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THE RISE OF HINDUTVA IDEOLOGY; THREATS TO RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper critically examines the ideological rise of Hindutva, spearheaded by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), and its profound implications for religious minorities in India, particularly Muslims. As India enters the third term of BJP-led governance, it increasingly reflects a political order where secularism is eroded and nationalism is conflated with Hindu identity. Through institutional convergence between the state and the RSS, Hindutva ideology has gained unprecedented mainstream legitimacy—redefining citizenship, marginalizing dissent, and targeting Muslim minorities as "internal enemies." Drawing on comparative frameworks, including parallels with ethnonationalist regimes like Nazi Germany, the study exposes the systematic disenfranchisement of Muslims through hate speech, anti-conversion laws, ghettoization, exclusion from political representation, and surveillance. Furthermore, the analysis explores the role of media propaganda, both traditional and digital, in reinforcing anti-Muslim sentiment. The paper also assesses international responses, including UN criticism and Western diplomatic hesitation, revealing a global accountability gap. The study argues that without the inclusion and protection of its largest minority, India cannot achieve genuine peace or democratic legitimacy. It concludes with actionable policy recommendations for both the international community and Indian institutions to address the threats posed by rising majoritarianism and to restore the pluralistic foundation upon which Indian democracy was built.

Introduction

India has long been celebrated as the world's largest democracy, founded on principles of pluralism, secularism, and constitutional equality. Since its independence in 1947, the Indian state has upheld a vision where diverse religious and ethnic communities coexist under a common democratic framework. However, in recent decades, particularly with the ascent of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to national power, there has been a discernible shift in the ideological foundations of the Indian polity. The BJP's rise is not merely a political development but reflects a broader cultural and ideological resurgence rooted in the doctrine of Hindutva, propagated by its parent organization, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) (Jaffrelot, 2021; Savarkar, 1923). Founded in 1925, the RSS envisions India as a Hindu Rashtra, a notion that directly challenges the secular and inclusive ethos enshrined in the Indian Constitution (Chatterji, 2009; Jaffrelot, 2007).

This ideological transformation has had far-reaching implications, particularly for religious minorities such as Muslims, Christians, and Dalits. Increasing reports of mob lynchings, hate speech, anti-conversion laws, and institutional bias reveal a disturbing pattern of exclusion and marginalization (Human Rights Watch, 2002; Reuters, 2025; ECLJ, 2022). The convergence of state power with Hindutva ideology has also drawn comparisons with

other ethnonationalist regimes in history, notably Nazi Germany, where a similar fusion of identity politics, propaganda, and authoritarianism led to systemic discrimination and violence (Mookerjee & Robotka, 2019; KIIR, 2025; JusticeForAll, 2025).

The present study explores the ideological foundations of the BJP-RSS nexus and critically examines its impact on India's secular framework and religious minorities. Furthermore, it investigates the role of media, state institutions, and international actors in responding to this ideological shift. Within the broader field of International Relations, this analysis is significant for understanding how democratic erosion and religious nationalism in a key global player like India can affect regional stability, international human rights norms, and global perceptions of democratic legitimacy.

Genesis of BJP-RSS Ideology

The ideological foundation of Hindutva, as articulated by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar in his 1923 work *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?*, reimagined Indian nationalism through an exclusionary lens that defined India as primarily a land for Hindus (Savarkar, 1923). According to Savarkar, only those who regard India as both their *Pitrubhumi* (fatherland) and *Punyabhumi* (holy land) could be considered truly Indian. This effectively placed Muslims and Christians outside the nationalist framework, sowing the early seeds of their "othering." The establishment of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in 1925 institutionalized these ideas, aiming to culturally and socially consolidate Hindu identity while portraying religious minorities—particularly Muslims—as perpetual outsiders and threats to the Hindu nation (Jaffrelot, 2007; Chatterji, 2009).

