

**VIOLENCE AND MILITARIZATION:
A STUDY OF THE RASHTRIYA SWAYAMSEVAK SANGH**

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It is certified that the dissertation entitled “**Violence and Militarization: A study of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh**” submitted by **Srobana Bhattacharya** is in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy of this University. This dissertation has not been submitted for the award of any other degree in this University or any other University and is her own work. We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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INTRODUCTION

Organization of Hinduism became a dominant feature in the 1920s. The distinctive Hindutva ideology as portrayed by contemporary Hindu nationalism saw its culmination during this time. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) formed in 1925, became the foundational organization for the formation of the *Sangh Parivar*¹, which depicts the Hindu nationalist tendencies in modern India. The Hindutva ideology from its very inception aimed at redefining the nation space and refashioning of the social space of the Indian nation.² The ideology and organization of the RSS was established with the attempt of awakening the Hindu consciousness, based on an ideological interpretation of culture. Redefinition of the culture was essentially located in creating a *Hindu Rashtra* through unifying and revitalizing the Hindu community. The pure Hindu state that the RSS wished to create meant total destruction of culturally pluralistic and diverse society of India, which in the long run harbored a possibility of civil war in the country³, the communal holocaust of Gujarat in 2002 being its most recent example.

Hindutva integrates Hindu religious based culture with political power to create a polarized society based on the concept of the “Other” and “social exclusionism.”⁴ Lying at the base of such an ideology is a mission to “cleanse” India from the non-Hindus, the “Other”. The exclusionist ideology of Hindutva

¹ The ‘family’ of RSS affiliated organizations is known as the *Sangh Parivar*.

² Satish Deshpande, ‘Communalising the Nation-Space - Notes on Spatial Strategies of Hindutva,’ *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXX, (50), p. 3220.

³ C.P.Bhambhri, *Hindutva: A Challenge to Multicultural Democracy* (Delhi: Shipra, 2003), p. 5.

⁴ Ibid.

as propagated by the RSS from the 1920s lay surrounded by certain myths, alleged past wrongs by Muslims against the Hindus. It became the essential weapon, a means through which these past wrongs would be avenged and to create a new Hindu identity - a strengthened and vigorous self. Gradually this notion of being a Hindu quite automatically came to be identified with the creation of a communal identity.

This identity is constituted by a sense of injury, a sense of always having been on the losing side, a sense of innocent victimhood.⁵ Strangely enough, the Hindu nationalism till now is in search of an identity to assert the cultural primacy of Hindus in India. Defining itself through historical wrongs has created a peculiar problem for Hindu nationalism. It is imprisoned by the past by its very perpetuation⁶ with a never-ending process. The process of rectifying these historical wrongs created along with it the perennial enemy in the form of Muslims, it created a deep divide which till now has not been bridged. Rather, it has been reinforced through a culture of hatred. Violence is justified in the name of protecting the "Self" and the *Hindu Rashtra*.

The Hindutva ideology has trapped itself in the vicious circle of hatred and revenge in a bid to obliterate the Muslims. It continues to perform the same wrongs, which it claims were committed in the past. However, propagation of hatred cannot protect Hinduism. What is required is to free it from the shackles of it and concentrate on a reform from within.

⁵ Pratap Bhanu Mehta, 'Introduction' in *Hindu Nationalism and Indian Politics: An Omnibus* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. xvi.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

The RSS had been largely successful in shaping up the Hindutva ideology as is present today. Together with a powerful political force Hindu nationalism has become a cultural phenomenon and social movement aiming at redefining India. The formation of the RSS, the organizational structure it followed, the numerous affiliates it created revolved around one aim - subduing the presence of Muslims, the "Other". The process was common - building up of a strong, masculine India, an India which would develop a military-industrial capability that would benefit its status as a great civilization.⁷ Through the 1920s to the present an interplay between the ideology and political power has produced Hindu nationalism which is engaged in creating and recreating a symbolic world as an attempt to assert the 'self'. Various methods, techniques, rituals and forms of mobilization have been adopted over the years in an effort to capture the Hindu masses.

The succeeding chapters are an attempt to trace the growth of violence as a natural and normal phenomenon embedded in the RSS ideology and later the brand of cultural nationalism as depicted by the *Sangh Parivar*. Particular focus will be given to the nature and character of violence as is persistently experienced by the country. Communal violence is the natural outcome of the exclusionist ideology as emphasized by Hindutva ideology, which further polarizes the two camps, "We" and "They", "Us" and "Them". The entire process of creating a militarized "self", of giving a masculine character to Hindu identity is in itself a process of manufacturing violence and contempt, a

⁷ Corbridge, Stuart, "The militarization of all Hindudom"?The Bharatiya Janata Party, the bomb, and the political spaces of Hindu nationalism,' *Economy and Society*, Vol. 28, No.2, May 1999, p. 227.

perpetual antagonism, redefined to suit the different time frames, be it the nuclear explosions of 1998 or the communal carnage at Gujarat in 2002.

However, the fact remains that Hindu identity in so many ways, rests upon a sense of resentment, no longer can it define itself by its achievements, the vitality of its thoughts and the creativity of its aspirations. A vital culture is one where individuals are energized by the thought of bettering themselves not by a strain of resentment and a pathetic sense of victimhood.⁸ Hindu nationalism is still bound by this sense of victimhood, which it tries to avenge by various acts of reasserting itself through a negative display of a virile self. The rise of Hindutva, thus saw an attempt to redefine politics. The assertion of aggressive Hindu identity during the 1990s is a consequence of the absence of any other alternative powerful social goal, which could have captured the imagination of Indian citizens.⁹ In a way it depicts pessimism of a crisis ridden society.

Purpose

Violent and militant construct of a *Hindu Rashtra* constitutes the core ideology of the RSS. The purpose of the study is to examine how this violent and militaristic tendencies were entrenched in the ideology, organizational structure of the RSS and process of mass mobilization adopted by the *Sangh*. Tracing the growth of the RSS from the 1920s to the recent decade particular focus is given on the ideological construct and how the society is militarized through a construction of hatred towards the non-Hindus.

⁸ Pratap Bhanu Mehta, 'Introduction' in *Hindu Nationalism and Indian Politics: An Omnibus*, op.cit., p. xvi.

⁹ C.P.Bhambhri, *Hindutva: A Challenge to Multicultural Democracy*, op.cit., p. 9.

Hypothesis

The RSS as an organization is essentially violent and militant in character. The core ideology of the RSS is to build up a *Hindu Rashtra*, which implies that India is the land of Hindus alone. Essentially exclusionist, it views all non - Hindus to be 'outsiders', the enemy 'other', who should stay at the mercy of the Hindus in this country. As a result it creates a divide between 'we' and 'they' and cultivates antagonism. Violence becomes a natural extension of this ideology, which is further demonstrated through the militant organizational structure of the RSS. The violent and militant content of the RSS is intensified through the frequent occurrence of communal riots.

Research Methodology

The methodology for conducting the research has largely been dependent on the available secondary material. Among the primary sources used, the *Organiser*, a weekly published by the RSS provided certain perspectives, essential for this research. Newspaper articles and certain reports of the Gujarat pogrom 2002 have been used to get details about the violence in practice.

Chapterisation

The research is divided into four chapters. Chapter one is an attempt to understand the phenomenon of violence and examine the occurrence of communal violence in India. The second chapter investigates the process of militarization as adopted by the RSS in a bid to construct a militant society and nation. The chapter discusses the ideology and organizational structure of the

RSS. It further discusses how the *Sangh Parivar* after attaining power in the late 1990s tried to create a militant state. Chapter three focuses on militant mobilization by the *Sangh* particularly during the Ramjanmabhoomi movement. Particular emphasis is given on symbolism as a process of mobilization. The concluding chapter is a study of the Gujarat pogrom of 2002. It examines the nature and pattern of violence unleashed by the *Sangh* and how it was different from other communal riots.

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CHAPTER: 1

EXPLAINING COMMUNAL VIOLENCE

No corner of this world exists without being unscathed by violence. The phenomenon of violence is intriguing. It is both fascinating and horrifying at the same time. Etymologically 'violence' means to carry force towards something or someone. This wide connotation of the term marks its occurrence in almost every sphere of life and appears in various forms. This chapter is an attempt to understand and explain communal violence in India, a peculiar form, which has been shaped by the communal organizations like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). In this light, it discusses how community identities are politicized leading to communal antagonism, communal hatred and finally communal violence. This chapter also attempts to explain the nature of communal riots and the essential characteristics of communal violence in India.

Understanding Violence

Violence, as Hannah Arendt opines is phenomenologically close to strength, since the implements of violence, like all other tools are designed and used for the purpose of multiplying natural strength until, in the last stage of their development, they can substitute for it.¹ She further observes that violence does not promote causes, neither history, nor revolution, neither

¹ Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1970), p. 46.

progress nor reaction, however it can serve to dramatize grievances and bring them to public attention.²

Robert F. Litke in his analysis of violence writes that “the disempowerment of persons”³ is what lies at the heart of violence. He further states that, with violence one can diminish human prospects systematically in every direction. It weakens the fine thread with which is woven the fabric of who we are as individuals, communities and cultures. Violence aims at harming each other in such fundamental and far reaching ways that in the end it proves to be self-destructive. Trying to understand the widespread occurrence of violence Litke has emphasized the role of power and tried to establish a link between the two. He writes about power as an ability to control or command i.e. power as domination. Thus power covers social relationships, which serve that end, from physical violence to the most subtle psychological ties by which one mind controls another. This power constitutes the core of political life and holding the hands of the power, violence also creeps into the system and the endless process and struggle ‘to dominate and not to be dominated’⁴ begins.

Another point that Litke mentions is that of competition. It is a natural occurrence in any society and through this there is a build up for power, to dominate. He rightly points out that one very effective way of controlling people is to disempower them through the use of physical force or

² Ibid., p.79.

³ Robert F Litke, ‘Violence and Power’, *International Social Science Journal*, 132, Vol. XLIV, No.2, 1992, p. 176.

⁴ Ibid., p. 177.

psychological manipulation.⁵ The pursuit and exercise of dominant power in political and social life cannot be avoided. What intrigues Litke is that the human race is forever engaging in destructive self defeat and he contemplates whether there are ways of preventing domination from becoming violent and therefore self defeating. Again he mentions that our natural and reasonable desire to dominate each other should be counter balanced by an equally natural and reasonable desire not to diminish each other's developmental power. It is essential so as to avoid the embarrassment and frustration of self-defeat. Essential human capacities should be given a chance to be developed and expressed and there should be a desire to act in concert with each other. Much of the violence in the world, which results from thoughtlessness, lack of awareness, human error could be avoided if these two factors are kept in mind. In the pursuit of power, exploitation thus constitutes an essential part of violence. As James W. Douglas writes ' a politics without violence is a politics without exploitation.'⁶

Political violence roughly defined is a considerable or destroying use of force against persons or things, a use of force prohibited by law, directed to a change in policies, personnel or system of government, and hence also directed to change in the existence of individuals in the society and other societies.⁷

Political sociologists like Ted Robert Gurr,⁸ on the other hand maintains that 'political violence' is a 'normal' phenomenon and that, as a part of the

⁵ Ibid., p. 178.

⁶ James W Douglas, 'Is there a Politics without Violence?', *Gandhi Marg*, Vol. 12, 1968, p. 234.

⁷ Ted Honderich, *Three Essays in Political Violence* (Basil Blackwell, 1976), p. 9.

⁸ Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 157.

self adjusting conflict situation it contributes to the eventual maintenance of societal equilibrium. Interesting, in his writing is the part where he discusses patterns of social violence. Decolonization indicates both the rejection of a dominant power structure and the affirmation of new awakening. It represents a watershed in human history.⁹ The people who constitute the core of the struggle aim at establishing a new relation between man and man and groups of men. However, he rightly mentions that decolonization is not a complete or completed process. Sometimes it is piecemeal, fragmented, partly genuine, partly spurious, partly accomplished, partly compromised. So violence here, becomes a force towards attaining freedom.

Situating Violence in India

India was subject to decolonization and the struggle to attain freedom saw a whole lot of bloodbath and violence, which eventually led to the independence of the country. Violence as perceived through the national freedom struggle was largely successful in the attaining that freedom. However, the Indian society was and still is wrought with a slightly different version of violence. Essentially communal in character, the presence of this kind of violence has a long history in our country and continues to perpetuate in the contemporary era. Communalism in India has produced much uncontrolled violence. Violence can be manifested in various forms and grow from varied causes but common to very form and causal explanation is the

⁹ Rasheeduddin Khan, 'Violence and Socio-Economic Development,' in J.M. Domenach et al. *Violence and its Causes* (Paris: UNESCO, 1981), p. 176.

underlying factor - to dominate, to rise and establish the superior self through a process of destruction. It thus becomes the way of life when there is an inherent insecurity, a broader plan of resurrecting the self against the inferior.

The incidence of violence, a universal phenomenon has not left Indian society untouched. Time and again the country has seen and experienced violence. Common is the image of bloody riots in the media and cinema, which often marked and still marks the history of India. It reached a new height in the aftermath of the partition of the country "into two new, mutually hostile sovereign states."¹⁰ Violence as expressed through these riots have become an undercurrent which surfaces quite frequently and shows the perilous manner in which the two communities, Hindus and Muslims exist in the society.

Veena Das and Asish Nandy¹¹ have tried to understand the problem of violence in terms of the structure of ideas within which it is perceived and represented. A large part of their work focuses on important works on the discourse on violence by Rene Girard. Girard in his interesting work considers the ubiquity of violence and its capacity to spread as the major problems in the maintenance of order in any given society. He argues that the mythological beliefs of all societies trace the origin of human society to an act of violence, which then is sought to be contained by the construction of a sacrificial order.¹² Das and Nandy provide an examination of the literature on sacrifice in the Hindu world-view to understand this. The ubiquity of violence according to

¹⁰ Paul Brass, *Explaining Communal Violence: The production of Hindu Muslim violence in Contemporary India* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003), p. 5.

¹¹ Veena Das and Ashish Nandy, 'Violence, Victimhood and the Language of Silence,' in Veena Das (ed.), *The Word and the World* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1986), p. 177-195.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.177.

this world -view is the normal condition of life. This can be seen in three different levels.

First, the Sanskrit word for non-violence '*ahimsa*' is constructed by conjoining the negative prefix 'a' to the word '*himsa*' (violence). Second, the ubiquity of violence is testified by the Upanisadic view, which states that it is the characteristic of life that it feeds upon life. Third, the birth of the world is traced to the sacrifice of *Purusa*, the primeval man who disseminated his body so that its different parts may become constitutive of the natural and social world. Violence in the sacrificial arena is thus turned towards regenerating the social order. Das and Nandy mention about three languages of violence - sacrifice, feud and vivisection. These provide legitimation to many kinds of violence in Indian society. From the actor's perspective violence can be justified when: i. It is counter-violence, ii. When it is imposed as a part of an ideology of salvation or liberation on the subjects of knowledge for their own good and iii. When one has journeyed through the experience of self-imposed violence and thereby acquired the right to demand austerity on suffering from others.¹³ As Das and Nandy point out, the communal riots in India are described not so much by the paradigm of sacrificial violence elaborated by Rene Girard - which is violence against one's own, but rather by the pattern of the feud, which is violence against the other. In a feud both attackers and attacked tend to lose their personal identities becoming mere representative of one side or the other.

¹³ Ibid., p.181.

Daniel Gold observes that South Asian communalism is the assertion of collective identity by the large socio-religious groups of the subcontinent. As part of this communalism the assertion of Hindu identity in contemporary India takes two characteristic forms: organized movements notable for their effective action and uncontrolled mob violence.¹⁴

The notion of communalism contains within its domain an antagonism, a distinction between religious communities whose interests differ and are opposed to each other. Religion and religious identity is central to the understanding of communalism.¹⁵ K.N. Pannikar points out that there is a whole range of social relations and politics over which communalism pervades today and this spread of communalism involves two inter-related central issues. First is the state of consciousness in society. The second is communalism as an instrument of power, not purely for capturing state power but operating in political, social and economic domains and at almost all levels of social organization.¹⁶

One of the major players of communalism in India is the RSS. With its inception in the 1925 following the Hindu Mahasabha, the creation of a Hindu identity became an instrument of religio-cultural assertion. As an institution the RSS is able to harness great grass roots enthusiasm by combining Western organizational efficiency with South Asian respect for religious leadership. The appeal of the RSS to its members seems to lie in its creation of a direct sense

¹⁴ Daniel Gold, 'Rational Action and Uncontrolled violence: Explaining Hindu Communalism,' *Religion*, Vol. 21, 1991, p. 360.

¹⁵ Nadeem Hasnain, 'Communalism and Communal Politics in India,' *The Eastern Anthropologist*, 56:1, 2003, p. 98.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

of personal belonging to an idealized Hindu community. The RSS shows how the idea of Hindu Nation can begin to play a new religious role in contemporary India.¹⁷ Hindutva attempts to make Hindus self conscious of their identity as Hindus. It seeks to create a Hindu identity that can transcend the internal social, cultural, political and regional distinctions of people classified as Hindus.¹⁸

The irrational religious attraction, however, of the Hindu nationalism has a further, more dangerous aspect. For the Hindu Nation that in some contexts is represented by a well- structured organization like the RSS may in others appear embodied in an unorganized mob, which can be joined through an irrational impulse that explodes in violence. Participation in mob violence, in contrast to participation in either organized associations or organized terrorism offers a mode of identification with a religiously valorized collectivity that is irrational not only in its motivation but also in the experience it generates.¹⁹

It is violence of this nature and character, which often disrupts the Indian society. A detailed discussion of how this type of violence is manufactured is essential to understand why it perpetuates even today and how the larger Hindu population identifies with it. Through establishment of a strong identity, which then proceeds to become a collective force and finally

¹⁷ Daniel Gold, 'Rational Action and Uncontrolled violence: Explaining Hindu Communalism', op.cit., p. 360-361.

¹⁸ Pratap Bhanu Mehta, 'Introduction,' in *Hindu Nationalism and Indian Politics: An Omnibus* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. viii.

¹⁹ Daniel Gold, 'Rational Action and Uncontrolled violence: Explaining Hindu Communalism,' op.cit., pp. 362-363.

culminates in violent outburst, communalism is firmly entrenched in the Indian soil.

Construction of Identity

In her discourse on violence Vivienne Jabri mentions that violent conflict arises from the individual's membership of bounded communities constituted through discursive and institutional dividing lines.²⁰ One dominant identity forms as an expression of multiple identities of individuals. This dominant identity, which is assumed to be inclusive of a community is constructed upon an imagined nation.

Jabri further explains the nature of identity and its relationship to conflict and how social identity is formed. The social identity theory is an attempt to link the polarity between the individual and collectivity. Here she mentions about how W. Bloom has established the theory of social identity. The social identity theory assigns a central role to the 'natural' human tendency to partition the world into comprehensible units. An individual's social identity is clarified through comparisons with other individuals and groups, the individual's desire for positive self-evaluation providing the motive for differentiation between in-group and the out-group. This process of differentiation is identified as the basis of inter-group discrimination and the propensity for violent inter - group interaction. Categorization provides the search for distinguishing features through social comparison where the need for

²⁰ Vivienne Jabri, *Discourses on Violence: Conflict analysis Reconsidered* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1996), p. 120.

positive identity or self-esteem is generated through selective accentuation of inter-group differences that favor in-group.²¹ There is an inherent desire in an individual to clearly demarcate and protect the identifications he has made which leads him to be a part of a separate identity. Thus the building of an 'identity' gradually drives towards its social positioning. It is thus inherently exclusionist in nature.

This is precisely how the communal identity took shape in India. There is a clear demarcation between the Hindu identity and Muslim identity or to put it more broadly it separates the Hindus and the 'others' (non-Hindus) and thus when they clash it often results in a violent outburst.

The cross-sections of the society share a communal ideology, which legitimizes the communal violence. Ghanshyam Shah examines the nature of individual identity and communal consciousness and how they get manifested into the social arena. Identity formation which is often, but not always, a cultural construct, is a process of 'inclusion and exclusion' of values and symbols defining "we" and "they" or "us" and "others". In the process boundaries between the two take shape whose forms keep changing from time to time.²² The cultural identity when blends with politics the wall of differentiation become more pronounced and strong.

With the construct of separate communal identity and consciousness of the two religions - Hindus and Muslims the road is paved towards communal violence. Shah mentions that communal consciousness is inculcated through

²¹ Ibid., p.124.

