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Hindu nationalism and the rise of BJP in India: A critical review

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Abstract

India is considered as new emerging great power in international politics that has significant implications for the world great powers. It is also considered as great regional power in Asia particularly in South Asia because of its exceptional economic, military and cultural power around the world. After its independence from British colonial rule in 1947, India emerged as secular state based on the notion of secular democracy around the country as well as the largest democratic country in the world. Under the leadership of Nehru, the national congress formed the government of India for the first time and started dominating the Indian political system. After that Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) emerged as political party in the late 1980s and BJP became one of the dominant political parties by the year of 1999 in Indian politics and formed BJP-led coalition government with other Hindu nationalist groups along with the support of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) based on the concept of Hindu nationalism for making India as Hindu State. In the general election of 2014, BJP came into the power brilliantly obtaining the majority seats where congress lost in the election poorly. Finally, BJP came to the power again in the general election of 2019 under the leadership of Narendra Modi. In this context, the paper tries to seek two key questions. First, how does Hindu nationalism instrumental to the rise of BJP? Second, what are the tactics that have been taken by BJP to foster their support in Indian politics?.

Keywords: Hindu nationalism, secular state, coalition politics, liberalism, politicization

Introduction

India has become one of the major powers in International Relations that has significant implications for the world great powers. India is considered as regional hub within Asia who can influence most in any significant issues in Asia. Among the South Asian countries, India is going forward rapidly based on its military, cultural and economic power. Now, India has become the third largest economic power around the globe which shows the tangible development of India as a major actor in international relations. India has always been a robust impact on its smaller neighbors regarding their cultures, economies and identities ^[1]. In that past, many people explain the question that- Does India matter for International politics but now the pattern of question has been changed focusing on why does India matter for others? This is because of India's rapid growth as a major power in international politics. India got its independence from British colonial rule in 1947. Since its independence, India has been a secular state which was supported by the India's first president Jawaharlal Nehru based on the notion of secular constitution of India for making united India under the flag of National congress of India. The notion of secularism is to make united India by giving equal opportunity to all groups including religious groups for practicing own values and cultures. The political organizations and secular groups of India respect the ethno-nationalist and religious beliefs of other particularly during respective festivals and cultural programs ^[2]. The National Congress has influenced till 1980s as a distinctive political party in Indian politics. After that for the first time BJP emerged as political party in Indian politics based on Hindu nationalism which promoted the idea of Hindu state ^[3]. Gradually, BJP started to rise in Indian politics although they promoted the idea of Hindu nationalism instead of secularism in India. By the year of 1996, they started to make alliances with other small political groups and religious organizations like RSS, Shiv-Sena, Sangh Parivar and Vishwa Hindu Parishad etc. The BJP-led coalition polled more than a quarter of the popular vote during the Lok Sabha election in Delhi in 1998. In that sense, the coalition politics helped to the rise of BJP as significant political party in India.

Moreover, they have ensured some structural changes based on Social welfare program which helped BJP to get the support of people around the country. In 2014 election, people elected Narendra Modi as their prime minister who is considered as most significant leader of BJP. After the national election which was held in 2014 and 2019, BJP started dominating strongly in Indian politics as single political party based on Hindu nationalism. Given the context, this paper analyzes two key questions. First, in what extent it is legitimate to say that Hindu nationalism is instrumental to the rise of BJP in Indian politics? Second, what are the strategies that have been taken by BJP to foster its support around the country? The paper is organized into seven sections. The first section deliberates the introductory notion of the paper. After the introduction, the second section analyzes the literature review to find the research gap of the study. The third section incorporates the research methodology. The next section deliberates the theoretical outlook of the study. The fifth section interprets the historical developments and dynamics of Hindu nationalism and BJP in Indian politics. The next section offers to discuss the key strategies of BJP as a political party for gaining the majority support of the people in Indian politics and the implications of Hindu nationalism and BJP in Indian politics. Finally, the last section deliberates the concluding remarks along with key findings of the study.

