

# THE IMPACT OF HINDUTVA IDEOLOGY ON INDIA'S DEMOCRACY AND SOCIAL COHESION\*

## HİNDUTVA İDEOLOJİSİNİN HİNDİSTAN'IN DEMOKRASİSİ VE SOSYAL UYUMU ÜZERİNDEKİ ETKİLERİ

Araştırma Makalesi  
Research Paper

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### Öz:

Modern Hindistan tarihini, bağımsızlık sonrası laik bir cumhuriyet kurmak için verilen mücadelelerle birlikte, toplumsal çatışmalar şekillendirmiştir. Hindistan anayasası, ayrımcılık yapılmaksızın tüm vatandaşlara eşit fırsat ve özgürlükleri garanti etmektedir. Ancak Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) ve onun siyasi kolu olan Bharatiya Janata Partisi'nin (BJP) etkisi, diğer dini grupları dışlayan Hindu Rashtra (Hindu Devleti) iddialarıyla hükümetin tarafsızlığına gölge düşürmüştür. Hükümetin Hindu olmayanlara yönelik kanun ihlallerine sessiz kalması Hindu milliyetçileri tarafından teşvik olarak algılanmakta ve Müslümanlara yönelik düşmanlığın artmasına yol açmaktadır. Mevcut politika, hükümetin şiddeti zımnen onaylamasını içermekte ve Hindu olmayan azınlıklara yönelik nefret suçlarının ve tehditlerin artmasına katkıda bulunmaktadır. Hinduizmi milliyetçiliğin temel özelliği olarak yücelten ve azınlıkların varlığını ve haklarını reddeden bu yaklaşım, muhtemelen ülkedeki iç huzura tehdit olma potansiyeline sahiptir. Bu çalışma, uluslararası insan hakları kuruluşlarının raporları, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri hükümetinin resmi raporları ve ilgili haber makaleleri ve kitaplar gibi birincil kaynaklardan yararlanarak Hindutva politikalarının toplumsal etkisini Şikayet (Grievance) teorisi merceğinden değerlendirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Analizde korelasyonel bir yaklaşım kullanılmakta ve bu politikaların Hindistan'da uygulanmaya devam etmesi halinde gelecekte toplumsal çatışmaların ortaya çıkma potansiyeli değerlendirilmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Hindutva, Hindu Devleti, Müslümanlar, Azınlıklar, Kast Sistemi

### Abstract:

Communal conflicts have shaped India's modern history, with post-independence struggles to establish a secular republic. India's constitution guarantees equal opportunities and freedoms to all citizens without discrimination. However, the influence of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and its political arm, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), has cast a shadow over the government's neutrality, with calls for a Hindu Rashtra (Hindu state) excluding other religious groups. The government's silence on violations of the law against non-Hindus is seen as encouragement by Hindu nationalists, leading to increased hostility towards Muslims. The current policy involves the government's tacit endorsement of violence, contributing to an increase in hate crimes and threats against non-Hindu minorities. This approach elevates Hinduism as the main feature of nationalism and denies the existence and rights of minorities, which has the potential to become a threat to the internal peace of the country. This study aims to assess the societal impact of Hindutva policies through the lens of grievance theory, drawing on primary sources such as reports from international human rights organisations, official US government reports, and relevant news articles and books. The analysis uses a correlational approach and assesses the potential for communal conflict in the future if these policies continue to be implemented in India.

**Keywords:** Hindutva, Hindu Rashtra, BJP, Muslims, Minority, India, Caste

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## INTRODUCTION

India is known as the world's largest democracy, having gained independence from British colonialism in 1947. The country adheres to secular norms and comprises 28 states and 8 union territories within a land area of 3.3 million square kilometres. It is governed as a "Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic with a parliamentary system of government" (National Portal of India, 2022). With a staggering population of 1.4 billion (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023), India is home to a wide range of religions, languages and diverse cultures. However, communal riots have been a recurring problem in India both before and after independence. These riots are primarily rooted in religious and ethnic differences. Communities such as Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians have been subjected to violence and massacres on various occasions. The most frequent clashes occur between the Hindu and Muslim communities due to their large population compared to other groups. According to 2022 statistics, Hindus make up 78.35% of the total population, while Muslims make up 14.2% and Christians 2.34% (Kanwal, 2022).

Frequent communal riots in different parts of India are not uncommon. Since 2014, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) have been promoting Hindutva and seeking to establish a Hindu Rashtra (state). As a result, there has been a marked increase in communal clashes and riots. Even under the secular government of the National Indian Congress, significant riots and conflicts were inevitable. Given the policies of the current ruling party and its parent organisation, the RSS, it is worth considering whether the promotion of Hindutva and the goal of establishing a Hindu state could lead to serious civil conflicts and riots, particularly with Muslims. This study will use a correlational approach and grievance-based explanation to examine the political situation in the country and assess the likelihood of civil conflict in India as a result of current policies.

## 1. METHOD AND THEORY

Methodology and theoretical framework are crucial elements in studying civil wars or disturbances and identifying causal variables. Numerous scholars have explored how civil conflicts arise and attempted to gather empirical data to understand the correlation between variables and the likelihood of civil conflicts, particularly after the Cold War era, during which interstate wars declined significantly. While it is not applicable to every civil conflict, it is possible to assert that conditions such as poverty, large populations, lack of economic development, a prior history of civil war, and political instability increase the likelihood of civil disturbances or civil war (Florea, 2017: 2-6).

