1. **marginalisation** (noun) – an act of making a group of people to feel isolated/insignificant/unimportant.
2. **appropriate** (verb) – acquire, assume, take over.
3. **rhetoric** (noun) – bombast, loftiness, hyperbole/extravagant language.
4. **outreach** (noun) – the level of reaching out/activity/effort; involvement.
5. **invoke** (verb) – cite, refer to, adduce.
6. **commentator** (noun) – narrator, journalist, reporter.
7. **appeasement** (noun) – conciliation, pacification; satisfaction, fulfilment.
8. **lynching** (noun) – an act of punishing/killing someone by hanging for claimed offence by the group of people without legal trail.
9. **secular** (adjective) – non-religious, worldly, earthly.
10. **narrative** (noun) – a representation of a particular situation; portrayal, statement, account.
11. **victimhood** (noun) – the state of being a victim.
12. **landslide** (adjective) – decisive, runaway (victory), overwhelming majority.
13. **polarise** (verb) – separate into two opposing groups.
14. **invoke** (verb) – bring forth, induce, cause.
15. **nurture** (verb) – encourage, promote, assist.
16. **polarisation** (noun) – separation of two contrasting groups (based on different opinions/beliefs).
17. **contour** (noun) – outline, shape, form.
18. **with regard to** (phrase) – in respect of, concerning, with reference to.
19. **unpack** (verb) – analyse, access (components/elements in something).
20. **contemporary** (adjective) – modern, present-day, current, present-time.
21. **manifesto** (noun) – (policy) statement, declaration, pronouncement of a political party issued before an election.
22. **madrasa** (noun) – a place (school or college) where people learn about Islam, the religion of Muslims.
23. **streamline** (verb) – make something efficient/smooth-running/well organized.
24. **perpetrator** (noun) – a person who does immoral, harmful and illegal activities; criminal, culprit, evil-doer.
25. **exaggerate** (verb) – overstate, overemphasize, overstress; magnify/amplify.
26. **persuade** (verb) – convince, influence, coax/prompt.
27. **categorically** (adverb) – clearly/directly, explicitly.
28. **delicate** (adjective) – careful, considerate, emotive/sensitive.
29. **inextricably** (adverb) – In a method that is not possible to separate.
30. **precondition** (noun) – necessary condition, imperative, requirement.
31. **patriotism** (noun) – devoted love and support for country; nationalism, national loyalty.
32. **indianness** (noun) – quality/feeling of 'being an Indian'.
33. **rely on** (phrasal verb) – depend on; resort to, have recourse to.
34. **binary** (noun) – something having two parts.
35. **legitimise** (verb) – validate, legitimate, permit/endorse.
36. **elusive** (adjective) – difficult to find; subtle, indistinct/intangible.
37. **jihadist** (noun) – an Islamic militant. (in Islam) a person who is with radical views & supports jihad (jihad literally means "effort" in Arab; Jihad also means struggling or striving and it allows the use of force if there is no peaceful alternative).
38. **activist** (noun) – advocate, champion, supporter (of a political or societal change/cause).
39. **secularist** (noun) – a supporter of a government which is free from religious considerations.

40. **hegemony** (noun) – leadership, dominance, authority.
41. **exclusionary** (adjective) – exclusive, alienating.
42. **read** (verb) – look through, understand, peruse.
43. **provoke** (verb) – prompt, evoke, stimulate.
44. **appease** (verb) – conciliate, pacify; satisfy, fulfil.
45. **pamper** (verb) – spoil, indulge, cater to someone's every whim.
46. **underline** (verb) – emphasize, highlight, underscore.
47. **subjugation** (noun) – domination/control.
48. **radically** (adverb) – completely, thoroughly, entirely.
49. **overplay** (verb) – overstate, overemphasize, overvalue.
50. **accommodating** (adjective) – helpful, willing, cooperative.
51. **rephrase** (verb) – reword, put differently, put another way.
52. **benevolence** (noun) – kindness, consideration, charity.
53. **generosity** (noun) – magnanimity, benevolence, kindness.
54. **privilege** (verb) – grant/provide give a privilege to.
55. **conscious** (adjective) – deliberate, intentional, purposeful.
56. **exploit** (verb) – utilize, use, capitalize on.
57. **evoke** (verb) – stimulate, give rise to, suggest.
58. **separatism** (noun) – dissension, nonconformity, dissent/faction.
59. **revealing** (adjective) – telling, meaningful, informative.

All for one, none for all

## The marginalisation of Muslims has been appropriated to serve the BJP's nationalism outreach

The attitude of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) towards Muslim communities in the last five years is seen in two very different ways. The rhetoric of 'sabka saath, sabka vikas (with everyone, everyone's progress)' is often invoked, particularly by pro-BJP commentators, to argue that questions related to Muslim marginalisation/representation should not be raised at all. The government is committed to 'development of all and appeasement of none' and it will take care of Muslim concerns as well. This argument is used extensively to justify every form of lawlessness, including the lynching of Muslims in the name of Hindu reaction.

## The background

On the other hand, there is an equally straightforward secular narrative of Muslim victimhood, which reminds us that the **BJP is a communal Hindutva party** controlled by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The landslide victory of the BJP in 2014, the argument goes, has given the RSS an opportunity to target Muslims simply to create a Hindu Rashtra. Establishing a link between violence

against Muslims and declining number of Muslim MPs and MLAs, we are told that the Narendra Modi government is primarily anti-Muslim.

No one can deny the fact that we live in a communally polarised environment, in which Hindu victimhood is systematically nurtured by invoking anti-Muslim feelings in the name of nationalism. However, there is a serious need to go beyond this polarisation so as to systematically analyse the contours of the BJP's nationalism with regard to Muslim communities.

