

EVOLUTIONARY TRAJECTORY OF HINDUTVA IN NEPAL AND INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Hindutva, as a Hindu nationalist political theory has major impact on the South Asian polity. History of Hindutva traces back to the Indian struggle of independence. Nevertheless, recently Hindutva became much impactful, particularly since 2014 after BJP, one of the major Hindutva political parties re-emerged into Indian central political power. Nepal has obvious impact of this political change in India, not only because Nepal is one of the neighboring countries of India, also because Nepal is a Hindu-majority country and once a Hindu nation. Hindutva ideologues have always described Nepal as a model Hindu nation also to consolidate their objective to establish India as a Hindu nation. Interestingly, when Hindutva ideology is at the central stage of Indian politics, Nepal no longer is a Hindu nation. Evolution of Hindutva politics has different trajectory in Nepali context. This paper studies how Hindutva politics historically evolved in Nepal and shows how it differs from Indian context notwithstanding fundamental similarities. Indian ideologues had developed Hindutva as a political theory but it was already in practice in Nepal in different ways long before it took a shape of a political theory. This research makes academic enquiry of historical documents and research papers as data sources to analyze the evolutionary trajectory of the Hindutva in Nepal against the backdrop of Hindutva theory evolved in India.

Keyword: Hindutva in Nepal, History of Hindu Nationalism

1. INTRODUCTION

Understanding of Hindutva political theory is crucially important to understand contemporary South Asian politics. Particularly after Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government led by Narendra Modi came to the Indian central political power since 2014 and implemented policies based on Hindutva political theory, its implication has widened, not necessarily constrained within Indian border, rather neighboring countries like Nepal as well.

Hindutva, as a nationalist political theory defines Hindu civilization originated on the bank of Sindhu River that subsequently extended throughout the Indian Sub-continent, as a Nation with its organic race, culture, geography language and jurisprudence based on blood relation.

Hindutva literally means Hindu-ness (Bownas, 2024) and alternatively in use for Hindu Nationalism (Banik, 2022) took a shape of political ideology after VD Savarkar defined Hindus as a nation in his seminal work 'Essentials of Hindutva' in 1924 (Graham, 1990, p. 44). He coined the term 'Hindutva' and analyzed it as a nationalist theory that 'does not coincide with Hinduism, a religion' (Jaffrelot, 2007, p. 15). He defines Hindu nation as an organic nation based on race, blood relation, culture and nationality, reside from *Sindhu* (*Sindhu* River) to *Sindhu* (Indian Ocean) with Sanskrit language as the root and who consider Hindustan not only as fatherland but a holy land.

Savarkar glorifies 'Hindu blood' that,

'...come down from the altitudes of the sublime *Vedic* heights to the plains of our modern history fertilizing much, incorporating many a noble stream and purifying many a lost soul, increasing in volume and richness...' (Savarkar, 2021, p. 30)

Major departure of Savarkar from his predecessors (such as Dayananda Saraswati and Vivekananda who advocated reform in Hindu religion) is he clearly demarked Hindu nationalism as a nationalist political ideology wider than Hinduism, a religion. He says, 'it must not be forgotten that we have all along referred to the progress of the Hindu movement as a whole and not to that of any particular creed or religious section thereof Hindutva and not Hinduism only (Savarkar, 2021, p. 20).

In quest of glorifying Hindu as the superior nation and defining Hindustan as geographically defined Hindu national territory, Savarkar and his followers drew

line between 'others' and Hindus creating binary opposition particularly with Muslims and Christians. They believe those are the foes of Hindutva who can pollute 'pure blood' of Hindus. Against the backdrop of British appeasing Muslims with an idea of separate electorates for Muslims and official secular policy of Indian Congress (Graham, 1990, p. 3), Hindutva forces formed Hindutva organizations to vanguard the Hindu nationality and establish Hindustan (from Sindhu River to Indian ocean) as a Hindu nation. Beside foundation of Arya Samaj in 1875 by Dayananda Saraswati, a political party Hindu Mahasabha was formed under the presidency of Savarkar in 1937 with an objective to challenge the secularism of the Congress and Muslim theocracy of Muslim League, politically.

Prior to that, in 1925 another Hindu fundamentalist organization '*Rastriya Swayamsewak Sangathan*' (RSS) was formed led by KB Hedgewar, follower of Savarkar's idea. Within Congress Party, impact of traditionalist Hindu nationalists was prominent under the leadership of Sardar Ballav Bhai Patel who simultaneously oppose Nehruvian Secularism and Fundamentalist Hindu nationalism led by RSS.

After Indian independence (1947) as the *Hindu Mahasabha* could not take height of a full-fledge political party and it mostly focused on cultural movement, a vacuum for liberal Hindu nationalist was fulfilled by the foundation of the *Bharatiya Jana Sangh* (BJS) under the leadership of Shyama Prasad Mookerjee on October 1951. But as the organizational base of the BJS was based on the RSS, very soon it became a political apparatus of the fundamentalist Hindutva organization.

