Dissent and Democracy in Contemporary India: Visions of Education, Versions of Citizenship, and Variants of Jihad

Nitasha Kaul, PhD
Professor of Politics, International Relations, and Critical Interdisciplinary Studies
Director, Centre for the Study of Democracy (CSD)
University of Westminster

Abstract
The post-2014 period in India has seen a clear political shift under the leadership of Modi-led BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party), a ruling party ideologically parented by the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh), a right-wing Hindu-nationalist paramilitary volunteer organization that has millions of members nationwide. These years have been marked by a resurgent Hindu nationalism referred to as Hindutva. Hindutva as an ideology of majoritarian nationalism claims to make India a strong nation and gain international recognition as a rising power. However, both domestically and internationally, it is evident that contemporary that India is marked by a consistent erosion of liberal democratic norms whereby constitutionally guaranteed rights continue to be steadily qualified, undermined, and diminished, alongside a lack of promised improvement in global rankings on various indicators. Moreover, there has been an increase in anti-minority targeting, which is multidimensional and pursued through non/violent and extra/legal means. In this article, I explain the broad backdrop to political transformation and increased violence in India and then specifically focus on explicating two key dynamics—one, the multiple ways in which changes in the sphere of education have been crucial to how dissent is securitized in India and two, how the internalized hierarchical ordering of ideas of citizenship within Hindutva means that Hindu males are seen as the normative citizens and Muslims as the radical Other that can be targeted with exclusion, discrimination, humiliation, even lynching. Using the example of the multiplying vocabularies of "Jihad," I highlight how any aspect of Muslim life or livelihood can be interpreted as a form of sinister "Jihad" deserving a justifiably violent response and/or economic marginalization. I conclude by referring to the sustained and ongoing nature of this transformation of India and call for us to recognize and challenge it.

Keywords: *Education, Hindutva, Islamophobia, India, Jihad, Dissent, Nationalism*

Introduction

This article focuses on the post-2014 Hindutva transformation in India. Since 2014, when the Modi-led BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) came to power at the national level, there has been an ongoing increase in violence in India. This increase has been systematic and multidimensional, and it structurally affects the marginalized minorities, especially the Muslims who are targeted as the Other. The BJP's 2014 election victory was attributable to Narendra Modi's twin promises of delivering Hindutva and development to the electorate (Kaul, 2017). But, in February 2019, a few months before the general elections, the BJP had already lost several regional elections and the unemployment rate stood at its highest in four decades. It was the mobilization of Hindutva in the form of hyper-nationalist sentiment in the media through the fundamentally Islamophobic anti-Pakistan and Kashmir terrorism tropes—following the tragic Pulwama attacks in the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir in Indian-Administered-Kashmir—that played an important role in guaranteeing the second term in 2019 for the Modi-led BJP.

Hindutva, or the political use of Hindu religion in order to construct an idea of India as a Hindu nation, is central to the Modi-led BJP. As an ideology of majoritarian nationalism, Hindutva claims to strengthen India and gain international recognition as a Hindu nation and as a rising power. These claims are based on specific notions of identity as they relate to the state and its citizens, so that the upper-caste Hindu male citizen is the normative ideal. The roots of Hindutva go back in time to the founding of the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) in 1925. The RSS is the ideological parent of the ruling BJP and the Prime Minister and numerous BJP ministers are members of this right-wing nationwide paramilitary organization. The RSS has been banned at different points in the life of post-independence India, yet today it enjoys an unprecedented sway over government, politics, and policy. Although the RSS presents itself as a social service organization, during the first term in power, BJP government ministers made policy presentations to the RSS. Across the country, this Hindu supremacist organization has millions of members, and its branches exist across all professional bodies. The RSS also has various affiliated Hindu supremacist organizations that carry out weapons training for armed Hindu militias, enforce moral policing, or engage in other Hindutva nation-building activities within the country or overseas (Bajrang Dal and Vishwa Hindu Parishad being the most prominent among them). Together, this assemblage is referred to as the "Sangh Parivar" (Hindu nationalist "family" of organizations).

The followers of the Hindutva subscribe to it as a project of pride—pride about India as a Hindu nation and pride about India as a rising power. On this worldview, Hindutva is needed to redeem India as a Hindu nation that has historically been subdued by Muslim conquerors and Western colonialists. Selective Hindutva historiography paints a picture of the country as essentially

and primordially Hindu and casts as outsider and as subordinate non-Hindu identities that have been part of the Indian subcontinent for hundreds of years. The contrast is between the post-1947 Nehruvian idea of India, projected as being pluralist, secular, and socialist, and the contemporary Hindutva resuscitation of RSS idea of India as an ancient Hindu civilization where those who are not Hindu should still abide by the idea of India as a Hindu nation. Implicitly, in the latter, there is the understanding that the rights of other minorities are not derived from their status as individual rights-bearing subjects of the state but that they are dependent on the benevolence of the majority Hindu community. Hindutva, thus, is a socially conservative ideology with repressive communitarian echoes along the lines of the Hindu community being the "naturally" dominant one.

