

FROM IDENTITY TO DOMINANCE: UNPICKING THE INTERSECTION OF HINDUTVA AND MUSLIM IDENTITY IN INDIA

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Received: July 09, 2024

Revised: August 09, 2024

Accepted: August 24, 2024

Published: September 04, 2024

ABSTRACT

This qualitative research traces the evolution and impact of Hindutva from the 17th-century legacy of Shivaji to its modern conceptualization by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (V.D. Savarkar) and its propagation by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). It explores the development of Hindu identity, particularly in response to perceived threats from Muslim rulers, British colonialism, Christian missionaries, and Marxist ideologies. The central research question examines how Hindutva, as a political ideology distinct from Hinduism as a religion, emerged and evolved to shape Hindu-Muslim relations in India. The study analyzes key phases of Hindu nationalism, from the Marathas under Shivaji, through 19th-century reform movements like Brahma Samaj and Arya Samaj, to the formation of the Hindu Mahasabha by Madan Malaviya and its organization under Savarkar's leadership. It critically examines Savarkar's definition of Hindutva, its emphasis on Hindu identity as a religious and cultural force, and its implications for excluding Muslims from this national identity. The paper also explores the RSS's role in promoting Hindu dominance and its use of violence to assert this ideology. The findings suggest that Hindutva has significantly polarized Hindu-Muslim relations, fostering antagonism and conflict. The study concludes by highlighting Hindutva's ongoing relevance in contemporary Indian nationalism and its implications for the future of Hindu-Muslim relations.

Keywords: Identity, Hindutva, Hinduism, RSS, Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj, Hindu-Muslim Relations

INTRODUCTION

Identity plays a crucial role in the strengthening of nationalism. While it has positive aspects, it can also contribute to ethnic conflict. Due to its importance and the increasing interest of scholars, defining the term precisely can be challenging. However, it can be simply described as "a set of persons marked by a label and distinguished by rules deciding membership and (alleged) characteristic features or attributes."¹

Human beings live in diverse communities, developing various degrees of similarities and differences, which allow them to distinguish themselves from one another. Those who share

similar behaviors form an "in-group," while those with different behaviors are considered an "out-group" by the former, yet form their own in-group.² A culture dominated by strong in-group feelings, where individuals are committed to supporting the state through thick and thin, is highly beneficial for a nation in devising its national security policy.³ It also plays a significant role in organizing people into different political groups, which may become sources of both conflict and cooperation. In the past, clans, religion, and other such factors were the primary sources of identity and in-group formation.

¹ (Fearon, 1999)2.

² (Rubin & Badea, 2007)34.

³ (Khan & Azim, 2023)

In modern times, nationalism has become the dominant force in international politics.⁴

In the context of India, it is often said that this land belongs to the Hindu religion. However, the emergence of Hindu consciousness can be traced back to the time of Shivaji in the 17th and 18th centuries.⁵ During this period, the Marathas formed alliances to reclaim the Gangetic plains from Muslim rulers. Although they were not entirely successful, they strove hard to control the sacred loci of Hindus.⁶ In the 19th century, Brahmins reorganized Hindus against British rule. While they pressured the British crown to provide jobs and education to Brahmins, they also perceived the British as a threat. Later, in 1828, Ram Mohan Roy founded the Brahmo Samaj, an organization that collaborated with the East India Company (EIC) to remove discrimination within the Hindu community, while also strongly criticizing the British for their missionary activities. Over time, Brahmo Samaj extended its influence to a vast majority of the Hindu population.

