

The Question of India's Endangered Democracy in the Light of Intolerance Debate: Some Reflections

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Abul Kalam Azad*

Fakir Chand College, India

Abstract

India is regarded as the world's largest democratic country. The country is well known for its rich cultural diversity, pluralistic society and inclusive secular democracy. However, the recent political scenario has partially damaged the values of the liberal democracy of India. Since Narendra Modi became Prime Minister in 2014, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its parental body Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangha (RSS) have tried to accomplish their goal of Hindu Rashtra. Minorities in the country have been attacked, killed and deprived of their human rights. This article examines this trend by focusing on the growing intolerance during the Modi regime and its impact on the country's democracy. It also discusses how the BJP at the central government and many other states, directly and indirectly, narrow down the space of civil society and media to fuel majoritarian agenda. Based on its findings, the article argues that in the Narendra Modi regime Indian political culture has been undergoing a shift from inclusive democracy to a narrow process of democracy. By doing so, it contributes to the studies on the rise of right-wing populism in some countries including India in the contemporary world.

Key Words

Hindutva, majoritarianism, democracy, intolerance, diversity, minority, mob lynching, Modi, BJP, civil society

Introduction

Since its independence, India has taken a democratic path to govern its citizen. It is viewed that India is the largest democratic nation in the world. Even in today's global scenario, Indian democracy is a reference point despite having so many highs and lows. As a political philosophy,

* Contact:

Assistant Professor Abul Kalam Azad, Department of Political Science, Fakir Chand College (Affiliated to the University of Calcutta), Diamond Harbour, South 24 Parganas, West Bengal, India.
Email: apjkalam90@gmail.com

democracy highly emphasizes individual liberty. The Constitution of India comprises all the democratic ethos and values. In the preamble of the Indian Constitution, India has been described as a 'Sovereign Democratic Republic' and these ideas are incorporated in the articles and schedules of the constitution. The constitution and its makers gave their highest effort to consolidate and establish democratic governance which builds more rational institutions and checks the executive branch of the government. India's democratic governance produces a democratic culture throughout the nation which provides a higher level of tolerance and pluralism as well.

However, the recently experienced majoritarian politics, the cry of Hindu nationalism, and the rising hooliganism of anti-democratic radical religious groups have been pushing Indian democracy to a certain level of authoritarian democracy. A biased discourse of Hindu nationalism has been formed in the mind of the Indian middle and lower middle class. An anti-democratic political culture is prevailing throughout the nation and the Hindu nationalists blame the secular culture of the country as 'pseudo-secularism' and it is nothing but appeasement of minority communities.

This article examines this trend by focusing on the political scenario of the first five years of Narendra Modi as Prime Minister (2014-2019), who is a poster boy of Hindutva politics in the post-Bajpayee-Advani era, and how the way he leads BJP's political culture is affecting the nation's liberal democracy and political tolerance. The required data for this study were collected through secondary data sources. The process and development of 'Hindutwa' politics in India and its effect on India's democracy were analyzed with the help of available secondary data. The data were collected from various books, journals, contemporary magazines, newspapers, websites, etc. The research questions of this article are how does BJP's 'Hindutwa' politics affect India as the largest democratic country?; what are the issues of recent religious intolerance in India?; and how the oppression of Dalits and civil society has increased during the Modi regime?

India as a Pluralistic Nation

Pluralism is a philosophy that supports multicultural values and emphasizes diversity and tolerance. In a plural society, a smaller group within a larger society can maintain their unique cultural identity, value, and practices. Pluralism is only possible when the majority section of society accepts the minority communities and agrees to mutual co-existence. The concept of plural society always emphasizes tolerance, mutual respect and peaceful co-existence among the majority and minority communities.

India is a diverse and plural nation. Many religious, cultural, and linguistic minority groups have been living in this country for years after years. Such heterogeneous culture has evolved over the centuries, through

a contentious adoption of cultural traits from the invaders like the Aryan, the Sakas, the Huns, the Pathans, the Mughals, and the Europeans. For this composite culture, many sociologists have described India as a “bouquet of flowers” or “vegetables in a salad bowl”.

India is the world’s second-largest country in terms of population that consists of diverse social, cultural, and ethnic elements at large. Linguistic diversity is a unique feature of India. The country has no ‘national language’; instead, 22 ‘official’ languages have been recognized in the constitution. A lion’s share portion of the Indian population, particularly in the northern region of the country, uses ‘Hindi’ as their spoken language. There are also more than 19,500 languages and dialects spoken in India.

