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'Hindutva': Political Narrative in India and its Implication for South Asia

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Abstract

Indian's long-standing identity as a secular democracy is increasingly being contested by ascendance of far-right ideological narratives, particularly those associated with the concept of "Hindutva". With the electoral prominence of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and ideological influence of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), 'Hindutva' has emerged as a dominant political discourse. The ideology envisions India as a fundamentally Hindu nation, wherein citizenship and national belonging are closely tied to Hindu cultural affiliation. In this framework, non-Hindu communities are expected either to conform to majoritarian norms or accept subordinate status. Political actors and affiliated organizations have strategically utilized mass media and discursive tools to foster communal polarization, often targeting Muslim and other minority communities. This has contributed to increased marginalization, socio-political exclusion, and incidents of communal violence. Moreover, such narratives have extended beyond national borders, contributing to the dissemination of exclusionary rhetoric within the South Asian region. Anti-Muslim sentiment promoted by certain Hindu nationalist factions has exacerbated regional tensions and reinforced militarized and nationalistic postures. There is a growing concern that Hindutva-aligned narratives may influence minority Hindu populations in neighboring countries, potentially catalyzing reactive mobilizations among other religious groups, including Muslim and Buddhist factions. This discursive spill over heightens the risk of reciprocal extremism, deteriorates inter-state relations, and intensifies communal tensions. Consequently, these dynamics pose a substantive threat to regional stability and minority rights across South Asia.

Keywords: communal violence, Hindu far-right, Hindutva, minority rights and Islamophobia, South Asia

Introduction

India has long been touted as the world's 'largest democracy' and often positioned as a model of 'functioning democratic' governance for postcolonial societies, particularly within the South Asia Region. This narrative has been emphatically promoted by segments of the Indian political establishment and widely embraced by receptive Western and regional audiences, including the media. However, prominent critiques – such as those by author Arundhati Roy – have challenged this perception, arguing that democracy in India is "only for the rich and the elite", and describing it as "the biggest publicity scam of this century. Holding

elections every five years does not necessarily mean that our country enjoys a democracy" (Roy, 2006).

The proliferation of far-right 'Hindutva' ideology has further complicated India's 'democratic' reputation, with scholars and observers documenting increasing instances of systemic marginalization and discrimination against Muslim and other minority communities (Wright, 2024; Dutta & Pal, 2024; Banaji, 2018; Shahzad et al., 2021). This article critically examines the regional implications of this ideological shift within South Asia, particularly as it relates to the rights, security, and social inclusion of the minority communities in neighbouring countries. This analysis draws on secondary sources and employs a content analysis methodology to examine the evolving political discourse and its transnational repercussions.

Hindutva and the Transformation of Political Discourse in India

In recent decades, the dominant political discourse in India has gradually shifted from democratic pluralism towards 'cultural-nationalist' and 'religious-nationalism', specifically manifesting in the ideology of 'Hindutva'. This shift has coincided with the rise of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a far-right political party, and its ideological parent, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) (Banaji, 2018). The concept of 'Hindutva', often translated as 'Hinduness', is distinct from religious Hinduism or the process of Hinduisation. Rather, it represents a form of exclusionary ethno-nationalist ideology that promotes a homogeneous Hindu cultural identity as the foundation of national belonging.

While V. D. Savarkar is widely credited for introducing 'Hindutva' in the 1920s, its ideological roots trace back to figures such as Swami Dayananda Saraswati, who formed the Arya Society in 1875 to reform Hinduism. Over time, the RSS and its auxiliary organisations, such as the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), BJP, Bajrang Dal, Hindu Jagran Manch (HJM), Shiv Sena (lately one splinter group opposing BJP politically), Rashtra Sevika Samiti (Women's Volunteer Committee), and the BJP – collectively known as the "Sangh Parivar" (the Sangh Family), expanded the ideology's influence. Although 'Hindutva' remained a fringe idea until 1980s, the RSS successfully mainstreamed it through the political ascent of the BJP.

Central to the 'Hindutva' ideology is the assertion of a monolithic Hindu religion, Hindu culture, Hindu nation/identity, and Hindu state (Dutta & Pal, 2024). V. D. Savarkar argued that Hindus are the "true sons of Indian soil," due to the geographic location of their sacred sites, while Christian and Muslim holy lands lie beyond India's borders (Wright, 2024). This claim underpins a broader narrative of religious and cultural superiority that often marginalizes religious minorities – particularly Muslims and Christians – who are perceived as external or historically invasive (Datta, 2024) – as well as socio-economically marginalised groups such as Dalits and Adivasis (Siddiqui, 2024).

