

Deconstructing the Weaponization of Faith and Nationalism with A Special Reference to Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's Anandamath

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Abstract

The increasing politicization of faith and nationalism is a potential menace confronting the major democracies today. The fragile peace and increasing violence are the immediate outcomes. We see today a systematic weaponization of belief systems and patriotism to assert supremacy, capture power and hegemonise people different in faith. What we witness today in India in terms of religious bigotry, demonization of minorities and Hinduisation of the state institutions and public spaces is not a sudden development but the culmination of continuous interruptions in the cultural life of people. The previous studies trace this confluence of faith and nationalism to the works of Hindutva ideologues in the early years of 20th century. However, this study traces it to 19th century Hindu reform movements and illustrates how this ideology threatens India's democratic existence today. The study uses qualitative method for description and analysis, treats the text as a primary source, and places it within the changing paradigms of the current nationalistic politics in India. It demonstrates how Bankim Chandra's Anandamath, often thought of as the foundational text of Hindu nationalism, imagines a Hindu state, demonizes Muslims, asserts a schism between the two faiths, iconizes the nation as a mother and calls India a land of Hindus alone. The study, moreover, shows how this text played a fundamental role in promoting the structured Hindu nationalistic politics which shapes the contemporary discourse in today's India.

Keywords

Anandamath; Hindutva; religious extremism; othering; racial supremacy; VandeMātaram

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Introduction

The concept of nationalism has different trajectories of manifestation in different regions and countries. It emerged as a secular concept in Europe. In colonized nations, however, it emerged both in response to the resistance to colonial regimes and in emulation of the Western civilization. Panikkar (2004) notes that nationalism primarily emerged and developed in response to the anti-colonial consciousness in 19th century British India. As the anticolonial resistance started reverberating across the nation, people, across the religious divide, came together to fight for a yet to come mythical nation. But, as has always been the case, things began to work differently and the resistance to colonialism soon began to disintegrate and assume different dimensions. With time, it began to assume a religious dimension and kind of “Bengali/Hindu cultural identity began to assert itself by the 1850s” (Sengupta 1993, p. 27). This deviation of nationalism as a resistance to colonialism to religious dimension was the result of the 19th century reformers who defined India's identity around the canonical texts. As the result of religious led reformation movements, a Hindu variant of nationalism began to resonate with the masses (Khan et al. 2017, p. 482). Thus, the start of the 20th century saw this Hindu variant of nationalism emerge as a formidable force and a structured movement (Anderson & Longkumer, 2018, p.1).

Various studies deal with the rise and growth of Hindu nationalism and Hindutva as an ideology. Savarkar's *Essentials of Hindutva retitled as Hindutva: Who is a Hindu*, published in 1927, marks a structured beginning of Hindutva as a political ideology. Built around Italian fascism, this political ideology seeks to militarize and weaponize nationalism and faith to reimagine and reshape India as a Hindu nation. The growth and development of Hindu nationalism in independent India find a detailed discussion in various important works. Marzia Casolari (2000) traces a direct connection between European fascism and Hindutva and how the former helped the latter formulate the fundamental principles. The article argues how Italian fascism and Nazi Germany continue acting as a guiding light for Hindutva politics in contemporary India. Similarly, Bhatt (2001) examines the rise and evolution of Hindu nationalism from the end of the last century. The book talks about the key concepts of Hindutva ideology and suggests that Hindu nationalism is a product of the ethnic and religious tradition of India. With the illustration of historical evidence, the book argues how structured Hindu nationalism poses a threat to the pluralistic ethos of modern India. Christophe Jaffrelot (2007) talks about the rise and steady growth of Hindutva as a vibrant force in the eighties. The book surveys the origin, key figures behind the movement, their contribution, and the imagination of India as a Hindu nation. Anand (2011) asserts that portraying Muslims as a potential menace is the central idea of Hindutva politics. The work argues how a set of different strategies is employed by the Hindu right for creating fear and anxieties in the minds of the Hindu majority. The study reveals how stereotypical 'Other' is a central aspect to Hindu nationalist imaginings. Leidig (2020) looks at Hindutva as a new variant of the Hindu right extremism. The article investigates the rise and development of Hindutva in colonial India parallel to the emergence of fascism in Europe. Hindutva, the study argues, played a significant role in developing Hindu consciousness and religious centred politics. The paper takes a broad view and considers right-wing politics as a global phenomenon.

