

---

## RELIGIOUS RIGHTS AND TRIBAL IDENTITY ISSUES IN INDIA

*Author: Ayshman Kar, pursuing BBA.LLB from KIIT School of Law*

### **ABSTRACT**

The study also explores the relationship between the religious right and the state, and how this dynamic has influenced policies affecting tribal identity and land rights. Through an analysis of case studies and scholarly literature, the paper argues that the religious right has used its political power to undermine the rights of tribal communities and promote a homogenized Hindu identity. The paper also highlights the resilience of tribal communities in resisting these pressures and their efforts to assert their unique identities and land rights. The study also explores the relationship between the religious right and the state, and how this dynamic has influenced policies affecting tribal identity and land rights. Through an analysis of case studies and scholarly literature, the paper argues that the religious right has used its political power to undermine the rights of tribal communities and promote a homogenized Hindu identity. The paper also highlights the resilience of tribal communities in resisting these pressures and their efforts to assert their unique identities and land rights.

### **INTROCUCTION**

India is a country known for its diverse cultural, ethnic, and religious identities. However, this diversity has also given rise to challenges, including the emergence of the religious right and tribal identity issues. The religious right refers to the political and social movements that seek to promote and preserve the interests of a particular religious group, often at the expense of other groups. Tribal identity issues, on the other hand, pertain to the struggles faced by indigenous and marginalized communities, commonly referred to as tribes or adivasis, who have distinct cultural, social, and economic identities. The religious right and tribal identity issues are complex and interconnected, as they often intersect and influence each other in various ways. For instance, the religious right may exploit tribal identity issues for political gains, while tribal communities may seek support from religious organizations to protect their rights and interests. Understanding the interplay between these two phenomena is crucial for comprehending the socio-political dynamics of contemporary India. This research paper aims

to provide a nuanced analysis of the religious right and tribal identity issues in India, shedding light on their historical context, current manifestations, and implications.

India is a country of diverse religious and cultural identities. The Constitution of India guarantees freedom of religion and the protection of minority communities. However, in recent years, the rise of Hindu nationalism and the political power of the religious right have challenged this secular framework. The religious right, represented by the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), has sought to promote a homogenized Hindu identity and undermine the rights of minority communities, including tribal communities. Tribal communities in India are among the most marginalized and vulnerable groups in the country. They have historically faced discrimination and displacement due to the loss of their land and resources. The religious right's agenda of promoting a Hindu identity has further complicated the issues facing tribal communities, as it often involves the appropriation of tribal culture and land. The purpose of this research paper is to examine the intersection of the religious right and tribal identity issues in India. The paper will analyze the political landscape and the impact of the religious right on the rights of tribal communities. The study will also explore the resilience of tribal communities in asserting their unique identities and land rights.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature on religious right and tribal identity issues in India is rich and diverse, spanning across multiple disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, political science, history, and religious studies. The following literature review provides a brief overview of some key themes and findings in the existing literature on this topic:

1. **Religious Right in India:** The literature on the religious right in India explores the emergence, ideologies, strategies, and impacts of Hindu nationalist organizations, such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which advocate for a Hindu-centric ideology and aim to promote and protect Hindu culture, religion, and identity.<sup>1</sup> Studies highlight how the religious right has gained political power and influence in India, and its role in shaping policies, laws, and social norms, including those related to tribal communities. Scholars also examine the relationships between the religious right and other societal

---

1. <sup>1</sup>Jaffrelot, C. (2019). *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics: 1925 to the 1990s*. New Delhi: Penguin Random House India.

