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**NATIONALISM AND POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN INDIA**

by

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**NATIONALISM AND POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN INDIA**

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## **ABSTRACT**

India is considered the largest liberal democracy in the world. It is home to a widely celebrated secular national identity despite its ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity. This distinction sets India apart as a successful role model for heterogeneous developing countries transitioning to democracy. This impression is, however, tempered by persistent communal violence dating to Indian independence from the British rule in 1947. Over the last few decades, this group violence, particularly between the religious majority and minorities, appears to have increased. The rise in communal violence has coincided with the ascendance of Hindu nationalists in Indian politics, thus raising questions about their connection with this trend. This thesis analyzes the role of Hindu nationalist organizations and their ideology in promoting political violence in India. It contrasts primordialist and instrumentalist arguments and, based on a range of evidence, finds support for the instrumentalist argument that Hindu nationalist organizations deliberately promote communal violence in India to build support among their base and advance their political interests. The outcome of this analysis will assist in the study of domestic communal violence in India and the implications of this violence for India's secular national identity as a heterogeneous country.

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

BD	Bajrang Dal
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BJS	Bharatiya Jana Sangh
INC	Indian National Congress
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
VHP	Vishwa Hindu Parishad
SCs	Scheduled Castes
STs	Scheduled Tribes
OBC	Other Backward Class

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

### **A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION**

Since the rise of the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) in India, Hindu nationalist organizations have also gained momentum. Such organizations, as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and its affiliates, promote “Hindutva,” which is conventionally understood as “an ideology seeking to establish the hegemony of Hindus and the Hindu way of life.”<sup>1</sup>

The opponents of Hindutva ideology characterize the RSS as an organization responsible for promoting political violence, targeting religious and ethnic minorities, including Muslims and Christians, among others. Supporters of Hindutva reject these claims and argue that the ideology celebrates a national Hindu culture and identity that is neither intolerant nor violent. They describe the rise of Hindutva as a welcome, broader civilizational resurgence of India.

Considering this difference of interpretation, the thesis asks the question of whether Hindu nationalist organizations promote political violence in India, and if so, how and why?

### **B. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION**

India is considered the largest liberal democracy in the world that is home to a widely celebrated secular identity despite its linguistic and religious diversity. This distinction sets India apart as a successful role model for developing countries transitioning to democracy.

This impression is, however, marred by persistent communal violence. Considering the country’s rather limited experience with democracy, coupled with its religious and ethnic diversity, an allowance may be given for this violence in the initial years of independence. However, even after the span of seventy years, this violence has not only

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<sup>1</sup> Oxford English Living Dictionary, s.v. “Hindutva,” accessed November 22, 2017, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/hindutva>.

continued, but appears to have increased in the last few decades. This increase in violence has coincided with the rise of Hindu nationalists in Indian politics, thus raising questions about their connection with this trend. Therefore, this thesis looks into the potential role of the Hindu nationalist organizations in promoting political violence in India.

The answer to the thesis question will not only assist in the study of domestic communal violence in India, but will also explore the implications of this violence for Indian secular national identity as a heterogeneous country.

## **C. LITERATURE REVIEW**

This review focuses on the scholarly discourse surrounding the motives of political violence and the behavior of its perpetrators, and then about nationalist violence as a form of political violence. This review then looks into the potential linkage between nationalism and political violence in India.

### **1. Political Violence**

The perpetrators of political violence may adopt a variety of means, from assassinations to riots, and from suicide bombing to genocide. This review will focus on group violence in the form of riots, as it will later assist in the thesis being a common phenomenon in India. Moreover, a number of motives may be attributed toward political violence, e.g., bringing down an oppressive government, to redefine ideals, for liberation or autonomy, or to enforce one's religious or doctrinal beliefs.<sup>2</sup> However, as the thesis examines the role of nationalism in India, therefore, this review will focus on nationalism, as a motive for political violence.

Political violence is not always a sudden event motivated by impulsive reactions. A number of analysts agree that it is a function of past tensions, exploited by current events. While Martha Crenshaw ascribes violence to motivating long-term factors as well as to

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<sup>2</sup> David E. Apter, "Political Violence in Analytical Perspective," in *The Legitimization of Violence* (New York, New York University Press, 1997), 5.



immediate events,<sup>3</sup> Donald L. Horowitz compares it to the “earthquake, where cracks in the surface portray violence, and the pressures far below, the tensions.”<sup>4</sup> Similar to Crenshaw and Horowitz, David E. Apter’s “people talking themselves into committing political violence”<sup>5</sup> also appears to refer to a planned action.

There also appears to be an agreement among various authors that in many cases, the immediate victim of violence may or may not be the intended target; rather, he or she is merely a source for the aggressor to convey his message.<sup>6</sup>

A biased ideology, over time, can create deeply negative perceptions, against co-existing communities. Jeffrey W. Murray focuses on this aspect and declares that an ideological rhetoric based on discrimination, and pinned in the minds of common people, can publicly approve of violence against the discriminated group.<sup>7</sup> Apter seems to agree with Murray when he claims that political violence is usually conducted in the name of some higher moral purpose, and is reinforced with social myths and traditions.<sup>8</sup> He also points out that political violence converts non-issues into major disputes and creates group discrimination in the name of race, ethnicity, religion, language, class, nationality etc.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the argument suggests a cycle in which a discriminatory identity or ideology leads to violence, and violence contributes to further discrimination.

As a type of communal violence, Horowitz explores the subject of ethnic riots in detail. He describes riots as intense and sudden attacks by a civilian ethnic group on another civilian ethnic group.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, he declares ethnic riots to be synonymous to communal,

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<sup>3</sup> Martha Crenshaw, “The Causes of Terrorism” in *Essential Readings in Comparative Politics*, ed. Patrick H. O’Neil and Ronald Rogowski, 4th ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2013), 335.

<sup>4</sup> Donald L. Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*, I ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 15.

<sup>5</sup> Apter, “*Political Violence in Analytical Perspective*,” 2.

<sup>6</sup> Crenshaw, “The Causes of Terrorism,” 333.

<sup>7</sup> Jeffrey W. Murray, “Constructing the Ordinary: The Dialectical Development of Nazi Ideology,” *Communication Quarterly* 46, no. 1 (January 01, 1998), 41–59. doi:10.1080/01463379809370083.

<sup>8</sup> Apter, “*Political Violence in Analytical Perspective*,” 4–5.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>10</sup> Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*, 1.

racial, religious, linguistic, or tribal disturbances.<sup>11</sup> However, he contradicts several authors when he declares that riot violence is not always a completely spontaneous action, rather it can sometimes be a very well organized one.<sup>12</sup> He considers the riots to be simultaneously a cause, an effect, and a process.<sup>13</sup> While comparing riots with other forms of violence, he tends to differ with conventional opinion by not accepting pogroms to be separate from the ethnic riots.<sup>14</sup>

While describing the riots, Thomas Blom Hansen is of the opinion that crowd violence remains a major weapon for its perpetrators as it justifies their act and makes it unpunishable. He mentions, “to kill in a crowd is, in effect, to kill with impunity.”<sup>15</sup> The failure of police and intelligence services in checking the violence further contributes to the issue.<sup>16</sup>

About the perpetrators of violence, Horowitz and Michael Mann appear to be in agreement that the actual number of assailants in a group may be very small, but a large majority either remains insensitive to the group’s actions, or worse still, considers it justified, as it represents their feelings as well.<sup>17</sup> This majority acts as a base for the bands of militants forming violent paramilitaries, while the radical elites become the decision makers.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*, 1.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 18. Here, Horowitz cites Ted Robert Gurr for reference in *Why Men Rebel*, p.11, and “Psychological Factors in Civil Violence,” *World Politics* 20, no.2 (January 1968): 275–76.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 20. Here, Horowitz cites works of several authors like Paul R. Brass, Leonidas E. Hill, and M.J. Akbar.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Blom Hansen, “The Political Theology of Violence in Contemporary India,” *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal*, 2 (December 2008): 6, doi: 10.4000/samaj.1872.

<sup>16</sup> Crenshaw, “The Causes of Terrorism,” 336.

<sup>17</sup> Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, 14. Michael Mann appears to have similar views when he says that “the [majority’s policies] are not directly intended to kill the out-group, but the dominant group has such negative views of the out-group that it does not particularly care if this ensues.” (Mann, 2003, 16).

<sup>18</sup> Michael Mann, *Dark Side of Democracy Explaining Ethnic Cleansing*, (LA, University of California, 2003), 8.

## 2. Nationalist Violence

Much literature is available on reasons for nationalist organizations adopting the path of violence, but most of these organizations represent the minorities fighting against a majority state. While not as extensive, sufficient literary material exists however, about the dominant aggressive behaviours of a majority in a heterogeneous state.<sup>19</sup>

The literature carries a number of definitions for nationalism. This thesis will principally follow Hobsbawm, who considers that nationalism is arguably a comparatively modern idea, with a linkage to the rise of middle class, literacy in the vernacular and invention of traditions.<sup>20</sup> In earlier times, humans did carry exclusive tendencies in relation to their tribe or clan or even religion, but the introduction of nation-states increased the span of these tendencies to an unprecedented scale. At this scale, the spectrum of interests and their clash with other groups expanded dramatically.

In a heterogeneous state, pursuit of group interests in national politics introduces disagreement and discord. In this situation, even the progressive and all-inclusive ideas like democracy, or a concept like nationalism, become risky. Michael Mann considers that “nationalism becomes dangerous only when it is politicized, when it represents the perversion of modern aspirations to democracy in the nation-state.”<sup>21</sup> He argues that democracy means the rule of the people, where people are represented by the Greek word *demos*; but people can also be interpreted as “nation,” or another Greek term *ethnos*, an ethnic group – representing a group enjoying common culture and sense of heritage, distinct from other people.<sup>22</sup> This interpretation of democracy, in a nation-state, carries negative propensities, as a majority ethnic group can rule the state “democratically but also

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<sup>19</sup> Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, 5; Horowitz, “Homogeneity is what rioters want and growing homogeneity is what they get,” *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*, 438; Mann, *Dark Side of Democracy Explaining Ethnic Cleansing*, 20.

<sup>20</sup> E. J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution, 1789–1848*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (Cleveland, OH: World Publishing Co. 1962).

<sup>21</sup> Mann, *Dark Side of Democracy, Explaining Ethnic Cleansing*, 3.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

tyrannically.”<sup>23</sup> As in a democracy, welfare is linked with power politics, therefore, control of the state becomes one of the main triggers of ethnic conflict.<sup>24</sup>

Horowitz appears in agreement with Mann, as while commenting on national politics, he expresses that “Control of a state and exemption of others are among main goals of ethnic conflict.”<sup>25</sup> Later again he mentions that “ in those states, where a few groups are so large that their interactions are a constant theme of politics at the center, then the claims of one group tend to be made at the expense of another.”<sup>26</sup>

The pursuit of power, in a state, by a majority is not a new phenomenon. However, in modern times, the norms of equality and other basic human rights have made ethnic subordination illegitimate and provoked ethnic groups everywhere to compare their standing vis-a-vis other groups in society.<sup>27</sup> The resistance of ethnic minorities against domination contributes to the tensions in the society, sometimes leading to violence.

### **3. Nationalism and Political Violence in India**

Communal violence or ethnic violence in India is a complex phenomenon and reasons for its recurrence are challenging to explain. Paul R. Brass analyzes Hindu-Muslim violence in India by taking the Aligarh district from the state of Uttar Pradesh as a model.<sup>28</sup> He declares that there is a tendency in India to contextualize the riots for serving political interests.<sup>29</sup> He also questions the spontaneity of the riots in Indian case.<sup>30</sup> He is of the opinion that repetitive rather than exceptional nature of violence, in India, makes it part of

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<sup>23</sup> Mann, *Dark Side of Democracy, Explaining Ethnic Cleansing*, 3.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>25</sup> Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985, 5.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>27</sup> Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985, 5.

<sup>28</sup> Paul R. Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India* (Seattle, WA: 2005).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 30. Here, Brass mentions that he is in agreement with Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds: Ethnonationalist Conflicts and Collective Violence in South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 30.

the political process.<sup>31</sup> Further, Brass considers, presence of feelings of past injustices in segments of Hindu majority as a significant contributory factor to the communal riots. In his book, he mentions that “their statements [militant Hindus, Brass interviewed] do indeed suggest that they harbour persecutory fantasies. Moreover, these fantasies seem also to have become quite widespread among middle- and upper-class, upper-caste Hindus in northern India.”<sup>32</sup> He links these sentiments to other antidemocratic and fascist movements of the twentieth century, who had created an “other” within their society to blame for their resentments.<sup>33</sup>

Thomas Blom Hansen gives a detailed analysis of political violence in India, including his personal eyewitness account of a riot in Mumbai. He considers that “an important aspect of democracy is that a cause or grievance must be made visible and audible to the public for making it real and exciting.”<sup>34</sup> Therefore, the crowd violence is considered an imperative for demonstration of deep anger and for gaining public recognition for this rage.”<sup>35</sup> Moreover, while continuing about crowd violence, Hansen mentions that “in the political environment of Indian subcontinent, since colonial times, the individuals are not held accountable for violence in the course of crowd action, thereby granting them impunity to kill.”<sup>36</sup>

Donald L. Horowitz, in his works, has extensively discussed the group violence in India. Although, he considers a lesser role of ancient enmities in contemporary rivalries, he agrees to their presence in Hindu-Muslim conflict, in India.<sup>37</sup> He appears to be in agreement to Brass, that the Hindu majority in India seems to carry a perception of threat

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<sup>31</sup> Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India*, 30.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 326.

<sup>34</sup> Hansen, “The Political Theology of Violence in Contemporary India,” *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal* 2, no. 2 (December 31, 2012), 4, doi:10.1080/09584935.2017.1297385.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>37</sup> Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*, 155.

from other minorities.<sup>38</sup> Reflecting on the violence against Sikhs in 1984, he proclaims that Sikhs in Delhi were considered to be occupying advantaged positions by their Hindu counterparts, which made them a target of choice.<sup>39</sup> Horowitz contradicts several authors, by ruling out the business rivalry as a possible reason of Hindu-Muslim violence in India.<sup>40</sup> He considers that some opportunists might have taken advantage of the ongoing violence by attacking particular businesses, as even in the absence of commercial rivalries, the violence against the minorities would persist.<sup>41</sup> With a number of examples, Horowitz points to the collaboration between the religious functionaries and the politicians for inciting violence against the minorities.<sup>42</sup> He appears to be in agreement to several authors, when he mentions that in order to minimize inter-caste violence which affects broad Hindu voter base, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) uses antipathies against Muslims to organize political support.<sup>43</sup>

Peter Krause in his book *Rebel Power: Why National Movements Compete, Fight, and Win* postulates that in democratic politics, just like national movements, the relevant strength of the players explains the greatest distinction in their behavior.<sup>44</sup> The hegemon tries to avoid violence, while the competing groups employ violence to gain sympathies of

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<sup>38</sup> Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*, 171. Here, Horowitz mentions that Hindu majority believes that higher rates of natural increase of the 15% Muslims will convert them into minority. Moreover, Muslims are traitors and will receive support from Pakistan, against Hindus, 172–175. Paul Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India*, 34–37.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 210. Here Horowitz mentions Anjoo Upadhyaya, “Recent Trends in Communal Violence: A Case Study of Varanasi,” and Asghar Ali Engineer, *Bhiwandi-Bombay Riots: Analysis and Documentation*, the University of California, 1984.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 217–218. Chetan Bhatt and Parita Mukta, “Hindutva in the West: Mapping the Antinomies of Diaspora Nationalism,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 23, no. 3 (January 01, 2000), 424–425; Rupal Oza, *The Geography of Hindu Right-Wing Violence in India*, Violent Geographies Fear, Terror, and Political Violence eds. Derek Gregory and Allan Richard Pred, 167; Hansen, “The Political Theology of Violence in Contemporary India,” 10–11.

