Journal of Multidisciplinary Cases
ISSN: 2799-0990
Vol : 02 , No. 01 , Dec 2021- Jan 2022
http://journal.hmjournals.com/index.php/JMC
DOI: https://doi.org/10.55529/jmc.21.10.15

Cow, Army and Nationalism: A Political Dialogue

Prasanth. P S*

**PhD Scholar in English, Kannur University, Kerala India.*

*Corresponding Email:*prasanthnaduvannur@gmail.com*

Received: 13 September 2021 **Accepted:** 03 December 2021 **Published:** 07 January 2022

Abstract: India, for the last few years has become a nation of prohibitions that deliberately or not challenge the nature of democracy and secularism. It is purely credible that, from the status of a domestic animal the cow has transformed to a political animal with National identity, especially during and after the unrests of beef ban. Parallel to this, another operating mode of Nationalism also is being celebrated connecting Indian Army with the romanticized and sentimental concept of the mother land. Constant efforts are made to propagate the patriotic image of Army so that the sense of protection and defense can be nationalized and re-defined. To fight for one's own land is treated as 'Kshatriya Dharma' and this notion is associated with Hindutva. Imposing ban on cow meat is also connected with the same ideology, for cow is treated holy according to the Hindu belief. Army and cow stand parallel in the discourse of Nationalism. The present paper is an attempt to trace the history of Cow Politics and nationalism in India which is not inclusive in nature. As a shared group feeling, nationalism is a concept that holds people together, attached to a single ideology and social conditioning. The question is how the state construct a biased and elite national identity by making use of some seemingly normal narratives in day-today political dialogues. The paper further investigates how the glorified Military narratives accelerate Hindu Nationalism dismantling the marginal voices of farmers challenging the slogan: Jai Javan, Jai Kisan.

Keywords: Democracy, Secularism, Nationalism, Hindutva, Identity Formation, Marginal Voices.

1. INTRODUCTION

In India, the act to protect cow has emerged as a communal and political affair reshaping the ideological pattern of Nationalism for the last few decades. Cow has become a symbol of the debatable 'Hindu identity' in the Parliamentary democratic Indian scenario. More than a policy decision of animal protection, it has influenced the electoral politics of the nation favouring its Hindutva affiliations. By communalising the meat industry in a binary of cow worshipping Hindus and cow slaughtering Muslims, the right wing political narrative has

Copyright The Author(s) 2022.This is an Open Access Article distributed under the CC BY license. (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Journal of Multidisciplinary Cases
ISSN: 2799-0990
Vol : 02 , No. 01 , Dec 2021- Jan 2022
http://journal.hmjournals.com/index.php/JMC
DOI: https://doi.org/10.55529/jmc.21.10.15

proved to be essentially anti-secular in its administrative management. Consuming various cuisines as part of the diverse cultural and religious habits is actually the part of a democratic and secular situation. It is evident in the history that special dishes are prohibited during certain religious periods. During Lent, (a religious observance of forty days) many Christians commit to fasting or giving up certain type of luxuries as a form of penitence. But here, the prohibition is not religious, but communal.

The prohibition of cow meat in many of the states in India is not a result of health considerations, other commercial or animal husbandry related reasons. Beef festivals were organized by various political and religious organizations across the country to protest against this prohibition soon after the ban was imposed in 2014. The cow politics is a very active even before independence; as a balancing act, it has been a strategy adopted by the Congress party too. When Ambedkar and Nehru emphasised on constituting an agricultural economy, animal husbandry was imagined as a supporting policy in it, but this consideration had nothing to do with any religious belief in general. They consumed that idea in a social and economic perspective. But there were parallel Hindu nationalist narratives on the symbol of cow from persons associated with the Arya Samaj who demanded ban on cow slaughter. Their description on the sacred cow was articulated by the Parliamentarians like Raghu Vira who said: "in this country's civilization, we gave prominent place to what we call *Ahimsa* or non-killing and non-injury … of human beings but also of the animal kingdom" (GOI, 1948) Cow's economic viability and sacred status were the two opposing ideas on those constitutional discussions. No law was made on cow slaughter and the matter was left to the state legislatures to take decision.