As India makes unexpected departure from the democratic path and its constitutional secular vision, it heads into an uncharted territory. India, a deeply divided and polarized nation today, witnesses the persecution and harassment of the minorities with the state looking the other way. The extremist groups backed by those in power lynch and hack people to death in the name of the protection of the cow and saving Hindu culture. The immunity with which they operate point to a disturbing pattern. Today, India experiences an increased politicization of faith and nationalism, demonization of Muslims, fictionalization of history, mythologization of India's past, an invention of an enemy, and a systematic use of religious symbols. All this social unrest and religious bigotry necessitates a fresh look at Hindutva which has always been a slow movement in the previous century. But with the capture of state power, it has emerged as a formidable force and threatens India's democratic existence. Using qualitative method and historical approach to study the text, the study seeks to dismantle this confluence of faith and nationalism.

The study uses descriptive, critical and analytical methods as tools to analyse the text. Besides this, it uses biographical and historical approaches to investigate the circumstances in 19th century Bengal. The first section gives a brief introduction to the rise of Hindu nationalism, its basic tenets, the core ideas it revolves around, and examines how Hindu consciousness had begun to assert

itself in the social life of people. The second section places the author within context and shows how it provided ideological underpinnings for the structured Hindutva movement. It briefly describes the core values of Hindu nationalism. The third section describes the main events of the text, demonstrates how these events of the texts are being enacted today and how India's democracy is being moulded in the line of Hindu imagination of India.

Defining Hindutva and Contextualizing Hindu Nationalism

The idea of Hindu supremacy, put simply, is the central theme of the Hindutva. The concept of Muslim 'otherness' brings it very closer to European fascism. It is all about establishing a Hindu state in India (Leidig, 2020, 2). Hindu nationalism, known today as Hindutva, is premised upon certain stereotypes, deformed images of Muslim, and alleged persecution of Hindus under Muslim rule. The Muslim otherness, imaginary fears, iconizing the land of birth as goddess and mother and inventing a Hindu glorious past lost out to alleged Muslim tyranny forms the core of Hindu nationalism. Anand (2011 finds that "Hindutva is porno-nationalism in its obsessive preoccupation with the predatory sexuality of the putative Muslim figure and the dangers to the integrity of the Hindu bodies" (p.1). The violence against Muslims is seen as an act of self-defense and a crusade to protect and preserve Hindu culture from an imaginary enemy. The proponents of Hindu nationalism view only Hindus as the legitimate citizens of the country and regards Muslims as the descendants of foreign invaders. Menon (2017) says that "Hindutva is violent and masculinist, and paradoxically, tries to fill Hindus with anxiety and fear about Muslim domination" (para, 16). Unlike Hinduism which is symbolic of diversity and inclusive of different cultures, practices, rituals, and traditions, Hindutva is a scrupulous use and politicization of the faith in ways that "being Hindu is equated with an ethnonationalist identity" (Leidig, 2020, p. 22). Hindutva is, thus, the weaponization of nationalism and symbols of Hinduism for political mobilization. What it needs is the conglomeration of a few symbols of Hinduism which can be mobilized to create tension vis-à-vis minorities. Hindutva, thus, conveniently politicizes and weaponizes Hinduism in such a way that being a Hindu fill one with a sense of cultural supremacy and an utter sense of contempt for others different in faith and culture. Thus, Hindutva is the politicization of Hinduism for asserting cultural supremacy and capturing power. Savarkar, himself an atheist, does not regard religion as an essential element of Hindu identity. The territorial sanctity, race, and language forms the core values of Hindutva philosophy.

The emergence of Hindu nationalism is not any sudden or spontaneous development but a steady one arising from the awakening Hindu consciousness in the latter half of the 19th century of Bengal Renaissance. But Hindutva as a structured movement could be traced back only to the early decades of the 20th century. It is often believed that "Savarkar's *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?*" provided the philosophical underpinnings of the Hindu nationalistic movement" (Khan et al. 2017 p.482). The Hindu right employs Hindutva to impose a narrow set of beliefs and doctrines which discard multiplicity of views, a plurality of voices, and schools of philosophy. While Savarkar, B.S. Moonje, and Gowalkar present Hindutva as embracing India's cultural diversity and pluralistic ethos, but it, in the opinion of the contemporary scholars, is a blow to the very essence of Hinduism as a religion. Jaffrelot (2007) rightly observes that "Indian culture was to be defined as Hindu culture, and the minorities were to be assimilated by their paying allegiance to the symbols and mainstays of the majority as those of the nation" (p. 5). The current RSS chief recently sought to recast Hindutva as inclusive and embracing all religious communities. He talked of Muslims being an integral part of the Hindutva project. But such illusionary statements do not go beyond seeking a distinction and differentiating a good Muslim from a bad Muslim. Hindu nationalism, reframed today as Hindutva, politicizes Hinduism in ways that it creates an 'ethnonationalist identity'. Thus, Hindutva seeks to militarize and weaponize nationalism and the majority faith, portray Muslims as a threat and presents them as descendent of invaders "who indulged in the destruction of Hindu culture and civilization as a religious mission" (Panikkar, 2011).

