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Interplay of Religion and Caste in 21st Century's India**

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Revival of Hindu Nationalism: Interplay of Religion and Caste in 21st Century's India

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Abstract

The relationship between caste and religion remains to be an important problematic for modernity and electoral democracy in Indian socio-political discourse. The theme of this research paper lays its foundation on the intersections of caste and religious mobilisation in India. The spaces of religions mobilization in contemporary Indian politics have been determinately occupied by Hindutva (a form of Hindu nationalism). It is evident that the Hindutva project is precariously positioned on the political agenda of bringing in diverse caste groups and organizing them under an overarching Hindutva religious identity that often labels Muslims and minorities as the "other". The rise of political party such as Bhartiye Janta Party (BJP) on the premises of Hindu nationalism ushered a momentous change in the socio-political landscape of India. Deeply divided by caste Indian society have sustained its historically violent, unjust and unequal form of Hindu social order. Quintessentially, Hindu religion being the doctrine for such stratification has shaped the socio-political identities and differences. This has brought the caste consciousness and religious identities to the fore and more importantly the mobilization of electoral support on the basis of caste and religion as a complex phenomenon. Hence, this research paper aims to unfold the dynamics of caste and religion in contemporary political ambience charged by Hindu nationalist projects.

Keywords: Electoral-Democracy, Caste, Hindu Nationalism, Religion in India

Introduction

Contemporary India owing to the changes, on the account of modernity, may seem distinct from its past. However, the primordial affinities such as caste and religion remain obstinate to entice the academic discourses. Therefore, the relationship between caste and religion manifests an important problematic for modernity and electoral democracy in Indian socio-political discourse. This paper situates caste and religion amidst the larger discourse of the Hindu nationalism, the electoral politics and the process of desocialisation and marginalisation. The paper, in particular, maps the trajectory and the role of religion and caste for the purpose of mobilisation and vote-bank politics.

The paper begins with an overview of major theoretical considerations of caste to elaborate on the genesis, mechanism and the function of the caste system in India. The next section of the paper expounds the foundations of Hindu nationalism and its political project in relation to the ideological construction of Hindu nation and identity. Following this, the study explains the further development of Hindutva as a political ideology embedded in the electoral ambitions of the Hindu nationalist parties in India and their agenda of co-opting caste identities within the larger folds of Hindu identity. The underlying theme of this paper is to comment on the political and religious machinery that simultaneously marginalises the religious minorities along with the low caste population by facilitating socio-political disadvantage and discrimination, all in the name of protecting India's majority religious community-the Hindus.

Complexion and Dynamics of Caste in India

Caste has been a subject of sociological and anthropological inquiry in India for more than a century. Being the first to study and document caste, the Orientalists studied caste as hierarchy of endogamous groups and considered it a reciprocal system of exchange (Nesfield 1885, Risley 1889, Hutton 1946, Senart 1978), on the other hand the Indologist stressed that caste is to be defined in terms of its Hindu attributes and rationale, on the basis of its uniqueness to the Hindu India or at least to South Asia (Ketkar 1909, Bougle 1958, Cohn 1968, Pocock 1975, Inden 1990). However, both the schools of thought, for their analysis of the caste system, relied heavily on the classical Sanskrit texts, Hindu religious treatises and used colloquial knowledge and information as the source material.

Later on, structural-functionalist who studies caste influenced by British school of social anthropology, notably, Evans-Pritchard and Radcliffe-Brown, brought a decisive transformation in the studies of caste in India. In this context, mention must be made of the rejection of the Varna theory of caste which divided Indian society into four categories.¹ The scholars of the structural-functionalist

¹These are the Brahmins (priests), the Kshatriyas (the warriors), Vaishyas (the merchants), and the Shudras (the menial workers). Few scholars maintained that these were not castes but Varnas which were not hereditary but flexible. Some exponents of this view are Weber Max (1882) and Ghurye (1932).

approach studied caste as a structural phenomenon and considered it as a category or type within a general theory of social stratification focusing on the understanding of the "ordering" and "patterning" of the social world (Srinivas 1962, 1987, Marriott 1956, Gough 1975, Sharma 1980). Yet, undoubtedly, in one of the most sweeping as well as insightful theorisation, Louis Dumont (1980) considered the relative opposition of pure and impure to be the defining characteristic of the caste system. His understanding of caste system incorporated "use of binary opposition" and concept of "holism", referred to the relational value that encompasses all others that can be conceived of as part of its set. As a major criticism to Dumont many scholars pointed out that it failed to explain the social change, dynamism and individualistic strivings that can and do take place even within the orthodox Hindu way of living (Berreman 1971, Raheja 1988, Gupta 2000, Dirks 2002, Quigley 2002).

