Youth Perception on Hate Crimes, Hate Speeches and Nationalism in Contemporary India

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Abstract In view of the recent surge in the number of hate crimes in India, particularly against minority groups such as Dalits and Muslims, this chapter aims to explore youth perceptions about hate crimes, hate speech, and ideas of nationalism, and examine the ways in which education has impacted their point of view. Through a critical examination of the reasons behind this sudden rise in hate crimes and hate speech, this chapter argues that a new form of nationalism founded based on religious sentiments and animosity among different religious groups is slowly emerging in present-day India. In the process, communalism has come to be conflated with nationalism. Results of this qualitative inquiry suggest that young people are lacking in a thorough understanding of these issues, although they do not appear to be altogether evasive of contemporary realities. This points towards the need for increased public awareness and education delivered through a critical lens, and alerts us to the dangers of overestimating the reach and influence of mass media to convey the magnitude of certain crucial issues.

Keywords Bharat Mata ki Jai · Conflict · Communalism · Diversity · Hate · Nationalism · Religion · Youth perceptions

1 Introduction

On 25 July 2019, the General Assembly of the United Nations passed a resolution to counter hate speech by promoting interreligious and intercultural dialogue and tolerance (A/RES/73/328) (United Nations 2019b). Before this, at the launch of the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech in New York on 18 June 2019, the UN Secretary-General António Guterres remarked that hate speech signifies “an attack on tolerance, inclusion, diversity and the very essence of our human rights norms and principles. More broadly, it undermines social
cohesion, erodes shared values, and can lay the foundation for violence, setting back the cause of peace, stability, sustainable development and the fulfilment of human rights for all” (UNIS/INF/545) (United Nations 2019a). He added that over the past 75 years, hate speech has resulted in a number of atrocity crimes, including genocide, and it has been strongly linked with violence and killings in several regions of the world. A manifestation of these tendencies can be seen in India as well. In 2018, Amnesty International’s India chapter noted a staggering increase in the number of hate crimes against Muslims and Dalits.

This chapter aims to critically examine the reasons behind the prevalence of hate speech and hate crimes in the name of religion in India. It is crucial to uncover why our country, once known for its secularist values, is now subordinating politics to religion. This has led to a new process of nationalism. Nationalism is now being built through arousing religious sentiments and instigating animosity against followers of various other beliefs.

“Nationalism” is not a tangible but rather an abstract concept. Over time its definitions have remained fluid as well as static. According to Gellner (1983, p. 5), it permitted the growth of an impersonal society where individuals were bonded through defining a shared culture and learning about a shared history. Within India, owing to its mixed plurality and multiplicity of cultures, nationalism has taken on many forms. According to Hobsbawm (1990), what began as a limited idea among the elite of colonial India, was soon converted to a mass movement during the twentieth century.

As India changed over time, so did its nationalistic identity. Pseudo-nationalists started to exaggerate the importance of a single history of one religious community as being the pre-eminent history of the nation, as well as to denigrate and distort the history of other communities. It was soon realised that no one identity could represent what was built on the backs of many. This resulted in multiple identities competing for visibility and inevitable conflict and inequality.

Owing to its long and rich history, much of what affects India today was due to nationalism as an ideology which arose to fight against the foreign imperialism but today it is affecting its own people. As Thapar et al. (1987) opined, wherever national consciousness failed, communalism developed. Even as children, our history books have indoctrinated in our minds that our national leaders fought vehemently against various alien enemies, beginning with the Muslim rulers. This has unconsciously led to the belief that there has always been a Hindu nation constantly fighting against certain evil powers. In time this has created a blatant culture of animosity, clearly estranging the Muslim population. This communal approach has injured and fractured our society deeply. As a wave of nationalism is now making its way across the globe, much of it has affected India’s own democratic process. For India, the concept of nationalism came about during the Independence struggle.

Today the idea of nationalism has been influenced by conservative right-leaning political policies. Instead of focusing on cultural diversity, the election mandate of the current ruling party has chosen to foreground religious and cultural divisiveness. This has contributed to an increase in pro-Hindu and anti-Muslim rhetoric. Hate
crimes are a reality of the disintegration of our religious diversity and peaceful coexistence. A discussion of the apparent changes in the national rhetoric is important.

2 Religious Diversity and Conflict in India

India is characterised by more ethnic and religious groups than most other countries of the world. India is the second most populous country in the world after China, with over 1.3 billion people. India has more than 50% of its population below the age of 25. It has more than 2000 ethnic groups and every major religion finds representation here. Hinduism comprises of 79.80% of the country’s total population, Islam 14.23%, Christianity 2.30% and Sikhism 1.72%.

In the recent past, highlighting the contradictions between various religious faiths has led not only to a divisive society on religious grounds but has also instilled fear in the minds of the minorities and the marginalised. According to Fact Checker 2019, an analyst of Hate Crime Watch in India, a database organisation violence has increased, leading to incidents such as the murder of rationalists, mob lynching following rumors of beef-eating and cow slaughter, honour killings, “gharwapsi” (home coming) campaigns and similar other disturbing social trends. The rising trend of religious hatred and the ensuing violence have been posing a major threat towards the integrity of the nation.

3 The Trend of Bhakthi Tradition

The Bhakthi movement that originated in South India in the ninth century B.C. is famous for two schools of thought: Nirguna (worship of God as a formless divine) and Saguna (worship of God in a physical form). Nevertheless, both carry the message of love, devotion, compassion and humanity to all. Today, India is experiencing a Bhakthi fad, but of a different kind, Bhakthi or devotion for the country. Unfortunately, this has united people on communal grounds which, in turn, is being posited as nationalism. Those opposed to this ideology are viewed as anti-nationals.

4 Meaning of Nationalism

There is no one understanding of the term nationalism, as it is an abstract concept. According to Carlton J. H. Hayes, “Loyalty and attachment to the interior of the group (namely the nation and homeland) are the basis of nationalism” (Hayes 1960). In fact, “it is attachment to nationality that gives direction to one’s individual and
social postures, not attachment to religion and ideology. A human being takes pride in his national achievements and feels dependent on its cultural heritage, not on the history of religion and his faith” (Hayes 1960, p. 56).

He further adds, “What distinguishes one human being from another are not their beliefs, but their birth-place, homeland, language and race. Those who are within the four walls of the homeland and nation belong to it, and those who are outside it, are aliens. It is on the basis of these factors that the people have a feeling of sharing a single destiny and a common past” (Hayes 1960).

According to scholar Anderson, nationalism is when “a new emerging nation imagines itself to be antique” (Benedict 1991, p. 68). Benedict Anderson, political scientist and historian, referred to this in his influential book *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*.

