The Muslim 'Threat' In Right Wing Narratives: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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THE MUSLIM 'THREAT' IN RIGHT-WING NARRATIVES: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

This paper attempts to analyse the impact of right-wing narratives propagated with State support, and how they normalise extremism against a particular community by drawing the ruling majoritarian government in India. The growing popularity of the right-wing and the victory of the Bharatiya Janta Party in the Lok Sabha elections of 2014 led to a rise in the anti-Muslim rhetoric by overcoming obstacles towards fully embracing the Hindutva rhetoric, which has the effect of mainstreaming anti-Muslim myths and narratives. These narratives play into events leading to mainstreaming the Muslim as a 'threat' legitimising right-wing extremism against Muslims. This normalisation of extremism and state complicity has facilitated the emergence of a de-facto (in practice) Hindu Rashtra in the form of cultural nationalism. The concept of a Hindu Rashtra indicates its civic rather than legal status, and not a parallel state or a separatist polity to Indian constitution. It functions as a recognised rational sphere of critical influence under the secular Indian Constitutionalism.

Key words: extremism, anti-Muslim, myths, narratives, threat

Critical Discourse Analysis of Cultural Nationalism

The Hindu nationalist movement sees India as a 'Hindu Rashtra', where various distinctive religious and cultural traditions have existed in the subcontinent since ancient times. These are based on a sense of belonging, fostered by a common language Sanskrit and shared philosophical and moral traditions. The movement propagates cultural nationalism with the end goal of restoring the Hindu Rashtra -- India to its glorious past, uninterrupted by invasions of Muslim and Christian rulers. Muslims are the primary targets of the Hindu nationalist organisations, wherein an idea of a dangerous outsider is constructed to represent everything wrong with the country and is the root of all problems (Jafferlot 1996, Hansen 1999, Anand 2011). The historical background of the anti-Muslim rhetoric of Hindu nationalist organisations, points to homogenising Hinduism and alienating Islam to construct a dichotomy. Hindutva organisations approach various issues concerned with the Hindu culture and identity in India. This article highlights the election of the BJP

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in 2014 as a point of politically consolidated motivation for the mainstreaming of Hindu nationalism. Previously when the BJP found itself in power, it was weighed down by its coalition partners and was prevented from adopting a Hindu nationalist ideology. But with the BJP securing a majority in the Lok Sabha on its own, Hindu nationalism has become the dominating factor influencing policy, leading to a normalisation of all claims of Hindu nationalist rhetoric about the Muslim 'Other' and provides legitimacy for extremism against the Muslim minority in India. I argue that this leads to the creation of an effectively de-facto (in-practice) Hindu Rashtra, based on a separatist rationale of cultural nationalism that is embedded in a long history of communalism and impunity.

Critical discourse analysis as the theoretical framework of the paper evaluates the central role of narratives and other discourse forms in organisational attempts to conceptualise dominant power strategies. Dominance here is understood as to how certain groups, organisations or institutions exercise social power. This dominance facilitates the production of inequality in the realms of culture, politics, race, class, ethnicity, and gender. Reproduction of such inequalities may entail different forms of discourse such as overt support and legitimation or indirect support and concealment by the powerful. The purpose of critical discourse analysis is to examine the roles of different structures, ways of communication, and text in the different modes of production of discourse. Critical discourse analysis, therefore, involves the analysis of the rhetoric or the meaning of texts for strategies aimed at concealing social power, such as denial, as well as rhetoric that asserts control, such as the use of commands and orders to enact power and exercise dominance (Dijk 1993).

It is also important to acknowledge the complicated nature of social relations involved in the reproduction of such processes. Therefore, to understand the relation between discourse and society and thereby the reproduction of the discourse of inequality and dominance, an examination of the perceptions of society in the minds of social actors needs to be critically analysed. The relationship between society, discourse and social cognition is at the centre of critical discourse analysis (Dijk 1993, p. 250-51).

In essence, critical discourse analysis is concerned with the critical deconstruction of messages (produced by the powerful) and the examination of how these messages facilitate and legitimise dominant ideological

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perspectives in society. The aim of critical discourse analysts thereby is to reveal how public discourses perpetuate inequality and subsequent oppression of the weaker sections (Ibid 1993). Moss (2008) suggests that despite several variations of approach, critical discourse analysis examines how dominant groups maintain power, attempts to analyse ideologies that underpin social discourse and finally this type of analysis is defined by a socio-political stance that targets the powerful groups and their critique implies a critique of those responsible for the (re)production of inequality and dominance. Therefore, critical discourse analysis contributes to social and political analyses by examining the role of language, ways of communication and social discourse in reproducing and sustaining unequal power structures in society.