Moreover, India is a land of many religions. The world’s six major religions have a presence in India. Of these, Hinduism (79.8%), Sikhism (1.7%), Buddhism (0.7%) and Jainism (0.4%) took birth in India, while Islam (14.2%) and Christianity (1.7%) came from outside (iccrindia.net). Caste is an important characteristic of Indian society.

Every individual in Hinduism is born into a caste and it is the central principle of four-fold hierarchy (*varna*) stratification in the Hindu social order. There are about 2000-3000 castes/sub-castes in India. As per the census of 2011, 16.6% of the total population of India has scheduled castes. Tribes are also a crucial part of the national population, popularly known as Adivasis (original inhabitants). India has the largest tribal population in the world. There are 550 tribes in India. According to the census of 2011, 8.6% of the total population of India are scheduled tribes (Jayal 2016).

‘India’s Democracy is in Danger’

The Economist, a wide circulated magazine with international repute, published in the last week of the January edition in 2020, had its cover page entitled “Intolerant India: How Modi is endangering the world’s biggest democracy.” In its ‘Leaders’ segment, the weekly magazine published an essay entitled “Narendra Modi Stokes Divisions in the World’s Biggest Democracy” and said that millions of Indian Muslims are frightened about the process of making a Hindu state. The magazine criticized that India changed the law (Citizenship Amendment Act 2019) to make it easier to get citizenship for the followers of all the subcontinent’s religions, except Islam.

At the same time, the ruling party, BJP, wants to compile a register (National Population Register) of the country’s hundred and thirty crore citizens, so that they can hunt down illegal immigrants (*The Economist* 2020). The Economist Intelligence Unit also stated that India has ranked

India 51 among 165 countries on the Global Democracy Index for 2019. The leader of BJP, Vijay Chauthaiwale, who is a foreign policy expert of the party, gave counter feedback on Twitter saying that the magazine is ‘arrogant’ with a colonial mindset. He wrote on Twitter, “We thought the Brits had left in 1947! But the editors of @TheEconomist are still living in the colonial era. They are furious when 600m Indians do not follow their explicit instructions of not voting Modi” (*Outlook* 2020). The *Annual Democracy Report 2020* prepared by V-Dem Institute (Department of Political Science, University of Gothenburg) and entitled “Autocratization Surges – Resistance Grows” says that India is being affected by a trend of autocratization along with some other G-20 countries like the USA, Brazil, and Turkey. According to the report, India’s democracy status is decreasing under Modi’s government because of the severely shrinking of space for the opposition, civil society, and media (V-Dem Institute 2020).

The iconic US-based *Time* magazine (Asia edition) dated 20 May 2019 put the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on its cover and cited him as “India’s divider in chief” –a reference to BJP’s Hindutva politics. An article in the magazine entitled “Can the World’s Largest Democracy Endure another Five Years of a Modi Government?” writes that under Modi, minorities of every line —liberals, lower castes, Muslims, and Christians— have been assaulted. The writer also criticized by mentioning “Not only has Modi’s economic miracle failed to materialize, but he has also helped create an atmosphere of poisonous religious nationalism in India” (Taseer 2019a). The article was written by a New York-based journalist Aatish Taseer, a son of Indian Mother senior journalist Tavleen Singh and Pakistani father Salman Taseer, former Governor of Pakistan’s Punjab province. The next day after the article was published, the BJP hit back with their official spokesperson, Dr. Sambit Patra, addressing a press conference and saying that the *Time* story was written by a Pakistani and “that nothing better could be expected from Pakistan.” Furthermore, Narendra Modi government decided to revoke the writer’s Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) status —a permanent visa for persons of Indian origin (Taseer 2019b). A good number of international media organizations raised their voice over the decision taken by the Government of India. World’s eminent creative artists and writers including Orhan Pamuk and J.M. Coetzee (both Nobel laureates), Salman Rushdie, Margaret Atwood, Amitav Ghosh, and Jonathan Franzen, wrote to Modi to restore Aatish Taseer’s OCI card. Many scholars said that the government decided intolerantly as the writer criticized the Prime Minister (Deb 2019).

