majoritarianism and exclusion commonly stem from worries that specific laws and behaviors unfairly benefit the dominant group, potentially marginalizing minority communities. This impression implies that the concerns and entitlements of minority groups are being disregarded or oppressed in order to prioritize those of the majority group. This method has the potential to exacerbate societal divisions, leading to feelings of isolation and marginalization among minority populations. Detractors contend that this can create an atmosphere in which the perspectives of minority groups are marginalized and their cultural, religious, or social customs are devalued or even deliberately discouraged. Legal and policy decisions may implicitly or openly put minority groups at a disadvantage due to the focus on majority group norms and values. This phenomenon has the potential to create a divided society, where the desires of the majority are

given more importance, and the value of variety is not fully acknowledged or honored. This could ultimately pose a challenge to the foundation of a society that values multiple perspectives and inclusivity. (Alam, 2020)(Kaul & Vajpeyi, 2020)

- Critiques from Secular and Minority Perspectives

Critiques originating from secular and minority viewpoints frequently center on the gradual decline of secular principles and the detrimental impact on religious and ethnic minority groups. Detractors argue that majoritarianism has the potential to greatly erode the fundamental principles of equality and inclusivity that form the basis of a diverse society. These opponents contend that when laws and practices prioritize the interests and beliefs of the majority, they can marginalize minorities and relegate them to a lower position. The departure from secularism, a principle that typically guarantees impartial treatment and safeguarding of all individuals irrespective of their religious or ethnic affiliations, can result in systematic disparities. This transition could also reduce the varied cultural and religious makeup of society, leading to a situation where minority communities feel marginalized and their contributions are not recognized or appreciated. This phenomenon poses a threat to the fundamental principles of democracy and secularism, which aim to safeguard equal rights and promote tolerance towards different perspectives. (Abizadeh, 2021)(Abizadeh, 2023)

Hindutva in Contemporary India

- Current Political Landscape

Hindutva, a political philosophy that advocates for Hindu nationalism, has exerted a significant influence on India's political landscape, especially during the tenure of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The BJP often focuses its policies and discourse on Hindu cultural values and identity, which has gained significant support but also generated major controversy. Critics contend that the focus on Hindutva has disenfranchised minority communities and eroded the secular foundations of the nation.

- Socio-Cultural Impact and Debates

The socio-cultural influence of Hindutva is significant and intricate. It has fostered a feeling of pride and solidarity among numerous Hindus, strengthening their cultural and religious identity. Nevertheless, the focus on Hindu nationalism has sparked intense discussions regarding religious freedom, the rights of minority groups, and the core of Indian identity. The advocacy of Hindutva has resulted in increased divisiveness across society. For certain individuals, it symbolizes a vital validation of Hindu identity and principles, perceived as essential for safeguarding cultural legacy. On the other hand, some people see it as a danger to India's historically inclusive and non-religious ethos, which has always been defined by its acceptance of many cultures and religions. This tension exemplifies broader apprehensions regarding the potential erosion of the inclusive ideals that form the foundation of the country's democratic structure, as a result of the increasing influence of Hindutva. Hindutva's influence on public discourse prompts crucial inquiries regarding the equilibrium between cultural esteem and the dedication to preserving a society that values and defends the rights of all individuals, irrespective of their religious or ethnic affiliations. (Danial, 2024)

Conclusion:

Hindutva has exerted a substantial impact on India's intellectual and political sphere, restructuring the country's sense of self by intricately connecting it with Hindu cultural and religious principles. This

philosophy originated as a response to colonial domination and developed during the early 20th century, taking inspiration from diverse nationalist movements across the globe. The formation of institutions such as the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS solidified the basis of Hindutva, advancing a cohesive Hindu identity and depicting other religious groups, particularly Muslims, as external to it. Although Hindutva has cultivated a feeling of pride and unity among numerous Hindus, it has also ignited significant controversy. Critics contend that it weakens the secular principles of India, marginalizes minority communities, and promotes social fragmentation. The intellectual principles of Hindutva, as expressed by individuals such as Savarkar and Golwalkar, prioritize cultural rejuvenation and national cohesion, often disregarding inclusiveness and plurality. The current political scenario, led by the BJP and figures like Narendra Modi, serves as a clear example of the widespread impact of Hindutva ideology. This raises important concerns regarding the delicate equilibrium between cultural identity and democratic principles. India's ongoing exploration of its rich and complex identity necessitates a crucial examination of the role of Hindutva in molding the nation's destiny.

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