

Neoteric Nationalism in India: Secular or Religious?

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The nationalism in India emerged with the national movement as an urge of political independence, but it is not necessarily a derivative of nationalism. In this post-independence period, the concept took a drastic change from politico-cultural nationalism to particularistic nationalism of many groups and now essentially religious nationalism. The present blend of nationalism is interpreted as Hindu nationalism. It evolved from nationhood to nationalism. In this open world, Indian nationalism has been unrolled with a Hindu dominating policy due to which religion in India got politicized. The surge of religion is too high in India has become an important political agenda. It has shuttered the participation of the religious minority from the mainstream of politics. This paper is an endeavour to present this new discourse of Indian nationalism which emerged at the backdrop of Hinduism.

Keywords: nationalism, Hinduism, secularism, minority, citizenship, ethnicity

Introduction

The concept of nationalism is a note of the 18th century which experienced gradual changes in its due course in the succeeding phases. Nationalism in India emerged in the specific context of the freedom movement and it served as an ideology of Swaraj or self-rule. Emerged as an offshoot of the national movement, nationalism got various interpretations, enriching the profundity of the study. The idea of nationalism emerged with the sole motto of the political independence of the nation, but it essentially reflected the social and cultural aspects, too. India took the European notion of “nationalism” that represents the country as a metaphysical entity. To ensemble Indian mass in their struggle for freedom, the concept of nationhood was generated, which was further contrived into nationalism. Indian nationalism flourished in the pre-independence era but eventually devolved into religious nationalism in recent days. Owing to the controversial and spurious interpretation of the subject, the real essence of nationalism has been downcast. As a result, the new generation deems Indian nationalism, a derivative of Hindutva.

Nationalism in India has been increasingly burgeoned, taking a discursive shape in the subsequent periods. There were tremendous social and cultural impacts on Indian nationalism in diversity-sensitive India. During India's struggle for freedom, national identity had been constructed to attain political liberation. The folks of the country, irrespective of caste, creed, race, and religion, jumped into the freedom struggle against alien rule. But the nationalism also had a strong communal cloying. The religious dogmatism provoked bloodshed and the creation of Pakistan as a separate state. Immediately, after independence, nationalism became a strictly political concept though it had a strong undercurrent of Hindu nationalism. The religious bigotry both in India and in Pakistan converged with their respective political programmes. Hindu nationalism frustrated the minority communities who received concessional rights in the post-independent political sphere. Though the constitution

of India inserted Part III which guaranteed equality to all citizens of India irrespective of caste, sex, race, religion and place of birth to qualify the constitution as a secular one, the word secularism was added in the Preamble only in 1976. Nevertheless, the religious contour of nationalism continued to be a political reality. Presently, the secularism of India is at risk due to its chauvinistic Hindutva policy. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government has introduced a new definition of nationalism in Indian politics. At this juncture, it is essential to analyze the nature of nationalism in India. In this background, this paper reviews the various nuances of nationalism in India and its changing contours over time. The paper gives the historical interpretation of the evolving socio-economic context of Indian nationalism. It inquires: Is Indian nationalism merely an ilk of Hinduism? Is Indian secularism reconstituted under Hindu nationalism?

Methodology

The present study is inter-disciplinary in nature. The historical and analytical method is followed in this research exercise. The historical method seeks to focus and analyze past events, conditions and phenomena, bestowed with political significance, in the light of the interpretations and explanations by the historians, authors, political analysts, etc. The approach in this study is essentially based on some observation, arrived against the backdrop of some general hypotheses.

Nationalism: A Nomothetic Expression

Nationalism has controversial connotations that created conceptual hiatus among academic thinkers. The West-Phalian Treaty (1648) had introduced the state with its offspring-nationhood and “nationalism”. The proximity between these two has made it a vivid contestation. As such the word “nation” stands for a collective identity of the people. Nationalism is a bridge between the nation and its citizens. The emergence of the Afro-Asian and Latin American countries as independent nations in the 1950s made the discussion of nationalism more contentious. However, under the prevailed postmodern world politics, the idea of “nationalism” has been subjected to intellectual debate. It is variedly applied in different countries. Nationalism is a pre-conceived historical idea. To get a precise understanding of nationalism a theoretical apprehension of the term is needed.

