

Nationalism in Indian Politics during PM Modi Regime (2014-19)

Umer Javaid Ghumman ¹, Dr rehana saeed Hashmi ²

¹ PhD scholar department of political science, university of the Punjab Lahore

² Assistant professor, department of political science, university of the Punjab, Lahore

ABSTRACT

This study is being taken to understand the current role of nationalism turned hyper nationalism in Indian politics. The research work will highlight different impacts of this ideology on Indian domestic society as well as its implication on relations with Pakistan. This research will focus on the reasons and incidents that led to the development and influence of nationalism in Indian politics and how it slowly turned the secular India to a hard-right-wing state. Furthermore, this study is important to understand the implications of this Indian nationalism on Pakistan especially in last five years as it is neighboring countries of India. The anti-Pakistan sentiments under PM Modi government have remained the pivot of Indian politics. Hence this study will focus on the main events that occurred under the supervision and sponsorship of PM Modi administration that damaged the Indian face & image as the biggest democracy in the world and portrayed true colors of Indian society as phonetic and extremist. Hence, this study will focus on all of these aspects making it a comprehensive research work on Indian nationalism. The study will be conducted through qualitative approach keeping in mind the view point of both Pakistan and India while analyzing and keeping in mind the research questions and objective of this study. The study will discuss the aspects of rapid rise in Indian politics, the current scenario in Indian politics post 2019 elections and potential threats and implications for Pakistan. This whole approach has destabilized the bilateral ties between India & Pakistan and has also affected the regional peace and stability in South Asia.

Key Words:

Nationalism, India, Pakistan, peace, BJP, PM Modi

Article Received: 25 August 2020, Revised: 15 October 2020, Accepted: 18 December 2020

Introduction

The phenomenon of nationalism had has played important role in the politics of India. One of the vital examples of nationalism turned into hyper nationalism can be seen in Indian politics tracing the history from 1980s, when the right-wing Indian political party Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) was established. BJP started taking part in politics of India with their policy and agenda of Hindutva and nationalism. Although the party won just two seats in 1984 elections but coming years saw its rapid rise in Indian politics. The incident of Babri Mosque in 1992, proved that BJP has become a strong political power in India (Peer, 2016).

PM Modi government has used the tool of nationalism against Pakistan to divert the focus from the real issues. Earlier, in 2016, the Indian government played the same ploy in shape of Uri 'surgical strike'. Without giving any evidence or solid proof, the Indian government boasted a successful operation by Indian Army within the territory of Pakistan. Despite several demands from both Pakistan and internally, Delhi administration has refused to share any proof of these strikes and just played the card of

nationalism stating that military forces cannot lie. The Indian PM made this incident as his success and instilled the injection of hyper nationalism in India (Nabeel, 2019).

As mentioned earlier, in the campaign of 2019 Indian State elections, the card of nationalism is the trump one for Indian ruling party. The core issues like employment and GDP have altogether been ignored by the BJP and only anti-Pakistan nationalistic rhetoric is center of elections. This increasing role of nationalism, turning into hyper nationalism, is a turning point between Pakistan and India as well as for South Asia. It is because this ideology has injected a sense of resentment in the society of India and the anti-Pakistan emotions are at its peak hence an instable future, hostility in bilateral relations and region with lack of trust is inevitable (Moonakal, Shanker, 2019).

Nationalist cum Hyper Nationalist Policies of Modi Regime:

After coming to power, Modi has taken several anti-Pakistan and anti-Muslims steps, and few of them are given below:

1. Uri Attack

On September 18, 2019, Kashmiri freedom fighters attacked Indian army brigade

headquarters in Uri region of Indian Occupied Kashmir. The attack happened during unrest in the valley following martyrdom of Burhan Wani. Indian army attacked and martyred Wani on July 8, 2016. Wani had become face of Kashmir freedom struggle against illegal occupation of India (The Indian Express, September 25, 2016). Although Wani had never attacked or killed any Indian troops, New Delhi still declared him a terrorist. Wani had an immense popularity among the Kashmiris because of message of freedom on social media (Times of India, September 18, 2016).

