

Attitudes, Behavior, and Contradiction: Galtung's ABC Conflict Triangle and the Institutionalization of Structural Violence in BJP Minority Legislations (2014-2024)

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Abstract

Johan Galtung's ABC conflict triangle is a core concept in Peace and Conflict Studies. This triangle comprises of Attitudes (A), Behavior (B), and Contradiction (C), and it has been applied in this paper to the decade-long Hindu nationalist governance in India between 2014 and 2024. This particular framework by Galtung's framework maintains that conflict is driven by the dynamic interaction of hostile attitudes between parties, conflict behaviors through which those attitudes are enacted, and an underlying structural contradiction whose persistence regenerates both attitudes and behaviors regardless of surface-level de-escalation. Drawing on Galtung's foundational formulations and on subsequent applications in conflict studies scholarship, this paper argues that all three vertices of the ABC triangle are simultaneously effective in the relationship between the State of India under the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) regime and the Muslim minority population, specifically during 2014-2024. It argues that the Attitudes are maintained through the Hindutva ideology and the political discourse that precedes this ideology, whereas the Behavior is the manifestation of a documented pattern of administrative demolition, legislative discrimination, and communal violence. Similarly, the primary Contradiction (C) is depicted by the structural incompatibility between ethnic majoritarian sovereignty and the constitutional guarantee of secularism and equal rights for all citizens. The core argument of this paper is therefore that the ABC Conflict Triangle framework of Galtung not only explains the pattern of structural violence in the said decade, but also addresses systemic causes explaining why the interventions in the behavior have been insufficient in bringing positive peace in India. With qualitative documentary analysis as its methodology, empirical evidence is drawn from Supreme Court proceedings, human rights documentation, political discourse analysis, and democratic erosion data.

Keywords: ABC conflict triangle, Galtung, Attitudes, Behavior, Contradiction.

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Introduction

The Parliament of India passed the Citizenship Amendment Act on December 11, 2019, which, for the first time in the constitutional history of the republic, made the criterion for citizenship dependent on religion. The law extended a pathway to naturalization for undocumented migrants from three neighboring countries who belonged to six specified religious communities; it explicitly excluded Muslims. Three months earlier, the government had revoked the constitutionally entrenched special status of Jammu and Kashmir by presidential order, detaining thousands, imposing a communications blackout, and bifurcating the state without legislative deliberation. Between these legislative landmarks, the decade of BJP governance from 2014 to 2024 accumulated a record that includes documented episodes of mass demolitions of Muslim housing, communal violence with documented patterns of targeting, vigilante killings under cow-protection mandates, and a measurable decline in India's scores on every major index of liberal democracy (Amnesty International, 2024; Freedom House, 2024; Human Rights Watch, 2024; V-Dem Institute, 2024).

How should this decade be understood analytically? The question is not merely descriptive cataloguing incidents is necessary but insufficient for understanding the systemic logic that generates them. It is, rather, theoretical: what framework best captures the dynamic through which a pattern of harm is produced, sustained, and reproduced over a decade, surviving episodic judicial intervention, sustained civil society documentation, and international criticism? The core idea of this paper is that the framework of ABC Conflict Triangle proposed by Johan Galtung in his work *Peace by Peaceful Means* (1996), later applied in his subsequent works as well, explains the state of minorities, particularly Muslims, living in the Republic of India under the BJP Regime, particularly in the decade of 2014-2024. It argues that the entire conflict is driven by structural and cultural violence in India, which is why there is absolute absence of Positive Peace in India, whose population is exceeding 1.4 billion as of 2024. (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2024). Therefore, with the absence of positive peace, and in the presence of structural and cultural violence in India, the application of ABC Framework is a logical explanation of the current state of the minorities in the republic. Attitudes (A) comprise of perceptions, emotions, fears, and misperceptions, whereas Behavior (B) explains actions, coercions, institutional maneuvers, and violence through which attitudes are endorsed and shaped. Similarly, Contradiction (C) are the underlying structural causes, resulting in the clash of interests, needs, and/or goals, ultimately resulting in violent attitudes and conflict behaviors regardless of surface-level change (Galtung, 1996, p. 70–72; Ramsbotham et al., 2011, p. 9).

The ABC triangle has been applied productively across a range of empirical scenarios throughout this paper. Aziz (2021) also applied this phenomena to the Naxalite insurgency in India; Anand (2024) to the Syrian civil war; Feeney (2023) to environmental conflicts in Colombia; Hernández (2023) to communal tensions in

Indonesia. The most important gap, however, the one that has not been fully explored, is how this full multilateral framework, i.e. Johan Galtung's ABC Conflict Triangle, applies to the relationship between a majoritarian state and a religious minority, especially in a democratic republic where democratic decline has been documented. (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; V-Dem Institute, 2024). This paper fills that gap, using India between 2014 and 2024 as its pragmatic foundation. The paper is basically organized into seven key sections. Section 2 of this paper explains Galtung's ABC model in detail. Sections 3, 4, and 5 examine and explain the Attitudes, Behaviors, and Contradictions of Galtung's ABC Conflict Triangle, respectively. Section 6 critically evaluates how the three components of the ABC triangle interact and what this means for Galtung's concept of positive peace. Section 7 concludes the paper.