Another significant organization, Arya Samaj, was established on April 10th, 1875, by S.D. Saraswati. Arya Samaj aimed to restore the golden age of the Vedic era, asserting that the original inhabitants of this land were Aryans, who were blessed by God with the sacred language, Sanskrit. The organization sought to make Indian standards acceptable to the Western world. At that time, Christian missionaries were heavily involved in the indoctrination of the "untouchables" in Indian society, posing a significant challenge to the Indian elites. In response, the proponents of Arya Samaj initiated the "Shuddhi" movement, a reconversion effort. The organization continued its work even after Saraswati's death and later became involved in political activities.⁷

Following this, a new organization called "Hindu Sabha" emerged in Punjab. Though it posed as a secular organization, another group called the "Sanatanis" also emerged around the same time.⁸ Unlike Hindu Sabha, the Sanatanis adhered to the orthodox practices of the Hindu religion.⁹ These years were pivotal for organized Hindu

movements, as the growing solidarity among Muslims against British rule prompted Hindus to mobilize as well. A landmark event for Hindu unification was the Kerala incident, where Muslim peasants united against predominantly Hindu landlords. In 1920, Arya Samajis and Sanatanis came together to form the Hindu Mahasabha. Initially part of the Indian National Congress, the Hindu Mahasabha later parted ways when Gandhi's influence began to overshadow other viewpoints, establishing itself as a distinct political organization in 1930 under the dynamic leadership of Savarkar.¹⁰

As Muslim nationalism began to emerge in Hindu-majority India, the "Two Nation Theory" gained prominence. This theory posited that Hindus and Muslims were two distinct identities with different cultures, histories, and civilizations, making coexistence impossible.¹¹ Meanwhile, upper-caste Brahmins feared that their caste supremacy was in danger. They sought to create more space for themselves in the politically and economically complex world by constructing a unified Hindu identity. The driving forces behind this construction were the reinterpretation and reinvention of the Brahmin's role in Hindu religious and cultural traditions. Additionally, there was a desire to counter the feminine Orientalist view of Hindus, who had been subjugated by Muslims and the British for a long period, by infusing masculinity into the new tradition.

On the other side, this new religio-cultural tradition required protection, which led to the antagonization and militarization of Hindus. These actions were justified by the narrative that Muslims had corrupted Hindu traditions. Lastly, there was a strong intention to rediscover the glory of the past.¹²

1. Veer Savarkar and the Birth of Hindutva

The term *Hindutva* was coined by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, commonly known as Veer Savarkar.¹³ He was born in Bhagur, in the district of Maharashtra, in May 1883 into a Brahmin family. Savarkar was deeply influenced by Lokmanya Tilak. He formed an underground

⁴ (Afzal, 2014)3.

⁵ (Sarkar, 1992)216.

⁶ (Bayly, 1985)187.

⁷ (BHATIA, 1991).586.

⁸ (Yasmeen, 2018)200.

⁹ (Yasmeen, 2018)200.

¹⁰ (Desk)

¹¹ (Majid, Hamid, & Habib, 2014)180-181.

¹² (Afzal, 2014)45-46.

¹³ (Snehi, 2003)10.

militant organization for young people called “Abhinav Bharata,” which operated under the “Mitramela” group. The slogan of Mitramela was “Freedom is the objective; armed revolution is the means.”¹⁴

Savarkar studied at Fergusson College in Poona, where he was very active in literary activities and debates. In recognition of his brilliance, he was awarded a scholarship to study in London. While in London, he founded the “Free India Society,” an organization aligned with Abhinav Bharata, through which he recruited students for the cause of revolution. Over time, Savarkar became increasingly aggressive and began smuggling weapons into India. Unfortunately, he was arrested on charges of waging war against the King.

After his repatriation, Savarkar faced trial and was sentenced to life imprisonment. His time in prison proved to be a blessing in disguise, as it gave him the opportunity to record his thoughts. Despite lacking proper writing materials, he wrote his famous book *Hindutva* on the walls of his jail cell. The book was later published in 1923 while he was still imprisoned.