Mookerjee tried to sustain the BJS as a liberal Hindu party but his unexpected demise in 1953, eased RSS to integrate it as per its objectives. Emergence of MS Golwalkar as the new leader of BJS directed it into political apparatus of RSS. Golwalkar argued that the servitude of the Hindus is because of the weakness of national consciousness of Hindus and so regeneration of Hindu nation is imperative (Graham, 1990, p. 46). His idea of racial purity directed him to appraise the Fascism then thriving in Germany and Italy. (Banik, 2022)

Golwalkar (1939) in his seminal book 'We; or, our Nationhood defined' writes,

'...the non-Hindu peoples in *Hindusthan* must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion must entertain no idea but those of glorification of the Hindu race and culture...they must cease to be foreigners or may stay in the country

wholly subordinated to the Hindu nations claiming nothing deserving no privileges far less any preferential treatment-not even citizen's rights.' (Golwalkar, 1939, pp. 55-56)

Nonetheless, Hindu nationalist forces were divided and was not represented by a single political party. Hindu traditionalists inside the Congress didn't support the BJS, pointing its affiliation with the RSS, a fundamentalist faction of Hindu nationalism. After the State of Emergency declared by Indira Gandhi in 1975, political scenario changed leading BJS merging into the coalition of anti-Congress forces that came together in the Janata Party. But due to 'hardly compatible with the constitutional framework' (Jaffrelot, 2021, p. 19) ex-Jana Sanghis were sidelined within *Janata Party* that finally led to the foundation of the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP), the currently ruling political party of India.

Discussion of trajectory of evolution of Hindutva ideology in India laid base for academic enquiry of evolution of Hindutva political practices in Nepal. Major argument of this paper is Hindutva political theory was already in practice as a ruling political ideology in Nepal when Indian Hindu nationalists were developing the Hindutva as a nationalist political theory in Indian context. By examining Hindutva political ideology in function at different period of Nepali history, this academic enquiry analyzes how it was functioning distinctly but inter-relating with Indian context. This paper will trace out the historical evolution of Hindutva ideology in Nepal and India and points out the differences of two historical evolutionary trajectories so that reliable background for further study of contemporary Hindutva could be done.

2. METHODOLOGY

This is qualitative, explorative and analytical research based on the secondary data, employing Historical Comparative Methodology. With objective to trace out the evolutionary trajectory of Hindutva ideology in Nepal and India, books, academic papers, news articles, opinion articles, published interviews, digital documentary and relevant feature films are used as the sources of data. Data are analyzed to figure out the similar and dissimilar characteristics of Hindutva ideology in both countries, simultaneously based on the timeline of Nepali history.

Since it is mostly focused on the historical comparison of trajectory of evolution of Hindutva ideology in Nepal and India, recent emergence of Hindutva politics and activities, particularly after 2008 when Nepal was declared a republic state, has been limitedly discussed just for directional indication. Nonetheless the analysis

and conclusion of this paper can help for the further academic research and analyze contemporary development of Hindutva movement in both countries, as a historical background.

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

While studying Hindu Nationalism or Hindutva ideology and its implication, adequate numbers of literature could be found on Hindu Nationalism in Indian context. But not much has been studied on Hindu nationalism in Nepali context. Nevertheless, available literatures about practices of Hindutva politics in Nepal is reviewed here.

Nepal has been included in many crucial Hindutva literatures from the beginning. Savarkar, a pioneer ideologue of Hindutva ideology, in his seminal work 'Essentials of Hindutva' has mentioned Nepal, that 'Hindu and *Hindusthan* owns a loving allegiance of millions of our people from the throne of Nepal to the begging bowl of the street' (Savarkar, 2021, p. 28). While showing the wide range of Hindus throughout *Hindusthan*, he glorifies Nepal as a country where Hindu king rules. Hindutva forces in India since then has been regarding Hindu monarchy in Nepal as a glory of entire Hindu nation and an integral part of Hindutva in Nepal.

Arguing the tolerance and inclusive nature of Hindu nation, he presented Nepal as an example where a Hindu of the highest caste is allowed to marry a woman of those who are supposed to be the alien tribes... who incorporated with and bound with Hindus the ties of common blood (Savarkar, 2021, p. 31). But Nepali society strongly based on Hindu caste system is still not flexible and tolerant for marrying a woman from alien tribes by the highest Hindu. Therefore, Savarkar's understanding about marriage between high caste Hindu and other alien caste in Nepal is not exactly true.

According to Wolf (2014), Savarkar had emphasized the importance of the Hindu Kingdom of Nepal as a model of governance and fabric of society. To Savarkar the calling of the Hindu Kingdom of Nepal as a foreign country was intolerable (Kuruvachira, 2006, p. 125). He held that the brave and warlike Gurkhas were part and parcel of Hinduism and any more to keep them segregated from India was strongly and relentlessly opposed to him.

This argument indicates that Hindu Nationalism about which Savarkar build an ideological frame was already in practice in Nepal before Indian Hindu nationalists were brain-working on it. Hindu nationalism in Nepali context though has certain

cultural and historical ties with Indian Hindu Nationalism but there are certain fundamental differences as well. It also shows Hindu nationalism in Nepal has different origin and background of evolution, differing Indian context.

