



**NAVAL  
POSTGRADUATE  
SCHOOL**

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

**THESIS**

**INDIA'S DEMOCRACY UNDER HINDU FUNDAMENTALISTS:  
THE QUESTION OF MINORITY CONDITION**

by

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December 2018

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE			Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instruction, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188) Washington, DC 20503.				
<b>1. AGENCY USE ONLY</b> (Leave blank)		<b>2. REPORT DATE</b> December 2018	<b>3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED</b> Master's thesis	
<b>4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE</b> INDIA'S DEMOCRACY UNDER HINDU FUNDAMENTALISTS: THE QUESTION OF MINORITY CONDITION			<b>5. FUNDING NUMBERS</b>	
<b>6. AUTHOR(S)</b> Shaukat Abbas				
<b>7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, CA 93943-5000			<b>8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER</b>	
<b>9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> N/A			<b>10. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER</b>	
<b>11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES</b> The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.				
<b>12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT</b> Approved for public release. Distribution is unlimited.			<b>12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE</b> A	
<b>13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words)</b> <p>The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has ruled India since 2014. After assuming power, the BJP attempted to implement its Hindu nationalist agenda and targeted minorities, trying to push India from liberal, secular democracy toward majoritarian, ethnic democracy. Efforts by India's civil society, including the media and judiciary, to resist the BJP's agenda have been met with legal retribution and violence. However, it remains unclear what BJP's domination of India's national parliament means for India's secular democracy.</p> <p>An analysis of the BJP's rule via Larry Diamond's four principles of democracy reveals that the BJP restricted participation of minorities in public life through violence, violated human rights, and subverted the rule of law. India's minorities, including the Dalits and Kashmiris, reacted by establishing private militias, staging protests, committing suicide, seeking asylum abroad, and intensifying their demands for independence of Indian-administered Kashmir. Overall, the BJP has harmed India's liberal democracy and polarized its traditionally secular society along religious lines; if the BJP maintains its Hindu nationalist policies, minorities may radicalize or migrate as refugees. That said, civil society, the judiciary, and opposition parties have restricted Hindu nationalists' attempts to turn India into an ethnic democracy and might be the key to countering this tendency in Indian politics.</p>				
<b>14. SUBJECT TERMS</b> Hindu nationalist extremism, undermining democratic institutions			<b>15. NUMBER OF PAGES</b> 161	
			<b>16. PRICE CODE</b>	
<b>17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT</b> Unclassified	<b>18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE</b> Unclassified	<b>19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT</b> Unclassified	<b>20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT</b> UU	

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**INDIA'S DEMOCRACY UNDER HINDU FUNDAMENTALISTS:  
THE QUESTION OF MINORITY CONDITION**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES  
(CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS)**

from the

**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL  
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## **ABSTRACT**

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has ruled India since 2014. After assuming power, the BJP attempted to implement its Hindu nationalist agenda and targeted minorities, trying to push India from liberal, secular democracy toward majoritarian, ethnic democracy. Efforts by India's civil society, including the media and judiciary, to resist the BJP's agenda have been met with legal retribution and violence. However, it remains unclear what BJP's domination of India's national parliament means for India's secular democracy.

An analysis of the BJP's rule via Larry Diamond's four principles of democracy reveals that the BJP restricted participation of minorities in public life through violence, violated human rights, and subverted the rule of law. India's minorities, including the Dalits and Kashmiris, reacted by establishing private militias, staging protests, committing suicide, seeking asylum abroad, and intensifying their demands for independence of Indian-administered Kashmir. Overall, the BJP has harmed India's liberal democracy and polarized its traditionally secular society along religious lines; if the BJP maintains its Hindu nationalist policies, minorities may radicalize or migrate as refugees. That said, civil society, the judiciary, and opposition parties have restricted Hindu nationalists' attempts to turn India into an ethnic democracy and might be the key to countering this tendency in Indian politics.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AAP	Aam Aadmi party
ABVP	Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad
AKP	Justice and Development Party
AFSPA	Armed Forces Special Power Act
BJP	Bharatiya Janata party
BJS	Bharatiya Jana Sangh
BSP	Bahujan Samaj Party
CBI	central bureau of investigation
CJI	Chief Justice of India
CPSC	Center for Promotion of Social Concerns
CPM	Communist party of India (Marxist)
DJS	Dharm Jagran Samiti
DMK	Dravida Munnetra Kazagham
DRAL	Dassault Reliance aerospace Ltd
EFI	Evangelical Fellowship of India
FCRA	Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA)
FTII	film and television institute
IB	intelligence bureau
ICHR	Indian council of historical research
INC	Indian National Congress
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
NDA	National Democratic Alliance
NDTV	New Delhi Television Network
NJAC	National Judicial Appointments Commission Act
NREGA	National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
NRHM	National Rural Health Mission
OBCs	other backward classes
PDP	Peoples Democratic party
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
SAD	Shiromani Akali Dal

SCs	scheduled castes
SP	Samajwadi party
SSA	Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
STs	Scheduled tribes
TDP	Telugu Desam party
UIDAI	Unique Identification Authority
UPA	United Progressive Alliance
VHP	Vishva Hindu Prishad



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

All praises to Allah Almighty, the most Magnificent, the most Merciful, Who gave me health and ability to complete this thesis. I am thankful to my thesis advisor, Dr. Anshu Chatterjee, for her unrelenting support, guidance and help. She is a thorough professional and devoted instructor of the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS). She was always there to guide and teach me in shaping my thesis. Simultaneously, she was always pushing, reminding me to complete the thesis. Dr. Chatterjee, you made this formidable task easy and smooth for me. My co-advisor, Dr. Carolyn Halladay, was always a rock-solid support. She gave insightful input in completing the research. Thank you Dr. Chatterjee and Dr. Halladay, you are assets of NPS.

Greta Marlatt, I have yet to come across as selfless and so helping a person as you. Whenever I needed to find research material, arrange books, or handle Zotero as well as the Chicago citation style, help came at the cost of your personal time and rest. Dear Greta, I will never forget your help.

The staff of the NPS Graduate Writing Center, Thesis Processing Office and Dudley Knox Library were always helpful. Carla Hunt is thoroughly professional; with her help in dealing with sentence making and punctuation, my thesis progressed. I am obliged to Matt Norton, Alison Scharmota, Chloe Woida, Dr. Sandra Leavitt, Susan Hawthorne, Michele D'Ambrosio and Irma Fink for their support in completion of my thesis.

I thank my beloved Pakistan and the government of Pakistan, who sent me to NPS. The last 15 months at NPS were intellectually so rewarding. I thank Allah Almighty for granting independence to Pakistan and helping my nation preserve independence.

This research is dedicated to my family, especially my late father, Chaudhry Muhammad Ilyas, and my mother, Mrs. Shaista Khanum. Their vision, effort and financial sacrifice for my education enabled me to join the prestigious NPS. My wife, Rabia, helped me to concentrate on research and took care of my loves, Fatima, Muhammad Rayan, Hamda and Anaya, who are my hope. Thank you dear family.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Several news sources point to rising intolerance against minorities in India since the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) took over the central government in 2014. Anish Kapoor, a U.K.-based Indian columnist, declared that “a Hindu version of the Taliban is asserting itself, in which Indians are being told: It’s either this view—or else.”<sup>1</sup> Specific examples of intolerance and even violence include the following. The state had a shocking and delayed response to the rape and abduction of a Muslim girl, Asifa, in the Kathua District of Indian-administered Kashmir on New Year’s Eve 2017. When police arrested eight Hindu men for the attacks, Hindu right wing-groups and “two BJP’s ministers” supported the accused.<sup>2</sup> Prime Minister Narendra Modi took four months to break his silence to support the victim.<sup>3</sup> The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom also reports that, in 2017, the persecution of Christians by Hindu nationalists in India rose.<sup>4</sup> In addition, saffron-clad religiously motivated nationalist organizations have been penalizing people who eat beef since the Modi administration came to power.<sup>5</sup>

According to the BJP’s official website, the party is driven by Hindutva nationalist ideology, which seeks to convert all in India into Hindus.<sup>6</sup> The political party is also allied with *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS), whose exclusionary and violent Hindutva ideology is compared, by some scholars, to that of ISIS.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Anish Kapoor, “India Is Being Ruled by a Hindu Taliban,” *The Guardian*, November 13, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/nov/12/india-hindu-taliban-narendra-modi>.

<sup>2</sup> Kapoor.

<sup>3</sup> Haider Ali, “Ashamed of Rape Cases, Narendra Modi Breaks Silence Over Assault on Muslim Girl Asifa Bano,” *Daily Pakistan Global*, April 14, 2018, <https://en.dailypakistan.com.pk/world/ashamed-of-rape-cases-narendra-modi-breaks-silence-over-assault-on-muslim-girl-asifa-bano/>.

<sup>4</sup> Christophe Jaffrelot, “India’s Democracy at 70: Toward A Hindu State,” *Journal of Democracy* 28, no. 3 (July 2017): 60, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2017.0044>.

<sup>5</sup> “‘Cow Vigilantism’ in India - the Economist Explains,” *Economist*, February 15, 2018, <https://www.economist.com/the-economist-explains/2018/02/15/cow-vigilantism-in-india>.

<sup>6</sup> Mujibur Rehman, *Rise of Saffron Power, Reflections on Indian Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 2.

<sup>7</sup> Rehman, 2.

## A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION

What does the domination of the BJP, a non-secular party, in India's national parliament since 2014 mean for India's secular democracy and its religious minorities? Sub-questions are, one, whether secular and democratic watchdog institutions such as the judiciary and media are affected by the victory of a non-secular party, and two, how the decline of the INC, a predominantly secular party, contributed to the rise of a non-secular party. This thesis examines the circumstances that brought Hindu nationalists to power in the Lok Sabha (lower house of the parliament), the impact of that rise and current power on India's minorities, the state of India's watchdog institutions, and the overall impact on India's once-secular democracy.

## B. PROBLEM STATEMENT

India is constitutionally a secular country,<sup>8</sup> is the largest democracy of the world,<sup>9</sup> has a traditionally tolerant society, and, despite differences, has created unity in its diversity.<sup>10</sup> The founding fathers of India established a secular and liberal democratic state.<sup>11</sup> Article 15 of India's constitution bans discrimination on religious grounds.<sup>12</sup> Since then, Indian pluralism and secularism have been widely appreciated.<sup>13</sup> After 2014, for the first time, BJP party leader Narendra Modi, who is an active member of the RSS, a Hindu nationalist organization, became Prime Minister of India. The BJP's ascent to the center of the country represents an ideological and security problem for India, South Asia, and the world. If the Hindu nationalists continue to expand their influence into India's democratic institutions, it may lead to the breakdown of the world's largest

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<sup>8</sup> Christophe Jaffrelot, "India's Democracy at 70: Toward a Hindu State?," *Journal of Democracy*; *Baltimore* 28, no. 3 (July 2017): 50, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2017.0044>.

<sup>9</sup>BBC, "India Country Profile," January 23, 2018, sec. Asia, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-south-asia-12557384>.

<sup>10</sup> Kapoor, "India Is Being Ruled by a Hindu Taliban."

<sup>11</sup> Christophe Jaffrelot, "The Modi-Centric BJP 2014 Election Campaign: New Techniques and Old Tactics," *Contemporary South Asia* 23, no. 2 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.1080/09584935.2015.1027662>.

<sup>12</sup> Jaffrelot, "India's Democracy at 70," 50.

<sup>13</sup> Mohamed Rafeek, "Plural India: The Gandhian Path of Secular Democracy and Peace Building," (n.d.), [https://www.academia.edu/8668446/Plural\\_India\\_The\\_Gandhian\\_Path\\_of\\_Secular\\_Democracy\\_and\\_Peace\\_Building](https://www.academia.edu/8668446/Plural_India_The_Gandhian_Path_of_Secular_Democracy_and_Peace_Building).

democracy. Religious minorities may radicalize, leading to conflict in India, which could spill over to the neighbors in the form of cross border insurgences and possible refugee flows. In addition, a destabilized India would be a global security threat, as it contains the second largest population in the world, is a globalized economy, and is emerging as a security partner to the West in the Indian Ocean region.

### **C. SIGNIFICANCE OF RESEARCH**

Does the electoral victory of Hindu nationalism in India imply a threat to its democratic institutions, human rights, and overall internal stability? India may be experiencing a disturbing undermining of individual rights through democratic processes, similar to the West. Given its large minority population, analyzing India's shift toward a conservative religious political party provides an opportunity to understand whether a religious nationalistic swing, where a religious nationalist party seeks a particular national identity, undermines human rights. If, in fact, the BJP has undermined human rights, the question becomes how that undermining has affected democratic institutions. India's case also presents an opportunity to understand how democracies can decline. If the BJP's power has led to a decline in the strength of India's democracy, it may be affecting not only India's internal stability, but regional stability as well, which would in turn affect global stability. Other countries that are engaged in the democratization process in the region, such as Myanmar, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka, rely on the stability of a large neighboring nation for their domestic and regional security, and they look upon India's democratic framework as a model for their own, including how they treat their own minorities. Therefore, India is an important case study to understand how a large democracy is affected by a rightward religious regime and how those internal effects, in turn, affect regional and global stability.

### **D. LITERATURE REVIEW**

This literature reviews aims to present a framework by which to examine whether India's religious nationalistic swing has affected its democratic institutions through elections and the equal treatment of all persons. Larry Diamond identifies four basic elements of democracy: "a political system for choosing and replacing the government

through free and fair elections; the active participation of the people, as citizens, in politics and civic life; protection of the human rights of all citizens; and a rule of law, in which the laws and procedures apply equally to all citizens.”<sup>14</sup> The literature review has three sections of scholarly discussion related to those four core elements of democracy; current global issues regarding those core elements; and aspects that differentiate India’s democracy from others.

## 1. Democracy’s Core Elements

Various scholars agree with Larry Diamond that free and fair elections are central to democracy. Joseph Alois Schumpeter states that democracy is “a system in which rulers are chosen in free, competitive elections.”<sup>15</sup> For Samuel P. Huntington, democracy is “the extent that the most powerful collective decision makers are selected through fair, honest and periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes and in which virtually all the adult population is eligible to vote.”<sup>16</sup> Terry Lynn Karl states that “democracy is a set of institutions that permits the entire adult population to act as citizens by choosing their leading decision makers by competitive, fair and regularly scheduled elections which are held in the context of the rule of law and guarantees for political freedom and limited military prerogatives.”<sup>17</sup> She also concludes that “the government that lacks all three attributes of democracy is an autocracy.”<sup>18</sup> All of these scholars have agreed upon a common point of holding free and fair elections for democracy, and Karl adds political freedom.

Various scholars also agree on the importance of equal rights to a democracy, with equal rights as the essence of Diamond’s other three aspects—participation,

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<sup>14</sup> Larry Diamond, “What Is Democracy? Lecture at Hilla University for Humanistic Studies,” January 21, 2004, <http://web.stanford.edu/~ldiamond/iraq/WhaIsDemocracy012004.htm>.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph Alois Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (New York: Harper Publishers, 1950), 241.

<sup>16</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave of Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 6.

<sup>17</sup> Terry Lynn Karl, “Dilemmas of Democratization in Latin America,” *Comparative Politics* 23, no. 1 (1990): 2, <https://doi.org/10.2307/422302>.

<sup>18</sup> Karl, 2.

protection, and equal treatment under the rule of law. Guillermo O'Donnell and Phillippe Schmitter, while describing the "relationship between the development of civil liberties and democracy," state that "democracy without civil liberties suppresses participation and dissension, which suggests that citizens are not truly being represented."<sup>19</sup> According to Schmitter and Karl, the basic elements of democracy are "a regime or system of governance, rulers, the public realm, citizens, competition, fairly conducted elections, majority rule, cooperation, civil society, and representatives."<sup>20</sup> To emphasize protection of minority rights, they state that, "in a consolidated democracy, a majority rule to protect minority rights is sine qua non."<sup>21</sup> According to them, "if majority makes decisions that harm the minority (especially a threatened cultural or ethnic group), constitutional provisions protect the rights of minority."<sup>22</sup> Robert A. Dahl, while substantiating the protection of minority rights against the majority, states that polyarchy grants political rights to even slaves, women and the poorest.<sup>23</sup>

## 2. Threats to Democracy

If free and fair elections and equal rights stand central to democracy, how do democracies decline, and is it possible that they decline by the erosion of those central tenets? While democracy surged, according to Diamond and Marc F. Plattner,<sup>24</sup> since the USSR disintegrated, is it now declining, and, if so, is it because of internal threats? Indeed, military coups toppled democracies in Egypt on July 3, 2013,<sup>25</sup> and in Thailand

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<sup>19</sup> Guillermo A. O'Donnell and Phillippe C. Schmitter, *Transition from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 7.

<sup>20</sup> Phillippe C. Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl, "What Democracy Is . . . and Is Not," *Journal of Democracy* 2, no. 3 (Summer 1991): 76–80.

<sup>21</sup> Schmitter and Karl, 79.

<sup>22</sup> Schmitter and Karl, 79.

<sup>23</sup> Robert A. Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 221.

<sup>24</sup> Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner, *Democracy in Decline?* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 4, <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/40891>.

<sup>25</sup> Zena Tahhan, "'Egyptian Society Being Crushed' Five Years After Military Coup," *Al Jazeera*, July 2, 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/07/egypt-worse-indicator-2013-coup-170702072016494.html>.

in May 2014.<sup>26</sup> Could those coups be a response to elected leaders who subvert the democratic process?

While Plattner argues about the flourishing of democracy since 1991, Diamond and other scholars see a decline in liberal democracies since 2006.<sup>27</sup> Diamond posit that the quality of functioning, established, rich democracies declined in strategically important emerging-market countries such as India while authoritarianism deepened in established democracies like the United States.<sup>28</sup> He also states that, in places such as Russia, systematic deterioration and executive strangulation of political rights, civil liberties, and rule of law occurred.<sup>29</sup> In Peru, Alberto Fujimori dissolved the congress and seized unconstitutional power, and Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) eroded democratic pluralism and freedom by partisan control over judiciary, arrested journalists, intimidated press and academia, retaliated against opposition parties and persecuted alleged coup plots.<sup>30</sup> In Botswana, President Ian Khama displayed intolerance toward opposition and civil society, and used political violence and the state's intelligence apparatus to coerce his opposition and the press.<sup>31</sup> According to Diamond, such acts led to democracy "eroding in electoral fairness, political pluralism, and civic space for opposition and dissent."<sup>32</sup> According to Diamond, "Scott Mainwaring and Anibal Perez-Linan characterized these developments as countries heading toward being "semi-democracies."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Catherine E. Shoichet, "Thailand Coup: A Cheat Sheet to Get You up to Speed," CNN, May 23, 2014, <https://www.cnn.com/2014/05/21/world/asia/thailand-crisis-up-to-speed/index.html>.

<sup>27</sup> Larry Diamond, "Facing Up to the Democratic Recession," in *Democracy in Decline*, ed. Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 99.

<sup>28</sup> Diamond and Plattner, *Democracy in Decline*, 99–102.

<sup>29</sup> Diamond, "Facing Up to the Democratic Recession," 104.

<sup>30</sup> Diamond, 104.

<sup>31</sup> Diamond, 105.

<sup>32</sup> Diamond, 106.

<sup>33</sup> Diamond, 106; this is further defined in Scott Mainwaring and Aníbal Pérez-Liñán, "Cross-Currents in Latin America," *Journal of Democracy* 26, no. 1 (January 2015): 114–27, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2015.0003>.



Various scholars have argued that some democratically elected leaders become autocratic and do not exercise democracy in true spirit. Manuel Roberto Melendez posits that “democratically elected leaders maintain democratic façade by holding periodic elections, in which the government faces little or no challenge from a non-existent or weak opposition. By maintaining this democratic façade, they avoid criticism or sanctions from the international community.”<sup>34</sup> In such democracies, there appears to be “a lack of horizontal accountability, respect for civil liberties, and observance of basic principles of liberal democracy.”<sup>35</sup> In the same context, Barbara Crossett has introduced the notion of rogue democracy.<sup>36</sup> She states that these democracies go off the rails, display cruelty to citizens, backtrack on the promise that democracy will foster liberty and equality, and use legal methods to destroy political opponents through the courts.<sup>37</sup>

With not just elections, but free and fair elections, as a central tenet of democracy, various scholars see democratic decline in a semi or subverted democracy as the legal erosion of equal access to voting. While examining various internal threats to democracy, Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblath argue that democracies are facing threats from the very electoral process that defines them.<sup>38</sup> Levitsky and Ziblath stated that “like Chavez in Venezuela, elected leaders have subverted democratic institutions in Georgia, Hungary, Nicaragua, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Russia, Sri Lanka, Turkey, and Ukraine.”<sup>39</sup> In a subverted democracy, “people still vote, yet elected autocrats maintain only a veneer of democracy while eviscerating its substance.”<sup>40</sup> Levitsky and Ziblath state that such governmental efforts to subvert democracy are legal because “they are approved by the

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<sup>34</sup> Manuel Roberto Melendez, “Challenges to Democracy in Latin America: The Case of Venezuela under Hugo Chavez” (master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2001), 4, <http://hdl.handle.net/10945/2291>.

<sup>35</sup> Melendez, 5.

<sup>36</sup> Melendez, 4.

<sup>37</sup> Barbara Crossette, “The World: A Different Kind of Rogue; When Democracy Runs off the Rails,” *New York Times*, June 4, 2000, <https://www.nytimes.com/2000/06/04/weekinreview/the-world-a-different-kind-of-rogue-when-democracy-runs-off-the-rails.html>.

<sup>38</sup> Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblath, *How Democracies Die* (New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2018), 5.

<sup>39</sup> Levitsky and Ziblath, 5.

<sup>40</sup> Levitsky and Ziblath, 5.

legislature or accepted by courts.”<sup>41</sup> Such autocrats “portray efforts to improve democracy: making the judiciary more efficient, combating corruption, or cleaning up the electoral process.”<sup>42</sup> “They either buy or bully newspapers.”<sup>43</sup> Critics are targeted through the tax department or through legal troubles. <sup>44</sup> People keep believing that they are living under democracy as there is no martial law and no suspension of the constitution.<sup>45</sup> Levitsky and Ziblats claim that, in such places, elected despots do not cross red lines.<sup>46</sup>

### **3. India’s Democracy**

Several scholars have pointed out different worrying trends in India’s democracy under the BJP’s rule. Rehman states that the “BJP has fueled a majoritarian aggression.”<sup>47</sup> Christophe Jaffrelot shows that the BJP has exploited Hinduism for votes, challenged secularism, and enacted highly controversial laws on behalf of Hindutva ideology, which targets minorities, including violent cultural policing.<sup>48</sup> He argued that, under the BJP government, political norms have eroded and a kind of ethnic democracy has emerged.<sup>49</sup> Sammy Smooha defines ethnic democracy as one in which dominant nationalist ethnic group declares minor ethnic groups a threat to the state, imposes control over them and restricts their rights.<sup>50</sup> This thesis researched whether or not the BJP is engaging in such behavior toward its minorities.

Many scholars argued that the BJP is the political voice of Hindu nationalism in India. Subrata K. Mitra posits that “the BJP is the most important voice of Hindu

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<sup>41</sup> Levitsky and Ziblats, 6.

<sup>42</sup> Levitsky and Ziblats, 105.

<sup>43</sup> Levitsky and Ziblats, 5.

<sup>44</sup> Levitsky and Ziblats, 6.

<sup>45</sup> Levitsky and Ziblats, 6.

<sup>46</sup> Levitsky and Ziblats, 6.

<sup>47</sup> Rehman, *Rise of Saffron Power, Reflections on Indian Politics*, 4.

<sup>48</sup> Jaffrelot, “India’s Democracy at 70: Toward A Hindu State,” 54.

<sup>49</sup> Jaffrelot, 59.

<sup>50</sup> Jaffrelot, 60.

nationalism today in India, and its position at the center of national politics is a threat to democracy. In view of its emphasis on Hindutva as the core of political program and its strong links with extremist cultural and social organizations such as the RSS, the party is seen as the leading voice of electoral Hindu nationalism.”<sup>51</sup> He states that its opponents consider the party to be a form of militant Hinduism.<sup>52</sup> However, he also raises a speculation that BJP tries to create a sense of ambiguity with regard to the policies toward secularism and the protection of minorities by denying its communal tilt but its political leadership has always mobilized the sleeping giant of a majority Hindu population.<sup>53</sup> Martha C. Nussbaum also argues that the Hindu nationalists have a quasi-fascist ideology and a vision of India that contradicts Gandhi-Nehru’s vision based on secularism.<sup>54</sup> Pradeep Chhibber and Nirvikar Jassal have illustrated that India under the BJP underwent significant economic, political, and cultural change toward religious nationalism, and socially, the cow has reemerged as a central theme in the Indian polity.<sup>55</sup> She argued that this rise has received scant attention because the West is pre-occupied by the war on terror. This research focused on the authenticity of the arguments of these scholars and examined the effects of Hindu nationalism on Indian democracy.

Some scholars have argued that there is an erosion of democracy under the BJP due to majoritarianism and religious nationalism. Alfred Stepan states that the possible erosion of democracy in India is due to the rise of majoritarian democracy, which holds free and fair elections, places judicially enforced limits on executive power, and gives legislators constitutionally-embedded prerogatives. However, in contrast to liberal democracy, it has systematic bias against minorities.<sup>56</sup> Stepan argues that there is a serious danger of India going in a majoritarian direction, if Modi holds power for two or

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<sup>51</sup> Subrata K. Mitra, “The Ambivalent Moderation of Hindu Nationalism in India,” *Australian Journal of Political Science* 48, no. 3 (2013): 273.

<sup>52</sup> Mitra, 271.

<sup>53</sup> Mitra, 279.

<sup>54</sup> Mitra, 233

<sup>55</sup> Pradeep Chhibber and Nirvikar Jassal, “India in 2017: The BJP, Economic Reform, and Contentious Politics,” *Asian Survey* 58, no. 1 (February 2018): 86, <https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2018.58.1.86>.

<sup>56</sup> Alfred Stepan, “India, Sri Lanka, and the Majoritarian Danger,” *Journal of Democracy* 26, no. 1 (2015): 130, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2015.0006>.

three terms and, what is more, proves able to make constitutional changes.<sup>57</sup> Sinha, too, has argued that India's shift toward majoritarianism may have negative effects on the quality of Indian democracy. Whether majoritarianism is prevalent or the rights of minorities are protected under the BJP government will be the focus of this thesis.

Some scholars have argued that the BJP is likely to moderate itself due to democracy. According to Mitra, Down, Riker, and Ordeshook suggest that “the imperative of vote maximization drives leaders of extremist parties to the ideological middle ground.”<sup>58</sup> This conjecture is supported by Kalyvas, who, as quoted by Mitra, argued that “Christian movements in Europe eventually faded away, making possible the rise of moderate Christian Democratic parties.”<sup>59</sup> Christian movements in Europe, which also had an extremist past, gradually moderated their ideologies and found their own niche in the democratic liberal process.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, according to Mitra, Llewellyn claims that regular electoral participation has turned the BJP moderate.<sup>61</sup> Adam, Merrill, Grofman, and Meguid, as quoted in Mitra, all argue that “the process of majority coalition building will cause competing parties to converge toward the median voters.”<sup>62</sup> Uday Chandra argues that Modi’s coalitions combine organic social unity, political stability, economic growth and combined interests.<sup>63</sup> Mitra argues that founding fathers of the BJP kept positive secularism as one of the cores of party ideology.<sup>64</sup> He quoted the moderate economic slogan of “India Shining” by the BJP as a manifestation of liberal thinking and becoming moderate.<sup>65</sup> The thesis also examines if the BJP has moderated due to alliance building, coalitions, and as the majority party of India.

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<sup>57</sup> Stepan, 130.

<sup>58</sup> Mitra, “The Ambivalent Moderation of Hindu Nationalism in India,” 269.

<sup>59</sup> Mitra, 270.

<sup>60</sup> Mitra, “The Ambivalent Moderation of Hindu Nationalism in India,” 271.

<sup>61</sup> Mitra, 271.

<sup>62</sup> Mitra, 272.

<sup>63</sup> Rehman, *Rise of Saffron Power, Reflections on Indian Politics*, 25.

<sup>64</sup> Mitra, 278.

<sup>65</sup> Mitra, 279.

There are arguments that Modi moderated his attitude and engaged Muslims politically. Rehman states that Muslims voted substantially for Modi in the 2014 elections in Gujarat, Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh.<sup>66</sup> Stepan argues that Modi responded to electoral rather ideological imperatives in the elections of 2014 and made no reference to Hindutva.<sup>67</sup> Stepan, while quoting Jaffrelot, states that Modi realized that communal riots in India are in contravention to his agenda of attracting foreign investment.<sup>68</sup> The perception is further supplemented by Sridharan, Varshney and Kumar, who state that during the election campaign of 2014, Modi refrained from the highly divisive rhetoric of sectarian invectives.<sup>69</sup> Varshney states that the BJP-led governments did not pursue the promised adoption of a “uniform civil code” to govern personal matters such as marriage, divorce and inheritance, which are currently the domain of each respective religious community.<sup>70</sup> Therefore, has Modi really moderated due to democratic compulsions and norms?

#### **E. POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES**

The landslide electoral victory of the Hindu nationalist BJP in 2014 was at the cost of an all-encompassing, secular the INC party, which ruled India for almost five decades. India’s democracy is special in that it is both the largest democracy in the world and also that the two leading parties have totally different ideologies: the INC is secular and the BJP follows religious nationalism. As per Freedom House, India’s aggregate score of freedom for 2018 is 77,<sup>71</sup> not alarming in itself but potentially alarming for India, which has declined 11 points from 2014, indicating a potential democratic decline since the BJP took power. Has the change from a secular to a non-secular party affected India’s democracy by undermining equal rights for minorities and democratic watchdog

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<sup>66</sup> Rehman, 24.

<sup>67</sup> Stepan, “India, Sri Lanka, and the Majoritarian Danger,” 137.

<sup>68</sup> Stepan, 137.

<sup>69</sup> Sumit Ganguly, “The Risks Ahead,” *Journal of Democracy* 25, no. 4 (2014): 57, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2014.0077>.

<sup>70</sup> Ganguly, 57.

<sup>71</sup> “India,” Freedom in the World 2018, January 4, 2018, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/india>.

institutions, including the judiciary and the media? This thesis assesses whether the BJP's rise to and ensuing power has had no effect, a positive effect, or a negative effect on India's democracy.

## **F. RESEARCH DESIGN**

The research is a single case study regarding India. Based on scholarly research that sees free and fair elections and equal rights as core to democracy, this thesis assesses whether the BJP has affected India's democracy, and, if so, how. This research first examines India's switch to a non-secular government by analyzing the INC's decline and the BJP's rise to victory in the 2014 elections, including any possible stoking of ethnic divides for electoral purposes. In the context of the rise of Hindu nationalism, and the role of extremist Hindu religious organizations, the thesis then examines minority rights before turning to examining the health of institutions, specifically the media, judiciary, and civil society. The research relies on work of scholars, books, articles from journals, and newspapers that point to issues affecting minorities, freedom of the civil society including press, and the judiciary in India.

## **G. THESIS OVERVIEW AND CHAPTER OUTLINE**

The thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter II discusses the decline of the INC and the electoral rise of the BJP. Chapter III examines the treatment of minorities in India since the BJP's rise. Chapter IV analyzes watchdog institutions as the judiciary, press, and civil society to understand their role in relation to the protection of minorities in India. Chapter V provides a synthesized analysis of India's current state of democracy and its relationship to minorities, as well as suggestions for future research.

## II. DECLINE OF THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS (INC) AND ELECTORAL RISE OF THE BJP

India was a single party system, termed “the Congress System,” under the INC for the first four decades after independence in 1947.<sup>72</sup> While some regional and national parties such as Akali Dal (SAD) in Punjab, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), the Jan Sangh (BJS) and Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPM) existed as an opposition to INC, they remained at the margins of national level politics, influencing only some of the regions. In the mid-1980s, the system started to shift to produce more opposition parties at the regional level and eventually at the national level in the form of a Hindu nationalist party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). This chapter focuses on the decline of “the Congress System” and the simultaneous emergence of what is labeled by some scholars as “the Saffron System” that is challenging the secular institutions that the INC established.<sup>73</sup>

In 2014, the BJP secured a landslide victory in the 16<sup>th</sup> National Parliamentary Elections to become the first party to effectively challenge the INC since India’s independence in 1947. The BJP-led alliance, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) that was formed in 1998, produced a winning coalition in 2014 with a distinct difference: the BJP emerged as a single-majority party for the first time since its founding in 1980. In 2014, the NDA won 336 seats, out of which BJP alone won 282 seats, enough to form a government on their own.<sup>74</sup> Kim states that “with [a] 31 percent share of the vote, the BJP became the first party with an outright majority since 1984.”<sup>75</sup> The INC, on the other hand, led the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) with regional parties and only

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<sup>72</sup> The term was coined by Rajni Kothari, a historian. Rajni Kothari, “The Congress ‘System’ in India,” *Asian Survey* 4, no. 12 (1964): 1161, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2642550>.

<sup>73</sup> Mujibur Rehman, *Rise of Saffron Power, Reflections on Indian Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 3.

<sup>74</sup> Heewon Kim, “Understanding Modi and Minorities: The BJP-Led NDA Government in India and Religious Minorities,” *India Review* 16, no. 4 (2017): 357, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14736489.2017.1378482>.