The politics of Hindu nationalism has often caused violent disruptions in the form of pogroms, coordinated attacks and vigilantism targeted towards the Muslim population of the country. The Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) are three of the most prominent and visible organisations currently representing the Hindu nationalist ideology. Jafferlot (1996) has argued that during the colonial era, a Hindu nationalist movement existed in India parallel to the Secular nationalist movement that was led by the Indian National Congress (INC) and that it was the latter movement that succeeded in winning the support of the people. The genealogy of the Hindu nationalist movement is then traced back to organisations like the Hindu Mahasabha (HM), RSS and the Arya Samaj. He divides the post-colonial history of India into two sections: first was the era of Nehruvian secularism, and the second period was defined by its erosion under Indira Gandhi. The rise of Hindu nationalism runs parallel to the decline of the Indian National Congress' line of secularism in Indian politics. To analyse the various dynamics at stake, Jafferlot adopts the 'Secularism-Communism' framework. Focusing exclusively on organisations like HM and RSS as representatives of Hindu consciousness, however, is not sufficient to understand the nuances of the political scenario. It is also important to acknowledge the existence and expression of a moderate form of Hindu consciousness within the INC itself (Jafferlot 1996). The growing support for Hindu nationalism is also analysed as a positive response to RSS-VHP-BJP narratives, here again, a closer look at the anxieties caused by other factors such as Sikh separatism, an influx of Bangladeshi immigrants and minority appeasement by the government as seen in the case of Shah Bano, provides a well-rounded picture of the factors involved in the rise of Hindu nationalism in India.

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Hansen (1999) addresses the shift of Hindu nationalism from the margins of Indian society to the centre stage in the 1990s and the threat it posed to Indian democracy. He sheds light on the government's pledge to respect all religious communities and the affirmative action demands of lower castes as an antidemocratic constraint. He argues this system worked in the early years of the Indian democracy when the state wielded enough power to accommodate diversity. The split in the Congress Party in 1969 made the central government address the question of diversity directly. The resulting division opened the path for identity or religion-based politics and the saffron wave of Hindu nationalism to become a stakeholder in Indian electoral politics. Hansen moves away from Jafferlot's analysis of current Hindu nationalism resulting from organisational and political strategising and argues that instead of politics or religion, Hindu nationalism has emerged in the greater realm of political culture – the space in which communities and individuals represent and recognise themselves. The call for Hindutva mobilisation brings together xenophobic narratives, with discourses on rights and entitlements to develop a 'Conservative Revolution'.

The emotional creation of being under siege for the Hindu 'Self' sustains the support of the Hindu nationalist movements. The Muslim is, therefore, constructed as an object of fear, disloyalty, hatred and envy. The motive is to create a sense of insecurity among the Hindus and mobilise them to protect their identity from the 'Other'. The construction of the desired masculinity in the Hindu male requires the destruction of Muslim masculinity. Thus, through narratives of Love Jihad, overpopulation, disloyalty, a hypersexual Muslim male is constructed, which serves as the reasoning behind the need for mobilisation around the cause of Hindutva (Anand 2005). It is argued that the effort to define Hindutva as an ideology of Hindu nationalism, always revolves around Muslims. Islam is the antithesis of Hindutva, and since it originated outside of India, it cannot be considered a part of Indian culture. Thus, the presence of the Muslim 'Other' sustains Hindu nationalism as they can be used to signify the root of all that is wrong with the 'Self' and it also helps to evade ambiguities and internal contradictions within the Hindutva ideology (Ahmed 2019).

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2. Constructing a Dichotomy

Hindu nationalism represents a movement that aims to construct an image of a unified religion of Hinduism and of a distinct Hindu culture. The term 'Hindoo' was initially used by colonizers and European merchants to refer to people living beyond the river Indus. European scholars and historians were interested in analysing the various distinct cultures and religious practices of the subcontinent through the lens of a single religion, 'Hinduism' (Hansen 1999, p. 66). In his post-colonial critique, Richard King (1999) has examined the 'idea' of Hinduism and its emergence as a homogenous religion and how it enforces a singular vision, ignoring the various distinctive traditions existing in the subcontinent. He argued how high caste Indians (particularly Brahmins) co-opted the construction of Hinduism, conceived as a cohesive religion by Western Orientalists, and is circulated as an uncontested history of the region.