<sup>44</sup> Peter Krause, “The Politics of National Movements and the Future of Rebel Power,” in *Rebel Power: Why National Movements Compete, Fight, and Win*, 173–200 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctt1qv5qg6.11>.

the target audience.<sup>45</sup> If we use this claim in the context of Indian national politics, the Indian National Congress (INC) appears to be the hegemon avoiding the violence, while the RSS and its affiliates perform as the second group and the promoter of violence. However, the assumption of Krause does not answer the fact that the violence against minorities has continued even after the BJP's over taking of the INC at the center.<sup>46</sup> This situation might be attributed to the *persecutory fantasies* mentioned by Paul R. Brass.<sup>47</sup>

In his article, Stardu Sen compares Hindu nationalists with modern Zionists and identifies them as “a majority with a minority complex; [bearing] simultaneous consciousness of privilege and oppression, undeniable power and irrational anxieties (being outbred, being converted, being ‘defamed’, being eliminated).”<sup>48</sup> These anxieties create feelings for revenge as well as self-defence. The claim of self-defense or a retaliatory action is often used by Hindu nationalists to justify their violence, e.g., during the Gujrat riots in 2002, violence against Christians in Orissa, or mob lynching against beef eaters. It is in the same context, that leader of Shiv Sena, Bal Thackeray, justified the numerous attacks on Muslims and other minorities by his movement, as part of self-defense, or as the logical rage of the majority.<sup>49</sup>

An important aspect of communal violence in India is the apathy of state machinery toward its containment. Steven Wilkinson in his book *Votes and Violence: Electoral Competition and Ethnic Riots in India*, deals with this aspect in detail. He mentions that “Independent inquiries and newspaper investigations into the worst outbreaks of Hindu-Muslim violence have found that in almost all cases local police officers and magistrates had the forces available to prevent violence (or could have quickly called them in) but that

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<sup>45</sup> Krause, “The Politics of National Movements and the Future of Rebel Power,” 173–200.

<sup>46</sup> Apoorvanand, “What is behind India’s epidemic of ‘mob lynching’?” *Aljazeera*, July 6, 2017. <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2017/07/india-epidemic-mob-lynching-170706113733914.html>.

<sup>47</sup> Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India*, 28.

<sup>48</sup> Satadru Sen, “Fascism without Fascists? A Comparative Look at Hindutva and Zionism,” *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 38, no. 4 (2015), 710, doi:10.1080/00856401.2015.1077924. Here Sen appears to agree with Horowitz who mentions that “It has sometimes been noted that numerical majorities can behave as if they were minorities.” *The Dealy Ethnic Riot*, 172.

<sup>49</sup> Hansen, “The Political Theology of Violence in Contemporary India,” 1–14.

they failed to take preventive action, either because of direct orders from their political masters or because they feared retribution if they acted without first seeking political approval.”<sup>50</sup>

#### **D. POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES**

A review of the accessed literature provides two separate potential explanations for communal violence in India. First, the Hindu nationalist organizations promote discriminatory ideologies against minorities to mobilize the voters for the BJP, and engage in pre-planned violence against these minorities. Second, the Hindu majority harbors persecutory fantasies or feelings of great injustice in the past by Muslim and Christian minorities. Violence against the minorities, in this case, will perhaps be spontaneous and unplanned.

The first potential explanation, i.e., the use of discriminatory ideologies for political purposes sets well into the Indian context where, owing to diversity of Indian society and multiplicity of its interests, a political party may feel it difficult to draw membership from multiple voter communities. Therefore, it has to exploit some communal issue to incite an emotional response from the majority of voters. This approach may assist the political party not only in gaining majority support, but also in diverting attention away from intra-group differences within that majority. In such a case, the violence perpetrated through riots is likely to be pre-planned, and well organized.

The second potential explanation about the presence of persecutory fantasies or feelings of great injustice in the Hindu majority is equally important as the Arya Samaj movement, from which various Hindu nationalist organizations trace their origins had a strong belief in a golden age of Hinduism, before the Mughal or British invasion and colonialism.<sup>51</sup> Even the two initial purposes of formation of RSS were: “to unite Hindus, against the colonial rule; and to organize them against external dangers of Islam, Christianity and other outside creeds considered detrimental to the Hindu faith and

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<sup>50</sup> Steven I. Wilkinson, *Votes and Violence Electoral Competition and Ethnic Riots in India*, ed. Peter Lange and others (Cambridge, 2004), 94–95.

<sup>51</sup> Oza, *The Geography of Hindu Right-Wing Violence in India*, 157.



customs.”<sup>52</sup> In the presence of such feelings, even a trivial matter could incite a violent response. However, in this case, the violence will be spontaneous and unorganized.

## **E. RESEARCH DESIGN**

The thesis will analyze the RSS (and its affiliated organizations) as a single case study. The RSS will be examined through its history, ideology, and role in Indian politics, including but not limited to its relationship with the BJP. This case study will help explain the mechanics of the relationship between Hindu nationalist ideology and communal violence in India, whether planned or unplanned.

The thesis will focus on Indian politics from the late 1980s until the present, as the timeline coincides with the rise of the BJP in national politics as well as an increase in communal violence in India. RSS publications and government reports will be used in the analysis. Secondary literature, including peer-reviewed sources—books, edited volumes, and journal articles—will be referenced. Finally, contemporaneous news accounts of specific violent events will be consulted. Major incidents of communal violence, including the destruction of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya in 1992, communal riots in Gujarat in 2002, anti-Christian violence in Orissa in 2008, and a recent wave of lynching will be examined in detail.

## **F. THESIS OVERVIEW**

The thesis is organized into five chapters. The first chapter attempts to establish an understanding of nationalism, and its role in state politics. Then, it looks into its connection with conflict and violence in general, and India in particular. The behavior of majority and minority groups in a heterogeneous democracy is also analyzed. The second chapter focuses on the history of Hindu right, especially the origins of RSS, and its ideology of Hindutva. The third chapter of the thesis deliberates on the role of the RSS and its affiliates in Indian politics, their relationship with the BJP, and their antagonism against the INC. The fourth chapter deals with the potential role of RSS and its affiliates from Sangh Parivar

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<sup>52</sup> Walter Andersen, “The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh: I: Early Concerns,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 7, no. 11 (Mar 11, 1972), 589. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4361126>.

in political violence in India, and the advantages or disadvantages it receives from this violence. The final chapter of the thesis attempts to answer the thesis question of why and how the Indian nationalist organizations may be involved in the political violence. It will also include conclusions, and policy implications for addressing nationalist violence in India.

## II. HISTORY OF THE RASHTRIYA SWAYAMSEVAK SANGH (RSS)

Established in 1925, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh today forms the institutional nucleus of Hindu nationalism in India. However, the idea of Hindu nationalism is older than the RSS; therefore, before analyzing the origins of the RSS, this chapter looks into the genesis of Hindu nationalism. Through the available evidence, it discovers the growth of Hindu nationalism under the influences of colonial rule as well as western ideas of racism and nationalism. In order to explore the evolution of Hindu nationalism, this chapter examines the history of a Hindu reformist organization: the Arya Samaj, a Hindu nationalist political party: the All India Hindu Mahasabha, and then the Hindu volunteer movement: the RSS.

Before looking into the history of Hindu nationalism, however, a discussion on the Hindu nationalist ideology of *Hindutva* is necessary, as a clear difference of opinion exists between the proponents and the opponents of the *Hindutva* ideology. The activists of *Hindutva* maintain that it represents “the aspirations of the people united in history, culture, philosophy, and heroes.”<sup>53</sup> *Hindutva* in the eyes of its supporters reminds the world of the golden age of Hinduism that prevailed before the Muslim and British invaders,<sup>54</sup> and demonstrates to them the traditional tolerance and the admiration of diversity prevalent in Hindu society.<sup>55</sup> The opponents of *Hindutva*, however, claim it to be a discriminatory ideology that seeks a hegemonic control of the majority Hindus over the otherwise secular India.<sup>56</sup> The minorities in India consider that the promotion of *Hindutva* is an attempt by

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<sup>53</sup> “Hindutva: The Great Nationalist Ideology,” Bharatiya Janata Party, accessed May 24, 2018. [http://www.bjp.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=369:hindutva-the-great-nationalist-ideology&Itemid=501](http://www.bjp.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=369:hindutva-the-great-nationalist-ideology&Itemid=501).

<sup>54</sup> Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India* (New York: Columbia University Press), 27.

<sup>55</sup> “Hindutva: The Great Nationalist Ideology,” Bharatiya Janata Party, accessed May 24, 2018. [http://www.bjp.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=369:hindutva-the-great-nationalist-ideology&Itemid=501](http://www.bjp.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=369:hindutva-the-great-nationalist-ideology&Itemid=501).

<sup>56</sup> Majeed, Javed, Needham; Rajan, Anuradha Dingwaney; Rajeswari Sunder, “The Crisis of Secularism in India,” *Modern Intellectual History* 7, no. 3 (November 1, 2010): 653–666. [https://search.proquest.com/docview/755660424?rfr\\_id=info%3Axri%2Fsid%3Aprimo](https://search.proquest.com/docview/755660424?rfr_id=info%3Axri%2Fsid%3Aprimo).

the Hindu nationalists to forcibly assimilate them while disregarding the traditional diversity of India. Moreover, the adherents of the Hindutva ideology might use it as an excuse for violence against fellow Indian citizens from minority religions or cultures.

## A. HINDUTVA

While Hinduism is a religion practiced by millions of people around the world, *Hindutva* is an ideology promoted by Hindu nationalist organizations. The Oxford English dictionary defines *Hindutva* as “an ideology seeking to establish the hegemony of Hindus and the Hindu way of life.”<sup>57</sup> The advocates of Hindutva promote an idea that Hindus are the original people of India, while Muslims and Christian minorities are the alien invaders of the Hindu land or Hindustan.<sup>58</sup>

In the process of defining the Hindu nation’s identity, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, who coined the term of *Hindutva* in 1923, declared that the Hindu religion was only one aspect of Hinduness.<sup>59</sup> He argued that “a Hindu is one who is directly or indirectly (through his forefathers) [a] citizen of Hindustan<sup>60</sup> and considers it as his Fatherland as well as the holy land.”<sup>61</sup> Therefore, the Hindus, the Sikhs, the Buddhists, among others, could all be included in the Hindu nation. Savarkar however excluded the Muslims and the Christians, from the Hindu national identity because Hindustan is their Fatherland but not their holy land, which, instead lie in Saudi Arabia and Palestine.<sup>62</sup> He considered that Muslims and Christians possess divided loyalties as their practices are linked to the non-Hindu foreign cultural sources.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Oxford English Living Dictionary, s.v. “Hindutva,” accessed November 22, 2017, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/hindutva>.

<sup>58</sup> Oza, “The Geography of Hindu Right-Wing Violence in India,” in *Violent Geographies Fear, Terror, and Political Violence* eds. Derek Gregory and Allan Richard Pred, (New York: Routledge, 2007), 157.

<sup>59</sup> Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, 27.

<sup>60</sup> Commonly used term to denote India at that time.

<sup>61</sup> Oza, “The Geography of Hindu Right-Wing Violence in India,” 158.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>63</sup> Andersen, “The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh: I: Early Concerns,” 592.

M.S. Golwalkar, Head of the RSS from 1940–1973, lamented on the Indian Constitution, when he said, “unfortunately in our country, our Constitution has equated the children of the soil with the aggressor, and given equal rights to everybody, just as a person without understanding may give equal rights to his children and to the thieves in his house and distribute the property among all.”<sup>64</sup>

The present Hindu nationalist social and political structure in India continues to promote Hindutva as its ideology with dire consequences for the Indian minorities.<sup>65</sup>

## **B. EVOLUTION OF THE HINDU NATIONALISM**

The modern Hindu identity started taking shape in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, under the influence of the Maratha rulers, the reformist movements like Arya Samaj, and the functioning of the colonial empire. By the start of the twentieth century, the Hindu identity had become strong enough to support creation of a Hindu political party, All India Hindu Mahasabha, and a Hindu volunteer movement, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. For describing the evolution of the Hindu nationalism, this part of the chapter will initially focus on the pre-colonial status of Hindu identity, followed by the emergence of the reformist movement of the Arya Samaj by the close of the nineteenth century, and then the development of the Hindu political party of All India Hindu Mahasabha at the start of the twentieth century.

### **1. Initial Roots of the Hindu Rightwing**

The term *Hindu* appears to have originated from the name of the Indus River. Although the label *Hindu* was used by Achaemenids, the Greeks, and, later, the Muslims to denote the people dwelling in the lands beyond the Indus River, it was not assumed by the people inhabiting the Indian sub-continent themselves until the medieval period.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay, “Why RSS agreed on Ram Nath Kovind as BJP’s choice for Raisina Hill,” *Economic Times*, June 25, 2017, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/why-rss-agreed-on-ram-nath-kovind-as-bjps-choice-for-raisina-hill/articleshow/59302629.cms>.

<sup>65</sup> “Hindutva is the only way for Global Welfare-says Pujaniya Sarsanghchhalak,” Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, May 20, 2013, <http://rss.org/Encyc/2013/5/20/Hindutva-Global-Welfare-mohan-bhagwat.html>.

<sup>66</sup> Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, 4.

From the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, according to Christopher Bayly, the reformist movements had started shaping the religious identities in the Indian sub-continent, but the broad-based use of Hinduism as a communal identity before 1860 is difficult to find.<sup>67</sup> Jeffrelot maintains that the “Hindu consciousness” appears to have its first deliberate manifestation under the rule of Shivaji and the Maratha kingdom in Maharashtra 1674–1818, but even the Marathas rule cannot be considered as utterly poised toward Hindu domination.<sup>68</sup> Bayly brings up that Madhav Rao Peshwa (a Maratha ruler) desired to liberate the Hindu shrines in Malwa and Gujrat, as well as Paryag (Allahaabad) and Benaras, by driving out their Muslim rulers.<sup>69</sup> However, he suggests that the decline of Muslim power in northern India in the 1700s provided an opportunity to the Hindus to assert themselves more openly.<sup>70</sup> Hindu-Muslim violence did occur during this period, but it remained localized and related to issues like cow slaughter, and playing music in the vicinity of the mosques.<sup>71</sup>

An indirect, yet important, outcome of the colonization of India was the introduction of newly evolving ideas of the west, such as nationalism and the nation-state. The direct colonial rule of the British that started in 1858, had a multifaceted effect on the Indian socio-political system. First, the British attempted to interpret Hinduism as a religion from the perspective of Christianity, thereby negating its diversity and awarding its followers a single religious identity.<sup>72</sup> The census carried out under the colonial government categorized the Indian population into a Hindu majority and a Muslim minority.<sup>73</sup> Second, the British governed India through the native elites, who contributed in evolution of representative politics centered on the Hindu and the Muslim communal

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<sup>67</sup> C. Bayly, “The Pre-history of Communalism? Religious Conflict in India, 1700–1860,” *Modern Asian Studies* 19, no. 2 (April 1, 1985). <http://search.proquest.com/docview/61227179/>, 202.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>69</sup> G. Sardesai, *A New History of the Marathas* (Bombay: Phoenix Publications, 1948), ii, 541.

<sup>70</sup> Bayly, “The Pre-history of Communalism? Religious Conflict in India, 1700–1860,” 192.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>72</sup> Thapar, R. “Imagined Religious Communities - Ancient-History and The Modern Search for A Hindu Identity,” *Modern Asian Studies*, (May 1989), 229.

