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Hindu Nationalism and Rising Anti-Islamism in India

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Abstract

The weakening of the secular tradition, which has been influential in Indian political life since its inception, and the political rise of the Hindu right culminated in the overwhelming mandate of the Hindu nationalist BJP led by Narendra Modi in the 2014 elections. In 2014, the Hindutva ideology that the BJP was fuelled by had the opportunity to spread to all segments of society. As the BJP consolidated its political support from the community in 2019, it became even more prominent as a widespread worldview in India. Backed by the power of Hindutva supporters, the BJP systematically and deliberately targets the non-Hindu population, especially Muslims. Hindutva ideology, the Hindu right wing's ideology of ethnoreligious exclusion, has begun to affect Muslims through political decisions taken by the government and socially triggered acts of oppression and violence, often with the government's deliberate silence. This study discusses the historical and intellectual origins of the Hindutva ideology to reveal the current trends of the BJP's Islamophobic policies through a literature review. In this study, in which the current tendencies of the BJP's Islamophobic policies are tried to be revealed by reviewing the literature, the historical and intellectual origins of the Hindutva ideology are mentioned. The article also analyses the role of the media, which the Modi government uses for its main interests, in fuelling Islamophobia through misinformation and the discourse of 'corona jihad', particularly in the aftermath of the global Covid-19 pandemic. Ultimately, it is argued that the anti-Islamic policies in contemporary India - even though they have come to light with the BJP's rule - should be seen as the social and political projections of the Hindutva ideology, which sees India's ethnic and religious diversity as a threat rather than an opportunity and which was 'constructed' long before the BJP.

Keywords: Hindutva, Bharatiya Janata Party, Narendra Modi, Hindu nationalism, Islamophobia

Hindu Milliyetçiliği ve Hindistan'da Yükselen İslam Kaşıtlığı

Öz

Kuruluşundan bu yana Hindistan siyasal hayatında etkin olan laik geleneğinin zayıflaması ve Hindu sağının siyasi yükselişi, Narendra Modi liderliğindeki Hindu milliyetçisi BJP'nin 2014 seçimlerinde ezici bir yetkiyle iktidara gelmesiyle doruğa ulaşmıştır. 2014'te BJP'nin beslendiği Hindutva ideolojisi toplumun tüm kesimlerine yayılma fırsatı bulmuş ve BJP'nin 2019'da toplumdan aldığı siyasi desteği pekiştirmesiyle Hindistan'da daha da yaygın bir dünya görüşü olarak öne çıkmıştır. Hindutva destekçilerinin gücünü arkasına alan BJP, başta Müslümanlar olmak üzere Hindu olmayan nüfusu sistematik ve kasıtlı olarak hedef almaktadır. Hindu sağ kanadının etno-dini dışlama ideolojisi olarak Hindutva ideolojisi, sadece hükümetçe alınan siyasi kararlarla değil, toplumsal olarak tetiklenen ve çoğu zaman hükümetin kasıtlı bir biçimde sessiz kaldığı baskı ve şiddet eylemleriyle de Müslümanları etkilemeye başlamıştır. Literatür taraması yapılarak BJP'nin İslamofobik politikalarının güncel yönelimlerin ortaya konulmaya çalışıldığı bu çalışmada, Hindutva ideolojisinin tarihsel ve düşünsel kökenlerine değinilerek yer verilmektedir. Makalede ayrıca, Modi hükümetinin kendi temel çıkarları için kullandığı medyanın, özellikle küresel Covid-19 salgını sonrasında, yanlış bilgilendirme ve 'korona cihadı' söylemi yoluyla İslamofobiyi körüklemedeki rolüne değinilmektedir. Nihai olarak çalışmada -her ne kadar BJP iktidarıyla gün yüzüne çıksa da- günümüz Hindistan'ındaki İslam karşıtı politikaların, Hindistan'ın etnik ve dini çeşitliğini bir fırsattan ziyade bir tehdit olarak gören ve BJP'den çok önce 'inşa edilen' Hindutva ideolojisinin toplumsal ve siyasal izdüşümleri olarak görülmesi gerektiği ileri sürülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Hindutva, Bharatiya Janata Partisi, Hindu milliyetçiliği, İslamofobi

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Introduction

The lotus flower is one of the symbols of Indian religious thought. The meaning of this symbol is this: Just as the lotus flower emerges from the mud and reaches the surface of the water without being stained with soil or water, *the wisdom* that emerges from the human body develops its true qualities after rising above the swamp of *passion* and *ignorance*. The dark aspects of the deep turn into the pure water of the lotus flower (Izzetbegovic, 2011, p. 58). It is so ironic that the lotus flower is the logo of today India's leading party, BJP, full of *passion* for Hindutva and *ignorance* of Islam and Muslims. The hostility towards Islam and Muslims in India today has turned into hysteria. Since 2014, there have been numerous incidents of incitement to violence and attacks against Muslims, and the authorities have not taken meaningful action. In addition to the constant attacks on mosques and holy places or those who work there, direct attacks on individuals who are or are perceived as Muslims have become increasingly commonplace in the country. Even just a few reports in the press are enough to reveal the gravity of the situation.

A girl from a nomadic Muslim community that roams the forests of Kashmir was drugged, held captive in a temple, and sexually assaulted for a week before being strangled and battered to death with a stone in January 2018 (Schultz, p. 2019). In June 2019, a 24-year-old Muslim named Tabrez Ansari was beaten to death in Jharkhand. It turned out that Ansari was forced to praise the Hindu gods and was beaten for not doing so (Raj and Nordland, p. 2019). In May 2022, a 65-year-old mentally unstable man, Bhawarlal Jain, was found dead in Madhya Pradesh's Neemuch district. Two days after police Saturday arrested Dinesh Khushwaha [the husband of former Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) councilor Bina Khushwaha] who was seen in a video assaulting Jain while asking him if his name was Mohammed (India Today, May 21, 2022; Sarkar, 2022).

Since gaining independence in 1947, India has been referred to as the most significant secular democracy[1] in the world, which hosts various languages, religions, and ethnic groups. India had set an excellent example to the other countries with the peaceful methods it had used in the independence process from colonial rule and had adopted a secular worldview in the post-colonial period. As the leading party in India's independence process, The Indian National Congress (INC) (or Congress Party) benefited from this feature in the eyes of the public as the umbrella organization that would form India's post-independence identity.[2] The INC pursued a policy that stood at an equal distance to all ethnic and religious groups. Hence, this administration of the Congress, an egalitarian and secular political culture, has settled in India. The INC's influence in Indian society has been significant as an all-encompassing party that seeks to provide a pan-Indian representation for all its groups. The Indian constitution is very secular, conceding much autonomy and freedom to religious minorities (Singh, 2005).

Despite the efforts of the INC to govern the country with a 'secular' understanding as a continuation of its role in the independence process, the country's introverted policy and the failure to achieve economic development, in particular, drove large masses away from this party. Having emerged from the losses of the INC, the political vacuum, when combined with the destruction caused by neoliberalism in the country, resulted in the right-wing Hindu nationalists coming to power and activating the Hindutva (Hinduism) program, which can be described as a kind of Hinduization (Kumar, 2021, p.178). This program led to a social division by marginalizing Muslims in India.

While the Hindutva ideology, which appealed to a narrower circle until the 1990s, spread to different segments of society after the increasing influence of the BJP. Especially since the landslide victories of the BJP in the 2014 and 2019 elections, the principles of multiculturalism and secular constitution have practically started to give way to Hindu nationalism (Appadurai, 2017, p. 20). Hatred and violence against minority communities have emerged (Bajoria, 2020). The deteriorating situation facing Muslims as a religious minority in India has worsened under the

majoritarian Hindu nationalist ideology of the BJP. The Modi government continues its "anti-Islam" practices accompanied by terrible brutality. The Hindu nationalists claim that India's harmony, peace, and welfare can only be achieved under a *Ram Rajya³* (Vaishnav, p. 2019). Adopting a religious nationalism that favors Hindus, the BJP's anti-Muslim policy increases social unrest immensely, and the result of extreme polarization grows alarming. This dramatic change in the politics of India is remarkable. Gandhi's vision of equal rights for all religions has been shaken since 2014 in India. The majority Hindu identity is excluded from politics, and all ethnic and religious groups are treated equally.