In his book *Nation before Nationalism*, Armstrong (1982) differentiated between nationalism and nationhood. “Nationhood” is a political term whereas “nationalism” has both the social and cultural dimension along with its political status. Extending this definition, it can be said that nationalism had a strong sense of subjectivity as it mobilized a large section of people to raise a common demand for nationhood. Patriotism is also used interchangeably with nationalism. According to Charles de Gaulle (Amado, 2010), “Patriotism is when the love of your people comes first; nationalism, when hate for people other than your own comes first” (p. 28). On a similar line Rabindranath Tagore criticized the idea of nationalism and prioritised internationalism over nationalism. Tagore vehemently criticized this constricted proposition and emphasized internationalism over narrow chauvinism. He was not in favour of limiting nationalism within the territorial span, thus transcended regional consideration. Tagore rightly predicted that Indian nationalism can be turned into xenophobia under the veil of patriotism. He said, “Patriotism can’t be our final spiritual shelter. I will not buy glass for the price of diamonds and I will never allow patriotism to triumph over humanity as long as I live”¹.

¹ Rabindranath Tagore was a critique of nationalism. He predicted the fate of Indian nationalism. He hypothesized that an extreme claim for nationalism could lead to jingoism. The decision of the Supreme Court to play the national song in theatres proved this notion. In a letter to his friend, Tagore expressed his trepidation about extreme nationalism. See <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/national-anthem-flag-in-theatre-rabindranath-tagore-supreme-court-4406145/>.

When thinking about the Indian subcontinent, nationalism emanated from a multitudinous cluster of Indians. Thapar, Noorani, and Menon (2016) saw nationalism as an identity and a feeling of oneness—not limited to narrow chauvinism. On the contrary, an anomalous definition of state was placed by Anthony Smith (1998), when he said that a state is nested and cohabited by a single ethnic group and is bounded by cultural homogeneity. But such attenuations do not fit fully in India because Indian nationalism took variegated shapes over time. The history of the country proves its cultural pluralism. Defining a country, like India, completely from the religious perspective means demeaning its cultural plurality. India cannot be considered as a nation with a common culture due to its heterogeneous socio-cultural mosaic. And for this reason, in a society, like India, no particular religious community could claim to be a nation and this made the homogenized nationhood oxymoronic.

The constructivists hold a nation is neither a divine entity nor the result of evolution but is a man-made institution and a socially constructed concept. Benedict Anderson broached the idea of nationalism by introducing “imagined community” (Anderson, 2006). For him, a nation is a “socially constructed community”. Similar to this, the advocates of Rashtriya Sevak Sangh and its political allies consider India, the homeland of Hindu. This school abstracted that the Aryans were the original inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent and asseverated the need to make India a “Hindu nation” with its Hindu majority. Such a claim has helped in the formation of an imaginary national identity in India. Comparably, in the Marxist approach, nationalism is considered as a pave for capitalism. Marxism and nationalism are irreconcilable to each other. Marxists believe that beneath the metaphysical construction of nationalism, the international class consciousness disappears. It is essentially a bourgeoisie phenomenon and the “proletariat has no fatherland” (Llobera). Nevertheless, the Marxists took a strategic stand on nationalism when Lenin declared “national self-determination”, a first step towards achieving a classless society and Stalin (1941) in his seminal work *Marxism and the National and Colonial Question*, signified the role of a common language, territory and common economic life for constructing a common national identity. He realized that for the construction of socialism, it is most necessary to make national culture. Thus, the notion of nationalism evolved substantially in socialist countries. In this respect, the analysis of Gallner deserves special mention. In his notable work *Thought and Change* (1964), Gellner described nationalism as a manmade ideological construction that can never be natural, though he considered nationalism as an essential condition for the political entity and people living into that political boundary. Tuning with the Marxists, this non-Marxist theorist argued that nationalism is an upshot of industrialization (nation and nationalism). In his *Nation and Nationalism*, Gellner (1983) substituted Marx’s class consciousness with cultural consciousness and stated that in the industrial society, class antagonism honed cultural clashes and cultural awakening heightened nationalism. The influence of western ideas cannot be repudiated in the formation of the cluster of Indian nationalism. But the construction of Indian nationalism has its root in Indian socio-cultural origin which developed in the writings of many Indian theorists.