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), founded in 1980 as the political arm of the RSS, operates in close alignment with this ideological vision. Through systematic infiltration into state institutions, education, and media, the BJP-RSS nexus has sought to normalize the view of Indian Muslims as internal enemies or invaders, often referencing the Mughal period to justify contemporary mistrust and violence (Jaffrelot, 2021; The Probe, 2025). This ideological framing has translated into organized campaigns such as "Love Jihad", "Ghar Wapsi", and opposition to halal practices, which falsely portray Muslims as conspiring to demographically and culturally overtake Hindus (Time, 2023; Wired, 2024).

Anti-Muslim violence in post-independence India has frequently occurred in regions where the RSS has a strong presence. The 2002 Gujarat riots, which took place under then-Chief Minister Narendra Modi's administration, marked a turning point in legitimizing state-backed communal violence (Human Rights Watch, 2002; Wikipedia, 2025). Scholars like Christophe Jaffrelot and Angana Chatterji argue that Hindutva functions as a form of ethnic democracy, wherein minorities are tolerated only if they remain

politically and culturally subordinate (Jaffrelot, 2021; Chatterji, 2009). Moreover, RSS-affiliated organizations such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Bajrang Dal have played key roles in inciting hate and orchestrating attacks against Muslim communities, often with impunity (Human Rights Watch, 1999; Reuters, 2025).

Thus, the BJP-RSS ideological foundation is not merely a cultural project but a systematic attempt to redefine Indian citizenship in exclusionary terms. It constructs Muslims as the perpetual “other,” laying the groundwork for political marginalization, economic discrimination, and social violence under the guise of nationalism (Savarkar, 1923; Jaffrelot, 2021)

Hindutva and the Nazi Model: Constructing the ‘Other’

The BJP-RSS’s construction of Muslims as internal enemies exhibits striking parallelisms with the Nazi regime’s vilification of Jews. Both systems weaponized ethnonationalism to justify exclusion, persecution, and eventual political marginalization of a minority they defined as alien (Mookerjee & Robotka, 2019; KIIR, 2025; Justice For All, 2025). In Nazi Germany, the Reich Citizenship Law, Nuremberg Laws, and state propaganda erected Jews as racially impure and a threat to societal purity. Similarly, in India, the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) effectively render many Muslims stateless, marking them as second-class “infiltrators” undeserving of full citizenship (Time, 2021; Reuters, 2024; Human Rights Watch, 2020; Wikipedia, 2025).

Militarization and institutional co-optation are further shared links. The Nazis mobilized youth through the Hitler Youth, while the RSS runs daily paramilitary-style “shakhas,” drawing half a million participants and promoting a Hindu supremacist ethos that mirrors Nazi discipline and indoctrination (Jaffrelot, 2021; Van der Veer, 1994). Both regimes fostered youth militarism as a pillar of state-run hatred.

Propaganda was central to both ideologies. The Nazi Ministry of Propaganda, led by Goebbels, controlled media to dehumanize Jews. In contemporary India, this role is mirrored by BJP-aligned IT cells and “godia media” that flood social platforms with anti-Muslim narratives, while Bollywood and textbooks often frame Muslims as violent or untrustworthy (Al Jazeera Institute, 2025; Guardian, 2020; Washington Post, 2023; Time, 2023). The tangible violence that follows such hate is equally alarming. In Germany, Kristallnacht was state-sanctioned vandalism of synagogues. In India, mosques have been attacked and burned, homes demolished during “anti-encroachment drives,” and Muslim enclaves formed through systematic ghettoization and property discrimination (Reuters, 2024; Wikipedia, 2025; Human Rights Watch, 2002; Time, 2021). Labeling Muslims as “termites,” “pigs,” or “rakshasas” serves to dehumanize them morally and politically (Genocide Watch, 2023; Justice For All, 2025). In both contexts, this othering facilitated the erosion of legal protections—Nuremberg legal frameworks in Germany and sedition/religious conversion laws (e.g., “Love Jihad”

bans) in India. These laws legitimize exclusion and criminalization of Muslims, paving the way for systemic disenfranchisement (Human Rights Watch, 2020; ECLJ, 2022; Zenit, 2025). Overall, the BJP-RSS regime's parallels with Nazi Germany are more than rhetorical—state apparatuses, legal tools, ideology, and violence converge to position Muslims as enemies within, endangering their survival in India's polity (Chatterji, 2009; Jaffrelot, 2021).

