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ДОМИНИРОВАНИЕ «ПРАВЫХ» В ИНДИИ И ПОЛИТИЗАЦИЯ ИНДИЙСКИХ ВООРУЖЕННЫХ СИЛ

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С приходом к власти сил большинства в результате выборов 2014 г. в Индии наблюдается ослабление правительственных институтов. Правящая Индийская народная партия (Бхартия джаната парти – БДП) вернулась к власти с увеличившимся парламентским большинством в результате выборов 2019 г. Усиление влияния хиндутвы (*санскр.* индускость) – политической философии индуских националистических образований и «Сангх Паривар» (группа организаций Сангха), связанной также с организацией правого толка «Раштрия сваямсевак сангх» (*санскр.* Союз добровольных слуг родины) привело к переформатированию дискурса индийской национальной идеи. Представляется, что переформулирование индийских политических ценностей в терминах доминирующего национализма также затронет индийские вооруженные силы, которые традиционно считаются профессиональным, аполитичным и не связанным с религией институтом.

Вопрос о возможном влиянии диктатуры большинства на вооруженные силы Индии изучен недостаточно. Автор статьи исследует влияние режима мажоритарной демократии на индийские вооруженные силы, рассматривая трансформацию гражданско-военных отношений при правительстве, сформированном БДП. В гражданско-военных отношениях наблюдается сдвиг от объективного гражданского контроля, который поддерживает профессионализм вооруженных сил и позволяет им оставаться вне политики, в сторону субъективного гражданского контроля. Этот сдвиг создает риск утраты вооруженными силами их аполитичной этики, что в свою очередь приведет к изменению присущей им секулярной этики.

Выводы статьи в равной степени актуальны как для политической практики, так и для теории. С точки зрения практики, существует необходимость в сохранении профессионализма индийских вооруженных сил при помощи модели объективного гражданского контроля. Теоретическая актуальность состоит в выявлении границ

идеи подчинения вооруженных сил гражданским правителям. В случае проникновения политической идеологии в вооруженные силы и угрозы для их профессионализма вооруженные силы должны оказывать сопротивление ради сохранения национальной безопасности.

Ключевые слова: вооруженные силы Индии, военная социология, хиндутва, профессионализм вооруженных сил, гражданско-военные отношения, индийская политика.

Introduction. The Indian military is widely regarded as professional, which is defined in civil-military theory as embodying expertise, corporate autonomy and social responsibility (Huntington 1957: 8-18). In addition, India's military also has a reputation for being apolitical (Cohen 1971: 166-167, 176) and secular. Its apolitical ethic has long distinguished it from peer militaries since historically it has stayed out of politics (Wilkinson 2015: 3; Cohen 2010: 5). Its secular ethic is its being imbued with the notable Indian cultural value of secularism enshrined in the Constitution's preamble (Ogden 2017: 13-14). Of late there are concerns over the possible erosion in this apolitical and secular ethic.

As regards secularism, the apprehensions of a revision in India's approach to secularism renewed with the votaries of *hindutva* (Hindu-ness) or cultural nationalism gaining power in 2014. It was accompanied by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) attaining a parliamentary majority for the first time in thirty years (Ogden 2017: 19). The ideological dominance facilitated by power has enabled reelection of the ruling party in 2019 with more votes than in 2014. The normalisation of the world view of the BJP has shifted the high ground in Indian politics towards their ideas, which has "lastingly altered the Indian political landscape" (Ogden 2017: 19). It is possible to predict the incorporation of cultural nationalist verities into the Indian political culture in its second term (Chandra 2019).

Hindutva is a concept articulated by its leading adherent, VD Savarkar, as defining the Hindu nation along the lines of special geography, a common language, a shared culture and belief in the native land as a holy land (Ahmed H. 2019: 66-67). The contours of the majoritarian national project of the right wing have been described by a political scientist as: "[I]deologically adherent to Hindutva ['Hindu-ness'] and premised on Brahmanical dominance, Hindu nationalists are amplifying their seemingly irreversible crusade to render India into a Hindu state" (Chatterji 2019: 398). The change in political culture is evident from the dropping of the word "secularism" from the 2019 election manifesto of the leading opposition party, the Congress (Kumar 2019). The common observation is that the opposition has taken to "soft *hindutva*" for its electoral calculations, suggestive of the near hegemonic status of the cultural nationalist ideology in electoral politics (Palshikar 2019: 101).

The argument and scope. In theory, there are two options of civilian control over the military. Objective civilian control is the "maximisation of military professionalism" in order to keep it politically "sterile and neutral". On the other hand, subjective civilian control is maximisation of the power of a particular civilian group in relation to the military (Huntington 1957: 80-85). Objective

civilian control underpins professionalism. Subjective civilian control entails subscription to the ideological orientation of their civilian political masters by the military. Ideology is “a set of values and attitudes oriented about the problems of state” (Huntington 1957: 90). Since political parties differ in ideological orientations, in a democratic polity the military needs to maintain its ideological neutrality, easing its deference to civilian authority of any ideological hue.