After his martyrdom, the valley saw massive protests against the Indian forces and their brutalities. Avenging the martyrdom, four Kashmiri militants attacked the Indian army headquarters. During the attack 17 Indian soldiers were killed in six-hour long gunfight. The attack was called 'deadliest attack' on Indian army in recent history. The media reports also claimed that it was an inside attack as most of the killings happened after tents in the headquarters caught fire. The soldiers were residing in the tents as they were being replaced with new regiment. Residing the soldiers in the tent near border is not a common procedure in forces. (Ankit, 2016; The Quint, September 19, 2016).

Repeating its policy, New Delhi blamed Pakistan for the attack and that without any evidence and concrete proof. The Indian government refused to attend SAARC summit to be held in Pakistan in November 2016. Pakistan called the postponement unfortunate and called for regional cooperation for stability and peace (The Express Tribune, September 27, 2016).

On September 28, 2016, Indian army launched 'surgical strikes' on territory of Pakistan and claimed of killing 'terrorists' launch pads'. The Modi government declared it as a great victory. Despite Pakistan and international community's demands, India never shared any evidence of the 'strikes'. (The Economist, October 8, 2016). A day after the attack Indian Director General Military Operations (DGMO) Lt. General Ranbir Singh claimed that the attack was conducted as 'preemptive strike'. In a press conference, Singh said the attacks were conducted on 'confirm intelligence reports.' The DGMO, however, neither provided the locations of these attacks nor gave the number of killed militants in the attack. After the press conference, DGMO refused to take

any questions and ended media brief (Jamal, 2016; BBC, September 29, 2016).

While responding to Indian propaganda, Pakistan armed forces conducted a media tour and brief with national and international media. The media wing of Pakistan military took the international journalists to the Line of Control, where India had claimed of conducting attacks. During the tour, media wing head Major General Asim Saleem Bajwa told the visiting journalists that no such attack had happened and the place is physical evidence of it (Singh, October 4, 2016). The military took journalists to two main spots of Hotspring Formation and Boxor Formation along LoC, the place where India claimed that its troops had carried out so-called surgical strikes. At both locations, which are about 50 kilometers apart, no sign of casualties or destruction were found, except two Pakistani soldiers, who were killed during the Indian cross-border shelling. During the tour, Bajwa said, if India has really carried out the attack, it should open its side of the border for journalists too. The journalists represented the international media included BBC, Reuters, AFP, AP, CNN, BBC Urdu and News Week (Express Tribune, October 2, 2016).

In one of its research article, British based media outlet BBC analyzed the reality behind Indian-claimed surgical strikes. In its article, the media outlet talked to locals and visited the places, where India had claimed to hit the militants. The report said that there was no concrete evidence that these strikes were ever conducted. It said that Indian army did conduct the cross-border firing after coming forward from their military posts along LoC. The report further said that Indian army targeted Pakistani forces' posts on at least three different locations, martyring one soldier and injuring few others. The report concluded that it was a regular violation of ceasefire along LoC and there was no proof that any militants were killed. In its report, Indian media-outlet, The Wire said that Modi and his party used the so-called surgical strikes to win state elections in Uttar Pradesh. It reported that party placed hoardings and posters with victory claims in the strikes (Khan, October 23, 2016).

Balakot Attack:

The freedom movement and insurgency continued in Occupied Kashmir despite Indian forces' brutalities. The movement had got a fresh support after killing of Burhan Wani. The Kashmiri

freedom fighters had launched several attacks on the Indian forces in the valley. During the violence in valley, over 500 individuals, including civilians and Indian army troops were killed since 2016. The Indian authorities kept on targeting civilians in their attacks (Narain, 2016).

On February 14, 2019, a convoy of Indian paramilitary forces was targeted in Pulwama district of Occupied valley. The attack occurred when a vehicle-born suicide bomber rammed his car in the convoy killing 46 personnel of Central Reserve Police of India. The attacker was from Occupied Kashmir but India still blamed Pakistan for the attack. Islamabad denied any connection and offered India to launch a joint investigation into the attack. On February 19, 2019, Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan attributed Modi government's desire to hit Pakistan on bases of Pulawama attack (Gurung, 2019; Times of India, February 15, 2019).

