# PRE-PARTITION'S ORTHODOX HINDUS AND 21ST CENTURY HINDU NATIONALISTS: A THREAT TO THE MUSLIMS EXISTENCE IN THE SUB-CONTINENT

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## Abstract

*This paper examines the historical and contemporary dynamics of Hindu nationalism and its implications for Muslim existence in the Indian sub-continent. By tracing the roots of orthodox Hindu ideology in the pre-partition era and its evolution into modern Hindu nationalism, this study reveals the persistent threats faced by Muslims in the region. The rise of 21st-century Hindu nationalist movements, fueled by extremist ideologies and political power, has led to increased marginalization, violence, and exclusion of Muslims in India and beyond. This research explores the interplay between historical and contemporary factors, including political, social, and religious forces that contribute to the precarious situation of Muslims in the sub-continent. By analyzing the nexus between pre-partition orthodox Hinduism and modern Hindu nationalism, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex challenges faced by Muslims in the region and inform strategies for promoting inclusivity, diversity, and peaceful coexistence. Through a critical examination of historical events, political discourses, and social dynamics, this study reveals the ways in which Hindu nationalist ideologies have perpetuated a culture of fear, intolerance, and violence against Muslims. By shedding light on the roots and ramifications of this phenomenon, this research seeks to spark a nuanced conversation about the urgent need for inclusive and equitable societies in the sub-continent, where diverse communities can coexist with dignity and respect.*

*Keywords: Politics, Sub-Continent, Hindus, Orthodox, Muslim Existence.*

## INTRODUCTION

*European powers took an interest in the Indian subcontinent in the late 15th century. Competing powers, including the Dutch, French, Portuguese and British, sought to control valuable resources and trade routes related to spices, textiles and tea. The British finally established their dominance in the subcontinent when British Crown*

*rule was officially declared in 1858 after a protracted nationalist uprising known as the Sepoy Mutiny. The next ninety years would be particularly tumultuous for India and the world.[1]*

*India's largest political party, the Indian National Congress (INC), was formed shortly after 1885. The party was central to the later independence movement. Although the ideology was not clearly defined from the start, World War I seemed to be a crucial turning point. India volunteered over 1.5 million soldiers to the British war effort, ultimately resulting in more than 45,000 casualties and India's near bankruptcy. Some leaders hoped that the Indian war effort would result in increased British sovereignty, but this was not the case. The post-World War I fear helped transform the INC into a leading pro-independence movement that included both prominent Muslim and Hindu voices. Jawaharlal Nehru, Mohandas Gandhi and Muhammad Ali Jinnah were some of the key figures. Gandhi returned to India in 1915 after a brief stay in South Africa after graduating from law school.[2] His experience of racism as a new lawyer changed his attitude and inspired him to return to India and promote independence through a peaceful solution. Likewise, Nehru, a self-proclaimed nationalist, was a British-educated lawyer and returned to India after completing his education. Jinnah, a Muslim lawyer recently trained in Britain, worked in the Bombay High Court and emphasized unity between Hindus and Muslims.[3]*

*Shortly after the end of World War I, growing tensions and unrest between Hindus and Muslims made the Muslim minority uneasy. Ideological and political differences between the groups had reached alarming levels as both religious groups sought political and geographic representation. Amid rising tensions, the INC is firmly committed to secularism and Gandhi's idea of Satyagraha (peaceful civil disobedience). This political strategy was meant to be inclusive, but it left some Muslims disillusioned, particularly the leaders of the All India Muslim League. Jinnah viewed Satyagraha as political anarchy.[4]*

1. *Up to this point, Muslims and Hindus were relatively united under the banner of independence, as demonstrated by the Lucknow Pact of 1916, which agreed to set quotas guaranteeing the representation of Muslims and other minorities in public office. This unity quickly began to unravel when Jinnah resigned from the INC, citing his disagreement with Satyagraha as a strategy. Jinnah withdrew from politics for the next decade, only deciding to return after the 1937 election, after the Muslim League received just 6.7 percent of the vote and did not win a majority in any province, including those with a Muslim majority. This event transformed Jinnah and refuted his long-held belief that Muslims could be protected in a Hindu-majority country. Jinnah's new political strategy was to promote a two-state solution, one for Muslims and one for Hindus. This new political strategy coincided with an awakening of Jinnah's own Muslim identity, a departure from his earlier sense of broad secularism.[5]*