<sup>73</sup> Oza, “The Geography of Hindu Right-Wing Violence in India,” 155.

identities.<sup>74</sup> Third, under the British, mobilization of a larger Hindu community became essential as larger representation warranted a greater number of jobs in the government machinery.<sup>75</sup>

The orientalist scholars also contributed in generating the legend of a warrior Aryan race that subdued the earlier inhabitants of India and its linkages with the self-styled Aryans in Europe.<sup>76</sup> Joan Leopold analyzes the works of various proponents of the Aryan race theory from 1850 to 1870, and finds two reasons for its support: first, the advocates of the theory (Joan mentions the names of Max Muller, F.W. Farrar and Samuel Laing) wanted to justify the British colonization by declaring that Aryan Indians were liberated from the alien Turkish and Mongol rulers, and were living under the peaceful rule of their Englishmen brothers.<sup>77</sup> Second, these supporters of Aryan race theory intended to liberalize the Indian society by declaring that Aryans in India had degenerated due to adoption of pagan practices, and by embracing westernization, the Aryans in India can regain their lost status in the world community.<sup>78</sup>

## **2. The Arya Samaj**

By the end of the nineteenth century, the Hindu educated elite, through movements like Arya Samaj, worked to negate the effects of the colonial domination by promoting unity of the Hindus as well as reform in the Hindu religion.

The Arya Samaj movement worked on constructing a Hindu nationalist identity through a strong belief in a golden age of Hinduism, before the Muslim and the British invasions.<sup>79</sup> The Hindu nationalists during this period used the strategy of “stigmatization” and “emulation” to construct a nationalist identity that was quite different from the original

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<sup>74</sup>Oza, “The Geography of Hindu Right-Wing Violence in India,” 155.

<sup>75</sup> Thapar, “Imagined Religious Communities - Ancient-History and The Modern Search for A Hindu Identity,” 229.

<sup>76</sup> Oza, “The Geography of Hindu Right-Wing Violence in India,” 156.

<sup>77</sup> Leopold, Joan. “British Applications of the Aryan Theory of Race to India, 1850–1870.” *The English Historical Review* 89, no. 352 (1974), 24. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/567427>.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>79</sup> Oza, “The Geography of Hindu Right-Wing Violence in India,” 157.

Hinduism.<sup>80</sup> These nationalists stigmatized the Muslims and the British as *others* who invaded and subjugated their fatherland, while emulated the European nationalist concepts in the process of constructing a Hindu nationalist identity. The nationalists exploited the myth of original *Hindu* nations and peoples to place themselves in the European nationalist configuration, by using the territory of sub-continent while negating the diversity of its inhabitants.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, they deliberated on assuming the territory under the British rule as the homeland for the Hindus, although many parts of British India were never included in the mythical Hindu territory lying between the Indus River and the seas.

The social reforms, introduced by British, like the abolition of Sati, the Hindu Widows Remarriage Act of 1856, the Religious Disabilities Act of 1850, as well as vigorous Christian missionary activity spread the fear in Hindu intelligentsia that the British were deliberately targeting the Hindu religion and culture for converting India into a Christian state.<sup>82</sup> The Arya Samaj worked to counter this British influence on Indian culture by promoting the reformed Hindu culture. It even introduced the practice of proselytization in Hinduism that was otherwise exercised by the Abrahamic religions.<sup>83</sup> As their rule consolidated, the British made a number of allowances to minorities, especially extension of a separate electorate to Muslims at the municipal level; in response the Arya Samajists formed Hindu Mahasabha.<sup>84</sup>

### **3. The All-India Hindu Mahasabha**

The start of the twentieth century saw a greater political mobilization in British India. Muslims formed the Muslim League in 1906, and enthusiastically participated in the

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<sup>80</sup> Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, 6.

<sup>81</sup> Gould, William. *Hindu Nationalism and the Language of Politics in Late Colonial India* (Cambridge, UK, 2004).

<sup>82</sup> Oza, "The Geography of Hindu Right-Wing Violence in India," 157; Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalism A Reader*, 9–10.

<sup>83</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, Centenary Edition (Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1985), 336.

<sup>84</sup> Oza, "The Geography of Hindu Right-Wing Violence in India," 157.



Khilafat movement (an effort for revoking the abolishment of the Ottoman Empire after WWI), while the nationalist Hindu elites formed the Hindu Mahasabha, and the RSS.

The All India Hindu Mahasabha was organized in 1915 and right from the outset it faced a two-pronged challenge from the heterogeneous society of the Indian sub-continent. Foremost was the issue of the traditional diversity within the people it wanted to include in the Hindu nationality. In addition, India was also home to minorities like Muslims and Christians, whom the Mahasbha could not accept in the folds of Hinduism. Therefore, it set out to define a *Hindu* for clarifying its core ideas and the political direction.<sup>85</sup>

Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, a Hindu Mahasbha leader, wrote an ideological pamphlet: *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu*. Savarkar brought Hinduism out of the religious domain and defined it as an ethnic, cultural, and political identity. In fact, despite their revulsion at foreign models, the Hindu nationalists had adopted the western idea of ethnic nationalism.<sup>86</sup> Savarkar related the evolution of the Hindu nationality with the spread of the Aryans in the Indian sub-continent, and also included the pre-Aryan people of India into Hindus as they belonged to the same territory bounded by the Indus River and the seas.<sup>87</sup> Savarkar emphasized on the common ancestry of the Hindu nation, and that its people were joined with the common bonds of blood, and the love of their fatherland. All those who adopted Hindu culture and accepted India as its fatherland were welcome in the Hindu nation.<sup>88</sup>

On the other hand, Savarkar rejected the Muslims and the Christians as part of the Hindu nation, as they carried divided loyalties, where they shared the love of the fatherland with other Indians; however, their holy persons, and lands were not Indian. Unless, these people decided to have their allegiance and love for fatherland overtake their allegiance and love over their holy lands, Muslims and Christians could not be accepted in the Hindu

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<sup>85</sup> Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalism A Reader*, 86.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 87–88.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 84–96.

nation.<sup>89</sup> Exclusion of the Muslims and the Christians from the Indian nationalist identity on the grounds that their holy lands are located out of India seems strange. It might have more to do with the perception of the Muslims, and the Christians as the invaders who conquered India.

The Hindu nationalists considered the non-violent policies of the Indian National Congress (INC) as inadequate for gaining independence from the British. Moreover, the INC's secularist policies were also considered as an appeasement for the minorities at the cost of the Hindu interests. Therefore, the Mahasbha laid profound emphasis in inculcating 'aggression' in the Hindu youth.<sup>90</sup> It organized a military school in Nasik, promoted consumption of non-vegetarian food in Hindus, and focused on improving their physique.<sup>91</sup> Emphasis on aggression would support in identity construction as an image of a warrior protecting his religion, and the homeland would contribute toward the overall theme of a homogeneous 'Hindu' nation residing in India. Mahasabha was instrumental in the Hindu-Muslim riots in Nagpur in 1923 that later influenced the creation of the RSS by Hedgewar.<sup>92</sup> The first Indian Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, in his book alleges Mahasabha to be an "aggressively communal" and "revivalist" organization, whose superiors often indulged in "violent diatribes."<sup>93</sup>

The Mahasbha also faced an internal conflict between the reformists of the Hindu religion and the traditionalists who opposed reform. Although the reformists remained the dominant group in the Mahasbha, however, they toned down their reformist narrative, for the good will of the traditionalists who were the primary donors of the organization.<sup>94</sup> As the British ignored the Mahasabha leaders in the political negotiations and the INC adopted a pluralistic approach for addressing the diversity of Indian population, the Mahasabha

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<sup>89</sup> Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalism A Reader*, 84–96.

<sup>90</sup> Jha, Bhuwan Kumar. "Militarizing the Community: Hindu Mahasabha's Initiative (1915–1940)," *Studies in History* 29, no. 1 (February 2013), 141.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>92</sup> Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*, 12.

<sup>93</sup> Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, 386.

<sup>94</sup> Andersen, "The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh: II: Who Represents the Hindus?" *Economic and Political Weekly* 7, no. 12 (Mar. 18, 1972): 636, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4361149>.

moved closer to violent politics, again promoting aggressive behavior in communal relations.<sup>95</sup> However, being poorly organized and hierarchically dominated by the upper caste Hindus, the Mahasabha failed to perform politically, especially in the elections.<sup>96</sup>

Mahasabha became the parent group for the RSS, and many RSS members initially remained associated with it.<sup>97</sup> Savarkar, the champion of the RSS ideology, and Hedgewar, the founder of the RSS, were both Mahasabha members.<sup>98</sup>

Marzia Casolari claims that whether it was the matter of the revival of the Aryan culture and symbolism or the question of dealing with the respective Jewish and Muslim minorities, the Mahasabha remained highly inspired by Fascist Nazi Germany.<sup>99</sup> Balakrishna Shivram Moonje, the Mahasabha leader, met with the Italian fascist leader Mussolini in Italy in 1931, and was particularly impressed with the Italian fascist organizations, the Balilla and the Avanguardisti; the RSS would share similarities in its organizational structure with these Italian organizations.<sup>100</sup> Mahasabha, today, declares itself as a “non-secular party established for safeguarding the issues of Hindus.”<sup>101</sup>

### C. RASHTRIYA SWAYAMSEVAK SANGH

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) or the national volunteer corps is today considered as the primary organization of Hindu nationalists. The RSS also acts as the umbrella structure that joins various Hindu nationalist organizations into a family known as the *Sangh Parivar* (meaning the family of organizations).

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<sup>95</sup> Jha, “Militarizing the Community: Hindu Mahasabha’s Initiative (1915–1940),” 120.

<sup>96</sup> Andersen, “The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh: II: Who Represents the Hindus?” 636–637.

<sup>97</sup> Oza, “The Geography of Hindu Right-Wing Violence in India,” 158.

<sup>98</sup> Casolari, “Hindutva’s Foreign Tie-Up in the 1930s: Archival Evidence.” *Economic and Political Weekly* 35, no. 4 (January 22, 2000): 223.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

<sup>101</sup> “Akhil Bharat Hindu Mahasabha, Introduction,” Akhil Bharat Hindumahasabha, accessed May 24, 2018, <http://www.abhm.org.in/about.aspx#>.

## 1. The Development of the RSS

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) or the national volunteer corps was formed in 1925 in Nagpur by Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, a disciple of B. S. Moonje (the Mahasbha leader).<sup>102</sup> Hedgewar was discontented with the peaceful, non-cooperation drive of Mr. Gandhi against the British and considered that Mr. Gandhi's support to the Khilafat Movement had created separatist tendencies in the Muslims.<sup>103</sup> Moreover, Hedgewar was deeply inspired with the views of Savarkar about the Hindu nation, and after discussing the idea with Savarkar, he formed the RSS.<sup>104</sup>

The initial purpose of formation of the RSS was to unite the Hindus against the British colonial rule, and to guide them against external influences like Islam, and Christianity that were detrimental to the Hindu faith and customs.<sup>105</sup> Its members, on one hand, were required to take an oath of lifetime commitment to the RSS, and the betterment of Hindus as well as the country; while on the other, they had to observe absolute submission to the *Sarsanghchalak* (the leader of the RSS).<sup>106</sup>

The RSS focused on character-building and ideological education through 'military-style' training of its members, who were organized on the basis of *Shakhas* (the basic unit of the RSS configuration), and used *akahra* as a platform for their daily activities.<sup>107</sup> *Akharas* are the traditional gyms in Indian towns and villages. The master trainer at the *akahra* is treated as the mentor by his disciples. Therefore, a strong attachment to the group, and its instructor became inherent at the very basic tier of the RSS. The military-style parades, team sports, martial arts training, and intellectual discourse became routine activities of these *Shakhas*.<sup>108</sup> Renunciation of the professions and family was also

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<sup>102</sup> Andersen, "The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh: I: Early Concerns," 592.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 592.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 592.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 589.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 593.

<sup>107</sup> Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, 35.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 38–39.

promoted by the RSS, especially in its officers corps, so that they may devote their complete energies toward the cause of Hindu nationalism.<sup>109</sup>

Established in Nagpur, the RSS gradually started expanding by sending its students to the universities in the other cities, where they invited the teachers and the students to join the RSS. Although the RSS was pre-dominantly an upper-caste organization with maximum participation from the Brahmins, it promoted an egalitarian policy contributing to its popularity. Moreover, the physical exercises, and sports as well as promotion of high morals of the Hindu religion attracted the youth to the RSS.<sup>110</sup> In 1939, the RSS had 500 branches and 60,000 members, which grew to 76,000 by 1943.<sup>111</sup> At the time of the partition, the RSS claimed to have obtained the objectives set by Hedgewar of enrolling 3 percent of the total urban population and 1 percent of rural population.<sup>112</sup> The RSS also ran two colleges, and fourteen high schools at that time.<sup>113</sup> Mass appeal of the RSS was a function of its focus on character-building, nationalism, and the physical training promoted by its volunteers in a politically charged society. The post-partition welfare of the refugees would also contribute toward the popularity of the RSS in general public.

All-India Hindu Mahasbha was also instrumental in the surge of the RSS membership. However, the RSS did not become a subsidiary of the Mahasbha, and tended to remain away from the politics.<sup>114</sup> Moreover, differences between Savarkar (the leader of the Mahasabha) and Golwalker, who succeeded Hedgewar as the leader of the RSS after his death in 1940, led to the distancing between the RSS and the Mahasbha. Another reason of the estrangement between the two organizations was that many RSS members were also member of the INC, and therefore, they desired to keep the RSS closer to the INC rather

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<sup>109</sup> Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, 41–43.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>111</sup> Andersen, “The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh: I: Early Concerns,” 594.

<sup>112</sup> Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, 136–137.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 136–137.

<sup>114</sup> Andersen, “The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh: I: Early Concerns,” 594.

than the Mahasabha.<sup>115</sup> The influence of these RSS members on INC's local politics during this period is out of the focus of this thesis.

The split between the RSS and the Mahasabha would seriously harm the latter, which was composed mainly of rich elite, and was desperately in need of foot-soldiers for competing with the INC over the Hindu constituency. The Mahasabha later went on to support the creation of another organization, the Hindu Rashtra Dal led by Nathuram Godse (a disciple of Savarkar, a previous RSS activist and assassin of Mr. Gandhi); however, this organization could not become as widespread as the RSS.<sup>116</sup>

## **2. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the Indian Independence**

During WWII, the RSS, which had reached the height of its popularity, tended to avoid direct involvement in politics. Its activities were focused on preparations for protecting the Hindus from a possible Japanese invasion as well as against any communal fall-out with the Muslims, as the Muslim League had started its campaign for creation of Pakistan.<sup>117</sup>

After WWII, anticipating the departure of the British, all the communities in India were caught in the security dilemma, where the Muslims, the Sikhs, and the Hindus, especially in the Punjab and the Bengal provinces, armed themselves for a forthcoming confrontation. The RSS provided a trained, and motivated cadre to the Hindus during the communal violence resulting from the partition. Walter Anderson claims that the RSS leaders confirmed to him their “defensive” use of the weapons provided to them by the officials in the East Punjab for protection of the Hindus.<sup>118</sup> Anderson also considers that the Indian Home Minister Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel deemed the RSS as a useful tool for the protection of the Hindus.<sup>119</sup> Involvement of the RSS volunteers in the massacre of the

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<sup>115</sup> Andersen, “The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh: II: Who Represents the Hindus?” 637–638.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 636.

<sup>117</sup> Andersen, “The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh: I: Early Concerns,” 595.