Hindu nationalism in Indian context evolved as a part of anti-colonial struggle and independence of India from British colonialism. Hindu nationalists justify their ethno-nationalist identity as an obvious reaction of victimization of Indian Hindus by the Mughal conquerors and the British Colonialism and thus they wanted to established 'Hindu Nation' idolizing their 'golden past'(Leidig, 2020).

On the other-side, Hindutva in Nepal evolved as a cultural and political binding among different ethnic groups to build a state with homogenous nationality. One of the major differences of Hindutva in Nepal and Indian context is the existence of Hindu monarch in Nepal. While Indian Hindutva defines Hindu nation in term of geography, blood and language, in Nepali context Hindu monarchy is an essentially binding component for Hindu nation. Bownas (2024) states in Nepal, unlike India, political religion has been intimately bound up with monarchical power, and theologically, with syncretic practice.

According to Sharma (1997) in Nepal Hinduism provided the King (state) not only with its rational basis but also its popular legitimacy... based on the motivation for combining all the hill states into a single, powerful entity was not merely personal ambition but the wish to build a sacred Hindu land, distinct from and secure against the non-believing *Muglan* (Moghul Emperor) and the English '*Phiringis*' poised on the coast (Gellner et al., 1997, pp. 76-78).

Shastri (2002) argues that designation of Nepal as 'a real Hindustan' enabled the pursuance of a policy of isolation-political as well as cultural form the 'polluted' center while simultaneously following an aggressive Hinduisation of local communities within (Dixit et al., 2010, p. 35).

Review of literatures about evolution of Hindutva ideology in India and Nepal shows different trajectories in function. In India, Hindutva has been developed as a political theory to resist 'the others' and consolidate the purity of Hindu blood and culture in *Hindusthan* whereas in Nepal Hindutva has been practiced by the state to consolidate its power among the people by Hinduisation process. Hindutva forces in India are clearly drawing line of division with others such as Muslims, Christians and Communists where as in Nepal, Monarchy as the core of Hindutva force is using Hindutva as to fade out the differences between different

communities and ethnicities within Nepal to build whole country as a nation based on Hindutva.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Nepal took shape of a single unified country during the period of Gorkhali king Prithvi Narayan Shah (1742-75). He extended the boundary of his tiny hilly state of Gorkha to all four directions and corner-stoned the state, later known as Nepal. Since then, till 2008, Nepal was ruled by the Shah kings until it was declared a republic state. During Rana regime (1846-1951), Kings were practically deprived of any executive rights and Ranas were the actual rulers. In 1951, Rana regime ended and multi-party democratic system started with the King as the sovereign power. In 1960, King Mahendra took executive power on himself and introduced the political party-less Panchayat system that declared Nepal a Hindu state formally. People's Movement in 1990 ended the Panchayat system but the new constitution promulgated in 1991 continued Nepal as a Hindu nation. Maoist rebellion started in 1996 led the country for a decade long civil war. Royal Massacre in 2001 shook the political base of Hindu kingdom. Gyanendra Shah became the new King who practiced active executive rights, contrary to the constitutional provisions, leading to the People's movement of 2007. In 2008, ending the two-century long monarchical system, Nepal was declared republican and secular state.

Based on the study of evolution of Hindutva politics in Nepal, history of Nepal from the unification of Nepal to the declaration of republic, it can be divided into the three major periods- King Prithivi Narayan Shah's period, Rana period and Panchayat period. Hindutva politics in Nepali context is essentially based on these three distinctive periods with distinct and complimentary characteristics that is discussed below.

A. Prithivi Narayan's "*Asil Hindustan*"

Malla King Jayasthiti Malla (1382-95 AD) introduced the caste system based on Hindu scripture *Manu Smriti* in Nepal. He invited five Indian Brahmans namely Kritinath Upadhyaya Kanyakubja, Raghunath Jha Maithili, Srinath Bhatta and Rannath Jha for that task (Sapcotta, 2022). They helped to lay Hindu-based social structure in Malla kingdom in Kathmandu valley where before that majorly Buddhism was in practice.

Another Malla King Yakshya Malla also invited Hindu Brahman from the southern India to serve as the priest of Pashupatinath Temple located at Kathmandu. During the initial phase of Malla reign, Newar and other residence of Kathmandu valley were divided into four varnas and sixty-four castes (Sapcotta, 2022). As Malla kings came from Indian territory in Kathmandu valley, those social reforms were attempts for the readjustment of the local communities as per their compatibility to consolidate their regime. Due to numbers of ethnic culture already existed in Nepal during those days, introduction of Hindu value-based system forms a base for 'a syncretic form of Hinduism encompassing much that is Buddhist and animist' (Rose, 1971, p. 8).

Gorkhali King Prithivi Narayan Shah started expansion of his kingdom in 1744 and invaded Malla kingdoms of Kathmandu Valley in 1760-70s. Though reasons behind the expansion of Gorkha kingdom had other political and economic causes as well, later Shah defined the Gorkhali expansion as a quest for Hindu kingdom. Shah said he wanted to make Nepal a true Hindu state (*Asil Hindustan*) (Sherpa, 2021). He refers his hard-won kingdom as the '*asal*' (true) Hindustan, a 'garden' of four *varnas* and the thirty-six *jats* (Dixit et al., 2010, p. 25). Therefore, during his border expansion and conquest of the small states and principalities, he along with territorial conquest, established Hindu polity as the state system.