Hindu Revivalism in Indian Nationalism

While the subaltern narratives of nationhood engaged a large section of the middle-class intellectuals in the periphery of the Indian state, in the mainland, there emerged a Hindu revivalist movement in the 19th century, converging the Hindu renaissance with the Indian national movement. The correlation between Hinduism and the Indian national movement received momentum with tremendous intellectual support from one section of the elites who intended to majoritize the Hindu community by minoritizing the Muslim

community. This provided a reasoned alibi to demand a Hindu state. In the nationalist movement, Hinduism got an overwhelming public acceptance and the Hindu revivalist movement was initiated by several social and political leaders, including Dayananda Saraswati, Vivekananda, Narayan Guru and was further stirred by Tilak, Aurobindo, Lala Lajpat Rai, B. S. Moonje, Savarkar and, not the least, Shyamaprasad Mukherjee. They considered Hinduism as the fulcrum of the Indian national movement. A brief overview of the literature on the sagacity of Hindu nationalism would make the point clear.

During the 19th and 20th century, most thinkers have idolized nationalism and gave a metaphysical appearance to the idea. They metaphorically represented Territorial India as the “Mother India” and equalized Indian nationalism with Hinduism. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (1838-1894), was a stalwart in the field of Indian nationalism. His seminal work “Anandamath” has inspired millions of quavering hearts to be assorted with the main course of Indian nationalism. What he focused more on was the formation of national identity based on the Hindu glorious past. In his verbose “Anandamath”, Bankimchandra gave an enthralling and appealing analogy between the deity Kali and the nation (Chattopadhyay, 2017) where the “*Shakti*” form was perceived as the motherland. He induced a kind of spirit of nationalism among the Indians. The dark complexion of goddess Kali represented the illiteracy, untouchability and hunger that prevailed in India. Her disrobed form embodied impecunious India under alien rule. For that, Bankim had pictured India on the image of a great mother and portrayed a feminist image of the land entwined with an awakening measure for the Indians. In all his works, he constructed the glorious history of Hindu. Bankim Chandra did not directly voice against Muslims but he phrased a palaver where Muslims were demeaned when compared with the treacherous European rulers. His book *Durgeshnandini* explicitly discussed the prevalent cultural difference between Hindus and Muslims. Furthermore, the Hindu-deification of India was condemned by the Muslims when the Congress Working Committee declared Bankim’s “Vande Mataram” as the National Song of India in October 1937 due to its prejudiced and biased tone. Perhaps, he deliberately stamped out Muslim extant from the history of Indian nationalism. Paradoxically, though he was much influenced by western nationalism, he assorted cultural nationalism with western nationalism and the cultural signifier, to him, was “Vande Mataram”, which was an ode to the corpus of Mother India. On 24 January 1950, the Constituent Assembly of India adopted “Vande Mataram” as a national song.

Aurobindo Ghosh (1872-1950) was another notable figure who idealized Indian nationalism. The core of his political philosophy lies in introducing Indians to spiritual nationalism. In his speech in 1908 in Bombay, Aurobindo mentioned that “Nationalism is a religion that has come from God”. He accorded divinity to the motherland. According to Aurobindo, the complete realization of spirituality will lead to the political independence of the country. He said, “the movement of which the first outbreak was political, will end in a spiritual consummation” (Ghosh, 1908). Like Bankim Chandra, Aurobindo also found religion, the only thread which could knit the Indians together. Unlike Bankimchandra, Aurobinda’s metaphysical nationalism was quite sensible and pragmatic. He paralleled spiritual nationalism with total boycott and non-cooperation with the Britishers. Though he did not show any antagonism against the Muhammadan and preferred Hindu-Muslim unity, he viewed that this unity should not be at the cost of the subjection of the Hindus. Aurobindo suggested assimilating Muslims into Indian culture to solve the intractable Hindu-Muslim issue. In all intent and purpose, Aurobindo preferred addressing India, essentially as a Hindu nation in which the Muslim interlopers could be assimilated. The spiritual nationalism of Aurobindo was the manifestation of Sanatan Hindu dharma. His religious nationalism was a machination to give a clarion call for national liberation. But while mobilizing the

mass in the national liberation movement, he dropped the idea of a pan-national unity of the Hindus and the Muslims.

In both the accounts of Bankim Chandra and Aurobindo, the idea of nationalism was limited to the Bengali race and its scope was bounded up to undivided Bengal borderland and a few parts of Assam and Tripura. They had delineated a Hindu-Bengali mysticism and their span of nationalism excluded millions of people of India with diverse social backgrounds and dismissed the concepts both of pan-nationalism and of the sacred brotherhood. Many other theorists also limited their nationalism within a short territorial span. The editor of “The Maratha” and “The Kesari” and the well known Indian nationalist, Bal Gangadhar Tilak flagged “Advaitabad” for promoting nationalism in the Indian society. Tilak fostered religious festivals as “symbolic adjuncts of nationalism...” (U. Sharma & S. K. Sharma, 2001, p. 115). He started the Ganesh festival and Shibaji festival for propagating the Hindu religion amongst the people. Despite such a profuse call for the nation, his stab was limited to Maharashtra state only. Therefore, a specific provincial sentiment and a regional patriotism (Kabiraj, 2010) had worked as a major hurdle in the development of the national consciousness of the whole country.