In *Nations and Nationalism*, Gellner (1983), the British social anthropologist and a leading thinker on the subject of nationalism, linked it more closely to a new kind of society that grew out of an earlier society. The former permitted the growth of an impersonal society where individuals were bonded through defining a shared culture and learning a shared history.

Gellner E further argues that nationalism has become a necessity in the modern world and an interdisciplinary view including sociology becomes imperative.

Eric J. Hobsbawm, British thinker and historian, made a connection in *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (1990) between history and nationalism and explained how history is reconstructed in a way that suits the ideology of nationalism, and how this enterprise is crucial to the construction of nationalism. In the initial stages, anti-colonial Indian nationalism had a more limited role as compared to when it eventually evolved into a mass movement during the twentieth century. History played a crucial role in both creating the basis of the unity and for sustaining it.

Historian Breuilly (1993) defends a more modern theory of nationalism, similar to Benedict Anderson’s. According to Breuilly (1993, p. 401), one can understand nationalism as that class of political movement, in this perspective nationalism is a form of politics.

According to Thapar et al. (2016), the evolution of nationalist ideas in India was coupled with colonialism. She states “All of us in the Indian subcontinent, not to mention other ex-colonies, have faced the same questions of how to define ourselves as citizens of a new nation.” This relates to the question of identity or identities. We in India thought the answer was simple—it was the single identity of being Indian (Thapar et al. 2016, p. 7).

Nationalism was built by coalescing many identities and aspiring to be inclusive of the entire society. It inevitably opposed the contemporary tendency to rest the conception of a nation on the idea of a single identity being superior to the rest. Interestingly, according to Thapar et al. (2016), for such claims of superiority to take hold, an imagined history is put forth that endorses the dominance of the supposedly superior group.

I believe it is worth noting here, that the erudite scholar Thapar in recent times has become a target of hate crimes and hate speeches for her stand. This also becomes a fitting proof for a study of this nature.
According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2002), the term “nationalism” is generally used to describe two phenomena: (1) the attitude that the members of a nation have when they care about their national identity, and (2) the actions that the members of a nation take when seeking to achieve (or sustain) self-determination.

For this chapter, we shall define nationalism as an emotional attachment to the nation, the manifestations of which can be observed in the form of citizens who take pride in national achievements and who share a common cultural heritage, irrespective of caste, creed, sex, and race.

5 Meaning of Hate Speech and Hate Crime

The term “hostility” encompasses ill-will, ill-feeling, spite, contempt, prejudice, unfriendliness, antagonism, and resentment that sometimes culminate as malicious propaganda.

5.1 Hate Speech

The term “hate speech” was coined by a group of legal scholars in the late 1980s in the United States in response to what they saw as the ways in which different legal systems tackled certain sorts of harmful racist speech. Matsuda et al. (2018) first used the term “hate speech” in her article from 1989, “Public Response to Racist Speech: Considering the Victim’s Story”. Her central purpose in using the term “hate speech” was to highlight the lacunae in the US legal system to address harmful racist speech. Undoubtedly, due to the work of legal scholars like Matsuda, the term “hate speech” has now been taken up by legislators and legal professionals. However, today, its usage is commonplace even among the media and the public, and consequently, the term has come to assume a plurality of meanings. However, given that the right to freedom of expression is one of the core freedoms to be incorporated in the Bill of Human Rights, defining the limits of what counts as hate speech has become a difficult task laden with innumerable ambiguities.

UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech (2019c) defines hate speech as any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour, that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group based on who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor. This is often rooted in, and generates intolerance and hatred and, in certain contexts, can be demeaning and divisive.

Hate speech has not been defined in any law in India. However, legal provisions provided by certain legislations prohibit select forms of speech as an exception to freedom of speech.
For this chapter, hate speech can be defined as the vilification of a community or social group, whose stereotyping based on some specific religious characteristics is accompanied by hostility and discrimination against them.

5.2 Hate Crimes

A sociological understanding of hate crime is that which occurs when a perpetrator targets a victim because of his or her perceived membership in a certain social group, usually defined by racial group, religion, sexual orientation, disability, class, ethnicity, nationality, age, sex, or gender identity.

The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE ODHIR 2018, p. 16) defines hate crimes as criminal acts committed with a bias motive. A hate crime is any act which is prohibited under criminal law. This act is usually motivated by prejudice towards a specific characteristic of the person or social group. The offence can be directed towards one or more persons or property. The bias motivation is the offender’s prejudice towards the victim based on a characteristic that represents a shared group identity, such as race, language, religion, ethnicity, nationality, gender or other characteristics.

5.3 Literature Review

This section offers an overview of a few works that can help enhance our understanding of nationalism and its changing contours, and the ways in which nationalist sentiments often result in hate crimes.

Arvind Rajagopal in “Politics after Television: Hindu Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Public in India” (2004) examines how a larger historical context was woven into and eventually changed the character of Hindu Nationalism. In 1987, the Indian State run television began broadcasting a Hindu epic in serial form, the Ramayana. This resulted in the largest political campaign during the post-Independence period around the symbol of Lord Ram led by the Hindu Nationalists. “Indian Politics irrevocably changed,” writes Rajagopal (2004, p. 1). While the audiences were harking back to an epic of the golden age, Hindu Nationalists leaders were embracing the prospects of neo-liberalism and globalisation.

Dibyesh Anand’s work, “Hindu Nationalism in India and the Politics of Fear” (2011) argues that Hindutva in India is chauvinist, majoritarian and nationalistic which, in turn, creates the image of a peaceful Hindu vis-à-vis a threatening minority other. Anand asserts that Hindu Nationalism normalises the politics of fear as a defensive reaction to the imagined threats posed by Muslims to the Hindu collective.

Radha Krishnan in his article, “Religion Under Globalization” (2004) analyses the interface of religion and globalisation. He writes that the major consequences of globalisation have been: the trans-magnification of traditional religions and belief
systems, the beginning of the disintegration of traditional social fabrics and shared norms by consumerism, cyber culture, newfangled religions and changing work. His work asserts that there is fast spreading anomie, making individuals dependent on religion. This, in turn, has resulted in a scenario where religion is being deployed to give rise to extremist and terrorist tendencies in third world countries.

Rajeev Bhargava argues in “State and Religious Diversity: Can Something be Learnt from the Indian Model of Secularism?” (2014) that secularism must be viewed differently: as a critical, ethical and moral perspective, and not against religion but against religious homogenisation and institutionalised domination. This helps to shed a different light on social issues related to religion.

Romila Thapar et al., in “On Nationalism” (2016), contemplates on why it is important to understand what nationalism is, given that certain people with ulterior motives are seeking to create exclusive tendencies by segregating Indians into superior and second class Indians.