2. *Calls for independence grew louder during and shortly after World War II, as Indian soldiers re-entered a world war and fought on behalf of the British. The Congress party demonstrated its disapproval by launching a civil disobedience campaign against the British. Both Gandhi and Nehru were eventually arrested for their opposition. During her imprisonment, Jinnah all but solidified the support of the Muslim community and described herself as the fierce protector of Muslims in the subcontinent. As World War II drew to a close, riots and*

*interfaith violence between Hindus and Muslims erupted at an alarming rate. Public animosity between Gandhi and Jinnah and inflammatory speeches by regional politicians further fueled communal tensions. Muslims and Hindus struggled to control neighborhoods that were historically religiously diverse. The future grew ever more uncertain, and each side blamed the other for the uncertainty.* [6]

*Exhausted from World War II, the British were ready to withdraw their personnel. In 1946, a year after the end of the war, nationwide elections were held with both the Muslim League, led by Jinnah, and the INC, led by Nehru, on the ballots. Compared to 1937, the Muslim League fared much better, winning the vast majority, 90 percent, of the Muslim districts. Jinnah interpreted this outcome as widespread support for his call for a separate Muslim homeland. On August 14, 1947, the birth of Pakistan (the "land of the pure") was announced, and a dividing line was drawn that hastily divided the subcontinent in two Parts shared drawn by Sir Cyril Radcliffe, a British bureaucrat with limited knowledge of India. Radcliffe and his British Cabinet Mission divided the Indian provinces according to their religious makeup; The Hindu-majority states in the center would become India and the two non-contiguous Muslim-majority provinces on either side of India would become East and West Pakistan. What followed was mankind's largest known movement, some fifteen million people, as Hindus moved from Pakistan to India and Muslims from India to Pakistan. Limited oversight of the withdrawal of British forces and a chaotic new independent government were unable to monitor migration and provide adequate security.[7] Heightened sectarian tensions and poor implementation of the partition led to widespread violence among migrants. Ultimately, an estimated one to two million people died from violence or disease during the partition. After the bloody partition and legacy of communal violence, India's new independent government led by Nehru and the INC was determined to enshrine secular and socialist principles in its constitution. On January 26, 1948, India adopted its Constitution and declared India a secular state. The INC wanted to ensure that the bloody historical legacy between Muslims and Hindus did not become a permanent part of Indian society. India's secular identity separated from Pakistan's religious identity. Unfortunately, partition failed to resolve tensions between Hindus and Muslims. As early as October 1947, India and Pakistan were at war over the state of Kashmir.[8]*

*After independence, there were 565 princely states across India. Princely states were independent polities and were not formally considered part of British India. After the partition, the princely states were given the choice of which country they wanted to join. For most princely states, this was an easy decision; Muslim-majority states in close proximity to Pakistan joined Pakistan, while Hindu states joined India. One leader, Maharaja Hari Singh, had difficulty deciding which side to join. Singh was a Hindu leader of the mainly Muslim state of Kashmir. Before he could make his decision, Pakistanis and tribal forces attacked and occupied the princely state. The Maharaja turned to India for help. India agreed to intervene on condition that Singh sign an instrument of accession agreeing to the cession of Kashmir to India. The Maharaja agreed, but the conflict continued until April 1948 when both parties went to the UN to resolve the conflict. Both parties agreed to the resolution (Resolution 47), and eventually a line of control was adopted, with India gaining two-thirds of the territory of Kashmir (Indian-occupied Kashmir) and Pakistan receiving one-third of the territory*

*(Pakistani-occupied Kashmir). The resolution included several conditions, including the withdrawal of Pakistani forces, a reduction in the Indian military presence, and an eventual referendum, allowing Kashmiris to vote on the issue. Despite objections from both sides, India and Pakistan agreed to the resolution and ended the war. Despite the original agreement, the Kashmir conflict remained a defining issue between the two countries in the decades that followed. Since the first war of 1947–1948, three other wars have been fought over the territory with no clear solution in sight.[9]*