Hindutva as an ideology of majoritarian nationalism draws significant sustenance from the idea that it is about "Making India Great Again" (to use an American formulation), and in that sense, as Kaul (2019a) has argued, it is a project that is both neoliberal and nationalist, being "Postcolonial Neoliberal Nationalist." Far from the traditional understanding of neoliberalism and nationalism as opposing forces, this is a project that is majoritarian nationalist, neoliberal, and also postcolonial. Postcolonial not merely chronologically (post-as in after colonial) but in that it works with imaginaries of pride and futurity, so that the ruling party (and its Sangh Parivar family of Hindutva organizations) promise a return to the glorious past as future.

Thereby, a contradiction is at work; Hindutva ideologues claim to be making India proud by making it a Hindu rising power and yet at the same time this is not borne out in any of the indicators (of democracy, of religious freedom, of economic growth, of media freedom and more) where India has been declining. It is important to note two things here. First, that the precipitous decline in rights and freedoms in India is a verifiable, empirically substantiated fact. There are numerous ways in which we can index this (through global media reports, first-hand experiences, academic studies) and one clear international indication of this decline in a democracy is the Freedom House ranking for the country, which is now only a "Partly Free" democracy. Second, that while these restrictions on constitutionally guaranteed freedoms, decreasing rights, and recourse to judicial remedies affect all those in the country and in the diaspora in different ways, the sharp end of this is experienced by those who are a minority. Here, minority includes Indian Muslims, Dalits, Christians, Kashmiri Muslims, and activists/dissenters opposed to Hindutva anywhere. The effect on Muslims is particularly severe given the additional resonance between Islamophobic Hindutva and post-9/11 global Islamophobia.

In the following sections, I first discuss the ways in which the Hindutva project for contemporary India diminishes liberal democratic rights and freedoms, specifically the right to dissent, especially within education and academia that are meant to be the bastions of critical thinking. Although a linchpin of democratic functioning, dissent has increasingly been securitized in India and those who speak truth to power find themselves treated punitively. I then explain how Muslims are set up as an absolute Other to this Hindutva idea of India; the figure of the worthy "citizen" is at the center of this contestation and only citizens who

are deemed worthy to belong to the nation have their rights assured, others can be targeted with exclusion, discrimination, humiliation, even lynching. I demonstrate how any aspect of Muslim life or livelihood can be interpreted as a form of "Jihad" deserving a justifiably violent response and/or economic marginalization. I conclude by referring to the sustained and ongoing nature of this Hindutva transformation of India and calling for us to recognize and challenge it.

Securitization of Dissent through Changes to Education

The central part of the assault on rights and liberties with the Hindutva transformation is the securitization of dissent, and changes within the sphere of education are vital to achieving this. As Anand (2011) puts it, "[d]emocracy is not only about majority rule and minority rights, but also a political culture that allows for expressions of dissent without fear. Hindu nationalism has limited tolerance of dissent, resents minority rights, and only focuses on majority rule" (p. 159). The ability to express dissent is indispensable in any functioning democracy, but in contemporary India dissent and critical thinking is met with political labeling and punishment, and this is particularly severe when we consider education and the academic sphere.

In the post-2014 era, there has been a shifting of the common sense whereby it has become acceptable to label academics and others who dissent as "antinationals." Further, the specific use of phrases like "urban naxals" or "intellectual terrorists" is designed to target any activists or academics who speak as public intellectuals. The naxalite insurgency has a long and bloody history in rural areas, and calling academics and intellectuals "urban naxals" legitimizes the counter-insurgency style of thinking in the face of critical perspectives on democratic functioning. All protests against the regime can then be viewed through this prism. For instance, in 2019, Modi himself complained that Congress and the "urban naxals" were behind the protests against the citizenship amendment in India (see Saran, 2019). The wider term "antinationals" has become the preferred way to designate those who do not subscribe to Hindutva ideology, and dissent on specific issues like human rights or self-determination in Kashmir becomes immediately equated to sedition (see Kaul, 2018). The usage of offensive or derogatory political labels—including "sickular" for secular, "tukde-tukde gang" (or breakup gang) for critics, "presstitutes" for press and media—also serve an important purpose for violent Hindutva supporters in that they legitimize targeting and punishment of dissenting academics and institutions.

The reshaping of education and educational institutions is happening in a variety of ways. The heads of institutions are replaced by figures sympathetic to Hindutva ideology. Since 2014, several universities have been turned into battlegrounds as RSS-affiliated or Hindutva sympathetic individuals have been appointed as their vice chancellors. These struggles between senior management and faculty are replicated at the level of the student bodies that are youth wings of political parties in multiple universities (for examples, see Chenoy, 2017; Chaman, 2018; Sabrang India, 2019; Kaiser, 2020). The changes of the institutional heads have had a cascading effect across a range of potential and

possible activities: what lectures and seminars get approved, what courses are allowed to continue, how the syllabi of the courses are structured, what entry criteria are applied for research scholars, and so on. These questions have affected universities across the country, but prominent institutions like Jawahar Lal Nehru University (JNU), Jamia Milia University, Hyderabad Central University, Ashoka University, and others have especially been in the news.

