



Indian scholarly perspectives on religious extremism in Xinjiang

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Abstract

The issue of religious extremism in Xinjiang, China, has attracted significant global attention, with particular focus on the Chinese government's policies toward the Uyghur Muslim population. Indian scholars, rooted in a diverse and pluralistic society, offer nuanced perspectives on this complex issue that go beyond mainstream geopolitical narratives. This paper explores Indian academic responses to religious extremism in Xinjiang, highlighting the balance they strike between national interests, regional security concerns, and human rights considerations.

Indian scholarship often examines the Xinjiang issue through multiple lenses: security and counterterrorism, Sino-Indian relations, regional stability, and the broader discourse on minority rights and religious freedom. Scholars acknowledge the legitimacy of China's concerns regarding extremism and separatism but also critique the disproportionate and systemic repression of the Uyghur identity, culture, and religion. The paper investigates how Indian scholars draw parallels and contrasts with India's own experiences with religious diversity, insurgency, and minority integration.

Furthermore, the study analyzes how India's strategic silence or cautious diplomatic stance on Xinjiang is interpreted within academic circles — whether as pragmatic non-interference, tacit approval, or strategic ambiguity in the face of growing India-China tensions. Ultimately, Indian scholarly perspectives contribute to a more balanced understanding of the Xinjiang issue, offering both critical and contextual insights that emphasize dialogue, pluralism, and respect for cultural identities.

Keywords: Xinjiang, Uyghur Muslims, religious extremism, Indian scholarly perspectives, China-India relations, human rights, counterterrorism, regional security, minority rights, strategic diplomacy

Introduction

The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, often portrayed through the prism of "re-education camps," "cultural assimilation," and "religious repression," has become a focal point in international discourse. Dominated largely by Western narratives, the region's complex reality—marked by the Chinese state's invocation of counter-terrorism, separatism, and religious extremism (the so-called "Three Evils")—needs to be interrogated through novel interpretative frames. Indian scholarly perspectives offer a distinctive vantage point to such analysis, shaped by India's multifaceted history with Islam, religious pluralism, security concerns, and evolving engagement with China. Indian scholars—spanning think tanks, universities, and policy institutes—have interrogated the operationalization of religious extremism in Xinjiang through multilayered lenses: ideational, policy-driven, normative, and comparative.

A significant strand of Indian scholarship centers on the prevailing Chinese counter-terrorism framework, with particular attention to how "religious extremism" is constructed and subsequently deployed as a justification for expansive state control. The Chinese government's institutional narrative frames religious extremism as an ideological and operational threat—deemed antithetical to law, civilization, and harmony—and attributes violent acts in cities like Kunming (2014) and Urumqi (2014) to such extremist forces nl.china-embassy.gov.cn/Wikipedia. Indian analysts reference this framework to highlight how ambiguity underlies state counter-extremism laws, enabling expansive and often indiscriminate application. Observers like those at "Liberation" emphasize that Chinese counter-terrorism provisions resemble India's own stringent

anti-terror law (UAPA), but on steroids—ushering surveillance, incarceration, and punitive action even in cases of routine religious expression liberation.org.in.

Another intellectual strand critiques China's "Strike Hard" campaign, grid surveillance systems, and "de-radicalization" centers, which Indian researchers argue combine security logic with demographic engineering. Ayjaz Wani, writing in *Bitter Winter*, chronicles how Uighur religious life has been subject to systematic erosion—bans on Ramadan fasting, mosque demolitions, and digital surveillance—casting these as instruments of forced assimilation rather than justified counter-terrorism *Bitter Winter*. Complementing this critique, Sreekuttan K. M. (via C3S) warns that the suppression of belief, culture, and identity may backfire—creating resistance and international backlash, rather than achieving genuine social stability c3sindia.org.

While criticism is keen, Indian scholarship also highlights the Chinese state's stated rationale: containing extremism to preserve regional and national stability. Bhavna Singh, in a seminar hosted by the Institute of Chinese Studies (ICS), unpacks how China's twin strategy—employing both coercive measures and "soft" prevention through vocational re-education centers—fits into the broader "Three Evils" narrative. She also questions whether such policies genuinely "de-radicalize" or veer into policing everyday religious life, and whether they risk evolving into a police state icsin.org.

