

IN THE BELLY OF THE BEAST
THE HINDU SUPREMACIST RSS AND BJP
OF INDIA

AN INSIDER'S STORY

-By-

Partha Banerjee

May, 1998



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To

Ma,

*and my maternal family,
who showed me how to love
even in extreme adversity*

"tomader jonje"

CONTENTS

TO THOSE I KNOW, TO THOSE I OWE		iii
FOREWORD		vii
PROLOGUE	SO, REALLY, WHAT IS MY PROBLEM WITH "THEM"?	1
CHAPTER 1	RSS—THE "SANGH"	6
CHAPTER 2	THE SANGHSTHAN THE "SHAKHA" WHERE MILITARISTIC RITUALS SLOWLY INDOCTRINATE "MEMBERS"	25
CHAPTER 3	THE "SANGH PARIVAR"—SHIV SENA, ABVP, BMS, AND SOME MORE	31
CHAPTER 4	THE SIX FESTIVITIES A CLEVER ATTEMPT TO BYPASS HINDU TEMPLES AND PRIESTS, AND THAT TOO WITHOUT ANNOYING THEM	41
CHAPTER 5	PRARTHANA AND EKATMATA STOTRA: THE TWO PIVOTAL VERSES FOR CONTINUED INDOCTRINATION	51
CHAPTER 6	BEYOND THE SANGHSTHAN: MY DAYS OF POLITICS INDIAN STYLE FOR THE "NON-POLITICAL" RSS	73

CHAPTER 7	WOMEN AND THE SANGH: FEMINISM TOPSY-TURVY	85
CHAPTER 8	EPILOGUE GLOBAL FUNDAMENTALISM AND SOCIAL MOVEMENT ORGANIZATIONS: HOW RSS FITS IN THE PARADIGM	101
APPENDIX I	"ALL CAN BE SACRIFICED FOR IDEALS BUT IDEALS ARE NOT TO BE ABANDONED" (AN ESSAY BY MY FATHER)	116
APPENDIX II	COMMUNAL VIOLENCE IN INDIA: RHETORIC AND ROLE OF THE SANGH PARIVAR AND SHIV SENA	128
APPENDIX III	QUOTABLE QUOTES	136
APPENDIX IV	THE SANGH PARIVAR GOES HIGHTECH: GLOBAL DISPERSAL OF "HINDUTVA" DOCTRINE ON THE INTERNET	142
APPENDIX V	THE ORIGINAL "PRATAHSMARAN" OR "BHARAT BHAKTI STOTRA"—TEXT AND TRANSLATION	147
APPENDIX VI	EXCERPTS FROM "THE SANGH IS MY SOUL", BY ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE	154
INDEX		158

TO THOSE I KNOW, TO THOSE I OWE

Yes, I must thank all who I have known over the many years of my RSS connection. Many of them—in spite of my renunciation of the Sangh ideology I now know is fascist, supremacist, divisive, and therefore harmful for mankind—have allowed me to keep a personal and affectionate relationship. I do hope that these sane people in the Sangh read this book and think hard about it.

I must mention the Sangh personalities who I have remembered for their dedication and selflessness, and even for their resolve on thoughts and activities I never agreed on. Some of them passed away leaving behind a legacy of dedication not too many “modern” swayamsevaks can match—either in India or abroad. In fact, old-timers now frequently regret that the quality of Sangh membership has deteriorated so rapidly, and that the Sangh establishment has now become so opulent. That claim is another important reason we need to remember the old times.

So, I remember the late Bhaurao Deoras, the late Ram Prasad Das, the late Shyam Mohan De, the late Nandalal Shaw, the late Kanai Das, and the late Sudhiranjan Giri. I remember Ganesh Deb Sharma, Amal Kumar Basu, Keshav Dixit, Bansi Lal Soni, Chinmoy Sil, Sanat Banerjee, Ajit Biswas, Bijoy Adhya, Lakshmi Narayan Bhala, Anil Rakshit, and Ananta Majumdar (these are some of the Sangh people I met again recently). I recall Bhabendu Bhattacharjee, Bidyut Datta, journalists Ashim Kumar Mitra and Rathindra Mohan Bandyopadhyay; and past friends and colleagues from my RSS, Jana Sangh, and Vidyarthi Parishad days—Narayan Bose, Harish Chopra, Ranajit Ghosh, Mahesh Rastogi, Ranjan Pal, Vijaykant Shyam, Murari Nathani, Rohit Das, Achintya Majumdar, Tushar and Tarun Majumdar, Mihir Saha, Arabinda Saha and his brothers, Tushar Bhattacharjee, Sukhlal Ray, Sohan Singh, Gosai Das, Tapan Ghosh, Debasish Basu, Shyamal Chakraborty, Adarsh Piloniwala, and Pabitra Jha. I do

acknowledge some others who were always with me in good times and bad times: Samar Das, Utpal Bhawal, Gautam Datta, Shubhankar Mukherjee, Subodh Gupta, and Krishnendu Ray—some of you perhaps hate me now for my “change of faith”, but I remember you all, particularly those I convinced (arm-twisted?) to go to jail during the 1975-77 movement against the Emergency. The politics was bad, but your company was not. We spent so much time together—how can I forget?

I want to extend a special note of sympathy to those who were unjustly victimized by Sangh authoritarianism, and to those who were my predecessors in quitting RSS out of ideological conflict but could never speak out. They will always be in my heart.

My father Jitendranath Banerjee and my uncle Ramendranath Banerjee, despite our ideological differences, have been inspirations for me to keep in life conviction and uprightness—virtues fast-disappearing from the great country of India. They belong to those in the Sangh who remain in there because it is their familiar niche and not because they are bigots. These people still believe that the Sangh’s (and its allies’) espousal of hate and its reactionary activities are only superficial. Talk about ignorance, denial!

I must also thank my father for the generous permission to use his autobiographical article for this book. Besides, he provided many other valuable pieces of information, and put me in touch with Sangh leaders in Delhi in August 1997. He is old now, and I hope, the disrespectful and arrogant section of the Sangh does not cause him much trouble because of his “crime” that he helped me so much with this book.

My mother (she left me for her eternal abode in heaven) and my maternal family—my late grandmother Tapabala, my late uncle Buddhadev, and my only surviving aunt Sova, have shown me how to keep love and faith for mankind even in extreme adversity. I dedicate this book to them.

“e-boi roilo tomader jonye”

My newly-found friends in America have supported me, believed in me, and inspired me with their erudition, intelligence, and thoughtfulness. I therefore must acknowledge Rinita Mazumdar, Anibel Comelo, Mona Chopra, Pratyush Bharati, Monimalika Day, Sayan Bhattacharyya, Sudipto Chatterjee and Gargi Mukherjee, Meera Nanda, and Atiqur Rahman. These are only some of the many who helped me survive in this land of extreme alienation we call USA. I must thank Lori Leonardi and Patricia Kernan for their friendship. I do want to thank Sanjukta Ghosh, Sangeeta Kamat, Biju Mathew, Vijay Prashad, Sunaina Maira, Cynthia Leenerts, Soumitra Bose, Shoumyo Dasgupta, Diditi Mitra, and Nalinakshā Bhattacharyya for their friendship and esprit de corp. Some of them have been supportive when Sangh-fanatics caused me personal trouble.

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Dr. Eva Hellman of the University of Dalarna, Sweden, extended her helping hand in a marvelous way. Her friendship has been a great privilege for me. Her book on Vishwa Hindu Parishad has helped me greatly to understand some aspects of VHP I was not familiar with. She has also generously written the foreword for this book. I cannot thank her enough.

Des Raj Goyal and Achin Vanaik, activists and authors of two important books, *Rashtriya Swayāmsewak Sangh* and *Communalism Contested*, respectively, have been very supportive. I have borrowed profusely from Des Raj-ji's book. Dr. Asghar Ali Engineer, the Bombay-based activist, who has dedicated his life to promote communal harmony has kindly sent me suggestions and information on communal problems in India through his Centre for Studies of Society and Secularism. Ms. Madhu Kishwar, the editor of *Manushi*, has also been appreciative.

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Drs. Amrita Basu of Amherst College, Massachusetts, Cynthia Leenerts of George Washington University, and Mary Stewart van Leeuwen of Eastern College, Pennsylvania, kindly sent me some very informative and insightful literature that helped me write the chapter on RSS and women. I must thank them for all their support.

Over the past three years, articles, comments, and compliments from known and unknown friends on the various Internet discussion groups have contributed to my own comprehension of the "Sangh Parivar" and like organizations. And, how can I ignore the 90's "saffron brigade" in the virtual and real world whose acrimony, bias, and often improper personal attacks on me actually expedited the completion of this book? How can I forget the mudslinging in public media by extreme right-wingers? Who can overlook their name-calling in Calcutta Online?

A special note of thanks must go to Sri Lakshman Srikrishna Bhide of the Deendayal Research Institute (DRI) who kindly arranged for my stay at the DRI during my recent visit to New Delhi. The people at Keshav Bhavan, the new palatial Calcutta headquarters of the RSS, have been cordial during my several visits in 1994 and 1997. I especially thank the swayamsevaks of a couple of Calcutta shakhas (branches) who invited me to participate in their activities in August of 1997.

Yes, that's almost all I wanted to remember. Left someone out? Forgive me, please.

But of course I will mention my ever-supportive wife Mukti and my ever-appreciative daughter Nandini who have waited endless hours to see this book completed. They are so happy that the work is now done and, so am I.

FOREWORD

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A strong current of Hindu revivalism is apparent in contemporary India. Representatives of the movement want to structure the behaviour of the individual, the duties of man and woman, the family, the relationships between different social groups, the economy and politics according to what is put forward as Hindu principles and ideals. The spokespersons for a Hinduization of Indian society are numerous and highly influential. In the 1998 elections to the parliament, the Bharatiya Janata Party or BJP, the major political front of Hindutva ("Hinduness") or Hindu nationalism, ended up as the single largest party and was delegated the task of forming the new government. It is likely that BJP will have the same, if not more, influence in the Indian parliament and societies in the coming days. Hence Hindutva is not a movement at the margins of the Indian society but has a real and serious political influence.

"In the Belly of the Beast: the Hindu Supremacist RSS and BJP of India—An Insider's story" focuses on what has been called the Sangh Parivar, i.e., a network of Hindutva organizations. Central in this network is the Rashtriya Svayamsevak Sangh or RSS which is a cadre-based elite organization that initiates daughter organizations for work among different sections of the Indian society. The

RSS has launched the BJP, which is the political front of the Sangh Parivar; the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, which is the ecumenical branch; the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, which is a body for trade unions; and the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, which is the Sangh's student wing. These are just a few of the front organizations the RSS has started in order to organize different groups for Hindutva.

Dr. Partha Banerjee, the author of this book, gives a critical presentation of the main organizations of the Sangh Parivar. He was actively associated with the Sangh for more than fifteen years—first as a dedicated swayamsevak and later also as the West Bengal provincial joint secretary of Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad or ABVP. Thus, he has known the organization very thoroughly—this knowledge has been further augmented by his father's lifelong association with the Sangh. By discussing their political and social strategies, he draws the contours of the Hindutva ideology which he characterizes as hierarchical, patriarchal, conservative, and based on elements from the brahminical tradition. As a concerned and politically enlightened citizen, Dr. Banerjee is deeply worried about the possible scenario of India becoming a Hindu state. He draws a picture of domesticated women, disempowered dalits, Christians and Muslims becoming second-rate citizens and an uncompromising BJP-run state attitude towards Islamic neighbouring countries such as Pakistan and Bangladesh. In addition, the author highlights religious expressions of the Hindutva worldview. He brings forward sacred texts of the RSS as well as rituals of the organization. A hands-on treatise on the so-called non-political Sangh's open and secret political activities is also included. These aspects of the RSS have so far not been treated by other writers on the Sangh.

Dr. Banerjee's first-hand information on the RSS makes the book a valuable contribution to the study of the organization. This kind of material is necessary to elucidate and to make vivid the picture in standard works on the organization—such as J. A. Curran, *Militant Hinduism in Indian politics, A Study of the R.S.S.* (New York 1951); W. K. Andersen & S. Damle, *The Brotherhood in*

Saffron—The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Hindu Revivalism (New York 1987); and C. Jaffrelot, The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India (New Delhi 1996).

The present work discusses critical issues such as the future of Indian secularism and democracy as well as human rights, women's rights, and minority rights issues. Therefore, this book is highly relevant and a valuable source of information to anyone interested in contemporary India and the future for the fifty-year-old Indian Union. Since the RSS and VHP are active among Indians living overseas, the book should be of importance also to this group and serve as a reminder of their responsibilities for the future of a progressive and secular India.

PROLOGUE

SO, REALLY, WHAT IS MY PROBLEM WITH "THEM"?

Many years ago, when I was very young, my father took me to a "Sangh shakha" in a North Calcutta neighborhood. Since then, I remained in the "Sangh", or the RSS, for more than fifteen precious years of my life. I made friends, played games, sang songs, paraded on the street, took part in rallies and discussions, gave speeches, and did numerous other things for them year after year. Yet, I did not regret it when I came out of the organization—in fact, I was happy when I finally freed myself from its clutches. However, I permanently lost touch with some good old friends, and that made me sad.

But I must confess—I am scared today. When I think about the "Sangh" now, a nightmarish metaphor comes to my mind. I keep perceiving the "Sangh" as a continuously expanding creature like some mutated ominous insect inside an ancient cocoon—an insect that has mutated only to expand and eat everything it grabs but never to come out of its shell. It does it so slowly but surely that although it is potentially a great danger, nobody understands how perilous it is—one reason is that nobody can see it. Some find it a playful big cocoon lying in a remote corner of the colorful woods chewing away to its heart's content, some find it an unsightly object to crack jokes about, some find it only a subject of interest to discuss among academic circles. But the insect keeps growing and mutating and devouring anything it gets. It nourishes itself from all the youthfulness and freshness of its surrounding nature and becomes bigger, stronger, and uglier.

Then, one day, people realize that there is no more green left in the once-beautiful garden—everything is dull and barren and sad and gray—the now-monstrous vermin has absorbed all the fertile energy from the once-diverse nature—and now it has turned into such a colossal beast that nobody even dares to stop it from whatever it wants.

I am sorry if I sound pessimistic. But when I compare today's RSS with the one from my days or even before, this is how I really feel about the organization and its growth.

Some friends insist that I lay down my reasons why I came out of the Sangh after spending more than fifteen years—some of the most precious time of my life. In short, I came out because of my realization of its lies. I was deeply hurt by them. It took me some time to realize how disillusioned I was. But finally I did it—I made up my mind and freed myself. I could not put up with the lies and self-deception any more.

Among others, I would emphasize the following points that I consider seriously problematic and unethical with the so-called "Sangh Parivar": (1) Its pretense of being non-political; (2) The conformity and religio-cultural monolithism it preaches and practices; (3) Its now-exposed hypocritical self-assertion of being the "organization of difference"; (4) The militaristic, regimented disposition it sports; (5) The way it traps young people in and controls them; (6) Its segregation of men and women; and (7) Its fascist, supremacist, communal, and exclusionary social, political, religious, and economic dogmas.

To me, these are the "Seven Sins" of the Sangh—these are unacceptable by any means. Unless they are dealt with right now in a very careful, forceful, and orchestrated manner, these vices are going to bring India to massive deterioration and destruction in the coming days.

In this book, I show how the so-called "non-political" face of the Sangh is only a sham and how it has always used its rank and file membership for political purposes. In

recent years, this facade has become too well exposed. Particularly, since the inception of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the 1980s and the retreat of socialism worldwide, a pro-Hindutva momentum within the RSS has politicized its workers, young and adult alike, through its fronts. The parent organization RSS, and the BJP's sister organizations such as the Yuva Morcha and Mahila Morcha; Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and VHP's offshoot groups Bajrang Dal, Durga Vahini, and Bharat Sadhu Samaj; Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP); Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS); Rashtra Sevika Samiti (RSS for women), and the many other fronts the Sangh created have ceaselessly indoctrinated their members to strive for political power in local, state, and central governments. The international pro-RSS groups such as the Hindu Student Council (HSC), VHP-America, Overseas Friends of BJP, Hindu Vivek Kendra, and Global Hindu Electronic Network have contributed to this campaign. Although, groups such as the HSC and VHP-America have purposefully kept a superficial hiatus from their parent organizations.

During my 1997 visit to several RSS centers in India, I was shocked to see how much the greed for political and social power has surfaced in Sangh circles. This greed is now manifested in RSS' approval of BJP's political strategies where, just like the corrupt Congress; the self-proclaimed "party of difference" BJP has gotten into bed with extremely sinister and criminal individuals and groups, with the sole aim of making a last-ditch attempt to grab power at the center. They have succeeded. The class character of RSS, BJP, and VHP is no different from the Congress—as has been repeatedly made apparent by their actions. This class characteristic is evident in the leadership that is comprised mostly of upper-caste conservative men—rich landlords, businessmen, civil servants, and priests—the traditional kingmakers of India. These men know from their Congress experience that power, and power alone, can keep their long-spun web together, otherwise it will fall apart. That is why BJP has been so desperate these days, that is why RSS is so much supportive of BJP's unethical politics.

During my said trip to India, a pro-BJP Calcutta journalist, who was an invited speaker at a gathering of RSS' Bengali weekly "Swastika", declared that BJP leadership's recent embracing of the Nehruvian concept of a mixed nationality and its temporary shelving of the Kashi and Mathura temple issues are hypocritical and solely intended for power grabbing at the center.¹

However, over the years, the RSS has created, through its militaristic way, a cadre of ignorant and unquestioning members who neither know nor care to know the real nature of the Sangh. This lack of self-examination has made it very convenient for the Sangh to whip up right-wing pro-Hindutva sentiments among its rank and file members and sympathizers and retain them. I have elaborated what these sentiments are and why they have played so beautifully without any real opposition from either within or outside the group. The Indian progressives, in particular, have at best put up a disorganized show against the onslaught of the well-organized religious right. The stance of the "mainstream" Indian left (at least, of many of them) reminds us of the striking parallel we see in USA where a right-winger can go as far right as he wants, while the "mainstream" leftist is busy proving his "centristness" and dissociation from socialist mass movements.

The only internal opposition to the RSS has, ironically, come from its own extreme right wing faction—leaders such as Sadhvi Rithambara have opposed the party's politically strategic temporary shelving of the Ayodhya Rama Mandir issue. Rithambara's opposition went unheeded during the elections, but VHP and RSS are now slowly bringing the temple issue back up again.