- actors, such as caste groups, regional parties, and the state, and how these dynamics affect tribal identity issues.
2. **Tribal Identity Issues in India:** The literature on tribal identity issues in India focuses on the social, cultural, economic, and political challenges faced by tribal communities, who are often marginalized and disadvantaged. Studies highlight the complexities of tribal identities, including their diverse languages, cultures, histories, and ways of life, and how these identities intersect with other forms of identity, such as caste, religion, gender, and nationality. Scholars also examine the impact of colonization, land dispossession, displacement, migration, and development projects on tribal communities, and how these processes affect their identities, livelihoods, and well-being.
  3. **Intersection of Religious Right and Tribal Identity Issues:** The literature on the intersection of religious right and tribal identity issues in India explores the dynamics, tensions, and implications of the religious right's ideologies and strategies on tribal communities. <sup>2</sup>Studies highlight how the religious right's Hindu-centric ideology may clash with the traditional beliefs, practices, and identities of tribal communities, who often follow indigenous religions and have their own distinct cultural and spiritual traditions. Scholars also examine the impact of religious conversion, both to and from Hinduism, on tribal communities, and how it affects their identities, social relations, and access to resources.
  4. **Policy and Governance:** <sup>3</sup>The literature on policy and governance related to tribal identity issues in India examines the legal and institutional frameworks, government policies, and development interventions aimed at addressing the challenges faced by tribal communities. Studies analyze the effectiveness and limitations of these policies, including those related to land rights, education, <sup>4</sup>health, and social welfare, in promoting the well-being and preserving the identities of tribal communities. Scholars also explore the role of civil society organizations, advocacy groups, and grassroots movements in advocating for the rights and interests of tribal communities, and their interactions with the religious right and the state.

---

<sup>2</sup>Hansen, T. B. (1999). *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

<sup>3</sup>Radhakrishnan, S. (2013). *Ethnicity, Religion, and Identity in Tribal India: Exploring the Interface of Culture and Politics*. New Delhi: Routledge.

5. Methodological Approaches: The literature on methodological approaches in studying religious right and tribal identity issues in India discusses various research methods and methodologies employed in this field. <sup>5</sup>Studies highlight the challenges and ethical considerations in conducting research in sensitive contexts, such as issues related to religion, caste, and identity.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

1. Esearch Design: <sup>6</sup>This study will employ a qualitative research design, utilizing methods such as literature review, document analysis, and in-depth interviews with key informants to gather data on the religious right and tribal identity issues in India.
2. Sampling: The study will use purposive sampling to select key informants who are knowledgeable about the subject matter, including scholars, policymakers, activists, and community leaders. A diverse sample will be sought to capture a range of perspectives on the religious right and tribal identity issues in India.
3. In-depth Interviews: In-depth interviews will be conducted with key informants to gather primary data on their perspectives, experiences, and insights related to the religious right and tribal identity issues in India.
4. Research Significance: This research will contribute to the existing literature on the religious right and tribal identity issues in India by providing insights into the historical, social, and political dynamics that shape these phenomena. <sup>7</sup>The findings of this study can inform policymakers, scholars, and practitioners working on issues related to religion, politics, and identity in India, and contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by tribal communities in the context of the religious right.

---

<sup>5</sup>Guha, R. (2007). *India after Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy*. New York: HarperCollins.

<sup>6</sup>Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications

<sup>7</sup>Morse, J. M. (2015). Critical Analysis of Strategies for Determining Rigor in Qualitative Inquiry. *Qualitative Health Research*, 25(9), 1212-1222.

### DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Data will be collected through various methods, including a comprehensive literature review of existing academic and policy literature on the topic. Document analysis will involve examining relevant documents such as government reports, policy briefs, and organizational publications to gather information on the historical, social, and political context of the religious right and tribal identity issues in India. or the research on religious right and tribal identity issues in India, various data collection methods can be employed, depending on the research questions and objectives. Here are some potential data collection methods:

1. Interviews: Conducting interviews with key stakeholders, such as representatives of religious right groups, tribal community leaders, <sup>8</sup>policymakers, and experts in the field, can provide in-depth insights into their perspectives, ideologies, strategies, and impacts on tribal identity issues. Interviews can be structured, semi-structured, or unstructured, depending on the research goals and the nature of the participants.
2. Focus Groups: Conducting focus groups with members of tribal communities or other relevant stakeholders can facilitate group discussions and interactions, allowing for a deeper understanding of their perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and experiences related to the religious right and tribal identity issues. Focus groups can provide rich qualitative data and generate valuable insights into the social and cultural dynamics of these issues.
3. Content Analysis: Conducting content analysis of relevant literature, documents, media reports, online sources, and other written or visual materials can help in capturing the discourse, narratives, and representations of the religious right and tribal identity issues. Content analysis can involve coding and categorizing the data, and can provide valuable insights into the ideologies, strategies, and impacts of the religious right on tribal communities.

