

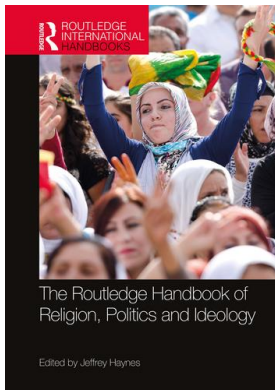
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HINDUISM, HINDUTVA,
AND IDEOLOGY*Abdul Shaban***Introduction**

It is no exaggeration to say ‘true religions are things of the past’. This applies to all the major religions of the world. They emerged in a specific time and place as both a fresh mode of thinking and to guide social organisation and the relation of the self to the supernatural or to God(s). Over time, they were transformed and co-opted and now serve the opposite purpose, be it in their relations to political power, capitalism, and violence between communities. In one of its most important applications, religion has been a tool to gain political power and build empires since medieval times via crusades, *jihads*, *dharma yuddhs* (war for religion), or through the creation of consciousness of ‘we’ and ‘our’ and separation from ‘they’ and ‘theirs’ on the basis of beliefs. But never before in human history and the development of global society and civilisations have countries been so divided on the basis of religion as today (see Huntington 1996). In recent years, we have seen naked violations of human rights in Syria (by Islamic State against Christians and Kurds), in Afghanistan (mainly against Muslim minority groups), in Pakistan (Taliban and other sects within Islam and against other religious groups), in Myanmar (Buddhists against Rohingya Muslims), and in Sri Lanka (Buddhists against Hindu Tamils and Muslims). In addition to the Middle East, which gave rise to three major Abrahamic religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam – South Asia is another birthplace of major religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism. India is the home of followers of all the major religions of the world: Hinduism (79.8% of its total population of 1.21 billion in 2011), Islam (14.2%), Christianity (2.3%), Sikhism (1.7%), Buddhism (0.7%), and Jainism (0.4%) (Census of India 2011). Beginning with the encounter with British colonialism in India and specifically with the rise of the Indian national movement for independence in the late 19th century, the relationship of Hindus with other religious groups has changed.

There has been a constant mixing of religion with geopolitics by far-right Hindus, which has created an impasse for the Indian secular (*sarva dharma sambhava*, equality of all religions) traditions followed by Ashoka (c. 265–238 BCE), Akbar (1556–1605 AD), and Mahatma Gandhi. The Hindu far-right ideology called Hindutva (belief in the superiority of the Hindu race and culture and exclusive claim to South Asian geography by its followers) poses a great threat to Indian diversity and peace. It has opened a theatre of ideological and physical conflict between its followers, and Muslims, Christians, and Sikhs, on the one hand, and those within Hinduism but at the margins like Dalits and feminists, on the other. While the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) has

significant moderate and centrist leaders, as a political representative of Hindutva, it has captured political power in many states of India, forming federal or central governments during 1998–2004 and from 2014. Under the rule of the BJP, India has also seen the transformation of its foreign policy and looming conflicts with neighbouring Muslim states. The far-right outlook and ideologies could open a theatre of conflict and war in South Asia, endangering not only peace and amity but also Hinduism as a porous and syncretic belief system that provides continuity and sustenance to Indian civilisation. In the above context, the chapter examines (a) Hinduism and the factors that led to its transformation in the colonial period, (b) the ideology of far-right Hinduism and its association with geopolitics in relation to its exclusive claims to South Asia and the Aryan race, (c) post-colonial development, the evolution of the ideology, and its relation to India's secular state and constitutions, and (d) ideologies shaping social structures within Hinduism. The chapter is divided into seven sections. The second section briefly discusses Hinduism as a religion. The transformation of Hinduism and rise of the Hindu far right and its encounter with colonial modernity are dealt with in the third section. The fourth section deals with the rise of Hindutva ideology, while the fifth section discusses the post-colonial development of Hindutva ideology and implications for secularism, citizenship, and constitutional values. The sixth section examines the social implications of Hinduism and Hindutva on social organisations with reference to foreign religions, Dalits, and women. The seventh section concludes the chapter.

Hinduism and Hindu as an identity

Hinduism is one of the largest religions, with about 1.1 billion followers globally (Hackett and McClendon 2017). Etymologically, the terms 'Hindu' and 'Hinduism' are derived from the word 'Indus' or 'Sindhu' (river), leading to the words 'India' and 'Hindustan'. The origin of Hinduism is associated with the mixing of various streams of people, including Aryans, coming to the Indian subcontinent from Central Asia and the aboriginal belief system already there. Various streams of people entering the Indian subcontinent have been discussed by Subbarao (1958), and we will not repeat the discussion here. In ancient and medieval times, the territory to the east of the River Indus (in the Indian subcontinent) was called 'Hind' in Arabic and Persian, and the people living therein were called 'Hindi' or 'Hindus'. Later this term was associated with the cultural and religious practices of the people in the region, and those following the mix of the geographical, cultural practices and faiths were termed as Hindus. As Amartya Sen writes,

The Persians, Arabs and the Greeks saw India as the land around and beyond the Indus, and Hindus were the native people of that land. Muslims from India were at one stage called 'Hindavi' Muslims, in Persian as well as Arabic, and there are plenty of references in early British documents to 'Hindoo Muslims' and 'Hindoo Christians', to distinguish them respectively from Muslims and Christians from outside India.