²² Ghanshyam Shah, 'Identity, Communal Consciousness and Politics,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, XXIX (19), 7 May, 1994, p. 1133.

various means. Symbols and legends are invented and history fabricated. This has been the mission of the RSS since the 1920s. Hindu religious leaders thus have tried reviving and rejuvenating Hinduism through various means and method and Hindu political leaders have created various symbols, festivals and idioms to foster unity among Hindus. The *Sangh Parivar* has been greatly successful in developing this brand of consciousness.

A number of intriguing queries arise so as to explain the occurrence of communal riots as a predominant expression of violence in India. It provides considerable information about the relation between the state, communities and collective violence.

Collective Violence

Explaining collective behavior has often played a considerable role in situating violence in societies. The development of communal ideology, which eventually leads to communal riots, is based somewhat on the collective behavior of the people according to Bipan Chandra. The communal ideology develops in some kind of hatred of other religions as religion moves out gradually from the realm of private to public. It encourages in the formation of a religious group, one against the other.

The compelling power of Hindu nation thus seems to lie in its significance as an encompassing, religiously conceived collectivity, one that can let Hindus of diverse religious predilections feel part of something larger than their finite selves. The extension of one's identity from the individual to

the group can then provide an abiding experience of the divinity of the group itself. The Hindu nation itself can be perceived as a divinity of sorts, an entity to which people are devoted and into which they seek to merge.²³

Paul Brass in his assessment of riots states that the process of riot production has some link with theories of collective action and social movements. Mentioning the works of Tilly, Tarrow, McAdam and others he observes that riots are a form of collective action, one among a number of repertoires of collective action that developed in India primarily in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As the great movements of non-cooperation and civil-disobedience and a whole host of other non-violent forms of agitation, demonstration and protests, riots have become a common and even an anticipated form of collective action.²⁴ He further mentions that every great wave of rioting in modern India has been preceded by new mobilizing tactics that become integrated into the new repertoire and promote violence.²⁵ He gives examples of rioting which occurred in 1923 and 1927 and how it was accompanied by competitive movements for the conversion and re-conversion of Hindus and Muslims in many localities in India to other religion. In contrast to this, the massacres of 1946 to 1948 were more directly linked to political actions and mobilizations around the demand for Pakistan.

Sudhir Kakar, while making observations on the question of ethnic conflict resulting in violent aggression i.e. mob violence explains how the mob

²³ Daniel Gold, 'Rational Action and Uncontrolled violence: Explaining Hindu Communalism,' op.cit., pp. 361-362.

²⁴ Paul Brass, *Explaining Communal Violence: The production of Hindu - Muslim violence in Contemporary India*, op.cit., p. 12.

²⁵ Ibid.

induces the great majority and illustrates the lack of rational thought, the vulnerability of behavioral controls, values, moral and ethical standards. Enquiring into the primary motivational factor in both religious assembly and violent mob he gives an interesting explanation. He states that there is a need for 'self-transcending' experience, to lose one-self in the group, suspend judgment and reality testing,²⁶ which works as the motivational factor. This often manifests itself in senseless rage and destructive acts.

However, Paul Brass differs from the way Kakar treats riotous crowds as an undifferentiated mass of individuals who adopt the identity of the crowd, losing their own in the process. Brass observes that this argument belongs among those interpretations of riots that displace blame onto entire collectivities, who cannot be held responsible for their actions because they have lost any sense of what it is that they do as individuals.²⁷ He is critical about the fact that Kakar is of the opinion that 'group identity' in general "is inherently a carrier of aggression" and thereby places the entire responsibility of communal violence in the irrational tendencies of the human psyche.

Daniel Gold explains that participation in mob violence, offers a mode of identification with religiously valorized collectivity that is irrational not only in its motivation but also in the experience it generates. Indian mob violence, he further explains is for its participation also a radical experience of identification with a particular large community that defies itself against

²⁶ Sudhir, Kakar, 'Some Unconscious aspects of Ethnic Violence in India,' in Veena Das (ed.), *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia* (New York:Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 143.

²⁷ Brass, Paul, *Explaining Communal Violence: The production of Hindu Muslim violence in Contemporary India*, op.cit., p. 29.

another. Individuals joining the mob in its fury may experience a mind less loss of self into a larger whole that recalls the excuse of divine madness founded at times in South Asian religions, where humans lose their senses. Forgetting their personal identities, they participate immediately in an unrestrained collective force and experience to express themselves in a somewhat extraordinary fashion.²⁸

Nature of Violence in Communal Riots

The definition of occurrences of violence involving members of one or more ethnic groups as being merely isolated incidents having no broader significance or as being 'riots' or pogroms is frequently itself a part of the political struggle.²⁹ The term 'riot' has historically meant disorderly action, that constitutes a direct assault upon or represent a danger to established authority.³⁰ The strategy or effects of a wave of riots and even of some that occur in isolation include intimidation of another group, protection of one's own, the promotion of a myth concerning the violent actions; the interpretation of the events afterwards to cast blame upon and discredit rivals, another group, or another group's or party's support base.³¹ Riots are among the most versatile forms of collective action, capable of carrying many

²⁸ Daniel Gold, 'Rational Action and Uncontrolled violence: Explaining Hindu Communalism,' *op.cit.*, pp. 363-364.

²⁹ Paul Brass, *Theft of an Idol: Text and Context in the Representation of Collective Violence* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1998), p. 5.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.10.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.13.

meanings in different times and places, occurring as part of routine as well as movement politics and displaying a multiplicity of ritualized practices.³²

Trying to answer various queries regarding riots and the nature of violence as expressed through it, Paul Brass mentions that riots cannot be explained by the spontaneous fury or rage of mad mobs. He observes that the whole political order in the post independence North India and many if not most actors have become implicated in the persistence of Hindu-Muslim riots. These riots provide a platform and have concrete benefits for particular political organizations as well as larger political uses. Hindu-Muslim opposition, tensions and violence have provided the principal justification and the primary source of strength for the political existence of some local political organizations in many cities and towns in North India, linked to a family of Hindu nationalist organization whose core is the organization founded in 1925, known as RSS. The vast range of organizations included in this family generally called *Sangh Parivar* are devoted to different tasks: mass mobilization, political organizations, recruitment of students, women and workers and paramilitary training. All the organizations in the family of militant Hindu organizations adhere to a broader ideology of Hindutva, of Hindu nationalism that theoretically exists independently of Hindu-Muslim antagonisms, but in practice has thrived only when that opposition is explicitly or implicitly present.³³

The incidence of violence in Gujarat in February 2002 witnesses a Hindu mob triggered by primal hate and armed with swords, clubs and petrol cans as

³² Ibid.

³³ Paul Brass, *Explaining Communal Violence: The production of Hindu Muslim violence in Contemporary India*, op.cit., p. 7.



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they hunted down the Muslims. Though this incident seemed to be a spontaneous occurrence, fuelled by the killing of sixty Hindus aboard the train called 'Sabarmati', in reality it was a carefully planned pogrom.

The outbreak of large-scale riots cannot be explained through prior history of communalism nor the immediate circumstances surrounding the so-called precipitating incident.³⁴ The decisive factor is the action that takes place before the precipitating incidents and immediately thereafter, action that is often planned and organized and that fills the intermediate space and time between past history and immediate circumstance.³⁵ This necessarily leads to the question: What interests are served and what type of power relations are maintained as a consequence of the wide acceptance of the reality of popular communal antagonisms and the inevitability of communal violence.

The illegitimacy of the action is not unknown to the promoters of the violence but they claim that the aggressor community was not aggressing but the action was a desperate attempt in defense against the attacks of the other and truly enough their violent manifestations appear spontaneous, undirected, unplanned- and even the most carefully planned and well organized assaults on the other community are designed to appear so. However, as Paul Brass mentions- legitimizing illegitimate violence, concealing the extent of preplanning and organization that preceded it and maintaining intact the persons, groups and organizations most deeply implicated in the violence by

³⁴ Ibid., p.11.

³⁵ Ibid.

preventing punishment of the principal perpetrators lies underneath the manufactured violence.

Brass mentions three phases of violence -- preparation or rehearsal, activation or enactment and explanation or interpretation. In areas where riots are endemic, preparation and rehearsal are continuous activities. Activation or enactment of large-scale riots takes place under particular circumstances, most notably in the case of competitive political systems in a context of intense political mobilization or electoral competition in which riots are precipitated as a device to consolidate the support of ethnic, religious or other culturally marked groups by emphasizing the need for solidarity in face of rival communal group. The third phase follows after the violence in a broader struggle not only within but also outside the local community to control explanation or interpretation of the causes of violence. In this sphere journalists, politicians, social scientists and public opinion get involved. It is often marked by a process of blame displacement in which, the social scientists themselves become implicated. It diffuses blame widely, blurring responsibility and thereby contributing to the perpetration of violent productions in future.³⁶

The study of riots and its occurrence, thus is a fairly complex question and calls for a thorough research into the relation between Hindus and Muslims, the construction of Hindu nationalism in India. The maintenance of communal tensions, accompanied from time to time by lethal rioting at specific sites, is essential for the maintenance of militant Hindu nationalism. It also has

³⁶ Ibid., p.15.

uses for other political parties, organizations and even the state and central governments.³⁷

Digressing from what Ashutosh Varshney³⁸ and Steven I Wilkinson³⁹ have pointed out by stating that incidence of Hindu-Muslim communal violence riots in India is skewed towards urban India in general and towards twenty four cities in particular, Paul Brass mentions that it is not incorrect to consider India as a whole country in which Hindu-Muslim riots persist and are endemic and he correctly points out that the number of such riots in the worst - hit cities account for only half the total incidents in the country. The pursuit of political advantage necessarily lies at the root of the cause of communal riots in India.

The violent outbursts as expressed through the riots in India are evidently 'communal' in nature and thus gets a connotation of 'communal' violence. How did communalism place its roots in the country and why till now is frequently a cause of riots? This question has been subject to various analysis, which tries to give explanation through historical, sociological, psychological and political perspectives.

Tracing the Occurrence of Communal Violence

One branch of historical analysis locates Hindu - Muslim consciousness and conflict to be a modern phenomenon dating back to the British rule and their policy of 'divide and rule'. It was because of a process of

³⁷ Ibid., p.9.

³⁸ Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2002)

³⁹ Steven I Wilkinson, 'Putting Gujarat in Perspective,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXVI (52) April 27 2002, pp. 1579-1584.

compartmentalization of the society into two separate entities that brewed antagonisms between the two communities. Another branch of historical analysis locates religious strife and riots between Hindus and Muslims in the eighteenth century and also in the earlier period of the Mughal era. According to this branch of analysis Hindu-Muslim conflicts were endemic in pre modern times. Following these two strains of thought Paul Brass mentions that this consolidation of the heterogeneous Hindu and Muslim groupings on the subcontinent and politicization of the differences between them are overwhelmingly a modern phenomenon deeply connected with the striving for control over the modern state apparatus, involving a claim to rightful inheritance on the part of Hindu and to self-determination on the part of Muslim leaders.⁴⁰ During the British rule the course of struggle commenced and intensified in the nineteenth century and reached the ultimate height with the partition of the country in 1947. The difference firmly set its roots in the communities and 'continues to be fed by political competition.'⁴¹

Richard G. Fox observes that in communalism there is an inherent infirmity or constitutional weakness, bound to come out sooner or later wherever modernity has disenchanted the world.⁴² In another view, Ashish Nandy observes communal and ethnic riots as an occurrence due to the nature of the state in these societies. According to him communal ideology may be

⁴⁰ Paul Brass, *Explaining Communal Violence: The production of Hindu Muslim violence in Contemporary India*, op.cit., p. 25.

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 25-26.

⁴² Richard.G. Fox, 'Communalism and Modernity in India,' in David Ludden (ed.), *Making India Hindu: Religion, Community and the politics of democracy in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 237.

said to be an expression of a group's attempt to create a legitimate space for itself in the public domain- especially in view of the homogenizing pressures of the modern state.⁴³ Sudhir Kakar situates the problem of communalism or fundamentalism in the context of developing societies. The religious community is the interactive aspect of religious identity. Whenever the community aspect of religious identity is threatened it gives birth to communalism and intolerance. These moments of crisis have great potential for social violence because it is only during this communal phase that feelings of 'intimacy and connectedness characterizing the religious community are polluted by an ambience of aggression and persecution'.⁴⁴

While explaining the phenomenon of communal violence, Gopal Krishna observes that Hindu-Muslim relations have had the dual character of being governed by power and accommodation and consequently the tension between the two communities endemic, sometimes, though only rather infrequently spilling over into mutual violence.⁴⁵ As to the question: Why do communal riots occur? He has given a fourfold answer stating the first cause to be that the communal conflict is in truth a result of mutual ignorance. Only if they know that all religions were 'fundamentally' one, and if they approached each other with good will, there will be no conflict. The second line of argument is represented by the power theory of communal conflict. The conflict revolves

⁴³ Veena Das (ed.), *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia*, op.cit., pp. 5-7.

⁴⁴ Birinder Pal Singh, *Problem of Violence: Themes in Literature* (Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Rshtrapati Nivas: Shimla, Manohar, 1999), p.134.

⁴⁵ Gopal Krishna, 'Communal Violence in India: A study of Communal Disturbance in Delhi,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XX, (2), January 12, 1985, pp. 62-63.

around the question: who will control the state power and preserve the culture and identity of the particular community. The third strand takes communal conflict, in the post-independence context to be a part of the competitive political process. Lastly, the Hindu communalist theory views minorities as enemies of the nation and communal violence as deliberate acts intended to humiliate and injure the Hindus. Its counterpart is the Muslim communalist theory which views communal violence as well organized, pre planned Hindu attacks designed to terrorize the Muslims to drive them out of their own areas, to reduce them to second class citizens. Another important point, which Gopal Krishna has addressed while discussing communal violence, is the “law and order problem. The primary responsibility of providing security of life and property of all has not been satisfactorily discharged in the past two decades and this failure has greatly aggravated the problem.”⁴⁶

Taking up this question of law and order, Steven I Wilkinson while analyzing the violence that occurred in Gujarat questions, “ Why, given that state governments are responsible for law and order in India, some state governments present communal violence while others do not?”⁴⁷ As an answer to this he gives three possible explanations for differences in state performance. First, that, decades of corruption, criminalization, politicization and a general lack of state capacity have left Indian state governments too weak to prevent riots. Second, that Indian state government is unwilling or unable to protect minorities because they systematically under-represent

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.63.

⁴⁷ Steven I Wilkinson, ‘Putting Gujarat in Perspective,’ op.cit., p. 1579.

Muslims and other minorities within their governments, police forces and local administration. Finally the degree of party competition affects the value governments place on attracting Muslim swing voters, which in turn has an effect on whether the governments will order their administrations to protect minorities. He also mentions that the level of a state's party competition is the most important factor in determining the government's response to outbreaks of communal violence.

The cycle of communal violence leading to increased segregation and mistrust between the communities, which in turn facilitates future communal violence, is common in the history of riots in India. The presence of communal violence and the gory heights it reached in the recent decades points towards the coming together of an already authoritarian and corrupt state and the strong presence of the Hindu Nationalist Movement. The incidents also indicate that riots are rarely spontaneous events. The *Sangh* ideology attempts to construct a period of pre-Islamic history but such simplifications of history are always dangerous. All empires, pre-Islamic, Islamic and post-Islamic have been born through brutal conquest and expansion and marked by great social injustices. Again enmity between India and Pakistan is crucially linked to the ability of the *Sangh Parivar* in India to orchestrate violence against Muslims. Fear of the enemy without and the enemy within feed off each other.⁴⁸

It was the construction of "Indian nationhood" which provided the backbone for the Hindutva ideology. Religion was distorted and with the help

⁴⁸ Murad Banaji, 'South Asia on the Edge: Communal Violence and nuclear stand off,' February, 2003 (<http://www.is.uwp.edu/academic/criminal.justice/violcommbk01b.htm>)

of mythology this brand of nationalism pulled the strings of mass sentiment. The Ramjanmabhoomi agitation in Ayodhya for example was made a central and highly mobile metaphor of a “lack” among the Hindus and Babri Masjid was made a sign of this traumatic wound in the nation and in Hindu civilization- a “lack” that could be healed through removal of Babri Masjid and construction of a Ram mandir in Ayodhya.⁴⁹

Thomas Blom Hansen observes that Babri Masjid signified the violated rights of the Hindu majority within a paradigm of “equal rights of communities” that remains at the heart of the notion of secularism authorized by postcolonial state. This majoritarian discourse was organized around metaphors that sought to infuse a sense of radical rupture: of the awakening of the dormant, hitherto silent Hindu Majority, rejuvenation of the Indian nation and the beginning of an epochal change from the old humiliating order to a new, proud and bright future.⁵⁰

The demolition of Babri Masjid thus created a sort of “Hindutva wave” - a wave of Hindu strength, a wave of revenge via-a-vis the Muslim community and a new jingoistic self-confidence among broad sections of the Hindus—middle and lower classes, rural and urban.⁵¹ The main objective of the entire agitation was to build up and expand and provide a strong platform of the *Sangh Parivar*, the RSS ideology and not necessarily the demolition of the

⁴⁹ Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 173. (Hansen explains two concepts: Derrida’s notion of “crypt” and Don Miller’s concept of Hindu Nationalism.)

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.173.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.184.

masjid. Religion as form of popular sentiment was used as a tool to establish the Hindutva ideology.

G.Aloyssis rightly points out that the *Sangh Parivar's* Hindutva campaign has to be understood as one formulation- remarkably compact and coherent- of our religio-cultural past as an agenda for present political action leading to the formation of Indian society.⁵²

Gyanendra Pandey in one of his studies has presented an interesting question - Why militant Hindu construction of community, nation and history has had such wide appeal in recent times. Pandey discusses two factors. The first is a widespread assumption that since the 'religious' condition, the need to believe in something larger and beyond oneself and this world is amongst the most deeply felt needs of human beings, organized religion and the community of religion is somehow 'natural'. The existence of something called a common Hindu interest and a universal Hindu solidarity follows as a matter of course.⁵³ A second factor that works in favour of the Hindu construction is the ability of hindu discourse to appropriate for itself the language of the 'truly' national. The prospect of being involved in an action that co-ordinates mass popular energies can exert a very wide appeal.⁵⁴

The 1920s were crucial in the history of Indian nationalism in two respects. First, they marked the point at which "the masses" entered the

⁵² G. Aloyssis, 'Trajectory of Hindutva,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXIX, (24), June 11, 1994, p. 1451.

⁵³ Gyanendra Pandey, 'Hindus and Others: The Militant Hindu Construction,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXVI, (52), December 28, 1991, p. 3005.

⁵⁴ Daniel Gold, 'Rational Action and Uncontrolled violence: Explaining Hindu Communalism' *op.cit.*, p. 365.

modern Indian history of political representation. Along with this 'massification' of the political scene, the period saw a steep rise in violent clashes between Hindus and Muslims. Second, it was a period in which the divergent visions of the Indian nation which since the turn of the century had cohabited under the slogan of 'swaraj', now developed into competing nationalist discourse. These competing visions all tried to address the most pertinent question of the day, namely the relation between communities and the question of which community the Indian nation was going to belong to.⁵⁵

It was in this background that the Hindu Mahasabha was formed in 1915. It came into being with the purpose of constructing a systematic organization and give a proper directive to the Hindu community. Though the Hindu Mahasabha was initially a provincial organization in Northern India drawing support from the Arya Samaj network in Punjab and the Hindu sanatana networks in United Provinces and Bihar, soon its significance reached beyond that. Through the organization gradually Hindu assertiveness and strength came to be build up.

Like the Hindu Mahasabha, the RSS, took shape in 1925 with the Nagpur riots in the background. Its aim was to consolidate the Hindu nation through a psycho- social reform involving some assimilation of the other's equalitarian values.⁵⁶ It was based on a 'strategic syncretism' as it aimed at assimilating within Hinduism at large those cultural features of the others, which have

⁵⁵ Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India*, op.cit., pp. 44-45.

⁵⁶ Christophe Jaffrelot, 'Hindu Nationalism Strategic Syncretism in Ideology Building', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXVIII, (12-13), March 20-27, 1993, p. 521.

made them formidable antagonists.⁵⁷ However, they aimed to do this through a Hindu pattern.

