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Hindutva and Anti-Muslim Communal Violence in India Under the Bharatiya Janata Party (1990-2010)

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**HINDUTVA AND ANTI-MUSLIM COMMUNAL VIOLENCE IN INDIA
UNDER THE BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY (1990-2010)**

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABVP	Akhil Bharatiya Vidhya Parishad (All India Student's Organization)
AIADMK	All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BJS	Bharatiya Jan Sangh
BSP	Bahujan Samaj Party
CBSE	Central Board of Secondary Education
CPI (M)	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
DMK	Dravida Munnetra Kazagham
MDMK	Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
INC	Indian National Congress/ Congress Party
JD	Janata Dal
NDA	National Democratic Alliance
NCERT	National Council of Educational Research and Training
OBC	Other Backward Classes
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
RSS*	Rashtriya Sevika Samiti
SC	Scheduled Castes
ST	Scheduled Tribes
SP	Samajwadi Party
UCC	Uniform Civil Code
UPA	United Progressive Alliance
VHP	Vishva Hindu Parishad
VKA	Vanavasi Kalayan Ashrama

TIMELINE
Landmarks in Indian History

1526-1858

Mughal rule in India

1858-1947

India under British rule

1947-89

August 15, 1947: Indian independence from British rule

January 26, 1950: Indian Constitution enforced

1967: Congress Party defeated in nine states

1969: Congress splits into two: Indian National Congress (Congress I) and Congress Organization (Congress O)

- Radical turn in Congress-bank nationalization
- *Garibi hato* (end poverty) policy

1971: Bangladesh attains independence from Pakistan. India sends troops to assist Bangladesh.

1974: Total Revolution, a movement initiated in the state of Bihar by Gandhian leader Jay Prakash Narayan, spreads across north India.

- Allahabad High Court judgment on corrupt electoral practices of Indira Gandhi-led Congress government leads to National Emergency.

1975-77: Government declares Emergency

1977-79: Congress defeated. Janata Party government assumes power.

- Democracy restored after Emergency

- July 1979- Janata government collapses

1980-88: Decade of turbulence because of separatist movements in Punjab and the northeast

- 1980- Indira Gandhi inaugurates another decade of Congress rule.

- June 1984- Operation Blue Star launched by Congress. Indian army moves into Golden Temple in Amritsar, Punjab, to flush out terrorists. Involves gun battle and attack on the Sikh place of worship. Leaves 550 dead.

- October 1984- Congress-sponsored massacre of Sikhs. Indira Gandhi assassinated by Sikh bodyguards.

- December 1984- Congress wins parliamentary elections due to "sympathy vote" after Indira Gandhi's death. Rajiv Gandhi becomes Prime Minister.

- 1986- Government passes Muslim Women Protection of Rights on Divorce Act. Overturns Supreme Court judgment on Shah Bano case.

- 1987- India deploys the Indian Peacekeeping Force (IPKF) in Sri Lanka

1989-2010

1989: Congress defeated following widespread allegations of corruption.

- National Front government under V.P. Singh wins elections with BJP support

1990: Mandal Commission Report implemented. Indian troops withdrawn from Sri Lanka.

1991: National Front government falls as BJP withdraws support following the first major attempt to demolish the Babri mosque. Congress returns to power.

- Rajiv Gandhi assassinated by Tamil suicide bomber

- Structural Adjustment Program initiated under International Monetary Fund (IMF)

1992: Babri mosque demolished due to Hindu right-wing mobilization.

1996: Congress defeated in national elections. BJP emerges as single largest party in Parliament. Is unable to garner support of other parties to form a coalition. Congress-led United Front government supported by leftists takes over.

1998: BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) takes power at the Center (union level). India detonates three nuclear bombs. South Asian arms race begins.

2002: Godra train attack on February 27, 2002 causes riots in the north western state of Gujarat. 2,000 Muslims perish. 100,000 women and children are displaced.

2004: BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) coalition loses to Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA)

2008: Mumbai terrorist attacks leave 175 persons dead

INTRODUCTION

On May 16, 1998, under the directives of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led coalition, the Indian government detonated three nuclear bombs in the Rajasthan desert, near a site called Pokhran.[1] If the name of India's inter-ballistic missile, *Agni*, the god of fire in the Vedic tradition, is inscribed in antiquity, its symbolism in 1998 was entirely new, reflecting the rise of a political party that emblematizes a chauvinistic, majoritarian stance.[2]

To celebrate India's accomplishment, the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), a sister organization of the BJP, ordered the construction of a temple dedicated to *Shakti*, the goddess of strength, some fifty kilometers away from the testing site.[3] The decision is an apt example of Hindutva ideologues' use of the feminine metaphor of "innate strength" to legitimize aggression against external forces. Shortly after the nuclear tests, Bal Thackerey, the chairman of the Shiv Sena, a Mumbai-based Hindu nationalist ally of the BJP, declared that Hindus were no longer eunuchs—a notion that traces its roots back to the Mughal period which spanned three centuries.[4] Thackerey's statement ironically subverted the idea of female power and reiterated the masculinist theme that has animated Hindu nationalism since its inception in the

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[1] Chetan Bhatt, "Introduction," in *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2001), 1-2.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.
[4] The Mughal period in India lasted from 1526 AD to 1858 AD. See footnote 15 for citation.

1920s. Hindutva's sacralization of aggression had an anticipated consequence: Pakistan retaliated by exploding five nuclear bombs on May 28, 1998.[5]

The names of both countries' missiles, *Agni*, the Vedic god of fire, and *Ghauri*, the famous Muslim conqueror,[6] make real the monumental conflict between primordial Hinduism and medieval Islam that votaries of Hindu nationalism consider central to their political agenda.[7]

The Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 reinstated the animosity between Islam and Hinduism, giving a new lease of life to the Hindutva cause.[8] In contemporary India, where Hindus constitute about 80.5 percent of the total population, followed by Muslims (13.4 percent), Christians (2.3 percent), Sikhs (1.9 percent), Buddhists (0.8 percent), Jains (0.4 percent), and others (0.7 percent),[9] this legacy is encapsulated in the struggle between the dominant Hindu majority and a comparatively belittled Islamic community. In its capacity as the second most powerful national party with a voter base of about twenty-five percent of India's population, the BJP has emerged as the most powerful organization for promoting the Hindu nationalist voice.[10]

This study aims at assessing the dynamics of Hindutva, or Hindu ethno-cultural nationalism, in the politics of the BJP from 1990 to 2010. It analyzes the inter-

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[5] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism*, 1-2.

[6] The name *Ghauri* comes from the famous Afghan ruler Muhammad Ghauri, known to have invaded India seventeen times between the 11th and 12th centuries. The missile is also referred to as *Hatf* V, which was the sword used by Prophet Muhammad. See footnote 1 for citation.

[7] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism*, 3.

[8] Ibid.

[9] For citation and further information, see table 1, pie chart 1, and map 3 in appendix.

[10] As of 2010, the BJP possesses 116 of 552 seats in the Lok Sabha (lower house of Indian Parliament), and 55 of 250 seats in the Rajya Sabha (upper house of Indian Parliament). For more information, see table 2 and map 1 in appendix. See footnote 1 for citation.

linkages between Hindu nationalism and extremism by evaluating the role of Hindutva rhetoric in inciting communal violence against India's 138 million Muslims.[11] Through its investigation of the interplay between rhetoric and patterns of violence, the analysis will address three essential questions. How has the BJP used Hindutva ideology as an instrument of political mobilization? How has BJP-led communal violence impacted Indian society and politics? What role will Hindutva play in the future political agenda of the BJP?

The first chapter of this thesis outlines the theoretical and intellectual developments that led to the rise of Hindutva as a form of Hindu ethno-cultural nationalism. The second chapter identifies the precursors to the BJP. It explores their organizational structures and missions to gauge the historical and political contexts from which the BJP borrowed. Chapter three details the evolution of the BJP and its core mobilization strategies. Subsequent sections of the thesis focus on specific cases, in order to illustrate how the BJP's rhetoric and mobilization tactics have garnered Hindu support for communal violence against Muslims.

Chapter four describes the destruction of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya in 1992, and assesses the role of the BJP in the demolition. It argues that Ayodhya was a catalyst for future communal violence; one such instance being the 1993 riots in the city of Mumbai. By demonstrating how southern, regional organizations like the Shiv Sena advanced Hindutva goals in the Mumbai riots, the chapter highlights the hierarchical tendencies in the BJP's organizational and operational structures. The fifth chapter is a study of the Gujarat riots in 2002. It deals with the complicity of the

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[11] For citation and further information, see table 1 in appendix.

BJP-led state government in the communal carnage, and exposes the absence of boundaries between religion and secularism in the Indian context. Chapter six explores the communal bias in the Prevention of Terrorist Activities Act (POTA) 2002, which was legislated during the BJP's reign at the Center.[12] By demonstrating how the Act was used to indict Muslims in the Gujarat carnage (2002) and Mumbai blasts (2003 and 2006), the chapter indicates POTA's legacy in Indian politics.

In light of the BJP's consecutive electoral defeats in the 2004 and 2009 national elections, the study proposes that the lack of a concrete socio-economic agenda is an impending loophole in the party's political strategy. It also suggests that for the BJP to maintain its current national standing, a more pluralistic stance is of the essence. This being said, the thesis acknowledges that the BJP's leadership has refused to forfeit Hindutva, despite the party's defeat at the 2004 and 2009 union polls. It establishes that while the party's share of the national vote has declined from 37.06 percent in 1999 to 24.6 percent in 2009, the BJP remains the second largest political party in India.[13] This not only indicates the continued presence of Hindutva in BJP politics, it also suggests that the BJP will rely on anti-minority violence to secure electoral victories.

This evaluation does not seek to project Hindutva as an ideology that has gripped the entire nation. Much of this analysis focuses on political dynamics in north-central India. Case studies in this thesis focus primarily on the states of Gujarat (Godhra) and Uttar Pradesh (Ayodhya). Yet, it is clear that Hindutva forces have

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[12] "Center" is a term used interchangeably with "union government" or "national government." See footnote 4 for citation.
[13] For more information, see tables 1 and 2 in appendix.

established their presence in south Indian states like Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Maharashtra[14]—though on a limited scale.[15] This analysis therefore attempts to demonstrate the potency of Hindutva despite its essentially northern appeal.

It is important to acknowledge that communalism in the modern Indian context is not a solely Hindu phenomenon. Islamic radicalism is an equally pressing concern for Indian statesmen.[16] Muslim-led communal riots in the pre-Partition era caused the death of close to 250,000 Hindus.[17] The 1967 riots in Allahabad (Uttar Pradesh) and Ahmedabad (Gujarat) were instigated by the Muslims in these cities. The 1987 riots in Pune (Maharashtra) commenced after Muslims burnt an idol of Lord Ganesha in a Hindu neighborhood.[18] Shiv Sena volunteers involved in the 1993 Mumbai riots claimed that their actions were a response to Muslim resentment against the destruction of the Babri mosque in 1992.[19] More recently, the alleged involvement of Muslim terrorists in the 2003, 2006, and 2008 Mumbai bombings have raised the ire of many in the Hindu community.[20]

There are several reasons for the recent surge in Islamic violence in India. Internal indoctrination by conservative priests or *mullahs;* radical Islamic rhetoric that presents Muslims as both marginalized actors and subjects of Western exploitation;

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[14] The 1993 Mumbai riots illustrate the BJP's presence in southern India. The Shiv Sena, a regional ally of the BJP, led communal violence against Mumbai's Muslims. The city of Mumbai is located in the south western state of Maharashtra. See footnote 14 for citation.

[15] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism*, 1-2.

[16] Ram Puniyani, "The Partition: Who was Responsible?," in *Communal Politics: Facts versus Myths* (New Delhi: Sage Publications India Pvt. Lmt., 2003), 111. **Note**: "Pvt. Lmt." is an abbreviation for "Private Limited." The notation will be used in subsequent citations in this thesis.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid

[19] Badri Narayan, "Introduction: Pastness and Politics," in *Fascinating Hindutva: Saffron Politics and Dalit Mobilization* (New Delhi: Sage Publications Pvt. Lmt., 2009), 17.

[20] Ibid.

and economic disadvantages associated with demographic factors like high birth rates are some reasons for the emergence of Muslim-sponsored communalism in the country.[21] Of equal significance is the fact that Hindutva rhetoric has proved damaging in this scenario. This assessment therefore underscores the manner in which the discourse and political activism of Hindutva ideologues, notably the BJP, have heightened the preexisting minority psychosis among Indian Muslims.[22]

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[21] Puniyani, *Communal Politics*, 111.
[22] Ibid.

CHAPTER 1

ORIGINS OF HINDUTVA

Making Connections

The birth of a distinctive view of Hindu supremacy is traced in historical scholarship to the violent but puzzlingly short period from 1919 to the mid-1920s.[23] It was in 1923 that V.D. Sarvarkar's founding statement on Hindu identity (*Hindutva—Who is a Hindu?*) was published.[24] The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) was formed in 1925, and Sarvarkar's Hindu Mahasabha of 1916, the central organ for promoting Hindu demands during the Indian independence struggle, was strengthened.[25] The idea of the *Sangh Parivar*, a family of Hindu nationalist organizations, took root during this period.

These crystallizing events were direct consequences of Hindu resentment towards nationalist leader Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi's support for the *khilafat* movement; a global Muslim campaign in support of the Caliphate after the Ottoman Empire's demise in 1920.[26] The rise of the All India Muslim League in the 1920s, Muslim demands for separate electoral representation, and agitation in the aftermath of the *khilafat* struggle led to the consolidation of a Hindu supremacist, anti-Muslim constituency in India. In this register, Hindu consciousness was viewed as an external

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[23] Chetan Bhatt, "The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's Ordered Society," in *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2001), 79.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid, 80.

factor, subsidiary to the movement for self-determination, and of relatively minor importance until well after independence.[27]

The link between Hindu consciousness and a nationalist view of political and social history became apparent in post-colonial India with the stabilization of the RSS in the 1960s, and the subsequent rise of its political arm, the BJP, in the 1980s.[28] This notwithstanding, the works of three scholars (V.D. Sarvarkar, K.B. Hedgewar, and M.S. Golwalkar) during the pre-independence period were instrumental in the fructification of Hindutva: an ethno-cultural and nationalistic view of the Hindu religious tradition.[29]

Sarvarkar's Discourse on Radical Ethno-Nationalism

Vinayak Damodar Sarvarkar was born in May 1883 in Bhagpur, a town in the Nashik district of Maharashtra in western India. He is celebrated in contemporary times as a revolutionary hero, a daring and courageous figure who fought the British in India.[30] While British colonialism was the catalyst for much of Sarvarkar's writing, his assessment of India's past drew from both the ancient Vedic era and the medieval period of Mughal domination.[31] Much of his work—he began writing in 1920 and continued until his death in 1966—is embedded in a dense hagiographical tone. His references to gods, saints, and medieval Hindu heroes stress themes of

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[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.
[31] The Vedic age lasted from the 1st millennia BC to the 6th century BC. The Mughal period lasted from 1526 AD to 1858 AD. See footnote 1 for citation.

uncompromising militancy and masculine strength, both against British colonial rule and against Indian Muslims.[32]

Definition of Hindu Identity

Sarvarkar's overarching aim was to provide a comprehensive definition of what constituted Hindu identity. To do so, he instituted Hindutva as the essence of Hinduness. Though he dismissed twentieth century views of Hinduism as rooted in Western ideas, Sarvarkar's goal was not to reject Orientalist conceptions of India's religious heritage.[33] Rather, he wished to underscore that Hindu identity is not defined merely through personal or collective religious beliefs: "A Hindu means a person who regards this land of *Bharatavarsha*[34] from the Indus to the seas as his Fatherland as well as his Holyland, that is, the cradle of his religion."[35]

In addition, Sarvarkar sought to introduce historically attenuated versions of what he believed were the foundations of Hindu *dharma* (religion). The strategic primordialization of Hindu identity proved essential in this regard.[36] Despite his outward rejection of Western conceptions, "the intellectual conditions for the essence of Sarvarkar's Hindu identity were the eighteenth and nineteenth century paradigms of [German and British] Orientalism."[37] He found in such views an unchanging quality to

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[32] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism*, 1-2.

[33] V.D. Sarvarkar, "Excerpts from Hindutva," in *Communal Identity in India: Its Construction and Articulation in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Bidyut Chakrabarty (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 69.

[34] "*Bharatavarsha*" is one of the several terms used by Sarvarkar to describe the Hindu nation. See footnote 9 for citation.

[35] Sarvarkar, *Communal Identity in India*, 69.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid.

the historicity of India. Time was purely serial, bereft of any consequence, and history was an outcome of external events: wars and invasions. Hinduism settled back to its steady state, in consonance with its primordial content once the external threat ceded.[38] By linking Hindutva with history, Sarvarkar was able to temporalize and secularize Hindu religious identity.

For Sarvarkar, the Hindu had come into being long before the Egyptian and the Babylonian; when the Aryans had crossed the Indus River to occupy India. This racial occupation of India's geographical space during the Vedic age became a key component of Sarvarkar's imagined Hindu nation.[39] Accounts of the Aryans' migration from the north to the south, an important facet of nineteenth century European Aryanism,[40] figure extensively in the ideologue's works.[41] This elucidates the link between Hindutva and European nationalist writings. Further, it stresses the origins of the Aryan Race Theory and the Out of India Theory.[42] The two are extensively employed by BJP cadres to root their antecedents in the "pure" Vedic civilization.[43]

While Sarvarkar believed that the comingling of indigenous and Aryan blood gave rise to the Hindu-Vedic civilization, he clearly stated that *Aryan* blood, culture,

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[38] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism*, 86.

[39] Scholars believe that the Vedic period extended from the 1st millennia BC to the 6th century BC. See footnote 10 for citation.

[40] Sarvarkar borrowed from the European nationalist writings of Gramsci, as well as the fascist writings of Hitler and Mussolini. Many of his ideas were rooted in German notions about the "pureness" of the Aryan race. See footnote 18 for citation.

[41] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism*, 86.

[42] Both the Aryan Race Theory and the Out of India Theory track Aryan migration (from Europe to India), thereby establishing Aryans (Hindus) as the true inhabitants of the Indian nation. See footnote 18 for citation.

[43] Ronald Neufeldt, "Hindutva and the Rhetoric of Violence: Interpreting the Past, Designing the Future," in *The Twentieth Century Confronts Its Gods: Globalization, Technology, and War*, ed. David J. Hawkin (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2004), 159.

and ideas were the ultimate basis of Hindu nationhood.[44] For example, in his discussions of the *Ramayana* myth, Hanuman, the representative of non-Aryan groups in southern India, is depicted as a supporter of Rama's Hindu mission to conquer the non-Aryan *rakshasas* (demons).[45]

Interestingly, in assigning a primordial attribute to the word "Hindu," Sarvarkar stressed that its roots were not indigenous. Of the above he said: "But when the self comes into contact with the non-self, then alone it stands in need of a name if it wants to communicate with others or if others persist in communicating with it."[46] This dual structure to the patronymic is insightful. The word "Hindu" originated among the British, who are projected as invaders in Hindu nationalist writings. The primal patronymic, according to Sarvarkar, is therefore "a product of Vedic-Aryan conquest that is antagonized in history through conflict with others."[47] The term "Hindu" is conferred upon India, and outlives other labels like *Bharata* and *Aryavarta*, at the juncture where conflict and war intersect with the primal patronymic.[48]

Fundamentalism in Sarvarkar's Hindutva

Sarvarkar's writings during the 1930s featured a definitively stronger version of Hindutva.[49] As noted earlier, European nationalism cast a profound impression on the ideologue. In the work of Giuseppe Mazzini, for example, Sarvarkar found an

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[44] Ibid.

[45] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism*, 88.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid, 89.

[49] Thomas Blom Hansen, "Imagining the Hindu Nation," in *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999), 77.

ideological framework that combined cultural pride and national self-assertion with a "vision of a homogenous nation embodied in a unitary state."[50] By 1938, Sarvarkar began drawing comparisons between Hindus and ethnic Germans *and* between Indian Muslims and German Jews. He repeatedly stated that an ethnically sound Hindu nation "should be inhabited only by pure-blooded Aryans."[51] Whereas Sarvarkar's previous notions focused on race and territory, his subsequent ideas stressed the role of militarism and war.[52]

The link between Hindu cohesion and German unification became the basis for Sarvarkar's comparison between Hitlerism and the "cowardly democratic-socialist attitude" of India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru.[53] The use of aggressive discourse to mobilize the economically downtrodden proved particularly effective during Sarvarkar's lifetime. This provides another close parallel between right-wing European ideas and the ethno-cultural nationalism that was emerging in India. By focusing on economic apathy and disadvantage, Hindutva forces developed a totalitarian view of *manushya* (man) and his role in Hindu civilization.[54]

*S*affron is believed to be the color of purity and strength in Hindu mythology. It became a means of internal colonization[55] for Hindu nationalists, who readily

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[50] M.J. Akbar, "The Hitler Note: Or, Notes on Apocalypse Now," in *Riot After Riot: reports on caste and communal violence in India* (New Delhi: Roli Books Pvt. Lmt., 2003), 167.
[51] Sarvarkar, *Communal Identity in India*, 70.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism*, 107.
[54] Akbar, *Riot After Riot*, 179.
[55] "Internal colonization" refers to the manner in which Aryanism was used to consolidate national power in the hands of the elitist *brahaminical* or priestly class. The Hindu nation envisioned by Sarvarkar was unified only in so far as it ascribed Hindu identity to the lower castes. In all other respects, the project catered to the whims of the upper castes. See footnote 33 for citation.

employed fascist appeals to insignia[56] while constructing the "otherness" of non-Hindus.[57] Armed with Hitler's ideas on the purity of the German race, and Mazzini's delineation of present humiliation and past glory, Hindutva ideologues reinforced the superiority of Hindu *brahamins* (priests).[58] Thus began the internal colonization of India, and the subjugation of all other castes and religions under the pretext of securing a unified Hindu nation.

Muslim Identity and Reinterpretation of Indian History

Hindutva's emphasis on aggression ensured that the Buddhist period between the Mauryan era (321-185 BC) and the Mughal sultanate (1526-1858 AD) barely received space in Sarvarkar's historical scheme.[59] Sarvarkar found Buddhism's universal, non-violent approach profoundly emasculating; demeaning to India's martial heritage.[60] Sarvarkar's repudiation of Buddhism also underscored his opposition to the pacifist Gandhian ideas that typified India's freedom struggle during the 1930s and 40s.

With Sarvarkar, and the simultaneous advent of Gandhi, there emerged two distinct interpretations of a modern Indian nation based on Hindu values. Sarvarkar's cultural nationalism was masculine, aggressive, and anti-Muslim, but also rational and

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[56] The *bhagwa dhwaj* (saffron flag) is for Hindu nationalists what the *swastika* (equilateral cross with arms bent at right angles) was for proponents of Nazism. See footnote 33 for citation.

[57] Robert E. Frykenberg, "Hindutva as a Political Religion," in *The Sacred In Twenty-First Century Poitics,* ed. Roger Griffin, Robert Mallett, and John Tortorice (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 205.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Ajit Karnik, "Sarvarkar's Hindutva," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 38, No. 15 (April 12-18, 2003), 1426.

[60] Ibid.

progressive.[61] Gandhi's views, in contrast, were rooted in tradition. He stressed the notion of *swadeshi* (economic self-reliance) and—unlike Sarvarkar who remained ambivalent about Western culture—projected peaceful nationalism against the backdrop of all that the West lacked.[62] Sarvarkar perceptibly refuted these ideas. His anti-Gandhian stance was strengthened on another account: M.K. Gandhi's support for Indian Muslims. These two features of Sarvarkar's Hindutva, its militant activism and anti-minority appeal, figure prominently in the contemporary discourse of the BJP and its allies.[63]

The elevation of India's ancient past and the repudiation of non-violent action in India's modern history were accompanied in Sarvarkar's discourse by a staunch dismissal of the medieval period. Sarvarkar readily employed the racial homogeneity of the Vedic era to demonstrate how the Mughals had destroyed and dismembered ancient archetypes of Aryanism.[64] In fact, the myth of Vedic origin allowed Sarvarkar to undermine *all* external forces. The essentials of the Hindutva landscape, blood ties to India's territory and a caste system founded on the purity of upper caste (Aryan) blood, contextualized much of Sarvarkar's critique of the British and Muslim eras.[65]

In an effort to undermine Muslim identity, Sarvarkar focused on Hindu martial clans like the Marathas and Rajputs. He presented medieval Hindu princes like Shivaji and Rana Pratap as epitomes of the Hindu essence. In addition, Sarvarkar cited medieval directives such as the imposition of *jaziya*, or pilgrimage tax, as evidence of

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[61] Ibid.
[62] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 79.
[63] Karnik, "Sarvarkar's Hindutva," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1426.
[64] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 79.
[65] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism*, 95.

the atrocities Hindus bore under Muslim colonialists.[66] His disdain for Muslim domination stemmed from the belief that Muslims had denied Hindus the opportunity to profess their faith.[67] He held that religious stringencies[68] were responsible for both the economic marginalization of Hindus and the communalization[69] of India's social space: "When Muslims penetrated India, the question of life and death began…Muslim rulers systematically plundered the wealth of Hindus…the illegitimacy of *jaziya* drove a wedge between the two communities."[70] Sarvarkar's repudiation of Mughal rule has made inroads into the BJP's rhetoric. Featured in an essay on the BJP's official website is the following quote:

> During the era of Islamic invasions, what Will Durant called the bloodiest period in the history of mankind, many Hindus gallantly resisted, knowing fully well that defeat would mean forced conversion, economic discrimination via the *jaziya* tax, or death. It is no wonder that the residents of Chittor, and countless other people over the length and breadth of *Bharat* [India], from present-day Afghanistan to present-day Bangladesh, thought it better to die gloriously rather than face cold-blooded slaughter. Hindus will never forget the repeated destruction of the Somnath Temple, the massacre of Buddhists at Nalanda, or the pogroms of the Mughals.[71]

The rationale of Muslims' extra-terrestrial loyalties was used by votaries of Hindutva to create an anti-minority psychosis among Hindus. In institutionalizing this

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[66] Amalendu Misra, "Sarvarkar's Discourse on Radical Ethno-Nationalism," in *Identity and Religion: Foundations of Anti-Islamism in India* (New Delhi: Sage Publications Pvt. Lmt., 2004), 172.

[67] Muslims (from Persia and other principalities in the Far East) began invading India around 1100 AD. The Mughal Empire was established in 1526 AD and lasted till 1858 AD, when the British took control of the Indian subcontinent. While early Muslim rulers were fairly tolerant towards Hindus, Emperor Aurangzeb (1618-1707 AD) set a precedent for the exploitation of Hindus by imposing additional religious and agricultural taxes on the community. See footnote 42 for citation.

[68] The imposition of pilgrimage tax impoverished a vast majority of Hindus, especially under Aurangzeb's rule. See footnote 42 for citation.

[69] "Communalization" refers to a process whereby inter-communal discord, both verbal and physical, becomes a permanent feature of social interaction in a country or region. See footnote 42 for citation.

[70] Misra, *Identity and Religion*, 169.

[71] *Hindutva: The Great Nationalist Ideology*. Bharatiya Janata Party Website (February 9, 2009). Available: http://www.bjp.org/content/view/2650/. [April 9, 2010].

reversal of affective states, a major problem for Hindu communalists was how the majority could be made to fear the minority. Their solution: repeated references to the Muslim brutes who specialized in sexual aggression against Hindu women.[72] In Sarvarkar's view, Muslim conquerors raped Hindu women to sully the honor of Hindu men: "Hindu women…were distributed in fives or tens amongst the most faithful followers of Islam. Their future progenies were Muslim."[73]

Sarvarkar's preoccupation with medieval struggles between Hindus and Muslims led to a narrow reading of Indian history, rendering Muslim identity a contested category. His substitution of Hinduism by Hindutva ironically augmented race at the cost of religion.[74] In claiming that Muslims and Christians had to be excluded from India because they were religiously dissimilar to Hindus, Sarvarkar overlooked the fact that the communities' racial identities were coextensive with their religious leanings.[75] Instead of rejecting the race-caste connection, Sarvarkar generalized the category of race by arguing that Hindu religious constitution[76] accounted for the primary difference between colonizers and the true inhabitants of India. Sarvarkar's view of Hindutva as comprising racial and geographic elements—Vedic-Aryan blood and territorially ordained descent—contained another loophole.[77] It failed to account for those Muslims who could lay claims to Indian territory owing

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[72] Aditya Mukherjee, Mridula Mukherjee, Sucheta Mahajan, "The Long Shadow of Gandhiji's Assassination," in *RSS, School Texts and the Murder of Mahatma Gandhi* (New Delhi: Sage Publications Pvt. Lmt., 2008), 83.

[73] Sikata Banerjee, "The Feminization of Violence in Bombay: Women in the Politics of the Shiv Sena," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 36, No. 12 (December 1996), 1215.

[74] Ibid/

[75] Sarvarkar, *Communal Identity in India*, 69.

[76] Sarvarkar seems to have concluded that the Aryans (as a race) were the forefathers of Hinduism (religion). See footnote 42 for citation.

[77] Misra, *Identity and Religion*, 172.

to the practice of inter-marriage. In lieu of the above, Sarvarkar introduced a third criterion for membership to the Hindu nation. The idea of a common culture constituted by both Hindu religion and Sanskrit language came to occupy the center stage in his theory.[78]

Although Sarvarkar sought a collective Hindu-Muslim front to curb British colonialism and synthesize the political aspirations of the two communities, Muslim demands for a separate nation turned him against inter-communal collaboration.[79] The solidification of the Pakistani state during the 1960s played an instrumental role in advancing Hindutva. Many deemed it necessary to establish counterweights to an intensely Islamic neighbor.[80] Sarvarkar's construction of the Muslim male as lustful and threatening corresponded to his view of Indian Muslims as supporters of Pakistan and agents of pan-Islamism.[81]

It is important to note that Sarvarkar's scheme overlooked Hindu-Muslim syncretism during the medieval era. It repudiated the links between the Hindu *bhakti* movement and the Muslim *sufi* tradition—both anti-establishment campaigns that sought to evade social hierarchies and move beyond deterministic orientations of identity.[82] Rather than incorporating notions of religious cohesion, Sarvarkar's Hindutva sought to bind Hindu men and women in an intensely nationalistic framework by juxtaposing India's martial heritage with the fertile, feminine nature of

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[78] Karnik, "Sarvarkar's Hindutva," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1515.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Misra, *Identity and Religion*, 175.
[82] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism*, 97-98.

India's geography. Hindustan became the *pitrubhoomi*, or the Fatherland, and the *matrabhoomi*, or the Motherland.[83]

Sarvarkar's vision of Hindu nationalism consisted of five salient elements. First, it was anti-Muslim and presented the medieval era as a period of Hindu exploitation. Second, it denounced Gandhian precepts of non-violence and favored India's martial tradition.[84] Third, it extolled the Aryan race and the virtues of blood ordained caste hierarchies. Fourth, it established blood ties to India's territory as the basis for membership to the Hindu state.[85] Lastly, it promoted the idea of a common Hindu culture based on Hindu religion and Sanskrit language. These components became the foundations of Hindu nationalism in India and are visible in the goals and charters of *Sangh Parivar* organizations.[86]

Hindu Nationalism under K.B. Hedgewar and M.S. Golwalkar

The ideas of Keshav Baliram Hedgewar (1889-1940)[87] and Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar (1906-1973)[88] built upon many of Sarvarkar's notions. *Brahamins* from western Maharashtra and co-founders of the Rashtriya Sawayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the parent organization of the *Sangh Parivar*, both Hedgewar and Golwalkar proposed

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[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.
[85] G. Aloysius, "Trajectory of Hindutva," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 29, No. 24 (June 11 1994), 1450.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Hedgewar began working for revolutionary organizations like *Jugantar* and *Anushilan Samiti* (both in Bengal) as early as 1910. His experience with anti-colonial activism found expression in all his writings between 1910 and 1940. See footnote 58 for citation.
[88] Golwalkar became involved in the nationalist movement after completing his L.L.B degree in England in 1935. He took to reading and producing nationalist literature less than a year later, and continued writing till his death in 1973. See footnote 58 for citation.

that India's colonization was a result of the weak and disaggregated approach of Hindus in the nation.[89]

An Overview of Indian History

Golwalkar and Hedgewar presented medieval accounts of Muslim domination to demonstrate the organization and strength of Indian Muslims, thereby exhorting Hindus to rise to the occasion.[90] In his treatise on Hindu nationalism, *We, or Our Nationhood Defined* (1939), Golwalkar sought to link Sarvarkar's conception of the Hindu nation with the notion of a Hindu state. Although he endorsed Sarvarkar's views on the antiquity and truism of India's Vedic civilization, Golwalkar argued that the Aryans were not exogenous to India.[91] Yet, both Golwalkar and Hedgewar claimed that the Hindu nation should not be viewed as the exclusive property of India's original inhabitants. Distinguishing between nation and state, they maintained that the latter was distinguishable from and subservient to the national concept.[92] The two ideologues repudiated Buddhist pacifism and Gandhian non-violence. Like Sarvarkar, they focused on the eight hundred-year period following the arrival of the Mughals in India.[93]

Hindu Identity and the Social Organization of the Hindu State

The BJP's political jargon of "one nation, one culture, one language, and one

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[89] G. Aloysius, "Trajectory of Hindutva," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1450.
[90] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism*, 113.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid.

race" draws in multiple ways from the writings of early Hindutva ideologues.[94] Both Hedgewar and Golwalkar endorsed the parallels between Nazism and Hindutva, and stressed the common racial spirit of the imagined Hindu nation.[95]

The complete abandonment of civic nationalism, which began under Sarvarkar, found a continuous chain of supporters through India's pre and post colonial periods. As with Sarvarkar, culture was indistinguishable from religion for Golwalkar and Hedgewar. This link formed the basis of a race consciousness.[96] Golwalkar's use of somatic metaphors—the healthy body of the Hindu nation being plagued by the minority cancer—supplemented his ideological double binds in which minorities could not be anything other than foreign, and therefore, could not claim citizenship to the Hindu nation.[97] According to Golwalkar, "The non-Hindu people in Hindustan must adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no ideas but those of glorification of the Hindu culture and race…We are an old nation; and let us deal, as old nations ought to deal, with foreign races who have chosen to live in our country."[98]

Interestingly, while Golwalkar and Hedgewar rejected Sarvarkar's emphasis on the caste system (*varnashramadharma*) and sub-caste hierarchies (*jatis*), they promoted the idea of a uniform racial heritage. Like Sarvarkar, they advocated rigid hierarchical organization in the RSS.[99] The need to efface hierarchical power in order

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[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid, 132.
[96] Ibid, 129.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Aditya Mukherjee, Mridula Mukherjee, Sucheta Mahajan, *RSS, School Texts and the Murder of Mahatma Gandhi*, 83.
[99] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 83.

to sustain the RSS brotherhood highlights that the Hindutva movement was founded on the premise of political clout.

In addition to providing structure to Hindutva organizations, the notion of a uniform racial heritage was pivotal to Golwalkar and Hedgewar's conception of a democratic state. The two argued that in the absence of race-based organization, local decision-making bodies like the village *panchayats* would cease to function effectively as arbiters of dispute.[100] The curtailment of state power to preserve democracy clearly indicates Hindutva ideologues' desire for control over India's religious affairs.

