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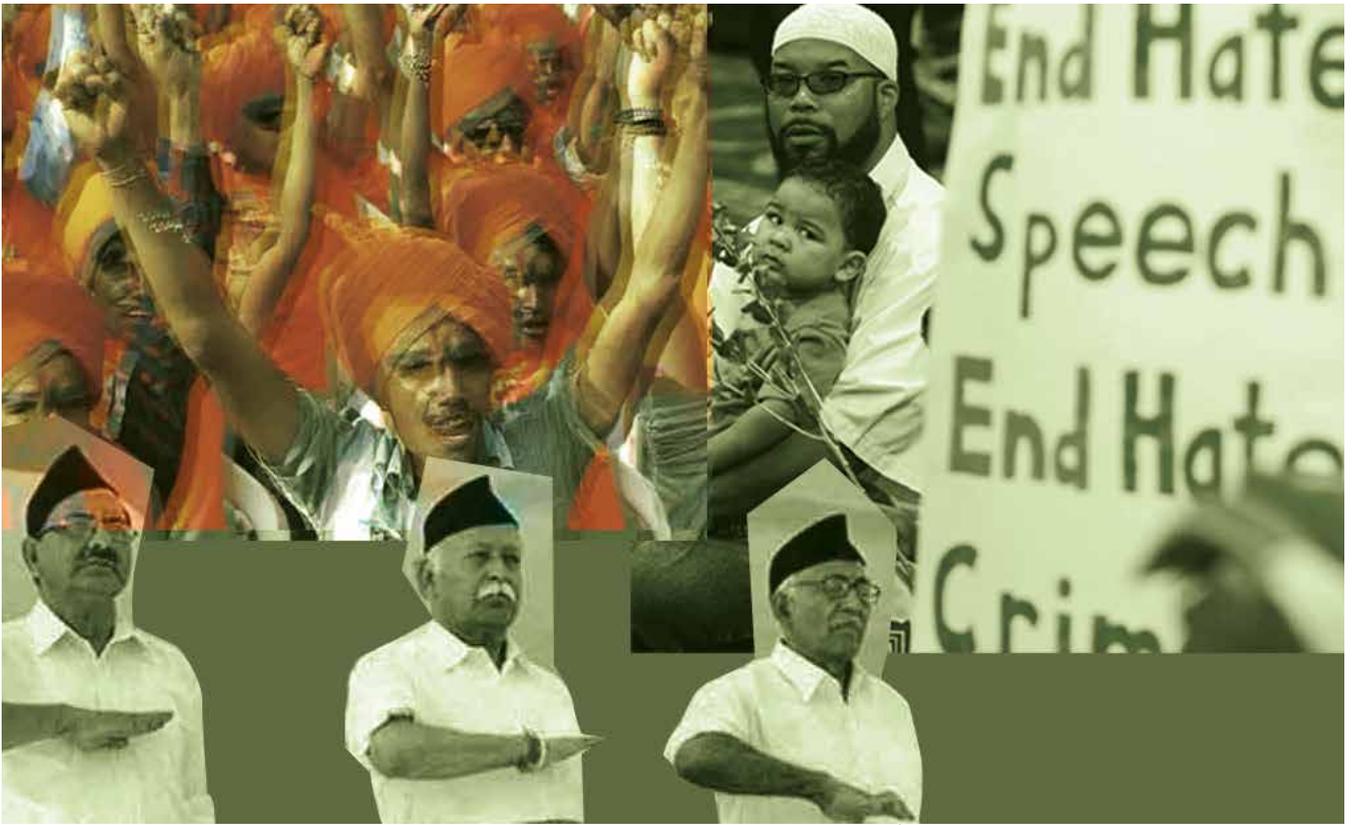
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The RSS, 'Hindutva' and Rising Attacks against Muslims in India

BY KALIM SIDDIQUI

The article will discuss the recent attacks against Muslims in Delhi and try to examine the 'Hindutva' (defined as extreme Hindu nationalism) organisation, mainly the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS), whose leaders and members not only participated in building a hateful environment, but were also found to be taking part in attacks against Muslims in Delhi. The term Hindutva is a far-right-wing ideology and it was first used by V.D. Savarkar, who defined it in

his book *Hindutva: Who is Hindu?*, published in 1925. Since then it has become the core philosophy of the RSS, whose political front is India's current ruling party the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP).

