



## The Complimentarity Between Nationalism and Hinduism

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### Abstract

*Both in the context of Nepal and India, Hinduism has been a complementing force to nationalism tacitly making people of other religious faiths amnesiac so that they are wholly blended into Hinduism imperceptibly. Although, primarily it is projected as secular state, the Indian fabric has been woven in such a way that it is the Hindu nationalism that supersedes all other nationalisms. Hindu nationalism has thus risen as a drive that is “deemed” capable of ensuring national integrity, binding peoples of divergent religious backgrounds and leveling all nationalities under one umbrella.*

**Keywords:** Hinduism, Nationalism, Racism, Sexism.

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### Introduction

The issue of nationalism is one of the most contested ones in the modern world. On the one hand the base of nationalism seems to be crumbling, owing to fast paced invasion of people's lives by globalization, whereas, on the other hand, the twentieth century world has witnessed a new wave of nationalism sweeping across trans socio- geographic locations. No matter what the interpretation of nationalism be, it would not be least incorrect to state that nationalism demolishes heterogeneity and tacitly and overtly calls for homogeneity. This leads to a tension between the ones who render faith in homogeneity and those who advocate for heterogeneity in terms of gender orientations, among others. Suresh Lohani (2019) in “Constructing nontraditional rhetoric: Critical Study on Gloria Anzaldua and Suresh Canagarajah” states that “whether it is the males dominating the females or the believers of heterosexual normativity looking down upon the peoples of different gender orientations, there is a constant tension between the practitioners of homogeneity and diversity” (p.7). Although his take is more tilted on gender issue, it can equally fit this topic with regard to the tug of war of homogeneity and heterogeneity in terms of nationalism.

The extremists many times in the name of nationalism ignores and shows racist behaviors. Ashok Bhusal (2017, 2019) in “The Rhetoric of racism and anti-miscegenation laws in the United States” and in “The rhetoric of racism in society” talks about how the majorities suppress the minorities and what we need to do to resist discriminatory practices. Bhusal argues that

we need to bring minority stories for discussion to expose racism prevalent in society. The push for homogeneity can be seen operating in the phenomenon of nationalism as observed in the Indian subcontinent where one dominant religion seems to be a yardstick of nationalism. In countries such as India and Nepal, Hinduism stands synonymous to nationalism. Disregarding its derivatives and diversities within, mainstream Hinduism stands as a nation symbol; unifying sign of diverse cultural backgrounds thereby demolishing those very elements; and a homogenizing tool which accommodates all the nationalities under one roof. However, a blanket view of Indian rigidity cannot be projected with regard to any homogenizing project. Suresh Lohani (2019), in LGBTQ...with regard to the societal and legal take on LGBTQ issue states that “In India, some are disowned by family for being homosexual and killing themselves, while the other Indian couple throw ‘a big fat Hindu wedding’ to the gay son” (pp. 64-65). Although this paper is heavily invested in Hinduism and Nationalism, this conception borne towards peoples of varied gender orientations, this view shows how it may be illogical to keep the views of all the different Indian institutions in the same basket. The ensuing paragraph will engage with how homogenizing Hinduism holds sway in Nepal.

To begin with, Hinduism functions as an emblem of national symbol in Nepal. Although one may strongly reject Hinduism as a singular notion and that within this lifestyle- the practices as a religion though some argue it is more a lifestyle!- there sprawl a deluge of derivatives and sects, each either maintaining their independent existence or perpetuating as a chain of a longer continuum. The umbrella term “Hinduism”, nonetheless, stuffs these divergent lifestyles in the same basket enjoying the status of a singularly all-encompassing institution. And it is this singularity that

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people swear their allegiance to. Alternatively, it may be debated that people are compelled to exhibit their conformity to this dominant religion against their inner calling. This is also a must for the failure to showcase harmony with Hinduism could mean a concealed risk of having them labeled as non-nationalists.

To elaborate the case further, it is awkward to hear of a Muslim leader from the ruling Nepali Congress Party, Aftab Alam, demanding that Nepal be reinstated a Hindu state. One may take it normally on a ground that the Muslim community, that is in minority in Nepal, fear communal clashes if Nepal remains a secular state despite more than 80% of the Nepalese being Hindus. If communal clashes unleash by any chance, the Muslims will probably encounter more excruciating troubles culminating in harrowing consequences. However, viewing it from a different lens, it can be comprehended that this subtle alignment, however fake, with Hinduism is a move to express or reaffirm nationalism which in Nepal's case by and large hinges on exposition of one's unflinching loyalty to Hinduism. Another interesting scenario is that of the festivals like *Dashain* and *Tihar* which are projected as national festivals. As cited by *Travel Nepal*, "Dashain is the longest and the most auspicious festival in the Nepalese annual calendar, celebrated by Nepalese of all caste and creed throughout the country". *This is a distorted reality* as these festivals are actually celebrated by Hindu peoples and not by "all Nepalese" but the media and state depict these festivals as though they are nation symbols and these festivals are the celebratory occasions for all the Nepalese.