In traditional nationalism frameworks, allegiance to the nation-state supersedes communal identities. However, in 'Hindutva', loyalty to the Indian nation-state is "inextricably linked" to the "Hindu religious affiliation" (Wright, 2024, p. 7). As Banaji (2018) observes, the ideological construct of Hinduism favoured by 'Hindutva' adherents is a contemporary, narrow and rigid interpretation of the religion, which is repressive, high-caste, vegetarian and chauvinist in nature. The broader political goal is the realization of a 'Hindu Rastra' (Hindu Nation) through the mechanism of exclusion, intimidation, subjugation, or assimilation (into a subordinate status) of non-Hindu communities (de Souza, 2022).

Positioning Indian nationalism with 'Hindu religion' and centrality of the 'Hindu state' makes 'Hindutva' a fascist ideology which works through violent exclusion of others (Shahzad et al., 2021). It is not surprising that its prominent proponents such as M. S. Golwalkar and B. S. Moonje drew their inspiration from Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy for ideological guidance while Savarkar envisioned placing Indian Muslims in a subordinate position similar to that of Black Americans in the United States (Hindu Supremacy and the Multiracial U.S. Far Right, 2024). Banaji (2018, p. 335) describes it as "Indian fascism" or "Hindutva fascism" and adds that "the RSS is a Hindu fascist "grassroots"

organisation similar in its values to the Hitler Youth (with "Muslims" replacing "Jews" in their propaganda)". Dutta and Pal (2024) compared 'Hindutva' with the White Supremacist Alt-Right and Nazi ideologies, highlighting shared tendencies such as glorification of violence, militarism, notions of racial or cultural purity, and hostility toward the perceived 'others'.

As a fascist ideology, 'Hindutva' depends on creating fear and anxiety among the majority Hindu population through inventing threats for political gains. One of the key strategies of 'Hindutva' is disparaging religious minorities, particularly Muslims, and other marginalised groups in India; another is subjecting them to discriminatory practices at different levels (Wright, 2024; Dutta & Pal, 2024; Banaji, 2018; Shahzad et al., 2021). Their narrative portrays Muslims and other minorities as a threat to 'Hinduism', who may surpass 'Hindu population' – demographically and politically – through population growth, conversion, and migration, echoing the rhetoric of the 'Great Replacement' theory (Dutta & Pal, 2024; Desai, 2022; Bhat, 2021). The BJP/RSS have propagated the false narrative that Muslims have disproportionately high birth rate and Muslim women have higher fertility and bear more children, despite official government data indicating otherwise (Desai, 2022). A common narrative depicts Muslim men as lustful and dangerous (Desai, 2022), who strategically form romantic relationship with 'Hindu' women with the alleged intent of converting them and involving them in extremist activist – a concept widely referred to as "love jihad" (Dutta & Pal, 2024; Siddiqui, 2024; ISD, 2023). In addition, they are also presented as antinational through rhetoric, imagery, and hate speeches (Deshmukh, 2021), which generates polarization, anti-Muslim hate campaigns, and violence in India and beyond (Shahzad et al., 2021). Dutta and Pal (2024, p. 2) noted that, "the majoritarian Hindu narratives thriving on constructing the minority other as an obstacle to achieving ethnic singularity, planting seeds of genocide, and initiating communal pogroms".

The mechanism of 'Hindutva' propaganda politically works across multiple layers. Domestically, it first vilifies and 'otherwise' Muslims, other religious minorities, and marginal groups. Internationally, it selectively focuses on the treatment of non- Muslim minorities – particularly Hindus – in neighbouring countries, while showing little or no concern for persecuted Muslim populations such as Rohingya. This double standard is often accompanied by escalated tensions with Muslim-majority neighbouring countries, such as Pakistan and Bangladesh to stoke up fear and consolidate political support domestically, particularly during election periods. Along with it, 'Hindutva' propaganda messages promote the idea of "Mother India" or "Akhand Bharat" (whole or unified India), which is based on a mythologized and romanticised vision of undivided pastoral South Asia, and often visualised through maps of "Mother India" or "Akhand Bharat" including present-day Pakistan and Bangladesh (Brosius, 2005 in Banaji, 2018). At the centre of 'Hindutva' propaganda and narrative is the 'Otherising' of Muslims and Islamophobia (Siddiqui, 2024). Muslims (and Christians) have always been depicted as outsider invaders, inherently violent and intolerant to other faiths, thus a threat to Hindus, portraying Hindus as potential victims (Datta, 2025) to incite violence against the Muslims and to justify that.