Galtung's ABC Conflict Triangle: Framework and Applications

The Architecture of the Framework

In *Peace by Peaceful Means* (1996), the founding father of Peace and Conflict Studies, Johan Galtung, introduced the ABC Triangle as a systemic way to analyze conflict. Conflict Analysis, which is the systemic study to understand the conflict, while using this triangle model, goes several steps beyond the basic victim vs perpetrator system, which is a binary and somewhat primitive way of understanding any conflict. This model goes beyond that binary model of victim versus perpetrator by offering a detailed systemic understanding of how conflict is caused and sustained. Galtung views conflict as a process, rather than an event, and considers it as a dynamic as well as continuous interaction between the three angles of a triangle. These three corners of the triangle i.e. ABC, are in a continuous mutual interaction with each other, and Galtung argues that each of them is equally capable of reproducing the other two, meaning that there is a direct and constant interaction between attitudes, behaviors, and contradictions (Galtung, 1996).

According to Galtung, Attitudes (A) in this triangle cover 'the subjective dimension of a conflict, which also includes the perceptions and misperceptions that the conflict parties may have between themselves and towards each other, and also towards the conflict itself' (Galtung, 1996; Ramsbotham et al., 2011). Attitudes in this triangle may include emotions, fear, hatred, distrust, contempt, as well as the perceptive constructions of the conflict parties towards the identities, motivations, and claims of the other party. Therefore, Attitudes in this triangle of Galtung do not need to be balanced or rationally grounded. Misperceptions and dehumanizing constructions are analytically as significant as accurate perceptions, because their behavioral consequences are equivalent: a party that constructs the other as criminal, threatening, or subhuman will behave towards them accordingly, regardless of the accuracy of that construction (Galtung, 1996; Jeong, 2008).

The second corner, Behavior (B), describes the actions that parties take toward one another: physical violence, institutional maneuvers, coercive

interventions, legislative impositions through which the conflict is enacted in the social world. Galtung (1996) distinguishes between constructive behaviors, negotiation, compromise, and accommodation, and destructive behaviors, coercion, threats, and direct violence. For the framework's analytical purposes, what matters is not the formal character of a behavior (whether it is technically legal, whether it is enacted by a state authority) but its functional effect on the conflict dynamic: does it escalate or de-escalate, reinforce or transform the triangle's other vertices? (Ramsbotham et al., 2011).

The third corner, Contradiction (C), is analytically the most important because it is the most fundamental: it names the 'objective dimension of the conflict, the actual incompatibility of goals between the parties' (Galtung, 1996). A contradiction, in Galtung's usage, is not merely a disagreement or a tension it is a structural incompatibility of interests, needs, or goals that cannot be resolved through attitudinal change or behavioral modification alone, because it is embedded in the social, institutional, or distributional arrangements that organize the parties' relationship. For Galtung, the conclusive property of a contradiction is its capacity to regenerate. This means that an unresolved contradiction will reproduce antagonistic attitudes and violent behaviors over time, regardless of any ceasefire, dialogue process, or institutional reform that addresses only the attitudinal (A) or behavioral (B) issues. (Galtung, 1996; Jeong, 2008).

The Triangle's Systemic Logic

The ABC Conflict Triangle derives its analytical ability from the dynamic relationships between its three corners of the triangle i.e. A, B, and C. This means that all three are interconnected and possess a correlation rather than being independent of each other. Galtung (1996, p. 72) categorically states that: "a conflict may start at any corner of the triangle, travel along the sides, and become entrenched." This fundamental attribute of the triangle is about the mutual correlation of its three corners. For the concept of peace, particularly in terms of negative and positive peace, this systemic logic of the ABC Conflict Triangle has direct implications. Johan Galtung defines Negative Peace as the absence of direct violence, which is achieved through coercion or the exhaustion of all the parties involved in the conflict (1969, p. 183; 1996, p. 9). In addition, Galtung defines Positive Peace as the absence of direct, structural, and cultural violence, or all violence. In other words, positive peace means social justice and the transformation of all the three corners of the triangle that are A, B, and C at the same time and not independent of each other.

According to Galtung's framework, Negative Peace is inherently unstable because it addresses Behavior while leaving Attitudes and Contradiction intact: the hostile perceptions and the structural incompatibility that generated conflict behavior remain in place, and they will regenerate behavioral escalation when conditions permit. Positive Peace, on the other hand, requires Conflict Transformation according

to Galtung (1996). He defines Conflict Transformation as “a transition from conflict to peace,’ achieved by ‘transcending’ the underlying contradiction rather than merely managing or suppressing its behavioral expressions” (Jeong, 2008; Ramsbotham et al., 2011).

The scholar who has emerged on the subject subsequently has further elaborated Galtung’s ABC framework across multiple empirical domains. Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall (2011) use the ABC Conflict Triangle as the organizational spine of their comprehensive conflict resolution text, treating it as ‘by far the most influential model in the field.’ Similarly, Jeong (2008) demonstrates its utility for disaggregating the causal components of protracted social conflicts, conflicts that persist across generations because their contradictions are embedded in ethnic, religious, or civilizational structures. Aziz (2021) applies the ABC Conflict Triangle to the Naxalite insurgency by mapping the Attitude of state contempt for Adivasi claims, the Behavior of paramilitary operations, and the Contradiction of land dispossession. More recently, the SCRR (2025) review applies it to the Israel-Palestine and Russia-Ukraine conflicts, demonstrating how unresolved territorial contradictions regenerate attitudes and behaviors across multiple rounds of negotiation and ceasefire. All of these applications of the ABC Conflict Triangle share is dependability to Galtung’s original systemic logic, establishing that the triangle is dynamic and neither of the three corners operates independently.