Although operating within the same organicist paradigm, the aforementioned figures disagreed with respect to the strategies needed to achieve the Hindu *rashtra* (nation). Sarvarkar focused on politics, agitation, and mass mobilization, whereas Golwalkar and Hegdewar focused on character building.[101] The crystallization of these two positions marked a restaging of the double-stringed strategy of gradual cultural change and public political articulation, which had emerged during India's freedom struggle.[102]

Upadhyaya's Integral Humanism

Equally pivotal to the Hindutva scheme are the ideas of Deendayal Upadhyaya, an RSS volunteer who wrote in post-colonial India during the 1960s. Borrowing from

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[100] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism*, 135.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 92.

theologian Shankaracharya's *advaita*[103] (non-dualism or spiritual monism)[104] philosophy, Upadhyaya developed the precepts of integral humanism; a premise that figures repeatedly in the charters and expressed goals of the BJP.[105] Upadhyaya's project was promethean. It sought to erase caste antagonisms and create a harmonious society based on ideals from India's Vedic past. Yet in offering equity among castes in Indian society, Upadhyaya's scheme appealed to the inequalities in the religious domain: A unified Hindu community could be achieved only after Muslim influences had been eliminated from the nation.[106]

Advaita and Hindutva

Upadhyaya used *advaita* philosophy to stress the principle of *ekamata*; a form of unity that pervades the universe, and of which humankind is a part. He frequently equated the human body, mind, intellect, and soul with the four universal objectives of *kama* (pleasure), *artha* (wealth), *dharma* (duty or natural law), and *moksha* (salvation). In so doing, he denounced economic systems like capitalism which accord autonomy to the individual.[107] By employing concepts like political morality, *saryodaya* (welfare for all), and *swadeshi* (economic self-sustenance), Upadhyaya's integral humanism

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[103] *Advaita* is a sub-school of the Vedantic school of thought. It was established by Adi Shankara and Gaudapada. It is a monistic philosophy which promotes the unity between the individual soul (*atman*) and the universal essence (*brahman*). See footnote 77 for citation.

[104] Monism holds that there is unity in all essences. Monists would assert (on the universal plane) that all things converge into oneness and (on a theological level) that there is only one God. Non-dualism describes things as distinct but not separate. It can be applied to belief, practice, or theory. See footnote 77 for citation.

[105] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism*, 92.

[106] Ibid.

[107] Ibid, 157.

"ideologically hijacked" the authority of the Gandhian idiom.[108] These notions figure widely in contemporary Hindutva. Contrary to the virtues of equality, *Sangh Parivar* politics focuses on the upper echelons of society, arousing mass consciousness only in name.[109]

Conception of the Hindu State and Projection of the Enemy

A staunch anti-modernist, Upadhyaya was deliberate in his choice of vocabulary. He stressed the power of Hindu *dharma* (duty) in relation to both society and the state, arguing that democracy is based on a hierarchical division of power that corresponds to the four ultimate objectives of life.[110] Despite his denials, Upadhyaya's conception of *dharma* oscillated between natural law, national soul, and the Hindu nation. This demonstrates that he envisioned democracy as subservient to a religious imperative. Upadhyaya's discussions on secularism weigh against the ideology's core principles, given that they necessitate social hierarchy, while simultaneously stressing the idea of an undifferentiated Hindu race.[111]

In assessing the interrelationships between secularism and democracy, it is important to note that unlike the Western world, India lacks a formal segregation between the religious and civic spheres.[112] Religious practices among Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and Jains are co-extensive with the communities' cultural activities.

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[108] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 85.
[109] A. James, "Hindutva: The Case For A Saffron Fascism," in *The Search For Neofascism: The Use And Abuse Of Social Change* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003). 216.
[110] Ainslie T. Embree, "Who Speaks for India? The Role of Civil Society in Defining Indian Nationalism," in *Prospects for Peace in South Asia*, ed. Rafiq Dossani and Henry S. Rowen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 168.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid.

Festivals and celebrations among these groups frequently possess religious underpinnings. Given the above, the conventional understanding of secularism, "as an ideology conveying social and political equality," appears a denial of the veracity of the Indian way of life.[113]

The Indian notion of secularism is influenced by the Hindu belief that various faiths offer different paths that lead to the same truth. Hindutva adopts this view, but with one crucial difference. It asks where the limits of the traditional acceptance of plurality lie, and takes it upon itself to defend the freshly demarcated boundaries.[114] The problem with Hindu ethno-cultural nationalism is not that it regards religion as an encompassing phenomenon but that it insists on the compatibility and transferability of secular and Hindu rationalities. The resultant dichotomies between the civil and religious realms engender strife among communities. Furthermore, faith based politics reinforces religious norms that perpetuate social hierarchies.[115]

Upadhyaya evidently appealed to the long-standing intersections between the religious, political, and social spheres. In the end, his failure to separate religion and nationalism significantly reduced the political currency of his secular rhetoric.[116] Taking cue from Upadhyaya's ideas, pro-Hindutva scholars like Ashish Nandy and Tarun Vijay have employed the religious imperative to stress that secularism is a colonial remnant. They maintain that secularity was imposed to create rifts between

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[113] Ibid.
[114] Deepa S. Reddy, "Ethnicism as *Critique*," in *Religious Identity and Political Destiny: Hindutva in the Culture of Ethnicism* (New York: AltaMira Press, 2006), 176.
[115] Embree, *Prospects for Peace in South Asia*, 168.
[116] Ibid.

Hindus and Muslims.[117] Unlike Upadhyaya, who embraced religious tolerance in

theory, Nandy and Vijay posit secularism as antithetical to the aim of a unified India:

> It is important to recognize that one of the major reasons for the rise of
> religious fundamentalism is the excess of ideological secularism and its
> emergence as a dogma…by subverting religion as generally understood,
> secularism sets off a reaction in the form of fundamentalism, which usually is a
> perversion of religion and has less to do with the purity of faith and more to do
> with the acquisition of power.[118]

To advance the idea of an undivided India, an *Akhand Bharat*, Upadhyaya

continuously counterposed his imagined Hindu nation with countries like Pakistan and

China. The first case, presents an enemy that was primordially part of the self, but that

has betrayed and denied the fulfillment of the self.[119] In the second case, the enemy is

projected as so radically removed from the self that annihilation proves the only

logical counterweight. By delving into the notion of selfhood and constructing the

category of the "other," Hindu nationalist forces concede to an important fracture in

their conception of Hindu superiority.[120] That Hindus readily converted to other faiths

in the Mughal and British eras, and in post-colonial India,[121] suggests that it is

Hinduism that is left wanting. Hindutva's problem with "otherness" is, therefore, just a

means of masking the inherent failings in Hindu society. This is precisely the point at

which Hindu nationalism relinquishes the Hinduism project and establishes itself as an

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[117] Reddy, *Religious Identity and Political Destiny*, 54.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Many *adivasis* (tribals) in the north-central states of Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, as well as in southern states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu embraced either Islam or Christianity during two decade-long conversion waves in the 1960s and 1980s. These low caste Hindu converts sought an escape from the rigidities of Hindu society. See footnote 89 for citation.

ideological substitute of the latter.[122] For this reason, Hindu nationalism has been unimportant for epistemological and metaphysical advancements, but incredibly significant for the substitution of Hinduism by the materialist concerns of territory, culture, xenology, and state power.[123]

Ideological Formulations and Hindutva Rhetoric

To ascertain Hindutva's impact on Indian societal formations, it is essential to explore the ways in which ideology operates. Ideological constructions perform two crucial roles. First, they act as lenses with which humans can view the world. Ideology "converts…contingency into an ostensibly stable symbolic order that promises to close gaps in social existence through the construction of a more harmonious social world."[124] Ideology becomes a means of either repudiating facts or embracing new knowledge. It then emerges as an affect of power; an attempt to conceal the raw contingency of the world. This allows ideology to perform the powerful function of articulating "subjects" and "objects." The disunity between imagery and symbolic orders at the subject level eventually paves the way for the creation of communities as objects of intense hatred.[125]

According to this framework, anti-Islamism in India is a consequence of rhetoric that holds Muslims responsible for fissures in Indian society. Hindutva rhetoric has indeed influenced the manner in which Hindus view Muslims. The

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[122] Aloysius, "Trajectory of Hindutva," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1450.
[123] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism*, 160.
[124] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 65.
[125] Ibid.

ferocity of violence during Hindu-led riots in Ayodhya (1992) and Gujarat (2002) bears testimony to this trend.[126] The potency of hatred among common people is expressed openly and candidly. With reference to a communal incident in Dattawadi, Pune, in 1987, a Hindutva follower from a low caste grassroots organization called the Patit Pawan stated, "Our Ganesh idols had been defiled by them…we actually terrorized [the Muslims] and they could not fight us [they were in a minority]. We burnt their houses and broke them down. We did not get enough time because the police came immediately."[127]

The aforementioned example illustrates the need for concrete frameworks to gauge the multiple levels on which Hindutva operates. Two ideological paradigms are particularly instructive in assessing the impacts of Hindu nationalism holistically: the modernity versus anti-modernity debate (culturalism) and the Marxist theory on economic relations (instrumentalism).

West vs. Rest: The Modernity vs. Anti-Modernity Debate

In *The Renewal of the Radical Right*, Michael Minkenberg says of right-wing radicalism:

> It is defined as a political ideology, the core element of which is a myth of a homogenous nation…the contemporary religious right wants government by the people, but in terms of ethnocracy rather than democracy…The nationalistic myth is characterized by the effort to construct an idea of national belonging by radicalizing ethnic, religious, cultural and political criteria of exclusion, to

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[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid, 125.

condense the idea of a nation into an image of extreme collective homogeneity.[128]

Western scholars attempting to study the birth of radicalism in the Third World have frequently used the European model, where extremism has been explained in terms of the psychological conditions of anxiety faced by people under the stress of modern-technological societies.[129] However, the religious extremism defined by V.D. Sarvarkar and practiced by BJP leaders like L.K. Advani cannot be explained in terms of the psychological dilemma (owing to modernization) of the Hindu majority, as Muslims in India arguably face similar societal and psychological constraints.[130] According to Sumit Sarkar, pro-Hindutva scholars like Ashish Nandy project modernity as the core cause of Hindu extremism, shying away from the inbuilt biases in Hindu nationalist ideology. By refusing to accept that the comingling of faith and politics taints the Hindutva perspective, Nandy offers a superfluous reading of Hindu religion. His view of modernity does little in the way of offering insights into Hindu nationalism.[131]

While the modernity versus anti-modernity approach appears less useful in explicating the extremist tendencies in Hindutva politics, the essence of fundamentalism is nonetheless found in the ideology and praxis of *Sangh Parivar* organizations.[132] In the first volume of *Major Religious Fundamentalisms Observed*, Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby state: "Fundamentalists begin as traditionalists

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[128] C.P. Bhambhri, "Introduction," in *Bharatiya Janata Party: Periphery to Center* (New Delhi: Shipra Publications, 2001), xii.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Reddy, *Religious Identity and Political Destiny*, 54.
[132] Bhambhri, *Bharatiya Janata Party*, xiii.

who perceive some challenge or threat to their core identity, both social and personal. They are not frivolous, nor do they deal with peripheral assaults. If they lose on the central issues, they believe [they've lost] everything. They react; they fight back with great innovative power."[133] The above mentioned description of fundamentalism provides a comprehensive picture of Hindutva in India. Indeed, Hindu violence against Muslims, and more recently against Christians,[134] stems from projecting the image of "the Hindu" being threatened by believers of another land.[135]

Marxists on Economic Relations

Traditional Marxists view the political processes as a means of intervention directed at creating a new social order.[136] Politics for them is essentially the site of conflict among contending social classes. A few distinctive features of Indian politics may be stated for the purpose of finding an appropriate relationship between Hindutva forces and the socio-economic soil on which they thrive.[137] The most significant feature of the current phase in Indian politics is that a majority of the competing actors belong to different fractions of the upper class. This competition among ruling elites is

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[133] Ibid, xiv.
[134] A majority of the Indian Christian community resides in the states of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Gujarat, and Orissa. The *adivasi* (tribal) population in these states converted to Christianity during the British period. Hindu tribals in these regions continue to embrace the religion. These states, along with the state of Kerala, have witnessed Hindu-inspired violence against Christians since the 1980s. Though violent acts have been sporadic, their frequency has increased since the 1990s. The riots in Ahwa, Gujarat, on Christmas Day, 1998 are a case in point. The BJP relied on the RSS and its affiliate, the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), to target and burn Christian homes. See footnote 107 for citation.
[135] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 200.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Bhambhri, *Bharatiya Janata Party*, xv.

unfolding at a time when the exploited are not in a position to effectively challenge the dominant class.[138]

Political rivalry among the empowered sections of society is fierce, as each section requires control of state apparatuses to lay claims over economic surpluses. This struggle has nullified the left-of-center politics of the Congress Party.[139] In a country where modes of production are in an uneasy stage of equilibrium, the processes of capitalism and globalization have only accentuated domestic social disparities.[140]

Hindutva found new footing in the 1990s because it used social discontent over the crisis of capital accumulation in India to its advantage.[141] On one hand, the BJP seeks to appease its traditional, upper caste voter base by opening India's economy to trade and foreign investment. On the other hand, the party has consciously appealed to the ideal of a unified India to expand its base and endear the Hindu masses. In sum, Hindutva has become the instrument that allows the BJP and its allies to employ religious symbolism in political contests.[142]

Hindutva Rhetoric and Communal Violence

The key to understanding the complex links between communal violence and militant nationalist discourses lies in three stages. First, are the everyday patterns of

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[138] Ibid.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Ibid, xviii.
[141] The BJP won the 1995 state elections in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Bihar in the north, as well as Tamil Nadu in the south. It was in power at the Center between 1998 and 2004. See table 3 in appendix for more details.
[142] Ibid, xix.

exchange, often marked by discrete separations or back-to-back interactions.[143] Sunil Kakar points out that in the case of the Muslim community in India, patterns of separation have been reinforced by the segregation of living spaces and occupational endeavors. The social void between Hindus and Muslims has in turn promoted stereotypes pertaining to the impure living conditions and dietary habits among Muslims.[144] Muslims, on the other hand, regard the medieval militant tradition of the Rajputs and Sikhs as indicative of a mob psychology among Hindus. Communal tension, often a consequence of economic and spatial distinctions, is the precursor to institutionalized forms of communal violence.[145]

Second, the narratives and actual experiences stemming from riots and other forms of communal violence establish the "other" as the source of absolute evil.[146] In his study, Kakar focuses on how wrestlers, or *pehelwans*, in both Hindu and Muslim communities are projected as heroes possessing immense martial prowess. While assaults on women and children are viewed as acts of transgression, *pehelwans* seek to commit such acts, seemingly to justify similar acts during subsequent retaliations.[147] Rumor and myth construction are integral to this process. They act as instruments of mobilization, encouraging individuals to engage in communal conflict.[148]

This leads to the third and final dimension of the reproduction of communal violence: the formation, organization, and dissemination of political identities around

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[143] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 203-204.
[144] Paul R. Brass, "The Persistence of Hindu-Muslim Violence: The Dynamics of Riot Production," in *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003), 357.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 204.
[147] Ibid.
[148] Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India*, 368.

discourses on the "other."[149] Provocation, usually through celebrative of funerary processions that encourage direct confrontation among communities, is an important mode of sustaining violence.[150]

According to Thomas Blom Hansen, the fundamental reason behind the capacity of ethnic hatred is the lack of self-esteem within a particular community. Fissures along caste and occupational lines demand a scapegoat: the Muslims appear ready targets.[151] The economic agenda of the Hindu elites, and upper castes' desire to retain their positional authority by preventing low castes' empowerment, has instigated violence since the inception of the BJP. A similar hypocrisy has been the idealization of women as inherently peaceful, despite their prominence in the communal activities[152] of the *Sangh Parivar*.[153]

There are obvious discrepancies between localized expressions of communal enmities and the more generalized majoritarian discourses on the Hindu nation. It is clear, however, that the nationalistic, anti-minority rhetoric of the BJP has left its mark on local communities.[154] Moreover, communal violence (both at the local and national levels) is cyclical and persists across centuries. The replication of violence illustrates its nature and utility:

> Violent acts are dramatic productions, creations of specific groups, persons and
> political parties, operating through institutionalized networks within a discursive

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[149] Ibid.

[150] Ibid.

[151] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 211.

[152] Women were at the forefront of communal violence in Ayodhya in 1992, Mumbai in 1993, and Gujarat in 2002. Women's collusion with Hindutva's agenda is evidenced by the fact that the Hindutva bloc possesses a women's wing called the Rashtriya Swayamsevika Sangh. See footnote 117 for citation.

[153] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 216.

[154] Ibid, 207.

framework of Hindu-Muslim communal antagonism, which in turn produces specific forms of political practice that make violence integral to the political process.[155]

Hindus and Hindutva

Is there a community of Hindus that will vote for Hindutva ideologues unfailingly? Will the BJP win all elections if all voters were Hindu by birth? As far as practicing Hindus are concerned, the two scenarios seem unlikely.[156] Even the most ardent Hindu believes that it is unethical to denounce either Buddhist pacifism or the medieval legacy of syncretism,[157] as encapsulated in the Hindu *bhakti* movement and the Islamic *sufi* tradition.[158] Religious harmony remains a crucial part of a Hindu ethos that stands on the principles of equality, mutual respect, and love for all beings. It is this equality of status that Hindutva most vehemently opposes. Though it seeks to endear all sections of society by espousing the rubric of a unified nation, Hindutva's ultimate allegiance lies with the high castes and elites.[159]

Communal violence in Gujarat, Ayodhya, and Mumbai has made people aware of the cleavages in Hindutva rhetoric. They have begun questioning the idea of a Hindu *rashtra* (nation) founded on the premise of denigrating Muslims.[160] One of the staunchest opponents of the destruction of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya, in 1992, was

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[155] Ibid.

[156] Nivedita Menon, Aditya Nigam, "Politics of Hindutva and the Minorities," in *Power and Contestation: India since 1989* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing Lmt., 2007), 58.

[157] Puniyani, *Communal Politics*, 217.

[158] The *bhakti* and *sufi* movements originated in India in the 14th and 15th centuries. They sought to move beyond excessive ritualism and endear the poor. Both movements advocated devotion to one God as the means of achieving salvation. See footnote 128 for citation.

[159] Ibid.

[160] Jawaid Quddus, "Hindutva and the Indian Diaspora," *in Religion, Power and Violence: Expression of Politics in Contemporary Times*, ed. Ram Puniyani (New Delhi: Sage Publications Pvt. Lmt., 2005), 154.

the head priest of a Rama temple adjacent to the site. Mahant Lal Das was vocal in his disapproval and paid with his life. He was brutally murdered on November 16, 1993.[161] Another instance of the non-malleability of Hindu society in relation to Hindutva designs was seen a couple years ago. Following its defeat in the 2004 parliamentary elections, the BJP tried to mobilize Hindus to oppose the arrest of the Shankaracharya of Kanchi, a Hindu spiritual leader from southern India, in a case involving internal rivalries within his *muth* (religious organization). The effort failed to win adherents, as the Shankaracharya's significance was limited to one sect of *brahamins* (priests) in the south. The BJP clearly miscalculated the relevance of the issue to the Hindu masses.[162]

Though many Hindus genuinely buy into the "Hindutva ideal," there is significant resistance from within Hindu ranks to being mobilized in this way. Backward classes and lower caste *dalits* fear being used as political implements for electoral feats. Feminists and homosexuals seek greater social freedoms. Corporate executives and entrepreneurs understand that political stability will augment their fortunes.[163]

Evidently, the masses have not blindly endorsed the secularism of pro-Hindutva scholars, who view communalism as a product of modern democratic governance. Hindus are gradually realizing that while secularism is always in the process of becoming, ethno-religious majoritarian rule is not a viable substitute.[164]

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[161] Ibid.
[162] Menon, Nigam, *Power and Contestation*, 58.
[163] Ibid.
[164] Ibid.

CHAPTER 2

SETTING THE STAGE: PRECURSORS TO THE BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY

Hindutva, as envisioned by Sarvarkar and Golwalkar, sought to instate an idealized Hindu nation by hearkening back to the Vedic age. In post-independent India, the ideology is represented by a group of political organizations collectively known as the *Sangh Parivar*.[165] Not every institution in this formation considers the bolstering of Hindu identity its primary aim.[166] This pragmatic self-designation is precisely the electoral strength of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which appeals to the vote of both the Hindu masses and those sections of the elite who view the BJP as a modern, secular party that will not pander to minority demands.[167]

This chapter analyzes the ideological orientations of the BJP's precursors. It explores the discourse and activities of the organizations to determine *how* they have influenced the ideology and praxis of the BJP.

Of the several Hindu nationalist organizations that gained prominence in post-independent India, four hold specific relevance within the politics of the BJP. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), the Swadeshi Jagran Manch (SJM), and the Bharatiya Jan Sangh (BJS) played

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[165] "*Sangh Parivar*" literally means "a family of organizations." These organizations derive their core values and goals from the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which was founded in 1925. See footnote 2 for citation.

[166] Nivedita Menon, Aditya Nigam, "Politics of Hindutva and the Minorities," in *Power and Contestation: India since 1989* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing Lmt., 2007), 41.

[167] Ibid, 42.

instrumental roles during the 1960s and 70s.[168] Their missions and activities perpetuated the Hindutva cause, and consolidated an environment within which the BJP could thrive. While the first two organizations profess cultural and social objectives, their activities—both in conjunction with and independent of the BJP— have caused considerable political polarization in India.[169] The Swadeshi Jagran Manch, on the other hand, focuses solely on economic concerns. It is the institution from which the BJP borrows principles of statecraft. The Jan Sangh was created as the political arm of the RSS. However, the party's inability to find following in the Indian electoral system grossly undermined Hindu nationalist efforts. Its collapse was the catalyst for the rise of the BJP.[170]

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)

Founded in 1925 by ex-Hindu Mahasabha[171] member Keshavram Baliram Hedgewar, the RSS is the ideological fountainhead of contemporary Hindutva politics. With a membership base of nearly six million people, the Sangh is a formidable force in Indian society.[172] Given its outwardly cultural agenda, the organization does not contest in elections. Regardless, its indirect control casts profound effects on the

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[168] Ibid.

[169] Ibid.

[170] Ibid.

[171] The Hindu Mahasabha was founded in 1916. It was a nationalist organization that participated in the Indian independence struggle. Both Sarvarkar and Golwalkar were members and chairpersons of the Mahasabha. See footnote 8 for citation.

[172] M.G. Chitkara, "Introduction," in *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh: National Upsurge* (New Delhi: A.P.H. Publishing Corporation, 2004), 9.

electoral face of Hindutva politics: the BJP. This is evidenced by the fact that many BJP leaders are also members of the RSS.[173]

The visible work of the RSS pertains to the management of educational and social institutions. However, these institutions are frequently used as centers to propagate anti-minority views among impressionable children.[174] The RSS's claims of being a cultural organization should not blind us to its identity as a body that can disengage itself from the interests of Hindu minorities, should they refuse to comply with the Hindutva ideal of assimilation.[175] The organization's emphasis on martial competence is equally worrisome. Dressed in khaki shorts, RSS cadres routinely engage in acts of communal aggression.[176] The next section of this chapter demonstrates the militaristic, hierarchical tendencies in the RSS.

Remapping Practices: Ideological Imperatives in the RSS

Dr. Hedgewar envisioned the RSS as a synthesis of Hindu elitism and the *sangathan* (brotherhood) methodology.[177] He argued in favor of the creation of a small but efficient organization of devoted men who could provide leadership to the entire Hindu community. Hedgewar therefore refashioned certain Hindu institutions, notably *akharas* (wrestling pits) and Hindu spiritual sects.[178] Though wrestling matches were popular forms of entertainment among both upper and lower caste Hindus, spiritual

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[173] Ibid.

[174] Menon, Nigam, *Power and Contestation*, 41.

[175] Ibid.

[176] Ibid.

[177] Ibid.

[178] Robert E. Frykenberg, "Hindutva as a Political Religion," in *The Sacred In Twenty-First Century Politics,* ed. Roger Griffin, Robert Mallett, and John Tortorice (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 190.

sects were frequented mainly by the elites.[179] In an effort to endear the Hindu masses, Hedgewar merged these two traditions; endowing *akharas* with spiritual content and religious sects with martial appeal.[180]

S*hakhas*—institutions where young boys would meet for physical exercise and ideological training—became tools for promoting virtuous behavior (*samskaras*),[181] strong fraternal bonds, and a compelling patriotic sentiment among volunteers. Even today, s*hakhas* function as ideological *akharas*.[182]

Masculine power lies at the center of the RSS's nationalist fraternalism. This notion of masculinity is based entirely on the consecration of warriorship. In one of his speeches to RSS volunteers, Golwalkar stated, "Let mothers bless and send their sons at this moment of trial. When the five Pandavas sought their mother Kunti's blessings before war in the [epic] *Mahabharata*, she told them, 'Go ye all to the battle.'"[183] Golwalkar's stance is buttressed by a martial tradition wherein the RSS *swayamsevak* (volunteer) is the *kshatriyaized*[184] antithesis to Gandhi's non-violent, effeminate Hindu. While *sevaks* are encouraged to act as youthful soldiers, *pracharaks*, or celibate cadres, are taught that asceticism is a way of reclaiming control and

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[179] Stipulations under the caste system categorically forbade low caste Hindus from entering religious and ideological institutions which were frequented by the elites. See footnote 12 for citation.

[180] Christophe Jaffrelot, "The Invention of an Ethnic Nationalism," in *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007), 17-19.

[181] Ibid.

[182] Ibid.

[183] Sikata Banerjee, "Cultural Nationalism, Masculine Hinduism, and Contemporary Hindutva," in *Make Me A Man! Masculinity, Hinduism, and Nationalism in India* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2005), 81.

[184] The term "*kshatriya*" refers to the warrior caste. It is one of the gradations in the four-fold caste system. See glossary for more details. See footnote 13 for citation.

masculinity to counter the defiant and lustful Muslim foreigner.[185] Interestingly, while

the RSS opposes the Gandhian notion of *satyagraha*, or passive resistance, its focus

on chastity and solidarity parallels Gandhi's vision of an independent India premised

on moral supremacy vis-à-vis the modern world.[186]

Out in the Field: RSS Activities

A staunch proponent of activism, Hedgewar avoided the RSS's involvement in

political agitations during its early years, so as to bolster its image among the

moderate members of the Indian National Congress (INC).[187] On assuming his

predecessor's position, Golwalkar sought to ascribe a nuanced cultural character to the

Sangh. This pitted him against those in favor of Hegdewar's militaristic stance.[188]

The birth of Pakistan gave RSS members a renewed sense of purpose and

unity. For RSS cadres, the Partition was the outcome of a mistaken soft-handedness

towards Indian Muslims.[189] They therefore sought to present communal atrocities

during the Partition as instances of patriotic baptism; initiations through blood and

sacrifice into the nationalist cause.[190] Despite Golwalkar's efforts, the strategic

pendulum of the RSS swung from character-building to activism. For their role in

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[185] Banerjee, *Make Me A Man*, 81.
[186] Thomas Blom Hansen, "Organizing the Hindu Nation," in *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999), 92.
[187] Ibid, 93.
[188] Chetan Bhatt, "The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's Ordered Society," in *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2001), 143.
[189] India and Pakistan achieved nationhood in 1947, following the enactment of the Mountbatten Plan. See footnote 18 for citation.
[190] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 95.

M.K. Gandhi's[191] assassination in 1948, close to 20,000 RSS workers were imprisoned along with the chief suspect, Nathuram Ghodse. The RSS was banned.[192]

After the ban was lifted in 1949, those in the RSS worked to overcome their tarnished image. Shedding militarism temporarily, the organization focused on four specific projects during the 1950s. *First*, it established the Akhil Bharati Vidhya Parishad (All India Student's Organization), which encouraged India's youth to combat "leftist" influences on education. Today, the organization supports the BJP in its electoral rallies.[193] *Second*, the RSS focused on strengthening its women's wing, the Rashtriya Sevika Samiti (RSS*), which was founded in 1936. Hindu nationalists' simultaneous emphasis on masculinity and women's connection with *Bharatamata*, or "Mother India," is perhaps the most striking contradiction in Hindutva ideology. Regardless, the BJP consistently appeals to this dichotomy in its electoral endeavors.[194] *Third*, the RSS made a conscious attempt to connect with India's urban working class by creating the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (Indian Worker's Association) in 1955.[195] The Mazdoor Sangh is a visible voice among the several labor organizations in contemporary India. The RSS later established a rural affiliate: the Bharatiya Kisan Sabha was created in 1979.[196] *Fourth*, the Vanavasi Kalyan Ashrama was formed in 1952 with RSS support. By 1980, it had become the leading re-

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[191] As noted in chapter one, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was a key figure in the Indian nationalist struggle against the British.

[192] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 96.

[193] Ibid.

[194] Ibid.

[195] A. James Gregor, "Hindutva: The Case for A Saffron Fascism," in *The Search For Neofascism: The Use And Abuse Of Social Change* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 200.

[196] Ainslie T. Embree, "Who Speaks for India? The Role of Civil Society in Defining Indian Nationalism," in *Prospects for Peace in South Asia*, ed. Rafiq Dossani and Henry S. Rowen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 177.

conversion body, and sought to counter Christian and Islamic missionaries[197] by working closely with India's tribal communities.[198]

Organizing the Brotherhood: Home to Hierarchies

In addition to widening its outreach through subsidiary institutions, the RSS also strengthened its internal organizational structure during the 1950s. To institutionalize authority and order, RSS leaders created a rigid hierarchy system.[199]

The entire structure of the RSS rests on permanent gradations. It is comprised of elite *swayamsevaks* or volunteers, who are ranked by education and age; *gatanayaks* or squad leaders; *mukhya shikshaks* or superior instructors; *karyavahas* or secretaries; *pracharaks* or celibate staff commanders; and *sanghchalaks* or directors at regional, local, and national levels. Each of these individuals is subordinate to the *sar sanghchalak*, the RSS's supreme leader and guide.[200]

While hierarchical relationships govern a vast majority of RSS activities, Hedgewar and Golwalkar understood that the organization's standing depended, to a large extent, on free information exchanges. They ensured that tacit, informal channels were established in their regional and local constituencies.[201] The existence of informal communication in an intensely hierarchical setup has lent charisma not only

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[197] Muslims constitute about 13.4 percent of India's population. Christians account for an additional 2.3 percent. For more information on the religious composition of India's population, see table 1 and pie chart 1 in appendix.
[198] Gregor, *The Search For Neofascism*, 200.
[199] Ibid.
[200] Frykenberg, *The Sacred In Twenty-First Century Politics*, 193.
[201] Ibid.

to the RSS as an organization but also to individual leaders like L.K. Advani and A.B. Vajpayee, who now play conspicuous roles in the BJP.[202]

Second Wave of Activism: Reconfiguring India's Educational System

From the mid-1960s to the mid-1990s, the RSS engaged in a massive outreach effort, creating once again, a host of organizations that served as subsidiaries to the RSS cause.[203] The Bharat Vikas Parishad was formed in 1963 to work with poor communities. The Bharat Shikshan Mandal was created in 1969 to promote Hindu values in the education system. The Vidhya Bharati was created in 1976 as the RSS's formal educational wing. It caters to primary and elementary school children, imparting them with the Hindutva view on history and social organization.[204] The RSS also has an international wing called Sewa International, which organizes funds for the *Sangh Parivar* by identifying Hindutva supporters outside India. Through the Deendayal Research Institute, and its journal *Manthan*, the RSS ensures the dissemination of Hindu nationalist ideas.[205]

Revisiting Hindutva Ideology

The RSS has worked for nearly seven decades to strengthen its position in Indian society. Through its organized and informal networks, the RSS structure grew

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[202] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 115.
[203] Ibid.
[204] Ibid.
[205] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism*, 115.

from a single *shakha* in 1926 to over 25,000 *shakhas* in 1989.[206]

While hierarchical organization remains a crucial aspect of the RSS's success, ideology is by no means unimportant. The primary objectives of the RSS are succinctly illustrated in its constitution. The document states that the RSS seeks to "eradicate differences among Hindus; make them realize the greatness of their past; inculcate in them a spirit of self-sacrifice and devotion to Hindu society as a whole; build an organized and well disciplined social life; and bring about the regeneration of Hindu society."[207] Rejecting secular ideas, the RSS constitution posits: "We make war or peace, engage in arts and crafts, amass wealth and give it away—indeed we are born and we die—all in accord with religious injunction."[208]

The RSS works through multiple layers of symbolic integration. Ironically, symbols of purity are frequently used by its members to perpetuate irreligious acts.[209] Saffron flags, for example, are used to demarcate Hindu territories during communal riots. Other symbols and events, such as the celebration of specific festivals[210] during the year, serve to enhance unity and reinforce ties of brotherhood within the RSS.[211]

The ritualization of Hinduism through insignia rests on a form of masculinity that draws from militancy *and* monastic existence.[212] Though it opposes Semitic traditions (Christianity and Islam), the RSS tries to overcome the supposedly

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[206] Frykenberg, *The Sacred In Twenty-First Century Politics*, 194.
[207] Embree, *Prospects for Peace in South Asia*, 171.
[208] Ibid.
[209] Ibid.
[210] Holi, Diwali, and Dussehra are three Hindu festivals that have been adopted by the RSS. See footnote 38 for citation.
[211] Embree, *Prospects for Peace in South Asia*, 171.
[212] Men in the RSS *shakhas* are taught to redirect their sexual impulses to physical and martial pursuits. See footnote 41 for citation.

effeminate state of subjugation by emulating the aggressive foreigner (both Muslims and the British).[213] Yet it simultaneously presents the Hindu capacity for endurance against subjugation. It follows that the RSS envisions the *sevak* (volunteer) as a liminal figure capable of transcending between celibacy and warriorship.[214]

Like Sarvarkar, RSS leaders maintain that masculinity provides the link to India's grandiose and paradoxically victimized past. Accounts of ancient Aryan heroes and medieval Hindu warriors figure extensively in the rhetoric of present-day RSS members.[215] The sanctification of manhood in these accounts provides an avenue for uniting factions in Hindu society. In eulogizing the idea of a nation to be defended, RSS leaders convince lower caste communities that external domination and not caste segregation is solely responsible for their fate.[216]

Images of power and strength within the RSS reflect a complex interaction between three forces: the structural logistics of a hierarchical environment; the perpetuation of heroic mythology in an ordered institution; and the indoctrinated psychological need among rank-and-file workers to revere their leaders.[217] RSS leadership expresses these ideas in a single statement:

> The ultimate vision of our work, which has been the living inspiration for all our organizational efforts, is a perfectly organized state of society where each individual has been molded into a model of ideal Hindu manhood and made into a limb of the corporate Hindu society.[218]

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[213] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 112.
[214] Frykenberg, *The Sacred In Twenty-First Century Politics*, 192.
[215] Ibid.
[216] Banerjee, *Make Me A Man!*, 84.
[217] Ibid.
[218] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism*, 140.

The Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP)

The Vishva Hindu Parishad came into being under the auspices of the RSS in 1964, following a movement to ban cow slaughter.[219] A recent incident in the Indian state of Haryana effectively represents the explosive potential of the cow slaughter issue.[220] On the morning of July 20, 2002, five men suspected of cow slaughter were encircled and lynched by VHP volunteers. The men turned out to be *dalits*, low caste Hindus, whose traditional work entailed laboring in tanneries.[221] People of this community obtain raw material for their work from the carcasses of cows that have died of natural causes. In a revealing clarification, VHP members brushed aside the incident as one of "mistaken identity," in which *dalits* were taken to be Muslims.[222] The revelation clearly indicates the anti-Muslim orientation of the Parishad.

On Hinduism and Hierarchies

The VHP's charter outlines the following as it core objectives: to consolidate Hindu society, to spread Hindu values, to establish a network comprising all Hindus living outside India, and to welcome back to the Hindu fold all those who had left Hinduism.[223] In accordance with its agenda, the VHP enunciated five requirements for being a good Hindu in a conference on religion in 1967. These included regular

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[219] The cow is considered sacred in the Hindu tradition. Since the Muslim community consumes cow meat, cow slaughter has been a source of communal tension among Hindus and Muslims since the medieval era. However, it became a predominant issue only in the 1800's, when the British repeatedly appealed to the question of cow slaughter to keep Hindus and Muslims divided. See footnote 44 for citation.