Thus far, Indian civil-military relations have largely been characterised by objective civilian control, wherein the military is kept distant from politics by an emphasis on its professionalism. India has been close to the Huntingtonian ideal of mutually respected political-military distance, wherein militaries restrict lobbying to such military-relevant matters as budgets, pay, weapons acquisition etc (Kundu 1998: 1) and protecting bureaucratic turf, without overly indulging in policy activism. On this aspect, Stephen Cohen’s observation of the early years of Independence, is that, “[T]o officers [in the Indian Army at least] profession comes first, and ‘politics’ finds no place” (Cohen 1971: 195).

The paper discusses politicisation by visualizing the cultural space as three nested circles: political, strategic and organisational culture. The three nested circles, with political culture at the outer layer and organisational culture in the core, have inter-permeable boundaries. Political culture provides the top-down context for strategic culture or political-military culture. Strategic culture is also subject to a bottom-up influence from the military’s organisational culture (Kier 1997).

Culture is collectively held at a national-societal-community level as “a set of unselfconscious assumptions as to seem a natural, transparent, undeniable and rarely debated part of the structure of the world” (Kier 1997: 26). Political culture includes “commitment to values like democratic principles and institutions, ideas about morality and the use of force, the rights of individuals and collectives, or predispositions toward the role of a country in global politics” (Lantis 2002: 90). The ruling party operating on a mix of authoritarianism, majoritarianism, nationalism and populism (Jaffrelot 2019: 4), is undertaking a makeover of India. The New India – a phrase coined by Prime Minister Narendra Modi – fostered by the “Hindu nationalist dominance to establish a majoritarian state in India” (Jaffrelot 2019: 1), may require more of the military than political inertness. The difference in political culture with right wing ascendance is in *hindutva* papering over shared divisions by emphasis on a shared religion. It is attempting to homogenize Hinduism, otherwise differentiated into several castes and sects.

Political culture impacts strategic culture. Strategic culture is an ideational milieu, setting pervasive strategic preferences for a state based on widely held concepts of roles and efficacy of use of force in political affairs by its political and strategic elites (Johnston 1995: 46). Apprehending a consequent national weakness, the ruling formations have alongside militarized the social and cultural spaces. Militarism in strategic policy is also much in evidence. Riding on the back of an upward economic trajectory, military modernisation over this century has recreated Indian military power. This has enabled a shift in strategic culture from strategic restraint (Cohen 2010: 13) to strategic proactivism in the Modi era, best signified by the surgical strikes (Ahmed 2016).

Strategic culture abuts organisational culture, which is, “the patterns of assumptions, ideas, and beliefs that prescribe how a group should adapt to external environment and manage its internal structure” (Legro 1994: 115). Since military culture comprises “beliefs and norms about the optimal means to fight wars” (Legro 1994: 109), organisational culture has an autonomous influence on military preferences. There are two routes for political cultural impact on organisational culture: one being the direct influence of political cultural change on the military’s organisational culture; and second, is through mediation by an intervening strategic culture.

Since the military, as a political community, is resident within a larger political community, its host society, it is affected by the dominant tendencies within the larger national community (Rosen 1996: 267). So far, India’s military as a technical and professional group maintained an isolation from society – best signified by its inhabiting cantonments distinct from local communities – not only due to inertia since the days of its origin as a British colonial institution, but also in order to keep away from the social and political tumult. Rapid political cultural change is voiding old verities. There is a collapse among the three circles with a monocular – saffron-political culture engulfing organisational culture, impacting the latter’s apolitical and secular facets.

The paper only briefly probes for changes in secularism, though a detailed study is separately needed. Secularism has been under redefinition by cultural nationalism (Chandhoke 2019: 538). Briefly, the incidence of cultural nationalist thinking has not been unknown in the military. Omar Khalidi, taking a sociological look at the military of the nineties, made critical observations on this score (Khalidi 2003: 38–40). The trend is a continuing distancing from civic nationalism towards religion-based ethnic nationalism (Ansari 2019). The *hindutva* version of secularism is not based on respect of plurality stemming from India’s diversity, but on the belief that India is secular since Hinduism is secular (Noorani 2019: 376).

The military is predominantly Hindu in social composition. The military’s sociological composition is unrepresentative of India’s social diversity (Rosen 1996: 206, 239; Jaffrelot 2019: 43–46). While numbers are not in the open domain, Muslims comprise about three per cent of the army and less than two per cent of the more consequential officer corps (Ahmed 2018). Even so, this does not *ipso facto* imply the military need be any more receptive to *hindutva* or political Hinduism.

Hindutva doctrine is essentially politicized Hinduism, a reactionary version of the syncretic Hindu faith. A case to point on the drawbacks is brought out in Christine Fair’s work (Fair 2014) on the Islamisation of the Pakistan army in the years of President Zia ul Haq. Drawing analogy by likening political Hinduism with political Islam, it is averred here that diluted professionalism, or departure from modern rational-legal norms, could accrue in case of India too.