(Sen 2005: 310)

Later, belief systems, such as Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, separated from the larger pool of Hinduism, and what was left became known as 'Hinduism'. Even so, within this separated Hinduism, there exists a variety of belief systems ranging from

an eclectic range of doctrines and practices, from pantheism to agnosticism and from faith in reincarnation to belief in the caste system. But none of these constitutes an obligatory credo for a Hindu: there are none. There are no compulsory dogmas.

(Tharoor 2016:14)

Hinduism does not require believers to follow one particular book or patterns of rituals to claim their belonging and so identify themselves. A Hindu can be *astika* (believer in the soul, self, and spirit, authority of/pious) or *nastika* (opposite of *astikas*). An *astika* (orthodox) Hindu can subscribe to any or a combination of any of the six schools of philosophies of *Nyaya* (the school of logic), *Vaisheshika* (the atomistic school), *Samkhya* (the enumeration school), *Raja yoga* (metaphysics of *samkhya*), *Mimamsa* (the Vedic exegesis), and *Vedanta* (Upanishadic traditions). The *nastikas* or heterodox are those who follow the other three schools, namely, Buddhism, Jainism, and the Charvaka School (essentially a materialist philosophy). The *nastika* are considered to have undergone reforms that arose over time to eradicate ritualism in Hinduism. Buddhism and Jainism emerged against the ritualism that the Brahmanic domination of Hinduism promoted. Both Buddhism and Jainism were initiated by the Kshatriyas as a revolt against Brahmanic dominations. Later on, these revolts and reforms were accommodated within Hinduism as reform movements.

Despite Hinduism being in its origin a collection of faith system of 'heathens', attempts were made to homogenise it and present it in similar ways as Abrahamic religions. For instance, the Arya Samaj movement that started in the late 19th century attempted to portray Hinduism as an organised religion and separate people from their syncretic practices via the *Suddhi* (purification) movement. This involved requesting those practising a mix of Hindu, Muslim, Christian, or other faiths and rituals to 'purify' themselves and abandon those other practices in order to be a 'pure' Hindu. At the same time, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, a political leader of the anti-colonial Indian national movement, claimed that 'a Hindu is he who believes that the Vedas contain self-evident and axiomatic truths' (Merchant 2014). This was an attempt to consolidate and homogenise the Hindus to compete with already well-defined and homogenised religions like Islam and Christianity with their specific religious books, the Qur'an and the Bible. But this definition of Hindu excluded *nastiks* – the Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs, and those believing in Charvaka philosophy.

Mahatma Gandhi advanced a similar opinion to that of Tilak: anyone believing in books like the Vedas, the Upanishads, and other Hindu scriptures, as well as gods and their incarnations, varnas (caste system) and ashrama (practices of four stages of life), and the cow as a holy animal, should be regarded as a Hindu (Tharoor 2016). However, in the 1920s, a Hindu far-right philosopher, VD Savarkar, did not recognise it as essential to believe in the Vedas to be a Hindu.

To him, the various religious disputes within Hindu religious thought – between monism and pantheism, between *Dvaita* and *Advaita*, between the Vedas and the Upanishads and even including agnosticism and atheism – were irrelevant to the issue of Hindu identity. Savarkar saw 'Hinduness' or 'Hindutva' as opposed to 'Hinduism' as a uniting cultural construct that underlay the identity of all those who belong to 'Bharatvarsha', the ancient land of India.

(Tharoor 2016: 12)

In addition, Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of India, observed that 'Being a Hindu means all things to all men' (Tharoor 2016: 12). In this connection, Alfred Lyall, a British civil servant, termed Hinduism as a "tangled jungle" full of paradoxes and contradictions, "a religious chaos" spread all over India, difficult to comprehend and define' (Tharoor 2016: 12). The second president of India, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, termed Hinduism 'a museum of beliefs, a medley of rites, or a mere map, a geographical expression?' (Tharoor 2016: 12).

Hinduism does not claim to be unique in terms of telling the truth and in its folk form gives equal importance to all streams of thought claiming to represent the truth. This aspect of the

religion is expressed by the Rig Veda, “*Ekam sat vipra bahudha vadanti*” – truth is one, sages call it variously’ (Tharoor 2016: 31).