A theoretical explanation of liberalism

There are many theories in international relations where each theory uses to understand the behavior of state and non-state actors of international politics. After the end of the Second World War, liberalism became the dominant theory based on the notion of capitalism in international politics. For understanding the politics of Hindu nationalism and the rise of BJP in India, the author has made efforts to fit liberalism for making the theoretical outlook of the paper. The paper also explains the concept of nationalism and Hindu nationalism. In the 20th century liberal thinking predisposed the policy making of the states regarding international politics. After the end of the First World War the notion of liberalism had taken place in International relations which is intellectually known as Idealism based on Ideal thinking regarding a variety of issues around the world. Very specifically, the notion of liberalism became the key theory after the end of the Second World War in international politics. Generally, realism is considered the dominant theory of international relation where realism is the natural party of the government but liberalism is the leader of the opposition^[4]. From this viewpoint, it can be said that liberalism has strong claim in international relations regarding the policy making of the states. Liberalism focuses on the notion of cooperation among the actors in international relations. In a broad sense, liberalism refers the idea of individualism and liberty around the world which tries to accomplish the notion of justice, equality, access of private property and individual liberty. John Gray Identified the four elements regarding the notion of liberalism such as individualism, universalism, egalitarianism and meliorism^[5]. The first refers the notion of individual belief where people can think according to their personal belief regarding any issues surrounding their political, economic and cultural life. The second poses the notion of equal opportunity for all the people by ensuring the redistribution of wealth, legal and political equality.

Universalism explains the moral character that follow liberal thinking regardless people culture, belief, behavior and tradition. And finally, meliorism means that human being has the ability to advance better in their life. India is considered the largest democratic state among the states around the world based on the notion of liberalism. Form its independence, India as a state took the policy of secularism for ensuring the equal opportunity for all the people in India. The traditional congress party leader Nehru who later became the first president of India took the policy of secularism for expanding the democratic vision around the country and focused on the notion of Indian nationalism. But, later people observed a different picture regarding the internal politics of India especially in the period of 1990s. When BJP emerged as influential political party in India, they took the notion of Hindu nationalism based on the idea of Hindu state rather than the notion of Indian nationalism and liberal democracy. In 2014, when Narendra Modi became the Prime minister of India, the notion of Hindu nationalism got influential significant regarding the internal politics of India. After the general election in 2019, Modi took the policy of prolongation based on Hindu nationalism. But critically, this picture is totally opposite to the notion of secular liberalism which can hamper the democratic rights of the other groups or religious groups of India. As a result, this picture can bring religious conflict dangerously among the different groups in India especially Hindu-Muslim conflict^[6]. It is evident that the riot of Gujarat between Hindu and Muslim was the result of the notion of Hindu nationalism in Indian politics promoted by BJP. Moreover, The concept of making Hindu state extremely disrupts the human rights of the people of India because every people has their own understanding, ideology and beliefs but Hindu nationalism pretenses serious threat to other religious and secular groups regarding their own belief. For example, some people from the notion of Hindu nationalism want to stop eating beef around the country because they think it will harm the religious notion of Hindu people and this concept hampers the Muslim minority rights in India. Thus Hindu nationalism has challenged the entire process of liberal democracy and secular identities of Indian people^[7].

Conceptualizing nationalism and Hindu nationalism

Defining nationalism is not an easy task in International Relations. Actually, the conceptualization of nationalism is very complex task because of its various sides of understanding. Moreover, the concept of nationalism can differ from state to state but the learning of nationalism is needed to understand the world politics. Generally, nationalism poses the notion of common identity based on common culture, language, sense of belonging and belief. Ignatief sees nationalism as “a notion that combines the political idea of territorial self- determination, the cultural idea of the nation as one's primary identity, and a moral idea of justification of action to protect the rights of the nation against the other (Barrington).” On the other, Gellner defines nationalism as “a principle which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent^[8].” Moreover Gellner and Benedict Anderson argue that nationalism is a socially constructed phenomenon. So, it can be said that defining nationalism is very much complex in international relations. The idea of Hindu nationalism came into Indian politics when BJP started their activity as political party during the period of 1980s. Gradually, the rise of BJP facilitated to

expand the notion of Hindu nationalism around the country with strong emotion. Many people have often identified Hindu nationalism as the biggest threat to the unity of India especially for the contemporary resurgence in Indian politics which can be harmful regarding the people rights of other religious and secular groups. It poses a strong challenge to the governing principals of the state. Hindu nationalism represents the idea of majoritarian, dogmatic and cultural nationalism which exclude the participation of Muslim and other religious minority groups. The idea of Hindu nationalism is totally different from the idea of Indian nationalism under the supervision of National Congress of India. Christophe Jaffrelot has argued that Indian congress poses the notion of Indian Nationalism based on civic virtue but Hindu nationalism sought to expand Indian identity based on ethnic criteria ^[9]. But this notion of Hindu nationalism exclude the rights of Muslim as Indian people because all Indians are not Hindus and were not Hindus. So the basic notion of Hindu nationalism is to expand Hindu state based on the concept of Hindutva.