¹Pabitra Kumar Ghosh. *Bartamaan*, a Calcutta daily. June 19, 1997.

At the same gathering, RSS ideologue H. V. Seshadri asserted that the "Bengal Renaissance" of the 1900's was a Hindutva movement—the fact is, the liberal Bengal Renaissance movement was against the Hindu orthodoxy.

In the coming days, the social fabric of India will change irreversibly. To some extent, it has already changed. The once-diverse and lively-colored garden is going to become dull, sterile, and monotonous—a forsaken thicket where we will neither find any playful children nor will we see any loving couples enjoying the beauty of nature. Everyone will be afraid of the hideous creature that now lives there—now it is the master of the place, and it is ruthless to brilliance, social progress, love, freedom, and life.

We will discuss in the following chapters what the RSS (and its offsprings such as BJP and VHP) truly is and what we must do to stop the RSS family—the “Sangh Parivar”.

CHAPTER ONE

RSS—THE “SANGH”

What is it, and what is it not?

"Jesus is junk. It is high time for Hindus to learn that Jesus Christ symbolizes no spiritual power, or moral uprightness. He is no more than an artifice for legitimizing wanton imperialist aggression. The aggressors have found him to be highly profitable so far. By the same token, Hindus should know that Jesus means nothing but mischief for their country and culture."²

The above was recently said by a prominent leader and theorist of RSS or Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (National Volunteer Corps), in a treatise on Jesus Christ.

Dr. K. B. Hedgewar floated the organization in 1925 on the Hindu holy day of Vijaya Dashami (the triumphant tenth day of the moon) in the Maharashtrian city of Nagpur. According to Hindu mythology, this is the day when in a holy war, Lord Rama, the God king, triumphed over Ravana "the demon king". The Sangh and its offspring organizations such as the BJP have successfully used the name of Rama as a ploy to garner Hindu votes and drum up anti-Muslim hatred. In addition to the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, the RSS, Jana Sangh (now known as BJP), and VHP or Vishwa Hindu Parishad have been

²Sita Ram Goel. 1994. *Jesus Christ—An Artifice of Aggression*. Voice of India, New Delhi.

implicated in numerous communal riots all over India.³ RSS now has two other important offshoots—Bajrang Dal (a militant auxiliary of VHP) and Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram, the organization targeted to include the tribals in its fold.

Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the parliamentary leader of BJP, is a lifelong member of RSS, more commonly known as the "Sangh". Most leaders and active members of BJP are products of the Sangh and steeped in its Hindu supremacist doctrine. Vajpayee was a full-time RSS worker before he was "released" for BJP (formerly Jana Sangh) activities. In one of his Hindi poems, Vajpayee proclaims: "*Hindu Hindu mera parichay*"—my only identity is Hindu. This may remind us of his campaign speeches during the recent Indian elections, "Is it a crime to be a Hindu in this country?"⁴ One can perceive the same Hindu Vajpayee—only with refined rhetoric and a display of moderation—very similar to the recently toned-down functioning style of BJP itself.

The meteoric rise of BJP is now all but certain to usher in an era of more social and political pressures for the traditionally oppressed—the "untouchables", the religious minorities, and women. BJP's ally Shiv Sena (SS) and its leader Bal Thackeray have been openly supportive of racist and oppressive social codes. Thackeray said that democracy is not for India and what Indians need is a "benign dictatorship." BJP's important home minister Advani is now actively touting a presidential form of government replacing the present prime ministerial system—an alarming proposition that foreshadows an authoritarian rule.

BJP leaders like Vijaya Raje Scindia, the queen-mother of the royal family of Gwalior favor the now-outlawed "sati" system ("sati" was a horrible practice where the widow was burnt along with her dead husband) and the degenerate Hindu caste system where Brahmans and other upper castes

³See appendices for more details.

⁴*New York Times*, May 1996. Also, see Appendix VI.

remain the leaders of the society, keeping the lower castes and "untouchables" in abject poverty, subservience, and death. Even though M. S. Golwalkar and Balasaheb Deoras, the second and third supreme leaders of the RSS, spoke against the caste system in its "degenerate form", they did not espouse its abolition.⁵ The theory and practice of caste differences is very much in vogue in RSS and its offshoot bodies, although, in order to bring together Hindus of all castes under its artificially-created "unity platform", a unifying theme of hatred for Islam and other "foreign" religions has been deliberately brought in. "Lower caste" legendary heroes such as Birsa have recently been included in the RSS Ekatmata Stotra (the verse of unification) to garner support among the dalits, "forest-dwellers", and other oppressed classes of the society.⁶

In order to learn about the BJP, the rising star of Indian politics, one must examine the RSS with an open mind. Most secular and progressive Indians, and those who do not have any particular political faith, either do not know much about the RSS and its modus operandi or because of a preoccupied mind, refuse to recognize them. To me, this ignorance or rejection is the very thing that has allowed the rapid growth of the Sangh organizations. We must defeat the RSS in its own game—its supremacist-divisive Hindutva doctrine must be countered with the secular and all-inclusive version of Hinduism which is the religion of Sri Chaitanya, Ram Mohan Ray, Ramakrishna Paramhansa, and Bhakt Kabir. The Sangh Parivar's doctrine of separatism and supremacy must be exposed by drawing parallels between them and other social-religious fundamentalist groups that

⁵ During the seventies, I remember the socialist leader Jaya Prakash Narayan calling all Brahmans to give up their "holy threads"—a symbol of their so-called superiority. However, the then Sarsanghchalak Balasaheb Deoras opposed this call -- Deoras said that all non-Brahmans should wear holy threads instead. Obviously, he knew that the Hindu Brahman would never accept that measure.

⁶See Chapter 5 on the Ekatmata Stotra.

fiercely fight with each other. Only then, their global bigotry and deceit can be truly assessed and dealt with.

Mahatma Gandhi was murdered by an RSS member—and that is the common belief

On the 30th of January 1948, within less than a year of the Indian independence, Nathuram Godse, a Hindu zealot from the western Indian state of Maharashtra, shot and killed Mahatma Gandhi at a prayer meeting in Delhi. Nathuram Godse was a prominent member of the RSS and a close associate of its founder Dr. K. B. Hedgewar. Just before the assassination, however, Godse “left” the RSS and joined another Hindu supremacist group Hindu Mahasabha.

So, why was the Sangh not convicted in Gandhi assassination?

RSS was never officially implicated and convicted in the murder of Mahatma Gandhi because, among other reasons, Nathuram Godse could not conclusively be proven to be an RSS member. This apparently bizarre conclusion was possible because of RSS' non-existent membership roster and the absence of any internal documented proceedings of Sangh activities or meetings. At the time of the assassination, the Sangh did not even have a constitution—this was after twenty three years of its public existence!⁷

⁷ What is the truth about Godse's RSS connection? ... Godse himself had stated before the Court: "I have worked for several years in RSS and subsequently joined the Hindu Mahasabha..." (Godse, Gopal: *May it Please Your Honour: Statement of Nathuram Godse*). The most significant is the revelation by his brother about the last moments of his life: "On reaching the platform they recited a verse of devotion to the Motherland: "Namaste sada vatsale matribhume..." [This is the RSS prayer sung even today — author]. The above is quoted from D. R. Goyal: *Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh* . Radha Krishna Prakashan. New Delhi. 1979.

RSS mobilizes workers into its different fronts. Other than the BJP, the Sangh mentors its cadres for its education front Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP). Industry-based cadres are sent to organize the labor front, Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS), and the more gray-haired and often rich workers from the business world move into the powerful well-financed religious wing, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) or the World Hindu Council. Although very much in the fray of capturing unions through electioneering (and hooliganism), both ABVP and BMS claim to be non-political.⁸

RSS, Shiv Sena, and their admiration of fascism

Dr. Hedgewar, the RSS founder, propounded the idea that national unity would only come about if it was declared that all non-Hindus in India, such as Muslims and Christians, do not form a part of the nation. This was because, in his opinion, non-Hindus deny Hindu traditions, ideals, and culture. Hedgewar indoctrinated this idea into his hand-picked protégé Madhavrao Sadasivrao Golwalkar (more commonly known as Guruji—"the teacher"), again from Nagpur.

The most comprehensive statement of this exclusionary idea was made in Mr. Golwalkar's book *"We or Our Nationhood Defined"* published in 1938⁹. The pamphlet-like book has so many laudatory references to Hitler and his theories of racial supremacy that it became embarrassingly uncomfortable for the RSS to continue its publication and was soon withdrawn from circulation.

It would be worthwhile to cite a few excerpts here: "German race pride has now become the topic of the day. To keep up the purity of the race and its culture, Germany

⁸To know more about ABVP, BMS, and other Hindutva organizations, see Chapter 3.

⁹M. S. Golwalkar. 1938. *We or Our Nationhood Defined*. Bharat Prakashan, Nagpur.

shocked the world by her purging the country of the Semitic races—the Jews. Race pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has also shown how well-nigh impossible it is for races and cultures, having differences going to the root, to be assimilated into one united whole—a good lesson for us in Hindusthan (i.e., the land of Hindus) to learn and profit by."

This is the lesson the "Guruji" wants Sangh volunteers to learn: "From this standpoint sanctioned by the experience of shrewd old nations, the non-Hindu peoples in Hindusthan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence the Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but the glorification of the Hindu race and culture, i.e., they must not only give up their attitude of intolerance and ungratefulness towards this land and its age-old traditions, but must also cultivate the positive attitude of love and devotion instead; in one word, they must cease to be foreigners or may stay in the country wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment, not even citizen's rights."¹⁰

The Hindu Mahasabha leader Savarkar, a much-respected personality in RSS circles, proclaimed,

"If we Hindus grow stronger in time Moslem friends ...will have to play the part of German Jews."¹¹

¹⁰This rhetoric reminds us of the anti-immigrant decree of Pat Robertson, the leader of the Christian Coalition of USA—a personality much despised by the RSS and VHP people of America. The Republican governor of California, Pete Wilson, won the recent elections in the state upon this anti-alien, anti-immigrant plank known as Proposition 209—a measure that denies all human rights to illegal immigrants and their children and some benefits even to legal immigrants.

¹¹Savarkar's presidential address to RSS members in Nagpur on 28 December 1938. *Indian Annual Register*, 1938 (1939), Vol. II, Calcutta.

"We or Our Nationhood Defined" was replaced by Golwalkar's **"Bunch of Thoughts"**, now the Sangh "Bible", in which an attempt has been made to clothe the RSS's fascistic concept of nationhood in a religio-cultural garb.¹²

The RSS and Hindu Mahasabha have always been fiercely anti-Muslim and anti-Christian. Golwalkar went as far as to raise an objection when Abdul Hamid and the Keelor brothers were honored by the Indian government for their patriotism and gallantry during the Indo-Pak war. Golwalkar did not want any non-Hindu soldiers to be honored however much they might have sacrificed for India.¹³

The fiercely anti-Muslim attitude of the RSS goes to the extent of dubbing even Urdu as a foreign language. "The import and significance of the word 'Urdu' is so derogatory to national self-respect that it suppresses all emotional upsurge in favor of the language. How and why should we own a language the very name of which constantly reminds us of our political subjugation? Hindu ancestors passed on Sanskrit and Hindi to their descendants. They had nothing to do with the transmission of Urdu".¹⁴

The Sangh family's political ally Shiv Sena even today hail Hitler and Nazi Germany. Shiv Sena's godman Bal Thackeray often eulogizes Hitler at public gatherings and in interviews. In its quest for political power, the Sangh naturally does not want to be a part of this "nuisance" any

¹²This section has been paraphrased after Des Raj Goyal, *Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh*, Radha Krishna Prakashan, New Delhi, 1979.

¹³Swatantra Bharat. December 24, 1965. Lucknow. Cited in D. R. Goyal. *Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh*, Radha Krishna Prakashan, New Delhi, 1979.

¹⁴*The Organiser* (RSS English weekly). February 2, 1962. New Delhi. The Sangh Parivar is fervently pro-Hindi.

more. However, it is yet to come out with a censure of Thackeray.

First RSS, Jana Sangh, then BJP—then a turn of luck

In 1951, RSS floated the Jana Sangh, its political wing, now known as the BJP, to counter the rising public hatred resulting as a fallout of RSS' involvement in Gandhi's assassination: It also wanted to have its voice heard in the first Indian elections of 1952. M. S. Golwalkar put Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, an ultra-nationalist and famous orator from the Bengal Hindu Mahasabha, in charge of the Jana Sangh. Dr. Mukherjee was allegedly murdered by the Congress Party or Sheikh Abdullah's¹⁵ party in a jail in Kashmir, and later, Sangh activist Deendayal Upadhyay became the president of the Jana Sangh. The unassuming and mild-mannered Upadhyay¹⁶ was also assassinated, again, allegedly by political rivals. Atal Bihari Vajpayee then took over as the Jana Sangh president and carried the mantle for a long and lonely decade. Jana Sangh came close to obliteration during the heydays of Congress under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru and subsequently his daughter Indira Gandhi. It was only the proclamation of the totalitarian Emergency rule by Indira Gandhi in 1975 that gave a second breath of life to Jana Sangh through its opportunistic alliance with other national opposition parties.

¹⁵ Sheikh Abdullah was the Kashmir chief minister for a long time since its inclusion in India. He was also close to Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Indian prime minister.

¹⁶ Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay was one of the most intelligent, scholarly, and ethical leaders RSS has ever produced. My father knew him well. I remember how shocked he was when Upadhyay was brutally murdered on a train he was traveling by himself. Among others who paid tribute after Upadhyay's death, the eloquent Communist Party leader Hiren Mukherjee called him "ajatashatru" — the one with no enemies.

Imprisonment of forgotten personalities like Vajpayee and L. K. Advani on Indira Gandhi's orders elevated them to national stardom. Indira Gandhi, under the mistaken impression that her popular support was strong, called for general elections in 1977. She and her Congress party were nearly wiped out, largely due to a massive people's movement led by socialist leader Jaya Prakash Narayan, and a hodgepodge coalition formed the government. Vajpayee and Advani assumed important portfolios of the foreign affairs and information-broadcasting ministers, respectively (a third unknown BJP person Brijlal Verma assumed the important communication ministry portfolio—even to many Sangh workers' surprise—this happened when another Sangh stalwart Nana Deshmukh¹⁷ declined the offer). Until then, few could dream of such a turn of luck for these two career politicians and for the BJP—the new incarnation of the Jana Sangh.

"Guru-Dakshina", and tons of soft money too!

Other than the enormous amount of money collected at the Guru-Dakshina (charity for the guru, in this case, the saffron flag) day every year (which goes largely unreported, and hence untaxed), RSS also reportedly generates huge sums of money from its members and sympathizers abroad¹⁸. Other than contributing to election funds of BJP, they say, immigrant Sangh sympathizers pay their "Guru-

¹⁷ Nana Deshmukh, popularly known as Nanaji, is another Sangh leader much respected for his organizational skills and little personal ambitions. Nanaji knew me through my father. I even ran into him during my 1997 trip to New Delhi. Once he asked me to write a paper on Rabindranath Tagore's social views (The Nobel-laureate poet Tagore was a skilled and benevolent zamindar or land owner. He also established two great universities named Shanti Niketan and Sri Niketan the latter being a vocational school). Nanaji paid me for the essay. My father translated it from Bengali to Hindi.

¹⁸ See Appendix IV for a description of RSS work overseas.

Dakshina" at various branches of the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS), the overseas version of RSS¹⁹. Money is also reportedly pumped in and out by other organizations such as the Overseas Friends of BJP (OFBJP), VHP of America, and the Hindu Student Council or HSC of America. Traditionally conservative but apolitical Hindu temples in USA and Europe are now targeted by the Sangh in order to mobilize second-generation Indian-American youth through organization of VHP-sponsored Hindu summer camps and various religious conventions of HSC. Under the guise of cultural education, a whole generation is being indoctrinated to be blind, separatists, and bigots. Many Indian immigrants, ignorant of the relationship of the VHP and HSC with BJP and RSS, are being used to further the fascist-like sociopolitical agenda of the Sangh Parivar.

The Rama Movement of the 90's—Vajpayee still wants the temple

Unlike many other religious fundamentalist movements across the globe that have a well-defined vision of the society they want to build, the Sangh's vision of the Hindu Rashtra (nation) is purposefully vague. As RSS seeks to extend its reach, its Hindu revivalist mission finds itself tangled with a number of serious obstacles. The RSS' brahminical version of Hinduism has little support among the poor and the lower castes, and its assertion of Hindu supremacy ignores deep-rooted caste, class, ethnic, linguistic, and regional loyalties. Against the backdrop of these difficulties, the Sangh came up with two objectives to forge its ambitious Hindu nationalism: (1) the tenet of hatred toward the Indian government and (2) drumming up hatred toward the minority Muslim population in India. The Rama Janmabhoomi campaign and the concurrent nationwide communal riots orchestrated by Sangh militants (where Muslims were the victims of murders, rapes, and destruction

¹⁹ The political activities are often masked by religious activities at Hindu temples, teaching of Sanskrit to youngsters, private gatherings, etc.

of property in overwhelmingly disproportionate numbers) fulfilled these two objectives. The Sangh Parivar now depicts itself as a nationalist movement besieged and confronted by a "socialistic and atheistic" state that pampers the minority communities—although the Sangh knows well how Muslims and other minorities in India have traditionally suffered as second-class citizens in political and economic life.²⁰

Thus, in the nineties, RSS, VHP, and BJP forged the strong Hindu revivalist Rama platform that dwelled on the issue of the "historic" birthplace of Lord Rama in Ayodhya in the state of Uttar Pradesh. Their contention was that the mosque, known as Babri Masjid (after the Islamic ruler Babar) was built upon the ruins of a Hindu temple that was supposedly been demolished by "Muslim" invaders. This temple, the Sangh says, was built to mark the holy birthplace of Rama, the God king. The Sangh contends that a temple with pillars had indeed been there since the eleventh century.

However, even an avidly pro-BJP Belgian columnist Koenraad Elst, in his book argues,²¹

"When that building (the temple) was destroyed, we do not know precisely, there are no descriptions of the event extant anywhere. Mohammed Ghoris's armies arrived there in 1194, and they may have destroyed it. It may have been rebuilt afterwards, or it may only have been destroyed by later Muslim lieutenants. So it is possible that when Mir Baqi, Babar's lieutenant, arrived there in 1528, he found a

²⁰This section is paraphrased after Amrita Basu's article "Women and religious nationalism in India: an introduction", *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, December 1993.