After the constitution was enacted, there was serious demand from RSS to ban cow slaughter in 1952. Bharatiya Janata Sangh (BJS) accused Nehru of ignoring the national interest and encouraging the minority (Muslims) to kill cow and earn profit (Puri, 163). Gradually states like UP and Bihar banned cow slaughter in the 50s itself. Many legal battles were emerged on this regard with multiple interpretation. The 1958 judgement of the Supreme Court validated the holy status of cow in terms of Hindu sentiment and the ban of slaughtering 'useful cattle' was allowed offering new political dimensions for cow. Later cow slaughter was banned in many states of India. In 1960s, when the cow protection campaign was intensified by BJS in Delhi, calling it a demand for cultural revival. The Congress still had a pro-Hindu group in it who also demanded the same. The formation of different committees representing each Hindu sect like VHP and Hindu Mahasabha protested again. Large agitations of more than one lakh participants were organized by Sanghparivar among which some protesters were killed and many were injured in the open fire. The Hindu groups continued demonising Muslims as cow slayers and beef eaters. In 1967, a committee was formed by the central government on cow protection, but in 1973 it was decided that a complete ban was not practical. The legal battles continued in the 90s and early 2000s; finally in 2014, a law was constituted by the Narendra Modi Government which banned slaughtering female cattle in many of the Indian states.

Plenty of funny narratives on cow politics appear in social media today. Hindu nationalist leaders and ministers are often seen and heard articulating about the divinity of cow and cow dung. Different cow protection groups have been formed to frame network of their own. An article appeared on BBC News points out:

Copyright The Author(s) 2022.This is an Open Access Article distributed under the CC BY license. (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Journal of Multidisciplinary Cases
ISSN: 2799-0990
Vol : 02 , No. 01 , Dec 2021- Jan 2022
http://journal.hmjournals.com/index.php/JMC
DOI: https://doi.org/10.55529/jmc.21.10.15

That's not all. The BJP-ruled state of Rajasthan has a cow minister. There are campaigns going on demanding that the cow should replace the tiger as the national animal - a minister in Haryana, also ruled by the BJP, promptly began an online poll. (Biswas)

A National security campaign which is deliberately propagated by the Hindu Nationalists parallel to cow politics is their narrative of Indian Army. India inherited a Military system which had been formed and developed by the British colonial power to consolidate their hegemony. After Independence, the first task they were called in to was to defend the Pashtun Pakistani tribal invation in 1947 itself. In 1948, Pakistan army officially joined the war that ultimately resulted in Kashmir dispute and a mutual agreement. After the war, it was decided by the Indian Arm to maintain military superiority over Pakistan. Rajat Ganguly observes in his article:

India's principal threat perception was from Pakistan, a country born out of the partition of British India. The trauma of the communal bloodbath and large-scale population migration that accompanied the partition was fresh in the minds of India's leaders, along with the memory of the Pashtun tribal invasion and Pakistani military attacks in Jammu and Kashmir. (189)

After 1955, the perception of national security was changed; it was viewed more as a political matter than a military activity. The decision to manage threats politically rejecting the traditional method of power politics was an enlightened administrative version. But in 1962, at the time of Sino-Indian boarder war, the previous decision was exposed as a strategic military failure and India finally decided to indulge in serious military preparations thereafter. In the same year, they were tested again in Jammu. After the Indo-Pak war in 1965, India decided to create mobile forces in 1980s for surgical strikes in Pakistani territory. India entered the twenty first century as one of the major military powers of the world.

In 2014 when the NDA Government came in power with Narendra Modi as the PM, defence and security sectors were seemingly positive in the beginning expecting lots of investments. But the force was not trained to face all conventional and unconventional threats. Ganuly argues: "…they have not developed a coherent vision that clearly sets out the objectives of military power and the conditions under which it is to be used by India" (200). Another challenge faced by the Modi government was an allegation corruption in defence related acquisitions. But BJP strategically used the image of Army increasing their political potential in a nationalist outlook.

In the narratives of RSS, India is a nation that has been internally struggling with hostile elements which have been defined as threats to national security. Golwalkar in his *Bunch of Thoughts* explains that these elements are not to be ignored continuously. For him, there are certain narrow interests for such sects of people who are potentially capable to stand against the concept of national freedom. In part II "Nation and Its Problems", Golwalkar introduces Muslims as the primary internal threat to the nation:

It would be suicidal to delude ourselves into believing that they have turned patriots overnight after the creation of Pakistan. On the contrary, the Muslim menace has increased a hundred

Copyright The Author(s) 2022.This is an Open Access Article distributed under the CC BY license. (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Journal of Multidisciplinary Cases
ISSN: 2799-0990
Vol : 02 , No. 01 , Dec 2021- Jan 2022
http://journal.hmjournals.com/index.php/JMC
DOI: https://doi.org/10.55529/jmc.21.10.15

fold by the creation of Pakistan which has become a springboard for all their future aggressive designs on our country. (149)