Christophe Jaffrelot correctly points out that this syncretism served strategic purposes for three related reasons. It enabled Hindus to use European methods against them, which can be called the 'mimetic dimension'. It strengthened the self-esteem of Hindus by convincing them that the new prestigious values and ideas derived from their golden age, which is the psychological dimension and Vedic precedents were reinterpreted to legitimize certain cherished institutions such as socio - ritual hierarchy in the case of the varna.

Hindu 'history' reduces all of India's past to a two-fold statement: first, the glory of pre-Muslim India and second, the unceasing troubles that have come to reign since the Muslims came to the subcontinent. Violence is the sole marker of this Hindu history.⁵⁸ The politics of Hindu self-assertion has reached a new militant pitch over the last few years, which speaks in the name of Hindu rights and Hindu nationalism.⁵⁹

Dibyesh Anand conceptualizes security as a discourse of violence that makes violence in the name of counter-violence, killing in the name of protection. The violence directed against the Muslim is normalized and legitimized in the name of personal, communal, national and even

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 522-523.

⁵⁹ Gyanendra Pandey (ed.), *Hindus and Others* (New Delh: Viking, 1993), p. 12.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p.14.

international security. It is the logic of this discourse of security that enables extreme violence to be normalized, systematized and institutionalized.⁶⁰ The 'Other' is discursively produced as a source of insecurity against which the 'Self' needs to be secured. Insecurities are social constructions rather than givens and the threats are created. This security of the self facilitates and even demands the use of policing and violence, it legitimizes anti-Muslim violence in the name of securing the Hindu body politic at various levels.⁶¹

The explanation of communalism and its presence in India, thus, contains several complex notions. The broad aim is to construct a Hindu identity - superior in every respect. As it moves towards this aim, "communal identity" takes a definite shape and is most often dictated by a 'hatred' of the 'other'. Communal violence is but the external manifestation of this hatred and the term has firmly placed itself in the Indian subcontinent.

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⁶⁰ Dibyesh Anand, 'The Violence of Security: Hindu Nationalism and Politics of Representing 'the Muslim' as a Danger', *The Round Table, The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, Vol.94, No.379, April, 2005, pp. 203-204.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

CHAPTER: 2

MILITARISING SELF, COMMUNITY AND THE STATE

Violence is essentially ingrained in the ideology of the RSS, in its organizational structure and militant character. Constructing a militant self is essential for the creation of a militarized Hindu community. This chapter focuses on the ideology of the RSS, which justifies the creation of a militarized self, community and state. Analyzing the ideologies of V.D.Savarkar, B.S.Moonje, K.B.Hedgewar and M.S.Golwalkar this chapter is an attempt to show how the RSS built up its violent-militaristic organizational structure. It also discusses briefly how the RSS attempted to militarize the civil society and the state through its affiliates (the Sangh Parivar) and particularly when it's political affiliate, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to control the state power in the 1990s.

After the RSS was established in 1925, it seriously took up the training of a group of Hindu boys under the pretext of character building. However, the real objective was to create a militant Hindu community against the enemy 'other'. Started in Nagpur, the RSS gradually developed into a communal militarist organization with violent tendencies. The culmination of Hindutva ideology lay in the belief that the Hindus are backward, sectarian, divided and weak. They are impotent and timorous. Taking advantage of this, the *Hindu Rashtra* has been under threat of foreigners number of times. This notion of a

wounded self, had given rise to a will to establish a different kind of identity exactly opposite to this.

The construction of *Hindu Rashtra* and the essential Hinduness through the creation of a strong Hindu identity by the RSS, followed an intensive ideological propaganda. A culture of hatred guided the formation of the organization. To foster a culture of hatred what is required is the presence of the 'enemy'. This 'fabrication' and 'preservation' of an appropriate enemy thus makes the ideology as followed by the RSS essentially violent in nature. To build an organized 'self', against this 'enemy' the RSS seeks to militarize and organize the entire Hindu society. The aim is to capture the mass psychology by feeding it with a constant threat of the 'enemy'. Violence becomes inevitable when construction of the communal identity takes shape, when the divide between 'we' and 'others' become concrete.

The whole process of the militarization of the self and the society is dependent on the presence of Muslims in the society. Based on this runs their project of building the majority i.e. the Hindu and the process of 'reordering Hinduism itself'.¹ The RSS construction of Hindu identity seeks to create a homogenized 'we' (the Hindus) where the internal, social, economic and cultural differentiations are relegated to the background. It also attempts to project and sustain the antagonistic 'other' for the purpose of organization, mobilization and consolidation of the Hindus.

¹ Aijaz Ahmad, 'Radicalism of the Right and logics of Secularism,' in Praful Bidwai, Achin Vanaik and Harbans Mukhia (eds.), *Religion Religiosity and Communalism* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1996), p. 40.

A consolidation of a strong united cluster of Hindu men who will be in a state of military preparedness both physically and mentally is what was aimed by the leaders of militant Hindu nationalism. Thus there is a strong presence of a temptation towards violence to avenge this wounded identity. The entire ideology revolves round the logic of “confrontation between the two camps of good and evil; or rather ‘we’ and the ‘others’”.² The survival of Hindutva politics is critically dependent on the construction of the demon image of a uniformly fanatic, backward looking aggressive Muslim whose only aim seemed to be restricted to decimation of Hindus.³ The war scenario may or may not result in a war situation. The incitement to communal violence may or may not lead to communal rioting. However, what the enactment of the war scenario does is to stimulate the situation of violence by transmuting existential identities into potential ones at sites more favorably located for the instigator of the transmutation, be it the state, a political party or a group with its gaze fixed at the locales of power.⁴ This anticipation of a clash between ‘us’ and ‘them’ nurtures the pugnacious element in the mind, which often foments into hostility. The RSS is devoted to mobilizing the Hindu community in this manner to ‘rectify’ alleged past wrongs committed against Hindus by Muslims.⁵ Organized and militant Hindu nationalism as it appeared in the 1920s was one

² Gerard Heuze, ‘Shiv Sena and National Hinduism’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, XXVII, (41), October 10, 1992, p. 2255.

³ Harbans Mukhia, ‘Communal Violence and the Transmutation of Identities’, in Praful Bidwai, Achin Vanaik and Harbans Mukhia (eds.), *Religion, Religiosity and Communalism*, op.cit., p. 35.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Paul Brass, *Theft of an Idol: Text and Context in the Representation of Collective Violence* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1998), p.17.

of several contingent outcomes of a protracted struggle over the definition of Indian nationhood.⁶

The masculinist celebration of intentional Hindu provocation of Muslims is characteristic of the RSS, as is the view that Indian Muslims were a force that was ceaselessly and secretly conspiring and plotting its 'murderous designs' against the Hindu nation. The RSS's vision of perpetual conspiracies against the 'Hindu nation' by internal but anti-national forces in alliance with external enemies to foment disorder and chaos as a prelude to bringing down and then taking over the nation was characteristic of its paranoid style of politics.⁷

The *Sangh Parivar* has always needed one or more enemy 'other' to consolidate into an aggressive bloc, the Hindu community, which it claims to represent and seeks to constitute.⁸ Thus at the heart of communalism there lies a religious concept of nation. As K.N.Pannikar points out, both the theoretical and programmatic foundation of this idea were laid by V.D.Savarkar and M.S.Golwalkar in their well-known texts, '*Hindutva*' and '*We or Our Nationhood Defined*' respectively. What they tried to do was to demarcate India as a Hindu nation, which their disciples in the *Sangh Parivar* are currently engaged in realizing through ideological, cultural and political work. The ideological base lay in a religious interpretation of the past, a Hinduized

⁶ Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 88.

⁷ Chetan Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Berg Publishers Limited, 2001), p. 117.

⁸ Sumit Sarkar, 'Conversions and Politics of Hindu Right,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, XXXIV, (27), June 26, 1999, p.1691.

history.⁹ This interpretation seeks to identify the non - Hindus as foreigners and to stigmatize them as enemies.¹⁰

The mutual antagonism between the two communities is central to the communal history as pointed out by V.D.Savarkar in '*Six Glorious Epochs of Indian history*'. This constitutes the blue print for much of the *Sangh Parivar's* Hinduized history. He conceived the entire history of India as a saga of Hindu resistance against the foreigners. At the heart of the cultural nationalism as represented by *Sangh Parivar* there is a demarcation to consolidate the Hindu community by stereotyping the minorities as the aggressive, alien 'other' at whose hands the Hindus have suffered in the past.

Influence of V.D.Savarkar and B.S.Moonje

That India is the land of the Hindus is the underlying assumption of the Hindu religious interpretation of history. By implication the members of all other religious denominations of this population, who are either descendents of migrants or converts from Hinduism are not part of the nation. This was the basic ideology behind the formation of the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS.

The creation of the militant Hindu identity was deeply entrenched in the ideologies of Hindu nationalists namely V.D.Savarkar, B.S.Moonje and the two leaders of RSS during the pre-independence period - its founder Keshav Baliram Hedgewar and Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar. Organizationally, though the RSS

⁹ K.N.Panikkar (ed.), *The Concerned Indian's Guide to Communalism* (New Delhi: Viking, 1999), p. xii.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

was independent of the Hindu Mahasabha, both the organizations shared the same ideology.

Savarkar remains the first and most original prophet of extremism in India. He politicized religion and introduced religious metaphors into politics. He pioneered an extreme, uncompromising and rhetorical form of Hindu nationalism in Indian political discourse.¹¹ Savarkar was intrigued by war, violence and militarism. For him, non-violence was not simply wrong but actively immoral, whereas 'justifiable aggression' defined individual or collective morality. Claiming that military strength was the only criterion of greatness and that it was the religious duty of Hindus to die while killing the 'enemy', Savarkar stated that against useless impotent and coward rulers who represented democracy in India, he would prefer the 'great leader' Hitler.¹² He addressed the lack in Hindu directly and tried to identify a remedy: the discovery and construction of Hindutva, a 'Hinduness' shared by all Hindus.¹³ Muslims as aggressors, the need for revenge, preserving Hindu dharma and securing national honour remained constant themes in Savarkar's life and thought. His universe was strictly divided into 'friends' and 'foes', 'us' and 'them', 'Hindus' and 'Muslims', 'righteous' and 'wicked'. The 'self' and 'non-

¹¹ Jyotirmaya Sharma, *Hindutva: Exploring the Idea of Hindu Nationalism* (New Delhi: Viking, Penguin, 2003), p. 124.

¹² Chetan Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths*, op.cit., p. 104. (Savarkar mentioned this view in his Speech in Poona, 15 Jan 1961)

¹³ Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India*, op.cit., p. 77.

self' in Savarkar's case were invariably in conflict and in antagonistic relation.¹⁴

Savarkar believed that 'Hindus' constituted in and of themselves 'a nation' and it was under siege of 'extermination' in India. His key aim was to provide a comprehensive definition of what constituted 'Hindu identity'.¹⁵ According to him the essential nature and significance of Hindutva could be expressed as:

'Forty centuries, if not more, had been at work to mould the Hindu identity as it is. Prophets and poets, lawyers and law-givers, heroes and historians, have thought, lived, fought and died just to have it spelled thus. For indeed, it is not the resultant of countless actions - now conflicting, now commingling, now co-operating - of our whole race? Hindutva is not a word but a history. Not only the spiritual or religious history of our people, but a history in full.'¹⁶

It was to protect this, that methods of strengthening the 'self' was adopted. Savarkar's notion of Hindu identity was essentially territorial and racial in nature. This was evident when he mentioned that Hindu dharma could not admit Muslims and Christians unless:

'Ye, who by race, by blood, by culture, by nationality, posses almost all essentials of Hindutva and had been forcibly snatched out of our ancestral home by the hand of violence- ye, have only to render whole-hearted love to our common Mother and recognize her not only as

¹⁴ Ibid., pp.125-6.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 85.

¹⁶ V.D.Savarkar, '*Hindutva*'- *Who is a Hindu?* (Nagpur: Veer Savarkar Prakashan, Sixth Edition, 1989), p. 3.

Fatherland but even as a Holyland and ye would be most welcome to the Hindu fold.’¹⁷

In these words are expressed a vicious and regressive logic which could never reach fulfillment to the satisfaction of the Hindu nationalist imagery.¹⁸ The context of ‘Hindu nation’ in Savarkarite ideology was narrowly and obsessively preoccupied with the themes of race, culture and militarism.¹⁹ Savarkar benchmarks Indian identity by saying that to be ‘Indian’ is not to worship a God outside India and so forth. Hindu nationalism is not so much about defending a way of life, as it is about creating litmus tests of true allegiance. These litmus tests are designed in such a way that it is almost over determined that minorities, especially Christians and Muslims will fail. They remain the permanent ‘other’ of Hindu identity that either need to be encompassed by bringing them under the sign of a common ethnicity, or else they remain, on this view, a permanent threat to Hindu identity and claims.²⁰ A Hindu according to Savarkar is, he who looks upon the land that extends from the Indus to the Seas as the land of his forefathers- his Fatherland (Pitribhu), who inherits the blood of that race whose first discernable source could be traced to the Vedic Saptasindhus and which on its onward march, assimilating much that was incorporated and ennobling much that was assimilated, has come to be known as the Hindu people, who has inherited and claims as his

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 115.

¹⁸ Chetan Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths*, op.cit. p 98.

¹⁹ Tapan Basu et al. *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags: A critique of Hindu Right*. (Delhi: Orient Longman, 1993),p.24.

²⁰ Pratap Bhanu Mehta, ‘Introduction,’ in *Hindu Nationalism and Indian Politics: An Omnibus* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004),p.xiii.

own culture of that race as expressed chiefly in their common classical language Sanskrit and represented by a common history, a common literature, art and architecture, law and jurisprudence, rites and rituals, ceremonies and sacraments, fairs and festivals; and who above all, addresses the land of Bharatvarsha as his Holyland. The essentials of Hindutva are - a common nation (Rashtra), a common race (Jati) and a common civilization (Sanskrit).²¹ Savarkar's cultural nationalism was communal, masculine and aggressively anti-Muslim but also rationalist in favour of rapid modernization.²² The cultivation of violence was necessary in protecting the *Hindu Rashtra* from those who did not belong to this place and thus he raised the slogan, "Hinduise all politics and militarize Hindudom".

Some of the principles and policies under Savarkar, which were enunciated as the following principles and policy of Hindu Mahasabha were - "Enemy of our enemy is our best friend. Enlightened national self-interest must be the guiding principle of foreign policy. So long as the whole world is aggressive we must be aggressive. Military strength behind our nation is the only criterion of greatness in the present day world. He wins half the war who takes the offensive, who is aggressive. Only those who are strong enough to protect not only themselves but also create fear in the minds of enemies, can talk of peace, non-aggression and non-violence."²³ Strengthening the society through militant mobilizations became the major concern of the leaders of

²¹ V.D.Savarkar, '*Hindutva*'- *Who is a Hindu?*, op.cit., pp. 115-116.

²² Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India*, op.cit., p. 79.

²³ Chetan Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths*, op.cit., p.103.

different communities during the 1920s. For Savarkar, words like revolt, revolution, rebellion and revenge, therefore were legitimate in order to remove injustice and bring about parity and justice. Revolt, bloodshed and revenge were at once the instruments of injustice and of bringing about natural justice. The Hindus were a martial race with a history of great men who showed the path of manliness in the face of aggression, according to him.²⁴ The Hindus had to constantly remind themselves of this and defend the *Hindu Rashtra*.

Sangathan meant the acquisition of strength through the consolidation of the community and this became the rallying cry of the Hindus who believed themselves to be lagging behind the Muslims in mobilization and militancy.²⁵ Savarkar referred to *Sangathan*, which constituted the core of organization as a movement that incorporates a whole host of organizations working towards the common goal of consolidation. 'All these Hindu *Sangathanist* institutions,' he says 'even though they are not formally affiliated to each other are still allied with one another in the common cause. All of them aims at regeneration of the Hindu Race, moulding it into a free and mighty Hindu Nation.'²⁶

The Fascistic Influence

The growth of Hindu radical force in the years around the Second World War clearly indicated a fascistic influence. The undemocratic, authoritarian,

²⁴ Jyotirmaya Sharma, *Hindutva: Exploring the Idea of Hindu Nationalism*, op.cit., pp. 147-8.

²⁵ Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics 1925 to 1990s* (Delhi: Viking Penguin India, 1996), Ch-1.

²⁶ Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India*, op.cit., p. 77.

paramilitary, radical and violent tendencies of the militant Hindu nationalism of RSS clearly indicated a sympathy for fascist ideology and practice. As Marzia Casolari in her detailed assessment has pointed out that the interest of Hindu radicalism in Italian fascism arose right from early 1920s. The interest was commonly shared in Maharashtra and must have inspired B.S.Moonje's trip to Italy in 1931.²⁷

Following his trip, Moonje tried to transfer fascist models to Hindu society and to organize it militarily according to the fascistic patterns. The interest of Hindu nationalists in fascism and Mussolini was not dependent on an occasional curiosity. They viewed fascism as an example of conservative revolution. At a time when the country was involved in an attempt to free itself from the British rulers the RSS and Hindu nationalism was preparing and arming themselves from internal enemies.

Moonje's intention was to strengthen the RSS and to extend it as a nationwide organization. During his trip to Italy he visited some important military schools and educational institutions and also met with Il Duce, Mussolini. He visited the Military College, the Central Military School of Physical Education, the Fascist Academy of Physical Education and the Ballila and Avanguardisti. According to him the last two organizations were the keystone of the fascist system of indoctrination. He felt that India needed some such institution for the military regeneration of Hindus.²⁸

²⁷ Marzia Casolari, 'Hindutva's Foreign Tie-up in the 1930s- Archival evidence', *Economic and Political Weekly*, XXXV, (4), January 22, 2000, p. 218.

²⁸ Ibid.

In 1934, Moonje started to work for the foundation of his own institution, the Bhonsla Military School and he also began to work at the foundation of Central Hindu Military Education Society whose aim was 'to bring about military regeneration of the Hindus and to prepare Hindu youths for undertaking the entire responsibility for the defense of motherland.'²⁹

For both Savarkar and B.S. Moonje, the practical militarization of all Hindus from high school age and adulthood was foundational to their conception of *Hindu Rashtra* and of their belief that India was under constant threat of Muslim conquest from Afghanistan and other- Muslim populated countries. In 1938, the Mahasabha submitted a demand to Central and Provincial Indian government and legislatures that compulsory military training be provided to Hindus in all high schools and colleges. This included pressure on schools to immediately adopt rifle training and initiate rifle clubs throughout India. The second component of this strategy was to use the conditions of war to encourage the widest possible military training of Hindus by urging all Hindus to join army, navy and air forces to become trained and skilled in methods and techniques of modern warfare. The ultimate aim was to raise a 'Hindu National Militia' in all Indian provinces that could defend Hindus from perceived external and internal threats. Savarkar claimed that military strength was the only criterion of greatness and it was the religious duty of the Hindus to die while killing the 'enemy'.³⁰

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Chetan Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths*, op.cit., p.104.

A much stronger conception of Hindutva emerged in Savarkar's writings and speeches under the influence of far right wing nationalist ideologies emanating from Eastern and Western Europe. In 1938 in a mass meeting in Poona, Savarkar demonstrated uncritical admiration for both Nazism and Fascism. Also, there were active links between the representatives of Italian fascism and leaders of Hindu militant nationalism in India.³¹

The organizational structure of the RSS clearly indicated that like fascists. Hindu nationalists never believed in perpetual peace. The mind of the nation should always be prepared for war and thus their attempt to militarize. Like the organization itself the RSS wanted the Hindu society to be like a disciplined hierarchical representation where every man would be able to defend himself and the Hindu society, if and when attacked by the enemy.

Apart from the methodological and organizational similarities between fascist youth organizations and the RSS, there was also an ideological commitment among RSS leaders in which an equivalence was created between self rule and dictatorial fascism moulded to Indian circumstance. Hedgewar was deeply influenced by Moonje and while giving a strong platform to the RSS followed the policy of 'Catch them young'- targeting the school boys from twelve to fifteen years of age group as it would be easy to mould their mind. His innovative organizational skills, missionary zeal and perseverance helped the RSS to grow considerably in a short time.³²

³¹ Ibid., pp. 105-106.

³² Pralay Kanungo, *RSS's Tryst with Politics: From Hedgewar to Sudarshan* (Delhi: Manohar, 2002), p. 44.