JNU, especially, has been deeply embroiled in the struggles between progressive and fascist ideologies. In 2016, several students at JNU were accused of sedition for having raised anti-India slogans, leading to the famous JNU sedition case. Singh and Dasgupta (2019) explain how this JNU case was given a specific connotation that was repeatedly circulated in various media, which "helped produce an image of JNU as a hub for anti-national activities and as populated with Jihadi terrorists plotting against the state… this interpretation of JNU worked as a multipronged strategy for BJP, RSS and ABVP [RSS youth wing]" (pp. 59–60). The crackdown on universities is undemocratic and tied to a specific Hindutva version of nationalism (see Bannerjee, 2016; EPW, 2017). Numerous JNU students were arrested, and a prominent example of one is Umar Khalid, then a PhD scholar in history (see BBC, 2016). Umar, who was also part of subsequent protests, continued to be in prison in 2023, having spent over two years under trial in jail (Outlook 2022). JNU students and journalists have been attacked by right-wing vigilante groups, including at one point on the premises of a court (see Kumar, 2016). Incredibly enough, right-wing lawyers were the attackers who proudly owned up to the attack and marched in support of the perpetrators in the capital city of Delhi. The NDTV (2016) article on this is titled "'We Hit Him,' Proud Lawyers Said to Police after Attacking Kanhaiya Kumar," the JNU students' union president at the time. The article also quotes the Supreme Court as saying "It is unfortunate that lawyers have stooped to such low levels. What can we do?"

But this should hardly be surprising in contemporary India where, in 2018 during the Kathua rape case, right-wing Hindutva activists, including two BJP ministers, marched in, and addressed, a rally organized by Hindu Ekta Manch (Hindu Unity Forum) against the arrest of the accused Hindu rapists of an eight-year-old Muslim girl, Aasifa (who belonged to a marginalized nomadic community in Jammu). A Muslim biotechnology master's student called Najeeb Ahmed disappeared in 2016 from the JNU campus after a reported scuffle with ABVP and has not been found even after five years (Aljazeera, 2021) The hashtag "where is najeeb" periodically surfaces on social media as a reminder of this, even as his mother resiliently pursues the campaign to get justice. The ultimate effect of such incidents is to create an atmosphere of fear and silence on university campuses. Academics who are critical of the government are penalized and vilified, court cases are lodged against them; a prominent example here is Nivedita Menon at JNU who was targeted as antinational (see Chaturvedi 2021). When Pratap Bhanu Mehta, a professor at Ashoka University, resigned in 2021 stating that his association with the university could be a political liability, a colleague of his noted that the university where he worked was backed by private capital and yet "can no longer provide a space for academic expression and

freedom" (see Dhillon, 2021). Over the course of time from 2014 to 2021, even those who were former advisers of the Modi government or who refrained from criticizing the government for its first few years in power now find that even their speech cannot be safeguarded through privilege.

Changes in policy have also been a means of targeting dissent, at times in ways that are reminiscent of colonial or authoritarian comparisons. In 2018, the government sought to turn teachers at central universities into government servants, making Central Civil Services (Conduct) Rules applicable to them. Sharma (2018) refers to how these rules restrict the freedom to criticize the government and its functioning and mirror the Indian Universities Bill brought in by the British Viceroy Curzon in 1903. The Modi government has tried to turn teachers into bureaucrats so that they must abide by CCS rules, which forbid academics from taking part in protests against the government or being critical of the government in their work. Student research is also sought to be surveilled and restricted. An order was issued by the Ministry of Human Resources in 2019 stating that only those PhD students should be admitted whose work is on topics related to "national priorities" (see Sharma, 2019). Upon protest by academics, the Ministry blamed this on a confusion caused due to an error, stating that "some junior officer of the under-secretary level inserted the word national priorities in the minutes" and emphasizing that their discussions had focused on how "many irrelevant PhDs are being done these days, which actually have no contribution to society and nation building." As with many totalitarian projects, the rationale offered for any policy moves is that they are meant to improve collective welfare in some way.

In 2021, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) sought to bring in rules requiring any publicly funded institution to seek prior approval from MEA if it wanted to host any speakers from abroad in online conferences or seminars on certain issues relating to Indian security or India's internal matters. This would have been similar to creating visa restrictions for online conferences, something existing in no other country (The Wire, 2021a). Although this did not eventually transition into successful policy due to wide-ranging domestic and international criticism, the restrictions on who is allowed to speak on topics such as Kashmir or the country's borders operate in a de facto manner. At its very base, there is a policing of speech, of what can be said, written, and read about the regime. Critical scholarship within institutions is discouraged and critical academics from outside are refused permission to present their work. In many instances, this denial of permission to speak about Hindutva transformation, Islamophobia, Kashmir, and so on is formal. It can take the form of lectures being agreed but within specified parameters of what the titles can be or lectures that are canceled after being arranged. However, an equally powerful and often used tactic to suppress dissent is through the mobilizing of right-wing student groups and vigilantes. Such groups of people, affiliated with Hindutva organizations, organize to challenge critical talks or publications (Kaul, 2021; Bala, 2022). This is a powerful means of stifling critical discourse on Hindutva in institutions within the country and abroad since it invokes the area of "hurt sentiments."

