Contesting Citizenship: Hindutva, the CAA, and Minority Communities in India

Sundus Basharat Ahmad,[1] Hiba Iman,[2] and Rizwan Zeb [3]

Article Information	Abstract
	Hindutva is an ultra-nationalist philosophy grounded in Hindu religion and mythology, has gained significant traction in India that poses challenges for religious minorities. These religious minorities include particularly several of them but mainly Muslims, Christians and Sikhs. While India has historically supported secularism, the rise of Hindutva has raised concerns about the erosion of religious freedom and equality. The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) of 2019 by the Modi regime accelerated citizenship for non- Muslim refugees from neighbouring countries is widely criticized for institutionalising religious discrimination. In this context this study examines the impact of Hindutva ideology and the CAA on minority communities in India. It tries to trace the historical evolution and its political manifestation through Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The analysis is based on qualitative content examination of academic literature, legal documents, media reporting, and selected case events. It critically assesses societal challenges posed by the CAA, highlighting its implications for India's secular framework and democratic values. Findings indicate that there is a substantial shift toward majoritarianism, raising concerns about the future of minority rights and social cohesion. This research aids to the broader discourse on nationalism, religion, and politics in contemporary India, offering insights into the intersections of power, identity and governance in a pluralistic society.

1. Introduction

India a nation known for its rich diversity, historical commitment and secularism, has faced back lash from the rise of Hindu nationalism in recent years. The nationalism is mainly the rise of Hindutva, the saffronization, and the glorification of Hindu nationalism. The genesis of Hindutva ideology can traced back to Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, who created the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in 1925. Hindutva refers "Hinduness", an identity that emerged in response to a perceived threat to Hindu culture and unity under British colonial rule and partition of India. One of the leading proponents of Hindutva ideology was Vinayak Damodar Sawarkar, who explained the cultural nationalist aspects of Hinduism, advocating an integrated Hindu identity that transcended religions in his book, "Hindutva: Who is Hindu?" published in 1923 (Sawarkar, 2021). Hindutva ideology sought to assert the importance of Hindu culture and tradition in India. This positions Hindus as original land inhabitants and advocating, protecting and developing followed by Hindu values. It aimed to unite Hindus under one cultural and national identity distinct from religious pluralism (Ejaz & Ilyas, 2021).

[1]Dr. Sundus Basharat Ahmad is Assistant Professor, International Relations, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Bahria University Karachi. She can be contacted at sundusbasharat.bukc@bahria.edu.pk

[2]Ms. Hiba Iman is an independent analyst and an alumnus of DHA Suffa University. She has graduated with a degree in International Relations.

[3] Professor Dr. Rizwan Zeb is visiting research fellow, BNU Centre for Policy Research, Beaconhouse National University, Lahore. Email: srizwanzeb@gmail.com

Over the years, Hindutva evolved into a political ideology whose believes adopted by the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, later the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP). The idea gained prominence in the late 20th century, catalysing the rise of Hindu nationalist politics in India. The BJP, as the political party of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) has actively embraced the ideological principles and politics of Hindutva. Under leaders like Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Narendra Modi, the BJP stood for the welfare of the Hindu majority by emphasising Hindu culture and religious unity. The electoral success of the BJP in the late 1990s and early 2000s further solidified the influence of Hindutva in Indian politics. Narendra Modi, who became prime minister in 2014, has implemented policies aligned with Hindutva principles, such as promoting Hindu culture, reviewing history books, and advocating for single civil code (Anderson, 2020). The construction of the Ram temple at a controversial site further solidified the image of BJP as a strong proponent of Hindu nationalism (Reuters, 2024). This ideological stance is further reflected in legislative actions such the Citizenship Amendment Act.

The Citizenship Amendment Act of 2019 is recognized as a turning point since it established religious discrimination in citizenship law. This turning point was the cause of huge protests all over the country and discussions that lasted about India's secular and democratic foundations. The statute of the Citizenship Amendment Act in 2019 was a major turning point that not only legalized religious discrimination in citizenship laws but also incited huge protests and discussions revolving around India's secular and democratic foundations. All religious minorities, except for Muslims who entered India before December 31, 2014, from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, are allowed to apply for Indian citizenship only through this law.

In support of the Citizenship Amendment Act, the BJP government took a position to make sure the security of religious minorities in neighbouring countries and to provide them a way to become Indians by citizenship. Safdar and Mushtaq (2019) pointed out that the law has caused a lot of discussions regarding citizenship, secularism, and religious identity in India. This brought out the complexities of the diversity of the socio-political landscape. By introducing a religious criterion into the citizenship laws, the Act has tested the secular fabric of the country. The CAA has sparked nationwide protests in India, with the opposition demanding its repeal and warning that it could be applied alongside the National Register of Citizens (NRC) to target and segregate Muslims (Gupta, 2019).