<sup>75</sup> Kim, 331.

won 60 out of 543 national assembly seats, or the lowest share it has ever received in the history of post-independence India.<sup>76</sup>

Under the “the Congress System,” India was considered a strong secular democracy. While Indian constitutional scholars still claim that India is a secular democracy because the constitution still reflects the multinational character of India as well as secularism, the BJP is a self-proclaimed Hindu nationalist party, fundamentally linking religion and state and affecting the rights of religious minorities and others that may represent diverse Hindu beliefs rather than those the party represents. Why and how did this change come about?

The purpose of this chapter is to advance our understanding of the political environment that led to the rise of the BJP. In order to do so, it is important to delineate the decline of the all-inclusive INC, which created a vacuum in the political structures leading to the subsequent rise of the BJP, an exclusionary party that has instead polarized the country. The chapter, thus, has two sections: the first explains the diverse reasons that led to the decline of INC and the second explains the rise of the BJP, which was able to promote itself using various strategies in the emerging vacuum as an alternative for a new India. The first section presents six primary reasons for the INC’s decline: the weakening of organizational structure through a lack of ideology; the eroding of intra-party democracy and challenges from other parties; the shrinking of a social base; the lack of charismatic leadership; corruption and weak implementation of social policies; and a lackluster electoral campaign in 2014. The second section presents the electoral rise of the BJP due its ideology, leadership, increased social base, and its campaign strategy, organization, and tactics in the 2014 election.

#### **A. THE DECLINE OF THE INC AND THE CONGRESS SYSTEM**

Allan Octavian Hume, a retired British civil servant, formed the INC in 1885 in response to a demand from Indian elites who wanted representation in the decision-

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<sup>76</sup> Rudolf C. Heredia, “The Dance of Democracy: Election 2014 and the Marginalized and Minorities,” in *Rise of Saffron Power: Reflections on Indian Politics* ed. Mujibur Rehman (London & New York: Routledge, 2018), 191.



making process.<sup>77</sup> His aim was to open a political dialogue between the Indian elite and the British Raj, and give a voice to the elites who the British relied on as part of their ruling structure. Eventually, the INC became synonymous with the Indian national movement for independence from the British Raj after the British kept them out of important institutions and engaged in a divide-and-conquer strategy that included communal representation. By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the INC had formed a broad base that included elites from various religious and ethnic groups. After independence in 1947, the people of different ethnicities, religions, social statuses, and political ideas had representation in the INC. Though Mohammed Ali Jinnah eventually led some Muslims elites out of the INC to later form what became Pakistan, according to Weiner, these various factions within the INC established “the Congress System based on party organization, adaptive quality, and monopoly over patronage resources.”<sup>78</sup> For these reasons, the INC won an impressive 364 out of 401 seats in the first Lok Sabha elections of 1952.<sup>79</sup>

Over the next few decades, the INC dominated Indian politics and state institutions. While other parties existed in different regions, the INC was present across the country. In this system, the INC, along with parties of consensus (such as allies or regional parties), primarily ruled India until 1989. For a brief period from 1977 to 1980, the Janata Party led a united opposition that wrested power from the INC, primarily because of Indira Gandhi’s anti-democratic moves in 1975; however, the united opposition collapsed within two years because of a diversity of views. Consequently, INC came back to power on the platform of “government that works.” A decade later in 1989, however, when the Janata Dal and a few regional parties including the BJP formed a coalition government, it became clear that the Congress System was in decline. Despite gaining power intermittently from 1991 onwards, the INC saw a continuous decline in its

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<sup>77</sup> “Allan Octavian Hume,” Britannica.Com, accessed September 17, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Allan-Octavian-Hume>.

<sup>78</sup> Yoosuk Kim, “Indian Electoral Politics and the Rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)” (Master’s thesis, Florida State University, 2006), 15, <http://diginole.lib.fsu.edu/islandora/object/fsu:181249/>.

<sup>79</sup> Praveen Rai and Sanjay Kumar, “The Decline of the Congress Party in Indian Politics,” *Economic & Political Weekly* 52, no. 12 (March 25, 2017): 2.

number of seats. Eventually, this decline became significant and led to winning only 44 seats and 19 percent of the vote share in the elections of 2014.<sup>80</sup> According to Sridharan and Farooqui, this result marked the INC's "lowest-ever seat and vote shares."<sup>81</sup> The decline of seats from 364 in 1952 to just 44 in 2014 illustrates the sheer collapse of the INC. The following sections discuss the multifarious reasons for its decline.

## 1. Weakening of Organizational Structure

Because the organization of political parties plays a pivotal role in their electoral rise or decline, in India, a sound political organizational structure enabled the INC to dominate the political landscape for four decades and ensured secularism. In describing the organization of successful congressional parties, Gunther and Diamond state that,

Congress parties are pluralistic, multi-ethnic parties which are coalitions of distinct ethnic, religious and regional groups that contain conflict through sharing of power and resources among ethnic groups, gain votes through clientelistic loyalties and appeals to national integration and have coalitional or federative organization based on regional elites and local notables.<sup>82</sup>

In the early decades after its formation and independence, the INC reflected this description; it was "an encompassing party in a heterogeneous country" and it was able "to unite all Indians against the colonial rule setting" bypassing class, ethnicity, caste, language and religious divisions.<sup>83</sup> Until 1967, according to Rai and Kumar, "the Congress system during this period worked in a copy book style with leadership at national, state and local level chosen by elected members of the legislative bodies commanding their full support. There was an overlap between the executive and legislative wings but their work profile was neatly demarcated for proper functioning

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<sup>80</sup> Zoya Hassan, "Collapse of the Congress Party," in *Rise of Saffron Power, Reflections on Indian Politics*, ed. Mujibur Rehman (New York: Routledge, 2018), 154.

<sup>81</sup> Adnan Farooqui and E. Sridharan, "Can Umbrella Parties Survive? The Decline of the Indian National Congress," *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 54, no. 3 (July 2, 2016): 331, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14662043.2016.1183308>.

<sup>82</sup> Farooqui and Sridharan, 333–34.

<sup>83</sup> Farooqui and Sridharan, 334.

united in purpose and full respect for constitutional propriety.”<sup>84</sup> The scholars clearly indicate that there was an internal democracy, a link among central, state and district party levels, and a collaboration between executive and political leadership of the party.

However, in the following years, organizational decay disabled the party, and thus with its decay, endangered the pluralism of Indian democracy. As Chhiber, Jensenius, and Suryanarayan find, “party organization or the lack of it has a significant impact on the party system.”<sup>85</sup> The INC remained successful when its organization was strong; however, it failed in 2014, when organizational decay was at its peak. Intra-party elections keep parties all-inclusive and compel members to look after their stakes through competition, as Nehru did. Jawaharlal Nehru ensured intra-party democracy until 1964. Under Nehru’s leadership, the INC maintained harmony, compromise and solved issues through negotiations. Under her father’s leadership, Indira Gandhi briefly became the president of the INC in 1959. After her father’s death, she was again made the president of INC in 1966. However, Indira Gandhi did not ensure democracy in the INC. Her actions produced a contest over leadership within the party and divided the INC into two wings, Indira’s INC (Ruling), and the Morarji-led INC (Organization) in November 1969.<sup>86</sup> Chatterji found that “she greatly weakened mediating structures and intermediate buffers between center and the various peripheries.”<sup>87</sup> She held intra-party elections only once between 1969 and 1984 in 1972.<sup>88</sup> She commenced arbitrary nominations at the center, state and district levels. According to Ray and Kincaid, “the rise of Indira Gandhi as a strong leader led to dissent and regimentation within the party.”<sup>89</sup> Farooqui and

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<sup>84</sup> Praveen Rai and Sanjay Kumar, “The Decline of the Congress Party in Indian Politics,” *Economic & Political Weekly* 52, no. 12 (March 25, 2017): 6.

<sup>85</sup> Pradeep Chhiber, Francesca Refsum Jensenius, and Pavithra Suryanarayan, “Party Organization and Party Proliferation in India,” *Party Politics* 20, no. 4 (July 2014): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068811436059>.

<sup>86</sup> Amal Ray and John Kincaid, “Politics, Economic Development, and Second-Generation Strain in India’s Federal System,” *Publius* 18, no. 2 (1988): 150, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3330467>.

<sup>87</sup> Rakhahari Chatterji, “Democracy and the Opposition in India,” *Economic & Political Weekly* 23, no. 17 (1988): 850.

<sup>88</sup> Francine R. Frankel, “India’s Democracy in Transition,” *World Policy Journal* 7, no. 3 (1990): 539.

<sup>89</sup> Ray and Kincaid, “Politics, Economic Development, and Second-Generation Strain in India’s Federal System,” 147.

Sridharan also state that, “Indira Gandhi suspended internal elections and made the INC a more centralized, top down party.”<sup>90</sup> Candland also states that after the 1971 election, Indira Gandhi took over decision-making at every level instead of allowing the local party leaders to make decisions; these decisions included who was going to be the chief minister at the state level. In other words, she removed the democratic part of the party.<sup>91</sup> Candland also points out that Indira Gandhi’s move came as a result of increasing protests at the local level due to the economic shocks of 1971.<sup>92</sup> However, the result was that the INC as an organization began to lose out at the state level in the 1970s.

## **2. Defections and the Rise of New Parties**

The lack of intra-party democracy can lead to dissatisfaction among party members, defections and the formation of new parties, which never happened in the INC until Nehru died. Chhiber, Jensenius, and Suryanarayan state that the members of less organized parties are prone to defect.<sup>93</sup> The dissatisfactions continued under the INC leadership of Indira Gandhi’s son, Rajiv Gandhi (1984-1991), his wife Sonia Gandhi (1998-2013) and his son, Rahul Gandhi (current President). The lack of intra-party democracy compelled INC leaders to defect and form various new parties since 1977. This fact has increased support for existing regional parties and therefore has weakened INC support. From 1967 to 2018, the rise of regional parties illustrates that had the INC maintained internal democracy, it could have maintained its dominance. Therefore, the decline of the INC is intrinsically related to the rise of the BJP and threats to Indian secularism. The following are examples of the rise of regional parties that ran parallel to the decline of the INC.

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<sup>90</sup> Farooqui and Sridharan, “Can Umbrella Parties Survive?” 350.

<sup>91</sup> Christopher Candland, *Labor, Democratization and Development in India and Pakistan: Workers and Unions* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 25.

<sup>92</sup> Candland, 25–26.

<sup>93</sup> Chhiber, Jensenius, and Suryanarayan, “Party Organization and Party Proliferation in India.”

**a. *The Dravida Munnetra Kazagham (DMK)***

The failure of the INC central leadership to listen to its regional leadership's concerns enabled the DMK, one of the regional parties, to cut into the INC's voter base. According to Chiriyankandath, the DMK displaced the INC from the state of Tamil Nadu in 1967.<sup>94</sup> Though DMK was established in 1949 by C. N. Annadurai, it did not become a viable challenge to the INC in Lok Sabha elections until 1967 after Nehru's death. During this significant time frame, Indira Gandhi was consolidating her grip over the INC, while other prominent leaders such as Morarji Desai were fighting with each other to increase their hold within the INC. In elections of 1967, DMK secured 25 Lok Sabha seats, a serious gain from winning only 7 seats in 1962. Meanwhile, the INC won only 3 Lok Sabha seats in 1967 as compared to 31 in 1962.<sup>95</sup> Thus, the DMK forced the INC to concede 18 Lok Sabha seats. In 2014, the INC did not win even a single seat in Tamil Nadu<sup>96</sup> and overall, regional parties won the most seats in 2014.

**b. *The INC Organization (O) and the Janata Party***

Morarji Desai, an elderly statesman and INC leader under Jawaharlal Nehru as well as the deputy prime minister of India from 1966 to 1969, resigned from the INC in large part due to the leadership struggle after Nehru's death. In 1969, he split the INC and formed the INC Organization (O) when Indira Gandhi sought to centralize power around her. The INC (O) played a pivotal role in the formation of the Janata Party, an alliance of four parties in 1977: the Bharatiya Lok Dal (BLD), Congress (O), Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) and the Socialist Party (SP) formed a coalition in 1977 to inflict a crushing defeat on the INC.<sup>97</sup> Morarji Desai became the Prime Minister of India in 1977. Other INC stalwarts such as Chandra Shekhar, Mohan Dharia, Biju Patnaik, and Asoka Mehta were part of this anti-INC coalition. Another example of important defections is when,

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<sup>94</sup> James Chiriyankandath, "Yes, But Not in South," in *Rise of Saffron Power, Reflections on Indian Politics*, ed. Mujibur Rehman (New York: Routledge, 2018), 45.

<sup>95</sup> Farooqui and Sridharan, "Can Umbrella Parties Survive?," 339.

<sup>96</sup> Chiriyankandath, "Yes, But Not in South," 48.

<sup>97</sup> Rakesh Ankit, "Janata Party (1974–77): Creation of an All-India Opposition," *History and Sociology of South Asia* 11, no. 1 (January 2017): 39–54, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2230807516652987>.

“Jagjivan Ram, Mrs. Gandhi’s Defense and Agriculture Minister, broke away and formed Congress for Democracy (CFD) on account of civil liberties violation[s] and decline of intra-party democracy.”<sup>98</sup> Jagjivan Ram (Indira Gandhi’s defense, agriculture minister in previous government and remained part of the INC for 40 years) also joined Janata Party’s government in 1977 to undermine Indira Gandhi.<sup>99</sup>

*c. The National Front (1989)*

The lack of intra-party democracy in the INC continued under Rajiv Gandhi, who became prime minister of India in 1984 and caused more defections. The adverse relationships within the party led to the INC dissident Vishwanath Pratap Singh (V.P. Singh) leading a Jan Morcha (People’s Front, a political party) in 1987. He formed the National Front in 1989, a coalition of the leftist parties, the BJP and the remnants of the Janata Party of 1977.<sup>100</sup> In 1984, he had been the Finance and Defense Minister in Rajiv Gandhi’s cabinet.<sup>101</sup> In the elections of 1989, the National Front was able to defeat the INC by shifting the INC’s position as a dominant national party to just another national party for the first time since independence.<sup>102</sup>

*d. The Telugu Desam Party (TDP)*

The states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana also illustrate the weakening of the INC in the 1980s. Some INC defectors and dissatisfied regional leaders encouraged the formation of the Telugu Desam Party. The INC had traditionally won landslide victories in Andhra Pradesh until 1983. According to Chiriyankandath, the INC, through its able Chief Ministers Sanjiva, Brahamnanda, Chenna Reddy and Narasimha Rao, “pursued

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<sup>98</sup> Ankit, 52.

<sup>99</sup> Inder Malhotra, “Congress Rule at the Centre Ends After Three Decades Since Independence,” *India Today*, December 26, 2005, <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/cover-story/story/20051226-congress-rule-at-the-centre-ends-after-three-decades-since-independence-786331-2005-12-26>.

<sup>100</sup> “V.P. Singh, Prime Minister of India,” *Britannica.Com*, accessed September 17, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/V-P-Singh#ref227034>.

<sup>101</sup> Mohammed Ayoob, “Dateline India: The Deepening Crisis,” *Foreign Policy*, no. 85 (1991): 171, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1148749>.

<sup>102</sup> Ayoob, 171.

strategies of accommodation” that helped maintain its hold over state.<sup>103</sup> Yet, Indira Gandhi’s over-centralization and splitting of the INC in 1969 and 1978 weakened the INC’s hold on the state. The TDP was formed in 1983 by cine superstar N.T. Rama Rao, who campaigned against the central government’s centralizing strategies. The TDP swept the state assembly elections in 1983 and ended decades of INC hold. From 1967 till 1986, five Lok Sabha elections were held. The INC won 35 out of 42 seats in 1967, 28 in 1971, 41 in 1977, 41 in 1980, and just 6 seats in 1984. It lost 35 seats from 1980s to the 1984 election.<sup>104</sup> The TDP won 30 seats in Lok Sabha elections of 1984, becoming the dominant party in the state.

According to Hassan, the organizational degeneration that commenced with Indira Gandhi’s over-centralization and “family-centric political organization” continued until 2014.<sup>105</sup> The defections and the worst electoral performance of party were obvious in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections. According to Khosla, “the rank and file of the INC collapsed with several union ministers from the region resigning, while some like D. Purandeswari switched over to the BJP.”<sup>106</sup> In the 2014 elections, the TDP won only 15 seats in Andhra Pradesh and INC did not win a single seat.<sup>107</sup> The continued decline of INC resulted in the rise of the BJP, which won two national assembly seats for the first time in Indian electoral history.<sup>108</sup>

#### *e. The Trinamool Congress in West Bengal*

In the state of West Bengal in 1998, the lack of intra-party democracy and insensitivity to regional leadership once again led to defections and the rise of a new regional party, as seen earlier in the southern states. Mamta Bannerjee, an ex-INC Union

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<sup>103</sup> James Chiriyankandath, “Yes, But Not in South,” in *Rise of Saffron Power, Reflections on Indian Politics*, ed. Mujibur Rehman (New York: Routledge, 2018), 52.

<sup>104</sup> Farooqui and Sridharan, “Can Umbrella Parties Survive?,” 338.

<sup>105</sup> Hassan, “Collapse of the Congress Party,” 155.

<sup>106</sup> Ritu Khosla, “Lok Sabha Elections in Andhra Pradesh,” in *Rise of Saffron Power, Reflections on Indian Politics*, ed. Mohamed Rafeek (New York: Routledge, 2018), 363.

<sup>107</sup> Khosla, 352.

<sup>108</sup> Khosla, 352.

minister from West Bengal, formed the Trinamool Congress in 1998.<sup>109</sup> Communist parties, especially the Communist Party of India and the Marxist CPI(M) traditionally had a hold over the West Bengal state since 1970,<sup>110</sup> but the INC always used to secure a sizeable number of seats in West Bengal until 1996. According to Islam, after the formation of the Trinamool Congress, “from 1998 to 2011, the INC was relegated to third place” in all elections.<sup>111</sup> The INC won 3 seats in comparison to 8 seats of the Trinamool Congress in 1999, 6 each in 2004 and 2009 and only 3 seats in 2014 elections. In the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, the Trinamool Congress won 34 Lok Sabha seats. Therefore, it is evident that, although the Trinamool Congress reduced votes for both CPI(M), it also successfully reduced INC’s share to only 4 seats in West Bengal (?) for the first time in history.<sup>112</sup>

### 3. The INC: Lack of Ideology

Ideology is the nucleus of any party organization, especially during electoral campaigns. Thus, an inconsistent and disorganized ideology led to the INC’s electoral decline. The INC has a history of fluctuating ideologies as it tried to be a catch-all party. In the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, this lack of ideology came to hurt it. According to Hassan, “the INC never had a clear-cut ideology like most other catch-all parties; yet, its identity is rooted in a Left-of-Center platform which it betrayed by flirting with neo-liberalism and indulging in crony capitalism.”<sup>113</sup> According to Frankel, Jawaharlal Nehru had an ideological tilt toward socialist democracy and secularism.<sup>114</sup> Thus, various scholars always saw the INC as a secular party.<sup>115</sup> Indira Gandhi espoused

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<sup>109</sup> Maidul Islam, “Big National Parties in West Bengal,” in *Rise of Saffron Power, Reflections on Indian Politics*, ed. Mujibur Rehman (New York: Routledge, 2018), 280.

<sup>110</sup> Jason Burke, “India’s Communist Party Faces Defeat in Its West Bengal Heartland,” *The Observer*, May 29, 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/may/30/west-bengal-elections-communists>.

<sup>111</sup> Maidul Islam, “Big National Parties in West Bengal,” in *Rise of Saffron Power, Reflections on Indian Politics*, ed. Mujibur Rehman (New York: Routledge, 2018), 280.

<sup>112</sup> “Lok Sabha Elections Results 2014: West Bengal,” *Indian Express*, May 17, 2014, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/politics/lok-sabha-elections-results-2014-west-bengal/>.

<sup>113</sup> Hassan, “Collapse of the Congress Party,” 161.

<sup>114</sup> Frankel, “India’s Democracy in Transition,” 549.

<sup>115</sup> Ayooob, “Dateline India,” 177.



socialism and nationalism,, keeping along the lines of her father; her campaigns of the mid-70s to eradicate poverty (*Gharibi Hatao*) shows her socialist tilt.<sup>116</sup> However, her harsh military action against minority Sikh nationalists in the Golden Temple Amritsar in 1984 took her away from her commitment to democracy. She did not send the military in for religious reasons; she went into Punjab for political reasons.<sup>117</sup> In addition, her son and successor, Rajiv Gandhi, introduced neo-liberalism in mid-80s by opening the economy to the world and moving the party away from leftish trade protectionism. P.V. Narasimha Rao, the INC's prime minister from 1991 to 1996, furthered neo-liberalism and switched from Indira Gandhi's socialism. His government's complicity in destruction of the Babri Mosque at Ayodhya in 1992 was a dent in the INC's traditional espousal of secularism as well. Muslims of India, who in general supported the INC, were disappointed and moved away to smaller regional parties such as the local OBC parties.<sup>118</sup> Thus, by not sticking to a particular ideology, the INC lost its electoral following.

The variability of not sticking to one ideology became more pronounced during campaign for the 2014 national elections. The INC's UPA (The United Progressive Alliance) I and II tenures from 2004 to 2014 mixed socialism and neo-liberalism. As an example of the confusion of the INC's ideology at the onset of campaign, Rahul Gandhi, while addressing The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry in 2013, claimed that the INC was pro-industrialism; after losing the election, in February 2015, he denied that statement and said that the INC supported the welfare of the poor and not that of the industrialists.<sup>119</sup> Such ideological confusion and statements by Rahul Gandhi

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<sup>116</sup> Rai and Kumar, "The Decline of the INC Party in Indian Politics," n.d.

<sup>117</sup> Sonali Pimputkar, "4 Decisions by Indira Gandhi That Changed India Forever," *Free Press Journal*, November 18, 2017, <http://www.freepressjournal.in/webspecial/4-decisions-by-indira-gandhi-that-changed-india-forever/1172295>.

<sup>118</sup> Ashish Tripathi, "20th Anniversary of Babri Mosque Demolition: The Damage Has Not Been Undone as Yet," *Times of India*, December 5, 2012, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/20th-anniversary-of-Babri-mosque-demolition-The-damage-has-not-been-undone-as-yet/articleshow/17497427.cms>.

<sup>119</sup> Hassan, "Collapse of The Congress Party," 161.

confused supporters of the INC and contributed to the worst electoral defeat of the INC.<sup>120</sup>

#### **4. The INC: The Shrinking of its Social and Economic Base**

The Congress System had historically maintained a wide social base made up of ethnicities, religions, and castes by means of internal discussions and problem solving; political parties use electoral strategies to gain votes of different segments of the population in multi-ethnic societies. Various scholars have pointed out that from 1952 to 1989, the INC traditionally obtained the vote of the Other Backward Classes (OBCs), the Scheduled Castes (SCs, such as the Dalits), the Scheduled Tribes (STs, such as the Adivasi) and other minorities. According to Frankel, Muslims, the rural poor and the Scheduled Castes (untouchables) traditionally supported the INC because of its commitment to “Nehruvian Consensus.”<sup>121</sup> The majority of Brahmans also supported the INC because founders of the party hailed from the upper class elites. According to Ayoob, the INC was able “to assimilate underprivileged classes into its power structure after independence without alienating the privileged castes and classes. This balance brought both the newly mobilized and the established groups into the existing political order and maintained a stable socioeconomic structure.”<sup>122</sup>

Over the years, due to organizational decay, the INC began to lose this wider social base. The population of India is currently 1.25 billion people, out of which 966.2 million are Hindus.<sup>123</sup> They are 77.20 percent of the total population. 40.96 percent of these Hindus are OBCs.<sup>124</sup> According to a survey in 2017, “91.4% of STs, 79.8% of SCs and 78.0% of OBCs” live in rural areas, and are engaged in

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<sup>120</sup> Hassan, 161.

<sup>121</sup> Frankel, “India’s Democracy in Transition,” 521.

<sup>122</sup> Ayoob, “Dateline India,” 174.

<sup>123</sup> “All India Religion Census 2011,” Religion Census 2011, accessed October 7, 2018, <https://www.census2011.co.in/religion.php>.

<sup>124</sup> “OBCs Form 41% of Population: Survey,” *Times of India*, September 1, 2007, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/OBCs-form-41-of-population-Survey/articleshow/2328117.cms>.

agricultural professions.<sup>125</sup> Most of OBCs and some SCs involved in agriculture live mostly in the northern, central and Andhra region of India. The Green Revolution in 1960s improved their economic condition from poor to lower middle class, middle class and the wealthy. Along with this prosperity, they also began to assert their political power. According to Farooqi and Sridharan, the INC failed to “accommodate the newly mobilized rich agrarian interests” in north India after the Green Revolution.<sup>126</sup> As the OBCs and other intermediate castes became more prosperous, INC’s upper caste leadership was unable to accommodate them fast enough. According to Chandra, the turbulence of the “Emergency years,” compelled OBCs to challenge the monopoly of power concentrated in the elite upper caste Hindu minority.<sup>127</sup>

The OBCs and SCs showed their frustration with the INC for the first time in the elections of 1977. The Janata Party formation discussed earlier successfully defeated the INC in 1977 by drawing its support from the lower-caste peasantry, the OBCs of northern India. The reaction of OBCs and SCs led to the INC losing in the northern states of Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.<sup>128</sup> The newly rich, agriculturally-based SCs formed their own party, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) later in 1984.<sup>129</sup> Similarly, the OBCs formed their own significant party, the Samajwadi Party (SP) in Uttar Pradesh in 1992.<sup>130</sup> This trend expanded in the 1980s. Despite suffering significant losses in their electoral base, the INC responded slowly to the prosperous farmers. For example, the INC neglected the demands of farmer unions like the *Bharatiya Kisan* Union in Western Uttar Pradesh and the *Shetkari Sanghatana* in Maharashtra. Their complaints included growing debt due to the need for agricultural machinery and agriculture inputs, the low level of guaranteed prices for agricultural

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<sup>125</sup> “OBCs Form 41% of Population: Survey.”

<sup>126</sup> Farooqi and Sridharan, “Can Umbrella Parties Survive?” 350.

<sup>127</sup> Uday Chandra, “The 2014 National Elections from the Margins of Modern India,” in *Rise of Saffron Power, Reflections on Indian Politics*, ed. Mujibur Rehman (New York: Routledge, 2018), 263.

<sup>128</sup> Farooqi and Sridharan, “Can Umbrella Parties Survive?” 338–39.

<sup>129</sup> Shanthie Mariet D’Souza, “Bahujan Samaj Party,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed October 7, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Bahujan-Samaj-Party>.

<sup>130</sup> Sudha Pai and Avinash Kumar, “Understanding the BJP’s Victory in UP,” in *Rise of Saffron Power, Reflections on Indian Politics*, ed. Mujibur Rehman (New York: Routledge, 2018), 119.

produce and the unfavorable terms of trade between basic agricultural products and manufactured items. In 1989, V.P. Singh of the National Front (discussed earlier) exploited the disappointment of the OBCs and was able to win at the national level. The National Front promised the OBCs a higher proportion of quotas in jobs and subsidies in the northern states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. V.P. Singh was able to portray Rajiv Gandhi's pro-business policies as a pro-rich rural bias. He convinced rural OBCs in Hindi speaking regions that the urban middle class was getting richer at the expense of the marginal land owners and landless laborers.

The INC's inability to accommodate the demands and interests of the agrarian OBCs and the SCs continued in 1989 and forced the INC to face the electoral defeat in the 1989 elections. The National Front, a coalition of the leftist parties, the BJP and the remnants of the Janata Party of 1977, was formed in 1989.<sup>131</sup> The party focused on the comparatively richer farmers too as "these rich farmers could not translate their economic gains from the green revolution into social prestige and power."<sup>132</sup> The National Front also promised OBCs the implementation of the Mandal Commission's recommendations, which "guaranteed the OBCs 27 percent of all government jobs, including the elite Indian Administrative Service, and the Indian Police Service."<sup>133</sup> In the 1989 elections in the state of Uttar Pradesh, the INC won only 15 seats compared to 83 seats in 1984. In Bihar, the INC seats reduced from 48 in 1984 to just 4 in 1989.<sup>134</sup> The INC's neglect of these newly rich, agriculturally-based OBCs and SCs in 1980 decisively weakened the INC.

## **5. The Expansion of the Party System: The Samajwadi Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party**

The failure of the INC to look after the interests of all segments of society in the 1980s and the subsequent weakening of the Congress System motivated various castes to acquire political representation by forming their own parties, therefore cutting deeply into

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<sup>131</sup> "V.P. Singh, Prime Minister of India,"

<sup>132</sup> Frankel, "India's Democracy in Transition," 533.

<sup>133</sup> Frankel, 533.

<sup>134</sup> Farooqui and Sridharan, "Can Umbrella Parties Survive?," 340.

the INC's social base and electoral vote. The disappointment of these newly rich, agriculturally-based OBCs and SCs with the INC became the foundation of the divided social base. As the INC was unable to accommodate their interests, the backward castes established their own parties for political empowerment. The SP and BSP became the main parties for these groups in North India, especially in Uttar Pradesh, which was the state in which the Nehru family stood elections. The formation of these two parties contributed to the expanding losses of the social and economic bases of the INC. By securing significant seats in Uttar Pradesh and other northern Indian states, they significantly reduced the INC's seat and vote share, as well as the INC's ability to maintain power in the central government.

As discussed earlier, to deprive the INC from OBC votes and attract their electoral support, V.P. Singh and the National Front attempted to implement the Mandal Commission recommendations in 1989.<sup>135</sup> However, due to legal and political opposition by the conservatives in the Janata coalition, particularly the BJP, its implementation was delayed. In 1993, the Prime Minister of India, Narasimha Rao of the INC, was able to implement the recommendations of the commission.<sup>136</sup> By then, however, the fact that it took the INC a decade to implement the recommendations of the Mandal Commission convinced the OBCs to form their own party. Mulayam Singh Yadav from the OBC caste formed the Samajwadi Party (SP) in Uttar Pradesh in 1992. The highest OBC population in India is in the north, in the states of Uttar Pradesh, followed by Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and other northern states.<sup>137</sup> Prior to the formation of the SP, the INC used to get OBC vote in Uttar Pradesh, but both the INC's vote and seats were reduced from 83 in 1984 to just two in 2014.<sup>138</sup> A more detailed description

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<sup>135</sup> "Sunday Story: Mandal Commission Report, 25 Years Later," *The Indian Express*, September 1, 2015, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/sunday-story-mandal-commission-report-25-years-later/>.

<sup>136</sup> "Mandal Commission Report," Encyclopedia.Com, accessed October 7, 2018, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/international/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/mandal-commission-report>.

<sup>137</sup> "UP Has the Highest OBC Population in All Indian States," *Times of India*, May 7, 2007, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/UP-has-the-highest-OBC-population-in-all-Indian-states/articleshow/2012439.cms>.

<sup>138</sup> Farooqui and Sridharan, "Can Umbrella Parties Survive?," 339–41.

of the Lok Sabha elections in the northern states from 1996 to 2014 (Table 1) illustrates the reduction of OBC vote for the INC and the increasing support for SP.

Table 1. The INC and Caste-Based Parties' Seats in Uttar Pradesh from 1996 to 2014

Lok Sabha Election Results in UP			
Years	INC seats	SP seats	BSP seats
1996	5	16	6
1998	0	20	4
1999	10	26	14
2004	9	35	19
2009	21	23	20
2014	0	5	0

Adapted from Election Commission of India data<sup>139</sup>

The formation of another caste-based party in 1984, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), meant further loss of the social base and vote share for the INC in northern states. The rise of the BSP cut into traditional pro-INC vote of SCs in Uttar Pradesh as illustrated in the chart above.<sup>140</sup> Prior to the 1980s, SCs were primarily mobilized by the INC since Mohandas Gandhi formed an alliance with B. R. Ambedkar, the spokesperson for SCs prior to independence. The BSP emerged to represent the lowest segment of society, such as the SCs in the states of Punjab and UP, which consist of the largest

<sup>139</sup> Sudha Pai and Avinash Kumar, "Understanding the BJP's Victory in UP," in *Rise of Saffron Power, Reflections on Indian Politics*, ed. Mujibur Rehman (New York: Routledge, 2018), 113.

<sup>140</sup> Anthony Heath and Yogendra Yadav, "The United Colours of The INC: Social Profile of The INC Voters, 1996 and 1998," *Economic and Political Weekly* 34, no. 34/35 (1999): 2523.

number of SCs in the country.<sup>141</sup> The SCs, like the OBCs, saw an increase in wealth during the Green Revolution but not in political power in the Lok Sabha. After getting disappointed by the INC, Kanshi Ram, a SC leader, formed the BSP in 1984.<sup>142</sup> The BSP in Uttar Pradesh influenced the INC of SCs, STs, OBCs and the Muslim vote significantly. Mayawati, a Dalit woman, became the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh in 1995, 1997, and 2001, before taking over the party in 2002.<sup>143</sup> The INC also lost its vote share among Scheduled Tribes (STs) from “45 percent in 1991 to 38 percent in 2014 at national level.”<sup>144</sup> The BSP’s vote share in 2014 was 4.19 percent nationally.<sup>145</sup>

The challenge presented by the OBCs and the SCs was compounded by the loss of support of other minorities caused by the INCs’ non-democratic tendencies. Indira Gandhi’s decision to attack the Golden Temple in 1984, a Sikh religious shrine in Amritsar, as well as the following Sikh Pogrom in 1984, anti-Muslim communal rights in different states reduced the traditional pro-INC minority base. In addition, the rise of the urban middle class in the 1980s helped to erode the INC base, as a result of the party’s ideological confusion over the implementation of neo-liberal economic policies while remaining rooted in socialism.

