Introduction

Indian Nationalism originally developed during the Indian independence movement against the British. The movement was about territorial nationalism, and worked towards gaining independence and freedom for all types of Indians. Now, Indian Nationalism has shifted more towards Hindu Nationalism, and this has been affecting current politics, elections, and government officials. According to Aljazeera, the 2019 Indian elections will likely be the first election to actually challenge the inclusivity of India’s political culture (Mukhopadhyay, 2018). If the current government wins another majority, the country will move towards becoming a majoritarian state. The current party, BJP, will secure control over all state institutions, media, and public discourse. Overall, this would reduce diversity, freedom of speech, and inclusivity in Indian government and politics. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to discover how such strong nationalism, specifically Hindu nationalism, developed in modern India, and how it impacts minorities and the outcome of the 2019 elections.

Theory

Definitions

Nationalism can be defined as identifying with a group of people “who share a common history, language, territory, culture, or some combination of these” (Houghton, p. 228). Ethnicity means “having a separate identity on the basis of common history, race, language, religion, culture and territory” (Pamir, 1997). Therefore, ethnic nationalism, or ethnonationalism,
specifically refers to a type of nationalism where the nation is defined by a “shared heritage, which usually includes a common language, a common faith, and a common ethnic ancestry” (Muller, 2008, p. 9).

The Social Dominance theory perceives society as “inherently oppressive and group oppression to be the ‘normal,’ default condition of human relations” (Cottam, 2016, p. 233). Jim Sidanius, who studied and contributed to this theory, argues that different types of oppression, such as racism and ethnocentrism, function to “maintain the integrity of this group-based, hierarchical structure” (Cottam, 2016, p. 233). Within every society, there is a dominant group along with a subordinate group. Sidanius proposes that these hierarchies develop naturally because societies tend to have a “competitive evolutionary advantage over those that are not organized this way” (Cottam, 2016, p. 233). Most societies include group-based dominance hierarchies, in which a social group, “often an ethnic, religious, national, or racial one,” possesses a disproportionate power over the subordinate or minority groups (Pratto & Stewart, 2011, p. 1). Therefore, discrimination becomes an accepted and basic daily occurrence. For example, there is the caste system in India, where the dominant upper castes have preferable educational, economic, and health opportunities compared to the members of lower castes.

The Psychoanalytic Approach refers to a more dispositionist approach to nationalism. Sigmund Freud specifically talks about the “tendency for conflicts to occur with people” of “minor differences” (Cottam, 2016, p. 234). For instance, with the Arab-Israeli conflict, there is a conflict between neighbors who seem to lack significant differences to outsiders (Cottam, 2016, p. 234). Additionally, Vamik Volkan and his colleagues describe how people feel the
need to split the world into “good” and “bad”, which leads to anger towards one’s enemies, and
rids one of the anger and rage they unwittingly hold towards themselves (Cottam, 2016, p. 235).
Overall, people attribute traits about themselves that they do not like or view as bad to others,
or the outgroup, and this is where the conflict rises, because people need to eliminate this anger
about these “bad” traits. Since people have an inclination for conflict, ingroups will foster
animosity for outgroups, even if the outgroup is very similar to them.

**Literature Review**

**Background of Hindu Nationalism**

According to Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, whose writings and beliefs are viewed as foundational texts for Hindu nationalists, the “Indian nation at its core is a Hindu nation” (Vaishnav, 2019). However, until the nineteenth century, “Hindu” simply referred to those who lived east of the Indus River; it had no specific religious meaning (Marshall, 2004). When the British colonial authorities in 1871 authorized a census that included Hindu “as a religious designation”, then Indians started to view themselves and India as “Hindu” (Marshall, 2004).

In the twentieth century, concern regarding the British caused the development of “the secular and socialist Congress movement,” along with the Hindu nationalist movement referred to as the Sangh Parivar (Marshall, 2004). The Sangh Parivar espouses an ideology called “Hindutva,” which has a goal to bring about the “predominance of Hinduism in Indian society, politics, and culture” through tactics of violence and terror (Marshall, 2004). The goal includes driving out and converting other religious and ethnic groups to Hinduism, especially Muslims and Christians. Keshav Hedgewar founded the Sangh Parivar’s central organization, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), in 1925. Hedgewar drew from the beliefs of V. D. Savarkar, who
thought that Hindus were the descendants of Aryans and that those who did not view India as their “fatherland and holy land” were not real Indians. The RSS initially objected to the idea of a secular Indian constitution and referred to minority groups, such as Muslims and Christians, as threats to India. Essentially, RSS glorified military discipline and Hindu scripture; their main beliefs consisted of a predominant Hindu society, government and culture. The RSS is also known for conducting several violent acts, such as the destruction of Babri Masjid, a mosque. This organization is supposed to spread Hindu values and beliefs, but at the same time it spreads vicious ethnic hatred.

