

Hindutva and Islamophobia

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Abstract

This research paper is an attempt to understand rising Islamophobia in India in relation to Hindutva as a political ideology. It is argued that Islamophobia is inherent in Savarkar's construction of 'self' and the 'other' that was reinforced by his followers Hedgewar and Golwalkar. These constructs are based on dominant Brahmanic traditions mainly used for political purposes to acquire and sustain power. The lower Hindu castes and minorities are primary victims in this homogenising project of Hindutva. Hindutva ideology emerged as a response to British colonisation based on politics of resistance. But in the post-partition era it evolved into politics of domination by a particular construct of 'Hindu Nationalism' comprising of Brahmanic, Aryan and Vedic components. Hindutva zealots equate an Indian with Hindu identity and Muslims are constructed as an internal threat to Hindutva ideology as they resist this homogenisation and continue to assert a separate identity for themselves.

Keywords: Hindutva Ideology, BJP, Sangh Parivar, Savarkar, Muslims, Islamophobia, India.

Introduction

India is a diverse and multicultural society encompassing a plethora of languages, religions, races and cultures. Its founders believed in 'unity in diversity' and pursued a secular vision of India. However, with Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) coming into power in 2014, the Hindutva ideology gained momentum in the Indian politics and is now

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stronger than ever. Although BJP government under Prime Minister Vajpayee was also closely associated with the Hindutva *Sangh Parivar* but did not make Hindutva a mainstay of their domestic policy partly because it did not command electoral majority in the Indian Parliament. In 2014, Modi's political mantra comprises of two slogans to attract votes: the slogan of 'development' to appeal to the Indian urban middle class and the ideology of Hindutva to extract Hindu vote, a model that he successfully applied earlier in the state of Gujarat.¹ In 2019 general elections, Modi attempted to expand Hindutva vote bank successfully by churning anti-Pakistan sentiment, portraying himself as '*Chowkidar*' – protector of the 'nation.'

Hindutva ideology of cultural nationalism is more about power politics and domination than religion. The political context in which it emerged must be borne in mind when trying to understand Hindutva as a political ideology. It emerged when the people of the subcontinent were fighting to throw off the yoke of British colonialism. In these times, Savarkar's outlining of a Hindutva way of life was an attempt to find a denomination of 'self' and also identify the multiple 'others' who were outsiders and intruders in the fatherland and holy land of Hindustan. The paper first discusses 'self' and the 'other' by Savarkar in the pre-partition and post-partition context with special focus on the Muslim 'other' to reveal the politics of domination underlying Hindutva philosophy. Then it deconstructs the inherent Islamophobia in Hindutva ideology and analyses how Muslims have been constructed as the threatening other. It argues that Hindutva inspired social and political activism has been going on for decades and has deeply penetrated the social milieu of India. The BJP under Modi's leadership is consolidating homogenisation project by establishing Hindu hegemonic identity within India. It is also interesting to note that this anti-Muslim vitriol is directed at Indian Muslims who resist hegemonic Hindu identity within India and Pakistan which is resisting regional hegemonic designs of India.

Savarkar and Hindutva

The psyche behind Hindutva ideology essentially involves closing off ranks against outsiders to protect the threatened purity and superiority of the

¹ Editorial, "The BJP Fringe: An Election Campaign on Development Has Done Nothing to Change its Hindutva Core," *Economic and Political Weekly* 49, no. 18 (May 2014): 7.

Hindu race and culture. This conception of purity and superiority of the Hindu Aryan race and culture is neither new nor did it originate with the coining of the term Hindutva by V.D. Savarkar in 1923. Long before Savarkar presented his philosophy of Hindutva, Alberuni — who accompanied Mahmud of Ghazni to India recorded that the Hindus referred to Muslims and all other outsiders as ‘mleccha’ and that this term had connotations of impurity and inferiority associated with the outsider other. Alberuni also noted the Indians he met “to them their religion, nation, country, etc. were superior, leading to Alberuni’s assessment of them as ‘vain’ and ‘haughty.’”² The term ‘mleccha’ was originally used to “indicate the uncouth and incomprehensible speech of foreigners and then extended to their unfamiliar behaviour”³ and has its basis in the belief of inherent superiority and purity of the Aryan race. This same concept was given a more political apparel by Savarkar in his pamphlet on Hindutva: as an ideology and a project to defend the sanctity of the Aryan race and culture against all outsiders — colonising Europeans, invading Muslims and proselytising Christians.