Hindu nationalism and the rise of BJP in India

After attaining independence in 1947, the leaders of India started to formulate its constitution with the direction of the Constituent Assembly which was headed by B. R. Ambedkar who is considered the pioneer of the Indian constitution. The Constituent Assembly formulated the Indian constitution formally on 26, January, 1950 which is considered as the secular constitution of India supported by the Indian first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Since independence of India, the constitution of India formulated crucial policies for protecting the minority's rights such as Muslim, Christian, Sikh and other populations form 80 percent Hindu population in India. "Article 25, which enshrines the right to individual freedom, also empowers the state to intervene in Hindu religious institution ^[10]. In this sense, it is evident that article 25 of the constitution of India has legalized to promote Hindu institution specially. During the time of congress as ruling power, the notion of Hindu nationalism was not in practice due to expanding the notion of secularism in Indian politics. When BJP came as a political party in India based on the concept of Hindu nationalism and Hindu state by late 1980s, the notion of Hindu nationalism became prominent. Gradually, BJP started to claim as influential political party because of their increased popularity among the population of India. The BJP origin in Indian politics lie in the Bharatiya Jana Sangh promoted by the Syama Prasad Mookarjee in 1951. The official philosophy of BJP is the notion of Integral Humanism linked with the concept of Hindutva and the concept of Hindutva influence the policies of BJP a lot in Indian politics. During the time of state emergency in 1977, Jana Sangh started their political activities to form Janata Party with some other parties in India but they were not able to defeat the traditional political party congress. The BJP is linked with the political agenda of RSS based on the notion of RSS Hindu nationalism in Indian politics. As a result, in the election of the parliament of Indian Lower House, BJP got only 2 seat but in 1989 they got 85 seats in Lokh Sobha which was the sign of the popularity of BJP in Indian politics. Later, the popularity was got tremendous enhancement in 1992 and BJP got 120 seats in Lokh Sobha. After achieving the popularity from the people of India, BJP emerged as dominant political party by the year of 1996 in

Lokh Sobha. After the general election, the BJP led coalition named National Democratic Alliance formed a government under the leadership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee which was the non-congress government in India and this coalition enormously ruled full time in India till 2004. But in the general election of 2004, BJP lost their appeal and congress won in the election. There can be some factors behind losing power of BJP. Most probably the India Shining Campaign was one of the major factors which assisted to make expand the discrimination of poor people and this people helped to bring Congress in power. But later, under the leadership of Narendra Modi who is considered very famous in India, BJP came to power again respectively in 2014 and 2019 with vast majority support and the national Congress defeated poorly. BJP has now emerged as single dominant party who is now ruling the country powerfully. In this sense, the relationship between Hindu nationalism and the rise of BJP can be instrumental. But Hindu nationalism is not only factors behind the rise of BJP in India because the institutional context of Indian politics facilitated regarding the emergence of BJP in the late 1980s where coalition politics verbalized the policy aims of BJP ^[11]. There are numerous factors behind the rise of BJP in Indian politics. First, the strong popularity of Modi helped to foster the appeal of BJP towards common people particularly Hindu majority people. Second, the ability to expand the traditional upper caste based on Hindu nationalism and the strong support of middle class assisted BJP to come in power with majority support. Third, the corrupted activities during the congress period and the weakness of the congress political mechanism and scandals of the congress party helped BJP to expand their popularity around the country. Thus, it can be said that other factors along with the notion of Hindu nationalism are instrumental behind the rise of BJP. It is important to analyze that how BJP emerges as dominant political party and what strategies they have taken for this tremendous achievement. The next chapter discusses this phenomenon along with analyzing the implications of Hindu nationalism in Indian politics.