Hindutva Ideology Threats to Religious Minorities in India

India's religious minorities—especially Muslims, but also Christians, Dalits/Adivasis, and Sikhs—face deeply entrenched and multifaceted threats across social, economic, political, and legal spheres. Under the rise of Hindu majoritarianism, these communities are increasingly portrayed as outsiders or threats to national unity. Muslims, in particular, are subjected to state-sponsored exclusion, hate speech, mob violence, and discriminatory laws (Chatterji, 2009; Jaffrelot, 2021; Human Rights Watch, 2020). Christians encounter anti-conversion legislation and attacks on churches (ZENIT, 2025; Human Rights Watch, 1999; ECLJ, 2022), while Dalits and Adivasis face cultural erasure and systemic marginalization (Van der Veer, 1994). The convergence of state policy, social prejudice, and political rhetoric has created a climate of fear, silencing dissent and undermining India's secular and democratic foundations.

1) Social and Physical Threats: Muslims as Internal Enemies

In contemporary India, Muslims are often constructed as the "other"—labeled as "infiltrators" or "termites" in political discourse, particularly by leaders within the ruling BJP and its ideological allies (Justice For All, 2025; Genocide Watch, 2023). This rhetoric frames Muslims as demographic and cultural threats to the imagined Hindu nation, fueling public hostility. According to a 2025 Reuters report, hate speech incidents rose by 74% in 2024 alone, with the majority of targets being Muslims, especially in BJP-ruled states (Reuters, 2025). Major communal riots, such as the 2002 Gujarat pogrom and 2020 Delhi riots, resulted in the deaths of hundreds of Muslims, destruction of property, and forced displacement (Human Rights Watch, 2002; Wikipedia, 2025). These acts of collective violence were often enabled by political inaction—or active complicity. As a consequence, many Muslim families have been pushed out of mixed neighborhoods and now reside in isolated, underdeveloped enclaves like Jamia Nagar in Delhi (Time, 2021). These post-conflict ghettos reinforce social exclusion, deepen economic marginalization, and serve as permanent reminders of state failure to protect minority citizens.

2) Political and Legal Marginalization

Muslims in India today face unprecedented levels of political exclusion and legal discrimination. The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), enacted in 2019, represents a historic shift away from India's secular framework by explicitly excluding Muslims from

eligibility for fast-tracked citizenship (Human Rights Watch, 2020; Reuters, 2024; Indian Express, 2024). While it offers asylum to persecuted non-Muslim minorities from neighboring countries, its omission of Muslims violates Article 14 of the Indian Constitution and raises alarm under international human rights frameworks (Swart, 2020).

This law is tightly linked to the National Register of Citizens (NRC), an identification initiative that has already led to the exclusion of 1.9 million people in Assam—many of them Muslims—who now face detention or statelessness (Time, 2021; Foreign Policy, 2024). Nationwide, this framework enables the state to selectively target Muslims for exclusion under the guise of documentation.

When Muslims mobilized against these discriminatory laws through peaceful protests—most notably at Shaheen Bagh and Jamia Millia Islamia—the response was often brutal. In Uttar Pradesh, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's administration cracked down with arrests, curfews, and asset seizures, disproportionately targeting Muslim demonstrators (Time, 2019; Wikipedia, 2025; Human Rights Watch, 2020).

This evolving legal landscape is not merely a policy shift—it is a strategic mechanism for disenfranchising Muslims and reshaping Indian citizenship along religious lines. It consolidates their marginalization, positioning Muslims not as equal citizens, but as a suspect population under perpetual scrutiny.

3) Economic Discrimination and Ghettoization

Muslim communities across India face structural economic discrimination that hinders their upward mobility and deepens marginalization. A significant driver of this inequality is ghettoization—the forced concentration of Muslims into densely populated, economically neglected urban enclaves due to communal violence, land policies, and social exclusion (Chatterji, 2009; Jaffrelot, 2021). Areas like Jamia Nagar and Loni in Delhi are emblematic, where Muslim families—often displaced by riots or social pressures—live with poor sanitation, limited municipal services, and crumbling infrastructure (Time, 2021).