The use of the "Correlational Approach" and, within it, "Grievance-based explanations," is highly relevant to India due to its population's ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity. Some scholars hold a more optimistic view regarding the potential for diversity to lead to civil war. Paul Collier argues that fractionalized ethnic and religious groups are less likely to engage in armed conflicts as it is harder to create collective action compared to homogenous groups. As a result, the risk of conflict decreases in diverse cultures. Collier's studies on civil conflicts from 1965 onwards have revealed that group grievance and inter-

group hatred are not the primary cause of large-scale civil war, and that economic agendas are typically at the center of conflicts (Collier, 1999: 1-8). Dan Smith suggests that the main reason for the absence of conflicts despite religious or ethnic differences is due to the "skill and learning of how to live together despite the differences." Smith also contends that failure to learn how to live together can pose a significant threat to society as it provides perfect material for political mobilization (Smith, 2001: 6). On this basis, this paper will examine the impact of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) on the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) policies, including the demolition of mosques, the establishment of Hindu religious sites on their ruins, discrimination against minorities, and the renaming of historical places such as gardens, monuments, and even islands to remove colonial history. The paper will analyze these actions within a grievance-based explanation framework and argue that the RSS-minded policies of the BJP pose a significant risk of civil conflict and beyond.

This study will utilize an empirical approach that involves analyzing statistical data. The research will draw on a range of sources, including archival documents, data, and information from the United States Government, reports and statistics from international non-governmental organizations, previous studies, news articles, and books to support the analysis.

## **2. THE SOCIOECONOMIC AND POLITICAL STATUS OF MUSLIMS IN PRE-BJP RULE INDIA: AN OVERVIEW**

Prior to the full emergence of the BJP government in 2014, under the Indian National Congress (INC), Muslims in India enjoyed greater freedom of thought and belief, and both Muslims and minorities had greater representation in government. Consequently, Muslims tended to vote in support of the INC over the BJP. During India's struggle for independence, Muslims and other minorities played an active role in various capacities. Following the partition of Bengal in 1905 by the British, prominent Muslim figures such as the Ali Brothers, Hakim Ajmal Khan (Jaswant, 2009: 29-32), and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad played a significant role in India's political movement and fought alongside their Hindu counterparts for the country's freedom from British rule. They were accepted by the INC, and in 1923, Abul Kalam Azad became the president of the party (Azad, 1988: 4-9).

During the Khilafat Movement, India's political leaders supported Muslims' efforts to safeguard Muslim holy places during World War I under the Ottoman Empire. This created a sense of nationalism and helped to build bridges between Muslims, Hindus, and other groups, creating a feeling of national solidarity in which people were encouraged to support each other, regardless of their religious beliefs (Bulut, 2021: 105-108). While these events may be considered historical and not reflective of the INC's current policies, the party has consistently advocated for greater inclusion and representation of Muslims in government. For instance, Mohammad Hamid Ansari served as the Vice President of India from 2007 to 2017 with the support of the INC. During his tenure, Ansari pushed for an investigation into the Gujarat riots and advocated for compensation for the victims and their families,

(Routray, 2023) which demonstrating the party's commitment to investigating riots and ensuring that Muslims and other minorities are not discriminated against in times of crisis.

After India gained its independence and the partition with Pakistan occurred, Indian Muslims remained active in Indian politics (Aras & Kandemir, 2023c: 411). Despite a reduction in their number and percentage, with only 31 Muslim members out of 235 in the Lok Sabha, Muslim representation has fluctuated over time. From 1947 to 2002, the number of Parliament members rose to 543 in 2004, while the number of Muslim Parliament members varied from a low of 21 members in 1952 to a high of 49 members in 1980 (Malik & Majid, 2020: 503). For the majority of the period from 1947 to 2014, the Indian National Congress (INC) was the ruling party, except for 15 years when other governments were in power (National Portal of India, 2023).

According to official documents from the Cabinet Secretariat, during the first term of Dr. Manmohan Singh of INC in 2004, out of 28 Cabinet Ministers, two were Muslim: Padantha Mohammad Sayeed as Minister of Power and Ghulam Nabi Azad as Minister of Parliament Affairs and Minister of Urban Development. In the second term of Singh's cabinet from 2009 to 2014, there were again two Muslim ministers: Gulam Nabi Azad as Minister of Health and Family Welfare, and Dr. Farooq Abdullah as Minister of New and Renewable Energy (Cabinet Secretariat, 2009). The presence of Muslims in these positions allowed for their concerns and issues to be addressed in the highest level of governance in the country.

The Congress party's overall inclusive and secular policies, although imperfect, were viewed as concessions by the BJP and pro-Hindu far-right groups. These groups accused the Congress party of following an appeasement policy towards Muslims and minorities. However, Professor Ashok Swain, a well-known Indian scholar specializing in peace and conflict issues as well as Indian politics, has provided a more accurate picture of the condition of Indian Muslims. Swain's analysis, based on data and studies conducted around 2004-2005 during the Congress government's tenure, reveals that the majority of Muslims in India were already less educated, and their economic situation was deteriorating day by day. Reports from that time indicate that 31% of Muslims in India were living below the poverty line. Interestingly, in some measures, even Dalits and Adivasis, who were thought to be in a worse condition than Muslims, seemed to be doing better than Muslims. The literacy level of Muslim people was only 59.1%, whereas the overall literacy level of the population was around 64.8%, indicating that Muslims lagged behind the general picture. After coming to power, the BJP abandoned what it called the "appeasement" policy towards Muslims and other minorities, which, according to Swain (2017), exacerbated the situation.