The rise of BJP in Indian politics

In the contemporary Indian politics, BJP has now emerged as most influential political party under the famous leader Narendra Modi and their political influence is increasing day by day although they follow the notion of Hindu state like the RSS. It is evident that BJP took numerous politics and strategies from the beginning of its emergence to expand BJP's political influence in India. For instance, alliance politics is considered one of the strong strategy of BJP for expanding their popularity in Indian political atmosphere *firstly*. It is very difficult for any political parties to get single majority seats to form a government in the general elections which poses political parties to make coalitions with other regional parties ^[12]. The BJP has close ties with the notion of RSS based on the concept of Hindu state. The Sangh Parivar known as the right wing Hindu nationalist like RSS, Vishwa Hindu Parisad (VHP), and Shiv Sena played significant rule regarding the coalition politics of BJP. In 1989, BJP made coalition with Shiv Sena which was instrumental for expanding their popularity in India. Later the coalition of BJP, RSS, Shiv Sena, VHP and Sangh Parivar helped to lead the national democratic alliance that was instrumental behind BJP's increasing popularity in Indian politics. In this sense, it can be said that

the alliance politics played significant role regarding the rise of BJP in India. *Secondly*, the BJP led social welfare program is another vibrant strategy regarding the rise of BJP in Indian politics. The social welfare programs support BJP to expand their upright in the society. The policy of helping the poor people and others played significant role behind the rise of BJP by which BJP is able to expand their popularity among the poor people. Moreover, they have taken several programs regarding the expansion of education which comfort them to fascinate the new generation support in India. For instance, they have committed to “reconstruct the primary school curriculum to include values for life, dignity, and patriotism as also conservation of electricity, water and security on roads ^[13].” They have also focused on the changes of low caste and strained to expand conclusive idea regarding the notion of Hindutva among the people of India exclusively among the deprived people. *Thirdly*, the charismatic leadership of the famous leader Narendra Modi during the time of 2014 and 2019 election plays momentous role to develop BJP as dominant political power in India. Narendra Modi is considered the pioneer of economic development of his previous states Gujrat although he was blamed for the riot in Gujrat. But his ability to expand the economic and infrastructure development in Gujrat help to make him as famous leader in India and BJP has used it for gaining the majority support in the general election in 2014. His personal capacity is far better than almost any other politician in India who can attack media reportage strongly ^[14]. *Fourthly*, as a part of their political strategy, BJP uses the internal and external problem of congress such as corruption, scandals, lack of political mechanism and the weak commitments of the congress. By expanding these kinds of weakness of the congress among the people of India, BJP efforts always to increase the majority support and this is really helpful. So, it is evident that not only the notion of Hindu nationalism but also the poor activities of congress assist BJP to come in the governmental power of India.

Implications

The politics of BJP based on the notion of Hindu nationalism has enormous implications in India which can expand the inner crisis in India. The notion of Hindu state challenges to the democratic principle of Indian society. The Indian democracy has the challenge considering a variety of religious clashes among different groups and identities ^[15]. Most importantly, due to the rise of Hindu nationalism and BJP in Indian politics, it is observed that the communal card has been enforced by the BJP and their allies to gain majority support during the time of general election except Muslim. This communal politics can bring numerous problems such as communal riot which people saw during the time of 2002 in Gujrat, violence, terrorism and ethnic conflict around the country because people of other ideologies such as Muslim and secular people do not support the notion of Hindu nationalism. They have different ideas, belief and ideologies and as a democratic country's citizen every people has rights to follow their own belief. But due to the concept of Hindutva, BJP is trying to ensure the influence of Hindu people over other which has created a clear division recently in Indian Society. As a result, BJP efforts to expand the notion of communalism which is detrimental to peace, justice, unity and democratic values ^[16]. Thus, the implication of Hindu nationalism and

the politics of BJP pretense a threat to the notion of democracy in India. In the contemporary India, the notion of Hindu fundamentalism has increased which affects the human rights of the minority people in India. Hindu fundamentalism can bring the extreme religious clashes among the Hindu people and Muslim because in some states the notion of Hinduism has been taken extremely where Hindu people killed Muslim for eating beef. In the context of foreign policy, the Modi government has also changed some policies by focusing on the common culture and heritage of Hinduism and economic development based on nationalist idea for achieving global targets which can affect democratic values also.