The *Hindu Mahasabha*, a right-wing Hindu nationalist outfit, was formed by Savarkar in 1917. A few years later in 1925, another Hindu right-wing organisation was formed called RSS. Both organisations had very similar ideas, and they

declared their primary objectives were to protect Hindus and only Hindus were allowed to become members of these organisations. A person could be a member of both organisations, (i.e. RSS and Hindu Mahasabha), at the same time. Neither Hindu extremist organisations extended their support to India's struggle for freedom against British colonial rule, and also did not participate in the Civil Disobedience movement of 1930 or the Quit India movement of 1942. Under the leadership of Savarkar, the *Hindu Mahasabha* was opposed to Mahatma Gandhi's gestures to Muslims and towards the Muslim League president Jinnah. (Siddiqui, 2018)

The link between far-right ideologies in South Asia long predates the relatively recent rise of right-wing populist leaders. In the 1930s, the RSS leaders praised the ideas of Italian fascists and German Nazis and kept contact with these parties in order to help advance their extreme right-wing organisations.

The founders of the RSS were Hedgewar, and Savarkar. Hedgewar became its first leader, and afterwards Golwalkar took over as the leader of the RSS.

The RSS leaders wanted to build India along the lines of Hindu nationalism and Hindu supremacy. The founders of the RSS were Hedgewar, and Savarkar. Hedgewar became its first leader, and afterwards Golwalkar took over as the leader of the RSS. Since its inception, the RSS has opposed the Congress Party's ideas on nationalism and secularism. (Siddiqui, 2019a) They wanted to build 'Hindu Rastra' and opposed the Congress Party's struggle for India's independence movement, which was then led by Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru, Patel and Maulana Azad. In their writings, they argued that India should resolve its "*Muslim problem*" in a similar way that used by the Nazis dealt with their "*Jewish problem*". The RSS is the oldest fascist organisation to have survived so long.

The BJP is the political front of the RSS and most of the BJP leaders, including the Prime Minister Narendra Modi, have been members of



the RSS. Even before becoming Prime Minister, Modi had reaffirmed his commitment to Hindutva: "*The nation and Hindus are one. Only if Hindus develop will the nation develop. Unity of Hindus will strengthen the nation*" (*Organiser* February 11, 2007 cited in Noorani, 2015). BJP and RSS are fully committed to the ideology of Hindutva, which is deeply rooted in hatred of India's religious minorities, particularly Muslims and Christians. (Siddiqui, 1992; and also see 1990) At present, the RSS has millions of members spread throughout most parts of India with more than 50,000 *shakhas* (branches). It also runs thousands of schools where young minds are poisoned with hate against Muslims. In Uttar Pradesh State alone, there are some 20,000 RSS controlled *shishumandir* schools which teach that the Muslims and Christians are unreliable people stirring up hatred against both Muslims and Christians, with children being taught that both these groups are foreigners and outsiders.

What does a 'Hindu Rastra' really mean? The literal meaning is the establishment of a Hindu state for the benefit of the Hindu community. It also means the subversion of secularism and reducing the Muslim community to the status of second class citizens. The actual aim is to create an authoritarian state which will suppress Hindus and Muslims alike, depriving them of their democratic rights and destroying the federal structure of Indian polity, and subjecting to unprecedented levels of exploitation of both Hindus and Muslims by the domestic corporate-financial oligarchy and international financial capital.