The Supreme Court of India described Hinduism as,

When we think of the Hindu religion, we find it difficult, if not impossible, to define Hindu religion or even adequately describe it. Unlike other religions in the world, the Hindu religion does not claim any one prophet; it does not worship any one God; it does not subscribe to any one dogma; it does not believe in any one philosophic concept; it does not follow any one set of religious rites or performances; in fact, it does not appear to satisfy the narrow traditional features of any religion or creed. It may broadly be described as a way of life and nothing more.

(*Supreme Court of India 1966: 15*)

Because of these reasons, Hindus are largely summed up as religious residuals in the Indian sub-continent, people not following Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Sikhism, Buddhism, and Jainism, or tribal religions.

Hinduism’s encounter with colonial modernity

With the rise of British colonial power in India, Hinduism, which had existed as the folk ways of life, as an assimilation of a multitude of religious scriptures, and with innumerable gods and goddess and rituals, started transforming itself. This happened as a consequence of British colonialism and the attempt to systematise the knowledge of Indian communities and use religions for its political administration. Colonial historians, such as James Mill, started compiling the history of India in the Hindu and Muslim periods. The division of Indian history on religious lines by Mill (1817) was not to arrive at impartial knowledge. It was an attempt to see India through a religious lens and to use its history to create differences between Hindus and Muslims and assist the colonial power to rule. The population census started in the second half of the 19th century and included classification of the population by religion and caste. The British used this knowledge for governance, to consolidate Hinduism, and to build a new consciousness among Hindus. The same can be said for the rise of Islamic consciousness in India (van de Veer 2002). This classification resulted in ordering religious groups on the basis of their numbers, which created the politics of the majority and the minority and the fear of numbers. Both Hindu and Muslim elites, organised in the Muslim League and Hindu Mahasabha and its associates Rastriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS), sought to organise in this way from the second half of the 19th century. The British ordering (including divide and rule) helped to control and rule Indians.

Additionally, the colonial government also opened the Indian social space for Christian missionaries, opposed equally by Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs (van der Veer 2002). This led Hindu religious leaders to start movements, like Arya Samaj in 1875, to homogenise the Hindus and bring back those who were gone to other religions or were living in syncretic traditions. Muslims also started similar movements, and *Tablighi Jama’at* emerged in the 1920s to bring Muslims back into a ‘pure’ Islamic tradition. The birth of *Jamaat-e-Islami* in 1941 and its rise again consolidated the role of religion in politics in India through an attempt to homogenise Muslim identity and speak on their behalf. In sum, the fear of Christian missionaries and technologies invented by the colonial government by creating religious-political identity groups encouraged Indians to fill the public sphere with religious symbols, a development that eventually led to the partition of the country.

Rise of Hindutva ideology

The present organised form of Hinduism has emerged as a response to encounters with colonial modernity (van der Veer 2002). As an organised religion, it tramples on the liberal space. Although many freedom fighters and even the framers of the Indian Constitution attempted to put in place the basic foundations of a liberal constitution, today it is under threat from far-right Hinduism (see Panthan 1997; Nandy 1988; Madan 1987; Chatterjee 1994). It is important to note here that in the last 200 years, Hinduism transformed from porous folkways of life and beliefs into a formidably organised form with muscular political power, driving it towards violence. This is the opposite direction that Swami Vivekanand and Mahatma Gandhi wanted to guide it, through acceptance of all faiths as truth and technologies of *ahimsa*. The Hindutva ideology is now in conflict with other minority religions like Islam and Christianity, while globally, it is competing to have its own space among organised religion and politics. Many far-right Hindus connect to Indian nationalism and citizenship with both a Hindu religious hue and ethno-nationalism. In addition, the transnational dialectics of identity and Indian diaspora are further sharpening and shaping the far right and encouraging religious divides in India (van der Veer 2002).

Individuals and organisations emerged in colonial India and set the scene for today's far-right Hinduism, known as Hindutva. The Arya Samaj movement aggressively sought conversion and reconversion to its brand of Hinduism and the protection of cows. In 1888, when the North-Western Provincial High Court decreed that the cow was not a sacred animal to be protected by the state, far-right Hindus turned against Muslims and Christians (Freitag 1989). In 1893, Bal Gangadhar Tilak initiated Ganesh Utsav (festival), which filled the public sphere in the Western region of India with religious colour. Two other far-right Hindu nationalists, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883–1966) and Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar (1906–1973) founded the philosophy and ideologies of Hindutva.

Two Hindu nationalist organisations, Hindu Mahasabha and RSS, have carried forward far-right Hindutva philosophy and ideology to the politics and common people of India in the name of Hindu culture and Hindu pride. The Akhil Bhartiya Hindu Mahasabha was founded in 1915 and developed into a political party in 1935, while RSS, which designates itself as a Hindu cultural organisation, was founded in 1925 in Nagpur, Maharashtra. The purpose of both organisations is to spread Hindutva, Hindu transnationalism, social conservatism, economic nationalism, and right wing-populism. It is ironic that both the religio-sectarian political formations of Hindu Mahasabha and those from RSS barely opposed British colonialism, as was also the case with the Muslim League.