<sup>118</sup> Andersen, “The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh: III: Participation in Politics,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 7, no. 13 (Mar. 25, 1972), 675, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4361179>.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 675.

Muslims in the Jammu district of Kashmir on the instigation of the Maharaja of Kashmir is also reported by many historians.<sup>120</sup> Golwalkar, the RSS leader, is also claimed to have met the Maharaja of Kashmir in October 1947, and urged him to recruit Punjabi Sikhs and Hindus in his militia against his Muslim citizenry.<sup>121</sup>

During and immediately after the partition, the RSS performed volunteer work for support of the non-Muslim refugees, and this volunteer work would earn widespread popularity for the RSS. The RSS successfully carved its image of a patriotic, and disciplined organization that was able to support the people who suffered from the partition.<sup>122</sup>

The assassination of Mr. Gandhi on January 30, 1948, by a Hindu nationalist Nathoram Godse, brought focus of the Indian government on all the Hindu nationalist organizations, and the RSS was also banned on February 4, 1948.<sup>123</sup> Mr. Nehru, the Prime Minister of India, considered the assassination of Gandhi as part of the wider RSS plot of taking over the Indian government; therefore, he ordered the Minister of Home Affairs Sardar Patel to suppress the RSS with force.<sup>124</sup> An internal report circulated within the INC described the RSS as a “communal militarist organization with violent tendencies that practiced secret and violent methods to promote ‘fascism’ and a disregard for constitutional methods.”<sup>125</sup> The report also specified that the real aims and objectives of the RSS were only limited to its “inner circle,” while restricting its activities to physical training only for

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<sup>120</sup> Christopher Snedden, “What Happened to Muslims in Jammu? Local Identity, “The Massacre” of 1947 and The Roots of the Kashmir Problem,” *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 24, no. 2 (2001): 120; Rifat Fareed, “The Forgotten Massacre that Ignited the Kashmir Dispute,” *Aljazeera*, November 6, 2017, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/11/forgotten-massacre-ignited-kashmir-dispute-171106144526930.html>; and Chatta, Illays, “Terrible Fate: Ethnic Cleansing of Jammu’s Muslims in 1947,” *Journal of Pakistan Vision* 10, no. 1 (2009): 126–127.

<sup>121</sup> Navlakha, Gautam. “Bharat’s Kashmir War,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 26, no. 51 (1991): 2951–962. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41625458>.

<sup>122</sup> Curran, Jean A. “The RSS: Militant Hinduism,” *Far Eastern Survey* 19, no. 10 (1950): 93–98. doi:10.2307/3023941, 94.

<sup>123</sup> Andersen, “The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh: III: Participation in Politics,” 675.

<sup>124</sup> Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, 87.

<sup>125</sup> Casolari, “Hindutva’s Foreign Tie-Up in the 1930s: Archival Evidence,” 218.

the general members of the RSS and the society.<sup>126</sup> The acceptance of the RSS in public suffered a huge blow as it faced mass arrests, and widespread condemnation all over India.<sup>127</sup>

Suffering from the ban, Golwalkar the RSS leader offered cooperation with the INC in politics while leaving the RSS functioning in the cultural domain; however, his offer was rejected and he was put in jail.<sup>128</sup> Sardar Patel at several occasions advocated the incorporation of the RSS cadre into the INC for strengthening the party base, however, Nehru firmly directed that the RSS members could only join the INC after forsaking their RSS membership. The ban on the RSS was removed in July 1949, after it had drafted a constitution that declared that the RSS work will be cultural only, it would avoid violence and it would remain loyal to the national flag.<sup>129</sup>

After lifting the ban, a debate about bringing the RSS into politics started within its circles, which paved the way for creation of the Bharatiya Jan Sangh, the political arm of the RSS (the details will be covered in the next chapter). The RSS also expanded its activities by supporting various labor and student organizations.

### **3. Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh Today**

Present RSS is the “umbrella structure” within which all other branches of the *Sangh Parivar* (meaning the family of organizations) are organized.<sup>130</sup> The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Baharatiya Janata Party (BJP) are the most powerful among more than sixty different organizations of the *Sangh Parivar*, with many of the key members of both organizations recruited from the RSS.<sup>131</sup> While VHP operates as a bridge between

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<sup>126</sup> Casolari, “Hindutva’s Foreign Tie-Up in the 1930s: Archival Evidence,” 218–228.

<sup>127</sup> Andersen, “The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh: III: Participation in Politics” 675.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 677.

<sup>129</sup> Curran, “The RSS: Militant Hinduism,” *Far Eastern Survey* 19, no. 10 (1950): 93–98. doi:10.2307/3023941, 95.

<sup>130</sup> Oza, “The Geography of Hindu Right-Wing Violence in India,” 159.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.



the religious establishment and the RSS,<sup>132</sup> the BJP performs as the political wing of the Hindu Right.<sup>133</sup> The BJP-VHP-RSS complement each other and present themselves as the exclusive authority to represent all Hindus in India.<sup>134</sup> In 2002, the RSS was running 20,000 private non-profit schools in India under an education system known as *Vidya Bharti*.<sup>135</sup> Vidya Bharti employs a syllabus that aims to revive the *Hindu* culture, and renounces the Muslim and Christian invaders. Today, the number of schools has doubled from 2002. In Indian politics also, the *Sangh Parivar* led by the RSS continues to endorse Hindutva as its ideology, and actively promote Hindu nationalism.

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<sup>132</sup> Hansen, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India*, 101.

<sup>133</sup> Casolari, "Hindutva's Foreign Tie-Up in the 1930s: Archival Evidence," 218–228.

<sup>134</sup> Oza, "The Geography of Hindu Right-Wing Violence in India," 159.

<sup>135</sup> Somini Sengupta, "Hindu Right Goes to School to Build a Nation," *New York Times*, May 13, 2002, <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/05/13/world/hindu-right-goes-to-school-to-build-a-nation.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>.

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### **III. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RASHTRIYA SWAYAMSEVAK SANGH (RSS) AND BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY (BJP)**

Before the partition of British India, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) avoided direct participation in democratic politics. However, after Indian independence, its members used specific Hindu nationalist political platforms to become actively involved in Indian democratic politics. This chapter examines two political parties, the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) which have been used by the RSS as its political arms. The chapter also describes how after failing to affiliate itself with the Indian National Congress (INC), the RSS became the INC's major opponent in politics and subsequently outperformed it through the BJP. It looks into the criticism faced by the politicians from the BJS and the BJP over the communalist image of their parties. In the end, it debates the possibility of the BJP parting ways from the RSS to avoid accusations of communalism after dominating Indian national politics.

#### **A. THE RSS AND DEMOCRATIC POLITICS**

The assassination of Mahatma Gandhi brought focus of the Indian government on all the Hindu nationalist organizations, and the RSS was also banned.<sup>136</sup> Suffering from the ban in 1948, Golwalkar, leader of the RSS, offered cooperation to the INC in its politics with the RSS remaining functional only in the cultural domain. However, the INC rejected his offer and he was put in jail.<sup>137</sup> Sardar Patel on several occasions advocated the incorporation of the RSS cadre into the INC for strengthening the party base; however, Nehru firmly directed that the RSS members could only join the INC after forsaking their RSS membership. The leadership of the INC was also skeptical of the RSS due to its extremist views: the RSS had objected to the Indian national flag;<sup>138</sup> it also criticized the Indian constitution for being secular and therefore non-representative of the greater Hindu

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<sup>136</sup> Andersen, "The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh: III: Participation in Politics" 675.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 677.

<sup>138</sup> Rakesh Ankit, "How the Ban on the RSS was lifted," *Economic and Political Weekly* 47, no. 16 (2012): 74–75, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23214601>.

civilization.<sup>139</sup> The ban was removed in 1949, after the RSS drafted a constitution which declared that its work would be cultural only, that it would avoid violence, and that it would remain loyal to the national constitution.<sup>140</sup> The RSS also expanded its activities by supporting various labor and student organizations.

After the ban was lifted, a debate about bringing the RSS into democratic politics started within its circles. The rationales for participating in politics included protection of the RSS, promotion of nationalist plans, and reversal of anti-nationalist policies introduced by the secular leaders of the INC.<sup>141</sup> Golwalkar, although against participation of the RSS in politics, agreed to a settlement in which he allowed the RSS members to join the INC; however the move could not materialize as Sardar Patel, the proponent of bringing the RSS in the folds of the INC had died, and Prime Minister Nehru intended to pursue secularist policies.<sup>142</sup> The freshly drafted constitution of the RSS allowed its members to join a political party, but the office-bearers in political party were not eligible for any post in the RSS.<sup>143</sup>

## **B. THE BHARATIYA JANA SANGH**

The Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) was the first political party with which the RSS got involved. Therefore, it is necessary to have a look into the history of the BJS for identifying the role of the RSS in Indian politics.

Syama Prasad Mookerjee, a Hindu nationalist and an ex-leader of Hindu Mahasabha, founded the Bharataya Jana Sangh in 1951.<sup>144</sup> After a meeting with Mookerjee, Golwalker agreed to endorse the participation of the RSS members in the BJS amid some guaranties that provided the RSS members control over the policies of the

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<sup>139</sup> Curran, "The RSS: Militant Hinduism," 95.

<sup>140</sup> Ankit, "How the Ban on the RSS was lifted," 78.

<sup>141</sup> Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, 116.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>143</sup> Craig Baxter, "The Jana Sangh: A Brief History," in *South Asian Politics and Religion I* ed. Smith, Donald Eugene (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966) 77.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

BJS.<sup>145</sup> The move sidelined the earlier members of the BJS. Later, the party usually followed the RSS guidelines, with a continued internal rift between the pragmatists and the people closer to the RSS.<sup>146</sup> Permanent BJS politicians often protested against the RSS intervention in party issues.<sup>147</sup>

Vir Bahadur Singh, a renowned Indian politician from Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, differentiates the BJS from other Indian political parties on four accounts. He claims that first, the BJS was not formed by a dissident group of the INC.<sup>148</sup> Second, the BJS focused on the cultural and communal issues as against other parties, who were more secular and non-communal. Third, with RSS at its back, the BJS was much more disciplined and organized than the other opposition political parties. Fourth, the voter base of the BJS was entirely different from that of other political parties: while the INC and other political parties mostly drew their support from the dominant peasant castes and laborers, the supporters of the BJS were former feudal or Hindu professional and business classes.<sup>149</sup>

In the 1960s, leaders of the BJS collaborated with the Hindu religious functionaries in the Indian state of Gujarat, and formed the “Committee to Defend the Hindu Religion.”<sup>150</sup> The committee held aggressive meetings and distributed provocative literature against Muslims. Their activities in the city of Ahmedabad in 1969 led to the most severe anti-Muslim riots since partition.<sup>151</sup> In 1970, in the Indian state of Maharashtra, again the BJS leadership cooperated with the Shiv Sena (a local Hindu nationalist party) during anti-Muslim riots in Bhiwandi.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, 119.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>147</sup> Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalism a Reader*, 175.

<sup>148</sup> Singh, V. B. “Jan Sangh in Uttar Pradesh: Fluctuating Fortunes and Uncertain Future,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 6, no. 3/5 (1971): 309. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4381552>.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 309.

<sup>150</sup> Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*, 215.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

In order to counter the INC's socialist policies, the BJS presented itself as the representative of the middle class and focused on various interest groups like small industries, commerce and the working class.<sup>153</sup> However, that nationalist agenda of the BJS hindered its success in Indian national politics against the INC.<sup>154</sup> Moreover, the constituency of the BJS was generally limited to upper-caste Hindus, while its leadership was pitted against the INC leadership who were considered the founding fathers of the newly formed Indian state. After failing to stand alone against the INC, the BJS resorted to coalition-building with other Indian political parties and formed regional alliances to offset the political hegemony enjoyed by the INC.<sup>155</sup>

During the period of emergency imposed by Indira Gandhi from 1975 to 1977, the BJS became actively involved in political agitation along with other opposition parties.<sup>156</sup> During the emergency, the INC government also banned the RSS. Fearing a situation like the earlier banning in 1948 to 1949, the RSS approached Indira Gandhi for a rapprochement, failing which the RSS became actively involved in resistance to the emergency.<sup>157</sup> The RSS also claimed that 105,000 of its members were detained by the government during the emergency.<sup>158</sup>

In 1977, the BJS merged with the Janata Party (JP) against Indira Gandhi of the INC and came to power. The merger was encouraged by the RSS, as it countered the

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<sup>153</sup> Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, 169.

<sup>154</sup> Bruce Desmond Graham, *Hindu Nationalism and Indian Politics: The Origins and Development of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 253.

<sup>155</sup> Jones, Kenneth W. "Hindu Nationalism and Indian Politics: Origins and Development of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (Book Review)," *The Journal of Asian Studies. The Association for Asian Studies, Inc.*, August 1, 1992, 690.

<sup>156</sup> The economic effects of 1971 war with Pakistan, the 1973 oil crisis, a severe drought, and massive strikes by Railways employees in 1974 resulted in extremely harsh conditions for the people of India. The opposition used this situation to mount their pressure on the Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi accusing her of corruption and election fraud. Indira Gandhi in turn blamed the opposition of contributing to the economic hardships by paralyzing the government, and imposed an internal emergency rule from June 1975 to March 1977. The emergency rule suspended fundamental human rights, granted autocratic powers to Indira Gandhi, censored the media, and terminated opposition's political activity. The emergency rule was terminated, in 1977 when Indira Gandhi released all political prisoners and announced the fresh elections.

<sup>157</sup> Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, 274.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 275.

dominance of Indira Gandhi and the INC in Indian national politics and placed the RSS members as federal ministers.<sup>159</sup> The formation of a friendly government in the center provided the RSS an opportunity to pursue a more communalist agenda as the communal riots in India, which had been on the decline for almost a decade, sharply increased.<sup>160</sup> Horowitz claims that “coalitions of convenience are easy to form but hard to sustain.”<sup>161</sup> Accordingly, cracks soon started appearing in the JP, which was basically a coalition against the INC, the political hegemon at that time. The secularist and the socialist factions of the JP wanted the ex-Jan Sangh members to distance themselves from the RSS, which led to a “dual membership” debate about the JP members possessing RSS membership as well.<sup>162</sup> The struggle within ultimately split the JP and brought its government down.

### **C. THE BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY**

In 1980, the former elements of the BJS formed a new political party, known as the Bharatiya Janata Party. The RSS is currently affiliated with the BJP, which holds power in the center as well as the bulk of the Indian states.

#### **1. Initial Phase of the BJP**

The first president of the BJP, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, was a long-time RSS member and a BJS leader. The initial political ideology of the BJP was “Gandhian socialism,” which was later changed to “integral humanism.”<sup>163</sup> Integral humanism is a corporatist social and political idea advanced by Dindayal Upadhyaya, an RSS member and founding member of the BJS.<sup>164</sup> Integral humanism and cultural nationalism still remain the basic elements of BJP’s ideology, based on the view of a model social system which is controlled by Hindu

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<sup>159</sup> Jaffrelot, “Refining the Moderation Thesis. Two Religious Parties and Indian Democracy: the Jana Sangh and the BJP between Hindutva Radicalism and Coalition Politics.” *Democratization* 20, no. 5 (August 1, 2013), 881.

<sup>160</sup> Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, 301.

<sup>161</sup> Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, 369.

<sup>162</sup> Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, 308.