Next in the case of India, which the ensuing paragraphs of the essay dwell upon, at the periphery of the Indian independence, Hinduism was used as a tool to subvert the Muslim sentiment. According to Spivak in *Nationalism and the Imagination*, the Hindu rights groups around the time of the independence floated the notion that "The British are our enemies and so are the Muslims" (p. 10-11). This is a promotion of Hindu Nationalism by all means, deliberately orchestrated to keep the Muslims at bay or fuse their emotions with the mainstream Hindu sentiment. She, in the same book, further says, "This hardy residual of the Muslim as not only enemy but evil is still being worked by the Hindu right" (p. 11). This design of labeling the Muslims as enemies and relegating their position inferior to that of the British seems to have germinated out of the desire to promote Hinduism as a singular entity that acts as the other facet of the coin with one being that of nationalism. But so horrific was the situation harbored around that juncture of history that, particularly in Calcutta, Hindus and Muslims both could not be equal carriers and one enjoyed preferential treatment over the other and emerged as national identity marker. It can be taken as one such picture where the powerful religion enjoys an edge over a relatively weaker religion and hence succeeds in establishing itself as the other face of nationalism. Hindu nationalism, it can be inferred, had its roots profoundly fixed in the Indian soil.

If we look at the present scenario of India, it does not seem to have changed much. Even today, it is more commonly known as *Hindustaan*, which loosely translates as the land of the Hindus. The name itself has created a dichotomy of "us" and "them" between Hindus and people of other religious backgrounds, in particular the Muslims occupy a lion's share of space in the "us" domain. There are many who believe that India, popularly known to the outside world, is better known in the region or rather wants to be known in the region as *Hindustaan*. The underlying motive behind this is obviously the desire of the Hindu rights wing groups to establish it as a land of Hindus. And here lies the irony: Despite being the biggest democracy in the world, the country seems married to Hinduism as if it is the sole religion that accommodates everyone, and for that reason divorced with Islam and other religious groups. It is a different chapter, however, that the leaders never tire talking about secularism. The recently concluded elections in India further exemplify Hinduism that is directly correlated with love for the nation. Narendra Modi's candidacy of the prime minister seems to have taken the nation frenzy and not to mention his party is a hardliner Hindu party. During the course of the election campaign, Giriraj Singh, a prominent Bihar BJP leader, said that those who did not support Modi should be sent to Pakistan, hinting that Indian nationalism was exclusively a Hindu affair and that those who did not harbor Hindu sentiments should have had no right to live in India. His radical view suffused with Hindu nationalism undercurrent, however, was outright condemned by a Muslim cleric, Maulana Mehmood Madani of Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind. He was quoted saying in a Zee News report that the "nation didn't belong to the BJP leader alone and it belonged to all Indians, irrespective of their religious conformities." This another blatant attempt from a senior Hindu leader openly gestures that Hinduism alone can house all diversities.

To further stretch the concept of Hindu Nationalism, one can read *Politics After Television: Religious Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Indian Public*, where Arvind Rajagopal states "With the escalating rhetoric of Hindu nationalism, and the identification by the BJP of Muslims as the enemy within, what became evident was the sinister form of politicization of Muslim identity" (p. 22). Clearly the attempt here has been channeled towards relegating the Muslims to an extent that everyone is hegemonized into believing that it is the monolithically singular Hinduism that is capable of providing a collective identity to India. It also overtly states that the Muslims pose a threat as they are the ones working from within the national frontiers to dismantle India, thus rejecting any remote chance of accepting nationalism through the Muslim perspective.

Yet one of the other reasons behind the success of the Hindu rights groups in promoting Hinduism could be because "the great devotional sects associated with the gods Vishnu and Shiva, had much stronger and

broader roots in society and much greater scope for political expression” (Graham, p. 51). The Indian Hindu society is so much engulfed in faith and ritualistic businesses that their effects have deep penetrated the Indian soils and helped Indians, most of them, internalize religious affairs to such a degree that one should not risk seeking a difference between Hinduism and nationalism. Hinduism and nationalism could be compared to devotion, one to god and the next to the nation.