K.B.Hedgewar and M.S.Golwalkar: Shaping up of a Militant Community

The clear demarcation that was created between Hindus and Muslims was reinforced again and again by the Hindu nationalist leaders. Mahasabha leaders like V.D.Savarkar and B.S.Moonje were a source of inspiration to K.B.Hedgewar, the founding father of RSS. They were fascinated and obsessed with the aesthetics of aggressive Hindu militarism, which continued even after independence.³³ Hedgewar, was deeply influenced by Savarkar and Moonje's ideal form of '*Hindu Rashtra*'. He possessed supreme organizational skills and believed in *Sangathan*, or strategic organization of Hindu society in order to achieve 'Hindu unity'.³⁴

Hedgewar believed that the Hindus were a mighty and prosperous nation. The basic weakness, which led to Muslim and British invasion of the Hindu land was the absence of 'national consciousness'. The real solution to correct this weakness remained with the arousal of 'national consciousness' and building up of 'national solidarity'.³⁵ His aim was to build up an organization, which will prepare its members to create a strong Hindu identity. Both physical training and ideological training was imparted to the members of RSS. They were prepared to become future missionaries of the RSS and carry Hedgewar's message of *Hindu Rashtra*.³⁶

³³ Chetan Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths*, op.cit., p. 103.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 125.

³⁵ Pralay Kanungo, *RSS's Tryst with Politics: From Hedgewar to Sudarshan*, op.cit., pp. 42-43.

³⁶ Ibid., p.45.

The RSS's organizational structure promotes an authoritarian, institutional secrecy that conceals the internal workings of the organization.³⁷ Through the organization Hedgewar wished to create a "new man"- patriotic, selfless individuals loyal to Hindu nation and the RSS - physically well trained, 'manly', courageous, self-disciplined and capable of organization. He wanted his RSS to remain primarily 'cultural', pursuing more long-term goals through quiet but sustained physical-cum-ideological training of cadres.³⁸ The RSS aims at Hindu *Sangathan*- organization of the Hindus. The structure is like a pyramid. At the top of the hierarchy, there is *Sarsangachalak*, the supreme leader. Then the country is divided into geographical units; the *shakhas* remain at the bottom of the organizational hierarchy.

The *shakha* constitutes the basic unit of the RSS, the chief instrument to organize Hindus. The *shakhas* thus work as what Christophe Jaffrelot calls 'ideological akharas'.³⁹ Membership in the *shakha* is small, usually not exceeding 100 male members. The *shakha* experience offers a unifying experience for the participants, providing them with a similarity in speech and outlook. The intensity of the bonds which are formed may account for the commitment to the ideology of the RSS.⁴⁰ These *swayamsevaks* of each *shakha* are divided into six age groups; *shishu* (below seven years), *bal* (seven to eleven years), *kishore* (12-16 years), *tarun* (seventeen to twenty five years),

³⁷ Chetan Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths*, op.cit., p. 116.

³⁸ Tapan Basu et al. *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags: A critique of Hindu Right*, op.cit., p. 24.

³⁹ Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics 1925 to 1990*, op.cit., pp. 34-35.

⁴⁰ Walter Anderson and Sridhar D. Damle, *Brotherhood in Saffron: The RSS and Hindu Revivalism* (Boulder and London: Westview Press, 1987), p. 6.

yuvalarun (twenty-six to twenty nine years) and *praudha* (above forty years).⁴¹ Though it presents a diverse age group it was successful in creating a strong group cohesiveness.

Recruitment follows a meticulous process and the boys are recruited at a very tender age as it is easy to inculcate political messages of fairly simple basic themes in their minds.⁴² Both physical and psychological aspects are important for the working of the organization. The main purpose of the *shakha* is to instill in its members the spirit of cohesion, discipline, reverence to organizational authority and ideological conformity.

The notion of Hindu culture that is propagated in the *shakhas* is a definition of a majoritarian and authoritarian *rashtra* where Hindus, under RSS direction will lay down the rules by which the minorities must abide. Its version of Hindu culture is inextricably mingled with antagonism against the non-Hindu.⁴³ A single format of rituals-cum-physical training, was to be performed at identical times by RSS *shakhas* all over the country. The notion of a spiritual energy generated by universal, time bound prayer and ritual draws its inspiration from a concept of an invisible congregation.⁴⁴

Besides daily *shakhas*, the RSS conducts a large number of camps for the continuous indoctrination of *swayamsevaks* to teach them *samskaras* (virtuous behaviour) and to consolidate the sense of community and brotherhood. There are three kinds of camps- the Instructor's Training Camps (ITC), three - day

⁴¹Pralay Kanungo, *RSS's Tryst with Politics: From Hedgewar to Sudarshan*, op.cit., p. 69.

⁴²Tapan Basu et al. *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags: A critique of Hindu Right*, op.cit., p. 35.

⁴³Ibid., p.13.

⁴⁴Ibid., p.16.

camps and the Officer's Training Camps (OTCs). The trainees receive an intensive instruction of Sangh ideology and go through an intensive physical training.⁴⁵

The core of the organization constitutes of the *Sangathan* ideology, the creation of a numerically small but devoted and efficient organization of patriotic men who could provide for a progressive organization of the entire Hindu community.⁴⁶ The RSS was the representation of the ideal Hindu male who is virile, physically strong, fearless, a celibate and most of all an ardent Hindu nationalist.⁴⁷ One of the organization's aim was to project the masculinity of the Hindu people.

The ideal *swyamsevak* was supposed to be a selfless activist dedicated to lifelong service to the nation. From its very inception in 1926 the RSS instituted a daily routine of physical exercise, military drills and marches, weapons training, ideological inculcation and Hindu nationalist prayers to the Motherland and Holyland and to the RSS's new saffron flag. The RSS's *shakhas* included *danda* (weapons training with lathi), *vetracharma* (fighting with canes), *khadga* (sword training) and precision drill marching. The prayer glorified 'Hindubhumi' and '*Hindu Rashtra*' while eliciting a declaration of Hindu 'heroism'.

The training of the boys combined physical culture with inculcation of a sense of the greatness of Hindu traditions. Hedgewar was given the sole charge

⁴⁵Pralay Kanungo, *RSS's Tryst with Politics: From Hedgewar to Sudarshan*, op.cit., pp. 82-83.

⁴⁶ Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India*, op.cit., p. 98.

⁴⁷ Paola Bacchetta, *Feminist Fine print: Gender in the Hindu Nation* (Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2004), p. 33.

of this training programme, and he carefully began to recruit schoolboys from the twelve to fifteen year age group, scrutinizing their eligibility in terms of capacity for loyalty and obedience. Through this process he aimed at developing a group loyal to him personally, a militant coterie, which would not stand duality of allegiance either to persons or to principles. Hedgewar personally supervised the physical training and as an intellectual exercise, told and retold stories of Hindu heroes like Shivaji and Rana Pratap who had fought Muslims valiantly in the past.⁴⁸

Between April and June 1927, the RSS held a training camp for twenty *swayamsevaks*. Through the training in weapons and playing indigenous games the constantly reiterated message was that Hindus were suffering because they had become unorganized, liberal, generous and peaceable. They needed to become militant and powerful, and for that an organization like the RSS was essential.⁴⁹

Hindu nationalism's obsession with male bodily strength and purity call to mind the cult of Aryan male in Hitler's Germany, the typical for of militarism and fascism - the cult of the uniformed and disciplined *sevak*, in the case of the khaki-clad RSS and of deliberate attacks upon the bodies of the 'Other'.⁵⁰

From 1930 onwards the RSS began to institute the *pracharak* (full time organizer) system whereby trained *swayamsevak* cadres were sent to other

⁴⁸ Tapan Basu et al *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags: A critique of Hindu Right*, op.cit., pp.17-18.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 18.

⁵⁰ Stuart Corbridge, "The militarization of all Hindudom? The Bharatiya Janata Party, the bomb, and the political spaces of Hindu nationalism," *Economy and Society*, Vol. 28, No.2, May 1999, p. 235.

premises to initiate branches and undertake propagation of the ideology.⁵¹ Its martial orientation shows up in its glorification of physical strength and bravery, and the use of traditional weapons and drills. The RSS discipline, its uniform and the Sanskritized military terms employed at its meetings conveyed a martial impression. Those historical figures which it honors tend to be warriors that the RSS associates with nation building e.g. Shivaji, Rana Pratap and Guru Gobind Singh.⁵²

The methodology of the RSS refashioned a number of existing practices, notably the 'akhara' institution, the long standing popular tradition of young men meeting at wrestling pits and doing physical exercises as well as the institutional form of a religious sect gathering around a spiritual authority.⁵³ The games cum physical culture aspect of *shakhas* have a major appeal, particularly in the overcrowded lower middle class living areas in the city or small-town neighbourhood, where alternative recreational facilities may well be absent. As training proceeds, RSS recruits acquire a new sense of corporate identity.⁵⁴ The aim behind all such games is to inculcate an attitude of militancy and training for any kind of civil strife like communal riot. This type of physical training is combined with games in which the emphasis again is on the development of clannish solidarity.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Chetan Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths*, op.cit., pp. 119-120.

⁵² Walter Anderson and Sridhar D. Damle, *Brotherhood in Saffron: The RSS and Hindu Revivalism*, op.cit., pp. 6-7.

⁵³ Sandria Frietag, *Collective Action and Community: Public Arenas and the Emergence of Communalism in North India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 122-125.

⁵⁴ Tapan Basu et al. *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags: A critique of Hindu Right*, op.cit., p. 35.

⁵⁵ D.R.Goyal, *Indian Version of Fascism* (Delhi :Gowardhan Kapur and Sons, 1975), p. 7

The guiding idea was to inculcate a national spirit as the ultimate and supreme loyalty and to build up a strong fraternal bond between the volunteers i.e. the *swayamsevaks*. What adds to the RSS appeal is the basic simplicity of its ideological message, preached in a style that deliberately avoids complexities and debates, and inculcated simultaneously via a whole battery of rituals and symbols.⁵⁶

The growing Hindu militancy is reflected in a proliferation of Hindu defense associations, in movements to restore temples used as mosques, in renewed efforts to convert Christians and Muslims to Hinduism. The RSS and its 'family' of organizations have been in the thick of many of these activities. The affiliates all have highly centralized authority structure very similar to that of the RSS.⁵⁷

M.S.Golwalkar was the second leader of RSS and it was under him that the RSS extended the ideological content of its Hindu nationalism. For him, the Hindus had to revive the undying Race Spirit to combat against the enemy 'other'. According to him Hindus were 'an immortal race with perennial youth'. Knowledge of this 'immortality' was the sole possession of Hindus and they therefore had a world mission towards the whole community.⁵⁸ For Golwalkar the history of the Hindu Nation was:

'the story of our flourishing Hindu National life for thousands of years and of a long unflinching war, continuing for the last ten centuries,

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 36.

⁵⁷ Walter Anderson and Sridhar D. Damle, *Brotherhood in Saffron: The RSS and Hindu Revivalism*, op.cit., p. 4.

⁵⁸ Chetan Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths*, op.cit., p. 127.

which has not yet come to a decisive close...And a Race Spirit calls, national consciousness blazes forth and we Hindus rally to the Hindu standard, the Bhagawa Dhwaja (saffron flag), set our teeth in grim determination to wipe put the opposing forces.’⁵⁹ He also stated that:

‘The Race spirit has been awakening. The lion was not dead, only sleeping. He is rousing himself up again and the world has to see the might of the regenerated Hindu Nation strike down the enemy’s (the British) hosts (the Muslims) with its mighty arm.’⁶⁰

Golwalkar defined Nation as consisting of five unities: Country, Race, Religion, Culture and Language. For him Race was a foundational component of nation. Both religion and culture created ‘the peculiar Race spirit’ and ‘Race consciousness’ that formed the ‘Hindu nation’.⁶¹ Golwalkar argued that the ‘National Race’ had

‘the indisputable right of excommunicating from its Nationality all those who, having been of the Nation, for ends of their own, turned traitors and entertained aspirations contravening or differing from those of the National Race as a whole.’⁶²

Thus the members of all other religious denomination of the population are not part of the nation. Golwalkar’s position regarding Muslims was even more extreme than Savarkar’s. He observes:

‘In one word, they (Muslims) must cease to be foreigners or may stay in the country wholly subordinate to the Hindu nation claiming nothing,

⁵⁹ M.S.Golwalkar, *We or Our Nationhood Defined* (Nagpur: Bharat Publications, 1939), p. 13.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁶¹ Chetan Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths*, op.cit., pp.128-129.

⁶² M.S.Golwalkar, *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, op.cit., p. 34.

deserving no privileges far less any preferential treatment, not even citizen's rights.'⁶³

In *'We or Our Nationhood Defined,'* Golwalkar employed distinctly metaphysical rather than strictly biological or simply hereditarian, conceptions of 'race'. This emerged most forcefully in his comparisons between India and Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. For him, Nazi Germany validated the 'scientific' prescription that a nation should comprise pure 'Race' having no contaminants, a model he believed India should emulate. In his book he explicitly models 'cultural nationalism' on Adolf Hitler:

'German national pride has now become the topic of the day. To keep up the purity of the nation and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of the semitic races- the Jews. National pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has also shown how well-nigh impossible it is for the races and cultures, having differences going to the root, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by.'⁶⁴

In every ideological strain one finds the desire to establish the supremacy of the Hindu identity, a deep reverence for the glorious past which was lost through foreign invasions. How to restore this supremacy and reawaken the Hindu culture was the foremost aim of the organization. This they tried to do by instilling in every Hindu mind, the notion of an offended self. The methods were taught and the men trained to combat the forces and violence became firmly entrenched in this thought process and action. The

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 48-49.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

militant Hindu nationalism was essential to rejuvenate the Hindus and bring their vigor back. The organizational structure thus rose and established itself keeping these ideologies in mind. What we have in the Hindu discourse is an urge to Hindu unity and militancy, overdetermined by a concern to preserve 'natural order'.⁶⁵

Militarization through the *Sangh Parivar*

The RSS always saw themselves as the nucleus of an organized militant society of the future. From 1950s a tremendous self - multiplication of the core organizational cluster took shape. The planned co-ordination that deliberately organized a phased self-multiplication saw the mutual conjoining of society and organization.⁶⁶

The politics of Hindutva is primarily engaged in defining the nation as Hindu through a process of cultural homogenization, social consolidation and political mobilization of the majority community and at the same time, by disgracing the minorities as aliens and enemies.⁶⁷ Thus militarization as conceptualized by the RSS is a process of asserting the strength of Hindus both physically and intellectually. It is making the Hindus imagine a constant conflict between themselves and non-Hindus mainly the Muslims. The character of this politics incorporates the familiar fascist traits of irrationality and coercion. The religious and the sentimental has formed the base for *Sangh*

⁶⁵ Gyanendra Pandey, 'Hindus and Others: The Militant Hindu Construction', *Economic and Political Weekly*, XXVI, (52), December 28, 1991, p. 3003.

⁶⁶ Tapan Basu et al. *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags: A critique of Hindu Right*, op.cit., p. 59.

⁶⁷ K.N.Panikkar (ed.), *The Concerned Indian's Guide to Communalism*, op.cit., p.xxx.

Parivar politics. Coercion, both emotional and physical, rather than consensus has been the key to this politics leading to insensitivity and brutalization in the society.

Formulation of militant groups often takes place in the conjunction of two circumstances. When a group or already formed community experiences a pronounced sense of loss of meaning or identity, of humiliation in the wake of dislocation (war, urbanization, rapid modernization) and when a leadership or ideologies are able to transform this experience into a positive projection of affection onto a leader and ideological cause that can produce a collective 'grandiose self' that is a community, organized around an inexpressible core or spirit. Such a construction is always threatened and undermined by the ambitions by other groups and authorities. This constant threat - the enemy, the 'other' consolidates, even constitutes the group's cohesion. Militant groups need strong and demonized others in order to construct themselves as a strong and cohesive force. The *Sangh Parivar* is an excellent example of such a subculture organized around a central secret (the Hindu spirit, the brotherhood of the sangha), providing a strong and demonized other.⁶⁸

Hindu communalism has worked through a large number of social and cultural organizations carefully nurtured during the recent past. They cover almost every field of intellectual and cultural activity- be it education, history, music or media, the Parivar has tried to promote its own institutional

⁶⁸ Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India*, op.cit., pp. 107-108.

network.⁶⁹ About twenty thousand schools under different denominations, scores of publishing outfits in almost every language, committees to write the history of each district, literary associations and drama clubs; environmental groups, women's organization, temple renovation committees and so on are a part of this network. Unlike the political formation, which function intermittently, and some only at the time of elections, the presence of these organizations in civil society is continuous and uninterrupted.⁷⁰

They all promote the hierarchy and power structure integral to Hindu tradition, uncritically reinforce and privilege the past cultural practices and valorize indigenism. All organizations sponsored by the *Parivar* through their social and cultural engagements, elaborate, disseminate and reinforce these values in civil society and pressurize the state to incorporate them in legislative measures. As Tanika Sarkar points out the gender perspectives and activities of the *Parivar's* women's wing and the first affiliate of the RSS, the Rashtra Sevika Samiti are particularly important in this respect, as exemplifying the predicament of negotiating a conservative, patriarchal agenda when gender equality has already emerged as a powerful idea in society.

The Samiti founded in 1936 and meant to impart physical and ideological training to women, had for a long time, a rather muted existence, without any major role to play in the scheme of activities of the RSS. It neither participated in mass struggles nor did much organizational work. The leaders of the RSS- an exclusive male organization till today- who entertained notions of domesticity

⁶⁹ K.N.Panikkar (ed.), *The Concerned Indian's Guide to Communalism*, op.cit., p.xxiv.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

and gender subordination of women restricted the Samiti's work to the familial chores: to manage the homes and to rear children on values prescribed by the *Sangh*. In the wake of the Ramjanmabhoomi movement, however, women were brought to the forefront by forming new organizations like the Mahila Morcha, Matri Mandal, Durga Vahini and recruiting thousand of karsevikas to participate in the demolition of Babri Masjid. Once the need for such a mass mobilization was over, the homebound women retrieved.⁷¹ The Samiti's activities essentially worked towards establishing women as repository and custodians of the essential Sangh values as well as its authentic ideology. The essential patriarchal values are preserved by the members of the Samiti.

From 1936, the RSS started spreading its wings and started entrenching into the society by forming affiliates. The RSS gradually tried to create a strong presence in the field of education, especially in Northern India. In 1952 the RSS founded a primary school, Saraswati Shishu Mandir at Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh and it was inaugurated by RSS leader M.S. Golwalkar. A Shishushiksha Prabandh Samiti was set up to coordinate the Saraswati Sishu Mandir at primary school level and the Bal Mandir at high school level. Delhi, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh picked up the enterprise, each with its state-wide committee and Andhra Pradesh was the first place in the South to develop its Saraswati Vidyapith.⁷²

⁷¹ Tanika Sarkar, 'The Gender Predicament of the Hindu Right' in K.N. Panikkar (ed.), *The Concerned Indian's Guide to Communalism*, op.cit., p. 142.

⁷² Tanika Sarkar, 'Educating the Children of the Hindu Rashtra: Notes on RSS Schools,' in Praful Bidwai, Achin Vanaik and Harbans Mukhia (eds.), *Religion, Religiosity and Communalism*, op.cit., p. 238. (Tanika Sarkar gives some data from 'Vidya Bharati, Akhil Bharatiya Shiksha Sammelan, *Alternative Model of National Education*, December 1990-91)

The 1970s saw a significant expansion as Vidya Bharati was set up in 1977 to co-ordinate efforts at an all-India level and to devise a curricula for the additional courses that provide the main content of RSS pedagogy. By the end of 1991, Vidya Bharati claimed that it was running the second largest chain of schools in the country, next only to governmental schools. Apart from regular schools, Vidya Bharati has two other kinds of semi-formal programmes. One is directed towards pre-school infants known as Shishu Vatikas. The other aims at setting up Samskar Kendras in backward areas of the country where very few schools exist. They implant the right qualities and 'noble virtues'. The syllabus of these part time school consists of elementary literacy and lessons in religion, 'patriotism', 'Indian culture' etc. Four kinds of locales are chosen by the Vidya Bharati, where, such centers are set up. Some exist in rural areas, around 500 such kendras are set up in urban slums. They are present in urban localities which are centers of convent and missionary schools. Again a thousand have been set up in tribal areas. This was done mainly to counter missionary educational influence and teach Hinduism and nationalism to tribals.⁷³ The broader aim is to remake the nation and form a layout for the creation of *Hindu Rashtra*.

