MANY SHADES OF HINDU NATIONALISM: FROM GENESIS TO HINDUTVA.

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Abstract: One of the few questions that India, after 78 years of independence still grappling with is the role of religion in politics and what kind of relation politics and religion should have? To find out this answer, this paper will delve into the latter decades of Nineteen century early decades of the 20th century, for these two time periods were very tumultuous in terms of shaping the future of Indian nationalism. The Hindu Sangthan movement, that was begins to reform the Hindu religion, gradually takes a rigid form. This paper also sheds some light on this journey.

Keywords: Reforms. Hinduism. Islam. Communalism. Nationalism.

I. INTRODUCTION

Religion is a profound and pervasive element of human society, influencing nearly every aspect of individual and collective life. Defined broadly, religion encompasses a set of beliefs, practices, and moral codes often centered around the divine or the sacred. It serves as a framework for understanding existence, guiding ethical behavior, and providing a sense of purpose and community. Throughout history, religion has been a central force in shaping cultures, governing societies, and influencing political structures. In its various forms, religion addresses fundamental questions about human existence, morality, and the nature of the universe. It often involves rituals, worship, and sacred texts that outline beliefs and practices. These elements contribute to a shared identity among adherents, fostering a sense of belonging and cohesion. This paper targets to visit the time frame which has been instrumental in shaping Hindu nationalism.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Chandra, Bipan (*Communalism in Modern India, New Delhi, 1984*) discusses about the true meaning of communalism in the Indian context and the process of its development in India. In other words, this book is one of the most trustworthy and pioneering works regarding the understanding of communalism. It will be of immense help to the research undertaken and to prepare the background leading to Communalism.

Bhatt, Chetan (*Hindu Nationalism,2001*) discusses the background of the rise of Hindu Nationalism in India. In addition to that, this book clearly shows the Hindu communal consciousness after the Bengal renaissance, and the role of the Bengali elite class in the early stage of the emergence of this ideology. But the role of the various organization during this turmoil period is absent in this book.

Jaffrelot, Christophe (*Hindu Nationalism. Permanent Black* 2007) discusses about early development of Hindu Nationalism and role of various person from Swami Dayananda to Deendayal Upadhyyaya to give a concrete shape to Hindu Nationalism. But one can see the absence minor religion organization and obscure religion leaders who have an immense role in shaping Hindu nationalism.

Pandy, Gyanendra (*Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India, Oxford 199*0) discuss elaborately how the Hindu community was mobilizing on religious grounds this mobilization created widespread communal violence throughout North India. The book also examines how nationalism and communalism are formed from common and conflicting ideas and battles, as well as from shared and contested experiences.

Javos John (*Emergence of Hindu nationalism in India*) discusses about Hindu Nationalism. Moreover, this book discusses the effect of "Dying Race" theory, propagated by Colonel U. N Mukherjee. In his theory, Mr Mukherjee categorically delves into details about how the number of Hindus has declined with time. This book also deals with how the Sangathan movement started and spread all over India

Gould William (*Hindu Nationalism and Language of politics in Late colonial India, Cambridge University press2004*) discusses about the Congress and the Hindu nation, the Muslim mass movement, untouchable upliftment and the role of Congress in partition or during that time. The nature of Hindu nationalism as an ideology and political language is also examined in this book. He illustrates how Hindu nationalist ideology impacted the secular Congress in Uttar Pradesh shortly before independence by drawing on a variety of historical sources.

Batabyal,Rakesh (*Communalism in Bengal, from famine to Noakhali,1943-1947*) deals with communalism and the struggle by political parties in Bengal to gain political space from 1944 to 1947. But this book emphasizes mainstream political parties, not religious organization. In its examination of the decade preceding independence, this book makes the case that nationalism and communalism clashed during the last stages of the anti-colonial movement, forgetting class and unity against the colonial force.
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Dasgupta, koushiki (*Minor Political Party and the Politics of Late Colonial Bengal Delhi 2014*) discuss political situations and the role of minor political parties during the turmoil situation of Bengal Politics. Numerous issues about the roles and ideologies of various minor political organizations, including the Hindu Mahasabha, the Swaraj Party, and the Krishak Praja Party, are brought up in this book.