Hindu Nationalism as a modern principle was not developed or at least not known to Nepali elites till then. But, King Shah's desire to build '*Asil Hindustan*' was impregnated with desire to establish Hindu nation. India, also popularly known as *Hindustan*, was then ruled by the British empire which for the Hindus was alien civilization. Britisher were regarded as 'impurity' within Hindu beliefs. Against such backdrop, it could be Shah's political rhetoric to win support of surrounding Hindu kingdoms and principalities for his expansionist campaign. Nevertheless, his desire to establish '*Asil Hindustan*' consequently became viable reason to either suppress or hinduize the 'other' principalities ruled by different rulers. Here 'the others' basically means probable hurdles of expansionist campaign and the enemies of Gorkha Raja.

The *Parbatiya* or 'hilly people' were the social backbone of the new state and their Khas language became the cultural foundation (Gellner, 2005).

Besides invading land and property, Gorkhalis exterminated the cultural identities and significance of local ethnic population. Sanskritization and Hinduization were the two powerful tools used to meet this objective.

Hilly Brahman family helped the king to expand the Sanskritization and Hinduization of the 'other' ethnic groups in Nepal. The defeated ethnic minorities had no other option than to abide the rules imposed by the Raja. Certain ethnic groups were deprived from joining and serving in state army. Newar, Tamang and some other ethnic people were not allowed to join national army, which was a political oppression of the ethnic minorities.

Since *Khas* language became the language that elites and government officials use, other ethnic languages were shadowed. As language is one of the major features of ethnic minorities, suppression of languages had vehement effect on identity of ethnic minorities.

Nevertheless, nationalism as a modern concept was not consciously implemented then, rather it was solely based on the expansionist policy of the Shah Durbar.

Hindu King, Hindu Kingdom, Hindu Norms and values have been a focal point for unity or unilateral or centralist policy and a discourse is created that they are strengthening the country and society (Swobhasa, Swojati, Sworatrako Bhasya, n.d.). In fact, the main core of the argument lies '*Asil Hindustan*' whereas casteism is in the core of politico-cultural-economic practices which is still popular in one way or the other.

Shah's popular quotation 'Nepal is a land of four *varnas* and thirty-six castes' was a vindication of Hindu-polity based system in Nepali society. Four *Varnas* is based on Hindu religious mythology and it is divisive and hierarchical. It enhanced horizontal division of Nepali society creating higher and lower categories within society. Similarly, presence of 36 castes in 'garden' does not necessarily means all have equal rights of exposure and approach for state power. Among the *varnas* and castes in existence, certain ruling elite *varnas* and castes ever remained at the center of political, economic, social and cultural power and other castes and *varnas* are degraded as the ruled categories.

Different than Indian Hindu nationalist idea, Prithivi Narayan Shah was not much adverse to 'Mohamadens' (Bhandari and Dennis, 2019). Mainali (2025) argues during Shah's period, Nepal's attitude was not revengeful towards Muslims as in India because except Bengal ruler Samsuddhin's attack on Kathmandu valley during Malla period, there was no possibility of Muslim invasion in Nepal as in India. Instead, Shah invited Muslims traders and artisans to live in Kathmandu and expelled Christians from Kathmandu which Mainali says was not because any religious cause but for political cause (Mainali, 2025).

Nevertheless, the fundamental foundation of Shah's kingdom was 'pure Hindu nation building' which was continuum of previous Malla, Sen and other principalities' legacy as well and building of 'pure Hindu nation' was continued by Shah's inheritors.

In India, Hindu Nationalism runs parallel to the dominant Indian political tradition of the Congress Party (Jaffrelot, 2007, p. 3). Idea of India as a Hindu nation came later only during the independence struggle against the British colonialism.

When Shah was building 'a pure Hindu nation' invading small principalities around the Gorkha kingdom, India was almost in verge of colonial rule of British empire. Hindus had not presented themselves as nation and political idea rather than a religion and tradition. King Shah had already worked on making Nepal as a Hindu nation, long before the idea of Hindu Nationalism took shape in India. This is one of the major differences in evolutionary trajectories between Nepal and India.

B. Jung Bahadur's Hinduization and *Muluki Ain*

In Nepal, Rana regime started in 1846 and in 1856 Prime Minister Jung Bahadur Rana decreed *Muluki Ain* (Legal Code). Gellner defines *Muluki Ain* as '...use of Hindu ritual and the codification of castes and ethnic groups' (Gellner, 2005, p. 5). *Muluki Ain* which has imbedded impacts still in Nepali laws consolidated Hinduization of whole Nepali society legally. Actually, the *Muluki Ain* completed the incomplete Hinduization of Nepali society, started by Prithvi Narayan Shah.