One of the most successful organizations created by the RSS was the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) in 1964, a body committed to organizing religious Hinduism under an overarching and violent Hindutva ideology. It was intended to provide a bridge between the religious establishment and the RSS. Its

⁷³ Ibid., pp. 239-240.

objectives were to consolidate “Hindu society”, to spread the Hindu values of life, to establish a network comprising all Hindus living outside India and establish a Universal Hindu Society. The VHP represented a continuation of the efforts in the 1920s to produce the “Hindu nation” through establishment of rashtra mandirs and all-encompassing national Hinduism prevailing over divisions of sect and caste. One of the significant activities of the VHP was to develop a national Hinduism suited to the modern times starting with the International Hindu Conference organized by VHP in 1966.⁷⁴ Another important organization was the Bajrang Dal, which was formed in 1984 as the youth wing of the VHP. Its main purpose is to implement the policies of VHP. The youth which constitutes the organization are drawn mainly from the ranks of poor, upper caste population of small cities and semi urban areas. The VHP helps them to cope with their anxieties by handing them a cause to fight for and by persuading them that on their young shoulders lie the responsibility of restoring to the Hindus their lost honour and pride. As if out to prove their worth to the society and themselves, the Bajrang Dal youth have expressed their frustrations through some violent incidents that have taken place as part of the Ramjanmabhoomi agitation. The Bajrang Dal has become better known after these as the militant outfit of the VHP.⁷⁵ The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was created out of the RSS remnants of the previous Bharatiya Jana Sangh political

⁷⁴ Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India*, op.cit., pp. 101-102.

⁷⁵ Ashis Nandy, *Creating a Nationality: the Ramjanmabhoomi movement and the fear of the Self* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 97.

party.⁷⁶ It is the political affiliate of RSS, which was formed in 1980 with the aim to capture the political arena in the recent future. It became widely successful in the late 1980s and 1990s in its pursuit of political power, a brief discussion of this is presented in the latter half of the chapter.

During the 1980s and 1990s there was a massive expansion of the *Parivar* into an extraordinarily wide range of fields. The movement was entrenched in an expanded network of *shakhas* and subsidiaries all over the country and was more self-confident than ever regarding its ability to shape and organize Indian society.

BJP and the Militarized State

Golwalkar suggested that the *Hindu Rashtra* should be a strong military power. On 26th February 1966, just before his death Savarkar had called in the Indian government to 'immediately equip India with nuclear weapons and missiles'.⁷⁷ The Vajpayee led government in 1998 aimed to do exactly this. Possession of nuclear weapons was what the *Sangh Parivar* always wanted. In 1951 the Jan Sangh manifesto had proclaimed the need for India to go nuclear. The party had greatly welcomed the 1974 Pokhran Nuclear Test.

With the BJP's coming to power, the RSS precipitated its campaign for the nuclear option. It asked for a re-evaluation of India's nuclear status, which had been overdue. The RSS argued that India's security concerns demanded an

⁷⁶ Chetan Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths*, op.cit., pp. 114-115.

⁷⁷ Sumit Sarkar, 'The BJP Bomb and Aspects of Nationalism', *Economic and Political Weekly* XXXIII, (27), 4-10 July, 1998, p. 1726.

in-depth evaluation of its defense requirements and, if after such an exercise, it were felt that Pokhran had to be repeated, the country should go ahead with it.

On 11 May 1998, India exploded nuclear bombs at Pokhran and Vajpayee proudly claimed that India has achieved the status of the sixth nuclear weapon State. The *Sangh Parivar* was very happy as the 'Hindu bomb' gave a boost to Hindu nationalism. For the RSS the possession of nuclear weapons symbolically asserted Hindu masculinity. The bomb was a symbol of their national greatness, their strength and even their virility: it was a Hindu bomb against the Islamic bomb of Pakistan. The bomb and the science behind it were being packaged in a Hindu idiom and propagated in schools, temples and the entertainment media as an unfolding of a holistic, unified, ultra-modern science already contained in ancient texts the Hindus. The detonation of the nuclear bomb was a religious phenomenon in which Indians saw "the triumph of divine power... the workings of providence, grace, revelation and a history guided by an inexorable faith."⁷⁸ It gave RSS and its cultural arm, The VHP a free rein to claim the bomb for the glory of Hindu civilization and Vedic Sciences. Shortly after the explosion, the VHP ideologues inside and outside the government vowed to build a temple dedicated to *Shakti* (the Goddess of energy) and *Vigyan* (science) at the site of explosion.⁷⁹ Again at the official level, the weapons and the missiles under

⁷⁸ Meera Nanda, *Breaking the Spell of Dharma and Other Essays* (New Delhi: Three Essays, 2002), pp. 3-5.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

construction are given mythological names from *Agni* (the fire God) to *Trishul* (trident, the symbol of god Shiva).⁸⁰

Militaristic authoritarianism has been at the heart of the entire Hindutva project. Pokhran II was an attempt to vastly accelerate the process of militarization of culture and education. The national cum Hindu chauvinism very obviously stimulated by the bomb fosters unthinking, jingoistic, aggressively male mindsets, for which the RSS has been systematically working for decades.⁸¹ The BJP called for the military to be given 'nuclear teeth'⁸² and thus aimed at military modernization. The explosion of the bomb was necessary to recover the country's pride and international status as befitting its natural greatness.⁸³ At the street level the VHP projected the bomb as a symbol of militarized Hindu Revivalism and celebrated the blasts with the cry of 'Jai Shri Ram'.⁸⁴ The Pokhran II nuclear tests were an act that symbolized violence, hatred and the capacity to inflict destruction on presumed enemies, internal and external. It was emblematic of a new kind of aggressive and belligerent Indian nationalism that has come to hold sway over a large part of the elite population of the country.⁸⁵ It was definitely a means by which the BJP and its allies sought to reinvent political spaces of India - a spatial representation that

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Sandy Gordon, 'Indian Security policy and Rise of the Hindu right,' in John Mcguire, Peter Reeves and Howard Brasted (eds.), *Politics of Violence: From Ayodhya to Berhampada* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998), pp. 253-71.

⁸³ Rita Manchanda, 'Militarised Hindu Nationalism and the Mass Media: Shaping a Hindutva Public Discourse,' *South Asia, Journal of Asian Studies, New Series*, Vol. XXV, Special Issue, 'The BJP and the Governance in India, December, 2002, p. 309.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 310.

⁸⁵ Achin Vanaik, 'Making India Strong: The BJP-Led Government's Foreign Policy Perspectives', *South Asia, Journal of Asian Studies, New Series*, Vol. XXV, Special Issue 'The BJP and the Governance in India, December, 2002, pp. 321-22.

allowed Hindu nationalists to position Bharat Mata as geographical entity under threat from Islam and in need of the protective armies of Lord Ram.⁸⁶

Rajni Kothari holds that 'its not militarism in the sense, that the military has come to power, but a new form of governance which attempts to increasingly militarize the state. Militarization of the society is an attempt to get over the widespread stigma of the Hindu's lack of killer instinct.'

The decline of Congress had inspired the BJP to occupy the vacant political space through a brand of politics of which militarism is an integral part. Unable to widen its social base through a pursuit of transformative politics the party hoped that militarism could cut across the class/caste divide and propel it into power. Militarism weaves smoothly into the BJP's world-view of creating a highly theocratic state. The stockpiling of nuclear arms as the BJP has claimed is not for peace but for combative purpose. It is aspiring for a militarily strong nuclear led infrastructure.⁸⁷ Militarised nationalism, anti-democratic impulses and hate politics are integral aspects of the Indian national security state package justified by the hostility of its neighbour.⁸⁸ The Kargil war also helped the Sangh Privar to dominate the political arena and reaffirm their strength to the Indian population.

Portrayal of a militarized state and violent display of hatred again came to the forefront through the Gujarat pogrom 2002. The violence as witnessed in Gujarat was not a riot, but a terrorist attack followed by a systematic, planned

⁸⁶ Stuart Corbridge, 'The militarization of all Hindudom? The Bharatiya Janata Party, the bomb, and the political spaces of Hindu nationalism,' *op.cit.*, p. 222.

⁸⁷ The Hindustan Times, 29 August, 1999.

⁸⁸ Rita Manchanda, 'Militarised Hindu Nationalism and the Mass Media: Shaping a Hindutva Public Discourse,' *op.cit.*, p. 311.

massacre, a pogrom. Everyone spoke of the pillage and plunder, being organized like a military operation against external armed enemy. It was not a spontaneous upsurge of mass anger but was a carefully planned pogrom. *Sangh Parivar* thus provided the ideological, political and administrative leadership and backbone for the tragic events in Gujarat. A detailed discussion of this event follows in the next chapter.

In these incidents one finds the practical implementation of ideology into action and the process of capturing the popular sentiments of the masses through a hate rhetoric by the *Sangh Parivar*. The five year rule of BJP at the center has given the RSS a platform which aimed at remaking India as a whole-politically, ideologically and historically.

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CHAPTER 3

MILITANT MOBILIZATION: A STUDY OF THE RAMJANMABHOOMI MOVEMENT

Perpetuation of the feeling of hatred and the concept of a divided society constitutes an important part of the ideology of the RSS. The process through which they wanted to cultivate this hatred was through invading upon the intellect and rationality of the Hindu masses. The aim of this chapter is to understand the method applied to propagate the violent and militaristic content of Hindu nationalism. The discussion will revolve around the methods of mass mobilization - the use of symbols and the modern technology for propaganda adopted by the RSS and its affiliates. This type of propaganda was directed towards moulding the pattern of thinking in Hindus. With the passage of time the methods changed and saw a rapid transformation during the 1980s and 1990s. It was more of an ideological endeavour during the 1920s, which was complemented with a religio-political dimension during the 1980s and 90s. This chapter also attempts to explain the particular form of mass mobilization adopted during the Ramjanmabhoomi movement, a campaign, which leaned heavily on violent mobilization with 'Ram' as a central symbol around which broader questions of politics revolved.

From its very inception, capturing the mass sentiment to create a stronghold for their ideology became one of the important agenda of the RSS.

The aim was to mobilize the masses in such a fashion that their ideology should remain ingrained in the minds of the entire Hindu population. They wanted every Hindu to think as they did.

The Ideological Content

In 1925 when the RSS came into existence, its mission was to actualize the possibility of universal brotherhood, to unite and organize Hindu society into a formidable force. The RSS had chosen to change people's attitude rather than seek political power. The focus on changing attitudes aimed at supra-political power, defining the very horizons of political debate and party conduct, in this sense it was far from being non-political. Rather it aimed at a stability and an influence beyond the reach of the vicissitudes of electoral democracy.¹ Capturing the mass psychology had a different connotation than what is perceived in the 1980s and 1990s. Establishing the 'Hinduness' of the *Hindu Rashtra* was the dominant aim in the pre-independence era rather than capturing political power. For M.S.Golwalkar, one of the chief ideologues of RSS - the mobilization was to be a slow process rather than a hasty shortcut. There was no substitute for slow long drawn-out organizational work, of drawing more and more people into *shakhas* and the accompanying daily discipline of an hour's prayer and ritual, until society was eventually coterminous with the *Sangh*. This would lead to Savarkar's dictum "Hinduisse all

¹ Arvind Rajagopal, 'Ram Janmabhoomi, Consumer Identity and Image-Based Politics,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, XXIX,(27), July 2,1994, p.1666.

politics and militarise Hindudom”- a task far more profound in implication and long lasting in effect than merely winning office.²

Built in 1920s the influence of Fascism was fresh. Not only was it perceptible through the organizational structure the RSS followed but also through its dominant ideologies, their process of mobilizing the masses, especially the youths. The *shakhas* modeled on military schools of fascist Italy wished to create a strong Hindu identity. ‘To be Hindu became a triumphant declaration of strength and vigour, and the symbol of an aggressive culture eager to acquire hegemony.’³ The structure adopted by the RSS towards forming the organization was an attempt to unite the entire Hindu community and rekindle what they thought to be a dying Hindu spirit, in order to give birth to and perpetuation of cultural nationalism.

The khaki shorts and white shirt which the members adorn, became a mark of that nationalism. Every morning the members of RSS *shakhas* saluted the saffron flag and sang ‘Vande Mataram’. This gesture of creating a disciplined self and regimentation appealed to the youth, who mainly constituted the core group of the organization. Another prominent feature, which differentiates their method of mobilization from that of the present era as followed by the *Sangh Parivar* was that of secrecy. More of a secret society aiming towards building up of *Hindu Rashtra* and restricted to the coterie of Upper caste Hindu Brahmins, the RSS tried to symbolize the strength, force and masculinity of being Hindu.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., p. 1659.

The method adopted by the RSS towards mobilizing the masses through an ideological brainwashing had a resemblance with the techniques followed by Fascism and Nazism. A system of myths, rites and symbols are intended to fuse the individual's identity to the larger Hindu community, which the RSS claims to represent.⁴ The RSS thus became "the largest and most influential organization in India committed to Hindu revivalism."⁵

The firm foundation provided by K.B.Hedgewar and M.S.Golwalkar made it possible for the spread of the organization outward from its original base in Maharashtra. Though cautious, not to be associated with political authority, the scenario started changing from mid 1960s onwards. Already there came into existence several affiliated organizations in several spheres like politics, education, social welfare, media, labourers and religious groups. The RSS thus had undergone a phenomenal expansion having *shakhas* in almost every part of the country.⁶ A metamorphosis of the original aim of the RSS started taking shape. A dilemma started building up as they had brief encounters with power politics. This was largely because the participation of its political affiliate in state coalition governments between 1967-1969, the active part played by the RSS and its "family" of organizations in a popular anti-corruption movement in 1973-1975, the underground movement against restrictions on civil and political liberties during the 1975-1977 state of emergency, as well as its support for the political alliance that captured power in the March 1977

⁴ Walter Anderson and Sridhar D. Damle, *Brotherhood in Saffron: The RSS and Hindu Revivalism* (Boulder and London: Westview Press, 1987), p. 6.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁶ Pralay Kanungo, 'RSS's Tryst with Politics: From Hedgewar to Sudarshan,' *op.cit.*, p. 181.

national elections.⁷ During this period they gained major public respect, which at times diluted their ideological parameters. However they could not ignore the benefits of power politics..

With this metamorphosis there came a shift in the strategy towards securing hegemony. A significant change was also seen in the process of mass mobilization. With the birth of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the 1980s there was an attempt to strike a balance between ideology and political power. Again in 1981 the resurrection of Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) following an incident of conversion of fifteen hundred Harijans into Islam in Meenakshipuram was another major step in making RSS a “national political force”.⁸ The *Virat Hindu Sammelan* was organized by the *Sangh Parivar* to adopt the abolition of untouchability as one of its objectives to target the untouchables. ⁹ Thus one finds the different phases and different types of mobilization as adopted by the *Sangh Parivar* towards building up a *Hindu Rashtra*.

From its very inception the strategy of mobilization pursued by the *Sangh Parivar* marked a departure from the norms essential for functioning of the democratic polity and society.¹⁰ In the 1920s there was a psychological content in the process of mobilization, which was nurtured further by a communal perspective under the garb of constructing a superior Hindu culture.

⁷ Walter Anderson and Sridhar D. Damle, *Brotherhood in Saffron: The RSS and Hindu Revivalism*, op.cit., p.3.

⁸ Ibid., p.192.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ K.N.Pannikar, ‘Religious Symbols and Political Mobilization: The Agitation for a Mandir at Ayodhya’, *Social Scientist*, Vol.21, Nos 7-8, July- August 1993, p.74.

In the later years, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s the mobilization firmly anchored itself to the domain of religious faith. There was an adherence to religious symbols and rituals coupled with aim of gaining political hegemony. The process often lacked rationality and relevance. The broader socio-political and economic development was lost in a bid to mobilize the uneducated, illiterate and God-fearing populace. Religion became a formidable instrument, which was used time and again to capture the mass sentiment. Rather than curing the deep malaise, which crippled the Indian society they wanted to capitalize on it. The ignorance of the masses, their blind faith in religion and ritualism became a tool in the hands of the *Sangh Parivar*, which could be exploited at any juncture of time to fulfill their broader aims.

The late 1980s and early 1990s shows how the *Sangh Parivar* introduced a whole new technique of mass mobilization. With the aid of new technologies in the field of communication and mass media, the mobilization pattern reached a dizzy height. Religion and history were moulded and reshaped by the *Sangh Parivar* to gain a secured position in the political arena. A study of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement is essential at this juncture to see the changing patterns of mass mobilization.

Background of the Ramjanmabhoomi Movement

The communalization of Indian political process in the 1990s, whether through the movement centered on Ayodhya or through the staging of communal riots, instituted frenzy as a potent instrument of political

mobilization. It is from the late 1980s that religious frenzy has been organized on an unprecedented scale as a strategic intervention in shaping the Indian parliamentary politics in particular, and Indian society in general.¹¹ The Ramjanmabhoomi movement is an event through which Hindutva used "Hinduism as an instrument of political mobilization and this Hinduism sought to masculinize the self-definition of the Hindus and thus, martialize the community."¹²

In 1984 the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) started a campaign to remove a mosque, built in the sixteenth century, from a place which it considered as the birth place of God Rama. While this campaign was initially not successful, the VHP continued to put pressure on politicians and it resulted in a decision of the District and Session Judge of Faizabad on 14 February 1986 that the disputed site should be opened immediately to the public. This decision triggered off communal violence all over North India. Though the mosque was open for the Hindu public but its future was still uncontested. The VHP demanded that the mosque be demolished and a Hindu temple be built in its place. The issue was made absolutely central by the BJP and from 1986 onwards the political agenda of the BJP cannot be separated from the religious agenda of the VHP.¹³ The countdown to the events of 1990 began for the Bajrang Dal, the youth wing of

¹¹ Harbans Mukhia, 'Communal Violence and the Transmutation of Identities,' in Praful Bidwai, Achin Vanaik and Harbans Mukhia (eds.), *Religion, Religiosity and Communalism* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1996), p.32.

¹² Ashish Nandy, *Creating a Nationality: The Ramjanmabhoomi movement and the fear of the Self* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.60.

¹³ Peter Van der Veer, 'The Politics of Devotion to Rama,' in David.N. Lorenzen (ed.), *Religion in North India: Community Identity and Political Action*, (New Delhi: Manohar, 1996) pp289-290.

VHP in July 1989. This was when the Dal held a Bajrang Shakti Diksha Samaroh at Ayodhya 'to strengthen the boys for the fight that lay ahead.' More than 6,000 volunteers, it was claimed went through the initiation rites.¹⁴

In 1991, the BJP's main electoral plank was the Hindu demand for the temple at Ayodhya. This nexus between religion and politics proved to be extremely rewarding to the BJP. The dispute over the Masjid in Ayodhya, which remained dormant for about forty years was enlivened by the BJP and was transformed into a 'national' issue, coupling it with cultural and political significance. The most important factor, which made the transformation possible was the mobilizing potential of religious symbols constantly brought into play by the *Sangh Parivar*.¹⁵ The increasing religiosity in the Indian society, the gradual decline of The Indian National Congress and the ambiguous nature of secularism as practiced by the Indian state were altogether responsible for such a situation to arise in the Indian society.

The movement for the construction of the temple at Ayodhya to replace Babri Masjid touched a sympathetic chord in the minds of Hindus, even in areas where worship of Ram was not popular. A symbolic meaning was attached to Ayodhya both about the 'self' and the 'other'. The Babri Masjid was portrayed as a symbol of Muslim aggression against Hindus, a collective humiliation of Hindus. The movement for the construction of the temple at Ayodhya was in

¹⁴ Ashish Nandy, *Creating a Nationality: The Ramjanmabhoomi movement and the fear of the Self*, op.cit., p.98.

¹⁵ K.N.Pannikar, 'Religious Symbols and Political Mobilization: The Agitation for a Mandir at Ayodhya', op.cit., p. 64.

reality an attempt at creating Hindu solidarity and avenging Muslim wrong.¹⁶ Interesting to note would be the strategy employed by Sangh Parivar. A series of events took place from Ramshila puja on September 1988 to the demolition of the masjid on 6 December, 1992. Ayodhya became a symbol of Hindu identity on one hand and Muslim atrocity on the other hand.