III. AIM OF THE STUDY

This present study aims to briefly examine the background in which Hindu nationalism started its journey. This paper also delves into the details of different approaches of the Hindu ideologue to carry this movement to its desired aim.

IV. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This study is qualitative, textual and analytical research. The researcher formulated a few research questions to carry out his research for the collection of pertinent information from literary sources like primary documents, secondary documents, journals, newspapers and articles related to this topic. The study is based on textual analysis of texts regarding this topic.

V. RESEARCH QUESTION

1. Was Hinduism invented by British colonizer?
2. Did colonial administrators play any kind of role in shaping Hinduism?
3. What is the background against the rise of Hindu nationalism?
4. What types of roles did many Sanghatans play in the early stage of Hindu nationalism
5. Was the transformation of Hindu nationalism to Hindutva driven by situational compulsion?

VI. MAIN DISCUSSION

Hinduism, the oldest religion of the world, as claimed by many scholars, but is it a religion like Christianity or Islam? It is such a matter that raises many debates. Because Hinduism is a conglomerate of different sects, Hinduism includes a diversity of Ideas on spirituality and tradition, but like other religions, it has no ecclesial order, no unquestionable religious authorities, no governing body, no Prophet, nor any binding holy book. Hindus can choose to be polytheistic, pantheistic, monotheistic, agonistic, atheistic or humanistic.[1] The word Hindu is derived from the Indo Aryan Sanskrit word 'Sindhu', the Indo Aryan name for the Indus River in the northwest part of the Indian sub-continent. According to Gavin Flood, "The actual term 'Hindu' first occurs as a Persian geographical term for the people who lived beyond the river Indus" (Sanskrit Sindhu). More specifically, in the 6th century B.C.E inscription of Darius l. The term 'Hindu' in these ancient records is a geographical term that did not refer to a religion. Among the earliest known records, the word Hindu with connotation of religion may be in the 7th century B.C Chinese text record of the Western region by Xuanzang and 14th century Persian text Futuhu-salatin by Abd Al- Malik Isami.

Over the past decade, many scholars have argued that"HINDUISM" was constructed, invented and imagined by British scholars and colonial administrators in the 19th century and did not exist before 19th century[2] Prominent among scholars who made this constructionist argument are Basudha Dalmia, Robert frykenberg, Christopher Fuller, John Hawley, Brain smith, Harjot Oberoi, W,C Smith. W.C Smith is identified quite correctly as a precursor of these scholars.[3] On the other side of the argument, several scholars have directly questioned this claim from various points of view, including Wendy Doninger, Cynthia Talbot, and Peter Van Dar Veer. They argue that 'Hinduism' was invented

by the British scholar, sometime after 1880, is false; the evidences instead suggest that the Hindu religion is theologically and devotionally grounded in texts such as the Bhagbad *Gita*, *The Puranas*.

The first expression of Hindu mobilisation emerged in the 19th century as an ideological reaction to the Europeans and gave birth to what came to be known a "Neo Hinduism" [4]. It was a reform movement, but gradually it was transformed into a revivalist movement, and it took place in the 19th century. Within the elite Hindu milieu, this is well illustrated by the contrast between the Brahmo Samaj and later, but not un related-organization Arya Samaj, set up by Swami Dayananda Saraswati. Through this organization the notion of the Vedic golden age, when Hinduism was superior to Christianity, was crystallized and for this purpose, he adopted the old ceremony of Shuddhi, by which upper caste Hindus who had been defiled could reintegrate with their caste. Shuddhi was therefore a purification procedure which Dyananda transformed into a reconversion technique, drawing inspiration from Christianity. Another important phenomenon of this century was the rise of Hindu Nationalism.[5] This Hindu nationalism has been referred to as a political ideology. According to historian John Javos, "Hindu Nationalism is defined as an ideology that seeks to imagine or construct a community based on common culture confined by a particular notion of Hinduism. Indian middle-class people created this ideology during a time that coincided with the rise of elite-led Indian nationalism. But in the 2nd half of the 20th century, this Hindu nationalism was manipulated by a narrow sectarian object that led to Political Hindutva. The Political Hindutva popularised by V.D. Savarkar through his book "Hindutva: Who is Hindu" that was published in 1923.[6] During this transformation from Hindu nationalism to political Hindutva, several Hindu organization were set up all over India, among them, important are Sankar Math, Arunachal Mission and Bharat Sevasram Sangha. But in comparison with other provinces of India, Bengal had a very liberal religious tradition, and in this regard, one can observe the rise of the *Brahmo* Movement and the Ramakrishna Vivekananda movement in Bengal.[7] Due to this liberal tradition, politics based on religion wasn't so much rigid in Bengal. But the liberal atmosphere suddenly changed after the failure of the Bengal Pact in 1923.