Conceptualizing Bankim Chandra's *Anandamath* and Contemporary Discourse

Bankim Chandra, often thought of as the father of Bengali fiction, was one of the earlier authors to imagine a Hindu nation. He gave expression and definite shape to the awakening Hindu consciousness in the latter of 19th century. Though deeply impressed by the ideals of the French revolution, but he soon realized that they were incapable of serving the cause of Hindu revival

(Mondal, 2020). In his understanding, nationalism as thought of and understood in Europe could not work without being put in the well of spirituality. He believed that "the only nationality India was capable of was a religious nationality" (Gupta, 1906, p.viii). He saw answers to many of the challenges confronting India in the revival of Hindu consciousness. Therefore, he chose to reject the secular idea and offered a Hindu variant of nationalism. His idea of India, according to Mukherjee (1982), was purely religious wherein 'patriotic zeal' could well be developed into a devotion to mother, and "the national regeneration could be identified with revitalization of Hindu religion..." (p. 905). Thus, his works "fused for the first time a revived Hindu religious fervour with a new found nationalistic zeal" (ibid p.904).

His writings are seen as one of the earlier attempts to reshape and redefine nationalism from a purely religious perspective. These works clearly seek to weaponize nationalism and faith. There is, says Das (2012), "a trend in his writings, in the construction of the Hindu as the 'self' and the Muslim as the 'other' mediated by notions of cultural differences" (p.4). A definitive strand of Hindu identity and vision of a Hindu nation is an underlying theme in his writings. Throughout it, the Hindu characters are valorized and Muslims are denigrated. Sarkar (2006) says that the novel "frames the events within an overarching agenda of Hindu nationhood: an idea that would not have existed even in prototype in the late 18th century" (p. 2). The Hindu monastic order's fight against Muslim rule is viewed as a crusade to reclaim Hindu lost glory and restore the exulted status of motherland before Muslim takeover. Das (2012) says that the central idea of the text is that "the Hindus and the Muslims are inherently dichotomous and that with the advent of the Muslims, the Hindus have undergone cultural ruin and degeneration" (p.6). The following excerpt expands and enlarges upon this Hindu theme of the text:

We have often thought to break up this bird's nest of Moslem rule, to pull down the city of renegades and throw it into the river—to burn this pigsty to ashes and make mother earth free from evil again. Friends, that day has come. (Gupta, 1906, p. 78)

His choice of historical framework is a conscious one. It afforded him the scope for romance and fantasy to glorify and invent a golden past lost out to Muslim tyranny—a consistent refrain in Hindu nationalistic discourse. He celebrates the Rajput warriors for their resistance to Muslim kings. But Bengal offering him no such Hindu figure, he turns to celebrate Sanyasi's rebellion for developing a certain kind of Hindu conscious narrative. The imagined Hindu state in the novel "represents the entire Hindu people, including low castes and peasants, albeit in differentiated capacities and firmly under the direction of Brahmanical authorities" (Sarkar, 2006, p.2). The recurring theme and consistent rhetoric is the Hindu regeneration and protection of mother India.

These went to the villages and wherever they found 20/25 Hindus, fell on Mussulman villages and set fire to their houses. While the Mussulman busied themselves in saving their lives, the children plundered their possessions and distributed them among their followers. (Gupta, 1906, p. 116)

Analysis and Discussion

The novel, *Anandamath*, (1882) is often thought of as the bible of Hindu nationalism. The text, set against the background of Sanyasi rebellion in the later part of 18th century, starts with the introduction of a couple forced to travel to some place of survival due to the scarcity of food and water. During the travel, they are separated. Kalyani, left with no other choice, starts with the infant in her hand. But she ends up being chased by the robbers. She loses consciousness at the bank of a river. A Hindu sanyasi, out to rebel against Muslim rule, took the infant to his home. The separated husband gets reunited to his wife but now he was more inclined to joining the groups of monks to serve the cause of the motherland and fight against Muslim Nawab. The story ends with them joining the nationalist forces to dethrone a Muslim king and establish a Hindu kingdom. Iconizing the nation as a mother worthy of worship forms one of the core themes of Hindu nationalism. It originated in the Bengal renaissance where "Shakto worship dominated and forms of the mother goddess such as Kali, Durga, Manasa, and Chandi were popular" (Daniyal, 2016, para. 7). The same idea finds mention even in a play of 1873, called *Bharatmata* wherein motherland is shown speaking and weeping. Described as a pale figure, she is stripped of all possessions by the British men. Bankim Chandra imagined the nation as a mother. This concept of the nation as a deity permeates almost all his works. He "converted a neutral territory, a profane space into a sacred ground of a community. Again this sacred ground turns into the feminine symbol of sustenance, the Mother, the virulent goddess from the Hindu tradition" (Das 2012, p. 1). Similarly, the land of birth is iconized as a mother in his *Rajsingha* (1882).