Also see Dr. Gopal Singh's report, *Minorities Commission*, 1983 (Source: *Emergency Assessments*, Vijay Prashad, *Social Scientist*, September-October 1996, p. 61).

²¹Koenraad Elst. 1991. *Ayodhya and After—Issues before the Hindu Society*. Voice of India, New Delhi.

heap of rubble, or an already aging mosque, rather than a magnificent Hindu temple."

Other archeologists plainly assert that there has not been a single piece of evidence for the existence of a temple of either brick, stone or both.²²

The fact is, Uttar Pradesh (U.P.) also has the largest number of parliamentary seats and is important enough to sway the outcome of the elections for one party or another. BJP has long concentrated to carry the state. The Rama movement of 1990-92 culminated in the forcible demolition, by Sangh militants, of the mosque on December 6, 1992, and consequent massive communal riots that claimed thousands of lives all over India—especially in North India and Bombay.²³ Repercussions followed in adjoining Pakistan and Bangladesh, where reactionary Muslim fanatics gathered strength out of this incident, and destroyed Hindu temples, lives and property.

The BJP managed to worm its way into a short-lived coalition government in U.P. in 1995, paving the way for a big win in the 1996 elections. In early 1997, after a long impasse, BJP and Mayawati-Kansiram's Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP, a splinter party of "lower castes") forged another coalition government in the state where a power sharing deal was cut—the small contingent of Mayawati's party would be given the chief ministership for the first six months, BJP would then have its own chief minister, and so on. In late 1997, however, BSP withdrew its support but the BJP managed to hang on to power in U.P. by means of massive "horse-trading" and use of muscle-power and money. The "new inductees" were subsequently rewarded with ministerial portfolios. The BJP chief minister had to create numerous portfolios to appease the "disgruntled"

²²*The Statesman Miscellany*. September 12, 1993, Calcutta.

²³*Granta*, Spring 1997. New York and London.

lawmakers. RSS, for its part, blessed these practices from its Nagpur headquarters.

Vajpayee and other BJP leaders still support the long-promised Rama temple on the demolition site. This is a centerpiece of the Sangh pledge to the conservative upper caste Hindus. Does Vajpayee want to ignore the RSS whip from the Nagpur headquarters? Not very likely.²⁴ Viswa Hindu Parishad (VHP) is also keen to create another bloody movement to "free" Mathura in U.P., the so-called site of Lord Krishna's birth—an objective Mayawati-Kansiram's party (the BSP) does not favor.

BJP government's nuclear tests create new tension

On May 11, 1998, the Indian state conducted three nuclear tests in Rajasthan. Prime Minister Vajpayee affirmed the position he took in the parliament in March that "our party feels India should have the bomb since it will place the country in a strong position vis-a-vis the outside world." It appears that this action by the BJP government is intended to send a jingoistic message to China, Pakistan, and to the entire world.²⁵ By most accounts, Pakistan is on the verge of having nuclear weapons, and Vajpayee government's above actions will only expedite it. Is a nuclear war brewing in the Indian subcontinent? The CIA reported, truly or falsely, that one such serious threat was averted only recently.²⁶ Nevertheless, after the May 11 incident, a subcontinental nuclear war is no longer an unlikely scenario.

²⁴ Vajpayee has some history of defying orders from RSS. In the sixties, he defied RSS' Golwalkar's insistence that an unknown Bachhraj Vyas be selected as the Jana Sangh chief instead of the popular leader Deendayal Upadhyay.

²⁵ Vijay Prashad and Biju Mathew, from a letter written to *India Abroad* and other Indian newspapers in USA.

²⁶ CIA's Robert Gates "confirmed" that India and Pakistan headed toward a nuclear confrontation in April/May, 1990. Gates visited India and Pakistan to dissuade the governments from such confrontations. *Intelligence Newsletter* 4/1/93.

Is RSS really fascist?

Why is the RSS labeled as fascist by some circles and how much justification is there? Why call anybody a fascist? Before RSS or BJP is called fascist, we need to describe their ideas. Let's explain what fascism is, and compare these ideas with what the "Sangh Parivar" practices.²⁷

The word "fascism" describes a set of overlapping and sometimes contradictory beliefs that first became fashionable in continental Europe in the 1920s. According to Dr. Mark Trisch of Johannes Gutenberg Universitaet, Germany²⁸, the following set of ideas (in varying combinations) fostered by a party or organization would brand it fascist:

- (1) Calling for a return to the "ancient traditions of the race"
- (2) A hierarchical, militaristic, corporate social organization
- (3) A cult of leadership
- (4) Calls for national self-reliance
- (5) Calling for "full employment"
- (6) Aggressively nationalistic foreign policy.

According to Dr. Trisch, although it is the combination of all these that makes for trouble, the first three seem to be the most important.

Do the RSS, and its sister organizations such as the BJP or VHP foster these ideas? Unfortunately, they do. A return to the ancient so-called "glorified Bharatiya traditions" of the Hindu race is their number one creed. Every single day, RSS, in its militaristic shakhas or gatherings, preaches to its workers and sympathizers that the "oldest nation of Bharatvarsha" was the "greatest" on earth and that its inhabitants were "happy, prosperous, and religious". The

²⁷ Also read, Achin Vanaik, *Communalism Contested*, Vistaar Publications, New Delhi, 1997. Vanaik prefers to call the Sangh Parivar a "pre- or potentially fascist" group. p. 279.

²⁸ Per *Indology* mailing list discussions on the Internet, December 1995.

Sangh leaders never forget to mention that all the ills of India began when, due to the "disunity of the Hindu race", Muslim and then British aggressors invaded and took over this "holy land". The long term goal of the Sangh Parivar is of course to bring back that "past era of glory" by creating an "Akhand Bharat" (i.e., an Undivided India ranging from "Himalaya to Kanyakumari" and "Gandhar to Brahmadesh" (i.e., from Tibet in the north to the southern tip of India, and from Afghanistan in the west to South East Asia including Burma, Laos, Thailand, and Cambodia)—culturally and politically. This dream of "unity" is to be reached by organizing Hindus from all around the globe.

The RSS is indeed a hierarchical, militaristic organization that actively practices regimentation.²⁹ RSS has a "Sarsanghchalak" (Supreme Leader) who is never elected (for that matter, no other leaders are elected—there is no system of internal elections in the organization)—the supreme leader's commands are obeyed without question. Further, Dr. Keshavrao Baliramrao Hedgewar, the founder of the Sangh and Madhavrao Sadasivrao Golwalkar, the second and most well-known supreme leader of RSS, are remembered in Sangh circles with a sense of divinity and admiration that reaches the level of God-worshipping. Indeed, these two men are officially given the status of Avatars (reincarnation of God) by the RSS. Pictures of these two Sarsanghchalaks are distributed and sold by RSS offices and bookstores and decorate walls of workers' homes. Stories, often exaggerated, about their lives are discussed at RSS camps and gatherings on a regular basis, essays are written on their lives and works and the best ones

²⁹See Chapter 2 on the activities of a Sangh shakha.

Moreover, RSS and BJP have also been linked with Ranabir Sena, a private army for big landowners that has most recently been responsible for the killing of sixty-one poor people in Lakshmanpur-Bathe village of Bihar's Jehanabad district on Dec. 1, 97. The angry people in the village recently did not allow Vajpayee to visit the killing fields.

are awarded prizes.³⁰ Portraits of the present Sarsanghchalak Rajendra Singh ("Rajju Bhaiya") is now promptly posted on RSS' Internet homepage by active workers in the USA.³¹ Similarly, Shiv Sena's new official homepage, on its title page, now has the picture of its supremo, Balasaheb Thackeray.

This is what the Shiv Sena homepage declares about its leader: "People from all parts of Hindustan have only one hope. "Hon'ble Shivsenapramukh Shri Balasaheb Thackeray is our only hope. He is our national Leader" they say."

National self-reliance is preached by the RSS: the Sangh has now actively taken up the issue of self-reliance and put forth a program called the "Swadeshi Jagaran Manch"—a

³⁰I too was once awarded a first-prize for an essay I wrote about the founder of the Sangh. The prize was another biography of Dr. Hedgewar!

³¹A meeting of prominent RSS workers was held on November 9 and 10, 1929. It decided against the 'cumbersome clap-trap of internal democracy' and opted for a centralized authority-based structure... The principle was called "Ek Chalak Anuvartitva" (following one leader) and was explained to the swayamsevaks by V. V. Kelkar who told them that it was on the lines of the traditional Hindu joint family system and was most appropriate for an organization wedded to reviving and rejuvenating the Hindu way of life. It is rather difficult to distinguish this arrangement from what has been called the "Fuehrer Principle" followed by the Fascists in Italy and Nazis in Germany in the decade leading up to WWII. Quoted from D. R. Goyal: *Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh* Radha Krishna Prakashan, New Delhi. 1979.

Recently, in an interview carried in the *Panchjanya*, a magazine with close RSS connections, Ms Uma Bharati, the BJP MP from Khajuraho and president of the party's Yuva Morcha, has quoted the RSS chief, Professor Rajendra Singh, to say that despite the number of police stations in the country, and thousands of policemen, Muslims cannot be safe if they have enmity with the Hindus. Source: *The Hindu*, January 18, 1998.

platform to champion the idea of total economic self-reliance. They decry the US investments in India and pro-US fiscal treaties such as the GATT and NAFTA—RSS' opposition to American investment might well have been a headache for the US government (and the) CIA in deciding between the faltering Congress or rising BJP to be covertly pushed as the next ruling party of India.³²

But the international investors can now breathe a sigh of relief as this call for national self-reliance has proved to be just a politically expedient move without any real will behind it as evident by what the BJP in fact did vis-à-vis the multinational Enron power project.

Full employment for labor (but without any real power or control over the workplace) has been a centerpiece of RSS and BJP actions implemented through the activities of Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh or BMS, one of the largest labor organizations in India. BJP's ultra-right ally Shiv Sena has come up with plans to support the Hindu labor force in the state of Maharashtra. The irony here is that the Shiv Sena was originally floated by national and international vested-interest groups to crush the once-powerful trade unions of Bombay back in the 1980's and has operated a protection racket ever since. In recent months, American pop-singer Michael Jackson and eminent Indian film playback singer Lata Mangeshkar and actor Dilip Kumar participated in huge Shiv Udyog Sena³³-sponsored concerts purportedly to raise funds for the Hindu laborers of Bombay.

An aggressively nationalistic foreign policy has always been at the forefront of RSS propaganda. Much toned-down by the BJP now, during the Jana Sangh days, it was much more overt. America was never well-liked by Sangh members—the United States has always been portrayed as the very image of immorality and profanity on earth.

³²To know more about RSS' fiscal policies, see Chapter 3.

³³ Shiv Udyog Sena is the commerce front of the Shiv Sena.

However, a previous Jana Sangh president and one of its most famous orators Balraj Madhok was an ardent pro-American who had a small but powerful following in his days. But he could not make RSS, and consequently Jana Sangh, openly pro-American. This was largely due to the opposition of the all-powerful Golwalkar and leaders like Vajpayee the latter being a supporter of non-alignment with a less vociferous objection against the then USSR (this was however a strategy for them to internationally undermine and isolate China—the Sangh's one main enemy). RSS' and Jana Sangh's (and now BJP's) foreign policy stands on the dictum of anti-Pakistan and anti-China hatred—and for that matter, hatred against any Islamic or socialist countries or alliances. George Fernandez, an important minister in the current BJP government, has proclaimed China to be India's number one enemy (May 1998). Israel now has become a hot favorite of the Sangh Parivar—Vajpayee, Advani, and other BJP leaders have frequented the country to show their support for the ferociously anti-Arab nation. Attempts have often been made, allegedly, to iron out the Sangh's previously bitter relationships with USA via the mediation of Israel. Note the irony here—a Hitler-admiring organization is having a mutual love-fest with the one nation that has the most reason on earth to despise anything that even remotely seeks of Hitler and the Nazi party.

What now?

Congress' fortune has plummeted. The party that many arguably say won Indian independence from the British and later degenerated into a party of corruption, inefficiency and anarchy, is now much weaker than before. Sitaram Kesari, the previous Congress president, withdrew support in late 1997 to the left-leaning United Front government paving way for a mid-term election and the new BJP-led coalition government at the center. RSS' Vajpayee is now the prime minister of India³⁴. Congress is breaking up again and its

³⁴ Vajpayee became the Indian prime minister in 1996 for 13 days — his minority government resigned rather than face a vote of confidence on the floor of the parliament. The only legislation the BJP government managed in those days were

more conservative section is leaning towards BJP. Some well-known Congress leaders such as Buta Singh, Maneka Gandhi, Sukh Ram, K.C.Pant are now supporting the BJP government.

Clearly, BJP now seems to be the party of choice of the upper caste conservative Hindus—the traditional kingmakers of India—and the political equilibrium seems to have shifted in their direction. How much effort BJP makes to implement the Hindu supremacist ideas of RSS and to what extent, if any, it resists them, remains to be seen. To the poor and ever-oppressed of India, one dark chapter of rule is now being replaced by another one.

To these Indians, who have been trampled upon by the Brahmins and other upper castes and social patriarchs for ages, the only hope is the true consolidation of a third force—a force of the untouchables, religious minorities, women, poor laborers and marginal peasants. The recent developments show that such a possibility, before it really crystallized, was destabilized mostly by outside forces through inevitable Congress sabotaging and due to internal squabbling. BJP has suddenly become the hot favorite of the big industrialists of India—the big businessmen put out huge newspaper advertisements in 1998 in favor of the party culminating in its victory.

Who is going to reap the harvest of all this? Other than the national and international power-brokers and anti-India agents, it will no doubt be the saffron supremacists of the “Sangh Parivar”.

some silly but nonetheless chilling restrictions on the broadcast media. The current BJP govt. is now extending the task by manipulating with the Prasar Bharati.



Dr. K. B. Hedgewar
Founding father and first supreme leader of the RSS
(1925-1940)



The “Bharatmata” (Mother India) concept adopted by the Sangh.

Note the similarity with Hindu goddesses specially
with the lion—goddess Durga’s escort.

Also note the saffron flag in her hand—a novel adaptation.



Deendayal Upadhyay
President of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh
(1967-1968)



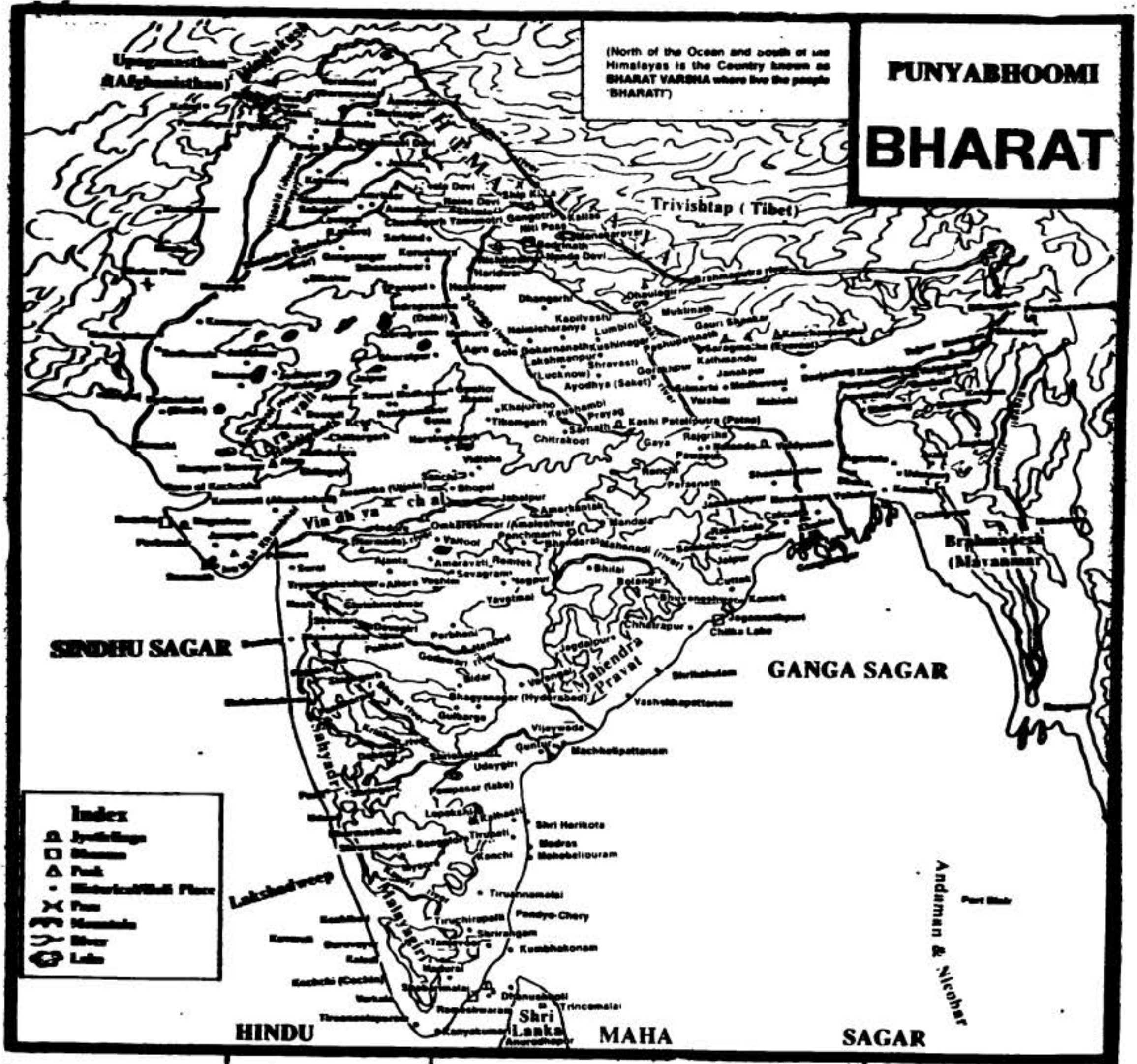
“Veer” Savarkar
Radical Hindu Mahasabha leader and
pioneer of Hindu supremacist doctrine

The RSS cultural map of "All-India Bharat"
(Unified)



M. S. Golwalkar
Second supreme leader of the RSS
(1940-1973)

The RSS cultural map of "Akhand Bharat" (Unified India)



Note the ancient Hindu names of places on the map—names frequently used in Sangh circles.