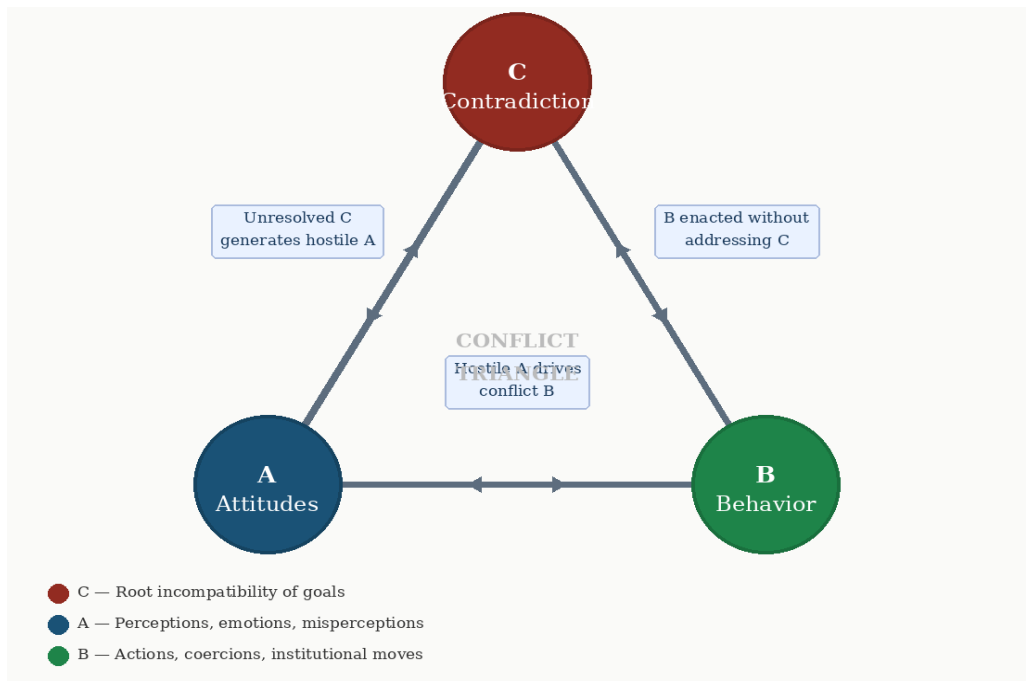
Applying the Triangle to State-Minority Conflict

State-Minority Conflict offers classic proving ground to test the application and capabilities of this triangle, particularly in a formal democratic environment. Moreover, in a democratic setting, it also raises several new methodological question that several previous applications of this model as stated in the previous section have not fully addressed. In symmetric or near-symmetric conflicts such as inter-state wars, armed insurgencies, civil conflicts with organized non-state actors, the A, B, and C of this triangle are mapped systemically. Each of the conflicting party has Attitudes toward the other, Behavior directed at the other, and Contradiction reflecting its own interests and goals. The framework’s explanatory leverage in these cases comes from showing how the parties’ versions of each corner interact and reinforce one another (Ramsbotham et al., 2011).

However, in the asymmetric conflicts such as the state-minority conflicts, the asymmetry of power between parties: a state with administrative apparatus, legislative authority, judicial institutions, and a control on the legitimate coercion on one side; a minority community with none of these institutional resources on the other requires explicit methodological attention. In such a scenario, Galtung’s framework accommodates this asymmetric application, where the triangle’s three corners are mapped from the perspective of the dominant party, which is the state in this case, the subordinate party, which is the minority in the case of India. It also goes further by

mapping the relationship between them (Bufacchi, 2012; Jeong, 2008). In this paper, the ABC triangle is mapped primarily from the perspective of the relationship between the actors, such as the Attitudes, which are analyzed as the attitudinal constructions that the dominant party (the BJP-governed state and its ideological apparatus) directs toward the minority. Similarly, Behavior is analyzed as the pattern of state actions that enact those constructions; and Contradiction is analyzed as the structural incompatibility that organizes the relationship between them, regardless of how either party formally characterizes it (Galtung, 1996).

Figure 1: *Galtung's ABC Conflict Triangle. Source: Galtung (1996); Ramsbotham et al. (2011).*



Attitudes: The Attitudinal Infrastructure of Communal Conflict

Hindutva as an Organized Attitudinal System Attitudes:

Galtung (1996) defines Attitudes as the subjective, affective, and cognitive dimension of conflict: the perceptions, emotions, fears, and misperceptions through which parties construct one another as objects of suspicion, contempt, or hostility. Attitudes must be conceptualized not only as individual psychological phenomena but also as socially organized and institutionally reproduced phenomena. The most analytically significant Attitudes in conflicts are not idiosyncratic prejudices but

systematic, ideologically elaborated constructions of the other that provide the affective and cognitive precondition for behavioral escalation (Jeong, 2008; Ramsbotham et al., 2011).