The event of Ramshila puja gave a new dimension to the Hindu nationalist movement. It paved the path towards Hindu communal mobilization. B.K.Kelkar wrote in the '*Organiser*' about the purpose of the puja - " It was a mass contact and mobilization program which emotionally involves and integrates the Hindu society to a national cause. It connected every individual to the national memorial of Shri Ram. The dharmacharyas of all the sects of Hinduism had come together on a common platform and participated in the mass mobilization."¹⁷

The Ramshila puja was followed by processions in which Ram shilas were carried around in different localities before being finally carried to Ayodhya. Apart from gaining popular ground through the religious propaganda, communal disturbances, occurrences of violence and loss of lives were other consequences, which marked the country. For the *Sangh Parivar* it was a mark of success. This led to more intense mobilization. The Rath yatra led by BJP leader L.K.Advani was an example of this.¹⁸

¹⁶ Ibid., pp.66-67.

¹⁷ B.K.Kelkar 'Frankly Speaking,' *Organiser*, Vol. XLI, No. 13, 8 October, 1989.

¹⁸ K.N.Pannikar, 'Religious Symbols and Political Mobilization: The Agitation for a Mandir at Ayodhya', op.cit., p. 71.

The initiative to conduct a procession through ten states from Somnath to Ayodhya, that began on September 1991 met with great enthusiasm all over the country. The 36 day long event invoked frenzied religious sentiments and militant national fervour. It was an appeal to unleash Hindu aggression. At Ahmedabad a volunteer of the *Sangh Parivar* pierced his arm with a *trishul* and put a *tilak* on Advani's forehead with his blood. Again at Jetpur, a *kalash* (pitcher) full of blood was presented to him by 101 Bajrang Dal volunteers. At every stop he was presented with innumerable bows and arrows, *trishuls*, discs and swords.¹⁹

The air-conditioned DCM Toyota converted into a tacky celluloid - inspired rath sporting the BJP's election symbol of a lotus was the most brazen mixing of religion and politics that India has ever seen. It was a turning point not only for the BJP and the Hindutva forces, but for Indian polity as a whole. From the BJP's point of view, the rath yatra was a stupendous success. It transformed Advani from a sober politician into a mass leader, capable of involving passion and frenzy. Thousands of men and women in the villages and small towns of North India lined the roads to see the rath and seemed wonder struck at this new avatar of an avenging Lord Ram. Most vociferous and visible section through out the route of the rathyatra were the youth sporting saffron scarves and head bands, carrying *trishuls* and letting out wild shrieks of *Jai Shri Ram* and assorted slogan.²⁰ The emphasis on Hinduness that the mobilization created transcended the caste status, which led towards a symbolic equality

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Manini Chatterjee, 'The BJP and Political Mobilization for Hindutva,' in Praful Bidwai, Achin Vanaik and Harbans Mukhia (eds.), *Religion, Religiosity and Communalism*, op.cit., p.99.

among the castes. The symbol acquires even greater force when a demon figure, the Muslims is constructed as a threat to all Hindus, the external threat becomes a strong cementing bond. This was perceptible in the participation of lower castes in waging communal riots that occurred in December 1992-January 1993.

The Rath yatra was dominated by religious imagery - from the primary terms of the procession, through the ritual idiom of pilgrimage, sacrifice and initiation, to the devotional responses towards Ram's chariot. Even the displays of military zeal were dressed not according to the modern denominations but rather in costuming and weaponry appropriate to ancient religious texts. The saffron flags, the repetitive use of the Hindu mantra *Om* and all visual iconography were drawn from religious sources. Together, they promoted the claim that the movement to liberate Rama's supposed birth-place spoke for all Hindus, for Hinduism itself.²¹

The support the movement gathered from all quarters of the country proved the massive success of the *Sangh Parivar's* mobilization techniques. The groundwork for the success of rath yatra had been done by the RSS and VHP. For over five decades the RSS and its affiliates had operated extensively in civil society and gradually spread its roots in large parts of the country. In the guise of 'cultural' and 'character-building' work the RSS had managed to spread its ideology to the extent of making it a part of the common sense of the urban and semi-urban middle classes. The years 1988-1990 were significant because

²¹ Richard H. Davis, 'The Iconography of Ram's Chariot,' in David Ludden (ed.), *Making India Hindu: Religion, Community and the politics of democracy in India*. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), p.51.

by that time the RSS succeeded in using this ideological advantage through organizational expansion.²²

What was the immediate outcome of this movement? They were successful in mobilizing the masses through religious turmoil. But on coming to power the BJP had nothing to offer that could address the underlying causes of discontent among the people. Following the demolition of Babri Masjid they had no potent symbol to rally the people around. There was a lack of theme and the party failed to get a majority in all the four state governments it had ruled before the demolition of the Babri masjid. However, one thing was evident. The event was able to create a deep impact upon the people and the *Sangh Parivar* established itself firmly upon the future political scenario of the country. The Ramjanmabhoomi agitation was staged as a modern expression of an ancient, irresistible cultural stream, a corporate Hindu culture. Ram was converted into a metaphor of the essential Hinduness of Indian culture.²³ Ram became a national symbol, Hindutva signified national pride and the removal of Babri Masjid and construction of Ram mandir in Ayodhya was the great symbolic purifier of the Hindu psyche, which would help in removing the humiliation and prove the existence of a common national will.²⁴

Analyzing the psychological and religious content of the movement one finds that the symbol of Lord Ram constituted a key role in shaping up the Ayodhya issue. The historic figure of Ram was reinvented, reintroduced and

²² Manini Chatterjee, 'The BJP and Political Mobilization for Hindutva' in Praful Bidwai, Achin Vanaik and Harbans Mukhia (eds.), *Religion, Religiosity and Communalism*, op.cit., p.99.

²³ Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.174.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.175.

recreated to fit in the present scenario. The entire process of mobilization revolved around the figure of Shri Ram.

Symbolism of Ram and Popular Sentiment

Anuradha Kapur mentions how over the last few years the figure of Ram has intervened in our lives in quite unprecedented ways. A particular version of Ram Bahkti was created by the television serial 'Ramayana', while on the other hand the Janmabhoomi issue had transformed Ram into a herald for demarcating geographic, territorial and spiritual boundaries. The politics of space had invented a Ram who is significantly different from the figure represented in the tradition of iconography available until now. The new image of Ram has altered the meanings of Ram Bhakti and popular Hinduism as well.²⁵

Kapur further mentions how there was a shift between traditional iconography and modern iconography of Ram. In traditional iconography a serene representation of Ram was seen. This was replaced by images which showed Ram pulling his bowstring, the arrow poised to annihilate - depicting strength and vigour. This image appeared time and again in calendars, posters, paintings for the Hindu masses to identify with. At the time of janmabhoomi event there were posters depicting Ram with bows and arrows, ready to strike adjacent to the picture of the temple with slogans like '*Saugandh Ram ki khatir hain hum Mandir vahin banayenge*' (In the name of Ram we will build

²⁵Anuradha Kapur, 'Diety to Crusader: The changing Iconography of Ram,' in Gyanendra Pandey (ed.), *Hindus and Others* (New Delhi: Viking, 1993), p. 74.

the temple there). This changing iconography of Ram met with a grand reception from the Hindu masses and gave rise to a mass frenzy.

Tanika Sarkar mentions her experience of visiting Saraswati Shishu Mandirs under Vidya Bharati, schools established by the RSS at an all-India level, in Delhi and observed that there was a striking visual display of Hindu political symbols that blend militancy with sacredness. Ram's picture was a common feature and in the offices, there were present, VHP posters, prints and calendars. The RSS map of undivided India with the divine Bharatmata depicted on it was also evident. Sarkar also gives evidence of certain events where political activists were brought in from outside to address students on current themes. There are certain carefully instilled ritual and extra-curricular practices that reinforce proper *samskaras* among students. There was a strong, almost mystical emphasis on physical culture, including yogic practices that are considered to be invested with extra-physical, moral properties. Yoga was also a popular form, which was used for developing physical and spiritual strength in mutual harmony. Special courses on Sanskrit that feature modern Sanskrit publications, promoting RSS values and teaching were conducted.²⁶ The textbook for Class IV also includes an account of the police firing on the mob that had tried to demolish the Babri Masjid in October-November 1990 along with photographs of 'martyrs'.

²⁶ Tanika Sarkar, 'Educating the Children of the Hindu Rashtra: Notes on RSS Schools' in Praful Bidwai, Achin Vanaik and Harbans Mukhia (eds.) *Religion, Religiosity and Communalism*, op.cit., p.244 (Sarkar gives some data from 'Vidya Bharati, Akhil Bharatiya Shiksha Sammelan, *Alternative Model of National Education*, December 1990-91)

Through this education system the RSS aims to ingrain in the minds of children a dominant slogan - *Bharat Mata ki jai*. According to them this is the true national education that teaches the student to be proud of his or her Hindu heritage. The RSS educational institutions call themselves *mandirs* or temples. The underlying objective of this entire process is to remake the nation and form a layout for the creation of *Hindu Rashtra*.²⁷

The RSS followed this kind of pattern to establish a system of education mainly to ingrain in the minds of children a particular strain of thought process. This process of mobilization indicate a clearly thought out plan, a foresight and a determination on the part of RSS members and leaders. It was not just a superficial gesture but a well laid plan with an emphasis on forming the 'psychological' sphere of the future generations to come. From 1950s - 1990s their mission to educate Hindu children was successful in a considerable area of the country. Religion, culture and tradition formed the core of their mobilization format.

From 1980s the imagery of Ram entered the realm of politics of Hindu nationalism giving rise to a form of 'cultural politics'. Cultural politics turns on questions of individual and group identity, esteem and disesteem. Honor and defamation, cultural aggrandizement and fear of cultural extinction. It is dependent of public culture which deals with what is read, heard and seen in the print, film and electronic media; what is published in books, press, journals; what is publicly displayed in posters, billboards and graffiti. Cultural

²⁷ Ibid.,p.240.

politics is grounded in the control of means of public culture. The criteria for how the media conducts themselves and are governed, whether by freedom of expression and market forces, state monopoly, government regulation, professional standards and ethics are some combination of them which are important aspects of cultural politics.²⁸

The VHP and BJP used this public culture to create a strong platform for the *Sangh Parivar* and establish a cultural nationalism. Ram constituted the center of this movement and dictated the course of public culture. The VHP's discourse on Ram represents a transportation of an other worldly tradition of devotion into purely terrestrial symbol which signifies the space (Ramjanmabhoomi) and antagonisms with Muslims by which Hindus can be recognized as such.²⁹ According to the VHP, Ram is an immemorial object of worship basic to Hinduism and the worship was being impeded by the presence of a mosque built on the site of his birthplace temple.

Ram as an icon was not created in a day. The support base it gathered and the religious frenzy, which marked the society during the Ramjanmabhoomi agitation was not a spontaneous occurrence. The *Ramayana* serial, whose broadcast from January 1987 to August 1989 covered the most crucial phase of the Janmabhoomi movement.³⁰ The struggle of Ram against Ravana in the Ramayana epic was supplanted into a struggle between Ram and

²⁸ Lloyd I. Rudolph, 'The Media and Cultural Politics,' in Subrata K. Mitra and James Chiriyakandath (eds.), *Electoral Politics in India: A Changing Landscape* (New Delhi: Segment Books, 1992), pp.81-82.

²⁹ Pradip Kumar Dutta, 'VHP's Ram: The Hindutva Movement in Ayodhya,' in Gyanendra Pandey (ed.) *Hindus and Others*, op.cit., p.54.

³⁰ Arvind Rajagopal, 'Ram Janmabhoomi, Consumer Identity and Image-Based Politics', op.cit., p.1661.

the Mughal emperor Babur, the Muslim invader³¹. The television serials interpreted the epics in their own ways and made it relevant for the times. With the use of imagination rather than truth the goal was to build a national Hindu identity, a form of group consciousness. Massive publicity was given to the symbol of Ram through the television serial of *Ramayana*. Before the serial was over, the VHP conducted its *shila pujas* and *shila yatras* and in 1989 the BJP made a resolution to adopt Ram temple issue in its electoral platform. The national Hinduism as portrayed by the VHP was a martial Kshatriya Hinduism depicting Ram as a warrior with bows and arrows in heroic postures.³² In a way it was an appeal to awaken the heroic spirit of the Hindu masses, to attain a warrior like stance in a pursuit to attain a Hindu identity and correct the past wrongs committed by the Muslims against the Hindus.

The notion of a great Hindu culture invaded the private domain of Hindus and occupied the intimate spaces of people's lives and through the lengthy broadcast, these images became familiar, domesticated and unforgettable. This was arguably a key symbolic backdrop against which the Ramjanmabhoomi movement can be seen to have taken off.³³ The Janmabhoomi campaign transformed Ram into a symbol of militant campaign claiming to span the country and standing simultaneously for nation and citizen.³⁴

³¹ Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India*, op.cit., p. 177.

³² Ibid.

³³ Arvind Rajagopal, 'Ram Janmabhoomi, Consumer Identity and Image-Based Politics' op.cit., p. 1661.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 1662.

In BJP's 1993 *White Paper of Ayodhya and the Ram Temple Movement*, L.K. Advani began his preface: "Shri Ram is the unique symbol of our oneness, of our integration, as well as our aspiration to live higher values. As Maryada Purushottam, Shri Ram has represented for thousands of years, the ideal of conduct, just as Ram Rajya has always represented the ideal of governance."³⁵ The image of Ram thus created, saw a mixture of the king and the divine hero-king Ram and a connection was established between the 'divine' and the 'king'. Besides the heroic, warrior like character of the king a divinity was attached to hero-God Ram. This portrayal thus symbolized the aggressive Hindu spirit on one hand and the divine character of Hindu culture and tradition on the other. It also symbolizes divinization and demonization. Ram became the undisputed leader of the Hindutva movement. This was largely possible because Ramayana had a long historical background. As Sheldon Pollock holds - 'Ramayana came alive in the public political discourse in Western and Central India in the eleventh and fourteenth centuries.'³⁶ He also mentions that the two thematics - divinization and demonization constituted the defining thematics of Valmiki's epic. They are the two most powerful conceptions of the socio-political imagination. The first proclaims that the order of everyday human life is regulated by the active, immanent presence of the divine; the second, that those who would disturb or destroy the order must be enemies of

³⁵ Richard H. Davis, 'The Iconography of Ram's Chariot,' in David Ludden (ed.), *Making India Hindu: Religion, Community and the politics of democracy in India*, op.cit., p. 34.

³⁶ Sheldon Pollock, 'Ramayan and Political Imagination in India,' *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 52, No. 2, May 1993, p. 281.

God and not really human.³⁷ The Ramayana was repeatedly instrumentalized by the ruling Indian elites of the middle period to provide theology to politics and a symbology of otherness. The valences now formulated and established - of the divine Hindu realm and the demonic 'outsider', a political mythology of efficacious simplicity - acquired a stability unlike any other representations, to be restored time and again over the coming centuries.³⁸ It is in this sense that the BJP, VHP and other Hindu organizations raised the slogan '*Babar ki Santan, Jao Pakistan ya Qabrastan*' (Babar's progeny, go to Pakistan or to the cemetery) during the Ramjanmabhoomi processions throughout India. All Muslims were perceived as the progeny of Babur who was an invader and a foreigner.³⁹

The reemergence of Ram in contemporary India thus had a long background. Ram existed in India long before television was invented. The serialization of Ramayana on Doordarshan was central to the project of fundamentalism, which attempted to privatize the imagination of individuals, to create a Hinduised identity. The entire campaign surrounding the demolition of Babri Masjid revolved round the narrative of 'lack' and the 'exorcising' of Muslims in order to create Hindu nation.⁴⁰ It became a symbolic center which attempted to 'essentialize the Muslim other'.⁴¹

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 287.

³⁹ Ashgar Ali Engineer, *Lifting the Veil: The Ramjanmabhoomi- Babri Masjid Controversy* (New Delhi: Sangam Books, 1995), p. 91.

⁴⁰ Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India*, op.cit., p. 181.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 178.

The Ramjanmabhoomi movement was an attempt to make a relatively quick bid for power at the center. There was clearly a shift from the methods used by the RSS during the 1920s. From mid-1980s the *Sangh Parivar* adopted a new method and strategy. Popular support was to be quickly mobilized and for that they took the help of already popular symbols, which led to the image-based mobilization.⁴² The period between late 1980s to the 1990s showed the tremendous potential of religious symbols towards mass mobilization. However, it also shows the vulnerability of the population, the times and the state machinery, which led frenzy to overpower reasoning and rationality. In a way it legitimized violence giving communalism a firm base while secularism took a back seat. Communalism became a way of life, violence and bloodbath became synonymous to 'sacrifice'. It actually showed not a glorious Hindu civilization but a civilization wrought with insecurity and false vanity whose entire wrath had to be born by the 'other'. Victimizing and demonizing the 'other' became a process through which they desired to gain their supremacy. One wonders, whether their 'undying Hindu spirit' will survive if suddenly the existence of the 'other' suddenly ceased or the demonized 'other' by some process perished from the Indian soil.

A brief discussion about the usage of mass media during the crucial phase of Ramjanmabhoomi movement by the *Sangh Parivar* will show how popular mediums were used to reach out to the people.

⁴² Arvind Rajagopal, 'Ram Janmabhoomi, Consumer Identity and Image-Based Politics,' op.cit., p. 1667.

Use of Modern Technology in Mobilization

The media imagery surrounding the destruction of the Babri masjid shows how mass media have been implicated in communalism. The communalization of print media during and after the Ayodhya conflict had severe effects on India's social fabric, civic discourse and individual lives. The Hindi press was most directly culpable media genre in fomenting communal rioting.⁴³ The Hindu imagery in market circulation in *Ramayana* redefines popular symbols, and proffers an invigorated sense of identity by inserting these symbols into a narrative of improvement.⁴⁴

Calculated use of various media forms was essential for the destruction of the Babri masjid particularly those outside state control. For 1993 elections, the BJP created a publicity committee to use cable systems as part of a media based election strategy. Videocassettes of party leader's speeches were provided to cable operators.⁴⁵ The BJP has made the most extensive and sophisticated usage of videos, touring the North with specially constructed video raths (chariots) bearing three hundred-inch screens. Promotional video and audio cassettes are widely disseminated by the nation's vast informal duplication infrastructure. Most tapes contained various mixtures of speeches and songs. The songs often consisted of new lyrics set to familiar film-music tunes.

⁴³ Victoria L. Farmer, 'Mass Media Communalism,' in David Ludden (ed.), *Making India Hindu: Religion, Community and the politics of democracy in India*, op.cit., pp. 108-9.

⁴⁴ Arvind Rajagopal, 'Ram Janmabhoomi, Consumer Identity and Image-Based Politics' op.cit., p. 1665.

⁴⁵ Victoria L. Farmer, 'Mass Media Communalism,' in David Ludden (ed.), *Making India Hindu: Religion, Community and the politics of democracy in India*, op.cit., p. 112.

In 1989-90, audio cassettes produced by Hindutva militants played a crucial role in raising the Ramjanmabhoomi campaign to fever pitch. The three most influential cassettes contained vitriolic speeches, recorded at rallies, by VHP-BJP leaders Uma Bharati, Ashok Singhal, Sadhvi Rithambara and others. The speeches reiterate the now-familiar Hindutva themes: the marauding, barbaric Muslims came as foreign invaders looting, pillaging and enslaving the peace-loving and tolerant Hindus, not content with dividing the country and taking Pakistan, they now have seized Kashmir and still seek to rule the country. Time has come for Hindus to follow the tradition of Maharana Pratap and Prithvi Raj Chauhan; not only will the Babri Masjid be destroyed, but three thousand other mosques as well; India is a Hindu nation in which only devotees of Ram may remain and so on.⁴⁶

A particular tape entitled '*Mandir ka nirman karo*'(Build the temple) mixes speeches with snappy songs. These contain lyrics such as:

“The time has come, wake up young men and go to Lucknow
You must vow to build Ram’s temple
The conches sound, Ram’s forces are standing ready for battle
Gandiv (Arjun’s bow) is twanging, his conch calls
Whoever joins the wicked, smash their dreams
Turn the political dice and blast their policies
Advance in the battlefield of politics and hit hard
To compare Ram with the wicked is beyond disrespect

⁴⁶ Peter Manuel, 'Music, Media and Communal Relations in North India,' in David Ludden (ed.), *Making India Hindu: Religion, Community and the politics of democracy in India*, op.cit., pp. 130-131.