This spatial exclusion is not coincidental but part of a larger pattern of state apathy and policy neglect. Muslim-dominated districts consistently receive less public investment in education, health care, roads, and housing, even when populations are dense and impoverished (Jaffrelot, 2021). According to the Sachar Committee Report (2006), Muslims lag behind even Scheduled Castes and Tribes in access to formal employment, literacy, and credit from banks—an alarming trend that continues today.

Many Muslims face difficulty obtaining housing outside Muslim areas due to communal prejudice in real estate markets. Employers also often reject Muslim candidates based on their names, attire, or perceived religious identity (Human Rights Watch, 2020; Guardian, 2020). This compounded discrimination—social,

institutional, and market-based—traps large segments of the Muslim population in poverty and isolates them from economic opportunity.

4) State-Sanctioned Hate Speech and Policy Bias

The political climate in India has grown increasingly hostile toward Muslims, largely due to the normalization of hate speech from influential political leaders (Reuters, 2025; Justice For All, 2025). Muslims are frequently referred to as “infiltrators,” “terrorists,” or “demographic threats” by senior figures in the ruling BJP, contributing to a toxic narrative that casts Indian Muslims as outsiders rather than citizens (Genocide Watch, 2023; Al Jazeera Institute, 2025). This dehumanizing rhetoric finds legal expression through discriminatory policies and policing. Laws such as the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) have been disproportionately used against Muslims. Routine profiling, arbitrary arrests, and prolonged detentions—often without trial—target Muslims accused of vague affiliations with “Love Jihad,” anti-national activities, or terrorism, despite a lack of substantial evidence (Human Rights Watch, 2020; Wikipedia, 2025).

The sedition law and anti-conversion laws are also wielded selectively against Muslim preachers, activists, and interfaith couples, criminalizing normal civic behavior (ECLJ, 2022; ZENIT, 2025). This legal harassment silences dissent and reinforces the perception that Muslims are inherently suspect.

Even mainstream media, often dubbed “Godi media” (lapdog media), amplifies state-sponsored narratives and refrains from critically reporting on hate crimes against Muslims (Al Jazeera Institute, 2025; Time, 2023; The Guardian, 2024). This convergence of political speech, legal tools, and media complicity enables systemic anti-Muslim bias and creates a climate in which violence and exclusion are normalized.

5) Comparative Threats Against Other Minorities

While Muslims remain the primary targets of state-backed marginalization in India, other religious and social minorities—including Christians, Dalits/Adivasis, and Sikhs—also face systemic threats under the current Hindutva-driven political environment (Chatterji, 2009; Human Rights Watch, 1999). In over 10 BJP-ruled states, anti-conversion laws criminalize religious conversions from Hinduism, disproportionately affecting Christians and Muslims (ECLJ, 2022; ZENIT, 2025). These laws are often used to harass pastors, disrupt religious gatherings, and arrest interfaith couples under false pretenses.

In 2024 alone, Uttar Pradesh recorded 188 incidents involving alleged forced conversions, many of which lacked credible evidence (Reuters, 2025). Violent outbreaks, such as the 2008 Kandhamal riots in Odisha, saw hundreds of churches destroyed and thousands of Christians displaced or injured (Human Rights Watch, 1999; Chatterji, 2009). Meanwhile, Dalits and Adivasis who

convert to Islam or Christianity lose constitutional protections under India's reservation system, making them more vulnerable to bonded labor, human trafficking, and systemic caste-based violence (Van der Veer, 1994). These communities continue to face police inaction and social exclusion, particularly in rural and tribal areas. Sikhs, though a politically visible minority, carry historical wounds from events like the 1984 anti-Sikh pogroms, and continue to be targeted by periodic hate speech and marginalization in state narratives (Wikipedia, 2025; Reuters, 2024). Collectively, these patterns reflect a broader strategy of religious and ethnic homogenization, where all non-Hindu identities are either suppressed, coerced into silence, or rendered politically irrelevant (Jaffrelot, 2021; KIIR, 2025)