However, it would be insufficient to claim that 2014 was a milestone in the upsurge of religious nationalism and anti-Islamism in India. Although the Hindu far-right movement and anti-Islamism in India seem to have been on the world agenda very recently, the background of these debates dates back to earlier times. Instead of being a new phenomenon, Hindutva represents continuity with the past rather than a rupture from the past (Ahmad and Kang, 2022, p. 132). In this context, this study puts forward the assumption that the anti-Islamic ideology of the BJP that rules the country nowadays was shaped earlier, and the article aims to reveal the dimensions of the rising anti-Islamism or Islamophobia in today's India in the context of religious nationalism as a distinctive sort of nationalism. In the first part, the historical and intellectual background of Hindutva thought as the central dynamic of Hindu nationalism is explained. In the second part, the discussion of Hindu nationalism in post-colonial Indian politics is covered, including the religious-nationalist and Islamophobic elements of the BJP policies. The article also analyses the role of the media, which government uses for its main interests in fuelling Islamophobia through misinformation (Ghosh, 2022) and the discourse of 'corona jihad', particularly in the aftermath of the global Covid-19 pandemic.

Intellectual and Historical Origins of Hindu Nationalism

It is necessary to consider the historical origins of Hindu nationalism⁴ to understand the anti-Muslim policies in Indian politics in the contemporary world coherently; the concept of Hindutva has principal significance in establishing a Hindu nationalist discourse (Shani, 2021, p. 268). In other words, to understand today's Hindutva that the world is witnessing now, it is indispensable to search for its historical origins (Basu, 2020).

Hindutva's religion-based concept of nationalism amounts to cultural denial and oppression, i.e., Hinduisation (Panikkar, 2004). Although Hindutva ideology, a modern right-wing ultranationalist formulation (Natrajan, 2022, p. 303), was first mentioned in Vinayak Damodar Savarkar's (1883-1966) essay 'Hindutva' (1923), the first ideological improvement of Hindu nationalism dates from the last quarter of 19th century. Despite the emergence in the modern world, Hindu nationalism's origins have been based on colonial rule and, notably, colonial policies of categorization and inventory (Kaviraj, 2010). Later, a 'national' cultural formation based on European orientalism, proclaiming Hindu supremacy, portraying Hindus as victims of Muslims rather than British colonial rule, gradually took solid form and became clearer (Appadurai, 1990; Sarkar, 2002).

The discontent created by the British colonial rule in Indian society prepared the appropriate ground for building the necessary national consciousness for the anti-colonial struggle. Religious and social reform movements led by Indian intellectuals in the 19th century paved the way for the national awakening in society to be channeled into this struggle.⁵ The INC was founded in 1885 in Bombay. The two groups, who disagreed on the aims and methods of the Congress, developed two different ideologies of nationalism. These two nationalisms became two separate forces that steered Indian politics in the fight for independence and after the independence period. The distinction between these two nationalisms constitutes the historical origins of the divide between the INC, which was in power after independence, and the BJP, which came to power after its 60-year rule. The moderates, adopting the ideas spread by Brahmo

Samaj (Society of Brahma), founded by the reformist Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833) in 1828, built a civic nationalism that saw Indians as part of the national unity, regardless of language, religion or race. On the other hand, the extremists under the influence of Arya Samaj (Society of Aryans), founded by Swami Dayananda Saraswati in 1875, built an ethnic nationalism that prioritized Hindu religion and culture, thus excluding non-believers. This movement was against the spread of Christianity and English education and the Muslim influence in social life as a means of education and language.

Arya Samaj, based on religion as the basis of national unity in India, laid the foundations of ethnic nationalism. "The other" of this nationalism, called Hindu nationalism, is not the British but the Muslims. According to this view, Muslim rule existed in India when the British occupation occurred. The British had taken over the administration from the Muslims, not the Indians. Therefore, according to Hindu nationalists, the main enemy that caused the breakdown of national unity was the Muslims.

To establish a monolithic Hindu community and unite against the British and the Muslims, Arya Samaj started the "Cow Protection (Gau Raksha)" Movement that highlighted and popularized the significance of the cow for Hindus.[6] This movement united the Hindu community against the Muslims who murdered the 'mother cow' (gau mata) and asked the British administration to stop their shared massacre. The importance of the Cow Protection Movement for nascent Hindu nationalism is that it views Muslims (and the British) as a threat to the natural order and stability of the Hindu community and argues that the Hibarbaric practices threaten the Hindu nation was Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856–1920) leading the Congress, who noticed from the Cow Protection Movement that popular religious symbols and festivals related to these symbols had vital importance in the effort to 'nationalize the masses. He used the traditional festivals, which contributed to the creation of Hindu identity, to propagate nationalist ideas through songs and speeches, such as Ganapati Utsav (festival)[7] organized in 1894 and Shivaji Mahotsav (the birthday celebration of the Maratha King Shivaji) in 1896. These events buttressed the Hindu culture dimension of Hindu pride and identity translated into Hindu nationalism or cultural nationalism from an Indian perspective,[8] and like Dayananda Tilak argued that the source of unity in India was the Hindu religion and values. Influenced by Mazzini's cultural nationalism, Tilak believed that the hallmark of an ardent nationalism was sharing a common culture and history. He developed the notion that the nation is not secular but rather reappraised, re-mythologized, a heroical Hindu nation carried forward by Moonje, Golwalkar, and Savarkar (Rao, 2010).

Manifesto of Hindu Nationalism: Hindutva

Contemporary India can only be made sense of by dissecting Hindutva. Hindutva, a neo-Sanskrit name, is formed by adding the Sanskrit masculine suffix '–tva' 'Hindu' and means Hinduism. Hindutva regards national and religious identity: an Indian is a Hindu—an equation that puts significant Indian religious communities outside the nation, such as Christians and Muslims; Hindutva emphasizes that Hindus form the majority community in the country and should rule India as a Hindu state (Hindu Rashtra) (Van der Veer, 1994, p. 1-2). Describing Hindutva as a mythic civilizational construction (Bannerji 2006, 364), Bannerji states that as a distillation of casteist Hinduism, the ideal of Hindutva of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (National Volunteer Service - RSS)[9] is a moral-political ideology poisoning the whole society. Presented as a natural and elevated form of civilization, Hindutva is described as 'ethnic nationalism' that calls Hindus political and social action against their 'enemies,' specifically the Muslims (Bannerji, 2016, p. 19). Thus, Hindutva-based 'Indian' culture and identity developed its accents of difference not contrary to British but essentially contrary to Muslims (Bannerji, 2011, p. 59).

Describing Hindutva as a fascist ideology that supports Hindu supremacy, particularly over Muslims, Truschke claims that Hindu nationalists blame all wrongs in Indian history on Muslims. She also notes that Hindu nationalists rarely distinguish between groups of Muslims, whether

past versus present (Truschke, 2020, p. 5). According to the believers in Hindutva, the period of the Delhi Sultanate (13th–16th centuries) and Mughal Empire (16th–18th centuries) is viewed as a foreign invasion (Waikar, 2018, p. 167). Hindu nationalists described the Muslim rule of the Mughal Empire as a thousand years of 'shame' according to the Hindus, the long rule of Muslims hindered India's development as a nation. To regain their nationhood, the Hindus should delete this undesirable history (Wariavwalla, 2000, p. 595). In this context, Hindu nationalism gives the Hindus a privilege and a superior status in India by basing the history of the Hindu religion and Hindu society in ancient times. The ancient Hindus are considered the natives of India, while the Muslims are declared foreigners by Hindu nationalists (Katju, 2005, p. 178-179). Thus, this nationalism established its existence based on anti-Muslim.