An academic conference on Hindu nationalism (titled "Dismantling Hindutva") held in the United States in 2021 was the focus of such a concerted attack where the speakers received death threats and various Hindu nationalist groups coordinated to carry out a campaign to apply pressure on universities that had academics who were participating in this (Ellis-Petersen, 2021). This weaponization of religious feeling and vigilante mobilization to harass and attack dissenters is used quite effectively to suppress free speech. There are coordinated campaigns against books on Indian history or Hinduism that are challenging of Hindutva claims; an early example of such targeting—in the run up to the 2014 elections—was a book on the alternate history of Hindus by US scholar Wendy Doniger that was attacked by Hindutva activists like Dinanath Batra who runs a Shiksha Bachao Andolan (campaign to save education) (see Time, 2014; Menon, 2014). School textbooks are sought to be aligned to Hindutva perspectives on Indian history and society, even at the cost of compromising relevant detail. For instance, a school history textbook in Rajasthan made no mention of Nehru as India's first Prime Minister (*India Today*, 2016). There has also been a systematic attempt to remove Mughals from history textbooks and replace them with Hindu rulers across the country (*Firstpost*, 2017a). Periodically, social media controversies on education in India surface online when hashtags like "delete Mughals from history" circulate on Twitter or exam papers reveal regressive passages of text. Many of these changes, dispersed as they are across a spectrum of the dramatic ongoing transformation (see Sundar & Fazili, 2020), are not always the focus of much attention. But, the overall assault on dissent and freethinking as well as the link with neoliberal remaking is evident. As Patnaik (2021) explains, the New Educational Policy (NEP) of the government, which seeks to replace the University Grants Commission (UGC) and radically restructure the educational setup, will homogenize syllabi and course content. Menon (2020) close-reads the NEP text to reveal the agendas of privatization and Hindu supremacism in the policy. A former president of the Delhi University Teachers Association, Narain (2022) also explains the many ways in which this policy will effectively harm publicly funded education, growth of students and teachers through setting up perverse incentives on funding and recruitment.

Another Hindutva tactic has been to transform educational institutions along ideological lines to install Hindutva figures as academics even when they lack scholarly credentials. Individuals who do not have the required qualifications or fulfill the criteria have been appointed as academics (see *The Wire*, 2018). In all this, there is also a role played by Hindutva-aligned foundations and think tanks through which the Sangh expands into society (see Mohan, 2021) and revolving doors are created between government roles and Hindutva think tanks; for instance, between the National Security Agency and the Vivekananda International Foundation (see Ramachandran, 2017). While these foundations thrive and generate discourse conducive to Hindutva ideology, other nongovernmental organizations, research institutes, and think tanks that work with the environment or human rights are either shut down or accused of being foreign agents or of being antinational (see Singh, 2022). New research fields like cow science, consonant with Hindutva worldviews, are in the process of being

promoted and legitimized, irrespective of scientific evidence (see Kaul, 2015; Chandrashekhar, 2020; Gettleman & Raj, 2021). Hindutva pseudo-science, revisionist history, and misinformation infiltrates prominent institutions and media; at times such as during the coronavirus pandemic, it costs lives (see Chopra, 2021; Bhattacharya, 2021).

This attack on critical thinking in the public sphere alongside the restructuring and radical reshaping of educational institutions is vitally significant for the normalization of the Hindutva worldview since the restrictions on rights and freedoms require narratives of legitimacy to immunize them from critical interrogation. This is even more relevant given the yawning gap between the rhetoric of Rising India and the reality of the economy. The narratives of legitimacy therefore entrench in public understanding what can be done to whom with which consequences. Education is a key ingredient of critical thinking. Ergo, the attack on critical education is a prerequisite for the success of totalitarian ideologies. The restrictions on critical thinking and the censorship of dissenting views in the name of anti-nationalism or sedition or urban naxalism decreases the plurality of perspectives and the scope for deliberation in the public sphere, of which the universities, schools, and other educational institutions are a crucial part. In line with the philosopher Hannah Arendt's link between the decimation of the public sphere and the rise of totalitarianism (see Butler, 2011), the Hindutva transformation in India is being undertaken by targeting the public sphere where critical thinking and exchange might be possible. The transformation is systemic and structural in how it affects the marginalized and the minorities, being most pernicious for Muslims, who are constructed as the absolute Other of the Hindutva project.