Savarkar is known for his two-nation theory – Hindus and Muslims in India as two nations. This led to their use and misuse in politics by both Hindu nationalists and the Muslim League, resulting in the partition of the country into India and Pakistan. Golwalkar, as head of RSS, as we will see below, boosted the rise of ethnic and nationalist Hindu pride. In addition, there were many other RSS leaders, such as the founding father of the RSS, Hedgewar (1889–1940), who wanted to root Indian citizens in Hindu identity, which contributed significantly to the rise of Hindutva.

Hindutva, or far-right Hindu cultural nationalism, led to a significant distortion of the ideology of Hinduism, which originally was porous, accommodative, amorphous, and based on religious equality. The Hindu Mahasabha, the RSS, and their representatives made concerted efforts to provide a new definition and meaning to Hinduism in the first half of the 20th century. However, they were overshadowed by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, popularly known as Mahatma Gandhi, considered as the most authentic representative of Hinduism and its glorious

tradition of accommodation, peace, non-violence, and religious equality. In fact, Gandhi had to pay a great price for this: he was shot dead by a far-right Hindu nationalist in 1948. Next, we discuss the understanding Gandhi developed of Hinduism, and then we examine the changes and transformed interpretation of the same by Hindu nationalists.

As a proud Hindu and believer in equality of all religions, Gandhi defined Hinduism.

It is the good fortune or the misfortune of Hinduism that it has no official creed ... If I were asked to define the Hindu creed I should simply say: search after truth through non-violent means. A man may not believe in God and still he may call himself a Hindu. Hinduism is a relentless pursuit after truth.

(1994:1)

Criticising Arya Samaj's *Suddhi* movement and proselytism, he further said, 'In my opinion there is no such thing as proselytism in Hinduism as it is understood in Christianity or to a lesser extent in Islam. The Arya Samaj has, I think, copied the Christians in planning its propaganda' (Gandhi 1994: 21).

However, far-right Hindu nationalists changed the traditional ideologies and belief of Hinduism and its worldview. Though marginalised because of Gandhi's aura and appeal, they kept on working to develop a new worldview of Hinduism and provide it with a new ideology. They threw away the ideologies of non-violence, coexistence, *sarva dharma sambhav*, and equality of religions dear to Gandhi and rooted in Indian tradition. They provided, through an assertion of majoritarianism, a violent ideology and a new definition of Hinduism, creating new relations of religion with geography, politics, society, economy, race, and culture.

Among the writings that gave shape to the conceptions of Hindutva and exclusionary Hindu Rashtra (Hindu nation) is the book, *We or Our Nationhood Defined* by Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar. Golwalkar was born in 1906 in Nagpur, became a member of the RSS in 1933, and led the RSS from 1940 to 1973 (Islam 2006). Golwalkar gave concrete shape to the ideas of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, who put forward his theory of Hindu Rashtra (Hindu nation) in his book *Hindutva* published in 1929. Savarkar claimed for exclusionary Hindu nationalism and argued that a Hindu,

is who looks upon the land that extended from Sindu to Sindu – from Indus to the Seas – as the land of his forefathers – his fatherland [*Pitribhu*], who inherits the blood of that race whose first discernible source could be traced to the Vedic Saptasindhus [Saptasindhus meant seven rivers presided by the river Sindhu, heavenly ordained land of the Aryans] ... who has inherited and claims as his own the culture of that race as expressed chiefly in their common classical language Sanskrit ... and who above all, address this land, this Sindhusthan as his Holyland [*Punyabhu*] ... These are essentials of Hindutva – a common nation [*Rashtra*], a common race [*Jati*] and common civilization [*Sanskriti*].

(Savarkar 1989 as quoted in Islam 2006:12–13)

It was Savarkar who mixed up geography and race and claimed the territory of the imagined community. Golwalkar (1939) used *swaraj* in a different sense to Gandhi. The word 'swaraj' can be broken in two parts: 'swa' meaning 'we' and 'raj' mean governance/kingdom. Where for Gandhi, it meant 'self-rule' by the people of India, Golwalkar used 'we' to denote Hindus, excluding others (Golwalkar 1939: 3). He defined the geographic notion of the Hindu race

converted into Hindu Rashtra. This geography expands from Afghanistan to Myanmar, including Sri Lanka. Yechury (2017) calls it

distortion of both history and science. First, the entire diversity of culture, traditions, language and customs of the peoples who inhabited India over centuries is sought to be straitjacketed into a monolithic 'Hinduism'. Secondly, an external enemy is created (that is, 'external' to Hindus) ... to whip up 'Hindu' consolidation.