The Hindu nationalist movement started to gain even more momentum in the 1990s, when the political party Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which stands for Indian People’s Party, “rose to power” (Jaffrelot, 2009, p. 3). During their control of parliament and the government, the BJP greatly took advantage of the “political and ideological vacuum” at the time, since the opposition, the Congress Party, was consistently facing accusations of corruption (Siddiqui, 2016, p. 13). During this time of uncertainty, the concept of uniting as Hindus served “as a means of social stabilisation” (Siddiqui, 2016, p. 13). By advocating for itself as the “defender of ‘Hindu society’” and utilizing derogatory propaganda against the Muslim community, BJP garnered great support and significantly affected the politics of India.

Current Prime Minister Narendra Modi of the ruling party, BJP, is still a common favorite amongst the public. During his role as Chief Minister of India’s Gujarat, communal riots broke out in 2002 that resulted in the killings of hundreds of people, a majority of which were Muslim. Activists of human rights accused Modi of instigating and allowing for these killings, even after he was absolved of any involvement by the courts (Jain, 2019). However, he
swept his party into power during the 2014 general elections and began his leadership role as the Prime Minister. Modi has regularly pushed a harsh form of Hindu nationalism that has further polarized India; both his and his party’s role in the government has caused a spike in the number of attacks on Muslims.

These groups and parties are significant in fueling nationalism in India; specifically, the current Prime Minister Narendra Modi and most of the other cabinet members are part of the RSS. By having so many elected officials in government come from a specific organization that sprouts ethnic and religious nationalism, these radical policies and beliefs are present in government, as well.

**Case Study: Hate Crimes**

Since the rise of Hindu Nationalism in India, one of the biggest conflicts has been between Hindus and Muslims. Hindu nationalists view Muslims as an outgroup and as a threat to the values of a Hindu India. According to Amnesty International, there has been an increase in Islamophobia and hate crimes against Muslims since April 2017 ("India: Hate crimes against Muslims and rising Islamophobia must be condemned - Amnesty International", 2017). The lynching/killing of Muslims in public has caused an increased sense of insecurity for Muslims and exacerbated religious tensions.

Anti-cow slaughter legislation and vigilantism have also increasingly caused communal violence against Muslims. Since cows are considered to be sacred in Hindu beliefs, the slaughter of cows has consistently raised tensions between Hindu and Muslim communities, and right-wing groups have utilized the issue for mobilization of Hindu nationalism. Even though Muslims are not the only group who consume beef in India, they have been the main target of
“gau rakshaks”, or Hindu extremists who act in vigilante groups ("A Narrowing Space: Violence and discrimination against India's religious minorities", 2017). This particular issue has led to targeted attacks and other acts of aggression against Muslims. Although all minority communities are affected by communal violence, these attacks still disproportionately affect the Muslim community in India ("A Narrowing Space: Violence and discrimination against India's religious minorities", 2017).

Similarly, Dalits, or “Untouchables”, also receive a majority of the hate and oppression of minorities in India. Dalit refers to the ethnic group in India that occupies the lowest caste, and these members face daily discrimination and a lack of opportunity for social mobility. Along with institutional discrimination, Dalits have also been victims of violence due to Hindu nationalism. Amnesty International claims that seventy percent of hate crimes in India since 2015 were committed based on caste, and a majority of such crimes committed in 2018 were against Dalits or Muslims ("Over 200 Alleged Hate Crimes in 2018, Reveals ‘Halt the Hate’ Website", 2019).

Although Muslims and Dalits have faced a majority of the oppression of Hindu nationalism and its violence, these beliefs and ideologies also affect Christians, Sikhs, and other minority groups in India that do not fit under the ethnic group of Hindus.

**Case Studies for Comparisons**

**Bosnia.** Bosnia recently held national elections in October, 2018. Bosnia has been experiencing nationalism in its culture and politics ever since the 1995 Dayton Agreement, which ended the Bosnian War from 1992. The country operates as a parliamentary republic, along with a quota system that “bureaucratizes ethnic belonging at every level of government” (Hajdari &
Due to the environment that has been fostered after the war a few decades ago, ethnonationalist parties tend to control the political sphere. Political scientist Jasmin Mujanovic explains that in this country, sectarianism and ethnic identity is the center of political life. Mujanovic describes that, “power is divided not according to one’s electoral performance but according to one’s presumed or professed ethnic identity” (Hajdari, 2018). However, even though Bosnians, Serbians, and Croatians all speak different languages and have different origins, the main difference is religion. This concept of ethnic identity has led to separation in several different parts of life, including how schools are still segregated in order to avoid mixing.