The Hindutva ideology is still an important factor causing debates in the Indian political arena and the people are talking about and discussing nationalism, religion and identity. The ideology asserts the majoritarianism of the ruling Hindu and disempowerment of the other religious and cultural groups in the shape of secularism which is opposes Hinduism. The present research traces the historical evolution of Hindutva from ideological and political through the BJP and RSS, while also looking at its effects on minority groups through the CAA as a case study. The authors of the paper critically assess the social problems relating to the CAA, pointing out to its consequences for India's secularism and democratic values. The paper puts forward a critical argument as to how the Hindutva ideology has been politicized and the Citizenship Amendment Act implemented causing an escalation of harassment and violent acts against minorities, mainly Muslims and Christians, in India. The present research is qualitative, argumentative, and focuses on specific events -the Kathua incident, the Shaheen Bagh incident, and the Aligarh University incident- to shed light on the threats faced by minorities. The research adopts a content analysis approach with inputs drawn from academic articles, government reports, and media coverage. With this regard, the study is guided by three research questions:

1. How has Hindutva evolved from a cultural movement into a political ideology embedded within the Indian state?

2. What ideological assumptions underpin the CAA, and in what ways do they reflect Hindutva's majoritarian framework?

3. How have the CAA and broader Hindutva-based politics affected the rights, security, and social belonging of minority communities in India?

1.1.   Problem Statement

The Hindutva ideology continues in the Indian politics and rests to ignite discussions about the concepts of nationalism, religion, and identity in the nation. It favours the majority and at the same time, breaks the secular character of India by putting the needs of Hindus first and the interests of the rest of the religious and cultural groups last. The research is done to understand how the Hindutva ideology and the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) are affecting the minority communities of India through their historical evolution via the ruling party BJP and the religious group RSS. It does so by looking into the CAA and pointing out its implications for India's secularism and democracy. This paper uncovers the linkage between the politics of Hindutva and the CAA, and the increase in minority harassment and violence, particularly Muslims and Christians, in India. The research is qualitative and adopts an argumentative approach, primarily through the lens of three events: the Kathua incident, the Shaheen Bagh incident, and the Aligarh University incident. The study used content analysis, academic literature, policy papers, and primary news researching.

1.2.   Objectives

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To trace the historical development of Hindutva ideology from its cultural origins to its political institutionalisation through the RSS and BJP.

2. To analyse the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) of 2019 in the context of Hindutva politics and assess its implications for citizenship and minority inclusion.

3. To examine the impact of Hindutva ideology and the CAA on minority communities in India, focusing on patterns of exclusion, social conflict, and challenges to minority rights.

2.   Literature Review

This part is a basis in the academic writings about Hindutva, Hindu nationalism, Citizenship Amendment Act giving a thorough understanding of the subject. It is carefully sorted into different parts, ending with the identification of research gaps. The literature review intends to delve into and combine the research related to the birth of Hindutva in India. One of its main goals is to clarify the Citizenship Amendment Act through a critical analysis of the theoretical frameworks and views, especially that of Anthony Smith on ethnic nationalism, to comprehend that ethnicity is linked to the ethnic core of any nation.

2.1   Hindutva and the Indian society: An Overview

The term Hindutva, which means "Hinduness," was introduced by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar in 1920 (Ejaz & Ilyas, 2021). Savarkar's thought heeded that India is a Hindu nation fundamentally and he was pushing for the religious and cultural integration of all people living in India into one Hindu ideology. This dream of Savarkar gained organizational strength with the founding of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in the year 1925. The RSS became a Hindu nationalist organization for the assistance of Hindutva with paramilitary activities. The whole thing was about emphasizing the Hindu cultural revival, the established hierarchical social order, and so on. The critics of the RSS have pointed out the organization's paramilitary activities and its involvement in violent incidents as proof of its undemocratic behaviour. The RSS, along with its allies such as Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Bajrang Dal, has played a central role in shaping the socio-political landscape in India (Jaffrelot,2010).

The BJP's ascendance, along with its strong connection with the RSS, has empowered the advocates of Hindutva. The party's political rise, primarily after the Ram Janmabhoomi movement and the destruction of the Babri Mosque in 1992, was a drastic movement towards the domination of the majoritarian rule. The electoral victories of the BJP, which ended with Narendra Modi's becoming

Prime Minister in 2014, made the presence of Hindutva in the government and policies even stronger. Critics believe that the BJP's language and actions are sometimes directed against Muslims, thus making a climate of fear and insecurity prevail (Kumar, 2013).

Hindutva's ideology has a multifaceted relationship with violence. In the words of Sanjeev Kumar, "the ideology can give a right to those using it to commit violence against nonbelievers or even to those who are simply perceived as threats. The Hindu fanaticism around cows goes even further, as Muslims are only suspected of cow slaughter, and they are attacked by Hindu mobs. Besides these incidents, large-scale communal riots have also occurred frequently in the country's history. The demolition of the Babri Masjid, a mosque built on the site believed by Hindus to be the birthplace of Lord Rama, by a Hindu mob in 1992 has been a turning point in history." (Raja, 2021)