Savarkar, the most prominent figure among all, had (1883-1966) flavoured nationalism with Hinduism. In his book *Hindutva/Who is a Hindu?* (1923), he wrote that Hinduism is a part of Hindutva. The latter one has an intense meaning as it includes the pattern or way of life. Under Hindutva, he wanted to veil all those communities who consider India as their *Pitri bhumi* (fatherland) and *Punya bhumi* (holy land). Under “pitribhumi”, he brought the components like – territory, race, religion, culture and language whereas “punyabhumi” stands for religion, culture and language (Zavos, 2005). Muslims are excluded from being considered as a native of India because though they take it as a holy land, it cannot be considered as their fatherland. In his view, for getting independence, India needs to prove it is a nation and for that, the Hindu efflorescence of the country is a prerequisite for making a national identity. Such views of Savarkar on Hindu chauvinism vehemently contributed to raising bellicose nationalism in India. His ideological acolytes had strong Aryan prejudice and considered India as the homeland of the Hindus only. Most of the Indian theorists tried to affirm their faith in recognizing the Aryans as original inhabitants of the country, ignoring the fact that the Aryans were alien invaders.

The discussion about Indian nationalism would be utterly incomplete without discussing Ambedkar. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, perhaps, is the only Indian figure who had realised the innate heterogeneity in Indian society. His idea of nationalism, folded with subaltern interpretation, is incorporated in the Indian Constitution. Dr. Ambedkar provided a significantly strong base to the Indian social structure. He was critical of the untouchable culture in Hinduism and hence had protested against the fragmented culture of Indian nationalism, propagated by both the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League. He was convinced that unless and until the unprivileged sections of Indian society get due recognition in the society, the true ethos of nationalism cannot be achieved. The view of Ambedkar is very much relevant in the present Indian political context where communalism and casteism have become an established socio-political reality.

Apart from the socio-political idiosyncrasies, the nationalism of India has nonpareil elitist nature. The contribution of Indian freedom fighters, political thinkers and iconic leaders were all reflected in the emergence of nationalism. In Ananda math, Bankim Chandra composed the song “Vande Mataram” (Hail to thee, Mother) for the awakening of the mass. He wrote—“Sujalam suphalam malayaja sheetalam Shyasyashyamalam maataram”.

In this hymn, the author praised the idolatrous motherland with all the goodness of nature. He rendered the abundance of the resources of the mighty motherland. It has sensitized the overall social culture of the Indian mass. But this eulogized song had overlooked the great famine of 1876. It rescinded the core realities of Indian society, thereby hindering the formation of nationalism. The elitist nature of modern nationalism is rightly observed by Sudipta Kabiraj. In his writing, modern nationalism achieved an enlightened cognition. Kabiraj (2010) viewed that the evolution of modern nationalism expounded the enthusiasm of the Bengali elites in advancing the spirit of patriotism. While writing about regional patriotism, he has partially touched on the influence of intellectual elites on nationalism. The Indian national movement itself was an assemblage of upper-middle-class intellectuals. The formation of the Indian National Congress and its core cadres, including Gandhi, came from the upper echelons and the national movement had been framed under their patronage. Contrary to this, Indian nationalism emerged against colonial rule with an intense urge for self-rule. But it cannot discard the elitist nature of Indian nationalism. This led the Hindu elites to imagine a Hindu nation and they sought to manufacture a common consciousness of the Indian mass by propagating Hindu nationalism. But this imaginary religious nation soon produced a parallel Islamic nationalism, advocated by Mohammad Iqbal and Syed Ahmed Khan, breeding hatred to one another. Revivalism of Hindu Sanatan Dharma stimulated Hindu-Muslim bifurcation.

After the independence, the Hindu zealots bust a gut to make India, a Hindu nation based on the traditional culture of “Hind, Hindi and Hindustan”. But respecting the religious plurality of the nation, it was made a profane state, although the secular stand of Congress under Nehru was the manifestation of its divergence with Hindu Mahasabha. It is due to the expansion of the cleavages between the Muslim League and Indian National Congress; the latter has chosen to maintain a secular stand to avoid the communal indictment. The Indian National Congress under Pandit Nehru sought their preference for a secular identity over religious and regional nationalism. However, the tune of the Indian National Congress was never secular from the beginning. It was only through the 42nd Amendment Act, the principle was incorporated officially in the Indian Constitution. This strategy made Congress run its monopoly for the next three consecutive decades. But the internal convulsion and lack of leadership in Congress culminated at the end of its Congress, giving space to BJP in Indian politics since the 1980s with a sole agenda of Hindu nationalism.

