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HINDUTVA, POLITICS, AND KHALISTAN: A STUDY ON THE RE-IGNITION OF THE KHALISTAN MOVEMENT IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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I. ABSTRACT

This paper examines the parallel histories and ideologies of Hindutva and the Khalistan movement, two divergent currents in Indian politics. Hindutva, articulated by Vinayak D. Savarkar in the early 20th century, envisions India as a “Hindu nation” defined by common culture and ancestry, and has underpinned the rise of Hindu nationalist parties (e.g. RSS/BJP) in India’s politics. In contrast, the Khalistan movement emerged in the 1970s–80s as a Sikh separatist campaign demanding an independent Punjab for Sikhs, galvanized by grievances over community rights and events like Operation Blue Star. We trace the key origins and figures (e.g. Savarkar, Bhindranwale), doctrinal tenets, and major events (e.g. Babri Masjid demolition in 1992, 1984 anti-Sikh riots) that shaped each ideology. The analysis then turns to recent developments as of 2025: in India, Hindutva has been institutionalized through the electoral dominance of the BJP, new laws (e.g. CAA, anti-conversion statutes), and changes in education (Hindu-centric curricula). Simultaneously, the Khalistan cause has seen a resurgence abroad, especially among diasporic Sikh communities in Canada, the UK, and the US. High-profile incidents – notably the 2023 assassination of Canadian Sikh leader Hardeep Nijjar and subsequent Canada–India diplomatic clash – spotlight renewed activism and state tensions. Social media and digital campaigns have become crucial to Khalistan advocacy (e.g. online “referendums,” virtual protests).

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II. KEYWORDS

Religion, Hindutava, Khalistan Movement, History, Ideologies.

III. INTRODUCTION

India's political landscape has long been shaped by competing visions of national identity. Two movements – Hindutva Hindu nationalism and Sikh separatism (Khalistan) – stand at opposite poles. *Hindutva* is an ideology and political project that seeks to redefine India as a “Hindu nation,” emphasizing a unified Hindu cultural identity and often marginalizing non-Hindu communities^{4,5}. In contrast, the *Khalistan* movement is a separatist campaign advocating an independent Sikh homeland, reacting against perceived historical injustices and minority status of Sikhs in India⁶. Both have deep roots in India's modern history and have waxed and waned through violent and electoral means. Understanding their origins is crucial: Hindutva traces back to colonial-era thinkers like V.D. Savarkar, while Khalistan arose from late-20th-century Punjab insurgency under leaders like Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale.

A. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To trace the historical evolution of the Hindutva and Khalistan ideologies, from their origins in the early 20th century to their contemporary manifestations in the 2020s.
- To analyze the ideological and political foundations of both the Hindutva movement, as articulated by Vinayak D. Savarkar, and the Khalistan movement, which emerged in the 1970s, and how these ideologies continue to influence Indian politics and international relations.

⁴ Olivia Bowden, what's happening in Canada? Hindu-Sikh clashes spark fears of division, *The Guardian* (Nov. 17, 2024)

⁵ Milan Vaishnav, *The BJP in Power: Indian Democracy and Religious Nationalism* (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Apr. 4, 2019)

⁶ Y.P. Rajesh, How Modi's BJP seeks Muslim vote in India's 2024 election, *Reuters* (Nov. 10, 2023)

- To examine the role of the Sikh diaspora in sustaining the Khalistan movement, focusing on digital platforms and transnational networks that keep the movement alive outside of India.
- To assess the institutionalization of Hindutva in Indian governance, particularly since the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in 2014, and its implications for secularism, democracy, and minority rights in India.

B. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How have Hindutva and Khalistan movements evolved from their historical origins to contemporary forms, and what are the key events that have shaped them?
- What role does diaspora activism play in sustaining the Khalistan movement, especially through online platforms and digital campaigns?
- How has the rise of Hindutva in India since 2014 impacted the political landscape, and what are the implications for India's secular democracy?
- What are the key intersections between the Hindutva movement and the Khalistan movement, particularly in terms of communal tensions and political mobilization?

C. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

- The resurgence of Hindutva in India has directly contributed to renewed Khalistan activism in the diaspora, with both movements now interacting on digital and geopolitical platforms.
- Digital platforms have transformed both the Hindutva and Khalistan movements from primarily territorial, national ideologies to transnational, diaspora-driven phenomena.

- The institutionalization of Hindutva within India's governance has strengthened Hindu majoritarianism and marginalized minority communities, leading to greater social polarization.
- The Khalistan movement has seen a resurgence abroad, particularly in the UK, Canada, and the US, where diaspora groups have used digital platforms to mobilize and advocate for a separate Sikh state.
- The political success of Hindutva has created a more hostile environment for minority religions in India, particularly Muslims and Sikhs, exacerbating communal tensions.

D. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a doctrinal legal research methodology combined with historical-comparative analysis to explore the evolution and contemporary manifestations of the Hindutva and Khalistan movements. It involves analyzing primary sources such as government documents, court judgments, and historical records related to both ideologies. Secondary sources, including academic literature, media reports, and political analyses, are used to understand the political, legal, and social implications of these movements. The research will also explore the role of diaspora activism through digital platforms, focusing on how social media has been instrumental in sustaining the Khalistan cause abroad. The study will include a case study of the 2023 Canada-India diplomatic clash to assess the geopolitical consequences of the resurgence of these movements.

E. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Hindutva and Khalistan movements have been extensively studied, but their intersection and the impact of digital activism remain underexplored. Hindutva, rooted in the ideology of Vinayak D. Savarkar, has been analyzed in terms of its institutionalization by the BJP and its implications for India's secularism (Ghosh, 2020).

Scholars such as Mehta (2019) have examined the rise of Hindutva, but less attention has been given to its impact on minorities and India's democratic fabric.

Similarly, while the Khalistan movement has been well-documented through historical events like Operation Blue Star (Puri, 2020), its modern resurgence in the Sikh diaspora and through digital platforms has not been sufficiently analyzed. The role of social media in mobilizing global Sikh communities, especially in countries like Canada and the UK, is a gap that this study seeks to address. This research also aims to examine the geopolitical tensions and their effects on India's foreign relations, which have become increasingly relevant in light of the 2023 assassination of Hardeep Nijjar.

F. HISTORICAL ORIGINS OF THE KHALISTAN MOVEMENT

The Khalistan movement emerged from long-standing Sikh demands for autonomy and security. In independent India's early decades, Punjab was reorganized to create a Sikh-majority state (Punjab in 1966), but many Sikhs felt still marginalized. In the 1970s, the demand for a separate Sikh state (Khalistan) intensified, fueled by both spiritual and political leaders. Notably, *Sant* Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale (1947–1984), a charismatic preacher turned militant leader, became the movement's figurehead. Britannica notes that Bhindranwale led "a violent campaign for autonomy for a Sikh state in Punjab" through the early 1980s. As conflict grew, Bhindranwale's followers fortified the Golden Temple (the holiest Sikh shrine) by 1984. The Indian government responded with Operation Blue Star in June 1984, sending troops into the temple complex and killing Bhindranwale and many militants⁷. This military action, though targeting insurgents, shocked Sikhs worldwide.

Operation Blue Star triggered a brutal backlash: on 31 October 1984, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards in retaliation. Her murder led to organized reprisals. Human Rights Watch reports that within days, mobs – allegedly

⁷ Ibid

instigated by political leaders – killed thousands of Sikhs in Delhi and other cities⁸. At least 2,733 Sikhs were killed in Delhi alone, with homes and Gurdwaras attacked, leaving survivors traumatized. The crisis propelled Sikh separatism further. In Punjab's rural areas, underground insurgents continued fighting into the 1990s. An estimated 30,000 people died in the Punjab insurgency of the 1980s–90s⁹.

