

RAGING FOR A HINDU ORDER

AUTHORITARIANISM, HINDU NATIONALISM AND CRISIS OF MODERNITY

Hassan Zaheer*

***Abstract:** Contemporarily, the world is experiencing a severe contestation of political ideas as nation-states are increasingly drawn toward finding their relevance in conservative nationalism. With the cold death of Fukuyama's End of History, ideological conflicts are born anew. Illiberal political ideologies are being revived, political distinctions are drawn, discourses are monopolized, and the return of the idea of the sovereign is upsetting the impartiality of legal order. The paper seeks to examine the resurrection of these ideas which are espoused in the politics of Hindu nationalism in the theoretical framework provided by German political theorist Carl Schmitt. His writings on politics, liberalism, and constitution outline a blueprint of illiberal authoritarianism. With the electoral mandate, powerful constituencies, and rising middle-class support, it is critical to develop an understanding of why Hindu nationalism appeals to the society and deliberate over what future holds for the modernity as fringe ideas are now becoming mainstream in India.*

Keywords: Hindu Nationalism, Carl Schmitt, Authoritarianism, Modernity, India

Introduction

In contemporary times, the world is experiencing a tumultuous and disruptive period of political unease and social fragility. Societies in the oriental and occidental worlds are gripped in

*Hassan Zaheer is a postgraduate scholar in Sociology at the University of Karachi. He is currently working as a Non-Resident Research Associate with the Centre for Strategic and Contemporary Research (CSCR), Islamabad

mass psychosis, crude nationalism, cultural ethnocentrism, and politicization of religion. The political and social values of the post-Cold War order of politics and culture no longer defines the governing structures of the societies across both worlds. This phenomenon of cultural and political backlash by the people against the ‘Old World’¹ was in the making for long as political undercurrents had been creeping into the social institutions of various societies² and vying for political power against competing forces of globalization and cultural homogeneity.³

Nonetheless, the political and social structures of the ‘Old World’, the Western Modernity, also played their critical role in not only exhibiting dereliction of duty in understanding the primal fears and ambitions of the people but actively sought to undermine the potency of these political undercurrents fraught with sentiments of anger, disillusionment, and vengeance. Concurrently, these structures of the western political order propounded a perspective of an alternative reality that betrays the brooding resentment in the societies.⁴

The present study will examine the crisis of modernity in augmenting the rise of crude authoritarianism in Indian society. The paper will seek to analyze the architecture of politics of Hindu nationalism, and by association Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in India in the theoretical framework of German political theorist and a potent critic of liberalism, Carl Schmitt. It will

¹Robert Zaretsky, “Max Weber Diagnosed His Time and Ours,” *Foreign Affairs Magazine*, July 24, 2019, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/central-europe/2019-07-24/max-weber-diagnosed-his-time-and-ours>. Also see Bruno Macaes, “The Secret Sources of Populism,” *Foreign Policy Magazine*, June 18, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/06/18/the-new-political-influencers/>

² Pankaj Mishra, “Globalization of Rage,” *Foreign Affairs Magazine*, November/December 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2016-10-17/globalization-rage>. Also see Fareed Zakaria, “The Rise of Illiberal Democracy,” *Foreign Affairs Magazine*, November/December 1997, <https://msuweb.montclair.edu/~lebelp/FZakariaIlliberalDemocracy1997.pdf>

³ Pippa Norris, *Cultural Backlash: Trump, Brexit, and Authoritarian Populism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); George Ritzer, “The Globalization of Nothing,” *SAIS Review of International Affairs* 23, no 2 (2003): pp. 189-200

⁴ Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?,” *The National Interest*, Summer 1989, https://www.embl.de/aboutus/science_society/discussion/discussion_2006/ref1-22june06.pdf. Also see Samuel P. Huntington, “Democracy’s Third Wave,” *Journal of Democracy* 2, no. 2 (1991): pp. 12-34; J. D. Vance, *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis* (New York: HarperCollins, 2016)

analyze how the Schmittian notions about politics, constitution, and society are influencing the authoritarian politics of Modi and how Hindu nationalism is exploiting the crisis of modernity to augment its political power, therefore cultivating 'A Hindu Order'.

Modernity, and more specifically the western conception of modernity, served as one of the essential idea and prime suspect behind the complacency of the western world in seeking to curate their perspective on reality and subsequently projecting the idea globally through organized violence and indoctrination. The term of 'modernity' has no singular definition but concerning the paper, it is pertinent to opt for the definition of Modernity which is propounded by British Sociologist Anthony Giddens: "The period of comprising all of post-medieval history of the western world", this definition ensures the focus of the study.⁵

There are some primary, multifarious fallacies in the underlying operation of the idea of modernity in the western conception of the word: the assumption of a homogenous historical experience of all societies⁶; the colonization of non-western world through various machinations and brute violence⁷; the assumption of the universal appeal of ideas of secularization⁸, liberal democracy⁹, and market capitalism¹⁰, and distinguishing a 'civilized west' and 'uncivilized others'.¹¹