"Hindutva" is usually identified with Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, the political activist whose writings are accepted as foundational texts by many vigorous Hindu nationalists. His 1923 essay, originally titled "Essentials of Hindutva" and retitled "Hindutva: Who is a Hindu" in its 1928 reprint, is the most frequently, often the only, cited text in this regard (Paranjape 2017). Nevertheless, before Svakar, in 1892, Chandranath Basu (1844-1910) had published a Bangla leaflet titled Hindutva, Hindu Prakrita Itihas ("Hindutva, the Authentic History of the Hindus") (Gupta, 2021). So the term "Hindutva" was already a part of Bengali vocabulary in the nineteenth century (Chaturvedi, 2022). Moreover, this concept was later used by nationalist figures like Tilak. Its contemporary usage is derived from the book of V.D. Savarkar (Bhatt, 2001, p. 77). According to Savarkar, the Indian nation is, at its core, a Hindu nation—a Hindu regards sovereign Indian land as both the fatherland and holy ground. Although Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, and Buddhists fulfill both criteria, other religious communities, such as Christians, Jews, Parsees, and Muslims, do not regard India as their natural holy land. For Hindu nationalists, India's Hindu identity can encourage the coherent national community needed for social stability and global recognition (Hansen, 1999, p. 11).

For Savarkar, Hindutva can be explained by the following principles. Firstly, Hindutva has a geographical character. Hindutva contends that Hindustan (land of Hindus) includes what is known today as India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. This concept has been referred to as Akhand Bharat (undivided India) since partition in 1947. Maps of the so-called Akhand Bharat served as the front piece for the BJP's publications, such as pamphlets and posters (Krishna, 1994, p. 520). On the website of BJP, there are expressions including 'Bharat Mata ki Jai' as the central theme of the party: "'Bharat' (our land), 'Mata. Have faith in cultural nationalism." Secondly, Savarkar includes a race consciousness based on Hindutva's common cultural blood ties. The third is the shared cultural denominator. According to this view, the primeval uniformity of Hindus is not an ideological assertion or a political project but a cultural legacy (Battaglia, 2017, p. 7). According to Hindutva doctrine, most Indian Muslims converted to Islam due to ignorance and forced recruitment. In other words, Muslims (also Christians) were genuine, at least ancestrally, Hindus with a false consciousness. According to this approach, conversion occurred because of using the sword in the case of Islam (and by material inducement under Christian colonialism) (Van der Veer, 2021, p. 7).

Moreover, conversions to Hinduism are mere "homecoming" (ghar wapsi), returning to their ancestral traditions (Rajeshwar and Amore, 2019). Thus, in the fourth principle, Savarkar reveals the common civilization heritage. He sees the history of a nation's civilization as the story of its ideas, activities, and accomplishments. Literature and art reflect the nation's views, while history and social institutions tell of its activities and achievements. Savarkar emphasizes common customs and ceremonies (festivals, celebrations, feasts, etc.) in the fifth principle. Finally, the culmination of Hindutva is revealed in the sixth item. According to Savarkar, the holy land of Indianness can only be in India. Desiring Hindutva to function as a "shield of protection" against Islam, Savarkar argued that Indian Muslims are not the essential elements of India. According to Savarkar, Muslims were dangerous to the presence of the 'Hindu Rashtra,' the actual state.

While Savarkar intellectually reveals the ideology of Hindu nationalism, the organization that demonstrates the action plan of the Hindus in the face of the Muslim threat is the RSS, founded in 1925 by K.B. Hedgewar and other Hindu militants after the Malabar Rebellion (Moplah Uprising) in 1921.[10] Founded as a cultural and paramilitary organization, RSS made Hindu-ness ('Hindutva') the ideological core of Indian political life and nationalist attempts, and it succeeded over the decades in gaining the support of many within the Congress movement, including some of its leaders (Stein, 2010, p. 33). The RSS aimed to mobilize Hindus politically in the name of cultural homogeneity. For Hedgewar, Hinduism must become the central element national identity of India after gaining independence from Britain.

The organization of the RSS was authoritarian in form and practice (Pillai, 1996, p.. 67). As a grass-roots organization, the RSS was shaped in the image of fascist Italian dictator Benito Mussolini's Balilla, an Italian Fascist youth movement constituted in 1926 to educate and construct a new, 'Fascist' generation devoted to Mussolini (Teltumbde, 2020, p. 115). Hindutva's intellectual pillars included elements of global ideological engagements such as Fascism and Nazism (Leidig, 2020, p. 220-221; Snehi, 2003, p. 14). In 1939 Madhavrao Sadashivrao Golwalkar, 'the chief guide' (sarsanghchalak) of the RSS, called to replicate Hitler's extermination of the Jews in India targeting Muslims, writing that Germany's elimination of the country of the Semitic Race (the Jews) was a helpful example for them in 'Hindusthan' to learn and profit by (Egorova, 2008, p. 42).

The RSS movement, which took its intellectual ground from the Hindutva ideology and aimed to spread this ideology, also played a meaningful role in strengthening the militaristic aspect of Hindu nationalism. Because this movement also aimed at gaining physical strength for the weak and divided Hindus against Muslims who were organized powerfully in the Khilafat Movement.[11] By the 1930s, RSS volunteers (swayamsevak) had become full-time organizers (pracharak) who wore their uniforms, attended the annual officer training camps training, and pledged themselves as a whole (body, mind, and being) to the preservation and development of the Hindu nation under the saffron-colored banner of the RSS. This formation, which strengthened the Hindus as a militant, united, and aggressive force, primarily targeted Muslims and forced the minorities to return to Hinduism using violence. The RSS, defining and disseminating the concept of Hinduism, saw Hinduism firstly as a "cultural nationalism" and secondly as a "political nationalism" when all Islamic remains, and perhaps of Muslims themselves, disappeared (Bannerji, 2011, p. 86-87).

Hindu Nationalism in the Postcolonial Period

In the post-colonial period, with India's independence from British rule, the division of the Indian subcontinent into two separate states, India and Pakistan, was simultaneous. The fact that this division based on religion did not occur peacefully has escalated the tension between Hindus and Muslims. Gandhi wanted to stop the post-partition massacres and establish good relations with Pakistan. Hindu nationalists were outraged when Pakistan asked India to share the treasury funds. On the other hand, Gandhi was willing to act justly, so he approved the partition and accepted a fair division. Again on January 12, 1948, Gandhi announced that he would start a death fast to end hostility and establish friendship between Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs.[12] He ended the fast on January 18, when he received word from the community leaders that the fighting would end. In an environment where communal hatred spread, Hindu nationalists interpreted Gandhi's action as pro-Muslim. In any case, Hindu nationalists saw the country's division as a defeat, and according to them, this defeat was the result of concessions made by Gandhi to the Muslims. The anger of radical Hindus towards Muslims was directed at Gandhi. Because of the tension, on January 30, 1948, Nathuram Godse, a fanatical Hindu and former RSS member, assassinated Gandhi.[13] The death of Gandhi, which shocked the whole country, meant for the RSS to be banned

and for many members of the organization to be arrested and to continue their activities underground.[14]

The BJP's Politics of Religious Nationalism and Rising Islamophobia

As Basu argues, it is impossible to comprehend the BJP solely as a political party formed as a peripheral party in the early 1980s; it should be considered within the broader framework Hindu nationalist movement established in the Sangh Parivaar[15], the family of Hindu nationalist organizations (Basu, 2020). Having strong links to the RSS, the most critical organization within the Sangh Parivaar, the BJP must be viewed in collaboration with this movement (Basu, 2006). As discussed above, the RSS was inspired by the ideology of contemporary European fascist movements (Jaffrelot, 1999) and has a strong presence throughout India; it is still the basis of the Hindu nationalist movement today (Sarkar, 1994, p. 10-15). The RSS influences political strategies and the appointment of most party members with a background in the RSS, including the current prime minister of India, Narendra Modi (Jaffrelot, 2007). The political success of the BJP depends explicitly on its alliance with the RSS and one of its affiliates, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council - VHP), an organization of religious leaders.