After the early-1990s crackdown, organized militancy in India largely subsided. However, the idea of Khalistan persisted among Sikh communities abroad. As the Council on Foreign Relations notes, Sikh groups in Canada, the UK, the U.S., and elsewhere kept the separatist demand alive through protests and lobbying¹⁰. A landmark diaspora incident was the 1985 bombing of Air India Flight 182: Sikh extremists in Canada killed 329 people on board, in an attempt to strike against India¹¹. The attack displays how overseas militants could impact global perceptions. In summary, Khalistan's roots lie in 1970s Punjab agitations, supported by the 1984 crisis. Key figures to this movement are persons like Bhindranwale and events like Operation Blue Star and the 1984 riots.

G. IDEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE KHALISTAN MOVEMENT

At its core, Khalistan ideology is an ethnoreligious nationalism¹²: it asserts that Sikhs constitute a distinct people deserving self-determination¹³ in their ancestral homeland (roughly Punjab). Its proponents invoke historical grievances (e.g. alleged broken

⁸ Y.P. Rajesh & Rupam Jain, India's Modi calls rival pro-Muslim as election campaign changes tack, Reuters (Apr. 23, 2024)

⁹ Council on Foreign Relations, Canada-India tensions over killing of Sikh separatist: What to know (Nov. 2023)

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Krishn Kaushik, India hunts Sikh preacher who has revived calls for homeland, Reuters (Mar. 21, 2023)

¹² "Ethnoreligious nationalism is an ideology merging a nation's identity with a specific ethnic and religious heritage, claiming that a dominant group's faith and culture define the nation, often leading to the marginalization or disadvantage of religious minorities and non-dominant ethnicities by asserting their version of national history and culture, and seeking political power through cultural consolidation. It arises from cultural anxieties, globalization, and secularism's decline, asserting a unique national narrative and often promoting a majoritarian view of state and society, impacting education, laws, and minority rights."

¹³ "Self-determination is the right of a people or nation to freely choose their own political status and form of government."

promises to Sikhs) and protection of Sikh identity. Central slogans include “Raj Khalsa” (Rule of the Pure) and references to Sikh sovereignty traditions (the Khalsa), implying continuity from the Sikh Empire (1799–1849) to present. Figures like Bhindranwale framed the movement in religious terms, though many modern supporters emphasize cultural and political autonomy rather than explicit theocracy. Still, elements of romanticized “martyrdom” (from guru memory) and calls for justice are ideological motifs.

Academicians note that Khalistan activism today relies heavily on diaspora mobilization¹⁴ and digital platforms. The *Frontiers in Communication* journal highlights that the Khalistan movement has “a strong presence on social media, particularly among the Sikh diaspora,” with online campaigns and virtual communities “keeping the movement alive”¹⁵. Thus, part of the contemporary ideology is shaped by international networks: Sikhs overseas leverage digital tools and organizing (e.g. online petitions, referenda) to demand a separate state. Another ideological dimension is external support: India’s government often accuses neighboring Pakistan of backing separatists. For instance, the CFR reports that in recent years Pakistan’s ISI “have been accused of keeping the movement alive” through funding and safe havens. This implies that part of Khalistan’s persistence stems from geopolitical rivalries (India-Pakistan), though Sikh activists emphasize internal Indian community rights.¹⁶

¹⁴ “Diaspora mobilization is the organized political, economic, or social engagement by people living outside their ancestral homeland to influence events, policies, or conditions in their country of origin, using resources, networks, and activism (like fundraising, lobbying, or protests) to support causes, pressure governments, or shape national identity, often leveraging technology for transnational action and becoming a key part of international politics.”

¹⁵ Ashwini, D. Y., Vishwanatha, N., & Puneeth, R. P. (2025). Social media as a platform for resistance: examining the language of dissent in Indian society. *Frontiers in Communication*, 10. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2025.1648587>

¹⁶ Who are the armed groups India accuses Pakistan of backing? Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/5/9/who-are-the-armed-groups-india-accuses-pakistan-of-backing> (2025, October 2).