<sup>163</sup> Bhatt and Mukta, “Hindutva in the West: Mapping the Antinomies of Diaspora Nationalism,” 420.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

*dharma* (religion).<sup>165</sup> Hansen claims that the concept of integral humanism stresses on two distinct fields, morality in politics and *swadeshi* (Indian local production and utilization)—both Gandhian in nature.<sup>166</sup> The two fields obscure the concept of integral humanism by relating it to Gandhi, and promote a softer image of the BJP; however, the *integral* nature and religious connection of this ideology point toward its association with Hindu nationalist philosophy.<sup>167</sup>

The moderate leaders within the BJP attempted to change the nationalist image the party carried from the outset. They adopted a policy of openness toward minorities; however, the BJP received a cold response from the minorities, who were probably skeptical of a political party dominated by Hindu nationalists.<sup>168</sup> The hardliners within the party used the failure of this policy of openness to pressurize the moderate leaders, threatening to withdraw their unconditional support for the party.<sup>169</sup> The supporters of the RSS recommended that the BJP leaders renounce their policy of appeasement of the minorities, encourage Hinduism, and promote “correctional politics,” which represented the millennia old Hindu civilization.<sup>170</sup> The BJP, failing to garner much support from the minorities, remained dependent on the RSS for its preliminary membership and support, like its predecessor the BJS. This fact is evident from the selection of BJP’s candidates for elections in 1980 and 1985.<sup>171</sup>

In the 1980s, the RSS attempted to create a feeling of vulnerability among the Hindus, by pointing toward the increased socio-economic status of the Muslims in India

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<sup>165</sup> Bhatt and Mukta, “Hindutva in the West: Mapping the Antinomies of Diaspora Nationalism,” 420.

<sup>166</sup> Hansen, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India*, 85.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>168</sup> Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, 327.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 327.

<sup>170</sup> B. K. Kelkar, “BJP and the Crisis of Political Alignment,” *Organizer*, April 10, 1988, 7.

<sup>171</sup> Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, 320.



due to remittances from the Gulf countries, the Shah Bano controversy,<sup>172</sup> the Islamic revolution in Iran, the Afghan war, the influx of Bangladeshi immigrants in Assam, the Sikh separatist movement, and the visit of Pope John Paul to India.<sup>173</sup> In order to mobilize Hindu voters, the *Vishwa Hindu Parishad* (VHP), an affiliate of the RSS, started long intra-state processions called *Ekatmata Yatra* (pilgrimage of one-soulness).<sup>174</sup> The processions, logistically supported by around 50,000 RSS workers, became a success and were able to generate huge profits through donations. In order to increase their presence in public space, these organizations mass-produced stickers, calendars, posters, and more carrying Hindu symbols and pictures of Hindu deities.<sup>175</sup> The VHP and the RSS re-raised the issue of the Babri Masjid / Ram Janam Bhoomi in Ayodhya,<sup>176</sup> which had been dormant since 1950s.<sup>177</sup> In 1984, the VHP also raised its militant youth wing, called the *Bajrang Dal*, led by Vinay Katiar, an RSS member. Activists from the Bajrang Dal are trained in combat and are responsible for communal violence in many states.<sup>178</sup>

For some time during the 1980s, the RSS came closer to the INC because: Indira Gandhi employed Hindu-specific themes in local state politics, and focused on economic liberalization instead of social development. In addition, Rajiv Gandhi appealed for Ram

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<sup>172</sup> Shah Bano, a Muslim woman was divorced by her husband in 1978 without alimony. She approached the courts, and in 1985, the Indian Supreme Court ruled that in favor of Shah Bano, and asked her ex-husband to provide alimony. The orthodox Muslims in India perceived it as an intrusion in the Muslim Personal Law, and protested in huge numbers. The INC led central government amended the law in favor of the orthodox Muslim stance as it intended to bag the Muslim votes in next elections. However, the government's decision created a dissatisfaction in the Hindus.

<sup>173</sup> Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, 343.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 360.

<sup>175</sup> Oza, "The Geography of Hindu Right-Wing Violence in India," 160.

<sup>176</sup> The Babri mosque was built around the sixteenth century in Ayodhya, with the name of Zaheer ud Din Babar, the first Mughal emperor of India. The Hindus believe that this mosque was built on the ruins of a Hindu temple that marked the *Ram Janam Bhoomi* (birthplace of the Hindu god Rama). In the 1850s, the first riots between Muslims and Hindus broke out when Hindus wanted to occupy the mosque and its terrain. However, the British colonial administration mediated a compromise in which Hindus were prohibited from accessing the inner area of the mosque, but they were allowed to worship in its courtyard. The issue continues to remain a source of contention between the two communities as litigation continues on the issue.

<sup>177</sup> Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, 373.

<sup>178</sup> Oza, "The Geography of Hindu Right-Wing Violence in India," 170.

Rajya (the rule of god Ram) in his election campaign of 1989,<sup>179</sup> and permitted running of processions in support of creation of a temple of Ram in Ayodhya.<sup>180</sup> But, as the INC government delayed the solution of the Babri Masjid / Ram Janam Bhoomi issue and the leadership of the BJP passed to the more hardline L.K. Advani, the RSS stood behind the BJP.

After the 1989 elections, the Janata Dal coalition was able to replace the INC in the center. The Janata Dal government was supported by the BJP. But, under this government, the BJP faced the dilemma when differences appeared in the Hindu voters on the issue of reservation of seats for lower-castes in government institutions. The BJP leadership successfully avoided discussion on the controversial issue by raising communal issues instead.

## **2. The BJP and the Upper versus Lower Castes Issue**

For thousands of years, an elaborate system had distributed the Hindus into their respective castes, which also corresponded to their professions. The system ensured the dominance of upper castes in the society and created a class difference, where education and administrative professions were reserved for the upper castes, and the lower castes and the untouchables had very limited leverage in job selection. Resultantly, the people who could be considered as the followers of “Hinduism” have remained widely divided within their socio-economic boundaries. As the aim of the Hindutva movement was to create the greater “Hindu” nation, right from the outset, it attempted to renounce the caste-based division of Indian society.

The Hindutva movement, however, faced a dilemma in its renunciation of the caste system, as the primary support base of the movement’s perpetrators, like the RSS, the VHP, and the BJP, were upper caste Hindus; any change in the traditional social structure was unacceptable to them. In order to address the caste and class issue, the Indian constitution granted the scheduled or lower castes & scheduled tribes (SCs & STs) a reserved quota of

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<sup>179</sup> Krishna Pokharel and Paul Beckett, “Ayodhya, the Battle for India’s Soul: Chapter Four,” *The Wall Street Journal*, December 6, 2012.

<sup>180</sup> Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, 350–374.

14 percent and 7 percent, respectively, in national and state legislative assemblies, as well as in government jobs and educational institutions.<sup>181</sup> This reserved quota remained controversial, as different politically strong castes posed as SCs and so the weaker portions of the society did not benefit. Moreover, the upper-caste Hindus considered this reserved quota a threat to their domination and regularly litigated against it.

The effects of the reservation quota started appearing in 1970s and 1980s, as some lower caste groups became able to improve their social conditions through better jobs and schooling. These lower-caste groups became politically active, thus threatening the hegemony of the upper castes in many Indian states as well as demanding the expansion of reservations for the SCs & STs (also known as backward castes) in government jobs. The social conflict became violent in the mid-1970s, as 6,197 atrocities were committed against the SCs in 1976; this number rose to 15,053 two years later.<sup>182</sup> In order to redress the issue of caste discrimination, the federal government appointed a backward-classes commission in 1979, headed by Mr. B.P. Mandal, which estimated plight of the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in India,<sup>183</sup> and suggested the reservation of 27 percent of seats for the OBCs at the national level, thus reserving 49 percent of the total seats for SCs, STs, and OBCs.<sup>184</sup> The report would wait a decade until Indian Prime Minister V.P. Singh of Janata Dal announced the implementation of its recommendations in 1990.<sup>185</sup>

The decision of V.P. Singh had immediate repercussions, as the upper-caste Hindus demonstrated in large numbers, and around 200 students carried out self-immolations to

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<sup>181</sup> Ornit, Shani, "The Rise of Hindu Nationalism in India: The Case Study of Ahmedabad in the 1980s," *Modern Asian Studies* 39, no. 4 (October 2005): 866.

<sup>182</sup> Ornit, Shani, *Communalism, Caste and Hindu Nationalism: The Violence in Gujarat*, (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 65.

<sup>183</sup> "OBCs are the castes in the Indian social system that are situated above the Untouchables but below the forward castes (the "twice born," Brahmins, Kshatriyas [warriors] and Vaishyas [merchants]) and the intermediate castes (mostly peasant proprietors and even dominant castes). They form the bulk of the Shudras-the fourth category (Varna) of the classical Hindu social arrangement. The OBCs, whose professional activity is often limited to being field-workers or artisans, represent about half of the Indian population, but they have occupied a subaltern position so far." Jaffrelot, "The Rise of the Other Backward Classes in the Hindi Belt." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 59, no. 1 (2000): 86–108. doi:10.2307/2658585.

<sup>184</sup> Shani, "The Rise of Hindu Nationalism in India: The Case Study of Ahmedabad in the 1980s," 867.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 895.

protest against the government's actions.<sup>186</sup> The decision shocked the BJP, which was part of the coalition supporting V.P. Singh. The BJP and its mentor, the RSS, were caught in a dilemma: support of the Mandal Commission would lose them support from the upper-caste voters, while rejecting it would antagonize the OBCs, who made up 52 percent of the Indian population.<sup>187</sup> In order to absolve itself from taking any sides, the BJP leadership decided to raise an entirely different issue.<sup>188</sup>

To avoid political debate on the Mandal Commission report, the BJP President, L.K. Advani, focused on the Babri Masjid / Ram Janam Bhoomi issue and embarked on a national ceremonial procession for generating support and funding for construction of a temple for the god Ram at Ayodhya.<sup>189</sup> The BJP declared that the building of the Ram temple would start at the end of the march.<sup>190</sup> The move sat well with the ongoing Hindutva and anti-Muslim campaigns of the VHP. The procession, supported through the Sangh structure, carried highly religious overtones and attracted a large audience all over India.<sup>191</sup> The procession heightened the communal tensions, and created a polarized environment, resulting in many riots and pogroms against Muslims.<sup>192</sup>

The religious hysteria created by the BJP successfully brought it out of the confines of the Mandal Commission issue, won it 120 seats in the national assembly in the 1991 elections, and resulted in destruction of the Babri Masjid. In the aftermath of the destruction of Babri Masjid, the nation-wide violence claimed more than 2000 lives, mainly Muslim, and caused a damage to property worth \$3.4 billion.

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<sup>186</sup> Guha, Ramchandra, *India after Gandhi*, (New Delhi, Picador India), 602–604.

<sup>187</sup> The Mandal Commission estimated the OBCs to be 52% of the Indian population, while adding SCs 15.05 % and STs 7.51% to the total, the lower castes become 74.55% of the Indian population. Authority: Part I (page 56) of the Mandal Commission Report available on the website of National Commission for Backward Classes, a statutory body under the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Government of India, [http://www.ncbc.nic.in/User\\_Panel/UserView.aspx?TypeID=1161](http://www.ncbc.nic.in/User_Panel/UserView.aspx?TypeID=1161).

<sup>188</sup> Bhatt and Mukta, "Hindutva in the West: Mapping the Antinomies of Diaspora Nationalism," 426.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 426.

<sup>190</sup> Inder Malhotra, "Mandal vs Mandir," *The Indian Express*, March 23, 2015.

<sup>191</sup> Hansen, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India*, 165.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

Nevertheless, BJP became able to manifest itself as the only political party able to challenge the INC on a national level.<sup>193</sup> However, as this success was facilitated through the promotion of an exclusive Hindu sentiment, the BJP had to keep endorsing the same rhetoric to maintain its grip on national politics. The BJP continued to follow the ideology of Hindutva in pursuit of creating a Hindu Rashtra (a Hindu country). The pursuit of Hindutva joined the Hindu voters across their caste divisions and supported the discrimination against the *outsiders* attacking the motherland. These outsiders were the traditional BJP/Sangh Parivar targets: the Indian Muslims as well as the Indian Christians.

### 3. The BJP in Power

The first BJP government in the center presented itself as the guardian of the Hindu Rashtra by focusing on the national security. It permitted 5 nuclear tests at Pokhran in May 1998 and accelerated the pursuit of the Indian long-range missile program.<sup>194</sup> A few months earlier in February 1998, the BJP had revealed in its election manifesto the need for a review of Indian defense capabilities and introduction of nuclear weapons into the Indian defense arsenal.<sup>195</sup> The BJP government under Atal Bihari Vajpayee also increased the Indian defense budget by 28 percent in 2000.<sup>196</sup>

The BJP government also used the institution of National Curriculum Framework (NCF) to focus on “value education that develops national spirit, and national consciousness.”<sup>197</sup> This development is aimed to be achieved through revision of the

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<sup>193</sup> Clemens Cavallin and Julia Kuhlin, “Violence against Christians in India: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Two Indian English Newspapers,” *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies* 27, no. 7 (2014). doi:10.7825/2164-6279.1579.

<sup>194</sup> Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalism A Reader*, 300–301.

<sup>195</sup> S. Ganguly, “India’s Pathway to Pokhran II - The Prospects and Sources of New Delhi’s Nuclear Weapons Program,” *International Security* 23, no. 4 (1999): 170.

<sup>196</sup> Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalism A Reader*, 302.

<sup>197</sup> Visweswaran, Kamala, Witzel, Michael, Manjrekar, Nandini, Bhog, Dipta, and Chakravarti, Uma. “The Hindutva View of History: Rewriting Textbooks in India and the United States (Culture & Society),” *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* 10, no. 1 (January 1, 2009): 101.

history syllabi in government schools by spreading a Hindu-centric version of history.<sup>198</sup> Sangh Parivar-affiliated organizations and charities have also attempted (at times successfully) to change the school syllabuses in different states of the United States.<sup>199</sup>

The BJP faced extreme criticism in 2002, when the Indian state of Gujarat underwent a huge phase of communal violence, causing the death of around 2000 people. The BJP's Chief Minister of Gujarat, Narendra Modi (also a member of the RSS), is accused of initiating, encouraging, and overlooking violence against Muslims during the riots in Gujarat.<sup>200</sup> Mr. Narendra Modi was also denied entry into the United States for being complicit in these anti-Muslim pogroms.<sup>201</sup> The state security apparatus, including the police, completely failed to protect the Muslims from the militant Hindu crowds. In some places, the security personnel did nothing to control the violent mobs; rather, they joined these mobs in attacking Muslims.<sup>202</sup>

The rise of the BJP in Indian politics also coincided with increased violence against Indian Christians. Apart from traditional Hindu nationalist opinion of Christians being foreigners, agents of the colonial masters, and attempting to convert poor Hindus through financial incentives, according to John Zavos, the campaign against Christians is also

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<sup>198</sup> Visweswaran, Kamala, Witzel, Michael, Manjrekar, Nandini, Bhog, Dipta, and Chakravarti, Uma. "The Hindutva view of history: rewriting textbooks in India and the United States. (Culture & Society)." *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* 10, no. 1 (January 1, 2009): 103. The writers mention that the new syllabus renders medieval India as a period of Muslim tyranny, and degeneration. It also describes all groups in India other than Hindus as foreigners; and claims that the struggle of independence became a "religious war" against the Muslims. Similarly, the authors mention Gujarat state's textbooks in their article that include chapters as "Hitler, the Supremo" and "Internal Achievements of Nazism." The section on the "Ideology of Nazism" translates Hitler's title of "Führer" as "Savior."

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 107. The examples mentioned in the article include defining many varieties of Hinduism as monotheistic, removing the word *Dalit* (untouchables) from the textbooks altogether, declaring the Indus valley civilization as *Aryan*, and presenting Indian Muslims and Christians as foreigners. Also see: Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalism A Reader*, 249–254.