On February 26, 2019, Indian Air Force's fighter jets intruded in airspace of Pakistan and claimed of targeting a militant camp in Balakot city. The Indian media and politicians claimed that hundreds of militants were killed in the airstrike, ranging from 150 to 350. The Indian Air Force, however, did not give any number. Pakistan army said that the Indian intrusion was intercepted by Pakistan and Indian air jets just threw their bombs in haste into an open space. Pakistan military said a few trees and a crow were killed in the attack.

Despite immense propaganda by Indian media and politicians, neutral sources, media outlets and foreign diplomats rejected Indian claim of hitting a militant camp in Pakistan. US based newspaper The New York reported that western security officials have serious doubts on Indian claims. Reuters reported that the said religious school does not exist at the place as it was destroyed a year ago by Pakistan (Slater, 2019; Kazmin, 2019).

The locals told media that the bombs only damaged some trees, a house and injured a local man. Journalists from Associated Press also visited the place on February 26, but could not find any hard evidence supporting Indian claims. The Satellite-Data analysis by Australian Strategic Institute's Nathan Ruser concluded that there was no apparent proof of any extensive damage and on the face of it does not validate claims by Indian government regarding the effect of strikes (Howell, Doyle, Scarr, 2019). Meanwhile, digital

forensic analysis organization Atlantic Council held an independent investigation on the issue and concluded that there were not damages inflicted to any building or infrastructure around the targeted site (EU Space Imaging, 2019). An investigation by high resolution satellite imagery Planet Labs noted that "there were no discernible holes on the roofs of building, no signs of scorching blown-out walls, displaced trees and around the madrassa or other signs of an aerial attack." Later, Australian Strategic Policy Institute also conducted an analysis from the Worldview-2 satellite saying that "all three weapons missed the location by similar distances suggesting that the misses were caused by a systematic targeting error" (Hellyer, Ruser, March 27, 2019).

In retaliation of Indian aggression, Pakistan Air Force conducted air strikes on February 27, 2019. The PAF fighting jets launched un-explosive bombs near Indian army headquarter in Indian Occupied Kashmir. The Indian Air Force tried to respond but a dogfight with PAF resulted in downing of two Indian fighting jets, MiG-21 and Su-30, and capturing of Indian pilot Wing Commander Abhinandan. Despite, Indian aggression, Pakistan did not inflict the hostility and released Indian pilot after a day of capture extending an 'olive branch' (Slater, 2019).

The time of India's Balakot stakes was rather important. Prime Minister Modi's popularity in India was going downwards mainly due to his economic policies. The strikes were conducted months before Indian general elections in 2019. Modi and his party used this attack as a political tool and fueled Indians' anti Pakistan sentiments using the tool of hyper nationalism. Modi won the elections by a land sliding victory and came into office for the second consecutive term, while riding on wave of nationalism, Hindutva and anti-Pakistan sentiments.

Revocation of Special Status of Occupied Kashmir:

On August 5, 2019, Modi government abrogated the Article 370 of Indian constitution, abrogating special status of Occupied Kashmir. Under this article, the valley had the right of holding autonomy, had separate state assembly, and state flag. Under the law, no Indian citizen can buy land in the valley. Although there are other states in India, which have special status under its constitution, but BJP only revoked the status of

Muslim-majority region (BBC News, August 6, 2019).

Right after revoking the article 370, Indian government put a complete curfew and communications blackout in the valley. Furthermore, all top Kashmiri politicians including former chief minister Omer Abdullah, Farooq Abdullah and Mehbooba Mufti were detained. Along with that, New Delhi arrested or house arrested pro-freedom leadership including Syed Ali Gillani, Yasin Malik and others (Gettlemen, Kumar, 2019). The inhumane behavior of India against Kashmiris led to outcry across the globe but Hindutva government did not give heed to it. New Delhi also banned entry of all human rights organizations, foreign journalists and UN Human Rights Observer into the valley.