H. HISTORICAL ORIGINS OF HINDUTVA IDEOLOGY

Hindutva – literally “Hindu-ness” – is a form of Hindu cultural nationalism conceived in the early 20th century. Its foundational figure is Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883–1966), an anti-colonial activist who, while imprisoned by the British, wrote *Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu?* (1923). In it Savarkar defined the Hindu nation not by religion alone but by a shared culture, territory (ancient India), and ancestry. He drew on Western nationalism, arguing India required a homogeneous national community and culture¹⁷. Savarkar declared that “Hindutva was bigger than Hinduism” and constructed an ideological “Hindu Rashtra” concept. Later leaders like M.S. Golwalkar (RSS leader) and others built on Savarkar, portraying Hindus not just as a majority community but as a nation’s core¹⁸.

In 1939 Savarkar explicitly coined the term Hindutva: as one source notes, “Savarkar...is credited with having invented the term ‘Hindutva’ or ‘Hinduness’,” distinguishing it from mere religious affiliation¹⁹. Under Hindutva, anyone whose “fatherland” and “holy land” is India was considered a Hindu, excluding those with loyalties (historical or spiritual) outside it. This formulation explicitly targeted Indian Muslims, Christians, and others as outsiders or threats. Indeed, a modern analysis states that Hindutva “seeks to empower the country’s Hindu majority while relegating Muslims and Christians to second-class citizens”²⁰.

After independence (1947), Hindutva was largely a fringe ideology until late in the century. Organisations like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS, founded 1925) and the Hindu Mahasabha kept its ideas alive, occasionally resorting to violence (e.g. Nathuram Godse, a Hindu Mahasabha member, assassinated Gandhi in 1948, motivated by Hindutva resentment). Through the decades, Hindutva remained on the

¹⁷ How Savarkar invented Hindu supremacy and its cult of violence | Aeon Essays
<https://aeon.co/essays/how-savarkar-invented-hindu-supremacy-and-its-cult-of-violence>

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ India, Hindutva, and V.D. Savarkar (1883-1966) | South Asia Institute
<https://sai.columbia.edu/content/india-hindutva-and-vd-savarkar-1883-1966>

²⁰ India’s anti-conversion law allows policing of Christians
<https://baptiststandard.com/news/world/indias-anti-conversion-law-allows-policing-of-christians/>

margins – until the 1980s and 1990s when events like the Ayodhya movement gave it national prominence. Pivotal was the 1992 demolition of the Babri Masjid (a Mughal-era mosque) by Hindu nationalist activists, after a mass campaign led by BJP leaders such as L.K. Advani²¹. That event, and subsequent communal riots, cemented Hindutva's image as a mass force.

I. IDEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF HINDUTVA

Hindutva ideology combines cultural nationalism with majoritarian politics. Its core claims are that all Indians of the Hindu culture-form the “nation,” and the state should primarily represent Hindu interests. Savarkar and his successors articulated criteria for being “Hindu”: adherence to *sapta-sheel* (common land, race, culture, etc.), which in practice justified denying the nationhood of groups with foreign ancestry or faiths. Under Hindutva, secular democracy was seen by its leaders as “pseudo-secularism” – accused of overly appeasing minorities. Indeed, analysts note the BJP (Hindutva's political wing) has blamed previous governments for “pseudo-secularism” that favors minorities over the Hindu majority.

Hindutva draws on historical narratives: it highlights medieval invasions by Muslim rulers as national trauma and preaches reconquest of a pure Hindu past. The movement venerates ancient Hindu symbols and heroes while portraying India's diversity as testaments of Hindu endurance. Critics compare Hindutva to fascist and exclusionary strains of nationalism. One news report succinctly characterizes Hindutva as “a political ideology...that seeks to empower the country's Hindu majority while relegating Muslims and Christians to second-class citizens”. In practice, Hindutva ideology has advocated the idea of a Hindu Rashtra (nation) and often supports laws that privilege Hindu customs. Its major organizational progeny is the Sangh Parivar (“family of organizations”) led by the RSS and politically by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)²².