The RSS/BJP invests money in education and introduces indoctrination at school level. So, the more the state retreats from social welfare responsibility, the more it becomes possible for these communal forces to move in and propagate their belief in as truth, which is very narrow, sectarian and divisive. (Siddiqui, 2016a) The RSS also has a long term strategy to subvert intellectual spaces, capture institutions of higher education and research, not through logical debates and facts, but through violence and intimidation and often with the aid of the state machinery. (Siddiqui, 2009) The danger is that the authoritarianism is spreading across



Hindu group Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Express Photo By Amit Mehra

educational institutions. From control of syllabus to control of thoughts is conducted according to the wishes of the Hindutva, which is the real danger of fascism hanging over India. Fascism assumes different forms according to historical, social and economic conditions and national peculiarities. In India, fascism seems to be emerging under the garb of nationalism, which is causing havoc to India's constitution and democratic morality. If India would like to be part of the civilised world, its leaders should safeguard the rule of law and uphold the constitution and pluralistic values.

The Ideology of the RSS

Golwalkar led the RSS for many years and he was seen as its ideological guru and defined Indian nationalism in his book, *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, (1947: 42) as:

“The non-Hindu people in Hindustan must adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no ideas but those of the glorification of the Hindu race and culture ... they must cease to be foreigners, or may stay in the country wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment - not even citizen's rights”. His sympathies for the views of the Nazi Party are evident from the following passage from his book: *“To keep up the purity of the race and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of the Semitic races – the Jews. Race pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has also shown how well-nigh impossible it is for races and cultures having differences going to the root, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by”.*

The RSS justifies violence against Muslims as necessary in the name of national security and for the so-called wellbeing of Hindus. Despite the fact, that the Hindus constitute the majority of India's population of nearly 80%, while the Muslims constitute only 17% of the total population. The will to secure the Self has as its corollary the will to make insecure the others. In the 2002 Gujarat riots,

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thousands of Muslims were killed by Hindu right-wing extremists including members of the RSS/BJP. The anti-Muslim pogrom in Gujarat portrayed a stereotypical image of Muslims as constituting a danger against the Hindus, with the Hindus needing to be secured. Violence against minority Muslims is facilitated and justified in the name of achieving security for Hindus.

The word often used to describe the RSS is “*paramilitary*”. In its near-century of existence, it has been found by several judicial commissions to have carried out attacks against minorities, particularly Muslims. Mahatma Gandhi was shot dead in 1948 by a member of the RSS, which led to the banning of the RSS for a short period. It was only allowed to begin again with the promise to abide by the law and not to indulge in violence against minorities. The RSS doesn't, by itself, engage in electoral politics, but does so thorough the BJP, the party that has governed India since 2014, and that has, under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, been remaking India into an authoritarian, Hindu nationalist state. (Siddiqui, 2019a)

Gopal Godse, brother of Mahatma Gandhi's assassin, Nathuram Godse, revealed in his book *Gandhi's Murder and I*, that there was a close relationship between Savarkar and his brother Nathuram Godse. In 1948, Savarkar was charged as a co-conspirator in the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. Soon after, he was acquitted by the Sessions Judge, only because the law required independent corroboration. However, later on in 1970, the report of Gandhi's assassination by Justice J. L. Kapur, a former Judge of the Supreme Court, found a “*conspiracy to murder by Savarkar and his group*”. (Noorani, 2002)

Narendra Modi, after becoming Prime Minister in 2014, set about to further demonise



the Muslim community by fulfilling the RSS agenda—a uniform civil code, the building of the Ram temple in Ayodhya, and in Kashmir, the abrogation of Article 370 of the Indian Constitution. On all these three issues, the government passed bills through parliament, which further undermined the democratic rights of the Muslim community in India. (Siddiqui, 2019b also see 2016a)

The Modi government has imposed a curfew and closed down the internet for the last 10 months in Kashmir. The security forces have been given more powers to arrest, intimidate and create fear among the local people. Kashmir is getting out of control. The agitation against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) has put the BJP government on the defensive.

However, the BJP government's anti-Muslim policy have still got support from India's big businesses, the middle classes, and right-wing Hindu organisations, and is also supported by large sections of India's media, both print and electronic. (Siddiqui, 2019; also see 2018b)

Since the BJP came to power in 2014, Muslims have often been attacked and killed in the name of protecting cows in mostly Northern states where the BJP has strong support. Christopher Jaffrelot (2019), who has written extensively on the RSS/BJP, argues that lynchings are due to the close cooperation between the RSS/BJP and the law enforcing agencies, namely the police.



