

The Powerful Rise of Hindu Nationalism and Its Impact

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Abstract: Hindu nationalism was born during India's struggle for national independence in the 19th century, and its core tenet is the establishment of a state ruled by Hinduism. It stands together with secularism as one of the two major sociopolitical trends in India. Since the start of its rule in 2014, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has pursued a series of policies promoting the powerful rise of Hinduism as the mainstream ideology in Indian society. Although Hindu nationalism focuses on domestic affairs, it has imperceptibly shaped India's foreign policy, and thus it has an ongoing influence on India's relations with other major countries as well as its neighbors. As such, it has formed an important perspective and indispensable factor in observing India's diplomacy. In the future, this momentum will continue to rise with the influence of Hindu nationalist organizations such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) continuing to expand, but it will face challenges from the traditional trends of thought such as secularism and pluralism.

Keywords: Hindu nationalism, Hinduism, Bharatiya Janata Party, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh

On December 11 of 2019, India passed the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) or the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). According to this amended Citizenship Law, India will conditionally accept those so-called persecuted Hindus, Zoroastrians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains and Christians arriving before December 31 of 2014 from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan as Indian citizens, with the exception of Muslims. This gave rise to large scale protests in Assam in Northeast India, the capital city of New Delhi, and other places, leading to a nationwide riot that led to several dozen

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deaths at least. Public opinion in India generally held this riot to be the most serious nationwide protest faced by Modi since he became India's prime minister in 2014. The passage of the CAB by the Indian authorities as well as their earlier endeavors to abolish the autonomous status of Indian Kashmir and to promote the building of the Hindu Temple of Rama on the ruins of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, have all reflected the powerful rise of Hindu nationalism within the Indian government and society. This paper attempts to unpick the evolution of Hindu nationalism, to summarize its impact on India's domestic politics and diplomacy, and to analyze its future development trend.

The Powerful Rise of Hindu Nationalism

Hindu nationalism arose in the 19th century during the struggle by the Indian people against the British colonialists for national independence. It fell silent after India gained independence in 1947, and resurfaced in the 1980s, and since 2014 it has risen powerfully to become the mainstream ideology in India. Although Hindu nationalism is rich and complex in content, its core appeal is the construction of an India ruled by Hinduism.

Over the past few centuries, the Indian subcontinent was repeatedly conquered and invaded, and in modern history it was ruled by the British colonialists. In the 19th century, the Indian national independent movement was on the rise, giving birth to a Hindu nationalism that constituted, together with secular nationalism, one of the two major ideological trends in India's national independence. The basic proposition of secular nationalism was that Indians, despite their differences in race, caste and religion, should be united in their common struggle against the British colonialists to ultimately build a politically independent and economically prosperous new India. Conversely, Hindu nationalism advocated a combination of national independence with religious interests, while suppressing so-called "heretics", including Muslims, as well as striving for Hindus to be able to access more political rights and economic interests during the course of winning national independence. In short, the definition of Hindu nationalism may be interpreted on two levels: Hinduism and nationalism. On the level of nationalism, this ideological trend, emerging during the course of India's national independence, demanded that

British colonialists withdraw from India and give India its independence. On the level of Hinduism, Hindu nationalism is very sectarian, not only opposing Muslims, but also seeking to build a state ruled by Hinduism. In Hindu nationalism, *Hindutva* written by V. D. Savarka, leader of the Hindu nationalist organization Hindu Mahasabha, has proved very influential, and is seen as a classic for Hindu nationalism. Hindutva was a new term created by Savarka, who personally expressed that what Hindutva emphasized was not religion, but a concept involving a nation, including history, culture and ethnicity, and thus assuming a strong political hue. Savarka held that although differences existed between Hindus, there were commonalities including religion, culture, history, race and language, upon which a definite and homogeneous nation was based and built. Compared this with the non-Hindu nations such as the Muslims, Savarka perceived Christians, Muslims and people who believed in other religions as people of another kind, namely “people who do not respect Hindu culture”. “Although Hindustan is also their motherland, but it is not their holy land. Their holy land is in Arabia and Palestine. And their myths and heroes do not root in this land either.” Savarka’s binary classification of “we” and “they” can be said to be the core of this thought, namely that Hinduism and Islam are two nations with different religions and racial backgrounds, histories and culture. Savarka repeatedly stressed that the Hindu traditions should be restored, and that a state ruled by Hinduism should be built.¹

M. D. Golwalkar, leader of the representative Hindu nationalist organization RSS, shared a similar viewpoint in his book *We or Our Nationhood Defined*. He deemed that Muslims and Christians living in India did not belong to this country, as in their minds they were not loyal to this country, and they did not love this country, and they even remained hostile to the Hindu way of life. He said that Muslim-populated area in India was a little “Pakistan”. According to this logic, Golwalkar excluded the Muslim and the Christian from the state of India.²

¹ Zhu Mingzhong and Shang Huipeng, *Yindujiao: zongjiao yu shehui* [Hinduism: Religious and social implications] (Shijie zhishi chubanshe [World Affairs Press], 2003), 144.