For the purpose of challenging the government and its discriminatory practices, two citizens disputed a part of the Bosnian constitution that allowed members “of the constituent groups to run for the presidency” (Hajdari & Colborne, 2018). The court discovered that this section violated the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), but the government still has not introduced the verdict (Hajdari & Colborne, 2018). Two other ECHR verdicts have further proved the problematic sections of the Constitution. Bursac, a journalist, professes that, “If you’re not a Serb, a Croat, or a Bosniak, you are by law prohibited to run for higher offices. However, you’re required to fulfill your civic obligations, such as paying taxes. You have limited citizenship rights unless you declare one of the three nationalities” (Hajdari & Colborne, 2018).
Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka has a semi-presidential representative democratic republic. For the past three to four decades, the conflict between the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) is “one of the longest-running civil wars in Asia” (Bajoira, 2009). Relations between Sinhalese, the majority in Sri Lanka, and the Tamil were not always so hostile. Following independence from the British, the Sinhalese disliked Tamils, since they were favored more by the British during the colonial period. Due to this animosity, Tamils were disenfranchised under the Ceylon Citizenship Act, Sinhala became the official language of Sri Lanka, and then Buddhism became the nation’s main religion (Bajoira, 2009). The Ceylon Citizenship Act also reinforced ethnic politics and minimized the electoral influence of the Tamils, who still live as an impoverished community today (Perera, 2001, p. 5).

This discrimination towards Tamils affected them in the areas of education, employment, and the issue of land. As this ethnic tension grew more hostile, the LTTE formed in 1976 to “campaign for a Tamil homeland in northern and eastern Sri Lanka” (Bajoira, 2009). Although there were only occasional cases of violence before, the main point of the conflict grew into institutionalized political violence which was “utilized by both the political parties in power and Tamil youth” (Perera, 2001, p. 20). This was the beginning of the militarization of the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict, which eventually reached civil-war proportions. Indian peacekeeping forces occupied Sri Lanka for a while, but the conflict between the LTTE and the Government resumed as soon as Indian forces left. The conflict escalated again “with conventional battles being fought to capture territory” (Perera, 2001, p. 21).

Discussion

India’s complex situation applies to the different approaches to nationalism. For instance, with the Social Identity theory, people tend to favor their ingroup, but dislike the outgroup. Hindus in India consider being a Hindu as their “national identity”, whereas
minority groups, such as Muslims, do not attach themselves to the presumed “national identity” of Hindu. This diminishes the role of minorities in Indian society and provides no space for their culture or beliefs. As mentioned before, BJP aspires to transform India into a predominantly Hindu society. Such strong nationalism can lead to expulsion, extermination, or assimilation of minorities, as the identity of minorities ceases to exist.

Overall, the majority group in India, Hindus, tend to favor their own ingroup, but demonstrate hostility to the outgroup, which is all the minorities in India, such as Muslims and Dalits. This conflict arose due to differences in identity, such as ethnicity, but more specifically, religion and caste.

The Social Dominance theory can also apply to India’s situation. Based on India’s history, there has always been a hierarchical society, specifically with caste. Those who were part of the upper castes were advantaged, as they were more wealthy, more socially accepted and valued. On the other hand, those who are part of the lower castes, like the Dalits, had no opportunities for social mobility and were ostracized from society. Hindu nationalists, especially those who are part of the upper castes, endorse this ethnocentrism in order to further enforce this hierarchical society, where minority groups have no place for success or acceptance. These inequalities against minorities are established and imposed through institutional and individual discrimination, which allows Hindu nationalists to establish dominance in India. Overall, Hindu nationalists are legitimizing and enhancing this existing hierarchy to preserve their power, specifically by implementing institutional discrimination against lower caste groups, such as Dalits.

Elements of the Psychoanalytic Approach are also identifiable in India’s situation. For example, the biggest ethnic conflict in India is between Hindus and Muslims. To an outsider’s perspective, these two groups have very minor or no differences. As Freud discussed, people
have the tendency for conflict, which means people will find reason to fight within their differences. In Indian society, ever since independence from Britain, Hindus have divided the society into “good” and “bad”, with Hindus occupying the “good” category, while minorities occupy the “bad” category. For example, Muslims are regularly demonised as “sexual predators, as being sympathetic to terrorism,” and as slaughterers of cows, which are sacred for Hindus (Mander, 2017). Due to the fact that Hindu nationalists have categorized Hindus as part of the “good” group, they morally justify any violent conflict or discrimination against the other groups, especially Muslims.