In 2014, due to the BJP's well-known pro-Hindu attitude, Muslims had concerns about their representation and freedoms. Nevertheless, some Muslims expressed cautious hope in the new government, citing the BJP's speech on future development (Muslim Mirror, May 18, 2020). However, their concerns regarding safety and freedoms turned out to be valid, and their representation in a secular country reached its lowest level. By 2020, the top ten

states with 80% of the Muslim population, which sent 281 representatives to the Council of Ministers, had only 16 Muslim representatives (Indibuzzonline, May 16, 2020). In 2022, the resignation of Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, the Minority Affairs Minister, marked the first time that the ruling party in India had no Muslim parliamentarian in their body (Kuchay, July 6, 2022). It is evident that Muslims now have less voice and influence in the country compared to before the BJP rule. Except for Dr. A.P.J Abdul Kalam, who was President of India with the support of the National Democratic Alliance from 2002 to 2007 (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2004b), the BJP did not make an effort to include Muslims in the ruling of the country. Some politicians within the BJP openly expressed their reluctance to give tickets to Muslims. For instance, in 2019, KS Eswarappa, a senior leader of the BJP, stated during a speech in Karnataka that they would not give tickets to Muslims as they did not believe in the party (India Today, 2019).

The exclusion of Muslims from the ruling of the country, lack of representation, and inadequate provision of safety and freedoms, despite constituting over 14% of the population, highlights the differences between the BJP and pre-BJP times for Muslims.

### **3. THE MATERNAL-PATERNAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE RASHTRIYA SWAYAMSEVAK SANGH (RSS) AND BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY (BJP) IN CONTEMPORARY INDIAN POLITICS**

There is a wealth of literature by scholars and politicians alike, seeking to explicate the connection between the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Nonetheless, one particularly succinct and illuminating depiction emanates from a BJP leader himself. Specifically, Subramanian Swamy, a senior member and notable figure in the BJP, characterizes the RSS as a "power plant" for the BJP, with BJP parliamentarians functioning as mere "bulbs" (The Week, 2019). Given Swamy's extensive experience in both the BJP and its predecessor, the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS), his words merit attention in assessing the ideological underpinnings of the BJP. It is beyond doubt that the BJP is an extension of the RSS in the political sphere, with the former firmly adhering to the latter's central agenda of transforming secular India into a Hindu Rashtra, or Hindu state. In this regard, the RSS-BJP nexus can aptly be likened to that of a mother (RSS) and son (BJP).

Instances of conflict between Hindus and Muslims have been a recurrent feature throughout Indian history, occurring on both a large and small scale. Nevertheless, several scholars contend that the religious clashes have become endemic since the 1980s. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and its political offspring, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), bear a significant responsibility in this regard. Following India's independence in 1947, the Indian National Congress (INC) was the ruling party; however, it failed to resolve the issue of communal discord that was exacerbated by the policies of the RSS and BJP, particularly from the 1980s onwards. The BJP succeeded in gaining significant political traction by exploiting ethnoreligious divisions within Indian society (Puddington, 2020), with the support of the RSS constituting a crucial factor in this ascent.

In order to comprehend the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's (RSS) ascendancy, it is necessary to examine its historical progression. The organization was established on September 27, 1925, with the objective of mobilizing Hindus throughout India and imparting physical and intellectual training to help them achieve their goals. The RSS actively participated in Indian politics during the freedom movement and on all significant occasions. From its inception to the present day, the RSS has steadfastly maintained that India belongs to Hindus and is a Hindu country (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sank, 2017). With this conviction, and with a strong emphasis on discipline, the RSS gradually expanded its reach by enlisting new members, subjecting them to ideological and physical training in uniforms. Over time, the organization managed to acquire greater political power. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is regarded as the outcome of the RSS's political efforts. The RSS directly entered politics in 1951 through the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS), and subsequently collaborated with three other parties to form the Janata Party. However, this coalition was marred by internal disputes arising from the RSS's influence on the party. Some leaders opposed Janata Party members attending RSS gatherings and events, given that the RSS had infamously given birth to Nathuram Godse, the assassin of Mahatma Gandhi. Eventually, the Janata Party disintegrated due to these disagreements, and the BJP was formed in 1980 (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2004).

The emergence of a new political party in India, which was not averse to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and whose leaders had received RSS training and hailed from within the RSS, marked a significant turning point in the country's political landscape. Over time, the party gradually gained traction and increased its presence in the Indian Parliament. In the general election of 1984 after assassination of Indira Gandhi, the Indian National Congress (INC) won the popular vote, while the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) secured only two seats, which was below its actual potential. However, in the general election of 1989, the BJP garnered 85 seats, and in 1990, the RSS and BJP leaders embarked on a campaign towards Ayodhya, which bolstered their popularity among religious Hindus. This surge in popularity was reflected in the 1991 elections and in subsequent elections, as the BJP continued to strengthen its position in the lower house of the Indian Parliament, the Lok Sabha, and the upper house, the Rajya Sabha. In 2014, for the first time, the BJP secured a full majority in Parliament and the Lok Sabha, with 282 seats under the leadership of Narendra Modi. This trend continued in the 2019 general election, with the BJP winning 303 seats for the second time, and as of the time of writing this article, the BJP remains in power in India.

In addition to its political power, it is widely acknowledged that the RSS and its affiliated groups hold significant influence in various aspects of Indian society. For instance, the largest university group in India, the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), is affiliated with the RSS. Similarly, the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS), which is the largest trade union in the country, is also affiliated with the RSS. Moreover, the RSS has numerous sub-groups that play an active role in shaping various facets of Indian life. It is important to note, however, that certain affiliated groups have been associated with violence and hate

crimes carried out in the name of Hinduness and Hindutva, as will be further discussed in this study (Andersen & Damle, 2019).