The Hindu nationalist discourse which is propagated by organisations such as the RSS, VHP and the BJP draw their inspiration from ideologues such as Savarkar and Golwalkar. In his book *Hindutva* (1969), Savarkar argues that the term 'Hindu' is a territorial signifier of the Hindu civilisation. He developed the idea of a Hindu nation, by defining two aspects: territory and culture. He argued that the ancient land of 'Sindhu' comprised of the entire subcontinent and that a sense of common culture already existed several thousand years ago which developed through a common language of Sanskrit and shared traditions in the ancient 'Vedic Nation' (Hansen 1999, p. 78).

Golwalkar (1966) further developed this cultural nationalist discourse, where he argues for cultural holism and national integration as a response to the threat of modernity. He made a case for the Hindu civilisation, based on spirituality, as an alternative to the failed hedonistic Western model. He invokes the idea of 'Motherland', in order to mobilise Hindu men around the virtues of serving the sacred motherland and the inculcation of a nationalist spirit that revolved around a 'Hindu' nation (Hansen 1999, p. 81). Hindu nationalist scholars approach history from an essentialist lens focusing on the homogeneity and timelessness of a cohesive Hindu culture. This civilisation is an all-encompassing body wherein different religions like Buddhism and Jainism were integrated and considered a part of the whole (Flåten 2012, p. 632). It is argued that an intimate relationship exists between Indian territory and Hindu culture, wherein our ancestors described their homeland as the Bharatvarsa. The term 'Sanatan', which means eternal, is used to describe Hindu culture and it is stated that there

was an existence of a broad unity and nationalism in India which originated in prehistoric times. The idea of 'unity in diversity' is propounded so as to ensure that the existence of other traditions such as Buddhism and Jainism do not pose a threat to the idea of a cohesive Hindu culture (Ibid, p. 634). The caste system barely finds space in the Hindu nationalist history, except in rare claims that it creates solidarity based on caste interdependence (Ibid, p. 636).

Hindutva nationalists present the argument of the *Holyland* and argue that since the holy place of worship for Muslims is not India, but elsewhere, it should be used as a framework for evaluating their patriotism (Ahmed 2019). The narratives that Hindu nationalist organisations propagated to conceptualise ancient Indian history were based on peaceful coexistence between groups following diverse traditions and a shared sense of belonging to the Hindu civilisation. When it comes to medieval Indian history, however, Hindu nationalists created a narrative of a clash between the opposites. Having essentialised Hinduism, this nationalist identity was pitted against Islam and Muslims who came to account for everything that was contrary to the homogenised Hindu identity. The approach towards Muslims was also of essentialisation. Constructing a homogeneous Muslim identity was motivated by the desire to make Islam the only factor considered while analysing Muslims and their activities. Hindutva scholars define the Mughal era of Indian history as a period in which Hindu India was under siege, and there is a constant struggle between two opposing cultures -- Hinduism and Islam. Muslims in these narratives are portrayed as barbarians and religiously intolerant, which was claimed to be evident from forced conversions and large-scale destruction of Hindu temples. All rulers were portrayed as similar, and this homogeneity was based on the claim that Muslim rulers were regulated by the tenets of Islam and jihad was the unifying factor for them. Therefore, no difference was observed between Akbar and Mahmud of Ghazni, and these linear narratives conveniently ignored the social, political, and economic factors that impacted their conduct (Flåten 2012, p. 636-640).

3. Hindu Self, Muslim Other and the Politics of Moderation

The problem of conversion of Hindus has always been one of the major issues of Hindu nationalism. Reacting to Hindus converting to Christianity and Islam, Hindu nationalists initiated "*Shuddhi*" – purification, an initiative used largely by the Arya Samaj to purify and reinstate Hindus who had converted to Islam and Christianity. Hindu organisations made efforts to make the government prohibit missionary activity by law when the Constitution was being written. This issue was taken up again when Janata government was in power, and a 'Freedom of Religion Bill' was introduced which prohibited conversion via force or fraudulent means. The issue gained legitimacy in 1981 when a thousand Dalits from Tamil Nadu converted to Islam. Research on these conversions revealed that they took place out of concern for their quality of living and in a bid to escape the caste system. This was followed by efforts from the Vishwa Hindu Parishad to integrate Dalits more effectively into the Hindu society, which included religious leaders eating alongside Dalits, to prevent these conversions to foreign religions. Similarly, narratives about reconverting Muslims and Christians back to Hinduism, as they were originally Hindu also existed. Arguing that India is an agricultural economy, and Muslims and Christians consume beef, reconverting individuals to Hinduism would earn gratification of saving lives of five cows, an animal that is revered as a mother in Hinduism (Jafferlot 2007, p. 238-250).