<sup>200</sup> Eamon Murphy, "State Terrorism, Politics and Communal Violence in the Indian State of Gujarat, 2002," in *Contemporary State Terrorism Theory and Practice* ed. Richard Jackson, Eamon Murphy, Scott Poynting, (London: Routledge, 2009), 86.

<sup>201</sup> "No entry for Modi into US: Visa Denied," *The Times of India*, March 18, 2005. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/No-entry-for-Modi-into-US-visa-denied/articleshow/1055543.cms>

<sup>202</sup> Eamon Murphy, "State Terrorism, Politics and Communal Violence in the Indian State of Gujarat, 2002," 86; Mark Tully, "Taking revenge in Gujarat," CNN.Com, May 15, 2002, <http://edition.cnn.com/2002/WORLD/asiapcf/south/05/15/tully.gujarat/index.html>

aimed at discrediting the INC leader Sonia Gandhi, the Italian-born wife of Rajiv Gandhi (the assassinated prime minister of India) and mother of Rahul Gandhi (the current President of the INC).<sup>203</sup> Sonia Gandhi remained President of the INC from 1998 to 2017. Her foreign descent and Christian ancestry is often used by the Hindu nationalists to discredit the INC and its leadership. L.K. Advani, the BJP leader compared the BJP versus the INC, with *Ram Raj* (the god Ram's rule) versus *Rome Raj* (Roman rule).<sup>204</sup> Similarly, the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi alleged that Sonia Gandhi's Christian descent signified Rome Raj.<sup>205</sup>

The BJP remained in power in the center from 1998–2004 and then from 2014 till now. The BJP also has its own Chief Ministers in 14 Indian states, including Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Goa, Manipur, Assam, Haryana, Arunachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Gujarat.<sup>206</sup> In another five states, i.e. Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Nagaland, and Sikkim, BJP shares power with other political parties of its National Democratic Alliance (NDA) coalition.<sup>207</sup>

The policies adopted by the BJP governments have generally negated the secular politics promoted by the INC. The BJP leadership considers the INC's policies unfair to the majority Hindus and "pseudo-secular."<sup>208</sup> The banning of cow slaughter in states, revision of history syllabi in schools, and projection of "Hindu culture" instead of an Indian culture have led to increased violence and discrimination against Indian Muslims and

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<sup>203</sup> Zavos, John. "Conversion and the Assertive Margins: An analysis of Hindu Nationalist Discourse and the Recent Attacks on Indian Christians." *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 24, no. 2 (December 1, 2001), 79.

<sup>204</sup> P.C. Ganesan, *Sonia Gandhi – The Unfolding Scenario*, (Chennai, Sura Books, 2002), 68.

<sup>205</sup> Pankaj Mishra, "Hindu Nationalism is more Italian and Christian than Sonia Gandhi," *The Times of India*, January 22, 2017, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/sunday-times/all-that-matters/hindu-nationalism-is-more-italian-and-christian-than-sonia-gandhi/articleshow/56711905.cms>.

<sup>206</sup> "BJP in Power in 19 States, has 14 Chief Ministers," *The New Indian Express*, December 17, 2017, <http://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2017/dec/18/bjp-in-power-in-19-states-has-14-chief-ministers-1730655.html>.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Chris Ogden, "A Lasting Legacy: The BJP-led National Democratic Alliance and India's Politics," *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 42:1, (2012), 26, DOI:10.1080/00472336.2012.634639.

Christians. However, the BJP leadership terms these efforts as an endeavor to achieve national integration and a solution for communalism.<sup>209</sup>

#### **D. THE BJP WITH/WITHOUT THE SANGH PARIVAR**

The domination of Hindutva in Indian politics has put a question mark on the secular identity of India, and brought criticism on the BJP, which claims to be the largest political party in the world. In the wake of this criticism, some academics believe that the BJP used Hindu nationalist organizations to outperform the INC. As it consolidates its domination on the Indian national politics, the academics claim that the BJP will distance itself from the Sangh Parivar, and will opt for more pluralistic politics for silencing its critics regarding accusations of communalism.

Considering the aims of the BJP to replace the INC in Indian national politics, it appears imperative that the BJP at some point of time will prefer to separate itself from the Sangh Parivar or try to dilute its nationalist agenda. Peter Krause, in his book *Rebel Power: Why National Movements Compete, Fight, and Win*, postulates that, in democratic politics, just like national movements, the strength of the players explains the greatest distinction in their behavior.<sup>210</sup> The hegemon tries to avoid violence, while the second group employs violence to gain sympathies of the target audience.<sup>211</sup> In the context of Indian national politics, the Indian National Congress previously appeared to be the hegemon, avoiding violence, while the BJP and the Sangh Parivar performed as the second group and the promoters of violence. Therefore, in view of this line of thinking, it is possible that the BJP and its affiliates will turn away from violence as well as hate-based politics after political consolidation. However, observers argue that the BJP has completed its five years in power

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<sup>209</sup> Atal Bihari Vajpayee, "The Bane of Secularism." In S.S. Bhandari, ed., *Jana Sangh Souvenir* (Delhi, BJP, 1969), 55. Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalism A Reader*, 315.

<sup>210</sup> Krause, "The Politics of National Movements and the Future of Rebel Power," 173–200.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.



and is likely to be victorious in the coming elections as well.<sup>212</sup> Hence, it may no longer be considered in the consolidation phase of its domination of Indian national politics.<sup>213</sup> Thus, the BJP's continued reliance on the RSS and its Hindutva ideology, even after bypassing the INC attracts criticism and makes its policies doubtful.

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<sup>212</sup> Kritika Banerjee, "Why Congress May Not Be A Formidable Challenge to BJP in 2019 Lok Sabha Elections," *India Today*, March 6, 2018, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/why-congress-may-not-be-a-formidable-challenge-to-bjp-in-2019-lok-sabha-elections-1183044-2018-03-06>; and Barkha Dutt, "Under Narendra Modi, India's Right is Finally, Winning the Culture Wars," *The Washington Post*, March 5, 2018, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2018/03/05/under-narendra-modi-indias-right-is-finally-winning-the-culture-wars/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.08f9dd90a3c3](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2018/03/05/under-narendra-modi-indias-right-is-finally-winning-the-culture-wars/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.08f9dd90a3c3)

<sup>213</sup> "Narendra Modi Can Form Government Again If Elections Happen Today, Congress Will Increase Tally: Survey," *Financial Express*, January 25, 2018, <http://www.financialexpress.com/india-news/narendra-modi-abp-news-survey-2019-lok-sabha-elections-rahul-gandhi-congress/1030193>.

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## IV. THE RASHTRIYA SWAYASEVAK SANGH AND VIOLENCE

This chapter looks into “revenge” and “self-defence” as the two major apparent political themes of the RSS and its affiliated organizations (Sangh Parivar); the outcome of both the themes in the form of communal violence; and the pros and cons of such politics. It argues that the two hate-based political themes serve the Sangh Parivar well, as they unite its voters, attract new members, present the Sangh as the protector of Hindu ethnicity and religion, suppress the minorities and condemn Sangh’s opposition for appeasing the minorities. Such politics, at times, also have unintended effects due to the local interests of junior Sangh members. However, the analysis of Sangh’s political themes also finds that hate-based politics, keep the Sangh restricted to its constituency, present a poor global image for India, politicize parts of the security apparatus, and have the potential to create permanent divisions in Indian society.

### A. THE RSS AND POLITICS OF REVENGE

In order to gain ascendancy in the Indian democratic process, the RSS and its affiliates employ different methodologies to provoke sentiments among the general Hindu electorate. A major theme is to present Hindus as the aggrieved party within their own country who must avenge their centuries of humiliation and persecution.<sup>214</sup> The Sangh criticizes dominance of the INC in Indian national politics after independence from British rule and terms its secular policies as appeasing toward the minorities.<sup>215</sup> The Sangh accuses the INC of dragging its feet on important Hindu religious issues like banning the consumption of beef from cows (as opposed to buffalos) and the anti-conversion bill (which would restrict religious conversion of Hindus).<sup>216</sup> Likewise, the provisions of the

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<sup>214</sup> A.G. Noorani, “History Revised,” *Dawn*, November 22, 2014, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1146033>.

<sup>215</sup> “Savarkar, Modi’s Mentor: The man who thought Gandhi a sissy,” *The Economist*, December 17, 2014, <https://www.economist.com/christmas-specials/2014/12/17/the-man-who-thought-gandhi-a-sissy>.

<sup>216</sup> “Congress Opposed to Anti-Conversion Bill,” *The Hindu*, December 24, 2014, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/bangalore/conversion-controversy/article6720108.ece>.

Indian constitution that guarantee the rights of minorities are also blamed on the former INC leadership that passed these regulations and provided Indian minorities the right not to assimilate with the Hindu culture.

The RSS and its partner organizations use primordial accusations of aggression and socio-political persecution of Hindus for more than 1,000 years by Muslims and then by Christians, as well as the post-partition pacification of religious demands of Hindus<sup>217</sup> by the INC, and use these claims as political slogans to generate feelings of abuse and injustice in Hindus that must be avenged.<sup>218</sup> For the Hindu nationalists, the present Muslims in India personify all the offences committed against Hindus in the past; therefore, they may take revenge on any Muslim in India for anything any Muslim had done or could do.<sup>219</sup>

Feelings of revenge not only unite the supporters of the RSS and its affiliated organizations but also win over the silent majority of voters who may not directly participate in the violence, but who at least fail to condemn such activities. Micheal Mann mentions a similar situation when describing political violence: “The [majority’s policies] are not directly intended to kill the out-group, but the dominant group has such negative views of the out-group that it does not particularly care if this ensues.”<sup>220</sup>

The “revenge” of the Hindu nationalists usually comes in the form of crowd violence. Hansen analyses crowd violence in India and indicates two important aspects. First, a significant feature of democracy is that a cause or grievance must be made visible and audible to the public to make it real and exciting; therefore, the crowd violence is generally considered an imperative for expression of deep anger and for gaining public recognition for this rage.<sup>221</sup> Second, in the political environment of the Indian subcontinent since colonial times, individuals who participate in riots frequently are not held accountable

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<sup>217</sup> Like banning cow slaughter, the creation of Ram Mandir in place of Babri Masjid, and banning the conversion of Hindus to Islam or Christianity etc.

<sup>218</sup> Anand, Dibyesh, *Hindu nationalism in India and the Politics of Fear*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 134.

<sup>219</sup> Sarkar, Tanika. “Semiotics of Terror: Muslim Children and Women in Hindu Rashtra.” *Economic and Political Weekly* 37, no. 28 (July 13, 2002): 2874.

<sup>220</sup> Mann, *Dark Side of Democracy*, (University of California, 2003), 16.

<sup>221</sup> Hansen, “The Political Theology of Violence in Contemporary India,” 4.

for violence in the course of crowd action, effectively granting them impunity to kill.<sup>222</sup> It is in this context, claims Hansen, that the leader of Shiv Sena, Bal Thackeray, justified the numerous attacks on Muslims and other minorities by his movement “as spontaneous reactions, as defense against a threat, or as the justified wrath of the community.”<sup>223</sup> However, crowd action is not the only form of revenge exercised by the RSS. The RSS members are also accused of carrying out bombings of Muslim neighborhoods in 2006–2007 a revenge for alleged terrorist attacks by Muslims.<sup>224</sup>

## **B. RSS AND POLITICS OF SELF-DEFENSE**

The notion of self-defense has always remained central to the RSS philosophy and politics. As the Hindutva ideology created the “other” to discriminate against, within the Indian population, naturally a threat spawned from this “other.” Hence, in order to resist the threat from the self-created enemy, the followers of Hindutva had to remain in a perpetual state of confrontation where they must “defend” themselves and their Hindu nation from the aggressors and traitors present inside and outside their fatherland.<sup>225</sup> Stardu Sen compares these Hindu nationalists with modern Zionists and identifies Hindu nationalists as “a majority with a minority complex; [having] simultaneous consciousness of privilege and oppression, undeniable power and irrational anxieties (being outbred, being converted, being ‘defamed’, being eliminated).”<sup>226</sup> Hobsbawm considered European nationalism to be a modern idea, connected to “the rise of middle class, literacy in the

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<sup>222</sup> Hansen, “The Political Theology of Violence in Contemporary India,” 6.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>224</sup> 2 members of the RSS were convicted for bombing of a Muslim shrine in Ajmer city, while 4 members of a Hindu nationalist organization “Abhinav Bharat” are under trial for bombing in Malegaon. Jaffrelot, and Maheshwari, Malvika. “Paradigm Shifts by the RSS? Lessons from Aseemanand’s Confession,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 46, no. 6 (February 5, 2011): 43.

<sup>225</sup> In a report on the Gujarat pogroms in 2002, Human Rights Watch describes the theme of self-defense used by the Sangh as, “training camps were conducted by the Bajrang Dal and the VHP, backed by the RSS and supported by democratically elected representatives from the ruling BJP. The camps were often conducted in temples. The aim was to generate intense hatred against Muslims painted as ‘the enemy’, because of which violence was both glorified through the distribution of trishuls [tridents] and swords, and justified as the legitimate means to self-defense.” In “Gujarat 2002 – Background to the Violence,” *Human Rights Watch*, accessed on May 28, 2018, [https://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/india0703/Gujarat-02.htm#P258\\_49787](https://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/india0703/Gujarat-02.htm#P258_49787).

<sup>226</sup> Sen, “Fascism without Fascists? A Comparative Look at Hindutva and Zionism,” 710.

vernacular and the invention of traditions;”<sup>227</sup> Hindu nationalism has also expanded with the economic progress of India, and has invented threats from minority Muslims and Christians.

The projection of minorities as threat serves many purposes for the RSS and its affiliates. First, it discredits the minorities and places their just demands for recognition of their identity and equal status in Indian society in doubt. Second, it portrays the RSS and other Hindu nationalist organizations as the saviors of the Hindu religion and the fatherland, thus earning immense popular and political advantage for these organizations. Third, it justifies aggressiveness against the minorities. Fourth, it provides authority to the Sangh Parivar to declare any supporter of minority rights (e.g., a member of a political party or a journalist) as traitor.<sup>228</sup>

The usual narratives the RSS uses for inciting the suspicion of security threats from the minorities are the threat of terrorism, religious conversion particularly as a threat to Hindu women, and Muslim over-population.

### **1. Threat of Terrorism**

The emergence of terrorist organizations like Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) in the Middle East has affected the image of Muslims globally. Media coverage of the global war on terror has also reinforced perceptions about connections of Islam with terrorism.<sup>229</sup> These general perceptions about Islam are used by the RSS and its affiliates to present Indian Muslims as terrorists, real or potential. This depiction accords well with the Hindutva ideology, which perceives Muslims in India as aggressors who subjugated the Hindus for more than 1,000 years and are still struggling to subdue the

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<sup>227</sup> Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution, 1789–1848*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed, The World Histories of Civilization, 1962, Cleveland, OH: World Publishing Co.

<sup>228</sup> Jayshree Bajoria and Linda Lakhdhir, “Stifling Dissent – The Criminalization of Peaceful Expression in India,” *Human Rights Watch*, accessed May 28, 2018. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/05/24/stifling-dissent/criminalization-peaceful-expression-india>

<sup>229</sup> Dibyesh. “The Violence of Security: Hindu Nationalism and the Politics of Representing ‘the Muslim’ as a Danger.” *Round Table*, no. 379 (April 1, 2005): 208. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/218820306/>.

Hindu majority in India through terrorism and cooperation with its internal and external enemies.