CHAPTER TWO

THE SANGHSTHAN

The "Shakha" where militaristic rituals slowly indoctrinate "members"

Five-thirty on a summer evening. A treeless, grassless, dusty park in a North Calcutta neighborhood. Odors of cowdung, coal-fumes, and sweat permeate the air. The benches are stolen from the park, the slides and swings are long gone—only their iron frames stand like skeletons reminiscing the good intentions the city mayor once had. Large groups, mostly of boys, young and old, are playing football. Many teams are playing on a ground no bigger than the size of one football field. There are no goalposts, there were never any. Instead, piles of rubber slippers are substituting for them. In one corner, some girls shyly entertain themselves with some "girls' games" and at the same time, save themselves from dangerously-shooting balls and their boastful shooters. These girls will go home well before dark.

In yet another corner, a handful of pre-teen and teenage boys are doing things that nobody really understands. A small curious crowd of neighborhood kids and street-dwellers watches them. This is a small place in a relatively secluded area in the park—demarcated by a row of slippers and piled up shirts. A small makeshift brick pedestal is also there on which a saffron flag is hoisted atop a bamboo stick. The owners of the slippers and shirts are now filing in queues based upon their age-groups and making a short introductory salutation to the flag before starting off with the games. These games do not include the popular football or

cricket or hockey, for they are not "Bharatiya" enough to be played. Instead, they include "Kabaddi", "Lame-man", "Handkerchief Thief", "Kho-kho", and also some other games played nowhere else—games with Hindu male scriptural connotations—"Bhasmashura" (the monster ablaze), "Rama-Ravana", etc. Some games include loud slogans "...*Hindusthan Hindu ka nahi kisika baap ka*" (Hindusthan belongs to Hindus, not to someone's father), or "*Hara Hara Bom Bom*". There is a practice session for the older boys and young men where they are instructed in the use of bamboo sticks, canes and leather shields, fake knives, and other instruments—relics of the nineteenth century.

Yes, this is an RSS shakha, the local-branch daily hour-long meeting of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh—the formidable Hindu organization—one that has produced and nurtured the mighty Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), and Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS).

There are some twenty-five members or "swayamsevaks" present in this afternoon's gathering—the "saayam" (evening) shakha. (The morning or "prabhat" shakha at this location draws fewer people—that would be a gathering for older attendees—businessmen, service-holders, maybe a couple of school-teachers.) Out of the twenty five, there are three or four arbitrarily-formed groups—shishu or the children (age six to ten), baalak or the young boys (age eleven to sixteen), and tarun or the older teenagers. The twenty-fifth person is the "Mukhya Shikshak" or principal teacher. Physical stature also determines one's inclusion in a given group. Each group has a selected leader too—he is called the "Gatnayak" and/or "Shikshak", the assistant teacher. The "borderline" swayamsevaks would be promoted or demoted to a given group by the authoritative Mukhya Shikshak—an appeal against a demotion is completely out of question.

The shishu swayamsevaks are now playing the "Lame-man", the baalaks are playing "Kabaddi", and the taruns are marching and practicing with the bamboo sticks or "wnda"—much to the envy of the younger boys. The

players are all required to wear shorts, preferably the signature Sangh khaki, a rather awkward outfit—the teacher would rebuke the “irreverent” ones with long pants. The physical activities would continue for three quarters of the hour—this is different at a morning shakha where physical activities include mostly yoga and other free-hand exercises—after all, the average urban Indian man above the age of thirty cannot move himself much. At prabhat shakhas therefore, at least half of the hour would be spent discussing social and political subjects, and chanting Sanskrit slokas glorifying Hindu India—a verse called the Ekatmata Stotra (the verse of unification), a revised and expanded version of an older verse called the Pratahsmaran or morning recollection. In the afternoon, the situation is different.

All the commands given by teachers are in Sanskrit, an esoteric language, that nobody understands well. The onlookers are puzzled and bemused. They grin, they mock. The teacher and seasoned swayamsevaks do not budge—they are somber, grave. To them, Sanskrit commands are the common bonds unifying them all, the medium of communication for their vision of “Akhand Bharat” (the Unified India). So, the Shikshak shouts “Mandalah”—swayamsevaks form a circle; the teacher commands “Upabesha”—they sit; he says “Uthistha”—they stand back up; “Sankhya”—people in a file loudly count their numbers from “ek” (one) through the end; upon the instruction of “Pra Chalah”, they start marching; the leader orders “Stabhah”—they stop. Games begin with the command “Kuruh”, then they abruptly stop at the teacher’s command—an appeal to continue the game is tersely ignored. The English command “attention” is turned into “Dakshah”, “stand at ease” becomes “Ah-ramah”. The list is endless. Other more intricate Sanskrit commands are reserved for special shows, winter camps, and Officers’ Training Camps (or OTCs). Besides, there are classes to learn how to play the “anak” (side-drums), “banshi” (the flute), “sankha” (the bugle), etc.

It is now six-fifteen. The teacher blows his coveted whistle. Everyone gets together in a circle. The teacher instructs them to sit down in a “mandal”. They sit on the

dusty ground. Information about upcoming events, etc. are passed on by the teacher (this is always given in the vernacular—in Calcutta, it would be in Bengali or in some localities, Hindi—the reason is obvious: neither the teacher nor the students are able to communicate in Sanskrit—the Sanskrit commands are symbolic of “Hindu culture” just as the military-style filing and marching are symbolic of a militant discipline).

A token of “charchaa” (theoretical discussion) is now also held: “What is the full name of our organization?”—few answer, most don't; “What is our mission?”—“Hindu sangathan—organizing Hindus”; “Who founded RSS?”—“Dr. Keshavrao Baliramrao Hedgewar”, answers one of those diehards; “Is Sangh the same as Jana Sangh (now BJP)?”—A resounding “No” airs from the squatting audience. Yes, these questions and answers are very important—they are practiced almost on a daily basis.

Someone now sings a song familiar only to the Sangh workers. It is a song praising the old nation of Bharat and its Hindu culture. The lead singer is followed after each line in a monotonous way—like the other activities at the shakha, the song also doesn't inspire any spontaneity. Almost everything is pre-decided, pre-determined, pre-disciplined, and mundane. Fun is secondary, free exchange is very secondary, discipline is primary. This is how the Sangh wants to see its trainees, and the future generations of its envisioned “Akhand Bharat”.

Then it's time for the daily prayer. Everybody stands up in their respective queue facing the saffron flag, the “Bhagwa Dhvaj”. A senior guest swayamsevak has just turned up from a distant place—probably, he is the senior executive for the whole city. He also has brought along a deputy on his motorcycle. These two men bow at the flag and gesture respectfully at the principal teacher for his permission to get in. At the time of the prayer, they as visitors form a separate file. The Sangh gesture of respect is a relic that finds its origin in nineteenth-century Maharashtra boy-scout-type clubs—the right hand folds at the elbow and the open extended palm with the fingers joined together

touch the breast—the left hand and feet stay in "attention" mode, then the head bows down.

A designated swayamsevak walks up and stands by the teacher who is now standing perpendicular to the files. The twenty-string-long prayer is chanted by the promising young designee and repeated after each line by all. The Mukhya Shikshak commands all to pay respect to the flag—"Dhwajapranam ek, do, teen". Then, it is time for the solo reciter to march up to the flag, bow to it the RSS way, and take it down. He folds the flag on his left arm now bent in a right angle, marches back to the teacher who then formally announces the end of the day's meeting—"Sangh Bikiroh" (let the assembly be dispersed). Most of the boys would disperse for their homes.

Seven forty-five PM. The two senior executives after a short chat with the teacher have long left. After an hour-long tour of the neighborhood houses looking for and talking to swayamsevaks who missed tonight's shakha, spreading news about upcoming events to all regular and irregular attendees, the popular teacher might now treat the few intimate followers to a serving of warm jilebi or other sweets at a local shop. This is the time for the close ones, the seasoned ones, to talk about real stuff—the upcoming parliament elections, the local BJP candidate's chances, the prospective party agents to be placed at the polling stations, converse about who has arms and can rescue workers in case there is a bomb attack by Youth Congress thugs. This is serious business!

Finally, it is time for everybody to say goodbye—time for recalling today's events and getting excited about tomorrow's. The Mukhya Shikshak of course must fulfill his obligations—he has a late evening weekly meeting at the city headquarters. Other "inner core" swayamsevaks would now take a slow stroll home. School or college studies? Trivial—it hardly matters to these average students, some of whom are eagerly awaiting the day to stop studying—they have already begun taking care of the family business. Father's rebuke, mother's tears? Household chores? They will be there after all (and most Indian men don't do

chores—it's seen as the women's job). The "patriotic activities" come first, rescuing the Hindu motherland comes first, working hard for the local BJP or ABVP election candidate comes first—everything else can wait. Or else, the "holy land of Bharatvarsha" would sure go in hands of the "rapacious Islamic despots, foreign missionaries, and communists"! Can the "Hindutva patriots" let it happen?

CHAPTER THREE

THE "SANGH PARIVAR"—SHIV SENAS³⁵, ABVP, BMS, AND SOME MORE

Shiv Sena

The Hindu extremist Shiv Sena (literally, the soldiers of the Maratha king Shivaji), many say, began its career as a hate-movement of a section of Hindu Maharashtrians (Marathis) geared against the non-Marathis. Shiv Sena workers earned notoriety for their forcible purging of Tamils, and then Bengali and other non-Marathi businessmen and workers from the state. It is also alleged by some that Shiv Sena was financially and politically sponsored by some other powerful agencies to help them crush the once-powerful leftist trade unions of Bombay. This was precipitated after the massive textile workers' strike of Bombay paralyzed the anti-labor and autocratic textile mill owners. The recently-assassinated (in 1997) labor leader Datta Samant and other labor union leaders were able to forge an unprecedented alliance of laborers to carry out the strike—by some experts' accounts, this was the largest labor strike ever in the world.

³⁵Shiv Sena is not an official member of the "Sangh Parivar". However, because of its notoriety and ultraconservative hate activities as well as its active coalition with the RSS and BJP, it must be discussed here in the same vein. Sangh leaders such as L. K. Advani are proud of their alliance. Also, see Appendix II for narration on Shiv Sena's views and role in 1992-93 Bombay riots.

Shiv Sena is a fascist organization that believes in a theocratic Hindu nation. Its supreme leader Balasaheb Thackeray is avidly pro-Hitler and often eulogizes Nazi Germany at public meetings. Shiv Sena is now running a coalition government in the state of Maharashtra with BJP. Neither BJP nor RSS has ever come out with a censure of Mr. Thackeray's extreme views. RSS leaders believe that Shiv Sena has "changed and moderated" themselves and is now actively working democratically for their Hindutva doctrine. However, only recently, Shiv Sena goons carried out a cleansing of poor Bengali Muslim (many from Bangladesh) and other non-Marathi slum-dwellers and workers—a barbaric act that killed, raped, maimed, and evicted thousands off the streets of Bombay.³⁶ Shiv Sena workers now include many fanatic members of the near-obsolete Hindu Mahasabha and its family of organizations.

Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP)

Vidyarthi Parishad was floaed by RSS on the 9th of July, 1949 in Delhi to augment its powerbase among the conservative-rightist students and teachers. ABVP claims to be a non-political organization. However, it participates in student union elections held at colleges and universities and the functioning styles of ABVP and Congress student political groups are completely identical vis-à-vis massive campus violence, kidnapping candidates, and the like. Vidyarthi Parishad workers, many of whom are RSS swayamsevaks, actively help the BJP in political elections. Most ABVP workers and leaders, after finishing their student life, go on to work for the BJP. Govindacharya, one of the most well-known ABVP leaders, is now a controversial national secretary of the BJP. Likewise, Sushil Modi, an ex-ABVP stalwart, is now the state BJP leader in Bihar. There are many such examples.

³⁶ See Appendix II for eyewitness reports on the recent Bombay riots.

In 1975, the socialist leader, Jaya Prakash Narayan (popularly known as J. P.), once a close associate of Mahatma Gandhi and Vinoba Bhave, began a massive campaign against the corruption, inefficiency, and hooliganism of the then-prime minister Indira Gandhi's Congress party. This campaign was perhaps the single most important movement in the post-partition India that changed the political scenario of the country forever. The movement was started by a group of students in the state of Gujarat³⁷, and it was led by socialist and Sarvodaya students ideologically affiliated with Jaya Prakash Narayan. Soon after, the movement was hijacked by the then steadily-obliterating Jana Sangh and its sibling organization ABVP under the guidance of RSS. The movement was then spearheaded under the stewardship of its student leaders such as Sushil Modi of Bihar (as stated above, Modi is now the Bihar state assembly BJP leader). Other leaders included Ram Bahadur Rai, Raj Kumar Bhatia, Arun Jaitley (now an attorney for BJP in Delhi), Madan Das (now the Deputy General Secretary of RSS), and Sunil Mittal.³⁸

³⁷Jaya Prakash Narayan. *Total Revolution*. Sarva Seva Sangh, Varanasi. 1992 edition.

³⁸In the same year, I was asked by RSS leaders to work for the ABVP, and later was appointed the joint-secretary of West Bengal state Vidyarthi Parishad. I began working with Lakshmi Narayan Bhala and other West Bengal leaders brought in by RSS. After the fall of the Indira Gandhi government in 1977, a statewide conference was organized in Calcutta that did not draw enough students (ABVP was never a force to reckon with in West Bengal — its campuses are traditionally divided between the left parties and Congress student organizations). However, national leaders such as Govindacharya came to speak at this conference where Hindu right-wing student leaders from Bangladesh also spoke and described the "tyranny" carried out by Muslims. The conference culminated in a fairly large student rally at the University of Calcutta campus where I spoke along with another well-known BJP leader of that time, Subramanian Swamy, who later became the party's critic. The Calcutta daily Ananda Bazar Patrika published a front-page picture of this rally.

The Vidyarthi Parishad's role in the J. P. movement was singularly important for two reasons—(1) it shot into national limelight the RSS, BJP, ABVP, and their leaders which was absolutely necessary for them to survive the seemingly inevitable political oblivion; and (2) it rejuvenated their powerbase as well as their workers, and leaders who later carefully revised their strategies to play national and state politics to grab power. Now, these groups are some of the mightiest ones in the Indian political spectrum.

It is strongly presumed by some that the CIA had a role to play in the anti-Indira Gandhi movement. Indira Gandhi, in spite of her autocratic functioning style, her infamous and morally corrupt Congress party, and her tyrant son, Sanjay, was a pro-socialism leader—much-admired, especially by the third-world international politicians, and at forums such as the "Non-Aligned Movement" or NAM. The American and other foreign investment capital was kept off the Indian stock exchange for quite a while. The CIA was desperately looking for an opportunity to break open the Soviet and socialist monopolies in India.³⁹ They had been only partially successful in forging an anti-Socialist coalition before.⁴⁰ The J. P. movement came as a boon to them.

Along with Govindacharya and Lakshmi Bhala, I came to know other national ABVP leaders such as Madan Das who was the RSS pracharak to organize ABVP activities nationwide. Mr. Das during his Calcutta visits came to my house for informal meetings.

³⁹Nair, K. (1986). *Devil and His Dart*. Gist: The CIA tried to misguide, divide and incapacitate the non-aligned movement at the 7th NAM summit in India. The CIA launched media campaigns against Fidel Castro and Indira Gandhi.

⁴⁰Interference in elections in northern Bombay where Krishna Menon was a candidate were cruel and brutal. CIA recruited plotters from semi-fascist parties and groups, reactionary politicians and anti-socialist press. From: Parakkal, P. V. (1984). *Secret Wars of CIA*.

J.P.'s selfless role in the movement was undermined by the right-wing groups and Congress; the post-Indira Janata Party government of the socialists, centrists, and BJP (the post-Emergency incarnation of the Jana Sangh) was weakened by internal squabbling between the left and the right, and finally collapsed in 1980 when CPI(M) withdrew its crucial numerical support to the Morarji Desai government. BJP later escalated its right-wing constituencies in the country. Indira Gandhi came back to power in 1980, but in 1984, she was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards who were part of a Sikh separatist movement also allegedly sponsored by the CIA.⁴¹

Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS)

RSS assigned its distinguished leader Dattopanth Thengadi to establish its labor front, the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS), on the 23rd of July, 1955 in the city of Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh. Bhopal incidentally came in international spotlight when in late 1984, a massive and deadly leak of methyl isocyanate gas from the American factory Union Carbide killed thousands of innocent people and permanently injured and blinded thousands of others—this has arguably been the largest industrial disaster in the

⁴¹ *Washington Post*, November 2, 1984. Moscow hints CIA behind assassination of Indian prime minister Indira Gandhi. Moscow repeated charges that large-scale CIA activities had supported Sikh separatists.

The CIA is active in Jammu and Kashmir, encouraging and supporting pro-Pakistani elements. In October 1982, the US military attaché held consultations with leaders of pro-Pakistani elements. From: Parakkal, P. V. (1984). *Secret Wars of CIA*.

Parakkal, P. V. (1984). *Secret Wars of CIA*. The CIA sponsoring the Khalistani separatists. Gist: A map published in US includes a map of the imaginary Khalistan.

world to date.⁴² The centrist and right-wing governments run by the Congress and BJP in the state of Madhya Pradesh and in New Delhi miserably failed to take the American company to international court. Union Carbide officials—Indian and American—chastised by all labor and environmental groups across the globe escaped imprisonment and other serious financial consequences because of lack of solidarity among the company's workers and unions—most of these unions having been traditional strongholds of BMS and INTUC, the latter being the Congress labor front. This was in spite of the fact that BMS and RSS volunteers helped some of the severely-affected Union Carbide workers and their families during and after the disaster. In 1991, leftist trade union leader Shankar Guha Niyogi was brutally murdered by killers allegedly hired by some big businesses—thus crushing the uproar among the leftist union workers. Niyogi was a young, popular leader in the state of Madhya Pradesh.

BMS, like ABVP, claims to be non-political, only to contradict itself by paralleling Congress-style labor union activities, often causing death and permanent bodily and emotional injury to workers of rival unions. The demise of left-wing trade unions in Bombay due to violence of Shiv Sena in the eighties has paved the way for a surge of BMS activities in the state of Maharashtra and its neighboring state of Gujarat—currently the two most prosperous industrial states. BMS is also powerful in other RSS/BJP strongholds such as the city of New Delhi and its suburbs, some urban parts of Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan. BMS' influence is however very limited in the left-leaning states of West Bengal, Assam, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and other South Indian states such as Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.