Global organizations including United Nation (UN), Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch (HRW), European Union (EU) protested against the lockdown. On request of China and Pakistan UN Security Council held two meetings over the issue of Kashmir, for the first time in history of organization. European Parliament held special sessions on Indian step and recorded its protest against the illegal move. In several reports, HRW and Amnesty International condemned human rights abuses in the valley. The rights bodies reported that continuous lockdown has led to humanitarian, health, food, education, and security crisis in the valley. The organization said New Delhi and its occupation forces are harassing Kashmiri without any reason, making everyday life worse for them (Reports HRW, Amnesty International, August, 2019).

A number of rights activists and civil rights bodies from India also visited the occupied valley. One of fact-finding mission reported that Indian forces have arrested and detained over 13,000 Kashmiris in the period of two months. It said minors are included in the arrested groups. The report said Indian troops tortured many of them mercilessly, leaving them scarred for life. The activists met local Kashmiris and reported that no single voice was found in the valley in support of this annexation (TRT, September 27, 2019; Wallen, 2019).

Another fact-finding report from India said that Kashmiris have started civil disobedience movement against New Delhi. The report said locals have refused to obey Indian government's orders and just shut themselves inside their

houses. It said they local businessman open their shops from 7 am to 9 am in the morning and then shut them down. Despite, Indian government's claim of total normalcy in the valley, Kashmiris behaviors proved otherwise. To prove their point, New Delhi even arranged a tour of foreign envoys from Europe but later media reports proved that it was a private trip and EU had no connection with it. Interestingly, all envoys belonged to far-right political parties of Europe (Kala, D'Souza, *etal*, 2019).

Due to the complete internet ban, longest by a democracy in history, and lockdown, Kashmiri local business faced over \$2 billion losses. Multiple media reports said that Kashmir apples left hanging on trees in the orchards as traders refused to pluck them along with no trade options for them. The travel industry lost over 12,000 jobs in matter of months and carpet and house industry faced severe loss. The lockdown made Kashmiris suffered in any aspect of life but despite all these hardships the locals refused to bow down before the pressure of India and vowed to keep on the movement for freedom (Bukhari, December 19, 2019).

Ayodhya Verdict:

One of the major anti-Muslim steps which Modi government took was announcement of Ayodhya case verdict. The case was started in 1991, when Hindu mob destroyed Mughal-era Mosque in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh. In late 1980s, BJP started a nationwide movement for the construction of Ram Mandi at the very place of Babri Mosque, claiming that was birthplace of Hindu God Ram. BJP's top leadership conducted a countrywide rally for the construction of the temple, resulting in destruction of mosque, followed by killing of over 1000 Muslim in a massacre. The case was filed in different courts over the years and finally reached to Supreme Court of India.

After hearing the case on daily bases for over a month, Indian top court announced its verdict on November 9, 2019 (Asian News Network, November 9, 2019; Das, 2019). In its controversial verdict, the apex court handed over complete Babri Mosque land which was 2.77 acres to Hindus. The court ordered Indian government to form a special board for the construction of Ram Temple at the site (The Hindu, November 9, 2019). Although in its verdict, Supreme Court admitted that there was no

evidence that Ram was born at place or there was a temple at that very place. The top court still handed the place to Hindus, pleasing radical and Hindutva powers in India (Times of India, November 9, 2019).

In a meager compensation, the top court gave 5 acre land to Muslims on alternate location for the construction of the mosque. In its verdict, the Supreme Court also said that the mosque was constructed on an ancient non-Islamic structure but it does not mean that it was destroyed by people. Still, the court said Muslims cannot prove the ownership of the place while Hindus presented better evidence over the ownership of the mosque (Times of India, November 9, 2019).

The verdict by five-member bench, headed by Indian Chief Justice Ranja Gogoi, exposed Hindutva aggression of Modi government as construction of Hindu temple was part of its election manifesto. The Muslim parties refused to admit the verdict and vowed to challenge it (The Hindu, November 9, 2019). The Muslim advocates said, the evidence provided by Muslims were sufficient and concrete but court still favored Hindu parties.