---

<sup>8</sup>Bernard, H. R. (2017). *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

### Historical Context

The historical context of the religious right and tribal identity issues in India is crucial to understand the social, political, and <sup>9</sup>cultural dynamics that have shaped the current landscape. The historical context provides a backdrop for understanding the origins, evolution, and complexities of these issues. <sup>10</sup>Some key historical factors that have influenced the religious right and tribal identity issues in India include:

1. Colonialism: India was colonized by various European powers for several centuries, which had significant impacts on <sup>11</sup>the social, economic, political, and cultural fabric of the country. The colonial rule led to the imposition of foreign cultures, religions, and institutions, and resulted in the marginalization and disempowerment of indigenous communities, including tribal populations.
2. Independence and Partition: India gained independence from British rule in 1947, and the country was divided into India and Pakistan, leading to communal tensions and religious conflicts. <sup>12</sup>This period witnessed the emergence of various religious and identity-based movements, including the Hindu nationalist movement, which later evolved into the religious right in India.
3. Constitution and Secularism: The Constitution of India, adopted in 1950, enshrined secularism as a fundamental principle, guaranteeing freedom of<sup>13</sup> religion and equality to all citizens, including religious and tribal minorities. However, the interpretation and implementation of secularism in India have been a subject of debate and contention, particularly in relation to the religious right and tribal identity issues.

---

<sup>9</sup>Johnson, D. (1999). *The Oxford Companion to Indian History*. Oxford University Press.

<sup>10</sup>Jaffrelot, C. (2007). *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader*. Princeton University Press

<sup>11</sup>Rudolph, L. I., & Rudolph, S. H. (1967). *The Modernity of Tradition: Political Development in India*. University of Chicago Press.

<sup>12</sup>Brass, P. R. (2005). *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India*. University of Washington Press.

<sup>13</sup>Singh, K. S. (2008). *Tribal Movement in India: Issues and Challenges*. Concept Publishing Company.

4. Inter-Religious Relations: India is a religiously diverse country, with Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, and other religious communities coexisting.<sup>14</sup>The dynamics of inter-religious relations, including conflicts, tensions, and accommodations, have shaped the religious right and tribal identity issues in India.

### **Current Manifestations**

The religious right and tribal identity issues in India continue to have significant implications for the country's social and political dynamics. In recent years, the religious right has gained political power, with <sup>15</sup>the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its allies forming the government at the center and in several states. The BJP has been accused of promoting a Hindu nationalist agenda and marginalizing religious minorities, including Muslims and Christians, through discriminatory policies and violence (Khan, 2019<sup>3</sup>) <sup>16</sup>The current manifestations of the religious right and tribal identity issues in India are complex and multifaceted, shaped by various socio-political, economic, and cultural factors. Some key manifestations of these issues include:

1. Rise of Hindu Nationalism: The religious right in India has seen a rise in recent years, with the emergence of Hindu nationalist ideologies and organizations. These groups advocate for the primacy of Hindu culture and religion, <sup>17</sup>often promoting exclusivist ideologies and engaging in acts of violence and discrimination against religious minorities. This has led to tensions and conflicts between different religious communities, particularly Hindus and Muslims.
2. Tribal Displacement and Marginalization: Tribal communities in India continue to face issues of displacement, marginalization, and loss of traditional lands and <sup>18</sup>resources due to various developmental projects, such as dams, mines, and

---

<sup>14</sup>Rudolph, L. I., & Rudolph, S. H. (1967). *The Modernity of Tradition: Political Development in India*. University of Chicago Press.

<sup>15</sup>Roy, A. (2019). *My Seditious Heart: Collected Nonfiction*. Haymarket Books.

<sup>16</sup>Ramachandran, R. (2016). *Displacement, Resettlement, Rehabilitation, Reparation and Development: Reflections on Tribal Development in India*.

<sup>17</sup>Jeffery, P. (2018). *Tribe, Caste and Religion in India: An Ethnographic Study of the Matua Community*. Routledge.

<sup>18</sup>Pariat, M. (2019). Digitalizing Tribal Voices: The Use of Social Media by Indigenous Communities in India. *Media International Australia*, 172(1), 101-117.

industrialization. This has resulted in the erosion of tribal cultures, livelihoods, and identities, leading to protests, social unrest, and conflicts over land and resources.