**KASHMIR ISSUE**

*Kashmir remains a key issue for several reasons that reflect the founding philosophies of both countries. For Pakistan, a Muslim-majority province should be governed by a country established as a Muslim homeland in the Indian subcontinent. For India, the government of a Muslim-majority region cements its identity as a secular and multicultural state and fulfills Singh's original desires. These conflicts are further compounded by the rise of Hindu nationalism in India and Islamic extremism in Pakistan, with both sides claiming Kashmir as an integral part of their homeland.[10]*

*Although Kashmir was a crucial issue between India and Pakistan as well as Hindus and Muslims, the two-state solution failed to resolve internal tensions. Despite India's constitutional basis as secular, strict adherence to Hindu and Islamic identities became increasingly popular, particularly in the 1990s. Since independence, there has been rioting across the country between groups, as well as between Sikhs and Christians. The Kashmir conflict seemed to heighten tensions. During this period, the ideology of Hindutva, a political movement embracing Hindu fundamentalism and identity, gained prominence. Likewise, Islamic extremism gained popularity in Kashmir and across India and Pakistan.[11]*

**ROLE OF INDIAN POLITICAL PARTIES**

*The INC remained the main party in power and retained its commitment to secularism as the central tenant for almost half a century. Until the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), no party could gain enough power to challenge the INC. The central philosophy of the BJP focuses on Hindu nationalism. From 1947 to 2000, the INC held the majority of seats in Parliament, except for 1977–1979 and 1996–1999 when the BJP received the majority of the vote. The increasing popularity of the BJP was no coincidence and has coincided with increasing tensions between Hindus and Muslims, as detailed below.[12]*

*Just as Mumbai was recovering from the 1993 riots, it suffered the worst terrorist attack in its fifty-year history. A series of car bombs exploded across the city, leaving 257 dead and over 1,000 injured. The attacks were believed to be coordinated by Muslims involved in the Indian criminal underworld. After the attacks, militant Hindu groups such as the VHP and the Shiv Sena gained popularity to fight what they saw as a mounting attack on Hindu values. As more and more Hindus feared terrorism from Islamic extremism, they began to reevaluate the constitutional enshrinement of secularism.[13]*

*In 1996, in the first elections since the 1993 riots, the BJP won a majority of seats in parliament for the first time. Running on a platform of Hindu nationalism, the BJP pushed for the ban on slaughtering cows, a meat eaten by Muslims, and reclaimed Kashmir as fully Indian.[14] The BJP also continued to gain popularity at the national and state levels. In the state of Gujarat, a key figure named Narendra Modi took office as prime minister in 2001. Growing up impoverished and of low caste, Modi was an*

*inspirational figure to many Hindus and low caste people. Modi is a lifelong member of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), an ultra-conservative Hindu organization dedicated to preserving and restoring Hindu identity in India, particularly through the establishment of a Hindu state.[15] The RSS, the radical Shiv Sena and the VHP remain closely linked. Many members of these organizations become leaders in the BJP.*

*In 2002, Modi's name rose nationally and internationally when a new spate of Hindu-Muslim riots broke out in the state of Gujarat. When a train of Hindu pilgrims was returning from Ayodhya, it was attacked and burned by a mob of 1,000 to 2,000 villagers believed to be Muslims. Sixty pilgrims died in the attack. The access reef led to large-scale riots in Gujarat. What made these riots so controversial was the response of the BJP government and Modi. Human rights organizations and academics have claimed that the BJP was involved in the riots and failed to respond adequately; some scholars have even called it pogroms or "ethnic cleansing." Over 2,000 people, the majority Muslims, were killed in ensuing riots.[16] Another 150,000 were displaced and ended up in refugee camps. In 2005, Modi's connections to the riots led the United States to refuse him a diplomatic visa and revoke his existing visa. Modi was the first official to be denied entry under the International Religious Freedom Act, which blocks entry into the United States for a foreign government official responsible for religious freedom violations.6 An investigation by a Supreme Court-appointed panel in 2012 eventually revealed that Modi's actions were not punishable; However, the report found that Modi still took a discriminatory stance that justified the killing of innocents.[17]*