The planned attacks against the Muslims in Delhi are a serious threat to the very foundations of India's pluralism and democracy.

Recent Riots in Delhi

The planned attacks against the Muslims in Delhi are a serious threat to the very foundations of India's pluralism and democracy. As we saw last February, members of the BJP/RSS succeeded in carrying out their attacks against Muslims in Delhi, by killing more than 60 people and also burning hundreds of houses and shops. It is a blot on the government and institutions including the police that most mainstream organisations and the media have not exposed the treachery of the RSS/BJP and have acted hand in glove with the BJP.

Delhi, the capital of India, was taken over by communal riots for four successive days in the last week of February 2020. The violence was a calculated attempt by Hindu extremists to tear apart the fabric of society. The violence also coincided with the visit of the US President Donald Trump to New Delhi, which appeared to be part of a nefarious plot by the RSS and other Hindu extremist elements to undermine the rule of law. Moreover, the failure of the law enforcement agencies to crack down on the rioters in the initial phase of the riots made matters worse. The police in Uttar Pradesh state were not free from blame either, and their behaviour at Aligarh Muslim University, and that of the Delhi Police at Jamia Millia University, where excessive use of force was used, was very undemocratic and brutal against students from a predominantly Muslim community.

A few days before the riots in Delhi, the RSS/BJP leaders were found to be publicly instigating their party members to attack Muslims, but the police failed to register first information reports (FIRs) against the BJP leaders, including the party Legislatures and Member of Parliaments, who were accused of making hate speeches: Kapil Mishra, Abhay Verma and Anurag Thakur.

The London based *Economist* (February 27, 2020) noted regarding the hate campaign and violence in Delhi: "Inflammatory rhetoric from Mr Modi's party makes things worse. During local elections in the capital in February, one of his candidates led crowds in chants of "Shoot the traitors!" In reference to groups protesting the citizenship law...the riots were triggered by a local politician who declared that if the sit-in by Muslim women protesting against the citizenship law was



Scenes of destruction at Bhanjapur in Northeast Delhi during the riots
| Photo: Suraj Singh Bisht | ThePrint

Since BJP government came to power in 2014, Muslims are often attacked and killed on the name of 'protecting cows' in mostly Northern states where BJP has strong support.

not lifted by the time United States President Donald Trump left India, his supporters would no longer remain peaceful. Soon after, mobs went on the rampage in Muslim neighbourhoods, often with police looking mutely on, or, say many witnesses, aiding the attackers.”

Similar accounts of the violence and attacks against Muslims were noted by others. India's newspaper, the *Telegraph's* correspondent reported (February 25, 2020): “[The] violence is well planned and organised and is the direct result of incitement by BJP leader Mishra. The police did not take any action against him when he held a procession on Sunday provoking his supporters to clear the peaceful protest.” The real perpetrators of the riot were not the two individuals, but those who created an atmosphere of hate, which drew the crowds to take sides in a petty incident. It seems that this violence was planned and carried out by the RSS/BJP members.

The researcher on Hindu-Muslim violence, namely Ward Berenschot argues in his study *Riot Politics*, “Hindu-nationalist organisations stepped up their activities in the months preceding riots. According to several informants, the RSS started organising new weekly meetings

in Isanpur in the months before the riots, which were then discontinued after the riots. This increased activity of RSS and Bajrang Dal units was also noted in other parts of Gujarat, which suggests that the preparation for the violence had been under way before the burning of the train coach in Godhra.”

Another prominent researcher, Paul Brass, who has carried out studies on communal riots and also he has done extensive fieldwork in Western Uttar Pradesh. His work *Theft of an Idol* is of seminal importance (Princeton University Press, 1997). He argues: “The riotous events I have here documented were not primarily ‘spontaneous’ occurrences or chance happenings and that there were identifiable culprits who had conspired to produce or who had committed acts either designed to produce or whose effects were to produce riotous and murderous results... the kinds of violence that are committed in ‘communal riots’ are, I believe, undertaken mostly by ‘specialists’, who are ready to be called out on such occasions, who profit from it, and whose activities profit others who may or may not be actually paying for the violence carried out. The local politicians and authorities are often either incompetent or they themselves desire the riots to take place, and are willing to place a communal interpretation on the precipitating incidents.”