It was repeatedly reported and even propagated by RSS that Indian Army is being ill-treated by the Muslim community of Kashmir. The anti-Indian Islamic propaganda in Kashmir resulted in easy interactions of militant organizations of Pakistan which could ultimately support Muslim terrorist organizations. Their strategy is to demonise India and Indian Army differentiating two broader collectives – The Indians and the Pakistanis which turns to be the Hindus and the Muslims. So when the anti-Indian Islamic narrative spreads across Kashmir, a counter anti-Kahmiri (Pakistan) narrative is deliberately coined by the Hindu nationalists. This counter narrative is constructed through the image of Army and it has been used in a general sense manipulating that a particular religion is anti-Indian or anti-nationalist. This rumour has its own sensitive potential that it is able to propagate Islamophobia across the nation, projecting the specific religion as an internal threat to the nation as proposed by Golwalker in *Bunch of Thoughts*. The role of Army here is to be a catalyst as there is a mutual conflict going on between the two religious militants based on national identity. Aditya Gowdara Shivamurthy in his article observes:

Consequently, a negative perception of India and its policies has been nurtured; there is popular perception amongst the Kashmiri people of the Indian state being a "coloniser" or an "occupier". The impacts of these perceptions have only been exacerbated in more recent years, amidst what analysts call "new militancy"—where the locals dominate the militant movement, and social media facilitates mass radicalisation and the spread of anti-India propaganda. It is in this context that India needs to exert greater effort in shaping its narratives to address the widespread negative perceptions and maintain its territorial integrity. (Shivamurthy, 3)

Just like the political cow, Indian Army also functions as a tool that can easily distorted to propagate a particular national identity. The Islamist sentiments in Kashmir and the Hindutva sentiments in India together create a binary of collective mobilisation. For the Islamic terrorist groups in Pakistan and Kashmir are the militant threat to the nation, adequate action of Army is required, but that should not result in such a binary making process sponsored by the state. But the political engagement of Army is taken peripherally as their responsibility to provide quality life in Kashmir. Shivamurthy says:

It is the Indian Army, however, that has had the primary responsibility to counter militancy, beginning in the conflagrations in 1989. The Army adopted a strategy of Winning Hearts and Minds (WHAM) to counter the negative perceptions of India, and also provide a quality life for the Kashmiris. (*ORF*)

Army has done a great job in enhancing Indian nationalist narratives in Kashmir Valley fighting against the terrorist groups and protecting the nation. This image of armed forces has been wildly celebrated by the Hindu Nationalists in social media as a victory over the demonic Muslim sects in India. On the contrary, Kashmir remains as isolated and alienated; after revoking Article 370, it is very relevant to observe, what will be the next step the central

Copyright The Author(s) 2022.This is an Open Access Article distributed under the CC BY license. (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Journal of Multidisciplinary Cases
ISSN: 2799-0990
Vol : 02 , No. 01 , Dec 2021- Jan 2022
http://journal.hmjournals.com/index.php/JMC
DOI: https://doi.org/10.55529/jmc.21.10.15

government is going to take up in Kashmir. Has Kashmir been saved? Have the armed forces could fulfil their 'Kshatriya Dharma' of protecting the home land? Have everybody been rescued from this battle of narratives? These are some serious democratic and secular concerns. Imposing discriminatory restrictions in Muslim majority areas of Jammu and Kashmir is continued. Citizens were denied access to information, health care and education even during the Covid-19 pandemic. Several allegations of ill-treatments, arrests, tortures, cases of human rights abuses have also been reported. Charges were mainly against 'anti-national activities. Government decided to change its media policy empowering authorities to take decisions on unethical, anti-national and fake mediations of the people.