Thapar et al. (2016) criticise the communal approach to Indian history and point out the obstructions which its communal interpretation places to the holistic understanding of our history and the concept of nationalism.

Jack Levin and Mc Devitt in their study “Hate Crime: The Rising Tide of Bigotry and Bloodshed” (1993), analyse how hate crimes have become a growing threat to the well-being of our society. Hate offences, the authors claim, can be regarded as acts of domestic terrorism. They conclude by stating that all hate crimes are motivated by bias or bigotry and impact the broader continuity. And these arise not out of the rare or few deviant types of individual in society but of the very mainstream society.

William Gould explores a controversial theme in “20th Century Indian History and Politics: The Nature of Hindu Nationalism as an Ideology and Political Language” (2004). He analyses how Hindu Nationalism affected the Congress, supposed to be a secular political party, particularly in the state of Uttar Pradesh. The work is a historical analysis of the Partition and Independence in 1947. Gould portrays how language and ideologies transformed the relations between the Congress and North Indian Muslims.

5.4 “Historical” Construction of Communalism in India

Bipin Chandra in his article, “Historians of Modern India and Communalism” (1987) writes that it is widely accepted today that the teaching of Indian history has a great deal to do with the spread of communalism in the last 100 years.

Thapar, in her book, “Communalism and the Writing of Indian History” (Thapar et al. 1987) says that historical interpretation can be a product of contemporary ideology since it is integrally connected to a people’s notion of their culture and nationality. Naturally, this impacts political ideologies and nationalism. For example, she states that attempts are being made to highlight the importance of Aryan culture by trying to prove that the Harappan culture was also Aryan despite the fact
that extant archeological evidence contradicts this theory. This boosting up of the Aryan culture is directly proportional to the propagation of the Hindu interpretation of Indian History. What makes it even worse is that the entire enterprise rests on giving an incorrect description of the Aryan way of life. For instance, to deny that the Aryans ate beef and consumed alcohol is to deny the evidence presented by both literary and archeological sources.

The absence of any critical analyses is further evident in the widespread assumption that only Muslim rulers vandalised idols and temples out of their opposition to idol worship. Thapar substantiates her claim through an example of Harsha, the eleventh century king of Kashmir, who appointed a special officer to plunder temples for their wealth. Further, history is replete with examples of destruction of places of worship by Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim rulers. It is recorded that Aurangzeb destroyed a masjid when he attacked a ruler in Lahore (Azgar Ali 1995).

Regarding conversion, Thapar et al. (1987) writes that conversions, mostly at mass level, were voluntary in nature. Although Emperor Ashoka popularised Buddhism and converted people using the state machinery, he is projected as a great emperor. On the contrary, in medieval India, although the state was not interested in proselytising, it stands condemned. For generations, history books have taught us that the State was an agency in converting people to Islam. This type of convoluted and inauthentic interpretation has given rise to pejorative attitudes against certain communities which, in turn, have resulted in the contemporary conflicting situation in India. Mukhia writes that the state in medieval India was not a perfectly secular state. Rather, the medieval Indian state was negatively secular, that is, it subordinated religion to politics rather than politics to religion.

Thapar et al. (1987) further opines that even during the seventeenth century when great popular uprisings (like the Maratha, Sikh and Jat uprisings) took place and led to enormous conflict between the state and others, communal riots at the social level were absent. The causes of these uprisings could be more appropriately attributed to economic and political reasons rather than religious, and religion did not have any role to play in aggravating them further.

6 Growth of Communalism As Nationalism

Thapar et al. (1987) refers to the creation of “national – heroes” in the second half of the nineteenth century as the product of an emotional attraction to the spread of a national consciousness, the chief aim of which was to counter the British view that Indians lacked the capacity for self-government. Rana Pratap, Sivaji and Guru Gobind Singh emerged as national heroes, as opposed to those who had fought against the British for purely political reasons. The creation of these heroic figures was meant to arouse nationalism, although in reality, they did not fight against the British, as they belonged to medieval India, when the principal aim was to fight against the Moghul authority. This clearly establishes the communal approach.
Mukhia asserts that hero myths are political creations and not a product of genuine historical writing.

The culture of estranging Muslims continues in our society until today. This communal approach has injured and fragmented the society deeply. Muslims are unable to express their nationalist sentiments with the same enthusiasm as the majoritarian groups, as they are continually projected as the common foreign enemy against whom our national heroes fought. Under such circumstances, for assimilation to take place, both groups should cooperate. As long as one group is made to feel foreign, true integration and nationalism is hard to develop.

6.1 Communal Approach and the Present Scenario

The question of how to define ourselves as citizens of a new nation was perceived to be an uncomplicated one by our leaders during the rise of Independent India. Thus, they envisioned a common identity for everyone— that of an Indian.

Today, the reality is different, and the answer to the question of a common identity is no longer as simple as it was originally imagined. It necessitates the adoption of a pluralistic approach to the understanding of India’s history, both before and after Independence. The Congress’s support for minority fundamentalism has produced a sharp divide among Hindu-Muslim groups. The campaigns leading up to the 2014 general elections witnessed multiple clashes between the two major political parties—the Congress and the BJP—each with its own distinct ideology. BJP’s political campaign had undertones suggesting that the Hindu population was being marginalised for the progress of the minorities. This “otherisation” was way more overtly and vigorously expressed during the campaigns for the 2019 elections when open hate speeches became the order of the day. For instance, the BJP leader Maneka Gandhi during a political rally remarked that she would not give jobs to Muslims if they did not vote for her (Economic Times, April 15, PTI 2019a).

The communal riots that took place in Calcutta and Bombay in 1992 saw Indian Muslims desperate to escape from their own birthplace and homeland to seek refuge in another state. The identity of being Indian became a travesty. Clearly, they had become entrenched in this “otherisation”.

Two important events that took place in modern India can be linked to this ever-increasing trend of hate crimes and hate speeches in India, and the resultant identity politics. The destruction of the Babri-Mosque in Ayodhya on December 6, 1992 and the communal riots that took place in Gujarat in the year 2002 are two significant events that have redefined nationalism and led to a major political transformation in India.

Following these two events, religion came to occupy the center stage in the country’s public life. This is conspicuous in identity-based nationalism. Hate speeches have become a tool to rekindle Hindu sentiments, resulting in huge electoral victories for communal political parties.
The BJP White paper states: “The Ayodhya movement also clears the confusion as to what is nationalism and what constitutes the ideal basis for inter religious harmony. It asserts that it is not the spiritually bankrupt Western concept of secularism, but the assimilative Hindu cultural nationhood that is the basis for religious harmony” (BJP 1993, p. 15).