Notwithstanding the progress and evolution of societies occurred in the Eurocentric modernity; the rise of nation-states, mass society, progress in science and technology,

⁵ Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (California: Stanford University Press, 1991)

⁶ Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Roads to Modernity: The British, French, and American Enlightenments* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004)

⁷ Priya Satia, *Empire of Guns: The Violent Making of the Industrial Revolution* (New York: Penguin Press, 2018); Shashi Tharoor, *An Era of Darkness: The British Empire in India* (New Delhi: Aleph Book Company, 2016)

⁸ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007)

⁹ Huntington, "Democracy's Third Wave," pp. 12-34

¹⁰ Joseph E. Stiglitz, "The Globalization of Discontent," *Project Syndicate*, December 5, 2017, <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/globalization-of-discontent-by-joseph-e--stiglitz-2017-12>

¹¹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2005)

industrialization and mass literacy, there also happened to be profound perils of these rapidly evolving changes in the social structures and organization of societies across the globe.¹²

Yet, none of the political actors advocating for the adoption of Eurocentric modernity by non-western societies through the will of the people or barrel of the gun had imagined that the inevitable consequence of this full-spectrum domination of western conception of modernity would be the rise and mass acceptance of authoritarianism.¹³ This is precisely where lies the ‘Crisis of Modernity’, western advocates of modernity could not even imagine that there could be plural conceptions and forms of modernity which can be distinctive from its western counterpart.¹⁴

Although, there were clearer signs - in the form of intermittent rise in conservative political forces, civil wars and faltering societies - of the consequences of dominating western modernity on the people which had a distinct socio-historical experience, the challenge for modernity and its associated ideology of liberalism emerged from its backyard.¹⁵ In recent years, two pivotal events in the modern history of western politics catapult the political undercurrents against modernity and its perils to the mainstream; these events were the election of Donald Trump and the vote of Brexit.¹⁶

The consequences of these changes in the western political world are felt more palpably in non-western societies. The case study of the paper comprises of India. In one way or the other, the political world of the Indian society has had a structurally-chronic relationship with the

¹² John Hutchinson, *Nationalism and War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Peter Wagner, *Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012)

¹³ James C. Scott, *Seeing like a State* (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1998); Roberto Stefan Foa, “Modernization and Authoritarianism,” *Journal of Democracy* 29, no. 3 (2018): pp. 129-140

¹⁴ SN Eisenstadt, “Modernity and modernization,” *Sociopedia.isa*, (2010); Steven B. Smith, *Modernity and Its Discontents* (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2016)

¹⁵ Patrick J. Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed* (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2019)

¹⁶ Francis Fukuyama, “Against Identity Politics,” *Foreign Affairs Magazine*, September/October 2018, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/americas/2018-08-14/against-identity-politics-tribalism-francis-fukuyama>. Also see Douglas Keller, “Donald Trump, Globalization, and Modernity,” *Fudan Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences* 11, no. 3 (2018): pp. 265-284; Matej Avbelj, “Brexit: An End to the End of History,” *German Law Journal* 17, no. 51 (2016): pp. 1-6

western world and therefore shares a masqueraded aversion toward the western ideas of politics and social culture.¹⁷

Philosopher of Power

Order and Exception are two of the most significant elements in the universe of ideas of Carl Schmitt. Experiencing the faltering constitutional order in the interwar period of Weimar Germany with the frailty of its parliamentary politics fraught with social divisions and political desynchronization, geopolitical humiliations and capitulation of the state, and economic turmoil and lost sense of national purpose, the conservative political and constitutional theorist perceptively deconstructed this tumultuous period of uncertainty as an eventual endgame of the idea of Liberalism.¹⁸

This shattering of the ‘*Old Order*’ in Weimar Germany imbued Schmitt to construct a new framework of ideas that centered on the concepts of ‘*Order and Exception*’. The canon of literature which resulted from this literary experience is considered as the ‘*Blueprint for Authoritarianism*’.¹⁹ Notwithstanding Schmitt did write on the multitude, and vast, subjects as

¹⁷Partha Chatterjee, “Empires, nations, peoples: The imperial prerogative and colonial exceptions,” *Thesis Eleven* 139, no. 1 (2017): pp. 84-96. Also see Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, “Post-Colonial South Asia: State and Economy, Society and Politics, 1971-1997,” in *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1998), pp. 220-239; Paul D. Kenny, “*Populism and Patronage: Why Populists Win Elections in India, Asia, and Beyond* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017)

¹⁸ William E. Scheuerman, “Carl Schmitt’s Critique of Liberal Constitutionalism,” *The Review of Politics* 58, no. 2, (1996, Spring): pp. 299-322. Also see Heiner Bielefeldt, “Carl Schmitt’s Critique of Liberalism: Systematic Reconstruction and Countercriticism,” *Canadian Journal of Law and Jurisprudence* 10, no. 1 (1997, 2015 published online): pp. 65-76; Matt McManus, “Who Was Carl Schmitt?,” *Merion West*, January 1, 2020, <https://merionwest.com/2020/01/29/who-was-carl-schmitt>