Muslim role in partition of India in 1947, the independence movement in Muslim-dominated Kashmir, and loyalty toward Pakistan are common themes for charging Muslims as traitors who collaborate with the enemies of India to disintegrate the Hindu fatherland.<sup>230</sup> Likewise, the RSS alleges the separatist movements in Northeastern India and the Maoist insurgency in “Red Corridor” states as Christian attempts to dismember the Hindu fatherland.<sup>231</sup>

## 2. Threat of Religious Conversion

Missionary activity during British colonial rule and the threat of religious conversion of Hindus was one of the major causes of the evolution of Hindu nationalism. Moreover, as the Hindu identity started taking shape, the Hindu nationalists became cautious about the religious conversion of even Dalits, about whom the upper-caste Hindus had hardly ever been concerned earlier. The Arya Samaj movement as well as other Hindu nationalists started accusing Christians of religious conversion of Dalits through financial incentives. They started campaigns against these conversions and painted a disastrous picture to the general public by declaring in 1925 that, every week, 2,000 untouchable Hindus were converted to Christianity—meaning 104,000 converts every year.<sup>232</sup> These groups also alleged that 200,000 untouchables became Muslims every year.<sup>233</sup> Such

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<sup>230</sup> “‘Muslims Should Not Even Be Living In This Country, They Should Go to Pakistan or Bangladesh,’ says BJP MP Vinay Katiyar,” *The Times of India*, February 7, 2018, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/muslims-should-not-even-be-living-in-this-country-should-go-to-pakistan-bangladesh-says-bjp-mp-vinay-katiyar/articleshow/62815998.cms>; Sujoy Dhar, “Attacks on India’s Minority Muslims by Hindu Vigilantes Mount,” *USA Today*, May 5, 2017, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2017/05/05/attacks-indias-minority-muslims-hindu-vigilantes-mount/100951514/>; “Shah Rukh Khan a Pakistani Agent, Should Go There: Sadhvi Prachi,” *The Indian Express*, May 7, 2018, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/shah-rukh-khan-a-pakistani-agent-should-go-there-sadhvi-prachi/>.

<sup>231</sup> Pavan Dahat, “RSS Leader Alleges Link between Maoists, Christians,” *The Hindu*, November 15, 2015, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/rss-leader-alleges-link-between-maoists-christians/article7880908.ece>.

<sup>232</sup> C. Gupta, “Intimate Desires: Dalit Women and Religious Conversions in Colonial India,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 73, no. 3 (2014): 665, doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0021911814000400>.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, 665.

statements created a fear in the Hindu majority of becoming a minority and won the Hindu nationalists the support they needed. These organizations were also able to generate fear in the Dalits by alleging forced or deceitful conversion of Dalit women by Muslims and Christians.<sup>234</sup> Charu Gupta quotes a newspaper article representative of concerns of Hindu nationalists: “we should make all efforts to prevent our outcaste women from marrying such men [Muslims and Christians]. It is imperative so that the number of cow-protectors does not reduce.”<sup>235</sup>

A similar narrative continues even today, where Christians are accused of converting poor Hindus through monetary benefits or even with force<sup>236</sup> while Muslims are accused of waging a campaign of *Love Jihad* by converting Hindu women to Islam.<sup>237</sup> The current RSS chief, Mohan Bhagwat, even accused Mother Teresa of working to convert people to Christianity in the garb of offering charitable services.<sup>238</sup>

In order to counter the supposed Muslim and Christian efforts to convert Hindus, the RSS and the VHP have introduced forced reconversion<sup>239</sup> campaigns named *Ghar Wapsi*, literally meaning “return to home.”<sup>240</sup> Bhardwaj claims that the “term is strategically called as Ghar Wapsi by Hindu Activists so as to provide little sense of social

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<sup>234</sup> C. Gupta, “Intimate Desires: Dalit Women and Religious Conversions in Colonial India,” 677–678.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, 677.

<sup>236</sup> Suhasni Raj and Nida Najar, “Hindu Group Claims, Christians Tried Forced Conversions in India,” *New York Times*, April 8, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/08/world/asia/india-uttar-pradesh-hindu-christian-church-conversions.html>; and Bauman, Chad M, “Hindu-Christian Conflict in India: Globalization, Conversion, and the Coterminal Castes and Tribes.” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 72, no. 3 (Aug 1, 2013): 633–653. doi:10.1017/S0021911813000569. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43553529>.

<sup>237</sup> Steve George and Huizhong Wu, “India’s Top Court Upholds Marriage in ‘Love Jihad’ Case,” *CNN*, April 11, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/04/11/asia/india-love-jihad-intl/index.html>.

<sup>238</sup> Najar, “Hindu Leader is Criticized for Views on Mother Teresa,” *New York Times*, February 24, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/25/world/asia/head-of-hindu-group-criticized-for-remarks-about-mother-teresa.html>.

<sup>239</sup> “India Parliament Uproar over Conversions by Hindu Groups,” *BBC*, December 22, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-30573796>.

<sup>240</sup> Bhardwaj, Prem. “Dynamics of Religious Conversion in Himachal Pradesh (HP) Paradox of Manufactured Uncertainties.” *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology* 3, no. 8 (August 1, 2011): 264. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1037876682/>.



legitimacy to their interference in the religious code of conduct of the people.”<sup>241</sup> The U.S. Commission for International Religious Freedom, in its annual report for 2017, claims that six Indian states (Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, and Odisha), have enacted “Freedom of Religion Act(s),” or anti-conversion laws, restricting religious conversion.<sup>242</sup> The laws largely entail government officials evaluating the legitimacy of conversions out of Hinduism and imposing fines and imprisonment on anyone who uses force, fraud, or incentives to convert another. The report claims that “while the laws purportedly protect religious minorities from forced conversions, they are one-sided, only concerned about conversions away from Hinduism but not toward Hinduism.”<sup>243</sup> BJP leaders are campaigning for enactment of such anti-conversion laws all over India.<sup>244</sup>

### **3. Threat of Muslim Over-Population**

Another threat projected by the Sangh organizations is Muslim over-population. Members of the RSS and the BJP stir up religious tensions by declaring that Muslim population growth is directed toward domination of the Hindu fatherland, where Hindus will ultimately become outnumbered. These allegations remain baseless: according to the latest official census report of 2011, the Hindu population in India is 79.80 percent, while the Muslim and Christian populations stand at a mere 14.23 and 2.30 percent, respectively.<sup>245</sup> There appears to be no probability of the Muslim and Christian population exceeding the Hindus in India. However, the Hindu nationalist leaders continue to portray this threat to their constituencies. Even prominent BJP leaders like Yogi Adityanath

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<sup>241</sup> Bhardwaj, Prem. “Dynamics of Religious Conversion in Himachal Pradesh (HP) Paradox of Manufactured Uncertainties,” 264.

<sup>242</sup> United States Commission for International Religious Freedom, *2017 Annual Report – India*, 150, <http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2017.USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>245</sup> Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, “C-1 Population By Religious Community,” Last updated on December 27, 2017, <http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011census/C-01.html>.

(current Chief Minister of the state of Uttar Pradesh) and Sakshi Maharaj (member of National Assembly) have called for laws to regulate the Muslim population.<sup>246</sup>

The RSS posits Muslim men in particular as a physical and moral threat to the Hindu community.<sup>247</sup> The colonial rulers of India may be partially blamed for the creation of a negative image of Muslim men in India. As the British had wrested the control of India from Mughals, who were Muslims, the British posed Muslims as oppressive and self-indulgent, but also full of masculinity and vigor.<sup>248</sup> This image of Muslims is still used by the RSS and similar organizations to generate a feeling of hatred as well as threat emanating from the Muslims, which permits violence against them in the name of securing the Hindu body politic. The anti-Muslim feelings prompted by the RSS also call for adoption of forceful and masculine behavior among Hindus for self-defense and security.<sup>249</sup> During and after the Gujrat riots in 2002, the BJP used these feelings to improve its political standing, winning a greater majority immediately after the riots.<sup>250</sup>

### C. THE RSS AND COMMUNAL VIOLENCE

Communal violence in India is a complex phenomenon, and reasons for its recurrence are difficult to explain. However, the Sangh Parivar's projection of political themes of revenge and self-defense remain major contributors to the communal violence in different parts of India as the practice of hate-based politics supports development of discord and dissent in Indian society. Paul Brass believes that the primary cause of

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<sup>246</sup> United States Commission for International Religious Freedom, *2017 Annual Report – India*, 152, <http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2017.USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>.

<sup>247</sup> See, for example, Dibyesh Anand who explains: “a stereotype of Muslim males, is posed as a danger to the body of Hindu women and through her to the purity of the Hindu nation. At the same time, it is seen as a threat to national, state and international security.” Dibyesh. “The Violence of Security: Hindu Nationalism and the Politics of Representing ‘the Muslim’ as a Danger,” 210.

<sup>248</sup> Barbara D. Metcalf, “Presidential Address: Too Little and Too Much: Reflections on Muslims in the History of India,” *The Journal of Asian Studies; J of Asian Stud* 54, no. 4 (1995), 951–967. doi:10.2307/2059955.

<sup>249</sup> Dibyesh, “The Violence of Security: Hindu Nationalism and the Politics of Representing ‘the Muslim’ as a Danger,” 210. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/218820306/>.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

communal riots in India is the pursuit of political advantage at any cost.<sup>251</sup> In his book *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India*, Brass observes that there is a tendency in India for contextualizing the riots in a way that serves political interests.<sup>252</sup> Political manipulation of local conflicts also precipitates Hind-Muslim or Hindu-Christian hostility and the resultant violence.<sup>253</sup>

The ideology as well as activities of the RSS and similar organizations have alienated minorities from these organizations and allied them with the opponents of the RSS. An aggressive approach from the RSS and its affiliates maintains a check on the level of involvement of the minorities in Indian politics;<sup>254</sup> and their use of the religious card helps in overcoming the inter-caste divisions among Hindus.<sup>255</sup> The politics of the BJP over the Babri Masjid dispute is a set-piece case where in order to absolve themselves from taking any sides on the issue of Mandal Commission's report on seat reservation for lower-castes, Hindu nationalist leadership decided to raise construction of Ram Temple in place of Babri Masjid, and were able to subdue the split within the Hindu constituency by uniting upper- and lower-caste Hindus on a religious issue against a minority.<sup>256</sup>

Hindu nationalist organizations continuously portray Muslims and Christians as the aggressors as well as traitors which has helped generate suspicions about Muslims and Christians among the general public.<sup>257</sup> Dibesh Anand points toward the existence of such sentiments in the RSS and other Hindu nationalists when he says that "Hindutva shares the neo-Orientalist belief in the primordial naturalness of Hindu-Muslim violence in

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<sup>251</sup> Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India*, 26.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>254</sup> "Is Modi's India flirting with fascism? Ram Madhav, National General Secretary of India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, on Hindu nationalism," *Aljazeera*, Video, December 25, 2015, <https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/headtohead/2015/12/modis-india-flirting-fascism-151201114124802.html>.

<sup>255</sup> Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*, 217–218.

<sup>256</sup> Bhatt and Mukta, "Hindutva in the West: Mapping the Antinomies of Diaspora Nationalism," 426.

<sup>257</sup> "India's Hindu Fundamentalists," *Aljazeera*, Video, 22:03, October 8, 2015, <https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/peopleandpower/2015/10/indias-hindu-fundamentalists-151008073418225.html>.

India.”<sup>258</sup> A biased ideology, over time, can create deeply negative perceptions, against co-existing communities. Jeffrey W. Murray focuses on this aspect and declares that an ideological rhetoric based on discrimination, and pinned in the minds of common people, can publicly approve of violence against the discriminated group.<sup>259</sup> The presence of discriminatory sentiments among the general public is a not a healthy sign for Indian society and carries a potential threat for Indian secular identity.

Additional elements like economic competition in local markets, biased interpretation of history, and attempts to forcefully assimilate minorities also contribute to incidents of communal violence. In a majority of riots, the businesses of Muslims and Christians are targeted to economically cripple them and to force them out to peripheral areas. Moreover, devastation of minority businesses supports competing Hindu businesses in the market, which in turn fund the Hindu nationalist organizations. Likewise, the biased explanation of history through a revised educational syllabus which visualizes a thousands of years old golden Hindu era in India disrupted by the aggression of Muslims and Christians,<sup>260</sup> and attempts to force-assimilate the minorities<sup>261</sup> by the Sangh Parivar also generate communal violence.

A further important aspect of communal violence in India is the apathy of the state machinery toward its containment. Wilkinson, in his book *Votes and Violence: Electoral Competition and Ethnic Riots in India*, deals with this aspect in detail. He concludes that “Independent inquiries and newspaper investigations into the worst outbreaks of Hindu-Muslim violence have found that in almost all cases local police officers and magistrates

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<sup>258</sup> Dibyesh, “The Violence of Security: Hindu Nationalism and the Politics of Representing ‘the Muslim’ as a Danger,” 210. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/218820306/>.

<sup>259</sup> Jeffrey W. Murray, “Constructing the Ordinary: The Dialectical Development of Nazi Ideology,” *Communication Quarterly* 46, no. 1 (January 01, 1998), 41–59. doi:10.1080/01463379809370083.

<sup>260</sup> Lloyd, Marion, “Hindu Nationalists Campaign to Remake Education in India,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 45, no. 24 (February 19, 1999): A56; Nandini, Sundar, “Teaching to Hate: RSS’ Pedagogical Programme,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 39, no. 16 (2004): 1605–1612.

<sup>261</sup> Brass, *Language, religion and politics in North India* (London; Cambridge University Press, 1974), 264; “India Investigates Reports of Mass ‘Reconversion’ of Christians,” *The Guardian*, January 29, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/29/india-mass-reconversion-christians-hinduism>; and “India’s Hindu Fundamentalists,” *Aljazeera*, Video, 07:46, October 8, 2015, <https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/peopleandpower/2015/10/indias-hindu-fundamentalists-151008073418225.html>

had the forces available to prevent violence (or could have quickly called them in) but that they failed to take preventive action, either because of direct orders from their political masters or because they feared retribution if they acted without first seeking political approval.”<sup>262</sup> The indifference of security officials toward the attacks on minorities could also be due to the prevalent persecutory fantasies Brass has mentioned in his work. Certain security officials might, at times, carry hatred against Muslims and Christians, thus participating personally in the anti-minority riots, or at least not preventing them.

#### **D. RSS: ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE**

The RSS’s engagement in hate-based politics and political violence carries advantages as well as disadvantages for the Sangh. Some of the pro and cons of political violence supported by the Hindu nationalists are these:

##### **1. Advantages of Political Violence**

The most noticeable advantage gained by the RSS, the BJP, and similar organizations is that, through violence, they are able to unite Hindus across the caste lines in the name of religion to counter the alleged Muslim and Christian threat. The Babri Masjid issue (1992) and Gujrat riots (2002) are examples out of many where Sangh organizations were able to unite Hindus from all castes and classes by inciting religious hatred. Moreover, the violence as compared to non-violence may attract more youth membership for these organizations.

The RSS’s aggressive attitude also helps them to suppress and ghettoize<sup>263</sup> minorities and maintain a check on the level of their involvement in Indian socio-politics. By embodying Muslims and Christians as a continuous threat to Hindus in various forms, Hindu nationalists are able to create perpetual feelings of resentment, which Brass termed

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<sup>262</sup> Steven I. Wilkinson, *Votes and Violence Electoral Competition and Ethnic Riots in India*, ed. Peter Lange and others (Cambridge: 2004). 94–95.

<sup>263</sup> Rowena Robinson, “Boundary Battles: Muslim Women and Community Identity in the Aftermath of Violence,” In *Women’s studies international forum*, vol. 33, no. 4, Pergamon, 2010 365–373.; and Oza, “The Geography of Hindu Right-Wing Violence in India,” 162.