In his pamphlet, *Hindutva, Who is a Hindu*, Savarkar’s definition of a Hindu had “territorial, political, nationalistic and ancestral components.”⁴ Savarkar’s Hindu needed to fulfil the following conditions: i) “born within Hindustan and thus have a legitimate claim to this nation-space as their fatherland” (*Pitrabhoo*), ii) “inherit Hindu ‘blood through natural parents” (*Jati*), iii) be part of “a shared culture or *sanskriti*...[in terms of] allegiance to a particular sacred geography...[Thus] the final and ultimately all-important criterion for being a Hindu is that one’s ‘punyabhoo’ or holy land should coincide with the ‘pitrabhoo’ [fatherland].”⁵ This essentially rules out all Muslims and Christians Jews and Parsis, even native converts. Savarkar was careful to include Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists within the fold

² Denise Cush, Catherine Robinson and Michael York, eds., *Encyclopedia of Hinduism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), 294, <https://books.google.com.pk/books?id=kzPgCgAAQBAJ&pg=PA294&lpg=PA294&dq=muslim+mleccha+impure&source=bl&ots=W15YdxbPJC&sig=ACfU3U34kMP0HVpsFtuhI8zSbBtsulfNDQ&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj9gLnI6PToAhWSo3EKHYHyACcQ6AEwBH0EAgQAQ#v=onepage&q=muslim%20mleccha%20impure&f=false>.

³ “Mlechlha,” Encyclopaedia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/mlechlha>

⁴ Encyclopaedia Britannica.

⁵ Satish Deshpande, “Communalising the Nation-Space: Notes on Spatial Strategies of Hindutva,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 30, no. 50 (December 1995): 3222.

of this definition as he wanted “to avoid the political fall-out of an excessively narrow definition of Hinduism (in his view) which had the unhappy consequence of excluding the Buddhists, the Sikhs, and the Jains from the Hindu community.”⁶

Hindutva: From Politics of Resistance to Politics of Domination

Some authors believe that “Hindutva today gradually evolved from a counter-ideology that sought to destabilise colonialism into a ruling ideology that seeks to consolidate political power. Thus, the ramifications of its expansive growth are concretely felt every day through the functioning of the Indian nation-state.”⁷ Hindutva ideology was about political power right from its inception and it moved from a politics of resistance to a politics of domination in the post-partition era. Savarkar presented the ideology as a response to colonisation in order to take back the social, cultural and political space that had been encroached upon by the colonisers, Muslim rulers and Christian missionaries. After partition, Savarkar’s drift changed to consolidation of other minorities within the all-encompassing constructed Hindu identity and minimising Muslim self-assertion.

The Hindutva ideology propounded by Savarkar was an attempt to forge a united identity among the scattered Hindus and other Indian-origin religions in order to assert their political power. As per one scholar, the purpose of “the three essentials of Hindutva — a common nation (Rashtra), a common race (Jati) and a common civilization...is to confer a Hindu nationality on all the followers of the four religions of Indian origin — Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism.”⁸ This common sense of identity and nationhood was necessary to fight British imperialism, as well as act as a shield against hegemonic Western culture. Savarkar envisaged the concept of Hindutva as a way of life based on the superiority of Hindu culture and race that would “enable new nationalists to regain a unified, continual Indian (“Hindu”) identity, based on Arya-hood and “Aryan”

⁶ Arvind Sharma, “On Hindu, Hindustān, Hinduism and Hindutva,” *Numen* 49, no. 1 (2002): 22.

⁷ Clarke, “Hindutva, Religious and Ethnocultural Minorities, and Indian-Christian Theology,” 205.