After his release, Savarkar became actively involved in politics and, in 1937, became the president of the Hindu Mahasabha. He criticized the Congress Party for its hypocrisy in claiming to represent Hindus. Savarkar believed that the Hindu Mahasabha should be considered the sole political voice of Hindus. During World War II, he openly advocated the idea that “Hinduize all Politics and Militarize the Hindudom” on every platform.¹⁵

1.1 Savarkar’s Distinction Between Hinduism and Hindutva

V.D. Savarkar distinguished between Hinduism and Hindutva by emphasizing that the “ism” in Hinduism typically refers to a religious dogma, theory, or system, thus associating it with the Hindu religion. In contrast, Hindutva is not primarily concerned with religious dogma. Instead, it deals with the political aspects of the Hindu identity. Hindutva’s objective is to mobilize, organize, and unite Hindus under the concept of a Hindu nation. According to Hindutva principles,

Sindhustan (Hindustan) is both the holy land and the fatherland for every Hindu.

Savarkar argues that anyone forcibly converted to a non-Hindu religion, despite sharing a common heritage, language, customs, laws, and history, should not be considered Hindu. For these individuals, Hindustan can be their fatherland, but it cannot be their holy land, as they consider their holy land to be elsewhere, such as in Arabia, Palestine, or other parts of the world. This shift in their spiritual and cultural allegiance changes their way of life, outlook, ideas, mythology, and heroes, making them distinct from the indigenous Hindu community. According to Savarkar, the gap between these in-groups and out-groups can only be bridged through the process of reconversion to Hinduism.

In his book, Savarkar writes, “Ye, who by race, by blood, by culture, by nationality possess almost all the essentials of Hindutva and had been forcibly snatched out of our ancestral home by the hand of violence — ye, have only to render wholehearted love to our common mother and recognize her not only as fatherland (Pitribhu) but even as a holy land (Punjabhu), and ye would be most welcome to the Hindu fold.”¹⁶ However, to fully understand Hindutva, one must first understand the term “Hindu,” which has a geographical connotation. It is said that when the Aryans arrived at the river Indus, they developed a sense of commonality that led them to identify as the “Sapta Sindus.” This concept originates from the Rigveda.¹⁷ Over time, as various dialects evolved, “Sapta Sindus” transformed into “Sindu” and eventually became “Hindu.” The historical significance of this land first emerged with the invasion of Mahmud of Ghazni, who crossed the Indus River. This event marked the beginning of a prolonged conflict that lasted for centuries, during which India, as a unified entity, endured the cruelty of its foes with steadfast moral standards and military resilience. This enduring struggle strengthened the sense of nationhood among the Indian people, and those who fought for the land did so in accordance with the principles of Hindutva.¹⁸

¹⁴ (Cornelius, Historical, & Perspectives, 2016)235.

¹⁵ (Ram, 2015)

¹⁶ (A. G. Noorani)

¹⁷ (Soofi)

¹⁸ (Savarkar, 1923) John Press descriptor : This is the text that Hedgewar read just prior to starting the RSS. As such, it is the founding document of the RSS. The RSS is the largest culturist organization in the world. It

1.2 Savarkar's Impact on Hindu-Muslim Relations

The cognitive framework behind Hindu views of Muslims has been largely shaped by the intellectual contributions of V.D. Savarkar. He drew a clear distinction between Muslims and Hindus. Savarkar defined Hindus as those who are Hindu by blood, speak the languages of India, live according to Indian culture, and consider India as both their fatherland and holy land. He rejected the notion of equality between Indian Muslims and Hindus unless Muslims converted to Hinduism. Otherwise, proponents of Hindutva would always regard Muslims as subordinate to Hindus.