## **6. Lack of Charismatic Leadership**

Strong leadership is a requirement in maintaining a cohesive political party and it was one of the INC’s main assets until 1984. According to Kirchheimer, catch-all parties such as the INC tend to show reduced ideological commitment and depend more on

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<sup>141</sup> B Sivakumar, “Half of India’s Dalit Population Lives in 4 States,” *Times of India*, May 2, 2013, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Half-of-Indias-dalit-population-lives-in-4-states/articleshow/19827757.cms>.

<sup>142</sup> “Bahujan Samaj Party,”

<sup>143</sup> Jason Burke, “Mayawati – the Untouchable Idol of India’s Most Populous State,” *The Guardian*, February 7, 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/feb/07/mayawati-profile-uttar-pradesh-chief-minister>.

<sup>144</sup> Farooqui and Sridharan, “Can Umbrella Parties Survive?,” 353.

<sup>145</sup> “BSP Gets Third Highest Vote Share, but No Seats,” *The Indian Express* (blog), May 17, 2014, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/bsp-gets-third-highest-vote-share-but-no-seats/>.

strong leadership.<sup>146</sup> The INC remained dominant as long as it had strong leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi; however, the party declined under Rajiv Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi, and Rahul Gandhi. According to Kim, after independence and the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi in 1948, Jawaharlal Nehru sustained the Congress System and its viability through sheer charisma and national standing. Kim states that “Nehru gave the INC true national character.”<sup>147</sup> He kept strong intra-party democracy, introduced and protected secularism, emphasized the views of regional and district leadership, and looked after the interests of all castes.<sup>148</sup> He protected the rights of minorities and made them shareholders in political decision-making. He carried out inter-group negotiations, managed conflict, and built consensus. After Nehru’s death in 1964, his daughter Indira Gandhi, through a personality cult and cutthroat removal of opposition, kept the INC dominant.

Various scholars criticize Indira Gandhi for her authoritarian decisions and stated that she weakened the Congress System. According to Chiriyankandath and Mitra, Indira Gandhi turned “the INC into [a] personal vote aggregating machine.”<sup>149</sup> According to Hardgrave, she turned the INC “into an instrument of personal power and did not nurture anyone who might challenge her position as prime minister or endanger the succession of her children.”<sup>150</sup> Yet, few doubt that Indira Gandhi clearly held the INC together. Malhotra of the *Times of India* stated that “the INC was no more than a rabble held together by one towering personality.”<sup>151</sup> Indira Gandhi also led the INC to victory in four Lok Sabha elections from 1967 to 1980. Until 1984, due to Indira Gandhi’s political strategy and mass appeal, the INC remained the dominant party in the country.

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<sup>146</sup> Tatiana Telegina, “Political Moderation in India: The Case of Bhartiya Janata Party” (Master’s thesis, Central European University, 2017), 4, [http://www.etd.ceu.hu/2017/telegina\\_tatiana.pdf](http://www.etd.ceu.hu/2017/telegina_tatiana.pdf).

<sup>147</sup> Kim, “Indian Electoral Politics and the Rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP),” 15.

<sup>148</sup> Srijana Mitra Das, “Modi Model: A Break from ‘Nehruvian Consensus’?” *Times of India*, May 28, 2014, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Modi-model-A-break-from-Nehruvian-Consensus/articleshow/35649672.cms>.

<sup>149</sup> Kim, “Indian Electoral Politics and the Rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP),” 16.

<sup>150</sup> Jr. Robert L. Hardgrave, “India on the Eve of Elections: Congress and the Opposition,” *Pacific Affairs* 57, no. 3 (1984): 406. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2759067>.

<sup>151</sup> Hardgrave, “India on the Eve of Elections,” 406.



The leadership crisis struck the INC when Indira Gandhi's son Rajiv Gandhi took over as Prime Minister of India in 1984 after his mother's assassination.<sup>152</sup> In December 1984, during the Lok Sabha elections, the sympathy vote allowed the INC party to win 414 seats out of 541.<sup>153</sup> Overall, this mandate was the largest in the electoral history of India. However, just five years later in 1989, during the Lok Sabha elections, the INC secured only 197 seats.<sup>154</sup> The loss of 217 seats reveals the decrease of national support for the INC after Gandhi's death. Why did the INC see a loss in support? According to Frankel, "the INC insiders blamed Rajiv Gandhi's leadership for the defeat and called him emotionally immature and an autocratic leader. He lacked both Nehru's breadth of knowledge of India and Indira Gandhi's intuitive understanding of the masses."<sup>155</sup> Rajiv Gandhi was also considered to be a corrupt leader. Frankel stated that the most famous slogan in India during the 9th Lok Sabha Elections was "in every street, the cry is, Rajiv Gandhi is thief."<sup>156</sup> The INC suffered because of Rajiv Gandhi's lack of charisma. Tainted with corruption, his bad public image kept the INC from creating the needed coalition to form the government in 1989. The INC lost all state elections except in Nagaland, and Rajiv Gandhi lost credibility as leader.<sup>157</sup> He was assassinated in 1991 and as a result INC entered another leadership crisis.

The INC leadership crisis continued up to national elections of 1996. Narasimha Rao, the president of the INC and the prime minister from 1991 to 1996, was called "Narasimha Rout."<sup>158</sup> He failed to stop the destruction of the Babri Mosque in December

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<sup>152</sup> Ray and Kincaid, "Politics, Economic Development, and Second-Generation Strain in India's Federal System," 2.

<sup>153</sup> Farooqui and Sridharan, "Can Umbrella Parties Survive?," 339.

<sup>154</sup> Farooqui and Sridharan, 338.

<sup>155</sup> Frankel, "India's Democracy in Transition," 525.

<sup>156</sup> Frankel, 531.

<sup>157</sup> Ray and Kincaid, "Politics, Economic Development, and Second-Generation Strain in India's Federal System," 164-65.

<sup>158</sup> "India's Rao Resigns After Election Debacle," CNN, May 10, 1996, <http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/9605/10/india.rao/index.html>.

1992 by a Hindu nationalist mob.<sup>159</sup> This incident, for the very first time in Indian history, caused INC to lose Muslim votes. Narasimha Rao was also unable to stop defections from the INC. N.D. Tiwari, Arjun Singh, and Madhav Rao Scindia, prominent INC leaders, defected in 1997 after differences with Narasimha Rao.<sup>160</sup> These events point to the weakness of his leadership and contributed greatly to the INC's loss of the election in 1996, when the INC won only 140 seats.<sup>161</sup>

Sonia Gandhi, the wife of the late Rajiv Gandhi, took over as president of the INC in 1998 and made efforts to revive the party, including creating a party alliance.<sup>162</sup> However, the INC could only secure 141 seats in the 1998 Lok Sabha elections.<sup>163</sup> In 1999, during the Lok Sabha elections, the INC could barely win 114 seats.<sup>164</sup> In the Lok Sabha elections of 2004, the INC won only 145 seats but it was able to come to power through an alliance called the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) with the regional parties of SP, BSP and Left Front. Interestingly, these parties represented the groups that had left the INC in the past decade. Though its electoral performance was not strong, this alliance saved the INC. In 2009 during the Lok Sabha elections, the INC secured 205 seats and once again came to power as a leader of an alliance.<sup>165</sup> However, the party was never able to regain its strong party leadership and, therefore, never be as victorious as in the 1984 elections.

Despite some progress, the leadership crisis became more pronounced starting in 2009, when the INC was in government. Manmohan Singh of the INC was the Prime

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<sup>159</sup> "Babri Demolition Had Narasimha Rao Govt's Backing: Ex-BJP Mp Vedanti," *Deccan Chronicle*, May 20, 2017, <https://www.deccanchronicle.com/nation/current-affairs/200517/babri-demolition-had-backing-of-narasimha-raos-govt-ex-bjp-mp-vedanti.html>.

<sup>160</sup> Amitabh Tiwari, "5 Controversies That Marred Narasimha Rao's Political Legacy," *Daily O* (blog), June 28, 2016, <https://www.dailyo.in/politics/pv-narasimha-rao-babri-masjid-hawala-scam-harshad-mehta-congress-sonia-gandhi/story/1/11444.html>.

<sup>161</sup> Farooqui and Sridharan, "Can Umbrella Parties Survive?," 341.

<sup>162</sup> Pai and Kumar, "Understanding the BJP's Victory in UP," 118.

<sup>163</sup> Salil Gaurav, "From 1952 to 2014: A Timeline of the Congress Party's Rise and Fall," *Youth Ki Awaaz* (blog), April 10, 2018, <https://www.youthkiawaaz.com/2018/04/main-reasons-behind-congress-party-downfall/>.

<sup>164</sup> Gaurav.

<sup>165</sup> Farooqui and Sridharan, "Can Umbrella Parties Survive?," 341.

Minister; however, according to Zoya Hassan, “Manmohan Singh ran a government with multi-power centers.”<sup>166</sup> There was lack of consensus on different issues within both the party and the government. Sonia Gandhi forced the government to approve the Women’s Reservation Bill despite resistance.<sup>167</sup> “The Nuclear Civil Liability Bill” was almost blocked by the INC party leaders “to protect Indian safety concerns, instead of protecting American commercial interests.”<sup>168</sup> Sonia Gandhi had serious differences with Manmohan Singh on economic policies, with the former supporting social welfare necessary for inclusive growth and the latter advocating for neoliberal economic reforms to restore high economic growth.<sup>169</sup> As a result, the image created was of both a party and a country divided.

The leadership issue became most pronounced in the 16th Lok Sabha elections of 2014 when Rahul Gandhi took over as the party president. Pai and Kumar stated that “Rahul Gandhi failed to provide leadership and direction.”<sup>170</sup> According to *The Hindu*, “he does not have what it takes: he has neither demonstrated the ability to sustain an idea or the hard work demanded of a full time politician in a leadership role.”<sup>171</sup> Rahul Gandhi also faced an opposition leader who was more charismatic. According to Surhud, “Modi’s leadership style was hyper-masculine, authoritarian and hyper efficient.”<sup>172</sup> During the campaign, Narendra Modi led successful rallies across India and severally criticized the INC for being a dynasty that had failed to solve India’s problems. Rahul Gandhi was unable to articulate a defense in response.

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<sup>166</sup> Hassan, “Collapse of the Congress Party,” 160.

<sup>167</sup> Hassan, 160.

<sup>168</sup> Hassan, 160.

<sup>169</sup> Hassan, 160.

<sup>170</sup> Pai and Kumar, “Understanding the BJP’s Victory in UP,” 118.

<sup>171</sup> Hassan, “Collapse of the Congress Party,” 161.

<sup>172</sup> Harsh Mander, “Election 2014 and the Battle for India’s Soul,” in *Rise of Saffron Power, Reflections on Indian Politics*, ed. Mujibur Rehman (New York: Routledge, 2018), 135.

## 7. Corruption

The INC was also struck with various corruption scandals during the Rajiv Gandhi era. According to Ayoob, “there was rampant corruption and bribery in the highest political circles.”<sup>173</sup> Rajiv Gandhi allegedly took kickbacks from major defense deals of Swedish Bofors artillery guns and submarines of West Germany.<sup>174</sup> According to Frankel, “Rajiv Gandhi covered-up the full-scale inquiry into the deal.”<sup>175</sup> For every \$69 million allocated for development by the government, only 10 million were spent on public projects. The remainder was consumed by middle men, bureaucrats and politicians.<sup>176</sup> Gandhi’s defense minister V. P. Singh, who defected and formed the opposition in the shape of the Jan Morcha in 1987. In addition to mobilizing the OBCs constituencies, V.P. Singh exploited Rajiv’s alleged complicity in the defense scams during the electoral campaign of 1989 national elections.

In general, social policies and the implementation of development projects play important role not only in the development of a country, but also in the support or lack thereof of any political party. From 2004 to 2014, the INC implemented various social welfare policies to look after poor sections of society. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) was launched to target rural unemployment, skill development, universal education and mid-day meals for school children.<sup>177</sup> *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA), Right to Education, National Rural Health Mission (NRHM), National Food Security Act and the Forest Rights Act were attempts to encourage overall economic growth.<sup>178</sup> Although the programs were initially successful, according to Shankar and Gaiha, due to administrative corruption, the welfare programs failed miserably.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Ayoob, “Dateline India,” 171.

<sup>174</sup> Ayoob, 171.

<sup>175</sup> Frankel, “India’s Democracy in Transition,” 523.

<sup>176</sup> Frankel, 529.

<sup>177</sup> Chandra, “The 2014 National Elections from the Margins of Modern India,” 265.

<sup>178</sup> Hassan, “Collapse of The Congress Party,” 156–58.

<sup>179</sup> Chandra, “The 2014 National Elections from the Margins of Modern India,” 265.

Another significant corruption scandal struck the INC in 2011.<sup>180</sup> It became the most important scandal because it not only defamed the INC leadership, but also led to formation of a new political party, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP),<sup>181</sup> whose single-point agenda was to fight against corruption in India. The INC was ruling the country as part of an alliance—the United Progressive Alliance (UPA)—since 2004. Anna Hazare, a social activist, demanded enactment of the Lok Pal Bill (Anti-Corruption Bill) during a protest in New Delhi on April 5, 2011.<sup>182</sup> Countrywide protests in Anna Hazare’s support took place. The aim of the bill was to ensure accountability in the public sector through strict anti-corruption measures. According to Hassan, “the explosion of revelations about corrupt practices pointed to the worst excesses of crony capitalism that underpinned the growth story of the UPA government and proved that the UPA-II government was the most corrupt government of independent India.”<sup>183</sup> This movement delegitimized the government and earned the wrath of the middle class and a full range of voters across the social divide. Although AAP did not obtain significant votes or seats across the country in Lok Sabha elections, the AAP party discredited the INC by its anti-corruption sit-ins and protests. According to Hassan, “AAP routed INC in Delhi Assembly state elections in 2013, a loss INC has yet to recover from. BJP is the current government in Delhi and became the ultimate beneficiary of the bumper anti-corruption harvest.”<sup>184</sup>

## **8. The INC’s Lackluster Electoral Campaign**

The INC’s 2014 campaign lacked ideology, agenda, and a rallying point around which it could gather an audience for electoral gains. Political parties orchestrate comprehensive electoral campaigns based on well-thought out strategies and tactics. While commenting on the 2014 electoral campaign of the INC, Hassan argued that “the

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<sup>180</sup> Hassan, “Collapse of The Congress Party,” 159.

<sup>181</sup> “Timeline: Aam Aadmi Party’s Journey to Power in Delhi,” News18,, accessed November 20, 2018, <https://www.news18.com/news/politics/timeline-aam-aadmi-partys-journey-to-power-in-delhi-657669.html>.

<sup>182</sup> Arundhati Roy, “I’d Rather Not Be Anna,” *The Hindu*, August 21, 2011, <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/id-rather-not-be-anna/article2379704.ece>.

<sup>183</sup> Hassan, “Collapse of the Congress Party,” 159.

<sup>184</sup> Hassan, 159.

INC ran a lackluster campaign which clearly failed to connect with the new generation of voters who were no longer bound by traditional affiliations to a family or an ideology.”<sup>185</sup> Rahul, Sonia Gandhi and Manmohan Singh lacked the energy to match Modi, who addressed 40 rallies in six months in the Uttar Pradesh alone. As Sonia Gandhi notes, “the INC’s message was lost in the dust and din raised by an aggressive and polarizing campaign by our opponents, which was backed by unlimited resources and a hostile media.”<sup>186</sup> She basically blamed the failure of her party’s communication policy during the campaign. The bias of the media was evident from the coverage it gave to Gandhi’s campaign vis-a-vis Modi’s. According to the Centre of Media Studies, “five main stream media channels gave 50 percent prime time coverage to Modi, while Rahul Gandhi’s share was just 8 percent.”<sup>187</sup> Additionally, during the campaign, members of the Gandhi campaign, including PM Manmohan Singh, failed to come forward to contest the charges of corruption.

The BJP’s electoral victory did not occur overnight. The INCs decline that started in the 1970s culminated in the BJP’s victory in 2014. As this section has illustrated, several factors went into ending the Congress System that represented India for over four decades after independence. However, along with these various factors, the BJP’s campaign and strategy also played well into the changing India, which the INC was not able to accommodate. The following section will discuss how the BJP was able to fill the vacuum left by the INC and it will also discuss what it may mean for India’s secularism and democracy.

## **B. THE ELECTORAL RISE OF THE BJP**

The BJP made its first national-level debut in 1989 as part of a coalition government formed by V. P. Singh. However, its comprehensive electoral victory took place in the 2014 election as part of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), a coalition made up of the BJP and some regional parties including one in Kashmir, Punjab and

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<sup>185</sup> Hassan, “Collapse of the Congress Party,” 162.

<sup>186</sup> Hassan, 163.

<sup>187</sup> Hassan, 163.

Andhra Pradesh. The NDA won 323 seats while the BJP - a party that had never won a national majority – comprehensively defeated the INC and other opponents by winning 283 seats. How did it secure such a landslide victory is the main question here? While the previous section explains the decline of the INC that produced a political vacuum, this section describes the BJP’s organization, its electoral strategy and expansion of the social base to fill that vacuum at the national level. What was the BJP’s electoral strategy? What role did important personalities play? How did the RSS, the VHP and other extremist Hindu organizations use their political position or power to facilitate the BJP’s electoral rise?

### **1. Ideology: Redefined Hindutva**

Hindutva as an ideology is at the center of the BJP’s mission and strategy. The Oxford English dictionary defines Hindutva as “an ideology seeking to establish the hegemony of Hindus and the Hindu way of life.”<sup>188</sup> Jaffrelot states that the ideological roots of Hindu nationalism are rooted in V.D. Savarkar’s interpretation of Hindutva. Savarkar defined Hindu people as sons of soil for whom India is a sacred land.<sup>189</sup> Islam and Christianity, by contrast, are considered to be outsiders’ religions whose followers have threatened Hinduism in the past; while some people have converted to these religions, they should now swear allegiance to the primary symbols of Hindu identity in order to become true Indian nationals.<sup>190</sup> These facts clearly imply that Hindutva as an ideology is not in line with constitutionally-guaranteed secularism.

The BJP entered the 2014 campaign using this Hindutva ideology, exploiting religion and communalism for electoral and political gains. Narendra Modi, during campaign of 2014 Lok Sabha elections, connected Hindutva to the promise of rapid economic development for all castes and communities.<sup>191</sup> For instance, his campaign utilized the economic expansion of Gujarat as an example of his “NaMo” strategy. The

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<sup>188</sup> “Hindutva,” Oxford Dictionaries, accessed October 7, 2018, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/hindutva>.

<sup>189</sup> Jaffrelot, “India’s Democracy at 70: Toward A Hindu State,” 52.

<sup>190</sup> Jaffrelot, 52.

<sup>191</sup> Pai and Kumar, “Understanding the BJP’s Victory in UP,” 122.

name NaMo became an acronym of Modi's name and also a word used in Hindu chants.<sup>192</sup> Pai and Kumar called this mix of development with Hindutva ideology "Redefined Hindutva." According to Pai and Kumar, Modi and his confidante, Amit Shah, combined both "Hindutva and development" for a victory in Uttar Pradesh in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections. They further argued that "party cadres employed communal strategies – used at times by Modi himself – to create a broad Hindu vote bank encompassing the upper castes, the backwards and also the Dalits."<sup>193</sup> In each case, Hindu nationalism and economic growth were promoted as a common and connected theme; the campaign used Hindu terminology to present growth and plans such as Swachh Bharat, which was designed to hygienically clean India but also promised to clear Bharat of a corrupt economy.<sup>194</sup> The implementation of the program was also strategically announced the day after Diwali, which is a Hindu holiday connecting religion to development plans. Redefined Hindutva as an ideology contributed into the landside BJP electoral victory in the 2014 elections, but it has also had a polarizing effect on Indian society, which is the focus on the next chapter.

## 2. Leadership: Creating the Modi Wave

While the INC lacked a charismatic leader, Narendra Modi led the BJP to a sweeping victory in the elections of 2014.<sup>195</sup> It was the first political party that won a full majority since 1984. Modi handled the election campaign in a way that was later described as the "Modi Wave." What are some of the election strategies used by Modi that allowed the BJP to make history in Indian politics by winning 283 out of 543 Lok Sabha seats?

Scholars debate the influences of Modi's Hindu training as part of the RSS and the use of Hindu rhetoric during the campaign. According to Chandra, Modi entered

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<sup>192</sup> Ashita Sharma, "The NaMo Brand Phenomenon," *The Hindu Business Line*, May 29, 2014, <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/catalyst/The-NaMo-brand-phenomenon/article20785652.ece>.

<sup>193</sup> Pai and Kumar, "Understanding the BJP's Victory in UP," 111.

<sup>194</sup> "Note Ban, Like Swachh Bharat, Is a Movement to Clean India: PM Modi," *Business Standard India*, February 7, 2017.

<sup>195</sup> Chandra, "The 2014 National Elections from the Margins of Modern India," 263.



politics after a lengthy training in Hindu fascism in the ranks of the RSS, which became obvious in his political strategies.<sup>196</sup> He writes, “Modi represents the apogee of this religious ideology, replacing the covert violence of earlier Hindu violence against Dalits and religious minorities with an overt belligerence toward the non-Hindu Other.”<sup>197</sup> Kaul argues that the RSS is a paramilitary organization and Modi is a member. He has the “explicit aim of making India a pure Hindu Nation.”<sup>198</sup> Sumit Ganguly stated that, “despite Modi’s reputation as a religious firebrand, he mostly refrained from highly divisive religious rhetoric during the election campaign of 2014.”<sup>199</sup> Yet he argued that a more careful examination of the record suggested that it was hardly absent.<sup>200</sup> Modi and his followers “raised highly charged ethno-religious issues.”<sup>201</sup> Sridharan stated that in 2014, in West Bengal, Narendra Modi stated that immigrants from Bangladesh should be deported. In Assam, he characterized Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants as troublemakers in contrast with Bangladeshi Hindu immigrants, who suffered from persecution.<sup>202</sup>

Modi’s campaign rhetoric created fear. According to Mander, “Modi ran [a] campaign on communal fundamentalism, constituting barely disguised hostility toward minorities, especially Muslims, which was the main rallying agenda on the ground in electorally crucial states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.”<sup>203</sup> Modi, during his campaign, created a fear of others that stirred Hindu castes regardless of whether voters belonged to upper castes, OBCs, Scheduled Castes (SCs) or Scheduled Tribes (STs). In examining this situation, Chandra argues that “charismatic political leaders create a unity on the fear and hatred of the Other, whether in the form of ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities or

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<sup>196</sup> Chandra, 273–74.

<sup>197</sup> Chandra, 274.

<sup>198</sup> Nitasha Kaul, “On Hindutva Hate Politics: A Few Things I Wasn’t Able to Discuss with Ram Madhav on Al Jazeera,” *Scroll.In*, December 30, 2015, <http://scroll.in/article/778661/a-few-things-i-wasnt-able-to-discuss-with-bjp-leader-ram-madhav-during-his-al-jazeera-interview>.

<sup>199</sup> Ganguly, “The Risks Ahead,” 57.

<sup>200</sup> Ganguly, 57.

<sup>201</sup> Ganguly, 57.

<sup>202</sup> Ganguly, 57.

<sup>203</sup> Mander, “Election 2014 and the Battle for India’s Soul,” 2018, 133.

political rivals.”<sup>204</sup> This attitude and rhetoric was against traditional Indian secularism. Modi ran a divisive and non-pluralist campaign which sent minorities, especially Muslims and Christians, into shock. They feared both backlash and persecution. This “campaign and use of slogans such as *garva se kaho, hum Hindu hai* (Say with pride I am a Hindu) polarized the civil society and politicized the religious communities.”<sup>205</sup> Modi’s leadership led to intolerance, conflict and violence. Modi also promoted himself as a macho, masculine leader. He bragged “about his 56-inch chest” and claimed that he would reassert Indian power across the globe.<sup>206</sup> He “promised to toss environmental and labor laws in the dustbin” and claimed trains would run on time, workers would obey their supervisors and the armed forces would spread their testosterone along India’s borders.<sup>207</sup> During his 2014 campaign, he lambasted China and Pakistan.<sup>208</sup> He promoted himself to be a tough leader on anti-terrorism and hinted to even cross the border of Pakistan to chase terrorists. He promised zero tolerance on organized crime and Mao’s insurgency.<sup>209</sup> He severely criticized the INC for enhancing trade with Pakistan and initiating bilateral talks.<sup>210</sup>

Amit Shah’s leadership, like Narendra Modi, turned out to be invaluable in winning Uttar Pradesh, an essential state to win national elections. While Modi was the face of the BJP during the campaign, Amit Shah was the CEO of electoral organization. According to Prashant Jha, “if Modi’s mass connect is one part of the story, the fifty-two-year old Amit Shah’s work in transforming the BJP is an equally important element of

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<sup>204</sup> Chandra, “The 2014 National Elections From the Margins of Modern India,” 271.

<sup>205</sup> Heredia, “The Dance of Democracy: Election 2014 and the Marginalised and Minorities,” 197.

<sup>206</sup> Vijay Prashad, “Tough Guy Modi Is the Man of the Moment for Wealthy Indian Americans,” *The Guardian*, September 26, 2014, sec. Opinion, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/sep/26/narendra-modi-indian-americans-anti-muslim-pogrom>.

<sup>207</sup> Prashad.

<sup>208</sup> Ankit Panda, “Modi May Be Interested in Cross-Border Covert Ops Against Pakistan,” *The Diplomat*, May 2, 2014, <https://thediplomat.com/2014/05/modi-may-be-interested-in-cross-border-covert-ops-against-pakistan/>.

<sup>209</sup> Panda.

<sup>210</sup> Panda.

the same story.”<sup>211</sup> He is the current president of the BJP. He was rewarded and made president as the result of his excellent management of the 2014 sensational electoral victory in Uttar Pradesh. Like Modi, he has been a member of the RSS since 1984-1985.<sup>212</sup> He has been a friend and political associate of Modi since 1982.<sup>213</sup> He earned the reputation for political acumen and election campaign management as he managed Modi’s successful campaigns in Gujrat state. He acquired experience in organizing and winning elections through his first stint as an election agent in Ahmadabad’s Naranpura ward.<sup>214</sup> He then became coordinator for the BJP stalwart L.K. Advani’s election bid of 1989.<sup>215</sup> He consolidated his organizational experience by winning elections of Gujarat state’s cooperative banks, milk dairies, agricultural market committees, and Cricket Association elections in the 90s.<sup>216</sup> He won four consecutive state assembly elections in Gujarat from 1997 to 2012 and organized Modi’s campaigns in Gujarat state from 2002 to 2012.<sup>217</sup> After these excellent performances, he was appointed general secretary in charge of Uttar Pradesh in May 2013.<sup>218</sup>

In order to understand the importance of leadership and the BJP campaign, one has to examine the BJP’s election campaign in the state of Uttar Pradesh. The BJP made Uttar Pradesh (UP) its main political battle ground in 2014. It is often stated that “the road to Delhi lay via U.P.”<sup>219</sup> Late Atal Bihari Vajpayee of BJP, an ex-Prime Minister of India once famously “declared that the road back to power for the BJP lies in the results

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<sup>211</sup> Prashant Jha, *How the BJP Wins* (New Delhi, India: Juggernaut Books, 2017), 46.

<sup>212</sup> “About Amit Shah,” Amit Shah, accessed October 8, 2018, <http://amitshah.co.in/introduction/>.

<sup>213</sup> “BJP President Amit Shah: All You Need to Know About Modi’s Real No. 2,” *Firstpost*, July 9, 2014, <https://www.firstpost.com/politics/bjp-president-amit-shah-all-you-need-to-know-about-modis-real-no-2-1610139.html>.

<sup>214</sup> Jha, *How the BJP Wins*, 47.

<sup>215</sup> Jha, 47.

<sup>216</sup> Jha, 48.

<sup>217</sup> Jha, 47–48.

<sup>218</sup> Jha, 49.

<sup>219</sup> “The Importance of Uttar Pradesh,” *The Hindu*, March 19, 2014, sec. Editorial, <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/the-importance-of-uttar-pradesh/article5801641.ece>.

of the elections in India's most populous state.”<sup>220</sup> Uttar Pradesh has 85 out of 543 Lok Sabha seats, the highest number of seats among all states of India. The party that wins the maximum number of seats from Uttar Pradesh has more chances to form a government at the center. The fact that Modi held 40 rallies in Uttar Pradesh signifies the importance of this state.

In 2014, Amit Shah was in charge of the campaign in U.P., which eventually led to the BJP’s national victory. According to Jha, Shah’s expertise lay in fomenting communal tensions, creating an anti-minority situation, especially with regard to Muslims, in order to attract votes, and devising strategies to obtain votes of all castes — especially OBCs, SCs, STs and the Other Most Backward Castes.<sup>221</sup> Amit Shah exploited the social fault lines of Uttar Pradesh deftly. He understood the prevailing communal tensions, along with how to utilize Hindutva for the Hindi-speaking population. He accordingly revamped the party organization and chalked out campaign tactics based on communal divisions. The Uttar Pradesh state has the largest Muslim population, at 19 percent; in real numbers there are 38 million Muslims in U.P. The majority of Hindus are from OBCs and SCs. The STs also have a considerable presence in the state. The caste-based parties such as SP and BSP have secured the maximum seats in Uttar Pradesh since 1989. Before that, it was stronghold of the INC. Amit Shah’s primary action was to orchestrate the Muzaffarnagar Communal riots in Uttar Pradesh between Muslims and SCs and OBCs on August 21, 2013, almost eight months before the 2014 elections.<sup>222</sup> The aim was to attract the Hindu vote of lower castes. Amit Shah stated in April of 2014 that the predominantly Muslim Muzaffarnagar district of Uttar Pradesh was a base of terrorists.<sup>223</sup> Simultaneously, he organized and addressed small meetings in remote Uttar Pradesh villages, where he attempted to stir up hatred against Muslims. Although the State Election Commission registered an investigation against

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<sup>220</sup> Farzand Ahmed and Ashok K. Damodaran, “Winning in Uttar Pradesh Still Important for Political Parties,” *India Today*, April 30, 2007, <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/cover-story/story/20070430-essence-of-indian-union-uttar-pradesh-748753-2007-04-30>.

<sup>221</sup> Jha, *How the BJP Wins*, 48.

<sup>222</sup> Pai and Kumar, “Understanding the BJP’s Victory in UP,” 123.

<sup>223</sup> Ganguly, “The Risks Ahead,” 57.

Amit Shah and other leaders of the BJP for instigating violence, the SCs (Dalit), Scheduled Castes and OBCs of rural areas overwhelmingly voted for BJP leaders. Besides fueling the anti-Muslim environment, simultaneously, Amit Shah also created a rift between the BSP and the SP over the *Chaurasi Parikarma Yatra* (a religious walk carried out by followers of Hinduism in UP). While the SP state government banned it, the BSP supported the walk organized by the VHP.<sup>224</sup> Thus, Amit Shah was successfully able to split the SC votes between the SP and the BSP.

### 3. Expanding the Social Base

The BJP appealed to a wider social base to become the single largest party, as the INC successfully did from 1952 to 1984. In analyzing the BJP victory of the 2014 Lok Sabha elections in UP, Pai and Kumar stated that, “the victory was due to revival of its organization and social base.”<sup>225</sup> To increase its social base, the BJP carefully combined ideology, the Gujarat development model and leadership. Campaign slogans based on this strategy were used. According to Palshikar, the BJP portrayed their leader Modi as “*the vikash purush* (development leader) for the backward states, *rashtra purush* (national leader) for the urbanized states and *the Hanuman* of Lord Ram for the northern states, which were more prone to Hindutva.”<sup>226</sup> This slogan appealed to all segments of society across different states and the slogan was conveyed to society through a strong organization (to be discussed in a later section).

In addition to the leadership and ideological factors as discussed earlier, the success of the Gujarat economy also presented an opportunity during the campaign. The Gujarat model for development became a main theme for expansion of the social base. Modi was the Chief Minister of the Indian state of Gujarat beginning from 2002 until 2014. Under his leadership, “Gujarat saw double-digit growth at rates higher than most

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<sup>224</sup> Pai and Kumar, “Understanding the BJP’s Victory in UP,” 123.

<sup>225</sup> Pai and Kumar, 111.

<sup>226</sup> Heredia, “The Dance of Democracy: Election 2014 and the Marginalised and Minorities,” 197.

other states.”<sup>227</sup> Gujarat, which has only “5 percent of India’s population, contributed 21 percent to India’s exports and 13 percent to its industrial production in 2009.”<sup>228</sup> Modi also boasted that he was able to attract significant FDI and implement major infrastructural projects during his tenure as Chief Minister.<sup>229</sup> Modi as chief minister of Gujarat maintained contact with Gujarati diaspora in the United States and across the globe through video conferences. This tactic helped Modi to maintain and develop business relations abroad as well as to attract foreign remittances. He extensively visited Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan and Thailand. He made Japan and Canada partners for his biennial Vibrant Gujarat Investors Summit.<sup>230</sup> He got twelve out of twenty-two diamond traders released from China after his frequent visits to China.<sup>231</sup> Consequently, he was able to win confidence of mid-level businessmen. He provided also land in Sanad, Gujarat to Tata Motors to set up a factory to manufacture the Nano, the company’s small car, after the company failed to set up a manufacturing unit in Singur, West Bengal.<sup>232</sup> According to Mander, Modi “streamlined economic processes, removed tape and curtailed corruption in ways that made the state a key driver of national economic growth.”<sup>233</sup>

According to some scholars the development in Gujarat model was more of a myth than reality. According to economist Sood, “the Gujarat’s performance was overstated and its share in FDI in 2012-2013 was 2.38 percent, placing it at distant sixth position among the states of India.”<sup>234</sup> However, during the campaign of the 2014 elections, corporate businesses used media to create hype about Modi’s Gujarat

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<sup>227</sup> Harsh Mander, “Election 2014 and the Battle for India’s Soul,” in *Rise of Saffron Power, Reflections on Indian Politics*, ed. Mujibur Rehman (New York: Routledge, 2018), 136.