Conclusion

The Influence of India as an actor is growing rapidly around the world that has great implication in international politics. India is considered the 3rd largest economy around the world and it has well military and cultural power in international politics. After the independence of India as state, the notion of secular democracy had been taken by the leaders with constitutional clarification under the first president Nehru. Since its independence, India is considered the largest democratic country around the globe based on the notion of secularism, equality, proper human rights and dignity of the citizen and united India. The traditional political party named the national congress dominant the Indian politics based on the notion of secularism and Indian nationalism until 1980s. But in the late 1980s. The BJP became a strong party based on the notion of Hindu nationalism for making India as Hindu State. Gradually, the BJP-led coalition became strong political forces in Indian politics and they dominates the Indian politics now especially after the general election of 2014 and 2019 where BJP-led national coalition got the power with vast majority and the national congress lost in the election badly. As a result, a Hindu nationalist political party brings numerous new realities which have lots of implications in Indian politics. BJP have used the notion of Hindu nationalism as political instrument for gaining the majority support of the people except the Muslims that led to the rise of religious fundamentalism where there is evident regarding the problem of well-planned riots and communal violence in Indian politics. But not only BJP use the concept of Hindu nationalism but also use the lack of political mechanism of the national congress along with focusing on the welfare program for gaining the support of the people particularly the young people which opened a new reality of Indian politics where the predominant traditional political party the National Congress faced serious challenges from BJP and their philosophical alliances based on Hindu nationalism. They have made the concept of coalition politics in Indian culture which helped to accumulate other Hindu nationalist groups such as (RSS, Shiv-Sena, Sangh Parivar and Vishwa Hindu Parishad) in the political system for gaining the majority seats in the general election and formed BJP-led coalition called National Democratic Alliances. Under this alliances, they are demanding to transform India as Hindu state based on the notion of Hindutva which is considered totally opposite to the Nehru's notion of secularism. At present day politics, BJP and RSS jointly trying to expand the notion of Hindu nationalism for ensuring India as Hindu state. On the above discussions, the key findings of the paper are given below:

Close linkage between Hindu nationalism and the rise of BJP

There is close link between the rise of BJP and Hindu nationalism in Indian Politics. The notion of Hindu nationalism has helped to make coalition with other Hindu nationalist group which is considered very much significant for the politics of BJP that assists to establish the BJP-led National democratic alliances in India. Under the leadership of BJP, the NDA coalition was able to gain the support of the majority Hindus except the Muslim based on the concept of Hindu state. As a result, it can be said that BJP did tremendous performance in the general election of 2014. So, it is evident that there is close linkage between Hindu nationalism and the rise of BJP in Indian politics. BJP is using the notion of Hindu nationalism as vital instrument for gaining the political targets or goals.

The failure of national congress

The national congress is considered the most dominant traditional political party in India which lead the independence struggle during the colonial rule in India. After the independence of India, the national congress formed the first government of the Indian history under the leadership of Nehru based on the notion of secularism and democracy in Indian politics. Later, it is evident that a new reality in Indian politics especially in the late 1980s when BJP began to claim them as strong political party and they achieved the support of Indian people and formed government in 1998 and 2014. But the fact is that how BJP got the support of the majority people? The possible answer is the failure of national congress in Indian politics regarding the lack of political mechanisms and not protecting the scandals and corruptions around the country.

Hindu nationalism and anti-secularism

India is the largest democratic country around the world based on the constitutional recognition of secular state where every people will get the rights to practice their own belief and ideology. But the notion of Hindu nationalism stances something opposite notion of secularism in India that wants to promote India as Hindu state. But In India, there is living many people who have their own beliefs and religions, as the citizen of a democratic country, these people have rights to follow their own religion and they have the rights to belief in the notion of Indian nationalism rather than Hindu nationalism. So, the notion of Hindu nationalism promotes the idea of anti-secularism in Indian politics.

Hindu nationalism as innermost crisis in Indian politics

The notion of Hindu nationalism can be considered as inner crisis in Indian politics because of its discriminative policies which promote the violence extremism in India. The BJP and their allies want to establish India as Hindu state based on the notion of Hindu nationalism which is considered the violation of other religious or distinct groups' rights which can create serious political crisis in India. It is evident that Hindu nationalism promotes a variety of challenges to the notion of democratic values, justice, peace and development. Using the popularity of Modi, BJP started their political activities during the last general election again in 2019 with the notion of the personalization of successful leader based on the ability of the leader's popularity along with the idea of Hindu state. The personalization of the

popular leader Narendra Modi helped BJP to gain the majority seats in the last general election even BJP use this notion almost in every election now. As a popular leader, the discriminatory policies taken by the Modi based on Hindu nationalism will expand numerous inner crisis in Indian politics among different religions, groups and people

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