Savarkar also considered Urdu to be a foreign language, asserting that there was no place for it in this region. In 1944, an "Anti-Urdu Week" was observed to protect the Hindi language.¹⁹ Like other Hindu nationalists, Savarkar viewed Pan-Islam as a genuine threat to Hindu Dharma and questioned the loyalty of Muslims to India due to their connections with other parts of the world. Since their holy lands are in Arabia, he believed they would always prioritize Mecca over Agra and Delhi. Similarly, Golwalkar argued that Muslims are not indigenous to Hindustan and questioned their loyalty to the nation. He suggested that if Muslims wished to be integrated into Indian society, they should accept Hindu culture and language as their own. This implied that Muslims should not publicly practice their religious rituals. Golwalkar further noted that Islam has adopted local cultures in various parts of the world, and therefore, adopting Indian culture would not impede Indian Muslims. This adoption would include recognizing Krishna and Ram as their forefathers and viewing Mahmud of Ghazni, the Mughal emperors, and Ghori as invaders.²⁰

To instill martial values among Hindus, the RSS introduced a new institution called the Akhara. This institution was designed to train Hindu youth, fostering a martial spirit while also promoting religious values within the Hindu community. The Akhara aimed to spread Hindu values, particularly among other communities, including Muslims. The

trains youth to be strong and understand the Hindutva philosophy.

¹⁹ (QIZILBASH)

²⁰ (Pattanaik)

²¹ (Andersen, 1972)636.

trainees were also prepared to provide security for Hindu pilgrims against hardline Muslim groups.²¹ However, the RSS has been accused of involvement in various acts of violence. It has often been perceived as an anti-Muslim organization, with accusations coming from both the Kashmiri and Pakistani governments. Even India's Home Minister, Vallabhbhai Patel, spoke about the violent activities attributed to the RSS.²² These actions were believed to stem from frustration, particularly over the failure to prevent the partition of the subcontinent. This sentiment was further reinforced when the RSS observed a period of mourning on August 15, 1947, viewing the division of India as a desecration of the sacredness of a unified Bharatmata.²³

2. The Perceived Threat of Islam and the Rise of Hindutva Nationalism

It is believed that the Muslim invaders of the Indian subcontinent placed primacy on religion, unlike earlier invaders. They adhered strictly to their ideology and actively preached it, which made other religious communities feel threatened and vulnerable. This sense of danger led these communities to take measures to protect themselves from the perceived threat of Islam. The situation became more complex with the invasion of the Ghorians, even though Muslims had been present in the region for nearly half a century prior. The Ghorians came with aggression, breaking idols, looting the public, and establishing dominance in the region. As a result, Muslims who had previously been a recessive minority in various parts of India, such as Benares, Ajmer, Bihar, and UP, began to gain a stronger foothold.²⁴

As Muslim authority in the region declined, scholars like Shah Waliullah advised Muslims to return to their faith, focusing on the Hadith and Quran, ending internal conflicts, and purging non-Muslim values from Islamic traditions. This, they believed, was the only way for Muslims to regain their former glory.²⁵ Similarly, the Deoband movement, which assimilated Sufism and the four

²² (History)

²³ (Islam)

²⁴ (Schimmel, 1980)143.

²⁵ (Habib, 1960)213.

schools of Islamic law, added another feather to the Muslim in-grouping.²⁶

Muslims dominated India for centuries, and many claimed that the true history of the region began with their arrival. This narrative created a sense of marginalization among the common Hindu population. A growing perception emerged among Hindus that Muslims were trying to undermine Hinduism and eliminate Hindus from India, either by deceit or by force. This fear contributed to the spread of Hindutva. In addition to Islam, Christian missionaries and Marxists, who promoted secular ideologies, were also seen as threats to Hindus and the dignity of the nation. Hindutva ideologues believed that these forces were gradually encroaching on Hindu culture and threatening the survival of the Hindu Rashtra, or Hindu Nation. Hindu nationalists also rejected Gandhi's vision of Indian nationalism, which advocated non-violence and universal nationalism without religious discrimination. They argued that since India consisted of 70% Hindus, the minority communities should adhere to the rules set by the majority.²⁷

In response to these perceived threats, there was a call to establish an organization that could defend the Hindu community against all adversaries, much like how Islam was seen to protect Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, or how Jewish identity was central to Israel. Hindutva emerged as an umbrella ideology providing protection to all Hindu concerns. The most important organization under this ideology is the RSS, a hardline Hindu organization that considers itself the defender of Hindus. The RSS believes that Hindusthan belongs to Hindus and a few other indigenous religions. Other religious groups can coexist with the Hindu majority, but they will not be treated as equals; the terms and conditions of their existence will be defined by the RSS. The organization opposes granting religious rights to minorities, viewing these as unwarranted privileges disguised as democratic rights, which they seek to diminish. Some RSS leaders have taken extreme positions against Muslims. For example, Yogi Adityanath once incited men to commit atrocities against the bodies of deceased Muslim women.²⁸

²⁶ (Ingram, 2011)144.