⁸ Sharma, “On Hindu, Hindustān, Hinduism and Hindutva.”

beliefs. All could be proud to reinstate that golden age characterised as Ram Raj — the Hindu god-king Rama’s realm.”⁹

Savarkar’s Hindutva ideology was concerned with forging a united sense of self by defining who was a Hindu, and also define possible threats to the Hindu nation — not only the external threats such as the colonising British, but also the internal threats that were supposedly weakening the nation from within. These internal threats included Christians and Muslims as Savarkar’s definition of a Hindu “equates Hindu identity and Indian nationalism, meaning that religious minorities are not only “aliens,” but because of their “extraterritorial loyalties” (to holy lands in Arabia, Israel [and Palestine]), they are also potential traitors.”¹⁰ The foremost of those threats were Muslims who were considered by Savarkar and his followers as invaders, usurpers and conquerors and who needed to be subjugated. Thus after partition, the Hindutva project shifted to a politics of domination where minorities were cajoled to find their place within the all-encompassing Hindutva way of life.

Hindutva and Islamophobia

Islamophobia is intrinsic to the very definition of Hindu and Hindutva in Savarkar’s ideology. This Islamophobic discourse originated with Savarkar himself who regarded Muslims to be the most challenging out of all the minorities of India as in his view “they belong, or feel that they belong, to a cultural unit altogether different from the Hindu one. Their heroes and their hero-worship, their fairs and their festivals, and their ideals and their outlook on life, have now ceased to be common with our own.”¹¹ Those converted to Islam, their loyalties apparently lie elsewhere. This point was elaborated by Savarkar as:

For though Hindustan to them [Muslims and Christians] is fatherland as to any other Hindu yet it is not to them a holyland, too. Their holyland is far off in Arabia or Palestine. Their mythology and God-men, ideas and heroes are not the children of this soil. Consequently their names

⁹ Humes, “Hindutva, Mythistory and Pseudo archaeology,” 189.

¹⁰ Sangeeta Kamat and Biju Mathew, “ Mapping Political Violence in a Globalised World: The Case of Hindu Nationalism,” *Social Justice* 30, no. 3 (93), The Intersection of Ideologies of Violence (2003): 10.

¹¹ Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* (2nd Edition, Bombay: Veer Savarkar Prakashan, 1969), 101.

and their outlook smack of foreign origin. Their love is divided. Nay, if some of them be really believing what they profess to do, then there can be no choice—they must, to a man, set their holyland above their fatherland in their love and allegiance.¹²

Thus even though Muslim converts fulfilled the first two requirements of being a Hindu, they could never form part of the Hindu nation and would, in Savarkar's view, always remain outsiders in their own homeland. This particular animosity of Savarkar towards Muslims certainly revolved around the issue of power and domination as "of all the outsiders who controlled India, for brief and long periods, it was the Muslims whom Savarkar criticised the most. Savarkar saw only the decline of the Indian nation and the loss of identity of its majority community, the Hindus, during the seven hundred years of uninterrupted Islamic rule. Hence his interpretation of history was used as an incitement to Hindus to rise against Muslims in order to re-establish their supremacy."¹³ Savarkar's dislike for Muslims and his Islamophobic discourse sprung from his own history and sense of identity, as being a Maratha Hindu (warrior Hindu) "he learned to hate Muslims from birth. And in addition to blaming Muslims for all the ills that existed in India he championed the idea of complete marginalisation of Muslims."¹⁴

After partition, Savarkar made overtures to other minorities, such as Parsis and Christians, who were not Hindus as per Savarkar's definition but they could still form part of the Hindu nation as they were more reconcilable to the Hindutva way of life than Muslims. As he stated about the Parsis:

[s]o far as other minorities in India are concerned, there cannot be much difficulty in arriving at an Indian national consolidation. The Parsis have ever been working shoulder to shoulder with the Hindus against the British domination. They are no fanatics. From the great Dadabhai Nowrojee to the renowned revolutionary lady Madam Cama, the Parsis have contributed their quota of true Indian patriots, nor have

¹² Savarkar, *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?*, 113.

¹³ Amalendu Misra, "Savarkar and the Discourse on Islam in Pre-Independent India," *Journal of Asian History* 33, no. 2 (1999): 144-145.