Christophe Jaffrelot provides a significant perspective on the influence of Hindutva ideology (Jaffrelot,2010). Walter Andersen and Shridhar D. Damle (2019) argue that the extremist Hindutva ideology has led the Hindu majority in India to adopt a harsher stance towards the country's minorities. This analysis highlights the impact of ideological movements on societal attitudes and intergroup relations within India. The supporters of Hindutva sought to protect the native Hindu cultures and traditions to the extent that the ideology has now been politicized. Although the constitution of India still profess secularism, yet for the past three decades, political trend in India increasingly indicates its slide towards Hindutva motivated Hindu extremism (Andersen & Shridhar, 2019) . Hindutva as an ideology has pushed most Hindus to adopt a more repressive, brutally authoritarian attitude toward minorities. Christians in India are also currently the target of right-wing Hindu extremists in the context of ongoing violence against Muslim minorities. Attacks against the small Christian minority that are motivated by religion have increased in the past two decades especially since Narendra Modi took helm of affairs in New Delhi. Constituencies represented by BJP and its affiliates are witnessing a sharp increase in violence directed against the Muslim and Christian communities.

The adoption of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) in 2019 can be seen as a noteworthy step in the Indian legislative process. The Act simplifies the process of acquiring citizenship for non-Muslim minorities from the stated countries of Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan. The Act is considered by many as an act of discrimination against Muslims because it does not allow them the privilege of citizenship on an expedited basis. Further, the critics of the CAA contend that it is another move in the direction of a Hindu-dominated India and thus a denouncement of the secular and inclusive character of the nation's values.

The Citizenship Amendment Act, which came into effect in December 2019, is one of the most controversial and hotly debated legal measures taken by the Modi government. CAA especially alters the 1955 Citizenship Act significantly by producing one road to citizenship for non-Muslim immigrants from the three neighbouring countries: Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan. More precisely, CAA gives citizenship to the Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi and Christian migrants who came to India before the end of 2014, citing religious persecution as a reason for their movement. The official purpose of the CAA is humanitarian – to shield the oppressed minorities in the Islamic states neighbouring India. However, the law outright excludes the Muslims, which not only raises questions about its unfairness but also about its compatibility with the secular character of the Indian constitution. Opponents argue that the CAA along with the proposed National Register of Citizens (NRC) could disenfranchise large numbers of Indian Muslims effectively, thus rendering them non-citizens and exposing them to detention and deportation. (CAA, 2019)

CAA has sparked widespread demonstrations and litigations throughout the country. The critics claim that the Act is directly violating the secular tenets of the Constitution since it is based on the religious distinctions. Moreover, the Act is seen as a danger to the multi-faceted character of the Indian populace and as a precursor to the religious-based citizenship criteria. (Safdar & Mushtaq, 2019). Students and civil society groups have been the main drivers of the protests which have raised the alarm that the CAA, together with the NRC, is an instrument for the marginalisation of Muslims. Along with this, critics have raised a point that although the Act claims to be the panacea for religious persecution, it turns a blind eye to the sufferings of the Muslim minorities in the neighbouring

countries, for instance, the Rohingyas in Myanmar. Besides, the execution of the NRC in Assam, which led to the exclusion of close to two million people, the majority of whom were Muslims, from the citizenship rolls has intensified these concerns.

Muslims, who make up approximately 14.23% of India's population, were the primary victims of this Hindutva wave (Soutik, 2019). Systematic discrimination in housing, employment, and education is their lot, and they are often the objects of communal violence. The implementation of the CAA and the NRC is viewed as part of a larger plan to marginalise Muslims by putting their citizenship and loyalty to the country under question. Christians, who account for around 2.3% of the popu-lation, have also faced more intense persecution. Reports have come in of attacks on churches, forced conversions, and the harassment of Christian missionaries, especially in BJP-ruled states (Jaaved, 2019).

The Sangh Parivar's aggressive preaching campaigns, characterized by their attempt to "re-convert" Christians to Hinduism through the "*Ghar Wapsi*" (homecoming) program, have further estranged the Christian community. The Modi government has thus created an atmosphere of fear and insecurity among the minorities with its socio-political environment. The promotion of Hindu supremacy through legal and illegal means has become a major threat to India's secular and democratic values. The CAA and the overall Hindutva movement not only challenge but also threaten to alter the core identity of the nation by gradually eradicating the pluralism and diversity that have been its hallmark traits through the ages (Human Rights Watch, 2024).

2.2　Ethnic Nationalism: Theoretical Foundations and the Case of Hindutva

The analysis employs the political ideology and nationalism scenario theorists' framework, i.e. Anthony D. Smith, which conflict researchers have already recognized as a basic framework for understanding nationalism based on ethnicity and cultural identity. Smith, in his theory, considers ethnic nationalism as a community consisting of people who share kinship, culture, language, and history; hence, a nation is viewed as a community rather than a political entity (Smith, 1991).On the account of Smith, the ethnic nationalism draws based on an ethnic core that is usually made up of:

1. Shared ancestors or mythical lineage
2. Similar historical memories or events
3. A mutual culture (language, religion, and customs)
4. Belonging to a significant territory
5. A sense of unity among the people