7 Magnitude of the Problem

The government of India does not register religion-based hate crimes as a separate offence, and therefore, statistics on communally motivated crimes in India is not available. Hence, this analysis relies on statistics produced by media reports.

According to Fact Checker 2019, an analyst of Hate Crime Watch in India, a database organisation, 91% of religiously motivated hate crimes have taken place in the last 5 years in India. An analysis of hate crime records reveals that in the past 10 years, 262 of 287 (91%) of religion biased crimes have taken place in the recent past only.

Further, surveys reveal that, from 2014 to 2019, 99 persons were killed and at least 703 were injured in hate crimes motivated by some form of religious bias across 23 of 36 states and Union Territories (UTs) in India. Even states (particularly those in the southern part of India) which did not experience religiously motivated crimes in the past, reported such crimes in 2014.

7.1 Hate Speeches

At the time of writing this chapter, the most debated and controversial issue concerned Nathuram Godse, who assassinated Mahatma Gandhi, one of the founders of the Indian nation. An actor turned politician made a statement in the recent election campaign that Godse was the first Hindu terrorist. What followed was despicable hurling of abuses by political leaders, all in the name of religion. In all these, the attempt was to project the idea that to be a nationalist, one has to be a Hindu. The argument was that all Hindus are patriots; Godse is a Hindu, and therefore, Godse is a patriot. These fallacious inferences ignited the emotions of the public and creates false labels such as “patriot” for some and “alien” for others.

According to a national news channel, NDTV, the use of hateful and divisive language by high-ranking politicians has increased almost 500% in the past 4 years (NDTV April 19, Jaiswal et al. 2018).
7.2 **Media Reports on the Trends of Hate Crimes and Hate Speech in the Recent Past**

Alimuddin Ansari, a Muslim beef smuggler, was killed by a crowd of angry Hindu extremists in June 2017 in India. Ansari’s killing played out in almost real time on WhatsApp, a messaging platform that is widely used in India, which has progressively become a vehicle for the spread of hate speech. Harsh Mander, Director of the Center for Equity Studies in New Delhi, observes that perpetrators often film these lynchings and post videos online to threaten victims who are often minorities (Washington Post, Oct 31, Gowen and Sharma 2018).

Pew Research Center, a US-based think tank, in its 2017 analysis ranked India among the worst in the world for religious intolerance. The nation of 1.3 billion trailed behind Syria, Nigeria and Iraq. It is clear that India has been witnessing the rise of religion-based hate speeches and resultant crimes at an alarming rate (PEW, Majumdar 2018, fact tank on religions in India).

7.3 **Hate Crimes and Hate Speech Trends in the Year 2018**

According to India Spend that tracks reports of violence in English language media, since the BJP has come to power in 2014, an overwhelming number of Muslims have been victimised in crimes largely perpetrated by Hindus (Scrollin, Oct 14, Mander 2018).

India’s Prime Minister, Narendra Modi (Washington Post, Oct 31, Gowen and Sharma 2018) has said that the onus of punishing the perpetrators largely lies with the state governments, and that his administration is committed to upholding the law. However, critics opine that his party has emboldened Hindu extremists across the country.

In fact, data collected by India Spend (Scroll in Oct 14, Mander 2018) supports this claim: more than half of the cases of hate crimes reported in 2018 through October came from three states in northern India—Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Jharkhand—where Modi’s Bharatiya Janata Party, or BJP, enjoys strong support (Scrollin, Oct 14, Mander 2018).

In 2018, 30 deaths were recorded as religious bias crimes. Of that, 60% of the victims were Muslim, 33% Hindus and 7% of the victims were Christians (Scrollin, Oct 14, Mander 2018).

The year 2018 witnessed 63 religiously-motivated attacks, of which 71% of the perpetrators belonged to the Hindu religion followed by 27% who claimed to profess Islam (NDTV, Trends of Hate crime and Hate speech, Hate Crime Watch Jaiswal et al. 2018).
7.4 Trends of Hate Crime and Hate Speeches in 2019

As of April 2, 2019, Hate Crime Watch has recorded 282 attacks which have resulted in 100 deaths. Muslims, who constitute 14% of India’s population, were victims in 57% of the incidents, Christians—2% of the population—were victims in 15% of the cases. Hindus, constituting the majority or 80% of the population, were victims in 13% of the cases. In 12% or 30 incidents, the religion of the victim was not reported (NDTV, Trends of Hate crime and Hate speech, Hate Crime Watch Jaiswal et al. 2018).

Considering only the 252 incidents where the religion of the victims was known, Muslims were victimised in 64% of the total number of attacks, Christians in 16% of the incidents, and Hindus in 16% of the total number of cases. Overall, Hindus were alleged perpetrators in 56% cases, while Muslims in 12% cases. In 85 cases, the religious identity of the perpetrator was not known (NDTV, Trends of Hate crime and Hate speech, Hate Crime Watch Jaiswal et al. 2018).

Nearly 91% (262 of 287) of hate crimes motivated by religious-bias recorded in the decade between January 2009 and April 30, 2019 took place in the last 5 years, after Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power, according to Hate Crime Watch, a Fact Checker database that tracks such crimes (NDTV, Trends of Hate crime and Hate speech, Hate Crime Watch Jaiswal et al. 2018).

Between May 2014 and April 2019, 99 persons were killed and at least 703 were injured in hate crimes motivated by religious bias, across 23 of 36 states and Union Territories (UTs) in India (NDTV, Trends of Hate crime and Hate speech, Hate Crime Watch Jaiswal et al. 2018).

7.5 Five Hundred Percent (500%) Increase in Hate Speech According to National Television News Channel Report

NDTV (Jaiswal et al. 2018) scanned nearly 1,300 articles and cross-referenced this with existing databases on hate speech. It analysed 1000 recent tweets of politicians and public figures, and cross-referenced this information with databases such as the Documentation of the Oppressed and Amnesty International’s Halt the Hate Tracker. The use of hateful and divisive language by high-ranking politicians has increased by almost 500% in the past 4 years, according to NDTV. Ninety percent (90%) of hateful comments made during the 2014–2018 period were by BJP politicians. For example, Anant Kumar Hegde a BJP Member of Parliament from Karnataka, in March 2016, stated, “As long as we have Islam in the world, there will be no end to terrorism. If we are unable to end Islam, we won’t be able to end terrorism” (The Economic Times, March 31, Aji 2016).