²¹ Babri mosque to Ram temple: A timeline from 1528 to 2024 | India Election 2024 News | Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/22/babri-mosque-to-ram-temple-a-timeline-from-1528-to-2024>

²² Supra at note 17

IV. COMMUNAL CLASHES AND NATION-BUILDING

Both movements intersected with major events in Indian history. For Hindutva, a watershed was the decades-long Ayodhya temple movement. Al Jazeera summarizes the culmination: in January 2024, Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated a grand Hindu temple to Lord Ram at Ayodhya, fulfilling a four-decade campaign by Hindu nationalist groups. The site was where the Babri Masjid stood until it was razed by Hindu mobs on 6 December 1992. The 1992 demolition – backed by BJP and VHP cadres – “triggered a nationwide Hindu-Muslim riots that killed more than 2,000 people, most of them Muslims”. This polarizing event, and the 2019 Supreme Court ruling granting the land for the temple, are seen as emblematic of Hindutva’s rise. Observers note the Ayodhya temple’s inauguration is viewed as a symbol of turning India “into a Hindu-first nation,” cementing the ideological victory of Hindutva forces²³.

For Khalistan, the key flashpoints were Sikh-targeted violence. In the post-1984 period, as noted above, retaliatory riots killed thousands of Sikhs. The Khalistan insurgency itself was violent²⁴: Sikh militants attacked Hindu civilians and security forces; for example, the 1985 Air India bombing killed 329 passengers (mostly Hindus). The insurgency was eventually crushed by the 1990s, but at great human cost. The Council on Foreign Relations notes that after Bhindranwale’s death, “Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her own Sikh bodyguards. Her murder led to riots... and thousands of Sikhs were killed”²⁵. These events deeply scarred the Sikh community and entrenched Khalistan identity for many.

Both movements also have overlapping facets in intercommunal conflict. 1984 is a tragic watershed: Hindutva cadres framed the anti-Sikh pogrom as spontaneous, but human-rights observers see it as organized carnage. Conversely, Hindutva’s narrative of

²³ Supra at note 18

²⁴ Human Rights Watch, India: No Justice for 1984 Anti-Sikh Bloodshed (Oct. 29, 2014) <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/10/29/india-no-justice-1984-anti-sikh-bloodshed>

²⁵ Council on Foreign Relations, Canada-India tensions over killing of Sikh separatist: What to know (Nov. 2023)

persecution is fueled by memories of Muslim rule and partition, and by periodic violence (e.g. 2002 Gujarat riots, 1990s Kashmir conflict). Over decades, each side has seen the other as existential threat – an aspect that informs their ideologies^{26,27}.

V. CONTEMPORARY RESURGENCE: KHALISTAN IN 2025

Though militant Khalistan insurgency in India largely ended by the mid-1990s, in the 2020s the movement has re-emerged in geopolitical and digital arenas. The most notable catalyst was the assassination of *Hardeep Singh Nijjar* in Canada (June 2023). Nijjar was a Sikh separatist leader whom India had labeled a “terrorist” in 2020. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau later publicly accused Indian agents of orchestrating Nijjar’s murder – allegations India vehemently denies. This unprecedented accusation “stirred frictions between two major democracies” and placed Khalistan back on the global agenda^{28,29}.

In the diaspora, Khalistan activism remains strong. Canada, with over 770,000 Sikhs (the largest Sikh population outside India), has become a flashpoint. Sikh advocacy groups like Sikhs for Justice (SFJ) have organized “referendum” campaigns and protests. In 2024 Guardian coverage, Hindu and Sikh groups clashed in Vancouver over Khalistan symbolism, prompting Indian leadership to decry it as violence at a Hindu temple. The crisis even prompted diplomatic expulsions: Canada expelled six Indian diplomats over the Nijjar case, and India reciprocated.