The Hindu nationalists have been succeeded to expand their 'Hindutva' hegemony to such an extent that the other major political parties adherent to secularism, such as Congress, have been adopting a 'soft version of Hindutva' for political convenience.

Hinduisation, Hindu Nationalism in Nepal, and Hindutva

The historical trajectory of Hinduisation and nation building in Nepal offers a valuable framework for distinguishing between 'Hindutva', Hinduisation, and other expressions of Hindu nationalism. Within South Asia, apart from India, Nepal is the only country with a majority Hindu population. For a significant period in history, it was the world's sole officially recognised 'Hindu state' before transforming into a secular republic in 2007 following a decade-long civil war.

According to Lawoju (2025), the process of 'Hinduisation' in Nepal began during the Malla dynasty (1382-95 AD) and continued through the

Shah dynasty (since 1760-2008), and was formally codified in law under the Rana regime (1846-1951). During the century-long Rana regime, Hindu religious practices, values, and nationalism became deeply embedded in the socio-political order, shaping national identity and reinforcing Hindu-centric governance. Even after the country's transformation into a constitutional monarchy, the narrative of Hindu nation-building agenda continued through the mechanisms of democratic party politics.

Interestingly, Nepal integrated Hindu religious and cultural elements into state affairs for nation-building (though not a 'nation-state' in contemporary sense) for at least a century before the earliest notion of 'Hindutva' took root in India. In fact, Nepal served as both an inspiration and a model for the pioneers of 'Hindu nationalism' in India (Lawoju, 2025). While many Nepalis shared 'Hindu nationalist' sentiments with their Indian counterparts, they also tried to maintain a difference from Indian 'Hindu nationalism' (Lawoju, 2025). In Nepal, the term 'Hindutva' has not historically been used to describe the process of 'Hinduisation', 'Hindu nationalism' or Hindu nation-building. Nonetheless, these ideologies share notable similarities – both aim to supress diversity among population and enforce hereditary hierarchies through the use of Hindu religion and culture, thus making them coercive and inherently unequal in nature.

Yet, there are several distinctions between Indian 'Hindutva' and the process of 'Hinduisation' in Nepal. First, they evolved in different historical periods. In Nepal, Hinduisation originated in the fourteenth century, during a time when kings held sovereign power and could impose religious practices and social customs of their choice and legitimise it among their subjects relatively easily as sovereigns. These rulers gradually consolidated a hierarchical social order for their own strategic interests, organising society into vertically stratified but horizontally categorised groups.

By contrast, 'Hindutva' was introduced in India much later, in early twentieth century, when the concepts such as the 'nation-state', 'democracy' and 'citizenship' were relatively more familiar with the convening of first elections for the Imperial Legislative Council and Provincial Councils in 1920. Within this contested context of electoral politics and independence movement against British colonisers, 'Hindutva' relied upon glorification of 'Hinduism' and inventing binary opposition to consolidate support along religious lines.

As a result, the Nepali 'Hinduisation' was comparatively more cohesive and not overtly hostile toward Muslims or other religious minorities. 'Hindutva' promoted concepts of Hindu racial and cultural superiority, historical glorification, purity of blood, and invented threats of Muslims and Christians to increase and consolidate its support base among majority Hindus and was fundamentally divisive in nature.

In Nepal, the Hindu monarch and the institution of monarchy have historically been central to the idea of a Hindu Nation and are often considered as complementary to it – though not necessarily indispensable. Conversely, while 'Hindutva' idealises mythological kings (such as Ram) as epitome of rulers and regards Nepal as an ideal Hindu nation, it does not advocate for a monarchy in India. Furthermore, whereas, 'Hindutva' proponents were actively engaged in opposing British colonial rule, Nepal's Hindu nationalist elite did not antagonise the British, despite their ideological ties with Indian Hindu nationalists (Lawoju, 2025).

Propaganda Infrastructure, Media and Tactics

Indian far-right 'Hindu nationalists' use an elaborate information-sharing infrastructure – encompassing digital platforms, traditional media, and offline networks – to propagate their narratives and establish 'Hindutva' hegemony at national, regional, and global levels (Datta, 2025).