¹⁹Michael Lind, “Carl Schmitt’s War on Liberalism,” *The National Interest*, April 23, 2015, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/carl-schmitt%E2%80%99s-war-liberalism-12704>. Also see Joseph Owen, “Why journalists reviving Carl Schmitt are playing a precarious game,” *Prospect Magazine*, September 11, 2019, <https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/politics/journalists-carl-schmitt-revival-sovereign-trump-brexit>; Rose Deller, “Long Read Review: Carl Schmitt in and out of History”, *London School of Economics Review of Books Blog*, June 19, 2019, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lsereviewofbooks/2019/06/19/long-read-review-carl-schmitt-in-and-out-of-history/>;

diverse as spatiality and war, citizenship and democracy, history and philosophy, national constitution and international law, primarily his three ideas regarding sovereign leader, political distinctions, and inherent fallacy in the parliamentary democracy form the core of his matrix of thoughts.

Schmitt's conception of a sovereign leader in a democracy shapes the structure of the latter two of his ideas – political distinctions and intrinsic fallacy in the parliamentary democracy – respectively. The chronic failure of the leadership of Weimar Germany in the provision of order and security to the state and community markedly shaped Schmitt's idea of a sovereign leader.²⁰

In his literature of *Political Theology* and *Constitutional Theory*, Schmitt contends that modern liberal constitutional framework is predisposed to the cultivation of balance of power between institutions of the state – political executive, judiciary, and parliament – leading toward a significant yet deleterious division of power. This division, according to Schmitt, leaves no space for the provision of sovereign authority in the constitutional framework.²¹ This absence sets the polity in an unpropitious circumstance because the constitutional order may fail to act

Leila Choukroune, "When the state of exception becomes the norm, democracy is on a tightrope," *The Conversation*, April 27, 2020, <https://theconversation.com/when-the-state-of-exception-becomes-the-norm-democracy-is-on-a-tightrope-135369>; Matt McManus, "Carl Schmitt, Liberalism, and Post-Modern Conservatism," *Merion West*, June 18, 2018, <https://merionwest.com/2018/06/18/carl-schmitt-liberalism-and-post-modern-conservatism/>

²⁰Acar Kutay, "From Weimar to Ankara: Carl Schmitt, sovereignty and democracy," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 45, no. 6 (2019): pp. 728-752. Also see John P. McCormick, "The Dilemmas of Dictatorship: Carl Schmitt and Constitutional Emergency Powers," *Canadian Journal of Law and Jurisprudence* 10, no. 1 (1997, 2015 published online): pp. 163-187; Ville Suuronen, "Carl Schmitt as a theorist of the 1933 Nazi revolution: "The difficult task of rethinking and recultivating traditional concepts"," *Contemporary Political Theory* (2020); Richard Wolin, "Carl Schmitt, Political Existentialism, and the Total State," *Theory and Society* 19, no. 4 (1990): pp. 389-416; Samuel Earle, "The terrifying rehabilitation of Nazi scholar Carl Schmitt," *New Statesman*, April 10, 2019, <https://www.newstatesman.com/2019/04/terrifying-rehabilitation-nazi-scholar-carl-schmitt>

²¹Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006): pp. 5-35

when challenged by an exceptional situation as, Schmitt contends, the application of normative procedures of law dictates that situation should be normal.²² Following this chain of thought, Schmitt argued that for a polity to have a functional legal order it is imperative to have sovereign authority, invested in a person or an institution, which can assess and determine the situation of exceptionality and can act with decisively definitive action by operationalizing extra-legal measures to bring back the longed normalcy in the polity. This authority which has that power to marshal is the sovereign authority. This sovereign authority is foundational for any legal order, Schmitt followed.

However, this sovereign authority when acts in an exceptional situation to restore normalcy leads in the name of the people. Its role is not always constitutionally-determine, but socially-constructed, leading to the construction of a new socio-legal order in the polity as the sovereign authority restores order and normalcy. Consequently, for a sovereign authority to be existent, it is necessary for the people to first exist as a political community.

Resulting from this is the second most important idea of Carl Schmitt – the political distinction. Carl Schmitt in his *Concept of the Political* contended that for any people to exist as a political community in a given spatial context then it must form a political distinction in the same spatial context in terms of friend and enemy. Only by reducing the political distinction in binary terms can a group of people truly realizes the essence of existence as a political community.²³ For Schmitt, the ideology of liberalism fails to construct this distinction in a given polity by conceptualizing all people as equal in rights and law. For him, the ideology of liberalism in itself possesses the roots of authoritarian nationalism.²⁴

Schmitt then affirms that the determination of friend and enemy political distinction is by ascertaining the intensity of degree of animosity and separation between them. It means a group of people must be considered as a political community by determining how far they are willing to preserve their way of life even if it leads to war with other communities. Once such a