This perspective affirms that the country is not merely a political body but a collection of the old tribal identities which have survived and kept their existence through the bad times and long periods. Smith's idea is still considered an exceptionally powerful means to facilitate the unravelling as well as the coming to grips with the upsurge of Hindutva and its effects on Indian society and politics. In an ideological sense, Hindutva, a term that connects the RSS and BJP in the political domain, endorses the identification of Hindus, both religiously and culturally, in the country. The idea uses cultural narratives and emblems to show the Indian national identity which is mainly Hindu-centred. Smith's rationale leads to the idea that the main goal of character-based nationalism is the announcement and protection of the cultural and ethnic identity of the ruling group within the nation-state's borders. Furthermore, Smith's model greatly aids the examination of the political fights and policy shifts in India influenced by Hindutva. The Hindutva proponents by asserting Hindu cultural values and identity as the centre of their position, aim at the passing of laws that may be unwise towards religious minorities, and thus the whole situation affects the solidarity and administration spheres of society. This perspective underlines the need to view nationalism as a political doctrine and as a cultural and historical phenomenon that influences the society's interactions and the policy outcomes in a way that is not only output but also input. Thus, Anthony D. Smith's theory of ethnic nationalism doesn't only present an approach to comprehend the ideological underpinnings of Hindutva in contemporary India but also indicates its impacts on the fabric of society and its influence on power politics and administration in the country.

2.3   **Research Gaps**

Hindutva has been extensively covered through the lenses of majoritarianism, religious extremism, and authoritarian populism; nonetheless, there is still a large gap in the systematic application of Anthony D. Smith's ethno-symbolist approach within the Indian scenario. Besides, the historical and mythological underpinnings of Hindutva are usually mentioned as a matter of fact; however, very few works empirically follow how modern Hindu symbols and civilizational narratives are being used in today's political discourse and state policies, including laws like the CAA and temple-centric politics, from a long-durée perspective. The issue of banning cattle slaughter and other incidental violence remains an area where the Hindutva-driven ethnic nationalism has been institutionalized through everyday governance practices such as citizenship regimes, bureaucratic procedures, policing, and welfare access beyond ideological rhetoric. Moreover, the coexistence and gradual displacement of India's civic-secular nationalism by ethnic nationalism have not attracted sufficient attention, despite Smith's assertion that these forms often overlap. The views and experiences of minorities are still only studied to a limited extent within this ethno-nationalist framework, particularly regarding symbolic exclusion, boundary-making, and identity insecurity. The violence linked to Hindutva is mostly seen as occasional or radical rather than being understood as a mechanism of ethnic boundary enforcement constituting the very structure of society. Lastly, there has been little empirical research into how Hindutva.

3.   Methodology

3.1.   Research Design

This research applies a qualitative research design that is based on interpretive and critical analytical methods to explore the extent to which Hindutva ideology and the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) have affected the minority communities in India. The study intends to trace the interaction of that state supported allegorical narratives and ideological policies to social relations, the rights of the minorities, and the incidence of violence. The researcher intends to uncover and evaluate the historical roots and the ideological and institutional foundations of the political and social outcomes of today by bringing Hindutva to light in its evolution through the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The case study method is applied to get a thorough understanding of certain happenings that demonstrate the wide-spread trends of exclusion, harassment, and resistance that are engaged with Hindutva politics in a very intimate way. The research utilizes a theory-informed qualitative methodology that relies on the frameworks of ethnic nationalism and political ideology for the interpretation of the results. The set-up facilitates the contextual analysis of the events, yet it preserves the rigor and coherence of the theory at the same time.

3.2   Data Collection

The research primarily adopts qualitative content analysis of secondary data as the main method of data collection. The set of sources for the study comprises academic literature including peer-reviewed journals, books, and critiques of public and policy debates that are dealing with Hindutva, nationalism, minority rights, and Indian secularism. In the process, governmental documents and legal texts were also examined, including the Citizenship Amendment Act (2019), parliamentary proceedings, court decisions, and official reports. Media coverage accounted for another crucial source, which consisted of articles from credible national and international newspapers, digital platforms, and investigative reporting that were documenting communal violence, protests, and government reactions. Furthermore, the reports produced by human rights organizations and civil society groups were scrutinized to gather evidence of the ongoing mistreatment, violence, and marginalization of minority communities.

3.3   Case Study Analysis

The study looks into three significant instances in order to depict the concurrence of Hindutva politics, the state policies, and the religious minorities' experiences. The three cases were picked as they represent various aspects of the negative impact of Hindutva on the minority groups: the first being the murder and rape case in Kathua which caused direct violence, the second being the protest against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) which took place in Shaheen Bagh, and the third being the institutional pressures on education that the Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) had to face. The three together offer a comprehensive understanding of the interrelationship between the ideology, the policy, and the state machinery regarding the matter of minority rights and their social participation.

1. The Kathua Incident
The Kathua case is considered a religiously motivated conflict where the religious identity, political backing, and ideological mobilization were mixed up. One of the main points of the research is the influence of Hindutva narratives on public debate, political reactions, and interactions with the Muslim victim community, therefore, it shows how ethnic nationalism was powerful enough to legitimize violence.