The twenties of the 20th century Bengal were provided with a self-consciousness of communal identities. The construction of communal identities was to be viewed in the context of a search for nationhood or a special place within the nation by a group of people for the protection of their community interests.[8] The development and consolidation of a Hindu Block in the 1920s in Bengal had received its essential spirit from the so-called ideas of demographic decline of the Hindus. This idea of demographic decline was first brought to public attention in a series of articles published in the 'Bengali' in 1909 by Colonel U.N Mukherjee. Later, a pamphlet was published on this subject called 'Hindus—A Dying Race.' Afterwards, the communal common sense of a 'Dying Hindu' emerged as one of the recurrent themes within the Hindu political discourse, and the so-called anxiety of being outnumbered by the 'growing' Muslims became one of the useful instruments for mobilising a distinct Hindu electorate.[9] From 1923 onwards, the idea of horizontal restructuring of society began to dominate the mindset of politically aware Hindus who had found it obvious to articulate their 'Hindutva' through the organizational discourse of Hindu nationalism. This organizational discourse of Hindutva emphasized the moral crisis of the Hindus to take up the nationalist cause.

During the period when The Hindu Mahasabha, through Suddhi and Sangathan, was trying to infuse a new life and greater cohesion into the external body of the Hindu society, and was first acquiring political dimensions, that facet of Hindu resurgence which emphasised inner purification.[10] This trend, expressed as the ideology of man-making, tried to revitalize the 'dying race` based on spiritual collectivism. This period saw a plurality of such spiritual associations called Ashram or Sangahas, which tried to impose the ancient cultural values on modern conditions and were also inspired by Swadeshi spirit. Some important religious voluntary associations were Sankar Math, Arunachal Mission and the Bharat Sevasram Sangha. Having some similarities, they, however, showed many variations in details. The Bharat Sevashram Sangha was established in the year 1923 when the Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha made its official entry into Bengal, and both of these organisations showed how the notions of Hindu identity construction differed in Bengal on the grounds of idealism and exigencies. The ideological impetus behind the emergence of the Bharat Sevashram Sangha came from a strong denial of the materialist Western culture and the regeneration of India with the help of Western values and education. The Sangha reflected the nationalist as well as humanist orientation, which transcended the barriers of caste and creed. At the same time Sangha showed concern for the Hindus as a community.[11] Bharat Sevasram admitted that their movement was a sort of inheritor of the Ramakrishna Vivekananda legacy and explained the appearance of the Swami Pranavananda after that of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda as a necessity. Vivekananda deplored the uncritical imitation of the materialistic and individual civilization of the West. Bharat Sevasram too, represented a counter–challenge to the hypnotic spell of materialistic Western culture, without ignoring the basic needs of man. It must be mentioned here that, unlike the Mahasabha, the Bharat Sevashram Sangha did not have an agenda of constructing the Muslims as threatening 'others' like the Mahasabha in its early phase; rather, the entire question of Hindu decadence was attributed to the physical and moral degeneration of the Hindus to the adoption of western morale and habits. It is to be mentioned here that the idea of political mobilization for an