“persecutory fantasies,”<sup>264</sup> in Hindus in India. Based on his interviews with different Hindu nationalists as well as general Hindu population in India, Brass observes that widespread persecutory fantasies in the upper-caste Hindus from middle and upper classes are a significant contributor to the communal riots.<sup>265</sup> He links these sentiments to other antidemocratic and fascist movements of the twentieth century, which created an “other” within their society to blame for their resentments and gross ignorance.<sup>266</sup> Such feelings can win lasting membership for the Sangh Parivar and a stronger position in the national politics. Personifying the minorities as a threat to Hindu women, religion, and state and then terrorizing them into submission through violence also assists in maintaining a psychological and religious ascendancy for the Hindu majority.

Although such an approach alienates the RSS and its affiliates from the minorities, the small minority voter percentage and its wide dispersion make losing the minority vote insignificant compared to the advantages of securing a Hindu majority vote. Brass is of the opinion that in order to maintain its hold on the Hindu majority voters, it is in interest of the BJP that “it maintains the institutionalized riot system that the RSS family of organizations has built.”<sup>267</sup> The nationalist narrative also portrays the Sangh as defender of the fatherland and all its opponents as disloyal to the country and allies of the traitors (minorities). The RSS has leveled such allegations many times against the INC as well as other political parties and media.

Another apparent advantage is that the coercion of minorities serves to move India toward homogeneity, thus addressing the inherent issue of diversity. This homogeneity has long been sought after by the Hindu nationalists and is the basis of Hindutva ideology. They assume that diversity remains a major hurdle to projection of a positive Indian image and the country’s rise as a global power.

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<sup>264</sup> Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India*, 28.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.* 326.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*, 301.

The violence, at times, may also serve the interests of local Sangh leaders while remaining distant from the larger party interests at national level. Local group rivalries and economic competition also precipitate communal violence that may not be intended by the larger political establishment of the Sangh Parivar. Local economic interests may, at times, be the hidden purpose behind an otherwise communal conflict. Asghar Ali Engineer is a strong proponent of this explanation for communal violence in India.<sup>268</sup> One of the incidents he discusses is a riot in Jabalpur in 1961, caused by the elopement of a Hindu girl with a Muslim boy. However, the hidden reason behind the riot was the tobacco business of the boy's father, which had captured the local tobacco market from the Hindu merchants.<sup>269</sup> The insurgents specifically targeted the Muslim tobacco businesses during the riots.<sup>270</sup>

## 2. Disadvantages of Political Violence

Though the Sangh Parivar has largely benefitted from its policy of engaging in political violence, Horowitz is of the opinion that "parties and politicians concerned solely with parochial ethnic conflicts find themselves unable to expand their influence beyond the locality."<sup>271</sup> Therefore, with each incident of violence, the RSS alienates itself from the minorities while taking them closer to its political opponents. Second, the violence also not only degrades the RSS's name at international level but also portrays a chauvinist image of India, the fatherland the RSS aims to serve.<sup>272</sup>

Furthermore, RSS's involvement in anti-minority violence politicizes the state machinery, especially the security apparatus, and threatens the democratic process. As India boasts an image of a champion of democracy, it cannot afford to be blamed for

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<sup>268</sup> Asghar Ali. Engineer, "Religious Fanaticism and Communalism," *Economic and Political Weekly* 32, no. 14 (April 5, 1997): 704.

<sup>269</sup> Engineer, "The Causes of Communal Riots in the Post-Partition Period in India," *Communal Riots in Post-Independence India* (1984): 36.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

<sup>271</sup> Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, 38.

<sup>272</sup> "Vision and Mission," Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, accessed June 12, 2018. <http://rss.org/#/530>.

maintaining politicized or communalized institutions. Additionally, the politicized institutions have the potential of bifurcating the Indian society along political lines and will not be acceptable to the opposition political parties within India either. The involvement of security personnel in anti-minority violence may prompt counterattacks from these minorities against institutions and threaten national integration.

The RSS's creation and maintenance of persecutory fantasies in the Indian majority is dangerous for Indian democracy as well as national harmony. Such ideas and sentiments may produce permanent divisions in Indian society and create conditions conducive to insurgencies or militant activities. The events taking place in a radicalized society will also attract international condemnation.

An analysis of the pros and cons of Sangh's political themes and practices indicates that hate-based politics has served the Sangh well in shorter term. However, in longer period such politics has the potential to permanently polarize Indian society and harm national integrity.



## V. ANALYSIS, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Hindu nationalist organizations, collectively known as the Sangh Parivar and led by the RSS, promote the ideology of Hindutva – a national Hindu culture and identity that celebrates a purportedly tolerant and peaceful resurgence of a millennia-old Indian civilization. Critics of the ideology, however, accuse sponsors of Hindutva of being responsible for promoting political violence and targeting religious as well as ethnic minorities in India. Given the difference in interpretation of Hindutva ideology, this thesis had asked whether Hindu nationalist organizations promote political violence in India, and if so, how and why?

### A. FROM HINDUTVA TO SANGH PARIVAR

Analysis of the origins of Hindu nationalism and creation of Hindu identity in India supports an instrumentalist argument, as Hindu nationalism, in its present form, appears to have developed in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries under the influence of the colonization of India and introduction of Western ideas like nationalism and democracy. Communal violence occurred in India even before colonization but it remained localized. Viewing Hinduism from the perspective of Christianity, the British colonizers may have belied its diversity in awarding its followers a single religious identity. The census carried out under the colonial government also categorized the Indian population into a Hindu majority and a Muslim minority. Later, orientalist theories about the presence of a warrior Aryan race, the threat from British Christian missionary activities, and various Hindu reformist movements seemingly helped consolidate a Hindu nationalist identity.

Analysis of the Hindutva ideology finds that Hindutva promotes the development of a particular culture, the Hindu culture, in an otherwise widely diverse India. Moreover, Hindutva can be used to discriminate against the *other*, an illusory identity created by the exponents of Hindutva to disparage Muslims and Christians in India. By declaring Muslims and Christians *others*, proponents of Hindutva move into the constructivist domain, ascribing Muslims and Christians as the heirs of aggressors who looted and plundered India for more than a thousand years. Such claims provide a source of bonding to the majority

group and justify hatred and violence against these minorities. With the characterization as heirs of aggressors, Muslim and Christian minorities in India apparently become responsible for all the offences committed against Hindus in the past thousand years; therefore, supporters of Hindutva may take revenge on any Muslim or Christian for anything any Muslim or Christian had done or could do. Another implication of the promotion of a single culture under Hindutva is the inherent danger for the minority cultures in India; thus, Hindutva appears to be an effort to forcefully assimilate minorities by the majority. Promotion of Hindutva presents Hindu nationalists as the true guardians of Hindu religion, race, and culture; thus, they gain the authority to declare their opponents including politicians and journalists, disloyal to the nation.

The RSS has been the principal organization leading the conglomeration of Hindu nationalist groups: the Sangh Parivar. While the creation of the RSS may be attributed to the dynamic socio-political environment of British India after WWI, its initial popularity appears to be a function of its emphasis on social work, character-building, and ideological education through a kind of martial training. After partition, in order to interact with different classes and communities, the RSS advanced various subsidiary organizations, like student and labor organizations as well as BJS, VHP, and Bajrang Dal among others. Dominance of the INC in Indian national politics maintained a check on the activities of the Sangh; however, the decline in the INC's popularity in the seventies and eighties encouraged the Sangh to practice its nationalist politics with more vigor through a fresh political platform: the BJP. Since then, the BJP has thrived on the support of the Sangh Parivar, which maintains a volunteer network at the grassroots level of Indian society. Elite manipulation is evident in the politics of the BJP, where the BJP-RSS nexus has advanced communal issues to increase their popularity, counter the inter-caste differences within the Hindu majority, and, ultimately, defeat the INC in Indian national politics.

Analysis of Sangh Parivar's politics of 'revenge' and 'self-defense' and their contribution to communal violence leads to the conclusion that in the interim period, the Sangh has immensely benefited from hate-based politics. By projecting Muslims and Christians as a threat to the purity of the Hindu religion and the structure of the Indian state,

the Sangh has successfully generated “persecutory fantasies,” as Brass calls them,<sup>273</sup> in the Hindu majority against Muslims and Christians in India. Hate speech as part of rallies and election campaigns; teaching a biased version of history in schools that casts Muslim and Christians in India as aggressors; asserting minority holy sites are built on Hindu temples; claiming Muslim men are waging Love Jihad against Hindu women; linking Muslims with international terrorism; and accusing Christians of deceitful conversion of Hindus and the insurgency in Red Corridor states, supposedly are all efforts to generate feelings of revenge or self-defense in Hindus. The Sangh has effectively manipulated these feelings to surpass its political opponents and gain power.

An additional noticeable advantage of aggressive politics is that the Sangh’s apparent coercion of minorities serves to move India toward homogeneity, thus addressing the inherent issue of diversity. This homogeneity has long been sought after by the Hindu nationalists and is the basis of Hindutva ideology. They appear to believe that diversity remains a major hurdle to the international projection of a positive Indian image and the country’s rise as a global power.

Arguably, a negative outcome, however, of Sangh’s nationalist politics is communal violence. Sympathizers with Sangh have been religiously charged to the extent that they exploit opportunities to carry out violence against Muslims and Christians, their fellow citizens of India. Crowd violence or riots is the usual method employed, as it displays the sentiments of anger and is more visible to the targeted audience, and because individuals who participate in riots frequently are not held accountable for their actions. Riots are carefully staged to appear as a spontaneous crowd action in response to some current event. But, in many occurrences, riots are well-planned actions where the rioters are adequately armed and have complete knowledge of their targets. The direct involvement of local Sangh members in riots is also a usual phenomenon.

Today, the BJP, duly supported by other Sangh organizations, has established itself in Indian national politics, and after completing its five years in power, may be victorious in the coming elections as well. Some academics believe that now the BJP will opt for more

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<sup>273</sup> Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India*, 28.

pluralistic politics to silence its critics' accusations of communalism by distancing itself from the RSS and other Hindu extremist organizations. It appears that in the long term, hate-based politics and communal violence may not remain beneficial to the Sangh Parivar. First, their association with communal violence brings domestic and international criticism to the Sangh and mars their image as volunteer organizations. Moreover, communal violence also portrays a chauvinist image of India, the fatherland the Sangh aims to serve. Second, violence alienates the minorities from the Sangh and brings them closer to their opponents. Third, in a democracy, it is difficult for parties to sustain themselves for longer periods solely by stirring religious emotions of its voters. To remain in power, the Sangh will have to work in the domains of reforms and development instead of exclusively relying on the agenda of portraying Muslims and Christians as a menace that should be dealt with by enforcing Hindutva.

There are possibly multiple reasons however, to believe that the BJP will not be able to part ways from the Sangh Parivar. First, the ability of the RSS to provide a motivated and disciplined force that can support a political party at a grassroots level appears to be a crucial asset for the BJP. From the failure of Hindu Mahasabha in 1930s and 1940s, it is clear that, without the support of the RSS, it would be difficult for any political party working on a nationalist agenda to be successful. Even the BJP became a force only after adopting a hardline approach. Second, BJP's core leadership has emerged from the RSS, so it will probably be difficult for them to change their sympathies and separate themselves from the RSS. Third, for leaving the RSS, the BJP will perhaps have to build on the constituency of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes (SCs & STs), to accomplish which it will have to form alliances with its opponent SC & ST parties, thus alienating its prime voter base of upper-caste Hindus. Fourth, if the BJP leaves the RSS, owing to its elaborate structure, the RSS will likely be able to field another political party even against the BJP. Last, the increased political and economic importance of India has conceivably compelled the international critics of Hindu nationalism to look the other way. The nationalist policies of the BJP have not always received the condemnation they merit from the international community. Therefore, it is likely that the BJP will continue to promote the Hindutva ideology of the RSS and use the nationalist expression in its politics.

## **B. POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

Hindutva campaign's creation and maintenance of persecutory fantasies in the Indian majority is arguably dangerous for Indian society as well as Indian secular national identity. If the feelings of injustice and persecution are allowed to prevail in the Hindu majority, violence against minorities in India is likely to become more pronounced. Hate-based narratives may produce permanent divisions in Indian society and create conditions conducive to insurgencies or militant activities. The violence taking place in a radicalized society may also attract international condemnation and harm India's global image as a secular democratic country.

Sangh Parivar's involvement in communal violence may also politicize the state security apparatus, especially the Police, and threaten the democratic process. As India boasts an image of a champion of democracy, such outcome will be detrimental to its image. The politicized security institutions carry the potential of creating social disappointment and will not be acceptable to the opposition political parties within India either. The involvement of security personnel in communal violence may generate counterattacks from the targeted people against institutions and threaten national cohesion.

The rise of the Sangh Parivar in Indian national politics also coincides with the recent wave of nationalism and populism in many other countries of the world. Strong populist leadership in these countries is promoting authoritarianism and curbing human rights. India till now has presented an image of a secular democracy and a role-model for other countries seeking democracy. However, a nationalist, populist government and promotion of Hindutva presents an undemocratic image of India which is an example for other nationalist populist countries. Conversely, the current world wave of nationalism and populism may be used by the Sangh Parivar to support its policies.

In continuing their nationalist policies, and in order to secure their nationalist vote bank, the BJP and the RSS are likely to maintain a hawkish approach in regional issues.

Kapur and Ganguly enforce this point: “The Doklam<sup>274</sup> episode was generally interpreted as a victory within India, garnering largely favorable press coverage and commentary from the strategic community. This will create domestic political incentives to continue to pursue forward-leaning policies.”<sup>275</sup> However, an aggressive attitude from India will be detrimental to regional peace and will increase tensions in a heavily armed and poverty-stricken region.

### C. FUTURE RESEARCH

Communal violence jeopardizes the secular framework of a nation and endangers its internal security. It also encourages separatist elements and supports conditions beneficial for growth of radicalism and terrorism. Therefore, it is imperative that the phenomenon of communal violence be analyzed in detail and the behaviors and policies of participatory groups be scrutinized. Such an understanding is likely to benefit efforts to maintain a check on communal conflicts and the resultant violence.

The worldwide upsurge in nationalism and populism has already attracted the attention of the academic community. In many countries today populist rule is distributing people into a homogenous group and the *others* into an out-group. The out-group may be immigrants, minorities, or even people bearing majority ethnicity but different ideas. To the scholars of nationalism and populism, India can serve as a case-study where the rise of Hindutva is creating similar bifurcations within the society and harming the secular democratic appearance and functioning of the country.

Today, India stands as a strategic partner to the United States in South Asia and is considered in the West as a potential counterweight to the Chinese influence in the region. India’s democratic history, coupled with its economic and military strength, backs this estimation. However, as the nationalist and populist elements in India consolidate their

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<sup>274</sup> Doklam is an area lying between China, Bhutan and India, and is of strategic importance for these countries. Both Bhutan and China have claims over Doklam territory, however, the dispute has not been resolved till date. In June 2017 a military standoff took place between China and India, as Indian troops (while acting on behalf of Bhutan) barred the Chinese from constructing a road on the Doklam plateau.

<sup>275</sup> Sumit Ganguly, S. Paul Kapur, “Is India Starting to Flex Its Military Muscles?” *foreignpolicy.com*, October 17, 2017. <http://2017/10/17/is-india-starting-to-flex-its-military-muscles/>.

power, the country's widely celebrated democratic values might become vulnerable, straining Indo-U.S. relations. Scrutiny of such an outcome will be of value to the scholars and analysts of international affairs.

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