Security concerns illustrate the social dimension: Canadian police have warned diaspora Sikhs that they face credible assassination threats from foreign agents. Reuters reports that the RCMP warned at least a dozen Sikh activists advocating for Khalistan

²⁶ Langa, M. (2019, December 12). Justice Nanavati-Mehta Commission gives clean chit to Narendra Modi in 2002 Gujarat riots. *The Hindu*. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/2002-gujarat-riots-state-govt-to-table-justice-nanavati-mehta-commission-report-in-assembly-today/article30274396.ece>

²⁷ eLibrary Sansad. (2004). Justice nanavati Commission Of Inquiry 1984 Anti Sikh Riots Report 9th February 2005. <https://elibrary.sansad.in/items/c64e5330-b7c4-4a17-b25a-cecfd46347f6>

²⁸ Council on Foreign Relations, Canada-India tensions over killing of Sikh separatist: What to know (Nov. 2023)

²⁹ BBC News. (2023, September 22). India-Canada row: Justin Trudeau repeats allegation against India amid row. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-66886559>

that they were targets (implying Indian involvement). These warnings forced some families into hiding. So, on one hand, Canada's Sikhs feel targeted; on the other, Indian officials accuse Canada of being a safe haven for separatists. A CFR analysis notes that India has long complained Canada "harbors Sikh terrorists" and previously had trouble prosecuting the Air India bomber³⁰.

Meanwhile, Khalistan sentiments have found a digital echo. Activists deploy social media hashtags (e.g. #Referendum2020), online rallies, and YouTube channels to keep the cause alive. Researchers observe that Khalistan "has a strong presence on social media, particularly among the Sikh diaspora," with "online campaigns, digital publications, and virtual communities" sustaining it. Even remote Sikh communities (in Australia, the U.K., etc.) sometimes rally outside Indian embassies or organize diaspora conventions. The combination of diaspora activism and digital mobilization effectively globalizes the movement, creating sustained pressure on India's image and on host nations³¹.

Geopolitically, the Khalistan issue now affects India's foreign relations. The Canada dispute strained ties with a Western ally. India has pressed other countries to curb Khalistan-supporting groups (e.g. demanding the U.S. extradite Sikh extremists). Simultaneously, some analysts warn that the resurgence of Khalistan rhetoric unites Indian political factions: as CFR notes, the "threat of a revitalized Khalistan movement" has ironically rallied broad support within India for the government's hardline stance.

VI. CONTEMPORARY RESURGENCE: HINDUTVA IN 2025

Hindutva's resurgence has been institutional, as the ideology's bearers became the ruling power in India. Since winning a decisive majority in 2014, the BJP (Hindutva's political vehicle) has transformed many aspects of Indian governance. Analysts observe that India's BJP "came to power on the backs of [a pro-Hindu] ideological foundation".

³⁰ Anna Mehler Paperny, Warned by police, some of Canada's Sikhs feel threatened by India, Reuters (Oct. 20, 2024)

³¹ Frontiers in Communication, Social media as a platform for resistance: examining the language of dissent in Indian society (2025)

The party has enacted policies reflecting Hindutva tenets. For example, it pushed the Citizenship Amendment Act (2019) to fast-track citizenship for non-Muslim refugees, a move critics say discriminates by religion. It has floated a national register of citizens (NRC) in Bihar (2019) and discussed it elsewhere, raising fears of many statelessness, especially among Muslims³².

State governments aligned with Hindutva have enacted “anti-conversion” laws purportedly to curb forced conversions, but which primarily target Christian missionary activities. As of 2025, eight Indian states have such laws (including BJP-ruled Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh). An RNS report notes that these laws empower vigilantes to police religious activity, and cites data that after Uttar Pradesh strengthened its law in 2024, incidents of church raids and arrests surged. These legal changes reflect an agenda to prioritize Hindu customs: BJP leaders often justify them as needed to protect “Hindu way of life,” but civil-rights groups see them as institutionalizing Hindutva’s majoritarian bias³³.