The political parties called Hindu Mahasabha and Bharatiya Jana Sangh (Indian People's Association; BJS) were earlier incarnations of the BJP. They became representatives for Hindu nationalism in the 1950s and 1960s, although they were unsuccessful in Hindu elections before the BJP. In other words, they helped to reproduce the language of Hindu nationalism that the BJP would build in the 1980s (Chacko, 2018, p. 13). So the BJP traces its roots to the BJS, which was established in 1951 as the political wing of the pro-Hindu group RSS by Shyama Prasad Mukherjee to fill the gap that occurred by the downturn of Balakrishna Shivram Moonje's Hindu Mahasabha[16] in the 1940 (Chacko, 2019, p. 5-6). The BJS advocated rebuilding India through Hindu culture and called for forming a strong, unified state.[17]

In 1977, the BJS, led by Atal Bihari Vajpayee, joined with three other political parties to form the Janata Party and took over the reins of government. Plagued by factionalism and infighting, however, the government collapsed in July 1979. The BJP was formally established in 1980, following a split within the Janata coalition by dissidents whose leaders wanted to ban elected BJS officials from joining the RSS. The BJS then reorganized as the BJP under the leadership of Vajpayee, Lal Krishan Advani, and Murali Manohar Joshi.

The BJP began to have electoral success in 1989. Because it capitalized on an anti-Muslim feeling by calling for the destruction of Babri Masjid (Mosque of Bābur), built in 1528 by the Mughal ruler Babur in an area in Ayodhya (formerly known as Faizabad) considered sacred by Hindus.[18] By 1991 the BJP had considerably increased its political appeal, capturing 117 seats in the Lok Sabha (lower chamber of the Indian parliament) and taking power in four states, including Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state. As a party promoting a Hindu view of Indian history (Sen, 2005) that fosters the consensus of a Hindu identity with a more general Indian identity (Ludden, 1996, p. 63), BJP's first action was symbolic political aggression in December 1992: the demolition of Babri Masjid. The mosque's destruction led to violence throughout the country, leaving more than 3,000 dead (Talbot and Singh, 2009, p. 150) because organized pogroms were realized against Muslims by armed mobs of more than 300,000 militant Hindu nationalists (RSS, VHP, and BJP).

Hindu nationalism became a political force after the Ayodhya rioting (Kinnvall, 2019, p. 289). Following the electoral successes of the BJP in Gujarat, an anti-Muslim pogrom in Gujarat took place in February 2002. It was one of the most notorious mob attacks. In Gujarat, over 2,500 Muslims were cruelly murdered by Hindu mobs who wield political and social power.[19] Two hundred thousand families were also displaced in a state then led by Gujarat's chief minister and India's current prime minister, Narendra Modi (Shani, 2021, p. 270). It erupted on February 27,

2002, because of the burning of a train carrying Hindu pilgrims. After this incident, with the anti-Muslim winds in the world after the 9/11 attacks, nationalist Hindus blamed Muslims for the fire and described them as "terrorists." Hindu gangs, holding Muslims responsible for the fire, attacked Muslim neighborhoods and villages in Gujarat. Although it was understood that the train had accidentally caught fire in the following years, this was insufficient to prevent anti-Muslim violence at that time. According to reports from human rights organizations and non-governmental organizations, the attacks against Muslims were planned by the state and were accompanied by intense police participation and the cooperation of BJP government officials.[20]

Modi led the BJP to victory in the 2014 elections with a 66 percent turnout. The party came to power alone for the first time in history, gaining 282 seats in the Lok Sabha. Since coming to power at the national level in May 2014, The BJP has pursued radical policies that exacerbated Islamophobia in India, apparent provocative attacks on Muslims, and mass lynching. Firstly, Modi has used typical rhetoric, which has aroused a violent defender movement against beef consumption and those supposedly linked to it. The cow trade and beef consumption have significantly triggered increasing hate crimes against Muslims since the Modi regime came to power. New legislation has been made which criminalizes even further actions, such as the possession or sale of beef (Banaji, 2018, p. 338). The Cow Protection Movement[21] is an ideal tool to garner support from the masses and expand its power base. Since 2014, an extreme explosion of public violence has occurred, and the mass lynching of Muslim citizens suspected of possessing or selling cow meat has increased.

Secondly, after 2014 the influence of the government was most simply seen in the changing signs on the streets. Expressions written in Urdu, spoken by Muslims in general, have been removed from road signs. Although these small changes were perceived as a classical nationalist reflex at first, othering and violence continued to increase with each passing year. Moreover, in October 2018, the government pushed the nationwide revision of place names. It changed many place names with Islamic implications to names with a Hindu solid. For instance, the name of the city known as "Allahabad," built by the great Akbar of the Mughal Dynasty in the 16th century in northern India, has been renamed as "Prayagraj" (meaning Hindu holy land) by the government of Uttar Pradesh controlled by the BJP (Shida, 2020, p. 60). It seems that the primary purpose was to draw attention to the day "Kumbh Mela" in the city of Prayagraj, the crucial religious meeting in the world. An average of 15 million people attend the meeting, which includes the ritual called "bodily purification," which lasts an average of 55.

The landslide victory of the BJP in the general elections in 2019 (303 seats in the Lok Sabha) (Parciack, 2021, p. 540) and the re-election of Narendra Modi as Indian prime minister have increased concerns about the threat to India's religious and linguistically diverse democracy and the rule of law (Adeney, 2021, p. 394). Because Narendra Modi and his party, BJP, started to become more radical after winning a significant victory[22] in the 2019 election. In his second term, the Modi government decided to build the Ram Temple on the land of the Babri Masjid. The question of Babri Masjid was in the judicial process. However, after the great victory of the BJP in 2019, the Supreme Court of India (Ayodhya Judgment Supreme Court of India, 2019) gave a ruling, including permission for the Government of India to build a temple for the Ram on the ruins of the Babri Masjid (Van der Veer, 2021, p. 5).

Another issue against Muslims in 2019 was the amendment of Article 370, which guarantees the special status of Kashmir. This was a part of the 2019 election manifesto (Saleem, 2021). In August 2019, the Modi government retrieved the autonomous status of Jammu and Kashmir, the most Muslim-populated region in India (Medha, 2019). By abrogating Article 370 of the Indian Constitution that grants autonomy to Kashmir, Modi aimed to dissolve India's only Muslim-majority state into the Hindu-dominated Union (Shani, 2021, p. 273). The agreement made by the

Indian state with the Muslim population of Kashmir in the 1950s, in a way, gave Kashmir a unique cultural and political status.

With this special status granted to Kashmir, the Kashmir region's population and unique regional structure were preserved. This special status was maintained, and Indians were not allowed to become residents of the disputed territory. Since it did not allow foreigners to settle permanently in the disputed territory and prohibited them from buying land there (Rashid 2020), all decisions and rights regarding internal matters such as paying in Kashmir, buying land in Kashmir, and appointment as officials in Kashmir belonged to Kashmiris. In addition, only some people who were not citizens of Jammu and Kashmir could obtain the right of settlement in Kashmir in any way. This privilege also maintained the population balance in Kashmir and the Muslim population to preserve their right to self-determination in case of any plebiscite between India and Pakistan for Kashmir. However, such a territory within Indian territory troubled the ruling ultranationalist BJP administration. For this reason, Article 370, which was thought to prevent the increase of the Hindu population in the region, was abolished, and the rights of Kashmiris were taken away. It has been a confusing issue that after this process, the BJP government will implement a policy similar to Israel's policy of removing local settlers from their homes - either by buying or forcing them - in Palestine.

Another government-related problematic issue against Muslims is the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), signed into law in December 2019. The CAA differentiates citizens in the country on a religious base. It is argued that the law is designed to reorganize and homogenize Indian society by intensifying its exclusivist Hindu demography and character (Parciack, 2021, p. 538). In other words, religion has been the main determining factor in obtaining citizenship in India with the CAA. India opened its doors and granted citizenship to anyone oppressed in their own country, whose life was in danger, or whose freedom to practice their religion was restricted.