¹⁴ Misra, "Savarkar and the Discourse on Islam in Pre-Independent India," 145.

they ever displayed any[thing] but goodwill towards the Hindu nation....Culturally too, they are more akin to us.¹⁵

The same overtures are extended to the Christian minority in India by Savarkar as he stated:

In a lesser degree the same thing could be said about Indian Christians. Although they have yet done but little to contribute any help to the national struggle yet they have not acted like a millstone round our neck. They are less fanatical and are more amenable to political reason than the Muslims. The Jews are few in number and not antagonistic to our national aspirations. All these minorities of our countrymen are sure to behave as honest and patriotic citizens in an Indian state.¹⁶

Just as there was a political reason for Savarkar to extend the definition of a Hindu to include Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs; similarly his overtures towards the other minorities of India after independence in 1947 also had a political purpose: “By allowing them a share in national consolidation he built a combined front against the Muslims whereby every non-Muslim community would be forced to see Muslims as the alien ‘other’, and the enemy. By recognising the contributions of non-Hindu and non-Islamic communities, Savarkar succeeded indirectly in propagating the belief that Muslims were traitors whose patriotism was dubious.”¹⁷

Savarkar’s followers such as Golwalkar, former chief of the RSS even surpassed Savarkar in ‘othering’ Muslims. He wrote:

The foreign races in Hindus than must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no ideas but those of glorification of the Hindu race and culture ... or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment not even citizen’s right.¹⁸

Similarly, Balraj Madhok, a member of the Jana Sangh, BJP’s predecessor, advocated the “‘Indianisation’ (in effect ‘Hinduisation’) of

¹⁵ Misra, “Savarkar and the Discourse on Islam in Pre-Independent India,” 151-152.

¹⁶ Misra, “Savarkar and the Discourse on Islam in Pre-Independent India,” 152.

¹⁷ Misra, “Savarkar and the Discourse on Islam in Pre-Independent India,” 152.

¹⁸ Sharma, “On Hindu, Hindustān, Hinduism and Hindutva,” 26.

Muslims and Christians”¹⁹ while the RSS inculcated “the principle of majoritarian rule [in their fundamental constitution] as passed in the RSS All India General Council in Bangalore, 18 March 2002,... Let the Muslims understand that their real safety lies in the goodwill of the majority.”²⁰

In addition to a constructed threat from Indian Muslims, the invocation of Pakistani involvement is often used as a political device. It was a common political tool in the repertoire of the BJP leaders of Gujarat to incite the non-Muslim against Muslims. 9/11 was commonly referred to by (the then) Chief Minister Modi as an example of “worldwide Muslim terrorist movement.”²¹ Not only Modi, but Prime Minister Vajpayee also expressed similar sentiments when he charged the Muslim community with spreading terror: “Wherever Muslims live, they tend not to live in co-existence with others, not to mingle with others; and instead of propagating their ideas in a peaceful manner, they want to spread their faith by resorting to terror and threats.”²²

This Islamophobic discourse by Hindutva advocates has gradually gathered political space under the leadership of Narendra Modi. In 2014, while the main plank of Narendra Modi’s election campaign was ‘development’ with Gujarat model showcased as a success story, but he also vigorously pursued Hindutva agenda to mobilise Hindu vote. In a speech BJP’s Amit Shah, currently Modi’s Home Minister, called upon “the Hindu voters of western Uttar Pradesh to take revenge on those who had violated the honour of their womenfolk (which is normal Hindutva code for Muslims).”²³ Giriraj Singh, a BJP leader, currently Minister of Rural Development and Minister of Panchayati Raj in Modi’s cabinet, claimed that once Modi came into power, all his opponents, including Muslims and liberal Hindus would be packed off to Pakistan. In addition to these statements by BJP leaders Ramdas Kadam, a Shiv Sena leader, labelled all Muslims as traitors who would be dealt with by Modi when he became

¹⁹ Sharma, “On Hindu, Hindustān, Hinduism and Hindutva,” 26.

²⁰ Howard Spodek, “In the Hindutva Laboratory: Pogroms and Politics in Gujarat, 2002,” *Modern Asian Studies* 44, no. 2 (March 2010):364.

²¹ Spodek, “In the Hindutva Laboratory: Pogroms and Politics in Gujarat, 2002,” 378.

²² Spodek, “In the Hindutva Laboratory: Pogroms and Politics in Gujarat, 2002,” 377.

²³ Editorial, “The BJP Fringe: An Election Campaign on Development Has Done Nothing to Change Its Hindutva Core,” 7.