In *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India*, Thomas Blom Hansen writes that the profundity of “Hindu nationalism is the relative ease with which it has fitted into most of the authorized discourses on India and more generally on politics and culture in the postcolonial world, as they circulate inside as well as outside India” (5). This can be best understood as the craving of the Western media to a certain extent to paint India as basically a territory of Hindus. For example, it is the Hindu *Yogis*, and holy dips in the sacred rivers that draw attention of the West and reinforce the mystical identity of India. This practice, which not only presents to the Western world the depiction of the east they have in their minds, also reflects a lifestyle that so much aligns with Hindu nationalism.

Suresh Lohani’s (2019) book *Scholar’s Social Studies and Creative Arts* talks about how people practice a lifestyle that is so much shaped by the cultural sites that they belong to. This may happen in both visible and invisible level (p.39). So, these different Hindu yogic practices stem out of rigid Hindu cultural settings that promote a certain definitive Hindu nationalism in India.

Bollywood films, likewise, that deal with the issue of nationalism posit the peoples of the Muslim background as the ones engaged in terrorist activities as in one of the dialogues from a hit Bollywood movie, *Sarfarosh*, the protagonist, Aamir Khan, says that India is also a land of the Muslims and he delivers a dialogue with clout that “India has more Muslims in India than there are in the whole of Pakistan and that no force should dare to attempt to turn our Muslim brothers against Hindus. Hindus and Muslims are brothers and no force can create a schism between them”. A casual read of the dialogue presents the Indian Muslims in a positive light but reading against the grain, it would not be difficult to deduce that it is the Hindus that have to protect the Muslims and that Muslims are tacitly barred from engaging in free discourses that may even have a remote chance of offending the Hindu sentiment.

The issue of hardcore nationalism stands quite analogous to the dichotomy that has been created between patriarchy and feminism. Just like patriarchy stresses the dominance of males, positioning women at an inferior footing, Hindu nationalism renders all other religious sentiments secondary to its clout, positing only Hindu nationalism as powerful and authentic nationalism. Sharada Neupane Lohani & Suresh Lohani (2019) in “Females Voices through the lens of feminism and critical race theory” state that “various cultural,

corporal, economic and social factors, to name a few have immensely contributed to power dynamics in the society. Although patriarchy still falls heavy on the female gender, a lot of cracks in the middle have begun to emerge” (p.66). These very power dynamics between patriarchy and feminism in terms of cultural, and cultural factors is akin to Hindu nationalism when placed vis-à-vis other religious sentiments that may nurse or accentuate the same, if not more, level of nationalism but yet are forced to position themselves below Hindu nationalism.

In all the endeavors of glorifying Hinduism and presenting it as the other side of nationalism a caution is taken not to expose the cracks and fissures of Hinduism as that would loosen the grip of Hindu nationalism. It is so tactfully designed that all the peoples of Indian are enveloped a greater sense of allegiance to Hindu faith and on that account to Hindu nationalism.

We need to keep social justice in mind in the context of teaching multilingual students. Ashok Bhusal and others (2018) in *Multilingual students in writing classes: A guide for teaching and learning* state that “Multilingual students deserve to have informed writing instructors who teach in writing programs that encourage a view that language difference is the norm. Only then will our classrooms come close to being equitable spaces” (np.). Visual rhetoric, which can be a subject of study for multilingual students, provides powerful tools for social change as Bhusal (2019) in his “The Power of Visual Rhetoric for Social Change” says. By challenging monolingualism, Ashok Bhusal (2019) in “Addressing FYC instructors’ lack of technological expertise in implementing multimodal assignments” says that it is important to integrate multimodality into first-year composition students. To create an awareness on the dangers of absolutism, whether with hegemonic language or the overarching sentiment of nationalism, students from young age should be instructed and promoted to practice multimodality that endorses diversity in composing practices which can ultimately develop in the practitioners of such composing orientations a sense of acceptance towards heterogeneity, reflecting that in their takes on nationalism. Similarly, Ashok Bhusal and Suresh Lohani in their *Pedagogy, Language Ideology and Multimodal Composition* (2019) provide guidelines on how to teach multilingual students from a social justice perspective. Suresh Lohani (2019) in “The history of multimodal composition, its implementation, and Challenges” talks about multimodality. He says that “Multimodality, speaking from the translingual perspective, is a challenge to autonomous orientation to literacy that advocates for the conformation to the dominant language conventions” (p.124). He further states that “The changed writing and technology landscape merits the recognition of the multiliteracy practices of the minorities from across times and cultures (p.122). Thus, inclusion of multimodality in college curricula will tacitly help develop a more accepting and accommodating psyche in

students, and that may even help loosen up the very rigid mindset that peoples have towards nationalism.

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