

INDIAN ELECTIONS: DEMOCRACY ENDANGERED?

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 Analysis

We know and have concerns about endangered species on planet earth. Yet we hardly bother about the endangered democracies on the same planet earth. The recent general elections in India and the subsequent results have endangered the already failing democracy in the country. The Hindu nationalist party Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has emerged as the single major party in 2019 general elections. BJP swept its opposition aside and succeeded in holding the power in second consecutive term. The BJP and its allies won more than 350 seats.

This clear domination has smoothly landed the country's mandate to Narendra Modi-led BJP to further control the politics of Hindu nationalism in India. The fear about the future of Indian democracy is not mere speculation, but it is very well founded. The whole election campaign was run on the basis of Hindu nationalism rhetoric. BJP had nominated a number of

people in the elections who are famous for their toxic statements. Not only this, BJP had fielded candidates like Pragya Thakur, who was accused of Malegaon bombings of 2008, and is presently out on bail. Pragya contested elections in Madhya Pradesh state and won, becoming the first ever Indian Member of Parliament who is facing charges of terrorism.

There was a widespread outrage against her, but BJP leaders, including Modi, defended their decision to nominate the terrorist-accused Pragya. Pragya glorified the assassination of Gandhi and praised the killer as a true patriot. This suggests that far-right activism of BJP will not stop in its second term. Another reason to worry about Indian democracy is that BJP has a bad record of dealing with India's public integrity and democratic institutions. Many judges complained about the growing political pressures during Modi's previous term,



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which seems to be unstoppable in this term as well. There are even speculations that such infringements against the judiciary and other public investigating agencies will rise while BJP consolidates power in India.

The BJP's nature of the politics has very less provision for the plural social fabric of India. The ideological roots of BJP belong to Rashtriya Swamsevak Sangh (RSS), an extremist ultra Hindu nationalist party, which believes in the *Hindu raj* (rule) in India. Indian minorities were apprehended and attacked for mere suspicions during Modi's previous tenure. These attacks intensified during BJP's term leaving minorities feeling more alienated and marginalized by the state of India. The Muslim community has been the main target of the attacks, believed as the people who encourage cow vigilantism in India. BJP is trying to homogenize the Indian nation, which certainly will have disastrous effects on the future of Indian democracy. The policies of BJP are evident that the apprehensions of Ali Mohammad Jinnah and Dr Iqbal, among others, are true.

The poet Mohammad Iqbal who is also known as Iqbal Lahori (meaning Iqbal from Lahore, Pakistan) is considered as the first Muslim in the subcontinent who dreamed about a separate land for Muslims in post-colonial India. Many people of his times opposed the very idea of a land solely dedicated for Muslims. Pakistan, or even the 'idea' of Pakistan, was not only opposed by the Hindu leadership, but also by famous Muslim leaders and scholars like Abul Kalam Azad, Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani among others. Iqbal wrote a poem titled "Hussain Ahmad", talking about Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani R.A, who voiced his protest against the Ulema (Muslim scholars) for criticizing the idea of Pakistan.

"The Ajamites do not yet know the essence of our faith, Otherwise, Hussain Ahmad of Deoband would have not talked strangely. He sermonizes from the pulpit that 'nation is by a homeland', how sadly unaware is he from the real position of the Arabian Prophet." (Iqbal, *Armugan e Hijaz*)

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Ali Mohammad Jinnah made the 'idea' of Pakistan into reality on the basis of the two-nation theory, suggesting that Muslims will not be secure under a majority Hindu rule in India. The subcontinent was divided into two, India and Pakistan, on the basis of the two-nation theory. Pakistan's creation witnessed Martial laws and military rule for the longest period. This is the first time in the history of Pakistan after Musharraf-the last military ruler of Pakistan-that the country is witnessing the tenure of a third consecutive

elected civilian government. The struggle for democracy in Pakistan is strengthening by every passing day.

Unfortunately the future of democracy in India seems to be bleak. The country of Gandhi and Nehru, as great supporters of secularism, democracy and non-violence, is witnessing its worst kind of populist and autocratic rule since 2014. The liberal elites in India are greatly worried about the future of democracy in India. The future of democratic and political institutions, seem to stop functioning independently. The Indian Election Commission and Supreme Court are being perceived to fail to work transparently.

Rise of Hindutva and fears of Muslim minority:

The rise of Hindutva in its political form-the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-is considered as a major threat to the pluralistic idea of Indian society. BJP has used the policy of division

among the different sections of Indian society. The ethnic and communal division in India has witnessed a rise since the beginning of Modi administration.

While BJP used *Hindutva* as a tool to garner mass support in elections, the main congress opposition party tried to lure the Indian public under 'soft Hindutva' pretext. This transformation of congress party is worrisome for many ethnic and religious identities of the country. The threat of political and democratic institutions and the rise of the majority Hindu population have endangered the very idea of India.

Most of the voters in India were ignorant about these issues, except for the religious minorities like Muslims, who are worried about the declining face of plural India. The division of Indian society based on caste, community and religious basis is not altogether new, but with the emergence of BJP the red lines between castes and religious communities has increasingly becoming bolder. It is true that within the Indian society caste and community play important roles vis-a-vis politics. There are a large number of political parties, both national and regional, which are explicitly based on caste. Most of the Indian political parties, while fielding their candidates in local or general elections, consider the benefits that can be gained on the basis of caste and community. Every party tries to mobilize caste and community-based vote and support for their candidates.

The main transformation in this regard is that extremist right-wing parties such as BJP have emphasized more on the religious divide in order to take advantage of communal division on the basis of Hindu Muslim binary. Nearly 200 million Indian Muslims, which count more than 15% of total population, are living under continuous fear. In 2015, a Muslim man named Akhlaq and his son were lynched by an angry Hindu mob

on a mere suspicion of storing beef in their refrigerator. Akhlaq died from the lynching while his son survived the attack miraculously. Cow slaughter is banned in parts of India. Since BJP assumed power in 2014, the beef ban has been continuously used by Hindu nationalists to attack and lynch Muslims publicly without fearing any prosecution. The menace of mob lynching took such an ugly shape that on 17 July 2018 the Supreme Court of India condemned the epidemic mob lynching. The Supreme Court further asked the Indian parliament to draft a legislation that could help stop the angry Hindu nationalists from taking law into their own hands. According to different surveys involving nearly 100 persons, majority of Muslims have been publicly attacked by angry mobs in the five-year tenure of BJP.

The most recent case of killing by cow vigilantes happened in the troubled territory of Jammu and Kashmir. Nayeem Ahmad Shah with other Muslim men was transporting horses when they were stopped and fired upon by Hindu nationalists. This resulted in the killing of Nayeem Ahmad Shah. The only reason for the emboldened Hindu nationalists is BJP. The main opposition leader of Congress Rahul Gandhi recently had referred to 2019 General Elections of India as, a battle for the 'soul of India'. He actually was referring to the founding ideas of

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India like pluralism, freedom, equality, inclusion, secularism and democracy. People criticize ruling party BJP for damaging these very basic building blocks of the Indian Republic. There have been repeated attacks on India's social fabric. A recent analysis of data put out by the India's Home Ministry has found a 28 percent increase in the rise of communal attacks under BJP's rule. The situation is worrisome

due to the reason that the system, which was inherently installed in Indian democracy, such as to check and balance such violations have weakened considerably.



Clearly the emergence of Modi as a strongest leader of India has posed a threat to the Indian democracy. The results of 2019 elections serve as potential threat to the constitutional democracy

of India. The minorities, particularly Muslims, fear an even unsafe future under the ongoing Hindu nationalist regime of Modi.