² Ibid., 148.

Until this day, Hindu nationalists have still taken the views of Savarka and Golwalkar among others seriously. These people believe that Hinduism is excessively diverse and complex when compared with the monotheistic religions such as Christianity and Islam, as there is no single religious text recognized by all Hindus, and nor is there a strict code of conduct that all Hindus must observe. In Hinduism there are multiple religious texts and numerous deities without a single god that all Hindus must worship. Historically, this attribute of Hinduism led to the decentralization of Hindu power, so that Hindus were not able to respond to the invasion by Muslims and British colonialists effectively. For this reason, Hindu nationalists have striven to create “Hindutva” through “culture reconstruction”, strengthening the common identity of all Hindus in order to transform Hinduism from a diverse and loose religion to that of a unified and well-organized religion based on shared religious beliefs. Only in this way are they able to maximize the cohesion of all Hindus, and join their forces through the rendering of an imaginary external threat in order to jointly serve Mother India. Meanwhile, Hindu nationalists have been striving to revive ancient Hindu society and culture, and build India into a state ruled by Hinduism. Moreover, they seek to shape the domestic and foreign policies of the Indian government according to Hindu beliefs and culture. In sum, for Hindu nationalists, the land of India is the land of Hinduism; Indian civilization is the civilization of Hinduism; the Indian way of life is the Hindu way of life; and the state of India is the state of Hinduism.¹ What Hindu nationalists are seeking is the goal of “one state (India), one religion (Hinduism), one nation (a nation believing in Hinduism), and one language (Hindi)”.

In recent years, Hindu nationalism has risen powerfully on the Indian sub-continent. After its independence in 1947, India’s first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru led his Indian National Congress (INC) government in adhering to secularism and opposing narrow Hindu nationalism, with the latter falling silent for a time. Since the 1980s, as the INC began to lose its super position in Indian politics, the concepts that it had pursued, including secularism and nationalism, began to fade away gradually, while Hindu

¹ Ibid., 150.

nationalism seized its opportunity to rise again. Hindu nationalist organizations, such as the RSS and the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), promoted the dismantling of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, and demanded that the government re-build the Hindu Temple of Rama on the ruins. As a major political party supporting Hindu nationalism, the BJP rapidly extended its influence among Hindus by supporting and promoting the reconstruction of the Hindu Temple of Rama. In the 1990s, the BJP won the bid for the federal government, thus becoming one of the two major parties in Indian politics, along with the INC.

In 2014, the BJP won the national election and formed its government. The growth and rise of the BJP as the highest power in India has resulted from its holding high of the banner of Hindu nationalism. After taking power in 2014, the BJP pursued a series of radical policies to fan the flames of Hindu nationalist sentiment. For instance, the BJP pushed the nationwide revision of place names, changing many place names with Islamic implications to new names that carried a strong Hindu hue. For example, Allahabad (meaning the place where Allah is), the city in northern India, that was built by the great Akbar of the Mughal Dynasty in the 16th century, has served as the administrative, military and cultural center of the Mughals. This city, which carried its name for 435 years, contains scores of places of historic interest, such as the former home of India's founding father Nehru and the old castle built by the great Akbar. However, the government of Uttar Pradesh, controlled by the BJP, insisted that the original name of the city was Prayagraj, meaning Hindu holy land, and accused the great Akbar of changing the city's original name. Accordingly, it officially renamed Allahabad as Prayagraj in 2018. Nevertheless, there are scholars in India who believe this to be pure imagination. For instance, Professor NR Farooqui, former vice-chancellor of Allahabad University, said "Prayag, also mentioned as Jhansi Prayag in some books, was a well-known pilgrimage destination. The place has been mentioned in several Hindu scriptures as well. But it was never a city."¹ The BJP government also began pushing extremist

¹ "Allahabad: The Name Change that Killed My City's Soul," BBC, accessed June 19, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-46015589>.