While caste in India has been evoked as traditional, native and ritualistic premised on the hierarchical Hindu social order, the influence of modernity, rallying around the concepts of development, progress, merit, inclusion and citizenship has changed its complexion on the basis of additional secular-political and material interests (Hardgrave 1969, Shah 1975, Frankel and Rao 1990, Kothari 1991, Beteille 1996, Fuller 1997). Introduction of modern secular-democracy and universal adult franchise largely influenced the character and scope of the involvement of caste in the political process. This resulted into bringing caste consciousness to the fore and most significantly, the complex phenomenon of mobilizing electoral support on the basis of caste. Pertinently, during the last three decades, political realignments and social churning in India's electoral democracy have unleashed a variety of patterns of the interplay of caste and politics. However, to be conscious of manifestations of caste and religion in a democratic society necessitates us to observe the process of discrimination and creation of inequality. While, caste as a Hindu social order based on gradation and differences expounds that, there hasn't been and cannot be a brotherhood or compassion within caste system. "The spirit of mistrust" is embedded in hegemonisation of caste since the empathy and the compassion are reserved for one's caste men, which lay a foundation of violence of isolation (Geetha 2016: 213). On the other hand, religious belief and ideologies have shaped and instituted discrimination and marginality through communalism and conflict in India (Pandey 1996, Jassal 2007).

Nationalism, Religion and Caste

Religion has played an important role in Indian nationalism so much so that the enormous overlap in personnel, assumptions, and symbols between mainstream Indian nationalism and Hindu communalism can be evidenced on the mobilisation of the people around religious issues. (Van Der Veer 2002, Sarkar 2005, Chatterjee 2007, Jaffrelot, 2007). Sarkar mentions that one can think of the "Bande Mataram" ("Hail to Thee, Mother") hymn cum-slogan, central to much anti-British patriotism and at the same time a Hindu rallying cry, at least in Bengal, during confrontations with Muslims (Sarkar 2005: 272). Colonial state conceived as fundamentally

Christian not neutral and secular also recognised a close association of aggressive Hinduism with nationalism (Van Der Veer 2002). Therefore, India nationalism coupled with the growth of religious movements not only rejected the appeal of non-violence by the Congress but also understood British colonialism as posing a threat to the Hindu civilization (Deol 2000, Jaffrelot 2007). In the great revolt of 1857, a large number of Hindu hermits and sages were also part of the forces which fought against the British forces of East India Company who were already part of a long drawn rebellion against the British and local authorities.² During the course of Indian nationalist movement, several Hindu leaders increasingly made emotional appeals through the literature, music, drama, and other art forms which had devotional and religious connotations. Hinduism became a source of India's identity Hindu nationalist, however, this also alienated members of other religious communities, particularly Muslims. For instance, "some historical novels in 19th century Bengal written by nationally prominent authors of Hindu origin were criticized for their bias against Muslim characters or episodes of history" (Dasgupta 2007).

At the same time, during the colonial rule in India, British through the process of Bureaucratization instated upper castes, who had hitherto maintained the dominance through religio-cultural ideology, into a unified bureaucracy for administration with effective power.³ The British provided the upper castes with a legitimising ideology by abridging the gulf between social dominance and state power while they also rigidified the caste system and the ritual hierarchy (Cohn 1997, Bayly 1999). The immediate effect of such an act of the British Raj brought the upper caste primarily Brahmins to the direct influence of English culture, education and ideals. East India Company used the services of the compradors and local literati who came from Hindu upper caste, mostly Brahmins (Galanter 1989, Dirks 2002, Jeffrelot, 2007). Consequently, new elites of upper caste emerged who were largely concerned of their interests but concurrently regarded the West as a threat to their culture and traditions. The exposure to the West and the ideas of liberalism and modernity was well received but at the same time the upper caste elites were not to abandon or disown their religious ideal and tradition. The first expression of Hindu mobilization as an ideological reaction to European domination was also a result of British imposition of cultural hegemony in cognizance with Western ideals and modernity. Reformist, therefore, became revivalists by pretending that, in emulating west, they were only restoring the pristine purity of their own traditions via eliminating later accretions (Jeffrelot 2007: 7). Hindu revivalist movements pioneered by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, who himself was western