Prime Minister. In 2019, election campaign Narendra Modi' successfully employed the *Chowkidar* slogan on social media by mobilising anti-Pakistan sentiment and integrated it with the offline campaign. He used the *Chowkidar* campaign not only to counter allegations of corruption, but also to project himself as the custodian of India's security following the attack in Pulwama (Indian Occupied Kashmir) and subsequent Balakot attack on Pakistan.²⁴ Modi dropped the *Chowkidar* prefix from his *Twitter* handle on May 23, the day election results were announced. Following massive victory in the general elections, Modi's Hindutva agenda moved to the centre stage of the Indian political space. It is manifested in scrapping of the Article 370 and passing of Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) in August and December 2019 respectively. While revocation of special status of Kashmir takes away the state subject status of the Kashmiris hitting Muslim majority, the CAB affects citizenship rights of the Indian Muslims and undermines cultural identity of both groups.

Reasons behind Considering Muslims as a Major Threat in Hindu Ideology

In order to understand why Muslims are constructed as a major threat to the Hindutva way of life, one must first understand the purpose and agenda of the Hindutva project which is "absorbing minorities into its ideology... involving the coming together of culture, society, and politics, it seeks to fuse all the distinct particularities and differences of religious minorities (Muslims and Christians) and ethno-cultural minorities (Dalits and Adivasis) into its Brahmanic construction of an Indian nation. Thus Hindutva threatens all minorities in the Indian nation who assert features of their distinct variance from this imagined homogeneous identity."²⁵ This conception of nationhood based on common Aryan identity as original inhabitants of India ignores the fact that there are other ethnic groups in India, such as Adivasis and Dravidians who were there before the Aryans arrived. Meanwhile, Muslims are considered outsiders because they came to India from other lands — though many locals from lower caste converted to

²⁴ Ronojoy Sen, From Chaiwala to Chowkidar: Modi's Election Campaigns Online and Offline," *Economic & Political Weekly*, vol.54, issue no.51, December 28, 2019, <https://www.epw.in/engage/article/chaiwala-chowkidar-modis-election-campaigns-online>

²⁵ Clarke, "Hindutva, Religious and Ethnocultural Minorities, and Indian-Christian Theology," 2002.

Islam. An Indian Supreme Court's judgement authenticates the theory that India is largely a nation of immigrants.²⁶

According to Arvind Sharma, Hindutva's agenda has been to "solve the problem of the presence of non-Hindu elements in Indian society and polity — primarily of the Muslims and Christians, and secondarily of such Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs as [they] do not respond to the general interpretation of the term 'Hindu' it offers. By inviting them to partake only of Hindu culture and not religion, it wants to make it socially easier for these communities to become part of the larger whole."²⁷ Thus Muslims are considered the biggest threat, offering resistance to the hegemonic and homogenizing project of Hindutva ideology. Another reason for the insecurity Savarkar and his followers felt regarding Muslims was that "Muslims were numerically powerful and in this alone they posed a threat to Hindu ideals on national consolidation."²⁸ Muslims are still the biggest minority in India and they are often accused of increasing their numbers through uncontrolled birth rate and 'love jihad' — enticing non-Muslim girls to convert to Islam so they can marry Muslim men.

Hindutva's Project of Hinduisation of Minorities and Marginalisation of Muslims

The Hindutva followers have not only been busy in a social and cultural restructuring of society but are also trying to Hinduise the social, cultural and political space of India. One of the ways in which Hinduisation of society has been achieved is proliferating Hindu spiritual imagery. According to Robinson, "packaged spirituality [is] available on the Internet, and... thrust on us by television and the many newspapers. Television channels vie with each other for the spiritual attention of viewers...religious serials of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata remain favourites...*Bhakti geet*...serials on Krishna, on Ganesh or on Hanuman — are all available for spiritual consumption. The newspapers provide columns with titles like "Sacred Space" and "Sacred Chants", "Inner Light", "Religion", and

²⁶ Opinion, "India, Largely a Country of Immigrants," *Hindu*, October 17, 2016, <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/India-largely-a-country-of-immigrants/article15127444.ece>

²⁷ Arvind Sharma, "On Hindu, Hindustān, Hinduism and Hindutva," 27.

²⁸ Misra, "Savarkar and the Discourse on Islam in Pre-Independent India," 152.