In order to validate his geographical thesis, Golwalkar argued that those who were in possession of this land historically were Hindus:

'We – Hindus – have been in undisputed and undisturbed possession of this land for over 8 or even 10 thousand years before the land was invaded by any foreign race' and because of this the land 'came to be known as Hindusthan, the land of the Hindus'.

(Golwalkar 1939: 6)

It is important to note that the term used here is 'Hindusthan' not 'Hindustan'. The similarity is between '*stan*' (mean country or land) with the Sanskrit word '*sthan*' meaning place. By the term 'foreign race', he means both Muslims and Christians. But Golwalkar glosses over (a) the history of Central India and South Asia, which has been very dynamic, and one after the another, ethnicities have made their incursions into these lands in prehistory until very recently; (b) that there were no original residents of the lands but the accretion of the same took place over time (Subbarao 1958); and (c) that a large proportion of the natives of what he called the residents of these lands converted to one or other religions. The same has happened in today's mainland India involving Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, and Buddhists. Hindu far-right organisations use Golwalkar's understanding to depict a map of Bharat from Afghanistan to Myanmar. In order to justify his political understanding, Golwalkar assumes that Hindus (used synonymously with the Aryan race by him) were the original inhabitants of Hindusthan and did not come from anywhere else. He designates Western scholarship on migration and origin of Aryans from somewhere near the Caspian sea as the 'shady testimony of Western scholars' (Golwalkar 1939: 6).

In fact, one of the major challenges before Golwalkar was to justify and weave into his story the argument by Bal Gangadhar Tilak that Vedas originated in the Arctic. For this, he argued that,

We may agree with him that originally the Aryans i.e. the Hindus lived in the region of the North Pole. But, he was not aware that, in ancient times, the North Pole and with it the Arctic Zone was not where it is today ... North Pole is not stationary and quite long ago it was in that part of the world, which, we find, is called Bihar and Orissa at the present; that then it moved northeast and then by a sometimes westerly, sometimes northward movement, it came to its present position. If this be so, did we leave the Arctic Zone and come to Hindusthan or were we all along here and the Arctic Zone left us and moved away northwards in its zigzag march? We do not hesitate in affirming that had this fact been discovered during the life-time of Lokmanya Tilak, he would unhesitatingly have propounded the proposition that The Arctic Home in the Vedas 'was verily in Hindusthan itself and that it was not the Hindus who migrated to that land but the Arctic Zone which emigrated and left the Hindus in Hindusthan'.

(Golwalkar 1939: 45)

This indicates that he did not give serious consideration to time, geology, and geography before presenting his thesis on the origin of Aryans and Vedas.

Given the human implications of Golwalkar's thought, the noted author Kushwant Singh in his review of Islam's (2006) book, wrote that:

Golwalkar's thinking was much influenced by Veer Savarkar. Both supported caste system, approved of Hitler exterminating millions of Jews in gas chambers, supported Zionism and Jewish State of Israel for no other reason other than it was forever waging wars against its neighbours who were Muslims. Islamophobia became an integral part of Hindutva.

The ideological threads, streams, and brand of 'Hindutva' that Savarkar and Golwalkar developed were later strengthened and further mythicised by their followers. To them, scientific evidence and historical facts were less important than myth and belief. Gandhi's ideas of a diverse and religiously plural India have been displaced by this brand of Hindutva in recent decades.

However, the terms 'Hindu' and 'Hindutva' have also been interpreted as the identity of all the people of the subcontinent or Bharatvarsh (mainland India). This meaning is sometimes advocated by the RSS. Hindutva, RSS head Mohan Bhagwat claims, is an identity applicable to all Indians:

The word [is] applicable to all 1.3 billion people who call themselves the sons and daughters of Bharatvarsh, whose everyday life is striving towards an alignment with its moral and ethical code and who are proud of the heritage of their ancestors.

(PTI 2020)

These thoughts about Hindus and Hindutva, though accommodative of other religious groups, is focused on an uncritical understanding of past heritage and ideology and conflicts with both modernity and the Indian Constitution in relation to the caste system, untouchability, women's social position, and mythical belief systems. It is doubtful of 'others' and regards them as separatists. In fact, this lack of trust was the root cause of the country's partition in 1947 and the emergence of Pakistan. A Muslim poet and philosopher, Mohammad Iqbal, who later aligned with Muslim separatism because he doubted that Hindus should force their cultures on Muslims after the British left India, wrote a poem that includes a line '*mazhab nahi sikhata apas mein bair rakhna, Hindi hain hum watan hain, Hindostan hamara*' (religion does not teach to hate each other, we all are Hindi, and this is [our] country). This is very close to the interpretation by Mohan Bhagwat and could be reworked to create accommodation and harmony between religious groups.

Post-colonial rise of Hindutva

Although Hindutva ideologies originated in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, they took hold of Indian politics in the post-colonial period. In this section, we attempt to understand their rise and implications.