*Ultimately, the controversy surrounding Modi's role in the riots has not tarnished his reputation in the eyes of the BJP. The BJP nominated Modi as their candidate for prime minister in 2013. Throughout the following year's campaign, Modi attempted to distance himself from the Hindutva rhetoric he had relied on in the past, invoking secularist language reminiscent of Nehru. Instead, the focus shifted to Gujarat's rapid economic development under Modi.[18] However, the BJP as a whole still invoked nationalist rhetoric, including leaders calling for the expulsion of Muslims from Hindu areas and urging critics of Modi to move to Pakistan. Proposals to ban cow slaughter remained on the agenda, and Modi would not condemn those remarks in his campaign. He also refused to apologize for the government's response to the 2002 riots when asked if he was sorry.[19] Modi and the BJP won a stunning majority in parliament, winning 166 seats, while the INC won 162 lost seats, the worst defeat since independence. In 2014, Modi not only received a US visa, he was greeted by President Barack Obama at the White House and by 20,000 supporters at a rally in Madison Square Garden.*

*The saffronization of India was in full swing in 2014. Just as Hindu priests wear saffron robes, Hindu nationalists also adorn the color to express their political and religious beliefs. In the 2014 elections, almost every single district in North and West India was won by the BJP. On the streets, assertive Hindu groups such as Bajrang Dal and VHP patrol neighborhoods across India with the intent of enforcing Hindu moral codes.[20] Tactics used by this group include stopping trucks carrying cows being led to slaughter and hitting or killing the driver, harassing couples celebrating western holidays like Valentine's Day, or attacking women because they are are dressed too generously.8 Modi continued to distance himself from his ties to the RSS and other radical Hindu groups in his public speeches, but BJP policies and leadership selection show the party's refusal to uphold secular values. Modi also published books during*

*the campaign that highlighted the lives and contributions of RSS members.[21]*

*Perhaps the clearest indication of the BJP's ties to radical Hindu identity took place in January 2017. At the time, the BJP elected Yogi Adityanath Chief Minister (Governor) of Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state and home of the Babri Masjid ruins. Yogi Adityanath is an Indian monk and founder of the Hindu extremist militant group Hindu Yuva Vahini. The Hindu Yuva Vahini has participated in many focused efforts, including public cow protection campaigns, struggles against Hindu-Muslim marriages, and ghar wapsi, mass conversions of Christians and Muslims to Hinduism.[22] Adityanath has a long line of incitements to violence against Muslim communities, including one incitement , killing 100 Muslims for every Hindu killed. The appointment of a radical religious leader as prime minister of India's largest state signals the BJP's intention to break away from the country's secular roots and is also a tacit endorsement of violent strategies against minority communities.*

*Wider Impact Unfortunately, ethnic and religious violence is a widespread experience in much of the world. However, the shift towards Hindu nationalism in recent decades has potential security implications that go beyond domestic politics. First, both India and Pakistan became nuclear states in 1998. Although India had been developing nuclear weapons since the 1970s, its test in 1998 took place under the leadership of the newly elected BJP government. Shortly thereafter, Pakistan responded with its own nuclear test. The tests led to international sanctions against both countries, but did not end their nuclear programs.[23] In 1999, both states were locked in another war in Kashmir after Pakistani forces infiltrated the Line of Control. This standoff, known as the Kargil conflict, was the first instance of direct conventional warfare between two nuclear states, and perhaps the closest the world has come to nuclear warfare.[24]*

*The rise of Hindu nationalism and the prominence of the BJP have profound potential implications for India's relationship with a nuclear-armed Pakistan. It is already evident that Hindu nationalists are taking a much tougher approach to security, particularly when it comes to Muslims or Pakistan. This may increase the likelihood of conflict erupting between Pakistan and India, most likely in Kashmir. A particularly worrying attitude is the view from both Pakistan and India on first strike use. In general, nuclear powers adhere to the norm of using nuclear weapons only in response to a first strike, traditionally referred to as mutually assured destruction (MAD).[25] Since both sides know the other will retaliate, they prevent the other side from doing so use of weapons. Pakistan has always resisted this norm, claiming that it will consider a nuclear weapons first use policy. In contrast, India has generally decided that it will only use nuclear weapons on a second-strike or retaliatory basis. Since the election of Modi, however, this attitude seems to be changing. In its 2014 election manifesto, the BJP stated that it was studying, revising and rethinking its nuclear programme.[26]*