(In) tolerance: A Contradicted Political Culture of ‘New’ India

The people of India are always proud of the motto “unity in diversity” which allows the coexistence of types of diverse cultures without giving privileges to a particular group or community. However, in the recent past, India has witnessed issues that flag serious doubt about its cultural heritage. Ram temple, the Gita, or the cow became the symbols of national identity. As a result of this, a wave of Hindu nationalism has been trying to manipulate Indian politics. Such illiberal attitudes have been pushing the minority section to the margin. Prime Minister Narendra Modi uses the term ‘new India’ in his speech very frequently.

A changing pattern of political culture has been seen in Modi’s “new India”. Citizens tend to imagine a strong concept of nationalism, which would be coercive and there is a tendency to connect the nation with religion. In such a texture of new nationalism, people start to believe the state and its military wing are strong enough to strike at enemies (especially Pakistan) at any time. A section of the non-Muslim majority sees the Muslim population as being more violent and less patriotic than others. Very often many leaders of BJP and other right-wing nationalist groups publicly say that “Muslims should not be living in India; they should go to Pakistan” (Palshikar 2019).

Religious Intolerance

Secularism is a crucial component of democracy. However, the concept is under threat after Narendra Modi-led BJP came to power in the central government in 2014. BJP is a shadow political organization of the right-wing ideological group Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangha (RSS). The leaders and members of RSS are very critical of the principles of secularism since its inception in 1925. They have been campaigning continuously for ‘one state, one religion’ (Hindu Rashtra). After 2014, hate speech and violence against Muslims, brutal killings of Muslims and Dalits in the name of absurd things, issuance of a threat to *madrasas* (religious schools of Islam), withdrawal of subsidies of the hajj pilgrimage, etc. are a few of a long list of violation of the secular values of India (Chandoke 2019).

Fifteen months after Modi’s rise to power, the news of mob lynching of beef eaters and cattle traders started to come and got nationwide attention. During his regime so far, the graph of mob killing, rather than say lynching, has been rising to an extent level. These incidents of violence occurred mostly due to cow issues or when someone disagreed to chant ‘*Jay Sree Ram*’ (victory to Lord Rama). On 28 September 2015, a fifty-year-old man, Mohammad Akhlag, was lynched to death and his son Danish, 22

years old, was brutally tortured for allegedly storing ‘beef’ in their house in Uttar Pradesh. The mob lynching case of Pehlu Khan in Rajasthan was a unique one. In this case, Police filed a charge of cow smuggling against the person who was lynched by some self-appointed *gau rakshak* (cow vigilante) (Alam 2019). Tabrej Ansari, a twenty-four-year-old Muslim man who was being suspected of theft, was attacked by a mob in Jharkhand. He was beaten up brutally and forced to recite ‘*Jay Sree Ram*’ and ‘*Jay Hanuman*’. Later, he was handed over to the Police but after four days he died due to severe injuries he had during the mob attack. Since 2014, many people have been killed and hundreds of people have been injured in mob attacks. But no strong actions have been taken at the central government level except a few general statements from ministers in the parliament. The victims of mob lynching are mostly from the Muslim community (*BBC News* 2019).

The central government always tried to hide the original data regarding mob lynching incidents around the country. In July 2018, Union Home Minister of State (MoS) Hans Raj Ahir told Rajyasabha: “The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) does not maintain specific data with respect to lynching incidents in the country” (*The Wire* 2019). The Upper House was informed that the state governments were competent to deal with such offences under the existing laws. Such statements came from Home Affairs Ministry when the Supreme Court in its judgments condemned the lynching incidents as “horrendous acts of mobocracy” and asked parliament to enact an effective law to deal with mob lynching and cow vigilantism incidents. The three-Judge bench headed by the former Chief Justice of India Dipak Misra observed with wonder whether the “populace of a great Republic like ours has lost the values of tolerance to sustain a diverse culture?” (*The Hindu* 2019).

Over the last decade, the term “love jihad” has become very popular among many Hindu vigilant organizations as they started campaigning against Hindu-non Hindu marriage. ‘Romeo jihad’ or ‘love jihad’ is an alleged attempt by which Muslim men pretend to love for Hindu women to convert themselves to Islam. Some radical Hindu organizations like Hindu Mahasabha, Biswa Hindu Parishad, Bajrang Dal, and R.S.S. have been campaigning boldly that it is a conspiracy by Muslim organizations that engaged their youth to feign love non-Hindu women and convert them to Islam. In January 2018, a few months before the Karnataka assembly election, the Bajrang Dal began distributing pamphlets in the state’s communally sensitive coastal district of Dakshina Kannada warning Hindu girls and families against getting trapped by ‘Jihadi Muslim’ boys.