Methodology and layout. The paper is a qualitative study based on secondary sources. The paper takes the rise of the political Right in Indian politics as an independent variable and the military’s professionalism as the dependent variable. There are two intervening variables within the military’s organisational

culture: apolitical ethic and secularism. To observe the impact of *hindutva* on the organizational culture, the paper confines itself to observations on the apolitical ethic. It presents the shift from objective to subjective civilian control as evidence of implications of *hindutva* for the apolitical ethic. Change in the intervening variable – apolitical ethic – can be expected to herald a change in the sister ethic, secularism (discussed briefly in the paper).

The paper has two parts. In Part I, it undertakes a case study of the February 2019 crisis between India and Pakistan and the immediate aftermath (Shankar et al. 2019) to highlight changes in the apolitical ethic of India's military. This part highlights the manner in which the military has supported the government's political interests by egregiously intervening in the then ongoing election-relevant debates. In Part II, it discusses permeation of *hindutva* into organisational culture. As evidence of a direct route of such penetration, the paper presents an article published in a professional journal of a training institution of the army wherein the author, the head of the institution, reveals political polarisation within the military (Ghura 2018). A brief sub-section carries illustrative examples of presence of right wing trope in Indian military professional journals.

Part 1. Case study on the India-Pakistan crisis.

The political contention. In the run-up to the 2019 national elections, over 150 veterans of the armed forces wrote an open domain letter to the President of India¹. Noting the references to military operations in electioneering, in particular by the ruling party, the letter expressed apprehensions over the politicisation of the military. The letter served the purpose of bringing the threat of politicisation of the military into the open.

In the run up to the 2019 elections, persuasive narratives spelling a challenge for the BJP built up around such issues as unemployment, the effects of demonetisation, the implementation of the goods and services tax, farmers' suicides, rural distress etc. (Safi 2019). However, as the elections approached, the game changer turned out to be the Balakot aerial strike by India on 26 February 2019. The aerial strike was the first one inside Pakistan since the 1971 War, Balakot being inside Khyber Pukhtunistan province. Aerial targeting of an alleged terrorist training facility was conducted by India in retaliation for the 16 February car-borne improvised explosive device attack on the Indian security convoy in Pulwama in Kashmir that resulted in 44 troopers as casualties (Rashid 2019).

On the campaign trail, Prime Minister Narendra Modi took credit for the strikes. He had been rather critical of the preceding Congress-led government's response – or lack thereof – to the Mumbai terror attack, 26/11, in November 2008². His posturing over security in the election run-up met with the

¹ URL: <https://thewire.in/security/veterans-ask-president-to-urge-parties-to-stop-using-military-for-political-gains>

² URL: <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/modi-played-despicable-politics-during-26-11-mumbai-terror-attack-congress-1396976-2018-11-27>

opposition's protests to the election commission that that violated the model code of conduct. The election commission found nothing amiss, though, as it later turned out, its decision lacked consensus (Chopra 2019). Over subsequent days, the government's version was exposed by international media as lacking substance (Vijayan, Drennan 2019). This led to the pushback by the opposition seeking to undercut the ruling party.

The BJP's election strategy had precedence in its similarly playing up the land-based surgical strikes of 29 September 2016, when across a wide front the army had launched multiple trans-Line of Control (LC) raids on terrorists' camps in retaliation to the terror attack on the army garrison at Uri on 18 September 2016 (Transcript... 2016). In the event, Pakistan denied those had ever taken place¹. The surgical strikes were put to political use by the ruling party in state elections in Uttar Pradesh in February 2017, resulting in its sweeping victory. The government hyped up the surgical strikes yet again in 2018, this time by observing *Parakram Parv*, Surgical Strike Day (Joshi 2018a), as elections to three cow-dust belt state assemblies – Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh – loomed large. Nevertheless, later in the year, the BJP lost the three assembly elections narrowly, setting the stage for the national elections.

The BJP, seemingly checked, was looking out for an opportunity to reframe the election narrative away from issues of governance. The opportunity came in the form of the Pulwama terror attack, allowing it to use its bold retaliation at Balakot to elevate national security as the core election issue. To assert its strong-on-defence credentials, it also undertook an anti-satellite weapons test, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi using an address to the nation to proclaim the success of the test². Sensing the reframing of the electoral agenda, the opposition Congress party claimed that while in power it had similarly launched trans-LC raids³. It specified six such strikes, with former commanders testifying along the same lines in the media.

The army's partisanship. In so far as the claims and counter claims played out between the two political parties, it could be taken as par for electioneering course. However, the military joined the electoral debate on the side of the government. Whether it was put to it by the government or its action was at its own behest is unknown. In either case, it was a political intervention on the part of the military.