“Religious Values.”²⁹ This bombardment of the masses with Hindu spiritual and cultural imagery is a systematic campaign to Hinduise the social sphere and take Hinduism to every household.

Another means of achieving Hinduisation of society is through the vast network of Hindu nationalist organisations working under umbrella of *Sangh Parivar*. Spawned by RSS, they include, Vishva Hindu Parishad, Bajrang Dal, Akil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, and its ideological ally Shiv Sena and political offshoot — the BJP. This has been equated to cultural intervention by some scholars: “Unlike the political formations which function sporadically and intermittently... the presence of these organisations in civil society is continuous and uninterrupted ... If today communalism is deeply embedded in social consciousness it is to a large measure due to the cultural intervention of these organizations.”³⁰

For long Hindutva inspired communalist, social and cultural activism has been carried out through the vast network of *Sangh Parivar*. Panikkar observes:

Hindu communalism has worked through a large number of social and cultural organizations carefully nurtured during the last many years. The number and strength of these organisations with branches all over the country are difficult to ascertain, but they cover almost every field of intellectual and cultural activity — be it education, history, archaeology, music or media... About twenty thousand schools under different denominations, scores of publishing outfits in almost every language, committees to write the history of each district, literary associations and drama clubs, environmental groups, women’s organizations, temple renovation committees and so on are part of this network.³¹

The *Sangh Parivar* works in a systematic manner to fulfil the communal agenda of Savarkar in order to Hinduise India. The agenda of the *Sangh Parivar* is “to further the process of taming all heterogeneous and plural forms to fit into the unitary construction of a religiously synthesised India

²⁹ Robinson, “Virtual Warfare: The Internet as the New Site for Global Religious Conflict,” 200-201.

³⁰ Robinson, “Virtual Warfare: The Internet as the New Site for Global Religious Conflict,” 202.

³¹ Robinson, “Virtual Warfare: The Internet as the New Site for Global Religious Conflict,” 201.

while defining the core of this disciplined pan-Indian identity in Hindu (specifically Brahmanic) terms.”³²

In keeping with Savarkar’s positive overtures towards other non-Hindu minorities of India except Muslims in order to form a united front against Muslims as well as homogenise and Hinduise the minorities living in India, the *Sangh Parivar* network has adopted a two tier approach. On the one hand, it reaches out to those minorities which Savarkar identified as closer and more amenable to Hindu culture and tries to absorb them within the fold of Hindu nationalism. On the other hand, it actively uses those communities to garner support or to use them against Muslims.

Hindutva’s socio-cultural activism attempts to “entice[s] minorities to renounce their cultural and religious differences and embrace the all-encompassing Indian identity in its Hindu visage.”³³ Thus the majoritarian principle adopted by Savarkar and his followers aims to absorb the diverse races, religions and cultures of India into the dominant Hindu tradition based on the primordial ‘superiority’ of the Aryan race and Vedic culture. But as argued above, this is not just about racism but politics of domination where members of a majority community are running a systematic and organized campaign to convince Dalits, Adivasis and Christians to assimilate their identity within the culture of the majority by educating them at the grassroots level of their religio-cultural space within Hinduism. The RSS has started village-level educational units that enable teachers well-versed in the ideology of Hindutva to live with and instruct minority communities about their nation, heritage and civilisation. It is estimated that there are at least 2.4 million pupils and 80,000 teachers in these *Vidya Bharati* schools run by the RSS-VHP coalition.”³⁴ However, this cultural indoctrination in the name of imparting knowledge about Hindu culture and way of life “is designed to promote bigotry and religious fanaticism in the name of inculcating knowledge of [Indian/Hindu] culture in the younger generation.”³⁵

³² Clarke, “Hindutva, Religious and Ethnocultural Minorities and Indian-Christian Theology,” 208.

³³ Clarke, “Hindutva, Religious and Ethnocultural Minorities and Indian-Christian Theology,” 205.

³⁴ Clarke, “Hindutva, Religious and Ethnocultural Minorities and Indian-Christian Theology,” 205.

³⁵ Clarke, “Hindutva, Religious and Ethnocultural Minorities, and Indian-Christian Theology,” 206.