²The establishment of British control over Bengal after 1757 led to increase in land revenue and the exploitation of the peasants. The Bengal famine of 1770 led peasants, whose lands were confiscated, displaced zamindars, disbanded soldiers and poor to come together in a rebellion. They were joined by the Sanyasis and monks. The Sanyasi Uprisings took place in Bengal between the periods of 1770-1820s. The Sanyasis also rose in rebellion after the great famine of 1770 in Bengal which caused acute chaos and misery. However, the immediate cause of the rebellion was the restrictions imposed by the British upon pilgrims visiting holy places among both Hindus and Muslims.

³As put by Bernard Cohn, the British Empire made its influence visible largely through gradual extension of officialising procedures (1997: 3). They controlled their many colonies by defining and classifying spaces, making separations and categorizing the indigenous population.

educated and employed by the East India Company and supported Western reform ideas founded Brahma Samaj in 1828 based on the ideas for removal of practices which retrograded Hinduism. Similarly, another revivalist, Swami Dayanand Saraswati, who had embraced *sanyas* (asceticism) founded Arya Samaj in 1875, which not only laid its principles focused on Vedic golden age as Brahma Samaj but also valorised the spiritual glory which represented Indian antiquity imbued with cultural and social greatness.

The Hindu revivalist movements which were part of the larger nationalist movement inaugurated a specific combination of endangerment and stigmatization of a threatening "Other" was only regional and limited towards influencing the larger Indian population. However, with the formation of Hindu Mahasabha by 1915 the ideas of a majority religion and dominant castes flourished and expanded its reach to most parts of India under colonial rule (Jaffrelot 2007: 12). The Hindu Mahasabha was not a party in its own right but a subgroup of Congress members and worked as a lobby within congress until it became a full-fledged party in the late 1930s under the leadership of V. D. Savarkar, who made its ideology so radical that it was seen as a communal and fundamentalist variety of politics (Jaffrelot 2007: 13). With this, for the first time, Hindu nationalism appeared on the political map of India and required reforming and systematising themselves in an organisational structure. This task was taken up by Keshab Baliram Hedgewar who founded RSS (*Rastriye Swayamsevak Sangh*) in 1925 at his home town Nagpur (Anderson and Damle 1987). The ideological position of RSS was called "Hindutva" due to its emphasis on Hindu consciousness and Hindu inspiration as the starting point for the realisation of power necessary for the self-protection of Hindus (Shah 2002, Zavos and Hansen 2004). In another major development, select Hindu religious leaders, under the leadership of the Swami Chimmayanand formed Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) in 1964. This group would act as a RSS affiliate in the field of religion to consolidate and strengthen Hindu society, to protect and spread Hindu values through various activities, and to establish and strengthen links among Hindus in different countries (Anderson and Damle 1987, Davis 2007, Jaffrelot 2007).

Development of Hindutva as a Political Ideology

However soon after independence negotiations and discussions between RSS and Hindu Mahasabha resulted into creation of Bhartiye Jan Sangh in 1951 to remain relevant and participate in electoral politics. The Jan Sangh grew as a major national party in 1977 for the sixth general elections and won 94 seats in the parliament of India. It merged with Janta government to oust Indira Gandhi government at center but it also broke away from Janta Dal in 1980 and found itself in its new avatar as Bhartiye Janta Party (BJP). Concomitantly, the Hindutva project of RSS kept trying a combination of aggressive integration, sometimes accommodating Sanskritising demands from below and constantly working on the fear of an "Other." But until they hit upon the idea of replacing a mosque in Ayodhya with a temple, all of this could not gather enough strength for the BJP to win a majority in any region of India.