The pamphlets were distributed in colleges, door to door, and wherever the Bajrang Dal cadres see Hindu girls, they warned them to “keep distance” from Muslim boys in schools, colleges, workplaces, and during travelling. Bajrang Dal state president Sharan Pumpwell told the media that the objective of the activity is to warn Hindu mothers and girls of the organized conspiracy to convert Hindu girls to Islam through ‘love jihad’ (*The Economic Times* 2018). Even before Yogi Adityanath became Chief Minister in Uttar Pradesh (U.P.), he started a strong protest against the ‘love jihad’ issue. During the state assembly election campaign in February 2017, he said in a news channel-organized event that the issues of the upcoming election would be ‘love jihad’ and women’s safety, Hindu exodus from Kairana, etc (*The Economic Times* 2017). The murder of Mohammad Afrajul in a protest of ‘love jihad’ shocked the nation in no time. Afrajul, a fifty-year-old migrant labourer from West Bengal, was hacked to death and burnt by a local goon Sambhulal Regar in Rajasthan on December 6, 2017. The footage of the murder was uploaded on social media where Regar stated that he had burnt the man to protect a “Hindu sister” from the so-called ‘love jihad’. But the real shock came again during the U.P. assembly election when Uttar Pradesh Nabanirman Seena declared that Sambhulal Regar would contest from the Rampur constituency against Samajwadi Party General Secretary Azam Khan (Dey 2018).

According to annual reports of the ministry of home affairs, more than 10,362 communal incidents were reported between 2004 and 2017, of these incidents (28% or 2,920 cases) were recorded during the NDA government between 2014 and 2017 (*Fact Checker* 2019). The New Delhi riot in 2020 was the worst incident of this decade. Between 23 February 23 and 1 March 2020, India’s capital city witnessed a spate of inter-racial and religious riots between Hindus and Muslims, resulting in dozens of casualties, while vehicles, shops, and houses were massively destroyed. In all, 53 people were killed and they were mostly Muslims. The clash broke out when BJP leader Kapil Mishra gave an “ultimatum” to the police to remove anti-Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) protests that blocked roads in Jaffrabad metro station in Northeast Delhi. He called his followers to assemble at Maujpur Chowk in support of the newly passed citizenship law to counter the roadblock by the anti-CAA protestors. After a few hours, the police started lathi-charge and, many armed with weapons and donning Hindu symbols, attacked the protesters (Singh 2020). The mob attacked a local mosque, fired on it, and placed a ‘Hanuman flag’ on the minaret of the mosque. In many areas, police have been accused of siding with Hindutva groups in attacking Muslims (Barton 2020).

The NDA government led by Modi in their second term passed a few legislations that challenge the status of Muslims as equal Indian citizens. Passing the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill in July 2019 was one of the few which created nationwide controversy. The law says there shall be three years imprisonment for the pronouncement of instant '*talaq, talaq, talaq*'. The opposition political parties remarked critically that the law could be misused to attack Muslim identity and citizenship as the law is much closer to the long-time agenda of R.S.S. to implement a Uniform Civil Code with an intentional Hindu majoritarian colour. Many political analysts said that the law is discriminatory as there is no law to protect women of other religions who are abandoned by their husbands (Mahaprashasta 2020).

Indian parliament passed the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) in 2019 to provide a fast-track route to Indian citizenship for illegal migrants of Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi, and Christian religious minorities, who had fled persecution before December 2014 from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan. However, the law does not mention Muslim members of neighbouring countries. The law is anti-Muslim and unconstitutional as religions are used as a criterion for getting Indian citizenship. The CAA created a huge hue and cry among the Indian Muslims as they are scared of being snatched their citizenship with the help of the process of National Register of Citizens (NRC). The religious basis of CAA violates the idea of secular India as the preamble of the Indian constitution says: "We the people of India have solemnly resolved to constitute India into a Sovereign, Socialist, Secular and Democratic Republic" (Changoiwala 2020).