2. The Shaheen Bagh Protest
The protest at Shaheen Bagh is perceived as a combination of small minority opposition and large-scale civil disobedience against the CAA. The case illustrates how Muslim women, while subjected to ethnic nationalist policies, eloquently claimed constitutional principles and secular nationalism as their values. The writer depicts the state's conduct, the media's portrayal of the protest, and the Hindutva ideology's undermining of the demonstration.

3. The Aligarh Muslim University Incident
The Aligarh case is presented as a main example of the criminalization of dissent and the removal of educational areas for minorities. The authors investigate the police, politics, and media to illustrate that government institutions can be viewed as the impositions of the dominant ideology.

3.5   Rationale and Analytical Approach

These incidents have been taken to show varied manifestations of Hindutva influence; for instance, the direct violence in Kathua, the civic protest at Shaheen Bagh and the institutional pressures in AMU. Qualitative content-analysis of literature, legal documents, media reports, and civil-society records is done to find common themes like exclusion, securitization, and contestation of rights. Thus, the investigation can look at the details of each instance in the light of its social and political context and at the same time point out the larger patterns that cut through the instances.

4.   Data Analysis

4.1.   Analysing the Intersection of Religion, Politics, and Constitutional Debates on the Citizenship Amendment Act

The CAA, or Citizenship Amendment Act, is a legislation passed in India which allows very specific religious persons coming from neighbouring countries (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan) to gain Indian citizenship. Among these groups are Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, and Parsis. One thing that has been criticized about the Act is the exclusion of Muslims, which has been interpreted as against the very principle of equal treatment. The law has stamped the participants with their respective religions, and this has continued to erode the secular foundation of India. Opponents argue that the Act is anti-Article 14 of the Indian Constitution, which states that no one is to be discriminated against and everybody is to be treated equally. Furthermore, from the moment it was enacted by the Indian Parliament in December 2019 (CAA, 2019), CAA has turned into a hot topic, a source of social conflicts and a reason for the courts to be busy. Its subject matter was directly related to identity, religion, and basic rights. The Act had a very complex relationship with Indian society: it

won Hindu nationalist supporters but also created a lot of resentment among and opposition from the minorities, especially Muslims, who are very afraid of the whole thing. After all, supporters of the Bill argue that it is a just recognition of the rights of the persecuted minor groups, while the critics interpret it as a direct attack on the Muslim population and India's secular character. This situation has led to a confrontation over the question of the religious politicization of citizenship laws. The coupling of the CAA with the NRC, which has been advocated as a way to pinpoint illegal aliens in India, is one of the main reasons for the fears, especially among Muslims, of being left out and of being pushed to the fringes. It has only made the situation worse, as some groups, particularly Muslims, are now left with nobody but themselves who are scared of being indecently excluded. The citizens' religious involvement in politics has caused the fault lines to deepen and has put the question of how inclusive and diverse India's democracy really is.

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Tolerance of one religious community over others in the issue of citizenship has made people worried about the equality of all citizens and the safeguarding of the rights of minorities in India. Hindutva supporters have claimed for the CAA that it indeed offers asylum and citizenship to anyone who is a persecuted minority from the neighbouring countries, especially Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis, and Christians. They present the Act as a tangible measure to guarantee the rights of these communities and to compensate for the historical injustices inflicted on them in large numbers, notably in the Muslim-majority countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan. By advancing the cause of these religious minorities, Hindutva groups not only seal their constituency but also take one step further in their vision of a Hindu-centred nation.

The CAA has been a tool in the hands of the Hindutva gangs to emphasise the already existent narrative of protecting Hindu interests and therefore, Indian culture. The organisations that are aligned with Hindutva consider the Act a step forward to assert and even enhance the presence of Hindus in the national discourse while also pointing out the injustices done to Hindu refugees. Theoretically, these forces allied with the CAA are trying to combine their power, drawing support from their respective constituents and manipulating public opinion for policy that is financed through ideology-based suggestions. Their enactment of the CAA has further strengthened the Hindutva's plan of a majority Hindu India wherein the rights of the non-Muslim minorities would be defended thus, altering the political landscape of the nation. This intricate relationship of religion, politics, and identity is revealed in the citizenship and nationalism discussions.

The RSS, BJP, VHP, Bajrang Dal, and Hindu Sena have been among the Hindutva-affiliated groups that have vigorously endorsed the CAA as a tool for their agenda of establishing primarily Hindu India. They strategically target the Hindu vote, particularly in West Bengal and Assam. The BJP made the CAA one of its pre-election promises, thereby attracting voters on the lines of identity and security. Nonetheless, protests the CAA broke out all over the country with students, activists and citizens making their dissent known. The legal proceedings maintain that the Act goes against the secular spirit of the Constitution and is therefore discriminatory against Muslims.