#### 4. HINDUTVA AND ITS POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA

The Hindu nationalist agenda of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) places Hindutva at the center of its ideology. The primary objective of this ideology is to assimilate other religions under the banner of Hindu national culture. According to Hindutva, all Indians are essentially part of the Hindu civilization (Shani, 2021: 264). Therefore, the ideology is not conducive to a multi-religious, multi-cultural country and lacks openness and friendliness towards it.

Upon examining the origin of the term, it becomes clear that the ideology is relatively new in historical perspective. The emergence of Hindutva in the early 1900s was a result of the confusion surrounding the word "Hindu" and its meaning. Veer Savarkar, a Hindu revolutionary, believed that simply focusing on the religious aspect of Hinduism and ignoring its historical and cultural aspects would not provide a complete understanding of the term. As a result, he coined the word "Hindutva" to explain the religious, cultural, and historical totality of Hindu people (Prakashan, 1969: 4-5). He expounded on Hindu culture and history through historical battles against invaders. This may be a starting point for explaining why far-right groups harbor hatred towards Muslims and other minorities. According to the creator of the term Hindutva, one of the foreign invaders were "Mohammedans," and thus they were enemies to fight (Prakashan: 1969: 44). For them, Mohammedans are not a part of their national identity and are, in fact, enemies to fight on the path towards a Hindu state where everyone should view India as their "holy land and fatherland."

However, a nationalist freedom fighter like Lajpat Lala Rai believed that Muslims were not like western invaders because they came to India, chose to stay, work, have families, and die in India rather than collect and transfer wealth and economic power to some far-off land (Aras & Kandemir, 2023b: 17). They are, therefore, a part of Indian society. While Rai supported nationalism with similar ideas, he did not see other religions or groups as enemies to fight (Rai, 1916: 29-40). Such inclusive words, however, do not resonate with RSS organizations' goals, as they aim to create a Hindu Rashtra that does not promise a peaceful environment for Muslims or even other smaller parts of the country's population.

Prakashan's notion of Hindutva, as reflected in his book, shows one of the elements of the grievance theory, which is a grudge against a group for historical reasons. This is an obstacle in front of the RSS in learning how to coexist with different groups. On the front cover of his book, Prakashan gives a brief introduction to Hinduism from his perspective, which excludes Muslims and many other groups. He says, "A Hindu is a person who regards this land of Bharatvarsha, from the Indus to the Seas, as his Father-Land as well as his Holy-Land that is the cradle land of his religion" (Prakashan, 1967: Front Cover).

Based on this ideology, some actions have been taken with the aim of establishing a Hindu Rashtra, which include elements of grievance theory. These actions include the

demolition of the Babri Masjid, the revocation of Article 370, hate speeches, India's evaluation by international organizations on democracy and freedoms, and current hate crimes. In sum, the Hindutva movement's goal of establishing a Hindu Rashtra has led to a range of actions that have had significant impacts on the social, political, and legal landscape of India. These actions have been criticized for their divisive and exclusionary nature, and for undermining India's democratic values and traditions.

## 5. ACTION IN PROGRESS FOR HINDU RASHTRA

### 5.1. Excluding Muslims from Political Power Spots in India

Giorgio Shani, a noted India expert, contends in his work "Towards a Hindu Rashtra: Hindutva, religion, and nationalism in India" that the policies of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) following its rise to power have fundamentally redefined the national culture of secularism, transforming it into a nationalism of the majority (Shani 2021: 265). This shift, he argues, deviates significantly from the central tenet of secularism.

Aakar Patel, former head of Amnesty International India from 2015 to 2019, has claimed in an interview that Hindutva and its adherents perceive the establishment of a Hindu state as their primary objective. Patel contends that the BJP's policies and Modi's leadership are predicated upon the "exclusion and persecution of India's minorities, particularly Muslims...that is all there is to Hindu Rashtra" (Tapar, 2020). It is therefore imperative, according to Patel, to prevent Muslims from attaining positions of power. The exclusion of Muslims from positions of power during BJP governments is readily apparent in the demographics of government and bureaucratic bodies in India. Despite comprising 15% of the population, no state among the 28 has a Muslim chief minister, and 15 states lack a single Muslim minister in the government. In the Lok Sabha, the lower house of India's parliament, only 27 Muslim representatives are present, a figure significantly lower than their proportional representation in the population (Ibid). Muslims comprise a mere 4.9% of state and central government positions, and their representation in the higher echelons of the military is estimated to be approximately 1%.

Based on the India Human Development Survey Round 2, a collaborative project of the National Council of Applied Economic Research and the University of Maryland (National Council of Applied Economic Research), a study suggests that the Quality of Life index of Muslims in urban India is considerably worse compared to that of upper-caste Hindus, particularly with respect to education, health, access to basic amenities, social and political networks (Mukherjee & Dasgupta: 21-22). It is important to note that preventing Muslims from attaining positions of power and employment opportunities that generate income for society may exacerbate their economic difficulties. This situation could heighten the risk of communal unrest, as per the Grievance Theory, where economic issues and the feeling of discrimination by the government and ruling powers can be considered contributing factors for creating civil conflicts over the long term.