Women from Muslim community protest against CAA and NRC in Mumbai.
Credit: PTI Photo



Since BJP government came to power in 2014, Muslims are often attacked and killed on the name of 'protecting cows' in mostly Northern states where BJP has strong support. (Siddiqui, 2019b; also see 2016b) As Christopher Jaffrelot (2019), who has written extensively on the RSS/BJP, argues on lynching about the close cooperation between the RSS/BJP and the law enforcing agencies, namely police: *"Not only has the Prime Minister abstained from condemning lynching, some legislators and Ministers have extended their blessings to the lynchers. Whenever lynchers have been arrested, the local judiciary has released them on bail. If the executive, legislature and judiciary do not effectively oppose lynching, India may remain a rule-of-law country on paper and, in practice, a de facto ethno-state."*

These people's protests against the CAA had a special emotive content in the national capital, symbolised by the *Shaheen Bagh* protests led primarily by women and children, also added to and intensified the Hindutva communal manoeuvres. On December 24, 2019, barely a fortnight after the passing of the CAA in Parliament and approximately 10 days after the *Shaheen Bagh* protests began, BJP leader Kapil Mishra likened the women and children protesting at the site to Pakistani agents. These were desperate efforts by the RSS/BJP, which were targeted towards polarising voters on pro- and anti-Hindutva lines and thus defeating the rival candidates in the Delhi local election.

A fact-finding report released on 17th July 2020 by the 'Delhi Minorities Commission' on the violence unleashed in Delhi in February 2020 has shed light on the collusion between state and non-state actors in a planned and targeted attack on members of the Muslim community. (The Wire, 2020) It also brought out the deliberate

inaction by police officials, and the incitement of violence by members of the RSS/BJP, and also several

The Muslims peacefully protested against these above laws, and due to the tense political environment eventually communal violence broke out in the national capital, Delhi, in February 2020.

central government BJP ministers used misogynist and communal slurs to refer to the anti-CAA protests led by Muslim women since December 2019. At a rally in Uttar Pradesh, chief minister Yogi Adityanath said, "Men are sleeping under quilts; women, kids are pushed forward to protest against CAA". Historically, during any episodes of communal violence, women's bodies are used to take revenge against a community. The episode of violence unleashed in Delhi reveals yet again a similar exertion of power with impunity. A similar pattern of violence had emerged in Gujarat by then BJP state government of Mr Modi in 2002 and Muzaffarnagar in 2013.

In February 2020 riots in Delhi, Muslim lost their property, businesses, their houses were looted and burned and their jewellerys, documents, money, amongst other valuables, were taken by the attackers. Women protesters from the *Chand Bagh* sit-in protest site, claimed that they had been beaten up by male police officials. The police did not help or support them when the mobs were attacking people in the area. In all,

11 mosques, 5 madrasas (or religious schools) were burned down and also a Muslim shrine and a graveyard were attacked and damaged by the Hindu extremists, the fact-finding team from the commission said in its report released recently. "Seemingly, to crush the protests, with support of the administration and police, a retaliatory plan of pro-CAA protesters was worked out to trigger violence at a large scale," it said. The Minority Commission also noted that witnesses spoke of police failure to intervene in the rioting. "Multiple testimonies collected by this Fact-Finding Committee recount reports of police inaction even as violence unfolded before them, or of police not arriving despite being called repeatedly," it said. (Wire, 2020)

The fact remains that the collusion between the government, the rioting *Hindutva* aggressors, the police, and the activists of the ruling dispensation, was the most prominent factor throughout the four days. In spite of this, the Delhi Police in its investigations have primarily targeted Muslims.