In India under BJP governance between 2014 and 2024, the Attitudinal corner of the ABC triangle is populated by Hindutva ideology, a systematic, historically elaborated, and politically institutionalized construction of India's Muslim minority as spatially transgressive, demographically threatening, civilization ally incompatible, and potentially seditious. V.D. Savarkar developed the ideological basis of Hindutva in *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* (1923). He described India as the *pitribhumi* and *punyabhumi*, which literally means the fatherland and holy land of Hindus. Since the holy land of Muslims lies outside India, they were presented as lacking the same civilizational connection to India as the Hindus. In retrospect, this idea does a lot more than describe only the religious difference between Hindus and Muslims by creating an Attitude that justifies unequal treatment. From the Hindutva perspective, Muslim civic equality appears as an exception rather than a basic right (Galtung, 1990; Jaffrelot, 2021). Galtung (1990) identifies ideology, religion, and language as key areas through which hostile Attitudes are organized and reproduced, a process he describes as cultural violence. Hindutva fits closely with Attitudes component of Galtung's model because it presents hostility towards Muslims as a natural view of civilizational reality instead of a political prejudice. Political parties, educational curricula, media, and religious organizations help reproduce these ideas across generations and social settings (Jaffrelot, 2021; Varshney & Staggs, 2024).

The Amplification of Attitudes through Political Discourse, 2014–2024

Galtung's framework does not treat Attitudes as static background conditions. They are actively produced, amplified, and reproduced through the political and institutional work of the dominant party (Ramsbotham et al., 2011). The decade under examination represents a period in which the attitudinal corner of India's communal conflict triangle was actively amplified through the highest levels of political discourse.

At the apex of formal political speech, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 2024 electoral campaign included characterizations of Muslims as 'infiltrators' who would disproportionately benefit from opposition wealth redistribution policies, and warnings that the opposition would redistribute 'the mangalsutra of your mothers and sisters' to Muslims (ACLED, 2024). Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath of Uttar Pradesh has, across multiple electoral cycles, described demolition drives as responses to 'criminal elements' coding Muslim residential concentrations as the natural loci of lawlessness and civic transgression (Jaffrelot, 2021; Sharma, 2025). The India Hate Lab (2024) documented 668 hate speech events targeting Muslims in India in 2023, a figure that rose 74 percent in 2024, with 36 percent of documented events including explicit calls for violence against Muslims. All of these examples are not merely the

marginal expression of the individual bias of Hindus towards Muslims. Instead, they are the attitudinal productions of the ruling party i.e. BJP, and are delivered from the official platforms of institutional authority.

The construction of the Muslim other in this discourse draws consistently on four Attitudinal themes that Galtung (1996) identifies as characteristic of conflict attitudes: dehumanization (Muslims as 'infiltrators' rather than citizens); criminalization (Muslim residential areas as inherently lawless); demographic threat (Muslim population growth as a deliberate strategy of civilizational displacement); and civilizational incompatibility (Muslim loyalty as structurally divided between India and an external Islamic authority). Each theme functions attitudinally to pre-legitimate behavioral responses: the infiltrator can be expelled, the criminal's property can be demolished, the demographic threat can be contained, the civilizational incompatible community can be held to different civic standards (Jaffrelot, 2021; USHMM, 2024).

The Institutionalization of Attitudes

Galtung's framework requires attention to the institutional channels through which Attitudes are reproduced, because it is institutionalization, not mere rhetorical expression that gives Attitudes their systemic, conflict-sustaining character (Galtung, 1996; Jeong, 2008). In India under BJP governance, the attitudinal constructions described above have been institutionalized through at least the following three channels.

a) Legislative Institutionalization

The Citizenship Amendment Act (2019), the National Register of Citizens process, the anti-conversion laws enacted in multiple BJP-governed states, and the municipal ordinances restricting Muslim vendors at Hindu religious events collectively embed the Attitudinal construction of Muslim civic membership as conditional and potentially revocable into the formal institutional structure of the state (Jaffrelot, 2021; Freedom House, 2024).

b) Educational Institutionalization

Documented revisions to the curricula of the educational institutions, primarily schools, in the BJP-governed states have systematically minimized the historical contributions of Mughal-Era figures, and have removed curriculum-based content on the achievements of Muslim scholars and rulers of India. Moreover, they have been systemically substituted by the narratives of Hindu civilizational continuity in order to effectively ensure the reproduction of Hindutva Attitudes in the next generation (V-Dem Institute, 2024).

c) Media Institutionalization

Just like the educational institutions and the curriculum of schools, manipulation and engineering of the media is no exception either in the BJP-led India. The consolidation of major Indian television and print media under

ownership sympathetic to BJP governance. According to the Reporters without Borders (2024) World Press Freedom Index, India has now been placed at 159 out of 180 countries. BJP regime, particularly in the decade of 2014-2024 has produced a media environment in which Hindutva Attitudinal constructions receive amplification while Muslim counter-narratives receive minimal platform.

Behavior: The Enactment of Conflict across Administrative, Legislative, and Physical Domains

Behavioral Patterns in Galtung's Framework

Galtung defines the Behavior (B) corner in the ABC Conflict Triangle as the domain in which Attitudes are enacted in the social world through actions coercive, violent, or institutionally structured (1996, p. 70). A critical feature of Galtung's analysis, under-emphasized in some applications of the framework, is that Behavior in conflict is not limited to direct physical violence. Instead, it covers a wide range of actions through which the dominant party enacts the conflict: legislative impositions, administrative decisions, institutional exclusions, and structural arrangements that disadvantage the minority, as well as the direct physical violence of riots, demolitions, and vigilante attacks. The analytical criterion for classifying an action as conflict Behavior in Galtung's sense is functional. It has a direct effect on the position of the subordinate party, reinforcing the dominant party's Attitudes, and contributes to the perpetuation of the underlying Contradiction (Jeong, 2008; Ramsbotham et al., 2011).