Anandamath "dramatizes and transfigures the image of abjection into a lustrous, powerful deity" (Sarkar, 2006, p. 4). The song, *Vande Matram*, which conceives the nation as a mother, written on a different occasion, now forms an integral part of the text. In the text, Mahendra, on his way to the inn where he left his wife and daughter, was arrested by the British sepoy. Bhavananda too, in search of Mahendra, was arrested. But the two men somehow managed to escape after an encounter between santans and sepoy. When they both leave the place, Bhavananda tries to talk to Mahendra. Unable to elicit any response from him, Bhavananda starts singing:

"Hail thee, mother! To her, I bow
Who with sweetest water overflows?
With dainty fruits is rich endowed
And cooling whom south winds blow,
Who's green with crops as on her grow;
To such a mother down I bow."

This song puzzled Mahendra who, unable to grasp anything, asked Bhavananda what mother he was talking about. Without any attempt to answer his companion's question, Bhavananda starts singing:

"With silver, moonbeams smile her nights
And trees that in their bloom abound
Adorn her; her face doth beam
With sweetest smiles; sweet's her sound!
Joy and bliss she doth bestow;
To such a mother down I bow.

"It is the country and no mortal mother" (Gupta, 1906, p. 31) cried Mahendra.

The text iconizes the place of birth and transports it to the level of deity in its various states. "I never called anybody mother except my country. This well-watered land of ours, rich in dainty fruits, is a mother to us" (Gupta:145), Satyananda tells Santi. The children who call themselves santans are hailed for fighting against Muslim rule and making efforts to restore the lost glory of motherland and Hindu kingdom. The same theme is reinforced in Rabindranath Tagore's *The Home and the World* (1916) when Sandeep, a Hindu nationalist says, "I truly believe my country to be my God. I worship Humanity. God manifests Himself both in man and his country" (p. 37). With the persistent efforts of Hindu nationalists following their rise to power, the idea of the land as a mother goddess has become a battle cry and the most potent weapon to polarize society along religious lines. The song 'Vande Mataram' written to glorify the motherland has become a battle cry for these Hindutva forces. The song now acts as the most potent tool in the hands of the Hindu nationalist forces to portray as traitors those who consider it as an encroachment on the values of their faith. This glorification and idolization of the place of birth feeds today's communal and divisive politics. The Muslim undesirability and 'otherness' forms an integral part of Hindu nationalistic discourse. "Gowalkar uses, says Sharma (2011), "the word 'a Hindu' or non 'Hindu' to indicate the otherness of Muslims and all other foreign faiths that happen to live and flourish in India and need to be digested in independent India" (p.183). Even the individual acts of a ruler arising from political expediency are viewed as the conspiracy to ruin Hindus. The Muslim Nawab is blamed even for the natural calamity of famine which acts as a background in the text. Last year when corona pandemic hit the country, there were media trials, harassment and persecution of a religious organization. Muslims were described as a potential vector of coronavirus. It triggered attacks on

people with visible Muslim identity. The same theme is underscored in the text under study when Muslim Nawab was held "responsible not just for widespread death and starvation, but also for the deliberate and total destruction of Hindus, of their honor, faith, caste and women" (Sarkar 2006). The falsification and fictionalization of history is one of the common themes of Hindu nationalism. The Hindutva ideologues consistently portray Muslim rule as a period of tyranny and Hindu persecution. The Muslim rule is viewed as a period of Hindu oppression and persecution. A golden past and glory lost out to Muslim tyranny is a consistent theme in Hindu nationalistic discourse. Khan et al. (2017) says that a golden past is "invoked to define the origins of Hindu nationhood, whereas a dark age in its historical trajectory was invoked to identify peoples considered to be enemies of Hindu nationhood, and thereby to legitimize their exclusion" (p. 477). The novel blames Muslims for the degenerations and decays plaguing Hindu society. It insists on "saving the motherland but the criterion for self-defense lay in opposing and destroying the Muslims who had maneuvered Hindu decay" (Das, 2012, p.6).