[220] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism*, 140.

[221] Ibid.

[222] Menon, Nigam, *Power and Contestation*, 44.

[223] Ibid.

worship, visits to temples, basic knowledge of the sacred geography of India, knowledge of mythical epics, and loyalty to Hindu culture.[224]

Estimates hold that the VHP's membership base ranges from two and a half to four million persons.[225] The Parishad is organized on a state by state basis. It is divided into zonal branches or *vibhaags*, district branches or *prakhands*, and sub-district units or *upkhands*. The supervisors at each of these levels ultimately report to two *shankaracharyas* or spiritual leaders. While the VHP draws extensively from the hierarchical structure of the RSS, interactions between volunteers at the civic level and leaders at the spiritual level are much stronger in the framework of the former organization.[226]

Defining an Agenda

The Vishva Hindu Parishad was founded as a religio-cultural institution. Its cadres serve as intermediaries between Hindu religious institutions and the RSS establishment. The VHP's activities are, therefore, dedicated to producing a Hindu ethos that is divorced from the prescriptions of caste and sect.[227] To achieve this end, the organization has constructed a series of *rashtra mandirs* (national temples). Drawing upon the Indian tradition of *sadhus* (holy men) heading religious institutions, the VHP relies on *gurus* (guides) to oversee its discourse on spirituality.[228]

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[224] Ibid.

[225] Chitkara, *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh: National Upsurge*, 9.

[226] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism*, 183.

[227] Ibid.

[228] Frykenberg, *The Sacred In Twenty-First Century Politics*, 191.

Global in reach, the VHP's international profile, not surprisingly, is one of promoting Hindu culture. The Vishva Hindu Parishad of America and other related organizations, such as the Hindu Student Council, focus specifically on garnering financial support from the overseas diaspora community.[229] Proceeds from these organizations have supplemented VHP activities in India.

From Words to Action

VHP efforts to promote a Hindu nation commenced as early as 1966, with the first International Hindu Conference in Allahabad.[230] During the next decade, the VHP pursued the strategy of uniting Buddhists, Sikhs, and Jains by promoting a common understanding of each religious tradition's beliefs and practices. The organization's professed syncretism was limited in reach (focused only on Hindu sects) but strategic in form (endeared more supporters).[231] The far reaching significance of this strategy was demonstrated in the late 1980s, when the VHP and RSS used their version of Hinduism for rallying the masses during the *Ramjanmabhoomi* agitation.[232]

VHP endeavors during the early 1970s reflected a broader activist agenda. The organization embraced social causes, instituting schools, medical centers, and hostels all over the country.[233] Like the RSS, the VHP set up reconversion units, or Vanavasi

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[229] Jawaid Quddus, "Hindutva and the Indian Diaspora," *in Religion, Power and Violence: Expression of Politics in Contemporary Times*, ed. Ram Puniyani (New Delhi: Sage Publications Pvt. Lmt., 2005), 148.

[230] Ibid.

[231] Ibid.

[232] The *Ramjanmabhoomi* movement was a campaign (initiated by the RSS-BJP-VHP commune in 1985) to replace the Babri mosque with a temple dedicated to Lord Rama. Consult glossary for more details. See footnote 59 for citation.

[233] Hansen, "Organizing the Hindu Nation," in *The Saffron Wave*, 102.

Kalyan Ashramas, to encourage *adivasi* (tribals) Christians to embrace Hinduism during this period. It conducted thousands of *shuddhi* (purification) ceremonies under the auspices of these *ashramas*.[234] To enhance Hinduism's appeal among those who had converted to other faiths, the VHP engaged in a rationalization of ritual practices. By stipulating that only three rites, birth (*namkaran*), marriage (*vivah*), and death (*antesi*), were integral to Hinduism, the VHP sought to convince low castes that Hindutva would rid Hindu religion of excessive ritualism.[235] A VHP pamphlet from 1972 indicates the urgency with which this project was pursued: "The VHP is dedicated to preventing the apprehensions amongst the have-nots [from leading] to a storm of hatred which will destroy the whole structure of society.[236]

The rhetoric on the need to educate India's youth was another compelling aspect of the VHP's agenda. After initial difficulties in convincing parents to send their young sons to *ahramas* (places of worship and learning), the VHP succeeded in promoting Hindutva's cultural and spiritual values.[237] Language (Sanskrit), tradition (Vedic culture), and Hindu religion became instruments for promoting ordered relationships in society.[238]

The organization's experiments in the social sphere, though momentous, were short lived. Like the RSS, the VHP assisted the BJP during its communal campaigns in Ayodhya (1992), Mumbai (1993), and Gujarat (2002). In consonance with the Hindutva ideal of a unified India, VHP members organized several *Ekamata*

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[234] Frykenberg, *The Sacred In Twenty-First Century Politics*, 197.
[235] Thomas Blom Hansen, "Organizing the Hindu Nation," in *The Saffron Wave*, 105.
[236] Ibid.
[237] Ibid.
[238] Ibid.

(unifying) processions between 1980 and 1999.[239] Mythological accounts of Hindu warriors like the Pandavas in the *Mahabharata* and Lord Rama in the *Ramayana* continue to characterize the VHP's discourse. It is important to note that the VHP's emphasis on cultural goals veils its identity as an elitist organization.[240] The mere presence of women and low caste Hindus in the VHP does not prove its sincerity towards the masses. In reality, the VHP seeks to acquire mass support by unearthing local myths and casting them in the masculine, martial framework of the aforementioned epics.[241]

Saints and Swords

While the RSS regards both warriors and monks as symbols of masculinity, the VHP bases its masculine agenda solely on the premise of martial expertise. The Bajrang Dal, which was founded in 1984 as the VHP's youth wing, is a fitting example of this tradition.[242] Men in the Dal are always armed with *trishuls* (tridents), and openly resort to violence during times of communal tension. Members of the organization played visible roles in both the 1992 Ayodhya riots and the 2002 Gujarat riots. Since the RSS and VHP plan communal violence under cover, their links to militant bodies like the Bajrang Dal are hard to establish.[243]

It is important to note that the similarities between the RSS and VHP are not accidental. Like other *Sangh Parivar* members, the latter enjoys little autonomy.

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[239] Ibid.
[240] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 107.
[241] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism*, 187.
[242] Banerjee, *Make Me A Man!*, 88.
[243] Embree, *Prospects for Peace in South Asia*, 177.

Constant RSS oversight ensures that VHP members conform to its hierarchical and majoritarian nationalist framework.

Swadeshi Jagran Manch (SJM)

The SJM was founded in 1991 with the exclusive agenda of opposing economic imperialism.[244] Since its inception, the organization has actively promoted the slogan of *swadeshi*, "Of one's own land," which originated during India's nationalist movement against the British. Perceptibly, the SJM stands against contemporary corporatism and foreign economic assistance. It opposes International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Trade Organization (WTO) sponsored Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) in India, arguing that their inbuilt conditionality imposes significant costs on the Indian poor.[245]

The SJM repudiates Western aid and promotes instead indigenous economic models of statecraft[246] contained in works like the *Arthashastra*, a treatise compiled by Kautilya in 300 BC.[247] The organization frequently assists the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, an RSS-oriented trade union, in its campaigns against multinational institutions in India.[248]

As noted previously, the BJP employs the SJM's principles to articulate its economic position. Despite its professed allegiance to economic self-sustenance, the

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[244] Ibid.
[245] Menon, Nigam, *Power and Contestation*, 45.
[246] The *Arthashastra* maintains that there are four pillars of statecraft: *sama* (knowledge), *dama* (money), *dand* (punishment), and *bhed* (economic and political prudence). See footnote 82 for citation.
[247] Menon, Nigam, *Power and Contestation*, 45.
[248] Ibid.

BJP has emerged as a visible agent of liberalization. The party's reign at the union level between 1998 and 2004 resulted in market reforms, and paved the way for international developmental initiatives.[249] The most contested of all BJP endeavors was its decision to commission a dam on the Narmada River. In this case, the drive for development led to large-scale displacement of tribal communities in central India. The party's stance raised concerns over its implicit urban bias.[250]

Though the BJP's orientation during the 1990s caused RSS leaders and leftists to accuse the party of hypocrisy, the former's move towards economic interdependence did not undermine its "Hindutva" plank. On the contrary, the BJP's version of liberalization has augmented the fortunes of its upper class supporters. And globalization has won the BJP new adherents.[251] The middle class in urban and rural India have benefited from the influx of entertainment, economic opportunity, and a higher quality of life.[252]

The Bharatiya Jan Sangh (BJS)

While the VHP was instituted to the RSS's cultural agenda, the vision of Shyama Prasad Mukherjee led to the birth of the political affiliate of the RSS. The BJS was formed during an RSS consultation in October 1951.[253] The party's stated objective was to rebuild India on the basis of four ideals: one nation, one culture, one

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[249] Robert L. Hardgrave Jr., "Hindu Nationalism and the BJP: Transforming Religion and Politics in India," in *Prospects for Peace in South Asia*, ed. Rafiq Dossani and Henry S. Rowen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 191.
[250] Ibid.
[251] Menon, Nigam, *Power and Contestation*, 45.
[252] Ibid.
[253] Ibid.

country, and rule of law. The Jan Sangh embodied an eclectic mix of tradition and modernity, and while it proclaimed open membership and sought a populist stance, it possessed a covertly communal character.

The BJS began its political career by securing three Parliament seats in the 1952 general elections.[254] Its strongest electoral performance came in the 1967 elections, when the Congress majority was the thinnest. Between 1967 and 1971, the BJS participated in coalition governments in five states.[255] It played a vital role during the National Emergency between 1975 and 1979, when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi imposed the second ban on the RSS. The party was left to monitor the *Sangh Parivar's* agenda in the absence of key RSS leaders.[256]

The BJS's performance during the 1960s and 1970s impressed conservative members of the Congress Party, as well as elites (merchant and landed communities) in urban and rural India.[257] Despite its populist activism during the period, the BJS was unable to establish a national presence.[258] Through the 1970s, the party oscillated between Hindutva's ethno-religious orientation and the need to integrate itself with mainstream politics.[259] The problem was that the BJS could never establish its legitimacy as a progressive political entity. The party depended on RSS support for all

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[254] The Indian Parliament is divided into two houses. The Lok Sabha is the House of Commons, or the Lower House of Parliament. See footnote 90 for citation.

[255] The Bharatiya Jan Sangh won the state assembly elections in Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan. See footnote 84 for citation.

[256] Ibid.

[257] Robert L. Hardgrave Jr., "Hindu Nationalism and the BJP: Transforming Religion and Politics in India," in *Prospects for Peace in South Asia*, ed. Rafiq Dossani and Henry S. Rowen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 191.

[258] Ibid.

[259] Ibid, 192.

its electoral endeavors.[260] To make matters worse, RSS volunteers sensationalized their role during the Emergency by equating themselves with mythical heroes in epics like the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*.[261] This proved to be a major setback for the Jan Sangh's progressive economic campaign.

Taking cue from ex-RSS member Jay Prakash Narayan's Total Revolution, the BJS eventually joint forces with the Bharatiya Lok Dal, the Socialist Party of India, and Congress (O)[262] to form the Janata Party.[263] Strong at the outset, the Janata government failed to harmonize the goals and aspirations of its disparate political actors. The party remained active on the Indian political scene for scarcely three years, during which time internal controversies weakened its electoral capabilities.[264] The *Sangh Parivar's* diminishing political presence demanded the creation of a cohesive and stable organization that would fill political lacunae in Hindutva politics. The BJP was instituted to achieve this goal.

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[260] Ibid.

[261] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism*, 167.

[262] The Bharatiya Lok Dal was formed due to the fusion of seven parties in 1974. It joined the Janata Party in 1977, and ceased to exist as an independent party. The Socialist Party of India was formed in 1972. Like the Bharatiya Lok Dal, it joined the Janata Party in 1977. The Congress Organization or Congress (O) split from the Congress Party in 1969. See footnote 96 for citation.

[263] Frykenberg, *The Sacred In Twenty-First Century Politics*, 195.

[264] Ibid.

CHAPTER 3

BHARAT: THE INDIA OF THE BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY

Having secured victory in India's twelfth parliamentary elections in 1998, the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) assumed power as the head of an inchoate alliance of political entities.[265] A year later, the government in shambles, India went to the polls again. The BJP secured a more decisive victory this time, establishing a front of twenty-four regional parties that lasted till the 2004 elections; when the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) assumed the political reins.[266] Though out of power at the time of this writing, the BJP remains a formidable force in Indian politics in 2010, and Hindutva, more generally, continues to cast profound implications for India's future.

This chapter delves into the electoral history and mobilization strategies of the BJP. It provides a comprehensive sense of the structural and functional aspects of BJP politics. In so doing, it establishes a backdrop for the forthcoming case studies, which explore Hindutva-inspired communal violence in twentieth and twenty-first century India.

The Bharatiya Janata Party

By 1977, the Janata Party coalition under Prime Minister Morarji Desai was

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[265] Chetan Bhatt, "The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's Ordered Society," in *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2001), 135.
[266] Ibid.

onto the last chapter of its life.[267] Enfeebled by the persistent ideological disagreements among its member parties, Desai's government faced another ordeal: the dual member controversy. Given the Janata Party's alliance with the *Sangh Parivar*, most of its members were also members of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), and did not want to give up either of the two positions. The RSS, on the other hand, seemed less impressed with the fact that the Janata Party shared forces with leftist and socialist actors. This spurred a huge debate within the *Parivar*.[268] Opinions became increasingly polarized, and the RSS was unable to contain the debate. The disunity among Hindutva ranks adversely impacted the electoral fortunes of the Janata Party, which was replaced by a Congress-led front in 1980. In the aftermath of the 1980 elections, the Janata Party disintegrated, only to be replaced on April 5, 1980 by the new and invigorated Bharatiya Janata Party.[269]

Establishing a Name

The BJP spent most of the 1980s out in the cold. In an effort to build a modern, progressive image during this period, the party distanced itself from its communal lineage, and embraced instead the model of Gandhian socialism.[270] BJP leaders consciously reflected on issues like price rise and corruption to attract a broader voter base. Unfortunately, the party's experiments with these alternatives did not yield immediate outcomes.

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[267] Ibid.
[268] Ibid. / Nivedita Menon, Aditya Nigam, "Politics of Hindutva and the Minorities," in *Power and Contestation: India since 1989* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing Lmt., 2007), 42.
[269] Ibid.
[270] Ibid.

Change came in the mid-1980s, when specific developments—namely the dispute over the Babri mosque in Ayodhya and the debate over a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) for Hindus and Muslims[271]—led to the realization that there was greater potential in reviving the Hindutva platform.[272] Another related event was the Congress government's Operation Blue Star of 1984, which targeted the premises of the Golden Temple in Amritsar, Punjab, in order to end Sikh secessionist demands for an independent state of Khalistan. Indira Gandhi's decision to target the Sikh community provided the BJP with an opportune moment. By claiming that Sikhs were members of Hindu society, the party accused the Congress of insensitivity towards Hindu sentiments.[273] With the termination of Operation Blue Star began the most orchestrated Hindu revivalist movement in India. The slogan of *jagaran* (revival) pervaded Indian politics for the next two decades.[274]

The Plunge into Hindutva

Armed with the ideology of Hindutva, the BJP emerged as a formidable force during the 1989 elections. It won an impressive total of eighty-nine seats in the Lok

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[271] The Uniform Civil Code (UCC) debate arose in relation to a 1986 Supreme Court case, which granted alimony to a seventy-three-year old Muslim widow, Shah Bano. The case violated the precedent of referring matters of Muslim personal law to the Muslim Personal Law Board of India. Though the BJP criticized the Congress for its approval of the case, BJP members expressed concerns over the rampant illiteracy and ambiguous rights of women in India's Muslim community. The party's stance greatly angered conservative Islamic leaders, who viewed this sympathetic rhetoric as an assault on the community. See footnote 1 for citation.
[272] Menon, Nigam, in *Power and Contestation*, 42.
[273] Ibid.
[274] Robert E. Frykenberg, "Hindutva as a Political Religion," in *The Sacred In Twenty-First Century Politics,* ed. Roger Griffin, Robert Mallett, and John Tortorice (New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 195.

Sabha,[275] where it previously possessed only two places.[276] The 1989 elections were important on another account: they demonstrated how the BJP utilized anti-minority violence to secure electoral victories. The party won forty-seven of the eighty-eight state assembly seats in Gujarat and Bihar.[277] In addition, it obtained a majority in the Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh state elections.[278] BJP leaders were quick to note the relationship between electoral gains and the use of force. The communal tactics that characterized the BJP's early efforts have unfortunately won the party political office on most occasions.[279]

The 1991 election campaign is regarded as the most expensive and violent campaign in the history of independent India. Contesting parties used the electronic and print media, video *raths* (trucks with large video screens), as well as religious and cultural rallies to perpetuate an unprecedentedly sharp communal tone.[280] The BJP seemed to be making all the right overtures during the campaign, until an unexpected event changed its fortunes. The assassination of then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi by a Tamil suicide bomber swung the campaign in favor of the Congress. Having won the "sympathy vote," the Congress was back to man the helm. Despite this, the BJP secured feats at the state level, winning intensely communal electoral struggles in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.[281] The reemergence of the Congress prompted the

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[275] The Lok Sabha is the lower house of the Indian Parliament. It contains 552 seats. States are allotted seats in the Lok Sabha based on their relative populations. See footnote 10 for citation.
[276] Menon, Nigam, *Power and Contestation*, 43.
[277] Ibid.
[278] Ibid.
[279] Thomas Blom Hansen, "The Saffron Wave," in *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999), 163.
[280] Ibid.
[281] Ibid.

BJP to assert its Hindutva agenda with greater vigor. The demolition of the Babri mosque in 1992 was a clear indication of the BJP's ideological stance. The party also endorsed the Shiv Sena's[282] communal atrocities in Mumbai in 1993. This reiterated the BJP's disapproval of the Congress's soft-handed approach toward Muslims in India.[283]

After its debacle at the Center in 1996 and 1998, the BJP perfected its coalition building skills. With 270 parliamentary seats and 37.06 percent of the national vote in the 1999 general elections,[284] the party emerged as the linchpin of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), a twenty-four party coalition[285] with regional and leftist parties.[286] These parties did not join the BJP for ideological reasons. They were motivated by the logic of political configuration in their states. For instance, the Trinamool Congress opposed the Congress and CPI (M) in West Bengal, the Telugu Desam Party opposed the Congress in Andhra Pradesh, and the DMK and MDMK in Tamil Nadu were opposed to a third party (the AIADMK)[287] in the state.[288] Due to the

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[282] The Shiv Sena is a regional Hindu nationalist ally of the BJP. It is not a political party, and works independently of electoral outfits. The Sena was responsible for instigating communal violence against Muslims in Mumbai through the late 1980s and 1990s. It is active in the south western state of Maharashtra. See footnote 12 for citation.

[283] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 163.

[284] See table 3 in appendix for more details.

[285] Currently, the NDA consists of the following members: Bharatiya Janata Party (national party), Janata Dal (Bihar and Uttar Pradesh), Rashtriya Lok Dal (Uttar Pradesh), Shiv Sena (Maharashtra), Shiromani Akali Dal (Punjab), Telangana Rashtriya Samithi (Andhra Pradesh), Asom Gana Parishad (Assam), Nagaland People's Front (Nagaland), Uttarkhand Kranti Dal (Uttarkhand). Erstwhile NDA members are: Jammu and Kashmir National Conference (Jammu and Kashmir), Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazagham (Tamil Nadu), Lok Jan Shakti Dal, All India Dravida Munnetra Kazagham (Tamil Nadu), Dravida Munnetra Kazagham (Tamil Nadu), Pattali Makkal Katchi, Indian Federal Democratic Party, Trinamool Congress (West Bengal), Biju Janta Dal (Orissa), Indian National Lok Dal. See footnote 55 for citation.

[286] Thomas Blom Hansen, "The Saffron Wave," in *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999), 167.

[287] See list of abbreviations for more information.

[288] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 167.

BJP's attempts to forge stable coalitions during the 1990s, regional political considerations began impacting a multitude of union-level alliances. In fact, the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) tapped on the BJP's strategy to regain central control in 2004.[289]

Politicians and Militants: Caretakers and Communalists

In the aftermath of the Babri mosque dispute in 1992, the BJP consciously sought to project a right-of-center image. The BJP's 1998 election manifesto contained explicit references to the Hindu nationalist vision of early ideologues like Sarvarkar.[290] It presented *Bharatavarsha*[291] as the cradle of the superior and ancient Vedic culture. In addition, the manifesto presented the BJP and not the Congress as the true inheritor of the freedom legacy. It is worth noting that while a majority of NDA members were not adherents of Hindutva politics, their participation in the coalition continued unabated. Though these actors supported the BJP in the hopes of strengthening their own position in regional constituencies, they were unable to challenge the party—even as communal stakes were gradually and alarmingly raised.[292]

Soon after assuming power, the NDA repudiated hegemonic anti-proliferation regimes, and crossed the nuclear threshold by testing the inter-ballistic missile, *Agni*,

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[289] Menon, Nigam, *Power and Contestation*, 53.
[290] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism*, 176.
[291] *Bharatavarsha* is one of the several terms that Sarvarkar used to describe the idealized Hindu nation. The Hindu *rashtra*, *Bharatamata*, and *Bharatvarsha* were all variants of one idea. See footnote 22 for citation.
[292] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism*, 176.

in May 1998. Shortly thereafter, Pakistan declared its nuclear capabilities as well. Within a year of the BJP's ascension, India was entangled in its first military conflict in thirty years.[293] The 1999 Kargil War, a product of the two nations' long-standing dispute over Kashmir, ended only when the United States actively intervened. Following conflict at the Indo-Pakistan border, the BJP engaged in a cultural venture.[294] In overhauling history textbooks across India, the party consciously articulated a narrow version of India's past. The supremacy of India's Vedic-Aryan roots and the ignominy of Hindu subjugation under medieval Mughal rule became common themes in India's educational system. The project essentially aimed at unifying the diverse sections of Hindu India into a homogenous community.[295]

A Tryst with Moderation

Its experiments in the educational sphere notwithstanding, the BJP sought to project itself in a more liberal light. Although its Hindu nationalist partners (particularly the RSS and VHP)[296] accused the party of digressing from a conservative platform, the BJP's economic progressivism actually strengthened Hindutva's support base. The party's liberalization program appealed to Hindu elites. The strategy also won a new section of India's society. Trade and investment created a wealth of economic opportunities, and expanded the already burgeoning middle class. Despite

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[293] Menon, Nigam, *Power and Contestation*, 53.
[294] Ibid.
[295] Ibid.
[296] The Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) is the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's (RSS) cultural affiliate.

its numerous efforts to garner political support, the BJP failed to survive another term in office.[297]

Though the elections of 2004 and 2009 routed the NDA alliance, it would be a mistake to read the events as a clear vote against communalism.[298] First, disagreements among party members have not undermined the importance of Hindutva within the BJP. On the contrary, the RSS's involvement in the party suggests that Hindutva will remain a key component of future BJP operations.[299] It is worrisome that some sections of the Hindu right have concluded that their defeat proves that people have rejected not Hindutva but its dilution of the BJP. Communal violence is, in their view, an essential means of countering this dilution.[300] A recent instance is a series of violent acts in coastal Karnataka in 2006. Economic factors, such as the competition between Hindu and Muslims traders, are being used by BJP and RSS forces to whip up anti-communal sentiments. The aim is to reclaim the lost grassroots support.[301]

This being said, the final tally in an election never represents the country-wide trend. National and local elections are fought under completely different conditions. It is noteworthy that merely three months after the Congress won the 2004 Lok Sabha election seat from Junagadh (Gujarat), the BJP swept the municipal corporation election in the district; capturing thirty-five of fifty-one seats. Evidently, forecasting

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[297] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 171.
[298] Menon, Nigam, *Power and Contestation*, 53.
[299] Ibid. / Increased RSS involvement in the BJP may undermine the party's political autonomy. The RSS may promote its cultural-nationalist agenda too vigorously.
[300] Menon, Nigam, *Power and Contestation*, 53.
[301] Ibid.

patterns in party victories based on insights from a single round of elections amounts to an oversimplification of the trends in question.[302]

Means and Ends: Mobilization Strategies of the BJP

The BJP has relied on four pillars to advance Hindutva ideology during its time in *and* out of office. First, it has created alternative discourses on nationalism in order to bring lower caste Hindus into its ideological fold.[303] Second, by paralleling its masculinist rhetoric with discourses on the latent power of the Hindu woman, the party has achieved the illusionary notion of women's emancipation.[304] Third, as noted earlier, it has embarked on a massive overhaul of the existing educational system. By revamping history textbooks, the party seeks to impart Indian students with a Hindu supremacist view of Indian nationhood.[305] Fourth, it has effectively employed the print and electronic media to reach out to Hindus in India.[306]

Broadening its Base: Lower Castes and the BJP

The 1996 election manifesto of the BJP promised to work for a strong and prosperous India. Though self-rule (*swarajya*) and good governance (*surajaya*) were

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[302] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 171.

[303] C.P. Bhambhri, "Governance," in *Bharatiya Janata Party: Periphery to Center* (New Delhi: Shipra Publications, 2001), 179.

[304] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 171.

[305] Ibid.

[306] Prakash Louis, "Hindutva and Weaker Sections: Conflict between Dominance and Resistance," *in Religion, Power and Violence: Expression of Politics in Contemporary Times*, ed. Ram Puniyani (New Delhi: Sage Publications Pvt. Lmt., 2005), 164.

central to the party's campaign, the notions veiled the monolithic tendencies in Hindutva politics.[307]

Voices that don't Count

Dalits, Scheduled Castes (SC), and Scheduled Tribes (ST) constitute the lower castes in India. Estimates from the 1991 census reveal that SCs, including *dalits*, constitute about 16.48 percent of India's population, while STs account for close to 8.08 percent of the population.[308] The Constitution of India clearly establishes that the development of these communities must be the imperative of every government. Article 46 of the Constitution maintains that, "The State shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and Schedules Tribes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation."[309]

Despite constitutional dictates, and the existence of legislation such as the Prevention of Atrocities Act (1989), SCs continue to suffer social and economic subjugation. After six decades of independence, only 37.8 percent of SCs are literate.[310] As of 1991, 72 percent of SCs and STs worked as landless laborers. Since the mid-1990s, close to 74,00,000 *adivasis* (tribals) have been displaced in the state of Jharkhand.[311] Several others live without access to their traditional forest spaces, owing to BJP-led development initiatives. The construction of a dam on the Narmada

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[307] Ibid.
[308] Ibid, 160.
[309] Ibid, 159.
[310] Ibid.
[311] Ibid, 164.

River is a case in point. It led to the displacement of a sizable section of Jharkhand's tribal community.[312]

Since caste norms were traditionally tied to occupational modes, economic status in medieval India was an outcome of the caste into which an individual was born.[313] Given the centrality of the ancient Vedic age in Hindutva discourse, it is ironic that Hindu elites seem bent on incorporating the caste gradations that emerged in medieval India. This being said, it seems clear that elites in Hindu society seek to safeguard themselves from low castes and Muslims alike.[314] The genesis of Hindu violence against Muslims lies in this tri-polar relationship between class, caste, and the alienation of the "other." According to Ornit Shani, "Communalism [grows] in the intersections between caste and class. The threat Hindu nationalists [claim is] posed by Muslims actually expresses a fear about the peril of violating the Hindu social and moral order from within."[315]

The upper class appeal of the BJP is in no way accidental. The rise of *dalit* consciousness in independent India threatened the Hindu *brahamanical*[316] community. In Hindutva, the elites found a "majoritarian" substitute for true democracy:

> The formation of a Hindu nationalist government in May 1998 at the crest of Hindutva's recent electoral surge clearly testifies to the increasingly authoritarian urges of India's ruling class. Hindutva's chances of holding state power more securely lies in a more complete hegemonization of this now overwhelmingly capitalist class…The implication is clearly

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[312] Ibid, 162.
[313] Ibid.
[314] Ornit Shani, "The Making of Ethno-Hinduism," in *Communalism, Caste and Hindu Nationalism: The Violence in Gujarat* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 145.
[315] Ibid.
[316] "*Brahamanical*" refers to the elite or priestly Hindu community. See footnote 50 for citation.

majoritarianism…And majoritarianism, as always, comes clothed in the rhetoric of democracy.[317]

By subverting democracy, Hindutva forces sought to subjugate *dalit* identity. But Hindutva forces were unsuccessful in clamping down on the community's rising consciousness for long.[318]

Narrowness of the Broad Base: The BJP's Rationales for Mobilization

The Nehruvian consensus[319] on secularism broke during the 1970s. The National Emergency[320] resulted in black marketing on the economic front and corruption on the political front.[321] In light of the above, the 1980s witnessed a resurgence of *dalit* activism. The newly formed BJP[322] took charge of affairs at this juncture.

In a tactical move to unite all Hindus under the national umbrella, the party embarked on an era of strategic political incentives. Unfortunately, in their attempt to endear *dalits*, BJP leaders reverted to the *brahaminical* Hinduism and caste supremacy of V.D. Sarvarkar. The strategy was clever. It allowed the BJP to reap the benefits of a broader support base.[323] The party could mobilize low caste communities as foot

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[317] Radhika Desai, "Culturalism and Contemporary Right: Indian Bourgeoisie and Political Hindutva," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 34, No. 12 (March 20-26, 1999), 697.

[318] Ram Puniyani, "Introduction: Religion, Power and Violence," *in Religion, Power and Violence: Expression of Politics in Contemporary Times* (New Delhi: Sage Publications Pvt. Lmt., 2005), 23.

[319] "Nehruvian Consensus" describes India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's views on secularism. Nehru was strictly against caste-based politics. See footnote 49 for citation.

[320] Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, a Congress Party representative, declared a State of Emergency between 1975 and 1977. Her decision sought to counter the surge in *dalit* activism under Jay Prakash Narayan's Total Revolution. See footnote 49 for citation.

[321] Menon, Nigam, *Power and Contestation*, 53.

[322] The BJP was formed on April 5, 1980. See footnote 56 for citation.

[323] Shani, *Communalism, Caste and Hindu Nationalism*, 145.

soldiers without making any tangible attempts to ensure their assimilation in mainstream politics and society:[324]

> The *Sangh Parivar*, for all its rhetoric on the upliftment of the *dalits*, hardly ever raises a voice against caste-based discrimination or atrocities against *dalits*. This ambivalent attitude has led to considerable disenchantment and confusion among the *dalits*, which is exacerbated during times of tension.[325]

Whether it was the Chakravara incident in the 1980s, where *dalits* were denied the right to enter the village pond, or the Jhajjar incident in the 1990s, where five *dalits* were lynched to death owing to their "impure profession" as leather tanners, *dalits* have consistently been disposed off by the dominant classes.[326]

Blocking Progress

The recommendations of India's first Backward Classes Commission, known as the Kelkar Commission, went largely unnoticed in the political community. Following the commission's disintegration, the Janata Party[327] instituted the Mandal Commission in 1976; supposedly to keep its electoral promises to low caste communities.[328] However, the Janata government did little in the way of reform during its time in office. During the 1980 anti-reservation riots, "the party tried to project the anti-*dalit* war [waged by upper class Hindus against lower classes] as a Hindu-Muslim conflict."[329]

A decade later, the Mandal Commission submitted its report to V.P. Singh's

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[324] Ibid.

[325] Ghanshyam Singh, "BJP's Rise to Power," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 34, No. 2/3 (Jan 13-20, 1996), 166.

[326] Louis, *Religion, Power and Violence*, 166.

[327] The Janata Party (1977-1980) was a precursor to the BJP. Chapter two outlines the party's history.

[328] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 146.

[329] Shani, *Communalism, Caste and Hindu Nationalism*, 151.

National Front government.[330] The twenty-seven percent quota proposed by the Mandal members caused uproar in urban India. Like its predecessor, the BJP emerged as an advocate of a socially conservative platform. The party consistently blocked lower caste emancipation.[331]

Stories, Symbols, and Sour Promises

Hindutva's appeals to low caste communities are invariably undergirded by the desire to perpetuate the goals of India's traditional elites. *Sangh Parivar* organizations have adopted a range of strategies to incorporate weaker sections into their fold. In particular, BJP leaders have reverted to figures like B.R. Ambedkar, who fought vehemently for the cause of *dalits* and Other Backward Classes (OBC) following the collapse of colonialism in India.[332] Instead of promoting these individuals' ideas on equality, the party has co-opted the likes of Ambedkar into the Hindutva scheme by presenting them as guardians of the *brahaminical* tradition.[333]

Additionally, Hindutva forces have relied on a series of processions and prayer ceremonies to mobilize low caste communities. The BJP's Ekamata Yatra (unifying procession) of 1983 is a case in point.[334] The Yatra was the first of a series of month-long campaigns undertaken to broaden the BJP's social base, brush off the urban, upper class label attached to it, and popularize the idea of a unified Hindu society in

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[330] The National Front government assumed power after the Congress's defeat in the 1989 general elections. It was supported by the leftists and the BJP. See footnote 58 for citation.

[331] Deepa S. Reddy, "Cultures," in *Religious Identity and Political Destiny: Hindutva in the Culture of Ethnicism* (New York: AltaMira Press, 2006), 114.

[332] Louis, *Religion, Power and Violence*, 174.

[333] Ibid.

[334] Ibid.

the wake of regional secessionist movements and *dalit* assertions.[335] Three symbols—

Bharatmata, *Gaumata*, and *Gangamata*[336]—have found resonance in each of the

subsequent BJP-led processions. Collectively, they remind the lower castes of their

responsibility towards a unified Hindu society.[337]

Repeated victories in the political realm strengthened the BJP's resolve. In

1984, the party launched the *Ramjanmabhoomi* liberation campaign. The movement

endowed the BJP with another central symbol: the myth of a unified India under Lord

Rama became a pivotal feature of subsequent BJP mobilization efforts.[338] In his *ratha*

yatra (chariot procession) in 1984, BJP leader L.K. Advani declared: "Manu and Shri

Krishna are our Lawgivers and Shri Rama, the commander of our forces. Let us

relearn the manly lessons they taught us."[339]

The selection of Rama as the fountainhead of Hindu identity was a calculated

decision. The dispute over Rama's birthplace became a national issue, which

eventually culminated in the destruction of the Babri mosque in 1992. More

importantly, however, every household in India is familiar with the *Ramayana*.[340]

Since narratives in the epic ranged from local myths involving the downtrodden to

upper class ideas on warriorhood and kinship, the BJP could achieve what it most

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[335] Ibid.

[336] "*Bharatmata*" means mother India; "*Gaumata*" refers to the cow as a mother figure; "*Gangamata*," refers to the Ganges River as a mother figure. The three terms are used to denote the feminine attributes of Indian territory. See footnote 68 for citation.

[337] Manjari Katju, "Mobilization for Hindutva," *in Religion, Power and Violence: Expression of Politics in Contemporary Times*, ed. Ram Puniyani (New Delhi: Sage Publications Pvt. Lmt., 2005), 180.

[338] Ibid.

[339] Sikata Banerjee, "Nationalism: Masculine Hinduism, and Resisting the British Gaze," in *Make Me A Man! Masculinity, Hinduism, and Nationalism in India* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2005), 57.