Education and culture have also been reshaped. Under Modi’s government, school curricula are being “RSS-ized” by inserting Hindu mythological or revisionist content. Al Jazeera reports on new textbooks (used especially in RSS-run schools) that teach Vedic sages as scientific pioneers – for instance, claiming a sage was “the world’s first atomic scientist” or “inventor of plastic surgery”. Such content blurs fact and faith: critics warn that Modi’s government has “blurred the lines between religious Hindu beliefs... and established history and science”. More broadly, an ultra-nationalist narration pervades schoolbooks and public memorials. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh’s education wing (Vidya Bharati) runs over 12,000 schools (educating ~32 million

³² Milan Vaishnav, *The BJP in Power: Indian Democracy and Religious Nationalism* (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Apr. 4, 2019)

³³ India’s anti-conversion law allows policing of Christians, Religion News Service (Dec. 2, 2024)

students) where overtly Hindutva-themed materials are taught alongside or within the standard curriculum³⁴.

Electoral politics continues to be colored by Hindutva. In the 2024 general election campaign, Prime Minister Modi explicitly appealed to Hindu identity. Reuters observed Modi calling opponents “pro-Muslim” and accusing them of planning to redistribute Hindu wealth to Muslims. Such rhetoric – rare for Modi until then – signaled a strategy to mobilize his core base. Modi also invoked the recent Ram temple as proof of Hindutva success: the temple inauguration was hailed as a symbol of “Hindu rejuvenation”.

Beyond words, party actions have institutionalized Hindutva. The BJP now governs in a sharply majoritarian mode: its cabinets can lack any Muslim ministers, and government statements sometimes posit secularism as “minority appeasement”. Simultaneously, laws and policies favor Hindu symbols: the central government appointed organizers for Hindu pilgrimages (like the Amarnath Yatra), approved building of new temples, and criticized “love jihad” – a Hindutva trope alleging Muslim seduction of Hindu women³⁵.

Socially, there is evidence of rising communal polarization. Human rights reports and news accounts document an uptick in vigilante violence against Muslims and Christians³⁶. For instance, in 2024 a research group noted anti-minority hate speech in India rose significantly. The World Christian Association recorded hundreds of attacks on Christians (often linked to conversion rumors). Minorities increasingly report fear of abuse by extremist vigilante groups (e.g. Bajrang Dal, VHP activists). The Modi

³⁴ Snigdhendu Bhattacharya, How RSS textbooks are reshaping Indian history and science under Modi, *Al Jazeera* (Feb. 19, 2024)

³⁵ Y.P. Rajesh & Rupam Jain, India’s Modi calls rivals pro-Muslim as election campaign changes tack, *Reuters*

³⁶ Y.P. Rajesh, How Modi’s BJP seeks Muslim vote in India’s 2024 election, *Reuters* (Nov. 10, 2023)

government officially denies discrimination, but many analysts see a “deep-rooted” fault line of Hindu-Muslim distrust³⁷.

Institutionally, the Hindutva movement has also remodeled state bodies. The ruling coalition encourages appointment of BJP-aligned loyalists to positions in the civil service, judiciary, and media regulators. Critics note that mainstream media now often self-censors the criticism of Hindu nationalism; while dissenting academics or activists have faced sedition or terrorism charges. As one report concludes, the BJP’s rise “signaled a shift toward a muscular, pro-Hindu brand of nationalism” that is reshaping India’s secular democratic character³⁸.

VII. SOCIAL DIMENSIONS FOR RESURGENCE OF THESE MOVEMENTS

Both movements now exert influence beyond traditional political channels. For Hindutva, one geopolitical effect is India’s changing global posture. The BJP government often frames foreign policy in cultural terms, for instance seeking solidarity with global Hindu communities and leveraging the diaspora for political messaging. Domestically, Hindutva’s social impact is profound: many Hindus, especially young rural voters, have embraced Hindu nationalist identity. Survey data suggest that a growing share of Indians see national identity primarily as “being Indian and Hindu” rather than pluralistic; this shift has electoral consequences, empowering the BJP at the polls.