<sup>228</sup> Mander, “Election 2014 and the Battle for India’s Soul,” 2018, 136.

<sup>229</sup> Sameer Hashmi, “Can India Model Itself on Gujarat?,” May 5, 2014, sec. Business, <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-27257790>.

<sup>230</sup> Rehman, *Rise of Saffron Power, Reflections on Indian Politics*, 175.

<sup>231</sup> Rehman, 175.

<sup>232</sup> Mander, “Election 2014 and the Battle for India’s Soul,” 2018, 137.

<sup>233</sup> Mander, 135.

<sup>234</sup> Mander, 137.

development model,<sup>235</sup> and sold this image successfully. The fact that Gujarat also experienced religious riots during Modi's tenure was ignored. When Modi was questioned about the riots, he acknowledged them but often changed the topic.

#### 4. The Urban Middle Class and Young Voters

Indian society experienced rise of a new segment of society, the urban middle class, due to the adoption of a free market economy in 1991.<sup>236</sup> During the campaign, the BJP was successfully able to target this group, even though the expansion of India's middle class occurred under the INC regimes. Approximately 40 million of the 70 million people comprising Indian middle class lives in urban areas.<sup>237</sup> According to Mander, "the middle class was impatient to see his (Modi's) installation as the one man who could accelerate economic growth."<sup>238</sup> There was another sixty million people at the lower middle class level, who were awaiting entry to the middle class, who also wanted to benefit from promised economic prosperity along the lines of the Gujarat model. Mander describes this group as the country's neo-middle class. He states that these Hindu urban upper, middle, aspirational middle classes and those who have not yet entered any level of middle class supported Modi.<sup>239</sup> These classes wanted to benefit from the economic prosperity promised by Modi along the lines of Gujarat model. Other than these urban classes, the corporate businessmen openly favored Modi during the campaign. The wealthiest Indian businessmen, Mukesh Ambani, Ratan Tata of Tata Motors and telecom giant Sunil Mittal openly favored his campaign.<sup>240</sup> In addition to upper and middle classes, Mander pointed out that the majority of young voters between

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<sup>235</sup> Heredia, "The Dance of Democracy: Election 2014 and the Marginalised and Minorities," 197–98.

<sup>236</sup> Edward A. Gargan, "India Stumbles in Rush to a Free Market Economy," *New York Times*, August 15, 1992, <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/08/15/world/india-stumbles-in-rush-to-a-free-market-economy.html>.

<sup>237</sup> Christian Meyer and Nancy Birdsall, *New Estimates of India's Middle Class*, Technical Note (Washington, DC: Center for Global Development, 2012), [https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/archive/doc/2013\\_MiddleClassIndia\\_TechnicalNote\\_CGDNNote.pdf](https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/archive/doc/2013_MiddleClassIndia_TechnicalNote_CGDNNote.pdf).

<sup>238</sup> Mander, "Election 2014 and the Battle for India's Soul," 2018, 140.

<sup>239</sup> Mander, "Election 2014 and the Battle for India's Soul," 2018, 131.

<sup>240</sup> Mander, 135.

ages 18 and 22 voted for the BJP. Many among these were first-time voters. Interestingly, 47 percent of these young voters voted for the BJP in the 2014 elections in Uttar Pradesh state.<sup>241</sup> The Centre for the Study of Developing Societies in partnership with Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, carried out a survey in 2017 and found young people between ages 15 and 34 had fairly conservative views.<sup>242</sup> For example, “They supported banning movies that hurt religious sentiments and believed the consumption of beef should not be allowed.”<sup>243</sup> The survey clearly shows that young people vote for the BJP due to Hindutva ideology and anti-Muslim sentiments.

## 5. Mobilizing the Backward Castes

The BJP also expanded its campaign to include lower castes, although its primary leadership and historical constituency lies in the upper caste. Besides the urban middle classes, the party aggressively approached the rural population of OBCs, SCs, STs (Adivasis) and even minority Christians. Possibly, a combination of Hindutva ideology and the Gujarat development model played an important role to attract these voters. Mander argued that “the BJP benefited hugely from a unified anti-minority Hindu vote bank” which even included low-caste Dalits and minority Christians in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, against Muslims.<sup>244</sup> The BJP was successfully able to present Muslims as a competing groups for quota-based benefits. Since some lower castes, SCs, and Christians fall into the same lower-income category, they saw Muslims as a competing community for the lower-income government subsidies.<sup>245</sup> According to Pai and Kumar, the BJP gave 28 tickets of Lok Sabha to Dalits and OBCs candidates in Uttar Pradesh and gave importance to OBC leaders such as Kalyan Singh, Uma Bharti, Satyendra Kushwaha,

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<sup>241</sup> Pai and Kumar, “Understanding the BJP’s Victory in UP,” 116.

<sup>242</sup> S. Rukmini, “How India Votes: The BJP Could Retain the Millennial Vote, but It Doesn’t Mean a Ringing Endorsement,” *Scroll.In*, October 8, 2018, <https://scroll.in/article/897361/how-india-votes-the-bjp-could-retain-the-millennial-vote-but-it-doesnt-mean-a-ringing-endorsement>.

<sup>243</sup> Rukmini.

<sup>244</sup> Mander, “Election 2014 and the Battle for India’s Soul,” 2018, 131.

<sup>245</sup> Ornit Shani, *Communalism, Caste and Hindu Nationalism, The Violence in Gujarat* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 55.



Rameshwar Churasia and Rajveer Singh.<sup>246</sup> The BJP also promoted Modi as a *Chaiwala* (tea seller) from a backward caste.<sup>247</sup> They also argue that the BJP leveraged the symbolic value of important Dalit figures, such as B. R. Ambedkar, to secure Dalit support, especially among the Jatavs community, who make up nine percent of the population of Uttar Pradesh.<sup>248</sup> For example, the BJP organized a *Bharat Ratna* for the BSP founder Kanshiram; the statue of B.R. Ambedkar was extensively revered and garlanded in different areas of state.<sup>249</sup> According to Verma, Beg, and Kumar, 70 percent of Brahmins, 60 per cent of the OBCs, 53 percent of the Kurmis (SCs) and 45 percent of the other Dalits voted for the BJP in Uttar Pradesh state.<sup>250</sup> Through a carefully orchestrated combination of Hindutva ideology, the leadership of Modi and the Gujarat development model, the BJP expanded its social base for a stunning 2014 Lok Sabha electoral victory.

## 6. Aggressive Campaign Based on Extensive Rallies

The campaign in the Uttar Pradesh became the model for the BJP electoral rise across the country in the elections of 2014, and it is illustrative of the core values of Hindu nationalism that drive the party. Amit Shah and Sunil Bansal, through their Sangh organizations, arranged forty massive rallies for Modi across the state over a six-month period. While Amit Shah's leadership skills have been discussed earlier, Sunil Bansal, a head of the RSS student organization, became the head of electoral zones during the 2014 campaign. As a student he was able to tap into the college campuses and other youth groups.<sup>251</sup> Under his leadership, RSS volunteers from IT institutes ran a high-tech social media campaign and managed the BJP social media headquarters in Lucknow.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> Pai and Kumar, "Understanding the BJP's Victory in UP," 123.

<sup>247</sup> Jaffrelot, "The Modi-Centric BJP 2014 Election Campaign: New Techniques and Old Tactics," 159.

<sup>248</sup> Pai and Kumar, "Understanding the BJP's Victory in UP," 123.

<sup>249</sup> Pai and Kumar, 123.

<sup>250</sup> Pai and Kumar, 116.

<sup>251</sup> Jha, *How the BJP Wins*, 50.

<sup>252</sup> Pai and Kumar, "Understanding the BJP's Victory in UP," 126.

The symbolic names given to each rally promoted aggression and religious nationalism. The first rally was called *Vijay Shankhand* (Victory Declaration) at Kanpur on October 19, 2013.<sup>253</sup> The last was called *the Bharat Vijay* (Conquering India) on May 10, 2014 in eastern UP. In order to mobilize supporters, Amit Shah effectively used the Sangh organization networks to reach voters. The RSS, VHP and other Hindu religious extremist organizations have a presence at the grassroots level through their social organizations. Ideological affinity mobilized approximately 5 million<sup>254</sup> of the RSS cadre for the BJP in the elections of 2014; these volunteers showed up at events in order to get media attention. In addition, these RSS cadres also went to villages, towns and cities in the Uttar Pradesh to get feedback after each election rally and speech by Modi. The feedback was sent to the election headquarters established in the Uttar Pradesh to further improve narratives for the next speech.<sup>255</sup> Furthermore, Amit Shah nominated a contact person for one of every 140,000 booths (place to cast vote) in Uttar Pradesh for a total of eighty constituencies.<sup>256</sup> In addition, Amit Shah divided the Uttar Pradesh into eight zones and these zones were divided further into twenty-one clusters of three to five seats.<sup>257</sup> Each seat was further divided into booths. Booth Committees were formed to look after the affairs of each booth. Amit Shah's aim was twofold: first, to assure that no part of the state was neglected and second, to identify which castes and sections of the population were residing in those zones in order to devise different campaign slogans and strategies. From his headquarters, aggressive tactics were initiated, coordinated and implemented.

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<sup>253</sup> Pai and Kumar, 126.

<sup>254</sup> Saswat Singhdeo, "The Number Of Men Joining RSS Every Month Is Up 600%: Here's Why," *ScoopWhoop*, January 9, 2016, <http://www.scoopwhoop.com/The-Number-Of-Men-Joining-RSS-Every-Month-Is-Up-Heres-Why/>.

<sup>255</sup> Pai and Kumar, "Understanding the BJP's Victory in UP," 126.

<sup>256</sup> Jha, *How the BJP Wins*, 52.

<sup>257</sup> Pai and Kumar, "Understanding the BJP's Victory in UP," 126.

## 7. The Role of the RSS and Other *Sangh Parivar* Organizations

How vast the existing organization of the RSS and affiliated Hindu nationalist organizations are requiring an understanding to know its contribution to the BJP's victory. The RSS and its affiliates supported the BJP as part of the *Sangh parivar* (family of Hindu nationalist extremist organizations). According to Walter Anderson, the RSS acts as a main coordinator among various the *Sangh* organizations such as VHP and *Bajrang Dal*; it mitigates differences in order to keep the grassroots cadres united for electoral mobilization.<sup>258</sup> The RSS does not publish exact numbers of its members; however it has a presence in more than 50,000 villages of India.<sup>259</sup> Another source argues that the RSS has 5 million members across India.<sup>260</sup> The RSS and the BJP were tied together before the election. According to Mujib, the RSS was deeply committed to Modi.<sup>261</sup> Prime Minister Modi and leaders of the BJP also take pride being members of the Hindu extremist RSS.<sup>262</sup> The RSS's Chief, Mohan Bhagwat, claimed after the elections that the RSS contributed to the BJP's victory of 2014, and it was not a one man show.<sup>263</sup> The RSS and its affiliate Hindu organizations provided their on-the-ground foot soldiers to organize the campaign, establish booth committees, and harass anti-BJP elements.

The RSS and affiliates have a presence across India due to its involvement in social projects. According to Ramchandaran, *Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram*, an organization affiliated with the RSS, "runs health and education services for the tribal communities" in Tripura, Assam, Nagaland and Mizoram, and paved the way for the BJP's electoral

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<sup>258</sup> Rehman, *Rise of Saffron Power, Reflections on Indian Politics*, 14.

<sup>259</sup> "Basic FAQ on RSS," accessed October 9, 2018, <http://rss.org/Encyc/2017/5/20/Basic-FAQ-on-RSS.html>.

<sup>260</sup> Singhdeo, "The Number of Men Joining RSS Every Month Is Up 600%."

<sup>261</sup> Rehman, *Rise of Saffron Power, Reflections on Indian Politics*, 12.

<sup>262</sup> Kaul, "On Hindutva Hate Politics: A Few Things I Wasn't Able to Discuss with Ram Madhav on Al Jazeera."

<sup>263</sup> Ashok Pradhan, "BJP's 2014 Win Wasn't One-Man Show, RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat Says," *Times of India*, August 11, 2014, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/BJPs-2014-win-wasnt-one-man-show-RSS-chief-Mohan-Bhagwat-says/articleshow/40029715.cms>.

victory in northeastern tribal states.<sup>264</sup> She argued that “though the RSS maintains it is apolitical, there was convergence between its 5000 strong cadre of foot soldiers on [the] ground and the BJP on how to breach the bastions and reach out to people in northeastern states.”<sup>265</sup> According to Rai, the RSS welfare programs in Uttar Pradesh played an important role to gain votes for the BJP.<sup>266</sup> The RSS had 78,627 education schools, 19,591 health dispensaries and ran 22,450 projects of imparting skills for self-reliance in Uttar Pradesh in 2016.<sup>267</sup> Thus, the RSS, attracted votes for the BJP through welfare projects. It is therefore very likely that the RSS members working on these projects, by default, also supplemented the BJP organization.

## 8. Targeting the Nehru Dynasty

The younger generation in India, especially voters aged between 18 and 22, has much less knowledge about the Nehru family’s (father of Indira Gandhi) contribution to Indian independence from colonialism; they effectively represent the third generation since 1947. Amit Shah’s declaration of the Nehru as a non-democratic dynasty vilified them for the new generation of voters. Modi stated in 2014 that the INC was a dynastic party, overwhelmed by the Nehru family. In addition, the BJP, led by Modi, constantly accused the INC and the Nehru family of attempting to appease minorities, therefore being non-democratic as well as non-secular.<sup>268</sup> Sonia Gandhi’s Italian nationality was emphasized and she was labeled a foreigner. Rahul Gandhi was called a “*Pappu*” (Soft Leader) who was not capable of handling the insurgencies in Kashmir and the northeastern states of India. According to Hassan, “Modi in his rallies claimed that if

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<sup>264</sup> Smriti Kak Ramachandran, “Assembly Election Results: How RSS Helped BJP in Nagaland, Tripura and Meghalaya,” *Hindustan Times*, March 3, 2018, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/how-rss-helped-bjp-in-nagaland-tripura-and-meghalaya/story-uGB72XgWMZTXVF7Pb0XaGJ.html>.

<sup>265</sup> Ramachandran.

<sup>266</sup> Siddhartha Rai, “RSS’ Welfare Projects Helping BJP Ahead of 2017 Uttar Pradesh Elections,” *India Today*, May 22, 2106, <https://www.indiatoday.in/mail-today/story/rss-welfare-projects-helping-bjp-ahead-of-2017-uttar-pradesh-elections-324858-2016-05-22>.

<sup>267</sup> Rai.

<sup>268</sup> Rudolf C. Heredia, “The Dance of Democracy,” in *Rise of Saffron Power, Reflections on Indian Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 197.

India had to realize its full potential, India must get rid of the Gandhi dynasty and make India *the INC-mukt Bharat* (The INC-free India).”<sup>269</sup>

## 9. The Use of Media and Technology

The Indian political system has relied heavily on the media for political communication and the new generation has opened its doors to social media as well. In 2014, for instance, India had 15 million Twitter users, 200 million Facebook users, and another 200 million users for WhatsApp.<sup>270</sup> Amit Shah was able to use India’s media setting to create a “Modi Wave.”<sup>271</sup> A media war room was established in Lucknow.<sup>272</sup> In areas beyond media range, classified as dark zones, “Modi Vans” fitted with GPSs, campaign materials and a fourteen-minute video on his personality, speeches and the BJP’s manifesto traversed 10,000 villages of the UP. According to Jha, a membership registration campaign began in January 2014. The momentum was such that by 31 January 2015, the BJP had 18 crore (18 Mn) new members in the Uttar Pradesh state.”<sup>273</sup> These members were registered through *Sangh parivars* foot-soldiers who went on door-to-door visits, and text messages. The INC did not realize that the young voters of India extensively use social media and technology; thus, the party suffered to secure votes of the urban youth voters. Currently, Modi has a Twitter account that he uses regularly to reach his supporters. Since then other politicians have followed suit, but the BJP was a leader in utilizing social media for this purpose.<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Hassan, “Collapse of the Congress Party,” 163.

<sup>270</sup> “Leading Countries Based on Number of Facebook Users,” Statista: The Statistics Portal, October 2018, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/268136/top-15-countries-based-on-number-of-facebook-users/>; “WhatsApp Now Has 1.5 Billion Monthly Active Users, 200 Million Users in India,” *Financial Express*, February 1, 2018, <https://www.financialexpress.com/industry/technology/whatsapp-now-has-1-5-billion-monthly-active-users-200-million-users-in-india/1044468/>.

<sup>271</sup> Pai and Kumar, “Understanding the BJP’s Victory in UP,” 126.

<sup>272</sup> Pai and Kumar, 126.

<sup>273</sup> Jha, *How the BJP Wins*, 63.

<sup>274</sup> Dinesh Narayanan and Venkat Anand, “How the Mobile Phone Is Shaping to Be BJP’s Most Important Weapon in Elections,” *Economic Times*, August 23, 2018, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/how-the-mobile-phone-is-shaping-to-be-bjps-most-important-weapon-in-elections/articleshow/65508743.cms>.

## C. CONCLUSION

The chapter analyzed the decline of the INC and rise of the Hindu Nationalist BJP. The premise here is that the BJP was able to utilize the political vacuum left by the INC that has dominated Indian politics since it started to mobilize for independence in 1890s. The INC declined for multiple reasons such as a decaying organization and lack of intra-party democracy, lack of ideology, weak leadership, corruption, lackluster election campaigns and weak implementation of social policies, all of which led to a narrowing social base. Conversely, the BJP went into the 2014 elections with the strong leadership of Narendra Modi, who presented a strong man appeal using Hindutva ideology. He was backed in his campaign by an Amit Shah and Bansal-led organization that was able to use the numerous RSS, VHP and other extremist religious organization cadre to reach people at the grassroots level, such as in schools, colleges, IT institutions, the streets, in villages and in cities.

Though in line with one of Diamond's four basic elements of democracy – fair and free elections<sup>275</sup> -- the BJP took over the government of India in 2014 democratically, however, the BJP's election success polarized society along communal lines due to Hindutva ideology, which is illustrated in the next chapter. The victory of BJP raised the concerns for the human rights of Indian minorities, as Diamond highlighted that the protection of human rights are part of the four basic elements of democracy.<sup>276</sup> The concern with regards to the protection of minority rights is important because they became the primary targets of the BJP in order to build an oppositional majority to the INC, which represented a secular India.

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<sup>275</sup> Diamond, "What Is Democracy? Lecture at Hilla University for Humanistic Studies."

<sup>276</sup> Diamond.

### III. THE VIOLATION OF MINORITY RIGHTS AND THE BJP GOVERNMENT

According to sociologist Sammy Smooha, “in an ethnic democracy, the dominant nationalist ethnic group can declare minor ethnic groups a threat to [the] state, imposes control over them and restricts their rights.”<sup>277</sup> The threat of the dominant Hindu majority imposing their ideological ideas upon minorities and the secular Hindu population cannot be ruled out. Since 2014, the BJP-led coalition, the NDA, has been in power in India with a two-thirds majority in the parliament.<sup>278</sup> The INC, and its coalition UPA with only sixty seats, presents a weak opposition.<sup>279</sup> The BJP, and its extremist cultural and socio-political organizational allies, led by the RSS and VHP, is the leading voice of Hindu nationalism; the BJP draws exclusionary political support from people who wish to promote a Hindu, non-secular view of the nation, state, and collective identity.<sup>280</sup> The BJP’s dominant position in the parliament for the first time in Indian history gives it power at a national level to implement its vision. This chapter examines what this scenario means for the Indian religious minorities and low castes. In the past four years of power, has BJP protected rights of Indian minorities? What policy shifts have affected minorities since the BJP took over government in 2014?

Freedom House reports a decline in India’s democracy, and scholars have also begun to study the relationship between the BJP and minorities. Freedom House states that the health of democracy has reduced in last four years from 88 to 77.<sup>281</sup> It also states that there has been a substantial rise in attacks on minorities, and the government either did not respond or took belated action.<sup>282</sup> Rehman, for instance, argues that the BJP potentially has restructured the state-citizen relationship, fueled majoritarian aggression,

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<sup>277</sup> Jaffrelot, “India’s Democracy at 70,” 60.

<sup>278</sup> Heredia, “The Dance of Democracy,” 191.

<sup>279</sup> Heredia, 191.

<sup>280</sup> Mitra, “The Ambivalent Moderation of Hindu Nationalism in India,” 273.

<sup>281</sup> “India,” January 4, 2018.

<sup>282</sup> “India.”

and enacted a “Saffron System” that resulted in the subversion of human rights, mob lynching by cow vigilantes, and Saharanpur anti-Dalit violence.<sup>283</sup> Shiv Visvanathan stated that human rights are now Hindu and Muslim rights: “our loyalties are now to religion, caste, groups and clubs.”<sup>284</sup>

While Chapter II examined the BJP’s rise to power along with the INC’s decline, Chapter III examines the impact of its rise on minorities. Chapter III gives background on the relationship between the BJP and extremist organizations, then details three categories of current, anti-minority measures undertaken by the BJP: changing symbols and rhetoric; inciting riots and violence; and actively altering norms and laws, including the administration of Kashmir.

## **A. BACKGROUND**

The BJP is replacing India’s traditional constitutional secularism with communalism and Hindu Nationalism.

### **1. Constitutional Secularism versus Hindutva Ideology**

Secularism in democratic multi-ethnic, multi-religious societies usually plays a balancing role and keeps a check on religious fundamentalism. India is constitutionally a secular country in line with its multi-ethnic and multi-religious society. According to Mander, the “Indian constitution pledges equal citizenship to all persons regardless of their faith.”<sup>285</sup> The founding fathers of India created a secular democratic state, based on liberal principals.<sup>286</sup> They made vigorous efforts to balance the interests of minorities against the power of the majority and an egalitarian democracy.<sup>287</sup> In 1976, the Indian Constitution was amended to enshrine secularism. Article 15 of the Indian Constitution bans discrimination on religious grounds, and Articles 26 and 30 allow minorities to

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<sup>283</sup> Rehman, *Rise of Saffron Power, Reflections on Indian Politics*, 4.

<sup>284</sup> Soutik Biswas, “Why India Woke up so Late to a Brutal Rape,” *BBC News*, April 14, 2018, sec. India, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-43751166>.

<sup>285</sup> Mander, “Election 2014 and the Battle for India’s Soul,” 2018, 144.

<sup>286</sup> Jaffrelot, “The Modi-Centric BJP 2014 Election Campaign: New Techniques and Old Tactics,” 273.

<sup>287</sup> Jaffrelot, 276.



manage their religious matters.<sup>288</sup> In line with constitutional dictates, on January 2, 2017, the Indian Supreme Court banned electoral campaigns based on religion, race, caste, community, or language.<sup>289</sup>

However, religious nationalism now threatens India's secularism. Despite legal and constitutional guidelines, the BJP, and supporting *the Sangh* (the assembly of organizations) Hindu organizations like the RSS, the VHP, and others, mobilizes electoral support based on a Hindutva ideology. Hindutva dilutes secularism.<sup>290</sup> With a significant minority and OBCs, SCs, STs population, BJP's perusal of Hindutva ideology and politicization of religion appears to contradict Indian constitutional secularism. Hindutva is a Hindu nationalist ideology that seeks to Hinduize the entire Indian population within its borders.<sup>291</sup> The followers of this ideology want to convert all minorities to Hinduism.<sup>292</sup> Hindutva appears to be intimidating minorities and threatens liberties and democratic rights for all. In line with Samuel Johnson's caution that patriotism is the last refuge of scoundrels,<sup>293</sup> the BJP resolves to limit minorities' human rights in the name of protecting a Hindu nationalism. When the INC, the leading opposition party, tries to resist, the BJP and *the Sangh Parivar* use strategies of defamation that include blaming the INC for being too pro-minority and against the benefit of the majority.

The BJP's 2014 campaign slogans strategically and not surprisingly used Hindutva during electoral mobilization. Although it accused the INC of not being secular, it argued that it can be fairer to the majority of Hindus by not giving preference to minorities. The BJP, the RSS and the VHP extensively also used social campaigns to target minorities. For instance, the anti-Love Jihad campaign argued that Muslim men

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<sup>288</sup> Christophe Jaffrelot, "India's Democracy at 70, Toward A Hindu State," *Journal of Democracy* 28, no. 3 (July 2017): 50, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2017.0044>.

<sup>289</sup> Heredia, "The Dance of Democracy," 200.

<sup>290</sup> Heredia, 199.

<sup>291</sup> Kim, "Understanding Modi and Minorities," 357–58.

<sup>292</sup> Heredia, "The Dance of Democracy: Election 2014 and the Marginalised and Minorities," 191.

<sup>293</sup> Samuel Johnson, "Patriotism Is the Last Refuge of a Scoundrel," Samuel Johnson Sound Bite Page, accessed August 27, 2018, <https://www.samueljohnson.com/refuge.html>.

wooded Hindu women for marriage specifically in order to convert them. Consequently, families were told to watch out for their daughters and that only the BJP can protect India from this threat. In addition, “*Ghar Wapsi*” (return to home, referring to the reconversion of Muslims and Christians to the Hindu religion) was frequently used as a slogan.<sup>294</sup> The *Bajrang Dal* used “*Bahu Betiyon ki izzat bachao*” (Save the honor of daughters-in-law and daughters).<sup>295</sup> Yogi Adityanath, an RSS leader and current Chief Minister of the Uttar Pradesh used “*Mala key saath Bhalla*” (pray and fight) and “*Shastra ke saath shasstra*” (weapons along with scriptures).<sup>296</sup> All of these slogans were utilized as a vicious mobilization strategy during all elections since 2014, especially to exploit the emotional younger generation of Hindu voters.

## **B. CHANGING SYMBOLS AND RHETORIC**

The BJP implemented the policies against minorities in line with the Hindutva ideology by changing symbols and rhetoric.

### **1. Changing Symbols**

The RSS and other Hindu nationalistic organizations have demanded and desired to change fundamental symbols to align with the Hindutva ideology since 2014, while the BJP authorities at the center have remained silent about controversial issues. The RSS and Hindu *Mahasabha* desire to replace the image of Mahatma Gandhi on Indian currency with *Veer Shivaji*, a 17th century Maratha Hindu warrior king and *Maharana Pratap*, a Hindu King of Rajasthan who fought against Mughals.<sup>297</sup> These organizations also want to commemorate the day Gandhi’s assassin, Nathuram Godse, died as a day of sacrifice.<sup>298</sup> Taking a lead from Hindu *Mahasabha* (name of the Hindu nationalist

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<sup>294</sup> Charu Gupta, “Allegories of Love Jihad and Ghar Wapsi, Interlocking the Socio-Religious with the Political,” in *Rise of Saffron Power, Reflections on Indian Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 86.

<sup>295</sup> Gupta, 91.

<sup>296</sup> Gupta, 103.

<sup>297</sup> Rajiv Srivastava, “Hindu Mahasabha Wants Gandhi Image Off Currency Notes,” *Times of India*, January 4, 2015, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/lucknow/Hindu-Mahasabha-wants-Gandhi-image-off-currency-notes/articleshow/45746423.cms>.

<sup>298</sup> Ishita Bhatia, “Nathuram Godse’s Balidan Divas: Hindu Mahasabha Launches Godse website,” *Times of India*, November 16, 2015, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Nathuram-Godses-Balidan-Divas-Hindu-mahasabha-launches-Godse-website/articleshow/49790755.cms>.

movement)<sup>299</sup> and the RSS, the *Bajrang Dal*, the VHP and *Shiv Sena* wanted to celebrate the day of the destruction of Babri Mosque as *Shourya Divas*, day of valor and victory.<sup>300</sup> It reflects how the *Sangh Parivar* (family of organizations) wants to bring symbols of Hindutva into a system that has emphasized secularism. Most recently, on October 2, 2018, the RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat demanded the government to build the Ram temple at Ayodhya and claimed that it would be built at all cost.<sup>301</sup> The RSS and the BJP demolished the Babri Mosque in 1992; however, they could not build the *Ram Mandir* on the site. Mohan Bhagwat claimed that “the Ram Mandir and the Lord Ram is a symbol of our (Hindu) faith.”<sup>302</sup> The BJP government changed the name of Christmas Day to “Good Governance” day.<sup>303</sup> It has become a working day for all government officials since December 2014.<sup>304</sup> The VHP stopped Santa Claus from distributing chocolates in Christian schools.<sup>305</sup> The VHP insisted that these schools should install statues of Hindu Goddess of wisdom, “Saraswati,” in schools. Such actions and demands have led to an atmosphere of fear, and panic among minorities.

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<sup>299</sup> “Mahasabha,” Oxford Dictionaries, accessed October 21, 2018, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/mahasabha>.

<sup>300</sup> “25 Years since Babri Masjid Demolition: It’s ‘Shaurya Diwas’ vs ‘Yaum e Gham’ in Ayodhya Today,” Zee News, December 6, 2017, <http://zeenews.india.com/uttar-pradesh/25-years-since-babri-masjid-demolition-its-shaurya-diwas-vs-yaum-e-gham-in-ayodhya-today-2063463.html>.

<sup>301</sup> MS Nawaz and Akhilesh Singh, “Ram Mandir Will Be Built at Any Cost: RSS Chief,” *Times of India*, October 3, 2018, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/ram-mandir-will-be-built-at-any-cost-rss-chief/articleshow/66047173.cms>.

<sup>302</sup> “RSS Demands Earliest Construction of Ram Temple at Ayodhya,” *Devdiscourse News*, September 29, 2018, <https://www.devdiscourse.com/Article/religion/188885-rss-demands-earliest-construction-of-ram-temple-at-ayodhya>.

<sup>303</sup> “Now, a PMO Note Says Christmas Is a Working Day for Government,” *India News*, December 22, 2014, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/pmo-note-says-christmas-is-a-working-day-for-government-232409-2014-12-22>.

<sup>304</sup> “Good Governance Day Observed Today to Mark the Birthday of Former PM Vajpayee,” *DD News*, December 25, 2017, <http://ddinews.gov.in/national/good-governance-day-observed-today-mark-birthday-former-pm-vajpayee>.

<sup>305</sup> “Sorry Kids, But The VHP Just Told Santa Claus Not To Give You Chocolates This Christmas!,” *India Times*, November 26, 2014, <http://www.indiatimes.com/news/india/sorry-kids-but-the-vhp-just-told-santa-claus-not-to-give-you-chocolates-this-christmas-228620.html>.

## 2. Rhetoric of Fear

Religiously and ethnically-charged, irresponsible actions and words from the BJP and RSS leaders for political mobilization have polarized multi-ethnic and secular Indian society since 2014. Especially, this rhetoric has created an anti-Muslim atmosphere. Mr. Modi refused to put on the Muslim skullcap in Ahmedabad in 2011.<sup>306</sup> His refusal was based on not appeasing the sentiments of minorities, which is part of the anti-INC campaign.<sup>307</sup> Shashi Tharoor, a prominent ex minister of the INC, criticized him for putting on cultural symbols of other religions, but not the Muslim skull cap.<sup>308</sup> The RSS leaders also stated that the 16th Lok Sabha elections could be won without Muslim support, and that Muslims should be taught a lesson to respect Hindu sentiments by giving up their claims over Ayodhya, Kashi and Mathura.<sup>309</sup> They should accept a uniform civil code that denies all minorities of India the right to deal their own religious matters.<sup>310</sup> The chief patron of the VHP and senior RSS leader stated on Modi's swearing-in ceremony, the "tables had turned and the polls were a setback to Muslim politics used by foreign and divisive force to destroy our identity."<sup>311</sup> Their actions may have promoted anti-Muslim feelings. For instance, after Modi became the Prime Minister, a member of Hindu *Rashtra Sena*, a Hindu extremist organization, killed a Muslim Techie from Pune for wearing a skullcap in public, which created fear among Muslims.<sup>312</sup>

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<sup>306</sup> "Narendra Modi Replies on His Refusal to Wear Skull Cap in 2011: 'Mahatma Gandhi Never Wore Any,'" *India Today*, April 12, 2014, <https://www.indiatoday.in/elections/highlights/story/narendra-modi-skull-cap-mahatma-gandhi-bjp-pm-candidate-188697-2014-04-12>.

<sup>307</sup> Kaul, "On Hindutva Hate Politics: A Few Things I Wasn't Able to Discuss with Ram Madhav on Al Jazeera."

<sup>308</sup> P. S. Gopikrishnan Unnithan, "Why Does PM Modi Refuse to Wear Muslim Skull Caps, Asks Shashi Tharoor," *India Today*, August 6, 2018, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/why-does-pm-modi-refuse-to-wear-muslim-skull-cap-asks-shashi-tharoor-1306115-2018-08-06>.

<sup>309</sup> Mander, "Election 2014 and the Battle for India's Soul," 2018, 148.

<sup>310</sup> Mander, 148–49.

<sup>311</sup> Mander, 148.

<sup>312</sup> Kaul, "On Hindutva Hate Politics: A Few Things I Wasn't Able to Discuss with Ram Madhav on Al Jazeera."