[340] The *Ramayana* was composed between the 2nd century BC and the 3rd century AD. See footnote 73 for citation.

desired: the support of all Hindu castes and classes.[341] In choosing Rama as its overarching symbol, the party repudiated the VHP's discourse on Rama as a benevolent figure in poet Tulsidas's *Ramcharita Manas*. It employed instead the symbolism of the aggressive, masculine warrior.[342] Ironically, the BJP's emphasis on "martial Rama" was deemed essentialist by many in India. In the aftermath of its defeat in 2009, the BJP has consciously embraced local discourses to endear the lower castes.[343]

Myth, History, and Past Glory

History became an essential means of creating and promoting a lower caste consciousness. Hindutva ideologues sought to evoke a sense of historicity in communities by referencing mythical and historical heroes belonging to specific castes. These mythical figures were identified, and portrayed as subsidiaries or aides to overarching figures in Hindutva meta-narratives.[344] For example, the story of Eklavya, the loyal *dalit* archer who gave up his right thumb for his teacher, Drona, is presented as an instance of *dalits*' support for the *kshatriya* (warrior) class, to which Drona belonged.[345] The local popularity of Eklavya is transposed onto the overarching narrative of the *Mahabharata*;[346] where traces of upper and lower caste exchanges are

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[341] Katju, *Religion, Power and Violence*, 181.

[342] Badri Narayan, "Introduction: Pastness and Politics," in *Fascinating Hindutva: Saffron Politics and Dalit Mobilization* (New Delhi: Sage Publications Pvt. Lmt., 2009), 17.

[343] Ibid, 19.

[344] Ibid.

[345] Ibid.

[346] The *Ramayana* (200 BC to 300 AD) and *Mahabharata* (540-300 BC) are two pivotal epics in Indian mythology. See footnote 73 for citation.

found. Similarly, the BJP has employed the myth of Guhya, the king of low caste *Nishads*[347] in Uttar Pradesh, to highlight Guhya's role in the *Ramayana*.[348]

Hindutva ideologues' use of the myth of Suhaldev, another hero among the *Nishads*, finds close parallels with fascist narratives based on the mysticism of blood and sacrifice.[349] Fascist narratives attempted to construct racial unity by demonizing other communities. According to right-wing nationalists, violence was a means for the superior and cohesive racial group to project heroism and supremacy.

The tactic of employing myth to create foot soldiers is all too evident in the BJP's political strategy.[350] Through legend and mythology, the RSS, VHP, and BJP convince marginalized communities that Muslims and not upper caste Hindus are responsible for their plight. By tailoring mythical narratives to reflect contemporary struggles, proponents of Hindutva ensure the perpetuation of medieval antagonisms in contemporary socio-political interactions.[351]

Hindutva at the Grassroots

It was with the intent of mobilizing the poor, downtrodden castes that Sarvarkar organized a band of young boys into a society called the Patit Pawan.[352] The group has been active since the 1950s, and allies with BJP members in the state of Maharashtra. If Rama is the BJP's unifying symbol for northern India, the legend of

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[347] The *Nishads* are a *dalit* community in the state of Uttar Pradesh. See footnote 67 for citation.
[348] Katju, *Religion, Power and Violence*, 181.
[349] Sumanta Banerjee, "Hindutva: Ideology and Social Psychology," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (January 19, 1991), 98.
[350] Narayan, *Fascinating Hindutva*, 17.
[351] Ibid, 51.
[352] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 127.

Maratha leader Shivaji is the party's avenue into southern territory. In recent years, the Patit Pawan has grown tremendously due to the BJP's strategic discourse on Maratha leaders' endeavors to counter Mughal rule.[353] Many view the Patit Pawan boys as the progenies of these valiant Hindu princes.

Equally important is the manner in which the BJP has linked local communal skirmishes—such as the Dattawati riots in Pune, Maharashtra, in 1992—with the overarching struggle against domination by other nations and religions.[354] The adoption of religion as the idiom for popular mobilization is illustrated by the Patit Pawan. In arguing that external influences have violated Hindu religious sentiments, volunteers of the organization mobilize their *dalit* constituents to partake in communal violence.[355]

Another example of the use of local spaces to inject communal ideas is the Suhaldev festival. Since 2001, BJP forces in Uttar Pradesh have invited wrestlers to participate in the Virat Dangal competition during the Suhaldev festival in Bahraich.[356] It is noteworthy that by secluding the Muslim community from these events, the BJP reinforces the age-old distinction between "self" and "other." Wrestling matches become occasions where Hindu myth, religion, and social conduct are discussed in the absence of external influences.[357]

Political Alliances: Hindutva and the Hindu Masses

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[353] Ibid.

[354] Ibid.

[355] Ibid.

[356] Ibid.

[357] Narayan, *Fascinating Hindutva*, 67.

As proponents of Hindutva cater their rhetoric towards the subordinate section of Hindu India, lower caste communities find themselves entrenched in an ambiguous set of socio-economic realities. On one hand, *dalits* and backward castes invest tremendous faith in modernity. They hope that new institutions and ideas will redeem their place in society. On the other hand, they are averse to the dominant secular-nationalist discourse on modernity.

This ambivalence is visible in Indian culture and politics.[358] On the face of it, it seems logical that the lower castes seek to join the right-wing to undercut the latter's internal upper caste hegemony. The problem, however, is that instead of the lower castes deriving political and economic voice, they are co-opted into the Hindu nationalist scheme.[359] The rise of *dalit* political formations like the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), and their subsequent ties with the Hindu right, is a fitting example of the above. Based in Uttar Pradesh, a predominantly *dalit* region, the BSP has repeatedly embarked on alliances with the BJP.[360] It formed state level coalitions with the party in 1993, 1997, and 2002. BSP leaders also supported the BJP's endeavors in Gujarat during the 2007 elections.[361] More importantly, however, the BSP-BJP alliance indicates how individual *dalit* leaders often collude with the Hindu nationalist agenda of economic and political supremacy. BSP leader Mayawati's use of both the

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[358] Menon, Nigam, *Power and Contestation*, 22.
[359] Narayan, *Fascinating Hindutva*, 12.
[360] Ibid.
[361] Ibid.

Hindutva discourse on *sarvajan* (all inclusiveness) and the myth of Rama during the 2007 state elections in Uttar Pradesh affirm the above.[362]

Contrary to Mayawati's approach, leaders like Laloo Prasad Yadav have consistently opposed Hindu right-wing operations. Laloo Yadav played an instrumental role during the arrest of L.K. Advani, a BJP member involved in the destruction of the Babri mosque, and lost his Chief Ministership in Bihar as a result.[363] Traces of dissidence are also evident among low caste communities in southern India. For these individuals, the struggle is two-pronged: an opposition to *brahamanism* and a repudiation of the north Indian variant of the religious system.[364]

Undeterred by the efforts of enterprising *dalit* leaders, the BJP has largely succeeded in mobilizing the masses. Even after the collapse of the BJP-BSP alliance for the third time in August 2003, reports from Uttar Pradesh indicated that the *dalit* masses believed the BJP would assist them in securing dignity in society.[365] Evidently, the BJP's discourse contains a strong trace of hope—an evocation of the desires of marginalized communities. Mythical narratives chosen by the party undermine Hindu casteism and denounce external control. By providing an alternative vision of socio-cultural relationships, these myths become instruments for achieving political support.[366]

To appreciate the import of the BJP's mobilization efforts, it is worth assessing

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[362] Ibid.
[363] The National Front government assumed power after the Congress's defeat in the 1989 general elections. It was supported by the leftists and the BJP. See footnote 84 for citation.
[364] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism*, 205.
[365] Menon, Nigam, *Power and Contestation*, 25.
[366] Narayan, *Fascinating Hindutva*, 37.

the conception of caste in contemporary India. Modernization has rendered the official discourse on caste as a construct of the past.[367] Most of India is given to believe that caste is no longer a prominent issue in Indian society. Yet, discourses on caste frequently break through everyday narratives, as generalized remarks on the characteristics of other caste groups—on customs, cleanliness, and atmosphere. The parameters of caste have thus become an "idiom of civic order: the *brahamin* caste spirit has gradually been injected into the modern mentality."[368]

Given the above, Hindutva's denial of caste as an issue is a way of convincing lower castes that they are a part of the Hindu civilization, as well as a means of perpetuating the hierarchical model of social organization deemed "orderly" in the discourse of Sarvarkar.[369] In co-opting *dalits* into the Hindu *rashtra* (nation), the BJP has undermined the communities' mythical figures and cultural practices. These have been replaced by the obligations inherent to *brahamanism*.[370] In essence, those seeking to advocate Hinduism have countered its egalitarian appeal at every level. Hinduism is being impoverished of its erstwhile tolerance as a result. Long prized for its diversity, the religion risks loosing a multitude of symbolisms and practices.[371]

Subdued yet Assertive: Women and the Feminization of Violence

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[367] Ibid.

[368] Ibid.

[369] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 146.

[370] Ibid.

[371] Jains constitute only 0.6 percent of the Indian population. The Zoroastrians (*Parsis)* are another marginalized community. Hindutva's monolithic emphasis on Rama has also undermined the animistic traditions of tribal communities in states like Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh. See footnote 90 for citation.

According to the 1991 Census, women constitute about 40 million of India's 1.2 billion people. Yet, they are the most marginalized section of the country's population. The 1980s and 1990s witnessed a marked increase in feminist movements across India.[372] The *Chipko* movement in the Uttaranchal hills,[373] and the *Naxalite* movements in the northeast and Bengal,[374] empowered women to protest against the patriarchal system upon which gender inequality in India is based. Unfortunately, the emergence of Hindutva has given a new lease of life to patriarchal social structures by ensuring that women collude with its overtly masculine agenda.[375]

Bringing Hindutva to Women: The Rashtriya Sevika Samiti

Since its inception, Hindu nationalist ideology has appealed to the notion of masculinity to justify violence against foreign forces. This being said, the Hindutva framework has not excluded women's organizations altogether.[376] Founded in 1936 by Laxmi Kelkar, the Rashtriya Sevika Samiti (RSS*) is the largest women's affiliate of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).[377] The symbolism inscribed in the names of the organizations is in itself instructive: the former presents women as *sevikas* or servants of the Hindu nation, while the latter refers to men as *swayamsevaks* or

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[372] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 146.
[373] The *Chipko* movement is a campaign in the north western foothills of the Himalayas, where women stand in front of trees (*chipko* is the Hindi word for hug) to prevent them from being felled. See footnote 90 for citation.
[374] The *Naxalite* movements were secessionist movements in Bengal and the north eastern territories. They began in the 1970s and have continued since that time. See footnote 87 for citation.
[375] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 146.
[376] Ibid.
[377] Ibid.

volunteers of the national cause.[378] Furthermore, while the founding myth of the RSS*

underscored India's martial heritage by focusing on stories of heroic men (like the

Rajput king Rana Pratap and the Maratha leader Shivaji)[379] during the medieval

period, the Sevika Samiti was founded on the myth of the Muslim *goonda* or brute.[380]

In addition to uniting Hindu women against Muslims, the Samiti underscores

the importance of reaffirming traditional Indian values. With regards to the latter, a

sevika stated: "Forgetting their own self, they are fascinated by the idea of equal rights

and economic freedom. This unnatural change in the attitude of women might have led

to the disintegration of the family, the primary…unit for imparting good *samskaras*

[values]."[381]

These differences aside, the RSS and the Sevika Samiti follow a decidedly

militant line. Although women of the Samiti are encouraged to revert back to the

hearth, they are simultaneously told to partake in militant ventures against the nation's

enemies.[382] In this scheme, the man has complete control over nation and home. The

woman's job is to nurture her sons, abide by the word of her husband and father, and

preserve her homeland when called upon to do so: "A Hindu woman has performed

excellently…by her forbearance, affection, and dedication. It is quite natural to get

injured during a battle but it requires boldness, steadfastness, bravery, and tenacity to

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[378] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism*, 136.
[379] The stories of Rana Pratap and Shivaji's feats were chosen deliberately. Rana Pratap was a warrior from the north western state of Rajasthan. Shivaji was a figure that resonated with those in south India. Given the historical accounts of Pratap and Shivaji's confrontations with medieval Muslim Emperors like Akbar and Aurangzeb, the figures reinforced the BJP's efforts to alienate Muslims. By emphasizing the northern appeal of the former, and the southern following of the latter, the BJP covered large sections of India's territory. See footnote 99 for citation.
[380] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism*, 137.
[381] Ibid.
[382] Ibid.

sustain injuries. These qualities are to be acquired by a Hindu woman to deal with problems of all sorts."[383]

Symbols of the Samiti

The Samiti's ideology of a passive and sacrificing home-maker and mother is supplemented by its conceptualization of "the Goddess;" the latter being symbolically linked with the sacred topography of India.[384] This religio-territorial identification highlights the Samiti's underlying partriarchal nature, as it indicates an active and militant notion of womanhood. While this symbolism is a "stark mobilization of political affect, in order to cultivate a religious-territorial nationalism, it key intention is to function as a pedagogy for an idealized Hindu womanhood."[385]

In this conception, the Motherland endures for the sake of her Hindu children. Her forgiveness arises from her suffering. An important component of the Samiti's character-building is, therefore, to promote a dual role of womanhood. Female militarism focuses on the force of sacrifice. The tenderhearted woman becomes bold and aggressive if time demands.[386] The goddesses Durga and Kali are presented as the *shakti*, the innate power, that Hindu women require to face problems in life. They are not simply "the powers" which redeem the Hindu nation in times of trouble, but also "the resilience" the Hindu woman must cultivate to be dedicated and chaste.[387]

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[383] Ibid, 138.
[384] Paola Bachetta, "Hindu Nationalist Women as Ideologues: The Sangh, the Samiti and Differential Concepts of the Hindu Nation," in *Embodied Violence: Communalizing Women's Sexuality in South Asia*, ed. Kumari Jayawardena and Malathi de Alvis, (London Zed Books, 1996), 126.
[385] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism*, 139.
[386] Ibid, 140.
[387] Ibid.

Mythological female figures perform similar roles. As part of its discourse on the sanctity of the epic *Ramayana*, the BJP has highlighted the character of Sita, the devoted wife of Rama, who remained chaste even though she was captured by the daemonic Ravana (the foreign force in the epic).[388] Kunti, the mother of the five Pandava brothers in the *Mahabharata* is portrayed as the epitome of motherhood. By raising dutiful warriors, she contributes to the sustenance of the kingdom of Hastinapur. Like the valiant goddess, Kunti's *shakti* is directed at nurturing and protecting her people.[389]

The discourse on female *shakti* reinforces the systemic forms of patriarchy and hierarchy that typify the Hindutva framework.[390] The use of the feminine metaphor—the equation of female dignity with the sanctity of Hindu India—enables Hindutva ideologues to emphasize that India must be constantly protected by the strong Indian male.[391]

Politics and Hindutva women

The political fortification of cultural nationalism—through the BJP's use of historical and mythical narratives—has played out rather interestingly in India. On one hand, it has strengthened feminist voices among more liberal middle class women. On the other hand, it has subverted these women's efforts by mobilizing lower class

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[388] Ibid.
[389] Ibid.
[390] Sikata Banerjee, "The Feminization of Violence in Bombay: Women in the Politics of the Shiv Sena," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 36, No. 12 (December 1996), 1215.
[391] Ibid.

women.[392] In fact, the party's hegemonic approach has subverted the rights of women in communities that hitherto granted females considerable autonomy. The tribal populations in states like Bihar, Jharkhand, and Chhattisgarh are a fitting example of this trend.[393] Despite the fact that these communities have been subjugated by Hindu elites over many centuries, their animistic traditions and informal social networks grant women significant leverage. As *dalit* and tribal women embrace Hindutva, they risk losing this aspect of their traditional cultures.[394]

An interesting development within BJP politics is the appointment and promotion of women leaders. Women like Sushma Swaraj and Uma Bharati have emerged as outspoken proponents of gender-based legislation such as the Women's Reservation Bill of 1996.[395] While both favor reservation policy, Bharati seems predisposed to the idea of double quotas. In her view, low caste women require twice the assistance because they are twice as disempowered as ordinary women.[396] It is worth noting that Bharati's popularity in the BJP indicates that Hindu elites view women as "acceptable counter-measures" to the rising backward class consciousness in Parliament.[397]

The aforementioned discussion illustrates that the BJP's supposed empowerment of women is a means of both assuaging low caste anxieties and upholding Hindu masculinity.[398] This development only reiterates the relative

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[392] Louis, *Religion, Power and Violence*, 171.
[393] Ibid.
[394] Reddy, *Religious Identity and Political Destiny*, 116.
[395] Ibid.
[396] Ibid.
[397] Menon, Nigam, *Power and Contestation*, 30.
[398] Ibid.

powerlessness of women. That they are placed at the forefront of Hindu nationalist organizations because of the belief that they will *not* prove effective agents of change highlights the masculinist tendencies within BJP politics. A similar trend is reflected in the operations of Jan Kalyan, a grassroots organization set up by a shankaracharya (spiritual guide), in Kanchipuram, Chennai.[399] The organization was established in the 1980s, by Jayanendra Saraswati, supposedly to represent the lower castes in the city. However, Jan Kalyan has been using feminine idioms—women's involvement in prayer and ritual—to project itself as a mediator between the low castes and the upper caste *smarta* community in the region. This is ironic, because the *smartas* repeatedly establish their superiority over other castes.[400]

Feminization of Violence: Women Under the BJP

Hindutva's infatuation with the Vedic past provides its supporters with a means of denigrating Muslims: The convenient chronology is that women lost all their glory and liberty in the dark period of history when India was ruled by the Mughals.[401] This notion of female victimization has found profound expression in the ideas and activities of right-wing Hindu women. Militant, and committed to the ideal of a Hindu nation, many female activists promote a millenarian vision of Rama being the new messiah.[402] By promoting the unity of Sitaram, these women ensure that Sita becomes

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[399] Mary Elizabeth Handcock, "Hindu Culture for an Indian Nation," in *Womanhood in the Making: Domestic Ritual and Public Culture in Urban South India* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1999), 229.
[400] Ibid, 237.
[401] Ibid.
[402] Ibid.

an integral dimension of the martial Rama. A popular tape of the speeches of Uma Bharati, one of the most prominent women acolytes of the BJP declares: "If needed we will make bricks out of our bones, and our blood will be the mortar to build [temples]."[403] Women's collusion with the Hindutva cause is evident in the 2002 Gujarat riots, "when women led mobs and dragged Muslim women and children into the streets, applauded their gang rapes, and joined men in stoning Muslim women and setting them on fire."[404] This brutality against other women is explained as a manifestation of female anger towards the entire Muslim community. Referring to the power of goddesses, women unknowingly assume masculine traits to instigate acts of communal violence against Muslim men and women.[405]

In reality, the RSS strategy of managing Hindu male sexuality excludes women. Hindutva ideology places men in a purified space typified by celibacy. The continual sublimation of sexual energy becomes a means of serving Mother India and warding off foreign influences.[406] Notions of sex segregation, communalized narratives on myth and history, as well as the differentiation of male and female roles may reflect the empowerment of women, but women's autonomy extends only insofar as they profess faith in the notion of an "endangered nation that requires immediate unification."[407]

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[403] Ibid.
[404] Ibid.
[405] Banerjee, *Make Me A Man!*, 13
[406] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 112.
[407] Patel, *Religion, Power and Violence*, 200.

Knowledge Distorted: Education under the BJP

A National Steering Committee on Textbook Evaluation consisting of widely respected scholars was instituted before the BJP regime assumed power. In its meetings in January 1993 and October 1994, the Committee evaluated the content of school textbooks in India through the reports prepared by the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT).[408] The reports also focused on the educational curricula of RSS-led institutions like the Saraswati Shishu Mandir Prakashan. The Committee's recommendations to the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) underscored the partisan and communal nature of *Sangh Parivar*-led educational endeavors.[409] Voicing its concerns about the Saraswati Shshu Mandir Prakashan, the Committee revealed: "Some of the textbooks which are currently in use at the primary level…present an extremely virulent communal view of Indian history…historical facts have been fabricated …[to achieve] blind bigotry and fanaticism. These textbooks should not be allowed in schools."[410] The NCERT and the Steering Committee strongly recommended that legal stipulations be imposed upon those seeking to dismantle India's education system.[411]

Remapping History: A National Endeavor

The de-secularization of national space has been highly apparent in the policies

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[408] Aditya Mukherjee, Mridula Mukherjee, Sucheta Mahajan, "RSS and School Education," in *RSS, School Texts and the Murder of Mahatma Gandhi* (New Delhi: Sage India Publications Pvt. Lmt., 2008), 21.
[409] Ibid.
[410] Ibid.
[411] Ibid.

of the BJP since the mid-1990s; particularly since the coming to power of BJP-led governments at the Center in 1998 and 1999. While the RSS has endeavored to communalize India's society since its inception, the BJP's rise to power resulted in a dangerous trend: the use of political office and state power to attack secular historians and promote communal historiography.[412] After the BJP's victory in 1999, Murli Manohar Joshi, long time RSS member and BJP Minister for Human Resource Development, initiated several proposals to amend school textbooks.[413] The changes were intended to make the Indian education system "Indianized, nationalized and spiritualized."[414]

Anticipating resistance from autonomous institutions like the NCERT, University Grants Commission (UGC), and the Indian Council of Social Science and Research (ICSSR), the government appointed to educational commissions those who were willing to serve as its instruments.[415] After unceremoniously sacking Professor D.N. Jha, the reigning chairman of the country's national educational organ, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), the BJP secured control over the nation's examination system.[416] The party thereafter used the CBSE to pressure the NCERT and other organizations. In 2001, for example, the NCERT was forced to delete passages in history textbooks without informing scholars like Romila Thapar, Satish Chandra, and R.S. Sharma, who had authored these texts.[417]

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[412] Ibid.
[413] Ibid.
[414] Ibid.
[415] Ibid, 33.
[416] Ibid.
[417] Ibid.

In BJP-controlled states, these measures paved the way for the imposition of RSS primary and secondary school curricula onto state textbooks. In Gujarat, for example, the Narendra Modi government engaged in a massive overhaul of the existing educational framework, replacing history and political science textbooks with RSS material on the Hindu tragedy during the medieval era.[418] Studies conducted post the Gujarat riots of 2002 have shown that two decades worth of communal indoctrination made the carnage in Gujarat inevitable: young minds in the state gradually became willful subjects of the political regime. [419]

Indoctrination: The Basis of Violence

Consistent with Sarvarkar's discourse, BJP and RSS funded texts have said of Islam: "Wherever they went, they had a sword in their hand…Houses of prayer and universities were destroyed. Religious books were burnt. Mothers and sisters were humiliated; mercy and justice were unknown to them."[420] BJP endorsed historical texts in school systems extol the "Greater India," of the ancient times; they describe the Aryan civilization as the birthplace of humanity, from which the Persians, Greeks, and Egyptians borrowed.[421] The pre-Aryan Indus Valley civilization is described as the Vedic *core* of Indian culture. Islam is said to have brought with it the rule of the sword.[422] For this reason, school texts focused on the Rajput and Maratha clans,

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[418] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism*, 205.
[419] Ibid.
[420] Aditya Mukherjee, Mridula Mukherjee, Sucheta Mahajan, "RSS and School Education," in *RSS, School Texts and the Murder of Mahatma Gandhi*, 21.
[421] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism*, 206.
[422] Ibid.

featuring their vigorous efforts to thwart the dominion of the Mughals; the idea being that Hindus cannot confine themselves to words. This message pervades BJP attempts to re-cast history.[423]

In political science textbooks, Upadhyaya's ideology of integral humanism and *Dharmarajya* (rule by righteousness) has been inserted. A Gujarati history textbook from 2002 states that the "Aryans were the most illustrious race in human history, [and] Hitler instilled the spirit of adventure in the common people."[424] A state-level examination for tenth grade students featured a question which asked, "If it takes four *sevaks* [RSS volunteers] to destroy one mosque, how many does it take to destroy twenty?"[425] In a literature textbook in Rajasthan, a guide to essay writing includes the following conversation between a teacher and pupil:

> Student: Master, what has India achieved by doing the nuclear tests? Was it a correct step?
> Teacher: Undoubtedly, it was correct…Economic sanctions do not matter. The country first has to become powerful. Only the powerful are listened to. Now we can talk about world peace aggressively.[426]

In today's context, it is of particular interest to see how the Hindu effort to appear nationalist has led to the distortion of the Hindutva. The Indian independence movement, which was a secular struggle against communalism, is projected as cultural nationalism.[427] Leaders are presented in an intensely partisan light, and the entire struggle is projected against a communal backdrop. Gandhi is consistently criticized

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[423] Ibid.
[424] Ibid.
[425] Ibid, 207.
[426] Ibid.
[427] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism*, 205.

for supporting Muslims, while Muslim leaders like Jinnah are viewed as aggrandizing individuals who hinged their political victories on Gandhi's support.[428]

Despite nationwide protests, this process of *Talibanization* of education was continued.[429] It culminated in the existing NCERT history textbooks being withdrawn altogether. These were replaced by the works of key *Sangh Parivar* ideologues. [430]

By using education as the primary vehicle of ideological dissemination, the BJP fortified the fictions of the Hindutva curricula. The attempts to distort Indian history veiled the momentous developments in Hinduism, and undermined the substantive elements of traditions like Buddhism, and Jainism. More importantly, they have snatched from posterity the opportunity to bask in the truly diverse nature of India.

Pervasive Press, Manifest Media

Since its inception, the BJP has employed visual and print media in a targeted and focused manner, since its inception. Following the proliferation of news channels during the last two decades, political reporting has found new following in India.[431] This has bestowed an indirect advantage upon the BJP: its activities and programs are often accorded excessive publicity. A formal association between *Sangh Parivar* leaders and the media emerged around the mid-1980s, around the same time that the

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[428] Ibid.
[429] The term "talibanization" was used by Hindustan Times editor Vir Sanghvi, to describe Hindu nationalist goals in the educational sphere. See footnote 163 for citation.
[430] Ibid.
[431] Narayan, *Fascinating Hindutva*, 17.

VHP and BJP were trying to link Hindu ethno-cultural nationalism with the notion of *ramrajya*, or rule by Rama.[432]

The Targets: Women, Children, and the Marginalized

The popularization of the *Ramayana* through television prepared the public for the Hindu nationalist venture of the BJP and RSS, by presenting Rama as both a historic hero and a supreme deity of the Hindus.[433] The BJP clearly understood the potential of Lord Rama as a god, ideal, and hero or mobilizing people of both rural and urban areas. The slogan "*man man mein hain Rama*," or "in everyone's hearts resides Lord Rama," was successful in targeting rural communities, for whom the stress on culture and tradition signified a break from the BJP's urban-developmental agenda.[434]

A characteristic feature of the BJP's media campaign between 1999 and 2004 was the broadcasting of national festivals centered on the deification of the Ganges River. This sacralization of India's geography was accompanied by news reports on *yajnas* (sacrifices) and *yatras* (processions).[435] The VHP's Ekamata Tatra (unifying procession) of 1983 and BJP leader L.K. Advani's *ratha yatra* (chariot procession) of 1992 are fitting examples of the above. Both the movements were extensively covered by news channels like *Aaj Tak* and leading national newspapers like the *Pioneer*.[436]

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[432] Ibid.
[433] Ibid.
[434] Ibid.
[435] Ibid.
[436] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism*, 179.

The media also enabled the BJP to enlist the support of the marginalized in Hindu society. For example, in the state of Uttar Pradesh, the BJP relied on the print media to carve the image of Suhaldev, a Pasi[437] hero who spent his life countering Muslim rule.[438] Booklets like Hindu Samaj ke Gaurav: Pasi Veer Maharaja Suhaldev Ki Shaurya Gatha, written by Trilokinath Kol, a local RSS activist and BJP leader in Bahraich, used the figure of Suhaldev to demonstrate how the Pasis had been dethroned and ostracized by the Mughals. For the BJP, Muslim rule became the sole means of deflecting blame from its traditional elitist voter base. That lower caste troubles, and divisions in Indian society, were a consequence of medieval colonial domination was a strand of thought that underlay the entire rhetorical approach of the BJP.[439]

Co-opted Media: Recasting Violence

The most appalling aspect of the BJP-media accord is the latter's extensive coverage of BJP-inspired riots. Prior to the Ayodhya riots in 1992, news channels like *Aaj Tak* covered entire speeches of BJP members like L.K. Advani, whose views extolled violence against the Muslims. Coverage of the riots themselves presented the image of Hindus going to "avenge the wrong leashed upon them."[440]

Gujarati newspapers played a provocative role in highlighting the communal riots in 1998 in Bardoli, a town about thirty kilometers from Surat. Shortly after the

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[437] Like the *Nishads*, the *Pasis* are a sub-set of the *dalit* community in the state of Uttar Pradesh. See footnote 160 for citation.
[438] Narayan, *Fascinating Hindutva*, 88.
[439] Ibid.
[440] Aaj Tak News Chanel off the Air in Gujarat. *Indian Muslims* (October 2007). Available: http://www.indianmuslims.info/news/2007/oct/26/aaj_tak_channel_air_gujarat.html. [April 4, 2010].

incident, a twenty-member assessment team reported: "The story about the attack by a Muslim crowd on the midnight of June 26 in Bardoli which appeared in *Gujarat Samachar* and *Dhabkar* on June 27 was found by us to be completely fabricated. Photographs published in one newspaper were manipulated."[441] *Gujarat Samachar* had a four-column headline: "Muslims Retaliate in Bardoli: Disgusting Attempt to Set Fire to Three Innocent Children. Attempt to Rape Women, Idol of Ganpati [Lord Ganesh] Broken."[442] *Dhabkar* stated: "A strict economic boycott will throttle the Muslims. It will break their backbone. Then it will be difficult for them to live in any part of the country. Friends begin this economic boycott from today..."[443]

Addressing an electoral rally in the city of Lucknow in 2009, BJP leader Advani stated: "It is a dream of [millions] of people across India and a magnificent temple will definitely come up in Ayodhya."[444] His speech was welcomed by youths in organizations like the Bajrang Dal and the Akhil Bharati Vidhya Parishad; newspapers like the *Gujarat Samachar* celebrated this decision. [445]

Educational institutions and the media have proved indispensible electoral planks of the BJP. They have provided Hindutva ideologues with the means necessary to disseminate its rhetoric and ideology. Women and lower caste communities are the primary targets, but also the means—they are the noble volunteers who spread the BJP's message far and wide. Through their endeavors, the supposed "dream" of

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[441] Digant Oza, "Innovation in Media Censorship: Gujarat Experiment of Mini Emergency," Presented at the Seminar *Resisting Censorship/ Celebrating Freedom of Expression (*New Delhi, 2004). Available: http://www.sacw.net/Gujarat2002/DigantOzaSept2004.html. [April 4, 2010].
[442] Ibid.
[443] Ibid.
[444] Ibid. / Lucknow is a city in the state of Uttar Pradesh.
[445] Ibid.

homogenous India is partially actualized, consecrated in the violence that Hinduism so

overtly opposes.

CHAPTER 4

MOSQUE OR TEMPLE? THE BABRI *MASJID-RAMJANMABHOOMI* DISPUTE

> With regards to the decision of whether to give in to the Hindu demand concerning [Lord] Rama's traditional birth site, it is sufficient that there is a consensus among those people who worship Rama…When on October 8, 1990, fighting broke out in Jerusalem over the "Dome of the Rock" and the Al Aqsa mosque, absolutely no one stood up and questioned the Muslim claim that the Al Aqsa mosque was built over the Prophet's footprint in the rock. So why should Hindus start proving the sacredness of their sacred places?
>
> -Koenraad Elst, *Ayodhya and After: Issues Before Hindu Society*, 8.

The demolition of the Babri mosque was justified by Hindu zealots as an attempt to rid India of a relic of Muslim domination.[446] While proponents of Hindutva continue to advocate for the construction of a temple where the mosque hitherto stood, several Indians view the events of 1992 as an onslaught on Indian secularism and democracy.[447]

Precursors to the Demolition: Shah Bano and the Uniform Civil Code Debate

Sensing the heightened insecurity among Muslims following the Partition[448] in 1947, the Congress government under Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru sought to assure members of the community that they were an integral part of India. It did so, ironically, by excluding them from what was to have been a uniform civil code

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[446] Robert E. Frykenberg, "Hindutva as a Political Religion," in *The Sacred In Twenty-First Century Politics*, ed. Roger Griffin, Robert Mallett, and John Tortorice (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 189.

[447] Ibid.

[448] India and Pakistan became separate nations following India's independence from the British in 1947.

(UCC).[449] Accommodation of religion became a matter of intense controversy with the enactment of the Hindu Code Bills in 1950.[450] While the Bills replaced Hindu personal law governing marriage, divorce, adoption, and inheritance with a uniform civil code, they left Muslim customary law unchanged. This infuriated Hindu nationalists, who claimed that the proposed directives undermined traditional Hindu practices.[451]

Through the 1960s and 1970s, proponents of Hindutva decried the government's pampering of minorities, and denounced pseudo-secularism—state policies that accorded special rights to Muslims in matters pertaining to personal law.[452] The issue reemerged in a 1985 Supreme Court Case[453] involving a seventy-three-year-old Muslim woman, Shah Bano, who was divorced by her husband after forty-three years of marriage.[454] By requiring that Shah Bano receive monthly maintenance from her husband, the Court's decision broke with the legal precedent of adjudicating Muslim family disputes[455] under the Islamic Personal Law Application Act.[456] Hindu nationalists opposed the Supreme Court's decision, maintaining that it

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[449] Frykenberg, *Sacred In Twenty-First Century Politics*, 189.
[450] Ibid.
[451] Ibid, 188.
[452] Marriage, divorce, child adoption, and property transfers (within a family) fall under the purview of Muslim personal law. See footnote 1 for citation.
[453] Justice Y.V. Chandrachud was the first judge to have granted maintenance to a Muslim under Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code. See footnote 1 for citation.
[454] Shyam Benegal, "Secularism and Popular Indian Cinema," in *The Crisis of Secularism in India*, ed. Anuradha Dingwaney Needham and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2007), 236.
[455] Muslim disputes still fall under the purview of Muslim personal law. They are referred to the Muslim Personal Law Board. The Board consists of members of the *ulama*, or the clerical community, and is responsible for interpreting the Islamic Personal Law Application Act.
[456] Thomas Blom Hansen, "Democracy, Populism and Governance in India in the 1980s," in *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999), 147.

was unnecessarily sympathetic towards Indian Muslims. They were equally critical of the Congress Party, which was in power at the time.

Indian Muslims found their own set of religious rationales for opposing the Bills. Islamic clerics condemned the decision as an interference with *Sharia* law,[457] and a step towards a uniform civil code that would deny Muslims the right to profess their faith.[458] In an attempt to stem the withdrawal of Muslim support from the Congress Party, the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi announced his support for the Muslim Women Protection of Rights on Divorce Bill. The Bill became law in 1986, despite widespread agitation by conservative Islamic clerics, progressive Indian Muslims (who genuinely desired Hindu-Muslim cohesion), and Hindu nationalists (whose communal agenda was severely compromised due to the law).[459]

The Shah Bano controversy provided proponents of Hindutva with a tailor-made opportunity, for it dramatized the dilemma of instituting democracy in a multicultural, multi-religious society.[460] The courts[461] bolstered Hindu nationalist aims by situating the issue of women's rights in the conflict between a monogamous Hindu

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[457] *Sharia* law in this context refers to the set of customary precedents upon which Muslims base their jurisprudence and law enforcement. See footnote 8 for citation.

[458] Madhu Kishwar, "Breaking the Stalemate: Uniform versus Optional Civil Code," in *Religion at the Service of Nationalism and Other Essays* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 230.

[459] Ibid.

[460] Ibid.

[461] Two decisions prior to the Shah Bano case (Justice Krishna Iyer's decisions in 1979 and 1980) had dealt with the question of awarding monthly maintenance to Muslim women divorcees. Neither case aroused such intense debate. The 1985 decision, on the contrary, sought public attention. See footnote 10 for citation.

society and a polygamous Islamic tradition.[462] Appeals to gender problematized the debate on personal law within an intensely religious setting.[463]

Recognizing the benefits that would accrue from cashing in on these events, Hindu nationalists used the consensus in favor of a national civil code to their advantage. They repeatedly emphasized that the Congress response to the Shah Bano case proved that the party was courting the Muslim vote. This affirmed, in their view, that Indian secularism was a sham, that it was, in fact, anti-Hindu.[464] The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), by contrast, stood for a "positive secularism" that embodied a uniform civil code—albeit a Hinduised version.[465] By framing the Shah Bano case as one involving the sentiments of a *Muslim woman*, the BJP expressed a clear move against womanhood and Islam.[466] In reality, the UCC debate reflects the communal tendencies of the Hindu right-wing. Proponents of Hindutva deliberately overlooked the persistence of personal law in other communities, among the Indian Parsi community, for instance.[467] That they consciously appealed to the structural patriarchy

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[462] This is ironic, given that the 1961 census revealed that polygamy is actually less prevalent among Indian Muslims (5.7 percent) as compared to Hindu tribal (*adivasi*) populations (15.25 percent). See footnote 10 for citation.