The Khalistan movement’s resurgence has direct geopolitical fallout. India accuses Pakistan of clandestinely supporting Khalistani activists, straining India-Pakistan relations. Conversely, Canadian and Western responses to Sikh diaspora activism have introduced new dimensions to counterterrorism dialogues. Canada’s public naming of Indian diplomats as security threats is unprecedented and has internationalized the Khalistan issue. Other governments are caught in the middle: e.g. U.S. lawmakers have

³⁷ Y.P. Rajesh, How Modi’s BJP seeks Muslim vote in India’s 2024 election, Reuters (Nov. 10, 2023)

³⁸ Sarah Shamim, Timeline of tensions: How India-Canada relations soured, Al Jazeera (Oct. 15, 2024)

been asked to pressure Canada to cooperate on extraditing extremists. Within Indian foreign policy, Khalistan is often cited as evidence of foreign interference, justifying a more aggressive stance on overseas Sikh dissent.

Socially, both movements polarize communities in India. Hindutva's majoritarian thrust has inflamed Hindu-Muslim and Hindu-Christian tensions, as discussed. The Khalistan legacy still looms in Punjab's society, where older generations remember the terror of the insurgency. In parts of Punjab, Khalistan-support sentiments persist among small groups; in other parts, fatigue and a desire for development have eclipsed separatism. However, occasional local incidents (e.g. arrests of alleged Khalistani posters) can spark communal resentments. Meanwhile, Hindutva's impact on society includes a reassertion of caste-hierarchy and patriarchy under the guise of tradition (for example, many Hindutva voices champion conservative norms on family and gender). The intersection of religion and social change is a contested arena, with Hindutva activists often clashing with caste and gender rights movements.

Digitally, both movements thrive on social media though in different ways. Khalistan activists use online platforms to connect the scattered Sikh diaspora (forums, encrypted chats, YouTube sermons). They share martyr narratives and call for "referendum" that echo worldwide. Hindutva supporters similarly use social media to promote nationalism: pro-government influencers amplify slogans (#IndiaFirst), and there is a parallel economy of often unchecked social media "troll" armies propagating anti-minority messages and government propaganda. Notably, some of the same platforms (Twitter/X, Facebook, WhatsApp) host both Hindutva and Khalistan content, making the Indian digital space highly polarized.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This paper has traced the historical roots, ideology, and recent trajectories of two opposing identity movements in India. Hindutva – born from Savarkar's 1920s nationalism – has evolved into the dominant ideological framework for India's current leadership, shaping policy, education, and collective identity. Its political

institutionalization has transformed India into a more overtly Hindu-majoritarian state, with significant implications for minorities and secular democracy. In contrast, the Khalistan movement – which peaked violently in the late 20th century – now primarily manifests abroad and online, fueled by diaspora activism and geopolitical friction. Though Khalistan has no legal standing inside India, its symbolism and networks continue to affect regional security and India's relations with Sikh-populated democracies.

Both movements illustrate how religious and cultural identities can be mobilized for political ends. They also show India's ongoing struggle to reconcile its pluralistic constitution with competing majoritarian and separatist nationalisms. Looking forward, several insights emerge: First, Hindutva's agenda seems entrenched as long as the BJP holds power, especially given its integration into state apparatus (policies and education). This may further strain India's social fabric and democratic norms unless balanced by strong institutions or opposition. Second, the Khalistan cause – while unlikely to re-enter Punjab via armed struggle – remains potent as a diaspora movement. Its future may depend on how India engages with global Sikh communities and addresses underlying grievances; heavy-handed tactics risk reinforcing separatist sentiments. Finally, both cases underscore the new role of digital media: each movement uses online platforms to shape narratives and organize supporters across borders. Policymakers and scholars should note that the internet now acts as a force multiplier for identity movements.

To summarise, Hindutva and Khalistan represent two very different visions of nationhood – one based on Hindu cultural unity, the other on Sikh self-determination. Understanding their histories and contemporary forms is essential to grasp current tensions in India and among its diaspora. The analysis here, grounded in diverse sources, highlights how past events continue to reverberate in politics today, and cautions that ideological conflicts in India are far from being confined to textbooks or

old rivalries – they remain deeply influential in 2025's electoral campaigns, policymaking, and international relations.

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