Ancient Hindu scripts (*Dharmashastra* and *Nitishastra*) were the bases of the *Muluki Ain*. "... (Rana) introduced a written law based on Hinduism, which divided Nepal into several hierarchical levels and subordinated all other ethnic communities to the *Bahun* and *Chhetri* (*Khas*) ruling castes of Nepal (Shrestha, 2007). Pokharel (2020) sees *Muluki Ain* to have aggregated the pre-existing ideas in the Hindu scriptures and turned them into laws. It has strengthened the caste system in Nepal creating obligatory parameters for purity, impurity, inter-caste relations, commensality rules, sexual relations, divorce, incest and rape.

All these legal provisions are based on Hindu philosophy which helped the elite class to build Nepal as a Hindu Nation and on that base whole Nepali society was Hinduized. The authoritarian Rana government was committed to punish the trespassers of the *Muluki Ain*. No matter how different citizens' cultural background and religious values differ, they were obliging to abide it.

Celebration of cow as a holy animal could be an appropriate example here. As Hindu considers celebrating Cow as the ‘insignia and a symbol’ of Hindu-ness, (Gellner et al., 2012) *Muluki Ain* decreed killing of cow a punishable crime. It is stated that ‘in the Kaliyuga this kingdom is the only kingdom in the world where cows, women and Brahmans may not be killed’ (Gellner et al., p. 80). But certain numbers of ethnic groups of Nepal have cultural practice of killing cows for meat consumption. Due to the introduction of such legal provision based on Hindu polity, ethnic groups either have to Hinduized or be punished. King of Nepal was presented as ‘*Gaurakshyak*’ means protector of cow. In India, Hindu belief on cow as a holy animal, became a condition for the conflict with Muslims whereas in Nepal, it posed threat to local ethnicities for legal punishment and suppression.

Certainly, the implementation of *Muluki Ain* had strengthened the stronghold of the Rana rule and it started the rule of law in Nepal that hitherto was not in practice.

Imposition of Hindu legal system as a national law was an initiative to build a modern nation rooted on Hindu polity and morality. It was a process of homogenization of heterogenized Nepali society with Hinduism as a core. Through *Muluki Ain*, Nepali society was further horizontally divided and the cultural differences between Nepali ethnicities were minimized, framing the whole society into a single monolithic frame.

Jung Bahadur Rana was clear about the kind of ‘*rajya*’ he was building. He said,

‘We have our own country, a ‘*Hindu Rajya*’, where laws prescribe the cows shall not be slaughtered and women and Brahmans not be sentenced to capital punishment ...’ (Dixit et al., 2002, p. 25)

More than a century long Rana regime had consolidated the Hindu nationalism and deepened the Hindu religious belief, enhanced Hindu nation building and celebrated Sanskrit language. Introduction and implementation of *Muluki Ain* based on Hindu values and establish it as a foundation of Hindu nation in Nepal is another distinct feature of Hindu nationalism in Nepal, different than India. In India, Hindu nationalists though do practices based on Hindu religious scripts, do not have any such legal tool based on Hindu polity as a state law.

During Rana regime in Nepal, independence movement was taking shape and myriads of thoughts were in debate in India interacting ideas on what sort of country India should to be. One of the influential schools of thought in interaction was the Hindu Nationalist thought. This school was even impactful inside the

Indian Congress who formally comply secularism. According to Graham (1990) Indian Hindu nationalists then were divided into three major types- a) Hindu Traditionalists who were the members of Congress and believed that liberal Hindu nation building is possible through the mechanism of the Congress party. b) Hindu Nationalists who also believe on need of building liberal Hindu nation but didn't believe that it is possible through the Congress who is staunch advocate of secularism. c) Hindu Fundamentalist who wanted to build pure Hindu nation and for that, wanted to build militant organization.

Different Hindu nationalist political and cultural organizations were founded in India during the latter half of Rana regime in Nepal. As Rana rulers also were building Hindu nation in Nepal to consolidate their regime, Indian Hindu nationalists had deep faith upon Nepali elites. They believed Nepal as the cradle of Hindu nationalism that support their effort in building Hindustan as the Hindu nation. But their belief failed to understand the differences between the motive of Hindu nation building in India and Nepal. Motive of Hindu nation building of Nepali elites was to retain it as an outer cover to vanguard from outer invasion and strengthen cultural homogeneity inside but they never were ready to weaken the British empire in India as it was the political support of their regime in Nepal.

An event popularly known as the 'Nepal plot' happened during the first decade of 20th century is an example of the difference of expectation of Nepali and Indian Hindu nationalists then. According to Kuruvachira (2006), Hindu nationalist such as Bal Gangadhar Tilak planned to convince the king of Nepal to invade India, after which they think in India there would be an uprising in support of Nepali King because 'if the independent king of the only independent Hindu Kingdom conquered India, there would be one sovereign Hindu nation' (Kuruvachira, 2006, p. 84).

As per the plan, Tilak and his business associate Ganesh Joshi visited Patna on early 1902 and from there they had plan to enter Nepal on February when Nepali border opens for pilgrims who visit *Pashupati* temple to mark the Shiva Ratri festival. As per their plan, once they arrive Kathmandu, they were to visit the King and convince him on their plan. But their plan failed as Nepali border didn't open that year because of plague. Their meeting with King was planned by a Maharashtrian school mistress known as *Mataji* who lived in Calcutta and Nepal for many years. (Kuruvachira, 2006) Later Tilak deputed Joshi and KP Khadilkar to Nepal to establish arms and ammunition factory, which produce arms to supply the Nepalese army whom were supposed to invade India.