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All these narratives created and disseminated by the Sangh Parivar, in the garb of working towards protecting and safeguarding Hindu religion and culture, were aimed at ascribing certain characteristics and features to the defined Muslim 'Other'. The 'Other' possessed qualities which were contrary to those of the Hindu 'Self', thereby essentialising anything ascribed to the Hindus as tolerant and assimilative, and everything chaotic and unaccommodating to the Muslims. Such dichotomies between the Self and the Other in the form of religious narratives came to be defined in a pivotal way through the critical junctions in the well-known Ayodhya dispute. Towards the end of the 1980s, RSS, VHP and BJP rallied behind a common cause of the construction of the Ram Janmabhoomi Mandir, a temple which was allegedly destroyed by Mughal emperor Babur for the construction of a mosque in its place. The movement mobilised widespread support of the Hindu community for the Sangh Parivar. The important aspect of this event was the symbolic historical narrative it reasserted, that it was a common practice among Muslim rulers to destroy Hindu places of worship and this action was meant as an attack on the Hindu religion (Hansen 1999, Jafferlot 1996, 2007).

Atal Bihari Vajpayee was the first BJP leader to be appointed Prime Minister of India, first for a short-lived term in 1996 and then for a full term in 1998. In the second instance, the government was formed with the help of alliance partners under the coalition of the National Democratic Alliance. Therefore, while the BJPs tally of seats improved continuously leading up to the 1999 elections, it was still short of 90 seats to form a majority at the centre, thereby enabling coalition partners to play a major role and giving them considerable influence over policy formation (Hansen & Jafferlot 2001, p. 317). This strengthening of a coalition strategy had several implications on the conduct of the BJP at the centre. First, the BJP had to distance itself from its Hindutva ideology as most of the regional allies in the NDA did not conform with the Sangh's cultural nationalism, and a few allies were even proponents of anti-north Indian regionalist cultures and relied on the support of Muslims. Second, with coalition came the compulsion of sharing the ministerial portfolios with coalition partners which ensured the existence of diversity in the Cabinet, instead of a

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domination by Hindutva ideologues (Ibid, p. 325). With these changes and compromises, it can be observed that the compulsions of coalition led to the BJP adopting a more moderate line of politics, abandoning its Hindutva identity in pursuit of political power. The dependence on alliance partners to sustain power led to the adoption of a 'National Agenda for Government' because of which the Vajpayee government was formed.

As most BJP allies, barring the Shiv Sena did not ascribe to the Hindu nationalist rhetoric, the mainstays of the Sangh Parivar – abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution removing the special status of the Muslim majority state of Jammu & Kashmir (J&K), the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya at the site of the Babri Masjid, and the establishment of a Uniform Civil Code towards the dissolution of Muslim Personal Law which ensured religious liberty for Muslims were not incorporated in the newly formed agenda of the Vajpayee government. L. K. Advani who was the president of the BJP at the time, asserted the need for the BJP to appear as a governing party, not based on single ideology. The BJP, however, prided itself on its 'Achievements and Initiatives' such as conducting nuclear tests. Efforts to counter terrorism in J&K and illegal immigration from Bangladesh, were deemed as problems caused by the Muslim 'Other'. The party had to abandon its Hindutva ideology and adopt a more moderate image, portraying itself as secular (Ibid, p. 341).

4. Mainstreaming the Muslim Threat: Over population, Love Jihad and Vigilantism

In the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP emerged as the single largest party and won the majority parliamentary seats for the first time in its history. This victory has freed the BJP from satisfying coalition partners, clearing the path to pursue the Sangh's Hindu nationalism. During this phase, social and cultural stereotypes propagated by Hindu nationalist organisations were openly disseminated by MPs and MLAs, without any pressure or opposition from within.