²²Carl Schmitt, *Constitutional Theory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008): pp. 169-196

²³Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political: Expanded Edition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007): pp. 25-26

²⁴ Ibid, pp. 126

determination is ascertained then a group of people attains an existence in the context of a political community.²⁵

After discerning the existence of a political community and the sovereign authority, Carl Schmitt in his two pivotal literature *Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy* and *Constitutional Theory* postulates upon two fundamental concepts regarding governance – *will of the people* and *identification of the will of the people*. As revealing as it is, Schmitt didn't advocate a majoritarian principle for governing the society. Castigating the system of parliamentary politics, Schmitt argued that the principle of majority nullifies the democratic argument of representing the will of people. It is, for him, no less a dictatorship when a will of the people is enacted and practiced through the majoritarian principle.²⁶

However, one would be intrigued to ask, if the majoritarian principle is negated in enacting the will of the people what will then constitute the *identification of the will of the people*. Carl Schmitt, as a masterful legal strategist, asserted that we can identify with the will of the people through the concept of the political community. For Schmitt, a legal rule which constitutes the will of the people is predicated upon the principle of political equality. Political community heralds political equality in a given polity when there is a shared sense of friend and enemy distinction between the governing and the governed.²⁷ This conclusive mark is an authentic expression of the will of the people leading to the emergence of a new power structure and order in society.

A Hindu Imperium

Modern India represents an intriguing case for the architecture of politics which Carl Schmitt laid out in his consequential literature. The modern foundations of the Indian state may constitute a liberal polity with a secular constitutional order and integration of minorities into the national political framework.²⁸ It may also constitute a comparatively greater degree of a secular

²⁵ Schmitt, *Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab, p. 27

²⁶ Carl Schmitt, *Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1988): pp. 25-32

²⁷ Ibid, pp. 10-14; Schmitt, *Constitutional Theory*, trans. Jeffery Seitzer, pp. 255-257

²⁸ Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (New Delhi: Penguin India, 2008); Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999); N. Chatterjee, *The Making of Indian Secularism: Empire, Law and Christianity, 1830-1960* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011)

democracy with a relative degree of authoritarian orientation.²⁹ Yet the social, political, ideological, and economic tensions lurking beneath the façade of Indian secularity since the partition of British India in 1947 illustrates the existence of a parallel India. This parallel India is fraught with ideological tensions in the manifestation of religious and caste identities, and ideological conceptions regarding the political and constitutional order, and even the very historiography of the Indian state.³⁰

The primary representative political ideology of this parallel India is the ideology of the Hindu right, commonly known as Hindu nationalism or Hindutva. In the aftermath of the British Raj, the elite formation in the modern new Indian state was, for the most part in post-partitioned Indian history, negligent of the parallel ideological force structure which is rooted in the bones of the Indian social structure.³¹ This parallel ideological political structure, unable to make earlier electoral gains, focused its strength in cultivating, sustaining, and consolidating a separate socio-

²⁹ Maya Tudor, *The Promise of Power: The Origins of Democracy in India and Autocracy in Pakistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Anuradha D. Needham, *The Crisis of Secularism in India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); C. S. Adcock, *The Limits of Tolerance: Indian Secularism and the Politics of Religious Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013)

³⁰ Ashutosh Varshney, "India's Democracy at 70: Growth, Inequality, and Nationalism," *Journal of Democracy* 28, no. 3, (2017): pp. 41-51. Also read Cynthia Ann Humes, "Hindutva, Mythistory, and Pseudoarchaeology," *Numen: International Review for the History of Religions* 59, no. 2/3 (2012): pp. 24; Barkha Dutt, *This Unquiet Land: Stories from India's Fault Lines* (Kolkata: Rupa and Co., 2015); Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Clash Within: Democracy, Religious Violence, and India's Future* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2009); Madhav Nayar, "The 'Glorious' History of Hindutva and its Hypocrisies," *The Wire India*, August 13, 2019, <https://livewire.thewire.in/politics/the-glorious-history-of-hindutva-and-its-hypocrisies/>; Aatish Taseer, "India Is No Longer India," *The Atlantic*, May, 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/05/exile-in-the-age-of-modi/609073/>

³¹ Pradeep K. Chhibber and Rahul Verma, *Ideology and Identity: The Changing Party Systems of India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). Also see Kingshuk Nag, *The Saffron Tide: The Rise of the B.J.P* (Kolkata, Rupa Publications, 2014); Lauren Frayer, "The Powerful Group Shaping The Rise of Hindu Nationalism In India," *National Public Radio*, May 3, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/05/03/706808616/the-powerful-group-shaping-the-rise-of-hindu-nationalism-in-india>

political consciousness in the population through acts of public service, political iconography, and an ideationally opposed discursive structure.³²