[463] Flavia Agnes, "The Supreme Court, Media and UCC Debate," in *Religion, Power and Violence: Expression of Politics in Contemporary Times*, ed. Ram Puniyani (New Delhi: Sage Publications India Pvt. Lmt., 2005), 234.

[464] Martha C. Nussbaum, "A Democracy of Pluralism, Respect, Equality," in *The Clash Within: Democracy, Religious Violence, and India's Future* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2007), 147.

[465] Robert L. Hardgrave Jr., "Hindu Nationalism and the BJP," in *Prospects for Peace in South Asia*, ed. Rafiq Dossani, Henry S. Rowen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 196.

[466] Kishwar, "Pro Women or Anti-Muslim?," in *Religion at the Service of Nationalism and Other Essays*, 211.

[467] "*Parsi*" is a term that refers to the larger of the two Zoroastrian communities in India. See footnote 18 for citation.

in Islamic society indicates how Hindu nationalists used the Shah Bano case, and the related debate on personal law, to promote their anti-Muslim agenda.[468]

As indicated in chapter two, the BJP was forced to return to its militant roots in the wake of its electoral defeat in 1984.[469] L.K. Advani, who possessed closer ties with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), replaced the more moderate A.B. Vajpayee as party president.[470] This change in the BJP's leadership, the aforementioned Hindu Code Bills controversy, and the Shah Bano episode were events that crystallized the Hindu revival movement of the 1980s. In search of an outlet to express their grievances against Congress pseudo-secularism and the Muslim minority, the BJP-RSS-VHP[471] triad launched the *Ramjanmabhoomi* movement: The drive to erase the Babri mosque at Ayodhya encompassed the gambit of fears that plagued votaries of Hindutva.[472]

Hindu Revivalism: The Struggle over *Ramjanmabhoomi*

Hindu revivalism during the 1980s was characterized by massive reconversion drives. The aim was to reclaim those low caste communities who had embraced

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[468] Upendra Baxi, "Citing Secularism in the Uniform Civil Code: A Riddle Wrapped Inside an Enigma?," in *The Crisis of Secularism in India*, ed. Anuradha Dingwaney Needham and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2007), 284-286.

[469] The Congress Party won the 1984 elections owing to a "sympathy vote." Its leader Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards following the Indian military's Operation Blue Star, which targeted the Golden Temple in Amritsar to rout Sikh secessionists. Indira Gandhi's son, Rajiv Gandhi became Prime Minister upon the Congress's victory. Of 229 seats in the 1984 parliamentary elections, the BJP secured only 2. With only 7.4 percent of the national vote, the party was in shambles. See footnote 20 for citation.

[470] Baxi, *The Crisis of Secularism in India*, 284-286.

[471] As mentioned in chapter 2, the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) is the RSS's cultural affiliate.

[472] Hardgrave Jr., *Prospects for Peace in South Asia*, 196-197.

Islam[473] during the medieval period.[474] To this end, the BJP organized national *yagnas* or integration rituals, and the VHP made attempts to reestablish control over holy sites like the Kashi Vishwanath Temple in Varanasi and the Krishna temple in Mathura.[475] Public processions such as the Ekamata Yatra or unifying pilgrimage of 1983, and the solidification of subsidiary militia units—the VHP's youth wing, the Bajrang Dal,[476] came into being in 1984—paved the way for a nationwide campaign directed at affording legitimacy to the "idealized Hindu nation."[477]

Though incremental, these measures positioned Hindutva forces for strategic action in the future.[478] In 1985, the VHP launched a movement to liberate *Ramjanmabhoomi,* the birthplace of Lord Rama in the city of Ayodhya.[479] The operation was spearheaded by the Sri Ramjanmabhoomi Mukti Yagna Samiti (Committee for Sacrifice to Liberate Rama's Birthplace).[480] At issue was the Babri mosque, which was constructed in 1528 AD by the first Mughal emperor Babur.[481]

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[473] Hindu reconversion efforts were later extended to the tribal communities who embraced Christianity during British rule (1868-1947), and in independent India during the 1970s and 1980s.

[474] Hardgrave Jr., *Prospects for Peace in South Asia*, 196.

[475] Mathura and Varanasi are cities located in the north Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. See footnote 23 for citation.

[476] The Bajrang Dal draws from a reservoir of poorly educated, unemployed young men. Thuggish and undisciplined, members of the Dal are identified by their saffron headbands bearing the word "Rama." See footnote 23 for citation.

[477] Prakash Louis, "Hindutva and Weaker Sections: Conflict between Dominance and Resistance," *in Religion, Power and Violence: Expression of Politics in Contemporary Times*, ed. Ram Puniyani (New Delhi: Sage Publications Pvt. Lmt., 2005), 177-179.

[478] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism*, 170.

[479] *Ramjanmabhoomi* is a site in the north Indian city of Ayodhya, in the state of Uttar Pradesh, where a Hindu temple commemorating the birth of Lord Rama may have formerly stood. The temple was supposedly destroyed in 1528 AD by the Mughal emperor Babur who built a mosque on the site. The territory was contested until 1992, when right-wing Hindu forces demolished the mosque. See footnote 23 for citation.

[480] Ram Puniyani, "The Babri-Masjid-Ramjanambhoomi Dispute: Abode of Ram or House of Allah," in *Communal Politics: Facts versus Myths* (New Delhi: Sage Publications India Pvt. Lmt., 2003), 122.

[481] It is believed that the Emperor's General Mir Baqi oversaw the mosque's construction. See footnote 20 for citation.

Hindu nationalists alleged that the site hitherto housed a *mandir* (temple) marking the birthplace of Rama. The belief led to the eventual destruction of the mosque in 1992.[482]

Ayodhya: Contested through History

The Babri *masjid-Ramjanmabhoomi* controversy is not of recent origin. It is believed that Hindus attacked the Babri mosque four times during Babur's reign and close to twenty times a century later, during the reign of Emperor Akbar.[483] Conflict over the territory resurfaced in the modern period, when a group of Hindu ascetics attacked the mosque in 1850.[484] A compromise was later reached under the British government, and Hindus were allowed to offer prayers on a platform outside the mosque. The move failed to placate Hindus: In 1883, a coalition of devotees demanded that a temple be built adjacent to the mosque. The British refused to comply.[485] Then in 1949, Hindu priests broke into the Babri mosque and placed an idol of Lord Rama in the premises. Against the backdrop of nearly a century of conflict over the shrine, the Congress government of 1949 declared the premises a disputed area and locked the gates.[486] These efforts failed to avert contention, and a

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[482] Ranbir Vohra, "The Decline of the Congress: 1985-1996: The Emergence of Hindu Nationalism and Caste Politics," in *The Making of India: A Historical Survey* (New York: M.E. Sharpe Inc., 2001), 261.
[483] Puniyani, *Communal Politics*, 122.
[484] Ibid.
[485] Nussbaum, *The Clash Within*, 174.
[486] Nivedita Menon, Aditya Nigam, "Politics of Hindutva and the Minorities," in *Power and Contestation: India since 1989* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing Lmt., 2007), 48.

1951 district court ruling in the state of Uttar Pradesh affirmed Hindus' rights of worship on the land.[487]

For nearly four and a half decades, Hindu nationalists sought an agenda which would warrant the call of revival. The opportunity arrived in 1986 when a district judge from Faizabad, in the state of Uttar Pradesh, ordered that the gates of the mosque be opened to Hindu worshippers.[488] The decisions of 1951 and 1986 brought to the fore the inherent politicization of the Indian judiciary. The BJP would use this dynamic to its advantage in time to come. While the VHP launched its revival movement, Muslims formed the Babri Masjid Action Committee and observed nationwide mourning.[489] More than 300,000 Muslims gathered in New Delhi in March 1987 to demand the return of the mosque. This was the largest organized Muslim rally since independence; only to be followed a month later by a massive Hindu rally organized by the pro-Hindu BJP.[490]

As Hindu-Muslim tensions escalated, the VHP intensified its stand. Undergirding its efforts was the desire to consolidate a support base that could be mobilized to perpetuate Hindutva goals.[491] The BJP pursued a mixed strategy. It entered into open alliances with opposition parties and also focused on Hindu

[487] Koenraad Elst, "Ramjanmabhoomi and the Courts," in *Ayodhya and After: Issues Before Hindu Society* (New Delhi: Voice of India, 1991), 42.
[488] Ibid.
[489] Ibid.
[490] Ibid.
[491] Ibid.

mobilization campaigns. The VHP had revived the *Ramjanmabhoomi* dispute and the

BJP promptly boarded its chariot.[492]

Revivalism, Rama, and Rationales for Aggression

Through its discussion of the BJP's mobilization strategies, the previous

chapter established that the god-hero Rama holds a pivotal position in Hindutva

iconography. The notion of *ramrajya* (rule by Rama) has enabled the party to

perpetuate Sarvarkar's views by employing symbols and narratives with which

modern-day Hindus can relate.

In appropriating Rama as a party symbol, the BJP has substantially altered the

conventional iconography associated with the historical figure. First, the effort to

equate Rama with a uniform Hindu consciousness received a tremendous boost

following the popularization of visual media. In particular, the broadcasting of a

televised version of the *Ramayana* in 1987-88 allowed millions to view excerpts from

the epic on a daily basis.[493] The move ensured that local traditions and myths were

contextualized by a dominant, national narrative. It also enabled Hindu nationalists to

use the myth of Rama during their political campaigns.[494] The BJP's projection of

Rama as the linchpin of Hindu religion was and remains a monolithic attempt that

subverts the diversity in Hinduism:

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[492] VHP and BJP launched chariot processions (during the late 1980s and early 1990s) drew from the symbolism of Lord Rama's famous chariot (*rath*). In Hindutva ideology, the *rath* functions as a metaphor for the ideal Hindu nation under Rama's rule (*ramarajya*). See footnote 33 for citation.

[493] Hardgrave Jr., *Prospects for Peace in South Asia*, 197.

[494] Nussbaum, *The Clash Within*, 174.

> One could argue that the *Sangh Parivar's* strategy of generating a nationalized Hinduism through the production of a religious community imagined around the national geography of sites like Ayodhya…is an attempt to "massify" the nation in a concrete spatial sense…The majoritarian notion of the "rights" of Hindus as the dominant interpretation of secularism…has settled among broad groups as the fundamental principle of intelligibility of the social world.[495]

Second, by representing Rama as an aggressive warrior, the BJP has converted the hitherto moral representation of Rama into an overtly physical one.[496] Anuradha Kaur says of this development: "Rama [has become] a warrior, not easily distinguished from other warriors: Ben Hir, El Cid, or to take Indian examples, Arjuna and Bhima. Like them, he fights for possession, control, [and] status."[497]

Finally, the new iconography of the Hindu right focuses explicitly, on Rama's opposition to the Mughal Empire. By portraying the mosque at Ayodhya as a relic of oppressive and unjust Muslim rule, and as the chief obstacle to the restoration of *ramrajya*, Hindu nationalists have made Muslims a permanent subversive element in all references to Rama.[498] As Tapan Basu and his co-authors remark, "The new historical myths have achieved a vital substitution of associative feeling so effectively…that Muslims need not be introduced at all…Rama's face and his life story are enough…to [bring] in the invented medieval history of India."[499] This sentiment is explicitly expressed in the ideas of Jana Krishnamurti, former BJP Vice-President and strategist. In an interview in 1999 he stated, "Ask [Hindus]…whom do they prefer: Babur or Rama? [The destruction of the Babri mosque] was…a

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[495] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 157.
[496] Ibid.
[497] Ibid.
[498] Ibid.
[499] Nussbaum, *The Clash Within*, 173.

misreading of the mood of Hindus by other political parties. We are not asking for every mosque to be removed. We desire only the birthplace of Rama back…if the Muslims feel this is their land, why do they not agree to leave the site?"[500]

The 1988 Rama *shila pujas*, wherein bricks inscribed with Rama's name were worshipped during a nationwide campaign organized by the VHP, illustrate the inventive manner in which Hindutva rituals reinforced the singular myth of Rama. The bricks, wrapped in saffron cloth and displayed at temples and public sites, proved instrumental in the BJP's operations in Ayodhya.[501]

Phase 01: Consolidating Consensus

Establishing an alternative set of significations allowed Hindutva ideologues to instate a spirit of reformation among its cadres. The phase of revivalism ushered in 1985 culminated in a full-fledged drive against remnants of medieval Islam.[502] For the VHP, the Babri mosque was the edifice upon which Muslim rule once rested. Upon joining forces with the BJP, VHP cadres took the final leap. They decided in 1989 to launch an official movement dedicated to building a Rama temple in place of the Babri mosque.[503]

As Hindu devotees from across India, each bearing a brick for the construction of the new temple, made their way to Ayodhya, the nation witnessed a communal

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[500] Ibid.
[501] Paul R. Brass, "Introduction: Explaining Communal Violence," in *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003), 26.
[502] Ibid.
[503] Hansen, in *The Saffron Wave*, 161.

confrontation featuring over a 100,000 armed Hindutva volunteers.[504] With parliamentary elections around the corner, the BJP was forced to forfeit the temple issue temporarily.[505] Meanwhile, Congress representative Rajiv Gandhi, who had made every attempt to stir the communal pot in his bid for Muslim support during the Shah Bano controversy, sought to use the Ayodhya riots against the BJP.[506] His efforts proved largely ineffectual, and concerns over corruption and inflation drove the Congress out of power.[507] With 11.4 percent of the national vote and eighty-five seats in the Lok Sabha,[508] the BJP possessed all but one ingredient (a non-elitist socio-economic agenda) necessary to rake up its ethno-nationalist Hindu agenda.[509]

The lack of a shared vision ate away at the BJP coalition. Out of power by the 1990s, the party faced another dilemma. The Mandal Commission, created a decade ago by the Congress, released its report favoring a twenty-seven percent quota for backward classes in all government institutions.[510] The BJP responded with disapproval, maintaining that the quota undercut the party's attempts to unite upper and lower caste Hindus. Caught between the pulls of its traditional elitist base and the

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[504] As noted before, the VHP (and its youth wing, the Bajrang Dal) and the RSS led the destruction of the mosque, and enthusiastically assisted BJP leader L.K. Advani's chariot processions of 1990 and 1991. See footnote 33 for citation and map 3 for death toll in Ayodhya riots.

[505] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism*, 191.

[506] Ibid.

[507] Christophe Jaffrelot, "The Diaspora and Hindu Nationalism," in *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007), 361/ 363.

[508] The Indian Parliament is modeled on the British system. The Lok Sabha is the lower house of Parliament. It is comprised of 552 seats. See footnote 56 for citation.

[509] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism*, 191.

[510] Deepa S. Reddy, "Cultures," in *Religious Identity and Political Destiny: Hindutva in the Culture of Ethnicism* (New York: AltaMira Press, 2006), 89.

newly emerging lower caste brigade, whose vote won the party national office a year earlier, the BJP desperately sought an agenda that would ensure political victory.[511]

Phase 02: *Dharma Yuddha* (Righteous War)

Several BJP members proposed the revival of the Babri mosque dispute as the path forward. Sensing the need to distract the party's electoral base from the Mandal Report, BJP leader L.K. Advani launched a *rath yatra* (chariot procession) in 1990,[512] with the support of RSS and VHP volunteers[513] The 10,000-kilometer journey[514] across ten states in the heartland of north India was to end at Ayodhya on October 30, 1990, when the construction of the much awaited Rama temple was scheduled to commence.[515]

As the date neared, tens of thousands of Hindu militants led by Advani met at Ayodhya. "Women brought coconuts, incense sticks, and sandalwood paste…youngsters met the *rath* armed with…swords and *trishuls* (tridents)…VHP and Bajrang Dal activists prepared the route with decorations."[516] Advani's *dharma yuddha* (righteous war) had begun.[517] Invoking the principles of secularism, then

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[511] Vohra, *The Making of India*, 264-265.

[512] For information on the route and death toll, see map 3 in appendix.

[513] A.K. Ojha, M.R. Kazmi, "Bi-Polar Competition and the 13th Lok Sabha Elections in Bihar," in *India's 1999 Elections and 20th Century Politics*, ed. Paul Wallace and Ramashray Roy (New Delhi: Sage India Publications Pvt. Lmt., 2003), 292-293. / Zoya Hasan, "Community and Caste in Post-Congress Politics in Uttar Pradesh," in *Community Conflicts and the State in India*, ed. Amrita Basu and Atul Kohli (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 149.

[514] BJP leader L.K. Advani conducted this *rath yata* (chariot procession) with several other BJP and RSS leaders. The leaders travelled in Toyota vans fashioned to represent Lord Rama's *rath* (chariot). See footnote 63 for citation.

[515] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism*, 171.

[516] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 165.

[517] Puniyani, *Communal Politics: Facts versus Myths*, 144.

Prime Minister V.P. Singh[518] stressed that the Uttar Pradesh High Court's interim order to secure status quo at the disputed site would be enforced, and that the mosque at Ayodhya would be "protected at all costs."[519] In lieu of the above, Advani and other BJP leaders were arrested on October 23, en-route to the mosque.[520] The arrests sparked a series of clashes among Hindus and Muslims that left nearly three thousand people dead. Hindu nationalist forces withdrew from Ayodhya with the promise to return.[521]

The incident had immediate political impact. Following Advani's arrest, the BJP withdrew its parliamentary support from V.P. Singh's National Front government. On losing a vote of no confidence, V.P. Singh submitted his resignation as Prime Minister.[522] The BJP exploited the Ayodhya issue in the subsequent elections, thereby increasing its holdings in the Lok Sabha from eighty-five in the 1989 parliamentary elections to a hundred and nineteen in the 1991 elections.[523]

The commonly cited rationales for Advani's decision to launch the *rath yatra* relate to the Hindu vote bank, which the BJP had been cultivating since the mid-1980s. As caste loyalties came to the fore owing to the release of the Mandal Report,[524] proponents of Hindutva were faced with the need to safeguard their

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[518] V.P. Singh headed the National Front coalition (1989-1991) which relied on BJP support. See footnote 63 for citation.

[519] Puniyani, *Communal Politics: Facts versus Myths*, 144.

[520] Bihar's Chief Minister, Laloo Prasad Yadav, was instrumental in this arrest. Along with other representatives of low caste communities, Yadav was determined to avoid *dalits*' cooptation into the BJP's communal agenda. See footnote 62 for citation.

[521] Puniyani, *Communal Politics: Facts versus Myths*, 144.

[522] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism*, 172.

[523] Ibid.

[524] As mentioned earlier, the Mandal Report proposed a twenty-seven percent quota (in educational and political institutions) for low caste communities in India. This aroused upper caste fears.

established electoral base.[525] Advani continues to claim that whether or not the Babri mosque had been built over an existing Rama temple is irrelevant. Of importance is the symbolism of Ayodhya in Hindus' imagination. In fact, several accounts have suggested that a temple never existed on the site.[526] The *Ramjanmabhoomi* movement was therefore an attempt to substitute the issue of caste discrimination with an alternative political configuration in which backward castes could be "sutured into an integrated Hinduism."[527] This allowed the BJP to displace blame for the post-Mandal era anti-reservation riots (spurred by Hindu elites) onto the Muslims. It also ensured low caste support for the party's agenda in Ayodhya. Advani's *yatra* was a calculated political move. Put simply, it was the BJP's anti-Mandal strategy.[528]

Phase 03: Turned to Rubble

Lalit Vachani's documentary, *The Boy in a Branch*, depicts BJP leader Arun Shourie hoisting the *bhagwa dhwaj*,[529] the saffron flag, at the RSS's 1992 Founders Day rally, shortly before the destruction of the Babri mosque.[530] Shourie is dressed in secular clothing, not in the khaki shorts and saffron stoles worn by other RSS members at the rally. Unlike his contemporaries K.K. Shastri and Devendra Swarup, Shourie is not a dogmatic RSS man.[531] A man with well-thought-out but nonetheless

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[525] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism*, 171.
[526] Puniyani, *Communal Politics: Facts versus Myths*, 128.
[527] Ibid.
[528] Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism*, 172.
[529] Literally translated, "*bhagwa dhwaj*" implies "protective shield." The saffron color embodies the greatness of the Vedic past, and the pure, sacrificial quality of *Agni*, the Vedic god of fire. See footnote 75 for citation.
[530] Nussbaum, *The Clash Within*, 62/ 70.
[531] Ibid.

controversial economic views, he portrays himself as wanting the BJP to lose its extremism. Yet his speech accords complete support to the Ayodhya campaign. There is no getting around the fact that Shourie joined the BJP not for its economic policies alone, but because of the conviction that Muslims pose a danger to India and must be kept in check. Shourie's case is a classic example of the implications of Hindutva. Through the promise of an economically vibrant India, Hindu nationalists seek to control even the moderate Hindu vote.[532]

Following the 1991 elections, the BJP's liberal economic bent under Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee was severely critiqued by several RSS leaders. In a joint VHP-RSS rally on October 29, 1991, Hindutva forces threatened, "If the BJP dragged its feet over the construction of the temple at Ayodhya, its government will fall."[533] In the face of mounting pressure from other right-wing organizations, the BJP had little choice but to comply with the larger demands of the Hindutva family. This being said, Hindutva ideologues recognized that the garb of economic liberalism would ensure the BJP's success in office. The party's stable position at the Center was a golden opportunity for the right-wing forces embroiled in the decade-long struggle at Ayodhya.[534]

The rally launched in October 1991 spurred thousands into action. By October 31, 1991, a sizeable front had gathered in the grounds adjacent to the Babri mosque. The same day, a group of young activists climbed onto the domes of the Babri mosque

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[532] Ibid.
[533] Ibid, 176.
[534] Ibid.

and hoisted saffron flags, destroying one of the building's outer walls.[535] By the end of July 1992, RSS cadres were in the midst of completing a concrete platform on the site. Their actions clearly violated a 1990 Supreme Court order which prohibited the creation of "a permanent structure" in the vicinity of the mosque.[536]

By December 5, 1992, about 100,000 supporters joined Hindutva forces at the mosque. At this juncture, the BJP sent hard-liners like Advani with explicit instructions to engage the masses while the government sought a compromise with RSS cadres. Unfortunately, Advani's speeches yielded the opposite result. Those at Ayodhya viewed the presence of BJP leaders as a tacit endorsement of Hindu communal intentions.[537] On December 6, 1992, as three hundred thousand supporters gathered to listen to RSS speeches, some pilgrims breached the cordon, entered the disputed area, and began stoning the mosque.[538] Using iron rods, they defaced the mosque's north wall. By late afternoon, five and a half hours after the first group of Hindus crossed the cordon, all three domes of the mosque had been pulled to the ground. Two thousand Muslims were killed in the three weeks of rioting that ensued in the north western states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.[539]

A Successful Siege

There is still no agreement about the extent to which the demolition was planned. Advani is said to have shown signs of surprise and distress: he resigned from

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[535] Puniyani, *Communal Politics: Facts versus Myths*, 141.
[536] Ibid.
[537] Ibid.
[538] Ibid.
[539] Ibid.

his post as the leader of the opposition. Vajpayee, who was not present at the time, said the demolition was the "worst miscalculation ever made by his party."[540]

Meanwhile, the Congress government under Narasimha Rao vacillated, failing to take strong action against the Hindu nationalist perpetrators. The ban imposed on the VHP and RSS on December 8, 1992 was quickly withdrawn.[541] Aware that the demolition was not receiving strong criticism, BJP leaders repealed their earlier statements, arguing that there was no salient distinction between moderates and hard-liners in the party. The initially apologetic Vajpayee seemed only happy to support his camp's misdemeanors. He stated, "The Babri mosque was a symbol of shame and has been erased."[542]

Although the Congress instituted an inquiry commission to investigate the Ayodhya riots under Supreme Court Justice M.S. Liberhan,[543] the commission finally submitted its report to the current Congress-led coalition under Prime Minister Manmohan Singh after seventeen years and forty-eight extensions. Despite the report's release on June 30, 2009, the ruling government has failed to institute concrete measures against the RSS and BJP.[544]

The political potential of the *Ramjanmabhoomi* agitation lay in the multiple ways in which it engaged the dominant discursive narratives in post-colonial India. It sought to use alternately, and to its advantage, three contested ideas: the fallacy of the

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[540] Nussbaum, *The Clash Within*, 177.

[541] Ibid.

[542] Ibid.

[543] Excerpts from the Liberhan Commission Report. *Hindustan Times* (November 25, 2009). Available: http://www.hindustantimes.com/rssfeed/india/Excerpts-from-the-Liberhan-Commissionreport/Article1-479907.aspx. [April 12, 2010].

[544] Ibid.

Nehruvian state,[545] Indian society as dominated by an inherently tolerant Hindu culture; and communalism as anti-national sentiments among minorities.[546] By asserting that Ayodhya was Rama's birthplace, the BJP cast the Babri mosque as a remnant of medieval Mughal rule.[547] This became the central mobilization tactic during the 1992 campaign. Domestic constraints only aided Hindu nationalists.[548] The breakdown of Nehruvian socialism during the early 1990s, along with allegations of corruption which plagued the Congress, augmented the *Ramjanmabhoomi* campaign.[549]

The sharpest edge in the entire campaign lay in the constant drawing of boundaries between "self" and "other." Just as it was crucial to "fetishize the materiality of the Babri mosque," it was important to "essentialize the Muslim community."[550] Muslim destruction and brutality—as epitomized in the Partition— became popular themes for women like Sadhvi Ritambara and Uma Bharati. The two BJP leaders continually stressed their status as *sadhvis*, or women willing to sublimate their femininity. The parallels between the RSS warrior-monk and the *sadhvi* are instructive, as they point to women's co-optation into the male-centric framework of the *Sangh Parivar*.[551] As noted in chapter three, the use of rhetoric imbued with

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[545] As stated in the previous chapter, India's first Prime Minister Nehru envisioned a brand of socialism which would draw upon the skills and accomplishments of all sections of India's population. See footnote 73 for citation.

[546] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 173.

[547] Ibid.

[548] Ibid.

[549] Elst, *Ayodhya and After*, 116.

[550] Ibid.

[551] Sikata Banerjee, "In the Crucible of Hindutva: Women and Masculine Hinduism," in *Make Me A Man! Masculinity, Hinduism, and Nationalism in India* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2005), 135.

violent metaphors has caused women and backward communities to equate empowerment with acts of force. This orientation has advanced the BJP's attempts at legitimizing violence against Muslims.[552] The staging of Uma Bharati as a young, angry, "backward class woman" has played subtly on the assimilationist attributes of Hindutva. Bharati's statements reflect this collusion: "We could not teach them with words, now let us teach them with kicks…tie up your religiosity and kindness and throw it in the Jamuna [River]…[A]ny non-Hindu who lives here does so at our mercy."[553]

Ayodhya: A Road Map for Future Violence

The illegal construction of the Rama temple in Ayodhya commenced soon after the destruction of the Babri mosque in 1992, and has gathered pace since.[554] The demolition brought in its wake an unprecedented attack on Muslim communities in late 1992 and early 1993, in both north and south Indian towns and cities. In Mumbai, the Hindutva campaign was systematically planned. Muslim individuals, business, and homes were methodically targeted by the Shiv Sena, a regional Hindu nationalist outfit.[555] Though the Mumbai violence was a product of a range of causes, such as the lack of land redevelopment and the rise of organized crime, it is nonetheless estimated

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[552] Rowena Robinson, D. Parthasarthy, "After Gujarat: Making Sense of the Reports on the Post-Godhra Violence and its Aftermath," *in Religion, Power and Violence: Expression of Politics in Contemporary Times*, ed. Ram Puniyani (New Delhi: Sage Publications Pvt. Lmt., 2005), 312.
[553] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 180.
[554] Ibid.
[555] Vohra, *The Making of India*, 274.

that close to 67 percent of the people who died in the 1993 Mumbai riots were Muslim.[556]

In the aftermath of the riots, Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao instructed the Maharashtra state government to institute a commission of inquiry under Justice B. N. Srikrishna.[557] Though its initial brief was to investigate the causes of the Mumbai riots, the Shiv Sena-BJP joint government that took control of Maharashtra expanded the commission's area of inquiry to include the bomb blasts that occurred in Mumbai in March 1993.[558] The blasts were believed to have been supported by individuals in the city's growing criminal circle, whose Muslim origins were of particular concern to the BJP. The commission refrained from expanding its focus, and identified the Hindutva camp, in particular the Shiv Sena, as responsible for the 1993 communal riots in Mumbai.[559]

According to the Srikrishna Commission Report, "While several incidents of violence took place during the period…large scale rioting commenced from January 6, 1993…owing to the efforts of the Shiv Sena and its leader Bal Thackeray who continued to whip up communal frenzy [through] their statements and acts."[560] The Mumbai riots are significant because they exemplify the extent to which Hindutva

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[556] Ibid.
[557] P.V. Narasimha Rao headed the Congress government from May 1991 to May 1996. Much of his tenure was marred by allegations of inaction. He was accused of being indifferent towards the BJP's growing militant tendencies. See footnote 102 for citation.
[558] Nussbaum, *The Clash Within*, 178.
[559] Ibid.
[560] Ibid.

ideology is impacting India's political character. The increase in regional organizations supportive of the BJP indicates the potency of Hindu nationalist ideas.[561]

From Mumbai, riots spread to cities like Allahabad in the state of Uttar Pradesh (1994-95) and Ahmadabad in the state of Gujarat (1996). Communal tensions in Gujarat culminated in the carnage of 2002, in which the BJP played a pivotal role.[562] The *Ramjanmabhoomi* campaign represented "the coming together" of the BJP's communal tactics. The destruction of the Babri mosque proved that the party's mobilization strategies and discourse could actualize change. The BJP, having perfected the myth-mobilization paradigm, reverted to the myth of Rama in virtually every communal skirmish thereafter.[563]

In some ways, the BJP has created a monster it can no longer contain. As historian Christophe Jaffrelot states, "It was easier to mobilize Hindus *against* the Babri mosque than *for* anything else."[564] Subsequent riots initiated by the undisciplined members of the Bajrang Dal and other youth organizations caused trouble for the BJP, which needed to play its cards deliberately but carefully.[565]

Additionally, the party's rhetorical support for the status of Muslim women (post the Shah Bano controversy) and its simultaneous emphasis on the virtues of adopting a uniform civil code have roused the ire of conservative Indian Muslims. Such anti-minority imports, coupled with the institutionalization of violence in the decade following Ayodhya, have caused clerics to affirm international Islamic

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[561] Ibid.
[562] Puniyani, *Communal Politics: Facts versus Myths*, 141.
[563] Ibid.
[564] Ibid / Nussbaum, *The Clash Within*, 178.
[565] Puniyani, *Communal Politics: Facts versus Myths*, 141.

radicalism.[566] Hindu nationalist-led violence has caused consistent Muslim backlash. This was evident in the Allahabad and Ahmadabad riots in 1987 and 1993, where Muslims reacted fervently to Hindutva activism.[567] "The size and spontaneity of Muslim rallies—such as the 300,000 people who gathered in Mumbai on November 20, 1985—indicate the frustration and insecurity among Indian Muslims."[568]

The Ayodhya incident was a godsend for Pakistan. Islamabad used the event to convince other Islamic countries that Muslims everywhere should prevent Hindu India from "butchering" its Muslim citizens.[569] Pakistanis used the Babri mosque controversy as an occasion for temple-burning and the murder of Hindus, who constitute less than 1.6 percent of the nation's population.[570] Unfortunately, the Indian Senate Committee on Religious Freedoms and Minority Affairs sided with Pakistan, citing the Liaqat-Nehru Pact,[571] which promised safeguards to minorities in both India and Pakistan. Between November 1989 and November 1990, over 240 Hindu temples[572] were destroyed in Bangladesh.[573] Since sections of the Indian media openly promoted the Hindutva standpoint during and after the Ayodhya riots, India's immediate neighbors seized the opportunity to engage in anti-Hindu reporting. In recent years, moderate voices in the BJP have spoken against biased media reports in

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[566] Agnes, *Religion, Power and Violence*, 234.
[567] Nussbaum, *The Clash Within*, 147.
[568] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 149.
[569] Vohra, *The Making of India*, 274.
[570] Ibid.
[571] The Liaqat-Nehru Pact was signed in 1950 by Pakistan's Prime Minister Liaqat Ali Khan and India's Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. See footnote 116 for citation.
[572] Hindus account for 9.2 percent of Bangladesh's population. See footnote 116 for citation.
[573] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 149.

India.[574] V.K. Malhotra, former BJP Secretary notes, "The responsibility for what has happened in Pakistan and Bangladesh is entirely that of the Union government and the [media]. They have been engaging in so much anti-Muslim propaganda that [other] governments have an excuse for [reverse] publicity."[575]

It is clear that the BJP's current anti-minority stance will strengthen the majoritarian politics[576] of Islamic separatists in contested territories like Kashmir.[577] Aside from bolstering the aims of Pakistan, continued militancy in such areas will heighten fundamentalist tendencies among Hindus and Muslims alike. A secure and confident Muslim community in India is therefore the surest means of refuting Mohammad Ali Jinnah's legacy of the Two-Nation Theory.[578]

As the caste system became increasingly dogmatic during the medieval period, Hindu low castes sought other faiths.[579] Conversion gained popularity in latter half of the British era (1900-1947). In independent India, the 1980s witnessed a wave of *adivasi* (tribals) conversions to Islam and Christianity.[580] These conversion drives, along with the strong assertion of Muslim identity in connection with the Shah Bano case caused proponents of Hindutva to strengthen their right-wing stance.[581] The rise of Islamic fundamentalism has received significant space in the writings of Hindu

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[574] Ibid.

[575] Elst, *Ayodhya and After*, 63.

[576] About 77 percent of Kashmir's current population is Muslim. See footnote 122 for citation.

[577] Ibid.

[578] Muhammad Ali Jinnah was the leader of the All India Muslim League. His Two-Nation Theory was used as a justification for the creation of Pakistan. See footnote 122 for citation.

[579] Theodore P. Wright Jr., "The Muslim Minority Before and After Ayodhya," in *Hinduism and Secularism After Ayodhya*, ed. Arvind Sharma (New York: Palgrave Publishers Lmt., 2001), 3.

[580] Estimates reveal that close to 11 percent of tribals (*adivasis*), primarily from states like Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh in central India, as well as Assam, Manipur, and Tripura in north eastern India, embraced alternative religious orientations (mainly Islam and Christianity) during the early 1980s. See footnote 127 for citation.

[581] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 151.

nationalists and intellectuals alike. While Islamic backlash suggests the possibility of heightened communal confrontations in India, those writing in the Indian context forget that Hindu nationalist discourse has contributed to Muslim insecurities.[582] By postulating that Islam is hijacking Hindu devotees, votaries of Hindutva invariably appeal to the fundamentalist tendencies they seek to oppose.

In recent years, notable Muslim figures in India have used their status to oppose the conservative elements in India's Islamic community. Asghar Ali Engineer, a prominent Islamic scholar based in Mumbai, said in 1990: "Every human life is much more precious than a hundred *masjid's* [mosques] or temples…we should therefore do everything possible to resolve this issue…through the spirit of reconciliation."[583] The likes of Imam Maulana Waheeduddin Khan, and Professor Imtiaz Ahmed of the Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, have on several occasions initiated inter-communal dialogue. Unfortunately, the BJP and RSS have responded by hinting that they may press in due time for more mosque demolitions across India.[584]

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[582] Ibid.
[583] Wright Jr., *Hinduism and Secularism*, 14.
[584] Ibid.