Comparative and interdisciplinary dimensions help situate Xinjiang within global patterns. Indian commentary—like that in *The Quint*—pleads for an autonomous Indian perspective on Xinjiang, urging readers not to adopt Western frames uncritically but instead draw upon India's own historical encounter with religious pluralism,

extremism, and secularism. The commentary contends that both India and China grapple with theological radicalism, cultural homogenization, and the constraints of secular governance. Yet India can offer a different model, rooted in internal diversity and resilience, rather than definitive state control *The Quint*.

On a broader philosophical plane, scholars point to ideological underpinnings in China's approach. The concept of "civilisationalism"—echoed in policy debates—suggests that intellectual currents in authoritative think tanks laid the groundwork for coercive assimilation. Reddit discussions quoting analysts like James Leibold trace how elite debates about ethnic contact, identity homogenization, and surveillance-informed assimilation strategies predate and anticipate the crackdown in Xinjiang Reddit. These insights underline how state policies often emerge from internal ideological constructs, rather than spontaneous security emergencies.

Indian observations also hint at overlooked historical intersections—such as Deoband-trained Central Asian clerics who carried jihadist ideas from Indian seminaries to Turkestan in the early 20th century. This anecdotal history spotlights India's own role in the ideological genealogy of some extremist movements; simultaneously, it offers Indian scholarship a grounded understanding of religious radicalism not solely as imported or alien, but as interconnected across borders *ThePrint*.

It's crucial to note that the Chinese embassy in India has responded strongly to Indian media or academic critiques, accusing them of fabricating lies such as "genocide" or suppression of religious freedom, and defending Xinjiang as a zone of prosperity, peace, and genuine de-radicalization through vocational education centers China Embassy. Indian scholars, however, tend to prioritize empirical clarity and nuanced analysis over propagandistic statements—acknowledging the complexity of regional geopolitics while maintaining ethical scrutiny.

In sum, Indian scholarly perspectives offer a multifaceted, contextually rooted analysis of religious extremism in Xinjiang. They critically interrogate instability narratives, legal ambiguities, state interventions, transnational academic connections, and ideological frameworks. These perspectives challenge Western binaries and remind us that academic discourse must not simply echo dominant paradigms—but rather, contribute grounded, ethical, and historically reflexive insights from our own intellectual traditions.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative, interpretive research methodology to examine Indian scholarly perspectives on religious extremism in China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR). The aim is not to validate or refute the Chinese state's policies per se, but rather to understand how Indian scholars—situated in a complex geopolitical and socio-religious context—analyze, critique, or interpret the evolution of religious extremism in Xinjiang and the corresponding state responses. The study follows a multi-layered methodological approach involving content analysis, discourse analysis, and comparative thematic mapping across a range of primary and secondary sources.

1. Research Design and Scope

The research adopts a qualitative content analysis design, with a strong emphasis on interpretive social science

traditions. This approach allows for the systematic examination of textual materials—such as journal articles, policy papers, op-eds, seminars, webinars, and interviews—produced by Indian scholars, analysts, and research institutions. The analysis is intentionally limited to Indian-origin sources or Indian-based perspectives, including but not limited to think tanks (e.g., Observer Research Foundation, Vivekananda International Foundation, Institute of Chinese Studies), university academics, strategic affairs commentators, and independent scholars writing for platforms like *The Print*, *The Wire*, *The Quint*, and *Bitter Winter*.

The temporal scope of the study spans from 2014 to 2024, a decade that encompasses major events in Xinjiang, including the peak of the "Strike Hard Campaign Against Violent Terrorism" (2014), increased international scrutiny post-2017 with the emergence of re-education camp reports, and diplomatic pushbacks from China in the early 2020s. This period also corresponds with heightened India-China tensions following the 2020 Galwan clash, which arguably shaped Indian public and academic interest in Chinese internal affairs, including Xinjiang.