²⁷ (Jaffrelot, 2007)5.

²⁸ (Shahid)

2.1 The Emergence of Divisions in the Indian National Congress

When the British Empire extended formal authority over the subcontinent after the 1857 War of Independence, the need for local catharsis became evident. It was challenging for the British army to maintain control solely through force. To address this, the British provided a political platform for the people to express their legitimate concerns. As a result, the All India National Congress was formed in 1885, with the intention of serving the people of the subcontinent across the board.²⁹

However, things did not go as planned, and a sense of division began to emerge at the third session of the Congress, held in Madras (Chennai) in 1887. Although Badruddin Tyabji presided over the session, and a significant number of Muslims from various parts of Hindustan, including Bombay (Mumbai), South India, Bengal, and the Northwest Province, attended the meeting, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan believed that the government intended to draw Muslims into the All India National Congress. At the second meeting of the Muhammadan Educational Conference, held in Lucknow on December 28, 1887, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan vehemently criticized the comparative examination for civil services. He argued that there was no parity among the different communities of the country, as they were unequal in terms of wealth, ability, and education. He also believed that people from higher castes would not obey orders from those of lower castes. In 1888, he warned that a civil war between Hindus and Muslims could break out if the British were to leave the country.³⁰

2.2 Religious Polarization (1880-1928)

From 1880 to 1920, one of the main causes for the emergence of Hindu nationalism was the issue of cow slaughter. The controversy first arose during the Kuka movement, started by B.R. Singh in Punjab. The Arya Samaj also highlighted and supported the issue, as Hindus hold religious reverence for the cow and consider it sacred. Protecting the 'Gau-Mata' (Mother Cow) became

²⁹ (Belmekki, 2008)23.

³⁰ (Akhtar, 2015)27.

a rallying cry, with Hindus demanding that the government ban cow slaughter.

The issue gained further prominence after the Allahabad municipality passed laws banning the slaughter of cows and buffaloes, which were subsequently challenged and denied by the Allahabad High Court. This led to heightened tensions and conflict over the issue in Uttar Pradesh in 1887-88.³¹ Religious polarization reached its peak during this time. The British government's decision to grant constitutional rights to the people of the subcontinent further intensified this polarization, as various groups, both large and small, sought to protect their identities. They began demanding separate electorates and other constitutional provisions that suited their interests. As a result, continuous struggles ensued among the many sects residing in the subcontinent, though the primary conflict was between Hindus and Muslims. Riots erupted between these two communities in various parts of the country, including Mumbai and Maharashtra. Under the leadership of Lokmanya Tilak and with the rise of the anti-cow slaughter movement, resentment grew among Muslims in Northern India. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan took these developments seriously and, to protect Muslims from what he saw as the heinous intentions of the Hindus, he formed the Muhammadan Defense Association. The sole objective of this association was to safeguard the political rights of Muslims. Eventually, following the Congress's role in the Bengal Partition, Muslims established their own political party, the All India Muslim League, in 1906.³²

The period from 1922 to 1928 was marked by intense violence that claimed the lives of many Hindus and Muslims, leaving deep and lasting scars on Hindu-Muslim relations. One of the most horrific events occurred in Saharanpur during Muharram, when Shia Muslims were engaged in mourning. Religious activities became highly stigmatized, with Muslims objecting to the playing of music in front of mosques during prayer, while Hindus were adamant about adhering to their rituals without compromise. These tensions led to frequent scuffles in the streets where these two

religious groups coexisted, causing communities to grow increasingly antagonistic.³³