Everybody said, "The Moslems have been defeated and the country has come back to the Hindus, cry Hari Hari!" The villagers would chase any Mussulman that they would meet-some would combine and go to Mussulman quarters to set fire to their houses and pillage them. Many Moslems shaved off their beards, smeared their bodies with earth, and sung Harinam. When challenged, they would say in their patois that they were Hindus. (Gupta, 1906, p.167)

The Hindu right views Muslim rule as a period of slavery, religious persecution, destructions of Hindus, and foreign rule. A common man is being dished out "the alleged atrocities of Muslim kings in medieval India, from Alauddin Khalji to Aurangzeb. He equates in his mind this stereotype of the medieval Muslim with present-day Indian Muslims" (Salam, 2020, para.3). What is interesting to see is the romanticization of the British rule by the Hindu right. After the fall of Muslim rule, Satyananda in the text is chased by a heavenly soul which counsels him to discontinue the fight against the British "till the Hindus are great in knowledge, virtue, and power, till then the English rule will remain undisturbed. The people will be happy under them and follow their religion without hindrance" (Gupta, 1906, p.199). The theme of alleged Hindu persecution is further corroborated by what Modi said, in his maiden speech as prime minister, describing earlier twelve hundred years as a period of servitude. As children/ sanyasis in the text fight to overthrow Muslim rule and establish a Hindu kingdom, Hindutva forces asserts that India primarily belongs to Hindus. "To votaries of Hindutva, the country is best served if it is expunged of Islam" (Subramanian:2020, para, 8). Therefore, these followers of foreign faith need to be culturally assimilated into the Hindu faith as is evident from everyday assertions that everyone living in India is Hindu.

In keeping with the Hindu vision of India, the state, acting as an instrument of the Hindu right today, is forging ahead with legislations that deny the pluralistic character of the secular republic and reshape it in the imagination of a Hindu state. For instance, the newly enacted citizenship law challenges our founding principles and "creates a system of tiered citizenship in which some citizens have more rights than others" (Roy, 2020, p.93). The purpose is to persuade the majority that India is primarily a Hindu nation before anything else. Unlike Jinnah who demanded a separate land for Muslims, Savarkar, a Hindutva ideologue, wanted Muslims to live on the same land not with the rights of equality but with a subordinate and secondary position. Muslims, in the opinion of Hindu nationalists, are like Jews of Germany and, therefore, have no place in India. That they are treacherous and descendants of invaders is a constant refrain in the Hindu nationalist discourse.

As protests erupted across the nation following the passage of the contentious citizenship bill, there were sustained efforts by Hindu nationalist forces to portray the anti CAA protesters as traitors with Hindu cleric chief minister of Uttar Pradesh talking of resorting to bullets if people persisted with the protests. The Delhi violence majorly claiming Muslim lives and property is the direct fallout of such provocations. The Hindu right seeks to legitimize violence against Muslims as revenge for the alleged atrocities. Muslims are branded as Babor's sons who, in their false and manufactured historical narrative, pulled down an existing temple to build a mosque. The Hindu nationalists preached this false narrative, mobilized mass support in the last decades of the 20th century and got the mosque pulled down by a frenzied mob in 1992 under the full media glare. After thirty years of dilly-dallying, India's supreme court handed over the land to the mob that committed the crime and asked Muslims to build their mosque on some other land. With a special court acquitting all those who led this frenzied mob, Indian Muslims are pushed to the periphery of India's social life.

Our religion is gone; so is our caste, our honor, and the sacredness of our family even! Our lives even are to be sacrificed now. Unless we drive these tipsy long beards away, a Hindu can no longer hope to save his religion. (Gupta, 1906 p. 35)

The Hindu right's rise to power marks the beginning of reimagining India as a Hindu nation. The revocation of article 370 is a foundational shift and a clear manifestation of India's secular republic being redefined as a Hindu state. The acts of the govt have a clear influence and imprint of the Bankim Chandra's ranting against the Muslim rule. This disempowerment of this Muslim majority states shares many parallel with the text. The message is clear: How Muslims can think of being the owners of their destiny and enjoy autonomy in a Hindu majority nation. "As news of the new act spread, Indian nationalists of all stripes cheered.... There was dancing in the streets and horrifying misogyny on the internet" (Roy, 2020, p. 63). A few days later, Modi addressed an India celebrating the disempowerment and a Kashmir under a communication blackout. Roy (2019) talks about "the deathly silence from Kashmir's patrolled, barricaded streets and its approximately seven million caged, humiliated people, stitched down by razor wire, spied on by drones, living under a complete communications blackout" (para.9). The cheering of Hindutva forces over humiliation and disempowering this most empowered state echoed and reminded of the happiness of the sanyasis in *Anandamath* celebrating the defeat and fall of Muslim rule. A secular state witnessed the distribution of sweets, dancing in streets, and a kind of triumph for the Hindu nation.