The construction of a broad-based Hindu brotherhood opposed to its universal other: the Muslims, is clearly the result of a long drawn out ideological campaign (Jaffrelot 2007, Bandyopadhyay 2008). Unifying all Hindus without disturbing the dominance of the upper castes and classes has been the major challenge for the Hindutva (Shah 2002, Shani 2007). While the BJP had initially drawn its support mainly from upper-caste Hindus, the notion of a consolidated Hindu identity, the essence of Hindutva politics, became the most passionate appeal by them in electoral democracy (Corbridge and Harris 2000, Jaffrelot 2007, Varshney 2013). In subsequent elections, BJP rose to power at a remarkable pace; it had two seats in 1989 but increased its tally to 119 by 1996 although, it was still a minority party in the lower house of the Indian parliament which has 543 seats in total (Vanaik 2002). Such a phenomenal rise of BJP is credited to the political and ideological vacuum, at a time when people were disillusioned with the Congress party and its government which was consistently facing accusations of corruption. Varshney (2013) describes the Congress Party as, "the Congress is no longer a party but an undifferentiated, unanchored medley of individuals sustained by patronage" (Varshney 2013: 242). By the late 1980s, organizationally, the Congress was listless and ideologically, it was not obvious what it stood for. Professing secularism, its leaders were unafraid to use religion for political purposes and while professing socialism, some of its leaders wholeheartedly embraced the market (Varshney, 2013: 243). Subsequently, BJP played its strong Hindutva roots capitalizing on the national Hindu uproar over the Ramjanmabhoomi issue which was the movement concerning the disputed Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. Along with this BJP also orchestrated, Hansen called a mostly "anti-Rajiv" campaign citing issues of corruption in Bofors tank deal and Muslim Women's Bill, 1986, which the BJP was able to call an instance of how Congress appeased Muslims towards gaining votes (Hansen 1999: 321). The rise of BJP was also accompanied by the Babri Masjid-Ramjanmabhumi dispute of Ayodhya protests against reservation recommendations of Mandal commission. BJP due to its pro-upper-caste and pro-Ramjanmabhumi stance became an anti-reservation party and a communal party in India.

Religion and Caste in Electoral Democracy

Babri Masjid-Ramjanmabhumi dispute, undoubtedly one of the most sensitive communal issues, after the partition of India, provoked whole of the country in the grip of communal tension and hatred (Nandy et al. 1997, Corbridge and Harris 2000, Van Der Veer 2002, Jaffrelot 2007). Ramjanmabhumi i.e. Ayodhya city of India, the birthplace of Ram (according to Hindu community), which ought to be a sacred place of worship, took the shape of battle-field for both, the Hindus and the Muslims (Nandy and et al. 1997: 01). The identification of present Ayodhya (Uttar Pradesh) with Ramjanmabhumi is based upon the faith of the Hindu community with no historical evidence. Similarly, there is no conclusive proof that the mosque built at the time of Babar (1483-1530), a Mughal emperor, was on a temple site or that a temple had been destroyed to build it. However, during the

year 1992, the dispute took the form of a national crisis, when the Masjid was demolished with an intention to build a temple at that very site. The BJP was able to influence the Hindu voters on this issue and won more seats in the parliamentary election as well as in numerous state assemblies.

At the same time, Central government of India announced, on 7 August 1990, its decision (based on the Mandal Commission) to reserve 27% of civil posts for the socially and economically backward castes (SEBCs). The momentous policy announcement triggered a massive anti-reservation agitation on an unprecedented scale. The anti-Mandal agitation reflected the resistance by the privileged upper castes to the claims of the ascendant OBCs on the state resources. The movement also symbolized the extra-institutional struggle of the dominant castes in defense of the status quo and hence against reform and redistribution. BJP being predominantly an upper caste party due to its RSS association could not hide its views against reservation. Although BJP, like other national parties, supported the OBC reservations in principle, they emphasized the importance of "economic criteria" and advocated additional reservations for the economically poor of the upper castes and other communities. Their identical positions on the policy reflected their largely upper caste leadership and the crucial upper caste constituency; and their attempts to broaden their social base by supporting the policy.

Therefore in the light of these two events, BJP's communalist discourse became especially appealing to the now disenfranchised upper castes sensing their world being encroached upon by the lower caste communities (Hansen 1999, Corbridge and Harriss 2000). Consequently, the BJP's rhetoric of India as an endangered nation needing cultural purification and social harmony tapped into the sentiments of upper caste Hindus who turned to BJP to protect their social interests. In this context, the interplay of religion and caste in Indian socio-political spaces, although existent in the discourse of Hindu nationalism, became exceptionally apparent at this juncture.