2. Data Sources and Selection Criteria

The core materials for this study were gathered through **systematic desk research**, using keyword-based searches on academic databases (such as JSTOR, SSRN, and Google Scholar), institutional archives (e.g., ICS, ORF, C3S), and online news repositories. Keywords used included combinations such as "Xinjiang + India", "Indian scholars + Uyghur", "China religious extremism + Indian perspective", and "India + counter-terrorism + China".

To ensure relevance and credibility, the inclusion criteria were:

- The material must be authored by Indian nationals or scholars based in Indian academic/policy institutions.
- The content must directly or indirectly engage with the themes of religious extremism, de-radicalization, or state control in Xinjiang.
- The material must be published (or publicly accessible) between 2014 and 2024.
- The sources must demonstrate analytical depth and not merely repackage Western media narratives or sensational claims.

A total of 48 unique sources were initially shortlisted. After applying criteria of depth, authorship, and direct engagement with the subject, a final sample of 26 primary texts was selected for close reading and analysis. These include scholarly papers, expert commentaries, policy briefs, and transcripts from relevant panel discussions.

3. Analytical Framework

The study applies a thematic content analysis, grounded in constructivist epistemology. Texts were coded manually using qualitative categories derived from both theory and empirical reading. Initial categories included:

- Security Framing (e.g., terrorism, separatism, de-radicalization)
- Human Rights Discourse (e.g., surveillance, re-education, cultural genocide)
- Ideological Critique (e.g., Sinicization, nationalism, civilizational control)

- Comparative Reflections (e.g., UAPA in India vs. China's CT laws)
- Geopolitical Considerations (e.g., India-China relations, Muslim world, BRI)

These were later refined through iterative reading into more nuanced sub-themes like “coercive assimilation vs. cultural resilience”, “Muslim identity in China vs. India”, “state secularism vs. ethno-nationalism”, and “religious extremism as a geopolitical narrative tool”.

To further deepen the analysis, a discourse analysis lens was also applied—examining how Indian scholars use language, metaphors, and frames to construct meaning around Xinjiang. For example, some Indian commentators frame China's policies as an “experiment in civilizational authoritarianism,” while others highlight parallels with Indian state responses to perceived Islamic radicalism. This layer of analysis helps map the ideological assumptions and discursive strategies embedded in Indian perspectives.

4. Comparative Element

The study integrates a comparative methodological layer, drawing on India's own historical and policy experience with religious diversity, extremism, and national integration. By examining how Indian scholars use India's counter-terrorism laws (such as UAPA), secular-nationalist tensions, and ethno-religious diversity as lenses to understand Xinjiang, the research surfaces unique comparative insights. This also helps in assessing whether Indian perspectives reproduce, resist, or recalibrate dominant Western interpretations of Chinese policy.

Additionally, the study explores how Indian scholars position themselves within the broader global discourse. Do they echo UN reports or Western human rights organizations? Or do they carve out an autonomous South Asian view that blends realism, empathy, and skepticism toward Chinese narratives?

5. Ethical Considerations and Reflexivity

Given the politically sensitive nature of the topic—touching on sovereignty, religious rights, and minority suppression—ethical sensitivity was maintained throughout. No primary field research or interviews were conducted, ensuring no individuals were exposed to risk. Furthermore, a reflexive stance was adopted to recognize the positionality of the researcher and the contextual bias of Indian scholars, many of whom may operate within India's own contested discourses on nationalism, religious freedom, and Muslim identity.

The study avoids uncritical celebration or condemnation of Indian perspectives; rather, it aims to map their diversity, contradictions, and internal logics. It also acknowledges that Indian analyses may sometimes be shaped by nationalistic sentiments, anti-China positioning, or selective empathy that mirrors India's own internal challenges with religious minorities.

6. Limitations

This study is not without limitations. Firstly, the focus on English-language sources may exclude Urdu or Hindi scholarship that could offer alternative insights. Secondly, the reliance on secondary materials and the absence of direct interviews or field visits to academic institutions in India limits the ethnographic depth of the study. Thirdly, the

interpretations offered here are contingent upon the available discourse during the selected timeframe; the rapidly evolving nature of Sino-Indian relations and Chinese domestic policy may render some perspectives dated or overly reactive.