When it ends, as it must, the violence that will spiral out of Kashmir will inevitably spill into India. It will be used to further inflame the hostility against Indian Muslims who are already being demonized, ghettoized, pushed down the economic ladder, and, with terrifying regularity, lynched. (Roy, 2020, p.69)

Like Bankim Chandra, today's Hindu nationalists weaponize faith and its symbols. For example, the issue of cow politics is pulled out now and then to polarize the society along religious lines. Though many states have enacted laws to respect Hindu sensibilities but the politics around it endorses "an excessively narrow, Brahmanical form of Hinduism—Hindutva—while simultaneously impoverishing the material, religious, and physical well-being of minority communities such as Muslims and Dalits" (Sarkar & Sarkar, 2016, p. 1). The issue is part of the carefully crafted agenda to politicize faith as the Hindu right sees a potential in the symbol of a cow to mobilize mass support. The cowsheds run by the state provide a base for lynch gangs to indulge in crimes and escape prosecution.

By choosing to act as the defender of the Hindu faith, the state led by the Hindu right is choosing to weaponize faith and is facilitating Muslim 'otherness' who are seen as less Indian than others. The violence in the name of cow protection is designed to terrorize Muslims, damage their livelihood, and force them to assimilate into the Hindu fold. "The ultimate objective of the cow vigilantism", argues Ramachandran (2017), "is achieving the goal of the Sangh Parivar: homogenizing pluralistic India and making it a Hindu state" (para. 12). The spate of lynchings and murders in the Hindi belt is caused by this erroneous notion and false propaganda. Only Akhlaque and Pehlu's lynchings drew global outrage. These murders by mobs in broad daylight are now an everyday phenomenon. These non-state actors dressed up as cow vigilantes involved in these crimes are ideologically affiliated to the ruling dispensation. "Hindu nationalists felt so empowered that they formed gangs to lynch Muslims and lower-caste Hindus, on flimsy suspicions that their victims were smuggling cows or in possession of beef" (Subramanian, 2020, para, 22). They rather are hailed as heroes. The convicts, released on bail, were draped floral garlands by a minister. Roy (2020) says that "in the benevolent shadow of such a state, numerous smaller Hindu vigilante organizations, the storm troopers of the Hindu Nation, have mushroomed across the country, and are conscientiously going about their deadly business" (p.69).

The Hindu god Ram birthplace issue was consistently blown up by the Hindu right to polarize society and lend credence to Sangh's false historical narrative about Muslim rule. The entire movement was founded on bigotry, hate, and portraying Muslims as descendants of foreign invaders and desecrators who persecuted Hindu and destroyed temples. Like the Hindutva forces' mobilization to pull down Babri mosque, the children in the text express a wish to demolish a mosque and erect a temple in its place. A word was sent to all the 'children' to assemble and listen to Satyananda who had returned from his sojourn to Himalaya. There is a sense of celebration among the children one of them saying, "Brother, would the day come when we shall be able to break the mosque to raise the temple of Radha-Madhava in its place" (Gupta, p.146). The demolition of the mosque may have been triggered by some other immediate events, but the narrative of the entire movement is echoed in the text. The sense of jubilation and celebration

of the frenzied mob at this crime reminds of the sanyasis' celebration of the fall of Muslim rule. As is clear from the reaction of Hindutva forces to the top court's Ayodhya verdict, this movement was to convey a message of Hindu superiority. Tundawala & Choudhury (2019) say that "the judgment is indeed momentous, as it paves the way for a neater, tighter and more sanitised Hindutva to hegemonise India in years to come" (para. 16). The Hindu right weaponized faith and polarized the society in the last thirty years to the extent that the top court got swayed to pass a judgment based on majoritarian faith disregarding the laid down and settled principles of evidence, legality, and constitutionality.

After the trial continued dragging on for almost 30 years, the flawed verdict of a special court acquitting all the accused despite incriminating evidence conveyed that "in majoritarian India, Muslims had to reconcile to being second-class citizens" (Subrahmaniam, 2019, para. 1). The Ayodhya judgment last year enshrined Hindu majoritarian wishes as a principle of law and acts as a cornerstone for the Hindu state. The court chose to 'other' the largest minority and the judgment effectively paves the way for Hindu supremacy. As the top court started the hearing to pronounce the judgment, there was a palpable sense of constant fear and anxieties that had gripped the entire community. They had hope for justice but were scared of reprisals and backlash. The new India "was large, hostile, and ever-present; it hovered over the community in a constant reminder that they existed at the pleasure of the state and majority Hindu" (ibid 1).