Neoteric Nationalism in India

The major agenda of the NDA government in 1999, 2014, and 2019 was the establishment of the Ram janmabhumi and Babri Masjid conflict. The saffron brigade in India has established an unconscious nationalism. The “One Nation” Theory of BJP has become so manifested that it made the difference between state and nation very indistinctive. The secular stand of India was diluted with racial affinity. Eventually, the national identity of a citizen becomes a subject to his religious subjectivity. The march of Hindu nationalism started long back, but it got official acceptance when the Bharatiya Janata Party came in power with other Hindu adherent parties in 1999. The issues which are centred on the notion of nationalism and thus leading to the manipulation of the concept are—the Ayodhya-Babri Masjid dispute, formation of Hindu identity, nationals and anti-nationals debate, enmity with Pakistan, language. The fascinating Hindu-Muslim cleavage has always been used as scaffolding for preemptory nationalism in India.

The historic victory of the BJP government under Modi in 2014 was flabbergasting in Indian politics. Despite its ardent Hindutva policy, the BJP government, won by a striking majority in the general election of

2014 and 2019 respectively. In fact, in the 17th Loksabha election (2019), BJP's vote increased by 6% from 31.1% in 2014 to 37.4% in 2019 (Ganguly & Jha, 2019). The sweeping majority of the party indicates BJP's success in promoting its Hindu ideology. It is perhaps, due to this Hindutva policy of the BJP, it could wipe out its counterpart Congress with whopping support. The overwhelming Hindu nationalism has hidden the hierarchical stratification, rooted in Hinduism. With this Hindutva agenda, the BJP not only secured the support of upper castes but also the Dalit section. The skilful stabbing of Hindu nationalism of BJP amongst Indian mass assured their victory in 2019. Data showed a sharp increase in the number of votes of BJP in 2019². In a state, like Uttar Pradesh, where the political set-up revolves around casteism, BJP decimated all the major political contenders. Despite the stature of Yogi Adityanath, being a representative of the upper Hindu caste, people from every stratum in Uttar Pradesh showed their adherence to the Modi government and eventually, BJP won with a whirling majority. So, the present blend of Nationalism in India is surmised as an imaginary idea and a political tool that is used by the government to tighten its political grip. The party adopted the following strategies to legitimize Hindu nationalism.

Minoritization of Muslim Community

The lynching of minorities has become a trend in India for the last few years. Incidents like cow slaughtering, Ram Mandir issue have severely incited the atrocities targeting Muslims. The less attention of the Central and State governments as well towards such lynching has severely questioned the secular structure of the country. A 24-year-old Muslim boy was lynched in Jharkhand in June 2017 for not chanting the slogan of "Jai Shree Ram"³. The Hindu nationalists reinterpret nationalism from the religious ground. According to the data, given from India Spend, since 2014, nearly 84% of the mob lynching was done against Muslims (Abraham & Rao, 2017). All these atrocities pinpointed the intolerance towards the minority. The discriminatory attitude towards minorities was heightened on the "Triple Talaq" issue of Muslims. The ruling government placed the bill in 2015 to protect Muslim women from subjugation which they have been facing for a long. The Muslim community took it as an attack on their Shariya law. The government placed the bill and asked for solidarity with Muslim women. The Hindu government stowed away the issue of poverty and illiteracy and fanatically focused on the triple talaq issue as the main hurdle for Muslim Women's development. At this juncture, the minority community could not present a valid riposte to this issue by pointing to the deprivation of Hindu women from ancestral property. Moreover, in the second term, the NDA government had reprimanded the traditional teaching system of the Muslims and warned the government of West Bengal to check the Madrasas in the Muslim populated areas of the state charging that these institutions were being used as breeding grounds of terrorism⁴. This remark has curtailed the fundamental rights of the Muslims as Article 30 of the Indian Constitution ensures, "All minorities whether based on religion or language shall have the right to establish and administer educational institution of their choice".

² BJP shared increased votes in 2019. But it could not hype much in the Muslim dominated constituencies. Available at https://www.datawrapper.de/_/GN2JP/.