One of the most prominent features of the Hindu nationalist rhetoric is to emphasise a Muslim conspiracy to render the Hindus a minority in the country, based on the argument that Muslim fertility is higher than Hindus. This claim also based on accusations of Muslims being anti-national as they give primacy to Islamic doctrine over the Indian Constitution (Jeffrey & Jeffrey 2002, p. 1807). Islam opposes family planning and therefore is against adopting modern contraception. In painting this picture of the entire Muslim community

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dominated by the Islamic doctrine, the Hindu Right essentialises Muslim identity and without recognising other social, political and economic factors that come into play.

The Hindu Right's construction of an identity narrative, aimed at demonising Muslims, focuses on how Islamic institutions suppress and victimise Muslim women. Muslim men depicted as more sexually active and wanting more children as compared to Hindu men are common. Muslim women are denied any agency and reduced to being passive actors with the sole purpose of reproduction without any say or control over their body. The perception of Islam permitting Muslim men to have four wives boosts the claim on reproduction and increase of the Muslim population in India. Narratives illustrate Hindus following family planning, the Muslim practice of polygamy, linked to raised fertility. Slogans like *"hum paanch, hamare pachis -- We five, our 25"* are used to call out this supposed Muslim conspiracy of using polygamy to increase the Muslim population and use it as a weapon of war against Hindus (Jeffrey & Jeffrey 2002, p. 1808). A demographic analysis of these claims reveals that both Hindu and Muslim fertility rates are high in rural areas and the economically poor groups. The fertility rates are lower for both communities among the wealthier and educated groups. Thus, social, economic and political motivations influence fertility and reproduction among both Muslims and Hindus in India (Agnihotri 1997). This analysis contrasts with the Hindu Right narrative essentialising the categories of 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' as homogeneous, and for the latter following Islamic doctrines (Ibid. p. 1811).

While Muslims were stereotyped as conscious agents of overpopulation, the post-2014 election victory led government MPs and MLAs to mainstream the notion of threat to Indian Hindus. Several demands for bringing a population control law demonise Muslims for the country's increasing population. In 2018, a BJP MLA claimed Hindus for giving birth to only one or two children while focusing more on their education. The Muslims are increasing their population and taking over the nation. The interview propagated the narrative of a Muslim conspiracy to reduce the Hindus to a minority. (BL Singhal interview 2018). On a similar note, a Union Cabinet minister of the BJP in his speech claims "that if a law to control the population was not enacted the Hindus would become a minority in India.'' He blamed the increase in population on one community in the country, directly targeting Muslims (Giriraj Singh speech 2019). The verbal construct of the homogenous 'Muslim psyche' connected to the huge Muslim population of the country (Anand 2011, p. 71), essentialises a single community

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through narratives based on belief and faith lacking any strong evidence to support the propaganda. Endorsement by government officials gives further legitimacy to becoming common truth and a sense of social good. The idea of an over fertile Muslim man denied any individual agency and reduced to a single overarching religious identity has been integrated into the mainstream politics of representation.

The Hindu nationalist rhetoric has made claims that there is a Muslim conspiracy underway. The proponents argue that Muslims in India are conspiring to seduce, marry, forcefully convert, and even traffic young Hindu girls. This conspiracy which is termed 'Love Jihad' is allegedly aimed at both reducing the Hindu population in India as well as undermining the Hindu religion. The rhetoric of 'Love Jihad', is spread primarily to demonise the Muslim 'Other', a ploy by the Muslims as a collective group, and portrays the Muslim male as a lustful, deviant and money-hungry character who is out to distract Hindu women from their social duties (Tyagi & Sen 2019, p. 112). Many scholars view the emergence of Love Jihad panic like the descriptive narratives on exploitation of Hindu women, abduction, sexual violence and forced conversions by Muslim men that were circulated by Hindu revivalist organisations in the 1920s. The early revivalists used books, testimonies, and rumours to paint a similar picture of the dangerous Muslim 'Other' and victimised Hindu women. These narratives gave fuel to large scale anti-Muslim rhetoric and campaigns such as purification of Muslims or 'shuddhi' by reconversion to Hinduism. Another impact of presenting an image of a hyper-sexualised Muslim male and a passive victimised Hindu woman, mobilised men from the Hindu community to commit violence against Muslims to protect their masculine honour (Gupta 2009). These fears of the dangerous Muslim 'Other' have no factual basis, as studies indicate that only 2.1% of marriages in India involve partners of different faiths, mainly due to legal and social obstacles in inter-faith marriages (Das et. al., 2011).