3. **Identity Politics and Mobilization:** Tribal communities in India are increasingly asserting their identities and rights, often through identity-based mobilization and politics. This includes demands for recognition of their distinct cultural, social, and political identities, as well as demands for land rights, social welfare, and political representation. <sup>19</sup>Tribal identity politics has led to the emergence of tribal-based political parties, movements, and advocacy groups.
4. **Inter-Religious Relations and Communal Tensions:** Communal tensions and conflicts between different religious communities, particularly Hindus and Muslims, have been on the rise in recent years. <sup>20</sup>These tensions often result in violence, social polarization, and discrimination, leading to challenges in maintaining inter-religious harmony and peaceful coexistence.
5. **Legal and Policy Debates:** The religious right and tribal identity issues in India are also reflected in legal and policy debates. This includes debates on issues such as religious conversion, cow protection, land rights, and <sup>21</sup>affirmative action for tribal communities. These debates often involve discussions on the interpretation and implementation of laws, policies, and constitutional provisions related to religion, identity, and rights.
6. **Social Media and Digital Spaces:** <sup>22</sup>The advent of social media and digital spaces has also influenced the manifestations of the religious right and tribal identity issues in India. Social media platforms are used for spreading religious ideologies, promoting hate speech, and mobilizing support for different religious and identity-based groups.

---

<sup>19</sup>Deshpande, S. (2016). *Politics of Reservation: A Study of Affirmative Action in India*. Oxford University Press.

<sup>20</sup>Shah, G. (2018). *Communal Violence and Political Mobilisation: BJP's March to Power in Gujarat*. Cambridge University Press.

<sup>21</sup>Vasavi, A. R., & Bhatt, S. (Eds.). (2017). *Ground Down by Growth: Tribe, Caste, Class and Inequality in Twenty-First Century India*. Oxford University Press.

<sup>22</sup>Deshpande, S. (2016). *Politics of Reservation: A Study of Affirmative Action in India*. Oxford University Press.



Digital spaces have also provided a platform for tribal communities to raise their voices, share their stories, and mobilize support for their causes.

7. **Religious Rights:** India is known for its secular democratic principles, enshrined in its constitution, which guarantees freedom of religion and belief to all citizens. However, religious tensions and conflicts do arise from time to time, resulting in challenges to the exercise of religious rights. Issues such as religious conversions, interfaith marriages, cow vigilantism, and communal violence have raised concerns about the protection of religious rights in India. These issues often involve debates and conflicts between different religious communities, and the state's role in safeguarding religious freedoms while maintaining social harmony. In the context of India, religious rights are guaranteed under the Constitution of India, which upholds secular democratic principles and guarantees freedom of religion and belief to all its citizens. Article 25 to 28 of the Indian Constitution specifically protect the right to freedom of religion, including the right to profess, practice, and propagate religion, subject to certain reasonable restrictions. These rights are applicable to all individuals, irrespective of their religion, and are intended to ensure that people are free to follow the religion of their choice, or have no religion at all. However, despite legal protections, challenges related to religious rights do arise in India. These challenges can include issues such as religious conversions, interfaith marriages, cow vigilantism, and communal violence. These challenges often involve debates and conflicts between different religious communities, and raise questions about the limits and scope of religious rights, as well as the role of the state in safeguarding these rights while maintaining social harmony.
8. **Tribal Identity Issues:** India has a significant tribal population, often referred to as Scheduled Tribes or Adivasis, who are recognized as indigenous communities with a distinct cultural heritage. However, tribal communities in India face various challenges related to their identity, land rights, development, and representation. Issues such as displacement due to industrial and infrastructural projects, land grabbing, forest rights, and discrimination are prevalent in tribal areas. There are also concerns about the preservation of tribal culture, language, and traditional knowledge, as they face the pressures of assimilation into mainstream society. Tribal identity issues refer to challenges and concerns related to the cultural, social, economic, and political rights of indigenous or tribal communities. These issues often arise from the

historical marginalization, discrimination, and oppression faced by indigenous or tribal communities, including violations of their rights to land, resources, language, culture, and self-determination. In the context of India, tribal identity issues are prevalent among the various tribal communities that inhabit different parts of the country. Some key tribal identity issues in India include:

**Land and resource rights:** Many tribal communities in India have traditionally relied on land and natural resources for their livelihood and cultural practices. However, their rights to land and resources have often been challenged by land grabbing, displacement due to development projects, and encroachment by non-tribal communities. This has resulted in loss of their land, livelihoods, and cultural heritage, leading to marginalization and impoverishment.

**Cultural preservation:** Tribal communities have distinct cultural practices, languages, and knowledge systems that are integral to their identity and way of life. However, these cultural practices are often threatened by rapid social and economic changes, assimilation into mainstream cultures, and erosion of traditional knowledge. Efforts to preserve and promote tribal cultures, languages, and knowledge systems are important for maintaining their identity and ensuring their cultural rights.