Legislative and Administrative Behavior

The most systematic form of conflict Behavior in India between 2014 and 2024 is legislative and administrative, the use of state institutions to enact the Attitudinal constructions of Hindutva through formal procedure. The Citizenship Amendment Act (2019) constitutes conflict Behavior in Galtung's sense because its functional effect, the creation of a citizenship pathway asymmetrically available to non-Muslim migrants, worsens the structural position of Muslim residents and enacts the Attitudinal construction of Muslim membership as conditional (Freedom House, 2024; Jaffrelot, 2021). Together, CAA and NRC combine this behavioral effect, requiring all residents to document their citizenship in India, while simultaneously providing non-Muslims with a pathway to regularization that is not available to Muslims. Thus, the legal architecture creates a system in which Muslim residents who cannot produce documentation face statelessness, while similarly situated non-Muslim residents do not (Human Rights Watch, 2024, p. 4).

The demolition governance documented across BJP-governed states between 2020 and 2024 represents a second major domain of administrative Behavior. Human Rights Watch (2024) documented 617 directly affected individuals and households across BJP-ruled states; Housing and Land Rights Network (cited in Sharma, 2025)

calculated 738,438 displaced persons between 2022 and 2023. Amnesty International's (2024) cross-state investigation documented the pattern across Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Delhi, and Gujarat, finding consistent operational signatures: notices served with timelines ranging from eleven hours to forty-eight hours, documentation requirements calibrated to formal property markets that the majority of targeted low-income Muslim households cannot meet (Roy, 2009), and temporal clustering of drives within forty eight to seventy two hours of communal episodes (Human Rights Watch, 2024, p. 11; Amnesty International, 2024, p. 9).

The behavioral character of demolition governance is confirmed by the Supreme Court of India's November 2024 judgment, which stated that demolitions 'cannot be used as a tool of retribution' and that 'citizens' voices cannot be throttled by a threat of destroying their properties' (In Re: Directions in the Matter of Demolition of Structures, 2024). The Punjab and Haryana High Court, in proceedings arising from the Nuh-Gurugram demolitions of August 2023, stated that it was 'not oblivious to the fact that buildings belonging to a particular community are being brought down' and raised the question of whether the pattern constituted ethnic cleansing (Anjuman Tanzeem-E-Masajid v. State of Haryana, 2023, p.6). That the highest constitutional courts of the land reached for this language is the most powerful available institutional evidence that the demolition drives functioned as conflict Behavior rather than neutral administrative enforcement (Galtung, 1996; Ramsbotham et al., 2011).

Physical and Vigilante Violence

Direct physical violence constitutes the most visible dimension of the Behavior Corner. Galtung (1996) includes direct violence within the Behavior corner alongside behavioral coercion and institutional imposition it is one mode of Behavioral enactment among several, and his framework insists that its relationship to Attitudes and Contradiction, not its visibility, determines its analytical significance. The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED, 2024) documented over one hundred incidents of targeted violence or demolition against Muslim communities in BJP-governed states between 2019 and 2024. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (2024) and the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (2024) both documented patterns of Behavioral escalation meeting the analytical criteria their respective monitoring frameworks apply to early warning conditions.

Cow vigilante violence attacks on Muslims and Dalits by self-organized groups operating under the banner of Hindu cow-protection represent a form of conflict Behavior in which the state participates not through direct action but through the selective non-enforcement of law against perpetrators. Independent monitoring by Human Rights Watch and India Spend identified over one hundred cow-vigilante attacks between 2010 and 2017, with the rate increasing sharply after 2014, and approximately 84 percent of victims being Muslim or Dalit. In multiple documented

cases, victims were prosecuted under cattle-transport statutes while their attackers faced no charges (Human Rights Watch, 2024). Galtung's (1996) framework encompasses this form of state-facilitated indirect Behavior: the dominant party's participation in conflict Behavior does not require its direct enactment; selective non-enforcement of protection constitutes behavioral complicity in the conflict dynamic.

The temporal correlation between communal episodes and administrative demolition drives documented by Human Rights Watch (2024) and Amnesty International (2024, p. 9) as consistent across multiple states and multiple annual cycles confirms the behavioral integration of apparently distinct forms of violence. Physical communal violence and administrative demolition are not independent incidents; they are linked nodes in the behavioral dimension of the ABC triangle, each reinforcing the attitudinal construction that makes the next behavioral episode politically sustainable (Galtung, 1996; Sharma, 2025).