The statements of the Chief Ministers of the BJP-run states has created an anti-minority atmosphere since 2014. In the presence of Yogi Adityanath, the incumbent BJP Chief Minister of U.P., his supporters instigated people to exhume the dead bodies of Muslim women and rape them.<sup>313</sup> According to Chibber and Jassal, Adityanath propagates placing Hindu idols in mosques and ordered his followers to kill Muslims, if any Hindu was attacked.<sup>314</sup> He praised the efforts of U.S. president Donald Trump's ban on travelers from seven Muslim countries and proposed the same anti-terrorism steps in India.<sup>315</sup> He called Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan a terrorist.<sup>316</sup> He is a supporter of Gau Rakshaks (cow protectors) and has put a ban on the beef trade in his state.<sup>317</sup> According to him, anyone who opposes Surya Namaskar, a Yoga exercise, does not deserve to live in India.<sup>318</sup> His targets are not only Muslims; according to BBC News, he blamed Mother Teresa for leading a campaign in converting Hindus to Christians. Another BJP Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, Shiv Raj Chouhan, opposed the inclusion of eggs in the diet of the school lunch program.<sup>319</sup> He stated that "the human body is meant to consume vegetarian food which has everything the human body

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<sup>313</sup> Nilanjana Bhowmick, "Meet the Militant Monk Spreading Islamophobia in India," *Washington Post*, March 24, 2017, sec. Opinion, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2017/03/24/meet-the-militant-monk-spreading-islamophobia-in-india/>.

<sup>314</sup> Chhibber and Jassal, "India in 2017," 90.

<sup>315</sup> "BJP's Yogi Adityanath Praises Trump Ban, Compares Western UP to Kashmir," *NDTV.Com*, January 31, 2017, <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/bjps-yogi-adityanath-praises-donald-trumps-immigration-ban-says-india-needs-it-1654430>.

<sup>316</sup> "Top Five Controversial Comments by Yogi Adityanath," *Economic Times*, March 18, 2017, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/top-five-controversial-comments-by-yogi-adityanath/articleshow/57707151.cms>.

<sup>317</sup> "Who's the Hindu Hardliner Running India's Most Populous State?," *BBC News*, March 29, 2017, sec. India, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-39403778>.

<sup>318</sup> "Leave India If You Are Opposed to Surya Namaskar: Yogi Adityanath," *Hindustan Times*, June 9, 2015, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india/leave-india-if-you-are-opposed-to-surya-namaskar-yogi-adityanath/story-cBxJTUVD7mbACqy8AWPR5J.html>.

<sup>319</sup> "Madhya Pradesh CM Says No to Eggs," *Hindu Business Line*, June 1, 2015, <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/national/madhya-pradesh-cm-says-no-to-eggs/article7271862.ece>.

requires.”<sup>320</sup> The RSS claims that non-vegetarian food leads to an unrighteous nature. All BJP run states are implementing consumption of vegetarian food in schools.

The BJP Union Ministers of central government did not leave the Chief Ministers alone in appeasing the RSS and creating an anti-minority environment. On the demands of the RSS, the BJP minister Simriti Irani ordered schools to establish separate vegetarian canteens in such famous Indian institutions as the Indian Institute of Technology and the Institute of Management at Madras and New Delhi.<sup>321</sup> While this plan was not implemented—and, in fact, was opposed inther parts of the country, vegetarian food has become a part of anti-minority politics as Muslims and lower castes are often seen as non-vegetarians, which is far from reality as 70 percent of India is not vegetarian.<sup>322</sup>

The BJP members of parliament also contributed to anti-minority polarization. Sakshi Maharaj, a BJP parliamentarian, stated that, “the Muslim idea of four wives and forty children would not work in India.”<sup>323</sup> Assam’s Governor Padmanabha Balakrishna Acharya stated that Hindustan is for Hindus and all Muslims should move to Pakistan.<sup>324</sup> In January 2018, Vinay Katiyar, a senior BJP member of the Parliament demanded all Muslims must go to Pakistan and Bangladesh. He also alleged that the Taj Mahal, one of the wonders of world, was built by Hindu King Tejo and Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan forcibly annexed it. He stated that it should be called the Tejo Mahal.<sup>325</sup> Ram Madhav,

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<sup>320</sup> Kaul, “On Hindutva Hate Politics: A Few Things I Wasn’t Able to Discuss with Ram Madhav on Al Jazeera.”

<sup>321</sup> Kunal Anand, “5 Reasons Why Smriti Irani’s Idea Of Vegetarian Canteens for IIT Is Ridiculous!,” *India Times*, October 30, 2014, <http://www.indiatimes.com/news/india/five-reasons-why-smriti-iranis-idea-of-vegetarian-canteens-for-iitians-is-ridiculous-228203.html>.

<sup>322</sup> Soutik Biswas, “The Myth of the Indian Vegetarian Nation,” April 4, 2018, sec. India, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-43581122>.

<sup>323</sup> “Didn’t Name Any Community: Sakshi Maharaj Defends ‘4 Wives, 40 Children’ Remark,” *Hindustan Times*, January 11, 2017, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/didn-t-name-any-community-sakshi-maharaj-defends-4-wives-40-children-remark/story-9H9QiXhJkmQOjnUoum4L8J.html>.

<sup>324</sup> “Assam Governor’s Anti-Muslim Soundbite: After Tarun Gogoi, Mayawati Now Demands Acharya’s Sacking,” *First Post*, November 24, 2015, <https://www.firstpost.com/politics/tarun-gogoi-demands-assam-governors-removal-over-communal-remark-2517790.html>.

<sup>325</sup> Arित्रy Das, “BJP Lawmakers Continue Targeting India’s Religious Minorities,” *Asia Times*, February 8, 2018, <http://www.atimes.com/article/bjp-lawmakers-continue-targeting-indias-religious-minorities/>.

General Secretary of the BJP, emphasized that “Indian minorities should earn respect of majority Hindus for their safety.”<sup>326</sup> The BJP President Amit Shah, the most responsible head of a political party, was involved in the polarization through inciting anti-minority feelings among the majority Hindu population. After the Muzaffarnagar riots in August and September 2013, he held secret meetings in remote villages of Uttar Pradesh and directed Hindus to take revenge over Muslims over Muzaffarnagar riots.<sup>327</sup> The Muzaffarnagar riots were incited by the BJP, in the Muzaffarnagar district of Uttar Pradesh to defame the SP state government as well as to raise anti-Muslim sentiment among the majority Hindu population over an alleged rape of a Hindu girl by a Muslim male. The riots left forty-three dead and forty-three thousand homeless. The majority among them were Muslims.<sup>328</sup> In April 2014, while addressing an election campaign in the Shamli village of Muzaffarnagar, the epicenter of riots, he stated that the elections are “one of honor... an opportunity to take revenge and teach lesson to people (Muslims) who have committed injustice.”<sup>329</sup>

Minorities have responded to the anti-minority statements and actions with protests and self-protective measures. A few Dalits committed suicide to protest the BJP’s discrimination. The most highlighted according to the BBC News was “the 26-year-old PhD student” Rohith Vemula, who committed suicide in March 2016 “inside the campus of Hyderabad Central University.”<sup>330</sup> He killed himself to expose the attack on him by “a member of *the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP)* - the student wing of India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party.”<sup>331</sup> According to the *Los Angeles Times*, another

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<sup>326</sup> “Transcript: Ram Madhav on Hindu Nationalism,” *Al Jazeera*, June 7, 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/headtohead/2016/02/transcript-ram-madhav-hindu-nationalism-160201131633738.html>.

<sup>327</sup> Pai and Kumar, “Understanding the BJP’s Victory in UP,” 123.

<sup>328</sup> “Muzaffarnagar Riots Leave 43,000 Homeless,” *India Today*, September 13, 2103, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/north/story/muzaffarnagar-riots-leave-43000-homeless-210878-2013-09-13>.

<sup>329</sup> Pai and Kumar, “Understanding the BJP’s Victory in UP,” 123.

<sup>330</sup> Omer Farooq, “Rohith Vemula: The Student Who Died for Dalit Rights,” *BBC News*, January 19, 2016, sec. India, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-35349790>.

<sup>331</sup> Farooq.

Dalit student “Muthu Krishnan, 28, a first-year student in the philosophy program pursuing a master's degree at the prestigious public university in India's capital,” committed suicide to expose the discrimination Dalit students were facing in India's higher education institutions.<sup>332</sup> Dalits of Western Uttar Pradesh established a “Bhim Army,” apparently for Dalits' education, but actually to protect Dalits from the atrocities of upper caste Thakurs (majority supporters of BJP, discussed in the previous chapter) on July 21, 2015, just one year after the BJP's government took power in the center.<sup>333</sup>

Besides suicides and creating private militias, another reaction of minorities is measured from the increase in the number of asylum seekers abroad. According to *Newsweek*, the “U.S. Customs and Border Protection data shows during the 2018 fiscal year so far, more than 3,750 people arrested by Border Patrol agents by April 2018 were Indian nationals.”<sup>334</sup> Furthermore, “In 2017, 2,055 and in 2016, 3,398 asked for asylum in US. This number is already surpassed in 2018.”<sup>335</sup> According to *Newsweek*, asylum seekers applied due to atrocities committed by the BJP.<sup>336</sup> These asylum seekers are 40 percent of the total number of asylum seekers to the US in 2017.<sup>337</sup> These developments clearly reflect that basic human rights, freedom of religion, freedom of speech and pluralism are under threat in India. Though the aggressive majoritarian rhetoric and Hindutva implementation have given electoral dividends to the BJP, yet, in the longer run, Indian secularism has come under attack of the Saffron Brigade.

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<sup>332</sup> Parth M.N, “Another Dalit Suicide on Campus Raises Fears of a Crisis of Discrimination at Indian Universities,” *LA Times*, March 14, 2107, <http://www.latimes.com/world/la-fg-india-dalit-suicide-20170314-story.html>.

<sup>333</sup> “What Is the Bhim Army?,” *The Indian Express* (blog), May 10, 2018, <http://indianexpress.com/article/what-is/what-is-the-bhim-army-5171341/>.

<sup>334</sup> Chantal da Silva, “Nearly Half of All Immigrants Detained in Federal Prison Are Indian Asylum Seekers,” *Newsweek*, August 14, 2018, <https://www.newsweek.com/growing-number-asylum-seekers-india-showing-us-mexico-border-1072329>.

<sup>335</sup> da Silva.

<sup>336</sup> da Silva.

<sup>337</sup> da Silva.



### 3. Labeling the INC as Pro-Minority (Primarily Muslim)

The BJP has severely criticized the INC as pro-minority and tried to put all pro-secularism forces on defensive. In the campaign for the 2014 elections, the BJP used the INC's accommodation of religious minorities against them. According to Heredia, the BJP constantly accused the INC as a party that appeases Muslims.<sup>338</sup> A Kerala-based BJP Lok Sabha MP, B. Gopalkrishnan, went as far as suggesting that Godse should have killed Nehru instead of Gandhi.<sup>339</sup> This hate is due to "Nehruvian Consensus" and his advocacy of secularism in multi-ethnic, multi-religious India. Sonia Gandhi, the INC's ex-president admitted: the "BJP successfully managed to convince people" that the INC was pro-Muslim and pushed the INC to corner.<sup>340</sup> During all national and state electoral campaigns since 2014, the BJP targeted the INC for being too soft on insurgency in Indian-administered Kashmir and the neighboring rival state of Pakistan, using them as an example of the INC's pro-Muslim stance. The BJP hesitates to nominate Muslims in elections. Despite a significant majority of Muslims in the Uttar Pradesh state, the BJP did not award a party ticket to any Muslim candidate in the state elections of Uttar Pradesh in 2017.<sup>341</sup> It is a clear manifestation of the BJP's efforts to target the INC and the Muslim minority.

### C. INCITING RIOTS AND VIOLENCE

The BJP and its affiliated Hindu nationalist organizations incited riots and used violence for political gains.

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<sup>338</sup> Heredia, "The Dance of Democracy," 197.

<sup>339</sup> Liz Mathew, "Godse Should Have Targeted Nehru, Says RSS Mouthpiece," *Indian Express*, October 25, 2014, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/godse-should-have-targeted-nehru-says-rss-mouthpiece/>.

<sup>340</sup> "BJP Managed to Convince People We Are a Muslim Party: Sonia Gandhi," *The Indian Express* (blog), March 10, 2018, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/bjp-managed-to-convince-people-we-are-a-muslim-party-sonia-gandhi-5092572/>.

<sup>341</sup> "Not a Single Muslim Was Given a BJP Ticket in Most Populous State of Uttar Pradesh," *Bdnews24.Com*, March 12, 2017, <https://bdnews24.com/neighbours/2017/03/12/not-a-single-muslim-was-given-a-bjp-ticket-in-most-populous-state-of-uttar-pradesh>.

## 1. Use of Communal Riots as Election Strategy

Encouraging communal violence in India or riots among religious communities contributed to BJP's electoral strategy. In India, communal violence is becoming endemic to the political system, and can also be observed between religious communities as well as upper caste Hindus and scheduled castes, also known as Dalits. The Muzaffarnagar anti-Muslim riots and the Saharanpur anti-Dalit riots are a few examples. According to Paul Brass, "The production of Hindu Muslim violence as institutional riot system is lying dormant until activated by politician[s] for their own benefit."<sup>342</sup> According to Berenschot, while writing about BJP's involvement in the 2002 Gujarat Pogrom of Muslims, when a party gains power, such violence becomes redundant, only to be reactivated when required.<sup>343</sup> For example, the Ram *Janam Bhoomi* and Babri Mosque riots in 1991, Gujarat riots in 2002 and Muzaffarnagar riots in 2013, were used to attract the majority Hindu vote. The results of Lok Sabha elections in the U.P. state of 2009 and 2014 explains the issue. The BJP won 10 seats in the 2009 Lok Sabha elections.<sup>344</sup> However, as some scholar have suggested, after successfully inciting Muzaffarnagar riots in September 2013, BJP secured 71 seats in Lok Sabha elections of 2014 in UP.<sup>345</sup>

The BJP took over the government in 2014; since then, communal riots have continued to rise, illustrating the continued use of riots as a political strategy. According to BJP's Union Minister of State for Home, Hansraj Gangaram Ahir, "822 communal incidents took place in the country in 2017, whereas 703 such incidents occurred in 2016 and 751 incidents in 2015." The largest Indian state, Uttar Pradesh, tops the list of riots. While this circumstance could be due to the very fact that it is a large state; the BJP has

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<sup>342</sup> Paul R. Brass, *Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2011), 60, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ebook-nps/detail.action?docID=3444296>.

<sup>343</sup> Heredia, "The Dance of Democracy," 206.

<sup>344</sup> "Party Wise Seats Won and Votes Polled (%), Lok Sabha 2009," Election Commission of India, accessed September 13, 2018, [https://eci.nic.in/eci\\_main/archiveofge2009/Stats/VOLII/STATE\\_PARTYWISESEATWONANDVOTES\\_LokSabha2009\\_24012014.pdf](https://eci.nic.in/eci_main/archiveofge2009/Stats/VOLII/STATE_PARTYWISESEATWONANDVOTES_LokSabha2009_24012014.pdf).

<sup>345</sup> Pai and Kumar, "Understanding the BJP's Victory in UP," 112.

outwardly used riots as a strategy in this state.<sup>346</sup> The BJP member of parliament, Raghav Lakhanpal incited Saharanpur riots against Dalits to grab votes in the May 2017 Uttar Pradesh Municipal elections.<sup>347</sup> According to ND TV, “44 people were killed and 540 injured in Uttar Pradesh in 2017. This rate compares poorly with 29 deaths and injuries to 490 people in 2016, and 22 deaths and 410 injuries the previous year.”<sup>348</sup> The SP governed the Uttar Pradesh state until 2017. According to Mujibur Rehman, the BJP used the strategy of communal polarization, which contributed into its victory in Uttar Pradesh.<sup>349</sup> The BJP secured 312 seats out of 403 state assembly seats and formed the government in the Uttar Pradesh in March 2017.<sup>350</sup>

## 2. Love Jihad

Extremist Hindu nationalist leaders have made marriage of a Muslim man to a Hindu woman controversial by suggesting that the Muslims are using marriage to convert Hindu women to Islam. Inter-religious marriages are quite common in India, among the most prominent was that of Indira Gandhi, ex-Prime Minister of India and her husband, who was from the Parsi community. To save Hindu women from conversion, these organizations initiated “Love Jihad.”<sup>351</sup> Pramod Muttalik, founder of *Ram Sena* (Army of God, a Hindu religious extremist organization) in Karnataka, initiated a covert campaign of “*Beti Bachao Andolan*” which means “save your daughters” and coined the term “Love Jihad” in 2005.<sup>352</sup> According to Charu Gupta, “Love Jihad is an attempt at

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<sup>346</sup> Mohammad Ali, “Saharanpur Riots Timed for Local Polls,” *The Hindu*, April 22, 2017, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/saharanpur-riots-organised-ahead-of-municipal-elections-dalits/article18192004.ece>.

<sup>347</sup> Ali.

<sup>348</sup> Neeta Sharma, “Communal Violence Goes Up in Country, Uttar Pradesh Still Tops List,” *NDTV.Com*, March 14, 2018, <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/communal-violence-goes-up-in-country-uttar-pradesh-still-tops-list-1823917>.

<sup>349</sup> Rehman, *Rise of Saffron Power, Reflections on Indian Politics*, 371.

<sup>350</sup> Rehman, 368.

<sup>351</sup> Gupta, “Allegories of Love Jihad and Ghar Wapsi, Interlocking the Socio-Religious with the Political,” 85.

<sup>352</sup> Gupta, 91.

political and communal mobilization in the name of women.”<sup>353</sup> He also states that, “it was a mythical campaign designed as a lethal mobilization strategy and a vicious crusade for political gains in Uttar Pradesh state assembly elections in 2017.”<sup>354</sup> Love Jihad is dubbed an international Muslim conspiracy.<sup>355</sup> Muslim youth are accused of getting foreign funds and using the money to entice Hindu women. Slogans such as “awake Hindu awake, beware of Love Jihad” are used. Muslim males were described as men with false promises, high sexual desire and religious fanaticism. The BJP and the RSS propagated that Muslim men forcefully converted Hindu women to Islam through trickery and marriage.<sup>356</sup>

Love Jihad is not only anti-Muslim but also violates women’s’ rights and has led to the escalation of anti-Muslim violence in India since the BJP took over government. In sync with Love Jihad, *Bajrang Dal*, another Hindutva organization, ran a movement, “*baho betiyon ki izzat bachao* (save the honor of daughters and daughters in law).”<sup>357</sup> Posters appealed to Hindu men to protect their daughters and sisters from becoming victims of Love Jihad.<sup>358</sup> One such example is, “a magazine *Himalaya Dhvani*, of *Durga Vahini*, the women wing of VHP,” which had on “its cover the image of Kareena Kapoor, half covered in Burqa.”<sup>359</sup> Kareena Kapoor is a famous actress of India and is married to Muslim Indian actor Saif Ali Khan. Meanwhile, certain restrictions were put on Hindu woman in UP. They were forbidden to go to Muslim tailors and barbers, not to visit Muslim shrines and to avoid wearing green clothes (a traditional Muslim color).<sup>360</sup> Parents were advised to keep an eye on their daughters’ mobile phones. Muslims were

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<sup>353</sup> Gupta, 85.

<sup>354</sup> Gupta, 86.

<sup>355</sup> Gupta, 90.

<sup>356</sup> Gupta, 84.

<sup>357</sup> Gupta, 91.

<sup>358</sup> Gupta, 91.

<sup>359</sup> Gupta, 99.

<sup>360</sup> Gupta, 94.

banned from attending Garba celebrations (a Hindu ritual).<sup>361</sup> Various Muslim men have been targeted and killed in this politicization of love.<sup>362</sup> A few examples are: the Hindu *Yuva Vahini* killed an old Muslim man in May 2017 over helping a Muslim man to love a Hindu girl in UP.<sup>363</sup> A Muslim male was brutally killed over Love Jihad in December 2017 in Rajasthan and his video was circulated on social media to terrorize other Muslims.<sup>364</sup> A young Muslim male was beaten up on July 25, 2018 outside Ghaziabad court while registering his marriage with a Hindu girl.<sup>365</sup>

While Love Jihad does not have formal government backing, civil society and various scholars see the BJP's silence on the issue as support for it. It has emboldened extremist Hindu religious organizations to initiate Love Jihad in Western Uttar Pradesh. These organizations use pamphlets, meetings, conversations, rumors, and every-day conversations to keep it alive and make it a political issue.<sup>366</sup> Love Jihad is a Hindu nationalist's propaganda, which targeted all women who married Muslim men. According to Gupta, "Love Jihad is a mythical campaign, a delicious political fantasy, a lethal mobilization strategy, and a vicious crusade - a jihad against love – for political gains in elections."<sup>367</sup> This movement has furthered the anti-Muslim atmosphere.

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<sup>361</sup> Gupta, 94.

<sup>362</sup> "Arrest over Brutal India Killing Video," *BBC News*, December 7, 2017, sec. India, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-42261797>.

<sup>363</sup> Rupam Jain, "Muslim Man Beaten to Death for Helping Interfaith Couple Elope," *The Independent*, May 3, 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/hindu-militia-youth-force-uttar-pradesh-detained-murder-muslim-interfaith-couple-love-jihad-a7715361.html>.

<sup>364</sup> Jeffrey Gettleman and Suhasini Raj, "His Defense of Hindus Was to Kill a Muslim and Post the Video," *New York Times*, February 5, 2018, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/08/world/asia/india-muslim-killing-video.html>.

<sup>365</sup> "Love Jihad: Man Beaten up in Ghaziabad Court Premises," *Times of India*, July 26, 2018, sec. video, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/videos/city/delhi/love-jihad-man-beaten-up-in-ghaziabad-court-premises/videoshow/65137088.cms>.

<sup>366</sup> Gupta, "Allegories of Love Jihad and Ghar Wapsi, Interlocking the Socio-Religious with the Political," 96–99.

<sup>367</sup> Gupta, 86.

### 3. The *Ghar Wapsi* (Return to Home) Movement

Secularism discourages any government or organization from restricting freedom of religion or forcibly converting individuals from one religion to another. On the contrary, the BJP and the RSS have used the *Ghar Wapsi* slogan not only as campaign slogan but also as a prominent conversion to the Hinduism movement since 2014. *Ghar Wapsi* means “return to home” implying reconversion as returning to one’s own community. The aim of this movement was to reconvert Muslims, Christians and all other minorities to Hinduism, with an assumption that they were first Hindus who converted to Islam or other religions. The VHP, RSS and other extremist Hindu religious organizations declared that those who converted from Hinduism to other religions were innocent and asked them to reconvert. According to Praveen Togadia of the VHP, “at a point of time there were 700 crores Hindus, and now there are just 100 crores.”<sup>368</sup> These organizations claim that the entire world was Hindu.<sup>369</sup> The Uttar Pradesh head of Dharm Jagran Samiti (DJS), Rajeshwar Singh, threatened all non-Hindus and stated: “so they would either be converted to Hinduism or forced to run away from here.”<sup>370</sup> He vowed that “Our target is to make India a Hindu *Rashtra* (Hindu state or nation) by 2021. The Muslims and Christians don’t have any right to stay here.”<sup>371</sup> While highlighting Modi’s support to such statements, “Church of North India, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Salvation Army Church” of India claimed that Modi provided tacit support to *Ghar Wapsi* movement.<sup>372</sup>

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<sup>368</sup> Milind Ghatwai, “Want to Protect Hindus Today and 1,000 Years from Now: Pravin Togadia,” *Indian Express*, December 22, 2014, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/will-raise-hindu-population-of-country-to-100-says-togadia/>.

<sup>369</sup> Gupta, “Allegories of Love Jihad and *Ghar Wapsi*, Interlocking the Socio-Religious with the Political,” 100.

<sup>370</sup> Piyush Srivastava, “DJS Leader Vows to Continue Conversions and Restore ‘Hindu Glory,’” *Daily Mail*, December 19, 2014, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/indiahome/indianews/article-2879597/We-free-India-Muslims-Christians-2021-DJS-leader-vows-continue-ghar-wapsi-plans-restore-Hindu-glory.html>.

<sup>371</sup> Srivastava.

<sup>372</sup> “3 Churches Come Together to Demand Ban on ‘*Ghar Wapsi*,’” *Times of India*, January 5, 2015, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/3-churches-come-together-to-demand-ban-on-ghar-wapsi/articleshow/45755330.cms>.

In recent years, Ghar Wapsi strategies have also included changing the symbols of popular holidays. For instance, Christmas is reimagined as Madan Mohan Malviya's and Atal Bihari Vajpayee's birthdays, both important political leaders for the Hindutva brigade. Atal Bihari Vajpayee was the first prime minister of BJP in India from 1998 to 2004.<sup>373</sup> In 2014, the *Dharam Jagran Samiti* (Awaken Religion Organization), also a RSS affiliate, announced the conversion 4,000 Christians and 1,000 Muslims on December 23, 2014 in the Ali Garh town of Uttar Pradesh state<sup>374</sup> to commemorate the assassination of Swami Shraddhanand (December 23, 1926), the ideologue of *Shuddhi* movement (the "making India pure" movement) on Christmas day.<sup>375</sup> The organizations could still not get official approval from the government. However, the claims of the RSS chapter of Uttar Pradesh to convert and reconvert 40,000 Muslims and Christians in Aligarh,<sup>376</sup> as well as the desire of the VHP to use two lakh per year on a Christian and five lakh on a Muslim for conversion,<sup>377</sup> solidify their intentions and efforts for *Ghar Wapsi*.

While Love Jihad specifically targeted Muslims, the followers of the *Ghar Wapsi* Hindutva brigade did not spare Christians, and violence against them alarmingly increased since 2014. The Indian Christian population is 2.30 percent of the 1.2 billion people living in India.<sup>378</sup> The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom,<sup>379</sup>

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<sup>373</sup> Gupta, "Allegories of Love Jihad and Ghar Wapsi, Interlocking the Socio-Religious with the Political," 100.

<sup>374</sup> Pragya Kaushika, "Don't Want a Religion That Only Rejects Us, Say the Aligarh Dalits on RSS List," *Indian Express*, December 14, 2014, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/dont-want-a-religion-that-only-rejects-us-say-the-aligarh-dalits-on-rss-list/>.

<sup>375</sup> Anil Chawla, "Re-Conversions or Ghar Vapsi or Shuddhi Movement - First Steps of a Global Process," *Samarth Bharat* (blog), December 28, 2014, <http://www.samarthbharat.com/reconversion.htm>.

<sup>376</sup> Kaushika, "Don't Want a Religion That Only Rejects Us, Say the Aligarh Dalits on RSS List."

<sup>377</sup> "Rs 5 Lakh for a Christmas Conversion: RSS Outfit Seeks Donations for Renewed 'Ghar Vapsi' Drive," *First Post*, December 12, 2014, <https://www.firstpost.com/politics/rs-5-lakh-for-a-christmas-conversion-rss-outfit-seeks-donations-for-renewed-ghar-vapsi-drive-1846181.html>.

<sup>378</sup> Heredia, "The Dance of Democracy: Election 2014 and the Marginalised and Minorities," 207.

<sup>379</sup> "India Tier 2," in *United States Commission on International Religious Freedom 2018 Annual Report*, by U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (Washington, DC: U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, 2018), <https://www.uscirf.gov/reports-briefs/annual-report/2018-annual-report>.

Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI)<sup>380</sup> and Open Organization<sup>381</sup> reported that Hindu nationalists increased persecution of Christians in 2017. India rose to number 15 from 31 on the World Watch List for Religious Intolerance in 2017.<sup>382</sup> In 2017, 351 verified incidences of murders of pastors, burning of churches and shops, burning of the Bible, beating of clerics and burning Christians alive took place throughout the country. India's Hindu-nationalist government had acknowledged in parliament in 2017 that "communal violence, increased 28 per cent over last three years."<sup>383</sup>

The attacks on Christians in India has a history; however, *Ghar Wapsi* movement raised the number of attacks. The Christians living in in Gujrat, Kota in Rajasthan, Manglore in Karnataka, and Kandhamal district in Odisha,<sup>384</sup> faced persecution before 2014, but, its ferocity increased since 2014. Besides *Ghar Wapsi*, the BJP also has an electoral vendetta against Christians. The BJP already had intimidated the Dang Tribal Christians in South Gujrat from 1997 onwards.<sup>385</sup> These Christians used to vote for the INC. BJP used the *Bajrang Dal* and RSS to intimidate Christians and deny the INC of their vote. Pastor Gideon Periyaswamy was killed by the extremist Hindus in Tamil Nadu in Jan 2018.<sup>386</sup> "On 30 March, Hindu extremists attacked Pastor Maddira Kotireddy with axe and critically injured him in Hyderabad, India."<sup>387</sup> There is an endless list of Hindu extremists' individual and collective attacks on Christians in line with the *Ghar Wapsi* movement.

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<sup>380</sup> "India: Videos Show Hindu Nationalists Attacking Christians, Burning Bibles," *World Watch Monitor* (blog), February 22, 2018, <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2018/02/india-videos-show-hindu-nationalists-attacking-christians-burning-bibles/>.

<sup>381</sup> "India."

<sup>382</sup> World Watch List 2018: The 50 Countries Where It's Most Dangerous to Follow Jesus (Santa Ana, CA: Open Doors, 2018).

<sup>383</sup> "India," February 22, 2018.

<sup>384</sup> Heredia, "The Dance of Democracy: Election 2014 and the Marginalised and Minorities," 200.

<sup>385</sup> Heredia, 201.

<sup>386</sup> Elizabeth Llorente, "Pastor's Grisly Death Spotlights Persecution of Christians in India," *Fox News*, January 26, 2018, <https://www.foxnews.com/world/pastors-grisly-death-spotlights-persecution-of-christians-in-india>.

<sup>387</sup> Chloe Kerr, "Christianity UNDER ATTACK: Week of HORROR in India as Worshippers Suffer Easter Attacks," *Express*, April 4, 2018, <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/941431/christianity-persecuted-christians-attack-india-open-doors-easter>.



Celebrating birthdays and anniversaries are the right of these organizations; however, the worrisome act is to forcefully convert people of other religions and to create an atmosphere of fear across the country. The act not only discourages the Christian community to celebrate Christmas under an atmosphere of fear, but it also insults the symbolic importance of celebrating a big event of the Christian community. These assertions of *Ghar Wapsi* and Love Jihad emanate anti-minority overtones and a creed of violence.

#### **4. The *Gau Raksha Dal* (Cow Vigilante Movement) and the Rise of Mob Lynching**

The BJP changed legislation to ban cow slaughter and its affiliate extremist organizations used violence to restrict beef consumption, as cow has a sacred status in Hinduism.<sup>388</sup> Muslims sacrifice cows and goats as a religious ritual to commemorate Prophet Abraham's sacrifice of his son Prophet Ismail. Muslims in India eat beef as do many Hindus in India; for instance, in the south or east, as well as western restaurants in major cities such as Mumbai.<sup>389</sup> Dalits are involved in the leather business and they skin cows in slaughter houses, which is what makes them outcasts. In line with Hindutva ideology, the BJP and extremist organizations vow to protect cows from slaughter. According to Jaffrelot, lacking a majority, the BJP government could not change rules about the protection of cows and ban beef consumption in the center. However, the Maharashtra and Haryana state governments of BJP put a ban on beef consumption as well as possession of beef, and made it a punishable offense for five years in jail in 2015.<sup>390</sup> BJP state governments of Yogi Adityanath's Uttar Pradesh closed slaughter houses in 2017.<sup>391</sup> Beef consumption is legal across India except in Kerala, West Bengal

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<sup>388</sup> Jaffrelot, "India's Democracy at 70," 56.

<sup>389</sup> Samarth Bansal, "More Indians Eating Beef, Buffalo Meat," *The Hindu*, October 29, 2016, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/%E2%80%98More-Indians-eating-beef-buffalo-meat%E2%80%99/article16085248.ece>.

<sup>390</sup> Jaffrelot, "India's Democracy at 70," 54.

<sup>391</sup> Chhibber and Jassal, "India in 2017," 93.

and northeastern states, which partly or fully ban cow slaughter.<sup>392</sup> The Maharashtra government even created official posts of “Honorary Animal Welfare Officer.”<sup>393</sup>

The BJP-run state governments changed the rules of states and created an anti-minority environment. Simultaneously, they opened an avenue to violence and intimidation. Taking a lead from cultural policing of the VHP,<sup>394</sup> the RSS and its affiliates formed “the *Gau Raksha Dal*,” an organization to protect cows.<sup>395</sup> The BJP-governed states of Maharashtra and Haryana have outsourced the implementation of cow protection to these private militias.<sup>396</sup> The other BJP-run state governments followed this precedent. This organization has created militias in every state to prevent the slaughter of cows. Members of these militias are called *Gau raksha*.<sup>397</sup> This organization has 5,000 members in Haryana state alone.<sup>398</sup>

The *Gau Rakshaks* and the *Gau Raksha Dal* often take the law into their own hands and use mob lynching to terrorize minorities. Incidents of mob lynching and violence have been on the rise in India since 2014. The *Gau Rakshaks*, equipped with hockey sticks and sometimes weapons, carry out patrolling on state highways, check trucks, beat many Muslims and burn their cargos.<sup>399</sup> These incidents have alarmingly increased since 2014. These organizations now have offices in 10 BJP-led Indian states. When they catch a Muslim or Dalit with a cow, the *Gau Rakshaks* immediately call other *Gau Rakshaks* of the surrounding areas to gather and lynch the individuals on the spot. The first serious incident took place in Dadri, Uttar Pradesh in September 2015.<sup>400</sup>

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<sup>392</sup> Jaffrelot, “India’s Democracy at 70,” 56.

<sup>393</sup> Jaffrelot, 56.

<sup>394</sup> Jaffrelot, 55.

<sup>395</sup> Jaffrelot, 56.

<sup>396</sup> Jaffrelot, 56.

<sup>397</sup> Jaffrelot, 56.

<sup>398</sup> Jaffrelot, 56.