In the case of the controversy surrounding the surgical strikes, the military contested the version of a retired general who had conducted the September 2016 surgical strikes. Retired General DS Hooda had been critical of the government for overhyping the surgical strikes. Hooda had been contracted by the opposition Congress party to write up its national security doctrine

¹ URL: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/09/pakistan-denies-india-carried-surgical-strikes-160929165646369.html>

² URL: https://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/news_updates/pm-addresses-the-nation/

³ URL: <https://scroll.in/latest/922364/ex-army-officer-who-oversaw-surgical-strikes-says-cross-border-operations-were-conducted-before>

(Hooda 2019). The Congress party wary of being accused of being soft on security used Hooda's doctrinal ideas to inform its manifesto to pep up its electoral prospects. In response, the northern army commander, Lieutenant General Ranbir Singh, argued that surgical strikes helped to communicate deterrence to Pakistan (Sengupta 2018). The controversy resurfaced as voting came to an end. Contradicting the Congress' claims on overseeing surgical strikes in its time in power, the army operations branch claimed that it had no record of any previous surgical strikes (Bhat 2019). The northern army commander, Lt Gen Ranbir Singh, seconded the operations branch¹, yet again at odds with the claim of his predecessor, retired General DS Hooda².

This indirect public exchange at the election time between a former and a serving general – with the serving general, Singh, contradicting the retired one, Hooda, associated with the opposition party – is an instance of politicisation (Joshi 2018b). It is not known whether General Ranbir Singh was acting at his own behest or was put to it by his political masters who wanted to refute the authoritative voice of retired General Hooda seen as favouring the opposition. In either case, it amounts to an intervention by the army relying on its professional credibility and credible image in the public eye to back the ruling party's case and is, therefore, an avoidable departure from its apolitical tradition.

The air force plays partisan. A similar departure from the apolitical credo can be made out from the controversy surrounding the Balakot episode and its immediate aftermath in a counter aerial strike by Pakistan in the Rajauri-Naushera sector on 27 February 2019. India lost a fighter plane in the dogfight and claimed to have shot down a Pakistani F-16. An information war with Pakistan resulted from that³. India subsequently awarded a combat medal to the pilot of its downed aircraft for having shot down a superior Pakistani fighter jet prior to bailing out in Pakistani territory. (He was later repatriated by Pakistan in a gesture that de-escalated the crisis.) The election time gain for the BJP is its image of a new, muscular India, which was provided by the narrative of exacting a higher damage on Pakistan for the loss of its Mig 21 fighter jet. The air force's lending credibility to the narrative – of having shot down an F-16 – amounts to political partisanship since it obscures its loss of an aircraft.

In addition, a major controversy played out in the national media over alleged procedural lapses in the acquisition of the Rafale jet aircraft from France. The Rafale aircraft purchase was fast-forwarded by the prime minister during his visit to Paris in 2015. The modified deal led to fewer aircrafts to be purchased than in the original agreement. The departures from the procedures this entailed led to allegations of benefits from the linked offset contract going to a corporate house allegedly favoured by the ruling party. In the event, a

¹ URL: https://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ani/first-surgical-strike-was-carried-out-in-sept-2016-confirms-lt-gen-ranbir-singh-119052000515_1.html

² URL: <http://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2019/may/20/army-carried-out-first-surgical-strike-in-september-2016-to-avenge-uri-lt-gen-ranbir-singh-1979480.html>

³ URL: http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/articleshow/68733231.cms?from=mdr&utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst

controversial ruling by the Supreme Court in the government's favour stopped further attempts¹.

As the controversy unfolded at the political level, the air chief publicly rued the absence of the Rafale aircraft (Peri 2019) in the inventory. The implicit criticism was that non-realisation of the deal in a timely manner deprived India of a technological edge. This was suggestive of a slovenly approach to defence procurements by the Congress-led predecessor government, which had long negotiated over the deal without finalizing it. In contrast, the BJP had it that the lack of aircrafts was caused by the Prime Minister Modi's decisive intervention in the Rafale purchase when he clinched the deal in his trip to France in 2015. In the process, he generated the controversy over the off-sets clause of the deal, the comparative price of aircraft and the fewer numbers settled for. Given the political backdrop of the Rafale deal, the air chief's unbidden reference to it was questionable.

Moreover, the air force delayed an inquiry over the downing of its helicopter in a fratricide incident over Budgam in Kashmir on 27 February, at the time of the heightened crisis when Pakistan carried out its counter strike. The cover up during elections was with the excuse that the black box recorder of the helicopter was stolen by Kashmiri locals, thereby delaying the inquiry (Javaid 2019). The timing of the release of the outcome of the inquiry till after the elections is suggestive of a political rationale. Friction is intrinsic to military action. The loss of the helicopter was due to the friction from the military action in the crisis, the responsibility for which did not require to be hidden. To the extent the military kept the reality voters, the military's actions can be seen as partisan.

Significantly, after the election, the air chief went on to claim that there was no intervention by the Pakistan air force into Indian airspace in their counter strike of 27 February². This contradicted the government's statement complaining of an air intrusion³. No clarification ensued. The air chief used the credibility of the military uniform and his appointment to rewrite the record of the crisis to the government's advantage.

Part 2. Political-organisational cultural interplay.

The cultural milieu. Stephen Peter Rosen in his book, *India and its Armies*, recalls noted political scientist Myron Weiner's observation of the sixties that there are two political cultures in India: a traditionalist-stone-Hindu – and, the second one – elite-apolitical culture with a modern and national outlook (Rosen 1996: 33). The latter – the elite strategic culture – subsumes the strategic subcultures:

¹ URL: <https://thewire.in/government/rafale-review-petition-full-text-of-written-submissions-by-bhushan-shourie-and-sinha>; (Shourie 2019).