CHAPTER 5

MODI AND HIS MUSLIMS: THE GUJARAT CARNAGE

On January 26, 2001, as India celebrated her fifty-first Republic day, the most powerful earthquake in almost two hundred years shook north western Gujarat. According to official estimates, over 20,000 persons perished and close to 200,000 were injured.[585] The aftermath of the earthquake was a portent of the partisan nature of both state and society in Gujarat: As government officials rushed to assist Hindus, Muslims were denied access to relief and rehabilitation.[586]

Ever since its inception, Gujarat's polity has witnessed many turbulent phases. In the three and a half decades between 1960 and 1995, when the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) established its power in the state, Gujarat witnessed four spells of Presidential rule[587] and the turn of seventeen ministries. Due to unstable political alliances and fragile state coalitions, not a single Chief Minister, except Madhavsingh Solanki who headed the Congress cabinet from 1980 to 1985, competed a full term of five years.[588] The instability in government paralleled upheavals brought about by rapid urbanization. Political entities exploited the fierce competition between castes and communities seeking to assume meaningful identities in Gujarat's evolving

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[585] Achyut Yagnik, Suchitra Sheth, "Social Landscape After Independence," in *The Shaping of Modern Gujarat: Plurality, Hindutva and Beyond* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India Pvt. Lmt., 2005), 227.
[586] Ibid.
[587] "Presidential rule" refers to a constitutional provision which empowers the Indian President to assume control over any Indian state's governance by declaring a State of Emergency. The provision is usually enforced in the event of inter-communal clashes, electoral violence, devastating natural calamities, or the complete break-down of law and order in a state. See footnote 13 for citation.
[588] Yagnik, Sheth, *The Shaping of Modern Gujarat*, 228.

society. Hindutva forces in the state embarked on each of these waves of discontent, turning them to their political advantage.[589]

Laboratory of the Hindu Nation

Though the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) found footing in Gujarat as early as 1941, votaries of Hindutva failed to establish political control in the state until the 1960s, when the erstwhile unity within the Congress Party's ranks became feeble. As Atal Bihari Vajpayee assumed the political reins of the Jana Sangh[590] in 1972, he pledged to move beyond reformist rhetoric, and promoted in its place an organized coalition of diverse Hindu groups in India.[591] The Gujarati Navnirman movement of 1974 provided Vajpayee and his followers with a golden opportunity to mobilize varied constituents in the state. As noted in chapter two, the movement allowed the Jan Sangh to join hands with Jay Prakash Narayan's Total Revolution, a campaign spearheaded by a newly formed party, the Congress (O), comprising a disgruntled group of former Congressmen who sought to involve the poor in electoral politics.[592] In addition to backing factional tendencies within the Congress,[593] Hindutva ideologues supported right-wing political bodies like the Swatantra Party, whose

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[589] Ibid.

[590] The Bharatiya Jan Sangh (BJS), or the Jan Sangh, was a precursor to the BJP. Chapter two outlines the history of this party.

[591] Yagnik, Sheth, *The Shaping of Modern Gujarat*, 228.

[592] See timeline for more details. See footnote 1 for citation.

[593] The Congress Party was the BJP's chief political rival. BJP leaders encouraged factions in the Congress to undermine the latter's political legitimacy. See footnote 1 for citation.

staunchly elitist appeal dominated Gujarat's political scene for much of the 1960s and 1970s.[594]

The general elections of 1980 witnessed a significant digression from the status quo, and changed the entire spectrum of political and social equations that hitherto characterized the state. Armed with a new strategy to counter its debacle in the previous decade, the Congress Party launched the KHAM (*kshatriya*, *harijan*, *adivasi*, Muslim)[595] alliance, which sought to challenge the hegemonic position of the Swatantra Party.[596]

Following this development, members of the educated middle class in Gujarat, specifically the *banias* and *patidars*,[597] retaliated with a series of anti-reservation riots during the early 1980s. The riots aimed at reducing the political and social leverage of Muslims and low caste Hindus alike.[598] Clashes between upper caste (*savarnas*) and lower caste (*avarnas*) communities in the industrial periphery of Ahmedabad gradually mutated into a caste war, which spread to eighteen of the then nineteen districts in Gujarat.[599]

Caste tensions resurfaced in 1985 during a second anti-reservation agitation. At this juncture, BJP leadership, drawn mainly from the upper castes, realized the

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[594] Yagnik, Sheth, *The Shaping of Modern Gujarat*, 228.
[595] "*Kshatriya*" refers to the warrior caste. It is the second tier in the four-fold caste system that originated in the medieval period. *Harijans* are a class of untouchables. The *adivasis* are tribal communities. They may be Hindu, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, or Jain. See footnote 4 for citation.
[596] Yagnik, Sheth, *The Shaping of Modern* Gujarat, 260.
[597] *Banias* and *patidars* belong to Gujarat's merchant community. See footnote 16 for citation.
[598] Yagnik, Sheth, *The Shaping of Modern* Gujarat, 260.
[599] The state is now divided into twenty-four districts. See footnote 14 for citation.

importance of expanding the party's social base to achieve electoral success.[600] While the BJP implicitly supported those allied with the Swatantra Party, it simultaneously employed a succession of *yatras* (processions) aimed at incorporating *dalits* into the party's gambit. The Social Assimilation Platform movement of the 1970s provided BJP members with a precedent for low caste mobilization.[601] The anti-Christian campaign was also brought in under this context. Hindutva's negative definition of Indianness—neither Christians nor Muslims were true Indians—paved the way for anti-minority violence in Gujarat.[602]

When communal riots broke out in the city of Ahmedabad in 1986, during an annual procession to the famed Jaganath Temple, the series of stabbings that ensued were projected as evidence of *dalits*' allegiance to the Hindutva cause. Revisiting the concept of *ramrajya* (rule by Lord Rama), the BJP initiated the Rama-Janaki Dharma procession in 1987, the Rama *shila* prayer ceremonies in 1989, and the Rama Jyoti pilgrimages during the early 1990s.[603] Advani's *rath yatra* (chariot procession) of 1990 lent fuel to the fire. It adroitly played on the Mandal reservation issue (1989-1990),[604] which favored political and educational quotas for the lower castes. BJP leaders repeatedly stressed that religious and caste issues should not be channeled to

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[600] Ram Puniyani, "The Gujarat Experiment: Programmed for Pogrom," in *Communal Politics: Facts versus Myths* (New Delhi: Sage Publications India Pvt. Lmt., 2003), 281.
[601] Ibid.
[602] Ibid.
[603] Ibid, 282.
[604] The Mandal Commission proposed a twenty-seven percent quota (in political and educational institutions) for backwards castes. See footnote 14 for citation.

the secular front. In reality, the party used low caste disillusionment[605] with the

Mandal Report to perpetuate anti-Muslim hysteria.[606]

Each of these events resulted in a trail of communal clashes. The first in the

series, the Rama-Janaki Dharma procession affected large areas of north western

Gujarat.[607] The second set of clashes due to the Ram *shila* ceremonies impacted 180

Gujarati villages. The Ram Jyoti pilgrimages and Advani's *yatra* unleashed violence

in thirty-three districts across the northern, eastern, and western regions of the state.[608]

The riots following the demolition of the Babri mosque in 1992 exacerbated Hindu-

Muslim tensions. Violence in the city of Surat, for example, caused the death of nearly

200 persons over a seventy-two hour period.[609]

The BJP adeptly used the chaos emanating from these acts of violence to shift

attention to matters of development. The strategy appeased the disgruntled Hindu

elites in Gujarati society. Following an International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan in

1987, the BJP began constructing a dam on the Narmada River; supposedly to

augment India's power generation capacity. The resultant displacement of tribal

communities and low caste Hindus exposed, yet again, the elitist and urban-centric

agenda of the BJP.[610] Inter-caste violence in Gujarat during the 1980s enabled votaries

of Hindutva to launch a nationwide economic reform movement rooted in the

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[605] The recommendations of the Mandal Report were not enforced because of the upper caste backlash. The BJP presented elite backlash as evidence of Muslim-sponsored communalism in India. See footnote 14 for citation.

[606] Puniyani, *Communal Politics: Facts versus Myths*, 281.

[607] Ibid.

[608] Yagnik, Sheth, *The Shaping of Modern* Gujarat, 259.

[609] Ibid, 264.

[610] Ibid.

repudiation of affirmative action.[611] This in turn facilitated the BJP to project elite-sponsored violence against lower castes as evidence of Muslim communalism. The link between low caste mobilization and anti-Muslim hysteria remains an integral aspect of BJP operations.

The cyclicality of violence in Gujarat created social cleavages, enabling the BJP to connect with the grassroots. By 1995, the party had achieved a clean sweep in Gujarat's local power institutions.[612] It won 395 seats in the state's six municipal co-operations; the Congress captured only thirty-seven. The BJP's feats at the village level were equally promising. The party secured close to eighty seats at the *panchayat* (village) level in 1995.[613]

Why Gujarat?

Aside from the fact that the BJP was extremely successful in establishing a firm political presence in Gujarat, the socio-economic climate in the state provided, for a multitude of reasons, the grounds necessary for the party to launch its nationwide endeavors.

As subjects of the Mughals, Gujaratis had witnessed the destruction of Hindu shrines and temples by foreign forces. This subversion of Hindu religiosity left irreversible antagonisms in the social fabric of the state.[614] That the north western

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[611] Ibid.

[612] Chetan Bhatt, "The Rashtriya Swayamsevaksangh's Ordered Society," in *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2001), 175.

[613] Ibid.

[614] Martha C. Nussbaum, "Genocide in Gujarat," in *The Clash Within: Democracy, Religious Violence, and India's Future* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2007), 24.

frontier of Gujarat borders Pakistan remains a significant factor in people's minds. Appeals to the Partition[615] and accounts of medieval Muslim oppression have fueled suspicions of Indian Muslims' loyalty to Pakistan.[616] This has strengthened the political currency of the BJP's rhetoric.

The economic apathy that gripped Gujarat after the 1980s was a crucial reason that Hindutva found following in the state. The closure and downsizing of the state's traditional textile industry, and the gaining popularity of Western modes of life, have severely challenged the pre-existing religious syncretism in Gujarati society.[617] Increased migration in search of economic opportunity has led to the emergence of a strong Non-Resident Indian (NRI) community. This has in turn created a rootless middle class dependent entirely on monetary infusions and retrograde ideological imports from abroad.[618] A parallel development is the enhanced willingness of low caste Hindus (*dalits*) and tribal communities (*adivasis*) to engage in communal acts. For these individuals, the journey to Hindutva is propelled by both the desire to escape poverty[619] and the quest for an overarching identity beyond the confines of caste and

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[615] As noted earlier, India and Pakistan became separate nations in 1947. See footnote 22 for citation.
[616] Nussbaum, *The Clash Within: Democracy, Religious Violence*, 24.
[617] Ibid.
[618] The Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) have active branches in Canada, Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom, Malaysia, and Singapore. Many Hindus in the Middle East support Indian VHP and RSS branches. The NRI community, especially in the Middle East, has enhanced the *Sangh Parivar's* anti-Muslim agenda by supplying the organizations with funding. VHP branches in Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom have also capitalized on Indian apprehensions about Western culture. See footnote 22 for citation.
[619] The demise of the traditional textile industry in Gujarat led to the disintegration of small-scale enterprises. Many in the state lost their means of livelihood and sustenance. See footnote 30 for citation.

community.[620] It is ironic that the BJP's promise of inclusion has prompted a majority of Hindus to overlook its elitist tendencies.[621]

Historical trends associated with Gujarat's industrial and economic sectors shed light on the rise of conservative forces in the state. The division of labor in Gujarat is based entirely on the Gandhian concept of trusteeship, under which submission of laborers is integral.[622] Given this antecedent, the tribal and low caste communities of Gujarat have remained menial workers under the state's landowning and entrepreneurial upper class. This trend explains the lack of an organized movement among low caste Gujaratis. It also underscores how socio-economic dynamics in the state curtailed neighboring Maharashtra's anti-*brahamin* movement from establishing its presence in Gujarat.[623]

Besides adversely impacting socially backward communities, economic apathy contributed to an increase in unemployment in the state. By 1995, close to 4.9 percent of Gujarat's youth lacked a permanent source of income.[624] Pointing to the repercussions of this development, Asghar Ali Engineer states, "BJP propaganda communalized, [i.e. indoctrinated with an anti-minority orientation] not only lower castes but also young Hindu elites in cities like Surat."[625] These individuals became ardent supporters of Hindutva, and actively endorsed the ideology through *Vinayaka*

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[620] Nivedita Menon, Aditya Nigam, "Politics of Hindutva and the Minorities," in *Power and Contestation: India since 1989* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing Lmt., 2007), 52.
[621] Nussbaum, *The Clash Within*, 24.
[622] Puniyani, *Communal Politics: Facts versus Myths*, 292.
[623] Ibid.
[624] Ibid.
[625] Ibid, 282.

idols, which aimed at culturally co-opting local subalterns into an elitist *brahaminical* culture.[626]

The contrarieties in Gujarat's educational system explain the sense of disillusionment among the state's youth.[627] Bound within the confines of a rote-based system, students are indoctrinated with right-wing European writings and Hindu ethno-cultural ideas. Textbooks in the state frequently equate fascism with nationalism.[628] It is hardly surprising that individuals bred in this system regard Hitler's feats as messianic, and look to his political model during times of struggle.

Godhra Train Attack

The macabre events in Gujarat began with the Godhra train attack in February 2002. The four-month long carnage that followed, from March to June 2002, led the country into the depths of violence. March 2002 witnessed the displacement of a 100,000 women and children. Close to 250 Hindus and over 2,000 Muslims perished in the clashes.[629]

The events in Gujarat reflect the barbarism of the Hindutva agenda. Alternatively, they demonstrate the disenchantment of broad sections of Indian society towards such a colossal tragedy.[630] Particularly reprehensible is the fact that the carnage occurred in a state ruled by the BJP for several years.[631] The infiltration of

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[626] Ibid.

[627] Ibid.

[628] Nussbaum, *The Clash Within*, 18.

[629] Jawaid Quddus, "Hindutva and the Indian Diaspora," *in Religion, Power and Violence: Expression of Politics in Contemporary Times*, ed. Ram Puniyani (New Delhi: Sage Publications Pvt. Lmt., 2005), 151.

[630] Nussbaum, *The Clash Within*, 18.

[631] The BJP was in power in Gujarat in 1993, 1995, and then again between 1999 and 2004. See footnote 36 for citation.

communally oriented individuals in the state apparatus allowed the Gujarat government to instigate and aid communal violence. The RSS and Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) emerged as the BJP's primary aides.[632]

On the morning of February 27, 2002, the Sabarmati Express train, carrying over four hundred Hindu pilgrims (*kar sevaks*), made its usual stop at the Godhra station in the western Indian state of Gujarat. During its four-minute stop, the train's S-6 car was set ablaze, allegedly by Muslims waiting on the platform. The incident caused the death of fifty-seven people.[633] Since the destruction of the Babri mosque in 1992, the dispute over the alleged birthplace of the Indian deity Rama has been the focus of Hindu-Muslim confrontations. Those on-board the Sabarmati Express were returning from their yearly pilgrimage to Ayodhya, a journey aimed at garnering support for the construction a temple where the Babri mosque hitherto stood.[634]

Forensic reports reveal that trouble erupted in Godhra when a Bajrang Dal activist[635] humiliated a Muslim tea stall vendor. Eyewitness accounts have suggested that violence commenced when some pilgrims on the train abducted a Muslim girl. Regardless of what was the catalyst, it seems clear that a large crowd descended on the platform. Shortly thereafter, a group of Muslim men began pelting bricks on the Hindu pilgrims.[636] The Hindus retaliated by using the sharp flint-like stones they found along the railway bed.

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[632] Nussbaum, *The Clash Within*, 18.
[633] Ibid.
[634] Ibid.
[635] The Bajrang Dal was founded in 1984. It is the youth wing of the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP). See footnote 22 for citation.
[636] Nussbaum, *The Clash Within*, 19.

Accounts of the events prior to the explosion offer fairly cursory information. Since the explosion was preceded by a confrontation with a Muslim mob, local police officials immediately blamed the Ghanchi Muslims living near the station.[637] The government later claimed that members of the community had thrown flaming kerosene-soaked materials into the train. Refuting this assertion, forensic expert Mukul Sinha stated, "If I may crudely use a term from tennis, the advantage lay with the *kar sevaks* [volunteers], because they were on the railway lines and had….ready made weapons in the stones on the tracks."[638]

Gujarat on Fire

Communal riots erupted in full force on February 28, 2002, a day after the Godhra train attack. Sporadic incidents of violence rapidly spiraled into a state-sponsored program against Muslims across Gujarat. Of the twenty-four districts in Gujarat, eighteen witnessed an outbreak of communal insurrection.[639] In Gandhingar, the capital of Gujarat, several Muslim administrative and religious buildings, including the Muslim *Waqf* Board and the Minority Development Board offices, were burned.[640] A series of trucks manned by Muslim drivers were also set ablaze on National Highway 8, just outside the main entrance of the Gujarat High Court. A

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[637] Ibid.
[638] Ibid.
[639] Ornit Shani, "The Making of Ethno-Hinduism," in *Communalism, Caste and Hindu Nationalism: The Violence in Gujarat* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 170.
[640] Ibid.

Muslim sitting judge of the High Court was forced to leave his official residence and take refuge in a Muslim majority district in Gandhinagar.[641]

The most barbaric scenes were played out in industrial Ahmedabad, where forty-three persons, including former Congress Member of Parliament (MP) Ahsan Jafri were burnt alive. That evening, a mob of 15,000 Hindus attacked the slum area of Naroda, killing eighty-four people.[642] The army was called in to contain the violence on March 1, 2002. By this time, violence had erupted in cities like Vadodra, Kheda, Panchmal, and Sabarkantha. The same day, fourteen people, nine of them Muslim, were burnt alive outside the Best Bakery in Vadodra. A week later, violence had spread both westwards and eastwards; to Surat and other locales around the Narmada River.[643]

Mobs during the period generally consisted of between 2,000 and 3,000 persons, although they sometimes swelled to 10,000. Rioters were armed with tridents, agricultural implements, and swords. The manner of arson suggested a well-laid out strategy of attack.[644] The rioters identified minority homes and businesses. Women and children were deliberately targeted, and sites of religious significance (shrines and mosques) were systematically destroyed.[645] Hanuman and Rama temples came up

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[641] Ibid.
[642] Nussbaum, *The Clash Within*, 19.
[643] Shani, *Communalism, Caste and Hindu Nationalism*, 170.
[644] Nussbaum, *The Clash Within*, 19.
[645] Ibid. / The shrine of *sufi* poet Wali Gujarati was attacked numerous times. Several other monuments built during the Mughal period (1526-1858 AD) were dismembered.

overnight where Muslim monuments earlier stood. Losses from the rampage were estimated at 3,800 crore Rupees (800 million USD).[646]

Truth Behind the Carnage

Even before people gained an understanding of the events at hand, the charred bodies of the Godhra victims were brought to Ahmedebad, where slogan shouting bands of VHP and BJP activists raised the communal temperature.[647] The district collector, Jayanthi Ravi, insisted that the tragedy was unplanned and must not be viewed from a religious lens.[648] Reports from the railway police, and subsequent confirmations from the National Forensic Science Laboratory and the 2005 Independent Commission under Supreme Court Justice U.C. Banerjee, debunked the theory that the fire was started by local Muslims.[649] A later forensic report also confirmed that the train had caught fire from inside, possible owing to a leaking kerosene stove that belonged to one of the pilgrims. The report went on to speculate that the event was a deliberate move by enraged *kar sevaks* (volunteers), whose ire at the Supreme Court's denunciation[650] of the Hindutva agenda in Ayodhya drove them to frame Muslims in a pre-fabricated incident.[651]

The complicity of the state government in the carnage that followed was appalling. Despite contrary evidence, Chief Minister Narendra Modi projected the

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[646] Shani, *Communalism, Caste and Hindu Nationalism*, 169. / Puniyani, *Communal Politics: Facts versus Myths*, 266.
[647] Ibid, 268.
[648] Ibid.
[649] Ibid, 267-268.
[650] A 2002 Supreme Court ruling had placed a ban on the construction of a Rama temple in Ayodhya. See footnote 60 for citation.
[651] Menon, Nigam, *Power and Contestation*, 51.

incident as a pre-planned act of Muslim-sponsored terrorism.[652] Following Modi's

instructions, the local police arrested sixty-two persons, including seven Muslim boys,

under the Prevention of Terrorist Activities Act (POTA).[653] The BJP had introduced

the Act in Parliament merely three months before the Godhra incident. Though the Act

was repealed in 2004 owing to its inherently partisan nature, few questioned the Modi

government's decision to enforce POTA at the time.[654]

Modi categorically instructed the police and other key officials in the

administration to remain indifferent to riot victims' appeals for assistance. His

inflammatory statements, such as his decision to label Muslim relief camps as "baby

producing centers," exacerbated the mob mentality already prevalent in the state.[655]

With the Chief Minister's support, members of the RSS and Bajrang Dal achieved the

legal immunity necessary to lead anti-Muslims riots.[656] The infiltration of RSS cadres

in Gujarat's the bureaucracy ensured that a nexus between the state and the civil

service was secured and maintained. Then Cabinet Secretary TSR Subramanian said

of this development, "There is no civil service left in Gujarat….over the years, it has

changed from steel frame to non-existent."[657]

The closure (*bandh*) that followed on February 29, 2002, is equally illustrative

of the extent to which Gujarat's polity drew from Hindutva's anti-minority orientation.

The *bandh* was fully backed by the BJP, despite a 1998 Indian Supreme Court ruling

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[652]Ibid.

[653] Puniyani, *Communal Politics: Facts versus Myths*, 267.

[654] Ibid.

[655] Robert L. Hardgrave Jr., "Hindu Nationalism and the BJP," in *Prospects for Peace in South Asia*, ed. Rafiq Dossani and Henry S. Rowen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 210.

[656] Shani, *Communalism, Caste and Hindu Nationalism*, 172.

[657] Puniyani, *Communal Politics: Facts versus Myths*, 269.

regarding the unconstitutionality of religiously motivated closures.[658] The appointment of Justice Shah—known for his anti-minority judgments which were later reversed by the Supreme Court—to investigate the Godhra case was another piecemeal development, intended to silence moderate elements in Indian society.[659]

Aftermath: Relief and Rehabilitation

Through the course of the communal riots, Modi repeatedly asserted that action was taken to avert every mob. He maintained that violence after the Godhra train attack was brought under control within seventy-two hours.[660] In reality, Gujarati Ministers like Nitin Patel and Narav Laloo Patel led riots against Muslims in locales like Kadih, Unja, and Mehsana in western Gujarat.[661]

Relief camps instituted by the state lacked adequate financial support. While local and international NGOs made significant progress in securing immediate relief, those in power neglected rehabilitation and crisis management completely.[662] Even pre-existing mechanisms of relief were denied to the riot victims. Fire brigades did not come to the rescue, hospitals turned away Muslims patients, and ambulance services to Muslims were systematically disrupted by the police.[663] Modi rejected demands for any form of resettlement and refused funds for the restoration of ransacked Muslims shrines. The breakdown of civic amenities heightened the sense of urgency among

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[658] Shani, *Communalism, Caste and Hindu Nationalism*, 171.
[659] Ibid, 169.
[660] Ibid.
[661] Puniyani, *Communal Politics: Facts versus Myths*, 269.
[662] Ibid.
[663] Ibid.

those affected.[664] Faced with no other alternative, these individuals turned to relief camps in the hopes of receiving aid. By March 2002, nearly 100,000 persons were enlisted in one of the many camps in the state. The figure grossed 150,000 just two weeks later.[665]

The Gujarat government's callous attitude towards those appealing for relief is manifested in the fact that Modi finally visited a relief camp at Shah Alam—during Prime Minister Vajpayee's survey trip to Gujarat—two months after the Godhra train incident had occurred.[666] Those in civil society either genuinely supported Modi's actions, or sided with the government owing to the fear of punishment.[667] *Communalism Combat*, a journal tracking Gujarati relief measures, said the following with regards to the situation six months after the riots:

> In Ahmedabad and Baroda, a salient yet effective boycott of Muslims, socially and economically, continues. A few icons of the Gujarati business community have tried to counter the hate politics encouraged by the Gujarati government…But schools and businesses…have now more so than ever…bid good-bye to Muslims. The general sentiment among mixed localities is that they do not want Muslims back. And the many Hindus who helped their neighbors…are under the threat that they will not be spared next time around.[668]

Aftermath: Reports of Human Rights Groups

A tragedy of serious proportions had struck the country. The targeting of minorities and the complicity of the Gujarati state government was both obvious and

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[664] Paul R. Brass, "Postscript: Aligarh and Gujarat," in *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003), 389.
[665] Ibid.
[666] Puniyani, *Communal Politics: Facts versus Myths*, 270.
[667] Romila Thapar, "Secularism, History, and Contemporary Politics in India," in *The Crisis of Secularism in India*, ed. Anuradha Dingwaney Needham and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2007), 215.
[668] Puniyani, *Communal Politics: Facts versus Myths*, 271.

painful.[669] Was all of this a signal of the permanent erosion of civic and democratic norms in India?[670]

Though the Modi government tried desperately to put a lid on events, members of organizations such as the National Human Rights Commission, the Forum Against Oppression of Women, and Human Rights Watch, focused precisely on the political conditions under which the carnage had ensued.[671] Their reports brought forth the gruesome nature of violence against women and children, the plight of refugees, and the apathy displayed by goverment and administrative ranks.

Yet, those in power in the union government, including then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, made every effort to deflect blame.[672] Whereas Modi deliberately cast the Godhra incident as an outcome of the radical Islamic movement, his Home Minister, Gordhon Zadafia, saw the hand of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) throughout the whole episode.[673] Politically, these orientations laid the foundation for a Hindu nationalist movement. For the popular mind, they heightened the allegedly paramount link between international terrorism, Pakistani intentions, and the Indian Islamic community. In its account of this trend, Human Rights Watch reported:

> The state of Gujarat and the central government of India initially blamed Pakistan for the train massacre, which it called a 'pre-meditated terrorist attack' against Hindus in Godhra. [Later], the revival of the Rama temple campaign, and the increased fears of terrorism since September 11 were exploited by local Hindu nationalist groups and the local press which printed

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[669] Ibid.
[670] Ibid.
[671] Ibid.
[672] Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India*, 388.
[673] Puniyani, *Communal Politics:Ffacts versus Myths*, 269.

reports of a 'deadly conspiracy' against Hindus in the state…Muslim survivors of the attacks repeatedly told Human Rights Watch that they were told to 'go back to Pakistan.'[674]

By casting Indian Muslims as agents of Pakistan, the BJP incorporated a pivotal tenet in early ideologue V.D. Sarvarkar's writing: a repudiation of the Muslim voice in India. This, along with the attempts to present the "pro-Muslim" Congress Party as "anti-national," allowed the BJP to deflect attention from the immoral proceedings in Gujarat.[675] At a speech in Goa on March 3, 2002, when Gujarat was seething under riots, Vajpayee claimed:

> If a conspiracy had not been hatched to burn alive innocent passengers of the Sabarmati Express, then the subsequent tragedy in Gujarat could have been averted…wherever Muslims live, they don't like to live in coexistence with others…they want to spread their faith by resorting to terror and threats. The world has become alert to this danger.[676]

If Vajpayee had intended to convey that India would not tolerate the spread of terrorism, then his decision to link the events in Gujarat with general observations about Indian Muslims was a serious miscalculation.[677] Referring to the nation's entire Muslim population under the rubric of terrorism would hardly rid the subcontinent of violence. Surely then, his rhetoric sought to counter the charges that were being leveled upon the Hindu community.[678] The conspiracy theory and the jargon on international extremism proved instrumental in achieving this goal.

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[674] Hardgrave Jr., *Prospects for Peace in South Asia*, 210.
[675] Gyan Prakash, "Secular Nationalism, Hindutva, and the Minority," in *The Crisis of Secularism in India*, ed. Anuradha Dingwaney Needham and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2007), 177.
[676] Nussbaum, *The Clash Within*, 30.
[677] Ibid.
[678] Ibid.

Fortunately, the international response to events in Gujarat has been more conclusive. It seems beyond dispute that the Gujarat carnage meets the definition of genocide offered in the United Nations Convention on Genocide.[679] Article two of the Convention states that:

> Genocide implies any of the following acts, committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group, such as: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.[680]

Incidents of rape and murder figured widely in the Gujarat riots. In light of the above, international journals such as *Dissent* and *Boston Review* tirelessly pursued contacts within the European and American State Departments.[681] Following the media frenzy, a March 2004 report by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom found Chief Minister Narendra Modi guilty of complicity in the Gujarat riots.[682] In September 2004, the State Department's International Religious Freedom Report reviewed the Gujarat case, giving a detailed account of the derailment of law and order in the state. The trajectory of violence associated with the BJP's Hindutva agenda came to the fore through this report.[683] Perhaps the most conclusive of these measures was the U.S. State Department's decision to deny Modi a visa, when he was invited to address the Asian-American Hotel Owners Association in Florida in 2005.[684]

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[679] Ibid.
[680] Ibid.
[681] Ibid.
[682] Prakash, *The Crisis of Secularism in India*, 177.
[683] Ibid.
[684] Ibid, 41.

While these efforts reined in militancy temporarily, and may have contributed to the BJP's defeat in the 2004 general elections, the party's presence in its traditional constituencies in northern India has not diminished. Of particular concern is the manner in which present-day Hindutva both reinforces and is reinforced by the anti-Muslim bias that has crept into India's judicial and executive branches.[685] The aforementioned discussion of the partisanship in the Gujarati civil service applies to the national context as well. Legal decisions involving infamous cases, such as the burning of fourteen persons outside the Best Bakery in Vadodra on March 1, 2002, demonstrate the loopholes in Indian secularism. In addition, they call attention to the absence of a formal "separation of powers" in the Indian federation.[686] In 2006, the Indian Supreme Court awarded a death sentence to Zahira Sheikh for her alleged involvement in the Best Bakery case. That the Court ruled against Sheikh, even though the National Human Rights Commission supplied the judges concerned with evidence of her innocence, indicates the prevailing biases in India's judicial system.[687]

Violence with a Difference

The 2002 riots were not the first time Gujarat had witnessed communal violence. Hindu-Muslim skirmishes have characterized the state's socio-political scene both prior to Partition[688] and in the decades following 1947.[689]

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[685] Ibid.
[686] Ibid.
[687] Ibid.
[688] Prior to India's Partition in 1947, the British policy of "Divide and Rule" pitted the two communities against each other. See footnote 79 for citation.
[689] Puniyani, *Communal Politics: Facts versus Myths*, 151.

It is worth noting, however, that the nature and scope of violence in post-independent India has witnessed a dramatic shift. In the pre-independence period, communal riots were a form of reciprocal violence between Hindus and Muslims who were pitted against each other by colonial forces.[690] Two features of rioting during the last two decades are perceptibly different. First, the number of victims from the Muslim community has consistently risen with each successive act of violence.[691] Second, Muslims have suffered a significantly higher rate of property loss during inter-communal clashes.[692] Small-scale riots in India have escalated due to the communalization of social space by dedicated organizational outfits. Rhetorical slogans, such as "Muslims are aliens," and "The only two abodes for Muslims are Pakistan and the graveyard," are an essential feature of the mob mentality, and have been used extensively in past riots. The 1967, 1975, and 1984 riots in Allahabad (Uttar Pradesh) and Ahmedabad (Gujarat) exemplify the above.[693]

The events in 2002 reflected many conventional patterns associated with religiously motivated violence. Yet there is consensus that the occurrences in Gujarat were fundamentally more alarming, as they signaled the rise of leaders steeped in Hindutva ideology.[694] For many, the most chilling aspect of the violence (and the one feature which demonstrated that Hindu-inspired communalism is capable of assuming genocidal proportions in India) was the complicity of those charged with law

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[690] Ibid.
[691] Ibid.
[692] Ibid.
[693] Ibid, 152.
[694] Ibid.

enforcement. Indeed, it was the steady infiltration of the BJP into the political fabric of Gujarat that enabled key leaders to enlist mass support for the violence that ensued.[695]

Unlike before, when rioters sought to intimidate Muslims by targeting vulnerable sections of the Muslim community, the violence in 2002 witnessed unprecedented attacks on middle and upper class Muslim localities.[696] Seemingly urbane Hindus participated in the looting. Muslims were openly attacked, even in areas where they constituted the majority.[697] Victims of violence in Vadodra remarked: "Earlier, if there were riots, there was stabbing or stone-throwing in the streets. If Muslims stayed at home, they were safe. This time…they came to destroy houses, loot and burn. Our neighbors were involved. We have lost our trust."[698] A section of the media—newspapers like *Sandesh* and *Gujarat Samachar*—added fuel to the fire by sensationalizing the tragedies reported. Their efforts were supplemented by the advertisements posted by *Sangh Parivar* organizations; many of which extolled acts of violence in the name of self-defense.[699]

Despite an outwardly defensive stance, internal estimates under the Modi government acknowledged the characteristic predominance of Muslim casualties in the Gujarat riots. Estimates indicate that initial violence resulted in the death of five Muslims for every Hindu. The ratio was as high as fifteen-to-one in the riots that

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[695] Nussbaum, *The Clash Within*, 26.
[696] Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India*, 388.
[697] Puniyani, *Communal Politics: Facts versus Myths*, 269.
[698] Rowena Robinson, D. Parthasarthy, "After Gujarat: Making Sense of the Reports on the Post-Godhra Violence and its Aftermath," *in Religion, Power and Violence: Expression of Politics in Contemporary Times*, ed. Ram Puniyani (New Delhi: Sage Publications Pvt. Lmt., 2005), 308.
[699] Ibid.

followed Godhra.[700] Women were raped. Infants were burnt alive.[701] The large-scale

incineration of civilians, indicative of a sophisticated plan for extermination, had never

been seen before; nor had the widespread use of sexual torture. For Hindu nationalists,

the assault on Muslim women's sexuality was a means of redeeming the dignity that

Hindus had lost under Mughal dominion.[702] These features of the Gujarat carnage

point to the institutionalized aspects of rioting articulated in the first chapter of this

thesis. They affirm that rhetorical and symbolic appeals to a negative view of history

can instigate cyclical acts of violence.[703]

A Haven for Hindutva?

As rioting gained momentum in Gujarat, Modi's government conducted a

survey to assess the electoral prospects of the BJP. The survey indicated that the

party's prospects were excellent. A news magazine, *The Week*, confirmed similar

findings a fortnight later.[704] At a time when the cry for rehabilitation was searing the

Gujarati conscience, talk of elections seemed unfounded. Yet Modi was firm in his

resolve. Aware that his government was under no threat, since he enjoyed a majority,

Modi dissolved Gujarat's state legislative assembly. His motive was clear: the Chief

Minister sought to use electoral victory as a means of improving the BJP's national

prospects.[705]

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[700] Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India*, 388.
[701] Ibid, 387.
[702] Puniyani, *Communal Politics: Facts versus Myths*, 274.
[703] Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India*, 388.
[704] Puniyani, *Communal Politics: Facts versus Myths*, 269.
[705] Ibid.

In a remarkable show of unity, the VHP, Bajrang Dal, and RSS came together to assist the BJP in its run for control over the state. By distributing leaflets, CD's, and free meals during electoral rallies, *Sangh Parivar* organizations expressly endorsed the Gujarat government's agenda.[706] As the Modi government secured a laudable sixty-five seats[707] in the state in 2002, the precedent for using communal violence to achieve electoral gains was strengthened. Seventy-one percent of the total votes obtained by the party came from thirteen (of twenty-four) riot affected districts in Gujarat.[708]

Given the BJP-led union government's support for Narendra Modi, the Election Commission of India decided to review the situation. The three-member committee appointed by the Commission confirmed that the political environment in Gujarat was unfeasible for fair elections to be held. In line with expectations, the Modi government challenged the committee's decision and referred the matter to the Supreme Court.[709] Though the Court has since refused to express a view on the conduct of elections in a state gripped by strife,[710] the events of 2002 reflect the BJP's successful manipulation of the Indian judiciary.