The SC ruling in the Ayodhya case, ordering that Muslims be given an "alternative" site, formalized the peripheralisation of the Muslims both spatially and politically, while the celebrations openly involving state machinery underscore the officialisation of the status of Hindu religion as the basis of the new republic. (Palshikar, 2020)

The rise of Hindu monk politician to the post of chief ministership in India's most populous and communally sensitive state of Uttar Pradesh was widely seen and interpreted as the sanyasi (Hindu ascetic) of Bankim Chandra's *Anandamath*. His comparison with the sanyasi of the novel had a symbolic meaning: Like the sanyasis who led violent campaigns to pillage Muslims, the UP-chief minister's past is marked by rabid communal rhetoric. His appointment is in keeping with the Hindu imagination of India. Like Sanyasis who plundered Muslims and set fire on their houses, he, within days of assuming charge, ordered the immediate closure of meat shops rendering thousands of people jobless. The crackdown on anti CAA protestors and the confiscation of their properties are in line with the role of Hindu ascetics and sanyasis in the novel.

He is often charged with weaponizing security personnel against Muslims with many reports noting an alarming increase in shoot-out orders against Muslims. Enthralled by the news of his appointment as chief minister, a hardcore ABVP supporter at JNU, said to a Muslim guy, "Now that Yogi's here, we'll cut down and devour the Muslims" (Subramanian, 2020, para. 24). The encounters and extrajudicial killings are an everyday phenomenon. "These gruesome acts of against Muslims are re-enacted as games in training sessions of Hindutva organizations" (Sabrang, 2017, para. 9). The state crackdown, harassment, arbitrary arrests, brutal atrocities were unleashed following the waves of protests against this law which redefines India in line with Hindu imagination. Shaheen says that "Adil had been tortured in jail—the police had set fire to his beard" (Sharma & Halder, 2020, para. 15).

A reign of terror was unleashed on people merely for speaking up for their constitutional rights. Even a poor rickshaw driver was re-arrested for his failure to pay Rs.21.76 lakh as a recovery for the alleged damage to public property. These methods of anti-Muslims riots show the clear imprint and influence of the techniques so grotesquely described in the text. "After getting them out of goal, children set fire to the houses of Mussulmans wherever they found them" (Gupta, 1906, p.80). The idea of hero-worship, borrowed from Italian fascism, forms one of the core themes of Hindu nationalism. The narrative that India needed a strong and decisive true Hindu leader to rid it of all long-standing ills has been carefully developed and promoted. Hindutva ideologues "repeatedly expressed their admiration for authoritarian leaders such as Mussolini and Hitler and for the fascist model of society. This influence continues to the present day" (Casolari, 2000, p.1). While democracy is all about accountability and answerability, the Hindu right views any dissent as an anti-national act and brand the dissenters as traitors. "In the case of those who are slaves by nature, the lack of strong master is the greatest of all calamities" (Tagore. 213), says one of the graduate students while arguing with Nikhil over his refusal to join the swadeshi movement turning increasingly violent.

A campaign was run describing Modi's predecessor as incompetent and incapable of taking firm decisions. Modi "inserted himself into this mythical, religious conception of India as the national

messiah, with willing acceptance from large sections of the people" (Ali, 2020, para. 15). This religious appeal persuaded people that their sufferings and hardships were for a higher cause of the Hindu nation. His use of spiritually imbued terms is conscious and deliberate. As he faces questions on the delivery front, he starts selling the idea of self-employment and self-reliant India. He "tells people he will build a 'self-reliant nation' — Atmanirbhar Bharat — on their sacrifices and penance" (Ali, 2020, para. 5). People at large thought "as though their suffering was the labour pain that would soon birth a glorious, prosperous, Hindu India" (Roy, 2020, p. 76). But these moves were never about economics and reforms. They were "a loyalty test, a love exam that the great leader was putting us through (ibid). The constant refrain among the Hindu right is that Modi is destined to fulfil their suppressed Hindu aspirations and cherished dreams. He needs your sacrifices for this great task. His appeal is quasi-religious, that of a messianic figure. He is the self-described 'fakir', unattached to family and material possessions, who is here to lead India not just politically, but also socially, morally, and spiritually. This is why he generates not mere following, but devotion. And this devotion is immune to the performance of the government he leads. (Ali, 2020, para. 4) The home-coming' (Ghar wapsi) campaign got further impetus following the BJP's rise to power. The assimilation of minorities into the Hindu fold forms one of the core themes of Hindutva as it discards India's religious diversity and cultural plurality.