As a reward, in September 2017, he was promoted to the position of Union Minister of Skill Development. Since 2014, Hegde has made seven such hate
speeches. In 2017, he declared that the party would remove the term “secular” from the Constitution. He gave a new connotation to the term “secularist” as those people without parentage/lineage. (The Economic Times, Dec 26, PTI 2017).

8 Reasons for Hate Speeches by Political Leaders

In at least two cases, hate speech appears to have profited the politicians making them. In September 2014, Yogi Adityanath, the current Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh ascribed the rise in riots in Western Uttar Pradesh to the population growth of a minority community (India Today Aug 31, 2014).

As further proof that such divisive speech has no negative consequence on the careers of political leaders, it was found that at least 21 political leaders (or 48%) had recorded more than one instance of hate speech (NDTV, Jaiswal et al. 2018). They were not reprimanded for their hateful comments, nor did they issue any apologies.

A BJP MLA, T. Raja Singh, has repeatedly made public speeches inciting violence. In November last year, he threatened to burn down theatres screening a movie called “Padmavat”. He publicly stated that every Hindu should carry weapons and attack other communities (The News Minute Jan 20, 2018).

Other prominent repeat offenders include former BJP Member of Parliament Vinay Katiyar, and the Governor of Tripura Tathagata Roy. Katiyar, in February this year, issued statements to the effect that Muslims have no business being in India, and should go to Pakistan or Bangladesh, and that the cremation ground inside the Taj Mahal will be destroyed since the Taj Mahal was originally a temple (The Economic Times Feb 7, PTI 2018).

9 Ghau Rakshak (Cow Protectors)

A significant number of instances of hate speech invoke the rhetoric of cow protection, a subject that has gained currency under this government. Elected leaders, including MPs, MLAs and even Chief Ministers, have used the language of vigilantes while calling for violence against those who kill cows. “There is no such thing (cow slaughter) happening in the state. It hasn’t happened in the state in the last 15 years. Has it? We will hang those who kill cows,” said Raman Singh, the Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh, in April 2017. “I had promised that I will break the hands and legs of those who do not consider cows their mother and kill them,” proclaimed Vikram Saini, a BJP MLA from Uttar Pradesh, last year (The Economic Times Feb 7, PTI 2018).

The rise in political vitriol over cow protection in the past 4 years appears to correlate with a rise in cow-related vigilantism. The fact-checking site India Spend reported that 97% of gauraksha attacks since 2010 occurred under the current government. They counted 76 attacks from May 2014 to December 2017, compared
to only two instances during the earlier period (from 2010 to May 2014) (India Spend June 27, 2017) (Human Right Watch 2019).

According to India Spend (2016), there have been 63 cows or beef related attacks from 2010 to 2017. During the period of 2014–2017, 96.8% of the attacks occurred. The data clearly indicates that 51% of the attacks were targeted towards Muslims and confirms the trend of rising religious intolerance in India.

10 Retaliatory Hate Speeches

In instances of hate speech by prominent leaders of the opposition during the past 4 years, threats of violence against Prime Minister Modi feature more than once. In October 2017, Bihar MLA and Rashtriya Janata Dal leader TejPratap Yadav said, “A conspiracy is being hatched to kill Lalu-ji. We will not stay silent. We will skin Narendra Modi.” Just a week before this threat, Rabri Devi, TejPratap’s mother and a former Chief Minister of the state, reacted to a comment by BJP MP Nityanand Rai saying he would cut off any fingers or any hand raised against PM Modi. “I dare them to cut (hands), there are many people who can cut the hands and neck of PM Modi,” she said (The Economic Times April 21, PTI 2019b).

10.1 Non-BJP Hate Speeches

Under the previous government, there were at least 21 instances of hate speech recorded across party lines. Amongst prominent instances, Rahul Gandhi in 2014, then a member of parliament, said, “If the BJP comes to power, 22,000 people will be killed” (NDTV May 10, 2014, Jaiswal et al. 2018). Also in the run-up to the general elections, Congress candidate, Imran Masood said, “If Modi tries to turn Uttar Pradesh into Gujarat, then we will chop him into tiny pieces” (The Hindu March 29, 2014, Chandramohan 2014).

Akbaruddin Owaisi, leader of the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen and then an MLA in Andhra Pradesh, had issued a violent threat against Hindus in December 2012. “Remove the police for 15 mins, we will finish off 100 crore Hindus,” he had said during a speech. He spent 40 days in jail on charges of hate speech before getting bail (Times of India Dec 28, 2012).

Political parties consider religion as means to appease their vote banks. In July 2016, Maharashtra Hindu National Shiv Sena Party leader, Uddav Thackeray called for action to declare the country a Hindu state. He affirmed that this would prevent attacks on Hindus (IANS, 2016).

In December 2015, the then Uttar Pradesh minister, Azam Khan was quoted as saying that many leaders of RSS are unmarried as they are homosexuals (Times of India Dec1, Tiwari 2015). This led to objectionable comments against prophet Mohammed resulting in the Kalichak riots. In July 2016, Gujarat Police used batons
and fired 24 gas shells against Muslim agitators who were seeking legal remedy against people responsible for a viral video accusing Muslims of “love jihad” - a term used to describe an alleged strategy used by Muslim men to marry women from other religions for the purpose of converting them to Islam (PTI 2017).

11 The Significance of the Study

In the present study, the investigator attempts to understand the perception of the public on this topic of concern by undertaking an empirical study entitled, “A Study on Youth Perception of Hate crimes, Hate Speeches, and Nationalism in Contemporary India”.

11.1 Objective

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights turned 70 in 2018. But the continuous onslaught on the fundamental values underpinning the Declaration has assumed dangerous proportions in India and elsewhere. Political leaders in India are using social and economic issues to perpetuate fear and hatred against religious minorities and various ethnic groups. Although outrage and protest against such vilification have been taking place, the costs of protesting against injustice these days is also steep. Today, the Government which has the duty of protecting its people from violence and terrorism are indirectly and sometimes directly, through hate speeches, involved in such acts. In this scenario, an understanding of the struggle for the values of human dignity which are slipping away in the name of religion is important to resist repression and violence, and create harmony and love - the real understanding of religion.

Given the background of the present Indian society, it becomes imperative to understand the perception of young adults on nationalism, hate crimes and hate speech to assess effectiveness of Sustainable Development Goals 16 (SDGs 16) in such a situation. SDGs 16 work towards promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels.