<sup>399</sup> Smita Nair, “Refrain in Sangh Turf: Cards Will Give Us Power,” *Indian Express*, January 27, 2017, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/maharashtra-government-beef-ban-gau-rakshak-id-cards-animal-husbandry-modi-sangh-turf-2991489/>.

<sup>400</sup> “Indian Man Lynched Over Beef Rumours,” *BBC News*, September 30, 2015, sec. India, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-34398433>.

Akhlaq, a Muslim man, was lynched in front of his family by a mob on suspicion of keeping beef in his refrigerator.<sup>401</sup> Two Muslim men were hanged in the Jharkhand state while herding buffaloes in March 2016.<sup>402</sup> In Haryana state, according to BBC News, two Muslim women were gang raped and their uncle and aunt were hanged over suspicion of eating beef in September 2016.<sup>403</sup> In June 2017, a young Muslim boy was lynched by a mob in a train.<sup>404</sup> In same state, in August 2018, a mob of the *Gau Rakshaks* lynched a Muslim Afzal in Palwal District, just fifty kilometers away from Delhi. He was in the cattle business.<sup>405</sup> In 2017, as soon as BJP won the state elections of UP, several Muslim butcher shops were attacked and legal slaughter houses were closed.<sup>406</sup>

The protection of cows also created a rift in northern and southern Indian states. State government of India banned the sale of cattle in markets for slaughter on May 29, 2017 under the 1960 Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act.<sup>407</sup> According to Chibber and Jassal, the 1960 Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act created tension between northern and southern states, as southern states, especially Tamil Nadu, have a game of “*Jallikatu*,” which is played by wrestling with bulls. The ban emerged as an important motif of contentious politics in India.<sup>408</sup>

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<sup>401</sup> “The Dadri Lynching: How Events Unfolded,” *The Hindu*, October 3, 2015, <https://www.thehindu.com/specials/in-depth/the-dadri-lynching-how-events-unfolded/article7719414.ece>.

<sup>402</sup> Alok K. Mishra, “2 Muslims Herding Buffaloes Thrashed, Hanged in Jharkhand,” *Times of India*, March 19, 2016, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/ranchi/2-Muslims-herding-buffaloes-thrashed-hanged-in-Jharkhand/articleshow/51465433.cms>.

<sup>403</sup> “Women Raped in Fatal Attack over Beef,” *BBC News*, September 12, 2016, sec. India, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-37336050>.

<sup>404</sup> “Haryana Train Lynching: 4 More Arrested for Killing Teen ‘Carrying’ Beef,” *Deccan Chronicle*, June 28, 2017, <https://www.deccanchronicle.com/nation/current-affairs/280617/haryana-train-lynching-4-more-arrested-for-killing-teen-carrying-beef.html>.

<sup>405</sup> “Haryana: Man Beaten to Death in Palwal Over Suspicion of Cattle Theft,” *India TV News*, August 4, 2018, <https://www.indiatvnews.com/news/india-haryana-man-beaten-to-death-in-palwal-on-suspicion-of-cattle-theft-mob-lynching-456390>.

<sup>406</sup> “India Meat Traders End Strike Against Uttar Pradesh Closures,” *BBC News*, March 31, 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-39454612>.

<sup>407</sup> Jaffrelet, “India’s Democracy at 70,” 57.

<sup>408</sup> Pradeep Chibber, “Part Decline in a Mature System: Congress Party of India,” *Taiwan Journal of Democracy* 1, no. 1 (2005): 92.

## 5. Anti-Dalit Riots

*Gau Rakshaks* and their violence did not even spare Dalits, who are Hindus from the lowest caste. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Dalits traditionally supported either the INC or their own BSP party. Thus the BJP and extremist organizations' animosity against them is two-fold: revenge over beef consumption as well as the use of violence to coerce future electoral support for the BJP. Certain castes of Dalits (untouchables), from Scheduled Castes (SCs) are in the leather business and are required to skin animal carcasses.<sup>409</sup> *Gau Rakshaks* severely thrashed four Dalits publicly in Gujrat in July 2016 while they were skinning a cow killed by a lion.<sup>410</sup> Mukesh Vaniya was lynched in Gujrat in May 2018.<sup>411</sup> BJP local leaders, their accomplices and the BJP state-run government terrorized a religious gathering of Dalits in Rajasthan in April 2018. Pawan Jatav, a 25 year-old Dalit, died and many were wounded.<sup>412</sup> The RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat defended the *Gau Rakshaks* publicly.<sup>413</sup>

The BJP-run state governments of Maharashtra and Rajasthan did not act to reduce anti-Dalit violence. Millions of Marathas came out in streets and demanded that the government repeal the Prevention of Atrocities Act of 1989, which protects Dalits from hate crimes. Dalits were part of the Colonial British Army in substantial numbers. When they were commemorating the 200-year anniversary of the Battle of Koregaon, which was fought in 1818, on January 1, 2018, Marathas attacked them. Marathas accused them of being stooges of the East India Company, which fought against the Maratha King. The riots spread to the whole state, including Mumbai. Dalits were subjected to looting and arson. An upper-caste landlord beat two Dalit boys on June 10,

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<sup>409</sup> Jaffrelot, "India's Democracy at 70: Toward A Hindu State," 57.

<sup>410</sup> Jaffrelot, 57.

<sup>411</sup> Gopi Maniar, "Dalit Man Lynched in Gujarat: How India Is Grappling with Epidemic of Violence," *India News*, August 17, 2018, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/dalit-man-lynched-in-gujarat-how-india-is-grappling-with-epidemic-of-violence-1238355-2018-05-21>.

<sup>412</sup> "'Violence against Dalits Continuing in Rajasthan,'" *The Hindu*, April 17, 2018, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/violence-against-dalits-continuing-in-rajasthan/article23565146.ece>.

<sup>413</sup> Pradip Kumar Maitra, "The Sacred Mission of Gau-Sevaks Would Continue: RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat," *Hindustan Times*, October 11, 2016, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/gau-rakshaks-operate-under-the-law-says-rss-chief-mohan-bhagwat/story-wdPF3BZUxNye2vzu6DJw8L.html>.

2018 in the Wakadi village of Maharashtra. They were tied and beaten with belts. The video of the incident went viral on social media. According to *The Indian Express*, “atrocities against Dalits have increased after the BJP came to power. Several instances of attacks against Dalits across states have been reported. The government is not doing enough to act against those who are attacking Dalits.”<sup>414</sup>In Rajasthan state, the state government did not act against anti-Dalit vandalism, in which more than 20 Dalits lost their lives and police officers themselves killed one Dalit protestor.<sup>415</sup>

#### **D. ACTIVELY ALTERING NORMS AND LAWS**

The BJP government carried out multi-faceted steps to alter the existing norms and laws.

##### **1. The “Saffronization” of Education Institutions and Curricula**

The BJP has taken measures to rewrite the curricula of education institutions in line with Hindutva ideology. The BJP government has appointed important Hindutva followers to important institutions since 2014. When it was done in the Film and Television Institute (FTII), students protested in 2015. Police cracked down on them.<sup>416</sup> The BJP and its state governments are rewriting text books in line with Hindutva ideology. The international community ridiculed the appointment of P. Sudarshana as the chairman of Historical Research, ICHR (Indian Council of Historical Research). He is a Hindutva ideologist.<sup>417</sup> The Human Resource Minister Smriti Irani instructed “the Indian Council for Historical Research (ICHR)” to rewrite history in line with Hindutva ideology.<sup>418</sup>

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<sup>414</sup> “Violence Against Dalits Continuing in Rajasthan,” *The Hindu*, April 17, 2018, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/violence-against-dalits-continuing-in-rajasthan/article23565146.ece>.

<sup>415</sup> “Violence against Dalits Continuing in Rajasthan.”

<sup>416</sup> Kaul, “On Hindutva Hate Politics: A Few Things I Wasn’t Able to Discuss with Ram Madhav on Al Jazeera.”

<sup>417</sup> Yasser Arafath, “Teaching to Hate,” *Indian Express*, July 19, 2016, <http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/saffronisation-of-education-mughal-rulers-hindutva-textbooks-hrd-prakash-javadekar-2922216/>.

<sup>418</sup> Danish Raza, “Saffronising Textbooks: Where Myth and Dogma Replace History,” *Hindustan Times*, December 8, 2014, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india/saffronising-textbooks-where-myth-and-dogma-replace-history/story-CauM4dmmsPGrjZ3APAvNxO.html>.

The BJP central and state governments supported demands of extremist religious organizations to “saffronize” education. According to Al-jazeera Television, “saffronization is used to refer to the policies of right-wing Hindu nationalist organizations, which refers to the saffron-colored robes worn by Hindu sages.”<sup>419</sup> The Rajasthan government has erased the name of Jawaharlal Nehru as the first prime minister of India. Instead, in history books, RSS ideologue Veer Savarkar occupies a large space.<sup>420</sup> The Rajasthan government introduced new history books for tenth and twelfth grade and university textbooks.<sup>421</sup> The Rajasthan government also criticized King Asoka for converting India into a big monastery of Buddhism. The Uttar Pradesh government eulogized *Shivaji* in history books. It did not want its students to read about the Muslim and British parts of Indian history. Madhya Pradesh and Gujrat states have also rewritten their textbooks.<sup>422</sup>

The BJP-led Gujarat state government went further to saffronize education curricula by introducing nine new books from first to twelfth grade. “Dina Nath Batra, founder of the Hindu nationalist organization, *Shiksha Bachao Andolan Samiti*,” who is a Hindu ideologue, wrote eight out of nine books. These were delivered to forty-two thousand elementary schools. Batra forced Penguin India Publishers to withdraw Wendy Doniger's book *The Hindus*.<sup>423</sup> He also forced other publishers to withdraw books that he deemed would not be in line with Hindu religious dictates. Prime Minister Modi wrote a

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<sup>419</sup> Raksha Kumar, “Hindu Right Rewriting Indian Textbooks,” *Al Jazeera*, November 4, 2014, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2014/11/hindu-right-ideology-indian-textbooks-gujarat-20141147028501733.html>.

<sup>420</sup> “Rajasthan Pulls a Vanishing Act of the Nehru-Gandhis from Its School Curriculum,” *HuffPost India*, July 3, 2017, [https://www.huffingtonpost.in/2017/07/03/after-erasing-nehru-rajasthan-govt-removes-indira-gandhi-s-name\\_a\\_23013253/](https://www.huffingtonpost.in/2017/07/03/after-erasing-nehru-rajasthan-govt-removes-indira-gandhi-s-name_a_23013253/).

<sup>421</sup> Tabeenah Anjum, “Saffronisation of Education in BJP-Ruled Rajasthan,” *Deccan Herald*, June 13, 2017, <https://www.deccanherald.com/content/617205/saffronisation-education-bjp-ruled-rajasthan.html>.

<sup>422</sup> Arafath, “Teaching to Hate.”

<sup>423</sup> Alison Flood, “Penguin’s Withdrawal of the Hindus Causes International Outcry,” *The Guardian*, February 13, 2014, sec. Books, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/feb/13/penguin-withdrawal-hindus-arundhati-roy-neil-gaiman>.

foreword in Batra's books while stating that "inspirational literature would inspire students and teachers."<sup>424</sup>

India's government has planned to spend 32 million dollars to establish a media university with a view to have their own Hindutva media brigade, and to reduce the role of the independent media. The idea is taken from the Communication University of China. Modi's government has planned to train thousands of journalists to protect and spread Hindutva through media.<sup>425</sup> Thousands of Modi Bhakats, or "followers of Modi," are trained in educational institutions. These Bhakats propagate Modi's policies in the community.<sup>426</sup> These efforts clearly reflect upon the BJP government's efforts to neutralize the independent media, who criticize the BJP and the extremist Hindu organizations' anti-minority policies and actions. Chapter IV discusses the BJP's anti-media curbs and efforts to control freedom of press.

## **2. Re-instatement of Anti-Minority Public Servants**

The BJP re-instated many Indian civil servants whom the courts of India either sentenced or suspended for their involvement in anti-minority acts. Modi reinstated them as soon as he became Prime Minister in 2014. This move formed a strong message to other civil servants that if they would help the BJP in illegal matters, they would be rewarded. This action also signifies an anti-minority stance, as most of these civil servants were involved in brutalities against minorities. For example, Ishrat Jahan was a 19-year young Muslim lady killed by the Gujrat Police along with three other Muslim males in 2004. She was killed due to having an alleged connection with terrorist organizations. It was a fake encounter as instead of prosecuting them through the court, they were killed.. India's media alleged that Amit Shah, the current BJP president, and Modi, then-Chief Minister of Gujrat, gave orders for the fake encounter, and were

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<sup>424</sup> Kumar, "Hindu Right Rewriting Indian Textbooks."

<sup>425</sup> Heather Timmons, "India Wants to Train Thousands of Journalists in Government Propaganda, Just Like China," *Quartz India*, March 18, 2015, <https://qz.com/india/363947/india-wants-to-train-thousands-of-journalists-in-government-propaganda-just-like-china/>.

<sup>426</sup> "How Blind Bhakts Can Actually Hurt India's Democracy," *Times of India*, January 8, 2017, <https://blogs.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/The-underage-optimist/how-blind-bhakts-can-actually-hurt-indias-democracy/>.

directly involved in the case. G.L. Singha, an Indian Police Services officer, carried out the fake encounter.<sup>427</sup> The BJP government reinstated him on May 28, 2014, just weeks after Modi took over as Prime Minister of India.<sup>428</sup> In another example, Sohrabuddin was a Muslim from Gujarat State. Rajkumar Pandyan, an Indian Police Services officer, killed him and his wife Kausar with his police team in November 2006 in Gujarat state.<sup>429</sup> The BJP suspected that they were involved in terrorism activities. Amit Shah gave orders for this extrajudicial killing.<sup>430</sup> Amit Shah was sentenced to life imprisonment in July 2010 for his involvement in the fake encounter and sent to jail; however, later he was granted bail. He was exiled from Gujarat state for two years. The BJP government of Gujarat reinstated Rajkumar Pandyan in December 2014.<sup>431</sup>

The BJP rewarded individuals or civil servants for their anti-minority support during the BJP government's tenure in Gujarat. The most prominent among them is Uday U Lalit, who was a senior advocate of the Supreme Court of India. He represented Amit Shah in criminal cases, including the notorious Sohrabuddin and his accomplices' fake encounter case. Narendra Modi elevated him to become a judge of the Supreme Court of India in 2014 in recognition of his services for the BJP and Amit Shah.<sup>432</sup> According to the Hindu Newspaper, Justice Sathasivam gave relief to Amit Shah in criminal cases

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<sup>427</sup> Aparna Alluri and Anand Katakam, "The Ishrat Jahan Encounter Case, Explained," *Hindustan Times*, 2017?, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/static/ishratjahan/index.html>.

<sup>428</sup> "Gujarat Govt Reinstates Ips Officer Gl Singhal, Accused in Ishrat Jahan Encounter Case," *Times of India*, May 28, 2014, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Gujarat-govt-reinstates-IPS-officer-GL-Singhal-accused-in-Ishrat-Jahan-encounter-case/articleshow/35689553.cms>.

<sup>429</sup> Harsh Mander, "Who Killed Sohrabuddin? Debate Around Judge's Death Puts Focus Back on Murders by Gujarat Police," *Scroll.In*, November 24, 2017, <https://scroll.in/article/859017/who-killed-sohrabuddin-debate-around-judges-death-puts-focus-back-on-murders-by-gujarat-police>.

<sup>430</sup> J. Venkatesan, "Amit Shah Had Active Role in Fake Encounter: CBI," *The Hindu*, August 13, 2010, sec. Other States, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/Amit-Shah-had-active-role-in-fake-encounter-CBI/article16129355.ece>.

<sup>431</sup> "Sohrabuddin Case: Accused IPS Officer Pandian Reinstated," *Indian Express*, December 12, 2014, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/sohrabuddin-case-accused-ips-officer-pandian-reinstated/>.

<sup>432</sup> "Meet New SC Judge Uday Lalit: Amit Shah's Lawyer, CBI Prosecutor in 2G Case," *First Post*, July 12, 2014, <https://www.firstpost.com/india/meet-new-sc-judge-uday-lalit-amit-shahs-lawyer-cbi-prosecutor-in-2g-case-1614481.html>.



during his Chief Justice tenure. Modi appointed him governor of Kerala state in June 2015.<sup>433</sup> Many scholars criticized and assumed that he was rewarded for his favors.

### 3. Anti-Minority Discriminatory Laws

The BJP enacted selective legislation, which targeted the Muslim minority since it took over the government in New Delhi. The Uniform Civil Code under Article 44 of the Indian Constitution is a guideline for the union and state governments of India to frame laws for the protection of women.<sup>434</sup> The BJP government supports it. However, in the Indian Constitution, the guidelines are also given for different minorities to pursue laws in accordance with their religion. An important legislation to target the Muslim minority was the Citizenship Amendment Bill in July 2016. The bill was an amendment to the Citizenship Act of 1955.<sup>435</sup> The bill provided citizenship to all Hindu, Sikh, Jain, Buddhist and Parsi illegal immigrants from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh.<sup>436</sup> The bill declared that since they were facing religious persecution, these groups therefore should be helped. However, none of the Shia, Ahmediya, and Rohingya Muslims from neighboring countries were considered for this bill. Rather, many BJP leaders demanded their return to their countries. This glaring omission clearly reflects the BJP anti-minority bias.<sup>437</sup>

The enactment of anti-Muslim legislation is also visible from the BJP government's amendment of the Enemy Property Act of 1968. "The Enemy Property

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<sup>433</sup> Sriram Panchu, "An Inappropriate Appointment," *The Hindu*, June 5, 2015, sec. Comment, <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/comment-on-justice-sathasivam-running-for-nhrc-office/article7282984.ece>.

<sup>434</sup> Wamika Kapur, "Three Legislations by Modi Government Which Expose Its Anti-Minority Stance," *Daily O* (blog), March 28, 2017, <https://www.dailyo.in/politics/triple-talaq-modi-government-anti-muslim-legislation-enemy-property-citizenship-bill/story/1/16393.html>.

<sup>435</sup> "What Is Citizenship Amendment Bill? Why Are People in Assam Unhappy About It?," *India Today*, October 25, 2016, <https://www.indiatoday.in/fyi/story/citizenship-amendment-bill-2016-assam-illegal-migrants-protests-348372-2016-10-25>.

<sup>436</sup> Kapur, "Three Legislations by Modi Government Which Expose Its Anti-Minority Stance."

<sup>437</sup> Prasanta Mazumdar, "Plea to Sift Assam Immigrants Without Reference to Religion," *New Indian Express*, January 2, 2018, <http://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2018/jan/02/plea-to-sift-assam-immigrants-without-reference-to-religion-1742189.html>.

(Amendment and Validation) Bill, 2016” in March 2017 replaced the previous act.<sup>438</sup> The bill allows the government to own all properties of individuals who had immigrated to China, Pakistan and Bangladesh.<sup>439</sup> These individuals are considered enemies. Their relatives who stayed back in India inherited their properties. However, the BJP government took their right away and took over all these properties. However, individuals of Chinese origin who owned property were a small percentage of those targeted, so that this bill mainly targeted the Muslims of Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. Thus, the BJP, by enacting Muslim-specific acts, showed its anti-Muslim prejudice.

#### **4. The Escalation of Violence in India-Administered Kashmir**

The BJP’s central government and the state government used inappropriate violent measures and escalated the situation in the Indian-administered state of Kashmir. The BJP, during its election campaign of 2014, promised the Hindu population of India to abrogate Article 370, which gives “special status” to Indian-administered Kashmir.<sup>440</sup> There has been an active struggle for independence in Indian-administered Kashmir since 1989. However, through a political process, negotiations and the inclusion of Kashmiri state parties, the INC successfully controlled the insurgency. However, the BJP, in line with its campaign slogan of the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, used the Armed Forces Special Power Act (AFSPA) and heightened violent state policies against the peaceful protestors of Kashmir. According to the U.S. State Department, “under the AFSPA, a central government designation of state or union territory as a disturbed area, authorizes security forces in the state to use deadly force to maintain law, and order, and arrest any person against whom reasonable suspicion exists without informing the detainee of the grounds for arrest.”<sup>441</sup> The law also “provides security forces immunity from civilian

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<sup>438</sup> “Parliament Passes Enemy Property Bill,” *The Hindu*, March 14, 2017, sec. National, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/parliament-passes-enemy-property-bill/article17461600.ece>.

<sup>439</sup> Kapur, “Three Legislations by Modi Government Which Expose Its Anti-Minority Stance.”

<sup>440</sup> Pai and Kumar, “Understanding the BJP’s Victory in UP,” 122.

<sup>441</sup> U.S. Department of State, “India 2016 Human Rights Report,” in *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2016* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State, 2017), 64, <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/265748.pdf>.

prosecution for acts committed in regions under the AFSPA.”<sup>442</sup> Meanwhile, in March 2015, the BJP joined the Jammu and Kashmir Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), leading the coalition of the state government.<sup>443</sup> According to CNN, “the Hindu-nationalist BJP jointly governed Kashmir with the Muslim-backed People's Democratic Party (PDP) since 2015. It was a highly unusual arrangement in the fractious region. Indian administered Jammu and Kashmir is India's only Muslim-majority state. Indian security forces killed Burhan Wani, a social media activist in July 2016.”<sup>444</sup> Since then, the people of Indian-administered Kashmir are carrying out protests and asking for independence from India with more vigor. The official record claims that only 92 individuals died during the protests. However, the people of Kashmir claim that thousands of unarmed protestors were killed and equal numbers have lost their eyes due to the use of pellet guns by security forces.<sup>445</sup> The BJP left the coalition in June 2018 over differences with the PDP for revoking the AFSPA and the resettlement of exiled Kashmiri Hindu Pandits.<sup>446</sup> It forced PDP Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti to resign. The BJP central government has imposed “governor rule” in the state since June 2018.<sup>447</sup>

Governor rule in Kashmir is not new; it is eighth time governor rule has been imposed in Kashmir since the independence movement commenced in 1989. Still, various Indian political parties doubted the intention of the BJP to impose governor rule. According to CNN, the BJP intentionally ditched the PDP government.<sup>448</sup> According to opposition parties, for the upcoming national elections in 2019, the BJP wants to use

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<sup>442</sup> U.S. Department of State, “India 2016 Human Rights Report.”

<sup>443</sup> Aijaz Ashraf Wani, “Electoral Politics in Jammu and Kashmir,” in *Rise of Saffron Power, Reflection of Indian Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 339.

<sup>444</sup> “Why the Death of a Militant Has Kashmiris up in Arms,” *BBC News*, July 11, 2016, sec. India, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-36762043>.

<sup>445</sup> Adil Akhzer, “What Are Pellet Guns and Why Are They so Lethal?,” *Indian Express*, July 14, 2016, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/kashmir-violence-what-are-pellet-guns-and-why-are-they-so-lethal-2913917/>.

<sup>446</sup> Wani, “Electoral Politics in Jammu and Kashmir,” 340.

<sup>447</sup> Santosh Chaubey, “Jammu & Kashmir Under Governor’s Rule for Eighth Time,” *India Today*, June 20, 2018, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/jammu-kashmir-under-governor-s-rule-for-eighth-time-1265259-2018-06-20>.

<sup>448</sup> Manveena Suri, “India’s Ruling BJP Quits Kashmir Coalition, Leaving Region on Edge,” *CNN*, June 20, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/06/20/asia/india-kashmir-bjp-intl/index.html>.

suspension of the PDP's government and imposition of governors' rule as a campaign agenda at the national level and raise anti-Muslim sentiment to gain the Hindu vote. Secondly, governor rule will help the BJP to win state assembly election. Last but not least, it will further destabilize the region through excessive use of force against innocent protestors. Few opposition leaders argue that the BJP may use the revocation of Article 370 and resettlement of Kashmiri Pundits' issue to win a landslide victory in 2019 to actually win a majority in Rajya Sabha also. It will help the BJP to amend the constitution. The BJP lacks that majority in Rajya Sabha currently. Indian opposition parties and especially Rahul Gandhi has criticized the BJP for the violent approach toward Indian-administered Kashmir.<sup>449</sup>

## E. CONCLUSION

In the last four years, the BJP targeted minorities. The minorities in India reacted to the situation. Many committed suicide to protest. *Ghar Wapsi* and Love Jihad resulted in immense violence in BJP-led states.<sup>450</sup> Many international watch dogs, including Freedom House, pointed to anti-minority violence and violations of human rights. Due to communal violence against Dalits, especially in BJP-led states, Dalits have established a private militia, the Bhim Army in UP, to protect themselves against Hindu extremists and upper castes.<sup>451</sup> The BJP's imposition of governor rule and high-handed approach has brought Indian-administered Kashmir situation to a point of no return. The high-handed approach of the BJP resulted in the escalation of Mao and Naxalite violence in Chhattisgarh, Orissa and Jharkhand states.<sup>452</sup> With more than 14 existing insurgencies in India, the BJP's current anti-minority approach is leading India toward more instability.

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<sup>449</sup> Suri.

<sup>450</sup> Yashee Singh, "How 'Forced Conversions' Lies Are Being Spread to Attack Christians in India," *Daily O* (blog), December 12, 2017, <https://www.dailyo.in/variety/aligarh-schools-asked-not-to-celebrate-christmas-minorities-under-threat-forced-conversions-hindutva/story/1/21236.html>.

<sup>451</sup> Mohammad Ali, "Day after He Got Bail, UP Govt Slaps NSA on Bhim Army Founder Chandrashekhar," *The Hindu*, November 3, 2017, sec. National, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/day-after-he-got-bail-up-govt-slaps-nsa-on-bhim-army-founder-chandrashekhar/article19975538.ece>.

<sup>452</sup> Nilesh J. Christian, "The Counterinsurgency Policies of the Hindu Nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party of India and the Naxalite Insurgency" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2016), 90, <http://hdl.handle.net/10945/51671>.

The BJP successfully polarized society on a religious basis through use of communal violence for political gain. The party successfully cornered the INC by portraying it as a pro-minority, primarily pro-Muslim, party. By enacting selective amendments in the constitution, the BJP has tried to target Muslims, the largest minority in India. The BJP, under the influence of Hindutva ideology, allowed the RSS and other Hindu extremist organizations to pursue *Ghar Wapsi* and Love Jihad policies. It made life difficult for Indian Christians and Muslims. The BJP leaders used inflammatory anti-minority language to terrorize them. In line with Hindutva, the BJP has changed history books. In short, the BJP successfully established a saffron system of education and eroded Indian constitutionally-guaranteed secularism.

Chapter III examined what the BJP government did in the last four years that raised concerns of the minorities of India. With such weak opposition and a vast extremist Hindu nationalist cadre on the ground, who would resist the BJP to protect minorities? The international community is focused on anti-terrorism, trade wars, and preventing another cold war, so Indian civil society must safeguard the minorities. In order to protect minorities, India must have a strong judiciary, media, and NGOs.

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## **IV. THE BJP AND THE ISSUE OF WATCHDOG INSTITUTIONS**

With minorities facing restrictions on their freedom of religion, increasing political violence that targets them, increasing tensions in Indian Administered Kashmir, and a lack of unified political opposition to the BJP, a larger question emerges regarding the overall impact of such activities on India's multi-ethnic democracy. This chapter thus aims to understand the BJP's impact on India's watchdog institutions that are essential for democracies: specifically, the media, civil society, and its judiciary. What are the democratic implications of BJP's rise to the center?

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section examines the BJP's actions toward an independent media and civil society, the second section analyzes the BJP's actions toward the judiciary, and the third section presents an analysis of the BJP and Hindu nationalist organizations' actions toward India's secular and democratic society as a whole. The four democratic norms posited by Larry Diamond provide the framework for the third section; this framework assists in answering the question of whether domination by the BJP, a religious-ethno party, in the central government affects India's secular and democratic institutions.

### **A. THE BJP'S ACTIONS TOWARD AN INDEPENDENT MEDIA AND CIVIL SOCIETY**

India has a vast media and expanded civil society, which has successfully maintained its independence since 1947, except for a brief crackdown during the 1975-1977 Emergency initiated by Indira Gandhi. India "produces 1,000 feature films each year, has over 90,000 registered publications, more than 900 television channels, in excess of 250 radio stations, over 900 million mobile phone subscriptions and some 700 million subscribers of [an] unspecified number of internet websites."<sup>453</sup> However the BJP, since coming to power, has attempted to control the independent media in several ways, ranging from influencing media owners and corporations to apparent threats

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<sup>453</sup> Amit Kumar, "Radio and TV Subject to the Law of Defamation," accessed November 1, 2018, [http://www.academia.edu/34367991/Radio\\_and\\_TV\\_subject\\_to\\_the\\_Law\\_of\\_Defamation](http://www.academia.edu/34367991/Radio_and_TV_subject_to_the_Law_of_Defamation).

against journalists in order to implement its Hindu nationalist agenda in a secular Indian democracy.

### **1. Control of the Media**

According to Kumar, “hailed as the Fourth Estate, media is the watchdog of the public affairs, informing the society and vice versa, acts as the forum to advocate the views of the society at large to those at the helm of public affairs.”<sup>454</sup> To avoid accountability and silence critics over anti-minority actions, the BJP has subtly used several indirect government approaches such as defamation, sedition laws, and the use of government force in accusing journalists of criminal activities. The BJP government has also shown a tendency to remain silent when faced with the direct violence of its affiliates, such as the RSS, VHP, *Bajrang Dal*, and other extremist organizations actions against the media. For example, pro-BJP social media activists hurled death threats at independent journalists Sagarika Ghose and Nitish Kumar, and the government did not apprehend them.<sup>455</sup>

The BJP government also uses public institutions such as the Central Board of Film Certification, the Press Council of India, Doordarshan (the state-owned television station), self-regulatory organizations such as the News Broadcasting Standards Authority, and the Advertising Standards Council of India, as well as regulations such as the Cable Television Networks Rules 1994 and the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act 1995 to control the media.<sup>456</sup> The government used Section 1(d), Section 1(g) and Section 1(e) of Rule 6 of the Programme Code prescribed under the Cable Television Network Rules 1994 in 2015 to threaten to cancel the licenses of Ananda Bazar Patrika (ABP) News, NDTV 24×7 and the Aaj Tak television channel,

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<sup>454</sup> Kumar.

<sup>455</sup> Raju Gopalakrishnan, “Indian Journalists Intimidated, Ostracised for Criticising Modi and the BJP,” *Dawn*, April 27, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1404121>.

<sup>456</sup> Kumar, “Radio and TV Subject to the Law of Defamation.”



when they aired an interview of sympathisers of Yakub Memon, a man hanged on charges of his involvement in the 1993 Mumbai attacks.<sup>457</sup>

The BJP is known to have also influenced media houses by forming alliances with large corporations that are invested in the media industry. Mukesh Ambani, a leading industrialist and the owner of the Reliance Corporation, bought India's largest media house, the Network 18, when Modi took over as Prime Minister.<sup>458</sup> He also financed Modi's election campaign of 2014.<sup>459</sup> Kumar, writing in *Economic and Political Weekly*, has argued that the takeover of Network 18 "marked a convergence of corporate and media interests that posed a threat to freedom of expression and media plurality."<sup>460</sup> Modi, as the Chief Minister of Gujarat, had already given favors to the Reliance group. According to the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India, until May 2014, the Gujarat government gave favors of about Rs. 25000 crores (\$33,783 Mn) to the Reliance Petroleum, Power, and other affiliated group of companies.<sup>461</sup> In 2016, the BJP government gave Anil Ambani's Dassault Reliance Aerospace Ltd. (DRAL), a defense contract worth 7 billion euros for the joint manufacturing of 36 fighter aircrafts with the French company Rafael.<sup>462</sup> This defense deal is source of a current corruption scam and a court case in India, where the plaintiffs have asked the court to force government transparency on such decisions. In another example, Mahendra Nahata and Abhey Oswal,

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<sup>457</sup> P. Vaidyanathan Iyer, "Explain Why You Shouldn't Face Action for Yakub's Execution Coverage: Govt Notice to 3 Channels," *Indian Express*, August 8, 2015, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/explain-why-you-shouldnt-face-action-for-yakub-coverage-govt-notice-to-3-channels/>. Soutik Biswas, "The Fear of Censorship in Indian Media," *BBC News*, August 11, 2015, sec. India, <https://www.bbc.com/news/33844154>.

<sup>458</sup> Megha Bahree, "Reliance Takes Over Network18: Is This The Death Of Media Independence?," *Forbes*, May 30, 2014, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/meghabahree/2014/05/30/reliance-takes-over-network18-is-this-the-death-of-media-independence/>.

<sup>459</sup> "Is Narendra Modi Silent on Mukesh Ambani Because of Campaign Funds, Asks AAP," *NDTV.Com*, February 13, 2014, <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/is-narendra-modi-silent-on-mukesh-ambani-because-of-campaign-funds-asks-aap-550681>.

<sup>460</sup> Kumar, "Radio and TV Subject to the Law of Defamation."

<sup>461</sup> "Gujarat Govt Unduly Favoured Reliance, Adani: CAG Report," *Times of India*, July 26, 2014, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Gujarat-govt-unduly-favoured-Reliance-Adani-CAG-report/articleshow/39005042.cms>.