Universities have been playing an important role in democratic protest in India. On the occasion of CAA, many higher education institutions like IIT, IIM, central and state universities, and colleges agitated against such a discriminatory law. Jamia Milia Islamia University (JMIU) and Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) are the frontrunners in this case. In the middle of December 2019, the students of JMIU started a rally to march toward Parliament to protest the exclusion of Muslims from the citizenship law. The police blocked and beat them up. Even Delhi Police controlled by the central Home Ministry entered the campus forcefully without taking permission from the authority and charged batons at the students and staff of the university (*Aljazeera* 2019). In March 2020, Safura Jargar, a M.Phil. student of JMIU, was arrested by Delhi Police under UAPA sections in connection with the Delhi riot. She was a member of the Jamia Co-ordination Committee that led protest

rallies in Delhi against CAA. According to her family, she was three months pregnant and was not allowed to meet with her lawyer and her husband as well. She was rejected for getting bail many times for her continued detention under UAPA (Khan 2020).

The police repression of the students of Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) in Uttar Pradesh was quite similar to JMIU. When the students started protesting against the CAA in solidarity with the students of JMIU, they were baton-charged by police. The police of the BJP that ruled U.P. fired tear gas directly at students, broke the main gate and entered the campus (Ahmed 2019). Such news came earlier in 2018 when Jagaran Mancha, a Hindu, entered the campus demanding the removal of Muhammad Ali Jinnah's portrait from the students' union room. The students protested heavily. To control the situation, police lobbed tear gas shells and a good number of students were injured (*Indian Express* 2018). This kind of incident is very common in nature and the way these two Muslim-based higher education institutions are tortured is a tendency toward the decline of democratic culture.

The students of JNU, particularly the left-wing student organizations attack the Modi-led BJP government as a 'fascist government'. As a response, BJP and its leaders always claim JNU as a den of anti-nationals. Last few years, this central university came to news headlines so many times for its unique student movement. But, in January 2020, the university witnessed a severe attack by some masked goons on students including the university's students' union president Aishe Ghosh and a well-known teacher Sucharita Sen. Students' union of JNU alleged that the attack was perpetrated by Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), a student organization affiliated by RSS. The goons pelted stones, vandalized the property, and physically assaulted the members of left-wing student organizations (*India Today* 2020).

Dalit Repression

The word 'Dalit' is primarily used to identify a lower caste of socio-religious groups in India. They are beyond of four-fold *varna* (social classes according to Hindu texts) system in Hinduism. Historically, they were marked as 'untouchables' and they were forbidden to celebrate Hindu religious and social life. The term 'Dalit' was popularized by a great Indian intellectual Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, an 'Untouchable'. He fought for the rights of the community throughout his life and believed that only by destroying the caste system could 'untouchability' be destroyed. In present India, Dalits have got the legal nomenclature of Schedule Caste (Minorityright).

org). Ideologically, BJP and Dalits have a very opposite stance on nation-making as the former is a campaigner of 'Hindu Rashtra' and the latter is very critical of such thoughts. In Modi's regime, Ambedkar, a hero for the Dalits, has been given tribute many times, but at the same time atrocities against Dalits have become the news for the nation. 2014 onwards, some negative developments, such as suppression of Dalit voice, assault of Dalit youth, and curb down of funding for development of Dalit sections, have signalized the hollowness of the Indian democracy. The news of lynching operations against Dalits and beating of Dalits in different parts of the country have been coming regularly. The incident of Una in U.P. was the worst among all. In May 2015, Ambedkar Periyar Study Circle (APSC), a student body in the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Madras, was suspended for 'misuse of privileges'. The decision was taken by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Government of India, following an anonymous complaint that the APSC was instigating protests against the BJP government policies and spreading "hatred" against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Hindus. After this decision came into effect, a huge protest was organized across the country, and finally, a few days later, the recognition of APSC was reinstated by the IIT, Madras, authority (Teltumbde 2019).