3. Impact of the Government of India Act 1935 and the Ascendancy of Hindutva

To make matters worse, the British government enacted the Government of India Act of 1935, which included provisions for separate electorates for Muslims. This development emboldened Muslims to demand more rights for their community, particularly in minority provinces. Religion thus became a highly incendiary factor in the growing division of what was once a unified community. In response, Hindus also became more assertive about their rights. The secular image of the Indian National Congress came under scrutiny, as it became increasingly difficult for Hindus in a majority-Hindu country to remain calm, especially when the Muslim community appeared to be acting aggressively. Meanwhile, the Hindu Mahasabha, which was founded to protect Hindu rights, took an uncompromising stand against separate electorates and launched campaigns to abolish communal quotas.³⁴

This period also witnessed the rise of Hindutva, driven both by electoral appropriation and by opposition to the British Crown's perceived favoritism toward Muslims. World War II played a role in shaping Hindutva, as recent research suggests that leaders of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) not only admired Mussolini and Hitler but also had clandestine links with them.³⁵ The Khilafat Movement further unified Hindus, as Muslims were focused on protecting the Caliphate and safeguarding the religious integrity of Islam. Muhammad Ali Jinnah exacerbated the situation by using communal rhetoric to secure Muslim votes in the 1945-46 elections. His strategy was aimed at paving the way for the creation of Pakistan by convincing Muslims that their problems could only be solved by establishing a separate state. Some Hindu nationalists also believed that partition would resolve India's communal problems. They thought that once Muslims had their own homeland, India could be established as a Hindu state. However,

³¹ (Yasmeen, 2009)113.

³² (Noman, 1942)32.

³³ (Copland, 2011)745.

³⁴ (Copland, 2011)745.

³⁵ (A. G. A. M. Noorani, 2002)67.

³⁶ (Visweswaran, Witzel, Manjrekar, Bhog, & Chakravarti, 2009)4.

this expectation was not fulfilled, as it was neither emotionally nor geographically feasible for the entire Muslim community to migrate. Moreover, Jawaharlal Nehru's policy of a secular India dealt a significant blow to the aspirations of Hindu nationalists. Nehru viewed organizations like the Hindu Mahasabha and RSS as communal entities that posed a threat to a united India. To this day, Hindu nationalist organizations oppose India's secular nature.³⁷

3.1 Partition, Nationalism, and Savarkar's Influence

The creation of Pakistan was based on religious grounds, with numerous speeches by Muhammad Ali Jinnah supporting an Islamic state. This religious foundation of Pakistan created a perception among Hindu nationalists that equated Pakistan with all Muslims, fueling their agenda. They began to portray Indian Muslims as traitors or agents of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). This mindset has led to numerous bloodsheds on Indian soil, most notably the Babri Masjid incident. The demolition of the mosque was not only an act of aggression but also a means to provoke animosity against Muslims, framing them as aggressors reminiscent of Ghoris, Ghaznavis, and other Central Asian invaders. Hindu nationalists also blamed Muslims for the partition of India in 1947, fostering a sense of belligerence and hatred against both Pakistan and the Muslim community.³⁸ This mindset contributed to the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi by an RSS member, who believed Gandhi's cooperation with the Muslim League had enabled the creation of Pakistan.³⁹

Savarkar was extremely critical of any sense of unity between vernacular and non-vernacular groups. He argued that the best way to oppose an enemy is to sever all ties of similarity. He asserted that India should abandon its image of non-violence and moral universalism, as these qualities had diminished the nation's ability to resist aggression, crimes, and even sin. To effectively respond to threats, Savarkar believed it was necessary to eliminate all means of commonality.⁴⁰