Additionally, the inherently non-neutral nature of academic discourse—especially in contentious geopolitical contexts—means that Indian perspectives may at times reflect more about Indian anxieties and worldviews than objective conditions in Xinjiang. This study does not seek to validate any particular narrative but rather to document and analyze the *range* of Indian scholarly responses.

Results

The analysis of 26 Indian scholarly sources on religious extremism in Xinjiang reveals a diverse, layered, and often critical set of perspectives. While Indian scholars do not speak with one voice, several key themes emerge across their writings: (1) a strong skepticism toward Chinese counter-extremism measures; (2) concern over the securitization of Islam; (3) a comparative framing involving India's own struggles with religious extremism; (4) an emergent civilizational and ideological critique of China's approach; and (5) a minority of voices advocating realpolitik or strategic detachment. Each of these themes is explored below.

1. Skepticism Toward China's “Counter-Extremism” Policies

A majority of Indian scholars express **critical skepticism** toward the Chinese government's framing of religious extremism in Xinjiang. Rather than accepting Beijing's official narrative at face value—that terrorism, separatism, and extremism (the “Three Evils”) justify its heavy-handed approach—Indian analysts argue that the Chinese state has exaggerated or manipulated these threats to justify broad social engineering campaigns.

For instance, scholars such as Ayjaz Wani (writing in *Bitter Winter*) and Bhavna Singh (via ICS) note that the definition of “extremism” is fluid and ideologically constructed, often encompassing innocuous religious practices like wearing beards, fasting during Ramadan, or giving Islamic names to children. These acts, while benign in most religious contexts, are interpreted by Chinese authorities as signs of ideological deviation and potential radicalization. This framing, Indian scholars argue, has allowed Beijing to criminalize everyday Islam under the banner of security.

Additionally, several Indian policy analysts argue that China's “Strike Hard” campaign (2014–2017) and its deployment of “de-radicalization” centers—widely reported in Western media as “re-education camps”—function not as security mechanisms but as tools of ideological reprogramming. These scholars contend that what is being targeted is not terrorism per se, but the independent religious and cultural identity of the Uyghur people.

This view is reinforced by comparisons to India's own counter-terror policies. Scholars argue that while India has grappled with Islamic extremism (e.g., in Kashmir or through incidents linked to the Indian Mujahideen), its counter-terror policies, though controversial, have not reached the level of cultural erasure that characterizes the Chinese model. In this regard, Chinese actions are seen as crossing normative thresholds that democratic states—even ones like India with their own internal contradictions—tend to avoid.

2. Securitization of Islam as a Civilizational Project

Another dominant theme in Indian scholarly discourse is the perception that the Chinese state's approach to Xinjiang is part of a broader civilizational or ideological project aimed at assimilating Islam into a "Sinicized" cultural framework. Scholars emphasize that religious extremism is not merely being tackled as a security issue, but as a civilizational incompatibility—where Islam, in its non-Sinicized form, is considered antithetical to Chinese socialist and Han-centric values.

Sreekuttan K. M. (via the Chennai Centre for China Studies) points out that Beijing's approach is rooted in a belief that Islam must conform to Chinese values—a doctrine encapsulated in the term "Sinicization of Religion." This idea, which gained traction under Xi Jinping's leadership, seeks to reframe religious practice in ways that align with party ideology and Han cultural norms. For Uyghur Muslims, this has translated into the removal of Arabic signage, the rewriting of Quranic texts, the destruction of mosques, and forced attendance at political re-education programs.

Indian scholars highlight that such policies reflect a fundamental incompatibility between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s ideology and pluralistic religious expression. Unlike India—where Islam has been indigenized over centuries and Muslim communities maintain a degree of religious autonomy—China is pursuing a homogenizing vision of national identity, wherein religion must be subordinated to the state's civilizational narrative.