Anti-minority Politics

During the last parliamentary election in India, the BJP campaigned to polarise people in a political experiment which attained unprecedented success. It aimed to consolidate India's Hindu majority at the cost of Indian Muslims. Modi's trusted aide Amit Shah, a hard-line Hindutva leader, was given the task of being the Bharatiya Janata Party's national president, to recondition the saffron party on visibly extremist lines. Amit Shah was rewarded with becoming the home minister. Another Hindu extremist, RSS hard core activist and founder of the *Hindu Sena* Yogi Adityanath, was made Chief Minister of the UP state, India's most populated state. (Siddiqui, 2016a; also see 2016c)

In 2019 parliamentary election, the BJP attained a larger majority, which enabled the party to fulfil its dream of adopting laws which are seen as discriminatory against Muslims. In the past 12 months, India's parliament has adopted a number of laws related to the Muslim community, which were promised by the RSS/BJP in the past.

First, the Modi government passed a law through Parliament criminalising the Muslim practice of instant 'triple *talaq*' (divorce). The irony was that India's Supreme Court had already invalidated itself. It was understood by many that making the pronouncement of the 'triple talak' a criminal act would be exclusionary and discriminatory against Muslims as there was no law to protect women of other religions who were abandoned by their husbands. Politically it seems that this was a direct attack on Muslim identity and citizenship, which enabled the Modi government to move much closer towards the RSS's long-term agenda of implementing a Uniform Civil Code with an intentional Hindu majority bias. (Siddiqui, 2018)

Second, the abrogation of Article 370 was a clear case of constitutional overreach. The article was the culmination of the RSS's long-term

The report, released by US Secretary of State Mr Pompeo, notes: "religiously inspired mob violence, lynching and communal violence"

MEAIIndia/Twitter

historic aversion to a Muslim-majority state enjoying autonomy under the constitution. The Article 370 was prepared by the Nehru government in the early 1950s, when Nehru also made a promise in the United Nations that the region of Jammu and Kashmir would remain disputed until plebiscite takes place and kept the provision to provide special status to the only majority-Muslim populated state in India, which led to a carefully crafted political-legal arrangement, which gave the Jammu and Kashmir state special status under Article 370 of the Indian constitution.

Third, the Supreme Court's judgment in November 2019 sanctioned the construction of a Ram temple in Ayodhya city in order to put an end to a long-running dispute regarding the Babri mosque between Hindus and Muslims. The apex court accepted that the mosque, which stood on disputed land, was demolished illegally by Hindu extremists in 1992, but at the same time, the court handed over the premises to the Hindutva organisations, who according to the court were behind the crime.

Fourth, the Modi government inflicted its most savage strike on the dignity of Indian Muslims. The CAA introduced religion for the first time as a criterion for acquiring Indian citizenship and barred Muslim refugees, which undermined the spirit of India's constitution, whose core values are liberty and equality. The constitution prohibits any discrimination between people on the basis of caste, creed, religion, or colour. But the CAA, which allowed fast-tracking of citizenship only for non-Muslim refugees, sent out a clear political message that the government regarded Indian Muslims as second-class citizens. The women sat for months to protest against the CAA citizen bill, the BJP government accused them of being anti-national and pro-Pakistani. With the mainstream behind the BJP, any solidarity and sympathy for those protestors was defused by the government.

The Muslims peacefully protested against these above laws, and due to the tense political environment eventually communal violence broke out in the national capital, Delhi, in February 2020. Over 60 people were killed; most of them Muslims, and their properties were destroyed with an intention to cripple them economically.



India had barely recovered from this damage when the coronavirus pandemic hit the country. During the recent outbreak of the corona pandemic, the RSS/BJP launched a disgusting campaign by blaming Muslims for the spread of the virus to kill and harm Hindus. Burying all reason and rationality deep, the BJP leaders led a vicious campaign to portray a Muslim organisation, *Tablighi Jamaat*, and Indian Muslims as a whole – as the only reason coronavirus infections spread in India. The government and mainstream media blamed corona virus on Muslims and divided the people on the basis religion.