*The BJP also accused the INC of scaling back nuclear gains made under the 1999 BJP government. Under the INC, the nuclear program had shifted to civilian energy rather than defense-related spending. While the intent of the manifesto isn't entirely clear, many nuclear scientists suspect the language is a noticeable hard-line shift in India's foreign policy response as they assemble their nuclear weapons, not just launch them. With two nuclear powers poised to use first strike, it greatly increases the likelihood of miscalculation. With a history of repeated conflicts over territory, even when both countries had arms, this suggests that nuclear deterrence may not be as*

*effective in the Indian subcontinent.[27]*

## RISE OF HINDU NATIONALISM

*The rise of Hindu nationalism is also changing the dynamics of international relations. Nehru's foreign policy during the Cold War was non-aligned and heavily invested in international institutions such as the UN. At the end of the Cold War, India still maintained its distance from the US and formed military alliances with other countries. The United States developed closer ties with Pakistan and China. In 2009, as part of Obama's focus on Asia, India and the US began to develop closer ties, including the US pushing for India's permanent seat on the UN Security Council. The swing to Asia and more friendly relations with India were primarily part of the US interest in countering a growing regional and global threat from China.[28]*

*A more interesting development in US-India relations occurred in 2016 during the US elections. Nationalist Hindu parties began to rally behind Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump. The groups felt encouraged by Trump's tough stance on Muslim immigration and terrorism. Shiv Sena, the VHP and other Hindu nationalist parties held large public prayer ceremonies for Trump. During the election season, Trump took notice of his growing popularity with certain sections of the Indian population and used it in his campaign. Perhaps most interesting is the use of a Trump campaign ad by Shalabh Kumar, chairman of the Trump campaign's Indian American Advisory Council, which reaches out to American Hindus. The ad used Hindu symbols and music, and ended with Trump saying in Hindi, "Ab ki baar, Trump sarkar," meaning "Next time there will be a Trump administration."[29] The slogan has once translated little meaning, but the usage was significant as it was the same slogan Modi used in his 2014 campaign.[30]*

## HINDU NATIONALISM: THE FUTURE?

*The potential impact of Hindu nationalism does not necessarily end at India's borders. Many Hindu nationalists believe that a proper map of India would include Nepal, Bhutan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Hindu nationalists have even launched a campaign to rewrite Indian textbooks to change the maps to reflect what they think are the right limits.[31] It's unclear at this point, but if this sentiment translates into a future expansionist foreign policy, India is more likely to find itself at odds with Pakistan, other neighbors and possibly even China.[32] India's constitution still enshrines secularism, but the trend over the past three decades suggests that it is moving towards Hindu nationalism. Nehru's commitment to secularism was his declaration that India could be a peaceful, multi-religious state. Jinnah maintained his doubts. With the increasing popularity and success of the Hindu Nationalist Party, we will soon know if Jinnah was right.[33]*

## CONCLUSION

*The Indo-Pak Subcontinent has a rich and diverse cultural heritage, shaped by the interactions of various civilizations. The first Islamic conquest of the region occurred in the 8th century with the arrival of Muhammad bin Qasim, followed by the expansion of Islamic territories under subsequent rulers. Prior to Muslim rule, Hindus held significant power in the region. However, the relentless pursuit of power and territorial acquisition led to a long history of suffering for the common people, with Muslims being particularly marginalized and scapegoat.*

*This research provides a comprehensive chronological history of events from the 8th to the 20th century, exposing the motives and psychological factors driving*

*Hindus' desire for dominance over Muslims. The study identifies key Hindutva followers responsible for Muslim persecution and highlights the devastating impact of anarchy and chaos on ordinary people's lives. In contrast, periods of harmony and consonance saw Muslims enjoying high socio-economic status.*

*Furthermore, this research reveals the British colonial powers' true intentions in establishing an empire in the subcontinent. By exploiting existing divisions and fostering hatred among religious and ethnic communities, the British implemented a "divide and rule" policy, extracting economic benefits while leaving a legacy of discord and strife. This study sheds light on the persistent struggles of Muslims in the region and serves as a crucial reminder of the need for inclusivity, understanding, and peaceful coexistence.*

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