Christiane Brosius wrote about the evolution of 'Hindutva' propaganda mechanism - it was initially in-person discussions and reading of texts among the neighbourhood member groups. Since 1980s it was cassette and video tape based, when a lot of "quasi-fictional" "documentary" was produced around the Babri Masjid issue to stir up "militant Hindu consciousness" to

unify them. The visual communication symbols were saffron flag for Hinduism, iconic images of Hindu chauvinist leader or leaders preferred by 'Hindutva', Gods, and romantic portrayal of "Mother India" (Bharat Mata) encompassing whole of South Asia. Devotional songs and music were integral parts of this communication process and often accompanied the visuals (Brosius, 1999 in Banaji, 2018). Increasingly, the BJP/RSS used the symbols of power, masculinity and aggression to portray a "muscular religion" to build a new Hindu majoritarian "national subject," based on mythological belief, where loyalty to the BJP leaders would be the ultimate measure of citizenship and national belonging. By 2014, with the advent of technology, the BJP/RSS shifted to online platforms including comic books, social media, and YouTube, for their communication and outreach efforts. (Banaji, 2018).

Along with these ordinary communication methods, extreme violence, such as pogroms and massacres were also used as message delivery methods. According to Banaji (2018, p. 341), "Sarkar's "semiotics of terror" analyses the pogrom itself as a calculated performance of a spectacle of bloodletting, with which the perpetrators wished the minds of all Indian Muslims and secular citizens to be imprinted. Ergo, the spectacle of this incredible, genocidal violence was a call to arms for some, a final warning for others. It was part of the visual repertoire of Hindutva."

According to Reporters without Borders (RSF) (RSF, n.d.) most of the major media outlets in India are owned by a few wealthy people closely affiliated with the BJP, which has "signalled the end of pluralism in the mainstream media". The huge government spending in advertisements, the primary revenue earning source for many media houses, is also used as a tool to control it. In addition, draconian laws, extrajudicial use of force, imprisonment, intimidation, harassment, and even killings are used to silence critical journalists. The BJP/RSS affiliated 'Hindutva' mob is notorious for branding critics as "traitor" and "anti-national", launching coordinated and terrifying hate campaigns against them, including calls for murder on social media and violently targeting women journalists and disclosing their personal information on internet (RSF, n.d.). Journalists who cover the news of Kashmir are often targeted by authorities, with some subjected to prolonged "provisional" detention. The Indian media has been in an "unofficial state of emergency" since the BJP led by current Prime Minister Narendra Modi, came to power in 2014, the RSF stated. As Banaji observed, "the mainstreaming of far-right positions on a number of issues concerning Muslims in India have been only one of the ways in which mainstream media both in India and the West, have colluded to allow the rise of fascism" (Banaji, 2018, p. 340).

In addition to its near-total control over conventional or mainstream media, the BJP/RSS has developed an intricate network of far-right web-based news sites, social media networks, and more closed huge groups in messaging apps such as WhatsApp and Telegram. This ecosystem also includes NGOs, think tanks, social media influencers and extremist songs used to promote 'Hindutva'. The abundance of BJP/RSS-affiliated media has given rise to a new terminology – 'Godi Media' – used by critics to describe outlets perceived as lapdogs of Modi government. The term combines Modi and the Hindu words for Lap (Goad), referring to media that serves the BJP and the Hindu far-right in India (Siddiqui, 2024; RSF, n.d.; Husain, 2020). All of these work as echo-chambers, amplifying each-other's message, flooding the information space with pushed up narratives suitable to their own agenda, and suppressing diverse perspectives – ultimately creating a loyal myopic follower base, while marginalising different opinions.

Over the years, the communication or propaganda infrastructure of the BJP/RSS has grown significantly both in size and jingoistic attitude, as well as, by level of misinformation and disinformation generated. According to a 2019 report by EU DisinfoLab, a coordinated network of 265 pro-Indian fake websites and think tanks across 65 countries was involved in influencing decision making and anti-Pakistan lobbying in Europe, all of which were traced back to a single Indian company, Srivastava Group (Carmichael & Hussain, 2019). Scholars such as Mohan Dutta have also found links between 'Hindutva' and other

far-right groups, such as White Supremacist groups and affiliated media, in spreading Islamophobia and hate against Muslims (Dutta, 2025; Dutta & Pal, 2024). Islamophobia and hate against Muslims are the points of convergence that bring these groups together. The "Love Jihad" narrative is a global Islamophobic trope that has been used by 'Hindutva', White Supremacist and even Burmese Buddhist fascists in Myanmar, to perpetrate violence, even genocide against Muslims (Dutta & Pal, 2024).