⁴²Some websites that discuss the Bhopal genocide.

<http://www.igc.org/trac/bhopal/>

<http://xp0.rtknet.org/E3380T132/>

http://www.infoasis.com/people/stevetwt/Environment/UnionCarbideIndia_environ.html

<http://www.earthbase.org/home/timeline/1984/bhopal/>

The "Swadeshi" of RSS, BJP, and BMS

The past Indian governments of Rajiv Gandhi and P. V. Narasimha Rao have strongly advocated free-market reforms and the acceptance of American and other foreign investments. To counter this trend—at least superficially, to please the ultranationalist and right-wing voters, the BJP, with active help from BMS, have launched the Swadeshi Jagaran Manch, a platform that staunchly opposes multinational capital and endorses a closed and secluded Indian economy (a similar plank has recently been used by ultraconservative US presidential candidate Pat Buchanan). BMS leader Mr. Thengadi, in his speech (20th December, 1994) in Calcutta entitled "The weapon for the fight is Swadeshi", likens the American economy with a sinking ship and labels the concept of capitalism as doomed. According to him, capitalism is bound to die down because of its big contradiction that "resources of the planet are limited, consumer's desires are unlimited". Thengadi strongly predicts that USA is going to lose its first place among the developed nations by the year 2010.⁴³

Madan Das, an erstwhile top Vidyarthi Parishad leader and presently the Sah Karyavaha (Deputy General Secretary) of RSS, writes:

"Today in the name of liberalisation, globalisation and in the mad desire to establish "Global Village" the western powers are perpetrating a conspiracy on all the third world countries to destroy their culture, their ethnic identity, their morals and value systems and thereby the biodiversity of

⁴³ Other than the strong dollar hegemony, the US really does not hold "first place" among the G-7 countries—it has an enormous national debt of trillions of dollars incurred over decades of wasteful economy and imbalanced international trade. Its real international might lies, arguably, in its military strength and bases all around the world.

various cultures in the world, which is so essential for healthy survival of the mankind".⁴⁴

The RSS-sponsored Swadeshi Jagaran Manch or Nationalist Awakening Platform lays stress upon patriotic pride and the Indian market's so-called economic self-reliance as the producer and the consumer. Thengadi, in his speech, asserts that India does not need any market relationship with any other countries. The key strategy of the BMS, BJP, and RSS is active confrontation with the "American conspiracy to buy off the Indian economy"—any surrender to them is out of question. BMS however, in spite of its call for confrontation, asks for foreign investment selectively in the high-tech and defense industries. BMS leaders applaud the aggressive confrontation against the GATT and NAFTA by Mexican peasants and Canadian populations and call for similar actions in India.⁴⁵

In the above speech, Mr. Thengadi—an RSS stalwart—condemns and berates the American pop-singer Michael Jackson as a symbol of the perverse American culture and applauds the rejection of Jackson's proposed visit to China and Korea. Thengadi invites such a rejection of the pop-star in India too. However, subsequent to Thengadi's speech, Jackson was given a red-carpet welcome by the Shiv Sena, RSS's ideological and political partner, to perform in Bombay.

Other fronts of the Sangh have also rapidly spread all across India. Some of these organizations are: *Bharatiya Kisan Sangh*—founded in March, 1979 in Kota, Rajasthan

⁴⁴ *Sanghshakti: Vijetreeyam*. Sangh publication. Ahmedabad, December 1995, p.42.

⁴⁵ BJP led a campaign against Enron in Bombay, making a huge issue out of it while it was in the "Opposition". Once it came into power in the Center in 1996 for a few days, the only time the Cabinet met was to approve Enron's proposal, and this was the fastest ever approval of a foreign investor's proposal in the history of India.

by Mr. Thengadi. *Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram*—established by Ramakant Keshav Deshpande in the city of Yashpur in Madhya Pradesh. This organization was begun to perform the "paravartan" or reconversion of tribal people converted into Christianity by the "conspiracy of the missionaries". Missionaries have always been targets of fierce criticism by the Sangh—to them, all missionaries including Mother Teresa⁴⁶ of Calcutta have been a part of an international conspiracy to convert India into a Christian country—the Sangh has the divine role of rescuing the "fallen" Christian converts and bringing them back into their "original" Hindu fold. Again, this propagandist style and functioning finds comparison in the activities of the Christian Coalition of USA or the Jamat-e-Islami of Bangladesh.

Bharatiya Sikshan Mandal is the teachers' front of the Sangh—again, declared to be "non-political"; *Itihas Sankalan Samiti*—busy rewriting Indian history to the Sangh's preference; *Samskar Bharati*—acting and singing out the "revised" history and culture of India; *Vastuhara Sahayta Samiti*—works amongst the Hindu refugees; *Purva Sainik Seva Parishad* is working amongst the retired servicemen to increase its powerbase in the army; *Vidya Bharati* has established hundreds of *Saraswati Shishu Mandir* and *Matrichhaya* supposedly to teach and shelter children and orphans; *Bharatiya Kustha Nibarak Sangh* is supposedly working for the benefit of the leprosy-stricken people.

⁴⁶ Mother Teresa's worldwide acclaim and her winning the Nobel Peace Prize have been undermined by the Sangh. Atal Bihari Vajpayee, while paying his largely ceremonial respect at the last rites of the celebrated nun, ridiculed the Indian Government because BJP and Vajpayee thought the Government has openly been non-secular in organizing the Christian missionary's funeral as a state-run program. In reality, the then Indian Government of I. K. Gujral went out of its way to accommodate the wishes of secular Indian and foreign dignitaries and the press who wanted Mother Teresa's funeral to be fitting her fame.

Among the many overseas RSS organizations, we must mention the *Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh* or *HSS*, *Vishwa Hindu Parishad*, *Friends of India Society International* (UK), *Hindu Sevika Samiti*, *National Hindu Students Forum* (UK), *Hindu Student Council* (USA), *Overseas Friends of BJP*, *Hindu International Medical Mission* (HIMM), *Sewa International*, and *Bharat Vikas Parishad International* (UK).

Needless to say, RSS is now an enormous umbrella organization with its many facets of work some of which indeed deserve praise. However, we must remember the fact that all this work is politically motivated, and strategically geared around conservative Hindus.⁴⁷

The primary purpose has never been selfless help—the purpose is indoctrination—although, the RSS claims otherwise. Sangh workers highlight the “selfless” service they provided to victims of flood, plane crash, etc. We know, however, that this service has always been strategic and the Sangh has not done much in situations where the social and political status quo in their favor would be disrupted. An example is the ongoing saga of bride burning and dowry deaths in the Sangh heartland, New Delhi, where these right-wing groups have not done nearly enough to protect Indian women from being abused and murdered by their husbands and in-laws. On the other hand, as we have discussed later in this book, leftist women’s groups, in spite of their limited strength in these areas, have attempted to help the women who are in desperate need.

Further, we must note that parallel religious fundamentalist groups such as the *Jamat-e-Islami* of Bangladesh, *Christian Coalition of USA*, and *Nurculuk* of Turkey also carry out “humanitarian” work—and RSS is never tired of decrying them and their sinister nature.

⁴⁷“During massive floods in Delhi in late 70’s, I have seen RSS workers ignore pleas from Muslims to help them evacuate even when the RSS workers were standing around with nothing to do.” — a witness.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE SIX FESTIVITIES

A clever attempt to bypass Hindu temples and priests, and that too without annoying them

The Sangh celebrates six "auspicious" days as symbols of Hindu glory.⁴⁸ These six days of celebration also serve as morale booster for the organization and its activities. A special effort is made to gather as many "volunteers" (regular and irregular) as possible to display the strength of a given local branch or shakha. A total city or district-wise tally is

⁴⁸ The brief narration of the Sangh festivities is modified from an RSS informational booklet. The six festive days are carefully chosen by the Sangh Parivar. They are unique because they are neither the most popular Hindu celebrations nor do they bear any scriptural significance. The Diwali, Durga Puja, Ganesh Puja, or some other more popular Hindu religio-cultural festivities do not mean much to the poor and untouchable as they are most often not even allowed to enter the temples and/or offer prayers (via the Brahman priest). Keeping this problem in mind, RSS ideologues and strategists came up with these days of celebration that have a somewhat less scriptural importance -- festivities that would bypass the anti-lower caste dictums of the upper caste-dominated temples — a clever way to appease both the upper and lower caste Hindus. However, there have been problems between the Sangh and Hindu "gurus" such as the Shankaracharya of Dwaraka on astrological decisions — the Sangh has contained the damage by receiving "affirmative instructions" by other Brahman priests. It is a common practice in Brahminic Hinduism where the priest, upon receiving a handsome dole, makes arrangements to "rectify" any lapses in the ritual.

made by the leadership at subsequent weekly evening meetings. After the usual physical drill at the gathering, a speaker, usually a senior leader from the city or district, delivers a speech to remind the volunteers of the importance of the festive occasion. The address is always one way, long-drawn, and full of factual errors and distortion of facts. There is never any room for an exchange of views or questions from the audience. Any cheering or clapping is forbidden. Even non-member guests, if any, are asked not to clap. This rule applies to all private or public functions of RSS, be it the six customary celebrations, the annual parade day, or the open meeting addressed by the Sarsanghchalak. Even at "public" rallies, where the audience is carefully picked, the audience is always instructed beforehand not to show any emotion. Strict regimentation is followed and "volunteers" are asked to keep a strict vigil on the gathering and warn against the slightest indiscipline. This is contrary to RSS leaders' assertion that the organization is not in favor of any regimentation.⁴⁹

(1) Varsh Pratipada

The Yudhisthira Year, Vikram Samvat, Shalivahana Year, etc., commence on this date. Lord Rama was said to have been coronated on this day. Vikramaditya and Shalivahana defeated the Shakas and celebrated this date. This is also the date of birth of Dr. K. B. Hedgewar, the founding father of RSS.

This day is perhaps celebrated mainly because of its importance as the date of birth of Dr. Hedgewar. At all gatherings, Sangh leaders remind workers of the significance and holiness of this day. Dr. Hedgewar's life is discussed and his work exaggerated at gatherings of swayamsevaks. The "Doctorji", as they call him, is systematically implanted in Sangh workers' mind as a divine

⁴⁹Guruji Golwalkar frequently mentioned about Sangh's "elastic discipline". Sangh leaders categorically deny that there is any regimentation present in the RSS.

personality and patriotic hero—almost an Avatar. It is always pointed out that Dr. Hedgewar's birth day is the same as the day of Lord Rama's coronation or Vikramaditya's defeating the Shakas—the Shakas being a typical icon of foreign aggression on "Hindu Bharatvarsha".

*"Keshava tumhe pranam
Yajna ghritasamidha tumhari
Prerana udbodhakari..."*

(Reverence to you, Keshav; you as the ghee and wood to the yajna fire have inflamed the inspiration in us...)

...goes a Sanskritized Hindi song at the shakha on this day to remember the divinity of "Doctorji".

(2) Hindu Samrajya Dinotsava

This is celebrated on the Jyaishtha Shukla Trayodashi—this day saw the coronation of Shivaji, a Maratha Hindu warrior during the Mughal Emperor Aurangjeb's reign.

The following Sanskrit song is used by the Sangh to glorify the life and deeds of Shivaji—"the one who served the Hindu nation and religion, saved from danger the Brahman and the cow." The danger of course is "Muslim" aggression. The latter part of the song brands the aggressors as the ones who want to drink the Hindu's blood and therefore flame a fire in the heart of the noble.

*"Bhoopabhushanam avibhayami
Rashtradharmam sevakam
Shivavidham bipatpatita
dhenu viprarakshakam..."*

*"sajjanamana davagni
Hindurudhirapanepsu..."*

The Hindu Samrajya Divas is an important celebration in Sangh Parivar for obvious reasons. The Maharashtrian-

dominated senior leadership and ideologues of RSS champion the glory of Chhatrapati Shivaji, a Hindu Maratha warrior who was famous for his bravery, guerrilla-style warfare, and persistence against the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb—the most convenient RSS icon of Islamic barbarism and anti-Hindu tyranny. Shivaji is probably the most important Hindu warrior-leader made into a national emblem of heroism by the RSS. To the Hindu organization, Shivaji symbolizes gallantry, and epitomizes revival of "old glory" Hinduism and defeat of Islamic "atrocious and tyranny"—the "supreme goal" ..

What is neglected in all this is the historical fact that Shivaji was a minor chieftain whose extreme heavyhandedness in his domain was what brought him to the attention of the Mughal Emperor. Shivaji was later defeated and captured by a Rajput ruler and sent to Aurangzeb. After Shivaji's death, his son Sambhaji became the leader of the clan. Sambhaji was an inept leader. Soon after, the Maratha clan of Shivaji collapsed. Maratha warriors later set out to "conquer" other parts of India including Bengal—these Marathas are still remembered in Bengali folklore that mention how tyrant and atrocious Maratha "Bargis" plundered Bengal.

Even these days, books on the life and works of Shivaji are being written, translated (from Marathi language) and published by Sangh houses. The extreme right-wing group Shiv Sena (literally the army of Shivaji) is in power now in the state of Maharashtra in coalition with the BJP. Shiv Sena is openly against anything non-Hindu and their supremo Bal Thackeray is an avid admirer of Hitler and Nazi Germany. Shiv Sena government was responsible for the recent purge of Muslim migrant workers from the streets of Bombay. No censure by RSS or BJP, of either Thackeray or Shiv Sena, has been recorded to date.

(3) Sri Gurupurnima

Gurupurnima is celebrated on the day of the full moon in the month of Ashadh (the first monsoon month). This day is

also called Vyas Purnima after Maharshi Vedavyas, the presumed author of the Hindu epic Mahabharata. Guru Purnima Day has additional importance for the Sangh because the celebration includes sanctification of the swayamsevak for the "guru".

However, RSS does not consider any singular person to be the guru or teacher of the Hindu society upon the excuse that no person can be deemed as the guru as he cannot be flawless (The Shankaracharyas, some of whom are now patrons of RSS and VHP such as the Shankaracharya of Kaanchi, would perhaps not like this view). RSS accepts as its guru the saffron flag or "Bhagwa Dhvaj" (a term historically coined by Shivaji and his mentor Sant Ramdas) as the symbol of knowledge, sacrifice, heroism, and self-restraint. On this day, RSS volunteers make a pledge to serve the flag, and contribute money, and a lot of it. This is the most important day from RSS' financial point of view.

It is virtually impossible to know the income and expenses of RSS which its critics say amount to millions of rupees or dollars every year. On the Guru-Dakshina Day, Sangh members leave their annual quota of contribution at the base of its symbolic guru, the saffron flag. The money is left in envelopes and donors mark the envelopes with their names. The amount to be "donated" is pre-instructed to members upon negotiations with their leaders. Thus, the income is already anticipated and budgeted. More than expected charity always draws high praise. The affluent self-servers are surely more liked by the inner circle. On the other hand, the workers who fail to keep their pledge are chastised in person causing enough embarrassment. Thus, the whole episode of this much-planned event goes well beyond the pretense of abdication and selfless service to the guru.

(4) Raksha Bandhan

The celebration takes place on the day of the full moon in Shravana (the second month of monsoon). Raksha Bandhan is an old Indian tradition where sisters tie a colored

thread around the wrist of their brothers as a gesture of love. This is celebrated among the Sangh workers as a symbol of friendship and brotherhood.

Sisters are not present in RSS mainstream activities. The all-powerful parent organization historically is an all-male body. Therefore, in spite of its much-glorification of the day, the "raakhi" or colored thread is tied around a "brother's" wrist by other "brothers". Likewise, in the women's group Rashtra Sevika Samiti, "sisters" participate separately. Moreover, in areas where the caste system is dominant (such as Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra—i.e., the RSS heartland), it is reported by witnesses that trans-caste "raksha bandhan" between either the brothers or sisters is not practiced much. On the other hand, in places like Bengal, this day once was an epitome of inter-religion cross-cultural unity—Rabindranath Tagore and other liberal leaders in 1905 used this event to make a unified statement against the British government's first attempt to partition Bengal.

(5) Vijaya Dashami

To Sangh, this is a day to celebrate the victory of Lord Rama over the "Demon king" Ravana. To RSS members, this day is a symbol of invocation of Shakti (power) through the puja of Shastra (weapon-worshipping). In 1925 on this day, Dr. K. B. Hedgewar established RSS in Nagpur, Maharashtra.

Vijaya Dashami is a much-glorified Sangh celebration. First, because of its importance as the day of its foundation, the workers are gathered together to show their numerical strength by such means as a city "route march" with members dressed in paramilitary uniform and carrying lathis or dwanda (bamboo sticks) on the shoulder. The martial posturing and parades are also meant to intimidate opponents and are explicitly modeled after Hitler's "Brown Shirts"—down to the uniform. Secondly, since the inception of the Rama Janmabhoomi movement that escalated Hindutva-related social and political violence in post-partition India,

this day has become commemorative among the Sangh members and sympathizers to be a symbol of "victory of the good over evil"—the undertone is triumph of the "son-of-the-soil" Hindus over the "invader" aliens.

(6) Makar Sankranti

This is also known as the Paush Sankranti (the last day of the month of Paush) or Tila (sesame) Sankranti. The sun enters the constellation of Makara (Capricorn), ending its southerly journey and starting its movement northward. This day signifies the beginning of increased daylight.

RSS wants to portray this day, like the others, to be a symbol of cross-caste Hindu harmony. According to them, on this day, all castes merge at the confluence of the river Ganges thus breaking socio-religious barriers. The reality, however, is that families belonging to a given caste or class perform their own rituals separately and there is no conscious intercaste mingling.

Obviously, the six festivities discussed above are purely Hindu celebrations and there is no room in the organization for any non-Hindu festivities. The Muslim or Christian revelry does not count, and even though RSS considers Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, etc. integral parts of Hinduism, not a single festival from these sects is celebrated by the Sangh Parivar—the BJP did issue a "Mary Christmas" poster in December of 1997.