During this time, Chandra Shumsher was the Prime minister of Nepal and Rana regime from the beginning had mutual beneficial relation with the British rulers. Since the British rule in India could not be overthrown and the Peking was weakened one after another war with foreign invading forces, Rana started appeasing the British rulers in India for their existence. Therefore, it was not objective to expect support from Rana or the King of Nepal who practically was prisoned by Ranas, for the Indian Hindutva forces to liberate India through Nepali king from the British colonialism and establish Hindu nation there.

Nevertheless, as Hindutva and Hindu religion were working as the cultural tool of ruling in Nepal, Ranas also wanted to show the Indian Hindutva forces support and rectify their reign in Nepal. That's why Chandra Shumsher was proposed to be the chief of Vishwa Hindu Mahasabha. Indian religious gurus and Hindu nationalists had good rapport with Ranas. But their relation with Hindutva forces in India can be extended unless it effects relation with the British rulers and disturb their autocratic reign.

Arya Samajist in Nepal

History of Hindutva in India traces back to the Nineteenth Century when Swami Dayananda Saraswati formed the Arya Society in 1875, intended to reform Hinduism. Swami Dayananda was proud of spiritual glory imbued with cultural and social greatness of Indian (meaning Hindus) antiquity (Jaffrelot, 2009). He argues that the Vedic epoch is not limited within the spirituality rather but also in a people-in its culture and its land. This idea of cultural and territorial supremacy was later developed as the Hindutva by forthcoming Hindu nationalists.

Ideas of *Arya Samaj* was extended to Nepal through intellectuals who studied in Indian academics. Madhavraj Joshi was one of the followers of Dayananda Saraswati in Kathmandu who believed on the reforms needed in traditional Hinduism during Rana regime. He established *Arya Samaj* in Kathmandu and actively involved in reformist activities (Malla, 2020). On 1905 July 26, Joshi was invited at Singh Durbar for intellectual debate with royal gurus for whom Joshi's reformist ideas were intolerable and finally he was punished.

Legacy of Joshi's reformist ideas was shouldered by his son Sukraraj Shastri, who was among four youths who were capitally punished on 1941 January by Rana regime. Shastri was educated in Vidhyabrat Graduation College in Sikandarabad of India and was largely influenced by Indian reformist idea and independence movement. He served as the Principal of Arya Samaj School at Allahabad. As

Indian Hindu nationalist, he on one hand seeks reforms in Hindu, Jain and Buddhist religions and on the other hand attacked on Islam and Christian religions (Annapurna Post, 2022). His book “*Swarga ko Durbar*” (Palace of Heaven) published in 1930 February from Calcutta elaborates the needs of reform and vanguard Hindutva.

In the book, he states the need to end girls’ marriage and polygamy and supports widow marriage as essential factors to reform Hinduism, that Dayananda Saraswati in India had been advocating for. He warned that malpractices of Hindu community are harming Hindu-ness and subsequently that poses threat of Muslims and Christians taking advantages of. (Annapurna Post, 2022)

Rana regime though based on Hindu polity, was intolerant towards reformist idea of Hindutva forces in India. Basically, it was because evolution of Hindutva ideas in India was deep-rooted on the anti-British Independence movement with whom Rana elites had dependent political relation. Additionally, any voice that advocate changes was intolerable for stubborn traditional Rana regime. Therefore, Rana used Hindutva as the shield to save their face from ‘impurity’ and prove own self ‘pure’ but they were not ready to change the concept of purity and impurity as the Indian Hindu nationalist did, regarding the British empire politically.

C. King Mahendra and Panchayat Period

King Mahendra during his tenure (1955-1972) consciously and prudently implemented Hindu nationalist policies in Nepal. Definitely his acts were the continuation of the evolution of Hindu Nationalism in Nepal started during Prithivi Narayan Shah’s time. But Mahendra implemented it consciously, categorically and in a planned way. Till then Hindutva political ideology was also much developed, institutionalized and organizationally wider in India. Beside impactful presence of Hindu nationalist like Sardar Ballav Bhai Pattel in the Congress, challenging the Nehruvian secularism, Hindutva outfits such as *Vishwo Hindu Mahasangha*, *Rastriya Swayamsewak Sangh* (RSS) and *Bharatiya Jana Sangh* were active.

In 1960 King Mahendra declared the Panchayat system and that system was based on Hindi Nationalist polity. He promoted the three pillars of Nepalese identity, which were Hinduism as religion, Nepali as a language, and monarchy as political institution. (Pulami, 2023, p. 38). He declared Nepal the only ‘Hindu Kingdom’ of the world (Shrestha, 2007) and glorified Shah kings and kingdom. His slogan

'*Aneka ma Ekta*' literal means 'Unity among Diversity' and '*Ek Bhasa, Ek Desh, Ek Jati, Ek Bhes*' literally means 'One Language, One Country, One Ethnicity, One Culture' that helped transforming Nepali society into a homogenous society from heterogeneity, into a national whole.