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exclusive Hindu constituency was influenced largely by the Hindu fear of being outnumbered by the Muslims, and no wonder that the Hindu blocks in the 1920s were drawn closer together upon a sense of insecurity and political impotency as a whole. In the 1920s, the common sense of a 'dying Hindu' incorporated in itself a similar anxiety for the conversion of the lower castes to a fearful extent. Even after the establishment of the Bengal Provincial Hindu Sabha by Piyush Kanti Ghosh in 1924, breathtaking news was coming from different parts of East Bengal about the conversion of the lower castes by an external 'other', either a Muslim or a Christian.[12] It is interesting to note that the word 'Hindu' has been used here to express the interests of the upper caste male Hindu as that of society as a whole, however, the categories like 'caste, 'class', 'race' or 'community' ever remained as shifting boundaries waiting to get fitted into the discourse of Hindu ascetic nationalism at the time of situational necessities. Throughout the 20s of the 20th centuries, the Hindus were left open to have their autonomous space of self-reconstruction in Bengal. It is a matter of understanding how, from the third decade of the 20th century, the radical spirit of the Hindu Bengalis transformed into a sectarian power culture and how both the Hindus and the Muslims redefined their identities through a continuous process of making and remaking. On a number of occasions, the priorities of Bengali exclusiveness suffered from the manipulative impact of national politics and the question of Bengali nationalism always remained vulnerable before the challenges of sectarianism and its subsequent predicaments. Surprisingly when the *Hindu Mahasabha* tried to constitute Hindus on a sectarian model and propagated the idea of competitive demography, the Bharat Sevashram Sangha put greater emphasis on constructive programmes to revitalise the Hindu society and made it a vow to Hinduise the Hindus, the so-called 'dying race', on the principles of Sanatana Dharma or Eternal religion.[13] In an environment of extreme political controversies, starting from the debate on council entry, the proposed Bengal Pact of Chittaranjan Das to the crystallization of a separate Muslim block in Bengal politics, the Sangha continued its constructive programs of nation-building based on material and spiritual necessities of the people. It indeed marked a new trend of political pragmatism away from the sectarian political turmoil of the country. However, it must be mentioned here that in spite of being committed to the service of humanity irrespective of religion or caste, the Sangha failed to become free from the maladies of *Hindu* community consciousness in an environment of growing communal frenzy in late colonial Bengal. The system of separate electorate had already received official recognition in the Morley-Minto Report and the Montagu-Chelmsford Act of 1919. The camouflaging unity of the Hindus and the Muslims during the Khilafat –Non-Cooperation period could not bring anything positive for a healthy operation of the electoral politics soon. For the *Sangha* the shift from constructive works including the integration of the society on universal humanist principles towards more communitarian interests had immense implications because on one side it justified the notions of threatened Hindu interests and the Congress failure to take the Hindu cause and on the other side it paved the way for the Hindu Mahasabha to make some adjustments with the Sangha on some common issues. The Hindu conference of the Sangha held in 1938 welcomed Dr Shyamaprasad Mukherjee as the president, and afterwards it almost became a practice to make collaborative actions form both the *Sangha* and the *Mahasabha* on different occasions of crisis.

It is to be mentioned here that the actual objective of the Hindu Jagatgathan movement had never been fulfilled by the Sangha. Apart from a few constructive programmes, a great number of issues affecting Hindu society at large remained untouched. The complexities of agrarian class structure and the correlated socioeconomic issues had never been included in the list of its programmes; rather, superficial commitments were made to the marginal Hindus, the worst-affected victims of agrarian class structure in rural Bengal. For the Hindu Mahasabha, the association with the Sangha was very much beneficial. It helped the *Mahasabha* to get some legitimacy among the Hindus, although for the Sangha, it proved to be detrimental because it lost its appeal of universal humanism and sacrificed its image of a liberal organization at the cost of its association with the Mahasabha. Many related debates may be raised about whether, in a situation of aggressive communalism, the *Sangha* was forced to take some situational steps; it created some misconceptions and left many questions to be answered by posterity.

CONCLUSION

Religion remains a powerful and multifaceted force in shaping political beliefs and practices worldwide. It provides moral and ethical frameworks that guide laws, governance, and public policy while also serving as a source of political identity and mobilization. Religious groups and movements can significantly influence electoral outcomes, legislative debates, and social policies, reflecting their values and priorities within the political sphere. Furthermore, religion can both promote social cohesion by fostering a sense of shared community and values, and contribute to conflict and division in pluralistic societies where differing religious beliefs are politicized. It is to be mentioned here that the actual objective of the Hindu Jagatgathan movement had never been fulfilled by the Sangha. Apart from a few constructive programmes, a great number of issues affecting Hindu society at large remained untouched. The complexities of agrarian class structure and the correlated socioeconomic issues had never been included in the list of its programmes; rather, superficial commitments were made to the marginal Hindus, the worst-affected victims of agrarian class structure in rural Bengal. For the Hindu Mahasabha, the association with the Sangha was very much beneficial. It

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