² URL: http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/69926362.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst

³ URL: https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/31100/Pakistan_demarched_on_the_act_of_aggression_against_India

hyper-nationalist, neo-liberal and Nehruvian (Bajpai 2002). The difference in the three strategic subcultures conceptualized by Kanti Bajpai is in the differing utility accorded to use of force and alternatives as economic incentives. However, over this decade, the rise of *hindutva* has substantially dominated the elite political culture in India's ideational milieu. Resultantly, Weiner's traditionalist Hindu culture now partially straddles the hyper-nationalist and neo-liberal strategic subcultural spaces and has decisively edged out Nehruvian strategic subculture.

Tenets of a revivalist strategic subculture are references to a hoary past vandalized by invading Muslim hordes. A worldview propagated by the prime minister early in his tenure is that Hindu power was eclipsed by subjugation for over a thousand years, including two hundred years under the colonial power, the British (Modi 2014). The revivalist strategic narrative accounts that by disunity within. Consequently, India needs a unifying adhesive, readily available in the shared Hindu religion, culture and heritage (Mehta 2019). This puts religion at the center of nation-building, with access to and control of state power necessary to extend this *hindutva* project.

Religion has the advantage of being a step higher than a caste, compensating for division into castes by religious affinity. Stephen Rosen surveyed the pervasive role of caste in its host society and its effect on the army (Rosen 1996: viii-x). With divisive caste superseded by harmonizing religion, military power could potentially be optimized. The separation of the military from society – to keep the divisions in society from being reflected in the army – could then be minimized. Strategic self-assertion has been largely welcomed by the military¹.

A view of the military's internal debates.

The polarisation within. The direct route of political cultural impact on organisational culture can be viewed in the article titled, "Keeping the military apolitical: Looking inwards" (Ghura 2018), authored by the then commanding general of the army's Counter Insurgency and Jungle Warfare School (CIJWS) in Veirangte, Mizoram, in the training institution's flagship journal *Pratividrohi* (Counter insurgent)². The question he poses is, "How do soldiers get polarized?" (p. 22). The question he poses presupposes polarisation within the military and a shortfall from his definition of apolitical: "[A] soldier is said to be apolitical if his biases toward any political party / politicians does not affect his ability to do his duty in service of his nation on orders of the Govt [government] or that political party in power" (p. 20). He underlines the touchstone of the apolitical ethic, thus: "The military needs to be apolitical so that the rule of law and democratic process prevails in the country in accordance with the Constitution. Military alignments can lead to crating biases amongst voters / citizens and election of politicians who may be Military favourites, which is neither acceptable nor desirable in democratic India" (p. 20). By this yardstick, he apprehends "a real danger – breakdown of professionalism" (p. 21).

¹ URL: http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/articleshow/60885703.cms?from=mdr&utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst

² Words in initial capitals in the extracts below from the article are of the author, Major General MS Ghura.

In India, polarisation is usually a euphemism for a divide along religious lines. Ascendance of the ruling party has been attributed to its increasing polarisation within society, furthered by the ruling party for political gains. The political strategy is to marginalize the minority, India's Muslims, and to generate for the BJP, a vote bank of the denominational majority, the Hindu community, comprising 80 per cent of the population (Jaffrelot et al. 2019: 8-11). Polarisation in society has been promoted by the personalized style of the Prime Minister Modi's politics (Jayal 2019: xxix). In the article, the author appears to refer to polarisation within the military between those in support for the ruling party and those wary of the ruling party and the traditionally neutral. The extent to which support for the ruling party implies support for its *hindutva* can only be defined through a wider survey-based study. It is not possible to conduct in a relatively closed military domain.

Querying the policy of deep selection. The author apprehends a possibility of compromise of the apolitical ethic in observing a "perceived change in the attitude of Senior military commanders as a result of the changed policy of selection of higher ranks with in the Services" (p. 22). To him, in such an environment, "decision making and risk taking ability becomes casualty" (p. 22), presumably because generals so afflicted would be looking over their shoulders to a cue from their political masters. He decries the resulting onset of "political ambitions of serving and retired military personnel" (p. 22).

He refers to politically inclined generals positioning themselves for higher ranks by signaling political pliability to the government. This change has been facilitated by the government's policy of deep selection of higher appointments against the earlier system of seniority based selection. This may incentivize ambitious generals to political proclivities of the ruling party, as spelled out by a former general: "Though it is good to have a meritocracy, there must be clear criteria for determining merit. Otherwise, generals will start approaching politicians who can promote them to the top, and that will end the apolitical character of the army" (Shukla 2016).

A case to point is controversial beginning of the deep selection system adopted by the government in the elevation of the army chief, General Bipin Rawat. It resulted in supersession of two of his seniors (Joseph 2016). An explanation put out was that the appointment resulted from Rawat's operational experience in counter insurgency and on the LC against Pakistan. This would prove useful for the government in its hardline policy against Pakistan involving retributory surgical strikes. Rawat had in a previous appointment overseen similar strikes in Myanmar territory in 2015¹ that had set the stage for replication of the tactics on the LC in 2016 (Dutta 2016).

