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**Topic of research- A Comparative Study of Hindu and Islamic Fundamentalism in Varanasi**

### **Findings**

This research investigates the idea of fundamentalism and the similarities and differences between the fundamentalist tendencies of Hinduism and Islam in a post-liberalized India and particularly in Varanasi. The reason for choosing Varanasi as a research site for this study lies in the fact that Varanasi has a significant number of Muslims (around 30%) and a majority of the Hindu population with a history of peaceful syncretic culture. But the post-liberalization phase has seen a great change in the city with emerging symptoms of modernity as well as two communal riots (1991) and the subsequent bombing of religious places like Sankat Mochan temple (2006) and Dasaswamedh Ghat (2010), which was blamed on the Muslim fundamentalist and terrorists. These events disturbed the prevailing harmony and fundamentalist forces started taking roots in the city. It will be helpful to find out what are the common factors in both religions that are leading to the rise of these forces and what has been the response of people as well as states to these forces? Findings can be compared with the general factors responsible for the rise of fundamentalist forces in India and the world. Regarding Hindu and Islamic fundamentalism there has been significant works by authors like Lumbard, Bernard Lewis, Manual Castells, Stuart Corbridge, John Harriss, and Meera Nanda.

It is observed in the research by the researcher that the role of the State in the management of fundamentalism has been largely determined by the government holding the central levers of power and administration. The period of congress rule in India saw a relatively moderate phase and maintenance of distance by state from

sensitive religious issues. Although charges of Muslim appeasement, visible in the Shah Bano case, (Mullally, 2004) and discriminatory attitudes towards Sikhs (Who Are the Guilty, 1984) were also labelled on the congress government. This scenario changed with the coming of the BJP-led NDA in the power. Recent events in the country indicate that political secularism is on a declining trend (Ramachandran, 2020 & George, 2019). Along with it, a simultaneous aggressive posture and approach of the current Indian State towards communal issues have resulted in a growing sense of insecurity among Indian Muslims. It has further instilled a distrust towards the Indian State. This phenomenon was also observed in the context of Varanasi with the difference that people in both communities admitted it in 'sotto voce' during the interaction with the researcher. The traditional culture is passing through a deep churning process since the globalization period of the 1990s. On the one hand, fundamentalist organizations like the Sangh Parivar are trying to drag the country back to the illusory Vedic age, on the other, the younger generation is trying to model it on the lines of global culture and consumerism. It is also true in the context of Islam.