Hindu priorities, including an effort to locate a mystical river that features prominently in Hindu scriptures. Critics called this pseudoscience, and said the search was akin to using public dollars to study mermaids.¹

Since 2019, the BJP government has introduced a series of Hindu nationalist policies and agendas that are even more sensitive and of higher density. On August 5, India issued a presidential order repealing Article 370 of the Constitution that granted “Jammu and Kashmir” (Indian Kashmir) a special status. It established instead two federal territories—“Jumma and Kashmir” and “Ladakh”, and began allowing non-local residents to buy real estate here. It had long been a demand of the Hindu nationalist forces in India to repeal the special status granted to “Jammu and Kashmir”, which had also been formally included into the BJP’s election platforms and its slogans several times. After Article 370 of the Constitution was repealed, Prime Minister Modi said, “In less than 70 days of the new government, Article 370 has become history, and in both Houses of Parliament, 2/3rd of the members supported this step. We want to serve Jammu, Kashmir, Ladakh. We do not believe in creating problems or prolonging them.”² The RSS, the mother of the BJP, had long accused Article 370 of the Constitution of leading Indian Kashmir to separate from the mainland of India, and demanding that it be repealed once and for all. On August 6, a day after Article 370 was repealed, the RSS publicly praised the government for its courageous action and fulfilling the purpose of the framers of the Constitution in making “Jumma and Kashmir” share the same status as other Indian states.

In November of 2019, the Supreme Court of India issued its ruling that recognized Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh as the birth place of the Hindu god of Rama, and gave the land where the Babri Mosque used to be to the trust fund set up by the government for the re-building of the Hindu

¹ “Under Modi, A Hindu Nationalist Surge Has Further Divided India,” *New York Times*, accessed December 31, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/11/world/asia/modi-india-elections.html>.

² “In less than 70 Days of New Govt, Art 370 Is History: PM in I-Day Address,” *Business Standard*, accessed December 31, 2019, https://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ani/in-less-than-70-days-of-new-govt-art-370-is-history-pm-in-i-day-address-119081500141_1.html.

Temple of Rama, in addition to allocating a piece of land 5 acres in size for the building of a mosque. Hindu nationalists hailed all of these actions. The head of the Hindu nationalist organization RSS, Mohan Bhagwat, said his group welcomed the right decision by the top court.¹ This case originated from the dismantling of the Babri Mosque by Hindu nationalists in December of 1992. They had insisted on re-building the Hindu Temple of Rama on the ruins, thus miring Hindus and Muslims in great debate up to the present day. Given that this case involved the religious feelings of both Hindus and Muslims, previous Indian governments had shut down the site in order to avoid the rise of new conflicts.

In addition to the federal government being controlled by the BJP, state governments controlled by the BJP and other Hindu nationalist forces have also made great efforts to promote Hindu nationalism. Yogi Adityanath, chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, adopted a series of measures with a strong Hindu nationalist hue soon after taking office. For instance, a strict ban was placed on cow slaughter; “anti-Romeo teams” have been set up to forbid men and women from showing affection in public; and smoking has been banned in all government offices in Uttar Pradesh. The BJP-controlled state governments, such as Gujarat, have also revised the history textbooks for primary and secondary schools, removing those sections that referred to any Muslim rulers.

The Profound Influence of Rising Hindu Nationalism

The rise of Hindu nationalism and the evolution of India’s political ecology are of reciprocal causation and mutually-enhancing. They are exerting an increased influence over the future development of India, as shown in both its domestic politics and diplomacy.

A. Domestically, Hindu nationalists continue to hype up many sensitive issues, such as repealing the autonomous status of Indian Kashmir, re-building the Hindu Temple of Rama on the ruins of the Babri Mosque, and conditionally accepting so-called “non-Muslim refugees” from neighboring

¹ “Ayodhya: India’s Top Court Gives Hindus Site Claimed by Muslims,” *Guardian*, accessed December 26, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/nov/09/ayodhya-verdict-hindus-win-possession-of-site-disputed-by-muslims>.