Selected for concordance with the government's hardline policy, allegations of partisanship have since plagued Rawat². He courted controversy in conferring an award on the perpetrator in a signal human rights violations case, the "human

¹ URL: http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/articleshow/47617871.cms?from=mdr&utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst

² URL: <https://thewire.in/video/watch-why-india-may-need-a-cds-but-its-not-bipin-rawat>

shield” episode in Kashmir. The case in question was in which an army major tied a Kashmiri to the bonnet of a jeep and paraded the jeep past a few villages as deterrent against stone throwing (Rowlatt 2017). Rawat once ventured out of his remit in controversially referring to domestic politics in India’s north eastern state, Assam, that has a relatively delicate ethnic balance, claiming a link between a regional political party and a voter base of illegal immigrants¹.

Recently, during his 2019 Independence Day speech the prime minister announced creation of the position of the chief of defence staff (CDS). The CDS would be a four-star appointment, mandated to oversee joint operational and support entities of the armed forces. Critics have it that, “Modi has shown a marked preference for officials either already known to him or those considered ideologically reliable” (Gupta S. 2019: 12). A CDS appointed on the basis of like-mindedness would open up the military further in-roads. The power of the government for elevating senior commanders to higher appointments may translate into a loyalty test. In the governance structure, NSA Doval, who was earlier head of the right wing think tank, is in charge of national security with a cabinet rank². There is a palpable danger to the apolitical ethic.

Direct political-organisational cultural osmosis. The author refers to a second conduit of domestic politics into the military: the retired military fraternity. The politicized section of the veterans’ community acts as a transmission belt of political positions³. The ruling party has inducted military veterans in large numbers into its ranks⁴. The first election foray of Narendra Modi in his 2014 bid for national power took place at an ex-servicemen rally organized by the retired army chief, who then went on to a ministerial position in Modi’s council of ministers⁵.

Within the military, pro-Modi elements within the ranks amplify the right wing trope in social media groups internal to the military, making such spaces politically charged (Ahmed A. 2017). The military is a conservative institution with its members being of a largely realist and nationalist persuasion (IDS 2017: 59). Therefore, the ruling party ideology holds resonance in a military constituency. The projection of decisiveness and being strong on defence issues enable Modi’s adherents – *bhakts* (devotees) in colloquial parlance – to rationalize their support in national security terms. It obfuscates their political inclination and political behavior under a populist sway. With the support of the media, Modi has personalized foreign and security policy for electoral ends (Noorani

¹ URL: <https://thewire.in/diplomacy/army-chief-bipin-rawat-questions-aiudf-expansion-assam-proxy-game-pak-china>

² URL: <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/pms-office-defines-work-for-top-bureaucrats-security-advisor-ajit-doval-2101719>

³ Other avenues such as family ties, caste affiliations, social media groups, glossy publications in the national security publications, national security websites are not discussed here, but form the ecosystem propagating Hindu nationalism.

⁴ URL: <https://www.thehindu.com/elections/lok-sabha-2019/senior-ex-servicemen-join-bjp/article26964734.ece>

⁵ URL: <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/narendra-modi-addresses-rally-in-haryana-his-first-as-bjps-pm-candidate-534670>

2019: 365; Varshney 2019: 335). This sets a process of direct interplay between political and organisational culture.

A pushback from within. In his article, the author perceptively notes, “[H]ighlighting military successes for political gains, like surgical strikes / success in war and tasking soldiers for unauthorised tasks demotivates the soldiers” (p. 23). This reflects the resentment within the army for its operational successes being appropriated for electoral purposes, highlighted by the veterans in their letter to the President of India (referred to in the earlier section), writing: “...unusual and completely unacceptable practice of political leaders taking credit for military operations like cross-border strikes, and even going so far as to claim the Armed Forces to be ‘*Modi ji ki Sena*’ [Modi’s army]”¹. To the extent this is in line with the opposition’s view, the military apparently has within it a segment responsive to Modi’s critics, too. This underlines the polarisation the author addresses in his concluding recommendation below:

“One can keep dwelling on how the Politicians, Media and the society at large is forcing the Military senior leaders and personnel to take sides or become politically aligned to a party. ...[we must] *recognise this challenge and address it upfront. However we must also discreetly inform the Governments in power not to politicize the Military actions or successes, since it effects and weakens the organization and Nation*” (p. 25) (italics added. – A.A.).