Normative Hindutva Citizen and the Muslim Other Practicing Variants of Jihad

Hindutva is a regressive nativist project that places as its Other various kinds of identities, and the Muslim identity is the prime othered identity. Across disciplines, there is much literature on Hindutva that relates to its historical origins especially with the RSS and its Sangh Parivar ideology, its relationship with Hinduism, its violent trends; its relationship with the BJP, its relationship with right-wing extremism, its existence as a form of nationalism, and so on (for examples, see Sharma, 2003; Anand, 2007, 2009, 2011; Kaul, 2015, 2017; Banaji, 2018; Waikar, 2018; Ramachandran, 2020; Leidig, 2020). Anand (2011) provides a particularly prescient and significant theorization of Hindutva that combines conceptual and ethnographic work. Hindutva as Hindu supremacist nationalism seeks to construct the idea of a Hindu nation for a historically beleaguered Hindu people who have historically been besieged by foreigners, especially Muslims. Hindutva fanatics attribute to the Muslim Other a variety of genetic, existential, socio-biological, and religious perversions and moral deformities (backward, overpopulating, depraved, fundamentalist etcetera), due to which they are stereotyped as the complete Other. As Anand (2009) puts it "terrorism, violence, genocide of Kashmiri Hindus, conversion, illegal infiltration by Bangladeshi

Muslims, seduction and rape of innocent Hindu girls, and over-population are all conjured up as weapons used by the traitorous Muslims to overwhelm Hindus in India" (p. 31). These Hindutva stereotypes of Muslims result in an encounter that can be understood in terms of "emulation, abjection, and extermination" (Anand, 2007, p. 261; cf. Jaffrelot, 1999). In this way, the Muslim Other serves as a warning to the Hindu self that allows the coherence of a Hindu national identity and also creates the legitimacy for dominant Hindu supremacist ideas.

The innovative strategies used by the Hindutva project of the Modi-led BJP are analyzed in detail in Kaul (2017). The BJP victory in 2014 was attributable to Modi as spearheading a project that combined Hindutva and development, however, there have been disastrous effects of Modi tenure on "minorities, environmentalists, labour rights activists, liberal media, progressive universities, socially, and economically vulnerable groups such as Dalits (oppressed castes) and farmers" (Kaul, 2017, p. 529). Notwithstanding the killings and beatings, murders of rationalists and atheists, open hate speech, removal of environmental safeguards, establishment friendly makeover of institutions, judicial quietude, heightened moral policing, increased surveillance, anti-science outlook, concerted attacks on critical public intellectuals, censorship of nongovernmental organizations, severe economic turmoil, the government remained popular and won another term in 2019. Kaul (2017) argues that this ought to be understood as a combination of political strategy (the systematic manipulation of inconsistencies and contradictions through a management of dualities by using "forked tongue" speech across domains such as corporate/grassroots, national/international, India/Bharat) and the constantly reinforced "Modi myth" that projects him as an ascetic, paternal, and decisive leader. In addition, the entrenched Islamophobia of the Sangh Parivar that the BJP trades on plays a crucial role. Kaul (2020a) analyzes how Islamophobia in India works in a multidimensional way to enable violence, subjugate, and intimidate Muslims as a threat to the nation in several different registers—the Indian Muslim is seen as the suspect citizen, the Kashmiri Muslim is seen as a latent terrorist, the nation-state of Pakistan is seen as an existential absolute enemy Other, and Muslim refugees such as the Rohingya are seen as invasive pests and referred to as such in dehumanizing animalizing language by prominent BJP leaders such as the Indian Home Minister Amit Shah.

Considering the functioning of Hindutva as a nationalist discourse in relation to Muslims as people, Islam as a religion, Islamophobia as a politically useful practice for the Hindutva project, and acknowledging the literature on Hindutva and how Islamophobia is central to the BJP as a Hindutva party (both before and after Modi came to power), I want to highlight how citizenship or the idea of who is a legitimate and worthy Indian citizen has become central to the BJP Hindutva imaginary. As a result of the numerous systematically exotic and/or derogatory stereotypes of the Muslim body, the Muslim individual who refuses to denounce Islam and accept a subordinate citizenship in a Hindu nation is rendered an extreme Other of the normative Hindu citizen. This Muslim Other, for the very survival of its existence in a Hindutva nation, perforce has to endure the possibility of restrictions, discriminations, humiliations, and acts of violence.

Moreover, as I explain below, every aspect of life and livelihood of this Muslim Other is able to be interpreted through the notion of Jihad. This Hindutva transformation of India is currently at a stage where public calls for genocidal acts are being made by Hindu religious leaders who have little fear of the police and no censure from the ruling politicians.