Hindutva ideology and nationalism, patriotism, and citizenship

The far-right Hindutva ideology has now given birth to a different form of Indian nationalism and patriotism. It believes in violent forms of assertion of majoritarianism and relegations of its constructed 'others' to the margins or out of the 'national territory'. It has revalorised and redis-

covered the fault lines of religion, caste, and modernity. The core of far-right nationalism is the belief that only Hindus are nationalist Indians. The loyalty of other religious groups and especially the followers of Abrahamic religions is questioned. A current circulating rumour on social media about Muslims is that a Muslim army regiment refused to fight with Pakistan in the 1965 war (Firstpost 2020). In fact, a Muslim regiment has never existed in the Indian army. Similar myths and propaganda exist about 'love jihad', that is, Muslim men marrying and converting Hindu girls to Islam (Gupta 2009); 'UPSC or civil services jihad', Muslims infiltrating Indian civil services (Shaikh 2020); 'land jihad' (The Wire 2017) and 'population jihad', that is, Muslims dominating the Hindus demographically (Srivastava 2015). In fact, a television news channel influenced by far-right ideology constructed a spurious list of types of jihad that Muslims are said to be pursuing in India (Ramachandran 2020). Social media and television channels have become important ways of spreading spurious news in order to metaphorically 'anti-nationalise' other religious communities and then to compromise their quality of citizenship.

There have been four forms of citizenship discourse in India since the 'freedom movement' emerged during British colonialism: liberal, republican, ethno-nationalist, and non-statist (Shani 2010; Shaban 2016). The Indian Constitution provides a liberal (universalistic) form of citizenships to both individuals and communities via fundamental rights. In the ethno-nationalist conception of citizenship, an individual can be a citizen only if his or her origin is from a specific race, belief, or kinship. Far-right Hindutva ideologues see 'Hindus' as a separate nation from other religious groups and put them as the first citizens of India and relegate followers of other religions to the margins. The ethno-nationalist discourse in the 1940s created massive violence in the subcontinent, and since the 1980s, with the rise of the far-right political formations, this discourse has again taken centre stage in India.

The unity of Hindus by the far right is constructed through a binary in which Abrahamic religions are conceived as the 'other'. However, history shows that an othering process has also historically worked against Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism as well (see Jha 2019; Singh 2017; Ashraf 2018).

The far-right wish to convert India into Hindu *Rashtra* is reminiscent of what occurred with the Islamic far-right leader, Mohammad Ali Jinnah. In fact, both Hindutva organisations and the Muslim League were implicated in the partition of India in 1947. Accompanying violence took the lives of around 2 million persons and 14 million were made refugees (Doshi and Mehdi 2017). A far-right Hindu extremist killed Gandhi in 1948. As Gyan Pandey puts it:

The assassination of Mahatma Gandhi in January 1948 at the hands of a Hindu extremist ... seems to have brought a good deal of north India back to its senses and marked [a] turning point in the debate between [a] 'secular nation' and 'Hindu nation'.

(Pandey 1999: 614)

Unlike other militant groups who work with religious ideologies, such as Muslim fundamentalists in Kashmir, the Hindu far right is quite open about its aims (Banerjee 1991). In the post-independence period, far-right Hindutva has thrown several challenges to Indian society and polity, some of which we discuss below.

First, it has not shied away from advocating violence. In fact, with the rise of far-right political parties, the Hindu-Muslim violence has significantly increased in India and has spread towards more tolerant south Indian states (Shaban 2016).

Second, a massification of the far-right Hindutva ideology has led to the proliferation of various organisations related to Hindutva culture, politics, student associations, women's associations, and worker associations, besides muscular organisations like Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) and

Bajrang Dal with their all-India appeal and linked to the RSS, different types of organisations with the suffix of *sena* or *vahini* (literally meaning armies) like Rastriya Hindu Sena, Sri Ram Sena (Express News Service 2018), and Shiv Sena. The latter (Shiv Sena) now shows considerable tolerance to diversity under the leadership of Udhav Thackeray, compared to that of Bal Thackeray during 1966–2011. There is also Durga Vahini (VHP's women's army), Hindu Yuva Vahini, Karni Sena, a caste-based organisation of Kshatriyas in Rajasthan with an all-India appeal and an ideology derived from Hindutva and far-right Hinduism. In addition, there are many regional organisations linked to far-right ideologies, including Sanatan Sanstha with an all-India appeal. Many workers' unions (such as Bhartiya Mazdoor Sangh) and student wings (Akhil Bhartiya Vidyarthi Parishad) have also emerged linked to far-right ideologies.

Third, with the rise of these organisations, especially since the 1980s, there has been a visible rise of extremism in India's public sphere. Social media, many television channels and newspapers, and public spaces (including parks and streets) are now filled with symbols that advocate and disseminate far-right ideologies (Ali 2001; Mehta 2020).