Violence against Muslim and other Minorities within India

The real-life consequences of the 'Hindutva' narrative and propaganda on the Muslims and other minorities in India have been devastating. With the rise of the BJP/RSS and the growing mainstream acceptance of the 'Hindutva' ideology, the persecution of minorities in India has increased exponentially (WWG, n.d.). Since returning to power for a second term in 2014, the BJP – under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi – has been pushing forward the 'Hindutva' agenda, effectively relegating Muslims and other religious minorities and marginalised groups to second-class status. Ninety percent of religion-based hate crimes in India between 2009 and 2019 occurred after Modi's 2014 election (Wright, 2024). Hate speech increased nearly 500 percent from 2014 to 2018 compared with five years before BJP rule, with 90 percent of those speeches coming from BJP members. Not only that, 255 gatherings were documented in the first half of 2023 that spread hate speeches targeting Muslims – an average of one per day – with 80 percent of that taking place in states governed by the BJP, which was far higher than in previous years (Wright, 2024).

Meanwhile, attacks against Christians, Dalits and other minorities have also been increased sharply. According to the Evangelical Fellowship of India, anti-Christian hate crimes had doubled since 2014 (ISD, 2023). The BJP/RSS-affiliated 'Hindutva' mobs stormed churches, burned Christian literature, attacked schools, and assaulted worshipers. In one instance, a group was reportedly organising online to plan raids on church services through a WhatsApp group with 5,000 members (Gettleman & Raj, 2021).

Muslims being the largest religious minority group in India (14 percent of the population), are the primary target of 'Hindutva' fascists. A 2021 survey among Muslims in India revealed the extent of online hate they experienced on digital platforms. Thirty-nine percent of the respondents said they are being called offensive names; 40 percent reported they had been targeted on social media in the past 12 months because of their Muslim identity. Furthermore, 60 percent encountered digital content stating Muslim immigrants would take over India; 58.9 percent came across digital content accusing Muslims of targeting Hindu women for marriage; 55.3 percent had seen dehumanizing content depicting Muslims as animals and 59.7 percent had encountered digital content inciting violence against Muslims (Dutta & Pal, 2024).

The communal conflict and violence reached a new level in India with the ascend of the BJP/RSS regime. Since 1950, more than 10,000 people were killed in Hindu-Muslim communal violence, where majority of them were Muslims. In 1992, following the demolition of the Babri Masjid (Mosque) by militant BJP/RSS cadres, an estimated 3,000 people, mostly Muslims, died in communal violence (Maizland, n.d.). In 2002, Hindu extremists affiliated with the BJP/RSS led brutal attacks on Muslims in Gujarat, where between 1,000 and 2,000 people, mostly Muslims, were murdered in a year-long violence widely recognized as a pogrom (Brass, 2004). According to Banaji (2018, p. 341), "This pogrom—which included gang rapes of Muslims and women married to Muslims, Muslim foetuses ripped from bellies with swords, the castration, stabbing, beheading and burning to death of Muslims, and Muslim housing societies set aflame while cordons of Hindutva women and police refused to allow fire trucks to save anyone – (Sarkar, 2002; Ohm, 2010)". The then chief minister of Gujarat, Narendra Modi, was accused of inciting and condoning the violence. The authorities such as members of the BJP government, the police, and even members of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), both at state and federal levels, were accused of colluding with the Hindu extremists in a methodical pogrom

(Brass, 2004), "enacted with precision and extreme brutality by persons and organizations" (Brass, 2004. para 7).

Other notable communal violence were 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots, the cow protection vigilante campaign against beef consumption intensified between May 2015 and December 2018, following the election of Prime Minister Modi and the 2020 Delhi riots (Wright, 2024). Very recently, Kashmiri armed groups fighting for the independence of Indian administered Jammu and Kashmir from India attacked tourists in Kashmir on 22 April 2025 killing 26, which was followed by widespread violence against Muslims and Kashmiris across India (Sharma, 2025; Mateen & Javeed, 2025). It was only the recent spate in ongoing violence against Kashmiri Muslims by Indian government agencies, including systematic killings, rape, disappearances, detentions, and collective punishments (Human Rights Watch and Physicians for Human Rights, 1993; 1993 ii, HRW, 2024). Even before that, communal violence had been rampant in Manipur since April 2023. The BJP/RSS linked groups and politicians were accused of inciting hatred and violence against minority Christian tribal population known as Kuki-Zo (Chakrabarti, 2024).