### 5.2. 'Destructive' Policies Towards Muslims



The demolition of the Babri Masjid, a highly symbolic location, can be viewed as a significant attack by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) with religious motives aimed at the destruction of a Muslim religious site. In 1992, a large group of Hindu mob attacked and demolished the historic Babri Masjid Mosque in Ayodhya, which had stood for over four hundred years. These organized attacks occurred all over India and resulted in the cruel deaths of over 3,000 individuals (Shani, 2021: 270). Many Hindus believed that the Babri Masjid was constructed on a pre-existing Ram temple, which was the birthplace of Lord Rama. This belief fueled the destruction of the Babri Masjid in 1992. A court case ensued, which was prolonged until 2019. The Supreme Court's decision allowed the RSS to achieve its goal of constructing a grand Ram Temple in place of the Babri Masjid. For Muslims, a new place to build a mosque was provided, which was located 30 kilometers away from the original site in Ayodhya (Nair, 2020).

During the "Bhoomi Pujan" ceremony for the new temple of Ram Mandir's construction, Prime Minister Modi served as both the chief guest and the head of the religious ceremony (Pradhan, 2020). This is believed to have expedited the process of constructing the temple in Hindu religion. The chosen date for the ceremony, May 5th, was interpreted as a message to Muslims because it was precisely one year later on the same day that Article 370, which granted Jammu and Kashmir special constitutional status, was removed. The temple's construction is expected to be completed around the same time in 2024, which is the year of general elections in India (Pradhan, 2020). This indicates that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) will continue to exploit the religious sentiments of the Hindu population and exert pressure on Muslims to secure a high number of votes in the 2024 elections.

In 2019, the special status of Kashmir was revoked, which had served as a security measure to safeguard the only Muslim-majority Indian state from an invasion, similar to what happened in Palestine-Gaza, and prevent other Indians from settling there. However, on August 5th, 2019, Article 370 was removed, putting an end to the longstanding agreement between India and Jammu and Kashmir (Shani, 2021: 273). The problems of the region were not resolved, and only a few months later, another discriminatory political move, the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), came into play.

The CAA is a politically motivated project aimed at targeting Muslims by the ruling party. For the first time in Indian Republic history, the act was based on religion. The law, which was passed by parliament on December 12, 2019, granted citizenship to Hindus, Christians, and other religious groups, apart from Muslims, who were living in India illegally and oppressed in the countries they came from, such as Bangladesh and Afghanistan. However, Prime Minister Modi rejected the claims that the law was discriminatory against Muslims. Despite this, between 2018-2020, over a dozen Muslim refugees from Rohingya Muslims were deported to Myanmar, despite facing life-threatening security issues, demonstrating the problematic approach of the BJP-RSS to reduce the population of Muslims in India, which has raised international human rights concerns.

The United Nations Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, expressed concern about the CAA, stating that it could leave many religious minorities stateless (Human Rights Watch, 2020). The CAA issue further exacerbates the existing problems faced by the Muslim population in India, and highlights the government's discriminatory practices that have violated the principles of human rights (Aras & Kandemir 2023: 161).

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) has been engaged not only in political suppression of minorities, but also in cultural and historical rebranding efforts to promote the Hindutva ideology. Hindutva attaches great significance to place names as they serve as representations of culture and history (Prashan 1969: 1-3). As part of an initiative to clear colonial history, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has been altering the names of countless railways stations, stadiums, airports, gardens, and even cities. For instance, in 2018, three famous and frequently visited islands in the Andaman and Nicobar region were renamed. Havelock Island, Neil Island, and Ross Island were rebranded as Swaraj Dweep, Shaheed Dweep, and Netaji Subash Chandra Bose Island, respectively (Bhardwaj, 2018). Although this move could be deemed acceptable by many Indians as these were names that originated from the British colonial era, the renaming of one of India's most prominent cities, Allahabad (City of God), to Prayagraj, appears to be an attempt to reject the historic names and history of Indian Muslims, and thus, appears to be outside the context of nationalism (Chakravorty, 2018).

It is evident that the policy of changing names in India since 2014 has become a rapidly growing trend. It appears that this policy is used as a means of gaining popular votes and diverting attention from real problems by creating new agendas. This trend has been observed in various aspects of Indian society, including the renaming of numerous rail stations, stadiums, airports, gardens, and even cities.

The Hindutva ideology places great importance on the names of places, as they are viewed as representations of culture and history. This ideology seeks to establish a Hindu Rashtra that is intolerant of any historical names associated with different cultures and religions. The changing of names from English or Muslim names to Hindu names motivated by religious beliefs has become commonplace. The recent renaming of the historic Mughal Gardens, belonging to the Presidential Palace, as Amrit Udyan is yet another example of this trend. It is noteworthy that this policy runs counter to the idea of coexistence and suggests a lack of willingness to learn how to live together. The ramifications of such policies extend beyond the mere change of names and can have serious implications for social cohesion and inclusivity.

## **6. BJP GOVERNMENT IN INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND GOVERNMENT REPORTS (2019-2023)**

International organizations have heavily criticized India's policies towards minorities, particularly Muslims. Reports from 2020 to 2023 indicate an increase in arbitrary treatment towards Muslims, such as beating alleged criminals in society and demolishing the houses of protestors. According to the 2021 Freedom House Report, freedom of expression and

belief in India scored 2 out of a possible 4. The report suggests that the media, under pressure from Hindu nationalists, views criticism as anti-national, resulting in self-censorship. Moreover, during the COVID-19 pandemic, many journalists critical of the government were sent to jail. The report argues that Hindu nationalist organizations and media groups are actively increasing anti-Muslim hostility. Between 2012 and 2018, 45 people were killed by cow vigilantes due to alleged cow killing. Under BJP rule from 2014 to 2020, cow vigilante-related cases, including lynching and killing cases, rose to 120. During the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Muslims were again targeted by Hindu nationalists and BJP politicians for allegedly spreading the virus. Overall, the freedom score for India has decreased from 71/100 to 67/100, and the country is now considered partially free (Freedom House, 2021).