Evidence of right wing cadence. Evidence of right wing thinking surfacing within the military’s intellectual sphere is visible in a recent issue of the professional journal, *Pratividrohi*, Autumn 2019. In the lead article of the journal on insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), the author – a serving colonel – writes: “[A]t the time of independence, J&K had 77 percent [sic] Muslims favouring accession to Pakistan...” (Gupta A. 2019: 2). It is difficult to agree with that since it is well known that the major Kashmiri political party popular with a substantial section of Muslims wanting accession to India in 1947 was the secular National Conference. On the current situation in Kashmir, the colonel goes on to write that, “Proliferation of large number of religious places has led to a constant flow of radical material for the masses” (Gupta A. 2019: 6). He equates religious literature in mosques with “radical material” implying that in his mind’s eye Islamic cultural transmission within the social sphere of a mosque equals radicalisation, a precursor to terrorism. Frustrated with the interference with military operations by stone pelting mobs of the Kashmiri youth, a feature of the last few years in Kashmir, he recommends, “Stone pelters have to be dealt with as terrorists to negate their nuisance value during operations” (Gupta A. 2019: 5-6). Remarkably, this rather extreme measure of elimination of unarmed stone pelting youth, that goes against the army’s well-regarded doctrine of “winning hearts and minds” in counter insurgency situations, is carried in its premier professional journal on counter insurgency.

Another illustration in the same journal is from the article by the CIJWS’ present Commandant, Major General MK Mago, who claims, “Global Jihadists into the country and tacit support and merger with home grown radicalised

¹ URL: <https://thewire.in/security/veterans-ask-president-to-urge-parties-to-stop-using-military-for-political-gains>

groups such as Student (sic) Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) and Indian Mujahedeen has deeply Radicalized people of a particular faith” (Mago 2019: 90). He defines radicalisation as “the process of adopting an extremist belief system including the willingness to use, support or facilitate violence, as a method to effect societal change” (Mago 2019: 88). The reference to Indian Muslims as “deeply radicalized” is arguably false. Such imagery is usually found in right wing literature for political purposes of Othering and marginalisation of India’s Muslim minority.

The general goes on to conclude that, “there is a need to revitalize India’s and the region’s socio cultural ethos, wherein countries should not just represent political unions but should emerge as organic, composite entities. In the absence of a strong social fabric and common cultural ethos, security measures can never prove sufficiently resilient against the threat of Radicalisation” (Mago 2019: 96). This extract has echoes of cultural nationalism. It is not known as to whether right wing motifs finding their way into military literature is part of a policy of the government or individual proclivities of right wing inclined officers.

Future course of politicisation. Polarisation within the military has opened it up to subjective civilian control, the first stage of politicisation. A closer embrace of the military is made possible by the right wing’s dominance of political culture, exercise of parliamentary majority and populist leadership at the helm. This creates the conditions for the second stage of politicisation – indoctrination with cultural nationalism. This will preclude the military having a different worldview, setting it at odds with the changed polity. Incentive thus exists for the government to proceed down this route.

Institutions and agencies of governance have been under pressure to conform to a cultural nationalist dictate (Varshney 2019: 342-345). The military cannot be an exception. Universally, military members largely vote for conservative parties; this is valid also for the Indian military. A former army vice chief, Vijay Oberoi, notes the affinity of the military with conservative parties, stating, “The language of those on the right of centre has always had greater appeal for men in uniform in most democracies. I have done a course in the United States and I saw 90 per cent of the officers were Republican” (Dutta et al. 2008). This predisposition makes it easier to bridge any gaps in the conservative world view of the military and cultural nationalism.

The army cannot be an institution for the autonomous formation of a worldview or ideology among its personnel. However, besides the usual national security and institutional interest related lobbying – for arms purchases etc. for instance – the military cannot be a player in domestic politics. If it is at odds with or is aloof from the cultural nationalist enterprise, it could by default be taken as favouring the other side in domestic politics; thereby intensifying the struggle between political forces for its affiliation. This threat of the military being sucked in willy-nilly into domestic politics makes it necessary to settle on ground rules keeping the military outside the religion and ideology framework and maintaining objective civilian control.

Being apolitical has the advantage of preserving the three planks of professionalism: expertise, advisory and corporate autonomy. Expertise is diluted

by elevation to apex military positions of officers inclined to the dominant ideological position. This may be occurring at the cost of their expertise, since their professionalism may be overlooked in favour of their ideological affinity or amenability to political manipulation. The second – advisory – function stands to suffer in case such appointees proffer advice that the political principal may wish to hear. The third – corporate autonomy – is compromised when the pliant organisational leader subordinates the organisational interest to the political interest of the governing political party.

More importantly, alternation of ruling parties in the dispensation of democracy implies that the military owing allegiance to a particular political party because of their ideological affinity would run afoul of other political parties elected to power. Exercise of the advisory function would be visibly affected, in addition to tensions in civil-military relations. Modi's adoption of a muscular national security policy has tapped into the doctrinally-expressed strategic preferences of the military¹. In Modi, the military has a pro-military leader. Pro-military is a predisposition to being sympathetic to a military viewpoint (Huntington 1957: 97). The personalisation of the connection compounds the problem, threatening to compromise the military in its relations with other political groupings if and when elected to power.