What fuels this belief is the proposition that Muslims' Hindu forefathers embraced Islam to escape persecution under Mughal rule (Sharma, 2020). As the cause which triggered this religious conversion no longer exists, they must return to their original fold. Since this campaign falls fit into the Hindutva narrative of 'othering' Muslims, it provides legitimacy to the false narrative that Hindus underwent forced religious conversion and persecution under Muslim rule. The basic idea behind the 'homecoming' (Ghar wapsi) campaign is to perpetuate and consolidate power for the establishment of a Brahmanical order. Katju (2015) finds that "converting minorities to Hinduism has always been an intrinsically violent affair and is linked to the notion of India being a homeland only of the Hindus" (p. 1). Therefore, this coming back to Hinduism is not conversion but a kind of homecoming. Recently RSS chief "sought to legitimize these conversion programs as taking back what was stolen by thieves. The poor analogy marks Muslims and Christians as thieves who have fraudulently converted Hindus" (Teltumbde, 2015, p. 1). While the fact is that these people from oppressed lower castes embraced Islam to escape the persecution, oppression, and untouchability. The Hindu right wants to re-establish the old system of caste oppression that India has eradicated since its journey as a constitutional democracy.

The campaign to boycott Chinese products in the wake of the border standoff with China echoes the Hindu right's politicization and weaponization of a purely nationalistic cause of the Swadeshi movement. The movement launched to resist Bengal's partition soon turned into the burning of the British products and harassment of the poor. Panchu's zamindar fined him for selling foreign products. He prayed and pleaded to Harish Kundu, a zamindar, for letting him sell-off only the remaining stock bought with borrowed money. For his failure to comply with the dictates of the Hindu right, he was thrashed by people chanting *Bande Matram*. A heated argument took place between students and Nikhil over the latter's refusal to support the Swadeshi movement. "But tell us, pray, are you determined to oust foreign articles from your market?", says the medical student (Tagore, 1916, p. 166).

The recent politicization of the campaign to boycott Chinese products offers a corollary of the weaponization of the Swadeshi movement by the then Hindu right. Sandip, a Hindu nationalist, symbolizes how the Hindu right exploited the situation in their favour by fuelling nationalistic zeal. This is what Nikhil, a true patriot, and voice of sanity, wanted to look up for before plunging headlong into any such wild phantasies. He advised his wife to desist from burning her cloth when she expressed her desire. He said to her, "You should not waste even a tenth part of your energies in this destructive excitement" (Tagore, 1916, p. 290). Like nationalists, Sandip weaponizes nationalism for accumulating wealth through all means of deceptions. Bimala falls into his traps for stealing away her husband's money as his actions are rooted in immediate selfish goals. Today's nationalists are the mirror image of Sandip. Banning 59 Chinese apps in no way is going to help the national cause. Instead, the decision rendered many people jobless. Like the Swadeshi movement, this campaign was hijacked and converted into a campaign to harass the poor as they are ultimate sufferers. Nationalism and Hindutva politics are for them merely a means of capturing power and accumulating wealth. Mukherjee (2019) writes:

The poor, lower-caste, and Muslim peasants resisted the attempt to thrust swadeshi products down their throats. The rural poor, oppressed by bhadralok landlordism for decades, could not be convinced that the rejection of cheaper foreign goods would improve their lives in any way.

Upper-caste-Hindu activists used every method to arm-twist the peasantry, precipitating violence in the countryside. (Para. 15)

Conclusion

Nationalism and religion have become potent tools for Hindu nationalist forces. They are being increasingly employed as weapons for consolidating power and capturing state institutions. The study asserts that the concept of nationalism, though introduced to India as secular idea, acquired a religious dimension around the middle of the 19th century. This was not a sudden development but a culmination of the persisting interruptions in cultural life of people. The authors like Bankim Chandra and others played a fundamental role in militarising the concept. His *Anandamath* was one of the earlier texts to conflate faith with nationalism, conceptualize a Hindu nation, iconize the nation of birth as a mother goddess, disparage Muslims, present them as oppressors, legitimize anti-Muslim violence, valorise Rajputs for confronting Muslim kings, and call India a land of Hindus alone. With the help of examples from India's contemporary social life, the study illustrates how the text under study did promote Hindu nationalism as a structured movement and shapes today the contemporary political discourse. The study places in contexts latest deviations and departures from the democratic path and certain recent developments to show how India's democracy moves into an uncharted territory.

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