

## EVALUATING THE CHANGING DYNAMICS OF THE 'HINDUTVA' IDEOLOGY IN MODI 3.0

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*(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)*



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### Introduction

Since its inception in 1925, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)-driven 'Hindutva' ideology has gone through a vigorous change over the past century. The organization started with strong cultural and nationalistic zeal and fervor focusing on the religious aspects of Hinduism and Pan Hinduism. As the affiliates of the mother organization grew and expanded over the decades, the priorities and strategies of the organization took a clear and dramatic shift. The making of Bharatiya Janata Party—BJP, the political affiliate of RSS, is what managed to influence the Sangh Parivar in a way that political and economic route became the most suited one to impose the Sangh's agenda overriding its religious and cultural outlook.

This political conviction that has managed to gain an extremely strong significance and prominence in the Indian state in the recent years has gone through a distinct evolution. The decades-long evolution in the priorities of RSS and its affiliates has given way to a new and evolved form of 'Hindutva' that may be called 'Hindutva 2.0'.

## A 'Hindutva 2.0'?

The 'Hindutva 2.0' is to be understood as an assertive, broad and multifractal interpretation of the original Hindu nationalist ideology.<sup>1</sup> The suffix of '2.0' indicates a shift in both practical and rhetoric applications and implications of Hindu nationalism. An evolved 'Hindutva' carves out much stronger emphasis on the political as well as social dominance and a more aggressive and rightist stance towards any sort of perceived or suspected threats to the classic Hindu ways of life.<sup>2</sup> By using both soft and hard power in its internal and external matters, the newly elected BJP government will shift the paradigms of 'Hindutva' to 'Hindutva 2.0'.

### Changing Dynamics

The evidently changing dynamics from Hindutva to Hindutva 2.0, on both internal and external fronts cannot be interpreted without understanding the standpoints of BJP and RSS. The RSS wholeheartedly believes that the people in the subcontinent –before any of their other religious, cultural and political associations– are first and foremost Hindu as they have been living on the lands of *Hindustan* for centuries. So the organization works to bring out a sense of Hindu nationalism amongst the masses, unite them on it and engrave its ideology and believes in them.

Arguably, however, BJP under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership has moved towards the expansive political agendas and strategies containing: fusion of Hindu votes, trying to weaken opposition and their alliances through propaganda, and by employing clever electoral tactics.

Modi has successfully managed to bring about an ideological shift that helped build his electoral persona. Whereas the RSS has been traditionally focused on cultural nationalism and mobilization at the grass-roots level, the BJP under Modi altered these aspects and ideas into something that aligns with his modern political and economic policies and frameworks. This involves the propagation of Hindutva through social media, technological advancements and leveraging the media.<sup>3</sup> BJP also played a strong hand with its rhetoric as well as practical policies on Kashmir, the Citizenship

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1 *Cherian George*, "The Rise of Hindu Nationalism", The MIT Press Reader, February 28<sup>th</sup> 2022, <https://thereader.mitpress.mit.edu/the-rise-of-hindu-nationalism/>

2 *Mou Banerjee*, "Ghostly Presences and Hindutva 2.0: An Interview with Anustup Basu". Political Theology Network, November 5<sup>th</sup> 2021, <https://politicaltheology.com/ghostly-presences-and-hindutva-2-0-an-interview-with-anustup-basu/>

3 *Krutika Pathi & Sheikh Saaliq*, "Once a Fringe Ideology, Hindu Nationalism is Now Mainstream, Thanks to Modi", The Diplomat, April 18<sup>th</sup> 2024, <https://thediplomat.com/2024/04/once-a-fringe-ideology-hindu-nationalism-is-now-mainstream-thanks-to-modi/>

Amendment Act—CAA, and National Register for Citizenship—NRC.<sup>4</sup> These policy decisions have led to an evolved Hindutva, more aligned to electoral and political dominance with the agenda of cultural transformation on a backburner.