Fourth, the idea of the Indian National Congress, popularised by Nehru, of the state's equal distance to all religions, which drew on the Western idea of secularism and neutrality, is now problematised and stigmatised and called pseudo-secularism. The Nehruvian idea of secularism is being replaced by positive secularism (as equal separation and interference in all religions) as the far right see reforms in Hindu Personal Laws in the 1950s as one-sided, as they were not applied to Muslim Personal Laws, as reflected in the Shah Bano case in the 1980s when the Indian government was seen to side with Muslim orthodoxy. It is true that successive governments did not seek to reform Muslim Personal Law. This hurt not only Muslims who wished to see change but also facilitated the rise of the far right. This was called 'Muslim appeasement' and was extended to the developmental initiatives by the government for marginalised and underdeveloped Muslims (see Sachar Committee Report 2006 on deprivation of Muslims). This kind of politics was termed by the Hindu far right as the Congress Party's 'pseudo-secularism'.

The Nehruvian idea of secularism has also been criticised by many scholars on the grounds that it may be ineffective in a religious country like India (Nandi 1988; Madan 1987; Chatterjee 1994; Pantham 1997). Critics advocate the Gandhian secularism of *Sarva Dharma Sambhava* (equality of religions) based on *satya* (truth) and *ahimsa* (non-violence) as an alternative. The BJP claims to follow the Gandhian conception of secularism (BJP n.d.). However, the Hindutva conception of positive secularism has been criticised by Chatterjee (1994):

'positive secularism' is meant not only to deflect accusations of its being antiseccular but also to rationalize, in a sophisticated way, its campaign for intolerant interventions by a modern, positively secular state against the religious, cultural or ethnic minorities in the name of 'national culture' and a homogenized notion of citizenship.

(quoted in Pantham 1997: 532)

Many far-right Hindutva ideologues also advocate for the removal of the words 'secular' (the basic constitutional value) and 'socialist' from India's Constitution.

Fifth, far-right Hindutva has its own agenda of manufacturing citizenship rooted in Hindu culture, and for that, it attempts to create an alternative education system through *gurukuls* and is opposed to the current modern liberal education system. In recent years, this goal was vigorously adopted (Bidwai 2014), as was communalisation of public institutions (see Brass 2003).

Sixth, the Indian Citizenship Act, which is based on non-ethnic and non-religious discrimination, was changed via the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) 2019. Muslims are likely to be affected the most by this amendment because (a) Muslim migrants from neighbouring

countries, unlike other religious groups, can now be deported to their native countries. If not accepted by the source country, they will be put in specially designed camps, (b) a significant proportion of Muslims (many of whom are illiterate, poorly educated, and economically marginalised) even from mainland India may face discrimination and end up in such camps because they may not be able to produce required documents, that is if enumeration and registration for the National Register of Citizens (NRC) are conducted. Many Muslims do not have assets, like land and a house, registered deaths and births, or educational certificates, or have their names on the voters' list, which establishes chronological or historical evidence for being an Indian citizen. Other religious groups from a similar cohort may have provisions to apply for the new citizenship, but Muslims will not have this opportunity because the CAA denies this possibility.

Seventh, in recent years, a number of civil society organisations working for civil liberties and development have been banned or constrained on the alleged grounds that they have been creating disaffection or engaging in activities that do not promote nationalism as conceived by the Hindu far right (Trivedi 2014; Chaney 2020).

Eighth, there is a visible preference for non-governmental organisations and other civil society groups with close links to far-right organisations (SAGAR 2020).

Ninth, far-right Hindutva ideology sees Muslims as the 'other'; in fact, its genesis is rooted in this. It is often insecure about the loyalty of Muslims and integration of Muslim territories into India, despite Muslims ruling much of the country from the 11th to the 19th century, while helping shape the coherence of India's culture, ethos, and syncretism, and giving birth to modern Indian territorial limits and organisations. The insecurity of the far right was strengthened with the division of the country in 1947 into India and Pakistan. This suspicion led to the repeal of Article 370 in 2019 related to the status of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) despite J&K being an integral part of the country and the Union of India having signed an agreement with a Hindu king, Hari Singh, for the special status of the state for its accession to the Indian Union in 1948.

Tenth, far-right ideology has a pretext for violence against Indian Muslims because of incidents of global Islamist terrorism. Yet, Indian Muslims have not been involved in it, whether in the Middle East, North Africa, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Europe, or the USA. Nevertheless, Islamic extremism in those countries helps the far right to justify their extremism in India. In this regard, far-right Hindutva ideologues are often prepared to ally with the far right in Israel, Europe, and North Africa. As a result, India's foreign policy, based on non-alignment, is under considerable strain.