Still, the CAA excluded undocumented Muslims who allegedly fled persecution from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan (Van der Veer, 2021, p. 11). The law amends the Indian Citizenship Act of 1955, which requires a citizenship applicant to have resided in the country for 11 years. The CAA was the way for non-Muslim refugees (Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, Jainists, Parsi/Zoroastrians, and Christians) who immigrated to India from three neighboring countries, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan before December 31, 2014, to become Indian citizens. The basic logic of this law can be summarized as "Muslims cannot be persecuted in a Muslim country" and, therefore, "Muslims from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan cannot be a refugee." However, a logical question emerged 'What about the immigrants who are distressed because they constitute a religious/sectarian minority in other "neighboring" countries such as Rohingyas from neighboring Myanmar, Tamils from another neighboring country Sri Lanka, Ahmadis or Shiites from neighboring Pakistan?'. Thus, the lawmakers argue that the said countries are Muslim nations with a record of discrimination against their non-Muslim minorities. Hence, India should provide refuge to them, especially the Hindu refugees (Javed, 2020, p. 18). Yet these countries also violate the rights of Muslim groups (Khan and Lutful, 2021, p. 8).

On the other hand, the National Register of Citizens (NRC) was a law targeting the re-registration of citizenships given to people who migrated from Bangladesh, especially in the 1950s. Nevertheless, with subtle changes made by the Modi government, the NRC paved the way for the stripping of citizenship of Muslims who had immigrated after independence and had lived in India for many years. Even if Hindus or members of other religions, whose numbers are very few in the country, cannot certify that they belong to India in line with the NRC criteria, the NRC entitles them to obtain Indian citizenship in any case. Still, not only Muslims will benefit from it.

The CAA and the NRC seek to alienate and make Indian Muslims second-class citizens. After coming into operation of the CAA on 10 January 2020, the security forces and the RSS, as the

social organizing pillar of the Hindutva ideology, resorted to violence to suppress the Muslims protesting the change in the CAA law. During the six-day events, 53 people lost their lives, 200 were injured, and more than 2,000 people were arrested.

The Role of Media in Stoking Islamophobia: Media as Spreaders of Misinformation and 'Corona Jihad' Discourse

Hindutva ideology and its aim of "sociocultural homogenization" make Muslims and Islam the subject of various jihad discourses, such as "love jihad" regarding religious conversion. Especially after 2008, Hindutva followers have asserted that Muslims are colluding to marry Hindu women and convert these women to Islam; and trying to increase the Muslim population in the country. According to Hindu activists, "love jihad" threatens to Hindus become a minority in society and undermine the Hindu religion. This moral panic in contemporary India provoked the narrative of Muslims as guilty of trying to abduct Hindu females through "love jihad" and resulted in physical violence and killing of Muslim men who had or were found to have a relationship with a Hindu girl. 'Love jihad' discourse legitimizes the actions of Sangh vigilantes who forcibly "rescue" Hindu women by claiming they have been "kidnapped" by Muslim men (Natrajan, 2022, p. 302). This discourse is also part of an extensive endeavor to encourage Hindu assertions of cultural and political supremacy, further marginalizing the Muslim minority as 'bad citizens' (Stroh, 2019). 'Love jihad' discourse overlaps with a Hindutva history approach that claims a constant struggle between the Hindus, interpreted as ancient and indigenous, and the Muslims, construed as the foreigner 'other' (Tyagi and Sen, 2020).

In the aftermath of the Covid-19 outbreak, which has been effective since February 2020 in India, the use of anti-Islamic messages by Indian political leaders publicly fuelled anti-Muslim sentiments and led to a new jihad discourse: "corona jihad." It was the securitization of the health crisis in India and its transformation into Hindu-led disinformation and even conspiracy against Indian Muslims. In the environment of fear and paranoia created by the epidemic and reinforced by the populist leader, the already constructed "enemy" was declared a "scapegoat" and discriminated against (Beydoun, 2023, p. 118). During the epidemic, the othering and hatred against the Muslim community spread primarily through the mainstream media (especially electronic media) and social media.[23] The hate speech of Hindu nationalists against Indian Muslims has been manifest through these two powerful communication tools. In this process, primarily upper and middle-caste Hindu social media groups produced and shared misinformation (ranging from unintentional deception to deliberate disinformation, such as accusing 200 million Muslims of being Covid "super-spreaders") that targeted Muslims, deepened the current hate speech in the country (Amarasingam, Umar, and Desai, 2022). Thus, it appears that Covid-19 has significantly contributed to Islamophobia in the media's rhetoric. News resources such as Timesofindia.indiatimes.com (The Times of India), Sabrangindia.in, and Theprint.in, mainly broadcasting the government's voice or interest when handling the outbreak of Covid-19, spread Islamophobia during the pandemic (Baharuddin and Baharuddin, 2022, p. 59-62). Misleading news about Muslims was not only in the written media but also in visual media. For example, a show aired on India Today TV news channel on April 10, 2020, stated that despite concerns about the spread of Covid-19, children are being crammed up in rooms in madrasas. The channel claimed that Muslims were defying social distancing, thus making them appear to be a greater enemy than the coronavirus (Citizens for Justice and Peace, 2020). All such media stories were systematically aimed at alienating and demonizing Muslims and holding them responsible, one way or another, for the nationwide spread of the pandemic. Sensationalized and inaccurate reporting, has contributed to public hysteria and widespread negative perception of the Muslim community. The consequence was a surge in hostility, segregation, and violence projected toward the Muslim community (Krishnan, 2020).

From the University of Michigan, Joyojeet Pal and his colleagues indicate that in this process, news sources have been complicit in spreading misinformation (Akbar, Kukreti, Sagarika, and Pal, 2020). They emphasize that most misinformation is from the "culture" category in the mainstream media. This situation suggests mainstream news sources have been particularly complicit in Muslim baiting.[24] Besides the mainstream media, it is clear that social media platforms, including Twitter, Facebook, TikTok, and WhatsApp, were the most robust platform for fuelling 'Corona-jihad' as an anti-Muslim discourse during the COVID-19 Pandemic in India. Because the misinformation spread by social media fed the mainstream media. Many Islamophobic hashtags, videos, and memes on social media stigmatized Muslims, linking them to the coronavirus outbreak. For example, fake posts circulating through social media hashtags (such as #CoronaJihad, #BioJihad, #MuslimVirus) fuelled Islamophobia (Wazir, 2020). Posts that blamed Muslims for the spread of the virus and portrayed them as "human bombs" and "corona jihadists" spread rapidly. The tweet showing a Muslim man from the Delhi community deliberately coughing on someone was just one of the fake tweets. Indeed the video in the viral tweet was shot in Thailand, not India, and there was no evidence that the man was a member of the Delhi community. Still, the speed of social media led to disinformation. Another was false news that Muslims violated quarantine protocols in India to gather to pray during Ramadan, and it soon went viral on social media (The Logical Indian, 2020).

Despite violating the hate speech and coronavirus policies of Twitter and other social media platforms, many such fake posts are not removed—the inaction of social media platforms allowed hate speech to turn into violence. Thus unhinged pandemic paranoia resulted in increased violence and hate crimes against Muslims. The rapid spread of misinformation via social media messaging platforms accelerated the rise of discriminatory mob violence (Bhatia, 2022). In other words, the results of the social media's Islamophobic campaign in the community have been grim: There has been a dramatic increase in Islamophobic hate crimes and discrimination. There have been increased attacks on Muslims in different parts of India. In addition to places of worship, businesses run by Muslims were also targeted.

Besides the media platforms, the Hindutva narrative has also been propagated and circulated through cultural products such as poetry, video, cinema film (Kumar, 2013), television serial, and music such as Hindutva songs (Rehbar, 2022). Bollywood, in general, has largely managed to stay away from Hindu-Muslim tensions; many movies revolve around the "Muslim terrorism" concept through the theme of Kashmir and the India-Pakistan conflict (Das, 2017).[25] All these cultural products have caused the politics of hatred to be sustained.