Destroying his temple is the limit of madness
Don't play the farcical game of acting in a courtroom
Liberate the janmabhoomi of the jewel of the house of Raghukul
If they don't heed with words, whip out your swords...
Face our enemies with courage
Now isn't the time for contemplation."⁴⁷

Tapes with Rithambara's speeches were widely circulated throughout the country and the theme was Muslim meance, destruction, bloodthirstiness and brutality - epitomized in Partition. One of the main attractions of Rithambara's oratory undoubtedly lay in the call for collective action on the part of Hindus to overcome the weakness, impotency and fear of the demonic, stereotyped and lustful Muslim. It challenged the Hindu man to protect Mother India and Hindu women.⁴⁸ Both Rithambara and Uma Bharati attempted at creating militant rhetoric as is evident in one of Uma Bharati's rhetoric in a widely circulated tape:

"Declare without hesitation that this is a Hindu Rashtra, a nation of Hindus. We have come to strengthen the immense Hindu shakti into a fist. Do not display any love of your enemies... The Qur'an teaches them to lie in wait for idol worshipers, to skin them alive, to stuff them in animal skins and to torture them until they ask for forgiveness... (We) could not teach them with words, now let us teach them with kicks...Tie

⁴⁷ Ibid. pp.133-34.

⁴⁸ Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India*, op.cit., p. 180.

up your religiosity and kindness in a bundle and throw it in the Jamuna...

(Any) non-Hindu who lives here does so at our mercy.”⁴⁹

The Hindutva tapes played an important role in instigating the wave of anti-Muslim riots and pogroms that subsequently swept North India. Other tapes contained sounds of screaming, gunfire and inflammatory slogans. They were blared from speakers on cars that drove at night through tense neighbourhoods of Agra, Ghaziabad. This was enough to bring armed men to streets and igniting riots.

Peter Manuel speaks about how the advent of cassettes constituted the “people’s medium”. Cassettes and tape players are cheap, portable, durable and easily mass produced. As such their spread has revolutionized the formerly monopolistic Indian music industry, making possible the emergence of several hundred production companies of various sizes, which have revitalized regional folk tradition formerly threatened by homogenizing film, music and spawned the growth of dynamic, syncretic folk-pop genres. At the same time, he observes, the negative potential of such democratization of the media is painfully evident in the uses of cassettes by the Hindutva movement to foment bigotry and violence.

The *Sangh Parivar* thus captured a wide area of the public space which eventually gave form to the “aggressive”. The masses took refuge in an irrational, often unexplained religious frenzy where they became prepared to kill.

⁴⁹ Ibid., (Hansen has quoted Uma Bharati’s Election Speech, 1991 as an example of her oratory.)

The mobilization of Hindus by invoking their religious identity and interests deeply affected the political and cultural foundations of the Indian Republic. It disrupted the political process, which sought to draw together people belonging to diverse cultural ambience and religious persuasions into a nation.⁵⁰ The event completely ignored the secular character of the state as mentioned in the constitution and proceeded towards communalism as a way of capturing mass sentiment.

The assertion of Hindutva assumed a menacing trajectory because the increasing inability of Indian state to adhere to secular principles in governance and its obvious propensity to comprise with communalism either for electoral support or for overcoming a crisis.⁵¹

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⁵⁰ K.N.Pannikar, 'Religious Symbols and Political Mobilization: The Agitation for a Mandir at Ayodhya', op.cit., pp. 72-73.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 74.

CHAPTER: 4

VIOLENCE IN PRACTICE: THE GUJARAT TRAGEDY

The violence as witnessed in Gujarat in 2002 is not simply a recurrence of the frequent communal tension, but a fundamental political transformation.¹ The incident that rocked Gujarat, which took violence to gory heights saw the practical implementation of the ideology of the RSS. This chapter is an attempt to understand how and why the Gujarat event took place. It examines the nature and pattern of violence unleashed by the RSS, through the narration of certain events and the methods adopted during the riots. This will highlight the role of the state government in perpetrating violence at the time of communal unrest. The chapter also explains how the civil society got communalized and militarized by the *Sangh Parivar*. Such incident as happened in Gujarat is indicative of a volatile society, where the attempt is to normalize the occurrence of violence in the name of protecting the Hindu identity. The perpetual enmity between the Hindus and Muslims is further strengthened and utilized to give violence a permanent entity and to gain broader political gains.

After Ayodhya (1992), Gujarat provided a battleground. The 'battle' provided them to show the skills they have acquired and attained through several years of training. It displayed the primal hate that they cultivated

¹ Tanika Sarkar, 'Semiotics of Terror: Muslim children and Women in Hindu Rashtra,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXXVII, (28), July 13, 2002, p. 2872.

against the enemy 'other'. It was a chance to demonstrate the military preparedness of the Hindu community acquired through both physical and ideological training. It brought into being a new order, dominated and established by the *Sangh*. It represented " an abrogation of all morality among significant sections of the Indians."² What Gujarat was subjected to was no simple communal violence, it was communal violence employed by the ruling Hindutva with a view, to materially and psychologically knock down the Muslim community beyond the possibility of a revival.³ The terror unleashed by Hindutva, obviously feeds on and seeks to further consolidate, the communal consciousness- Hindu communal consciousness masquerading as *rashtravad* - from which it seeks legitimacy.⁴

Underlying every act of violence and destruction was the idea that all Muslims are a threat to the nation. So, revenge must be taken on present day Muslims both for historical wrongs and for the future danger that they embody. For the RSS and its affiliates, the Muslims of today embody all past offences and future threats that have been allegedly committed. Therefore, revenge may be taken on any Muslim anywhere for anything that any Muslim could do or had done. Through this act they in a way assert their monopoly over historical truth. Religion and nation is fused into a single entity whose lifeblood is vindictiveness for alleged past wrongs committed by Muslim rulers. Every

² Ibid.

³ Sudhir Chandra, 'A Hindu's Protest', *Seminar*, 513, May, 2002, p. 49.

⁴ Ibid., p. 50.

activity of the RSS is guided by the same message and sense of purpose.⁵ The nature of ethnic cleansing indicated the spectacular success of the Modi government and the Sangh. This strength was further affirmed when Narendra Modi won the elections following this violent occurrence. The electoral victory in the State Assembly elections of December 2002 was the best performance ever by BJP on its own in any state in India. It showed that violence against the Muslims had paid off.⁶

Constructing a Militant Hindu Identity in Gujarat

Inter-caste community stereotypes are widely prevalent in all societies and Gujarat was no exception to it. The process of entrenching these stereotypes began with discourse on religion-centered nationalism. Since the 1965 Indo-Pak war on the Kutch border this has been gradually building up in Gujarat. Since then, the fear psychosis and sense of injustice among the majority community has been fortified and surfaced time and again. The myth that Muslims were favoured by the state has been systematically articulated and spread. Often the Muslims have been branded as anti-national, fundamentalist, conservative and backward and so on.⁷

The feeling of antagonism towards the Muslims has been methodically nurtured in Gujarat by the *Sangh*. Passions for the temple and against Muslim

⁵ Tanika Sarkar, 'Semiotics of Terror: Muslim children and Women in Hindu Rashtra,' op.cit., p. 2874.

⁶ Dibyesh Anand, 'The Violence of Security: Hindu Nationalism and Politics of Representing 'the Muslim' as a Danger,' *The Round Table, The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, Vol.94, No.379, April 2005, p. 204.

⁷ Ghanshyam Shah, 'Caste, Hindutva and Making of Mob Culture', in Siddharth Vardarajan (ed), *Gujarat, Making of a Tragedy* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2002), pp. 416-417.

have been building up in Gujarat for a decade or longer. The anti-Muslim feelings which prevailed among the upper-caste Hindus - mainly the Rajputs, Brahmins and Vantias were cultivated by the Jana Sangh and RSS in the 1960s. According to official figures there were as many as 2,938 instances of communal violence between 1960 - 69 in Gujarat.⁸ The 1969 riots began to change Gujarat radically. The violence payed rich dividends as did the inventive hate campaign spread by the VHP and RSS. It was instrumental in starting the process of ghettoisation of the Muslims and the growth in the power of Mafia-like bodies in both communities, always ready for a fight and acting like protectors of the Hindus and the Muslims at time of rioting.⁹

The 1980s, again, saw Gujarat engulfed in communal conflict and a new phenomenon which marked it was its spread to rural areas. A number of small towns and medium-sized villages even in tribal areas became sites of communal passions, resulting in killing and looting of Muslim households.¹⁰ Following the demolition of the Babri Masjid communal riots took place on a large scale in different parts of Gujarat and especially in Surat. Widespread anti-Muslim mobilization was effectively carried out prior to the riots by the BJP and other organizations of the *Sangh Parivar* through fiery speeches, slogans, processions and public meetings. Anti-Muslim passion clearly worked in favour of the BJP in elections and in the process of recruiting cadres. In the riots and in the Ram Mandir campaign organizations like VHP, Bajrang Dal, Shiv Sena, Bhavani Sena

⁸ Ghanshyam Shah, 'The BJP's Riddle in Gujarat,' in Thomas Blom Hansen and Christophe Jaffrelot (eds.), *The BJP and Compulsions in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 245.

⁹ Ashish Nandy, 'Obituary of a Culture', *Seminar*, 513, May, 2002, p. 16.

¹⁰ Ghanshyam Shah, 'The BJP's Riddle in Gujarat', *op.cit.*, pp. 246-247.

played a leading role. The larger agenda of the *Sangh Parivar* was to invigorate and rejuvenate the traditional Hindu culture. The RSS and VHP occupied a commanding position in the society and as protectors of morality and religion. They also assumed the responsibilities as torch-bearers and guides for party activists in order to maintain their hegemonic position within the larger movement.¹¹

The violence that occurred in Gujarat should be seen in the context of the total crisis sweeping through the Indian political system. The *Sangh Parivar* has treated Gujarat as its laboratory since the 1980s, experimenting with its saffronisation project. The systematic and planned penetration of the Gujarati society by the *Sangh Parivar* has had far reaching implications. Systematic mobilization of the tribals, middle classes and women and their induction into the Hindutva fold, methodical social engineering directed at achieving communal polarization through a propaganda for religious-cultural nationalism and a related hate campaign against the Muslims and the Christians and gradual incursion of the Hindutva forces and their sympathizers in government administration and police are symptomatic of the level of communal divide experienced by the Gujarati Society during last two decades.¹²

The efforts of *Sangh Parivar* and various religious sects aiming at reviving and reforming Hinduism have certainly contributed to the moulding of

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 249-250.

¹² Riaz Ahmed, 'Gujarat Violence: Meaning and Implications', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXXVII, (20), May 18, 2002, pp. 1872-73.

this larger Hindu consciousness. In Gujarat the BJP has effectively activated this consciousness and has thereby enabled the party to win elections.¹³

The Hindutva forces had taken advantage of the poverty and unemployment among dalits to advance their communal politics. For example, in the past few years, the dalits had been roused to anger by spreading rumours about Muslims being responsible for dalit workers losing their jobs in cotton mills.¹⁴ Again for past ten years, the VHP and Bajrang Dal have been attempting to mobilize adivasi youth in areas like Panchmahals, Dahood, Sabarkantha and Chota Udepur. Among the fears, that routinely play on is that of adivasi women being 'abducted' by Muslim men and the exploitation of adivasis by Muslims moneylenders.¹⁵

The Gujarat incident demonstrates how the enactment of collective guilt and responsibility reconstructs the body of the 'Other' not as an individual body but as a 'historical body', which is "caught in our territory"... an alien substance out of place, a metonymical representation of the community.¹⁶ The destruction of the historical body through the gruesome violence thus becomes a product of routine politics of the "'massification' of national identities".¹⁷ Though the inferno at Godhra may be the immediate cause behind such acts of terror, a long background of creating the historical body of the 'other' was also

¹³ Ibid., p. 265.

¹⁴ Mohandas Namishray, 'The violence in Gujarat and the Dalits', in Siddharth Vardarajan (ed.), *Gujarat, Making of Tragedy*, op.cit., p. 268.

¹⁵ Nandini Sunder, 'A License to Kill: Patterns of Violence in Gujarat,' in Siddharth Vardarajan (ed.), *Gujarat, Making of a Tragedy*, op.cit., p. 88.

¹⁶ Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 214.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 216.

a cause for the happenings in Gujarat. By 1980s, the VHP tried to construct Hindutva as the building cement for the Hindus. Earlier the ultimate symbolic target of hate was the dalit; now it was the Muslim. The Gujarati middle class spread over large cities like Ahmedabad, Baroda and Surat and over at least 40 middle level towns and consisting of mainly savarna and dalit adivasi government servants, teachers and petty businessmen had begun to foster a new 'brotherhood' and found a security within the ideology of Hindutva. By the 1990s the traditional structures of community control had crumbled. Growing numbers of young people participated in loot and arson. The youngsters in their late teens and twenties grew up on a diet of anti minority invective and the voices of moderation, of liberal thought and tolerance were missing from their environment. Also in the 90s, the social geography of Ahmedabad had slowly changed, creating Hindu and Muslim ghettos, resulting in declining social interaction between the communities. This was coupled with the obvious partisan significant behaviour of ruling political leaders made the scenario conducive for such violent developments to take shape.¹⁸

Despite outward modernization and institution building, modern values of equality, fraternity, justice and secularism remained weak. In this vacuum, Hindutva provided both identity beyond caste and community as well as sanction to pursue their own agenda of greater political, economic and social control. As Hindutva ideology scarcely raises any ethical questions for its

¹⁸ Achyut Yagnik and Suchitra Sheth, 'Wither Gujarat? Violence and After', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXXVII, (11), pp. 1010-1011.

supporters it was more attractive for the entrepreneur middle class to want the perpetuation of its hegemony.¹⁹

Again as A.M.Shah points out, there had been enormous growth of Hindu sects and also a widespread growth of modern associations of devotees of various sects and cults. All these developments in the religious sphere have provided a fertile ground for a growth of politics based on religion.²⁰ Ashgar Ali Engineer, observes that Gujarat was communally quite sensitive even before the BJP came to power and became much more so once they took over and the *Sangh Parivar* began intensive communalization of 'Gujarat Society'. Again he points another interesting phenomenon that might have had an impact on the communal situation in Gujarat. He mentions that there is a large-scale migration of upper caste Gujaratis to UK and US. These non resident Indians (NRIs) suffer from an identity crisis, feel rootless, in these countries and compensate for it by being ultra Hindu and chauvinistically Indian, more Indians than Indians in India. It is these NRIs who are liberally financing the VHP. The VHP has established its branches in these countries and is promoting Hindutva politics among them.²¹

All these events show that the *Sangh Parivar* had gradually encroached upon the society in Gujarat and this played a major role in the violent events, which occurred as an aftermath of the Godhra massacre. Silently the majority community of Gujarat supported the violent events of Gujarat indicating that

¹⁹ Achyut Yagnik, 'The Pathology of Gujarat', *Seminar*, 513, May, 2002, p. 21.

²⁰ A.M.Shah, 'For a Humane Society', *Seminar*, 513, May, 2002, p. 60.

²¹ Ashgar Ali Engineer, 'Gujarat Riots in the Light of the History of Communal Violence', *Economic and Political Weekly*, XXXVII, (50), December 14, 2002, pp. 5052-53.

the *Sangh* had created a strong hold in the society. It is indicative of the fact that hatred towards the Muslim minority was systematically inculcated over the years.

Godhra and the Aftermath

On February 27, 2002, when 'kar sevaks' of VHP were returning from Ayodhya on the Sabarmati Express, three coaches were burnt by a mob after the train was stopped by pulling the chain some distance from Godhra station. Almost 60 passengers were burnt alive. The communal carnage, which followed was explained by the *Sangh Parivar* as the retaliation by Hindu masses to avenge the Godhra killings, the 'reaction' to the 'action' at Godhra.²² However, the incident of Godhra was not an isolated event, it had a background against which it took place. Since the beginning of February, large numbers of VHP volunteers were going to and fro between Ahmedabad and Ayodhya on the Sabarmati Express for kar seva. According to the reports given by residents of Godhra and Faizabad, it was known that all along the route these volunteers misbehaved with hawkers, teased women, shouted slogans at many stations and made inflammatory speeches.²³

The exact details of events that took place during the Godhra attack on February 27 'remains unclear, as is almost always the case with communal

²² Achyut Yagnik and Suchitra Sheth, 'Wither Gujarat? Violence and After', op.cit., p. 1009.

²³ Ibid.

riots.²⁴ However by the beginning of April 2002 more than 800 people had been killed and many more injured in communal riots in Gujarat primarily in the major cities of Ahmedabad, Gujarat and Vadodara and in smaller towns and few villages. Following the event of February 27, the VHP called for a Gujarat Bandh on the next day, which turned into a mass slaughter, arson and complete breakdown of law and order. Twelve days after the Godhra incident, 60,000 riot victims were in relief camps, of which 40,000 were in Ahmedabad. The remaining 20,000 were scattered in make shift camps in towns and villages of Sabarkantha, Mehsana, Panchmahal and Anand districts.²⁵ 'With the gruesome burning of the train at Godhra and its equally barbaric aftermath, a supposed revenge, - the social fabric of the nation itself was ripped open and her multicultural society thoroughly ravaged.'²⁶

How did the *Sangh Parivar* justify their act of violence? According to them: "The massacre of Hindus on 27 February by the minority community would have slowly gone out of focus in television channels and in the newspapers in just a day or two as it usually happens with all such incidents of Hindu killings whether in Punjab, Kashmir or elsewhere if the Hindu backlash had not followed it. The Godhra incident would have just added one more to the ever growing list of such incidents of violence by which the Hindus have been suffering constantly over the last two decades, thanks to the 'militant elements' among the religious minority groups in India. But what has taken the

²⁴ Steven I Wilkinson, 'Putting Gujarat in Perspective' *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXXVII, (17), April 27, 2002, p. 1579.

²⁵ Achyut Yagnik and Suchitra Sheth, 'Wither Gaujarat? Violence and After,' *op.cit.*, p. 1009.

²⁶ Alakananda Patel, 'Gujarat Violence: A personal Diary' *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXXVII, (50), December 14, 2002, p. 4985.

politicians and secular media by utter surprise is that “the docile and soft Hindu” on whose shoulders alone rests the responsibility of keeping the Indian nation’s head high instead of silently dying at the hands of “militant madness” of religious minorities chose to pay back in their own coin. Is it not a shame on the Indian democracy where in the name of secularism, the politicians always appease the Muslims and suppress the voices of Hindus as fundamentalism.”²⁷

The legitimacy that the *Sangh* accorded to the violence unleashed by the Hindus against the Muslims in Gujarat was because they thought that: “the burning alive of 58 pilgrims at Godhra was an act of international terrorism planned and executed in connivance with jihadi forces based in Godhra with the evil design to push the country into a communal cauldron. One of the objectives behind the Godhra carnage was to weaken Indian positions on border and to make the area more porous for jihadi infiltrators by forcing India to divert its army from border to civil deployment.”²⁸ There was an underlying feeling of hurt among the *Sangh* because the act of violence in Gujarat was condemned. According to them “the misuse of the term ‘secularism’ continues. If every time there is an inter-community conflict, the majority is blamed regardless of the merits of the question, the springs of traditional tolerance will dry up. While the majority exercises patience and tolerance, the minorities should adjust themselves to the majority.”²⁹ Clearly indicative is the justification of the violence, which occurred in Gujarat and also there is a note

²⁷ Dr. R.Geetha, ‘Some Reflections on Godhra: Tilted Neutrality is no Neutrality’, *Organiser*, Vol. XLIII, No. 41, April 26, 2002, p. 9.

²⁸ ‘Godhra was a Pakistani Conspiracy’, *Organiser*, Vol. LIII, No. 42, May 5, 2002, p. 4.

²⁹ N.S.Rajaram, ‘Secularists’ Time of Reckoning’, *Organiser*, Vol. LIII, No. 45, May 26, 2002, p. 11.

of caution for the future. The violence is indicative of the systematic way in which the *Sangh Parivar* had communalized the state administration and society.