In addition to carrying this massive campaign to reach out to non-Hindu, non-Islamic minorities, Hindutva zealots have also been using them to isolate and marginalise Muslims. Dionne Bunsha wrote about Gujarat: “For several Dalits, it [anti-Muslim activity] is a way to gain social acceptance with the upper castes.”³⁶ Since the Dalits are themselves a suppressed community apparently included in the category of Hindu to boost the numbers of Hindus ; the question of caste, though not important to Savarkar, is still a reality in India and real power still resides in the hands of the religious, political and economic mostly Brahman elites. Thus the Dalits often find themselves being used as pawns in the Hindutva project of homogenising India and isolating Muslims: The Concerned Citizens Tribunal report on Gujarat riots observed:

The Bajrang Dal paid them [Dalits] salaries of Rs. 3,000-4,000/month to join camps where indoctrination against Muslims and arms training were given. These activists organised public functions in which swords and trishuls [trident daggers, symbols of Lord Shiva] were distributed with lots of publicity. In the private meetings activists were told, more explicitly, the trishuls are to be used against Muslims whenever there was a riot or a fight. If you killed Muslims, the organisation was there to protect you from any penal consequences. If something happened to you, the organisation was there to take care of your family. If you did get arrested during the riots, all you had to do was to show your Bajrang Dal membership card and the police was sure to let you go.³⁷

Prime Minister Modi has used the Other Backward Classes (OBC),³⁸ to which he himself belongs, as well as Dalits for anti-Muslim campaigns while he was Chief Minister of Gujarat. Especially during and after the Babri Masjid demolition, the BJP “invited OBC — like the Dalits — to provide muscle power and receive benefits, including some recognition in

³⁶ Spodek, “In the Hindutva Laboratory: Pogroms and Politics in Gujarat, 2002,” 375.

³⁷ Spodek, “In the Hindutva Laboratory: Pogroms and Politics in Gujarat, 2002,” 375-376. And Ghanshayam Shah, Under Privileged and Communal Carnage: A Case of Gujarat, Amsterdam: *Centre for Asian Studies Amsterdam*: Amsterdam School for Social Science Research, 2004, 23 quoted from *Concerned Citizens Tribunal Gujarat 2002* (Mumbai, Citizens for Justice and Peace, 2003).

³⁸ Other Backward Class (OBC) is a collective term used by the Government of India to classify castes which are educationally or socially disadvantaged. It is one of several official classifications of the population of India, along with General Class, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SCs and STs).

Hindu Brahminic civil society. Abusing Muslims would be their role, and Modi, in particular, invited them to play it full.”³⁹

In addition to social and cultural activism, another level at which the *Hindutva* homogenising project operates is by “an attempt to utilise government institutions to Hinduise all segments of the nation so as to forge a unitary consciousness at the heart of the nation. This involves the task of restoring the essentialised identity which was somehow lost through capture (colonialism), conversion and rebellion (Dalits’ and Adivasis’s self-assertion).”⁴⁰ This essentialised identity is of course the *Hindutva* construct of identity carved out on the principle of majoritarian rule by the descendants of the Aryan race.

State governments and currently the central government in India have also let their government machinery be used for Islamophobic policies and sometimes even anti-Muslim instigation. For instance, “the 1985 and 1986 riots in Ahmedabad which began as anti-reservation upper caste riots against Dalits were engineered and turned by BJP and VHP leaders, and Congress leaders as well, into anti-Muslim riots.”⁴¹ The purpose that it serves for such leaders is to augment their right-wing Hindu vote-bank and secure them some political mileage. These politicians not only turn a situation to serve their interests but also use their influence to run a demonisation campaign against Muslims as “the violent killing that took place in Ahmedabad required even more than demagogues and paid murderers. At some level it also required demonisation. Unfortunately, through a generation of incitement and propaganda, many of Ahmedabad’s Hindus had been taught to hate Muslims.”⁴²

Islamophobic policies of the government have become more obvious with the BJP coming into power under Prime Minister Modi. These included *Ghar Wapsi* (coming home) programme of religious conversions to Hinduism from Islam, Christianity and other religions, pursued by RSS and VHP. RSS Chief, Mohan Baghwat has asked Hindus to pledge to ensure

³⁹ Spodek, “In the *Hindutva* Laboratory: Pogroms and Politics in Gujarat, 2002,” 376.