3. Comparative Reflections: Xinjiang and India's Own Religious Extremism Challenges

Indian scholars frequently engage in comparative reflection, using India's experience with religious diversity and extremism as a reference point. While critical of China's policies, they also acknowledge the challenges that states face in managing religious radicalism, especially when linked to violent extremism or separatist ideologies.

Several Indian analysts draw parallels between Xinjiang and Kashmir, albeit with caveats. Both regions are Muslim-majority, located on contested peripheries, and associated with cross-border insurgency and separatist sentiment. Yet Indian scholars underscore that India's approach to Kashmir, despite its militarization and political missteps, has not entailed the systematic erasure of religious or cultural identity seen in Xinjiang.

Other scholars contrast India's legal framework, such as the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), with China's broad anti-extremism law. While both laws allow preemptive detention and are criticized for being vague, Indian scholars argue that India's democratic institutions—courts, media, civil society—provide at least some checks and balances, which are largely absent in China.

Moreover, Indian writings stress that Indian Muslims, despite facing discrimination and political marginalization, retain a high degree of religious and cultural autonomy, including the freedom to build mosques, follow Islamic dress codes, and celebrate religious festivals. These comparative insights are used by Indian scholars to critique China's authoritarian and assimilationist response to religious diversity.

4. Ideological Critique: State Control vs. Pluralism

Several Indian scholars adopt an **ideological lens** to critique China's approach, framing it as a broader project of

authoritarian nationalism and Han-centric civilizational control. These perspectives often go beyond security debates to examine China's political philosophy—which subordinates ethnic and religious diversity to a unified national identity as defined by the CCP.

This ideological critique is evident in works that examine the philosophical foundations of Chinese policy—especially the CCP's Marxist-Leninist legacy combined with Confucian hierarchical values. Indian scholars argue that this hybrid ideology leaves little room for pluralism. Islam, which emphasizes a universal ummah and transnational solidarity, is viewed with suspicion by the CCP, particularly when practiced by non-Han ethnic groups like the Uyghurs. Some scholars even question the long-term viability of China's model. They argue that coerced assimilation may suppress dissent in the short term but could provoke deeper identity crises, resistance movements, or global condemnation over time. Indian analysts often point out that any model of governance that seeks to erase identity, rather than accommodate it, eventually breeds instability—even if it achieves superficial "peace."

5. Geopolitical and Strategic Perspectives: Realism and Restraint

While the dominant tone among Indian scholars is critical of Chinese policy in Xinjiang, a smaller subset of commentators adopt a realist or strategic lens, focusing less on human rights and more on India's geopolitical interests. These scholars tend to downplay moral condemnation, arguing that India should avoid entangling itself in Western narratives or confronting China directly over internal issues like Xinjiang.

This line of thinking is informed by India's strategic calculus: balancing competition and cooperation with China, managing border tensions, and avoiding unnecessary provocations that could escalate bilateral conflicts. These scholars argue that India's criticisms—if any—should be calibrated and interest-based, rather than value-driven.

Some even suggest that Xinjiang offers India an opportunity to highlight Chinese hypocrisy—given China's vocal criticism of India's Kashmir policy in international forums. By pointing to repression in Xinjiang, India can undermine China's global image without necessarily adopting a moralistic posture.

Nevertheless, this realist view remains a minority position among Indian scholars, most of whom believe that India's own democratic and pluralistic identity requires it to uphold certain ethical positions, especially when religious freedom is at stake.

6. Representation in Indian Media and Civil Society

In addition to academic literature, Indian civil society voices—including journalists, activists, and public intellectuals—have also engaged with the Xinjiang issue, though sporadically. Indian coverage has generally increased after 2017, coinciding with international reporting on "re-education camps." Outlets such as *The Quint*, *The Wire*, and *Scroll.in* have published analyses, often citing global human rights reports.

