Hindutva as Political Monotheism: Exploring the Interplay of Religion and Politics in India

Hindutva, a concept closely associated with India's political landscape, is a complex ideology that has influenced the nation's social and political discourse for decades. At its core, Hindutva espouses the idea of India as a Hindu nation and seeks to promote Hindu values, traditions, and culture within the political sphere. This ideology has been embraced by various political organizations, most notably the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its parent organization, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). In this article, we delve into the concept of Hindutva as political monotheism, examining its origins, evolution, and implications for Indian society and politics.

Origins and Evolution of Hindutva

The roots of Hindutva can be traced back to the late 19th century, during the British colonial era. As India struggled for independence, various religious and nationalist movements emerged, seeking to revive Hindu identity and strengthen Hindu unity. One such movement was the Arya Samaj, founded by Swami Dayanand Saraswati in 1875. The Arya Samaj promoted a puritanical form of Hinduism, emphasizing monotheism, the rejection of idol worship, and the belief in the Vedas as the sole source of religious authority.
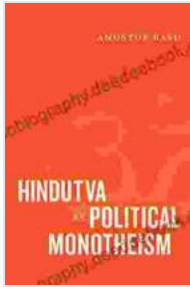
Hindutva as Political Monotheism by Anustup Basu

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The concept of Hindutva was further developed by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, a prominent Indian nationalist and political philosopher. In his book "Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?", published in 1923, Savarkar argued that Hindutva is not merely a religion but a cultural and political identity that encompasses all those who share a common heritage, history, and culture rooted in the Indian subcontinent. Savarkar's ideas gained traction within the Hindu nationalist movement and became a cornerstone of Hindutva ideology.

Hindutva as Political Monotheism

One of the key characteristics of Hindutva is its assertion of Hindu supremacy. Hindutva proponents believe that Hinduism is the true and original religion of India, and that all other religious communities, including Muslims and Christians, are outsiders who have come to India from foreign lands. This belief has led to a form of political monotheism, where Hinduism is seen as the only legitimate political and cultural identity for India.

Hindutva's political monotheism is manifested in various ways. One is the demand for a "Hindu Rashtra" or Hindu nation, where the laws and institutions of the state are based on Hindu principles and values. Hindutva proponents also advocate for the protection of Hindu religious symbols and

practices, such as the ban on cow slaughter and the promotion of yoga and Ayurveda. Furthermore, they seek to restrict the influence of other religious communities in public life, often leading to communal tensions and violence.

Hindutva and the BJP

The ideology of Hindutva has been closely associated with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP),a major political party in India. The BJP was founded in 1980 as the political arm of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS),a Hindu nationalist organization. The RSS, founded in 1925, has played a significant role in shaping the Hindutva ideology and has been a major force behind the BJP's rise to power.

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the BJP has pursued a Hindutva-centric agenda, promoting Hindu nationalist policies and rhetoric. The party has passed laws aimed at protecting Hindu religious sentiments, such as the prohibition of cow slaughter and the criminalization of religious conversions. Additionally, the BJP has supported the construction of a grand Hindu temple in Ayodhya, a site of religious significance for Hindus.

Implications of Hindutva as Political Monotheism

Hindutva as political monotheism has profound implications for Indian society and politics. It has led to increased polarization along religious lines, with tensions between Hindu and Muslim communities often escalating into violence. Furthermore, the assertion of Hindu supremacy has marginalized other religious minorities, creating a sense of insecurity and discrimination among non-Hindu citizens.

Politically, Hindutva has strengthened the BJP's position as the dominant party in India. By appealing to Hindu nationalist sentiments, the BJP has been able to mobilize a large voter base and secure electoral victories. However, the party's pursuit of Hindutva policies has also alienated other sections of society, including secularists, liberals, and members of minority religious communities.
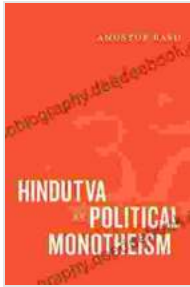
Hindutva as political monotheism is a complex and contested ideology that has shaped Indian politics and society for over a century. Its origins in the late 19th century Hindu nationalist movement and its evolution through the writings of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar have led to a belief in Hindu supremacy and the assertion of Hinduism as the sole legitimate political and cultural identity for India. The ideology's manifestation in the policies and actions of the BJP has had far-reaching consequences, exacerbating religious tensions, marginalizing religious minorities, and polarizing Indian society.

The future of Hindutva as political monotheism in India remains uncertain. While the BJP continues to espouse Hindutva as its core ideology, there are growing voices of dissent and resistance from those who reject its divisive and discriminatory aspects. The interplay of religion and politics in India is a complex and evolving phenomenon, and the role of Hindutva within that dynamic will continue to shape the nation's social and political landscape for years to come.

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