The whole conspiracy of handing mosque land to hindus revealed after four months in March 2020. The Modi government nominated the head of Ayodhya case and former chief justice of India Ranjan Gogoi for the upper House of Indian Parliament. This rare move in Indian constitutional history was done to reward Gogoi for his verdict in Ayodhya case. The move showed the world that Modi and his government is clearly against Muslims, even inside India. Despite being criticized by the opposition parties and politicians, Modi government refused to withdraw the decision. Hence, on March 21, Gogoi took oath as the new member of Indian parliament, stamping his biasedness against the Muslims. This move by Indian government exposed Hindutva agenda of Narendra Modi (India Today, March 19, 2020).

2. Citizenship (Amendment) Act 2019:

On December 11, 2019, Modi government passed Citizenship Amendment Act, approving another anti-Muslim policy. Under the new act, the government will conduct National Population Regulation (NPR) across the country and collect the data of its citizens. After the NPR, all of those individuals who don't have documents to prove their citizenship will be stripped off from their

citizenship. All Indian have to present birth certificates to show that they were born in the country. Furthermore, all of them have to prove that their ancestors were Indians. Under the next step National Register Committee (NRC), all of those without documents will be included back to its citizenship including Hindu, Buddhists, Jain and Christians. In this list of citizens, Muslims are not included. Modi government passed the bill, claiming that this is for the persecuted Muslim minorities who migrated from neighboring countries including Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh (Jayal, 2019). But the real purpose of the act is to exclude Muslims from the Indian citizenship. The Indian government has applied the same model in its Assam state, where around 2 million citizens, mostly Muslims, have been stripped of the citizenship and shifted to migration camps.

The act faced serious opposition across the country as civil activist rights, students, politicians and civil societies started protest against the bill. All of them held massive protests, demonstrations and rallies across the country. The government tries to suppress them resulting in killing of 30 people till February 23. On this date, another anti-Muslim riot broke out in Indian capital New Delhi. The mobs attacked, burnt, killed Muslims and destroyed their houses and shops. 53 people, mostly Muslims, were killed in four-day long riots. The radical Hindus destroyed mosques and a shrine in northeast Delhi (Kuchay, 2020).

Meanwhile, all-women sit-ins erupted across the country against the law. All-women sit-in at New Delhi Shaheen Bagh area led with the example. The women have refused to end the protest until the withdrawal of the controversial act. The sit-in inspired women across India as similar protests erupted in Mumbai, Lucknow, Aligarh, Chennai and other cities. Despite the pressure from Indian government and media, protestors have continued the sit-ins.

Conclusion

Modi is all-to-all radical and follower of Hindutva ideology. Since start, he has showed extreme anti-Muslim attitude. During his tenure as chief minister of Gujarat, he was responsible of Gujarat riots. During his election campaigns for premiership in 2014 and 2018, he used anti-Muslim and anti-Pakistan slogans for political gains. Throwing his own country in an economic turmoil, Modi has majorly focused on policies

against minorities, especially Muslims in India. Furthermore, Modi has targeted Pakistan on number of occasion, both political and through Indian army, just to express his aggressive policies. The incidents of cross border 'surgical strikes' and Balakot airstrikes are two major examples of his offense against Pakistan. Moreover, under his government Muslims lost Ayodhya case, Article 370 of Occupied Kashmir was revoked and then controversial citizenship act was passed to exclude Muslims from Indian citizenship. Modi took RSS ideology to peak with open anti-Muslim and anti-Pakistan policies. In last three decades, Indian politics have shaped drastically and gradually turned more hostile, radical, extremist and far-right. Secular by constitution, India has a new face now, which is Saffron and a hostile one. Modi government has no plan to stop these policies as it has announced to launch the population census, a first step of controversial Citizenship Act. Meanwhile, the enmity and trade deficit between Pakistan and India may be at its highest in last 72 years. Due to New Delhi hostility, two countries have not engaged in direct talks. Despite Pakistan's repeated offers and steps like opening Kartarpur Corridor have not made New Delhi to extend a friendly hand towards Islamabad.

