

Hindu Nationalism in India: Ideology and Politics,
Chakrabarty, Jha. Routledge New York, 2020, 289.

*Muhammad Abbas Hassan**

The latest addition to the Routledge series on South Asian studies, “*Hindu Nationalism in India Ideology and Politics*” is the eighth book of the series. It is written by two seasoned academics: Bidyut Chakrabarty who is Vice Chancellor of Visva-Bharati, a public university in Santiniketan, Bengal; and Bhuwan Kumar Jha who is Assistant Professor in History at Satyawati College, University of Delhi.

As stated by the authors in the preface, “the aim is to reach out to a wider section of readers; we have avoided, as far as possible, those futile academic jargons which usually make the text unnecessarily cumbersome and thus extremely difficult to read”. This decision makes the book not only more elaborative in nature but also pulls the reader into the intriguing content without making intellectual references or allusions.

The book begins with the notion that Hindu nationalism is a misnomer because conceptually Hindus cannot be nationalists and vice versa. Keeping this as the foundation, part one of this book comprises of the historical developments that started to take place a century ago and evolved into the origins of Hindu nationalism.

The book goes into the detail of the first three thinkers named Dayananda, Vivekananda and Aurobindo. The ideas of these three thinkers are rooted deep into Hindutva and they have laid the foundation of Hindu nationalism. Later on, the book goes into the activities and struggles of V. D. Savarkar who was also at par with the initial three thinkers of Hindutva, M. S. Golwalkar who organised the Hindutva movement systematically and Deendayal Upadhyaya who is often viewed as the originator of the evil.

The authors looks closely at each of the thinkers’ contributions to the cause of Hindutva, including their orthodox views on the place of women,

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Dalits and tribes in Hindu society as well as their visceral hatred towards Christians and Muslims. They have analysed the prehistory of Hindutva and examined the writings of some of its pre-eminent thinkers brings out several less-known facts that, if more widely known, are likely to leave not just Christians and Muslims deeply offended but will also worry women, Dalits, Kabirpanthis, Shaivites, Buddhists and anybody who does not appreciate orthodox and aggressive Brahminical Hinduism.

The second part of the book looks more at the organisational structures and efforts of the organisations that have contributed to the revival of Hindutva in India. Although the authors are adamant that the word Hindutva is always blown out of proportion, the current events confirm that deep down the violent nature of this idea has always been the source of inspiration for power-driven Hindus. The authors discuss four Hindu organisations named Hindu Mahasabha, The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Bharatiya Jana Sangh and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Out of these four parties, three are still functional. The parties have effectively built upon the ideas of the original thinkers and are now working to transform Hinduism into an aggressive and rigid religion; to reject non-violence as a creed; recognise Hinduism as the most ancient of faiths that had nothing to learn from other faiths; that there was a never-ending threat to Hinduism from westernisation, pan-Islamism, Buddhism, folk and tribal gods and goddesses, missionaries, conversion, lifestyle, poetry, creative literature, sexual mores, etc; and that the Vedas and Upanishads are supreme. The final characteristic is the introduction of invective, abuse and contempt as legitimate tools of writing, conversation and public discourse.

The book has also made an effort to highlight Hindus' pre-independence activism in India and how they used the press to influence the Indian leadership for charting out a future course of action for a Hindu-majority state. The notorious magazine, Kalyan, published by Gita Press played a key role in this regard. It aligned with all the right wing parties and labelled Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah as the modern day Aurangzeb. Later on, the magazine also published 12 points agenda which when read in 2020 seems to be fully implemented under the Modi regime.

In conclusion, this book is a timely addition to the body of knowledge on Hindu nationalism. It is written in a manner that the reader feels

connected to the issues that were set in motion centuries ago. The book deconstructs the Indian society and how the right wing parties have slowly, through continuous struggle, have managed to ascend to power. It also shows that the state institutions have worked in line with the power centers. In the 90s when the Indian National Congress was in power, the courts of India ruled in the favour of a petition that was against the hate speech initiated by a Hindu-nationalist politician, Shiv Sena, but under the regime of Narendra Modi, the Indian Supreme Court ruled in favour of the Hindus over Ayodhya. Therefore, the Hindu nationalism has progressed as the Hindu organisations have gained power and will only grow stronger in the future to come.