In the aftermath of the Ayodhya incident, the BJP's Rama campaign was loosing its steam. With the Babri mosque in ruins, and without an alternative rhetorical rallying point, BJP members struggled to garner local support. In light of the above, situating the violence in Gujarat in the "retaliation for Godhra theme" paid rich

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[706] Thapar, *The Crisis of Secularism in India*, 221.
[707] The Gujarat state legislative assembly contains 182 seats. See footnote 116 for citation.
[708] Puniyani, *Communal Politics: Facts versus Myths*, 296.
[709] Ibid.
[710] Ibid. / Thapar, *The Crisis of Secularism in India*, 221.

dividends to the *Sangh Parivar*.[711] It follows that the events in Gujarat cannot be viewed in isolation from the electoral fortunes of the BJP. As is typical of situations involving socio-political struggles, people in riot-stricken Gujarat sought stability. In fact, many in India believed that the BJP's ideal of inclusion would provide them with safety and security.[712] Unfortunately, the average Hindu gradually became invested in anti-minoritism due to Hindu nationalists' persistent rhetorical maneuvers.[713] By juxtaposing the issue of violence with Hindu nationalism, the BJP achieved not just electoral polarization, but also the communalization of civil society.[714]

The communal riots in Gujarat left a lasting imprint on the Indian conscience. First, they called attention to the inadequate protection of life and personal liberty in the country.[715] Second, they unraveled problems of relief and rehabilitation in the face of political and natural crises. Third, they exposed the need to hold perpetrators of political crimes accountable.[716] The Modi government failed to respond to any of these concerns. In relation to the above, historian Ram Puniyani remarked:

> An analysis of the Gujarat violence combined with the struggle against communalism not only leads to a better understanding of the phenomenon, but also brings out the real character of our 'democratic' institutions. Amidst our discussions regarding good governance, the crisis [of secularism], the decline into prejudice and partiality of our executive and judicial bodies, and the general decay of 'civil society' organizations of various forms have not been given due attention.[717]

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[711] Puniyani, *Communal Politics: Facts versus Myths*, 276.
[712] Ibid.
[713] Ibid.
[714] Ibid.
[715] Ibid.
[716] Robinson, Parthasarthy, *Religion, Power and Violence*, 310.
[717] Ibid.

Perhaps the most tragic result of the 2002 conflict is a phenomenon Allen Feldman calls the "militarization of everyday life."[718] One sees clear evidence of this not only in the form of everyday skirmishes amongst Hindus and Muslims in Gujarat, but also through the high incidence of suicides witnessed in the state between 2002 and 2003.[719] This indicates that violence has moved beyond the semantics of discourse. It has pervaded political institutions and previously syncretic social structures. A popular view is that communalization is the BJP's recourse to electoral supremacy. However, traces of communal undertones are visible in the politics of several entities in the Indian context. What distinguishes votaries of Hindutva is that communalism for them is both a means to political power and an essential component of an overarching end: an ethno-nationalistic form of governance.

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[718] Ibid, 316.
[719] Ibid.

CHAPTER 6

LEGALIZING COMMUNALISM: PREVENTION OF
TERRORIST ACTIVITIES ACT (POTA) 2002

POTA: Political Context and Legislative Scope

Sensing the need for a national framework to combat terrorism in the post-September 11 world order, India's union cabinet issued the Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance (POTO) in October 2001. The government claimed that POTO was a response to "the upsurge of terrorist activities, and the intensification of cross-border terrorism and insurgency across the country."[720] A precursor to POTA, the ordinance targeted those who "incited, supported, abetted, harbored, concealed, or benefited from the proceeds of terrorism."[721] In reality, POTO granted law enforcement officials "sweeping powers to investigate, detain, and prosecute for a wide range of terrorism-related offenses."[722]

For many, POTO bore a resemblance to India's "notorious" Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA), which lapsed in 1995 after years of abuse.[723] Despite initial criticism, POTO became an imperative segment of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led coalition's posture on extremism.[724] Events thereafter

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[720] Nivedita Menon, Aditya Nigam, "When was the nation?" in *Power and Contestation: India since 1989* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing Lmt., 2007), 164.

[721] Chris Gagne, "POTA: Lessons Learnt from India's Anti-Terror Act," *Boston College Third World Law Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Boston: Boston College Law School, 2005), 262.

[722] Ibid.

[723] Gautam Navlakha, "POTA: Freedom to Terrorize," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 38, No. 29 (July 19-25, 2003), 3039.

[724] Ibid.

only bolstered the party's rhetoric on the need for national anti-terrorism legislation.[725]

On December 13, 2001, the Indian Parliament was attacked; allegedly by members belonging to two prominent Islamic terrorist groups.[726] Accusing Pakistan of complicity, the BJP-led national government claimed that the attack was an assault on "the very heart of [India's] system of governance, on the symbol [the Parliament] and the keystone of the largest democracy in the world."[727] The adroit attempt to link global terrorism with Pakistan's (and implicitly Muslims') ill-founded motives in India[728] placed the country on a war footing (India deployed thousands of troops along the Indo-Pakistan border), and proved pivotal in pushing POTA through the Parliament. Less than three months after the attack, on March 28, 2002, during a joint session convened at the Prime Minister's request, POTO, a temporary ordinance, was phased out in favor of a permanent legislative directive: the Prevention of Terrorist Activities Act.[729]

While the current Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) coalition repealed POTA in 2004 due to its pro-Hindu bias, the Act legitimized rampant violations of minority rights in the two years that it was in force.[730] More importantly, POTA's legacy in India's executive, judicial, and legislative organs has long-standing implications for future decisions regarding inter-communal clashes and acts of

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[725] Gagne, "POTA," *Boston College Third World Law Journal*, 263.

[726] The five attackers were identified as members of two Indian Islamic extremist organizations: the *Lashkar-e-Taiba* and the *Jaish-e-Mohammed*. See footnote 3 for citation.

[727] Gagne, "POTA," *Boston College Third World Law Journal*, 263.

[728] By suggesting that Pakistan was responsible for the 2001 terrorist attacks, the BJP used the global rhetoric on Islamic radicalism to cast Indian Muslims as Pakistani loyalists. See footnote 3 for citation.

[729] Gagne, "POTA," *Boston College Third World Law Journal*, 263.

[730] Ibid.

terrorism.[731] Although the Congress oversaw POTA's demise, the party's own anti-minority orientation,[732] and its reliance on Hindutva support for articulating a national economic vision, has bolstered the BJP's nationalist aims. This chapter therefore seeks to describe both the import of POTA in the past and the legacy it has left for the future.

POTA Evaluated

Opponents of POTA cite three aspects of the Act—its broad definition of terrorism, the sweeping powers of arrest and detention enshrined in the legislation, as well as the appeal and review process mandated under it—to demonstrate how Hindutva forces used its inbuilt discretionary authority to perpetuate communal ends.[733]

Broad Definition of Terrorism

Many of POTA's flaws stemmed from its broad text. While all laws may be susceptible to abuse, anti-terror legislation enables misdemeanors by placing permissive language in the hands of law enforcement officials.[734] POTA defined terrorism as any act that "threaten[ed] the unity, integrity, security or sovereignty of India… [a] strike in the people or any section of the people…or a disruption of any supplies or services essential to the life of the community."[735] It was taken for granted

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[731] Ibid.

[732] The Congress government initiated a military operation in 1984 which targeted the Sikh Golden Temple in Amritsar. This point is discussed at length later in the chapter. See timeline for more details.

[733] Ibid. / Navlakha, "POTA," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 3039.

[734] Gagne, "POTA," *Boston College Third World Law Journal*, 263.

[735] Ibid.

that neither the government nor Indian security forces could be guilty of any of the aforementioned charges listed in Section II of POTA.[736] Since the Act granted significant leverage to political actors, it was used to justify military operations and activism. Successive governments' mobilization of troops in civilian populated regions of war-torn Kashmir, for example, was entirely exempt from the purview of POTA.[737] Moreover, the law imposed a minimum five-year sentence on "[w]hoever conspire[d] or attempt[ed] to commit, advocate, abet, advise, incite, or knowingly facilitate the commission of a terrorist act, or any act preparatory to a terrorist act."[738] Particularly troublesome were the words "advocate" and "incite," for they indicated the erosion of fundamental rights like free speech and political expression. Section 21 of POTA stipulated that even addressing "a meeting for the purpose of amassing support for a terrorist organization" was an outright offence.[739] Evidently, POTA did more than just create new categories of crime under the rubric of terrorism. By defining terrorist acts in generalized terms that encompassed ordinary cases of murder, robbery, and theft, the Act enabled law enforcement officers to circumvent constitutionally mandated procedural safeguards. Due to this immunity, the police could subject violators to severe penalties such as electrocution and arbitrary detention.[740]

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[736] Ibid.
[737] Ibid.
[738] Gagne, "POTA," *Boston College Third World Law Journal*, 265.
[739] Ibid.
[740] Ibid.

Sweeping Powers of Arrest and Detention

POTA's vague definition of terrorism was especially problematic in light of its arrest and detention procedures. A fundamental criticism leveled against POTA is that the legislation disregarded the tenets of "due process" and "presumption of innocence."[741] Persons arrested under the Act could be held for thirty days before authorities were required to produce them in a special POTA court. POTA also allowed law enforcement agencies to withhold the identities of witnesses.[742]

Human rights organizations have demonstrated that Indian authorities routinely used the thirty-day period to extract confessions from individuals of *targeted communities*. POTA was used by the government, writes Human Rights Watch, "against political opponents, religious minorities, *dalits* [or untouchables], tribal communities, and children."[743] India's Human Rights Commission also condemned POTA. Its members declared that existing laws were "sufficient to deal with any eventuality, including terrorism."[744]

As noted earlier, threats and torture became common means of extracting statements from individuals arrested under POTA. Detainees involved in the 2002 Godhra case and the 2002 Mumbai blast case were raped, burned with cigarette butts, and subjected to electric shocks. In both instances, POTA allowed the prosecution to use a person's confession—to a crime that he had not formally been charged with—as

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[741] Ibid.
[742] Navlakha, "POTA: Freedom to Terrorize," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 3039.
[743] Ibid.
[744] Ibid.

evidence in the court of law.[745]

Section 49(2) of POTA enabled the police to detain a suspect for up to 180 days without a formal charge. This far exceeded the limit stipulated under Indian criminal law.[746] The Indian Constitution requires police to immediately inform a person of the grounds for his or her detention. Indian case law states that a speedy trial is "an integral aspect of 'the fundamental right to life and liberty' as enshrined in the Constitution."[747] POTA dramatically undermined each of these safeguards by endorsing arbitrary and punitive detention.

Stringent bail procedures further suppressed the rights of the accused. Under Section 48 (7) of the Act, special POTA courts could postpone bail petitions for a year. Moreover, if a prosecutor opposed bail, the courts could not release the accused without "grounds for believing that he [was] not guilty."[748] This provision reversed the "presumption of innocence" clause in the Indian Constitution, and granted prosecutors a veto over bail applications.[749] In effect, POTA mandated a "presumption of guilt" even in cases where the accused merely possessed arms or explosives, or if his or her fingerprints were found at the scene of crime.[750]

Appeal and Review

While POTA enabled either party to appeal a special court's bail ruling before

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[745] Ibid.
[746] Ibid.
[747] Gagne, "POTA," *Boston College Third World Law Journal*, 266.
[748] Ibid.
[749] Ibid.
[750] Ibid.

a bench of two judges of a concerned state's High Court,[751] the Act stipulated no qualifications for the appointment of judges. Moreover, orders passed by a special POTA court during the interlocutory stage[752] were non-reviewable.[753]

The central government initially defended POTA, arguing that it was "safe from abuse" because it entrusted only senior law enforcement and judicial functionaries with extensive investigative and adjudicative authority.[754] Because POTA operated at the state level, however, regional governments wielded tremendous power over state law enforcement officials, regardless of their seniority.[755]

In an attempt to check this power, Indian legislators created a Central Review Committee. The measure was flawed from the outset. Though POTA's text provided for a review committee, the absence of interpretive guidelines led to considerable confusion: "The government's early interpretations limited the provision's application to the primarily advisory review of certain surveillance procedures and the designation of terrorist groups."[756] Only after numerous reports of POTA's anti-Muslim bias proliferated across India did the central government select certain cases, notably the 2002 Godhra case and the 2003 Mumbai blast case, for further review.[757] A formal amendment in December 2003 gave the Committee the

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[751] Crimes/acts of terrorism occurring in a particular state were referred to a special POTA court, but could be appealed only before the concerned state's High Court. See footnote 24 for citation.

[752] "Interlocutory" refers to a judgment delivered between the beginning and termination of a "cause of action." An interlocutory order is not final and is not subject to immediate appeal. See footnote 24 for citation.

[753] Navlakha, "POTA: Freedom to Terrorize," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 3039. / Gagne, "POTA," *Boston College Third World Law Journal*, 266.

[754] Ibid.

[755] Ibid.

[756] Ibid.

[757] Navlakha, "POTA: Freedom to Terrorize," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 3039.

power to "review prima facie cases," and declared that its decisions were binding on POTA courts. Despite these changes, the Committee continued to lack both the time and resources required to address the cases brought to its attention.[758]

POTA Applied

Once POTA was enacted, states wasted no time "in capitalizing on its broad definitions and sweeping powers of arrest and detention. Warning signs of POTA's susceptibility to abuse surfaced in the summer of 2002."[759] Only four months after its enactment, law enforcement officers had arrested 250 people nationwide under the Act.[760] Eight months later, seven states had used the legislation to arrest over 940 people, 560 of whom are still held in jail. The instances discussed in the following section shed light on both the communal and political motives behind the use of POTA.[761]

A Means to Communalism and Anti-Minoritism

Communalism and "political gamesmanship" have a long history in India. POTA's opponents warned that officials would use the law to target minorities and political opponents.[762] Their fears were soon realized.[763]

Gujarat

The misuse of POTA along communal lines was most glaring in the state of

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[758] Gagne, "POTA," *Boston College Third World Law Journal*, 267.
[759] Ibid.
[760] Navlakha, "POTA: Freedom to Terrorize," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 3039.
[761] Ibid.
[762] Gagne, "POTA," *Boston College Third World Law Journal*, 267.
[763] Ibid.

Gujarat, where the Act was invoked to arrest 123 Muslims who were supposedly involved in the February 2002 Godhra train attack.[764] The government declined, however, to use POTA against the Hindus involved in the March 2002 riots that killed over 2,000 Muslims.[765] Gujarat's Chief Minister Narendra Modi characterized the violence as a "spontaneous reaction" to the train attack, despite evidence that the riots had been initiated by Hindu right-wing organizations like the Rashtriya Swamyamsevak Sangh (RSS) and Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP).[766] The Gujarat police later used POTA to arrest Muslims involved in a post-riot reprisal against a former police official, K.N. Rao. Justifying the arrests, officials claimed that their investigations had "uncovered a major conspiracy. . .to strike terror in the minds of a particular section of [Hindu] people."[767]

It is worth noting that all but one of Gujarat's 240 POTA detainees were Muslim. Law enforcement officials evaded even the few existing safeguards intended to protect detainees from abuse.[768] According to Amnesty International, "The police neglected the writ of habeas corpus, held people for questioning for weeks without access to legal counsel, and threatened to arrest detainees' family members under POTA if they petitioned the government."[769] The accused repeatedly complained of

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[764] Ibid.

[765] Ibid.

[766] Jawaid Quddus, "Hindutva and the Indian Diaspora," *in Religion, Power and Violence: Expression of Politics in Contemporary Times*, Ram Puniyani Eds. (New Delhi: Sage Publications Pvt. Lmt., 2005), 99.

[767] Howard Spodek, "In the Hindutva Laboratory: Pogroms and Politics in Gujarat," *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 44 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 394.

[768] Preeti Verma, "Terror of POTA and Other Security Legislation," A Report to the People's Tribunal. On the Prevention of Terrorist Activities Act and Other Security Legislation, *Human Rights Law Network* (New Delhi, March 2004), 6.

[769] Ibid.

being tortured[770] and forced into giving confessions. POTA's text, and the state's justifications for prosecuting Muslims under the law, also supported charges against Hindu nationalist groups[771] involved in the riots.[772] Yet the Gujarat government chose to use the ambiguities in POTA to protect these groups. In so doing, it reiterated Hindutva's majoritarian stance.

In 2005, the POTA Review Committee instituted under the central government opined that the accused in the Godhra case should not be tried under the provisions of POTA.[773] Then in December 2008, the Supreme Court ordered that all proceedings in connection with the Godhra incident should be transferred from POTA special courts to the Godhra sessions court.[774] Its 2008 judgment notwithstanding, the Supreme Court's lack of leadership on the issue is disturbing. In a March 2009 follow-up judgment to the Gujarat High Court's February 2009 decision, Supreme Court justices K.G. Balakrishnan and P Sathasivam maintained that they would "wait on the Gujarat High Court's verdict."[775]

The state's High Court also decided that the Godhra carnage was not an act of terrorism and hence POTA was not applicable to the case. However, the Gujarat government refused to comply with the judgment and appealed the ruling before the

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[770] The previous section establishes that POTA detainees were commonly subjected to electrocution, sexual harassment, and assault. See footnote 14 for citation.

[771] As mentioned earlier, the VHP and RSS organized and instigated communal violence in Gujarat in 2002.

[772] Martha C. Nussbaum, Martha C. Nussbaum, "Genocide in Gujarat," in *The Clash Within: Democracy, Religious Violence, and India's Future* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2007), 24.

[773] Ibid.

[774] K. Nesan, Kranti Kumara, "India Five Years After 2002 Gujarat Pogrom," *International Committee of the Fourth International* (April 10, 2007), 2-3.

[775] SC Posts Gujarat Govt. Plea Against POTA Review Panel for Final Hearing. *Press Trust of India* (April 28, 2009). Available: http://blog.taragana.com/law/2010/03/15/high-court-to-hear-pleas-of-godhra-accused-tuesday-20813.html. [April 11, 2010].

Supreme Court.[776] Though the number of persons detained in connection with the Godhra case reduced from 240 to 79 by late 2009, the accused are still held under Section 3(10) of POTA by the Gujarat government.[777]

Uttar Pradesh and the Akshardham Attack

Gujarat was not the only state that targeted Muslim minorities arbitrarily. "Jharkhand gained particular notoriety for arresting women, children, and the elderly," despite the fact that states like Tamil Nadu decided against arresting juveniles under POTA.[778] In April 2003, police in Uttar Pradesh arrested two Kashmiri Muslim students under POTA for sympathizing with a Muslim terrorist group. Every Kashmiri in the state became a suspect in the subsequent investigation.[779]

POTA was also invoked in the 2002 Akshardham temple[780] terrorist attack case, in which thirty-three persons (Hindus and Muslims) were killed.[781] The case was originally assigned to the national Anti-Terrorism Squad. For reasons unknown, it was subsequently transferred to the Gujarat Crime Branch in Ahmedabad, which seized the opportunity to employ POTA. In positing Akshardham with the Godhra train attack,

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[776] Godhra Case: Gujarat HC Says no POTA on Accused. *Press Trust of India* (February 12, 2009). Available: http://www.rediff.com/news/2009/feb/12godhra-case-gujarat-hc-says-no-pota-on-accused.html. [April 11, 2010].
[777] Ibid.
[778] Ibid.
[779] Gagne, "POTA," *Boston College Third World Law Journal*, 290.
[780] The Akshardham temple complex is located in New Delhi. See footnote 52 for citation.
[781] Gagne, "POTA," *Boston College Third World Law Journal*, 290.

Gujarati Chief Minister Narendra Modi advanced the BJP's anti-minority discourse.
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Mumbai: 2003 and 2006

POTA's misuse after the 2003 Mumbai blasts was equally blatant. In 2008, a special POTA court acquitted two of the three Muslims accused in the 2003 Mumbai twin blasts at the Gateway of India and Zaveri Bazaar.[783] A year later, in a review judgment, the court sentenced to death the three persons (including a woman) convicted in the case.[784]

The 2003 blast case was not the only time Mumbai witnessed the use of POTA. According to official sources, the July 2006 blasts in the city's suburban railway trains killed 207 people, and left another 700 injured.[785] Since no individual or group claimed responsibility for the attacks, the media, police, and Hindu nationalist groups seized the opportunity to accuse Islamic terrorist organizations[786] of complicity in the bombings.[787]

The Mumbai police now claim the involvement of India's *Lashkar-e-Taiba* (LeT)[788] and Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) in both attacks. Since the

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[782] Kranti Kumara, "Repeal of India's Draconian Anti-Terrorism Law: Largely a Cosmetic Change," *International Committee of the Fourth International* (November 24, 2004), 6.

[783] POTA Court Acquits Two in 2003 Mumbai Twin Blast Case. *Press Trust of India* (November 17, 2008). Available: http://news.outlookindia.com/item.aspx?634530. [April 11, 2020].

[784] Death for Three in 2003 Mumbai Blasts Case. *The Hindu* (August 7, 2009). Available: http://blogs.thehindu.com/delhi/?p=27408. [April 11, 2010].

[785] Ibid.

[786] The government held two such organizations, the Lakshar-e-Taiba (LeT) and the Jaish-e-Muhammad responsible for the attacks. See footnote 55 for citation.

[787] Sudha Ramachandran, "India Playing Politics with Terrorism," *Asia Times* (July 22, 2006). Available: http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/HG22Df01.html. [April 11, 2010].

[788] The *Lashkar-e-Tioba* is an Indian-based Islamic extremist outfit. See footnote 3 for citation.

2006 blasts occurred under the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) coalition, BJP leaders claimed that the events were a consequence of the ruling government's leniency towards Indian Muslims.[789] The BJP's leadership therefore called for the revival of tough anti-terrorism measures such as POTA, which was repealed in 2004.[790] POTA's re-enactment was brought up by Hindutva ideologues again, in the wake of the Mumbai blasts on November 26, 2008.[791]

The danger of reinstating POTA lies in the fact that it was used extensively against Muslims after the 2003 bombings in Mumbai.[792] While the Congress-led UPA coalition chose to neglect BJP demands, it actively used the controversial Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (1967), which it revised and reenacted in 2004 after POTA was phased out.[793] It is clear that POTA's anti-minority stance has implicitly been adopted by the Congress. The move is telling of the extent to which the BJP's ideology has permeated Indian political scene.

A Tool to Eliminate Political Opposition

In addition to its application along communal lines, POTA was also used to rout political opposition in at least three states. Politicians unaffiliated with the Hindutva cause utilized "the national legislation" for personal purposes.[794]

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[789] Ramachandran, "India Playing Politics with Terrorism," *Asia Times*.

[790] Note how early ideologues' (Sarvarkar and Golwalkar) view of the Congress's pro-minority stance has become coextensive with the articulation of Hindu nationalist concerns. See footnote 44 for citation.

[791] Ramachandran, "India Playing Politics with Terrorism," *Asia Times*.

[792] Muslims in Mumbai at the Receiving End. *Milli Gazette Online* (October 14, 2006). Available: http://www.milligazette.com/dailyupdate/2006/20061014_Muslims_Mumbai_communalism_terrorism. html. [April 11, 2010].

[793] Ibid.

[794] Ibid.

Uttar Pradesh

In Uttar Pradesh, "after months of harassment in the form of criminal charges," Chief Minister Mayawati used POTA to arrest her long-time political rival Mulayam Singh Yadav[795] in December 2003.[796] Though the media openly criticized Mayawati,[797] the BJP-led national government endorsed the Chief Minister's decision, in the hopes of securing her support in the 2004 parliamentary elections.[798] The BJP's agenda witnessed a serious setback when Mayawati lost the January 2004 Uttar Pradesh state elections. On assuming political control after Mayawati's defeat, Mulayam Singh Yadav immediately released the former Chief Minister's rivals. Unfortunately, a POTA special court denounced his order as arbitrary.[799]

Jammu and Kashmir

In March 2002, police in Jammu and Kashmir invoked POTA to arrest a figure sympathetic to the secessionist movement: A former detainee under POTA's forerunners, "Yasin Malik remains a prominent figure among a coalition of parties which have long sought autonomy from the Indian union."[800] In July 2002, a POTA special court granted Malik bail because of his failing health.[801] The police rearrested Malik soon after his release under Jammu and Kashmir's Public Safety Act, which

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[795] Both Mayawati and Mulayam Singh belong to the Bahujan Samaj Party. They are both Hindus. This case is instructive because it reflects POTA's applicability in a non-communal context. See footnote 63 for citation.
[796] Gagne, "POTA," *Boston College Third World Law Journal*, 289.
[797] The BJP was still in power at the union level at this time. It lost to the Congress Party in the 2004 parliamentary elections. See footnote 63 for citation.
[798] Gagne, "POTA," *Boston College Third World Law Journal*, 289
[799] Ibid.
[800] Ibid.
[801] Ibid.

allows for preventive detentions.[802] Malik was thereafter detained for five months

before the state's new government mandated his release. The government proclaimed

magnanimously that the release reflected "a policy shift."[803] In reality, Malik's

detention and release bear testimony to the arbitrary application of POTA and related

laws in India.[804]

Tamil Nadu

The most significant example of POTA's political misuse occurred in July

2002, in the state of Tamil Nadu.[805] Chief Minister J. Jayalalitha arrested several

members—both Hindus and Muslims—of a rival Tamil nationalist party for publicly

expressing sympathy for the banned Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam[806] (LTTE).[807]

Prominent among those detained was Vaiko, the general secretary of the

Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK) Party. After over four and a

half months of questionaing, the police finally charged Vaiko, along with eight other

MDMK officials. In its 440-page report, the Jayalalitha government claimed that the

detainees had violated Sections 21(2) and (3) of POTA.[808] Vaiko's appeals against the

proposed charges eventually prompted the Supreme Court to clarify that a mere

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[802] Ibid.

[803] Ibid.

[804] K. Samu, "Terrorism/POTA-2005," *Human Rights Documentation*, (New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 2005). Available: http://www.isidelhi.org.in/hrnews/HR_THEMATIC_ISSUES/Terrorism /Terrorism-05.pdf. [February, 12, 2010].

[805] Gagne, "POTA," *Boston College Third World Law Journal*, 289.

[806] The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, commonly known as the LTTE or the Tamil Tigers, was a separatist organization formerly based in northern Sri Lanka. Founded in May 1976, it waged a violent secessionist campaign that sought to create an independent Tamil state in the north and east of Sri Lanka. See footnotes 70 and 73 for citation.

[807] Menon, Nigam, *Power and Contestation*, 137.

[808] Gagne, "POTA," *Boston College Third World Law Journal*, 292.

expression of "verbal support" did not amount to a violation of Section 21 of the Act.[809] Responding to Vaiko's detention and prosecution, the BJP-led central government endowed POTA's Central Review Committee "with the power to issue binding opinions on the validity of a state's prima facie cases."[810] Jayalalitha immediately challenged the Review Committee's jurisdiction over Vaiko's case, which was proceeding in a POTA court. Eventually, on February 7, 2004, as "Vaiko awaited word from the special court," the Committee released him on bail "after eighteen months of needless detention."[811]

The aforementioned cases demonstrate the varied ends towards which POTA's discretionary authority was directed. So grave were the misdemeanors that occurred under the auspices of the Act that Home Minister Lal Krishna Advani conceded—despite his staunch approval of the Act a year earlier—that evidence of POTA's misuse was "serious enough" to warrant review.[812]

A Lasting Legacy

In its assessment of POTA in 2004, the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) opined that a "revised version" of the Act should not include ordinary criminal cases in its definition of terrorism.[813] The assessment also stipulated that revisions to POTA must ensure that the independence of the judiciary is not compromised. Specifically, CHRI argued that no judge's tenure should extend beyond

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[809] Ibid.

[810] Kumara, "Repeal of India's Draconian Anti-Terrorism Law: Largely a Cosmetic Change."

[811] Gagne, "POTA," *Boston College Third World Law Journal*, 291.

[812] Ibid.

[813] Submissions to the Review Committee on POTA by Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (March 2004). Available: http://www.humanrightsinitiative.org/artres/pota_submission.pdf. [April 12, 2010].

the age of superannuation.[814] The study also suggested that the controversy with regards to Section 49 (7) of POTA should be set at rest by endowing the judiciary (as opposed to special POTA courts) with the power to grant bail. In addition to its advocacy of shorter time frames for trials, the CHRI stressed the importance of allowing the publication of trial proceedings.[815]

In consonance with the sentiment of Human Rights organizations, the Congress Party vehemently opposed POTA during the 2001-02 debate over its enactment. Though Congress leaders said little about the Act during the 2004 spring election campaign,[816] POTA's repeal (on October 7, 2004) was included in the Common Minimum Program (CMP) that the party negotiated with its UPA coalition partners.[817]

The UPA government's decision to repeal POTA failed to institute concrete change. The Act already contained a sunset clause which stipulated "a parliamentary review after three years of enactment," and was set to expire in October 2004, merely one month after its much praised repeal.[818] More importantly, however, the Congress combined the repeal of POTA with amendments to the 1967 Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA). These amendments have made POTA's repeal largely cosmetic, given that the UAPA retains many POTA clauses.[819]

Some believe that anti-terrorism legislation essential to curb extremism in

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[814] Ibid.
[815] Ibid.
[816] K.G. Kannabiran, "Repealing POTA: Some Issues," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 39, No. 34 (August 21-27, 2004), 3394.
[817] Ibid.
[818] Ibid.
[819] Ibid. / Arrest and detention procedures under the UAPA are markedly similar to erstwhile POTA directives.

India. However, when such legislation was in effect, it did not prevent terrorist attacks.[820] The Indian Parliament was attacked in December 2001, when POTA was an ordinance. The May 2002 Kaluchak army base attack in Jammu and Kashmir and the September 2002 Akshardham Temple attack in New Delhi occurred after POTA was enacted as a permanent legislation.[821] In fact, "POTA might actually have been instrumental in fueling terrorism."[822] Its misuse by Gujarati Chief Minister Modi is said to have "prompted hundreds of young people to join extremist outfits to counter the Indian state."[823] Unfortunately the lack of an international legal framework to combat terrorism has led the BJP to promote "Hindu nationalist" alternatives.[824] This has ensured the perpetuation of anti-minority legislation like TADA and POTA.

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[820] Ramachandran, *Asia Times*.
[821] Ibid.
[822] Ibid.
[823] Ibid.
[824] Kannabiran, "Repealing POTA," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 3394.

CONCLUSION

That the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) successfully enunciated a discourse on both Hindu nationalism and the need for strong governance proved instrumental to its success between 1998 and 2004.[825] Yet, the party's consecutive losses[826] in the general elections of 2004 and 2009 signal that its leadership has failed to strike a cord with the growing plural sections of Indian society.[827] As compared to the 270 parliamentary seats (37.06 percent of national votes) that the BJP captured in the 1999 general elections, its 159 seats (24.63 percent of national votes) after the 2009 elections illustrate the decline in the party's national standing.[828]

The state elections of 2003-2004 provided telling signs of the BJP's possible defeat in the upcoming national polls.[829] The BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) coalition lost in the February 2003 state elections, the northeastern states of Tripura, Meghalaya, and Nagaland.[830] In the next round in December—featuring northern states like New Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan—reining Prime

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[825] Thomas Blom Hansen, "Hindu Nationalism, Democracy, and Globalization," in *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999), 235.

[826] The Indian electorate seems to have rejected the BJP's version of Hindu nationalism. In addition, the party lost to the Congress due to its excessive focus on urban demands like city planning and infrastructural development. See footnote 1 for citation.

[827] Swapan Dasgupta, "The Art of Firing Blanks," *Tehelka*, Vol. 6, Issue 34 (New Delhi, August 29 2009), 30.

[828] For more information, see table 3 and graphs 1 and 2 in appendix.

[829] National elections were scheduled for March 2004. See footnote 1 for citation.

[830] The BJP was defeated in each of these states by either the Congress or regional parties. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) won the Tripura state elections. The BJP did not win a single seat in the state. The Congress won the Nagaland elections, securing 56 percent of votes in the state. The Congress also won the Meghalaya state elections. It secured 22 of the 40 seats in the Meghalaya state assembly, and formed a coalition with other regional parties. The BJP won only 2 seats in the state. See footnote 3 for citation.

Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's moderate approach rather than Hindutva's nationalist plank ensured the BJP's victory.[831] Evidently, Hindu nationalists are still bound to the norms of a democratic political system.[832] They must, therefore, cater their discourse to alternative electoral alliances *and* the impending anti-incumbency tendency; both of which have rendered "the state," i.e. regional constituencies, an important unit in India's electoral process.[833]

Hindutva and Muslims

Economic growth under the BJP's Liberalization, Privatization, and Globalization (LPG) program remained confined to urban areas. The party's efforts to commercialize agriculture during its reign between 1998 and 2004 were piecemeal, and found relatively few Muslim beneficiaries.[834] Though a middle class of Muslim traders and professionals has emerged in the urban centers of western and northern India, agriculture remains the primary mode of sustenance for a vast majority in the Islamic community. The lack of economic opportunity, along with the fact that only 59 percent of Indian Muslims are literate,[835] has contributed to the community's sense of marginalization and victimization.[836]

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[831] The BJP won 111 of 230 seats in the Rajasthan state assembly, 18 of 70 seats in the Delhi state assembly, and 88 of 200 seats in the Madhya Pradesh state assembly. See footnote 3 for citation.
[832] Robert L. Hardgrave Jr., "Hindu Nationalism and the BJP," in *Prospects for Peace in South Asia*, ed. Rafiq Dossani and Henry S. Rowen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 211-212.
[833] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 235.
[834] Ibid, 151.
[835] While a 59 percent literacy rate among Muslims is doubtlessly low, India's national literacy rate is not much higher. Only 64.8 percent of India's population is literate. See footnote 7 for citation.
[836] Hardgrave Jr., *Prospects for Peace in South Asia*, 211-212.

The virulent anti-Muslim rhetoric disseminated by *Sangh Parivar* organizations, in the wake of Hindu conversions to Islam during the late 1980s,[837] demonstrated that Hindu nationalists enjoyed a relatively free hand in India's political arena.[838] This predictably heightened Muslims' insecurities. Realizing that their community lacked powerful public leaders, religious heads like Imam Bukhari of Delhi's Jama mosque,[839] and populist Islamic figures like Syed Shahabuddin, emerged as outspoken proponents of a culturally conservative platform.[840] A quote from a 1991 editorial in Shahabuddin's monthly magazine, *Muslim India*, indicates an essentialist construction of religious identity similar to that proposed by Hindu nationalists:

> For a Muslim, at a personal level, his religious identity is supreme, rising above race, language, geography, [and] political jurisdiction. Indeed, he is not prepared to trade his religious identity at any price…to extend it is based in his scriptures, the Holy Koran and the Traditions of the Holy Prophet…this identity is universal, sacrosanct, and immutable; valid for all times and for all societies.[841]

A glance at some of the transformations in the Indian Muslim community may shed light on the outburst of what is now referred to as Islamic conservative radicalism.[842] As stated in chapter three, close to 4.5 million Indian Muslims migrated to Gulf nations during the 1970s.[843] The economic opportunities in these countries enabled Muslims to bring back funds for the betterment of their brethren. Their newly acquired resources aside, the anti-Western rhetoric professed by radical Islamists in

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[837] Chapter three discusses how economic marginalization and social exclusion drove tribal communities to embrace both Islam and Christianity.

[838] Hardgrave Jr., *Prospects for Peace in South Asia*, 211-212.

[839] The Jama mosque is situated in Delhi. It was commissioned in 1656 AD, along with the Taj Mahal, by Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan. See footnote 8 for citation.

[840] Hardgrave Jr., *Prospects for Peace in South Asia*, 211-212.