The other cultural issue is regarding yoga. Using the term "spiritual nationalism," van der Veer argues that yoga is not only a breathing technique or spiritual exercise but a historical and political phenomenon that intimately connects with the construction of modernity. He claims that yoga is a part of ancient systems of idea and action but has been re-formulated at the end of the 19th century as part of Hindu nationalism and made part of national heritage.[26] In fact, to external observers, yoga may seem largely innocuous, but domestically, it is part of existential debates over what constitutes India and being Indian (Mawdsley, 2023).

Conclusion

India, the world's largest democracy, is experiencing the rise of a religious nationalism fed by Hindutva ideology, with overt discrimination of India's Muslim minorities. India has taken a sharp right turn politically ever since the Narendra Modi-led government of the BJP in 2014. The election in 2014 accelerated the transformation of India from a secular republic to an ethnic-religious republic. BJP represents the political wing of the Hindutva ideology, which is highly critical of secular policies and practices. The BJP advocates Hindutva as an ideology to define Indian culture in terms of Hindu values. The main goal of BJP and Hindutva organizations such as the RSS, which are closely linked to the BJP, has been the same: liberating the country from

Muslim conquerors and their remnants. Hindus falsely and deliberately are portrayed as a single race (Bhagavan, 2008, p. 889). In this sense, policies implemented by the current BJP government might be seen as attempts to convert a state nation into a nation-state (Waha, 2020, p. 42). It is attempting to re-engineer the country demographically and is doing so by stoking Islamophobia and directing violence against Muslims.

After the BJP won an outright majority in the 2019 elections, the BJP and the paramilitary force operating under this party turned to the executing points of the worldview designed by RSS Savarkar a century ago. While the BJP has legally adopted organized Islamophobia since its early existence, members of the RSS have been playing the role of a violent movement on the street against Indian Muslims.

Having been weaponized, the COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated anti-Muslim hatred and implementation. But it is also important to emphasize that Corona Jihad discursive in the media was only a part of a broader phenomenon of anti-Muslim conspiracy theories gaining popularity in the Indian Hindutva-driven mainstream. The discourses such as 'love jihad' or 'corona jihad' lead to efforts to discourage inter-community relations by Hindutva groups (Irshad, 2022). These hate discourses have a more extended genealogy (Ahmad and Kang, 2022, p. 132). In other words, the new narrative that Muslims intend to spread the virus and join the 'corona jihad' represents a continuation of the underlying anti-Muslim propaganda started by ultra-nationalists in India.

The right to remedy for the Muslim minority in India appears to be increasingly ineffective, inadequate, or inaccessible. Moreover, Draupadi Murmu, the candidate of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), an electoral alliance led by the ruling BJP, was elected as the 15th president of India in July 2022. With national elections in 2024, some concerns about remodeling India as a one-party state will occur, and the targeting of Muslims will increase.

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Notes

[1] India is classified as a 'flawed democracy' in the Global Democracy Index released by The Economist Intelligence Unit. See (McCormick et al., 2022, p. 125).

[2] The INC held power nationally until 1977 when it was defeated by the Janata coalition. It returned to power in 1980 and ruled until 1989 when it was once again defeated. The party formed the government in 1991 at the head of a coalition, as well as in 2004 and 2009 when it led the United Progressive Alliance.

[3] A mythical and ideal form of governance under the Hindu Lord Ram or Rama.

[4] *Religious nationalism* has been commonly used to conceptualize Hindu nationalism (Copley, 2003). Other concepts, used to conceptualize Hindu nationalism, are close variants of religious nationalism: *political Hinduism and Hindu fundamentalism* (Lal, 2009). Emphasizing the spiritual nature of Hindu nationalism all these conceptualizations clearly reflect approaches to the political relevance of religion in India.

[5] For a book making an argument that Hinduism was "made up" in India by the colonial rulers at a time when information was scarce and the coloniser's power over it was absolute (Chakravorty, 2019). The book argues that the Hindu caste structure was also derived from the Brahmanvadi texts and had no relation to reality. According to Chakravorty, it is doubtful that caste had much meaning or virulence in society before the British made it the defining feature of India. Chakravorty argues that this was done primarily to create a single society with a common law that could be easily governed.

[6] Siyech and Narain claim that "in contemporary times, the Islamophobic violence is most pronounced due to the continued reinforcement of the Muslim identity as 'beef-eaters'". Despite India being the largest exporter of beef and the fifth largest consumer of beef, predominantly a single community is the target of all ire." (Siyech and Narain, 2018, p. 186 and 190).

[7] The annual festival is in honor of Ganesh or Ganapati, the elephant-headed deity who is known as the remover of obstacles and the god of auspiciousness.

[8] These events resemble the social media campaigns in contemporary India. It can be said that the BJP's long-unrivaled electoral victory arises from the BJP's ability to mobilize people through social media (Zain, 2021).

[9] The official website of the RSS in clear terms mentions the RSS as instilling "a spirit of righteous militancy in the Hindu society." They also openly proclaim India to be a "Hindu Rashtra" – a country for Hindus first (The RSS, 2022).

[10] The Malabar rebellion which is also known as the Moplah (Muslim) riots was an armed revolt staged by the Mappila Muslims of Kerala against the British authorities and their Hindu allies in 1921.

[11] A pan-Islamist political protest campaign launched by Muslims of British India to restore the caliph of the Ottoman Caliphate, promote Muslim interests and to bring the Muslim in national struggle (1919–24).

[12] Fasting is a tool that Gandhi uses as part of his policy of passive resistance. Gandhi fasted 17 times during India's independence struggle, the longest act of fasting lasted 21 days.

[13] Condemned as the murderer of the "father of India", a terrorist and a traitor, Godse was hanged for killing Gandhi in 1949. Nevertheless, as Hindu nationalism continues its march across India, a cult of personality is rising around Nathuram Godse, the Hindu extremist who killed Gandhi. (Withnall, 2019; Tripathi, 2015; Yasir, 2020).

[14] The second ban was also imposed during the Emergency between 1975 and 1977 by then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi (It is important to remember that Indira Gandhi and her son Rajiv Gandhi are no relation to the Mahatma Gandhi. Indira Gandhi was the daughter of Jawaharlal Nehru. The name "Gandhi" is common in India, and came to her by marriage Feroze Gandhi in 1942). Although it was banned, it maintained its strength through its members, moles, and connections in high positions of Indian politics throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s (Bannerji,, 2011, p. 87). The RSS was banned for the third time after the destruction of the Babri Masjid in 1992 (Sikander, 2021, p. 121). It has become widespread and strengthened over time and has survived to the present day to get cultural hegemony and political/state power. Today the *shakhas*, the smallest unit of RSS, reached 55,652 in March 2021 nationwide (The Times of India, March 27, 2021).

[15] *Sangh Parivaar* is an umbrella term used to designate the RSS and its many affiliate organizations, like the VHP, the student-wing ABVP (Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthy Parishad), and the labor union Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh.

[16] Hindu Mahasabha's leader, Moonje, was the the mentor of Hedgewar who established the RSS in 1925.

[17] For detailed explanations of ideological affinity between the Jana Sangh and BJP see (Lahiry, 2005).

[18] Babri Masjid was claimed to be Rama's *janmabhoomi* (birthplace) and they wanted to "re-built" the ancient temple to the nativist deity Rama.

[19] Bannerji writes that this was further than the people killed in the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York, on September 11, 2001 (Bannerji, 2011).

[20] For a documentary about the Gujarat pogrom prepared by Rakesh Sharma who is an Indian documentary filmmaker, see. https://vimeo.com/329340055

[21] As emphasized before contemporary lynching in the name of 'cow protection' has roots that are traceable back to the 19th century. Arya Samaj's 'Cow Protection Movement' popularized in the 1880s took the form of a growing grassroots movement uniting Hindus around the idea of the sanctity of a cow's life. The cow conservation movement and the violence associated with it have been one of the sources of religious conflicts in India today. See (Pandey, 1992).