The suicide case of Rohit Vemula, a 26-year-old Dalit Ph.D. student at Hyderabad University, in 2016 stirred the whole nation. Rohit was a key leader of the Ambedkar Students Association (ASA). The incident started with a clash between ASA and ABVP. After that, BJP and ABVP gathered at the university campus demanding punishment against ASA. Meanwhile, Bandaru Dattatreya, a cabinet minister of the Modi government sent a letter to MHRD saying the University of Hyderabad is a 'den of anti-nationals' and appropriate action had to be taken. The MHRD sent an email referring the letter to the university. Based on ABVP's complaint, Rohit and five others were suspended and expelled from the university hostel in August 2015. The students pitched a tent outside the university premise, stayed there, and agitated peacefully. On 18 December 2016, Rohit wrote a letter to the Vice Chancellor saying such discrimination might lead them to commit suicide, but the authority ignored it. Rohit committed suicide on 17 January 2017. It can be said that such systemic oppression and institutionalized discrimination pushed him to commit suicide. These are the incidents that proved the growing intolerant attitude of the government and ruling party to any kind of criticism (Shanta 2019).

Chandrasekhar Azad, a young leader of the Dalit community from Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh, was arrested a couple of times. He is a co-founder of the Bhim Army, an organization to fight for the development of

Dalits and other marginalized sections. He was first arrested under National Security Act allegedly in connection with a clash between Rajput and Dalit in Saharanpur that left one dead and many injured in June 2017 and he was released after one year in jail. Then, he was arrested for the second time during the anti-CAA protest in New Delhi (*The Indian Express* 2018). The saga of injustices against Dalit people continued in the Bhima Koregaon incident, where some radical Hindu organizations attacked the annual Dalit congregation on 1 January 2018 which left one dead and several others injured. In connection with violence at Bhima Koregaon, the then BJP-led Maharashtra government arrested five renowned activists under UAPA — writer P. Varavara Rao, lawyers Sudha Bhardwaj, Arun Ferreira and Vernon Gonzalves, and Gautam Navalakha in August 2018— by labelling them “Maoist links”. Even the police stated that the activists had a conspiracy plan to murder Prime Minister Modi. Such a vindictive attitude of the government is an obvious attempt to stifle democracy (Dutta 2018).

Distorting History

After coming into power at the central government and other states in India, the BJP-ruled government took an unscientific approach to Indian history. The decision of renaming streets, railway stations, towns, and cities are a part of the ideological politics of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which aims to impose a majoritarian cultural assertion. Uttar Pradesh’s government led by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, a Hindu priest and founder of a militant Hindu youth-wing group, recently changed the name of Allahabad to Prayagraj, Mughalsarai station to Pandit Dindayal Upadhyay Junction, an early ideologue of RSS, and Faizabad to Ayodhya. Aurangzeb Road in New Delhi has taken its new name as A.P.J. Abdul Kalam Road. The wish list of BJP and other Hindu organizations for renaming a place is quite huge. They proposed Agra to be Agravan, Muzaffarnagar to be Laxminagar, Ahmedabad to be Karnavati after Hindu king Karan Dev, Hyderabad to be Bhagyanagar after goddess Bhagyalakshmi and Aurangabad to be Sambhaji Nagar after Sambhaji, elder son of King Shivaji. Many BJP leaders opined that these efforts are nothing but a process to restore Indian culture particularly ‘Hindutva’ which was destroyed by Mughals (Mukhopadhyay 2018).

Before the BJP regime, the names of the cities were also changed to emphasize their independence from the British ruler and to pay respect to their linguistic autonomy. For example, the names of Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta were changed to Mumbai, Chennai, and Kolkata. But in the present regime, the intention is to erase the heritage of the medieval Muslim era and establish majoritarian authority to promote sectarian politics (Ahmad 2018).