The fact that citizenship, the idea of what it means to be an Indian citizen, has become ever more central to this project was exemplified with the 2019 Citizenship Amendment Act, which created a religious route to citizenship. Venkatesh and Ahmad (2020) refer to the antecedents of this move and explain its contradictions and hypocrisies (see also Rehman, 2021). In 2003, the BJP-led coalition amended the Indian citizenship act of 1955 to define the idea of an "illegal migrant." In 2019 they passed the Citizenship Amendment Act, which created an exemption from this category for persons of various different religions—except Muslims—from three neighboring Muslim-majority countries (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan). As a result, non-Muslim people from these countries could apply for citizenship in India as long as they fulfilled certain conditions. Muslim citizens of those countries (even if Muslims were persecuted in these countries) would not be similarly eligible. Along similar lines, the government also moved to implement the National Register of Citizens (NRC), which places the burden of proving citizenship through detailed documentation on the people and disproportionately affects those who are already most marginalized. The NRC pilots have enforced statelessness and life in detention camps in states like Assam in the northeastern part of the country (Kaul, 2020b). The significant contestation in this political project is about the idea of citizenship and the question of who is a legitimate citizen of India. The Hindutva project has an internalized hierarchy of citizenship where a Hindu male Indian is the normative citizen. To borrow from the sociologist Zerubavel (2018), this is the "unmarked norm" and against this idea, other identities are judged as being of different relative worth as citizens depending on how pathological, deviant, or abnormal they are seen to be from the norm. Muslims, Christians, Dalits, and others are marked in specific ways so that they have to demonstrate their goodness and worth as good patriotic citizens to be considered worthy of a subordinate citizenship dependent upon the benevolence of the Hindutva Indian state.

There is a multidimensional legal and extralegal vigilante violence that minorities, especially Muslims, are being subjected to by the Hindutva ideologues. Those who attempt to speak, teach, or write to raise critical consciousness about this in the public sphere are punished. There are numerous reports of instances where ordinary Muslim individuals have been deliberately publicly humiliated by Hindutva activists. Typically, Muslim men are degraded, made to adopt penitent postures, or worse. Then, there are the increased numbers of lynchings that are carried out by Hindutva activists; these include the "beef ban" lynchings where Muslim cattle transporters or meat consumers were killed on the suspicion of possessing or eating beef (see Kaul, 2015; Ramachandran, 2020). In another aspect of the restrictions on practices, there are also Hindutva attempts to restrict Muslims from offering prayers in any public areas. These are

not incidents that happen in some remote rural part of the country, but in Gurgaon (on the outskirts of the country's capital Delhi), there have been repeated attempts to stop Muslims from offering prayers in public (see Biswas, 2021).

The existential fear that is being engendered in people is through an idea of the absolute other—the Muslim. Connected to this is the appellation "Jihad" for anything that Muslims do—from love to livelihood is interpreted subversive antinational Jihadi activity. This creation of ontological insecurity against the Muslim Other then becomes the rationale of the regime to be able to push for policies that otherwise with democratic deliberation would be seen for what they are (i.e., attacks on the rights and freedoms of people). With the shifting of social common sense, there is an anti-insurgency type of thinking on who the citizen is, and the insecurity that it has led to in the lives of those who do not have the privilege of a Hindu surname is palpable.

A key way in which harassment, intimidation, and injury is perpetrated on minorities is through the use of the concept of "Jihad." The original Hindutva formulation in the 21st century has been "Love Jihad" (see Anand, 2011; Kaul, 2015; Strohl, 2019; Malji & Raza, 2021; Gupta, 2021) whereby marriages between Muslim men and women are seen as part of a conspiracy by Muslims to convert Hindu women to Islam. The idea here is to create a "moral panic" to save innocent Hindu women from being trapped by exceptionally virile, lustful Muslim men and to save the Hindu nation from a "take over" by the overpopulating Muslims. At its very root, this preposterous and unfounded idea relies on erasing the autonomy of those Hindu women who choose to marry Muslims. The deeply patriarchal and regressive nature of the ideology is clear from the emphasis within "Love Jihad" on interreligious marriages where the man is Muslim. Women are perceived as the property of men and the idea that the women might prefer a Muslim man is seen as deserving of punishment. Furthermore, this specious logic is also used to vilify and delegitimize women who speak up in the public realm by accusing them of being controlled puppets of Muslim men who hide behind them.

In recent years, this logic of "Love Jihad" has mutated into numerous other forms of "Jihad" in Indian public media and imagination—for instance, "Corona Jihad," "UPSC/Civil Services Jihad," "Thook/Spit Jihad," "Redi/Street Vendor Jihad," and "Land Jihad" to name a few. In each of these cases, life or livelihood related actions by Muslim individuals or community are interpreted as being imbued with sinister motivations of spreading "Jihad." In "Corona Jihad," it was alleged that Muslims in the Tablighi Jamaat order deliberately gathered to spread the coronavirus (see Asif, 2020; Apoorvanand, 2020). In sharp contrast to this, millions of Hindu devotees were allowed to gather for the holy Kumbh Mela on the banks of the Ganga/Ganges river even as the second wave of the pandemic in India was in the offing. In "UPSC Jihad," it was alleged that a large number of Muslims had secured high marks and infiltrated the bureaucracy through the civil services exam (called the UPSC) in order to enact a conspiracy against the nation (see Asthana, 2020). In "Thook Jihad," the allegation is that workers in Muslim eateries spit into the food that they cook, or that Muslim food workers deliberately contaminate the food that they serve to Hindus (see Jafri, 2021a; cf. Ranhotra, 2021). In "Redi Jihad," Muslim vegetable vendors are accused of deliberately