Muslim states as Indian citizens. This has inevitably deepened the disparity between domestic ethnic groups and classes, to the disadvantage of India's social stability and the building of an inclusive India. For example, historian Aditya Mukherjee once said that "this is something that Jawaharlal Nehru had predicted, if fascism ever came to India it would come in the form of majoritarian Hindu communalism. That is exactly what is happening."¹

Meanwhile, Muslims are being crushed across the board by Hindu nationalists. In terms of public security, according to the data provided by Factchecher, a group that tracks long-term hate crimes, radical Hindus attacked Muslims and other religious minorities in the name of protecting cows over a hundred times, causing a total of over a hundred deaths. In 2018 alone, at least 13 deadly crimes committed under the pretext of protecting cows took place in India. In 2019, Human Rights Watch, an international NGO concerned with the human rights situation, issued a special report recording the violent crimes of this nature that had taken place in India over recent years. This report points out that few perpetrators are punished, and that this has created a culture of impunity. In some quarters, killers are lauded as heroes for defending the faith and eradicating Muslims.² Politically, India's Muslim minority—about 15 percent of the population—was dealt a serious setback in the 2014 elections. Their parliamentary presence dropped to just 22 seats, or just 4 percent of the total available, the lowest Muslim representation in five decades. After the 2019 election, their representation in parliament remains less than 5 percent.³ On December 11, 2019, Rajya Sabha passed the amendment to the Citizenship Law, according to which the Indian government was authorized to accept so-called persecuted Hindus, Zoroastrians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains and Christians arriving before December 31 of 2014 from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan conditionally as Indian citizens. This soon gave rise to protests and demonstrations in more than a dozen states across India. For

¹ "Under Modi, a Hindu Nationalist Surge Has Further Divided India."

² "The Violent Toll of Hindu Nationalism in India," *New Yorker*, accessed December 26, 2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/on-religion/the-violent-toll-of-hindu-nationalism-in-india>.

³ "Under Modi, a Hindu Nationalist Surge Has Further Divided India."

Muslims living in India, the amended law, denying citizenship to Muslims from the above-mentioned three countries, implies obvious religious discrimination, which constitutes a new round of suppression imposed by the Hindu nationalists on Muslims. Amit Shah, former chair of the BJP, even went so far as to claim in parliament that after the amendments to the Citizenship Law had been passed, a national citizen registration system would be adopted nationwide. Previously, the Indian government had already put this system into practice in Assam, with about 33 million people submitting their documents, of whom 1.9 million people were excluded from the citizens' list. Several hundred people who were unable to prove their citizenship were already in detention camps.¹ In terms of economic rights, Amitabh Kundu, a well-known Indian economist, has documented that although caste-based discrimination has fallen considerably over the last few decades, discrimination against Muslims is on the rise. Despite an influx of people into urban centers across India, the rate of Muslim migration to large cities is decreasing, because they are largely shut out of the labor market.² In terms of the atmosphere in public opinion, some Indian analysts believed that the India media would not dare to touch certain topics, particularly those relating to hate crimes committed against religious minorities, due to tremendous pressures. For example, in July 2017, the *Hindustan Times*, one of India's biggest English-language newspapers, introduced its Hate Tracker campaign, marketed as India's first database for acts of violence based on religion, caste or other markers. Within three months, the campaign ended without explanation. Around the same time, the paper's top editor was forced out.³ In another example, a series of surveys conducted in almost all Indian states between 2016 and 2018 by Lokniti-CSDS and Azim Premji University confirm that a majority of Hindus support some of the key tenets associated with the BJP's brand of

¹ "Modi Contradicts Amit Shah over Citizenship Register as He Tries to Douse Protests," Reuters, accessed December 26, 2019, <https://in.reuters.com/article/indiacitizenship-modi/modi-contradicts-amit-shah-over-citizenship-register-as-he-tries-to-douse-protests-idINKBN1YR16R>.

² "The Violent Toll of Hindu Nationalism in India."

³ "Under Modi, a Hindu Nationalist Surge Has Further Divided India."

Hindu nationalism. This support is remarkably broad-based. For instance, the largest and most recent of the three studies, based on 12 states and with a total sample size of 24,092, finds that a majority of Hindus from different caste and tribal communities believe that those who eat beef should be punished. A majority of Hindus across different castes (but not among India's tribal communities) also believe that those who do not say "Bharat Mata ki Jai" at public functions should be punished. The majority of Hindus also believe most Hindus to be patriotic (to different degrees), but almost half are suspicious of the degree of patriotism among Muslims.¹ Salman Khurshid, India's former foreign minister, also expressed, "It's really a very, very bad moment for Muslims in India, who are experiencing a 'systematic oppression in the country'."²

B. Diplomatically, Hindu nationalism has already subtly influenced India's foreign policy, and this has had a continuous impacting on India's neighbors and the international environment.