Inevitably, Hindutva nationalism had its shot at the political power when it was elected to rule in the 1990s with a non-majority vote, and after decades of corruption-ridden Indian National Congress (INC) rule in the 2000s, it was elected once again in 2014 with a historical vote in recent Indian electoral history and with a new face of Hindu power – Narendra Modi. It is the election of 2014, and successive re-election in 2019, which are of great importance as with greater electoral strength, new contours in geopolitics, and a new generation of Indians angst with INC politics, Hindu nationalism with Modi as its *Protector of the Hindu Realm* appealed to the majority of the Indian public.³³

Rise of Hindu Power and Politics of Exception

With the turn of the decade in the 2010s, the changing paradigms of geopolitics and resurgence of conservative nationalism catapults nations to long for a strongman who can secure them from the clouding dangers of cultural and political liberalism within their societies. In an identity-fraught world, the strongman would imbue in them a renewed sense of purpose and identity to take pride in. Capturing the imagination of the Hindu Indians regarding wealth,

³²Swapan Dasgupta, *Awakening Bharat Mata: The Political Beliefs of the Indian Right* (New Delhi, Penguin India, 2019). Also see Chetan Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2001); Kalyani Shankar, “The Triumph of the Indian Right: Reasons and Ramifications,” *Wilson Center*, 2019, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/the-triumph-the-indian-right-reasons-and-ramifications>; James Robertson, “Modi’s Philosopher: An Interview with Vinayak Chaturvedi,” *Jacobin Magazine*, October 4, 2019, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2019/10/vinayak-damodar-savarkar-chaturvedi-hindutva-bjp-modi-hindu-nationalism>

³³ Amartya Sen, “Modi Won Power, Not the Battle of Ideas,” *The New York Times*, May 24, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/24/opinion/india-modi-election.html>. Also see Isaac Chotiner, “An Indian Political Theorist on the Triumph of Narendra Modi’s Hindu Nationalism,” *The New Yorker*, May 24, 2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/q-and-a/an-indian-political-theorist-on-the-triumph-of-narendra-modis-hindu-nationalism>; Soutik Biswas, “How Narendra Modi has reinvented Indian politics,” *BBC*, May 24, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-48293048>

power, and identity, Modi-led Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the political force of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) – the mother organization representing Hindu nationalism - surges into the Indian power structure in 2014.³⁴ However, in an effort of mass resocialization to construct a political community, this new face of Hindu power needed to reconstitute society and mass social consciousness by defining who belong to the *National Self* and who belong to *The Others* in this new exclusionary republic.

Naturally, religion is one of the fundamental determinant in identity-construction in India. Comprising as one of the foundational tenet of their existence, the political imagination of Hindu nationalism perceives belongingness in terms to upper-caste, Brahminical majoritarianism which by default excludes not only Muslims and Christians as religious minorities but also excludes castes such as Shudras, Adivasi and Dalitsetc from the *National Self*. Besides religious minorities and castes, there is an increasing drive in the political *Othering* of Indians who do not subscribe to the majoritarian view of the society. The people who belong in this category are liberals and seculars, independent judges and lawyers, academics and activists, and free independent press. All these people are considered as *Anti-National* and thus, by virtue of this categorization, they are considered as the *Enemy* in contrast with *Friend*, people subscribing to majoritarian view, in the emergent Hindu spatial order.

Albeit Modi-led BJP in its first term was concerned with economics and power consolidation within the Indian polity.³⁵ It was merely a matter of time when Hindu nationalism

³⁴ James Crabtree, *The Billionaire Raj: A Journey through India's New Gilded Age* (New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2018). Also see Kanchan Chandra, "The Triumph of Hindu Majoritarianism," *Foreign Affairs Magazine*, November 23, 2018, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/india/2018-11-23/triumph-hindu-majoritarianism>

³⁵ Sanjay Ruparelia, "'Minimum Government, Maximum Governance': The Restructuring of Power in Modi's India," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 38, no. 4 (2015): pp. 755-775. Also see Bhabani Shankar Nayak, "Disasters of Neoliberalism and Hindutva Fascism in India," *Oxford Political Review*, June 10, 2020, <http://oxfordpoliticalreview.com/2020/06/10/disasters-of-neoliberalism-and-hindutva-fascism-in-india/>; Thomas Crowley, "Will Modi Fall?," *Jacobin Magazine*, May 21, 2019, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2019/05/modi-bjp-elections-congress-communist-parties>; Adam Roberts,

will come in full force in reconstituting the identity framework. In their mid-term, and eventually after their re-election in 2019, Hindu power had finally unleashed its political project toward identity reconstruction. The first casualty of this identity-reconstruction project was naturally Muslims. It is a documented fact that Muslims are already severely marginalized in civil institutions and politics yet, with BJP ascendancy, their right to live and mobility freely is also forfeited through the application of range of vigilante groups comprised of Hindu zealots operating under state patronage to wreck murder and mayhem under groups such as Gau Rakshaks (Cow protection units) and Anti-Love Jihad (Anti-Romeo Squads), and with movements such as Ghar Wapisi (Back to Home), whose casualty are overwhelmingly Muslims but not limited to them.³⁶