Attacks on Civil Society and Media

The ‘intolerance’ wave hit the Bollywood film industry in a bad way in recent times so that many film personalities started questioning the freedom of expression in India. In 2017, national award-winning film director Sanjay Leela Bhansali received a life threat including his castings regarding the film making about the 14th century Rajput Queen *Padmavati*. The radical Rajput caste group, Karni Sena, started an extreme movement in northern India claiming that movie did a ‘history distortion’. Few State governments run by BJP decided not to release the film until necessary changes were made. Finally, in January 2018, the Supreme Court gave a judgment that the film could be released nationwide and four states — Haryana, Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Madhya Pradesh— which banned the film, were told to maintain law and order during the film’s release (Tilak 2018). A few months before this incident, another eminent film director Karan Johar faced a similar problem with a threat to stall the release of his film *Ae Dil Hai Muskil* for working with Pakistani actor Fawad Khan. Maharashtra Navanirman Sena (MNS) started a strong protest and threatened the owners of the movie theatre not to release the film. After a huge agitation against the film, the director-producer had to sit with MNS chief Raj Thackeray in the presence of the Chief Minister of Maharashtra. The whole issue was resolved with a decision that the owner of the film gave five crore rupees to Army Welfare Fund and the director promised that he would never work with a Pakistani artist (Dikshit 2016). Two Bollywood superstars, Shahrukh Khan and Aamir Khan, were attacked by Hindu nationalists as they remarked on intolerant India. In 2015, when Shahrukh Khan opined about growing intolerance in the country, Yogi Adityanath compared him to Pakistani terrorist Hafiz Saeed and threatened to mass boycott his films. A senior BJP leader, Kailash Vijayvargiya, remarked that Shahrukh’s comment was anti-national (*Hindustan Times* 2015). A few days later, Aamir Khan expressed his view over “rising intolerance” in India, stating his wife had inquired if they should leave the country. Aamir also said that his wife was scared for the safety of their children in a climate of insecurity (*The Hindu* 2015).

The decision of the Modi government to cancel the licenses of nearly 20,000 NGOs that receive foreign funds under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) was also an attempt at the systematic stifling of the voices of civil society groups. In India, about 3.4 million NGOs work as independent and voluntary for disadvantaged communities. The process started in 2015 based on a leaked Intelligence Bureau report stating that the NGOs with the help of the foreign fund tried to create an atmosphere

that might stall the country's development project. In 2018, many NGO activists were arrested including Sudha Bhardwaj, general secretary of the Chhattisgarh People's Union for the charge of Maoists connection (Kumar 2019).

The murder of 55-year-old journalist Gouri Lankesh in front of her house in Bengaluru in September 2017 triggered a nationwide outrage. Sujith Kumar, one of the Masterminds of this killing and a member of the Hindu Yuva Sena, confessed before the police that Gouri Lankesh was murdered for her "anti-Hindu views" (*The Indian Express* 2018). The BJP government, its members and supporters closely observe news channels that show 'anti-government' programs and try to control the channels. A few months ago, two very popular anchors of ABP News channel, Punya Prasun Bajpai and Abhisar Sharma along with the channel's Managing Editor Milind Khandekar, were forced to resign. The anchors were very outspoken about recent intolerant issues and anti-people government policies. Ravish Kumar, an anchor of the NDTV news channel was very critical of Modi Government and tried to deliver unbiased news. According to him, in 2018 whenever he aired his show discussing the unemployment issues in prime time, the signal would disappear. To him, to disturb the signal was a new weapon of control. In 2019, the founders of NDTV Prannoy Roy and Radhika Roy were stopped from travelling abroad by the immigration officials at the Mumbai international airport for allegedly a corruption case initiated by the Central Bureau of Investigation.

However, few channels have a pro-government stance as they are owned by either BJP leaders or their supporters. For example, Zee News is owned by Subhash Chandra who became an independent Rajya Sabha MP nominated by BJP legislators, Republic TV is owned by Rajeev Chandrasekhar (resigned from the Board of Directors in 2018) and News 18 Network is owned by Ambani group (Kumar 2019). Every country's democratic health largely rests in the hands of its civil society and media. But these two pillars of democracy in India are crumbling due to frequent attempts to control these institutions by the government and its supporters.

Conclusion

This article has tried to argue that in the Narendra Modi regime Indian political culture has been undergoing a shift from inclusive democracy to a narrow process of democracy. The values of diversity, openness and mutual coexistence have been languishing as the BJP is trying to accomplish its goal to make India a 'Hindu Rashtra', an ultra-fascist attitude in the twenty-first century. In the first five years of the Modi-led BJP government,

the people of India witnessed right-wing populism at the national level and a clear tendency for majoritarian politics. This transformation is largely damaging the country's very own consensual social fabric. In this short span, the idea of secularism has been attacked regularly in the name of Hindutva which violates the core values of constitutional democracy. An atmosphere of rising intolerance has been affecting civil society rights and freedom and the 'idea of India'. However, the people of India have seen a ray of hope as the nation has witnessed hundreds of movements and struggles in the last few years led by the young generation. If the common people can stop the attacks on secularism and if the country's democratic institutions can work rampantly for the welfare of the people of all strata of the society, India can recover its organic identity as a tolerant, liberal, composite, pluralistic and inclusive nation.

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