Kharel (2021) opines that the Panchayat period shaped a particular 'national identity' that remains contested today... and a lot of grievances against Nepali state- especially from a marginalized groups such as Janajatis, Madhesis and Dalits- have their roots in this period. Nepali language, *Daura Surwal* and Hindu religion were the foremost features of Panchayat system which according to Kharel was an aggressive campaign to mould a Nepali identity.

Nepali language, Hindu religion and the superiority of the upper caste Hindu *Parbatiya* group were the common grounds identified for the unification of this heterogeneous group (Sharma, 2023). Promotion of religious identity helped legitimize the institution of monarchy and promote 'Hindu Nationalism.'

With an intention of promoting *Khas* (Nepali) language as national language, development and promotion of other languages were undermined. No space was given to other languages of ethnic groups in state-owned media. Neither their use in official functions is authenticated. Publication of books, articles and newspapers in languages other than Nepali languages were suppressed by the state and even made subject of state-repression.

Similarly, *Daura Surwal* with *Dhaka Topi* was made national dress undermining other dresses of ethnic groups. Wearing of *Daura, Surwal and Dhaka topi* was made compulsory for any official functions and all male government officials and staffs must wear *Dhaka topi* mandatorily (Gupta, 2021). On a citizenship card, for men it was compulsory to stick a photo with *Topi* on head. Hindu religion was regarded as the official state religion and there were holidays during Hindu festivals such as *Dashain, Tihar, Shivaratri, Krishna Janma Asthami, Ram Navami* etc. This undermined the diverse ethnicities and their culture, enforcing them either to follow the Hindu polity or remained marginalized.

Literatures published in Nepali language were only considered as national and the authors who write in 'other' languages were hardly regarded as national luminaries. Essentially the period was domination of the 'One Nation, One Language and One Religion policy of government' (Shrestha, 2007). As Panchayat system was a party-less political system so it was easy for the state to suppress dissents against State policy of Hindu Nation building. Many books published in ethnic languages

were banned under various pretexts. Literary programs of ethnic languages were banned. *Khas* Nepali language was regarded as national language and other languages were segregated.

The 30 years of Panchayat politics gave immense support to Hindu religious organizations such as the World Hindu Council (*Vishwa Hindu Parishad*). With active initiation of King Birendra and Yogi Narahari Nath, the World Hindu Confederation (*Vishwa Hindu MahaSangh*) was established in 1981 (Bownas, 2024) amid the global meeting of *Sanatan Dharma Omkar* followers at Birgunj. Such initiatives were focused on at one side appeasing Indian Hindutva forces to continue their support towards monarchy and Panchayat politics of Nepal and on the other side to consolidate the Hindu nation building inside Nepal.

On the other-side, Nepali elites were equally cautious of being engulfed into the Indian Hindutva movement. As a separate country, they wanted to draw clear difference line between Indian and Nepali Hindu nation building. Foundation of Vishwa Hindu Parishad in an initiation of the King when the branches of other India-based Hindutva organizations were active in Nepal indicates this aspect. Therefore, Nepali elites then were cautious to Nepali national identity while promoting Hindutva in Nepal.

Post-1990 political change

Nepal went through a range of political ups and down after the political change of 1990. Panchayat system was overturned and the constitutional monarchy was practiced under the constitution of 1990. The King was defined as the symbol of National Unity and was celebrated as the incarnation of Vishnu, the Hindu God and the King of 'the last Hindu Kingdom of the world' (Gellner et al., 2016, p. 79). Royal family was above the laws. Constitutionally Nepal had status of the Hindu Nation. Privileges for Hindu tradition and practices were not changed at all. Political leaders representing various parties essentially were not free from the psychological habits and constitutional provisions based on Hindu nationalism. Multi-party democratic system was in practice. Against such backdrop, pro-monarchists were united into a political party-Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) which fundamentally was Liberal Hindu nationalist party. As a part of constitutional provision, political parties were essentially agreed upon the prevalence of Hindu nationalist practices. Therefore, the period 1990 to 2008 could be regarded as the continuation of Hindu nation building through democratic political parties.

Maoist rebellion started in 1996 February and for a decade Nepal went through the civil war. With the joint pressure of the Maoist rebellion and the People's movement of 2006 April, the monarchy was abolished in 2008 May 28. Nepal was declared a secular state constitutionally which means the state does not have any specific religion. Religious freedom is guaranteed for all citizens in the new constitution 2015.

As Nepal is declared a secular country, proselytization process increased. Number of churches throughout the country increased in substantial number, that aroused the resentment of Hindu nationalists in both Nepal and India. According to an article published in 15 February 2021, Christian community in Nepal is increasing remarkably (*Nepal: One of the Fastest-Growing Christian Populations in the World*, 2021). Hearth (2023) reported that in Nepal number of Christian grows more than 40 percent in less than a decade duration. This condition makes the Hindutva forces in Nepal cautious and resentful (Siyech, 2024), thus encouraging Hindutva movement in much fundamentalist ways.