<sup>462</sup> Sandeep Unnithan, "Rafale Deal: The Anil Ambani Connection," *India Today*, September 28, 2018, <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/cover-story/story/20181008-the-ambani-connection-1349998-2018-09-28>.

leading industrialists and friends of Mukesh Ambani and pro-BJP businessmen, own up to 70 percent of investments in India's five leading media houses that tend to curtail their criticism of the Modi government.<sup>463</sup> These media houses also gave 50 percent of their primetime coverage to Modi in 2014. According to *Times of India*, Modi's government spent Rs. 4,343.26 crore (\$ 59 Mn) on advertisement,<sup>464</sup> quite a bit of money for any non-corruption candidate worldwide. That money was divided between Network 18, the Zee TV Group, India TV, News 24 and Times Now.<sup>465</sup> Subhash Chandra, the owner of India's Zee TV Group, was elected member of the Lok Sabha from Haryana in 2016 as a BJP candidate.<sup>466</sup>

The BJP also is known to punish media houses and anchors that do not support them, creating a chilling effect upon the independent media. New Delhi Television Network's (NDTV) owner, Prannoy Roy, has his house raided in 2017 on the pretext of tax evasion and defaulted bank loans.<sup>467</sup> NDTV is a critical news channel that has maintained independent reporting despite attacks from the state. The owners claimed that the loan had been repaid in 2010.<sup>468</sup> The Editors' Guild of India has suggested that this situation is due to the BJP government's political vendetta against NDTV.<sup>469</sup>

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<sup>463</sup> Krishn Kaushik, "The Big Five: The Media Companies That the Modi Government Must Scrutinise to Fulfill Its Promise of Ending Crony Capitalism," *The Caravan*, January 18, 2016, <https://caravanmagazine.in/vantage/the-big-five-the-media-companies-that-the-modi-government-must-scrutinise-to-fulfill-its-promise-of-ending-crony-capitalism>.

<sup>464</sup> "Prime Minister Narendra Modi-Led Government Splurges Over Rs 4,300 Crore in Publicity," *Times of India*, May 14, 2018, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/prime-minister-narendra-modi-led-government-splurges-over-rs-4300-crore-in-publicity-rti/articleshow/64158279.cms>.

<sup>465</sup> "Is Media Managed by Modi Government?," *Quora* (blog), February 24, 2017, <https://www.quora.com/Is-media-managed-by-Modi-government>.

<sup>466</sup> Archis Mohan, "Subhash Chandra Bets on BJP Support for Rajya Sabha Entry," *Business Standard India*, June 1, 2016, [https://www.business-standard.com/article/politics/subhash-chandra-bets-on-bjp-support-for-rajya-sabha-entry-116053101457\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/article/politics/subhash-chandra-bets-on-bjp-support-for-rajya-sabha-entry-116053101457_1.html).

<sup>467</sup> Bikram Vohra, "CBI Raids NDTV's Prannoy Roy's Home: Could Narendra Modi Govt Have Engineered Such an Obvious Misstep?," *First Post*, June 7, 2017, <https://www.firstpost.com/india/cbi-raids-ndtvs-prannoy-roys-home-could-narendra-modi-govt-have-engineered-such-an-obvious-misstep-3526523.html>; "CBI Raids Residence of NDTV Founders in Criminal Conspiracy, Cheating Case," *India Today*, June 5, 2017, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/cbi-raids-residence-of-ndtv-founders-in-criminal-conspiracy-cheating-case-981119-2017-06-05>.

<sup>468</sup> "CBI Raids Residence of NDTV Founders in Criminal Conspiracy, Cheating Case."

<sup>469</sup> Vohra, "CBI Raids NDTV's Prannoy Roy's Home: Could Narendra Modi Govt Have Engineered Such an Obvious Misstep?"

Additionally, the BJP government has cancelled licenses of 147 news channels since 2014 on the pretext that they did not have security clearances.<sup>470</sup> Amit Shah also forced the ABP news channel to remove news editor-in-chief, Milind Khandekar, Punya Prasun Bajpai and Abhisar Sharma for criticizing Modi.<sup>471</sup> Bobby Ghosh, a journalist and the editor of the *Hindustan Times*, was also removed on the direction of Modi in September 2017.<sup>472</sup> The BJP did not like his online initiative of “the hate tracker.”<sup>473</sup> At the direction of the BJP government, N.N. Vora, Governor of Indian-administered Kashmir and head of trust of the *Tribune* newspaper, fired Harish Khare, a widely-respected editor of the newspaper.<sup>474</sup> Harish Khare and his team had exposed a security flaw in the Aadhaar database, which is a voluntary universal ID scheme that is an initiative of the BJP government.<sup>475</sup>

The BJP government has targeted publishing houses as well. The BJP’s affiliate, an extremist Hindu nationalist organization *Shiksha Bachao Andolan*, sued the Penguin publishers of India in February 2014 in order to withdraw Chicago-based author Wendy Doniger's book, *The Hindus*.<sup>476</sup> The publisher, instead of fighting for the freedom of press and speech case in court, withdrew the book from market.<sup>477</sup> The Aleph Book

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<sup>470</sup> Kamaljit Kaur Sandhu, “147 TV Channels Cancelled in Last 3 Years, Centre Tell Parliament,” *India Today*, July 30, 2018, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/147-tv-channels-cancelled-in-last-3-years-centre-tell-parliament-1300857-2018-07-30>.

<sup>471</sup> “Resignations of Two Journalists at ABP News Cause Disquiet in Newsrooms and Far Beyond,” *Scroll.In*, August 3, 2018, <https://scroll.in/article/889026/resignations-of-two-journalists-at-abp-news-cause-disquiet-in-newsrooms-and-far-beyond>.

<sup>472</sup> “Hindustan Times Editor’s Exit Preceded by Meeting Between Modi, Newspaper Owner,” *The Wire*, accessed October 31, 2018, <https://thewire.in/media/hindustan-times-bobby-ghosh-narendra-modi-shobhana-bhartia>.

<sup>473</sup> “After Editor’s Exit, Hindustan Times Pulls Down Controversial ‘Hate Tracker,’” *The Wire* (blog), October 25, 2017, <https://thewire.in/media/hindustan-times-hate-tracker>.

<sup>474</sup> Mohan Guruswamy, “Harish Khare Forced Out Again: Exit Casts Shadow Over The Tribune’s Independence,” *The Citizen*, March 18, 2018, <https://www.thecitizen.in/index.php/en/NewsDetail/index/4/13314/Harish-Khare-Forced-Out-Again-Exit-Casts-Shadow-Over-The-Tribunes-Independence>.

<sup>475</sup> Guruswamy.

<sup>476</sup> Flood, “Penguin’s Withdrawal of the Hindus Causes International Outcry.”

<sup>477</sup> Soutik Biswas, “Why Did Penguin Recall a Book on Hindus?,” *BBC News*, February 12, 2014, sec. India, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-26148875>.

Company, promoted by Rupa Publication, also withdrew another book on Hinduism in March 2015 under pressure from extremists.<sup>478</sup>

The BJP government also levied the administrations' power to change regulations and maintenance of law and order to target select media. It has used "national security, religious tolerance, blasphemy, libel, defamation, invasion of privacy, artistic license, pornography, obscenity, copyright and other intellectual property rights to restrict freedom of expression, often under highly contentious and controversial circumstances."<sup>479</sup> The government, while ignoring Article 19 (1) (a) of the Constitution of India which "guarantees freedom of expression as a fundamental right of all citizens, quite often used Article 19 (2) which imposes reasonable restrictions."<sup>480</sup> The BJP also used the Information Technology Act to ban individual Facebook accounts of some in Goa and Karnataka who criticized Modi.<sup>481</sup> Facebook responded by selectively banning some accounts and removing posts, though all requests of Indian government were not granted.<sup>482</sup> Maharashtra's BJP government arrested a journalist on spying charges when he reported on military officers and their mistreatment of subordinates.<sup>483</sup> On the pretext of national security and rule of law, the government carried out 60 internet shutdowns in 2017, 27 of which were in Jammu and Kashmir.<sup>484</sup>

In the past two years, the BJP government appears to be directly involved in two violent incidents that reflect upon the regime's anti-media proclivity. In 2016, BJP MPs Prahlad Joshi and Umesh Dushi filed defamation cases against Gauri Lankesh, objecting

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<sup>478</sup> Kumar, "Radio and TV Subject to the Law of Defamation."

<sup>479</sup> Kumar.

<sup>480</sup> Kumar.

<sup>481</sup> Kumar.

<sup>482</sup> Abhishek Dey, "Is Facebook Really Blocking Criticism of the Indian Government, BJP and Hindutva Groups?," *Scroll.In*, October 3, 2017, <https://scroll.in/article/852571/is-facebook-blocking-criticism-of-indian-government-bjp-and-right-wing-groups>.

<sup>483</sup> "World Report 2018: Rights Trends in India," Human Rights Watch, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/india>.

<sup>484</sup> "World Report 2018."

to her 2008 report against them and other BJP leaders.<sup>485</sup> She had exposed a gold selling racket in some BJP-affiliated corporations. Her newspaper *Gauri Lankesh Patrike* was also severely critical of Prime Minister Modi's anti-minority and Hindu nationalist approach, and she opposed the discriminatory, anti-Dalit actions of upper caste Hindus.<sup>486</sup> She also claimed that Umar Khalid, a Kashmiri student of the Jawaharlal Nehru University who was critical of the BJP regime, and Rohit Vemula, the Dalit student who committed suicide, were like her sons.<sup>487</sup> In September 2017, Gauri Lankesh was murdered in Bengaluru.<sup>488</sup> Her assassin, Parashuram Waghmore, admitted that he killed her to save his Hindu religion.<sup>489</sup> According to *The Washington Post*, "the day Gauri Lankesh died, another Indian journalist, Rana Ayyub, tweeted that Lankesh had recently published a Kannada-language version of Ayyub's investigative book, *Gujarat Files: Anatomy of a Cover Up*. Based on an eight-month investigation, her book accused India's now-Prime Minister Narendra Modi of complicity in violent riots that killed at least 1,000 people in 2002."<sup>490</sup> Rana Ayyub called the killers cowards and bigots.<sup>491</sup> Extremist organizations targeted her through hate messages on social media, such as sexist insults and faked pornographic videos, and called for her rape and murder.<sup>492</sup>

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<sup>485</sup> "The Jet Airways Lawsuit on Josy Joseph Means Press Must Stand up for Itself," *Daily O* (blog), December 14, 2016, <https://www.dailyo.in/variety/josy-joseph-the-hindu-civil-defamation-suit-1000-crore-naresh-goyal-jet-airways/story/1/14556.html>.

<sup>486</sup> Sudipto Mondal, "Why Was Gauri Lankesh Killed?," *New York Times*, January 20, 2018, sec. Opinion, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/13/opinion/gauri-lankesh-india-dead.html>.

<sup>487</sup> Mondal.

<sup>488</sup> Rajiv Kalkod, "I Killed Gauri Lankesh to Save My Religion: Waghmore to Sit," *Times of India*, June 16, 2018, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/i-killed-gauri-lankesh-to-save-my-religion-waghmore-to-sit/articleshow/64608133.cms>.

<sup>489</sup> Kalkod.

<sup>490</sup> Siobhán O'Grady, "An Indian Journalist Has Been Trolled for Years. Now U.N. Experts Say Her Life Could Be at Risk.," *Washington Post*, May 26, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/05/26/an-indian-journalist-has-been-trolled-for-years-now-u-n-experts-say-her-life-could-be-at-risk/>.

<sup>491</sup> O'Grady.

<sup>492</sup> Rana Ayyub, "In India, Journalists Face Slut-Shaming and Rape Threats," *New York Times*, May 22, 2018, sec. Opinion, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/22/opinion/india-journalists-slut-shaming-rape.html>.

Other such examples are emerging on a daily basis in India. In January 2018, the Crime Branch of New Delhi registered a First Investigation Report (FIR) against Rachna Khaira, an investigative journalist of *The Tribune*.<sup>493</sup> According to *The Washington Post*, she was punished for exposing the security breaches in BJP's initiative, the Unique Identification Authority (UIDAI), a biometric program "to check fraud in government sponsored welfare scheme," commonly known as the Aadhar program.<sup>494</sup> The BJP's official twitter account had declared the reporter's story was "fake news."<sup>495</sup> Pro-BJP social media activists also intimidated independent journalists. Sagarika Ghose, a well-known columnist of *Times of India*, and Nitish Kumar complained that pro-BJP activists sent them innumerable death threats and intimidated them on social media when they criticized BJP government policies.<sup>496</sup> Modi fans abused and physically attacked Rajdeep Sardesai, a famous secular author and journalist, outside Madison Square Garden in September 2014.<sup>497</sup> He had written about the 2002 Gujarat tragedy in his book *Gujarat: The Making of a Tragedy*<sup>498</sup> and criticized Modi in his book *2014: The Election that Changed India*.<sup>499</sup> Taking the lead of the BJP government's anti-media drive and relying on its silence, corporations and extremist organizations also have taken steps to curtail the freedom of press. The chairman of Jet airways, Naresh Goyal, filed a

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<sup>493</sup> "Fir Against the Tribune, Rachna Khaira Over Aadhaar Breach Story: Sections Under Which They Were Booked," *First Post*, January 8, 2018, <https://www.firstpost.com/india/fir-against-the-tribune-rachna-khaira-over-aadhaar-breach-story-sections-under-which-they-were-booked-4292361.html>.

<sup>494</sup> Vidhi Doshi, "An Indian Journalist Exposed a Huge Breach in a Government Database. Now She's Facing a Police Complaint.," *Washington Post*, January 8, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/01/08/an-indian-journalist-exposed-a-huge-breach-in-a-government-database-now-shes-facing-a-police-complaint/>.

<sup>495</sup> Doshi.

<sup>496</sup> Gopalakrishnan, "Indian Journalists Intimidated, Ostracised for Criticising Modi and the BJP."

<sup>497</sup> "Modi Upset Over Attack on Rajdeep Sardesai," *Rediff News*, September 30, 2014, <http://www.rediff.com/news/report/modi-in-us-upset-with-fans-over-attack-on-rajdeep-sardesai/20140930.htm>.

<sup>498</sup> Siddharth Varadarajan, *Gujarat, the Making of a Tragedy* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2002).

<sup>499</sup> Arghya Roy Chowdhury, "Book Review: Rajdeep Sardesai's '2014: The Election That Changed India' Is a Must Read for All News Junkies," *DNA*, November 14, 2014, <https://www.dnaindia.com/lifestyle/review-book-review-rajdeep-sardesai-s-2014-the-election-that-changed-india-is-a-must-read-for-all-news-junkies-2035090>.

defamation suit against investigative journalist Josy Joseph in 2016.<sup>500</sup> Joseph had exposed Modi's mentor, Naresh Goyal,<sup>501</sup> and wrote about "collusion among businessmen, bureaucrats and politicians" in his book *A Feast of Vultures: the Hidden Business of Democracy in India*.<sup>502</sup>

The extremist organizations affiliated with the BJP have engaged in violence against journalists across India. Reporters Without Borders (RSF) "has for the first time issued an Incident Report, on freedom of the press in India, after the murder of a fourth journalist in less than six months and a sharp rise in hate speech in April 2018."<sup>503</sup> India is declared 138<sup>th</sup> in the organization's freedom of press ranking, two ranks down from 2017.<sup>504</sup> In 2018, RSF secretary-general, Christophe Deloire, wrote to Prime Minister Modi and urged him to take action against the perpetrators. Yet Shujat Bukhari, editor of the *Rising Kashmir* newspaper was shot dead on June 14, 2018 in Srinagar.<sup>505</sup> According to BBC News, his newspaper faced censorship while he faced threats of arrest by the government. He was censured for his opposition to the BJP's attempts at removing Article 370, which gives Kashmir a "special status."<sup>506</sup>

## 2. The Use of Violence to Discipline Other Segments of Civil Society

To counter the increasing reaction of civil society and the media against the BJP, its allied Hindu nationalist extremist organizations used pro-BJP famous personalities to counter the anti-BJP narratives, as well as violence. When prominent intellectuals,

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<sup>500</sup> "The Jet Airways Lawsuit on Josy Joseph Means Press Must Stand up for Itself."

<sup>501</sup> Josy Joseph, "A Jet Propelled by Don Ibrahim," *Outlook*, July 21, 2016, <https://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/a-jet-propelled-by-don-ibrahim/297557>.

<sup>502</sup> Kanishka Gupta, "Write a Book Investigating Corporate Corruption. Get Sued. What next? Ask Josy Joseph," Text, Scroll.in, accessed November 2, 2018, <https://scroll.in/article/840178/write-a-book-investigating-corporate-corruption-get-sued-what-next-ask-josy-joseph>.

<sup>503</sup> "RSF Issues Warning to India in First World Press Freedom Index Incident Report," Reporters Without Borders, July 4, 2018, <https://rsf.org/en/news/rsf-issues-warning-india-first-world-press-freedom-index-incident-report>.

<sup>504</sup> "RSF Issues Warning to India in First World Press Freedom Index Incident Report."

<sup>505</sup> "Leading Kashmir Journalist Shot Dead," *BBC News*, June 14, 2018, sec. India, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-44488081>.

<sup>506</sup> "Leading Kashmir Journalist Shot Dead."

thinkers, and personalities decided to return an award as a protest over the BJP government's intolerance toward minorities, 36 prominent intellectuals came out with a combined statement favoring the Hindu nationalists in 2015.<sup>507</sup> Among the prominent signatories were ICCR president Lokesh Chandra and author and Sahitya Akademi award winner, S. L. Bhyrayappa.<sup>508</sup> Those who criticized the Hindu Nationalists were selectively eliminated. Dr Mallehappa Kalburgi, a prominent scholar and an ex-vice chancellor of Kannada University of the Northern Karnataka was killed in 2015. He criticized idol worship and pervasive superstition in Hindu religion.<sup>509</sup> According to BBC News, Hindu extremists had threatened him on social media.<sup>510</sup> Dr. Dabholkar, who was an intellectual and a social activist working for social justice, was also killed in similar circumstances. He was killed in August 2013 in Pune.<sup>511</sup> He campaigned "to get an anti-superstition law passed" by the Maharashtra government.<sup>512</sup> The Shiv Sena and the BJP opposed him as they argued that the law was anti-Hinduism. In August 2018, after continuous protests by civil society and pressure from the judiciary, the Maharashtra police claimed to arrest the alleged killer. However, it is not clear who was behind the murder.<sup>513</sup> In February 2015, Govind Pansare of Communist party was killed in Kolhapur, Maharashtra.<sup>514</sup> He supported Dr. Dabholkar's anti-superstition views openly.

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<sup>507</sup> "Intellectuals Come Out in Support of Modi Government," *Times of India*, November 6, 2015, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Intellectuals-come-out-in-support-of-Modi-government/articleshow/49681835.cms>.

<sup>508</sup> "Intellectuals Come Out in Support of Modi Government."

<sup>509</sup> Swati Gupta, "Indian Scholar Who Criticized Worship of Idols Is Killed," *New York Times*, December 21, 2017, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/31/world/asia/indian-scholar-who-criticized-worship-of-idols-is-killed.html>.

<sup>510</sup> Soutik Biswas, "Who Killed Dr Mallehappa Kalburgi?," *BBC News*, August 31, 2015, sec. India, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-34105187>.

<sup>511</sup> "CBI Arrests Key Suspect in Dabholkar Murder Case," *Times of India*, August 18, 2018, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/cbi-arrests-narendra-dabholkars-killer-in-pune/articleshow/65455189.cms>.

<sup>512</sup> Committee to Protect Journalists 330 7th Avenue, "Narendra Dabholkar Killed," Committee to Protect Journalists, August 20, 2013, <https://cpj.org/data/people/narendra-dabholkar-1/>.

<sup>513</sup> "CBI Arrests Key Suspect in Dabholkar Murder Case."

<sup>514</sup> Shoumojit Banerjee, "CPI Leader Govind Pansare, Wife Shot at in Kolhapur," *The Hindu*, February 16, 2015, sec. Mumbai, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/mumbai/gunmen-attack-maharashtra-communist-leader-wife/article6901207.ece>.



In January 2015, he opposed the glorification of Nathuram Godse, the murderer of Mahatma Gandhi, as a nationalist.<sup>515</sup> He argued that Nathuram Godse was from the RSS. In same lecture, he contradicted the narrative of the RSS about Shivaji being anti-Muslims and proved that one third of his army, as well as many generals and his ministers, were Muslims.<sup>516</sup> The extremist Hindu organizations threatened him on telephone.<sup>517</sup>

The BJP government and the affiliates have threatened important individuals of civil society. Ramachandra Guha, an eminent scholar and critic of the Modi government, recently refused the position at Ahmedabad University of Gujarat. The student wing of the BJP, Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) called him anti-national over his biography of Mohandas Gandhi.<sup>518</sup> Arundhati Roy, a long-time critic of BJP's development policy in Gujarat that led to displacement of people, has been a target of hate speech; more recently, she has also come out in opposition to the Indian military's violation of human rights in Indian-administered Kashmir.<sup>519</sup>

The BJP state governments frequently arrest members of minorities on charges of being anti-nationals. On February 9, 2016, upon ABVP's complaints, the authorities arrested Umar Khalid, Kanhaiya Kumar, and three other students on charges of sedition in Jawaharlal Nehru University.<sup>520</sup> They were actually protesting the hanging of Afzal

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<sup>515</sup> "What Could Be the Reasons behind Killing Govind Pansare?," Quora, accessed November 19, 2018, <https://www.quora.com/What-could-be-the-reasons-behind-killing-Govind-Pansare>.

<sup>516</sup> "What Could Be the Reasons behind Killing Govind Pansare?"

<sup>517</sup> Sonia Faleiro, "India's Attack on Free Speech," *New York Times*, January 19, 2018, sec. Opinion, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/04/opinion/sunday/sonia-faleiro-india-free-speech-kalburgi-pansare-dabholkar.html>.

<sup>518</sup> Soutik Biswas, "Right-Wingers Hound Out Gandhi Biographer," *BBC News*, November 3, 2018, sec. India, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-46069120>.

<sup>519</sup> Somak Ghoshal, "What Makes Arundhati Roy an Easy Target Of Hate," *HuffPost India*, May 24, 2017, [http://www.huffingtonpost.in/2017/05/24/what-makes-arundhati-roy-an-easy-target-of-hate\\_a\\_22106863/](http://www.huffingtonpost.in/2017/05/24/what-makes-arundhati-roy-an-easy-target-of-hate_a_22106863/).

<sup>520</sup> Heena Kausar and Shradha Chettri, "JNU Row a Year Later: Kanhaiya to Khalid, How Lives of 5 Students Changed," *Hindustan Times*, February 9, 2017, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/delhi/jnu-protests-a-year-on-how-the-feb-9-anti-national-event-changed-five-lives/story-4jbNO1ByQtC9B8XbOMFFUK.html>.

Guru in Indian-administered Kashmir over the Indian Parliament attack of 2001.<sup>521</sup> According to Arundhati Roy and many human right activists, there were many loopholes in the prosecution and he was hanged illegally.<sup>522</sup> Khalid Umar was also shot at in August 2018.<sup>523</sup> The BJP-led Madhya Pradesh arrested 15 Muslims “on sedition charges for allegedly celebrating Pakistan’s victory over India in a cricket match in June 2017.”<sup>524</sup> The nationalists’ organizations attacked Dalits of Maharashtra on January 1, 2018 while celebrating *Bhima Koregaon*, a Dalit festival.<sup>525</sup> Several journalists supported the Dalits and condemned the aggression. Maharashtra police arrested the Dalit writers and activists Sudhir Dhawale, Shoma Sen, Mahesh Raut, and Surendra Gadling for supporting the cause in June 2018.<sup>526</sup> These were followed by arrests of Sudha Bharadwaj, Gautam Navlakha, Varavara Rao, Vernon Gonsalves and Arun Ferreira, who are also writers and lawyers involved in examining the emergence of radical groups such as the Maoist separatists; the state alleged that these journalists are anti-nationalists and are cooperating with the Maoist separatists.<sup>527</sup>

**a. Use of the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) and NGOs**

The BJP government has attempted to contain secular and civil society NGOs. In November 2016, India’s National Human Rights Commission questioned the Ministry of

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<sup>521</sup> Kausar and Chettri.

<sup>522</sup> Arundhati Roy, “The Hanging of Afzal Guru Is a Stain on India’s Democracy,” *The Guardian*, February 10, 2013, sec. Opinion, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/feb/10/hanging-afzal-guru-india-democracy>.

<sup>523</sup> “JNU Student Leader Umar Khalid Attacked in Delhi, Escapes Unhurt,” *Times of India*, August 13, 2018, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/jnu-student-umar-khalid-survives-attack-outside-delhis-constitution-club-attacker-escapes/articleshow/65385813.cms>.

<sup>524</sup> “World Report 2018,” 2018.

<sup>525</sup> Gitesh Shelke, “Clashes Erupt in Pune Over Event to Mark Dalit Assertion, 1 Killed,” *Times of India*, January 2, 2018, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/clashes-erupt-in-pune-over-event-to-mark-dalit-assertion-1-killed/articleshow/62331776.cms>.

<sup>526</sup> Vishwas Kothari and Gitesh Shelke, “Raids in 7 Cities, 5 Activists Arrested; More Could Be Raided in Coming Days, Say Police,” *Times of India*, August 29, 2018, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/raids-in-7-cities-5-activists-arrested-more-could-be-raided-in-coming-days-say-police/articleshow/65585808.cms>.

<sup>527</sup> Kajal Basu, “A Crackdown on Dissent in India: What’s Behind the Recent Arrests of Rights Activists,” *The Diplomat*, August 31, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/08/a-crackdown-on-dissent-in-india-whats-behind-the-recent-arrests-of-rights-activists/>.

Home Affairs' decision not to renew the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) license of the Center for Promotion of Social Concerns (CPSC). The license was not renewed over allegations that the CPSC highlighted violation of human rights in India and defamed the country in the United Nations and other international forums.<sup>528</sup> The Lawyers Collective, an advocacy group in New Delhi, is an NGO that "provided legal assistance to women, nonunion workers, activists and other marginalized groups, often without charge."<sup>529</sup> The NGO also represented critics of Modi as well as environmentalists,<sup>530</sup> including Teesta Setalvad, who is campaigning for justice for the victims of the 2002 Gujarat Pogrom and Priya Pillai of Greenpeace India, who is against Modi's anti-environmental policies.<sup>531</sup> The BJP government had already canceled FCRA licenses of Teesta Setalvad's NGO Sabrang Trust in 2015.<sup>532</sup> This act was followed by restrictions on other NGO, Citizens for Justice and Peace (CJP) and the Central Bureau of Investigation registered a case against her Sabrang Communications and Publishing Private Limited (SCPPL) in 2015.<sup>533</sup> Since she demanded that Modi should be put on trial for the Gujarat Pogrom, the BJP government not only revoked her FCRA license, but federal agents also raided her house in Mumbai on allegations of stealing funds from her NGO. Though the Ministry of the Interior pointed out a few irregularities in her NGOs, civil society took this action as retribution by the government.

The BJP continuously targeted the domestic and foreign NGOs, which opposed the party's agenda. Amnesty International stated that the BJP government cancelled

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<sup>528</sup> "Restrictions under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA)," Worldwide Movement for Human Rights, August 22, 2017, <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/asia/india/restrictions-under-the-foreign-contribution-regulation-act-fcra>.

<sup>529</sup> Rohini Mohan, "Narendra Modi's Crackdown on Civil Society in India," *New York Times*, December 22, 2017, sec. Opinion, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/09/opinion/narendra-modis-crackdown-on-civil-society-in-india.html>.

<sup>530</sup> Mohan.

<sup>531</sup> Mohan.

<sup>532</sup> Bharti Jain, "Teesta's NGO Set to Lose FCRA Licence," *Times of India*, September 10, 2015, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Teestas-NGO-set-to-lose-FCRA-licence/articleshow/48893127.cms>.

<sup>533</sup> Jain.

licenses of 11,319 NGOs up until October 2018.<sup>534</sup> The most worrying aspect is that long-existing NGOs were also targeted. For example, Navsarjan Trust is a Gujarat NGO that took up the cause of Dalit beatings in 2016 to mobilize civil society against the violence.<sup>535</sup> The BJP government cancelled its FCRA license in December 2016. Other NGOs that lost their license since 2015 include Anhad, the Indian Social Action Forum (INSAF), Marwar Muslim Educational Welfare Society, and the Rural Development Research Centre.<sup>536</sup> The enforcement directorate raided the Amnesty International India office in Bengaluru on October 25, 2018.<sup>537</sup> Amnesty International called this action governmental harassment. Greenpeace India in September 2018,<sup>538</sup> Amnesty International,<sup>539</sup> Ford Foundation,<sup>540</sup> Compassion International, Caruna Bal Vikas and Compassion East India<sup>541</sup> are a few international NGOs that are facing restrictions under the BJP administration. Human Rights Watch, in its annual report of 2017, argued that “due to restriction on freedom of expression and NGOs, the civil liberties are at stake in India.”<sup>542</sup> To protest the government’s actions to restrict freedom of expression, thirty-nine writers have returned their Sahitya Akademi awards during the last three years.<sup>543</sup>

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<sup>534</sup> “Foreign Funding Law in India Used to Harass 25 Groups,” Amnesty International India, accessed November 3, 2018, <https://amnesty.org.in/news-update/foreign-funding-law-india-used-harass-25-groups/>.

<sup>535</sup> “NGOs See ‘Vendetta’ in Crackdown,” *The Telegraph*, December 12, 2016, <https://www.telegraphindia.com/india/ngos-see-vendetta-in-crackdown/cid/1514629>.

<sup>536</sup> “NGOs See ‘Vendetta’ in Crackdown.”

<sup>537</sup> “ED Raids Amnesty India Over FEMA Irregularities: A Brief History of Centre’s Crackdown on NGOs,” *First Post*, October 26, 2018, <https://www.firstpost.com/india/ed-raids-amnesty-india-over-fema-irregularities-a-brief-history-of-centres-crackdown-on-ngos-5450341.html>.

<sup>538</sup> “Govt Cancels Greenpeace India’s FCRA Licence,” *Deccan Herald*, September 3, 2015, <https://www.deccanherald.com/content/498950/govt-cancels-greenpeace-indias-fcra.html>.

<sup>539</sup> Krishna N. Das, “UPDATE 1-Amnesty India Says Raid, Frozen Accounts Aimed At...,” Reuters, October 26, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/india-amnesty/update-1-amnesty-india-says-raid-frozen-accounts-aimed-at-silencing-govt-critics-idUSL3N1X63D0>.

<sup>540</sup> Vaishnavi Chandrashekhar, “India Crackdown? Ford Foundation Latest Foreign NGO Slapped by Delhi,” *Christian Science Monitor*, May 4, 2015, <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-South-Central/2015/0504/India-crackdown-Ford-Foundation-latest-foreign-NGO-slapped-by-Delhi>.

<sup>541</sup> “World Report 2018: Rights Trends in India,” Human Rights Watch, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/india>.

<sup>542</sup> “World Report 2018.”

<sup>543</sup> “39 Writers Returned Their Sahitya Akademi Awards: Govt,” *Hindustan Times*, February 6, 2017, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/39-writers-returned-their-sahitya-akademi-awards-govt/story-W6JsnBkCMf9SmlKDIMw29I.html>.

## B. THE BJP'S ACTIONS TOWARD AN INDEPENDENT JUDICIARY

An independent judiciary is an important watchdog designed to protect the constitution and ensure liberal democracy. The BJP government has tried to either manage or neutralize the independence of judiciary to implement its religious nationalist agenda. Yet the judiciary has so far resisted these machinations to protect democracy and guarantee rule of law. What are the steps the BJP government has taken to undermine the judiciary?

The religious bias of the BJP has affected the judiciary's nomination process, particularly when it has come to dealing with its critics and to promote Hindu projects. The top judges of the Indian Supreme Court, commonly known as the collegium, has the constitutional right to select and forward names of future justices to the Supreme Court to President of India through the Prime Minister's recommendation.<sup>544</sup> In May 2014, the Ministry of Law recommended the names of three judges to the President for approval; however, the President rejected Gopal Subramaniam's nomination to collegium for reconsideration.<sup>545</sup> Subramaniam had protested that the BJP government tarnished his reputation due to a vendetta, based on his role as solicitor under the INC government from 2009 to 2011 and *amicus curiae* in the Soharbudin fake encounter case.<sup>546</sup> Subramaniam withdrew his nomination<sup>547</sup> for the Supreme Court over alleged bad CBI and FBI reports against him.<sup>548</sup> His persuasion convinced the apex court of India in 2010 to order CBI to probe into involvement of Amit Shah and Modi. Upon assuming power in

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<sup>544</sup> J. Venkatesan, "Law Ministry Turns down Gopal Subramaniam's Elevation as SC Judge," *Hindu*, June 19, 2014, sec. National, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/law-ministry-turns-down-gopal-subramaniam-elevation-as-sc-judge/article6127460.ece>.

<sup>545</sup> Venkatesan.

<sup>546</sup> Venkatesan.

<sup>547</sup> "Gopal Subramaniam Seeks Withdrawal of Candidature as a Judge of SC," *Times of India*, June 25, 2014, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Gopal-Subramaniam-seeks-withdrawal-of-candidature-as-a-judge-of-SC/articleshow/37174517.cms>.

<sup>548</sup> Dhananjay Mahapatra, "Centre Cites 2G Probe, Radia Links to Oppose Gopal Subramaniam's Appointment as SC Judge," *Times of India*, June 20, 2014, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Centre-cites-2G-probe-Radia-links-to-oppose-Gopal-Subramaniam-appointment-as-SC-judge/articleshow/36852561.cms>.

2014, the BJP government delayed the nomination of Gopal Subramaniam to the Supreme Court of India in June 2014.