[841] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 152.

[842] Ibid.

[843] Ibid.

the Middle East created a sense of urgency among Muslim intellectuals and clerics in India. Constructing an Islamic identity became crucial in this register.[844]

Hindu nationalist rhetoric strengthened the conservatism in Indian Islam. On one hand, Hindutva ideologues sympathized with the apathetic status of Muslim women. This displeased Islamic clerics, who viewed the talk on gender inequality as an assault on the traditional social norms of their community.[845] On the other hand, *Sangh Parivar* members spared no opportunity to direct rhetoric against Indian Muslims.[846] Of particular significance is the manner in which Hindu nationalists used the discourse on global Islamic extremism[847] to recast Muslims as a threat to the Hindus.[848] The 2002 riots in Godhra exemplify the above. Exploiting violence to the party's advantage, then BJP President Jana Krishnamurthi announced March 9, 2002 as "anti-terrorism" day.[849] Worse still, the media embraced this orientation. While controversies surrounding the construction of a Rama temple continued unabated, news from Ayodhya was presented as reports from Ground Zero.[850]

The enactment of POTA after the 2001 attacks on India's Parliament played on both the legacy of the Partition and the notion of Islamic terrorism. The BJP government's decision to expose the Pakistani origins of the conspirators was more

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[844] Ibid.

[845] Recall from the discussion in chapter four how Hindu nationalists supported the plight of Shah Bano, a Muslim divorcee, as well as projected the Congress's attempts to institute a Uniform Civil Code as evidence of the party's pro-Muslim orientation. See footnote 14 for citation.

[846] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 152.

[847] The discourse on Islamic radicalism after September 11 enabled the BJP to apply similar rubric to acts of terrorism in India. See footnote 16 for citation.

[848] Ornit Shani, "The Making of Ethno-Hinduism," in *Communalism, Caste and Hindu Nationalism: The Violence in Gujarat* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 181.

[849] Ibid.

[850] Ibid.

than just a statement of fact.[851] The Muslim angle was deliberately introduced to arouse Hindu sentiments. Though POTA is no longer an active legislation, the ideological biases inherent to the Act have become systemic. Yet again, Gujarat is a sad reminder of the extent to which partisan views have penetrated the nation's executive and judicial branches.[852]

By appropriating the rubric against terrorism, Hindu nationalists altered attitudes in the Hindu and Islamic communities alike. For one, they subverted low caste fears concerning globalization.[853] The strategy allowed the BJP to serve Hindu elites through the economic liberalization program of the 1990s. It simultaneously convinced other sections of Hindu opinion that global concerns posed a greater threat to the nation.[854] Hindutva's oscillation between anti-Muslim assertions and sympathetic discourse had already cornered the Muslim community. The emphasis on Islamic extremism further exacerbated conservative tendencies in Indian Islam. Communal backlash was the inevitable result.[855]

Mushirul Hasan, a leading historian of Islam in India, elaborates on the latter trend, when he claims that Indian Muslims' desire to assert their identity during the twentieth century encouraged them to insulate themselves from the processes of social change and modernization.[856] While Hasan rightly notes that internal factors were

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[851] Ibid.

[852] Paul R. Dettman, "1999 General Election Campaign," in *India Changes Course: Golden Jubilee to Millennium* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 1991), 134.

[853] Shani, *Communalism, Caste and Hindu Nationalism*, 181.

[854] Ibid.

[855] Ibid.

[856] Ainslie T. Embree, "Who Speaks for India? The Role of Civil Society in Defining Indian Nationalism," in *Prospects for Peace in South Asia*, ed. Rafiq Dossani and Henry S. Rowen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 174.

responsible for the community's alienation from India's secular and democratic institutions, it is equally true that Muslims are scarcely free to operate in Indian civil society. For over six decades, they have been targeted as undifferentiated enemies by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and its affiliates.[857]

Hindutva and Hindus

It is clear that the BJP's political praxis after the 1980s enhanced the pre-existing minority psychosis[858] in India's Islamic community. Besides its approach towards Islam, the party's consistent subversion of the mass Hindu voice is perhaps the greatest limitation in its political vision.[859]

The *Sangh Parivar's* challenge to the secular state in the 1980s was founded upon an alternative that the Congress Party had already made dominant in the political field.[860] According to historian Ram Puniyani, "The entire *Ramjanmabhoomi* agitation did not actually demolish secularism as a 'legitimate problematic' but recorded it to signify in 'high' political discourse what it already meant in political practice: the competitive mobilization of intersecting majorities and minorities along increasingly non-negotiable boundaries."[861]

The crux of the issue seems to be that although the BJP introduced a host of innovations into the practice of agitational politics, and set up a network of committed

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[857] Ibid.
[858] The fear psychosis among Indian Muslims is a product of the 1947 Partition, as well as external Islamic influences of the 1970s. See footnote 31 for citation.
[859] Embree, *Prospects for Peace in South Asia*, 174.
[860] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 187.
[861] Ibid.

activists all over the country, it has been unable to articulate a societal vision beyond the fuzzy rhetoric of social harmony (between upper and lower caste Hindus) even to this day. This has translated into the lack of an alternative party vision of what political practice should entail.[862] Hindutva's endorsement of both social conservatism and economic progressivism won the BJP the support of Hindu elites. The promise of economic opportunity also endeared those seeking upward mobility.[863] The problem, however, is that Hindutva's proximity to social hierarchies has rendered it difficult for the *Sangh Parivar* to articulate a socio-economic agenda that would mobilize the nation as a whole. Issues like land reform, education, and gender equality lie outside the overarching objectives of Hindutva.[864]

It is precisely due to the absence of a concrete agenda that the BJP has drifted, time and time again, towards matters pertaining to faith.[865] By undermining social hierarchies and providing a sense of unity during times of communal strife, religious issues have, until recently, sustained the party's power. In essence, the RSS and its frontal organizations have no sustainable model of mass mobilization other than the use of Hindu-specific themes, such as the myth of Rama and the ideal of a caste-free Hindu society. As the next section reveals, the temptation to use these themes is becoming more powerful in the face of the BJP's defeat.[866]

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[862] Ibid, 186.

[863] Manjari Katju, "Mobilization for Hindutva," *in Religion, Power and Violence: Expression of Politics in Contemporary Times*, ed. Ram Puniyani (New Delhi: Sage Publications Pvt. Lmt., 2005), 182.

[864] Ibid.

[865] Ibid.

[866] Hardgrave Jr., *Prospects for Peace in South Asia*, 213.

The Way Forward

The current Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government has repeatedly declared that it cannot intervene in either the 1992 Ayodhya dispute or the conflict over POTA's misuse after the 2002 Gujarat carnage.[867] Several reasons have contributed to this stance. First, the sympathies of significant elements in Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh[868] lie not with Muslim victims, but rather with the instigators of communal violence. The UPA does not want to lose this section of votes at the polls.[869] Second, the Congress relies on the BJP's support in pressing forward with India's "bourgeoisie reform agenda."[870] Third, were the Congress to dig into the BJP's role in the Gujarat and Ayodhya riots, the latter would assuredly clamor for an inquiry into the Congress Party's culpability in the 1984 anti-Sikh massacre.[871]

It is indeed worrisome that the two principal parties in the world's most populous democracy have secretly pledged to bury each other's communal crimes. The UPA government's inability to act notwithstanding, the elections of 2004 and 2009 have underscored that India's electorate seems vary of "coalition building" that rests on a pre-determined elitist base.[872] Alluding to this development in his essay, *The Muslim Factor*, Asghar Ali Engineer states:

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[867] Ajit Sahi, "Cleaning out the Augean Stables," *Tehelka*, Vol. 6, Issue 34 (New Delhi, August 29 2009), 34-35.

[868] The sentiments of people in Uttar Pradesh were important because of the Babri mosque demolition in 1992. See footnote 31 for citation.

[869] K. Nesan, Kranti Kumara, "India Five Years After 2002 Gujarat Pogrom," *International Committee of the Fourth International* (April 10, 2007), 4.

[870] Ibid.

[871] Ibid.

[872] Asghar Ali Engineer, "BJP and Muslim Factor," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 35, No. 45 (November 4-10, 2000), 3922-3923.

> The BJP is playing a complex game with the full knowledge and approval of the RSS. BJP leaders know that [their] overture to Muslims will not elicit a big response from the community. Some have suggested that the speech by [Party President Laxman] was not so much aimed at Muslims as liberal Hindus. This may or may not be true. But in this era of coalition politics, the BJP wants to clear the decks for its coalition partners.[873]

After having spent over two decades using the twin ideologies of economic liberalism and religio-ethnic nationalism to augment an elitist base, the realization that Indian institutions remain essentially pluralistic has predictably caused disappointment in the BJP. Of particular concern today is the future course that the party will adopt.[874] In an ideal scenario, Hindu nationalists would redefine "Hindutva" to better represent India's secular spirit. The fear is that the BJP's recent engagement with the RSS, to devise an agenda in the aftermath of its 2009 defeat, may result in an intensification of the pattern of cultural nationalism witnessed in the past.[875] The RSS's militant posture has hitherto stifled moderate voices in the BJP. The communalization of not just party ranks, but also the administrative machinery of an entire state is well illustrated in the 2002 violence under Gujarati Chief Minister Narenda Modi.[876]

As it stands, the BJP's electoral following is limited to twenty-five percent of the popular vote.[877] The issue today is not so much the "conversion" of India's moderate electorate as it is the potency of anti-minoritism within the pre-established voter base of the BJP. The party's decline[878] has not impacted grassroots supporters in its traditional constituencies in the north. Though it lost seats in states like Uttar

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[873] Ibid.
[874] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 235.
[875] Sahi, "Cleaning out the Augean Stables," *Tehelka*, 34-35.
[876] Ibid.
[877] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 235.
[878] Its voter base has reduced from 37.06 percent in 1999 to 24.6 percent in 2004. See table 3 in appendix.

Pradesh and Bihar in both 2004 and 2009,[879] its presence in the states is by no means eliminated. Moreover, evidence of activism and force in the party's rallies has actually increased.[880] While Hindutva remains an essentially north Indian phenomenon, the aforementioned patterns of activism are equally evident in the BJP's southern constituencies. Since 2003, the state of Kerala has recorded an average of two annual BJP-led rallies. Karnataka recorded twenty-two instances of communal conflict in 2003, and Tamil Nadu witnessed three mobilization rallies following the BJP's defeat in 2004.[881] While the aforementioned trends indicate, on the surface, a decline in the BJP's electoral strength (the party secured 24.6 percent of the national vote in 2009 as compared to 33.3 percent in 2004), they also indicate that the party's following is far from diminished.[882] A smaller, concentrated, and disciplined voter base may actually prove beneficial to the BJP's activist agenda.

The defeat in 2009 has provided the BJP's cadres with an opportunity to evaluate the relevance of Hindu nationalism as an electoral pillar. To expand its national standing, it is imperative for the BJP to relinquish the extremities embodied in Hindutva. Should the party's pendulum fail to swing in this direction, its economic reform agenda will continue to sustain its traditional elitist base. Chapter three reveals that it is possible for the BJP to use its current mobilization strategies—notably its use of the Rama myth—to endear low caste Hindus. It follows that irrespective of whether

[879] The BJP held 15 seats in Uttar Pradesh and 16 seats in Bihar in 2004. In 2009, its share reduced to 11 seats in Uttar Pradesh and 12 seats in Bihar. See footnote 42 and map 1 in appendix for citation.
[880] Ajit Sahi, "Cleaning out the Augean Stables," *Tehelka*, Vol. 6, Issue 34 (New Delhi, August 29 2009), 34-35.
[881] Hardgrave Jr., *Prospects for Peace in South Asia*, 213.
[882] See table 3 in appendix for more information.

the party wins new supporters, it will be able to retain those already in its fold.[883] In so doing, the BJP's leadership will likely strengthen its existing pattern of caste-based communal activism.

Regardless of which course the BJP adopts in the long-term, it is clear that the party will not forfeit Hindutva in the near future. On the eve of the BJP's defeat in 2009, Party President Rajnath Singh maintained that there would be no compromise on ideology. He added that the party did not regret raising issues like religious quotas during campaigning, "as [such issues] are in the country's welfare."[884] He also claimed that the BJP's commitment to building a Rama temple in Ayodhya is reiterated in the party's manifesto. With regards to the BJP's larger agenda he stated, "Perhaps we need to present our views in a better and more contemporary context. For this, it is necessary that we strengthen our organizational structure, campaign and strategy."[885] On one hand, Singh's comments underscore that the "contemporary context" demands plurality; i.e. the Indian electorate favors moderate institutions. On the other hand, they reveal the BJP's unwillingness to adapt Hindutva.

The BJP's insistence on maintaining pre-ordained political underpinnings despite the odds at hand is doubtlessly the most instructive aspect of this analysis. It proves that unless the party disassociates itself from the militant activism and rhetoric

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[883] Anirudh Deshpande, "Probity, Stability, and Responsibility: Ironies and Hypocrisy of the BJP," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 32, No. 52 (December 27, 1997-January 2, 1998), 3307-3308.
[884] B.S. Satish Kumar, "No Compromise on Hindutva Despite Poll Debacle," *The Hindu* (August 2, 2009). Available: http://www.thehindu.com/2009/08/02/stories/2009080260440900.html. [February, 12, 2010].
[885] Ibid.

inscribed in its core ideology, communal skirmishes and Islamic conservatism will continue to pervade the Indian political scene.

The findings in this thesis underscore the manner in which the Bharatiya Janata Party has emerged as the political face of Hindu ethno-cultural nationalism. They demonstrate the inter-linkages between the BJP and its parent organizations, and indicate how the "cultural" aims of the latter have confined the political leeway of those within the party. The BJP was born in 1980, when the Hindu right began promoting a brand of revivalism that was embedded in the anti-minority ideas of the pre-Partition era. Since the party came into being at a juncture when Hindu conversions to Islam were at the forefront of the political scene, its members were able to extend the Hindutva platform. Ayodhya and Gujarat demonstrate how the BJP successfully used its Hindutva lineage in contemporary situations.

In delineating the multiple facets of the BJP's political agenda, this thesis confirms many overarching views in the scholarship of Chetan Bhatt, Deepa Reddy, Thomas Blom Hansen, Ram Puniyani, and Badri Narayan; all of whom highlight how the party projects itself as an inclusive organization despite its allegiance to an elitist voter base. The findings in this analysis reflect existing concerns over the costs that militant activism may impose on India's social and political realms. While the thesis describes the pluralism in Indian society, it simultaneously reveals Hindutva's ability to employ and adapt militant strategies on a decidedly smaller-scale. This explains why the BJP's defeat has not prompted either its leadership or its grassroots supporters to shed the Hindutva plank. Equally significant is the persistence of an anti-minority

sentiment in India's executive, judicial, and legislative branches after the BJP's recent defeat. The case studies on Gujarat and the Prevention of Terrorist Activities Act (POTA) bear testimony to this legacy. For these reasons, and many others, Hindutva in its current or alternative form is likely to remain a crucial variable within the BJP's operations and in Indian politics.

APPENDIX

Table 1: Religious Composition of India

Religious Composition	Population	Percentage
Hindus	**827,578,868**	**80.5**
Muslims	138,188,240	13.4
Christians	24,080,016	2.3
Sikhs	19,215,730	1.9
Buddhists	7,955,207	0.8
Jains	4,225,053	0.4
Other persuasions	6,639,626	0.6
Religions not stated	727,588	0.1
Total	1,028,610,328	100

Source: Census of India, 2001. Available: http://censusindia.gov.in/. [April 10, 2010].

Table 2: National Parties in India

| Party	Year Founded	Seats in (Lok Sabha) Lower House of Parliament (out of 552)	Seats in (Rajya Sabha) Upper House of Parliament (out of 250)
Indian National Congress/ Congress	1885	206	72
Bharatiya Janata Party	**1980**	**116**	**55**
Bahujan Samajwadi Party	1984	21	11
Communist Party of India (Marxist)	1964	16	15
Nationalist Congress Party	1999	9	4
Communist Party of India	1920	9	5

Note: Parties are arranged by rank in descending order.
Source: Election Commission of India, 2009. Available: http://eci.nic.in/eci_main /index.as. [April 10, 2010].

Table 3: Comparative Holdings: BJP vs. Congress

Year	BJP		Congress	
	Seats	**Votes (in percent)**	**Seats**	**Votes (in percent)**
1991	120	20.1	232	36.5
1999	270	37.06	156	28.3
2004	181	33.3	218	35.4
2009	159	24.63	262	37.22

Source: Election Commission of India, 2009. Available: http://eci.nic.in/eci_main /index.as. [April 10, 2010].

Graph 1: Decline in BJP seats in Parliament
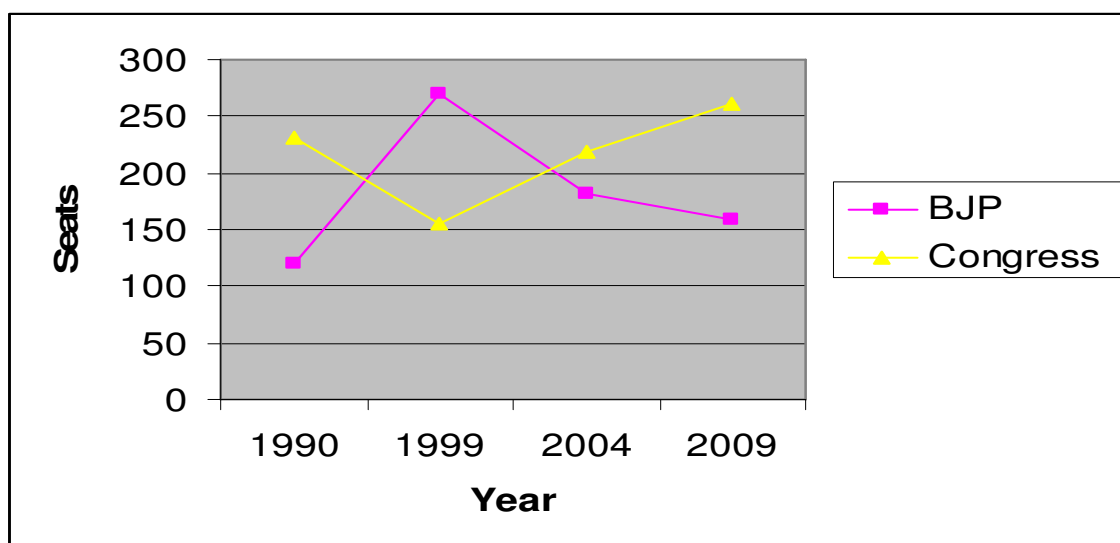
Note: Figures are listed in table 3.
Source: Election Commission of India, 2009. Available: http://eci.nic.in/eci_main/ index.as. [April 10, 2010].

Graph 2: Decline in BJP votes
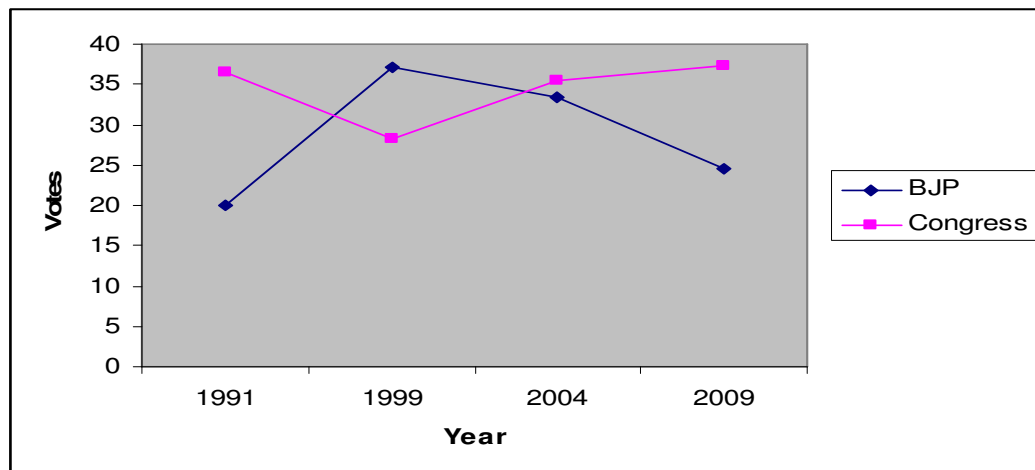
Source: Election Commission of India, 2009. Available: http://eci.nic.in/eci_main/
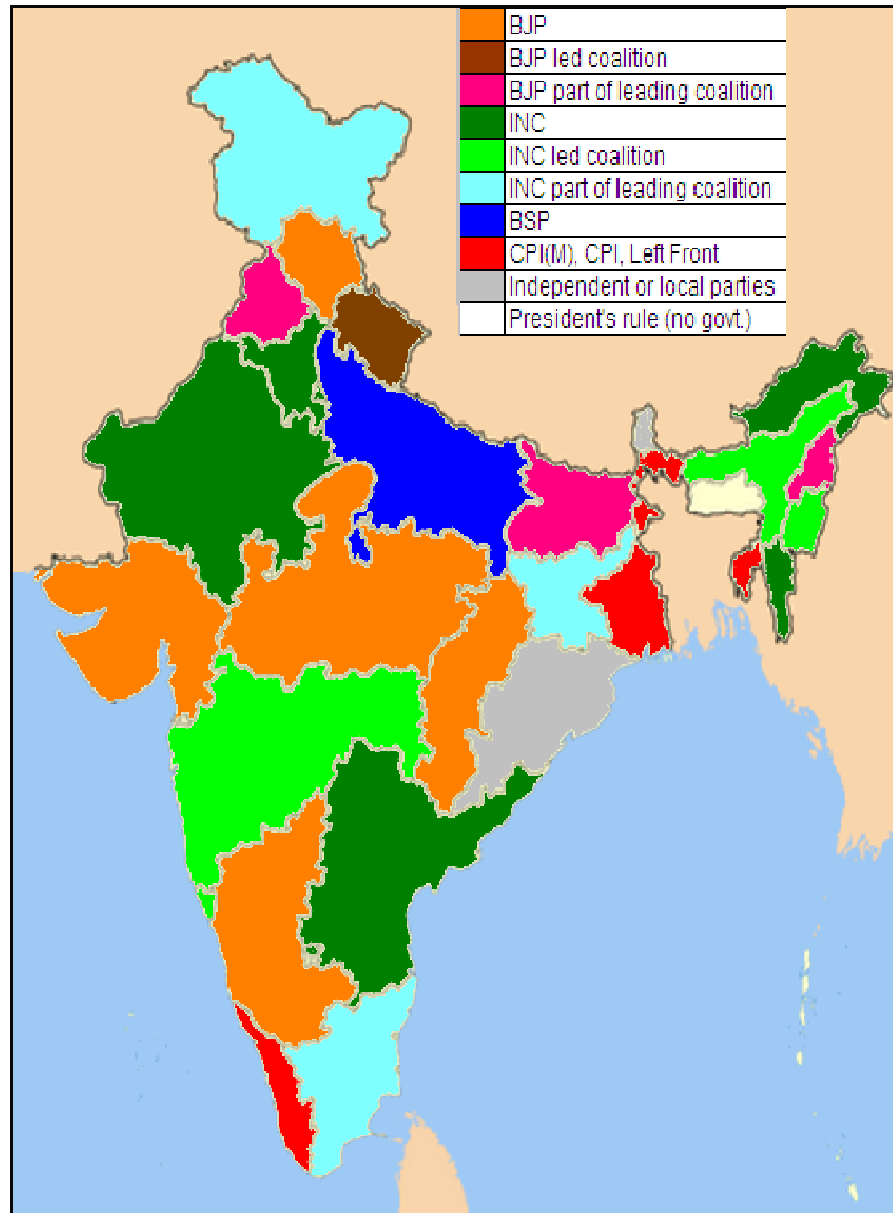index.as. [April 10, 2010].
Note: Figures are listed in table 3.

Pie-Chart 1: Religious Composition of India
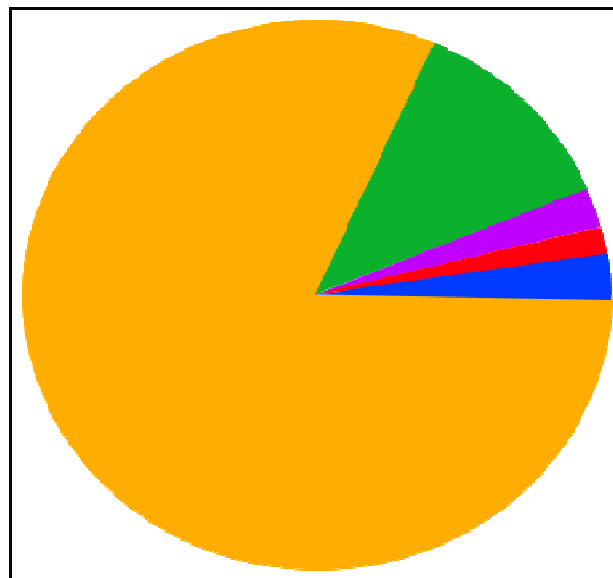
Key: Orange: Hinduism (80.5%), Green: Islam (13.4%), Purple: Christianity (2.3%),
Red: Sikhism (1.9%), Blue: Others (0.19%)
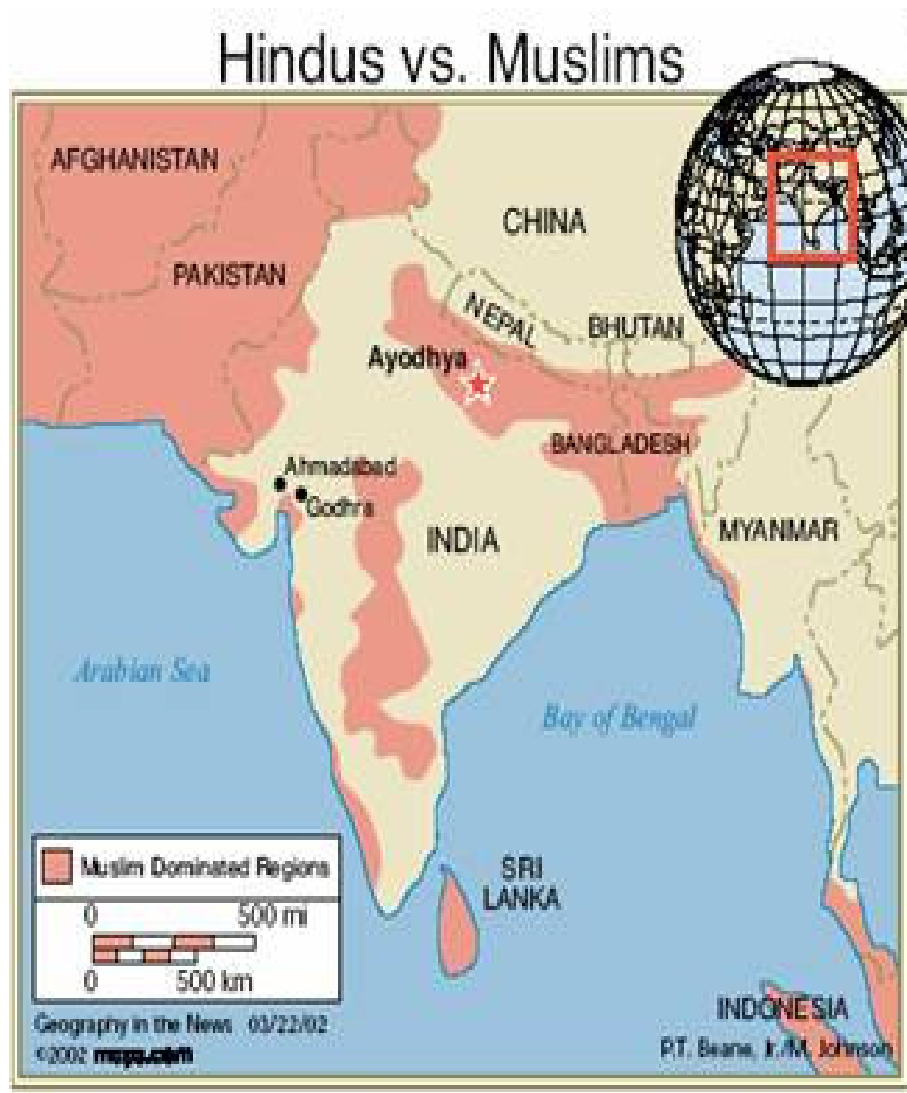**Source:** Election Commission of India, 2009. Available: http://censusindia.gov.in.
[April 10, 2010].

Map 1: BJP and Congress Constituencies in the 2009 State Elections

	BJP
	BJP led coalition
	BJP part of leading coalition
	INC
	INC led coalition
	INC part of leading coalition
	BSP
	CPI(M), CPI, Left Front
	Independent or local parties
	President's rule (no govt.)

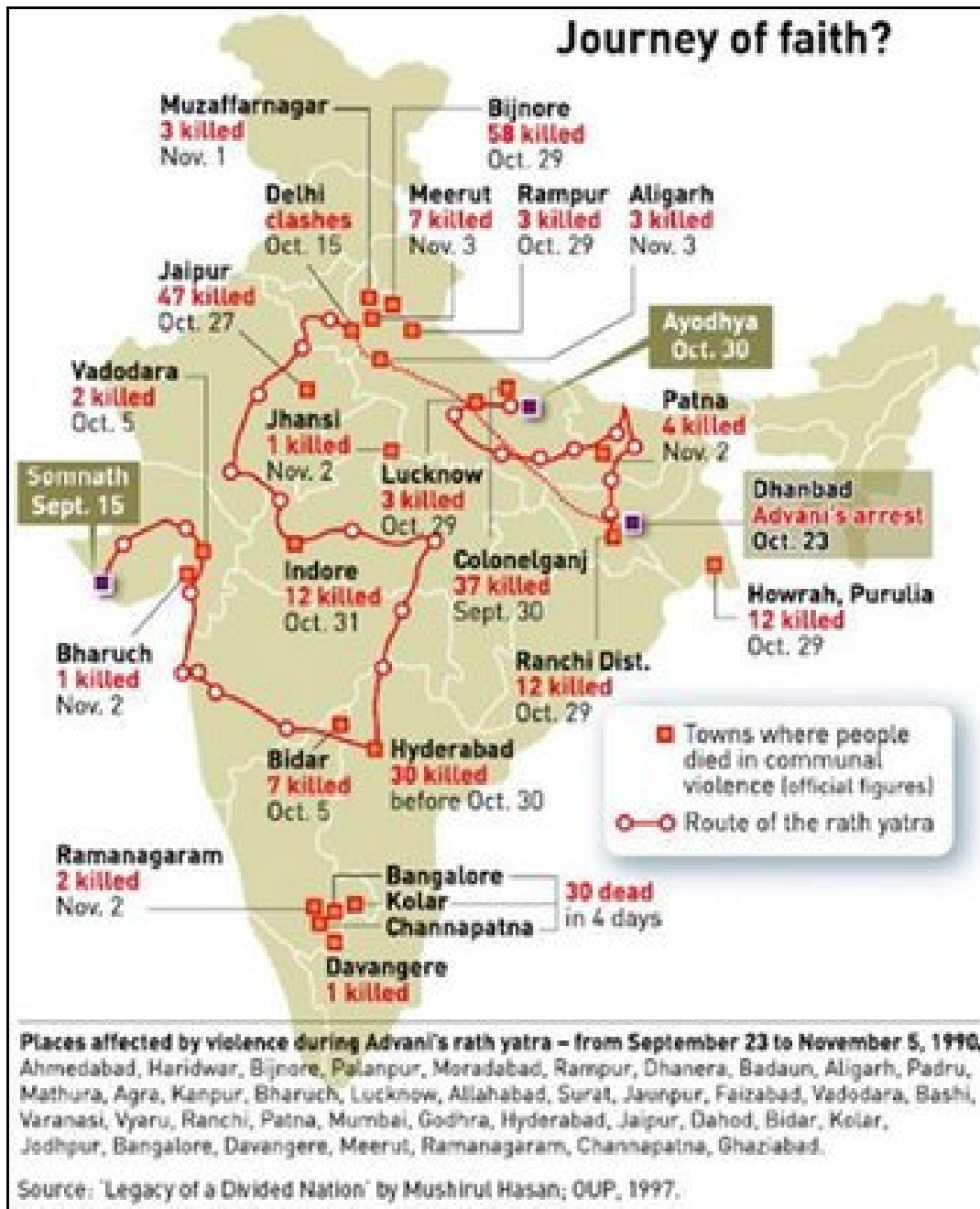**Source:** Election Commission of India, 2009. Available: http://eci.nic.in/eci_main/ index.asp. [April 9, 2010].

Map 2: Regional Distribution of India's Muslim Population

Source: Election Commission of India, 2002. Available: http://eci.nic.in/eci_main/
index.asp. [April 9, 2010].

Map 3: 1990 Chariot Procession (*Rath Yatra*) Locations and Death Toll

Source: Mushirul Hasan, *Legacy of A Divided Nation*, 330.

GLOSSARY

Several terms listed below have multiple meanings. They are defined here in accordance with the context in which they appear in this analysis.

Ahimsa—non-violence

Akhand Bharat—undivided India

Akhara—wrestling ground

Ashrama— (1) the four stages of life: student, celibate, householder, ascetic; (2) an institutional structure that may be used as a place of learning, or as a site for religious reflection

Atman—soul

Bhagwa dhwaj—saffron flag

Bhakti—devotional form of Hinduism; arose in the medieval period

Bharatmata—Mother India; feminization of Indian territory

Bhoudik—spiritual and ideological training

Brahamin—Hindu priest

Brahaminism—a form of elitist Hindu worship; stressed caste hierarchies to seclude lower castes

Brahman—universe; universal essence

Dalit—untouchable

Dharma—religion, duty, righteousness, the way of life

Garibi hatao—remove poverty; Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's slogan

Gaumata—Mother cow

Goonda—muscleman

Guru—religious teacher/ guide

Hindu rashtra—Hindu nation

Jati—caste group

Jawan—soldier; term used to denote youth

Kar sevak—RSS volunteer

Mandir—Hindu temple

Manusmriti—ancient Indian law book compiled between 200 CE and 200 AD.

Masjid—mosque

Namaz—Muslim prayer recited five times a day

Panchayat—local governing and adjudicating council

Pehelwan—professional wrestler/ strongman

Pitrubhoomi—Sarvarkar's term for Fatherland and Holyland

Pracharak—full-time RSS organizer

Puja—Hindu form of prayer

Pundit—learned Hindu scholar

Purdah—veil used by Hindu and Muslim women

Ramrajya—rule by Rama

Ramjanmabhoomi—the birthplace of Rama; a movement to replace the Babri mosque in Ayodhya with a Ram temple.

Ratha—chariot used in a religious procession

Rashtrasevika—female equivalent of a *swayamsevak*; member of the Rashtra Swayamsevak Sangh's (RSS) female wing, the Rashtirya Swayamsevika Sangh (RSS*)

Samskar—virtues, moral teachings

Sangathan—organization of Hindus

Sangh Parivar—the RSS family of organizations

Sarsanghchalak—president of an organization

Sarvodaya—welfare for all

Sati—immolation of widows upon the death of their husbands; arose in medieval times

Satyagraha—passive resistance

Shakha—an RSS organizational unit where young men meet and conduct daily prayers, exercise, and discussions

Shakti—creative power, latent or potential force

Shuddhi—purification or reconversion to Hinduism

Swadeshi— economic self-sustenance; indigenous production

Swayamsevak—RSS volunteer

Swaraj—self-rule, independence

Trishul—trident; emblem of Lord Shiva

Ulama—Muslim religious council

Varna—Vedic four-fold social ranking system consisting of *brahamins* or priests; *kshatriyas* or warriors; *vaisyas* or traders; and *shudras* or untouchables

Varnashramadharma—a system which combines caste rankings (*varna*), social stages in life (*ashrama*), and duties appropriate to both caste and stage

Yatra—pilgrimage, religious procession

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