In addition, the CAA has widened the chasm between the various religious groups and has turned them into adversaries. These debates on the Citizenship issue have gone public and they have even influenced the social unity. With the CAA, India has become very much talked about globally, and most of the time, it is a negative way, as this event has even led to a major review of India's secular democracy status. Critics object to the CAA on the grounds that it is unfair to Muslims and that it erodes the secular character of India. The fact that Muslims are not included within the scope of this Act has resulted in some people attributing this to the government's pretentiousness when it comes to equality through inclusiveness and thus it has been a factor to escalate debates on religious politicization of citizenship. This political backdrop has not only caused but also resulted in the isolation of parts of the society and the different opinions about the Act have become integral to public discourse and political rhetoric (Al Jazeera, 2024).

The design of the Act is not well-founded and sets eligibility criteria in an arbitrary manner. The Act offers a route to Indian citizenship for migrants coming from countries like Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan who are non-Muslim, but Muslims are specifically mentioned as the excluded community. This exclusion on the basis of religion has become a matter of dispute since it contradicts the secular principles of India.

The association of the CAA and the National Register of Citizens (NRC) is another discriminatory feature. Illegal immigrants in the country are the target of the NRC and when the CAA is added, the whole situation becomes scary and soon it would be possible to say that the Muslims would be the ones most affected and marginalised. This, in turn, has raised fears of discrimination and the targeting of a particular religious group. The NRC exercise in Assam, for example, resulted in 1.9 million people being excluded from the list, including both Hindus and Muslims. The BJP government's attitude towards the NRC and CAA has raised issues about selective inclusion and exclusion (BBC, 2019). In addition, the CAA has been branded as discriminating behaviour for the very reason that it establishes differing religion-based citizenship standards. As it brings forward certain religious groups and discriminates against others, it has been condemned for being against the principle of equality before the law and non-discrimination. Besides, the eligibility criteria and conditions laid down by the CAA lack valid reasoning and independence. Detractors assert that it weakens the Indian constitution. Detractors in fact argue that the Congress Party's inclusive citizenship policy during the formative years of India was to some extent influenced by ethnic-religious biases.

The CAA passing protests and discussions have been a very loud affair and thus this matter brings forth the conflict between religion and democracy in India. The question is how to blend the national character with the equal rights of all, regardless of their religious belief. The CAA is a matter of dispute mainly because it reflects the painstakingly subtle and complex negotiation between religion, law and politics. As India is in a period of approach and retreat through this hard era, it should not only be that the democratic values are preserved but that the real human problems are also given the priority they deserve.

4.2 Impact on Minorities: Analysing the Case Studies

4.2.1 Kathua Incident

The Kathua rape and murder incident is the name given to the extremely cruel act of raping and killing an eight-year-old girl from the Bakarwal Muslim community in Kathua, which is a part of the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir, in January 2018. The little girl was kidnapped, given drugs, gang-raped, and then killed in a temple. It is said that the crime was planned beforehand and was meant to force the nomadic Bakarwal community out of that area. The case brought the whole country to a boiling point and raised the issues of religiously motivated violence, crimes against women, and the legal system being manipulated by politics. The charge sheet mentioned eight people who were implicated in the crime, which included police officers and a temple caretaker. In June 2019, the court found six persons guilty and sentenced three of them to lifetime imprisonment and the other three got five years in prison for tampering with the evidence (Sharma, 2025).

Though the case of Kathua is now in the past, it is still widely recognized as one of the worst examples of delayed justice and the wide-ranging impact of communal tensions in India. The very nature of the crime, being one of the worst acts of violence based on religion, led to its coverage both nationally and internationally. There were many protests and candlelight vigils held all over the country as a response to the incident. It was a wake-up call for society to exercise greater caution in protecting children and other vulnerable groups. Additionally, it highlighted the need for a solution when it comes to tensions between religion-related issues and at the same time, bringing to justice those who committed such dreadful acts. The legal action taken against the culprits involved among others, the prosecution, arrests, and trials. This case not only raised the issue of violence against minorities but also the need for justice and protection for the affected communities. It was a case that brought to the limelight the vulnerability of the marginalised community and the need to protect their rights. Further, consciousness was raised about the extent of commission of such heinous crimes and the urgency to address them effectively through legal and social measures within a stipulated timeframe of strong laws and mechanisms to nip sexual violence and responses to it in the bud, with due punishment to the perpetrators of the crimes. However, more impeaching was how the authorities failed to protect the victim's rights and ensure effective and timely justice. The delayed response and the mishandling of the case have resulted in a host of questions regarding the protection of people in vulnerable categories in areas affected by conflict. This event served as a spotlight to the issue of gender violence, caste discrimination, and communal discord. The horrible nature of the crime and the implications of the different religions involved in it provided sufficient reason to investigate and try to resolve the issues stemming from discrimination, violence, and lack of accountability. The backing that some of the accused received from certain local officials of the Bharatiya Janata Party was one of the factors that increased the nationwide outrage already present.

The Kathua incident, in this context, was a clear example of Anthony D. Smith's theory of ethnic nationalism, above all, it demonstrated how ethnic identity and cultural symbolism could be turned to support exclusionary or even violent actions. The Hindutva narratives that were built around the case not only framed the crime as an isolated act but also as a sequence of communal tensions, thereby strengthening the sense of the Hindu majority being victims, and hence, they were united. These symbolic constructions were unveiled through media coverage, political discourse, and public demonstrations, which revealed the capacity of cultural nationalism to manipulate the perception of justice, to make violence acceptable, and to further the cause of minority communities' marginalization in both the social and legal spheres.