Table 1: ABC Triangle Operationalization for India, 2014–2024

Corner	Operative Content in India, 2014–2024	Primary Evidence Sources
Attitudes (A)	Hindutva construction of Muslims as infiltrators, criminals, demographic threat; dehumanization in elite political discourse; institutionalization through curriculum revision, media consolidation, legislative symbolism	India Hate Lab (2024); ACLED (2024); Jaffrelot (2021); Sharma (2025); Reporters Without Borders (2024)
Behavior (B)	CAA legislative asymmetry; demolition governance with compressed notice timelines; cow vigilante violence with selective non-prosecution; communal episodes temporally correlated with administrative drives; sedition charges against Muslim protesters	Human Rights Watch (2024); Amnesty International (2024); Supreme Court (2024); Punjab & Haryana HC (2023); USHMM (2024); ACLED (2024)
Contradiction (C)	Structural incompatibility between ethnic majoritarian sovereignty (Hindutva's Hindu rashtra project) and constitutional equal citizenship (Articles 14, 15, 21); suppressed as political conflict, recoded as law-and-order administration	Constitution of India (1950); V-Dem Institute (2024); Freedom House (2024); Varshney & Staggs (2024); Levitsky & Ziblatt (2018)

Source: Author's own elaboration based on Galtung (1996, p. 72) and empirical sources cited.

Contradiction: The Unaddressed Structural Incompatibility

Contradiction in Galtung's Framework: The Regenerative Core

Galtung identifies Contradiction as 'the basic element, the incompatibility of goals, the meta-conflict' (1996, p. 72). Without an unresolved Contradiction, hostile Attitudes and conflict Behaviors would de-escalate over time, because the structural fuel that regenerates them would be absent. In the Galtungian framework, the defining property of a Contradiction is precisely this regenerative character. According to Galtung, "even after a ceasefire, a peacemaking process, or even a peace agreement, the conflict may resume because the basic contradiction has not been transformed" (Galtung, 1996). This is why Galtung (1996) insists on conflict transformation rather than conflict resolution: resolution, the management of behavioral symptoms, leaves the Contradiction intact, guaranteeing its return.

Jeong (2008) elaborates that a Contradiction exists when "the goals of one party cannot be realized without violating the goals of another." The most intractable Contradictions are those embedded in the distributional, legal, or institutional arrangements that govern the relationship between parties, which Galtung (1969) elsewhere calls structural arrangements. When a Contradiction is structural in this sense, it cannot be dissolved by changing Attitudes or modifying Behaviors; it requires institutional transformation of the arrangements that produce the incompatibility (Ramsbotham et al., 2011).

The Root Contradiction in India's Communal Conflict

The Contradiction that drives India's communal conflict between 2014 and 2024 is the structural incompatibility between two sets of institutional commitments that cannot simultaneously be fully realized: the Hindutva political project and the constitutional framework of equal citizenship. Hindutva's political project, as operationalized under BJP governance across the decade under examination, holds that India is, in its civilizational essence, a Hindu rashtra a Hindu nation whose authentic character is expressed in the political and cultural primacy of Hindu institutions, symbols, and identity (Jaffrelot, 2021; Savarkar, 1923). The Muslim citizen who does not contest cow-protection enforcement, who does not object to the removal of Mughal-era place names, who does not organize against the CAA, may retain civic standing; the Muslim citizen who exercises constitutional rights to protest, organize, or litigate is, in the Hindutva frame, behaving in a manner incompatible with their conditional membership (ACLED, 2024; India Hate Lab, 2024; Jaffrelot, 2021).

In contrast, the Indian Constitution enshrines in Articles 14, 15, and 21 the principles of equality before the law, the prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, and the protection of the right to life and personal liberty for all persons subject to the Indian statute, without religious qualification. For over seven decades of jurisprudence, the Supreme Court of India has reiterated that these provisions are

non-derogable aspects of the Basic Structure of the Constitution. (Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala, 1973; Minerva Mills v. Union of India, 1980). The constitutional guarantee of equal citizenship is not just formal and it has been interpreted to include substantive protections against differential enforcement of law, housing rights (Olga Tellis v. Bombay Municipal Corporation, 1985), and protections against the use of state power for communal punishment (In Re: Directions, 2024).

These two commitments of ethnic majoritarian sovereignty and constitutional equal citizenship are structurally incompatible in Galtung's ABC framework (1996, p. 72). They cannot simultaneously be fully realized. A state that enforces citizenship law with a religious criterion, demolishes housing disproportionately in Muslim localities following communal episodes, and deploys its criminal law apparatus against Muslim protesters while declining to prosecute Hindu nationalist perpetrators is realizing the Hindutva project at the direct expense of the constitutional guarantee. A state that fully realizes the constitutional guarantee of enforcing equal protection without religious qualification, policing communal violence symmetrically, and applying demolition law without spatial targeting is constraining the Hindutva project at every point where the two commitments conflict. Therefore, it is an absolute contradiction, and it cannot be dissolved at the Attitudinal or Behavioral level. Instead, it can only be addressed by transforming the institutional arrangements that embed it (Galtung, 1996; Ramsbotham et al., 2011).