First, this has led to increased tension between India and Pakistan, which has resulted in regional turmoil. In 2019, the BJP government introduced some domestic and foreign policies that had a heavy Hindu nationalist hue, among which quite a few were targeted at Pakistan. This intensified tensions between the two countries and bringing them into confrontation once again, a situation that persists today. For instance, the Indian Air Force declared on February 26, 2019 that 12 Mirage-2000 fighters, supported by AWACS and tankers, had flown across the line of actual control between India and Pakistan in order to launch an air strike at the militant camp in Balakot, Pakistan. Afterwards, the Indian side explained that the air attack was made in retaliation against the suicide attack on India's central reserve police force on February 14 at Pulwama County in Indian-administered Kashmir by Jaish-e-Mohammed with its headquarters in Pakistan. In fact, however, many in the India media believed that although the air attack was said to have been made in retaliation against Pakistan, the hyping up of the security issue and exaggerating an external

¹ "How Hindu Nationalism Went Mainstream," accessed September 18, 2019, <https://foreign-policy.com/2019/06/13/how-hindu-nationalism-went-mainstream/>.

² "The Violent Toll of Hindu Nationalism in India."

threat for the coming parliamentary election in May was in fact a BJP government attempt to fuel Hindu nationalist sentiment and divert the discontent of the broad masses at home over economic slowdown, rising unemployment and serious problems relating to people's livelihood.¹ The Indian media held that the cross-border air strike had quickly diverted public attention from economic development as well as people's social lives and livelihood to the issue of national security. The BJP government is striving to create a positive image of Modi as the guardian of India, and this plays an important role in the BJP's attempts to win the upcoming election. However, India's cross-border air strike was strongly countered by Pakistan. On February 27, the Pakistani Air Force retaliated with a cross-border air strike at Indian Kashmir. During the course of this, the Pakistani fighters combated with Indian chase planes, shooting down an Indian fighter and capturing an Indian pilot. Meanwhile, there was a major movement of ground troops from both countries, with frequent accidental firing occurring. This relatively large-scale and long-distance invasion by Indian military aircrafts into Pakistani airspace was the first of its kind since the third war between India and Pakistan in 1971, and also the first formal confrontation between Indian and Pakistani Air Force formations since the Kargil conflict in 1999. This has caused serious concern among the international community over an all-out war between India and Pakistan. It is worth noting that this cross-border air strike by the Indian Air Force may be seen as the first case of India applying its "cold start" strategy against Pakistan. India's "cold start" strategy principally focuses on elevating the preparedness and rapid response capacity of India's military forces to launch quick counterattacks against Pakistan when it encounters emergencies such as cross-border terrorist attacks from Pakistan, and before the international community can intervene. Meanwhile, the counterattack is designed purely to "punish Pakistan", and is strictly confined to certain scale and targets in order to avoid all-out war. However, with this precedent, the possibility grows that India may launch frequent military

¹ "Will Balakot Air Strikes Influence How India Votes?," *Hindu*, accessed December 30, 2019, <https://www.thehindu.com/elections/lok-sabha-2019/will-balakot-air-strikes-influence-how-india-votes/article26555839.ece>.

attacks on Pakistan with a “cold start” in the future, while Pakistan could use tactical nuclear weapons to fight back under severe military pressure. As a result, the probability of an all-out war and even a nuclear war is mounting instead of declining, thus threatening regional peace and stability.

On August 5, 2019, the BJP government announced the abolition of the autonomous status of Indian Kashmir and the establishment of two federal territories — “Jammu and Kashmir” and “Ladakh”. This was intended not merely to fulfill BJP’s campaign promises, but also to realize the long-cherished objective of the Hindu nationalist forces. This has inflamed India-Pakistan relations once again. Pakistan was founded on the idea of the “Muslim homeland in South Asia”, demanding that Kashmir be included into Pakistan, as it is a region with a Muslim majority. Faced with internal and external pressure, the Pakistani government has mobilized both ground and air forces, and it has increased its missile deployment around Kashmir. India, meanwhile, has gone tit for tat, resulting in high-intensity military confrontation with frequent accidental firing occurring. As a result, the potential for escalation in the future cannot be ruled out. Meanwhile, a host of militant groups opposing Indian Kashmir exist in South Asia, such as the “Lashkar-e-Toiba” and the “Jaish-e-Mohammed”. India’s unilateral amendment to the status quo of controlled Kashmir may give rise to retaliations by the above-mentioned anti-India forces, and this would inevitably prompt India to take further action, leading to a further upgrading in the intensity of the India-Pakistan confrontation. Moreover, Article 370 of the Constitution had granted Indian Kashmir a special status, and this constituted the basis for cooperation between local political forces and the Indian government. However, the power of “Jammu and Kashmir” and “Ladakh”, the newly established federal territories, is much less than that of the original “Jammu and Kashmir”, and this has made local people feel “betrayed and cheated by the Indian government”. Currently, although the Indian government is maintaining stability in these territories by taking measures such as dispatching extra troops and police to the region and disconnecting local phone and internet access, these short-term pressure policies are obviously unable to ensure long-term peace and stability. Many people fear that the struggle in Indian Kashmir is likely to be more

aggressive and violent as local people are already shouting slogans such as “only violent solutions will do in the future” in their anti-government demonstrations.