Dutta & Pal (2024) noted that disenfranchisement through citizenship registers that exclude a minority community is a critical element in the stages of genocide (Stanton, 2020, in Dutta & Pal, 2024)), as is the act of dehumanizing them as animals and propagation of the "love jihad" trope. Reflecting the gravity of the situation, India ranked 5th highest-risk country for experiencing a new mass killing in 2024 and 2025 by the Early Warning Project of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and has remained among the top 15 highest-risk countries for several years (The Wire, 2024). However, Brass (2004) mentioned that the Gujarat pogrom extended beyond the boundaries of riots, pogroms, and massacres and transgressed into the "zone of genocide".

Hindutva and Regional Foreign Policy

The interplay of fascist 'Hindutva' politics, the resulting jingoistic popular sentiment, the 'Hindutva' media network, and Indian foreign policy is most evident in recent developments involving Bangladesh and Pakistan.

In July 2024, a student protest against overwhelming reserve quotas in government services in Bangladesh morphed into a popular uprising against the dictatorial rule of the then Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who led a fascist regime for more than 15 years with active support from the Indian state. In response, Hasina unleashed party-affiliated thugs and security forces that resulted in the killings of more than 700 people. Eventually, Hasina was ousted by the popular uprising and fled to India on 5 August 2024, where she was cordially received. The support for the repressive regime of Hasina and its role in suppressing democratic practices in Bangladesh had made India unpopular among Bangladeshi population, which further intensified with the massacre of hundreds of protesters, mostly students, and India's granting her refuge. During and after the protest against Hasina, 'Godi Media' flooded the information space with the fake news and disinformation about supposed 'violence against Hindus' in Bangladesh (Mahmud & Sarker, 2024; Faridi, 2024; Prothom Alo, 2024; The Wire, 2024). They [and most other media, experts and policy makers] have been falsely portraying that Bangladesh was taken over by violent Islamists or 'quite military coup or there was external influence behind the uprising (Mahmud & Sarker, 2024; Mojumdar, 2024). However, they were completely silent about the repressions of Hasina and crimes she perpetrated against the unarmed civilian protesters. Besides, there were 'protests' for alleged 'violence against Hindus' in Bangladesh organised by groups linked with the BJP/RSS in different parts of India, including attack on the Bangladesh Assistant High Commission in Agartala (The Daily Star, 2024). There were also reported incidents of refusing hotel and hospital services to Bangladeshi visitors (Times of India [TOI], 2024).

It is not surprising that even the Indian 'secular' opposition congress leader Rahul Gandhi expressed support for the government, citing concern for 'minority safety' and raised question whether there was foreign interference (Hindustan Times [HT], 2024. The profound contradiction in Indian foreign policy is clearly visible in the

statements of another congress leader, Shashi Tharoor, who articulated "cardinal yardsticks" to guide India's policies towards Bangladesh: *"Two things I will stress: we should not do anything overtly or covertly that implies interference with the internal affairs of Bangladesh…"; "And, secondly, we should keep uppermost the interest of the people, the well-being of the people, of Bangladesh rather than conveying in any way the impression that we are more concerned about either a particular political party or a particular community."* (Tharoor urges India to prioritise Bangladeshi people, The Daily Star 11 February 2025, para. 12-13.) Yet, despite these words he 'undoubtedly' supported hosting of Sheikh Hasina, who is alleged for committing massacres against the citizens of Bangladesh and wanted for those crimes.

In another incident, on 22 April 2025, armed men opened fire on tourists in Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir, killing 26 people. A little-known Kashmiri armed group, The Resistance Front (TRF), that demands independence of Kashmir from India, claimed responsibility for the attack (Al Jazeera [AJ], 2025). Without presenting evidence, India accused Pakistan for the attack. Pakistan denied involvement and called for an independent investigation; however, the Indian government demolished the houses of suspected gunmen without any trial – a form of collective punishment, often practiced by Zionist Israel against Palestinian resistance, and also applied increasingly against Indian Muslims. On 7 May 2025, India launched an aerial attack on Pakistan (AJ, 2025). Pakistan retaliated with its own missile and drone strikes in India and both sides continued until a ceasefire was agreed on 10th May through international diplomatic intervention. Prior to this, India had also carried out (or claimed to have carried out) cross-border attacks inside Pakistan - once in 2016 near the border (HT, 2016), and another in 2019 in Balakot, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province (TOI, 2019).