References

- [1] Nabeel, Fahad. (2019). Lok Sabha Election 2019: Implications for Pakistan. The Diplomat.
- [2] Moonakal, Nadeem; Shanker, Manasavi. (2019). The Pakistan Factor in the 2019 Indian General Elections. The Diplomat.
- [3] Peer, Basharat (6 December 2016). "'Maybe We Will Have The Temple When The Congress Is In Power': Twenty-Four Years After The Babri Masjid Demolition". The Caravan
- [4] Uri attack: BSF Jawan succumbs to injuries, death toll rises to 19 (September 25, 2016). The Indian Express.
- [5] Uri terror attack: 17 soldiers killed, 19 injured in strike on Army camp, (September 18, 2016). Times of India.
- [6] Ankit Panda, Gurdaspur, (September 19, 2016). Pathankot, and Now Uri: What Are India's Options?, The Diplomat,
- [7] Uri Attack: Most of the 17 Soldiers Died in a Tent Fire. (September 19, 2016). The Quint,
- [8] India pulls out of SAARC summit in Islamabad. (September 27, 2016). The Express Tribune.
- [9] India and Pakistan: Reversing roles. (October 8, 2016). The Economist.
- [10] Jamal, Umair (2016), India Pakistan Conflict: what is next for the historic foes? Al Jazeera Centre for Studies.
- [11] Kashmir attack: India 'launches strikes against militants. (September 29, 2016). BBC News.
- [12] 'Surgical strikes': Journalists flown to LoC to debunk Indian myth. (October 2, 2016). The Express Tribune.
- [13] Khan, Ilyas. (October 23, 2016). India's Surgical Strike's in Kashmir: Truth or Illusion? BBC.
- [14] Narain, A. (2016). Revival of Violence in Kashmir: The Threat to India's Security. Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses, 8(7).
- [15] Gurung, Shaurya Karanbir (February 20, 2019). "What happened at Pulwama and history of terror attacks on convoys". The Economic Times.
- [16] Times of India. (February 15, 2019).
- [17] Slater, Joanna. February 26, 2019). India strikes Pakistan in severe escalation of tensions between nuclear rivals, Washington Post .
- [18] Amy Kazmin (1 March 1, 2019). India and Pakistan engage in a high-stakes game of brinkmanship. Financial Times.
- [19] Howell, Martin; Doyle, Gerry; Scarr, Simon (March 5, 2019), Satellite images show buildings still standing at Indian bombing site, Reuters.
- [20] European Space Imaging (March 8, 2019), Pakistan: Satellite Imagery confirms India missed target.
- [21] Hellyer, Marcus; Ruser, Nathan; Bachhawat, Aakriti (March 27,

2019), India's strike on Balakot: a very precise miss? The Strategist, Australian Strategic Policy Institute.

- [22] Slater, Joanna; Constable, Pamela. (February 27, 2019), Pakistan captures Indian pilot after shooting down aircraft, escalating hostilities. Washington Post.
- [23] Article 370: What happened with Kashmir and why it matters. (August 6, 2019). BBC News.
- [24] Gettleman, Jeffrey; Raj, Suhasini; Schultz, Kai; Kumar, Hari (5 August 5, 2019). India Revokes Kashmir's Special Status, Raising Fears of Unrest. The New York Times.
- [25] Estimated 13,000 boys arrested in Kashmir since India's crackdown. (September 27, 2019). TRT World.
- [26] Wallen, Joe. (September 25, 2019). Young boys tortured in Kashmir clampdown as new figures show 13,000 teenagers arrested. The Telegraph.
- [27] Bukhari, Fayaz. (December 19, 2019). Indian Kashmir sees more than \$2.4 billion losses since lockdown: group. Reuters.
- [28] Ayodhya turned into a fortress ahead of Supreme Court Verdict. (November 9, 2019). Asian News International.
- [29] Das, Anil (September 28, 2010). Chronology of Ayodhya's Ram Janambhoomi-Babri Masjid title suit issue. International Business Times.
- [30] Ayodhya verdict: as it happened | Temple at disputed site, alternative land for mosque, says Supreme Court. (November 9, 2019). The Hindu.
- [31] Ranjan Gogoi, former CJI, takes oath as Rajya Sabha MP. (India Today, March 19, 2020). India Today.
- [32] Kuchay, Bilal. (February 24, 2020). Fresh violence erupts in Indian capital during anti-CAA protests. Aljazeera.