The U.S. Department of State Office of International Religious Freedom has reported that 10 out of 28 Indian states prohibit religious conversion, with penalties including up to 10 years of imprisonment without bail and a fine of 100,000 rupees for violations of the law (Office of International Religious Freedom, 2022). Such measures go against the principles of secularism and the freedom to profess, practice, and propagate one's beliefs. Interestingly, conversion to Hinduism from other religions is not considered an issue. In a recent event on January 24, 2023, about 1,100 Dalit Christians were converted to Hinduism in a ceremony performed by the BJP state secretary, Prabal Pratap Singh Judev (OpIndia, 2023). This double standard of the ruling party is a concerning issue.

According to Amnesty International, the Ministry of Home Affairs of India is misusing an act called The Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) to suppress and silence certain non-governmental organizations. For example, the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative had its license canceled, even though the organization was working towards access to information and justice (Amnesty International, n.d.).

India has been listed among the "Countries of Particular Concern" in the annual report of the United States Commission of International Religious Freedom (USCIRF). The report highlights how the freedom of religious expression has significantly worsened as a result of the Indian government's Hindu nationalist policies aimed at establishing a Hindu Rashtra. Religious minorities such as Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Dalits, and other groups have been negatively affected by these policies throughout 2021. The report recommends that the U.S. government impose sanctions on those who violate religious freedom and prevent them from entering the United States. Additionally, the report suggests that the U.S. Congress raise the issue in their bilateral relationships and express concern about religious freedom in their interactions with India (USCIRF, 2022).

In the latest World Report by Human Rights Watch, it is indicated that the BJP's "systematic discrimination and stigmatization of religious and other minorities, particularly Muslims" is ongoing. The nationalist agenda of the ruling party is evident in critical institutions of the country, such as the justice system and the National Human Rights Commission. The freedom of expression of opposition and civil society is being precluded.

Dalits, Tribal Groups, and religious minorities are under threat from the Hindu right-wing nationalist policies of state governors and politicians. In Gujarat, the police publicly flogged a Muslim man, alleging that he had disturbed a Hindu festival. In Madhya Pradesh, three Muslim houses were demolished without any legal authority, alleging that they had thrown stones during a Hindu ceremony. During protests against BJP politicians' insults to Prophet Muhammad all over India, police killed some Muslims, and some Muslim houses were demolished in Uttar Pradesh, alleging that they belonged to "key conspirators" behind the protest (Human Rights Watch, 2023). All these reports share a common criticism of the Indian government's treatment of religious freedom, freedom of expression, and minority rights, with arbitrary and lawless implications by local governors, police, or nationalist mobs.

## **7. THE IMPACT OF HINDU NATIONALISM ON RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN INDIA: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF HATE CRIMES AND ARBITRARY ACTIONS**

According to statistical data spanning from 2014 to 2019, a total of 928 hate crimes have been reported in India, with religiously motivated hate crimes being notably high in number, alongside caste-based hate crimes. The Christian community has reported 18 incidents of hate crimes, while the Muslim community has reported 196, and 29 hate crime cases have been reported against transgender individuals (Statista, 2021). As early as 2017, Amnesty International's Executive Director Aakar Patel had pointed out the rising issue of Islamophobia in India and claimed that the crimes were gaining "tacit approval" from state authorities. One of the most commonly seen hate crime issues arises from cow vigilantism. Many Muslims or Dalits have been attacked under the pretext of protecting cows, with claims of transporting cows being used to justify these attacks. These attacks are often ignored or justified by leaders from the ruling party, the BJP (Amnesty International, 2022).

The issue of hate speech by BJP leaders and right-wing nationalist groups towards minority groups, particularly Muslims and Christians, is not an isolated occurrence in India. While there are numerous examples of threats and insults against minorities, especially towards Muslims, only a few of the most dramatic incidents have been highlighted in this study. A recent hindutwa rally in Mumbai, held just a day before the 75th assassination anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, saw BJP Goshamahala MLA Raja Singh call for the boycott of Muslim-owned businesses and the "slitting of throats." Additionally, at a Hindu convention, BJP MP Pragyaa Thakur urged Hindus to keep guns at home and their knives sharp against their enemies, referring to those who had a "love Jihad" aim and claiming that children sent to Christian missionary-run institutions would not be part of Hindi culture. Hindu supremacist leader Pramod Muthalik, the Chief of the Sri Ram Sena Group, made inflammatory remarks about reclaiming temples and challenged anyone to stop his group from doing so. Meanwhile, in Madhya Pradesh, right-wing Hindu mobs were taking over Muslim neighborhoods in convoys, and outside a mosque, they chanted communal slogans (Sabrang India 2023, Muslim Mirror 2022, Surendra 2022). These incidents of hate speech and intimidation are not isolated but rather part of a pattern of behavior that has contributed to the growing problem of hate crimes in India.

The prevalence of politically divisive and discriminatory activities in India, driven by groups such as the RSS, has led to a trend of hate crimes and threats against minorities, particularly Muslims and Christians. Hate speeches by leaders of right-wing nationalist groups, such as the recent call by BJP Goshamahal MLA Raja Singh to boycott Muslim-owned businesses and "slit throats," further contribute to this concerning trend. In addition, the issue of cow vigilantism has resulted in attacks on Muslims and Dalits, often justified or ignored by BJP leaders. Such hate crimes are not new and have received tacit approval from state authorities, as pointed out by Amnesty International Executive Director Aakar Patel in 2017.