11.2 Research Questions

- Given the present scenario what is the perception of the youth on hate crimes, hate speeches and on nationalism?
- Has education impacted their view and raised social consciousness to bring about peace, justice and building strong institutions?
11.3 Methodology

11.3.1 Research Design

Keeping in view the objectives of the study and the issues mentioned at the outset, an appropriate logic of inquiry was applied. The qualitative study is descriptive in nature. It attempts to delve into the various definitions of hate speeches, hate crimes and nationalism formulated by the religiously diverse college students of Chennai city in Tamil Nadu. Through the adoption of an inductive strategy, the researcher collected data related to the aforementioned concepts and produced limited generalisation. The study was conducted in three prestigious city colleges of Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India. The random sampling technique was used to select the sample. The reason for this being that the researcher’s ability to conduct this study was contingent upon whether she received permission from the respective colleges as well as the availability of the students. Considering the sensitive nature of the issue, not many institutions were forthcoming in involving their students in this survey.

A very small group of the general public, across age groups, was also interviewed to shed light on a different dimension to the study.

11.3.2 Sources of Data

The current study is empirical and analytical in nature, and the analysis was carried out on primary data collected by the researcher.

11.3.3 Tools of Data Collection

This sample survey was conducted using a semi-structured questionnaire developed specifically for this study by the investigator. The respondents were asked to provide qualitative definitions of the following concepts: hate speech, hate crime and nationalism, to determine their attitude towards these concepts.

11.3.4 Limitations of the Study

The tool used, although it gave scope for free expression, had its own advantages and disadvantages. As the questions were all open-ended, the responses were highly subjective. Consequently, most of the questions had multiple answers. Hence, aggregation was difficult.
12 Analysis

The questionnaire used in this study was designed keeping in mind the current political climate of the country, specifically with respect to hate speeches, hate crimes, and nationalism. On social media platforms, many youths not only actively participate in perpetuating hate speech, but also fall prey to hate crimes. This automatically raises the question as to what nationalism means to the younger generation. This question assumes further importance as this generation is going to set the course for future India and assess the possibility of fulfilling the SDGs.

12.1 Demographic Details of the Respondents

Data was collected from a total of 92 respondents. Of the respondents 83% belonged to the 15–24 years age group, and 17% belonged to a higher age group, ranging from 25 to 29 years. The rationale behind this strategy was to see if there are any differences of opinion among the two age groups.

The results showed that respondents from the higher age group had a greater clarity with respect to their understanding of the issues discussed, and there were fewer questions that were left unanswered by them. For example, to the question on the reasons for hate speeches, only 66% of the younger age respondents even replied, whereas all the respondents in the higher age group gave a definite answer. Likewise, for the other questions, the respondents in the higher age group gave responses which reflected their experience and understanding of the issues at hand, whereas the younger respondents exhibited a certain degree of apathy, which can also be construed as fear. This will be discussed at the relevant places.

12.2 Sex-Wise Distribution

The sample comprised of 51% males and 49% females.

12.3 Religion-Wise Distribution

The respondents in this study were 52% Hindus, followed by 24% Christians while 20% belonged to the Islam faith. A small number of respondents (3%) were followers of Jainism. One respondent refrained from revealing his religious affiliation.
12.4 State-Wise Distribution

A vast majority of the respondents (91%) belonged to the Southern state of Tamil Nadu, where the study took place. The survey had one respondent each from Karnataka and Manipur.

13 Results of the Study: Hate Speech

13.1 On the Interpretation of Hate Speech

For the question on what hate speeches involve, 74% of the respondents said that it involves discrimination, whereas one person stated that it involved politics. The responses resonated with the view that hate speech creates an atmosphere of distrust and conflict.

13.2 On the Targets of Hate Speeches

Seventy-two percent (72%) of the respondents identified religious and ethnic minorities as the targets of hate speeches. Some of them even mentioned that Muslims are being targeted. The next highest category of response (33%) was that the marginalised and the poor were being targeted. Most of the respondents opined that it is usually the powerless who are the easy targets in society. Politicians were the targets according to 17% of the respondents which was also apparent in the election campaign speeches. Some respondents (3%) stated that the secular nature of the country’s democracy was being targeted in hate speeches. The rhetoric of secularism being a western concept often resorted to by the political leaders was acknowledged in the responses in this section.

13.3 On Reasons for Increase in Hate Speech

Intolerance as the main reason behind hate speeches was mentioned by 60% of the respondents while 23% said that the reason was politics. As mentioned earlier, this question was left unanswered by 34% of the younger respondents. This inability to provide their views could be attributed to fear. Hate speeches have paved the way for a climate of suspicion and fear and that might have prevented many of the respondents from expressing their views out of the apprehension that their opinions on this issue might jeopardise their future prospects. A recent incident from 2019 offers insights into what might be perpetuating such a climate of fear. An Indian student...
traveling with a political leader had told the politician that BJP is a fascist party. Complaints of threats to life were registered against the student who then had to face arrest and other legal consequences. This news became widespread and created an outrage among the public.

Among the older respondents in the sample, 56% opined that the reason for hate speeches was intolerance. The remaining 44% felt that politics was the reason. Comparatively, among the younger respondents, 14% felt that politics was the reason for hate speech while 86% was of the view that it was intolerance which resulted in hate speeches.

13.4 On the Reason for Hate Speeches by Political Leaders

More than 55% of the respondents felt that politicians indulged in hate speeches to appease their vote banks. Only one person mentioned it was for nationalism. Around 37% felt that politicians wanted to instigate differences among people and hence, they used hate speeches. Here again, the cases of Yogi Adithyanath and Hegde, as mentioned earlier, bear testimony to the fact that hate speeches delivered by them have translated into political gains for them despite creating discord among the people.

13.5 On the Repercussion of Hate Speeches by Politicians

The consequences of political hate speech made by politicians could be many but the consequence mentioned by 35% of the respondents was appeasement of their own political party, followers of their own religion, and members of their own caste and community. Some of the respondents (20%) felt that attacking and threatening other religious groups, especially the minorities and the powerless, were the consequences of political hate speech.

14 Results of the Study: Hate Crimes

14.1 What Does Hate Crime Involve?

All the respondents, who had given relevant answers, converged on the point that hate crimes involve violence. The types of violence mentioned by the respondents were varied ranging from mob lynching, honour killing, acid attacks, murder, mass killing, rape, etc. The Ram Janma Bhoomi and Godhra incidents, which brought about major transformations in India’s politics as mentioned earlier, lend support to
this finding from the study. Parallels can also be drawn with the genocides that have taken place in history because of hate crimes.

14.2 Who Are the Victims of Hate Crimes?

Forty-nine percent (49%) of the respondents felt that hate crimes are largely committed against the marginalised, especially the poor and the powerless. The next highest percentage (45%) of respondents felt that religious, linguistic, and racial minorities are the victims of hate crimes. Women as victims of hate crimes such as rape, acid attacks and honour killings was mentioned by 26% of the respondents and 9% said that children also become victims of hate crimes. This resonates with the fact that almost every incident of hate crime in the recent past has involved the rape, killing, burning, and mutilation of children. For example, the rape case of 8-year old Asifa in Kashmir.