³ The BJP and Shiv Sena use the Jai Shri Ram slogan as a battle cry of Ram against Ravana which flagged the victory to Lord Ram, the prince of Ayodhya. This epic slogan has now captured the public media including the social media in India and has coalesced with the political slogan of the BJP. The self-proclaimed Hindu nationalism and the 'Jai Sri Ram' slogan uprooted the intellectual discourse on pan-nationalism and demeaned the Muslim community.

⁴ Amit Shah, the Home Minister of the Modi government tacitly tweeted the State Government of West Bengal should check the Madrasas of Burdwan and Murshidabad district, at <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/centre-warns-bengal-of-state-madrasas-being-used-as-terror-breeding-ground-1560631-2019-07-02>.

The word “minority” has not been defined in the Constitution of India. It has a genesis in the Parliamentary statute. It is not even explicitly defined in any international pronouncements. The United Nations Minorities Declaration (Article 1) refers to minorities as “based on national or ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity” (UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), 2010). Further in the year 1977, the United Nations Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities defined minority as

A Group of numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a State, in a non-dominant position, whose members—being nationals of the state—possesses ethnic, religious and linguistic characteristics differing from those of the rest of the population and show, if only implicitly, a sense of solidarity, directed towards preserving their culture, religion or language. (UN OHCHR, 2010)

The minority issue is convoluted in India, like any other country. The Census Report (2011) revealed that whereas the Hindu constitutes 79.80% of the population, the Muslim makes up 14.23% of the total population followed by Christian and Sikh and others, 2.30%, 1.72%, and 1.97%, respectively. Muslims are the minority for Hindu, but the majority for Christians and other religious communities. This claim is substantiated by Myron Weiner’s assumption. Weiner (1997) claimed, “minority and majority status is a matter of self-ascription as well as objective definition. What is a majority from one perspective is a minority from another” (p. 242).

Minority as a term was artificially created during the partition of India in 1947. The Morley-Minto Reform Act (1909) had sowed the seed of religious antagonism in India by sanctioning a separate electorate for Hindus and Muslims. It culminated in the partition of the Indian subcontinent. Both the religious parties agreed to divide the nations on religious grounds. Based on the division on the ground of religion, the status of the minority had been determined in both India and Pakistan respectively. The Muslims who stayed back in post-partition India were given the status of minority. Thus, the minority issue in India is a mere conjecture driven by the backdrop of established discriminatory social practices. The political parties, since independence, under the secular structure of India have impersonated the Hindu-Muslim diversity for their political gain and the invidious utterance of Shah on Madrasa evinced the fact.

The Ram Mandir—Babri Masjid Issue

The conflict over Ram Mandir—Babri Masjid is finally halted in 2019 by the Supreme Court of India. The name of this case, “Ayodhya Dispute/Verdict” has evanesced the Babri Masjid issue, not from Ayodhya but from, people’s minds. The verdict indicates the triumph of Hindu nationalism. The apex court justified the claim of those who appealed for the construction of the temple. Collaterally, it sanctioned land for the construction of the mosque in the different sites at Ayodhya. The Hindu backers claimed the Babri Masjid site at Ajodhya as the janmabhumi of lord Rama (birthplace of God Rama). They believed that beneath the Mosque, a dilapidated temple was found that had been tumbled down to build the Masjid. On this plea, the Hindu radicals had destroyed Babri Masjid in 1992. The Archeological Survey of India (ASI) submitted their report to the court, based on which the verdict is made. The report was in favour of the complainant who was challenged by Jaya Menon and Supriya Varma, the professors from Jawaharlal Nehru University, and they apprehended the irregularities in the report. According to their report, the shrine that was claimed by the Hindu Mahasabha as a temple can be a Buddhist or Jaina sculpture (Menon & Varma, 2010). This controversy runs for a long time in Indian politics. It was ventilated from a different perspective and was used for political gain. This

controversy notwithstanding, Lal Krishna Advani, the former president of BJP, started the Ayodhya movement in his “chariot” from Gujrat to Ayodhya as a central plank of the 10th Loksabha election in 1991. It led to a public backlash in many parts of the country. The infamous Ayodhya verdict has been full-heartedly embraced by the NDA government and the right wings supporters.