One may unpack the contemporary moment of Hindutva at two levels: the Narendra Modi government's formal official response towards Muslim backwardness, especially with regard to the Sachar Committee Report; and the nature of the BJP's informal anti-Muslim discourse, which in a way constitutes the basis for its own version of nationalism.

## Minority welfare

The BJP's 2014 poll manifesto recognised Muslim backwardness as an important political issue. It argued that it would take care of Muslim concerns — such as modernisation of madarsas, protection of Urdu and streamlining of the Waqf Boards. Most importantly, it was promised that the party would 'ensure a peaceful and secure environment, where there is no place for either the perpetrators or exploiters of fear'.

Although there was no mention of the Sachar Report in the 2014 manifesto, the Ministry of Minority Affairs accepted it as an important reference point for all its schemes and programmes. The government also went ahead with the post-Sachar Evaluation Committee and persuaded it to submit its report in September 2014.

The Ministry still recognises the 15 Point Programme introduced by former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh for the welfare of minorities as guiding principles to deal with the exclusion of minorities, including Muslims. In fact, a study was commissioned by the Modi government in 2016 to evaluate the impact of these 15 points on minority communities.

These technical-procedural aspects of governance, however, should not be exaggerated. The 'Action taken Report' submitted by the Ministry to Parliament with regard to the implementation of the Sachar Report in 2018 categorically rejects a few crucial and politically sensitive recommendations.

For example, the Action Taken Report does not accept the inclusion of Arzal (Dalit) Muslims into the Scheduled Castes (SC) list. It also refuses to create the proposed all-India cadre of officers for the

State Waqf Boards and Central Waqf Council. However, the other 'non-controversial' recommendations of the Sachar Report are acknowledged.

This selective treatment of the Sachar Report by the BJP is not surprising. The BJP has never been interested in the Sachar Report, especially on the question of the inclusion of Muslim and Christian Dalits in the SC category. However, despite this highly critical position, the Modi government not only recognised the Sachar Report but also submitted a fully worked-out Action Taken Report.

Does it mean that the Modi government is also involved in what BJP leaders, including Mr. Modi, often call 'Muslim appeasement'?

### Link to nationalism discourse

The government's delicate position on Muslims as a marginalised/underrepresented community is inextricably linked to the media-driven discourse of nationalism which has been carefully produced in the last five years.

This nationalism has two core elements. First, it aims to recreate a new collective self-perception of Indianness. Evoking the old European-style 'one-language, one culture, one nation' framework, it is established that celebrating Hindutva (not Hinduism) in public life must be treated as a precondition for patriotism and Indianness. Since Hindus have been the main addressees of this project, Muslims are nowhere in the picture. However, this strange absence of Muslims is used to create an impression that the patriotism of Muslims needs to be probed.

RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat's three lectures on Hindutva delivered in September 2018 are a good example. Despite claiming that 'Hindutva without Muslims is meaningless', he did not deviate from the RSS's rather known position on Muslims. He relied heavily on the controversial distinction between 'Indian religions' and the religions that originated outside to define Indianness in strict Hindu terms.

This inside/outside binary is actually linked to the second core element of contemporary nationalism: 'territorial security'. The pro-BJP media reconfigured the old rhetoric of 'foreign enemy' so as to legitimise its elusive search for internal 'enemies'. Terms like 'jihadists' for Muslims, 'urban Naxals' for human rights activists and 'sickular' for secularists were employed simply to re-establish the hegemony of the Hindutva version of nationalism.

## Use of marginalisation

The demands posed by this exclusionary nationalism for Muslims, however, can also be read rather differently. In the last five years, Hindutva forces have experimented with at least five issues that were directly related to Muslims: ghar wapsi, love jihad, cow protection, triple talaq and a Ram temple in Ayodhya. Despite launching a highly sustained and organised campaign on each of these issues, the Hindutva forces actually failed to provoke Muslim communities into any collective action/ reaction.

This failure has forced the BJP establishment to reorganise itself to produce a Hindutva-centric yet anti-Muslim discourse of nationalism. The Muslim underrepresentation in various fields actually becomes an important point of reference in this schema.

It is important here to remember that the term 'Muslim' has emerged as a legitimate political category in the last two decades. This process began in 1993 when the National Commission for Minorities defined Muslims (and other religious minorities) as a national minority. This move, in a way, strengthened the already worked out idea of a 'Hindu majority'. It had now become easier for the Hindutva essentialists to argue that the minorities, especially Muslims, are appeased and pampered at the national level. This argument evolved as political rhetoric in the mid-1990s to underline Hindu subjugation.

The Modi government, it seems, has rediscovered the idea of Muslim marginalisation for a radically different purpose. Unlike the Congress/United Progressive Alliance, the BJP government does not show any interest in highlighting the achievements of the Ministry of Minority Affairs. Nor does the party overplay the 'Muslim support' card. It simply keeps the issue of Muslim underrepresentation alive for three possible political strategies.

First, the party often invokes Muslim marginalisation to legitimise its inclusiveness and accommodating approach. After all, Sabka Saath is still a slogan of the party, which has been recently rephrased as "development with dignity" in the 2019 poll manifesto.

Second, Muslim marginalisation is also appropriated to demonstrate Hindu benevolence and generosity. BJP leaders have used this strategy during the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill debates to make a case for privileging Hindus and other non-Muslim minorities living in the neighbouring country. In a sense, it is a conscious attempt to produce a grand Hindu identity at least in South Asia.

Finally, the relationship between Muslim marginalisation and underrepresentation is exploited to evoke the fear of Muslim separatism. This is exactly what the BJP has been doing with regard to the debates on Article 370. The attempt of the party to polarise the Jammu and Kashmir regions on religious lines is a revealing example.

It would be interesting to observe how this relationship between nationalism and Muslim marginalisation survives after the 2019 general election.