Eventually, BJP led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government from 1998 to 2004 became the first ever non-Congress government in Indian political history. Ogden in his article "*A Lasting Legacy: The BJP-led National Democratic Alliance and India's Politics*", states that, the BJP precipitated profound changes in the nature and functioning of India's domestic politics during and after the NDA government through the core beliefs underlying their Hindutva (Hindu nationalist) ideology which contrasted with previous Indian Congress Party (Congress) governments who conceived of the Indian polity as being secular and inclusive (Ogden 2012: 22). Instead, the ideology of the BJP indicates "Hinduness" based upon a common culture, linguistic features and geographical unity encapsulated by the "Hindu, Hindi, Hindustan" triptych (Zavos 2003). Simultaneously, the BJP perceived also the crystallization of a caste-based movement as a threat to an undivided Hindu community and sought to avert this threat by dissolving this identity within a broader movement stamped with the seal of Hinduism (Jaffrelot 2003: 18). Therefore by co-opting lower caste leaders, BJP attempted at creating a larger vote-back with the support from lower caste and communities. Although, the success of such an effort was limited as the BJP continued to disproportionately entice upper-caste voters. While the low-caste

parties were gaining momentum the policy of co-opting lower caste leaders could only deliver smaller numbers of supporters it became apparent that the BJP cannot fully rely on the mechanisms of co-option.

In 2004 BJP lost the parliamentary elections and Congress went on to form the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) with 11 coalition partners, which was a surprise for the majority of India's political analysts. The rise of low-caste and regional parties (such as the Samajwadi Party and Bahujan Samaj Party) and backlash concerning the Gujarat riots of 2002 significantly affected such a change in India polity.⁴ While the RSS and Hindutva activists cited the neglect of core Hindutva ideology, ideological dilution due to the coalition and leadership differences between the BJP as the cause of the defeat (Jaffrelot 2007, Ogden 2012, Heath 2015).

New Wine in Old Bottles; Reviving Hindu Nationalism

In the last two decades, the Hindutva movement evolved from being a fringe ideology proposed by Savarkar in the early 1900s to a dominant discourse in Indian socio-political domain. This section of the paper deals with the conditions and concomitant developments of Hindu nationalism and the interplay of religion and caste with regard to electoral democracy of India.

The return to power for BJP in 2014 was marked by two very important historical incidents. First, it was the first time since 1977 that a non-Congress party secured an outright majority on its own. Second, the BJP managed to do so with an unprecedented vote swing, taking its share of the vote from 18.8% to 31.3% which was larger than any of the previous "waves" that Congress enjoyed – bigger than the Indira wave of 1980 and bigger than both of the post-assassination waves of 1984 and 1991 (Heath 2015: 123). Such a gain for the BJP had to be a result of the mobilisation of new voters and creation of a larger vote-bank. BJP's prime ministerial candidate Narendra Modi, in particular, orchestrated a vigorous campaign embarking on a whirlwind tour of the country, speaking at over 400 rallies, and was the focus of media attention everywhere. Undoubtedly, the key to the BJP victory was the appeal it had to new voters (2015, 124-125). Narendra Modi was also supported in his campaign by the RSS since the RSS leaders recognised Modi to be a true Hindu nationalist (Jaffrelot 2015: 162). The fact that Modi belonged to a backward caste was highlighted in states such as Bihar and Utter Pradesh, where caste has historically been an important determinant of

⁴In late February 2002, a train fire on the Sabarmati Express near Godhra, a city in eastern Gujarat, led to the death of 58 passengers, many of whom were Hindus returning from pilgrimage to the Ayodhya temple. Though the actual cause of the fire was never settled on, due to the religious aspect of these deaths, many blamed the fire on Muslims. In the days following, the state erupted into anti-Muslim violence that would last for three months. An estimated 1,054 people died during the riots while an additional 2,500 were reported to be injured and over 200,000 displaced. While the BJP state government painted the violence as a natural response to what they believed to be an act of violence against the Hindu pilgrims of the train, deeper investigation shows evidence that the riots were in fact pre-planned and instigated for the benefit of BJP politicians for the upcoming elections.

voting behaviour. While the Hindutva rhetoric about the appeasement of Muslims and the threat to Hindus has been the crux of the BJP's vote-bank, for the sake of larger alliance 2014 elections campaign also an attempted appeal to the castes other than upper castes. Such a larger alliance between the "Sangh Parivar" and the expected bonhomie with other castes brought a set of dilemma and predicaments.