Anti-nationals Debate

In recent times, debate on anti-national activities has accentuated in India. The “anti-national” activity is understood as anti-constitutional activity as well. Any act of the citizens demurring the government policies is considered anti-national in India. The word “anti-nationals” was used first by Golwalkar, the apostle of Savarkar (Golwalkar, 1966) that often marred the freedom of expression of the people of India. The JNU issue in 2016 has aired the anti-national debate in the country when three students of the university were accused of being anti-nationals and were charged with sedition. The issue was clouded when few students raised voice against the Indian government’s decision on executing Afzal Guru, who was allegedly found guilty in the Indian Parliament attack in 2001. Furthermore, very recently the prominent figures, like Hiren Gohain, Akhil Gogoi, and Manjit Mahanta, were also attributed with sedition for their voice against the NRC issue in Assam. The charge of sedition has a colonial origin. Under British rule, many Indians were suppressed with sedition charges. In the post-partition period, colonial legacy was found active throughout the country. The anti-national accusation is generally wreathed censoring people’s right to free speech and expression. Under the veil of democracy, autocratic rulers are suppressing citizen’s fundamental rights.

Cow Slaughtering

The cow slaughter ban became a political agenda and a sacred commandment of neoteric nationalism since 2014. Under the Hindu religion, eating and selling beef is a transgression. A cow is considered holy and auspicious by the Hindus. On the contrary, Muslims along with other minorities consume cow flesh. The government banned the slaughtering and exporting of cows. But considering the adverse effect of the ban on the lather industry and the interest of the minorities, the Indian Supreme Court withheld the decision (BBC, 2017). The tragic irony is that the government even had proposed to provide a unique id to cattle (Mahapatra, 2017). The Solicitor General Ranjit Kumar has approached the Supreme Court to take a prompt step in this regard to stop the export of cows but the proposal was restrained by the court, afterwards. The beef policy of the Hindu government is unevenly laid out in India. The Modi government has decided to ban beef across the country, but all the Northeastern states along with Kerala are exempted from the beef ban. The state government of Goa has given an obverse reaction to this decision, followed by the Mamta Banarjee government in West Bengal. In his speech, the BJP President Amit Shah made it clear that they are not banning beef in Goa (Shaurya). Moreover, Biren Singh, the Chief Minister of Manipur assured that BJP does not have any issue with the consumption of beef in the entire northeast because beef is a traditional food of the indigenous and also a part of their daily diet.

Citizenship Amendment (CAA) Issues

The present controversy over CAA under the Modi regime has been found as the last pin on the demise of Indian secularism. The recently enacted Citizenship Amendment Act (2019) has experienced a tumultuous reaction and it raised protests from different segments of people in the country. It is widely criticized as discriminatory on religious grounds. The act is best known for the fact that it included religion as a determining factor to get citizenship of the country. Section 2 of the act declares—

Provided that any person belonging to Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi or Christian community from Afghanistan, Bangladesh or Pakistan, who entered into India on or before the 31st day of December 2014 and who has been exempted by the Central Government by or under clause (c) of sub-section (2) of section 3 of the Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920 or from the application of the provisions of the Foreigners Act, 1946 or any rule or order made thereunder, shall not be treated as an illegal migrant for the purposes of this Act; (The Gazette of India, 2019)

The citizenship amendment was a part of the electoral manifesto of the BJP. Through this amendment, the government of India declares that the aforesaid non-Muslim religious minorities who came to India and took shelter in or before 2014 will be given citizenship. The underlying substance of the amendment act is that other than Muslims, all the religious minority groups will be sheltered in India on the plea that in the neighbouring Islamic countries these minority groups have often been subjected to brutality. However, the Rohingya refugees did not get that much support from India. The Citizenship Act has stormed controversy and was demurred vehemently by people from different parts of the country. The protest mostly erupted in Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Assam and other parts of the Northeast. As many as 30 people died in protest of the invidious act. The protest marchers had been labelled as “Pakistani vandals”⁵. The mass protest against the act flared up in Delhi and Uttar Pradesh when the students of Jawaharlal Nehru University, Jamia Milia University and Aligarh Muslim University fulminated against the act. Many international forums have voiced against this discriminatory law and impetrated the Indian Parliament to repeal the religious manoeuvre. The United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres expressed his concern over the contentious act. Through this CAA, the BJP government has weaponized its long-lasting vision of the Hindu nation. The derogatory statement of the Home Minister of India (“I want to assure all Hindu, Sikh, Jain, Buddhist, and Christian refugees, that you will not be forced to leave India”⁶) affirms his intense loathing against Muslims. The prejudiced Citizenship Act bears a resemblance to the anti-Semitic Nazi policy in Germany. The acute detestation of the Modi government against Muslims has been reflected in the Citizenship Amendment Act of India.