4.2.2 Shaheen Bagh Incident

The non-violent protest became a symbol of democratic resistance and women's power, as the elderly women, known as the "Dadis of Shaheen Bagh," were the ones leading the movement. Knowns as The Shaheen Bagh protest was a female-dominated, all-day, all-night sit-in that commenced in New Delhi in December 2019 and continued for over a hundred days. The protest against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), National Register of Citizens (NRC), and National Population Register (NPR) was thus conducted through which a considerable number of people feared that Muslim citizens would be treated unjustly and deprived of Indian nationality (Al Jazeera, 2024).

The movement was also endorsed by various sections of the society, the most active being students, activists, and civil society who were all together in spirit. The demonstration lasted till March 2020 when the police used the COVID-19 lockdown as a pretext to disperse the protestors forcibly. The Shaheen Bagh movement has left its imprint in the annals of protest history in India; it has further given a strong reminder of the values of secularism, constitutional rights, and popular struggles that have stood up against the Government's discriminatory measures.

The Shaheen Bagh protest is very much tied to the broader question of Hindutva ideology and the CAA affecting the religious minorities in India. The CAA along with the proposed NRC and NPR were perceived to recast Indian citizenship in a manner that would be detrimental to the Muslims. The Hindutva agenda of converting India into a Hindu state was expressed through these policies and the matter of exclusion and discrimination became even more visible, hence the ringing cautions.

Shaheen Bagh's success and portrayal were that it created a strong and powerful counter-narrative to the ideology of discrimination and hate that contained, by its nature, resistance against a legal system that was seen as eroding the secular and pluralistic foundations of India. The predominance of women among the protesters also contested the patriarchal norms and boosted the concerns about inclusiveness and constitutional rights. The protests not only captured the whole country's attention but also highlighted the fears of the minority groups in the politically changing situation influenced by Hindu nationalism-oriented policies regarding their citizenship and belongingness.

The Shaheen Bagh protest illustrated the case where the minority communities claimed their rights and defended their position against the discriminatory policies, which were all done in the context of the ethnic nationalism. Using Anthony D. Smith's ideas, the protest brought to the front the contesting of the prevailing cultural narratives and the assertion of a new civic identity that was based on dare to the constitutional values. This instance displayed the conflict between the symbolic politics of the majoritarian and the agency of the minority, thus making it possible to look into the institutional pressures on the minorities, as was the case with the Aligarh Muslim University incident.

4.2.3   Aligarh University Incident

A conflict between law enforcement and students on December 15, 2019, was the main event that brought attention to the Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) incident. The AMU students who were against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) not only staged their protest through a rally but also showed their solidarity with the students of JMI, who were at that moment suffering from police violence (Al Jazeera, 2019). The demonstration at Aligarh Muslim University (AMU), which was taking place against the Indian government's Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and which also expressing solidarity with the students of JMI, the police attacked at that very moment by shooting tear gas and using batons to disperse the crowd. Many students were injured, some were arrested, and there were reports of police mistreatment during the detention. The internet got cut, and the university had to be closed for the time being.

The incident attracted widespread criticism, and the government was accused by its critics of employing violence through police and of suffocating dissent. The AMU campus emerged as a bastion of student resistance against the CAA, thereby affirming the universities' role in political oppositions as well as the state's brutal reaction to student protests. The event at AMU was one of the biggest incidents that occurred in the whole country during the protests against the CAA. The AMU incident not only emphasized the core issue of the protests that is, questions concerning citizenship, religious freedom, and minorities in India but also the demand for the protection of democratic values, the rights of all citizens to be respected and the existence of an atmosphere where diverse voices can be heard and respected. The university campus was involved in the discussions of the tensions surrounding the CAA and its implications for the rights and identities of the minority communities in the country through the intense demonstrations and clashes between the students and law enforcement authorities. Protests at AMU were part of the broader anti-CAA movement, which critics argued was discriminatory and contrary to the secular principles laid down in the Constitution of India. The students and faculty of this university, along with many other supporters, protested the law whose implementation would further marginalize the Muslim communities and also hurt the very ethos of inclusiveness of India.

One of the most significant and important events during the nationwide protests CAA was the one that happened at AMU. The whole episode at AMU brought to light the central issue of the protests against the CAA, not only the questions related to citizenship, religious freedom, and the minorities in India but also the demand for the protection of democratic values, the rights of all citizens to be respected, and the existence of an atmosphere where different voices can be heard and respected. The university campus directly participated in discussing the tensions surrounding the CAA and its impact on the rights and identities of minority communities in the country through the massive demonstrations and even clashes between students and law enforcement. The protests at AMU were part of the larger anti-CAA movement which critics referred to as discriminatory, and a violation of the secular principles ingrained in the Indian Constitution. The students and the faculty members of

the university along with many other supporters protested the law which was seen as a step to further marginalize the already marginalized Muslim communities and was going to be a blow to the very idea of India as an inclusive nation.