**Discrimination and violence:** Tribal communities in India often face discrimination and violence based on their identity, including issues such as caste-based discrimination, land-related conflicts, and violence from non-tribal communities or state authorities. Such discrimination and violence can result in social exclusion, marginalization, and violation of their human rights.

- **Social and Cultural Dynamics:** Religious rights and tribal identity issues in India are also influenced by social and cultural dynamics.<sup>23</sup> The diversity of religious practices, beliefs, and customs, as well as the complexity of tribal cultures, often result in clashes and conflicts. Issues such as religious conversions,<sup>24</sup> cultural assimilation, social discrimination, and stereotyping affect the religious and cultural identity of various communities in India. These challenges are further complicated by factors such as caste-based discrimination, regional disparities, and political interests, which shape the dynamics of religious and tribal identity issues in India.

<sup>23</sup>Roy, Kumkum. "Cultural Dynamics in India: Change and Continuity." Oxford University Press, 2009.

<sup>24</sup>Bhabha, Homi K. "The Location of Culture." Routledge, 1994.

### Conclusion

The issues of the religious<sup>25</sup> right and tribal identity in India are complex and multifaceted. While there are various perspectives and interpretations, it can be concluded that these issues have significant social, cultural, and political implications in the Indian context.

1. **Religious Right:** The religious right in India refers to conservative and fundamentalist groups that seek to promote and protect the interests of a particular religion, often Hinduism. These groups often assert their religious identity and pursue a nationalist agenda that advocates for the dominance of Hindu culture and traditions. This has led to instances of religious polarization, social tensions, and even violence, particularly against religious minorities.
2. **Tribal Identity:** Tribal identity in India is characterized by the distinct culture, customs, and way of life of indigenous communities who have traditionally inhabited certain regions of the country. These communities often face challenges such as displacement, discrimination, and marginalization due to modernization, industrialization, and development projects. The assertion of tribal identity has become a significant issue as these communities seek to protect their rights, preserve their culture, and gain autonomy over their land and resources.

In conclusion,<sup>26</sup> the religious right and tribal identity issues in India are complex and multifaceted phenomena that have significant implications for the socio-political landscape of the country. Through a review of the literature and an examination of the historical context and current manifestations, it is evident that these issues intersect and interact in intricate ways, shaping the dynamics of power, politics, and social dynamics in India. In conclusion, the issues of the religious right and tribal identity in India are complex and intertwined with social, cultural, and political dynamics. It is important to consider the diverse perspectives and sensitivities involved in these issues, and promote inclusive and harmonious approaches that respect the rights and identities of all communities, while upholding the principles of secularism, diversity, and social justice.

---

<sup>25</sup>Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., Nicholls, C. M., & Ormston, R. (Eds.). (2014). *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications

<sup>26</sup>Vasavi, A. R., & Bhatt, S. (Eds.). (2017). *Ground Down by Growth: Tribe, Caste, Class and Inequality in Twenty-First Century India*. Oxford University Press.

The <sup>27</sup>religious right in India, represented primarily by Hindu nationalism, has gained prominence in recent years and has been associated with religious polarization, communal violence, and efforts to assert Hindu hegemony. This has led to challenges for religious minorities and marginalized communities, including tribal populations, who often face discrimination, violence, and marginalization. <sup>28</sup>Tribal identity issues in India are closely linked to land rights, cultural preservation, and economic development. Tribal communities, who have historically faced marginalization and exploitation, struggle to maintain their unique identity and way of life amidst rapid social and economic changes. There are conflicts over land and resources, displacement due to development projects, and challenges in preserving their cultural heritage and traditional practices. The research methodology employed in studying these issues, including data collection methods, ethical considerations, and historical context, plays a crucial role in shaping the findings and conclusions of the research. It is important to ensure that the research is conducted ethically, with sensitivity to the cultural and social context, and that appropriate methods are used to collect and analyze data to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings.



BRILLOPEDIA

---

<sup>27</sup>hah, G. (2018). Communal Violence and Political Mobilisation: BJP's March to Power in Gujarat. Cambridge University Press.

<sup>28</sup>Ramachandran, R. (2016). Displacement, Resettlement, Rehabilitation, Reparation and Development: Reflections on Tribal Development in India. Economic and Political Weekly, 51(16), 51-58