Augmenting this process, in 2019, Modi-led BJP swept through the Parliament two important laws intermittently legalizing this process of new identity-construction. First law pertains to the abrogation of article 370 which regulated relationship of New Delhi with disputed territory of Kashmir. The constitutional clause gave Kashmiri Muslim a sense of distinctiveness in identity belongingness, which now is shredded amidst rising fear of demographic change. Second law pertains to two interrelated laws on citizenship – Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and National Registry of Citizens (NRC). Underpinning both laws is the determination of religion as a core feature of the national citizenship and which may inevitably lead to exclusion of already-marginalized Muslims, possibly leading to their eventual detention in camps of the poorest. In the same year, building upon practices of state-backed social violence and legalized discrimination, Indian Supreme Court ruled in favor of Hindu nationalists in the verdict of Ayodhya dispute, culminating in the fulfilment of Hindu nationalism's three key ideological

“Modi’s Strongman Economics,” *The New York Times*, July 9, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/09/opinion/narendra-modi-india-strongman.html>

³⁶Christophe Jaffrelot, “A *De Facto* Ethnic Democracy? Obliterating and Targeting the Other, Hindu Vigilantes, and the Ethno-State,” in *Majoritarian State: How Hindu Nationalism is Changing India*, eds. Angana P. Chatterji, Thomas Blom Hansen and Christophe Jaffrelot (New Delhi: HarperCollins India, 2019), pp. 41-69; Shakuntala Banaji, “Vigilante Publics: Orientalism, Modernity and Hindutva Fascism in India,” *Journal of the European Institute for Communication and Culture* 25, no. 4 (2018): pp. 333-350; Eliza Griswold, “The Violent Toll of Hindu Nationalism in India,” *The New Yorker*, March 5, 2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/on-religion/the-violent-toll-of-hindu-nationalism-in-india>

goal: marginalization of Muslims, diluting special status of Kashmir, and construction of Ram Temple on the site of Babri Mosque.³⁷

Besides the *Othering* of religious minorities, caste also plays an essential role in the identity-reconstruction project of Hindu nationalism. In essence the political project of Hindu nationalism concerns the maintenance of the Brahminical supremacy in the caste hierarchy of India thus coalescing caste politics with national politics. During BJP rule, caste violence through state institutions, discourse in media and corporations has been incessantly increasing, restricting their upward social mobility similar to the religious minorities for the sole purpose of maintaining the upper-caste, minority-dominated state structures and consolidating Brahminical supremacy.³⁸ Continuing their identity-reconstruction process, besides caste and religion, political beliefs also exercising an important role in determining the belongingness to the *National Self*. Indians belonging to the spectrum of left politics, liberal thinking academics, social activists, international non-governmental organizations, and free and critical journalists and press are in the crosshair of BJP's identity politics. They are termed as *Anti-Nationals* and invites wrath of the Indian right and vigilante violence from murder of journalists to the suppression of critical

³⁷Uday Chandra, "The making of a Hindu India," *Al Jazeera*, August 24, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2020/8/24/the-making-of-a-hindu-india>; Audrey Truschke, "Historical Right," *Caravan Magazine*, December 6, 2019, <https://caravanmagazine.in/religion/ayodhya-babri-masjid-ram-mandir-supreme-court-audrey-truschke>; Soumya Shankar, "India's Citizenship Law, in Tandem with National Registry, could make BJP's discriminatory targeting of Muslims easier," *The Intercept*, January 30, 2020, <https://theintercept.com/2020/01/30/india-citizenship-act-caa-nrc-assam/>; BibhudattaPradhan, "Millions in India Could End Up in Modi's New Detention Camps," *Bloomberg*, February 25, 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/features/2020-modi-india-detention-camps/>

³⁸DivyaDwivedi, Shaj Mohan and J Reghu, "The Hindu Hoax," *Caravan Magazine*, December 31, 2020, <https://caravanmagazine.in/religion/how-upper-castes-invented-hindu-majority>; AniketNandan, "Revival of Hindu Nationalism: Interplay of Religion and Caste in 21st Century's India," *Athens Journal of Social Sciences* 5, no. 4 (2018): pp. 441-454; Arundhati Roy, "Two conspiracies and a cremation," *Scroll India*, October 3, 2020, <https://scroll.in/article/974758/arundhati-roy-two-conspiracies-and-a-cremation>; Alyssa Ayres, "Ethnic and Caste Politics, Hindu Nationalist, and the Indian Elections," *Council of Foreign Relations*, May 14, 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/ethnic-and-caste-politics-hindu-nationalism-and-indian-elections>

reporting. Through maintaining a monopoly over truth and reality, and processes of identity-formation, Hindu nationalists are effectively reconstituting social and legal meaning of who belongs to the political community, thereby essentializing societal distinctions as between *Friend* and *Enemy*.³⁹

Protector of the Hindu Realm

However, the identity-reconstitution requires a mass public-consciousness investment in the construction of the cult of personality, or the sovereign leader, in whom the public could find reassurance of the security of their ethnocentric spatial order. This act of cultivating *Savior* to protect one's own security in a turmoil-charged world is a deliberate act by the ideological force, media, and the capitalist class in embedding a *Messiah* in the social consciousness and mass culture.⁴⁰