Media and Propaganda by BJP-RSS

Under the BJP-RSS political ecosystem, media has become a powerful instrument for constructing and amplifying the narrative of Muslim minorities as internal threats. From mainstream television to digital platforms and cinema, propaganda has evolved into a systematic tool for promoting Hindutva ideology, silencing dissent, and normalizing Islamophobia (Jaffrelot, 2021; KIIR, 2025; Chatterji, 2009)

1) Control Over News and Print Media

A growing number of Indian news channels and newspapers have been accused of operating as “Godi Media”—a term describing pro-government outlets that align with BJP narratives (Al Jazeera Institute, 2025). Investigative journalism has diminished, replaced by sensationalist coverage that disproportionately portrays Muslims as violent, unpatriotic, or linked to terrorism (Time, 2023; Washington Post, 2023). Journalists reporting on lynchings, police brutality, or anti-CAA protests—especially those critical of the government—have faced sedition charges, unlawful detentions, or digital censorship (Human Rights Watch, 2020; Wikipedia, 2025). The Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) and Information Technology (IT) Rules 2021 have been strategically applied to suppress Muslim voices and those advocating minority rights (Foreign Policy, 2021; ECLJ, 2022).

2) Bollywood and Islamophobic Narratives

Indian cinema, particularly Bollywood, has increasingly mirrored nationalist rhetoric. Films like *The Kashmir Files* (2022) and *Kerala Story* (2023) portrayed Muslims as anti-national or as radical threats to Hindu society (Chatterji, 2009; KIIR, 2025). These narratives, often supported by state leaders and public figures, receive official promotion, state tax exemptions, or screening in government institutions (Jaffrelot, 2021; Reuters, 2025). On the other hand, films promoting Muslim protagonists or peaceful coexistence struggle to receive support or face backlash. This politicization of entertainment serves to entrench communal divisions and indoctrinate the public against Muslims under the guise of national security storytelling (The Guardian, 2024; Time, 2023).

3) IT Cell, Disinformation, and Hate Campaigns

The BJP's online operations, often referred to as the IT Cell, play a central role in digital propaganda. Through coordinated troll armies, mass WhatsApp forwards, manipulated videos, and trending hashtags, a constant stream of Islamophobic content floods Indian social media (Washington Post, 2023; Wired, 2024). This includes misinformation about "Love Jihad," "Corona Jihad," and doctored videos of Muslims attacking Hindus—often later debunked, but widely shared before retractions are issued (The Guardian, 2024; Time, 2023; Genocide Watch, 2023). Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp have been used to incite riots, justify lynchings, or harass Muslim journalists and activists (The Guardian, 2020; Al Jazeera Institute, 2025; Justice For All, 2025).

Hindutva Ideology and International Response

India's domestic repression of Muslim minorities under the BJP RSS regime—through policies like CAA/NRC, media censorship, and targeted violence—has prompted sustained international concern, diplomatic statements, and institutional criticism (Human Rights Watch, 2020; Reuters, 2024; Swart, 2020).

1) United Nations and Global NGOs

The United Nations has repeatedly condemned the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) as "fundamentally discriminatory." In March 2024, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights stated that CAA violates India's international human rights obligations and risks disenfranchising India's 200 million Muslims (Reuters, 2024; Swart, 2020). UN Special Rapporteurs have formally urged New Delhi to examine the law's impact on minority rights in domestic courts. Human Rights Watch, in *Shoot the Traitors* (2020), and Amnesty International have documented official complicity in violence against Muslims during anti-CAA protests, urging investigations and repeal of discriminatory citizenship laws (Human Rights Watch, 2020; Human Rights Watch, 2020b).