Let us briefly look at the socio-economic status of Muslims in India. In 2005 a judicial commission was appointed by the Congress Party, which was called the Sachar Commission to “obtain relevant information and conduct a literature survey on the relative social, economic and educational status of Muslims in India”. The Sachar Commission did this job extensively and unambiguously underlined that Muslims were far more disadvantaged than Hindus in every respect, particularly on socioeconomic and educational fronts. The prevalent poverty and illiteracy in the Muslim community is largely responsible for its backwardness. The commission also gave a number of recommendations in order to improve the socio-economic conditions and uplift the Muslim community from poverty. However, fifteen years have passed since its recommendations were presented, but nothing was done by the successive governments to address these issues.

A recent US State Department’s annual report was presented to the US Congress on the current situation of minorities in India. It presents a detailed account of the protests and criticism against the Indian government’s decisions on the CAA and Article 370. The report, released by US Secretary of State Mr Pompeo, notes: “*religiously inspired mob violence, lynching and communal violence*”, and says that “*some officials of Hindu-majority parties, including from the BJP, made inflammatory public remarks or social media posts against minority communities*”.

The annual report further notes: “*In December, (Indian) Parliament passed the*

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The prevalent poverty and illiteracy in the Muslim community is largely responsible for its backwardness.

Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which accelerates citizenship for Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi, and Christian migrants from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan who entered the country on or before December 31, 2014, but not for similarly-situated migrants who are Muslims, Jews, atheists, or members of other faiths,” (pp.27) On Article 370, the US report notes: “*In August, the central government revoked the semi-autonomous status of the Muslim-majority state of Jammu and Kashmir and split it into two union territories: Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh... The revocation sparked protests, criticism from Muslim leaders.*” (pp.29)

Conclusion

The study has found that this contemporary form of fascism can be seen as a way of imposing the dictatorship of international finance capital on India while providing it with some kind of a mass base. At present, the major Indian capitalists have formed close alliance with the foreign capital and they find Hindu right-wing nationalism more suitable to serve their interests. The RSS/BJP plays a central role in this. This political group took no part in India’s

The study finds that with the adoption of neoliberal economic policy, India is surrendering its sovereignty to global finance capital.

struggle for independence from Britain - none of its members went to jail or participated in any anti-colonial movement. As Kavita Krishnan (2017) has emphasised, “*There is a wealth of documentary evidence to show those of the RSS’ “ideological fraternity” collaborated with the colonisers and were inspired by Italian and German fascism. Savarkar promised to be the “the staunchest advocate of loyalty” to the colonial government*”.

The RSS/BJP is not a liberal bourgeois party as we have seen in the West, because the origin of the RSS/BJPP is very different and their mode of functioning that accommodates different kinds of voices. (Siddiqui, 2009b) The necessity of fascism in the contemporary juncture arises from the tension between the existences of a polity in which a mass base is necessary while at the same time we live in a globalised world where the rule of international finance capital dictates the terms. This tension produces fascistic tendencies in a developing country like India.

At present, India faces an immense threat from fascism in the guise of Hindu nationalism. The process of uneven development and deepening socio-economic crisis has created conditions of backwardness and poverty, which in turn had created an opportunity for right-wing Hindu organisations to organise people on the basis of religion.

The study finds that with the adoption of neoliberal economic policy, India is surrendering its sovereignty to global finance capital. (Siddiqui, 2019a) There seems to be a “fusion” of the interests of the business and the state, which is close to an explicit definition of fascism and all these are hallmarks of fascism in India. The fusion of neo-liberalism and Hindutva is being cemented with more support from big business. Finally, the semi-fascist authoritarian right wing Indian government promises no prospects whatsoever to farmers, workers, minorities, tribal people and Dalits and provides illusory hopes to the majority

of the people. The RSS is trying to divide the society along religious lines. This will shake the foundations of India’s pluralistic character. 



Dr. Kalim Siddiqui is an economist, specialising in International Political Economy, Development Economics, International Trade, and International Economics. His work, which combines elements of international political economy and development economics, economic policy, economic history and international trade, often challenges prevailing orthodoxy about which policies promote overall development in less developed countries. Kalim teaches international economics at the Department of Accounting, Finance and Economics, University of Huddersfield, U.K.. He has taught economics since 1989 at various universities in Norway and U.K.

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