Resultantly, emerging as a Schmittean Demagogue, the *Cult of Modi* took a center stage in the Indian public consciousness following the election campaign in 2014 and, after 2019, is

³⁹Vidya Krishnan, "The End of the Indian Idea," *The Atlantic*, February 3, 2021, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2021/02/narendra-modi-assault-indian-idea/617904/>; Samanth Subramanian, "How Hindu supremacists are tearing India apart," *The Guardian*, February 20, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/20/hindu-supremacists-nationalism-tearing-india-apart-modi-bjp-rss-jnu-attacks>; Sonia Falerio, "India's Attack on Free Speech," *The New York Times*, October 4, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/04/opinion/sunday/sonia-faleiro-india-free-speech-kalburgi-pansare-dabholkar.html>

⁴⁰ Swati Chaturvedi, *I am a Troll: Inside the Secret World of the BJP's Digital Army* (New Delhi: Juggernaut Publication, 2016). Also see Naresh Khatri (Edt.), *Crony Capitalism in India: Establishing Robust Counteractive Institutional Frameworks* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Christophe Jaffrelot, "What 'Gujarat Model'? – Growth without Development - and with Socio-Political Polarisation," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 38, no. 4 (2015): pp. 820-838; Bhim Bhurtel, "Corporate media a serious threat to Indian democracy," *Asia Times*, April 29, 2020, <https://asiatimes.com/2020/04/corporate-media-a-serious-threat-to-indian-democracy/>; Mohammad Ali, "The Rise of a Hindu Vigilante in the Age of WhatsApp and Modi," *Wired Magazine*, April 14, 2020, <https://www.wired.com/story/indias-frightening-descent-social-media-terror/>

further reinforced often with authoritative fear and violence.⁴¹ This cultish devotion gave Modi an unprecedented power over the social consciousness of public that they are battle ready to experience any trial for the sake and glory of their political community including shocks of demonetization and four-hour notice of COVID-19 lockdown. Finding in Modi the *long-sought Savior*, Hindus, primarily upper-caste ones, developed a sense of prophecy fulfillment when their strongman who weld Hindu power, wealth, and identity, is restoring the balance of belongingness in the geopolitical marketplace and assert Hindu power onto the global chessboard of cultural identities.⁴²

Heralding a New Political Order

Mass society may have a proclivity toward crude nationalism with authoritarian outlook but such tendencies do not cease at the realm of construction of the cult and the identity-reconstitution. Once the process initiates and legitimizes by the masses, it permeate all levers of the power structure and social institutions, steering the polity toward a profound reshaping of the order of things.⁴³ Majoritarianism is the new normal in Indian politics as Hindu nationalism exercising the will of the people rampaging its ideological program through all institutions of the

⁴¹ Amy Kazmin and Jyotsna Singh, "Indians maintain faith in messianic Modi," *Financial Times*, July 7, 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/c35c840c-89ae-48d5-8814-9f2ac0acf3ed>; Shashi Tharoor, "India's Cult of Modi," *Project Syndicate*, May 28, 2019, <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/narendra-modi-india-election-personality-cult-by-shashi-tharoor-2019-05>; Hartosh Singh Bal, "Modi's Campaign of Fear and Prejudice," *The New York Times*, April 19, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/17/opinion/modi-india-election.html>

⁴² Azeem Ibrahim, "How Modi Is Using Hinduism to Turn India Into an Autocracy," *Foreign Policy Magazine*, July 13, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/07/13/modi-india-hindutva-hindu-nationalism-autocracy/>; Jeffrey Gettleman and Sameer Yasir, "Modi's Popularity Soars as India Weathers the Pandemic," *New York Times*, May 16, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/16/world/asia/coronavirus-modi-india.html>; Dexter Filkins, "Blood and Soil in Narendra Modi's India," *The New Yorker*, December 2, 2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/12/09/blood-and-soil-in-narendra-modis-india>; Pankaj Mishra, "How Narendra Modi Seduced India with Envy and Hate," *The New York Times*, May 23, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/23/opinion/modi-india-election.html>

⁴³ Chatterji, Hansen and Jaffrelot (Edts.), *Majoritarian State: How Hindu Nationalism Changing India*

country. Drawing upon the Schmittian notions of political community morphing into political equality which needed to reshape the politico-legal institutions, traditional checks and balances are increasingly being eroded with parliament serving as a rubber-stamping institution which is evident from the enacted laws especially against Kashmir and secular nature of citizenship. Paradoxically, it is the parliament itself which gives a heightened sense of power to Hindu nationalists as it allows unhindered centralization of power in the executive.⁴⁴