⁴⁰ Clarke, “*Hindutva*, Religious and Ethnocultural Minorities, and Indian-Christian Theology,” 206.

⁴¹ Spodek, “In the *Hindutva* Laboratory: Pogroms and Politics in Gujarat, 2002,” 375.

⁴² Spodek, “In the *Hindutva* Laboratory: Pogroms and Politics in Gujarat, 2002,” 377.

‘*Ghar Wapsi*’ of those who had converted to other religions.⁴³ The stripping of India’s only Muslim majority state i.e. Jammu and Kashmir’s special status has encouraged demographic change against Muslims there while, National Register of Citizens might leave thousands of Muslims stateless. Besides, India’s new Citizenship law that expedites citizenship for other external communities of perceived ‘Indians’ except Muslims shows that the Hindutva agenda is being implemented by Modi government quite vigorously.

Hindutva and Islamophobia in the Times of Pandemic

The coronavirus epidemic in India has again revealed the deep-seated Islamophobia in Indian society where the *Tablighi Jamaat* became the centre of a controversy for holding a mass gathering that caused further spread of the virus. The gathering unleashed a storm of Islamophobic attacks, social media trending hashtags against Muslims and with the fake news rumour industry working overtime to produce anti-Muslim content. There were videos of Muslim men breathing hard or spitting on policemen to intentionally spread the virus.⁴⁴ Social media and news channels are abounding with terms such as BioJihad, CoronaJihad, Nizamuddin Idiots and Corona Terror with Muslims being labelled as “super spreaders” who are “deliberately” spreading the virus. Delhi Minorities Commission head, Zafarul Islam Khan called this new spike in Islamophobic discourses part of the campaign of “systemic banishment” of Muslims in India.⁴⁵ Arnab Goswami, a TV anchor on one of India’s most-watched TV channels stated that “These are dangerous people: these lockdown cheats — they have compromised us all...We were just winning when they did everything to defeat us.”⁴⁶ The underlying theme in all these comments is the same as analysed above in Savarkar’s and his followers’ anti-Muslim discourse: that Muslims are the enemy within, trying to undermine and weaken India while living in it, their loyalties as citizens are suspect and all Muslims are traitors

⁴³ “RSS Chief Asks Hindus to Pledge to Ensure ‘GharWapsi’ of Those Who Have Converted,” December 16, 2021, <https://thewire.in/communalism/rss-chief-asks-hindus-to-pledge-to-ensure-ghar-wapsi-of-those-who-have-converted>

⁴⁴ Ravi Agrawal, “Islamophobia Is Making the Corona Virus Crisis Worse,” *Foreign Policy*, April 7, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/04/07/islamophobia-coronavirus-crisis-worse-india-tablighi-jamaat/>

⁴⁵ Online News Editor, “How Corona Virus exposed India’s Deep Religious Fault Lines,” *La Prensa Latina Media*, April 14, 2020, <https://www.laprensa-latina.com/how-coronavirus-exposed-indias-deep-religious-fault-lines/>

⁴⁶ Kazmin, White, and Palma, “Muslims Fear Backlash.”

and terrorists. Contranstingly, *Kumbh Mela*, a Hindu pilgrimage organised in April 2021 that caused super spread of delta virus was conveniently ignored.

Conclusion

Communal politics in India has existed for long. However, under the Modi regime, it has reached new heights and Islamophobia has become overt part of government policies. This article brings out that Islamophobia in the Hindutva project is rooted in Savarkar's conception of self and the other. This conception of a homogenous 'self' and the Muslim 'other' are themselves constructs being used for political purposes ever since their inception. This places Muslims forever in the out-group and they are considered by Hindutva zealots as a threat. In the Islamophobic discourses analysed above, Muslims of India have been portrayed as internal enemy who are trying to weaken India from within and they are a hurdle in the way of Hindu dominance. Thus Hindutva political project has moved from politics of resistance against colonisation to politics of domination over all the minorities of India in the post-partition era. Communal friction in India has reached dangerous levels as evidenced by the 2020 Delhi riots and if the Modi government continues to play their communal politics in the same brazen manner, the Indian social fabric is going to be ripped apart.