Chances are, in the coming years, these days of festivity will be replaced or added on with other more convenient days such as the Janmastami, the birthday of Lord Krishna, another supreme Hindu divinity who like Rama hailed from a non-Brahman caste. Or, maybe to woo the dalits and untouchables, the birthday of Birsa Ho, et al. would be included although it is doubtful. Days to strategically celebrate other allies' festivities could be annexed—examples: Sikh Akali festivities, or Ram Navami festivity from Gujarat or a strategic South Indian celebration. Days of Hindu celebration are not in any dearth in India—it's only

the poor and untouchable who cannot celebrate because of financial or socioreligious constraints.

The following is a Sangh calendar⁵⁰ that lists its days of celebration and commemoration. Mostly Hindu days will be found in the calendar. Some Sikh, Buddhist, and Jain days are included too. Most notable Indian holidays absent from this list are Muslim and Christian celebrations such as Id-ul-Fitar, Id-uj-Joha, Muharram, and Christmas—celebrations that are traditionally observed in secular India, and in many cases, held with cross-cultural gaiety. International days of importance such as the May 1 Labor Day is dropped—Sangh explicitly wants Vishwakarma Puja to replace May Day. Also notable is absence of the Indian Independence Day celebration on August 15.

50 Source: RSS publication in Hindi. RSS, West Bengal. 26 Bidhan Sarani, Calcutta 700 006.

Table 1. An RSS calendar of holidays and other days to commemorate—a list of holidays to replace what we now observe in secular India?

January

15	Vivekananda Jayanti and Makar Sankranti
23	Netaji Subhas Jayanti
26	Total Sovereignty Pledge Day and Republic Day
29	Lala Lajpat Rai Jayanti

February

12	Veer Hakikatrai Balidan
16	M. S. Golwalkar Jayanti and Shivaji Jayanti
27	Chandrasekhar Azad Balidan
Phalgun Shukla 2	Ramakrishna Paramhansa Jayanti

March

23	Bhagat Singh ⁵¹ , Rajguru, Sukhdev Balidan
Phalgun Purnima	Chaitanya Jayanti
Chaitra Shukla 6	Samarthguru Ramdas Jayanti and Rama Janmotsav

April

Chaitra Shukla 1	Dr. Hedgewar Jayanti and Varsh Pratipada
Chaitra Shukla 13	Bhagawan Mahabir Jayanti
Chaitra Purnima	Hanuman Jayanti

May

6	Pratap Jayanti
May 18	Veer Savarkar Jayanti
Vaishakh Shukla 5	Adi Shankar Jayanti
Vaishakh Purnima	Buddha Jayanti

⁵¹ Bhagat Singh was a socialist revolutionary. RSS claims him to be a "Hindu leader". Also see: Kshudiram Bose "Balidan" on August 11. Kshudiram was the first revolutionary to be hanged by the then British government. RSS, the organization that deliberately stayed away from anti-British struggles, includes him on this list as well.

Table 1. An RSS calendar of holidays (Continued).

June

Jyaistha Shukla 3
Jyaistha Shukla 13
23

Chhatrashal Jayanti
Hindu Samrajya Dinotsava
Dr. S.P.Mukherjee Balidan

July

13
23
Ashad Purnima
Sharavan Shukla Saptami

Veer Bajiprabhu Balidan
Lokmanya Tilak Jayanti
Guru Vyas Purnima
Tulsi Jayanti

August

11
15
Shravan Purnima

Kshudiram Bose Balidan
Rishi Arabinda Jayanti
Raksha Bandhan

September

Bhadra Krishna 8

Bhadra Shukla 2
Bhadra Shukla 8
25

Sant Jnaneshwar Jayanti and
Krishna Janmotsav
Mahatma Shankardev Jayanti
Viswakarma Puja
Deendayal Upadhyay Jayanti

October

2
23
30
31
Ashvin Shukla 10

Mahatma Gandhi Jayanti
Sister Nivedita Jayanti
Bhai Paramanand Jayanti
Sardar Patel Jayanti
Vijaya Dashami

November

16
Kartik Amavasya

Maharani Lakshmibai Jayanti
Swami Ramtirth Jayanti,
Swami Dayananda
PunyaTithi, Deepavali

December

22
25

30

Guru Govind Singh Jayanti
Mahamana Madanmohan
Malaviya Jayanti
Maharshi Raman Jayanti

CHAPTER FIVE

PRARTHANA AND EKATMATA STOTRA: THE TWO PIVOTAL VERSES FOR CONTINUED INDOCTRINATION

The Sanskrit-language Sangh prarthana (prayer) is three slokas and twenty strings long. It is a pivotal verse chanted every day at the shakha gatherings all over India and abroad. The prayer has assumed a sacred profile among the swayamsevaks. At shakhas, private or public meetings alike, the prayer ritual is performed as the final itinerary of a given program when everybody stands up—workers, leaders, and guests—and recites the prayer. For the inner core people, there is a pledge of allegiance (“Pratijna”⁵²) which only a chosen handful can get to pronounce. They are

⁵² RSS Pratijna [English version of the pledge which every candidate is made to take for admission to the inner circle]:

“Before the all-powerful God and my ancestors, I most solemnly take this oath, that I become a member of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh in order to achieve all-round greatness of Bharatvarsha by fostering the growth of my sacred Hindu religion, Hindu society, and Hindu culture. I shall perform the work of the Sangh honestly, disinterestedly, with my heart and soul, and I shall adhere to this oath all my life. Bharat Mata ki Jai. (Before 1939 the slogan in the oath was “Jai Bajrang-Bali Balbhim ki Jai”). Quoted from D. R. Goyal: *Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh*. Radha Krishna Prakashan, New Delhi. 1979.

then anointed by the supreme executive-designate (Sanghchalak) at a high-level meeting such as the Officers' Training Camp or O.T.C.⁵³ However, the prayer has a much wider appeal. This is the Sangh prarthana, the "National Anthem" for the swayamsevaks.

The Ekatmata Stotra (ES), on the other hand, is chanted mostly at winter camps, O.T.C., and similar prolonged gatherings of Sangh workers. Nowadays, some morning shakhas are performing the long ritual mainly because there is not much enthusiasm for physical activity among the mostly gray-haired swayamsevaks during their hourly presence. Further, since its inception, the ES has become a symbol of scholarship among the otherwise educationally nonchalant swayamsevaks. Sangh leaders and ideologues such as H. V. Seshadri, S. B. Varnekar, Ram Swarup, Sita Ram Goel, and pro-RSS right-wing western writer-politicians such as Koenraad Elst and David Frawley have become doyens of intellectualism and wisdom in Sangh circles. In the old "silent" days, RSS workers and sympathizers were content, to a large extent, with the writings of Golwalkar and Savarkar. The Deoras brothers (Balasaheb and Bhaurao), Dadarao Parmarth, Babasaheb Apte, Dattopanth Thengadi, Deendayal Upadhyay, and some other names would also be heard. Slowly but surely, the RSS is coming out of the clutches of the Marathi intelligentsia and putting on an all-Indian face. Now it is trying desperately to penetrate the conservative but literate anti-Hindi south and liberal and progressive eastern regions of India. Alliance with corrupt forces has enabled BJP to gain grounds in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu.⁵⁴

⁵³I was a swayamsevak chosen for one such O.T.C and was given the "honor" of reciting the pledge and being anointed by the Sanghchalak.

⁵⁴In 1998, BJP forged unethical and opportunistic electoral alliances with an extremely corrupt party in Tamil Nadu and a breakaway West Bengal Congress faction led by Mamata Banerjee who, in the 70s, broke up democratic meetings. In Tripura, BJP reached an election alliance with Tripura Upajati Yuva Samiti, a separatist group.

Most swayamsevaks do not read much, but that does not hinder their enthusiasm for the ideology they blindly espouse and follow. Writings like the Ekatmata Stotra and those compiled by the above-mentioned and like authors have given swayamsevaks some much-needed solace to at least psychologically counter the erudition of their opponents in India and abroad.

The Ekatmata Stotra (ES), originally compiled by Sridhar Bhaskar Varnekar from Nagpur, is unique in that it was compiled with the deliberate purpose of inclusion of all non-Islamic non-Christian sects and cultures of India under a common umbrella of Hinduism however far-fetched and vague that notion might be. Words for this verse have been carefully constructed, and many names and places have been included in an attempt to appeal to various sections of the above populations. The previous poem on which the ES is built was known as the Bharat Bhakti Stotra (BBS) or more commonly the Pratahsmaran (an early-morning chant), a collection of thirty "slokas" (stanzas or strings). Not only is the ES longer, it is radically different from the BBS in style, composition, premise, and sociopolitical implications. The BBS was more devotional in nature, sedate, although somewhat sloppy in structure. But, in spite of its loosely-bound structure with a naive and prosaic tune to chant it, the otherwise melodious Pratahsmaran with its signature initial stanza "Karagre basate lakshmi karamule saraswati, karamadhye tu govindah prabhate karadarshanam" would bring a sense of nostalgic emotional bonding among us, the veteran swayamsevaks, at RSS camps. I can vouch for many old-time swayamsevaks who feel the same way. Alas, like the little slim pratahsmaran pocket-booklet itself, "Karagre basate lakshmi" is no more—now, invocation will have to begin with a much more ambitious yet vague phrase 'benefactor of the universe and manifestation of eternal bliss'—"Sacchidanandarupaya, vishwamangalyamurtaye"!

Other than this obfuscation which is a signature of the Sangh Parivar and its Hindutva philosophy, the "just out" ES is also much more aggressive, structurally refined, and has a jingoist fervor. ES includes in it almost anything and

everything Indian that is non-Muslim and non-Christian—there is no difference between Indianness and Hindutva as long as it is not related to the other two “alien” and “enemy” cultures. Thus, Amritsar is included now as a Hindu place of worshipping obviously to court the Sikh community. It is no surprise that BJP has found an alliance in a section of Akalis of Punjab.⁵⁵ The dalit leader Bhimrao Ambedkar is now featured in the ES disregarding his fierce lifelong anti-Hinduism stance (the traditionally oppressed lower castes and dalits-untouchables have now become the focus of RSS recruitment, and BJP found another crucial ally in a section of dalits in Uttar Pradesh although that ally is bitter about BJP now). The anti-imperialist tribal leader Birsa is now included in ES, although it was the conservative Hindu landlords who conspired with the then British regime in India to capture and execute the “lower caste” warrior. And of course, Lord Buddha is long-included as a Hindu luminary (in fact, he has been elevated to one of the ten avatars or gods reincarnated in the Brahminic Hindu pantheon—Buddhists of India and abroad however could not care less).

Eva Hellman of the University of Dalarna, Sweden maintains that Sikhism, Buddhism, and Jainism are not recognized by the Sangh in their totalities. “The Sikhs are expected to provide martial prowess for the defense of Dharma, from the Buddhists there is expected a fight against the prevailing caste-system, and from the Jains are expected the inculcation of moral virtues. Only if Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains conform to these expectations will they be accepted

⁵⁵ However, very recently, the alliance is under strain. In an article, “Ungrateful country's traitor human rights activists”, in one current issue of RSS Hindi mouthpiece *Panchajanya*, both the Akali Dal and the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) were accused of siding with the militants responsible for the separatist Khalistan movement [Source: *Times of India* article by Bhaskar Roy, June 1997]. RSS and BJP supported Indira Gandhi's military operation in 1984 to flush out terrorists from the Amritsar Golden Temple Complex—an act strongly opposed by the Akali Dal.

as Hindus.” The Sangh Parivar, she asserts, operates with different kinds of inclusivism: subordinating, hierarchical, complementary and conditional.⁵⁶

The other very significant revisions are the inclusion of the Hindu woman nobility—like their male counterparts, from the various geographical regions of India. The representation of women (as well as men from areas such as South India or Assam) was minimal in the BBS, and replacement of religious nobilities by social and political celebrities has taken place—needless to say, none of the new inclusions are Muslims or Christians or Persees.⁵⁷

The sloka that glorifies Bharatmata (Mother India) (“...Vande Bharatmataram”) has now been promoted from its previous position as stanza 30 to stanza 3 in the newly carved ES. Likewise, the stanza referring to RSS, VHP, and BJP’s paramount battlefields, Ayodhya, Mathura, and Kashi (Varanasi), has been promoted from number 9 in BBS to number 6 in ES.

There are many such examples (see following text and discussion on ES) that would point us to a very systematic and purposeful revision, exclusion, and inclusion. One can easily find the belligerent and all-engulfing ideological and methodological manipulations practiced by post-Golwalkar RSS—with this kind of mindset, the “Sangh Parivar” has now set out to overpower all communities of the Indian nation that Rabindranath Tagore called “an ocean of humanity” once known for its interreligious acceptance and interracial tolerance.

In the newly-energized RSS book, the word diversity is no more—it is replaced by the concepts of conformity and acquiescence.

⁵⁶ Eva Hellman. *Political Hinduism: The Challenge of Vishva Hindu Parishad*. Uppsala, 1993.

⁵⁷ Persees are descendants of Zoroastrians who fled from Persia and settled in India in the eighth century.

Just as the Brahmans gradually penetrated whatever tribes and guild castes remained in ancient India, or just as the White European settlers in America systematically destroyed the aboriginal natives, the Sangh Parivar is slowly penetrating Hinduism and distorting it once and for all. This is a slow but systematic process that goes back to ancient times. Ramayan, Mahabharat, and especially the Puranas are full of such examples.⁵⁸

As D. D. Kosambi observes, during this process, new gods were introduced and gods unsuitable to the Brahminic needs were made inferior. "New places of pilgrimage were introduced with suitable myths to make them respectable though they could only have been savage, pre-Brahman cult spots. Buddha, and some totemic deities including the primeval Fish, Tortoise, and Boar were made into incarnations of Vishnu-Narayan. The monkey-faced Hanuman, so popular with the cultivators as to be a peculiar god of the peasantry with an independent cult of his own, becomes the faithful companion-servant of Ram, another incarnation of Vishnu."

Such willful assimilation and monolithization goes on for ever in Brahminic Hinduism. RSS is doing nothing but continuing the process.

⁵⁸D. D. Kosambi. *The Culture and Civilization of Ancient India in Historical Outline*. Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi. 1992 reprint.

RSS Prarthana or Prayer: The Text

[English translation by author is done after Sangh interpretation]

*Namaste sada vatsale matribhume
Twaya hindubhume shukham vardhitoham
Mahamangale punyabhume twadarthe
Patatweshha kayo namaste namaste ||1||*

*Prabho shaktiman hindurashtrangabhuta
Ime sadaram twam namamovayam
Twadiyao karyao baddha katiyam
Shubhamashisham dehi tatpurtaye |
Ajayam cha vishwasya dehisha shaktim
Sushilam jagad jena namra vabet
Shrutam chaiva yat kankakirnamargam
Swayam swikritam nah sugam karyayet ||2||*

*Shamutkarshanihshreyasasaikamugram
Param sadhanam naam veerabratam
Tadantahsphuratwakshwa dheyanishtha
Hridantah prajagartu tebrahnisham |
Bijetree cha nah sanhata karyashaktir
Vidhayasya dharmasya sanrakshanam
Param vaibhavam netumetat swarashtram
Samartha vabatwashisha te vrisham ||3||*

Bharata mata ki jay ||

Translation of the RSS prayer

Oh Mother (Bharatmata or Mother India) ever-affectionate to your children—salutation to thee. Oh Hindu land, I have been happily brought up by you. Oh the supreme benefactor holy land, this body be laid down for you. Many praises for you.

Oh mighty Master, as integral parts of the Hindu nation, we respectfully bow to thee. We have resolved (fastened our waist-belt) to perform your works. Please give us your blessing to fulfill them. Give us the universe's unconquerable power; (and) give us good behavior and pure character that would make the world gentle. Give us the wisdom that would make our (voluntarily-taken) thorny roads smooth.

The only supreme vigorous way to achieve earthly and after-life well-being and emancipation is the way of might—this thought be expressed in our minds. May an unending devotion to ideology be ever-kindled in our hearts. Our vindicated organized work for the protection of this religion (creed) through your blessings be successful to bring our rashtra (Hindu nation) to supreme glory.⁵⁹

⁵⁹Note the emphasis on “only way is the way of might” and “vindicated organized work for the protection of this religion” — Author.

Ekatmata Stotra or the “Verse of Unification”

[*Note: English transliteration of the text and translation of its literal meaning are done by the author and are based on RSS’s interpretation of the stanzas as published in the Suruchi Prakashan edition. The reader is invited to read the important preamble written by H. V. Seshadri—translated from Hindi by the author (parts cited here). Also note: some more important sections in the ES are highlighted.*]

The following is a section of the preamble (translated from Hindi texts) written by H. V. Seshadri. The preamble was written at the time of compiling and publishing this important verse—drastically and carefully revised after the original version called the Pratahsmaran or Bharat Bhakti Stotra. A pro-RSS Sanskrit scholar from Nagpur, S. B. Varnekar, has been instrumental in compiling this verse.

“Ekatmata Stotra or the Verse of Unification: the abdication”—The Preamble

“The unparallelness of this verse is exemplified by the name unification”—the introduction to the newly-composed Stotra declares. Sangh dignitary H. V. Seshadri, author of the preamble proclaims that the verse is unparalleled because through it, the cultural tradition of Bharat has taken a live form—the country’s national life and its feelings of unity and diversity have become alive. And the diversity has many facets. This is not confined to the inhabitants of this land, but its inanimate and formless entities have also come to live—Seshadri asserts. All these forms and figures and expressions have been united in a common thread to feel their souls and this feeling and identification have remained in the greatness of Hindu thoughts and their absolute consciousness. Here is the translation to the text of Seshadri’s preamble—only a part is cited here.

"In this regard, we want to remember Sir Jagadish Chandra Basu. In front of the British Royal Society of London, while describing how some forms of lead turn into "live" forms and upon passing electricity behave almost like humans in reaction to the electric current, Sir Basu, in his conclusion of speech at the meeting of eminent scientists, declared that what he attempted to show was already shown and described long time ago by the sages and saints on the banks of river Ganga, and that he described only a fraction of their vast knowledge; he declared, "In reality, only he is wise who knows that the live and lifeless forms of matter are a continuum of an all-inclusive concept."

[...]