[22] After 2019, the BJP has come to dominate 21 of the 29 states. This number was only seven in 2014, the year the BJP came to power. This marks a new record since the country's founding party, the Congress Party, dominated 15 states in 1993.

[23] For a study exploring the representation of Islam and Muslims in an antagonistic manner in the Indian English press, see (Sumra, 2020).

[24] The study also shares screenshots of news channels, including ANI, TOI Kochi, TV9, Global Times, OPIndia, and News18, participating in the circulation of misinformation.

[25] With Narendra Modi administration, this situation is likely to become even more acute. It now appears that Bollywood's record of tolerance is also in jeopardy. In fact Modi and his Hindu-nationalist BJP enthusiastically defended the Islamophobic movie "Kerala Story" released in May 2023 Indeed, a heavily politicized controversy over the film led to communal clashes, at least one death and more than 100 arrests in the western state of Maharashtra (The Economist, 2023). Another film demonising Muslims which Modi endorsed is *The Kashmir Files* (Hawaleshka, 2023).

[26] For More details about yoga and its particular relation to national identity and Hindu nationalism see (Van der Veer, 2007; Guptaa and Copemanb, 2019).

Hindu Milliyetçiliği ve Hindistan'da Yükselen İslam Kaşıtlığı

Fatma SARIASLAN

Genişletilmiş Özet

Giriş

Nilüfer çiçeği, Hint dinî düşüncesinin sembollerinden biridir. Bu sembolün anlamı şudur: Nasıl ki nilüfer çiçeği çamurdan çıkıp, çamur veya suyla lekelenmeden suyun yüzeyine ulaşıyor ve böylelikle derûnun karanlık yönleri nilüfer çiçeğinin saf suyuna dönüşüyorsa, insan bedeninden doğan akıl da gerçek özelliklerini tutku ve cehalet bataklığının üzerine yükseldikten sonra geliştirir (Izzetbegovic, 2011, s. 58). Böylesi bir çiçeğin günümüz Hindistan'ında Hindutva ideolojisi üzerinde yükselen ve İslam ve Müslüman karşıtlığından beslenen Bharatiya Janata Partisi'nin (BJP) logosu olması ise ziyadesiyle ironik. Zira bugün Hindistan'da İslam ve Müslüman düşmanlığı histeriye dönüşmüş durumda.

Çeşitli dilleri, dinleri ve etnik grupları barındıran Hindistan, 1947'de bağımsızlığını kazanmasından bu yana, dünyanın en büyük laik demokrasi olarak anılmaktadır. Bağımsızlıktan sonra ülkeyi uzun süre yöneten Hindistan Ulusal Kongre Partisi, tüm etnik ve dini gruplara eşit mesafede duran bir politika izlemiş; ülkede seküler bir siyasi kültür yerleşmiştir. Ancak 20. yüzyılın son çeyreğinde Hindu aşırı milliyetçilerinin desteğini arkasına alarak yükselişe BJP ile birlikte Hindistan, günümüzde Hindutva ideolojisinden beslenen ve Hindistan'ın Müslüman azınlıklarına yönelik alenen ayrımcılığı körükleyen bir dinî milliyetçiliğin yükselişini yaşamaktadır.

1990'larla birlikte başlayan süreç, 2014'teki seçimin ardından Hindistan'ın laik bir cumhuriyetten etnik-dini bir cumhuriyete dönüşümünü hızlandırmıştır. Bu süreçte başta 1992'deki Babür Camii nedeniyle Ayodhya'da ve 2002'de Gucerat'ta olmak üzere Müslümanlara yönelik çok sayıda saldırı yaşanmış ancak bu vahşice olaylara rağmen yetkililerce anlamlı bir önlem alınmamıştır. Ülkede camilere, kutsal yerlere veya buralarda çalışanlara yönelik sürekli saldırıların yanı sıra Müslüman olan veya Müslüman olarak algılanan kişilere yönelik doğrudan saldırılar da giderek yaygınlaşmıştır.

Hindu Milliyetçiliğinin Entelektüel ve Tarihsel Kökenleri

BJP'nin 2014 ve 2019 olmak üzere art arda iki kere iktidara gelmesi ile beraber Hindistan'daki İslam karşıtlığının hukuki ve kamusal yapılar yoluyla sistematik ve daha sağlam bir biçimde temellendirildiğini söylemek mümkündür. Zira BJP, laik politikaları ve uygulamaları eleştiren ve Hint kültürünü Hindu değerleri açısından tanımlayan Hindutva ideolojisinden beslenen aşırı sağ siyasi bir duruşu temsil etmektedir. Bu itibarla Hindistan'daki İslam karşıtlığının BJP iktidarıyla yeni ortaya çıkmış bir durum olmayıp, tarihi ve ideolojik bir arka plana sahip olduğu açıktır. Günümüzde BJP'nin uyguladığı İslamofobik politikalar 1915'de kurulan Hindu Mahasabha Partisi'nin lideri Veer Savarkar olarak bilinen Viyanak Damodar Savarkar'ın bir asır önce tasarladığı dünya görüşünün uygulamaları olarak ortaya çıkmakta ve İslamofobinin körüklenmesi ve şiddetin Müslümanlara yönlendirilmesiyle sonuçlanmaktadır.

Hindu Milliyetçiliğinin Manifestosu: Hindutva

Hindutva ideolojisi ilk olarak Savarkar'ın 1923 tarihli Hindutva adlı kitabında zikredilen modern bir sağcı aşırı milliyetçi formülasyondur. Hindistan'ın «her zaman bir Hindu ulusu olduğunu» tasavvur eden ve «İslam'ı ve Müslümanları, işgal ve savaş yoluyla Hinduluğun doğal durumuna zarar veren yabancı bir güç» olarak algılayan Hindutva ideolojisi ile Nazi düşüncesi ve faşizminin benzerliği de manidardır.

Post-kolonyal Dönemde Hindu Milliyetçiliği

Sömürge sonrası dönemde, Hindistan'ın İngiliz yönetiminden bağımsızlığını kazanmasıyla birlikte, Hindistan Yarımadası'nın Hindistan ve Pakistan olmak üzere iki ayrı devlete bölünmesi eşzamanlı olmuştur. Din temelli bu bölünmenin barışçıl bir şekilde gerçekleşmemesi, Hindular ve Müslümanlar arasındaki gerilimi tırmandırmıştır. Gandhi, bölünme sonrası katliamları durdurmak ve Pakistan ile iyi ilişkiler kurmak istemiş ancak Hindu milliyetçileri aynı görüşte olmamışlardır. 30 Ocak 1948'de fanatik bir Hindu ve paramiliter gönüllü organizasyon Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh'ın (RSS) eski bir üyesi olan Nathuram Godse, Gandhi'ye suikast düzenlemiştir. Tüm ülkeyi şoke eden Gandhi'nin ölümü, RSS'nin yasaklanması ve örgütün birçok üyesinin tutuklanması ve faaliyetlerine yeraltında devam etmesi anlamına gelmiştir.

BJP'nin Dini Milliyetçilik Siyaseti ve Yükselen İslamofobi

Hindutva ideolojisi, BJP'nin özellikle 2014 ve 2019'daki ezici seçim zaferlerinden bu yana toplumun tüm kesimlerine yayılma fırsatı bulmuş ve partinin aldığı siyasi destekle Hindistan'da daha da etkili olmuştur. Hindutva ideolojisi, sadece alınan siyasi kararlarla değil, toplumsal olarak tetiklenen baskı ve şiddet eylemleriyle de Müslümanları etkilemeye başlamıştır. Yaşanan sorunlar ve şiddet, birçok Müslümanın ölümüne, pek çoğunun da baskı ve zulme uğramasına neden olmaktadır. BJP ve bu partiye bağlı RSS gibi Hindutva örgütlerinin esasında ana hedefi aynıdır: ülkeyi Müslüman fatihlerden ve onların kalıntılarından kurtarmak. Hindular Hindutva destekçileri tarafından yanlış ve kasıtlı olarak tek bir ırk olarak tasvir edilmektedir. Bu anlamda mevcut BJP liderliğindeki hükümetinin uyguladığı politikalar, Müslümanları ötekileştirmekle kalmayıp ülkeyi demografik olarak yeniden yapılandırmaya çalışmaktadır.