An attraction for *hindutva* cannot be without its anti-minority baggage, leading to detraction from secularism. Proximity to *hindutva* implies disdain for religious and cultural diversity (Jaffrelot 2019). Contraction of secularism means a setback for modernity and scientific thinking. That the change is occurring can be seen in the message from the new naval chief. In the letter to naval members, the navy chief required curtailment of religious rituals in official ceremonies². This tacitly suggests that religious observance was increasing to such levels that the armed forces head had to curtail it.

Finally, the army is heavily involved in internal security operations in Kashmir, where there is a Muslim population. A major prospective adversary in a possible future war is Pakistan, a Muslim state. In case military operations acquire a religious colouring, emotive issues may cloud professional judgment.

Conclusion. India is turning into a majoritarian state. Right wing ideology has it that India's millennia-long weakness has been its diversity and its respect of diversity. An overarching sense of affiliation tying citizens together and to the state can be instilled by pan-Indian Hinduism. The right wing has acquired democratic power to give effect to their re-imagination of India as a Hindu India.

Since *hindutva* has not acquired political hegemony so far and is only making a bid for it politically and socially, having taken over the state through the ruling party, politically ascendant *hindutva* votaries would be inclined to use the military as part of their project. To them, displacement of the apolitical ethic in the military is a small price to pay for the larger national transformation.

¹ URL: <https://www.ids.nic.in/doctrine.php>

² URL: <https://theprint.in/defence/new-navy-chiefs-first-order-no-quasi-religious-functions-please-we-are-the-navy/245834/>

Adherence to cultural nationalism will make the military a reliable instrument in the defence and propagation of *hindutva*. Thus incentivized, the right wing take-over of the military will facilitate cultural nationalism and their hegemonic status.

This calls for a watchfulness on the military's part and a self-regulation on part of the political class to follow the time tested norm on keeping the military out of politics. In case of neglect of such an early warning, involvement of the military into politics sets the stage for the military's involvement in politics on its own volition. If the onset of subjective civilian control keeps the military subordinate to its cultural nationalist overseers in the initial phases of the national transformation exercise, it also simultaneously creates the conditions for military interference in politics subsequently. A cultural nationalism-inclined military maximally could veto democratic transition to a popularly elected future government not subscribing to *hindutva* or minimally prove insubordinate.

Politicisation of the military may prove both, the benchmark of success for the political project of *hindutva*, and the instrument of *hindutva* spread. That the incipient politicisation is underway is evident in the polarisation within the military. Cultural nationalism has been directly seeping into the military's organisational culture by way of the leadership cult around Modi, popular with the middle classes, from which spring the officership of the military, and due to the wide societal approval and allegiance of cultural nationalism. Indirectly, this has been reinforced through the strategic cultural shift to strategic proactivism that has the military's approval, under Modi.

The manner in which the military's organisational culture shapes up, will depend on the consolidation of hegemony of *hindutva*. Even if cultural nationalists succeed, the military will remain traditionally politically neutered through subjective civilian control. Subjective civilian control of the military then may arguably be employed as it may be necessary to ensure the military's subordination. However, a premature shift to subjective civilian control at the time when *hindutva* is contested can end up making the military a site of the competition by ending its traditional and hypothecated neutrality. This paper states that the apolitical ethic of the military is currently on the front line due to intentions of *hindutva* revivalists to co-opt the military in their reshaping of India and their desire to find partial resonance within the military. Consequently, the cautionary word for the government and the military is that both need persisting with the tried and tested mode of political direction and military subordination respectively.

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RIGHT WING ASCENDANCE IN INDIA AND POLITICISATION OF INDIA'S MILITARY

Abstract. The rise to taking over state power after elections of 2014 by majoritarian forces in India has since witnessed weakening of institutions of governance. The ruling Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) has returned to power with an enhanced parliamentary majority in the 2019 elections. The rise of *hindutva* (Hindu-ness), the Hindu nationalist political philosophy of the formations comprising the BJP and the *Sangh parivaar* (organizational family of the *Sangh*) or affiliates of the right wing *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS), has reshaped the discourse on the “idea of India”. Under the extensive reframing in majoritarian nationalist terms of Indian political verities, it is conceivable that the Indian military, widely regarded as a professional, apolitical and secular force, will also be impacted.

There has been little academic scrutiny of the possible influence of majoritarianism on the Indian military. The paper examines impact of the onset of majoritarianism democracy on India's military by taking a close look at the movement in civil-military relations under the BJP government. There is a shift in civil-military relations from objective civilian control, that enhances professionalism and keeps the military apolitical, to subjective civilian control, wherein the military is co-opted through subscribing to the ideology-based security perspective of the ruling party. This shift poses for the military a risk of losing their a political ethic. Erosion of the apolitical ethic of the military will open up the military's secular ethic to modification.

The conclusions are both relevant for policy and theory. The relevance for policy lies in the need for the Indian state and the military to preserve professionalism by persisting with the objective civilian control model. The theoretical relevance is in discerning limits to the concept of obedience of the military to the civilian political rulers. Where there is a threat from a political ideology or its penetration into the military's intellectual domain with the potential to dilute the military's professionalism, the military needs to pushback for the sake of national security.

Keywords: Indian military; military sociology; Hindutva; military professionalism; civil-military relations; Indian politics..

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