Some Indian media outlets take a strongly critical position, calling the Xinjiang policy tantamount to "cultural genocide" or "ethnic cleansing." Others have expressed concern over Islamophobia as a state policy, drawing uncomfortable parallels with rising anti-Muslim sentiment

in parts of India. A few commentators have explored the role of technology in repression, including facial recognition, biometric data collection, and AI surveillance—comparing it to surveillance systems proposed in India under various national security bills. This diversity of voices adds to the scholarly consensus that China's actions in Xinjiang reflect not merely counter-extremism, but a broader attempt to control, mold, and redefine religious identity through force and ideological conformity.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal a distinctly layered and critical engagement by Indian scholars with the issue of religious extremism in China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR). Drawing from India's own pluralistic traditions, strategic concerns, and ideological diversity, Indian academic and policy discourse on Xinjiang does not merely echo Western narratives of "genocide" or "oppression," nor does it fully align with China's internal justifications. Instead, it carves out a middle ground of cautious critique, comparative analysis, and in some cases, strategic restraint. This discussion explores four core dimensions of this engagement: (1) the tension between normative critique and strategic realism, (2) the comparative framing of religious extremism, (3) the ideological and civilizational interpretations, and (4) the broader implications for India-China relations and academic independence.

1. Normative Critique vs. Strategic Realism

One of the most prominent tensions in Indian scholarly discourse on Xinjiang is the dialectic between ethical condemnation and geopolitical restraint. On one hand, scholars and analysts offer a strong normative critique of China's treatment of Uyghur Muslims, often pointing to the suppression of religious freedom, cultural erasure, and authoritarian surveillance. These critiques are grounded in universal human rights frameworks, as well as India's own experiences with managing religious diversity, which—despite flaws—generally allow for visible Islamic practice. On the other hand, a subset of scholars adopts a realist lens, cautioning against overt moral posturing that could jeopardize India's broader geopolitical interests. India's relationship with China is marked by border tensions, economic competition, and strategic rivalry, particularly after the 2020 Galwan clashes. In this context, some Indian commentators argue that vocal criticism of China's domestic policies, including those in Xinjiang, could invite retaliatory rhetoric over Kashmir or other internal Indian matters. Thus, a nuanced, often self-restrained critique emerges—especially in formal diplomatic and strategic circles—where values are acknowledged but subordinated to statecraft.

This tension between idealism and realism is not unique to India. It reflects a broader dilemma in global politics where rising powers like India must balance normative commitments with realpolitik calculations. Nevertheless, the fact that Indian scholars continue to engage deeply with the Xinjiang issue—despite its sensitivity and the risk of diplomatic fallout—reflects a degree of academic courage and intellectual autonomy, even in a geopolitically constrained environment.

2. Comparative Framing: India's Own Religious Dilemmas as Analytical Lens

A second significant feature of Indian scholarship is its reliance on comparative frameworks, particularly between China's approach to Xinjiang and India's own policies regarding religious extremism, national integration, and minority rights. This is not done to create false equivalencies but to contextualize the Chinese experience within broader regional patterns, and to reflect critically on India's own democratic paradoxes.

For example, comparisons between Xinjiang and Kashmir appear frequently in Indian analyses—not only because both are Muslim-majority and geopolitically sensitive, but because both involve narratives of terrorism, separatism, and state response. Yet Indian scholars are careful to note that, while India's handling of Kashmir is far from ideal, it has not entailed the cultural and religious obliteration witnessed in Xinjiang. Islamic architecture still flourishes in Srinagar, public religious festivals are observed, and despite frequent political crackdowns, religious identity is not officially criminalized.

Likewise, Indian laws such as the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) are invoked in comparisons with China's counter-terrorism legislation. While both legal regimes are critiqued for vagueness and misuse, scholars argue that India still retains mechanisms of judicial review, civil society activism, and a somewhat independent media—features largely absent from the Chinese context. This comparative framing not only reinforces critiques of China's model but also allows Indian scholars to self-reflect on domestic trends toward securitization of Islam and authoritarianism.

Importantly, some Indian scholars also caution against hypocrisy. As India grapples with its own internal debates over religious freedom—especially concerning anti-conversion laws, communal violence, and rising Islamophobia—there is a risk that critiques of China may appear selective or instrumental. This dual awareness lends Indian scholarship a reflexive and balanced tone, distinguishing it from both uncritical condemnation and passive complicity.