Hindu milliyetçiliği, özellikle 1990'ların başında gündeme gelen Ayodhya isyanından sonra siyasi bir güç haline gelmiştir (Kinnvall, 2019, s. 289). Uttar Pradeş eyaletindeki Babür İmparatorluğu döneminde inşa edilen Babür Camii Aralık 1992'de radikal Hindularca yıkılmış ve ülke çapında 2 bin civarında kişinin ölümüyle sonuçlanan ayaklanmalara neden olmuştur. BJP'nin Gucerat'taki seçim başarılarının ardından ise, 2002'de Gucerat'ta Müslüman karşıtı bir pogrom gerçekleşmiştir. 2 bin 500'den fazla kişi Hindu çeteleri tarafından acımasızca öldürülmüş ve 200 bin aile, o zamanlar Gucerat başbakanı ve Hindistan'ın şu anki başbakanı Narendra Modi tarafından yönetilen bir eyalette yerinden edilmiştir (Shani, 2021, s. 270). İnsan hakları örgütleri ve sivil toplum kuruluşları raporları, Müslümanlara yönelik saldırıların devlet tarafından planlandığı ve saldırılara polisin yoğun katılımı ve BJP hükümet yetkililerinin iş birliğinin eşlik ettiğine dikkat çekmiştir. 11 Eylül olaylarından kısa bir süre sonra Gucerat'a yaşanan bu olumsuz gelişmeler, dünyada giderek ivme kazanan İslam karşıtlığı ve İslamofobi'nin sadece Batı'ya özgü bir gündem olmaktan çıkıp küresel bir boyut kazandığına da işaret etmektedir. Aynı zamanda 'İnek Koruma Hareketi' ve buna bağlı şiddet de, günümüzde Hindistan'daki dini çatışmaların kaynaklarından biri olarak öne çıkmaktadır. BJP'nin iktidara gelmesinden sonra, ineklerin korunmasıyla ilgili Müslümanlara yönelik toplu linç olayları artmış; sığır ticareti yapanlara şiddetli linçler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Bir diğer konu 2019'daki genel seçimlerde Modi'nin ikinci kez seçilmesini ardından, 1992 sonunda Hindu milliyetçilerince yıkılan Babür Camii yerine, Hindu Kral Rama adına tapınak inşa edilmesi konusunda alınan karar olmuştur. Yine Ağustos 2019'da Keşmir bölgesinin yetmiş yıldır özel statü konumunda olan Müslümanların en yoğun yaşadığı eyalet olan Jammu Keşmir'deki Hindistan'a ait olan kısmın özel statüsünün kaldırılması ve Hindistan Vatandaşlık

Yasası Değişikliği'ne (CAA) karşı yükselen protestolar ve Şubat 2020'de Kuzey Delhi'de patlak veren ve birkaç gün süren Hindu-Müslüman ayaklanması sırasında yerel odakların Müslümanlara yönelik şiddeti önlemekte bilinçli olarak isteksiz kalmaları, 2020'de Covid-19 salgını sonrasında Müslümanlar'a yönelik nefret suçları ve ayrımcılıkta yaşanan ciddi artış, Mart 2022'de Hindistan'ın güneyindeki Karnataka eyaletindeki mahkemenin, başörtüsünün İslam'ın önemli bir parçası olmadığını söyleyerek eyalet hükümetinin okullarda başörtüsü takma yasağını onaylaması gibi gelişmeler İslam'a ve Müslümanlara karşı ayrımcılık ve şiddet içeren politikalar olarak öne çıkmaktadır.

İslamofobiyi Beslemede Medyanın Rolü: Yanlış Bilgi Yayan Medya ve "Korona Cihat" Söylemi

Hindistan'da Şubat 2020'den beri etkili olan Covid-19 salgını sonrasında, Hintli siyasi liderlerin İslam karşıtı mesajları alenen kullanmaları Müslüman karşıtı duyguları körüklemiş ve "korona cihad" olarak nitelendirilen yeni bir cihat söylemine yol açmıştır. Salgının yarattığı korku ve paranoya ortamında, toplumda zaten düşman ve öteki şeklinde inşa edilmiş olan Müslümanlar "günah keçisi" ilan edilerek ayrımcılığa uğramıştır (Beydoun, 2023, s. 118). Salgın döneminde Hindu milliyetçilerinin Hintli Müslümanlara yönelik nefret söylemi, öncelikle ana akım ve sosyal medya aracılığıyla yayılmıştır. Twitter, Facebook, TikTok ve WhatsApp gibi sosyal medya platformlarında üretilen ve hızla paylaşılan İslamofobik içerikler, Müslümanları koronavirüs salgınıyla ilişkilendirerek damgalamıştır. Örneğin, #CoronaJihad, #BioJihad, #MuslimVirus gibi sosyal medya hashtag'leri aracılığıyla dolaşan sahte gönderiler İslamofobiyi körüklemiştir (Wazir, 2020). Virüsün yayılmasından Müslümanları sorumlu tutan, onları "canlı bomba" ve "korona cihatçısı" olarak tasvir eden paylaşımlar hızla yayılmıştır.

Örneğin, Delhi'de Müslüman bir adamın kasıtlı olarak birinin üzerine öksürdüğünü gösteren tweet, sahte tweet'lerden sadece biriydi. Esasında viral tweet'teki video Hindistan'da değil Tayland'da çok daha önce çekilmişti ve adamın Delhi topluluğunun bir üyesi olduğuna dair hiçbir kanıt yoktu. Ancak sosyal medyanın hızı dezenformasyonu çok daha etkili ve manipülatif kılmıştı. Bir diğeri, Müslümanların Ramazan ayında dua etmek için Hindistan'daki karantina protokollerini ihlal ettiklerine dair yanlış haberlerdi ve kısa süre sonra sosyal medyada viral oldu (The Logical Indian, 2020).

Sosyal medya platformlarının nefret söylemi ve koronavirüs politikalarını ihlal etmesine rağmen, bu türden sahte gönderiler bu platformlardan kaldırılmamıştır. Sosyal medya platformlarının eylemsizliği nefret söyleminin şiddete dönüşmesinde etkili olmuştur. Böylece, akıl almaz bir salgın paranoyası, Müslümanlara karşı şiddetin ve nefret suçlarının artmasına neden olmuştur. Yanlış bilgilerin sosyal medya mesajlaşma platformları aracılığıyla herhangi bir teyid mekanizması olmadan hızla yayılması, Müslümanlara yönelik ayrımcı şiddetin yükselişini hızlandırmıştır (Bhatia, 2022). Hindistan'ın farklı yerlerinde Müslümanlara yönelik saldırılar artmış ve ibadet yerlerinin yanı sıra Müslümanlara ait işyerleri de hedef alınmıştır.

Sonuç

Hindistan'da seçimlerin varlığı ve dünyanın en büyük demokrasisi olduğu gerçeği, Hindutva idaolojisinden beslenen ve RSS gibi paramiliter yapılarla iş birliği içerisinde olan BJP'nin sahip olduğu faşist dünya görüşünü örtbas etmek için bir referans noktası olarak kullanılmamalıdır. Zira BJP hükümeti, başta Müslümanlar olmak üzere Hindu olmayan nüfusu sistematik ve kasıtlı olarak hedef almaktadır. Ancak her ne kadar BJP iktidarıyla gün yüzüne çıksa da günümüz Hindistan'ındaki İslam karşıtı politikaların, Hindistan'ın etnik ve dini çeşitliğini bir fırsattan ziyade bir tehdit olarak gören ve BJP'den çok önce 'inşa edilen' Hindutva ideolojisinin toplumsal ve siyasal izdüşümleri olarak görülmesi gerekmektedir.

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