However, what was particularly notable this time was the scale of the 'information war' – a battle of misinformation, disinformation, and competing narrative - conducted at an industrial level across both social and electronic media, especially from India (Kumar, 2025). According to Syeda Sana Batool, the Indian side portrayed "Pakistan as a terror factory: duplicitous, rogue, a nuclear-armed spoiler addicted to jihad. Pakistani identity was reduced to its worst stereotype, deceptive and dangerous." On the other hand, Pakistanis depicted "India as a fascist state: led by a majoritarian regime, obsessed with humiliation, eager to erase Muslims from history. Prime Minister Narendra Modi was the aggressor. India was the occupier. Their strikes were framed not as counterterrorism but as religious war" (Batool, 2025, para. 17-18).

Indian media's narrative framed the attack as "righteous", targeting "terror hubs" – emphasizing that the enemy was not Pakistan but terrorism, and that the strikes did not amount to aggression. In contrast, the Pakistani narrative positioned itself as "righteous victim" – peaceful, but when provoked, fearless, restrained, and resolute in its response, as if exercising divine right to respond against an enemy transgressing their sovereignty. Both sides claimed victimhood and moral superiority, while accusing the other of aggression (Batool, 2025).

It was evident in recent spate of tensions and conflict between India and its neighbours that, *"It was a war of narratives, orchestrated in headlines, hashtags, and nightly newsrooms. The battlefield was the media. The ammunition was discourse. And the casualties were nuance, complexity, and truth"* (Batool, 2025, para. 3). It was "discursive warfare". Media on both sides constructed the identity of the enemy as an 'idea' something that cannot be reasoned with; 'otherised' and reduced them to caricature. The innocent civilian who were killed and suffered on both sides had their stories lost under the noise of rhetorical escalation (Batool, 2025). In such situation, "*Diplomacy becomes weakness. Compromise becomes betrayal. And war becomes not just possible, but desirable"*, Batool (2025, para. 20).

In the weeks leading up to the conflict, Indian media primed the public with narratives of Indian military capability, valour, moral righteousness, expectation of triumph, and revenge-making conflict seemingly inevitable. Joyojeet Pal observed that the scale of the misinformation campaign far exceeded the usual nationalist

propaganda in India and Pakistan: *"This had the power to push two nuclear armed countries closer to war"* (Ellis-Petersen, 2025, para. 14). Again, the far-right 'Hindutva' groups and 'Godi Media' were at the forefront of this war of narratives (Kumar, 2025).

Regional Implications

The fascist 'Hindutva' ideology and its political narrative promoted by the BJP/RSS have significant regional implications.

The core tenets of 'Hindutva' – Hindu supremacy, the exclusion and subjugation of religious minorities (as well as Dalits and other marginalised groups), the justification of aggression through a victimhood narrative, and the demonisation of others (Dutta, 2025) – have created an extremely jingoistic support base. This base not only views Indian Muslims as adversaries but also extends that hostility to Muslim populations in the neighbouring countries. The plight of Hindu and other minorities – particularly during any violent incident, whether true or fabricated- in Muslim-majority neighbours such as Pakistan and Bangladesh, is often inflated and paddled among the domestic public to stir up hate and Islamophobia.

One of the important propaganda narratives of 'Hindutva', "Bharat Mata" ("Mother India") and/or "Akhand Bharat" (Undivided India), envisions an undivided India that includes not only Pakistan and Bangladesh (Brosius, 2005 in Banaji, 2018), but also the whole of South Asia encompassing Afghanistan, India, Nepal, Myanmar/Burma, Tibet, Bhutan (Organiser, 2020), even Sri Lanka (Sahu, 2023). This narrative is inherently imperialistic and expansionist (Sahu, 2023), and it cultivates hostility among its followers to those states and the majority Muslim population living there. India's historic conflicts with Pakistan is a dangerous additive to this combustible mixture. The historically imperialist expansionist policy of the Indian state (Shahzad et al, 2021)– evident since its inception through the annexation of Kashmir, Hyderabad, Junagadh, and other princely states – along with its increasingly hawkish foreign policy to its neighbours (e.g., military strikes in Pakistan and political interference in Bangladesh), and influence of 'Hindutva' on foreign policy (Siyech, 2024) further deepen regional tensions and mutual animosity.