encroaching upon public spaces and of being Rohingya immigrants with a criminal past (see Jafri 2021b). In 'Land Jihad', Muslims who buy land in predominantly Hindu localities are accused of carrying out a Jihadist conspiracy through the means of systematically taking possession of houses in Hindu-dominated areas (FP Staff, 2017).

These claims of sinister Jihads are baseless and carry no empirical substantiation. These allegations are pushed by various Sangh Parivar or affiliated organisations and allied supremacist vigilante groups, and then propagated through various right-wing televisual media. They result in Muslims being ambushed, beaten up, and boycotted across a range of professions, and these attacks get exacerbated every year. For instance, Sachdev (2021) reports that within one month in 2021, there were cases of a Muslim rickshaw driver, beggar, bangle seller, scrap dealer, food seller, and cook being humiliated, assaulted, or beaten up in different states across the country. The multiplying variants of Hindutva allegations of "Jihad" are designed to delegitimize the social, political, and economic presence of Muslims across society. We can see a clear economic motive too, whereby members of the minority Muslim community are denied the terms of ordinary livelihood. As Kaul (2019a) has argued, "[a] political meaning to the Hindu identity is activated by linking it to entitlement and dispossession; defining it by the material or symbolic resources that it carries" (15). Further, "the discrimination faced by non-Hindus in a range of interactions where they are penalized" can be understood as "the 'wages of religious privilege' (to adapt Du Bois's term 'wages of whiteness') available even to the impoverished Hindus" (Kaul, 2019a, p. 15). Simultaneously, there is the effect of this in generating and consolidating Hindutva solidarity much beyond the exhortation not to let Hindu women marry Muslim men; one recent example is the video of a collective pledge where Hindus take an oath in large groups that they will not sell their land to Muslims, buy goods from Muslim shopkeepers, work for Muslims, and so on (PTI, 2022).

Conclusion

The Hindutva project has been unfolding in India over a long period of time and it has created its vision of India; it is a nationalist vision of the country as a Hindu supremacist democracy with subordinate rights and citizenship for dissenters and different identities. The radical Other is the Muslim (we can see this most clearly in the case of Kashmiri Muslims, whose rights are routinely and systematically violated en masse and whose consent in governance is seen as irrelevant, see Kaul, 2019b). Within India, activists, journalists, student leaders, officials, and other critics who shed light on the violence of Hindutva ideology are harassed and imprisoned. They are held without charge for long periods of time, or sometimes selectively charged for historic cases as a way of extracting revenge. The visible targeting of those whose ideas and actions are critical of the Hindutva project has also included the assassinations of rationalists, freethinkers, atheists, and journalists. There is a broader attack on media and on civil society. Most televisual and print media do not challenge Hindutva or the ruling party. The

judiciary is sought to be undermined. The role of the police in certain regions too has come under significant scrutiny especially in the aftermath of the "Delhi Riots" in 2020 when in the face of coordinated right-wing attacks on progressive activists, including at universities such as JNU and Jamia Milia Islamia in Delhi, the police appeared to have different and more lax rules for instigators or perpetrators of violence who functioned from a right-wing ideological perspective.

The "undeclared" nature of the emergency in India (in contrast to the period between 1975 and 1977 when an official "emergency" was declared by the then Congress government under Indira Gandhi) means that constitutional rights and freedoms are suspended or mutilated. Midway through the second term of the Modi-led BJP, freedoms are diminished, democracy is undermined, and rights are qualified in line with religious and other identities, but this transformation is accompanied by the hypocritical doublespeak of key figures like Modi who use a wide variety of prominent in-person global forums and digital spaces to uphold the ideals of tolerance, coexistence, democracy, Gandhian principles, and so on at the same time as maintaining absolute silence on egregious violations of these very same principles on a daily basis by adherents of the Hindutva ideology and/or the political party. Thus, the Hindutva transformation is happening broadly through legal and political means officially, along with a wholesale remaking of societal values and norms in line with the Sangh Parivar ideology of Hindu supremacism. From being a country that celebrated Gandhi for his values and understood the toxicity of the ideology that was held by the man who assassinated him (Nathuram Godse), today India sees open and unpunished calls by Hindu supremacists who revere Godse for having killed Gandhi.