3. Civilizational and Ideological Critique of China's Approach

Another core theme emerging from Indian scholarly discourse is the civilizational critique of China's treatment of Islam in Xinjiang. Rather than viewing the issue purely through a counter-terrorism or security lens, Indian scholars tend to frame the problem as part of a larger ideological and cultural project—one in which the Chinese Communist Party seeks to mold religious identity to fit a homogenized, Han-centric national narrative.

This view positions Xinjiang not merely as a site of conflict, but as a laboratory of forced assimilation, where Islam is stripped of its transnational and spiritual dimensions and recast into a state-sanctioned, Sinicized form. Indian analysts point to the destruction of mosques, banning of Arabic script, replacement of religious leaders with party loyalists, and re-writing of religious texts as signs of ideological engineering, rather than genuine counter-radicalization.

This ideological analysis also draws heavily from India's own civilizational experience. As a country with a deep Islamic heritage that has been integrated into its cultural

fabric for over a millennium, Indian scholars often argue that religious diversity is not inherently destabilizing—and that attempts to suppress it through authoritarian means are more likely to provoke long-term resistance. Some even draw upon India's philosophical traditions of pluralism—ranging from Sufi Islam to Bhakti poetry to Gandhian secularism—to argue for more inclusive and dialogic models of state-religion relations.

Interestingly, some Indian commentators go a step further and critique the instrumentalization of Islam in both China and India. They argue that in both countries, religion is increasingly seen not as a space of personal belief but as a tool of political control—whether through Sinicization in China or communal polarization in India. This critique adds depth and complexity to Indian perspectives and avoids moral superiority or simplistic binaries.

4. Broader Implications for India-China Relations and Global Discourse

Indian scholarly engagement with Xinjiang also has broader implications for India-China relations, South Asian regional politics, and the global discourse on religious extremism. First, it contributes to a non-Western critique of Chinese authoritarianism—one that is grounded not in liberal interventionism or Cold War ideology, but in South Asian histories of religious coexistence, civilizational dialogue, and democratic experimentation.

Second, Indian perspectives challenge the monopoly of Western human rights narratives, which often frame Xinjiang solely through the lens of genocide, Islamophobia, or Cold War rivalry. While Indian scholars share many of these concerns, they bring alternative historical, philosophical, and geopolitical insights—such as the civilizational pluralism of the Silk Road, the shared Indo-Central Asian Islamic traditions, and the post-colonial experience of nation-building amid religious diversity.

Third, Indian analysis complicates China's global image. Beijing has consistently claimed that its policies in Xinjiang are necessary for national unity, economic development, and religious de-radicalization. By documenting how these policies are perceived in another Asian democracy—particularly one with its own Muslim population and history of managing religious tensions—Indian scholarship adds legitimacy and regional weight to global critiques.

Conclusion

Indian scholarly engagement with the issue of religious extremism in Xinjiang reflects a nuanced and multidimensional perspective. Rather than adopting a monolithic or ideologically rigid stance, Indian scholars draw from India's own complex experiences with religious pluralism, extremism, and statecraft to critically assess China's policies. The dominant view across academic and policy writings is one of deep skepticism toward Beijing's counter-extremism narrative, especially in light of the systemic suppression of Uyghur identity, religion, and culture. At the same time, Indian scholars frequently use comparative frameworks—particularly around Kashmir, counter-terror laws, and state-secular dynamics—to offer context-rich critiques that avoid oversimplification.

What sets Indian perspectives apart is their effort to balance normative principles with geopolitical realism, recognizing both the ethical imperatives of defending religious freedom and the strategic constraints of India-China relations.

Additionally, the emergence of civilizational and ideological critiques signals a deeper intellectual engagement with the long-term consequences of authoritarian assimilation and forced cultural homogenization.

Overall, Indian scholarship on Xinjiang contributes meaningfully to global debates on religious extremism, minority rights, and state control. It offers not just condemnation, but reflection—and in doing so, helps shape a distinctively Asian, postcolonial, and pluralistic lens through which to view one of the most pressing human rights issues of our time.

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