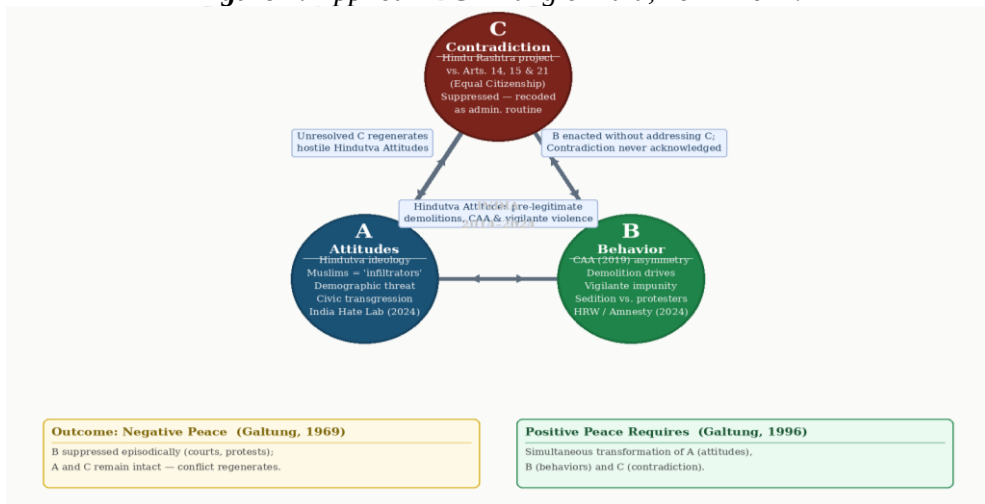
The Suppression of Contradiction: Why C Remains Unaddressed

In the light of the Galtungian ABC Framework, Contradiction (C) is not acknowledged as a political conflict by the dominant party. BJP governance has consistently characterized demolition drives as neutral regulatory enforcement and the CAA as humanitarian protection for persecuted minorities. Moreover, communal violence prosecution adds more substance to it because it patterns as evidence-based law enforcement (Supreme Court proceedings, 2022–2024; Amnesty International, 2024). In Galtung's ABC Conflict Triangle Framework (1996, p. 75), the Contradiction is suppressed rather than engaged, and the governing party refuses to name the structural incompatibility as a conflict, recoding it as a series of administrative decisions.

Ramsbotham et al. (2011) identify this suppression as analytically significant: when the dominant party in an asymmetric conflict denies the existence of the Contradiction, the subordinate party is structurally deprived of the political vocabulary through which to contest it. If the demolition of a Muslim household is not a behavioral enactment of a political conflict but merely a planning regulation enforcement, then the household's claim that it is being targeted for its religious identity has no legitimate standing within the official discourse. The denial of Contradiction is thus itself a Behavioral element: it forecloses the contestation that any acknowledged conflict would invite (Jeong, 2008).

The V-Dem Democracy Report (2024) also records India's reclassification from a liberal democracy to an electoral autocracy, while noticing a sustained decline of India in the Liberal Democracy Index from 0.57 in 2013 to 0.32 in 2024. This macro-level indicator is consistent with the Contradiction's suppression, which states that a liberal democracy requires that structural incompatibilities be available for political contestation. Instead, through media consolidation, civil society restrictions, and the deployment of criminal law against political opposition, Contradiction is rendered progressively less addressable within the democratic framework's own terms (Freedom House, 2024; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018).

Figure 2: Applied ABC Triangle India, 2014–2024.



The Triangle in Operation: Mutual Reinforcement and the Manufacture of Negative Peace

The Dynamic Interaction of A, B, and C

Galtung (1996) insists that the ABC Conflict Triangle must be analyzed as a system, not as three independent variables. According to Galtung, the three components of a conflict are not independent of each other. Instead of being independent, they are in a constant interaction with each other. The analytical test of any ABC application is whether it can demonstrate, rather than merely assert, the dynamic interaction through which each corner reinforces the others, the specific mechanisms through which Attitudes feed Behavior, Behavior intensifies Attitudes, and Contradiction regenerates both (Jeong, 2008; Ramsbotham et al., 2011). In India between 2014 and 2024, the interaction between A, B, and C follows an interesting pattern. The Attitudinal infrastructure of Hindutva ideology (A) provides the normative pre-legitimation for Behavioral enactment because Muslims are constructed as spatially transgressive, criminally associated, and civilizational

incompatible. The administrative demolition of Muslim housing can be presented as law enforcement rather than communal targeting, and cow vigilante violence can be defended as cultural protection rather than religious persecution. Moreover, legislative asymmetries can be presented as security measures rather than discrimination (ACLEd, 2024; Jaffrelot, 2021; Sharma, 2025 ;). Without the Attitudinal construction that codes Muslim civic presence as transgression, the Behavioral pattern would require explicit legal discrimination to be politically sustainable, discrimination that would be judicially vulnerable and internationally costly.

The Behavioral enactment (B), in turn, reinforces and amplifies Attitudes (A) through two mechanisms. First, it produces material evidence that confirms the attitudinal construction. Communities that resist demolitions, litigate the CAA, or protest cow vigilante violence are characterized as proving by their resistance the Attitudinal claim that Muslim civic engagement is inherently oppositional to Hindu national interests (ACLEd, 2024; India Hate Lab, 2024). The underlying Contradiction (C), the structural incompatibility between ethnic majoritarian sovereignty and constitutional equal citizenship, regenerates the Attitudes and Behaviors that the triangle's first two corners produce. So long as the Hindutva project and the constitutional guarantee of equal citizenship remain institutionally incompatible, the Attitudinal construction of Muslim civic presence as threatening will recur whenever electoral competition incentivizes its activation; and the Behavioral enactment of that construction through administrative and legislative instruments will recur whenever the political opportunity structure makes it available (Galtung, 1996; Jeong, 2008; Ramsbotham et al., 2011). Judicial interventions and civil society documentation, however significant as individual events, cannot interrupt the triangle's systemic regeneration because they address behavioral symptoms without transforming the structural Contradiction that produces them.