14.3 What Is the Motive for Hate Crimes?

Thirty-eight percent (38%) of the respondents named the desire for power as the main reason behind hate crimes. Other motives mentioned included factors such as the need to maintain the status quo, for instance, in the case of honour killing and mob lynching, or to launch an attack on a particular race, as in genocide. Dress was mentioned by two respondents as the reason for hate crimes. This is because certain symbolic gestures as well as attire do embody the potential to turn an individual into an easy target for hate crime. This response clearly shows that certain communities do hold views about the superiority of their own communities and tend to treat others with contempt. Additionally, a complete lack of fear of any kind of repercussions as their party is in power gives them the clout and audacity to commit such crimes openly.

14.4 How Can the Victims of Hate Crimes Be Described?

There was consensus among the respondents on the fact that all victims of hate crimes are innocent and they are not responsible in any way for their victimisation.
14.5 How Can Perpetrators of Hate Crimes Be Described?

Many a time, the perpetrators of hate crime are projected as patriots by those who instigate and support them. However, the respondents, in unison, agreed that hate crime perpetrators cannot be considered as patriots and should be punished under the law.

15 Results of the Study: Nationalism

15.1 What Is the Meaning of Nationalism?

There were varied responses to this question. Seventy-five percent (75%) of the respondents felt that nationalism means respect for one’s own nation as opposed to limiting oneself to upholding one’s own ethnic group which was mentioned by 8% of the respondents. This finding corroborates the view of Thapar on nationalism (Thapar et al. 2016) that in India, nationalism is a confusing concept laden with ambiguities.

15.2 How Do You Interpret Bharat Mata ki Jai?

“Bharat Mata ki Jai” is a Hindu nationalist slogan meaning “Hail Mother India” and is chanted across the country. Can there be one mother, in a country of religious and linguistic pluralities like India? This slogan, often heard in contemporary times, is opposed by the Muslims as it goes against their belief which is monotheism. All these led to numerous controversies when the new BJP government came to power in 2019. BJP leaders shouted slogans such as Bharat Mata ki Jai and Jai Shri Ram (Hail Lord Rama). On the other hand, Muslims raised slogans such as Allahuakbar. Such a frenzied atmosphere prevailed in the parliament as well this year. Given this context, it is crucial to gain an understanding of the respondents’ views and understanding of nationalism.

In this study, 59% of the respondents felt that the chant has a religious undertone to it, whereas only 26% said that it is an attribute of patriotism. However, the fact that the majority of the respondents stated that the chant does not indicate patriotism could also be attributed to their lack of knowledge of Hindi, the language in which the chant is composed. This is because most individuals residing in the southern part of India are not familiar with Hindi, mostly spoken in the northern and central parts.
15.3 What Is Your Identity When in India?

The question of how one would identify himself or herself within and outside India elicited interesting responses. Majority of the respondents (91%) stated that they identify themselves as Tamil (linguistic identity) as they hail from the state of Tamil Nadu. Religious identity was mentioned by four respondents who specified that they would identify themselves as Muslims in India. When in another country, majority (77%) of them responded that they will identify themselves as Indians. This could be seen as an outcome of pseudo-nationalist attempts at promoting a singular, monolithic history rather than emphasising the multiple pluralities that form an intrinsic part of India’s cultural fabric. In this study, respondents’ linguistic identity emerged stronger than other aspects of their self-identification.

15.4 Who Is an Anti-national?

In recent times, any criticism against the current government’s policies or programmes has been labeled as anti-national. Many academics, journalists, and social activists have been jailed for pointing out the lacunae in various government policies. Any view against Hinduism is being labeled as anti-Indian. In such a scenario, the responses to the question of who counts as an anti-national are of immense significance. Eighty-seven percent (87%) of the respondents labeled those who work against the country or harm the country as anti-nationals. Only 2% of the respondents said that those who are against the major religion are anti-nationals. Respondents were clear about the fact that anti-nationalism and expressing one’s opinion against something are two very distinct practices and should not be conflated. Among the respondents, there was agreement regarding the importance of public opinion in a democratic society.

15.5 What Do You Think Is the Identity of an Indian?

The question about the identity of an Indian elicited responses that appeared apparently irrelevant, but were thought provoking. Among those who defined the Indian identity, 40% said that it entails a feeling of pride to be a citizen of India, 18% felt that being an Indian involves being a secularist, and 4% felt that to be an Indian is to defend the country and to stand for it. One respondent appeared cynical about answering the question. The respondent said that singing the National Anthem in the theatre before a movie has the potential to strengthen one’s identity as an Indian. Thirty-eight percent (38%) of the respondents emphasised the importance of identification documents to establishing one’s identity as an Indian.
This tendency to assert one’s identity and citizenship, and in effect, one’s legitimacy as a citizen, through the possession of appropriate documents could be interpreted in two ways. First, the fact that identity is thought to be so intrinsically tied to the possession of documents that establishes one’s citizenship within a nation state implies that, to a large extent, one’s attachment to one’s nation is something that is superficially constructed and reinforced. Contributing to such nationalistic fervor are things such as the highly contentious National Registry of Citizens being undertaken by the government of Assam. Second, at some levels, this tendency also appears to stand in opposition to the premium place on linguistic identity over nationalist identity by some people. In the second instance, one’s sense of identification derives not from the country one has been born into and/or resides in, but the language one speaks, and the linguistic groups that one belongs to.

16 Discussion and Recommendations

Through an analysis of the issues of hate speech, hate crime and nationalism, this study was an attempt to delve into the extent to which the aims of the SDGs 16, which are to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels, are being fulfilled.

India, today, is facing a lot of discrimination based on religion, caste, class, ethnicity, language, state, race, gender, etc. It is doubtful whether the idea of a peaceful and inclusive society is at all being promoted in India. Hate speeches, hate crimes, and misrepresenting nationalism— all for political gains— have become the order of the day.

Every day there are media reports about the increasing rates of hate crimes and hate speeches. It is important to understand not only why this form of intolerance is currently widespread but also the historical and cultural contexts that have paved the way for a scenario such as this. Nationalism appears to be a highly misunderstood term, misconstrued further by erroneous interpretations and political ideologies inspired by ulterior motives.

Under such circumstances, this study was undertaken to explore whether the youth recognise and understand these processes that are currently underway in the country. Broadly, the conclusions can be categorised as follows:

16.1 Targets and Victims of Hate Crimes

Hate speeches are made against minorities and the marginalised.
Hate crimes target the marginalised and the minorities.
The victims of hate crimes are innocent people.
16.2 Perpetrators and Their Motives

The youth understand that hate speeches involve discrimination.