This hyper-power also enable them to challenge the very historiography of the modern republic by attempting to cohere their imagined past through dismantling national heritage sites and rewriting their history, conspicuously India's multicultural past.⁴⁵ By cultivating a political community in the Schmittian context, Hindu nationalists are co-opting law and security institutions in their quest of curating new political order which is reflected in the new assertiveness in international politics, and Delhi riots and its aftermath.⁴⁶ Besides, they also co-opted the capitalist class by reigning neoliberalism in the market and managing country's future through new education policy while browbeating free press and morphing it into an extension of

⁴⁴Tarunabh Khaitan, "Killing a Constitution with a Thousand Cuts: Executive Aggrandizement and Party state Fusion in India," *The Law and Ethics of Human Rights* 14, no. 1 (2020): pp. 49-95; Christophe Jaffrelot and Gilles Verniers, "A new party system or a new political system?," *Contemporary South Asia* 28, no. 2 (2020): pp. 141-154; YaminiAiyar and Louise Tillin, "'One nation,' BJP, and the future of Indian federalism," *India Review* 19, no. 2 (2020): pp. 117-135; Shashi Tharoor, "Changing to a presidential system is the best way of ensuring a democracy that works," *Indian Express*, July 25, 2020, <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/rajasthan-political-crisis-parliamentary-system-shashi-tharoor-6522100/>

⁴⁵Audrey Truschke, "Hindutva's Dangerous Rewriting of History," *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal [Online]* 24/25, 2020; Supriya Gandhi, "When Toppling Monuments Serves Authoritarian Ends," *Foreign Affairs Magazine*, July 13, 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/india/2020-07-13/when-toppling-monuments-serves-authoritarian-ends>

⁴⁶YasmeenSerhan, "India Failed Delhi," *The Atlantic Magazine*, March 2, 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2020/03/india-modi-hindu-muslim-delhi-riots/607315/>; Paul Staniland, "India's New Security Order," *War on the Rocks*, December 17, 2019, <https://warontherocks.com/2019/12/indias-new-security-order/>

government public relations, ensuring a near-monopoly over the political competition in the system.⁴⁷ Modi-led BJP is smashing the old pillars of Indian democracy and plural traditions of the Indian political culture, effectively laying the foundation of a Hindu Imperium.

Conclusion

In the history of political movements with paradigm-shifting ideas, demagoguery with incendiary identity elements such as religion, caste, ethnicity, sectarian, or economic and political ideologies, leads to mass social violence, brute authoritarianism, and economic centralization. Fascist movements of the early 20th century are a reference point in the analysis of contemporary radical right politics. These movements opt for confrontation over cooperation; monopoly over balance; violence over dialogue.⁴⁸

The past always has a lingering imprint on contemporary society. The popular appeal of the fascist movements was not the only precipitating factor in charting the path to power of the demagogues. It was the very distrust of the masses in the political dispensation aligned with legal and political expediency in the legitimization of their new order of things as radical movements must attain legitimacy particularly from legal institutions of the state. Modi-led BJP is not merely thriving on a mass populist appeal, it is also enabled by legal expediency which augments the legitimization of its attempts to institute a new political order in Indian society.⁴⁹

⁴⁷Rohit Chandra and Michael Walton, "Big potential, big risks? Indian capitalism, economic reform and populism in the BJP era," *India Review* 19, no. 2 (2020): pp. 176-205; Ashlin Mathew, "Modigovt's new education policy is nothing but a national exclusion policy, say experts," *National Herald India*, August 1, 2020, <https://www.nationalheraldindia.com/india/modi-govts-new-education-policy-is-nothing-but-a-national-exclusion-policy-say-experts>; VinuGoel and Jeffrey Gettleman, "Under Modi, India's Press Is Not So Free Anymore," *New York Times*, April 2, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/02/world/asia/modi-india-press-media.html>

⁴⁸ Michael Hirsh, "Why Fascists Fail," *Foreign Policy Magazine*, July 21, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/07/21/2020-election-trump-biden-fascism-autocrat/>

⁴⁹ David Dyzenhaus, "Lawyer for the strongman," *Aeon Magazine*, June 12, 2020, <https://aeon.co/essays/carl-schmitts-legal-theory-legitimises-the-rule-of-the-strongman>; MoizTundawala and SalmoliChoudhuri, "AyodhyaJudgement and the Legalisation of Hindutva Sovereignty," *The Wire*

With the reinvention of power and identity in modern India, Modi-led BJP is exfoliating the remnants of Indian secularism from the political order and restructuring the Indian polity in the image of Schmittian ideas.⁵⁰ Similar to the demagoguery of the past, Hindu nationalism supported by mass appeal, crony capitalism, militaristic passions, and browbeaten media, is obliterating the *Old Order*, and on the ashes of the *Ancien Régime*, is founding a new power structure – A Hindu Order.

India, November 18, 2019, <https://thewire.in/law/supreme-court-ayodhya-judgement-hindutva-sovereignty>

⁵⁰ Arundhati Roy, “India: Intimations of an Ending,” *The Nation Magazine*, November 22, 2019, <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/arundhati-roy-assam-modi/>