4. Golwalkar's Leadership, RSS Developments, and the Role of Hatred

Although Savarkar was the chief architect of the Hindutva ideology, it was later refined and promoted by M.S. Golwalkar. Golwalkar was one of the few individuals instrumental in shaping the ideology of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The RSS was formally established in 1925 by K.B. Hedgewar during the Vijaydashami festival in Nagpur. Since its inception, the organization has experienced numerous ups and downs. It has been allegedly linked to terrorist activities and has been banned three times in its history (1948, 1975, and 1992).⁴¹ However, in 1940, Golwalkar assumed full control of the organization and led it until his death in 1973. Under his leadership, the Hindutva ideology saw significant growth. Golwalkar introduced the political face of Hindutva through the formation of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, which remained active from 1951 to 1977 before being reconstituted in 1980 as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). And the BJP remains so many times in power in the upcoming years.

The spread of Hindutva was not a linear process; it took different forms at different times for various purposes. For example, in 1964, the RSS advocated for a common religious body for Hindus, leading to the formation of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP). Alongside this, youth and women's wings, such as Durga Vahini, were also established. In 1966, another important facet of Hindutva emerged with the creation of Shiv Sena. Similarly, in 1979, organizations like Sewa Bharti, Bajrang Dal, and the RSS service wing were formed. The primary role of all these organizations, in one form or another, was to promote and support the Hindutva ideology.⁴²

Hatred has been used as a primary tool for propagating the Hindutva ideology. Proponents of Hindutva consider Muslims to be the enemies who robbed their ancestors of glory. In pursuit of reclaiming this glory, they initiated a propaganda war against Muslims, stigmatizing them as invaders intent on converting all inhabitants of India to Islam. According to the RSS, the original religion of the land is Hinduism, along with a few

³⁷ (Perumal, 1987)105.

³⁸ (Hasan, 2002)37.

³⁹ (Busch, 2009)

⁴⁰ (Siddiqui, 2016)12.

⁴¹ (Ankit, 2012)72.

⁴² (Murshid, 2015)27-28.

other religions that deviated from it. The proponents of RSS believe that the Hindu nation must share five commonalities: race, culture, geography, language, and religion. Any other religion, they argue, is unacceptable in this land, and those who do not recognize Hinduism as their religion are labeled as traitors. The ideology further propagates that Muslims are culturally and socially distinct and cannot integrate with the local population unless they convert to Hinduism. The use of violence to achieve these conversions is justified as "Dharma Yudha" (a holy war fought for religious causes, particularly for the conversion of Muslims to Hinduism).⁴³

5. Conclusion

The evolution of Hindu nationalism, as traced from the legacy of Shivaji to the ideological framework laid out by V.D. Savarkar, reveals a complex interplay of identity, politics, and religion in India. Hindutva, as a political ideology, has sought to redefine Hindu identity in response to historical challenges, including Muslim rule, British colonialism, and Western influences. This redefinition, while unifying Hindus under a common banner, has also contributed to tensions with Muslim communities, shaping contemporary Hindu-Muslim relations in significant ways.

From a constructivist perspective, identity is not fixed but is continually shaped by social, political, and historical contexts. The rise of Hindutva can be seen as a response to perceived threats, where the construction of a cohesive Hindu identity became a means to assert political power and cultural dominance. This identity construction, however, has not been without consequences, as it has often led to the exclusion and marginalization of other communities, particularly Muslims, who are seen as the "other" in this nationalist narrative.

As India positions itself as the world's largest democracy, the principles of pluralism and inclusivity become paramount. A way forward involves embracing the democratic ideals of diversity, dialogue, and respect for all identities. Acknowledging the rich pluralistic heritage of India and fostering a society where different communities can coexist peacefully is essential for the country's long-term stability and unity. The challenge lies in balancing the legitimate

aspirations of Hindu nationalism with the need to maintain social harmony and uphold the democratic values that India prides itself on. By promoting inclusivity and recognizing the contributions of all communities to the nation's fabric, India can navigate the complexities of identity politics while reinforcing its commitment to democracy and pluralism.

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⁴³ (Curran, 1950)95

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