Intolerance is the reason for hate speeches.

Appeasement is the major motivation behind hate speeches.

Political hate speeches are made to expand vote banks.

All hate crimes involve violence.

The greed for power and status are the motives behind hate crimes.

The perpetrators of hate crime are all offenders and hence should be punished.

16.3 Communal Nationalism As a Trigger for Hate Crimes

Nationalism refers to respect for one’s country. Linguistic identity can assume prime importance as well.

Slogans such as Bharat Mata Ki Jai (“Hail Mother India”) are not an attribute of patriotism but have religious undertones to them.

Ethnic identity (such as the Tamil identity) can emerge as more powerful as compared to that of the Indian identity.

An anti-national is one who works against the country or harms the country, and not merely anyone who questions a particular religion.

The identity of an Indian can be defined by the pride one feels to be an Indian.

The present analysis and findings shed light on the subjective interpretations that young adults have of phenomena such as hate crime, hate speech and nationalism. Participants’ perceptions of hate crimes, and hate speeches, and why they occur, reveal a shallow understanding of these issues, although they do not appear altogether evasive of the current realities.

The reason behind adopting a semi-structured questionnaire in this study was to elicit responses that are detailed and uninhibited. However, contrary to expectations, the responses received were not as informative as anticipated. In all probability, this could stem from an apathy on issues that did not concern the respondents directly.

An alternative interpretation is that the views expressed by the respondents of this study are largely symptomatic of a high degree of regional orientation. Given that majority of the respondents in this study are from Tamil Nadu where issues such as lynching or gharwapsi (reconversion) are not as apparent as in the northern parts of the country where communally divisive politics operates with a much greater force, it is highly probable that the respondents are not fully aware of how hate speeches and hate crimes can pave the way for a certain kind of nationalistic fervor that rests on the perpetuation of hatred, divisiveness, and exclusionary tendencies. This could also imply that the power of mass media to convey the magnitude of certain issues to the general public has been largely overestimated.

All these, in turn, point towards the need for increased public awareness and education. Historians and academics are faced with the tall task of presenting
historical facts in an unbiased, objective manner. Academics need to debunk the myth that Muslim invasion marked the end of a golden age in India. This becomes crucial, given that it is ingrained in the minds of many that India will revert to its golden era once it has managed to successfully eliminate the aliens residing within its boundaries.

Further research is necessary to gain an understanding of what other factors exist that might influence the formation of individual perceptions on issues such as hate speech, hate crimes, and nationalism. Research is also needed to shed light on the constraints that may inhibit people from expressing their opinions on issues such as these. This study, in an attempt to offer a comparative framework, also involved collecting data from an older population to ascertain how their perceptions on these topics might be different from a younger generation. The findings reveal that although the older generation had a greater degree of clarity, they were either unable or unwilling to provide deeper insights into the issues at hand, in all likelihood, owing to the fear that has been instilled in their minds. All these also highlight the tremendous power that mass media and social media tend to exert over individual minds, pointing towards their ability to control mass psychology and influence personal interpretation and understanding, to the point that very few people, in fact, venture to unearth facts beyond what they are being offered via media messages. In this context, focus group discussions could be a useful strategy to gain deeper insights into these sensitive issues. Additionally, face-to-face interviews can help to affirm whether young adults are merely confused about their identity and therefore cannot affirm their loyalty, or whether their understanding of nationalism is indeed superfluous.

17 Conclusion

The latest announcement (September 2019) from Amit Shah, President of the BJP and the Home Minister of India, is that India needs One Language, One Culture to be One Nation (The Telegraph online, Sept 17, Editorial Board 2019).

A statement of this magnitude from a person occupying one of the most powerful positions within the government is intimidating. This statement alone justifies the purpose of this chapter, and highlights the pressing need for research on issues of hate speech, hate crime, and nationalism in today’s context.

Is it even practical to aspire for a common culture and one language in a culturally diverse, multi-linguistic country such as India? Speeches like that of Shah’s only serve to perpetuate hatred and fear and contribute to disharmony in society. While they are clearly in line with BJP’s vision of creating a Hindu nation which is being projected as paving the way for religious harmony (BJP White Paper 1993), provocative speeches such as this and the crimes they instigate are also, without a doubt, a violation of the principles laid down by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Promoting substantive equality among human beings, including freedom from discrimination, is a foundational idea in human rights, and this is reflected in
the very first article of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR), adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948. Additionally, Article 19 of UDHR guarantees the right to freedom of expression, including to “seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.” The right to freedom of expression is a fundamental human right which sets the context for the protection of all other rights. At the same time, it is not an absolute human right in the sense that it cannot override considerations of equality and public order. International law contains a number of provisions which provide a framework for balancing hate speech.

Currently, the COVID-19 which has had an unprecedented impact on the world has not been spared of political agendas. Even in a dire situation of a global pandemic, political agencies prioritise the agenda of polarisation aiming to create conflict and animosity. As economies and health care systems struggle to cope with COVID-19, we are witnessing how the coronavirus pandemic is shaping political agendas across the world.

The term China Virus as coined by the US leadership is an attempt to segregate nations by creating prejudice and animosity by drawing attention to the world that China is the cause of the health crises. In this context, global agencies such as the UN’s WHO—which were designed to help tackle such crises—have had their purpose and credibility questioned, and their role reduced. Even in the middle of the crisis, Trump announced in April 2020 that he would halt US funding (the world’s largest) for the World Health Organization.

The Indian social media’s usage of emerging terms such as Corona Jihad cast shadows of discrimination against certain religious communities. How do we separate politics of religion and formulate a globally viable culture of harmony and coexistence? This paper on the whole expresses social concerns on hate politics which aggressively creates conflict and divisiveness. Arguably, although we have entered by the phenomenon of globalisation into an era of global integration through global connectivity, I would argue that we are threatened by the dark forces of political and religious polarisation and would strongly advocate achieving a status of global communal integration and coexistence.

As stated earlier, attempting to re-construct history in a way that overemphasises the role of one religious community in contributing to the glory of the nation, while at the same time denigrating and distorting the history and contribution of all other communities, produces hatred and divisiveness. The strength of India lies in its diversity. Only the acceptance of multiple identities can pave the way for a harmonious coexistence of all communities. This has to start through education and the creation of varied platforms that facilitate the free expression of thoughts and promote the uniqueness of every culture without bias and fear.

In the quest for our identity as a nation, it is important that we do not lose out on our respect for humanity which is the essence of peaceful and inclusive collective living.
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