The event was a very clear sign of the major problems such as the rights of the small people and the social peace in India. The AMU incident, thus, makes one reflect on the hard socio-political struggles and the barriers to establishing and maintaining peace and inclusivity in any educational institution. This situation at AMU illustrated the socio-political problems that the government faces when it resorts to force in the control of protests and the necessity of understanding dialogues that expose the very essence of the grievances which lead to such confrontations. It is a common opinion that the matters of identity, citizenship, and religious pluralism in India are very complex and serve as a barrier not only to inclusivity but also to social unity. Furthermore, schools have been regarded as the most appropriate places to develop critical thinking, activism, and advocacy during the struggle for social justice.

The protests at Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) showed the way institutional frameworks turned out to be places for the imposition of ideological conformity under the rule of Hindutva. By using Anthony D. Smith's model, the incident revealed the impact of ethnic nationalism on the state's reactions, police operations, and media reporting, thus limiting the expression and participation of the minorities in the civic life. It exposed the intersection of the symbolic politics of the majority with the institutional power in such a way that the exclusion and marginalization of the minority communities were reinforced.

5. Conclusion

The Hindutva ideology has dramatically altered the entire political and social landscape of India. The principal players in this movement, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), possess a profoundly distinct and tactical perception of India as a land of Hindus. Among the primary government actions related to this ideology is the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) which allows citizenship to non-Muslim minorities from adjacent countries while Muslims are pointedly left out. This has very explicitly raised the question of secularism in India. The supporters of the CAA argue that it is a rectification of the historical grievances of the non-Muslim minorities in Muslim majority countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan that suffer from persecution. On the contrary, the attention of the critics is drawn to the fact that the Act is discriminatory towards Muslims, hence, causing a situation of isolation and marginalisation.

The Kathua case, the Shaheen Bagh protests, and the violence at Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) incidents have all been regarded as indicators of the social repercussions of the CAA and the larger Hindutva agenda. The Kathua case demonstrated the vulnerability of the minority communities to be the first ones affected by such violence. The protests at Shaheen Bagh, which were largely driven by women, were a silent but forceful opposition to the CAA that pointed to the Act's threat to the secular nature of India in the eyes of some. Likewise, the AMU protests and demonstrations reflected the participation of the student community in the struggle for social justice and the resistance to the guidelines that disenfranchise the minorities.

The ascendance of Hindu nationalism alongside the enactment of the CAA can be interpreted as the reflection of a bigger trend in the Indian political field, namely the increased reliance on religion, identity, and citizenship as political manoeuvres. The repercussions of the CAA on national unity, minority rights, and India's global image have highlighted the urgent need for laws that not only comply with the constitutional principles but also promote the growth of a diverse and tolerant society. This legislative act, though drastic, has effectively exacerbated the already existing divisions in society and has raised the fears of further alienation of groups, together with the decline of India's secularism. The debate is still ongoing; nevertheless, it is not the government to take the first step to involve the public in these matters through openness, legal safeguards, and policy measures that are in accordance with the tenets of equality and justice.

The CAA, which was put forward as a solution for the suffering of persecuted minorities, is in direct opposition to and is simply eroding the constitutional commitment to secularism and identical treatment for all citizens in India. The Act's discriminatory attitude and the possibility of stripping certain Muslims of their voting rights bring up very serious issues regarding India's democratic principles. To deal with these difficult problems, a careful approach that protects the rights of all citizens is needed, no matter their religious affiliation, while at the same time upholding the democratic and secular ideals that India stands for.

CAA has a highly significant socio-political influence that even goes beyond the borders and attracts global attention and criticism. Discriminatory nature of the Act and its adverse impact on India's secular democracy have been highlighted by human rights organizations and foreign governments, who all express their concerns. The association of CAA with Hindutva ideology along with the BJP's political manoeuvring of seeking the Hindu vote, has deepened the divide in politics and hence, leading to heated arguments on citizenship, identity and national security. While analysing the intersection of politics in Hindutva and CAA, it is imperative to recognize the tricky relations between faith, politics, and citizenship in India. Hindutva's stressing of the syncretism of Hindu's cultural and national identity has significantly altered the policy and public discourse, redefining the narrative of who is entitled to the Indian state. The BJP's mounting pressure to realize their Hindutva project by means of legal instruments like the CAA mirrors their perception of India where one religious community enjoys precedence over others, thereby raising basic questions about equality, inclusiveness, and the safeguarding of minorities' rights.

Moreover, the global response to the CAA has a negative impact on India's international relations as the country has been questioned by numerous human rights groups, foreign leaders, and governments about its commitment to democratic values. For India, it is fundamental to be perceived as a multifaceted and tolerant nation to retain its soft power and global alliances. India must do and be very careful not to lose its identity while being able to promote democracy. The latter entails creating a situation where citizenship policies are non-exclusive and non-discriminatory. The very principles of justice, equality, and constitutionality will significantly help the country's unity, social cohesion, and future global image.

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