One of the major dilemmas was for the upper-caste voters and party leaders of BJP. Thus, in the present context, it is essential to understand the tension and anxiety among the upper-caste community towards asserting their "casteness". Since in contemporary identity politics of India empowerment and recognition of social groups is attained by asserting the very same markers that distinguish and differentiate them from others as an assertion of self-identity based on difference rather than equality (Hasan 2010: 05). Upper caste too while inducing a distinct identity assert a self-formulated image which they express as a matter of pride. Thus, while the upper castes are compelled to tone down their assertive caste politics and join hands with other castes groups in the wider coalition of Hindutva politics, the boundaries and exclusivity of caste have been vehemently protected. Subsequently, it is also evident that the political alliance forged by upper castes in cooperation with other castes has only been a pragmatic move for the sake of attaining political power and no such interaction or cooperation is encouraged into the ritualistic or religious aspects of the caste.

However, the recent government of BJP instigated several controversies which not only created a communal space but also brought caste and religion to act together in the realm of public space and political sphere. Along with caste, religion once again, after the Ramjanmbhumi movement, became one of the sources of mobilization and differentiation in Indian politics and society. The cow protection movement once again became the treason for communal hostility between Hindu and Muslim and spilled over as a major discord among upper-caste and low caste Hindus.⁵ The origin of the cow protection movement has been located in the early days of Hindu nationalist movements during the British rule in colonial India (Pandey 1983, 1996; Damodaran 1992, Pinch 1999). Since the BJP government came to power at the Centre in 2014 the incidents of cow vigilantism have risen alarmingly. There have been 76 incidents of sever degree of hate crimes between 2014-2017, out of which 2017 has recorded the most, i.e. 37 incidents of hate crimes in the name of cow protection (Saldanha 2017).

⁵The Cow Protection Movement arose in Northern India in the wake of the efforts of the Kuka and the Arya Samaj to highlight the need for action on this issue. Stimulated by the writings and activities of Swami Dayanand Saraswati, the movement found a number of Gaurakshini sabhas (cow protection societies) in the early 1880s. The first was established in Punjab and then the movement spread to other parts of Northern and Central India. Nagpu.r, in the Central Provinces, was described as being the headquarters of the Gau.rakshini Movement in that decade. The focus of this paper is to chronicles this evet in the wake of recent mobilisation around the cow protection movement.

Articulation of Hindutva ideology in Relation to Caste and Religion

The political ideology of Hindutva by playing down the importance of caste: merely as an institution of Indian civilization aims at lessening the significance of the factors-like caste-that prevent from creating a larger Hindu identity. Simultaneously, a ploy to polarize both Hindu and Muslim communities through violent antagonism has remain central to the Hindutva politics. "It is through the construction and maintenance of boundaries between "us" and "them" that group identities are shaped" (van der Veer 1996: 156). Therefore, constructing identities of the "enemy other" and the "Hindu brethren" has been the most significant articulation of Hindutva ideology.

Thus, post-2014, the consistent propaganda of the cow protection and beef ban became one of the key issues, which not only determined the relations between the Hindus and the Muslims but also among the caste societies in India (Sarkar and Sarkar 2016). In 2015 India witnessed a wave of anti-beef legislation regarding bans on the sale, possession, and consumption of beef.⁶ In Hindu theology, while the cow is considered to be sacred and eventually consecrated in all the Hindu religious texts, beef is taken to be profane and impure.⁷ For this reason, a large section of Hindus believe that the cow is a sacred animal and needs to be revered. However, there are various caste and communities, within the Hindu fold, traditionally engaged in occupations of livestock, animal husbandry, farming and dairy. It is a common practice among them to sell old and stray cattle instead of abandoning them. Consequently, beef ban and cow protection was not only a targeted and planned aggression and violent assertion on the Muslims but also affected the livelihood and everyday practices of Dalits in India. In this context, the problem with resurgent Hindu nationalism in the form of Hindutva is that it has got carried away with a communal agenda that looks at non-Hindus as second grade citizens and at the root of this problem is the very doctrine of origin of caste system that divides humanity into superior and inferior (Mahendra 2016: 91).

