

Pahalgam Attack: Threat to Indian Secular Constitution

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Abstract

Kashmir is renowned for its breathtaking scenery, high mountain ranges, lush green meadows, pristine springs, and crystal-clear rivers. Every year, millions of tourists visit Kashmir to embrace this serene beauty. Tourism in Kashmir has been a primary source of livelihood for its people. It is a positive side of Kashmir. But Kashmir is also notorious for acts of terror. Since Independence, Kashmir has suffered from numerous terror attacks and infiltration. Abrogation of Article 370 has not yet changed the situation of Kashmir. The recent Pahalgam attack has proven a security threat to civilians. Earlier attacks like Uri and Pulwama were carried out by the armed forces. But the Pahalgam attack is a direct attack on Hindu civilians. It is a kind of attack that traumatized Indians with several contexts in terms of internal security, racial crisis, terrorizing certain religions, threatening the large Hindu population in India, questioning the Governmental prominence of the Indian Government, and most of all questioning secularism or the Indian Secular Constitution. Therefore, the area of study tries to find out what kind of threat has been suffered by the Indian Secular Constitution.

Keywords

Kashmir, Terrorism, Article 370, Internal Security, Civilians, Threat, Racial Crisis, Secular Constitution.

Reference to this paper should be made as follows:

Received: 26-02-26

Approved: 08-03-26

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RJPP Oct.25-Mar.26,

Vol. XXIV, No. I,

Article No. 16

Pg. 159-164

Similarity Check - 01%

Online available at:

<https://anubooks.com/journal-volume/rjpp-mar-2026-vol-xxiv-no1--270>

<https://doi.org/10.31995/rjpp.2026.v24i01.016>

Introduction:

In recent days, in global politics, wars, genocides, terror attacks, and geopolitical conflicts have been significantly circulated on social media within a few seconds. Whether it is Gaza's Rafah or Israel's war on Gaza, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the downfall of Sheikh Hasina, the emergence of an internal disputed political vacuum, or atrocity in Bangladesh, circulated on social media. Likewise, the Pahalgam terrorist attack is not different. On 22nd April, after the terror attack, various disturbing visuals surfaced on social media that captured the moment of the terror attack. Some annoying footage about the terror attack sets diverse political narratives, both positive and negative. The immediate response on social media about terrorism questioned the Secularist pattern of the Constitution. Before looking into the threat of the Secular constitution, let's briefly describe the Pahalgam terrorist attack. In the Pahalgam attack, a group of five militants targeted tourists in Baisaran Valley. The mass killing was done on the basis of religious barbarism by militant fundamentalists. In other words, the militants killed tourists for a certain reason first, the identity of being Hindu, second, an execution style of killing, which means militants forced them to recite Kalma, if they didn't recite Kalma, they killed them at point-blank range. Third, militants checked whether the males were circumcised or if not, they killed, and fourth, they left women and children to warn the Indian Government about their evil strategy and tyrannical practice. Various newspaper reports, tourists, and victims mentioned that the attacker shouted with Jihadi slogans during the time of killing. The responsibility of mass killing was taken by the Resistance Front. It is a militant organization that is involved in insurrection activity throughout Jammu and Kashmir. It was a subgroup of terrorist organisations like Hizbul Mujahideen and Lashkar-e-Taiba. Although the Resistance Front later refused to claim responsibility for the attack. But the organization was earlier involved in various terrorizing activities around Jammu and Kashmir's Handwara (2020), Keran (2020), Shopian IED attack (2022), Anantnag Encounter (2023), and Reasi attack (2024). This unanticipated killing in the tourist spots in Kashmir raises multiple questions regarding the security of the citizens of India within Indian territory. The killing of Hindus claims the separatist choices of the terrorists. In a simple sense, the act of terrorism aims to communally instigate the Indian populace with the instrument of religion. The motive of the attack was to have an immediate impact on the security and sovereignty of India. Another important reason might be the Amarnath Yatra. It means thousands of Hindu pilgrims visit these religious sites every year to worship lord Shiva's shrine. It is feasible that the terror attack will deter the Yatra. Besides, the killing of tourists rather than locals becomes impactful

for various reasons. It would have a negative effect on tourism in Jammu and Kashmir, on the one hand. And encouraging militant activity and destabilization within Kashmir on the other. The destabilizations in Kashmir is an age-old prevailing issue where a certain group of people has been used to create instability in the region. These age-old instabilities are “a mix of ethnic, religious, and territorial battles; irredentism; hyper nationalism; and economic reform and turbulence leading to protracted interstate and intrastate conflict” (Ganguly&Bajpai,1994, p.402). To take action against terrorist activities Government of India organized “Operation Sindoor” on 7th and 8th May 2025. It was launched by the Indian Armed Forces. This military operation was a challenge against “terrorist infrastructure,” which has a decade-long presence in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. It was a terror cleansing operation done by India to secure its people, citizens, from an undetermined loss. Besides, this military act was organized to secure intrastate integrity and fraternity. The terrorist camps of Hizbul Mujahideen, Lashkar-e-Taiba, and Zaish-e-Muhammad have been destroyed in nine places in Pok and Pakistan. The government announces it is a non-escalatory operation executed to abolish the act of terror in South Asia. Pakistan reacts with several drone attacks, but all are destroyed by India’s powerful Air defence system (PIB India,2025).