Nature of Violence in Gujarat

Narration of certain accounts that took place in Gujarat is essential to know the exact nature of violence and the horror and terror it unleashed. In an eye witness account, Abdul Islam narrated: “ The mob which came from Chara Nagar and Kuber Nagar started burning people at around 6:00 in the evening. The mob stripped all the girls of the locality, including my twenty-two year old daughter and raped them. My daughter was engaged to be married. Seven members of my family were burnt including my wife (aged 40), my sons (aged 18, 14 and 7) and my daughters (aged 2, 4 and 22). My eldest daughter who died in the civil hospital, told me that those who raped her were wearing shorts. They hit her on the head and then burnt her. She died of 80 percent burn injuries.”³⁰

Jannat Sheikh narrated another incident, which took place in Naroda Patiya on 28 February, 2002. She recounted that the mob came at around 6:30 in the evening and how they hit her husband with a sword and threw petrol in his eyes and burned him. Her sister-in-law who had a three-month old baby was raped and the child was thrown into the fire. The mob raped her mother-in-law also. The mayhem continued till 2:30 a.m. Then the ambulance came. The

³⁰ Testimony recorded by Citizen’s Initiative, ‘Nothing New? Women as victims in Gujarat,’ in Siddharth Vardarajan (ed.), *Gujarat, Making of Tragedy*, op.cit., p. 218.

police was on the spot but they were helping the mob. The telephone lines were snapped and they could not inform the Fire Brigade.³¹

Saira Banu recollects a particular gruesome incident, which occurred at Naroda Patiya, Shah Alam Camp. “But what they did to my sister-in-law’s sister, Kausar Bano was horrific and heinous. She was nine months pregnant. They cut open her belly, took out her fetus with a sword and threw it into a blazing fire. Then they burnt her as well.”³²

Unleashed through these acts of violence is a sadism which reminds the minority again and again about a future which is not secure, about a life which is not certain. The nature of violence is far more gruesome than what was seen in earlier incidents. There is no recovery from this type of horror because the intent is to deeply ingrain it in the minds of the people.

Massive killings, injuries and displacement of the Muslims and large-scale destruction of their belongings including their religious places in different places of the state of Gujarat in western India, have been categorized as “state-sponsored terrorism” and genocide. Many of those who visited the affected areas have come to the conclusion that Gujarat violence was more than collective punishment against members of the Muslim minority. Continuing massacres of members of Muslim minority group in Gujarat has been narrated by many in different ways. The affected community has categorized it as a clear pogrom, managed by planned methods of elimination and destruction. This view have been shared by several human rights activists who also carried

³¹ Ibid., p. 220.

³² Ibid.

out some survey work on the ground.³³ Gujarat 2002 looked a glaring example of a place having what Paul Brass calls an “institutionalized riot system”. It was clear that local as well as national level *Sangh Parivar* leaders and politicians interpreted the trigger incident communally and in fact desired the violence to take place. That the leaders of the rioting mobs had detailed information about the homes and business establishments of the Muslims, that they had mobile phones to contact one another as well as their leader, that the BJP, the VHP and the Bajrang Dal leaders were constantly monitoring the situation, all point to an informal organizational network of persons and forces, suggesting the existence of an ‘institutionalized riot system’. In an institutionalized riot system there are experts for playing specialized roles. During the Gujarat violence truckloads of slogan shouters came and went away. Use of cooking gas to set buildings ablaze also required expertise.³⁴ Inhumanity was justified in the name of party discipline. Escalation of tension was achieved by a political network of support in which political survival would be assured if the fear and wounds of Gujarati society would be tolerated. Brutal and indiscriminate violence were deliberately encouraged to distort culture and identity.³⁵

What Gujarat witnessed was not a riot, but a terrorist attack followed by a systematic, planned massacre, a pogrom. Everyone spoke of the pillage and plunder, being organized like a military operation against an external armed

³³ Arshi Khan, ‘Situating Riots, Communal Consciousness and the Culture of Exclusion in India’s Liberal Democracy’, *Social Action*, Vol. 52, No.3, July-Sept, 2002, p. 258.

³⁴ Riaz Ahmed, ‘Gujarat Violence: Meaning and Implications’, *op.cit.*, pp. 1872-73.

³⁵ R.K.Amin, ‘The Real Crisis in Gujarat: Liberalism, Humanism and Democracy go by Default’, in M.L.Sondhi and Apratim Mukarji (eds.), *The Black Book of Gujarat* (New Delhi: Manak Publications, 2002), p. 88.

enemy. An initial truck would arrive broadcasting inflammatory slogans, soon followed by more trucks, which disgorged young men, mostly in khaki shorts and saffron sashes. They were armed with sophisticated explosive materials, country weapons, daggers, swords and trishuls. They also carried water bottles to sustain them in their exertions. Some leaders were seen with documents and computer sheets, listing Muslim families and their properties. They had detailed, precise knowledge about building and businesses held by members of the minority community, such as who were partners in a restaurant business, or which Muslim homes and Hindu spouses were married, who should be killed and who should be spared. This could not have been a spontaneous upsurge. The *Sangh Parivar* provided the ideological, political and administrative leadership and backbone for the tragic events in Gujarat.³⁶

The Gujarat genocide had raised several critical questions about the place and role of civil and police administration in upholding and maintaining democratic principles.³⁷ The seminal significance of Gujarat's ethnic cleansing was that the state itself had emerged as the agent provocateur and active participant in the arson, loot, murder and mayhem. The upholder of law became the violator of law. Clearly visible was the partisan role of the police and civil administration.³⁸ The violence unleashed in Gujarat indicated a collusion of the state machinery and the ruling political establishment. A 'tremendous communalization of society' had taken place in Gujarat where

³⁶ Harsh Mander, 'Cry, the Beloved Country,' 13 March, 2003, (<http://www.sacw.net/Gujarat2002/Harshmander.2002.html>.)

³⁷ Prakash Louis, 'Gujarat Carnage: Protectors have become Predators,' *Social Action*, Vol. 52, No.3, July-Sept, 2002, p. 241.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

'hatred towards the Muslim minority had been systematically inculcated in such a manner that violence of barbaric proportion against them is not widely condoned but even enjoyed by certain sections of Hindu communities.'³⁹

'The police did not respond to numerous and reported phone calls by people who were seeking their protection and help.' Incidents took place near police stations and chowkies and despite complaints and prior information, the police dissented from taking any action. Rather they stood and watched while shops were looted and burnt, sometimes in front of police stations and control rooms. In many instances, the police took active part in looting, arson and the killings. They subjected women to verbal, physical and sexual abuse by assaulting and beating them. The police refused to lodge FIRs and in cases where they did, they were distorted.⁴⁰

Riots are quite suggestive to trace the degree of communal consciousness because it is deeply rooted to security, right to life, justice, working of the governmental agencies, rehabilitation of the riot commissions and measures for preventing such massive threats and collective punishment to the Muslim minority. In the recent communal riots, the role of the State government could be easily questioned on their prejudices against Muslim minority.⁴¹

³⁹ Ethnic Cleansing in Ahmedabad: A Preliminary Report, Sahmat, Delhi, 10-11 March, 2002. (<http://www.mnet.fr/aiindex/sahmatreport032002.html>)

⁴⁰ An Interim Report to the National Human Rights Commission, People's Union for Civil Liberties, Gujarat (<http://www.pucl.org/reports/Topics/Religion-Communalism/2002/Gujarat-nhrc-submission.htm>)

⁴¹ Arshi Khan, 'Situating Riots, Communal Consciousness and the Culture of Exclusion in India's Liberal Democracy', op.cit., p. 262.

Within the precinct of the secretariat, the offices of the Wakf Board and Minority Development Board were burnt. Shops directly opposite the gates of the Police Commissioner's office in Ahmedabad, were set on fire, the dargah of Shah Wali Gujarati, one of the pioneers of Urdu language and literature was razed to the ground and a temporary Hanuman temple hastily installed - the secretariat, the High court and the police commissioner's office mutely stood there without any aid.⁴²

The pattern of cruelty that dictated the nature of violence were mainly targeted at women and children. The woman's body was a site of almost inexhaustible violence, with infinitely plural and innovative forms of torture.⁴³ Tanika Sarkar observes that in readings of community violence, rape is taken to be a sign of collective dishonouring. The same patriarchal order that designates the female body as the symbol of lineage and community purity, would designate the entire collectivity as impure and polluted, once their woman is raped by an outsider. Rape, in Gujarat violence, obviously performed that function. As a justification to this act the Hindus had the backup of the invented murder of 80 Hindu women on the Sabarmati Express at Godhra reported by the Gujarati Press. According to this invented event, the women aboard the train had been raped and their breasts cut off. Though it was a complete invention, it served to justify the rapes and mutilations of Muslim women within the structure of 'action - reaction' discourse.⁴⁴

⁴² Achyut Yagnik and Suchitra Sheth, 'Wither Gujarat? Violence and After', op.cit., p. 1009.

⁴³ Tanika Sarkar, 'Semiotics of Terror: Muslim children and Women in Hindu Rashtra,' op. cit., p. 2875.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

One tends to question at this juncture that if the violence was portrayed as spontaneous by the Hindu mob why then was a systematic attack carried upon the Muslim women and children? The spontaneity of anger is naturally directed towards anything and anybody that comes in the vicinity of the attacker, surpassing logic and reasoning and often obfuscating the focus. Does it not invoke a momentary rage, which might kill instantaneously or injure gravely the object of hatred. Instead what is seen through the acts of heinous crimes and the dishonour inflicted upon the women folk belonging to the 'enemy' camp was a sadistic display of horror and terror. There was a deliberate attempt to make every act of violence as gruesome as possible. 'The same female body was subjected to a series of sexual humiliation, torture, mutilation and obliteration. Conjoined with the bodies of their children they provided a site where the entire drama of revenge was enacted in its long and complicated sequence. In Gujarat the mobs who raped sometimes came dressed in khaki shorts or saffron underwear, rape being obviously seen as a religious duty, a *Sangh* duty. The identification between killing and masculinity is a strong and uniquely *Sangh* teaching.'⁴⁵

Another special feature of the riot was its spread in many small towns and villages and Adivasi areas. In the recent years preceding the violence, the adivasis were subjected to the systematic process of Hinduisation.⁴⁶ The Bajrang Dal for example had tried to increase its base in villages by building local level organizations with office bearers and regular events such as sports.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 2875-2876.

⁴⁶ Bikhu Parekh, 'Making Sense of Gujarat', *Seminar*, 513, May, 2002, p. 27.

Again women members of VHP, organized meetings with adivasi women in some interior villages of Bhiloda Taluka.⁴⁷

The violence was targeted not only towards those who were held responsible for the Godhra event but towards the entire Muslim population residing in Gujarat. The innocents were not left and every process of destruction was aimed at them. The pattern which clearly emerges from a review of all that has happened in Gujarat following Godhra is one of state-sponsored genocidal violence against Muslim citizens. Communal violence has occurred many times before in independent India and the involvement of the state and ruling party is also not something new. But never before has the role of the state administration been so extensive and open and never before have its leaders been so brazen and remorseless in pursuing their victims.⁴⁸

The violence unleashed was fascistic in nature. 'The events in Ahmedabad do no fit into any conceivable definition of a communal riot. It was a completely one-sided and targeted carnage of innocent Muslims...closer to a pogrom or an ethnic cleansing.' It indicates the collusion of the state machinery and the ruling political establishment.⁴⁹

The Implications of the Violent Display of Hatred

The rise of Hindutva in the closing decades of the twentieth century changed the course of history of Indian politics. It witnessed an epochal change

⁴⁷ Bela Bhatia, 'A Step back in Sabarkantha', *Seminar*, 513, May, 2002, p. 38.

⁴⁸ Nandini Sunder, 'A License to Kill: Patterns of Violence in Gujarat', in Siddharth Vardarajan (ed.), *Gujarat: The Making of a Tragedy*, op.cit., p. 123.

⁴⁹ 'Ethnic Cleansing in Ahmedabad: a preliminary report,' by Sahmat, Delhi. (<http://www.mnet.fr/aiindex/sahmatreport032002.html>)

in the social base of right politics - the disappearance of the social basis of conservatism and with it, the emergence of an exclusively capitalist politics of the right.⁵⁰ Clearly perceptible with its rise was the frenzied and fascistic mobilizational campaigns which have advanced its political cause. It ignores the deeper organic continuities, especially of the established structures of the state, its class basis and attendant culture in modern India, which actually lie in the transition from Congress to Hindutva.⁵¹

The Gujarat events saw the installation of Hindu Rashtra - the dream of V.D.Savarkar, the vision of a nearly 80 year old Sangh. It had been inaugurated with the rituals and rites and sacrifices appropriate to itself. Bystanders and survivors during the days of maximal violence were struck by the festive, carnivalesque aspect of rampaging mobs. Gujarat was also a testing ground, a measuring of the tolerance level of the Indian polity, by the fathers of the new nation. Defying horrified anguish, protest, sincere relief and rehabilitation efforts from the whole world, the Modi government continued to enjoy full support of the Centre and the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) held firm.⁵²

The event is going to remain as a reference point in the identity narrative about the 'self' and the 'other'. A greater communal polarization coupled with a more aggressive Hindu religio-cultural nationalism in search of political power will mark the future. There is definitely an erosion of the legitimacy of the state which if not rectified will see the perpetuation of these forces.

⁵⁰ Radhika Desai, *Slouching towards Ayodhya* (New Delhi: Three Essays, 2002), p. xiii.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

⁵² *Ibid.*

The real message from Gujarat is that the socio-cultural roots of Hindu communalism have not been either identified or targeted even by the secular parties and autonomous secular institutions of civil society. The logic of situating the tragedy of March and April 2002 in the local historical settings of the Gujarati society is much too simplistic because the current happenings are closely linked and integrated with the growth of aggressive Hindutva at the all-India level. The Narendra Modi government could not have carried out its agenda of militant and violent Hindutva without the protective umbrella of the Modi government and without the social sanction and support of the believers of Hindutva in other parts of India.⁵³ This type of an idea or ideology or movements succeed because it is responsive to the felt needs of the people. It has become unstoppable because the so-called secularists either joined the bandwagon of Hindutva or were not ready to challenge the ideology of religion based politics.⁵⁴ The ideological-political tendency of the *Sangh* introduced into the political discourse, a strange system of logic where consistency, reasoning and internal coherence are entirely out of place. While behaving like terrorists and militants in both words and action, the spokespersons and representatives of this tendency are willing to condemn others are terrorists. There is only empty rhetoric, intimidation or gross violation of even basic human rights.⁵⁵

As Joseph Macwan writes - no one is concerned about hunger, unemployment, lack of access to natural resources and abject poverty; no one

⁵³ C.P.Bhambhri, *Hindutva: A Challenge to Multicultural Democracy* (Delhi: Shipra, 2003), p. 54.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58.

⁵⁵ Imtiaz Ahmed, 'The State of Lies and Lies of the State: The Gujarat Pogrom and Future of India', in M.L.Sondi and Apratim Mukarji (eds.), *Black Book of Gujarat*, op.cit., p. 44.

questions the disparities arising out of the liberal economic regimes. Instead there is a fight over Mandir and Masjid and the VHP and the RSS speaks of creating a second class nationality.⁵⁶

In this background the future seems to exist in peril. However, as Bikhu Parekh observes, India's national identity needs to be so defined that all Indians, irrespective of their culture, ethnic and religious and other differences can enthusiastically identify with it, own it with pride and build up on its basis a common sense of national belonging. It must, therefore, be defined in political terms, not cultural or religious. What all Indians share in common is their commitment to the political community of which they are all equal citizens and to which they are bound by the ties of loyalty. What is required is an overarching notion, not of Hindutva but of Bharatiyata, one that affirms and cherishes our rich cultural and religious diversity and embeds it in those public values, sensibilities and institutions that is shared in common. This great political project requires a historically sensitive imagination, a culturally attune intelligence and a shrewd sense of political possibilities.⁵⁷

The violence, however, was a process to fully entrench a right to collective vengeance and retaliation. The intensification of the polarization between Hindus and Muslims which are strengthened by these acts of violence are beyond repair. It only indicates to a future marked with conflict based on hatred hidden under the cover of creating a strong Hindu identity. Though, the coming into power of Congress at the center indicates a change in the political

⁵⁶ Joseph Macwan, 'This 'Unique' Land', *Seminar*, 513, May 2002, p. 34.

⁵⁷ Bikhu Parekh, 'Making Sense of Gujarat', *Seminar*, 513, May 2002, p. 31.

scenario it needs to be seen whether it can counter the communal trends of Hindutva politics and create a state which that does not feed upon the antagonisms between Hindus and Muslims.

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CONCLUSION

Asserting and reasserting the Hindu identity continues and is likely to continue. There is a constant endeavour to secure a dominant position for the Hindu 'self' despite the fact that Hindus are in majority in this country. The perceived 'fear' of the 'other' which is time and again portrayed through Hindu - Muslim antagonism makes hatred and violence a natural component of political culture. The RSS cultivates this mutual antagonism so as to keep its ideology in focus. It meticulously constructs the enemy 'other', thereby manufacturing hatred and harbouring violent sentiments. It justifies communal riots as a means of avenging the alleged past wrongs committed by the Muslims against the Hindus.

To create a *Hindu Rashtra*, which will constitute of pure Hindu race, is central to the ideology of the RSS. From its very inception in 1925 the aim of this Hindu militant organization was to project a superior, masculine Hindu 'self' in defense of the *Hindu Rashtra*. Embedded in this very ideology is the notion of the wounded 'self', which was a victim of humiliation and defeat in the past. This reliance on a distorted past history transformed Muslims into a perennial 'enemy'. Superceding spacio-temporal dimensions, Muslims anywhere and at any given time become the object of hatred and loathing. This vengeance gives rise to a desire to resurrect the essential Hinduness, which according to the RSS had been lying dormant.

Organizing and militarizing the Hindu self and the society became the foremost aim of the RSS. Both through physical and ideological training, it started a process of reshaping the Hindu identity. The hierarchical and disciplined organizational structure in its attempt to create a superior Hindu race is reminiscent of European fascism and German Nazism.

The RSS started creating affiliates from 1936 so as to reach out to the Hindu masses through various levels. The ideological propaganda gradually metamorphosed into political mobilization as its political affiliate the BJP started attaining power in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Successful mobilization of the masses constituted an important aspect for the survival of Hindutva ideology. Embedded in the Hindutva ideology and the entire process of mass mobilization was an element of violence and antagonism. The systematic nurturing of hatred eventually led to violent outbursts like the recent events in Ramjanmabhoomi movement and the Gujarat pogrom. Violence, thus very naturally becomes a justification for protecting and securing the 'self'. Over the years the violent outbursts have intensified and methods through which it is executed has taken a heinous and fascistic character. RSS definition of Indian nation has the element of exclusivism, intolerance towards diversity and violent social practices that aim at 'ethnic purification'.

Spectacular has been the rise of Hindu nationalism in the past decade. From a small coterie in the 1920s the ideology traveled through the years to gain a nation wide platform in the 1990s. However, equally spectacular is the

way the politics of the *Sangh Parivar* accommodates horror and terror towards the constructed 'object of violence' which resulted in revolting mass killings and senseless victimization of the Muslims in various occasions, the recent being the Gujarat pogrom.

The new aggressive militant Hinduism completely defies the notion of tolerance and preaches violence and hatred. Hindu - Muslim difference has been portrayed in such a manner by the perpetrators of Hindutva that the concept of the demonized 'other' has come to occupy the common sense of each vulnerable Hindu. Though the BJP lost power in the 2004 elections, the Right wing Hindu politics and the RSS ideology is still entrenched deeply in the country, be it in the field of education, religion, mass media and so on. Time and again Hindus are reminded about the perennial threat to the 'self' from the enemy 'other'. The Hindutva propaganda after the recent terrorist attacks on Ayodhya on July 5, 2005 may be cited as the latest example.

However, the fact remains that the RSS in its attempt to promote a fascistic agenda and create an intolerant state have often found itself incapable of coping with the realities of the 21st century. The ideology is perceivably negative and backward looking in character. The militant and aggressive projection of the Hindu self does not believe in the peaceful and tranquil existence of a secular India. It indicates that the RSS ideology has a destructive potential content.

The discussion in the previous four chapters is an attempt to show that the ideological content, the organizational structure and the political ideology

of the RSS is essentially violent and militant. The cultural nationalism of the *Sangh* is essentially a construct, which is dependent on distorted historical explanations and constructed conflict between two communities. The so-called Hindu nationalism, which the RSS tries to establish through a 'moral' ordering of every aspect of life goes against the multi-religious, multi-ethnic, multi-caste, pluralist and democratic character of the Indian nation.

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