Moreover, the recent statement by Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, declaring Hinduism as the national religion of India (Times of India, 2023), further emphasizes the discriminatory and divisive nature of the ruling government. In addition, the threat of demolition of mosques and other religious places in Muslim areas is also prevalent, with the Shahi Mosque in Saidabad being damaged by authorities for road widening without waiting for the court's verdict (CJP, 2023). The situation in India remains a matter of concern for the international community, with urgent action required to protect the rights of religious minorities and promote a more inclusive and tolerant society.

One pressing issue in India pertains to the occurrence of humanitarian emergencies. For instance, in Halwani, the governor of Uttarakhand has declared that 4,500 illegally built houses in the area will be demolished. However, the predominantly Muslim and economically deprived population argues that the area has been used in the same manner for the past 70 years, and that three government colleges are situated there. With a population of over 50,000 citizens, the locals believe that they are being targeted due to their Muslim identity (The Global Frontier, 2023). Moreover, reports from Hindutva Watch (2023) suggest that Hindu mobs have targeted not only Muslims, but also Christians and other minority groups in different parts of India. The impact of Hindu nationalism is also observed in some schools where girls wearing hijab are beaten or prevented from entering college campuses while wearing it, as reported by Al Jazeera (2022). In schools, Hindu mobs often seek to create a confrontation between hijab-wearing girls and those who wear saffron clothes.

The ideology of Hindutva, propagated by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), has not spared the movie and music industry in India. For example, the film "Pathan," starring renowned actor Shah Rukh Khan, came under attack from Hindu supremacists when the female lead wore a saffron-colored short dress. Protesters raised slogans against Prophet Muhammad and Islam, and various movie theaters were subjected to violent protests by Hindutva groups who chanted anti-Muslim slogans and insults directed towards the Prophet (News360, 2023; The Wire, 2023).

In addition to anti-Muslim protests, Hindutva groups have started using music as a propaganda tool, creating anti-Muslim songs that often contain threats of genocide against Muslims (Rehbar, 2022). This new music genre, referred to as "Hindutva Pop," is primarily

used in rallies organized by Hindu groups (DW, 2023). Amidst the rising trend of anti-Muslim and anti-minority sentiments, a BBC documentary titled "India: The Modi Question" was released on January 17, 2023, which focused on the alleged crimes of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the 2002 Gujarat riots, where he served as Chief Minister at the time (India: The Modi Question-Series 1: Episode 1&2, 2023). The documentary caused a stir among Indian right-wing groups and was subsequently banned on many platforms in India. The film revealed information regarding Modi's alleged order to the police to not intervene when Hindus attacked Muslim neighborhoods. The documentary was slated to be screened at Delhi University, but police detained students and prevented the screening from taking place (Al Jazeera, 2023).

## 8. ANALYTICAL SECTION

The ongoing policies of BJP governments with the support of their ideological fountainhead RSS appear to be geared towards the establishment of a Hindu state in India. These policies have resulted in the polarization of Hindus and Muslims and have raised concerns for the future of other minority groups. BJP's actions, such as excluding Muslims from bureaucratic positions, demolishing historical mosques and masjids, oppressing Muslim minorities in places like Kashmir and Assam, restricting people's rights to peaceful assembly and protest, and arbitrarily punishing individuals without a court hearing, are certainly not in line with civilized methods and make India more susceptible to major disturbances, as per the grievance theory.

The hate speech of BJP leaders during political rallies directed towards Muslims has emboldened RSS and affiliated groups to commit more hate crimes against minorities on a daily basis. Studies have shown that hate crime rates against Muslims and other minorities have been increasing since 2014, which is consistent with reports from non-governmental organizations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Freedom House, among others. According to these organizations and many governmental reports, the Indian government not only keeps non-Hindu Muslims and non-Hindus away from power but also systematically commits crimes against them.

Despite evidence and data indicating that Muslims are actually underprivileged in Indian society, BJP, by employing the misleading rhetoric of INC Muslim appeasement policies of the past, continues to put pressure on Muslims. The rising incidence of hate crimes, attacks on mosques, some of which are historical monuments of Indian heritage, and the marginalization of Muslims from economic and bureaucratic life are significant indicators of the grievances that underlie civil conflicts in a society. The grievance theory posits that discrimination, past grievances, and economic problems are critical factors contributing to the likelihood of civil conflicts. Ashok Swain's research suggests that Indian Muslims are nearing a tipping point due to these factors. Despite the mistreatment that Muslims have faced from the far-right government, separatist movements and terrorist groups have not received significant support from the Indian Muslim community thus far (Swain, 2017). However, the accumulation of pressures resulting from ongoing

discrimination and marginalization could drive young and uneducated Muslims towards these organizations and ideologies.

The upsurge in communal and religious hatred towards Indian Muslims and other minority groups, based on differences in beliefs, race, and caste, is being fueled by the ideological patronage of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and its political leadership, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The policies and increasing pressure from these groups have tarnished India's image, which claims to have a peaceful culture and a reputation for it abroad. However, unless the BJP's hate policies translate into electoral losses, it is unlikely that they will stop their discriminatory actions towards Muslims and non-Hindus. The solution to this problem is closely related to the willingness of political leaders to remove distorted political ideas from the discourse and embrace a healing process. The duration of this period will depend on how long it takes for the BJP and other political groups to change their attitudes towards minorities and reflect them in their policies.