The above mentioned is a short brief of the Pahalgam terrorist activity and India Government’s immediate action. But the question of Secularism remained ever after. Over the last three decades, Indian citizens observed a number of terrorist activities, from an aeroplane hijack to the Pahalgam attack. But there are interstate terrorist organizations that mostly run under Islamic militant organizations. These groups are located mostly in Pakistan and Pakistan Occupied Kashmir. Besides, there are intrastate terrorist groups like the Maoist organization, Khalistan Forces, ULFA or United National Liberalist Front of Assam, Jamiat-ul-Mujahideen India, which are banned by the Government of India. The present case study aims to analyse the impact of acts of terror on the secularism of India and its secular constitution.

Terrorism, Communalism and the threat to Constitutional Secularism:

Every time India suffered from terrorist attacks, the threat to the Secular constitution became a debatable phenomenon in the political and social life of India. The idea of Secularism indicates that the state does not validate or patronize any particular religious faith. It is a kind of emotion and belief where all citizens are equally treated in any public and political sector, regardless of religious identity. The word Secularism is derived from Latin, which denotes a ‘temporal world’. It was first used by Niccolò Machiavelli. In Machiavelli’s standpoint, “the state should not adopt its religion as its own. Religion should be left to individual citizens as it is

a matter of personal belief and conscience” (Mathur,1999, p.123). The idea of secularism is a two-fold ideology. Firstly, it prevents any form of injustice over religious faith, and secondly, it provides freedom in the practice of religion. There are Articles in the constitution that provide liberty to practice any religious identity for all the citizens. The constitution sanctioned ‘liberty of belief, faith and worship’ in the preamble, ‘the right to freely profess, practice and propagate any religion’ in article 25. Article 26 advocated for ‘every religious denomination has the right to manage its religious affairs’, in article 27 persons are not forced to pay taxes to promotion of religion while article 28 prevented religious instructions for educational institutions within territory (Laxmikanth, 2022, p.3.5). These are few articles of the constitution which are the soul of Secular identity of India as a nation, and its cultural, historical religious heritage. It is an inclusivity of the Secularist idea in India that the state is neutral to all religious matters. But the terrorist attack like Pahalgam raises queries about the secular identity of the nation and the constitution.

The militant attack raises the risks of communal polarization among the religious communities in India. It undermines the constitutional privileges of egalitarianism among its citizens. Often fuels to the social hatred and anxieties in the citizens at large. The attack in Pahalgam gives rise to the ideological devaluation. For that Indian Muslims were victimized by aggressive Hindu narratives, suspicion and surveillance. As a result, it weakens the secular belief of the Indian Constitution. The militant attack influenced internal politics through media embellishment that made a shift from public debate over secular principles to the communal polarization. Moreover, the Pahalgam attack creates a secular threat on politicization of the attack through social media and media narrative towards an identity-based social fragmentation. It is a xenophobic crisis within Indian territory where Hindu and Muslim co-citizens developed a kind of verbal, psychological friction both in social sectors as well as on social media. Besides, the attack creates a sudden change in the geopolitical perspective of South Asia. It revitalized India-Pakistan’s conflict regarding terrorism, Islamic bigotry and the Kashmir issue. The secular constitutional threat is also concerned about multilateral engagement. The terrorist attack “gravely destabilized regional equilibrium...an immediate surge in regional tensions, heightened security alerts across Kashmir” (Ahmed, 2025). The attack escalates outrage across the country. For that, the government retaliates with counter-military activity. In internal politics, anti-Muslim threat instigates across Indian society. The internet plays a crucial role in spreading religious hatred against Indian Muslims to some extent. The Kashmiri Muslims were threatened across the country (Ahmed, 2025). The social life of Jammu and Kashmir suffered due to the attack. The political

parties used a divisive approach to alienate Muslims from the mainstream social life of India. At the same time, non-Muslims are also enraged by the terrorist attack and are involved in the politics of hate against the Muslim population. It is a common nature of the Indian social system over the past hundred years to grow hatred between Hindu and Muslims. Although the pattern of blaming and hatred changes in every decade. But in recent days, enmity between Hindus and Muslims questioned the secular context of India as a nation, nationality and religion. The attack prevented cooperation and fraternity between religions and engaged in polarization and compounded the problem. To balance Secularist ideals government of India imposed diplomatic pressure on Pakistan to keep them apart from international forums.

Concluding Observation:

The study raises a question of the threat to secularism in Indian politics. It is found that the attack tried to put a concern on the national security across the nation in one side. On the other hand, targeting a certain religion in terms of terrorism. One of the significant facts is that the attack influenced politicization, communalization and social polarization between Hindu and Muslim citizens in India. It affects the secular constitution of India with sensitive issues like the vote bank. Besides, the Constitution of India states that our country never supports a particular religious way of life. Such a terrorist act challenges constitutional values and norms, increases social instability and communal atrocity. The Government of India immediately took steps regarding the terror attack, but a few extremist groups tried to deharmonise non-Hindu community in various places in the state. To strengthen Secularism and prevent terror attacks, the government banned different radical activities and introduced robust security for Indians both internally and externally. Took action like Operation Sindoor to wipe away the terrorist hotspots of Pakistan. But one of the considerable facts is that the military service of the Indian Army is good for its citizens. The terror attack instigates surgical strikes from the government of India. The terrorist attack impacts both mass awareness and governmental reaction for geopolitical significance in South Asia that recasting the secularist idea of the Indian constitution.

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