The BJP also faced allegations in the mysterious death of Judge Brijgopal Harkishan Loya on November 2014. This case has drawn attention due to the fact that he was a Special Judge to the Gujarat Central Bureau of Investigation and was engaged in bringing a case against Amit Shah's involvement in the fake encounter case of Sohrabbudin Sheikh.<sup>549</sup> His judgement on the case was due on December 15, 2014. In November 2017, Judge Loya's family raised suspicion that he died under suspicious circumstances.<sup>550</sup> His death successfully created an environment of fear and intimidation in the judiciary.<sup>551</sup> Doubts were further raised when Dr. R.K. Sharma — the former head of the Forensic Medicine and Toxicology Department at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in Delhi, declared that Judge Loya did not die of heart attack.<sup>552</sup> The family claimed that he was poisoned.<sup>553</sup> When civil society leaders and the media pressured the Supreme Court for an independent inquiry, the apex court declared it was a serious matter and carried out an inquiry.<sup>554</sup> The way the inquiry was handled by the Chief Justice of India (CJI), led to the press conference of the four senior-most judges of the Supreme Court, an unprecedented controversy in Indian judicial history. On April 19, 2018, the CJI rejected the petition and upheld decision of Bombay High Court that the BJP government was not responsible for the death of Judge Loya and that he died a natural

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<sup>549</sup> "Mysterious Death of Justice Loya a Serious Issue: Supreme Court," *Times of India*, January 12, 2018, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/mysterious-death-of-justice-loya-a-serious-issue-supreme-court/articleshow/62470560.cms>.

<sup>550</sup> "Timeline of Judge Loya Case," *The Hindu*, April 19, 2018, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/timeline-of-judge-loya-case/article23600908.ece>.

<sup>551</sup> "Judge Loya Case: Judiciary 'Worked Overtime' to Back State's Inquiry, Counsel Alleges," *Wire*, March 9, 2018, [https://thewire.in/230875/judge-loya-case-petitioners-counsel-accuses-judiciary-working-overtime-help-states-inquiry/?utm\\_source=twpage](https://thewire.in/230875/judge-loya-case-petitioners-counsel-accuses-judiciary-working-overtime-help-states-inquiry/?utm_source=twpage).

<sup>552</sup> Atul Dev, "Death of Judge Loya: Medical Documents Rule Out Heart Attack, Says Leading Forensic Expert," *Caravan*, February 10, 2018, <https://caravanmagazine.in/vantage/death-judge-loya-medical-documents-rule-heart-attack-forensic-expert>.

<sup>553</sup> "Judge Loya Case: Judiciary 'Worked Overtime' to Back State's Inquiry, Counsel Alleges."

<sup>554</sup> "Mysterious Death of Justice Loya a Serious Issue."

death.<sup>555</sup> The INC, along with seven opposition parties and members of civil society, criticized the decision.

Soon after assuming power in 2014, the BJP government tried to influence the selection and nomination of judges, including the Chief Justice of the Apex Courts. The government successfully amended the constitution by passing “the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) Act and the 99th Constitutional Amendment” in August 2014.<sup>556</sup> The Act and 99<sup>th</sup> amendment reduced the collegium’s powers and increased the influence of the Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition, as well as civil society representatives in the selection of top judiciary. Before the amendment, the collegium, comprised of the Chief Justice of India and “four senior-most Supreme Court judges” had the power “to form their opinion on judicial appointments and transfers.”<sup>557</sup> The famous three judges case in October 1998 vested this power in the office of Chief Justice and collegium.<sup>558</sup> The Supreme Court of India struck down this amendment as unconstitutional and restored the powers of collegium.<sup>559</sup> The judiciary never wanted the interference of political parties and the executive branch in order to maintain the independence of the judiciary.

The BJP government delayed the nomination of judges for specific purposes. The most conspicuous is the elevation of Justice Joseph, chief justice of Uttarakhand to the Supreme Court in 2018. Justice Joseph headed a bench in 2016 and quashed the decision of the BJP’s center government to impose governor rule in the state as well as to remove

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<sup>555</sup> Harish C. Menon, “India’s Supreme Court Won’t Allow a Probe into a Judge’s Mysterious Death,” *Quartz India*, April 18, 2018, <https://qz.com/india/1255932/judge-loyas-death-doesnt-need-further-investigation-indias-supreme-court-says/>.

<sup>556</sup> “NJAC Vs Collegium: The Debate Decoded,” *The Hindu*, October 16, 2015, sec. In-Depth, <https://www.thehindu.com/specials/in-depth/njac-vs-collegium-the-debate-decoded/article10050997.ece>.

<sup>557</sup> Krishnadas Rajagopal, “The Validity of the Collegium System,” *The Hindu*, June 25, 2014, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/the-validity-of-the-collegium-system/article6148870.ece>.

<sup>558</sup> Rajagopal.

<sup>559</sup> Krishnadas Rajagopal, “SC Bench Strikes down NJAC Act as ‘Unconstitutional and Void,’” *The Hindu*, October 17, 2015, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/supreme-court-verdict-on-njac-and-collegium-system/article7769266.ece>.

the INC state government.<sup>560</sup> The collegium recommended his name along with Indo Malhotra in January 2018 for elevation to the Supreme Court of India.<sup>561</sup> The BJP government appointed Indo Malhotra; however, it returned the name of Justice Joseph to the collegium in April 2018 for reconsideration on the pretext of being too junior at age 42, compared to the seniority of justices of high courts, as well as on the basis of an equal representation plea.<sup>562</sup> The government argued that instead of him, a justice from an SC or ST caste or from states that do not have representation in the Supreme Court be elevated. The BJP government, as per the constitution, used its discretion, but various scholars criticized the decision as based on the BJP's vendetta against Justice Joseph.<sup>563</sup> He was again recommended by the collegium and was elevated to the apex court in August 2018.<sup>564</sup> The delaying tactics of the government incurred the loss of eight months' seniority to Justice Joseph in the Supreme Court. The BJP government has still not filled 7 vacancies out of 31 in the Apex court in a move that delays the nomination of independent judges. The government is using CBI and Intelligence Bureau (IB) reports as a pretext to delay appointments.<sup>565</sup> There is widespread speculation that the BJP government is delaying the nominations and want to pack the courts with judges that are

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<sup>560</sup> "Uncertainty Over Justice KM Joseph's Elevation to Supreme Court," *The Tribune*, June 20, 2018, <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/nation/uncertainty-over-justice-km-joseph-s-elevation-to-supreme-court/608183.html>.

<sup>561</sup> "Uncertainty Over Justice KM Joseph's Elevation to Supreme Court."

<sup>562</sup> Dhananjay Mahapatra, "Centre Accepts Justice Joseph's Elevation to Sc, Appointment of 3 Judges Cleared: Sources," *Times of India*, August 3, 2018, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/centre-accepts-justice-josephs-elevation-to-sc-appointment-of-3-judges-cleared-sources/articleshow/65250050.cms>.

<sup>563</sup> Debanish Achom, "Justice KM Joseph, Rejected Earlier by Centre, To Be Supreme Court Judge," *NDTV.Com*, August 3, 2018, <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/justice-km-josephs-elevation-to-supreme-court-cleared-by-centre-1894442>.

<sup>564</sup> Achom.

<sup>565</sup> Pradeep Thakur, "It May Take 15 Years to Fill up Judge Vacancies in All HCs," *Times of India*, September 16, 2018, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/as-retirement-eats-into-fresh-appointment-of-judges-it-may-take-15-years-to-fill-up-existing-vacancies/articleshow/65825263.cms>.



pro-Hindu nationalism.<sup>566</sup> There are 1,079 posts available in high courts, but 427 have yet to be not filled.

### C. THE BJP'S IMPACT ON DEMOCRATIC NORMS

What has the BJP's domination in India's national parliament since 2014 meant for India's secular democracy and its religious minorities? As mentioned previously, Larry Diamond identifies four basic elements of democracy that are essential for the institution to function: "a political system for choosing and replacing the government through free and fair elections; the active participation of the people as citizens in politics and civic life; protection of the human rights of all citizens; and a rule of law, in which the laws and procedures apply equally to all citizens."<sup>567</sup> Do BJP activities threaten these notions that have guided Indian democracy?

This chapter illustrates that the rise of Hindu nationalist BJP is transforming a secular, multi-ethnic society and the institution of democracy to reflect its priorities. The BJP and its affiliates have targeted religious minorities and the rights of women through the *Ghar wapsi*, the Love Jihad drive, and cow vigilante mob lynchings. These events have created fear among minorities or anyone who chooses to eat beef. Since dominating the parliament in 2014, the BJP has carried out amendments to the constitution in order to reshape the judiciary, affect Muslim civil laws, and saffronize education curricula as well as education institutions. In addition, as the evidence above has shown, the BJP has also tried to manage the media, judiciary and civil society through replacement. Its affiliates have aided in this process through the intimidation and assassinations of journalists, scholars, thinkers, social activists and judges. The BJP and its affiliates have used the escalation of violence in Indian-administered Kashmir and the imposition of governor rule as a strategic means to change the authority relationship between the state and the central government. These developments created a threat to the political processes of

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<sup>566</sup> "BJP Wants to Fill Courts with It Own People, Says Congress," *Hindu Business Line*, April 26, 2018, <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/bjp-wants-to-fill-courts-with-it-own-people-says-congress/article23686871.ece>. and "This Government Doesn't Want Fearless and Independent Judges," *Rediff News*, January 17, 2018, <http://www.rediff.com/news/interview/this-govt-doesnt-want-fearless-independent-judges/20180117.htm>.

<sup>567</sup> Diamond, "What Is Democracy? Lecture at Hilla University for Humanistic Studies."

holding fear-free elections and the protection of minorities, human rights, freedom of the press and the right to dissent. While the opposition and civil society have continued to resist these attempts to protect secularism and democracy of India, is India heading toward a compromised democracy and destabilization as a result of it?

### 1. The BJP's Impact on Free, Fair Elections and Active Participation

The national elections of 2014 were fair, but not free of fear. The BJP assumed power through the democratic process of fair elections. However, the environment created by the BJP during its campaign was not free of fear. The “free and fair elections” principle illustrates that there was no election rigging, voters were not forced to cast votes in a particular way and there was no fear of retribution to elect candidates of their own choice. The highest turnout in the electoral history of India at 66.4 percent was recorded.<sup>568</sup> But minorities, especially Muslims and Dalits in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and other northern states no doubt experienced fear. The Muzaffarnagar riots in Uttar Pradesh denied opportunity to 50,000 Muslims who were displaced into relief camps, where they could not cast their votes due to fear, disappointment, and the lack of identity cards that were destroyed during riots.<sup>569</sup> The Hindu nationalist slogans such as *garva se kaho, hum Hindu hai* (Say with pride, I am a Hindu), calling Modi *the Hanuman* of Lord Ram, “*Bahu betiyon ki izzat bachao*” (Save the honor of daughters-in-law and daughters), “*Mala key saath Bhalla*” (pray and fight) and “*Shastra ke saath shashtra*” (weapons along with scriptures), were used to spread the notion of fear of the domination of Hindu nationalists among minorities. Amit Shah created an environment of fear by urging villagers of Uttar Pradesh to teach Muslims a lesson, as they were labeled terrorists.

The environment of fear persisted during various state elections since 2014. The INC was successfully cornered by the BJP for being a pro-minority party, thus forcing it to back off pursuing Muslim voters for the first time in India's political history since

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<sup>568</sup> Bharti Jain, “Highest-Ever Voter Turnout Recorded in 2014 Polls, Govt Spending Doubled Since 2009,” *Times of India*, May 13, 2014, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/news/Highest-ever-voter-turnout-recorded-in-2014-polls-govt-spending-doubled-since-2009/articleshow/35033135.cms>.

<sup>569</sup> “Why India's Muzaffarnagar Riot Victims Will Not Vote,” *BBC News*, March 3, 2014, sec. India, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-26540989>.

1947, further marginalizing a community that was already facing hate speech and threats from RSS cadres. Meanwhile, the RSS's 5 million cadres on the ground mobilized pro-BJP voters. Their presence in the streets was intimidating to anti-BJP voters. The mob lynching of cow vigilantes, the Saharanpur riots, and anti-Dalit riots in Rajasthan, Maharashtra, all created a sense of fear among the minority voters as well as those who would usually oppose BJP candidates openly in civil society. While the RSS used violence, the BJP stayed silent. The killing of a Muslim techie, the mob lynching by cow vigilantes, and the mysterious murders of Judge B. H. Loya, Dr. Kulburgi, Mr. Pansare and journalist Gauri Lankesh created fear across India. Therefore, while the election was fair and free, the campaign shaped by violence and threats shaped the environment around it, curbing free political expression.

## 2. The Protection of Human Rights

According to the United Nations, "Human rights are rights inherent to all human beings," including "the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education, and many more without discrimination of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion."<sup>570</sup> In relation to this definition, the radical organization's pressure on Hindu women not to marry Muslim men through the campaign of Love Jihad is a restriction of their freedoms. This campaign is an attempt to deny individuals a choice in selecting a life partner through love rather than religious discrimination. Dahl, while substantiating the protection of women's rights, argued that "polyarchy grants political rights to even slaves, women and the poorest."<sup>571</sup> Ramiz, a Muslim boy and Lisa, a Hindu girl of West Bengal, were among those hundred couples who faced death threats.<sup>572</sup> While the Supreme Court of India allowed a Hindu girl, Hadiya Jahan, to maintain her marriage to

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<sup>570</sup> "Human Rights," United Nations, August 30, 2016, <http://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/human-rights/>.

<sup>571</sup> Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics*, 4.

<sup>572</sup> Annie Gowen, "A Hindu College Student's Phone Pinged with a Terrifying Message. Her Name Was on a 'Love Jihad' Hit List," *Independent*, April 27, 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/muslim-hindu-couples-love-jihad-hit-list-facebook-interfaith-relationships-extremism-violence-a8325106.html>.

her Muslim spouse on March 8, 2018, despite objections from her family and extremist organizations, the National Investigation Agency is still investigating the couple on anti-terrorism suspicions.

The *Ghar Wapsi* movement is also an attempt to restrict the freedom of religion, as it becomes associated with the burning of Christian villages and killing of their pastors. These actions were not in line with the guidelines provided by Schmitter and Karl, that, “in a consolidated democracy, a majority rule to protect minority rights is *sine qua non*.”<sup>573</sup> According to them, if the majority makes decisions that harm the minority, constitutional provisions need to be there to protect the rights of minority.<sup>574</sup> Yet, the Modi government has not utilized any such provisions and has instead focused on changing the constitutional rights given to Muslims in 1948.

The BJP government derailed democracy and failed to protect human rights violations in Indian-administered Kashmir. The party scuttled a coalition with the PDP and imposed governor rule in June 2018.<sup>575</sup> Security forces used pellet guns and deprived 88 protestors from their eyesight in 2017 alone.<sup>576</sup> The UN Human rights argued that between July 2016 and August 2017, 6,221 people were injured by the metal pellets. Civil society organizations “believe that many of them have been partially or completely blinded.”<sup>577</sup> The Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), which gives the military excessive rights, remains in place in Kashmir.

The current situation follows Barbara Crossett’s notion of rogue democracy. She states that these democracies go off the rails, display cruelty to citizens, backtrack on the

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<sup>573</sup> Schmitter and Karl, “What Democracy Is . . . and Is Not,” 79.

<sup>574</sup> Schmitter and Karl, 79.

<sup>575</sup> “What Happens When Governor’s Rule Is Implemented in a State?,” *India Today*, June 20, 2018, <https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/gk-current-affairs/story/governor-rule-in-jammu-kashmir-1264928-2018-06-20>.

<sup>576</sup> Peerzada Ashiq, “Ban Pellet Guns in Kashmir: Amnesty,” *The Hindu*, September 14, 2017, <https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/ban-pellet-guns-in-kashmir-amnesty/article19680555.ece>.

<sup>577</sup> “First-Ever UN Human Rights Report on Kashmir Calls for International Inquiry into Multiple Violations,” United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2018, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23198>.

promise that democracy will foster liberty and equality, and use legal methods to destroy political opponents through the courts. As illustrated earlier in this chapter, Prime Minister Modi's aversion to criticism has threatened the watchdog institutions in the civil society, such as the media. Recently, when a Muslim girl Asifa was raped in Kashmir, leading to protests, the media was denied media access. The government and its affiliated organizations have tried to undermine the freedom of the media and outspoken members of civil society.

### **3. The BJP's Relationship with the Rule of Law**

While the BJP government works generally in line with India's constitutional norms and enforced rule of law, serious exceptions exist. "The UN defines the rule of law as 'a principle of governance in which all persons, institutions and entities, public and private, including the State itself, are accountable to laws that are publicly promulgated, equally enforced and independently adjudicated, and which are consistent with international human rights norms and standards.'<sup>578</sup> India's opposition parties and civil society have criticized the government for the violations of the rule of law. The criticism is based on partial implementation of the rule of law when it comes to activities in which BJP supporters are involved, for instance in mob lynching. The BJP government has yet to punish perpetrators of mob lynching. Another example of unequal implementation of the law the stripping of citizenship of four million Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants into Assam. However, the Hindus from Bangladesh were spared. Most seriously, the rule of law faces a threat as the BJP attempts to compromise the independent judiciary as shown in the constitutional amendments, such as the 99<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendment and the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) Act in August 2014. The aim was to reduce the powers of the judiciary in the selection and nomination of CJI and the judges of apex courts vis-a-vis the parliament.<sup>579</sup> The Supreme Court of India struck it down on the pretext of maintaining the independence of the judiciary and protecting democracy. The BJP successfully created a rift among the senior-most judiciary of the

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<sup>578</sup> Norul Mohamed Rashid, "What Is the Rule of Law?," United Nations and the Rule of Law, accessed November 4, 2018, <https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/what-is-the-rule-of-law/>.

<sup>579</sup> Jaffrelot, "India's Democracy at 70: Toward A Hindu State," 60.

Supreme Court over B. H. Loya's case, as well as the medical colleges scam case. However, the CJI showed unprecedented courage to maintain the status quo on the construction of Ram Mandir, as well as on the Hadiya Jahan anti-love Jihad case. Such acts threaten the democratic practices in India, therefore threatening the very institution of democracy as outlined by Larry Diamond.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

The BJP's Hindu nationalist actions and its silence on the violence of extremists appears to be shifting India's liberal democracy toward an ethnic democracy as described by Sammy Smooha, where the dominant nationalist ethnic group can declare minor ethnic groups a threat to state, impose control over them, and restrict their rights.<sup>580</sup> The BJP's lack of decisive action against cow vigilantes and their mob lynching, especially the murders of journalists, civil society intellectuals, scholars and anti-Hindutva individuals, shows this shift in Indian democracy. It cannot be assumed that India's democracy has totally become illiberal. Clearly, democratic processes are in progress; the opposition is protesting inside and outside parliament, and civil society is resisting through the use of protests, social media campaigns and petitions in the courts. The BJP and its affiliate radical religious organizations face resistance from pro-secular and democratic forces, due to which the BJP has yet to change Article 370 on the special status of Indian-administered Kashmir, introduce a Unified Civil Code and build the Ram Temple on site of Babri Mosque. Yet, its acts are undermining the secularism and democracy and therefore requires a closer examination of this ongoing threat to the Indian system that, as many scholars argue, is the reason for Indian stability.

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<sup>580</sup> Jaffrelot, 70.

## V. CONCLUSION

India's democracy, the largest democracy in the world, is currently experiencing a transition that may mean a threat to its institutions; the threat is coming from a democratically elected, right-wing Hindu nationalist party, the BJP. Threats to India's democracy could weaken regional democratization and undermine economic growth, as well as destabilize internal, regional, and global security. This thesis sought to answer the question of whether the 2014 election, the subsequent rule of the Hindu-nationalist BJP, and its support of affiliate Hindu radical organizations, are challenging the secular democracy of India. Larry Diamond's framework of democracy was utilized to understand whether Indian democracy is experiencing a fundamental shift. The research detailed the decline of the previous dominant ruling party, the INC, and parallel rise of the BJP in the vacuum that was left behind leading to its full control of the parliament in 2014. The thesis went on to describe how the BJP and its affiliates have treated minorities and civil society including media and the judiciary, in order to determine how the rise of Hindu nationalists in a multi-ethnic India is affecting India's democratic institutions. Specifically, the initial hypothesis tested here whether the BJP's rise to power has had no effect on democratic institutions, a positive effect, or, finally, a negative effect on India's democracy. What this thesis has illustrated is that while the BJP has come to power using democratic institutions such as elections and campaigning, it has had a negative effect on India's democracy because of its attack on minorities and watchdog institutions.

### A. FINDINGS: THE BJP'S NEGATIVE EFFECT ON INDIA'S DEMOCRACY

The BJP's rise cannot be simply understood based on the BJP's activities and campaign. While these factors played an effective role, it is important to understand the structural changes that have occurred in India since the 1960s that shifted the power basis in the country, especially in the countryside. These power changes affected the INC, the dominant secular party of India that led the country to independence from the British in 1947. This vacuum then created space for the Hindu nationalist movement to grow and allowed its political wing to take over the parliament in 2014.

## **1. The Decline of the INC Helped the BJP's Rise**

The second chapter of this thesis described the decline of the INC, once an all-encompassing, secular-looking party. The failure of the INC to maintain “the Congress System,” was due to weak leadership after Indira Gandhi, leading to organizational decay, lack of intra-party democracy, centralized control and disregard for the opinions of regional leadership, which together led to the defection of regional leadership to form new regional parties and caste-based parties. In addition, at the same time, India saw the rise of a new, powerful political base among the new rich agrarian OBCs and SCs that the INC attempted to accommodate but ended up promoting an inconsistent ideology instead. Furthermore, charges of corruption and a lackluster campaign in 2014 weakened the INC to a degree where it could not compete with the rise of the religious nationalist BJP that used this vacuum to further accuse the INC of being against the Hindu majority and anti-competition, due to special affirmative action programs known as the reservation policies.

## **2. The BJP Moving India toward a Non-secular, Ethnic Democracy**

Chapter II also described the BJP's comprehensive electoral strategy that was able to then target the INC by portraying the INC as pro-minority and pitched the secular ideology of the INC against religious Hindutva. Under the strong leadership of Modi and Amit Shah, the BJP was able to use the Gujarat economic model, an economic success story under then-Chief Minister Modi from 2002 to 2014, in their aggressive electoral campaign during a time of global economic decline. This electoral strategy won a landslide victory for the BJP; however, it has polarized Indian society along religious lines and threatened minorities as well as critical elements of civil society that act as watchdog institutions.

Since 2014, the BJP has tried to convert India's secular democracy, as guaranteed by the constitution, into what Smootha describes as an ethnic democracy.<sup>581</sup> The BJP is in the process of undermining the four basic elements of a liberal democracy as outlined by Larry Diamond: “free and fair elections; the active participation of the people, as citizens,

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<sup>581</sup> Christophe Jaffrelot, “India’s Democracy at 70: Toward a Hindu State?,” *Journal of Democracy*; *Baltimore* 28, no. 3 (July 2017): 60, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2017.0044>.



in politics and civic life; protection of the human rights of all citizens; and rule of law, in which the laws and procedures apply equally to all citizens.”<sup>582</sup>The BJP government’s use of its relationship with extremist organizations such as the RSS, VHP, and *Bajrang Dal* has led to a shift in dominant political symbols and rhetoric, riots and violence, and active alteration of norms and laws, including in the administration of Indian-administered Kashmir, leading to an expanding insurgency.

The shifting political space can be seen when one looks at the strategy of replacing symbols of secularism with those that represent a Hindu nation and in identifying a common enemy that threatens Hinduism. The BJP encouraged the Love Jihad movement and *Ghar Wapsi* (return home) movement that focused on religious separations versus common symbols of unity. The replacement of secularism with Hindutva symbols did not restrict itself to electoral mobilization movements and slogans only. In line with the *Ghar Wapsi* movement, the BJP government changed Islamic names of cities and towns in Uttar Pradesh. Additionally, attempts to change the rhetoric related to Gandhi's Hindu nationalist assassin, to celebrate the destruction of Babri Mosque as a day of valour and victory, to change the name of Christmas Day to Good Governance Day, to insist that schools should install statues of Hindu gods, and to vigorously pursue a case to gain permission to build the Ram Temple in Ayodhya at the site of the demolished Babri Mosque demonstrate a move toward Hindutva ideology as governance model rather than secularism. When civil society, as well as the press and the judiciary, have attempted to protect secular democracy of India, the BJP and its affiliate radical organizations used violence, laws, and government institutions to silence them. This ongoing battle is currently unfolding in India, led by courageous journalists, intellectuals and the judiciary.

The BJP’s and RSS’s leaders’ religious and ethnically charged, irresponsible actions and words have led to an expanding polarization in a multi-ethnic, secular Indian society, and created fear among minorities. The leaders have labeled Muslims as terrorists and urged them to migrate to Pakistan and Bangladesh from India. The Uttar

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<sup>582</sup> Larry Diamond, “What Is Democracy? Lecture at Hilla University for Humanistic Studies,” January 21, 2004, <http://web.stanford.edu/~ldiamond/iraq/WhaIsDemocracy012004.htm>.

Pradesh government closed slaughter houses and targeted Dalits and Muslims economically. The BJP government is also saffronizing education curricula and institutions by appointing Hindutva followers to rewrite textbooks in line with Hindutva ideology. The BJP and RSS's attempts to alter norms and laws and to convert people to Hinduism has increased anti-minority feelings.

In Chapter III, this thesis showed that BJP has used riots as a campaign strategy that may be producing dangerous reactions that threaten Indian stability. Indian society is experiencing a widespread reaction to the BJP's Hindu nationalist and anti-secular policies. Various Dalit students have committed suicide in protest. The Dalits of Uttar Pradesh has established a private militia, "the *Bhim Army*," to safeguard their communities from the oppression of upper caste Hindu nationalists. The Muslims of Indian Administered Kashmir are protesting on daily basis and the majority of them now are asking for independence. ISIS and al-Qaeda may also influence the Muslim minority under threat due to Hindu nationalism. An exodus of Muslim, Christian and Dalit refugees may begin, even as the region is already experiencing the exodus of Rohingya Muslim refugees from Myanmar to neighboring countries due to religious nationalism in that country. India already has four million Bangladeshi refugees since 1971, who are facing forced eviction and may react.

### **3. Controlling the Watchdog Institutions**

In Chapter IV, this thesis showed BJP's attempts to avoid accountability and silence critics over anti-minority actions. The BJP subtly used direct and indirect government approaches to control the media and the judiciary. The government is using institutions such as the CBI and police, and laws such as sedition and defamation against the media and journalists to remove hurdles to further the BJP's Hindu nationalist agenda. The BJP has also formed alliances with big media corporations and punished those in the media that are attempting to maintain their independence, as in the case of NDTV. The BJP government has cancelled the licenses of news channels and forced print as well as electronic media to remove editors and anchorpersons who may be critical of the government. The BJP government, its parliamentarians and affiliate radical

organizations used defamation laws to restrict media freedom. The affiliated extremist organizations selectively have used death threats and physically assaulted journalists.

The judiciary has also come under an attack, although it is a more difficult institution to control. The BJP is attempting to influence the judiciary by appointing advocates who represent the BJP's interests and delaying the appointment of those who are seen to be anti-BJP. The BJP government has still not filled 7 vacancies in the Supreme Court and 427 out of 1079 judges of high courts. The India media has accused the BJP of delaying nominations to pack courts with judges with a Hindu nationalist mindset. The BJP government has attempted to amend the constitution to have more say in the selection and nomination of judges. To maintain the independence of the judiciary, the Supreme Court has bravely struck down this amendment as unconstitutional and restored the powers of the collegium.

#### **4. Attempts to Silence Civil Society's Objections**

Besides the media and the judiciary, the BJP government used laws and its affiliate radical organizations used threats to silence civil society members who resisted the Hindu nationalists' anti-minority agenda, as shown in Chapter IV. The BJP government has used the renewal of licensing laws to attack civil society groups such as NGOs. By October 2018, 11,319 out of 33,000 NGOs lost their FCRA license. Allegations of anti-nationalism have been used to attack critical groups. The enforcement directorate has been used to raid the offices of NGOs. Meanwhile, the BJP's affiliated organizations have threatened eminent scholars and leaders of minority communities, such as Dalits, who are seen as critical. To protest such restrictions on the freedom of expression, 39 writers have returned their Sahitya Akademi awards during the last three years. The watchdog institutions are essential elements of democracy and the BJP's attack on them illustrates a threat to India's secular democracy.

#### **5. The BJP and Principles of Democracy: A Report Card**

Does India's democracy adhere to Larry Diamond's four basic elements of democracy under rule of the BJP? Does it engage in "a political system for choosing and replacing the government through free and fair elections; the active participation of the

people, as citizens, in politics and civic life; protection of the human rights of all citizens; and a rule of law, in which the laws and procedures apply equally to all citizens?”<sup>583</sup> The national elections of 2014 were fair but not free of fear. The BJP assumed power through the democratic process of fair elections but the BJP’s campaign was not free of fear. The religious hysteria created due to a divisive campaign based on Hindu nationalism discouraged minorities, especially Muslims and Dalits in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and other northern states to vote due to fear. The presence of five million RSS cadre across country added to the fear by calling Muslims “terrorists” and critics “anti-nationalist.” This fear restricted the active participation of voters of opposition parties and curbed their voluntary participation in elections as well as other aspects of national life.

The BJP and the affiliated RSS are engaged in violating human rights. They have threatened women’s rights and discouraged women from freely expressing their right to marry who they want through the use of Love Jihad movement. *Ghar Wapsi* (return to home), attempted to restrict the freedom of religion through a movement that has been on the rise since 2014. Cow vigilantes have restricted Muslim rights by preventing the slaughtering cows on Eid ul Azha, which is a religious ritual. The government and its affiliated organizations have tried to undermine the freedom of media, judiciary, and civil society. The student wing of the BJP, ABVP, has attacked secular students groups by targeting their leaders, such as Rohit Vemula, Muthukrishnan Jeevanantham, Umar Khalid and many more in institutions of higher education, by describing them as anti-national.

The BJP government has also derailed democracy and failed to protect human rights violations in Indian-administered Kashmir. Security forces have used pellet guns to control people instead of democratic institutions. Civil society organizations believe that 6,221 have been partially or completely blinded.<sup>584</sup> Over 27 internet sites have been shut down in Kashmir in 2017, denying media access. The Armed Forces Special Powers Act

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<sup>583</sup> Diamond, “What Is Democracy? Lecture at Hilla University for Humanistic Studies.”

<sup>584</sup> “First-Ever UN Human Rights Report on Kashmir Calls for International Inquiry into Multiple Violations.”

(AFSPA) has not been lifted despite widespread protests. The basic human rights of the people are suspended and violence is directed toward the people of Indian-administered Kashmir on the pretext of anti-terrorism measures.

The BJP's attack on the legal framework also is a sign of declining democracy. While the BJP government has worked generally in line with India's constitutional norms and enforced the rule of law, serious exceptions exist, as observed in the activities of BJP supporters and the extremist radicals who are not subject to the rule of law. For example, in the case of mob lynching, there is not a single mob lynching case in which the cow vigilantes were punished. The BJP government also did not ensure the rule of law to the murderers of anti-Hindutva civil society members. The government claimed to apprehend the murderers of Gauri Lankesh, Govind Paresare and Dr. Kalburgi; however, it has failed to expand on the causes for their murders and therefore, ignores the larger trends and groups behind the attacks. Finally, as discussed earlier, the judiciary has come under attack through constitutions amendments and deliberate delays.

While the BJP took over the government in 2014 through a democratic electoral process, the BJP threatens India's secular democracy specifically by encouraging violence toward minorities, minority activists, an independent civil society and judiciary, as well as by contravening the rule of law. The BJP's Hindu nationalist actions and its silence on the violence of extremists is shifting India's liberal democracy toward an ethnic democracy. Smootha rightly pointed out that, in an ethnic democracy, the dominant nationalist ethnic group can declare minor ethnic groups a threat to state, impose control over them, and restrict their rights. It cannot be assumed that India's democracy has totally become illiberal. Democratic processes are in progress. The opposition is protesting inside and outside parliament and civil society is resisting using protests, social media campaigns and petitions in the courts. Though media and opposition argued that the CJI Misra was compromised, he came out with very strong anti-Hindutva decisions on the cases related to the Babri Mosque and the Hadiya Jihan Love Jihad trial. Therefore, the BJP and its affiliate radical religious organizations' have faced resistance from pro-secular cum democratic forces. In this battle, the BJP has yet to change Article 370, which grants special status to Indian-administered Kashmir, or introduce a Unified

Civil Code and build the Ram Temple on the former site of Babri Mosque. Though the BJP has undermined secularism and democracy significantly, it has only shifted India toward an ethnic democracy.

## **B. RECOMMENDATIONS**

To safeguard against current threats to India's liberal and secular democracy, the INC and regional parties must unite against the Hindu nationalist agenda. The media, including civil society, has to continue resistance through peaceful protests, social media campaigns and educating common people about the rise of Hindu nationalism within the secular democracy of India. The BJP defectors, who once were insiders, need to come out and educate people about Hindu nationalist designs by using all forms necessary. The UN and the international community such as the UN High Commission on Human Rights and international NGOs such as Reporters Without Borders should continue to pressure the BJP to stop violating basic human rights and freedom of the press. The United States and the European Union combined should link the violations of rights of minorities to trade with India, which may compel the BJP government to respect human rights, freedom of the press and the rights of minorities.

## **C. SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

There are multi-faceted topics for future research on democracy in India. The most immediate can be how the BJP is strategizing to win the 2019 elections. For example, what is a single point unifying the agenda for the opposition parties of India to restrict the continuance of the BJP rule in India? Has the BJP rule in India initiated the process of turning the existing, subtle north-south divide into a prominent fault line of Indian society? Has the BJP aggressive policy in Indian-administered Kashmir brought the people of Kashmir to a point of no return on compromising on their demand of independence? Was the press conference of four senior-most judges of the India's Supreme Court based on substantive issues? Is the BJP alliance with the corporate media houses restricting freedom of expression in India?

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