The Hindutva brigade and the BJP use the Love Jihad rhetoric to mobilise their men against the supposed Muslim 'threat'. For electoral support, leaders overtly use rhetoric in speeches, interviews, and election campaigns. In Muzaffarnagar, the VHP trying to protect Hindu women established the "Beti Bahu Bachan Mahapanchayat – Daughter, Daughter-in-law Protection Council". Similarly, BJP used this rhetoric while campaigning in the city and asserted that their mission was to "protect the honour of daughters and daughter-in-laws". While there is no direct reference to persons the daughters need protection from, statements

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are targeted at non-Hindus and/or outside the community. Hindutva activists use slogans such as *"bahu lao, beti bachao"* (bring daughter in law, save a daughter) to encourage Hindu men to marry Muslim women. The slogans serve the sole purpose of countering the alleged Muslim conspiracy of undermining Hinduism by converting Hindu women to Islam (Strohl 2018, p. 30).

The Love Jihad narrative points to other aspects of communal anxiety. The rising fear of terrorism and the threat of Muslim fundamentalism create additional anxieties around foreign involvement in the religious conversion of Hindu girls. (Gupta 2009, p. 4) Yogi Adityanath (Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh), in an interview, claimed that Love Jihad is an important issue in the state (Yogi Adityanath interview 2017). Similarly, BJP minister Himanta Sarma appealed to voters in Assam by promising that, if elected, the government would start a fight against the threat of Love Jihad (Himanta Sarma speech 2020). These appeals lack factual evidence and are based on assertion and repetition by MPs and MLAs of the BJP. An investigation conducted by Shazia Nigar and Shishupal Kumar (2015) reveals how Hindutva activists use the threat and paranoia around Love Jihad to intimidate and abuse women and arrest men involved within inter-faith relationships. One of the testimonies by a Hindutva activist reveals how women are often detained against their will and sedated if they resist detention, often under state protection. This demonisation of Muslims by the Hindutva right and open endorsement by government officials without any repercussions has led to the creation of anti-Romeo squads that carry out moral policing and target interfaith couples. Such responses inculcated the idea of the Muslim male as a lustful and degenerate figure, driven only by alleged collective goals of Islamic expansion.

Since 2014, there has been a significant rise in vigilantism influenced by the ideology and narratives of the Hindu Right. In cases of vigilantism, the perpetrators receive state protection through non-interference and often complicity of the police. This kind of protection and complicity that vigilantes of Hindutva organisations receive makes them unofficial state actors. Between 2014 and 2020, the Sangh Parivar propagated and launched various campaigns used to demonise the Muslim community in India. An investigation of the Sangh's 'anti-Love Jihad' campaign by two journalists belonging to *Gulail.com* and *Cobrapost,* who posed as sympathisers to the Hindutva cause, revealed the state complicity in various instances of vigilante policing. The women are denied any agency and claimed to be 'vulnerable'. The BJP MLA Sangeet Som conformed to putting moral pressure on Hindu women to reverse

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their decision to marry a Muslim. In case this tactic fails, the Hindu woman had to remarry within the faith. Unique methods to implicate Muslim men under false charges of rape, abduction and other coercions exist. Sanjay Agarwal from Muzaffarnagar, who ran in municipal elections from the BJP, admitted to extracting fake testimonies from Hindu women. He further revealed how the police were complicit towards Hindutva activists, giving days to extract false testimonies before a court hearing. Judges often would give the girl over to the Hindutva activists, who get her remarried in a short span of three days (Nigar & Kumar, 2015). Along with the anti-Love Jihad campaign, this nexus between the state and Hindu vigilante groups exist.

5. Mainstreaming the Muslim Threat: Muslim Disloyalty and Terrorism

For Hindu nationalist organisations, the idea of the Muslim 'Other' is necessary to maintain Hindu identity and remain defenders of the 'Self'. The threat of disloyalty portrayed as a central feature of the Muslim 'Other' takes shape in the form of illegal infiltration and terrorism, which the Muslims are obligated to do by following their religious doctrines.