In India, a Hindu nationalist government led by Narendra Modi came in power in 2014. Hindu nationalist forces in Nepal are encouraged and strengthened as a pro-Hindu nationalist political party came to the power-center in India (Siyech, 2024; Bownas, 2024). Anderson and Longkumar (2018) states that Hindutva since 2014 appears to be more confident, proud, brazen, and belligerent than ever before. Mehta (2022) argues that today Hindu nationalist in India is displaying the core ambition of Hindu nationalism to collect complex cultural threads and weave them into a political unity and display in full might.

Politically though Hindu Nationalist forces in Nepal apparently seem weaker but they are encouraged with the political development in India with the hope of their heyday back again. Additionally, since majority of Nepali people are Hindu, glorifying Hindu culture and tradition is making easy impact on them. Recently pro-monarch and pro-Hindu nation political forces in Nepal are regaining momentum. Reason behind is internally because 'failure' of ruling mainstream political parties to meet the people's expectations and externally because of strengthening Hindu Nationalist forces in India (Manish Jung Pulami, 2023, p. 41). Certain influential leaders of major political parties are also supporting the agenda of restoration of a Hindu nation in Nepal (Narayan, 2022), adding fuel to Hindu nationalists.

Initiative for the restoration of Hindu nation along with Hindu monarchy in Nepal has been supported by the Indian religious Hindutva nationalists who have deeper

political and cultural influence in Nepal. (NepalLive , 2025; Nepali Times, 2024). Indian religious gurus, saints, pujaris and Hindu nationalist political leaders insisting for restoration of Hindu nation because they believe making Nepal a Hindu nation is also a part of Hindu nationalist movement.

On the other side, as proselytization is widening and number of Church and Christians are increasing, Nepal can be a venerable country for communal and religious conflict. Anti-Muslims activities in India help surging such activities in Nepal, particularly in Terai districts. Social media are used by Hindu Fundamentalists to widespread hatred speech against Muslims and Christians, kindling communal clashes and insecurity among local communities. Number of tensions increasing in recent years among Hindu and Muslims and Christian minorities (Bownas, 2024; AP News, 2023; Volz, 2018; Dev, 2025; HimalKhabar, 2025) shows the Hindu nationalist activities in Nepal is gradually moving towards fundamentalist direction.

5. CONCLUSION

Historical Comparative study of evolutionary trajectory of Hindu nationalism in Nepal and India show two different but interrelated trajectories of Hindutva ideological development and implementation in two countries. Hindu Nationalism is top-to-down approach in Nepali context that always played role to consolidate the political power of the ruling elites. Defining Nepal as a Hindu nation has always been a process of Hinduization of diverse Nepali society. Ruling class uses Hindu nation building as a cultural initiative to validate their regime.

In Nepal, Hindutva has been the ruling political ideology that was in practice since Malla period. Extension of Gorkha state led by King Prithivi Narayan Shah simultaneously extended Hindu nationalism as a process of nation building. Rana regime consolidated Hindu nationalism and Panchayat System formalized Nepal as a Hindu nation in much deeper ways.

Whereas evolutionary path of Hindutva in Indian context is different. Indian Hindutva ideologues developed Hindu nationalist theory as political and cultural counteract against British Christianization, Muslims prevalence and Secularism of Indian Congress. Hindu Nationalism in India started as a resistance of the external invasion upon Hindu-ness of Indian civilization and developed as a rightist political theory that intend to build Indian sub-continent as the *Akhanda Bharat* with supremacy of Hindu nation based on purity of blood, historical glorification and cultural supremacy. For Indian Hindu Fundamentalists, Nepal has always been

an ideal Hindu land where Hindu King used to reign and wanted India to be a similar sort of Hindu nation.

Hindu nation and Hindu monarch are different from each other and not necessarily complimentary. Indian Hindu nationalists have never talked about making India a country ruled by Hindu monarch. But in Nepali context, Hindu monarch had been a major part of Hindu nation. Hindu monarch is thought complimentary of Hindu nation. This is the distinct feature of Nepali Hindu nationalism with distinctive historical background, different from India.

Hindu nationalism in India context is divisive in nature which creates binary opposition between Hindus and others. But in Nepali context, implementation of Hindu nationalism has been a process of blurring the differentiation between different ethnic and religious groups through Hinduization process to make a single whole.

Recent restrengthening of Hindu nationalist forces in India has deeper impact in Nepal. Increment of communal clashes, acts of hatred and misinformation campaign and strengthening of Hindutva fundamentalism in Nepal are the direct impacts of revitalization of Hindutva politics in India. Expanding proselytization in Nepal is working as a pretext for the expansion of Hindu fundamentalism in Nepal. In fact, this condition could lead to further communal tensions in local community level.

In national level, declaration of Nepal as a secular state has been a subject of resentment for the Hindu nationalists in India. Number of religious and political leaders of India have been resenting on this issue and in fact they are supporting the restoration of Hindu nation in Nepal. This has encouraged pro-Hindutva and pro-monarch forces in Nepal to challenge the constitution of Nepal that states Nepal as a Secular Republic.

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