These cards are played by Modi as a vital aspect of establishing a nationalistic narrative to achieve the much larger dream of reclaiming and restoring the presumed past glory of India. The increased usage of religious and cultural symbols is a part of his strategic plan that he enacted to a certain point and plans to exploit it even more. This includes the efforts put in redeveloping the temple in the multi-religious city of Varanasi - The Kashi Vishwanath Temple, as a symbol of Hindu dominance. In recent general elections, Modi contested from Varanasi as it was considered one of the holiest places for Hindus.<sup>5</sup> Thus Modi has been using tactics of merging politics with religion and stirring the Hindu majority just as the BJP managed to stir and mobilize the Hindu masses to demolish the Babri Mosque and now build Ram Temple on top of its ruins. He looks forward to repeat the process with regard to two more mosques, in Varanasi and Mathura, respectively.<sup>6</sup>

### Future Aspects and Implications

The third term of Narendra Modi as the Prime Minister will have its specific implications and connotations, especially how he won yet faced defeat. Modi 3.0 may be a game play of both hard and soft powers at both internal and external fronts of the country. The Modi 3.0 may opt for majoritarian policies which include a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) and the attempt to bring changes in the reservation policies may be resisted. However, the resistance might not be enough to stop BJP from exercising this hard power. Federal agencies will be further used to keep targeting the leaders in opposition along with altering the processes of judicial positioning.<sup>7</sup> This exposes the BJP's attempts on enhancing its power and to control the opposition it may face in the future. Revising curriculum and course outlines on primary and secondary levels of education and incorporating the 'Hindutva' narrative in the teachings along with arranging multiple and consistent amount of cultural events focused on Hindu narrated heritage of India, have the potential to change the forthcoming

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<sup>4</sup> *Roshan Kishore*, "The disruptive social effects of Hindutva 2.0", *The Hindustan Times*, February 24<sup>th</sup> 2021, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/opinion/the-disruptive-social-effects-of-hindutva-20-101614181250159.html>

<sup>5</sup> "For India's Modi, Symbolism is Political", *VOA News*, April 7<sup>th</sup> 2019, <https://www.voanews.com/a/for-india-modi-symbolism-is-political-strategy/4865253.html>.

<sup>6</sup> "What after Ayodhya? BJP may have a different approach to Mathura and Kashi", *The Economic Times*, January 22<sup>nd</sup> 2024, [https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/what-after-ayodhya-bjp-can-have-a-different-approach-to-mathura-and-kashi/articleshow/107059338.cms?utm\\_source=contentofinterest&utm\\_medium=text&utm\\_campaign=cppst](https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/what-after-ayodhya-bjp-can-have-a-different-approach-to-mathura-and-kashi/articleshow/107059338.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst).

<sup>7</sup> *Snigdhendu Bhattacharya*, "How Different Will Modi 3.0 Be From Previous Terms?" June 11<sup>th</sup> 2024, *The Diplomat*, <https://thediplomat.com/2024/06/how-different-will-modi-3-0-be-from-previous-terms/>

generations of the country. Welfare schemes are another soft power game that will be played by Modi government to regain votes and the trust of the masses<sup>8</sup>.

### Conclusion

With the above points in mind, it can be impact-fully concluded that both practical and ideological realms have gone through a drastic shift to reshape the 'Hindutva' ideology to its new form: 'Hindutva 2.0'. This course will continue in the Modi 3.0. The relationship between RSS and BJP will play a crucial role in shaping and structuring these dynamics. Modi will be using populist cards to incorporate the Hindu ideology and nationalistic fervor in the masses for his own political and economic gains. Conversely, we will see RSS supporting BJP and Modi to advance its social, cultural and religious agendas revolving around the 'Hindutva' ideology.

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<sup>8</sup> *Christophe Jaffrelot & Pradyumna Jairam*, "BJP Has Been Effective in Transmitting Its Version of Indian History to Next Generation of Learners", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, November 16<sup>th</sup> 2019, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/11/16/bjp-has-been-effective-in-transmitting-its-version-of-indian-history-to-next-generation-of-learners-pub-80373>