Additionally, since hate crimes and Hindu nationalism are increasing in India, it can be expected that this momentum will mobilize voters to re-elect BJP and Modi. As India is already on this path, the re-election of BJP will allow for decreased secularism in government. BJP is increasingly introducing beliefs and policies in government that enforce the ideal for a predominantly Hindu society. This increased adoption of religion in government will reduce the separation between religion and government, which will also reduce religious tolerance. There will also likely be an increase in hate crimes. Hate crimes were predicted to increase after the election of BJP in 1994, so the same can be expected to happen after the re-election of BJP in 2019. Minorities are currently the targets of these hate crimes, but they will soon start to lack even more representation in government with the re-election of BJP. For instance, BJP promised to “disenfranchise millions of Muslim immigrants in Assam” in 2016 (Das 2016). Overall, BJP confrontational tactics worsen communal tensions between Muslims and Hindus, and having a Hindu nationalist party obtain the majority in parliament further reduces representation of minorities.

There have recently been allegations of mass voter exclusions for this election. For instance, nationwide reports have discovered that voters were unable to partake in the election
after “being deleted from, or deemed ineligible to be included” (Malhotra, 2019). Around 120 million people in India are missing from the list of voters; 40 million of these missing voters are Muslim, while 30 million are Dalits (Malhotra, 2019). There are concerns that this is targeted exclusion, which is fairly easy in the election process, as political parties have been known to fill out Form 7. In such instances, they request to remove several individuals’ names on the election commission’s website which can exclude certain communities (Malhotra, 2019). If such large groups of minorities are excluded from voting, then they will not be able to obtain minority representation for the upcoming government.

In this case, India would become similar to Bosnian government, where just a few ethnicities dominate Bosnian politics and government. Moreover, ethnic identities could influence all levels of government, with only ethnonationalist parties, such as BJP, also controlling the political sphere. As Mujanovic explained about Bosnia, ethnicity and sectarianism could also grow to be the center of political life for India. Eventually, the lack of secularism could become so severe that only Hindus are able to run for office and hold all power in India’s political climate.

The increase of Hindu nationalism also further exacerbates ethnic tensions between Hindus and Muslims in India. Ethnic tension in Sri Lanka led to armed conflict and devastating casualties. In Sri Lanka, all parts of government and society were controlled by Sinhalese, especially with the official language being Sinhala and the main religion being Buddhism. Since BJP and Hindu nationalists want to identify the “national identity” as Hindu, the utilization of one's identity as a way of exclusion could also cause worsened violent conflict between rival ethnic groups. For instance, if India did become a predominantly Hindu society, minority groups would fight for a voice and rights like the Tamil did in Sri Lanka. Essentially,
this use of a “national identity” could not only limit the voice of minority groups in government and society, but even introduce violent conflict for power.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to determine the origins of Hindu nationalism in modern India, along with the social and political impacts on minorities following the outcome of the 2019 elections. India’s 2019 elections depend on whether Hindu nationalism can allow for BJP to take a majority of the seats in parliament.

Hindu nationalism was not always so prominent in India. “Hindu” was originally a term to indicate those who lived East of the Indus River, but now the term is used for the religious group. Currently, Hindu is the ideal “national identity” for India, with Hindu nationalist groups and political parties, such as the RSS and BJP, that promote ethnonationalism. Since a majority of officials in India belong to such groups, this radical ideology presents itself in government, as well as society. The promotion of ethnonationalism through government officials and media also helps BJP stay in power. If the public is determined to achieve the “national identity”, BJP will win a majority again. The re-election of BJP will fuel Hindu nationalism and reduce secularism in government. This change in government will worsen hate crimes, minimize religious tolerance, and reduce diversity and representation of minorities in government.

Some of these nationalist phenomena can be explained by Social Identity theory, Social Dominance theory, and Psychoanalytic Approach to nationalism. The idea of the ingroups and outgroups is what leads to conflict between Hindus and other minority groups in India; the ingroup, or dominant group, is Hindus, while all minorities are part of the outgroup, or the “other”. Hindu nationalism in India grew because of animosity between Hindus and other minority groups, which has led to a significant spike in hate crimes and exclusion of minorities.
Future comparative research could focus on more case studies; this paper uses the case studies of Bosnia and Sri Lanka to infer the future of Indian government and the possibility of increased ethnic conflict. Comparing India to countries with a parliamentary government structure, such as the United Kingdom, could help discover how parliaments can exacerbate ethnonationalism. In addition, using countries with a specific history of colonialism and ethnic conflict would be helpful, as there are more similarities with India’s history and current state. For instance, Pakistan’s majority consists of Muslims with Hindus as the minorities. Since Pakistan was also part of India’s colonial history and had conflict with India due to ethnic tensions post-colonialism, further research could benefit by comparing India to Pakistan. This case study as a comparison also poses the question of how much more likely ethnonationalism is in a post-colonial context. Overall, future comparative research could focus on more case studies that mirror India’s government and ethnonationalism history.
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