In Nepal, the rise of BJP in India and failure of secular political parties to meet public expectations have emboldened the relatively weaker 'Hindu nationalist' forces. These groups have been demanding for the re-establishment of the Hindu Nation and monarchy. The Indian Hindutva camp, which was furious over the abolition of Nepal's Hindu nationhood, has also actively supported these efforts (Lawoju, 2025).

Besides, 'Hindutva' politics is also making its way in the Nepali political landscape. Allegations have surfaced that the pro-monarchist and Hindu nationalist party that made recent gains in elections has received funding and ideological support from the BJP (Siyech, 2024). In addition, a new party, the Nepal Janata Party (NJP), was formed in 2004 with the objective of re-establishing a 'Hindu Rashtra', which has uncanny visual, ideological, strategic, resemblance and engagement with the BJP/RSS (Siyech, 2024). Furthermore, Siyech (2024) also noted that, for India, deploying 'Hindutva' serves "both as an end and a means" to counter Chinese influence in Nepal.

The Indian state, which, in practice, has long been documented as discriminatory, hostile and repressive towards its own Muslim and other marginalized population (as previously discussed), regularly make official statements about the situation of Hindu minorities in neighbouring countries, which amounts to interference in their internal affairs. Meanwhile, the 'Godi Media' amplifies such narratives with a barrage of misinformation and fake news. In stark contrast, both the Indian state and media display indifference – or even hostility – towards persecuted Muslim population such as Rohingya facing genocide in Myanmar. Such selective outrage undermines communal harmony in the region (Mojumdar, 2024).

Another developing phenomenon, the 'Hindutva' ideology is spreading among the minority Hindu population in neighbouring countries in South Asia (Bhattacharya, 2024; Borham, 2024), which already has a significant presence among the Indian diaspora in the West.

There is an increasing risk of radicalisation, with early signs visible in the Western contexts (Dutta, 2025). On 17 September 2022, amidst communal tension between Hindus and Muslims in Leicester, England, around 200 masked men – some armed – gathered without authorisation and marched through an area with Muslim-owned businesses chanting "Jai Shri Ram"- the Hindutva militants and anti-Muslim violence in India (Dutta, 2025; Bhattacharya, 2024). The incident escalated into clashes, destruction, and further violence, which continued in following days (Dutta, 2025; Omer, 2022). Therefore, these radicalisations could further increase communal tension. Conversely, the far-right elements among the Muslim, Buddhist, and other religious groups in the neighbouring countries may be influenced by Hindu nationalists and replicate their strategy, if not already doing so, intensifying religious polarization. The perceived threat of 'Hindutva' dominance may press these groups to look for counter measures and degrade communal harmony severely.

In such a case, there is a potential risk of regional communal conflict and violence across South Asia. As evidenced during the recent India-Pakistan conflict and the uprising in Bangladesh – as well as from the fraught history of South Asia – ultra-nationalist rhetoric can create a very caustic environment across national, religious, and ethnic lines. These divisions often overlap, intersect and reciprocate with each-other, threatening already fragile regional stability, and leaving long-lasting repercussions for future generations.

Conclusion

The rise of 'Hindutva' as a dominant ideology in India has created an aggressive and hostile environment for religious and other minority communities, particularly Muslims, within the country. However, its impact is not only confined to India's domestic sphere – it extends beyond its borders, influencing regional communities and foreign policy (Siyech, 2024). This overlap, intersection, and reciprocity between domestic ideology and international relations have created highly contested atmosphere in South Asia. The prevailing narratives and rhetoric put religious and other marginalized groups across the region at increasing risk of exclusion, dehumanization, and violence.

As Sana Batool puts it so eloquently in the context of recent India-Pakistan conflict:

"In both countries, the media didn't mourn equally. Victims were grieved if they were ours. Theirs? Collateral. Or fabricated. Or forgotten.

This selective mourning is a moral indictment. Because when we only care about our dead, we become numb to justice. And in that numbness, violence becomes easier the next time." (Batool, 2025, paras. 15 & 14 from the bottom)

She concluded:

"Because in South Asia, the most dangerous weapon isn't nuclear.

It's narrative." (Batool, 2025, second-to-last para.)

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