Ethnic Nationalism in India

One of the striking features of the Indian political domain is ethno-nationalism. The central theme of ethno-nationalism was illustrated by Armstrong. He proposes that an ethnic community cannot merely be defined by its geographical boundaries (Armstrong, 1982). He constructed the concept “nation” first and then defined how ethnic construction leads to the formation of nationalism. He stressed the force of ethnicity which shapes the notion of nationalism. Ethnicity is a force that gives birth to national identity to countermand the extramural force. In the book *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Minority Rights* (May, Modood, & Squires, 2005), the authors hypothesised the difference between political conflict and ethnic conflict. Whereas the former represents the demands of the majority, the latter one is essentially the construction at the minority’s behest. This view is extremely relevant in understanding the contours of nationalism in the context of India where the nation-state and ethnic nationalism stood at two distinct poles and clashed headlong with each other, particularly in the post-Independence period.

Many ethnocultural movements sprang up in different parts of India, particularly in the Northeast, the homeland of diverse ethnic groups. India faced the first challenge of secession from the Naga National Council

⁵ See <https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/04/09/shoot-traitors/discrimination-against-muslims-under-Indias-new-citizenship-policy>.

⁶ The Union Minister and the BJP cohort Amit Shah in his speech in Kolkata stated this comment, see <http://janataweekly.org/amit-shahs-nrc-plan-decoded/>.

which was the first expression of ethno-nationalism. It was followed by numerous ethnic movements in different parts of Northeast India. There were also similar movements including the Gorkhaland movement in West Bengal, Jharkhand movement in Bihar, Orissa and West Bengal, tribal movements in Madhya Pradesh, Khalistan movement in Punjab, Telangana movement in Andhra Pradesh, and so on, although all these ethnic movements did not demand separate nations. The Bodoland and Twipraland movements did not seek separate nations but separate states to preserve their distinct cultural and linguistic identities. The ethnic movements have been the manifestation of the minority community for a separate nation. People from different ethnic roots have symbolized their ethnicity as a basis of their nationalism. These distinctive and small groups have idolized the concept of nationalism based on their strong sense of ethnicity, i.e., cultural distinctiveness, sense of inferiority and insecurity.

Thus, extending the views of Stephen May, it can be claimed that there is a thin line of difference between minority or ethnic nationalism and nationalism of majority. For example, India achieved independence from British colonialism by raising the issue of self-determination but it became an ethnic conflict when the same demand was raised by the Naga people. Furthermore, nationalism achieves success if the government, being the representative of the majority, raises the demand for nationalism, but when the same slogan is sung by a minority to protect and profess their culture, it becomes a separatist cry or ethnic conflict. At this juncture, the issue of nationalism is seen as detrimental to the interest of the minority. The idea of nationalism has supplanted the novel secularism.

Conclusion

The idea of nationalism is universal, but its application is particularistic. India cannot be considered a nation owing to its heterogeneous socio-political cluster. Historically, India was always seen a fascinating destination for invaders, travellers, traders and émigrés. People from different places, religions, races and creeds came to India. They settled down in the subcontinent in the different phases of time. It culminated in a variegated socio-political culture of India. It is the land of a composite culture that cannot be reduced to religious nationalism.

Indian nationalism emerged out of a prolonged dialectic process. If the Hindu nationalism of Savarkar is a thesis, the antithesis was found in Muslim consciousness in the writings of Muhammad Iqbal and the synthesis comes in an equivocal tune which is called composite nationalism. It further evolved from politico-cultural nationalism (thesis) to particularistic nationalism (anti-thesis). The nationalism in India that had been structured during the colonial rule had reflected the demand for self-determination and it was chorused by all segments of Indian society. But thereupon it fractured and narrowed down to ethno-nationalism. The growing religious urge of the governing and the governed is dismantling the secular structure of the country. Moreover, the unrestricted altercation on religion in the country is compromising with the financial growth of the country, cultural congeniality of the folks, security of the vulnerable and the unity and integrity of the nation.

In conclusion, it is clear that Indian nationalism under Hindu governance has strong political ground but it is philosophically erroneous. The artificial and imaginary construction of Hindutva is superseding the Indian way of life. The issue of nationalism in India covered the majority, whereas the minorities are lagging. If nationalism is a movement, promoting the interest of the nations, then it should be extended over the inhabitants of the country irrespective of their social division. But that reverberating issue of social unity is futile in India. Many Indian theorists focused on Hindu nationalism under the veil of Indian nationalism but in a heterogeneous country, like India, cultural nationalism based on the glorious history of Hindus is gratuitous.

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