We remember and think about our own ancient Bharatmata (the Mother India) and nation (rashtra), the seas and mountains that nourish them from all the directions. The concept of the formless almighty turns into a well-defined form and becomes a divine mother whose lotus-feet are washed by the seas and oceans and given endless gems, and whose head is crowned by the Himalay mountains. Her worshipping is performed by the creator of the world Brahma himself and other saints and sages. Since the times of the Vedic age, our ancient and modern national leaders have always invoked our country in the name of Bharatmata—a divine motherly form praised as the one who gave birth to her children. Whereas Bankimchandra praised her as Saraswati, Lakshmi, and Devi Durga, Rabindranath Tagore worshipped her as the unique goddess of the entire creation. While Vivekananda saw her as the mother of all gods and goddesses, Arabinda called her as the original power who takes form to accept puja from her sons. The revered Guruji Golwalkar saw her as the combined form of father, mother, and guru. Worshipping this divine mother fills our hearts with patriotism—which is cultivated through spiritual worshipping and meditation.

[Note: M. S. Golwalkar has been carefully brought in along with the other famous liberal philosophers — Author.]

[...]

Our holy places, capitols of famous kingdoms, and educational institutions are no inferior as they have been centers of reverence. For example, the Kumbh Mela of Prayag have had crores of Hindu populations coming from all corners of the country who bathe in the Triveni Sangam (the confluence of three rivers) and make a miniature of the entire Bharat. The birth places of Sri Rama and Krishna, Ayodhya and Mathura, that have formed emotional bonding between the north and the south and the west, are symbols of our country's oneness. The world-renowned academic institutions as universal teachers inspire our hearts with pride. However, Ayodhya, Mathura, Kashi and such holiest places and their relics are the ultimate relic to remind us how much price we had to pay (to keep these places). An intense and high emotion fills our heart that we will resurrect our Hindu society, wash us off the dirt of foreign rules, and elevate our flag of national honor to its highest place.

[Note: Ayodhya, Mathura, and Kashi have continually been used by the Sangh Parivar to whip up Hindu religious sentiments for political purposes. Immediately after the Mandal commission report implementation by the then prime minister V. P. Singh's government to set apart job quotas for the "lower castes", RSS, VHP, and BJP took out a "Rama Janmabhoomi" Rathayatra or a chariot procession through India—a political measure to reverse the massive departure of the oppressed and undermined from its Hindu fold. The repercussion the procession created was bloody—many communal riots took place with active involvement of pro-Hindutva party thugs killing and destroying lives and properties mostly of Muslims and other minorities. But this series of carnage gave BJP the much-needed boost to spring back to national limelight—the tide has since been mostly in favor of them — Author.]

Further, our motherland having been flourished reminds us of all the ideologies and values of our lives. All these having been created from Vedic or Pauranik (ancient) periods reflect their glories through their philosophies—be they Geeta's supreme goals or Sikhism's great saints' teaching—the message is inseparable—"One is the brahman (truth) : many are the speakers". This conveys the unique

power of Bharat that assimilates all ways of life and worship. For this reason, we see that there is so much similarity among the rituals (religious) of our people living far and near in this country. The thinkers of the world have agreed upon the fact that this all-inclusive philosophy is indeed the only smart philosophy that can prevent us from going into nasty bloody wars with fanatics breaking the human race in fragments.

[*Note: One group of fervently religious aggressive people is preaching against other forms of fanaticism. Also notable is the phrase "only smart philosophy" — Author.*]

These broad, philanthropic viewpoints are indeed remedies for the superstitious fanatics whose only weapon is barbaric oppression on other societies. Bharat has been relatively free of this dangerous poison and has been the land where there is tolerance toward all ways of life, and the reason is that we have brotherly respect for all human beings.

[*Note: Obviously, the "fanatics" alluded to here are "Muslims" who are systematically and continuously relegated and branded by the Hindu conservatives as the symbol of superstition, backwardness, social ills, and barbarism. However, the so-called land of tolerance named Bharat has seen eons of oppression, in the name of religion, on the lower castes, women, and other downtrodden. Slavery, polygamy, patriarchal social, labor, land, and property laws, extreme forms of male chauvinism, social and religious bigotry, economic and political corruption and such practices have been commonplace occurrences throughout the history of Brahminic Hindu India. Thousands converted to other religions to escape the tyranny of upper caste Hindus.*

Swami Vivekananda, the Sangh doyen of "aggressive Hinduism" said, "The Mohammedan conquest of India came as a salvation to the downtrodden, to the poor. That is why one-fifth of our people have become Mohammedans. It was not the sword that did it all." (*Complete Works*, Vol. 3: p. 294) — Author.]

These high principles have not only been with some selected personalities of the society. In reality, this has percolated down to all strata of life. Neither has this been only with the most developed languages, even our forest-dwelling Banavasi friends in their small tribal dialects⁶⁰ perpetuate these principles through their transformed Ramayan, Mahabharat, and other folk tales. Whether idol-worshippers or not, worshipers of figurative gods or an abstract supreme power, regardless of the various philosophical methods, all have remained together in a unique oneness in our society which gives a great lesson to all mankind because it shows how irrespective of the creed or sects, all contradictory communities remain united as a great spiritual family.”

[*Note:* This is perhaps the essence of RSS propaganda—that “all contradictory communities remain united”. That is what the Sangh wants us to believe. Nothing could be farther from the truth—Author.]

The Sangh Introduction to the ES

The previous version of the Ekatmata Stotra—Bharat Bhakti-Stotra—is more or less familiar to us—it is also known as Pratahsmaran because it is our ancient tradition to recite such verses early in the morning. From the standpoint of national unification, we have added some more names thus adding more extensiveness so that it can be chanted day or night. The all India executive body of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, upon this intention, has approved of this verse in 2042 Vikram Samvat...

⁶⁰It is important to point out here that the languages spoken by the indigenous tribes in India are in fact full-fledged languages with all the complexity present in other “major” languages, and are not “small tribal dialects”.

Ekatmata Stotra: Text and Translation

*Om namah sacchidanandarupaya paramatmane |
Jyotirmayaswarupaya vishwamangalyamurtaye ||1||*

Oh the brightness being, benefactor of the universe, manifestation of eternal bliss and wisdom, salutation to thee.

*Prakriti panchabhutani graha lokah swarastatha |
Dishah kalascha sarbesham sada kurvantu mangalam ||2||*

The elements of nature (satwa, raja, tama), the five material elements (earth, water, sun, air, and sky), the nine planets and their environment (heaven, earth, and abyss), the musical notes, the ten directions, time (present, past, and future)—they all be doing us good.

*Ratnakaradhautapadam himalayakiritineem |
Brahma rajarshiratnadhyam
vande bharatamataram ||3||*

Bharatmata or Mother India, whose feet are washed by ratnakar (the ocean), whose crown is the Himalay, whose treasures are the great saints and monks and other gems—be worshipped by us.

*Mahendro malayah shajhyo debatatma himalayah |
Dhyeyo raivatako vindhyo girischaravalistatha ||4||*

Mahendra mountains, Malaya mountains, Sahyadri, the soul of god Himalay, the playground of Srikrishna Raivatak, Vindhyachal and Aravalli mountains

*Ganga saraswati sindhur brahmaputrascha gandaki |
Kaveri jamuna reba krishna goda mahanadi ||5||*

Ganga, Saraswati, Sindhu, Brahmaputra, Gandaki, Kaveri, Jamuna, Reba (Narmada), Krishna, Godavari and Mahanadi, etc.

***Ayodhya mathura maya kashi kanchi avantika |
Vaishali dwarika dhyeya puri takshashila gaya ||6||***

**Ayodhya, Mathura, Maya (Haridwar), Kashi, Kanchi,
Avantika (Ujjain), Dwarika, Vaishali, Jagannath Puri,
Takshashila, Gaya,**

***Prayagah pataliputram vijayanagaram mahat |
Indraprastham somnathah tatha amritsarpriyam ||7||***

**The king of tirthas (holy places)—Prayag, Pataliputra, the
great Vijaynagar, Indraprastha (the capitol of the Pandavas),
Somnath and dear city of Amritsar (must be remembered).**

***Chaturvedah puranani sarvoponishadastatha |
Ramanyanam bharatam cha geeta saddarshanani cha ||8||***

**Chaurvedas (the four Vedas), Purana, Upanishads,
Ramayan, Mahabharat, Geeta, and all other great
philosophical texts (the Vedic six philosophies, **Buddhist,
Jain, etc.**)**

***Jainagamastripitaka gurugranthah satangurah |
Esha jnananidhih shresthah shradhyo hridi sarvada ||9||***

**The Jain texts, Buddhist Tripitak, messages of the
saints from the Guru Granthasahib are indeed the
best knowledge of wisdom in Hinduism. Be there a
lot of respect for them.⁶¹**

⁶¹With regard to the newly-found RSS respect for Buddhism and Jainism, here is an old quote from the Sangh English mouthpiece *Organiser*: "So far as Jainism and Buddhism are concerned they have never made any contribution to social and political thought as such. We have not inherited any arthashastras (politics and economics) or dharmashastras (social laws) from them. All we have from them are the various moksha-shastras pertaining to the supreme salvation of the individual soul." (*The Organiser*, 10/6/63).

***Arundhatyanashuacha sevatri janaki sati |
draupadi kannagi gargi meera durgavati tatha ||10||***

Vashistha's wife Arundhati, Atri's wife Anasua, the conqueror of Yama—Sabitri, Rama's devoted wife Sita, Shiva's wife and daughter of Yaksha—Sati, mighty Draupadi, queen of Dravida land Kannagi, Gargi the learned lady at the court of king Janaka, Chittor's devotee Mirabai, the gallant heroine of Garmandal—Durgavati

***Lakshmirahalya channamma rudramamba suvikrama |
Nivedita⁶² sarada cha pranamya matridevata ||11||***

The gallant woman of Jhansi Lakshmibai, motherly image of Indore—Ahalyabai, mighty lady of Karnatak—Channamma, great warrior queen of Andhra's Kakatiya land—Rudramamba, Vivekananda's disciple Nivedita, Sri Ramakrishna's wife Ma Saradamani—all these women are to be worshipped as mothers.

***Shriramo bharatah krishno bhishmo dharmastatharjunah |
Markandeyo harishchandrah prahlado narado dhrubah ||12||***

62 Sister Nivedita (originally Margaret Noble) came from Ireland to join her religious mentor Swami Vivekananda. She worked for the rest of her life among the poor and destitute of India especially Calcutta and Bengal. Like her mentor's version, Nivedita's Hinduism was also to uplift the oppressed and the downtrodden—Hinduness was an effective instrument for them. Nivedita died at an early age of 45 in Darjeeling. Before that, she became active in anti-British revolutionary movements in Bengal and co-founded one of the pioneering anti-imperialist revolutionary groups thus deviating from her avowed religious duties as a monk—a deviation which even Vivekananda did not approve. Perhaps the Sangh is unaware of this side of Nivedita—this celestial brave woman gave her life for liberal-progressive social and political causes and was much respected by the revolutionaries and freedom fighters. Also, see Appendix III on quotes.

**Sri Ram, Bharat, Krishna, Vishma, the king of virtue
Judhisthir, Arjun, Markandeya, Harishchandra, Prahlad,
Narad, Dhruba**

*Hanumanjanako vyaso vashistascha shuko volih |
Dadhichi-Vishwakarmanou prithu valmiki bhargavah ||13||*

**Hanuman, Janak, Vyasdeva, Vashista, Shukdeva, Voli,
Dadhichi, Vishwakarma, Prithu, Valmiki, Parashuram**

*Bhagirathaschaikalavyo manurdhanvantaristatha |
Shivischa rantidevascha puranodgeetakirtayah ||14||*

**Bhagirath, Ekalavya, the smriti-expert Manu, Dhanvantari,
benevolent king Shibi and king Rantidev—their great acts
are said in the Puranas**

*Buddha jinendra gorakshah paninischa patanjalih |
Shankaro maddhvanimbarko sriramanujavallabhau ||15||*

**All the incarnations of Lord Buddha, all the Jain
tirthankars, Guru Gorkhnath, Panini, Patanjali,
Maddhvacharya, Shankaracharya, Nimbarkacharya,
Ramanujacharya and Vallabhacharya**

*Jhulelalohatha chaitanyah tiruvalluvarastatha |
Nayammaralawarascha kambascha vasaveshvarah ||16||*

**Sant Jhulelal of Sindhupradesh, Mahaprabhu Chaitanya,
Vyashadeva Tiruballavayar, Nayammar and the saints of
Alwar, the Tamil Ramayan-composer Kamba and Shaiva
saint Vasaveshar**

*Devalo rabidasacha kabiro gurunanakah |
Narasistulsidaso dashamesho drirobratah ||17||*

The proponent of Paravartan-rule⁶³ Deval; the saint Rabidas, Kabir, Guru Nanak, the Vaishnav saint of Gujarat Narashi Tulsidas, the mighty tenth guru (Govinda Singh)

*Srimat shankaradevascha bandhu sayanamadhavan |
Jnashwarastukaramo ramadasah purandarah ||18||*

the vaishnav of Assam province Srimat Shankardev, the narrator of the vedas Sayancharya, Madhavacharya, Sant Jnaneshar, Tukaram, Samartha Ramdas and Purandar Das

*Birsa sahanando ramanandastatha mahan |
Bitarantu sadaivaite daivim sadguna sampadam ||19||*

The “forest-dwelling leader” Bhagawan Birsa, Swami Sahajananda, Swami Ramananda and the like great men be always giving us divine virtue.

*Bharatarshih kalidasah sribhojo janakastatha |
Suradasosthyagarajo rasakhanascha satakavih ||20||*

The first guru of school of drama Rishi Bharat, the great poet Kalidas, king Bhoj, Jakanacharya, Sant Surdas, the poet of South India Thyagaraja and great poet Raskhan.

*Ravivarma bhatkhande bhagyachandrah sa bhupatih |
kalavantascha vikhyatah smaraniya niranantaram ||21||*

The great painter Ravivarma, singer Bhatkhande, Manipur king Bhagyachandra and other like artists are famous and always be remembered.

[Note: The late Alauddin Khan, the great maestro and virtuoso of Hindusthani classical music, does not feature in this list of

63 Paravartan is a much-liked concept in the RSS circles. Paravartan means reconversion to Hinduism of people converted to Islam, Christianity, and other “alien” religions. Does RSS talk about paravartan of Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs, and Brahmos? Would be a matter of much interest in the coming days.

artists. Alauddin Khan and his illustrious son Ali Akbar Khan have been dedicated worshippers of music in a divine way that is much admired in Hinduism. In fact, Alauddin Khan and his family including his daughter Annapurna became unpopular to dogmatic Indian Muslims for their following of secular and more of a Hindu lifestyle and rituals. Excluding "Muslim" Alauddin Khan from the list of greatest artists shows exclusivism and narrowness. Incidentally, another 'legendary and pioneering music maestro Taansen from King Akbar's court is also omitted—Tansen converted to Islam— Author.]

*Agastyah kambukaundinyou rajendraschola vanshajah |
Ashokah pushyamitrascha kharabelah sunitiman ||22||*

Rishi Agastya, Kambu and Kaundinya, the Chola king Rajendra, emperor Ashoka, Pushyamitra, mighty and honest emperor Kharbel.

*Chanakya-chandraguptou cha vikramah shalivahanah |
Samudraguptah sriharshah shailendro bapparaoloh ||23||*

Chanakya and emperor Chandragupta, mighty Shalivahana, emperor Samudragupta and Harshavardhana and Shailendra and Bapparawal.

*Lachit bhaskarbarma cha joshodharma cha hunjit |
Shrikrishnadevarayascha lalitaditya udvalah ||24||*

Lachit Barphukan (Assam's Ahom kingdom's Kushal army-commander, Bhaskarbarma, Hun-conqueror (Pragjyotishpur—king of Guwahati) Jashodharma, the establisher of Vijaynagar kingdom Shrikrishnadev Ray, mighty king of Kashmir—Lalitaditya.

*Musunurinayakou tou pratapah shivabhupatih |
Ranajit Singha ityete virah vikhyata vikramah ||25||*

The general of Kakatiya king Pratap Rudra, Paulayanayak and his nephew Kappayanayak, Rana Pratap, Chhatrapati Shivaji, Ranajit Singh and such heroes have been famous for their might and heroism.

*Baijnankascha kapilah kanadah sushrutastatah |
Charaka bhaskaracharyo barahamihirah sudhih ||26||*

The famous scientists—Sankhya philosopher Kapil, physicist Darshanacharya (who described atoms as the cause of creation) Kanad, surgery-expert Sushruta, Ayurvedacharya the royal doctor of king Kanishka Charaka, mathematician and astronomer Bhaskaracharya, and famous scholar and astrologer king Varahamihir.

*Nagarjuno bharadwaja aryabhatta basurbudhah |
Dhyeyo bhenkataramascha bijna ramanujadayah ||27||*

The chemistry-scholar king Nagarjun, author on sky-matters Bharadwaj, astrologer and mathematician Aryabhatta, proponent of plant's life and inventor of radio scientist Jagadishchandra Basu⁶⁴, physicist Chandrasekha Venkataraman, famous mathematician Ramanujam, et al.

*Ramakrishno dayanando rabindro ramamohanoh |
Ramatirthaharabindascha vivekananda uddashah ||28||*

The most-adored other sons of Bharat are Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Maharshi Dayananda, poet of the universe Rabindranath, Raja Rammohan Ray, Ramtirtha, Maharshi Arabinda, world-renowned Swami Vivekananda

*Dadabhai gopabandhuh tilako gandhiradritah |
Ramano malaviyascha srisubramaniamabharati ||29||*

⁶⁴Sir Jagadish Chandra Basu was a secular and liberal person and a good friend of Rabindranath Tagore. He was supportive of the revolutionary freedom struggles in India. It is a misnomer though that he first established the fact that plants have life—he merely showed some vital signs of plants through sensitive instruments invented by himself.

Freedom fighter Dadabhai Nauraji, Utkal-gem Gopabandhu Das, Mahatma Gandhi, Maharshi Raman, Madan Mohan Malavya, and poet Subramaniam Bharati.

*Subhashaho pranavanandah krantiviro vinayakoh |
Thakkaro bhimaraoscha phule narayano guruh ||30||*

Netaji Subhaschandra Basu (Bose), the founder of Bharat Sevashram Sangha Swami Pranavananda⁶⁵, Veer Savarkar, the friend of the forest-dwellers Thakkar Bappa, the constitution-writer Doctor Bhimrao Ambedkar, social reformer Jotirao Phule⁶⁶ and Kerala's social reformer Srinarayan Guru.