Second, it has increased complexity in India’s relations with the US and the West. Since the Trump administration introduced the concept of the so-called free and open Indo-Pacific in 2017, it has become a bipartisan consensus to counterbalance China in the larger geographical context of the Indo-Pacific. Because of its size and unique geographical location, India has become the chief target for the US to draw over. Towards this purpose, the US has abandoned its original South Asia policy that took a balanced view of both India and Pakistan, and has begun to openly woo India and oppress Pakistan. It has repeatedly encouraged India to play the role of “net security provider”, and assisted India to increase its pressure on Pakistan, and it has also continuously supplied India with advanced arms and relevant technologies in order to achieve a strategic bundling with India. Nonetheless, the BJP government has continued to promote its Hindu nationalist agendas, and these have become more extreme and open. This has put the US in a dilemma. As a long-time advocate of values such as “freedom and human rights” in both its domestic and foreign policies, if the US remained indifferent to the oppression by Hindu nationalist groups of religious minorities, this would be akin to striking itself in the face. Because of this, the US and India held their annual 2 plus 2 meeting (between foreign and defense ministers) on December 18, 2019, but the US State Department and Congress among others concurrently criticized the radical moves made by the Indian government. For example, Alice G. Wells, Acting Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian affairs, said that the US government was following the situation in Indian Kashmir closely, and continued to appeal for the release of the detainees and for the restoring of the political and economic order. Meanwhile, the US Congress is concerned with the passage of the CAB, urging the Indian government to “protect the interests of its religious minorities” and re-open mosques and shrines in Kashmir that have been closed due to social unrest, as it believes the Indian Constitution has clearly stipulated religious freedom for all Indian citizens. At the same time, it is also worried about the restrictions on cell phones

and internet access imposed by the Indian government.¹ In a statement issued on December 9, the US Commission for International Religious Freedom or USCIRF alleged that the Citizenship Amendment Act enshrines a pathway to citizenship for immigrants that specifically excludes Muslims, setting a legal criterion for citizenship based on religion. It claimed that “The CAB is a dangerous turn in the wrong direction; it runs counter to India’s rich history of secular pluralism and the Indian Constitution, which guarantees equality before the law regardless of faith.” The USCIRF said that it was deeply troubled over the passage of the bill in Lok Sabha. “If the CAB passes in both houses of Parliament, the US government should consider sanctions against Home Minister Amit Shah and other principal leadership,” the Commission suggested.²

Meanwhile, many of the student organizations in the US wrote a joint letter to the US Congress accusing the BJP government of openly publicizing and promoting religious discrimination through legislation, and calling the US Congress to place sanctions against BJP government officials. These student groups include Yale’s South Asian Student Society, the South Asian Student Organization of Columbia University, Yale’s Organization of the Sikhs, and Brown University’s Muslim Student Union. The joint letter claims that the RSS is a Hindu extremist group, and that the BJP government is attempting to change the India with its diversified cultures and religions into an India of Hinduism, and to incite violence against Muslims by publicizing and promoting “Hindutva”. These organizations said that “The CAB is just the latest of India’s many steps taken by the RSS and the BJP to marginalize its population of 200 million Muslims.” Previously, in August 2019, the BJP government imposed the National Register of Citizens in Assam, stating that those Muslims and other religious minorities not registered as Indian citizens would end up either in

¹ “Weihe meiguo dui yindu fanmusilin zhengce jiben baochi chenmo [Why does the US basically remain silent on India’s anti-Muslim policy],” accessed December 31, 2019, <https://cn.nytimes.com/usa/20191218/india-muslims-state-department/>.