Hindu nationalist organisations have propagated narratives about Muslim disloyalty and terrorism for a long time. Since 2014, BJP leaders and legislators of the majoritarian government have laid qualitative claims to disloyalty and terrorism solely based on Muslim identity. When asked about Darul Uloom Deoband, one of the most prominent Islamic university in India, Union Minister Giriraj Singh claimed that it is a factory for producing terrorists. Referring to the school as "*Anatankwad ki Gangotri – Gangotri of Terrorism*", he reiterated that all the most wanted terrorists of the world are produced by Deoband (Giriraj Singh interview 2020). Not only do these claims go unchecked by the State, but the lack of evidence in public speeches, interviews and conversations does not undermine the conclusive statements made by Hindu nationalists.

Labelling a Muslim institution as a factory of terrorism leads to violence interpreted not only in the context of social conditions but through the lens of cultural nationalism. This practice normalises the idea of violence and conflict being carried out by the 'Other', pointing to the Muslim (Eckert 2012, p. 326). The paranoia around the myth of 'Mughalistan' is normalised in popular discourse and indoctrinated as common knowledge by the Hindu nationalists. According to Hindu nationalists, Mughalistan is a well thought out plan to carve

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out an undivided Islamic nation by diving India. Initially, just a manifesto uploaded on the internet by unverifiable sources and few subscribers, the idea adopted by Hindu nationalists acquired the shape of a larger conspiracy in which all Muslims are complicit. Narratives on the involvement of international actors essentialised Muslims irrespective of their geographical status. The map of the so-called 'Mughalistan' removing the various subdivisions between neighbouring countries has been circulating with the implication that it is the "Evil Design for Destroying India".

The Hindu nationalists pursue 'Mughalistan' by spreading narratives of a comprehensive scheme for the second partition of India. (Anand 2011, p. 55-60). BJP MP Tejaswi Surya, while addressing peaceful protests that were ongoing in Delhi opposing the anti-Muslim character of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), stated that the protests were an example of militant Islamism. He claimed that if the Hindu majority do not remain vigilant, then the Mughal rule would return to the country (Tejaswi Surya speech 2020). This speech made in the Parliament called upon the majority to be 'vigilant' and furthered a feeling of being under attack from the constructed 'Other'. For an MP declaring the popular right to peaceful protests as a case of religious militancy without any consequences possibly leads to truths about injustice. Exemplifying the pursuit of undermining Hinduism and forming an imaginary unified Islamic nation, perpetrated in the socio-cultural construct similar to a foundational myth of 'Mughalistan', Muslims are reduced to their Islamic identity, undoing the linguistic, ethnic, class and gender differences (Anand 2011, p. 62). This essentialised Islamic identity acquires the status of a myth in open discussions of the Parliament. The criminalisation of Muslim existence becomes part of the mainstream alleged conspiracy through populist measures.

CONCLUSION

This paper is a limited study drawing on a top-down approach to analyse the impact of right-wing discourse on Muslims living in India, right-wing extremism, and socio-political normalisation. By creating a dichotomy between Hinduism and Islam, the right-wing political discourse alienates the latter and homogenises the former under a collective Hindu identity. The article points to dichotomous narratives propagated regularly by various Hindutva organisations and their struggle to find a place in the electoral success of the BJP (2014 Lok Sabha elections). The subsequent freedom from coalition politics to majoritarian rule simultaneously marks a narrative shift from moderate politics to extremism.

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The election of the BJP with the predominant Hindutva ideology displays the mass support that the party has been able to win by projecting an idea and mission of an authentic Hindu nation. BJP as the ruling party promotes narratives of 'Otherness' as more acceptable in the social sphere and right-wing extremism as the new normal. This drive facilitated by assimilation of anti-Muslim socio-cultural constructs apropos to myths in belief systems and active propagation by mainstreaming essentialised identity narratives.

A porno-nationalist image of the Muslim 'Other' integrated with putative mainstream imagery carrying a dual function of assuring the Hindu 'Self' of its moral superiority, and at the same time creates insecurity of the hypersexual and immoral masculinity of the 'Other' (Kinnvall 2019, p. 294-297). The hype of an inflated self-imagery produces social anxiety used to mobilise the Hindus to protect their culture and identity; extract extremist reactions arising from threatened Hindu identity. While Hindutva narratives attempt to foster a siege mentality among the Hindu community to sustain its popular appeal, the radical mobilisation and right-wing extremism that it facilitates, in turn, create a fear psychosis among the Muslim communities. A bottom-up approach to analyse Muslim responses to this situation in the form of resistance, acceptance, and compliance can be focused through a non-essentialist lens -- as a diverse community with varying social, economic, and political aspirations.

Acknowledgements

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