The policy contains vague and overbroad provisions that are open to abuse and could unnecessarily restrict and penalize legally protected speech. International law provides that restrictions on freedom of expression must be necessary for a legitimate purpose, such as the protection of national security, public health, or the rights of others, and strictly proportionate to achieve that end. (*Human Rights Watch*)

A call for respecting the soldier has become a policy matter in India as they associate the individual with the nation. Lt Gen H S Panag, a retired Army official talks about the system of Indian armed forces that follows the regimental system. Soldiers do fight because of their unit cohesion and their motivation is primarily patriotism, not nationalism:

In the Indian armed forces, patriotism is an umbrella concept for motivation. An Indian soldier takes an oath on the Constitution. Patriotism is an integral part of the military training curriculum. Culturally, it is omnipresent in our insignia, salutations and ceremonial functions. Our armed forces are the epitome of 'unity in diversity'. (*The Print*)

He continues: "'Constitutional patriotism', as opposed to nationalism, is the latent but omnipresent motivational factor for the Indian military in a battle. We fight for our comrades, units and regiments, but the main objective is to ensure the tricolour flies high." (Panag)

The concept of war and military forces are always connected to nationalism, Victorty in war is a process of having dominion over the enemy. The government celebrating the short victories of Army over Pakistan is a political exploitation for electoral profits. BJP politicizes Army as they are fighting with Pakistan, an Islamic Republic. They glorify each surgical strike even in social media using the image of PM Modi in olive green dress standing with the soldiers. BJP appeals the citizen in social media to donate fund to elect Modi once again.

On social media, the richest national political party that boasts to have a building that is bigger than the office of any political party in the world, has also been sharing a link that directs users to the "donation" page on Narendra Modi's website. Invoking citizens, the appeal further says, "To elect Shri @narendramodi as the Prime Minister again, donate to BJP through NaMo App and get an opportunity to meet him. Also win exciting merchandise." (Sharma) Pertinently, Lt. Gen. (retired) DS Hooda, who was the chief of the Northern Command of the Army in September 2016 during the surgical strike, had recently pointed out that the strikes have been "politicised and overhyped" (Sharma).

Copyright The Author(s) 2022.This is an Open Access Article distributed under the CC BY license. (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Journal of Multidisciplinary Cases
ISSN: 2799-0990
Vol : 02 , No. 01 , Dec 2021- Jan 2022
http://journal.hmjournals.com/index.php/JMC
DOI: https://doi.org/10.55529/jmc.21.10.15

Army is used to bolster India's image suggesting that BJP is aware of domestic security of the citizens, but why not the farmers? Farmers do possess a Shudra or Dalit image in *Chaturvarnya* according to their occupation. They are not similar to soldiers who can be equated to a Kshatriya in the same criteria. '*Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan'* was the slogan of Lal Bahadur Sastri, the second Prime Minister of India which means 'Hail the Soldier, Hail the Farmer' in English. The present Indian scenario witnesses huge rally of farmers in the capital city protesting for their rights. Aren't they a part of the national identity of India?

2. CONCLUSION

In a concluding note, it is observed that both cow and Army are political catalysts. These two images share a major portion of nationalist narratives in India. The contemporary operating mode of nationalism in India is not inclusive in nature for it does not hold all people together under a shared feeling. Bringing back the traditions or age-old customs as part of a deliberate political strategy is not the policy of a nation with egalitarian perspective. The concept of National Security functions smooth only in a potentially forward political environment.

3. REFERENCES

1. Biswas, Soutic. "Why the Humble Cow is India's Most Polarising Animal", BBC News, 15 October 2015. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-34513185
2. Ganguly, Rajat. "India's Military: Evolution, Modernisation and Transformation". India Quarterly. 71(3), 2015, Sage Publications.
3. Golwalker, M.S. Bunch of Thoughts, Sahitya Sindhu, Bangalore, 1996.
4. Government of India (GOI). (1948, 24 November 24). Constituent Assembly Debates (CAD). Vols. II, V, VI, VII, XI. GOI.
5. India: "Abuses Persist in Jammu and Kashmir", Human Rights Watch, August 4. 2020. https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/08/04/india-abuses-persist-jammu-and-kashmir
6. Panag, H S. "Politicise all you want, but Indian soldiers don't fight in the name of nationalism alone", The Print, 16 May 2019. https://theprint.in/opinion/politicise-all-you-want-but-indian-soldiers-dont-fight-in-the-name-of-nationalism-alone/236092/
7. Puri, G. Bharatiya Jana Sangh organization and ideology, Delhi: A case study. Sterling, 1980.
8. Sharma, Ashutosh. "BJP again politicises Army to raise funds for poll expenses". National Herald. 14 December 2018, https://www.nationalheraldindia.com/media/bjp-begs-for-money-in-indian-armys-name
9. Shivamurthy, Aditya Gowdara. "Building Indian Narratives and Battling New Militancy in Kashmir". ORF. Issue No 480, July 2021.

Copyright The Author(s) 2022.This is an Open Access Article distributed under the CC BY license. (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)