² “‘Consider Sanctions Against Amit Shah’: US Commission On Citizenship Amendment Bill,” NDTV, accessed December 31, 2019, https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/started-on-wrong-foot-manish-tewari-on-chief-of-defence-staff-decision-2156733?ndtv_prevstory.

detention camps or as stateless persons. The signatories demanded the US House of Representatives pass Resolution 745 urging India to end restrictions on communications in Jammu and Kashmir. The signatories also said that the United States Congress should impose sanctions on the officials of the Narendra Modi-led government until the government repeals the Citizenship Amendment Act and the National Register of Citizens. They also appealed to the United Nations to take action against India for its allegedly undemocratic and unconstitutional treatment of Muslims.¹ Looking to the future, although the Trump administration is still trying to rope India in strategically, the Indian government continues to promote its Hindu nationalist agendas and to discriminate against and oppress its religious minorities. This will inevitably draw criticism from the US, which in turn will lead to India's resentment towards the US, and this may even become a major obstacle to the US and India getting closer to one another strategically. Moreover, India's relations with Japan are also affected. The Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe planned to visit India on December 15, 2019 and to have a summit with the Indian prime minister on the 16th in Guwahati, a city in Northeast India. However, the passage of the CAB and the large-scale riots that followed forced Japan to postpone Abe's Indian visit.

Finally, it is not conducive to improving India's relationships with its neighbors. For example, the CAB has badly affected India's relations with Bangladesh, a close neighbor to the east. Based on historical origins and personal relationships, the Sheikh Hasina government of Bangladesh has long kept friendly relations with India, and even went so far as to echo India's appeal to jointly boycott the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARP) summit, which had been planned to be held in Pakistan in November of 2016. Given that the population of Bangladesh is made up predominantly of Muslims, and it is inextricably linked with India's northeastern states such as Assam and West Bengal, the rise of Hindu nationalism in India is bound to have a direct effect on Bangladeshi

¹ "Citizenship Act: Student Groups Write to US Congress, Seek Sanctions Against Modi Government," Scroll, <https://scroll.in/latest/947512/citizenship-act-student-groups-write-to-us-congress-seeksanctions-against-modi-government>.

nationals, with pressures soon being felt by the Bangladesh government, as seen by the foreign and home ministers of Bangladesh cancelling their planned visits to India soon after the passage of the CAB. More importantly, opposition in Bangladesh has continued to criticize the weak position taken by the Hasina government on issues relating to India's National Register of Citizens and the CAA, and pressed the government to seek a written assurance from India that it will not "push" Muslim immigrants deemed illegal under the Act across the border back into Bangladesh.¹ At the end of December 2019, the Bangladeshi government cut off Bangladesh's mobile phone connections along its border with India for fear that Muslims in India, particularly in Assam in northeast India, would flee to Bangladesh as a result of being persecuted by the Act in India. As Bangladesh has already taken in almost a million Rohingya refugees fleeing from Myanmar, the already populous Bangladesh with limited land resources is obviously not ready or capable to accept Muslim refugees from India. The passage of the Bill is bound to have a long-term effects on India's relations with Bangladesh, and this may even lead to setbacks in their bilateral relationship.

An Analysis of Future Prospects

Presently and for some time to come, Hindu nationalism as a whole will continue to rise, and this will have a growing impact on India's politics, society and diplomacy.

Let's take for example the RSS, the core organization of Hindu nationalism. Although having been repeatedly banned after India's independence, it continued to survive. It does not have any direct involvement in government, but allows its members to support Hindu nationalist parties such as the BJP to run for election. For instance, the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS), the forerunner of the BJP, was formed in 1951 by Syama Prasad Mukherjee, a member of the RSS, while the RSS leadership of the time allowed its members to join the BJS as individuals.

¹ "Bangladesh Wants 'Written' Assurance from India that It Won't Send Immigrants after CAA," accessed December 31, 2019, <https://theprint.in/diplomacy/bangladesh-wants-written-assurance-from-india-that-it-wont-sendimmigrants-after-caa/342579/>.

Both the India and foreign media widely believe that during the 2014 and 2019 parliamentary elections the RSS fully mobilized its nationwide grass-roots units and spared no efforts in canvassing for the BJP, thus making critical contributions to the BJP's victories in those elections. As a result, the influence of the RSS has risen rapidly. At the present time, almost all the core members of the BJP government have a RSS background: Prime Minister Modi became a RSS activist as early as the 1980s; Interior Minister Amit Shah used to be the Chair of the RSS; and Defense Minister Rajinath Singh once served as the Chair of the RSS. Among the incumbent BJP general secretaries, the RSS faction is also very well represented, as Ram Madhav and P. Muralidhar Rao have all come from the RSS, while Bhupendra Yadav has intimate relations with the RSS. More importantly, the RSS not only has deep roots in Indian society, but has also established a firm power structure from the centre all the way down to local governments, thus making itself the most important, influential and down-to-earth social organization in India today. Just before the Modi government came to power, the RSS had about 45,000 daily shakhas across the country. That rose to nearly 60,000 shakhas by March 2019.¹ In addition to the RSS, other radical Hindu nationalist groups such as the Bajrang Dal, which is also affiliated to the Sangh Parivar,² are very popular. The Bajrang Dal was banned several times for its radical position, but it is now legal and has become very active. Some local governments in India have passed anti-conversion laws, which stipulate that coercing people to convert to new religions is an illegal act. On the surface, these laws are intended to protect Hindus from being coercively converted to other religions such as Christianity and Islam. However, they are used by the Bajrang Dal as pretext to attack Christianity and other religious minorities. Paul Richard