To illustrate, a BJP leader (Anurag Thakur) from Delhi who was filmed on record inciting the crowd to chant "Desh ke gaddaron ko / Goli maaro saalon ko" (These traitors of the country / We should shoot these dastards) in 2020 found himself promoted to the status of being the Union Minister of Information and Broadcasting and Youth Affairs and Sports by 2021 (see John & Gray, 2021). In another case, in December 2021 in the Hindu holy city of Haridwar, a "religious parliament" was held where militant Hindu fanatic religious figures openly called for Hindus to arm themselves and use weapons against Muslims to kill them (see The Wire, 2021b). This was not a one-off event—events calling for Muslim genocide have happened previously too (see Aafaq & Jafri, 2021)—and the speakers (saffron-robed religious "sadhus"/saints) have continued to insist on the need to eliminate Muslims and target anyone who worships the Quran. The police dealing with the case were filmed laughing with them about how the police were not neutral but "on their side" (see Scroll, 2021). The BJP leadership, from Modi at the very top, has not denounced or dissociated themselves from any of these individuals, organizations, or views. There is a clear pattern of suppressing dissent, promoting Hindutva transformation of democracy, and maintaining a "strategic silence" on constitutional and democratic violations (see Kaul, 2017, p. 531 and passim).

The Hindutva vision for Indian democracy, embodied by the Modi-led BJP rejects universal human rights for being Western. Ministerial figures of the

BJP have referred to the inapplicability of Western standards of human rights to India since India has its own indigenous, Indian version of human rights (see Scroll, 2019). The appeal to indigeneity as an anticolonial anti-Western move is accompanied by the promise that Hindutva will make India better and stronger than it has ever been against the West, and this is used to entrench regressive logics. These Hindutva ideas that attribute universal human rights exclusively to the West, while also disregarding the colonial history of the West and human rights violations in the West, are ultimately riddled with contradictions (on this, see Kaul, 2019, 2020b).

The transformation that India is undergoing at present is not unique, but part of a wider global right-wing political project that is dangerously undermining democracy. The use of hypocrisy and double speak is crucial to it. Therefore, Hindutva ideologues do not profess to the dismantling of democracy that they seek, instead their strategy is to justify the transformation in the country in the name of promoting Indian indigeneity as opposed to a historically colonial Western worldview. The numerous examples provided here indicate the multifaceted and multipronged systematic attempts to silence critical voices and strategically use the idea of nativism and free speech and anticolonial indigeneity in order to crush dissent.

As India becomes more powerful, its ability to exert power against its minorities increases. The Hindutva transformation that I refer to here is not representative of mere worries and fearmongering; what global audiences typically hear is the tip of the iceberg. This project is much worse than is widely realized thanks to the "rising power" rhetoric. It is especially sinister because it is happening with the consent of millions as part of a carefully engineered project of violent majoritarian nationalism. At the same time, this is globally presented as an irrelevant distraction from the story of India as a rising economic power, or alternatively, as the story of a rightful nativist indigenous anti-Western anti-imperial anti-elite political project. Under the garb of challenging a historical Indian elite, everything from opposition parties like the Indian National Congress, to human rights activists, to Hindutva-critical voices in academia and in the diaspora are delegitimized, even as we are to understand that the real beleaguered are the billionaire crony capitalist backers of the regime and the political operators of the Hindutva project (powerful political figures, Hindutva entrepreneurial figures) who are somehow not elite.

In the West, the fact of India being a democracy is held up as a key difference between other rising powers such as China that are explicitly authoritarian. The Hindutva repression of dissent is rendered unrecognizable when compared with other countries in the region that offer examples of explicitly authoritarian regimes at present or in the past. The suppression of freedoms in India, while resembling authoritarian maneuvers elsewhere, still passes incognito, because it is not undertaken with a military takeover, or the suspension of the courts, or shutdown of the media. The insidious nature of the transformation in India is such that the authoritarian effects of fear, censorship, repression, and structural antiminority discriminations are being achieved without a military dictatorship, closed courts, or banned newspapers. It is being carried out with the

help of digital technologies to create Hindutva ecosystems and with the mainstreaming of toxic hyper-nationalist televisual media. The common-sense within the country is shifted to support a particular leader, a particular party, and a particular ideology with unquestioning obedience and without brooking the thought of any alternatives. This indoctrination uses everything from brute force (whether it is the police or the armed forces) to corporate influence to patterns of constitutional appointments; it is at the same time very complex and yet also rather transparent. The project has global links and benefits from diaspora validation of Modi and the regime; political spectacles have been used in the form of overseas rallies with Trump and other leaders and images from such political theater are selectively projected back to the viewers on Indian media to demonstrate the global validation of Modi and his regime and thus simultaneously construct legitimacy on that basis. The country is on a proto-fascist trajectory and the dynamics get exacerbated by the day. In early 2022, Genocide Watch again sounded an alarm about the possibility of genocide in India (see Aljazeera, 2022). The stark nature of the change in India post-2014 will have lasting implications due to its systemic and structural nature. If and when the leadership at the helm changes, the leagues of Hindutva supporters will not surrender the anti-minority, Islamophobic, antidemocratic, regressive, and nativist perspectives that have come to be normalized for them.

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