2) Western Democracies: Balancing Diplomacy and Rights

Western governments have expressed growing unease. The U.S. State Department, the UN, and the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) warned that CAA could lead to mass statelessness and legal disenfranchisement for Muslims (Reuters, 2024; The Indian Express, 2024). USCIRF counseled considering sanctions against Indian officials if the citizenship policy advanced. The European Parliament adopted a resolution in late 2023, criticizing CAA/NRC as "dangerously divisive" and urging repeal amid broader concerns over press freedom and civil rights (The Indian Express, 2024; Human Rights Watch, 2020).

3) Regional Human Rights Advocacy

The U.S., EU, and UN interventions reflect a nuanced global shift: no direct sanctions have been imposed, emphasizing instead diplomatic pressure and condemnation. Regional UN experts and

human rights groups have highlighted parallels to ethnic cleansing—citing Assam’s experience with nearly 1.9 million Muslims excluded from its NRC, many now living under fear of detention and statelessness (Time, 2021; Foreign Policy, 2024; Wikipedia, 2025). Ongoing legal cases—such as *Mohammad Salimullah v. Union of India*—reflect international scrutiny of India’s deportation policies toward Rohingya Muslims (Wikipedia, 2025).

4) Diaspora and NGO Mobilization

The global Indian diaspora, rights organizations, and Muslim-majority nations have amplified the issue. During incidents like the Haridwar hate speech controversy, diaspora groups mobilized digital campaigns under hashtags like #StopIndianMuslimGenocide, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) formally urged the UN to act (Wikipedia, 2025; Genocide Watch, 2023). Countries such as Pakistan, Qatar, Kuwait, and Iran have summoned Indian envoys following Islamophobic remarks by domestic politicians, signaling rising diplomatic friction (Reuters, 2024; The Guardian, 2020).

Policy Recommendations

1) Policy Recommendations to the International Community

- i. Diplomatic Accountability:** Democratic allies must hold India accountable in global forums for violating human rights and undermining constitutional secularism.
- ii. Human Rights Monitoring:** The UN and international watchdogs must intensify scrutiny of CAA/NRC enforcement, hate speech by public officials, and targeted violence.
- iii. Support for Indian Civil Society:** Empower and fund secular NGOs, media platforms, and human rights defenders that are resisting Hindutva extremism.

3) Recommendations to Indian Institutions and Civil Society

- i. Rebuild the Democratic Consensus:** Political parties, intellectuals, and civil society must reclaim the secular and inclusive vision of India enshrined in the Constitution.
- ii. Uphold Legal Protections for Minorities:** Judiciary and law enforcement must be insulated from political influence and act as neutral defenders of rights.
- iii. Ensure Fair Representation:** Proportional representation of Muslims in legislatures, administration, and academia must be addressed to end political invisibility.
- iv. Promote Interfaith Harmony:** Initiatives in education, media, and culture must focus on countering Islamophobia and restoring social cohesion.
- v. Invest in Inclusive Development:** Economic policies must prioritize Muslim-majority areas, reversing decades of underdevelopment and discrimination.

Conclusion

As the BJP enters its third consecutive term in power, it is increasingly evident that the government has failed to deliver

inclusive governance, national unity, and communal harmony. Instead of promoting a vision of pluralistic democracy, the regime has weaponized religion for political gain, pushing forward the Hindutva agenda at the expense of India's secular foundations. The systematic targeting of Muslim minorities—through discriminatory laws, hate speech, media propaganda, and economic marginalization—has not only alienated nearly 200 million citizens but has also dangerously fractured India's social fabric.

No nation can claim peace, stability, or progress while excluding such a significant portion of its population. Muslims are not outsiders—they are integral to India's identity, economy, history, and future. Their political disenfranchisement, social demonization, and legal persecution signal not strength, but weakness in governance. Without justice for Muslims and other minorities, India cannot realize internal peace or command respect on the international stage. The current trajectory risks escalating communal violence, regional instability, and international isolation. In essence, India cannot move forward by pushing Muslims backward. The failures of BJP's third term reveal that exclusionary politics only breeds resistance, instability, and loss of moral legitimacy. A prosperous and peaceful India must be built with, not against, its minorities. The responsibility lies not only with Indian institutions but with the global community to stand for justice, equality, and human dignity in the world's largest democracy.

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