Negative Peace and Its Manufacture

Galtung (1969) defines negative peace as the mere absence of direct violence. He maintains that it is a surface calm produced not by the resolution of Contradiction but by the coercive suppression of the Behaviors through which conflict is visibly enacted. Negative peace is analytically unstable in Galtung's framework because the contradictions and Attitudes that generated conflict behavior remain intact. This means that they can possibly regenerate behavioral escalation, especially when the conditions of suppression relax or when new political opportunities arise (Galtung, 1996; Ramsbotham et al., 2011).

The decade 2014-2024 has produced periods of apparent surface calm that are consistent with negative peace in the analytical sense explained in the previous paragraph. Following major demolition drives, the targeted localities often became politically quiescent, with residents displaced, organizations chilled, and litigation capacity reduced. Similarly, right after the communal episodes, the affected

communities exhibited reduced civic organization and political mobilization. The Supreme Court's judgment of November 2024 produced a temporary reduction in reported demolition drives. Each of these surface calming's is consistent with Galtung's (1996) negative peace, which states that "the behavioral expression of the conflict is suppressed without the Contradiction being addressed, ensuring its eventual regeneration."

Positive peace, in Galtung's (1969 & 1996) framework, would require the simultaneous transformation of all three vertices: the transformation of Hindutva Attitudes toward Muslim civic equality; the reform of the Behavioral patterns of administrative discrimination, communal violence impunity, and legislative asymmetry; and most fundamentally the resolution of the Contradiction between ethnic majoritarian sovereignty and constitutional equal citizenship, through institutional arrangements that make the full realization of both simultaneously possible. The decade's trajectory suggests movement in the opposite direction: Attitudes have been amplified rather than softened; Behavioral patterns have intensified and institutionalized; and the Contradiction has been suppressed rather than acknowledged, rendered progressively less addressable as the institutional conditions for its political contestation narrow (Freedom House, 2024; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; V-Dem Institute, 2024).

Conclusion: The Triangle, Conflict Transformation, and the Conditions for Positive Peace

This paper has applied Galtung's ABC conflict triangle to India's decade of Hindu nationalist governance with the following results. The Attitudes corner is populated by Hindutva ideology's systematic construction of the Muslim minority, spatially transgressive, demographically hostile, and civilizational incompatible, an attitudinal infrastructure, actively amplified through elite political discourse, legislative symbolism, and media institutionalization across the period. The Behavior Corner encompasses a documented pattern of administrative demolition governance, legislative asymmetry in citizenship law, cow vigilante violence with selective non-prosecution, and the deployment of anti-terrorism and sedition statutes against Muslim protesters. The behavioral patterns whose conflict character has been acknowledged by setting constitutional courts in language of unusual directness. The Contradiction Corner names structural incompatibility between the Hindutva political project and the constitutional guarantee of equal citizenship, an incompatibility that the dominant party suppresses rather than acknowledges, recoding political conflict as administrative routine and thereby foreclosing political contestation that any acknowledged conflict would invite.

The primary strength of Galtung's ABC Conflict Triangle framework is not in the individual explanation of each corner, but in showing how the vertices interact with each other as a system. Attitudes pre-legitimate Behaviors, Behaviors reinforce

Attitudes, and the Contradiction regenerates both regardless of episodic behavioral suppression. This systemic logic explains what a purely behavioral analysis alone fails explain. The question that why judicial interventions, civil society documentation, and international criticism present throughout the decade have not interrupted the pattern. They address the behavioral surface, while leaving the Contradiction and the attitudinal infrastructure intact. Galtung (1996) is analytically precise on the fact that conflict transformation is the precondition for positive peace, and it (conflict transformation) requires the simultaneous transformation of all A, B, and C.

Galtung's (1969) famous distinction between negative and positive peace becomes more vividly clear in the case of BJP-led India from 2014-2024. Positive peace would require, at minimum: Attitudinal transformation toward genuine civic equality, not merely tolerant coexistence; Behavioral transformation toward symmetric enforcement of law and equal protection of minority and majority rights; and institutional resolution of the Contradiction between ethnic majoritarian sovereignty and constitutional equal citizenship. These are not modest requirements, and the paper does not suggest they are easily achievable. What the ABC framework makes clear, however, is that their achievement is the condition of any peace that is more than a temporarily enforced silence.

Three directions for future research emerge. First, a systematic comparative application of the ABC triangle to other cases of majoritarian democratic governance and religious minority conflict, such as Hungary, Turkey, and Sri Lanka, would test whether the dynamic identified here (Attitude amplification, Behavior proceduralization, Contradiction suppression) is a general pattern of majoritarian democratic conflict or specific to India's institutional configuration. Second, a longitudinal analysis of the Contradiction corner, examining whether any institutional arrangements in India's federal structure have moved toward resolving rather than suppressing the incompatibility between majoritarian sovereignty and constitutional equal citizenship, would extend the analysis beyond the decade under examination. Third, engagement with Galtung's (1996) conflict transformation concept in the context of asymmetric democratic state-minority conflict, asking what transformation of all three ABC vertices would require when the dominant party controls the institutional apparatus through which transformation would need to be achieved, would address the framework's most important and least resolved implication for political practice.

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