Several measures can be taken to address the issue of rising communal and religious hatred in India. As the largest democratic and secular country, India should ensure that its political realm reflects these values. BJP policymakers should refrain from supporting RSS, Bajrang Dal, Sakal Hindu Samaj, and affiliated groups that promote violence and hate speech towards Muslims and other minorities, as well as their claim of a "Hindu nation." The government should also enforce existing laws against hate crimes and discrimination, and promote interfaith dialogue and education to promote understanding and acceptance among different communities. Moreover, media outlets should refrain from sensationalizing hate speech and violence and instead promote ethical reporting that focuses on promoting peace and harmony. Finally, civil society groups should play a significant role in advocating for the rights of minorities and in promoting an inclusive society that respects diversity.

Collective and individual crimes committed with religious discrimination and grudges against specific groups must be addressed promptly with legal sanctions. This ensures that the public's trust in the justice mechanism is maintained and that persecuted groups do not resort to violent means. The Indian government must also cease pressuring media and political opponents and release any journalists who have been unjustly detained. Additionally, repressive actions, such as lockdowns, internet shutdowns, and bans on public meetings, in regions like Kashmir and Punjab, must be terminated. Arbitrary demolitions of houses and unjust punishments meted out by the police and local governors must also come to an end.

Creating a peaceful environment for every citizen of India, regardless of their religion, ethnicity, caste, and creed, requires the sincere efforts of the government to ensure justice within its citizenry. To address these issues, it is necessary to reverse the current trend of discrimination and ensure that justice is served impartially, without any religious or ethnic bias. This can be achieved by promoting interfaith dialogue and understanding, enforcing existing laws against hate crimes and discrimination, and empowering civil society groups to advocate for the rights of minorities.

## CONCLUSION

This study aims to provide a concise overview of the Hindutva policies of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which seek to establish a Hindu Rashtra (State) in India. The historical background of the ideology is also examined. The impact of these policies, including discrimination and assimilation efforts by far-right Hindu nationalist groups, is analyzed using the Grievance theory. The findings indicate that since 2014, the pressure on Muslims, Christians, and other groups in India has increased significantly due to the actions of Hindu nationalist RSS and its affiliated organizations. Their violent behavior, which often goes unpunished by law enforcement or government agencies, raises the possibility of communal disturbances and even large-scale conflicts.

The Grievance theory is used to analyze the potential for communal conflict or unrest based on variables such as historical grievances, inequality, discrimination, and authoritarianism that have intensified during BJP governments. One such variable is historical hatred, which is evident in the BJP's actions, such as demolishing historical mosques and changing names associated with non-Hindu or Muslim legacies. The most dangerous aspect of historical hatred is found in the book of Hindutva, which is the progenitor of the concept of Hindutva. The book asserts that Muslims are invaders who must be fought against, and this corresponds to the historical hatred aspect of the Grievance theory, which posits that such views may contribute to the likelihood of civil conflict. Furthermore, Indian policies display discrimination in terms of equal opportunities for minorities, such as Muslims or non-Hindus, regarding government employment and business opportunities. This discrimination exacerbates poverty, and poverty among significant portions of the population increases the possibility of civil disturbances. Therefore, to ensure a peaceful environment for all citizens of India, regardless of religion, ethnicity, caste, or creed, the government must make a sincere effort to address these grievances and ensure justice for all within the country.

Acts of hate crimes committed under the guise of cow protection, arbitrary demolition of protesters' homes, assault on students for wearing hijab in schools, murder and intimidation of individuals involved in interfaith marriages, and the prohibition of religious conversion, along with the targeting or threatening of tourists due to their Christian or Islamic faith, are considered severe human rights violations that contradict the principles of non-discrimination and the rule of law, which any secular country, including India, is obligated to uphold.

As previously documented, multi-religious, ethnic or cultural countries do not inevitably experience civil conflicts. The research of Paul Collier suggests that the frequency of conflict is significantly reduced for various reasons. Dan Smith provides an additional explanation for this phenomenon, suggesting that peaceful coexistence despite differences is possible through mutual respect and acceptance. However, Hindutva ideology, which does not acknowledge or tolerate any lifestyle or belief system beyond Hinduism, is incompatible with this notion. For Hindutva adherents, minorities are viewed as distinct from the



dominant culture and must be assimilated or eliminated through various means. This attitude not only has adverse consequences for the country, but it also creates an environment that is conducive to terrorist groups, which exploit vulnerable individuals by manipulating them to advance their agenda.

India stands out as a country with one of the most extensive cultural and religious diversities in the world, comprising an impressive population with diverse religious beliefs and a rich history. Since gaining independence, this socio-economically and politically prominent country has managed to remain united against all odds. However, if the country's leaders and organizations such as RSS and its affiliated extremist groups refuse to accept and respect the country's diverse religious and ethnic minorities, the risk of communal clashes and conflicts, as seen in the Neille massacre of 1983, Anti-Sikh riots of 1984, Gujarat riots of 2002, and other similar incidents that resulted in the loss of thousands of lives in a matter of days, could arise. If the Hindutva-based policies continue to gain momentum through RSS and other far- right Hindu groups, it is uncertain how far the resulting disturbance and communal conflicts will escalate in terms of intensity and duration, or whether they will evolve into a civil war or be remembered as one of the many bloody communal riots that have plagued Indian history.

### ***Araştırma ve Yayın Etiği Beyanı***

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### ***Araştırmacıların Katkı Beyanı***

Tek yazarlı ele alınan makale yazar tarafından üretilmiştir.

### ***Çıkar Çatışması Beyanı***

Makalede yazar tarafından beyan edilmiş herhangi bir olası çıkar çatışması bulunmamaktadır.

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