Hinduism, Hindutva, and social organisation

A distinction needs to be made between Hinduism and Hindutva. While Hinduism, like any other religion, has its own strength and limitations with regard to the social organisation that emerges out of a belief system, which over time can be subject to reform, far-right Hindutva ideology implies violent justification based on social structure and ethnicity. It is much less amenable to reform, as it is subject to glorification and manufacturing of a sense of pride in the social structure. It is in this sense, where Gandhi's Hinduism is reflective and that of Golwalkar and Savarkar is non-reflective. Inherent in the Hindu belief system are some basic unifying factors that provide socio-political ideologies and shape the social structure. Some of these basic belief systems relate to (a) purity and pollution related to foreign culture, (b) *varna* or the caste system based on purity and pollution within Hinduism, and (c) the position of women. It is considered *dharma* (sacred duty) and *karma* (ordained deed) to practice the same (the caste system, position of women, and purity and pollution related to foreign culture). Raja Ram Mohan

Roy and Gandhi advocated for many reforms in these practices and belief system. However, they are still largely prevalent.

We have seen a rising divide in Indian society in the post-colonial period. The divide is visible on multiple social planes but most prominent in relation to religion (especially foreign religions), caste, and gender bases. The far-right belief system in Hinduism has not been able to fully accommodate the culturally 'foreign' and treat it with equality. It associates social pollution with foreigners, and that is why a normal relationship cannot easily be established with religions outside Hinduism, including Islam, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism. Unlike other religions that promote collective eating and cooking, the kitchens of Hindus have been considered very sacred, and access to this has historically largely been denied to others. In fact, among others, this has been a major barrier not only for varna equality and mobility but also for the assimilation of foreigners into Hindu society.

Sometimes distinctions are made between the varnas and castes. The varnas are the four broad categories of social structure in Hinduism: priestly class (Brahmins), warrior class (Kshatriyas), those performing non-polluted works (Vaishyas), and untouchables (Shudras). Castes (*jatis*) are those hierarchies of social groups/communities within the varnas. The origin of the caste system is explained through (a) the origin of humans from different organs of Brahma (Olivelli 2005), (b) racial distinctions between Aryans and non-Aryans (Goetz 1964; Nehru 1972; Burnouw 1987; Munishi 1998), and (c) occupational distinctions pursued by different categories of people. Varnas and even *jati* within varnas are based on adherence to endogamy to maintain the purity of each group. The *shudras* further suffer from the disability of untouchability. The varna or caste system of Hinduism has created a social ideology linked with religion which historically produced a severe form of social and economic inequality. While reform movements in South India and the impact of urbanisation have lessened caste ideologies, it still persists.

There are very contradictory positions of Hinduism with regard to the status of women in society, including related to liberty and equality. Whereas on the one hand, the female is worshipped as a goddess, on the other hand, she is also relegated to a secondary position by some men. For instance, she should commit *sati* (burning herself on her husband's funeral pyre), remain tied to one man throughout her life, and as a widow, restrain her physical desires and socialisation. Related to marriage, Olivelli (2005: 31) translates the Manu Smriti verses 3.13–14 as:

A Sudra may take only a Sudra woman as wife; a Vaisya, the latter and a woman of his own class; a Ksatriya, the latter two and a woman of his own class; and a Brahmin, the latter three and a woman of his own class.

However, social reforms since the 19th century, as well as state interventions, opposed by far-right Hindus, are seeking to improve Hindu women's social and economic situation.

Conclusions

Hinduism is one of the four major religions of the world, and its followers have contributed significantly to the making of global civilisation. This chapter examined Hinduism's political manifestation via Hindutva ideologies and their social and political implications. The chapter shows that (a) Hinduism as an organised religion is a product of the encounter with colonial modernity and as a response to colonialism, (b) in its original form, it was very porous and syncretic, (c) while it offered a significant range of options of belief systems, it also created a universal social structure through the varna/caste system leading to the emergence of historical, social

inequalities and violence, and (d) far-right political Hinduism significantly penetrated current Indian society. This has led to a significant rise in social and religious conflicts in India and also has ramifications for foreign policy and alliances. Far-right Hindutva ideology, which originated in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, pitted itself against many other religious belief systems, helping shape violence in South Asia, which Islamists could not achieve. The beauty of Hinduism exists in its folkways of existence that made reforms and syncretism possible. The *satya* (truth, all religions as true) and *ahimsa* (non-violence, tolerance) attributed by Mahatma Gandhi and Swami Vivekananda to Hinduism and Indian culture were derived from the folkways of Hinduism. The new far-right Hindutva that is organised and politicised Hinduism is the antithesis of Gandhian understandings.

Far-right Hindutva shows a potent association of religion with geography and territory or the imagined space of *Aryavarta*. For peace and tranquillity to develop in India, Hinduism requires another Swami Vivekananda or Gandhi and/or reinterpretation of the term 'Hindu' and 'Hindutva', which, so far, has not been the case by leaders and office-holders of the Hindu far right (PTI 2020).

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