¹ "View: What Shape Will the BJP-RSS Dynamics Take under Modi 2.0?," *Economic Times*, accessed December 30, 2019, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/view-what-shape-will-the-bjp-rss-dynamics-take-under-modi-2-0/articleshow/69498073.cms?from=mdr>.

² The Sangh Parivar is a union of multiple Hindu nationalist groups, initiated by the RSS, which includes the BJP, the VHP, the ABVP, the BMS, the BKS among other. Although these groups operate independently, they share the same goal and conduct similar activities.

Brass, a professor emeritus of political science at the University of Washington, has called the Bajrang Dal “a somewhat pathetic but nevertheless dangerous version of the Nazi S.A.”— or the Brown Shirts, the Nazi Party’s first paramilitary organization.¹

We should also note, however, that Hindu nationalism is not invincible, as it faces backlash and resistance from the trends and forces of secularism and pluralism that India has persisted in ever since its founding. For example, secularists and pluralists in India fiercely opposed the passage of the CAB by the BJP government at the end of 2019, accusing it of defining citizenship according to specific religious identity, and believing that it violated the principle of secularism emphasized by the Indian Constitution, which undermines the foundation upon which modern India was built. As a result, protests and demonstrations against it of various kinds persist to this day. They claimed that if the BJP government’s original intention was really to protect religious minorities from other countries, then it should have granted citizenship to those Muslims who illegally entered India from Buddhist countries such as Sri Lanka and Myanmar. In addition, the challenges facing Hindu nationalism have also been reflected in local elections over the past two years. For example, in February 2020, a local election was held in New Delhi, India’s capital, and the Aam Aadmi Party (APP), a well-rooted local party, won a landslide victory, claiming 62 seats out of 70, while the BJP won only 8 seats. This election was very sensitive as it was held not long after the BJP government had repealed the autonomy of Indian Kashmir and passed the discriminatory CAB against Muslims. During the election, the BJP focused, as it always does, on national issues. Not only did it hype up the “sense of being threatened” by Pakistan and Muslims, but also fueled Hindu nationalist sentiment in order to win the election by establishing themselves as the “guardians of India”. Although the AAP also focused on national issues, it concerned itself primarily with local issues relating to people’s livelihood such as utilities, education and public health care. The election results demonstrate, in part, the backlash by India or at least New

¹ “The Violent Toll of Hindu Nationalism in India.”

Deli on intensifying Hindu nationalism. More significantly, in sharp contrast to the sweeping victories won by the BJP in local elections after it came to power for the first time in 2014, the BJP has lost several local elections in a row since 2018, including those in states with large populations and of great political and economic significance, including Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. The rapid advance of the BJP in Indian politics would appear not to have changed the general trend of political fragmentation in India that began in the 1980s, while the inherent advantages of the local parties, although they experienced a decline for several years after 2014, have manifested once again as they have taken root locally and got to grips with the needs of the local people. This indicates that the BJP's approach of focusing on the hyping up of Hindu nationalism in order to win support from Hindus by creating social division appears to have peaked due to its failure to boost economic development.

As mentioned above, Hindu nationalism, based on "Hindu majoritarianism", has become mainstream ideology in Indian society, and this is also exerting a profound impact on India's foreign policy and domestic environment. In future, Hindu nationalist organizations such as the BJP, the RSS and the VHP will continue to promote the reconstruction of the Indian state and the re-shaping of the Indian nation with their ultimate goal of building India into a state ruled by Hinduism. During this process they are bound to face backlash and resistance from traditional secularism, pluralism and localism, and this is likely to lead Indian society rapidly towards antagonism and division, with spills over into diplomacy. This will have a major impact on India's external relationships, including its relations with China.

(edited by Zhang Yimeng)