Nonetheless, the real discord between Hindutva and Hinduism has been for more than a century. While Hindutva continues to answer the question, who exactly a Hindu is in very simplified terms which identify an individual as a Hindu. For Hindutva, Hindu is the one who practices and adheres to the principles of Hindu social order and religious belief. However, in the political context Hinduness looks to be nothing but a slogan. In contemporary India, religion and caste not only continues to play a role in the life of the nation but also influencing the electoral process and determining political success more than before. The Hindutva in present context has not just look to induce religious morality with its

⁶In 2015, the Maharashtra government got presidential assent for its very stringent legislation-Maharashtra Animal Preservation Act, which criminalized slaughter of cows, calf, bull and bullock together with consumption of beef in the state. BJP government of Haryana has now reconstituted the Gau Seva Ayog and packed it with activists and leaders from various outfits of Sangh Pariwar such as RSS, Bajrang Dal, BJP and VHP.

⁷In many Hindu texts Cow has been treaty as a deity or a creature who accompanies a deity. In some cases it also has been given the status of mother or sister of some of the Hindu Gods. See, Rig Veda V1.28.1.8. and VIII, 101. 15

aggressive campaign but also attempts to constantly create a greater fissure between the Hindus and the religious minority. Concomitantly, the oppressed castes in Hindu society too have been on the receiving end of the brunt of aggressive Hindutva politics due to their demands and repetitive challenge to the existing Hindu social order and its exploitative mechanisms.

Conclusion

Historically in India despite the intra-regional differences caste corresponded to the border category of Varna. The functions of Varna premised on the certain Hindu ideological conceptions such as *samskara*, *karma* and *dharma* were woven into the caste system in pursuit of ordering the different Varna, clearly intended to support the theory of Brahminical supremacy. Thus, one could argue that caste system and its ideology (the Brahmanic version of social order) pervaded entire India through religio-cultural symbolism in the form of mythologies, ubiquitous temples and social institutions, language (Sanskrit as the sacred and language of high order), codification of laws and customs, and imbued society with a sense of cultural unity. As far as caste and its interface with Hinduism are concerned, the justificatory ideology for the hierarchy and inequalities of the system proposed by Hindu social order gain its legitimacy from the religious hypothesisation of Hinduism.

In the realm of electoral democracy caste and religion have proven to be most influential in the process of mobilisation and identity assertion. In contemporary India, the growing religiosity of the caste groups, and the resulting growth in popularity and the strength of Hinduism, can be explained in these sets of factor - the nationalism in India expresses itself predominantly in Hindu idiom and there has also been rise of Hindu symbolism in political domain, especially for the purpose of mobilisation and process of "othering". Thus the emergence of a self-conscious assertion of Hinduism and Hindu identity and its interests, through mobilization cutting across caste lines has been the expected political extension of the interplay of religion and caste in India. Even though Savarkar played down the importance of caste as a mere institution of Indian civilization in proposing a Hindu *rastra* (nation) of consolidated Hindu identity, there has always been an undercurrent of nepotism and dominance of upper caste in the organisational and functional mechanisms of Hindutva.

In 2014 election campaigns the two most famous slogans for the BJP activists and supporters- "*Jo Hindu hit ki baat karega, wohi desh par raj karega*" (only he who promotes the Hindu interests will rule the country) and *Har har Modi ghar ghar Modi* (Hail Modi! Everywhere Modi!) reflected in the Hindutva project of Hindu nation and consolidation larger vote-bank. Therefore, forcing the dominant castes to loosen their grip on political power by reconciling and accommodating numerically insignificant caste groups became an essential component of reviving Hindu nationalism in contemporary India. The success and increasing popularity of the BJP and Narendra Modi along with series of violence due to imposition of Hindu symbolisms defiantly highlight the resurgent Hindu nationalism in India.

However it remains to be seen- how caste identities are negotiated in this period of heightened religio-cultural hostility and how BJP fulfills its promise of "*Sabka saath, sabka vikas*" (Collective efforts, inclusive growth) in times to come.

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