[Note: Subhas Chandra Basu was a left-of-center freedom fighter and was extremely popular among the liberals in the Congress party. The conservative and financially powerful elements in the Congress did not like his popularity. Nehru saw his personal ambition to be post-British India's first prime minister at stake. Finally, with active support from Gandhi, these elements dethroned Subhas of a democratically elected Congress presidency. Subhas quit Congress and left India to garner anti-British support from outside. He never came back—his death has ever remained a mystery.

⁶⁵Swami Pranavananda broke away with the Ramakrishna Mission founded by Vivekananda and founded his own mission Bharat Sevashram Sangha—a friendly organization the RSS does not want to exclude. Ramakrishna Mission, on the other hand, with its more secular way of working, is not much favored by the Sangh.

⁶⁶Jotirao Phule was a champion of the Dalits and Shudras in the state of Maharashtra. He conceived of Shivaji not the way the Hindu right portrays the Maratha king as the “Go-Brahman Pratipalak” (i.e., protector of cows and brahmans) but as a Shudra king and a leader of the Shudras. Phule also compared the state of Dalits and Shudras in India with the blacks (African-Americans) of USA.

One of the recent propaganda of the Sangh people is to proclaim themselves as past supporters and activists in the anti-imperialist freedom struggles, and they are attempting to include highly regarded freedom-fighters such as Subhas Bose as sympathizers of the Sangh. The fact is, RSS' role, if any, in the freedom struggle was minimal (other than the fact that its founder Dr. Hedgewar, during his student days in Calcutta, came to know and work temporarily with noted revolutionary leaders such as Trailakya Maharaj). Further, Subhas Basu was one of the most liberal and secular leaders India has ever known. Basu made several attempts to meet Dr. Hedgewar during 1930's, but the Sangh founder did not care to see him or ask someone on his behalf to see him — *Author.*]

*Sanghashakti pranetarau keshavomadhavostatha |
Smariniyah sadaivaite navachaitanyadayakah ||31||*

The Sangh-power invoker revered Doctor Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, the revered Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar Sri Guruji, and like great men who resurrected the Hindu society—may they always be remembered.

*Anukta ye bhakta prabhucharanasansaktahridayah |
Abijnata beera adhisamaramuddhvastaripavah ||
Samajoddhartarah suhitakar bijnan nipunah |
Namastebhya bhuyat sakala sujanebhya pratidinam ||32||*

Those devotees who have been united with the god almighty but not mentioned here—those who conquered the enemies but remained unknown, those who worked for the welfare of the society, and those who are known for their wisdom in various subjects—all these great men be worshipped everyday.

*Idamekatmata stotram shraddhya yah sada pathet |
Sa rashtradharmanisthaban akhanda bharatam smaret ||33||*

He who reads this verse everyday with reverence becomes dedicated to the rashtra and remembers akhanda bharat.

*|| Bharat mata ki jay ||
|| Glory to Bharatmata ||*

CHAPTER SIX

BEYOND THE SANGHSTHAN: MY DAYS OF POLITICS INDIAN STYLE FOR THE "NON-POLITICAL" RSS

The Emergency of 1975-77—a personal chronicle

On June 12, 1975, Justice Jagmohanlal Sinha of the Allahabad High Court issued a verdict that overturned the then prime minister Indira Gandhi's election from the Rai Bareilly parliamentary constituency in Uttar Pradesh. The judge declared that Mrs. Gandhi had resorted to unconstitutional measures to get elected over the other major candidate, Mr. Raj Narain of the Socialist Party, who was then announced elected. This proved to be one of the most important events in the history of independent India.

Mrs. Gandhi, always a crafty politician, used a small loophole in Justice Sinha's verdict which allowed her to remain in charge of a caretaker government temporarily, and garnered the necessary two thirds majority in the parliament to amend the constitution—the infamous 42nd amendment. She then used the pretext of an "internal threat" to the nation to declare a state of national Emergency in the entire country. Under Jaya Prakash Narayan's (J. P.) leadership, the student movement by then had spread all over India—a movement called "Nav Nirman" (i.e., building anew) that sought the resignation of Mrs. Gandhi's government.

With the special and unprecedented power acquired through the constitutional amendment, Indira Gandhi imposed a total censorship on the press, promulgated

authoritarian laws such as MISA (Maintenance of Internal Security Act), and imprisoned anti-Congress journalists.

She imprisoned all the national leaders such as J. P. (a socialist), Raj Narain (a socialist), Morarji Desai (a pro-USA Gandhian), Atal Bihari Vajpayee (of Jana Sangh), L. K. Advani (of Jana Sangh), Madhu Limaye (a socialist leader scorned by the Sangh), Madhu Dandavate (a socialist), George Fernandez (a socialist), and other socialist, centrist, and right-wing leaders. A large number of student leaders and workers, especially those connected with the J. P. movement, were also arrested. Many of these students were physically and mentally tortured in jails by the police. I have seen candle-burns on the feet of the Delhi ABVP leader Raj Kumar Bhatia.

Surprisingly, many leaders of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), or CPI(M), were not much affected even though the party was against the Congress misrule. The pro-Soviet Communist Party of India (CPI) led by S. A. Dange openly supported Indira Gandhi's proclamation of the Emergency—a "grave mistake" later regretted by post-Dange CPI leaders such as Rajeshwara Rao and Indrajit Gupta. West Bengal's CPI(M) leaders such as Jyoti Basu and Promod Dasgupta did not speak out against the Emergency strongly enough—their opposition was subtle. However, other leaders of the party such as E.M.S. Namboodiripad of Kerala opposed the dictatorial rule.

RSS was banned for the second time in its history and its leaders, including Balasaheb Deoras, were jailed. Many leaders and workers went underground. A massive campaign started all over India by RSS swayamsevaks—they called it "Satyagraha" after Gandhi's "famous" namesake 1942 Quit India movement. The meaning of Satyagraha is embracing truth—in practice, it is a form of passive resistance and voluntarily courting arrest. The essence of the movement was to fill Indira Gandhi's jails and draw the attention of western countries, especially USA and Great Britain.

I was put in charge of coordinating some of these Satyagraha rallies by Sangh workers in Calcutta. It worked this way—a procession of some twenty people would suddenly emerge, chanting slogans against Indira Gandhi, the Emergency rule, and police atrocities (all such rallies were of course then banned by the government). Our processions were secretly scheduled to start at prime times from pre-determined downtown points in order to create maximum visibility. The police would quickly show up and arrest the "Satyagrahis". This maneuver went on for quite a few months. In most cases, the otherwise lethargic police reacted in such alacrity that even the most apolitical Calcuttans suspected a covert arrangement designed to avoid public turmoil. I helped many young swayamsevaks from my base of operation but was spared from going to jail myself. I was summoned by Sangh pracharak Ganesh Deb Sharma who had come from Tripura and had joined the Calcutta contingent of RSS leaders to carry out a clandestine literature campaign. I was entrusted by Mr. Deb Sharma, an affectionate, intelligent, and selfless man, to help prepare the literature and distribute it covertly to key RSS volunteers, and in general, to the Hindu Bengali neighborhoods of Calcutta. The whole operation was carried out in complete secrecy—leak of any information, or a slight slip in covering up our identity could result in arrest and possible torture by the police—they were like bloodthirsty hounds looking for us in desperation. At least, that is what was told to us by our leaders.

[It is also true that in many cases, RSS sympathizers in the police force, disgusted with the behavior of the Indira Gandhi government, would alert senior Sangh leaders by phone or messengers when raids were being planned. This allowed the leaders and workers, targeted in the planned raid, to go into temporary hiding.]

Anyway, the operation was like this. There were two or three key places in Calcutta—all residences of old-time swayamsevaks—where Ganesh Deb Sharma, Keshav Dixit (a lifetime pracharak), some other leaders, Pavan (a Hindi-speaking person) and I would meet once a week, help "Ganesh-da" (Mr. Deb Sharma) to prepare and revise the

one or two-page bulletin describing the nature of the resistance movement against Mrs. Gandhi's government (mostly real information, although often exaggerated). We would pick up a bunch of the printed bulletins (I would also proofread and pick up Bengali bulletins from a few printing presses—the owners of these presses were Sangh volunteers or sympathizers), distribute them in packets to key swayamsevaks—tailors, cloth-merchants, bankers, teachers, students. I would keep a few hundred for my own use, and then roam the Calcutta neighborhoods in darkness (power cuts were rampant in West Bengal those days, plunging Calcutta and its suburbs into darkness almost every night) and put them in citizens' mailboxes. Special precautions would be taken not to get caught, either by the police, or the Congress thugs, or the over-curious general public of Calcutta the latter forming a large part of the city population. After distributing one lot, I would go back to the "office" and pick up more bulletins. This operation went on throughout the two years of the Emergency rule—I was good enough never to get noticed by curious eyes. Although, I now have my doubts as to how eager the police was to catch me.

I also took on the responsibility of putting posters up in Calcutta neighborhoods, with the help of a few young friends, during the very early hours of the morning. We would organize the posters and sleep for a few hours at our place, then slip out around 3 AM to poster Calcutta walls. This went on until my young comrades got caught by the police during "Satyagraha" activities.

On the other hand, many old-time and so-called hardcore swayamsevaks left the RSS during those days—some temporarily, some permanently. At the very first opportunity, they would hurriedly destroy all the Sangh literature they had accumulated at home over the years. Or else, they would deposit them with me or my father. My father and I—my mother's opposition totally ignored—would save most of them and burn some. Of course there was the danger of getting caught by the police, especially when almost everyone in the neighborhood knew who we were—the sole torch-bearers of the RSS.

These "patriotic" escapees and many other "dedicated" workers and leaders would boycott all Sangh activities (however clandestine) at any cost. They would be very unhappy if I asked them to accept even a single copy of our bulletins. Some of these "patriots" came back in a big way only after the Emergency era was over and the ban on RSS lifted. Quite a few of them even got Jana Sangh and then BJP tickets to run for the assembly or parliament in later years!

Then it was time for me and some others to pay visits to our comrades in jail. We would go to the Presidency Jail in Alipore, Calcutta, once a week where our friends and colleagues were kept as political prisoners. Fortunately, they were not physically abused in prison. Some parents of these workers would also visit—the parents looked extremely worried (except for a very few who were diehard Sangh supporters). Most parents did not have a clue that their sons were going to imprison themselves voluntarily. They were first enraged, then mortified.

I do not know of any woman volunteer of the Rashtra Sevika Samiti who courted arrest during the "Satyagraha" movement.

During this time, various ephemeral and shady "patriotic" organizations sprang up at the insistence of RSS to rally common people around its cause (of course this was no surprise—this is one reason why short-lived "apolitical" RSS-sponsored organizations are found guilty of bloody communal riots year after year). I remember at least one such organization that came into being during the Emergency solely to "celebrate" the birth centenary of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's famous but controversial patriotic song "Vande Mataram" (Vande Mataram is branded, justifiably or not, by some progressives and Muslims, as being communal in nature because of the song's pro-Hindu fervor). The newly-formed RSS offshoot was named "Vande Mataram Shatavarsha Purti Utsav Samiti" (the committee to celebrate the Vande Mataram centenary).

Lakshmi Narayan Bhala, the East Zone ABVP pracharak, was appointed the coordinator of the Vande

Mataram committee by the RSS. Mr. Bhala took the assumed name of Animesh Gupta—an archaic name much-used by Indian people in hiding. The celebration was successful—an effort was slowly undertaken to let the outsiders know that the RSS was behind all this success—which in turn created sympathy for the "patriotic" and right-wing nationalist organization banned by Mrs. Gandhi.

A special effort was made by the Sangh to include as many non-Sangh citizens as possible in this venture so that none would suspect the real force behind the effort. Additionally, prominent individuals such as the Calcutta High Court Chief Justice were brought in—this man was well-known for his fervent anti-leftist position. Other lawyers, judges, and businessmen were also included who were avidly against socialism and supported the then-operative notorious Siddhartha Shankar Ray government of West Bengal. This was a Congress government that, with a barbaric zeal, crushed the Naxalbari movement, a Maoist peasant, worker, and student movement, run by the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) or CPI(M-L) in the early seventies. The Ray government killed, maimed, and raped thousands of young men and women. CPI(M) leaders such as Promod Dasgupta supported the carnage and encouraged his partymen to wage war against the CPI(M-L). Of course, "Naxals" were battling against CPI(M) workers too. Hundreds of CPI(M) workers were also killed by the Congress police. During the late sixties and early seventies, I grew up in this war-like climate when Calcutta and West Bengal were terrorized by the police and Congress party thugs.

Under pressure from India's allies and trading partners, and falsely buoyed by the misinformation fed her by a thoroughly incompetent secret service organization, Mrs. Gandhi lifted the Emergency regulations and called for general elections in 1977. Press censorship was lifted and political leaders of opposition parties were released from jail. Elections were held, and Indira Gandhi was shocked by a

massive defeat of her party all over the country except for the southern states.⁶⁷

Janata Party—an alliance of Jana Sangh, Socialist Party, Organization Congress (a pro-US group), and Bharatiya Lok Dal—won the elections and formed the first non-Congress Central Government in Indian history. Indira Gandhi herself lost the election, again to Raj Narain.

During these elections, Sangh workers like me worked overtime for the Janata Party candidates with much enthusiasm. We did everything a political party worker does in India—we copied voters' lists, distributed voters' identification slips, made and put up posters, held pre-election meetings with or without the party candidate, and on the election day, worked in and outside polling stations as party agents. After the balloting was over, we went to ballot counting places and stayed there for the whole duration of counting to prevent frauds. Some of us, the RSS workers, even cast multiple votes (commonly known as "proxy")—we knew how to erase the "indelible" voters' ink off our index finger.

In Calcutta, most of the Janata candidates were non-Jana Sangh. But we did not mind that. Our goal was to help the Janata Party win—we thought we were fighting to save our nation, and perhaps this was partially true. What we did not understand was that with Indira Gandhi's fall, the socialist fabric of India (however dilapidated) was also going to collapse. Western imperialist forces were entering India holding the hands of the rightist parties such as the Jana Sangh and Morarji Desai's party—the pro-U.S. Organization Congress.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ The southern states were not much touched by the Emergency excesses.

⁶⁸ The first non-Congress Prime Minister Morarji Desai was allegedly on the payroll of the CIA, at least according to the American journalist Seymour Hersh. Hersh's allegations came much after the collapse of the Janata government. Partly because of Morarji Desai's pro-US stance, the left

After the formation of the Janata Front government, an all-Indian convention of the constituent parties was called in New Delhi where these parties formally merged on the unstable foundation of a "common working platform", and launched the Janata Party. Just prior to this convention, a Jana Sangh conference was held on April 28-30, 1977 (where I was hurriedly summoned by Calcutta Sangh leaders). Sri Keshav Dixit, a lifelong pracharak, sent me in as a representative of the West Bengal Jana Sangh and the Vidyarthi Parishad. RSS/Jana Sangh paid for all my expenses.⁶⁹ Jana Sangh leaders from West Bengal, individuals such as Prof. Haripada Bharati and Sukumar Banerjee, led our delegation. At the first Janata Party convention on May 1, Babu Jagjivan Ram, the charismatic left-of-center leader of the lower caste and "dalit" Indians, who was always a very important man on Indira Gandhi's cabinet, joined the Janata Party. He also helped bring in other well-known socialist Congress leaders such as H. N. Bahuguna, Krishna Kant, and Mohan Dharia. Pro-socialist young Congress leader Chandra Sekhar had earlier joined the alliance. At the convention, Chandra Sekhar was elected the first president of the newly formed Janata Party.

The Emergency era, the movement against it, and my own active involvement with it is worth-mentioning simply to show how RSS and ABVP, in spite of their vociferous claims of being non-political, actively participated in political movements and insisted that their workers actively involve

parties finally decided to break away from the Janata Party government (CPI(M) withdrew the crucial numerical support it was providing while staying outside the government) causing the government to fall in 1980.

⁶⁹ Again, my mother strongly advised me against attending this convention—she knew I was young, just completing college, and did not belong with the other delegates who were diehard Jana Sangh people—she understood that the RSS leaders were taking advantage of my inflamed emotional state. However, in a patriarchal Indian home, not too many young men pay heed to their mother's premonitions.

themselves in the process. It is obvious now that RSS did all this to continue its own existence—especially, since Jana Sangh's future was at stake just before 1975. The Emergency proved to be a life-saver that rescued the Sangh and its political arm from oblivion.

It is important that we take note of the fact that the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), the richer, socially and financially established, gray-haired “Sangh Parivar” component was almost invisible during all this time of struggle. The “scholarly” and ceremonial presidents of ABVP,⁷⁰ other such office-bearers, and affluent workers and

⁷⁰This included the then West Bengal president of ABVP who was a Sanskrit scholar and would give very lengthy (and boring) Sanskrit speeches at RSS Officers' Training Camp (OTC or Sangh Shiksha Varg—RSS often uses the English name for this core training of utmost importance). This scholarly person however did not lose any opportunity to praise Indira Gandhi at the inception of Emergency—he came up with an epic tale for a radio show portraying Mrs. Gandhi as goddess Durga.

Sangh peripheral and ceremonial leaders' and workers' tilt toward the Congress party have been all too common. During the very turbulent days of the late sixties and early seventies in West Bengal when the CPI(M-L) movement (popularly known as the Naxalbari movement) threatened RSS shakhas to the brink of extinction, many of my “faithful” swayamsevak friends dropped out of the daily gatherings and quietly joined the student wing of the Congress, the NSUI. The West Bengal version of the NSUI was known as the Chhaatra Parishad—a group of people notorious for their tyrannical and rapacious acts. Indira Gandhi appointed her younger son Sanjay as the national leader of these elements and their big brother, the Youth Congress.

Incidentally, the now-famed “Grassroot Congress” leader Mamata Banerjee was being raised at that time under the wing of some of these notorious leaders. Later, Mamata Banerjee allegedly forged a doctorate degree from a non-existent American university, and used the “Dr.” prefix with her name to boost her status during elections, only to drop it when the scam was exposed. Mamata Banerjee, her mentor Subrata

leaders of RSS, Jana Sangh, and BMS showed up again only after the struggle was over. Some provincial and national leaders of Jana Sangh (personally known to me and who are now big names in BJP) were completely invisible during the difficult days of the Emergency. The West Bengal Jana Sangh headquarters at 6, Muralidhar Sen Lane wore a deserted look during those years.

The savory days after Emergency—the elation and euphoria

After the Janata Front won the elections that almost completely crushed the Congress Party, the newly formed government lifted the ban on RSS and released all remaining leaders and workers from jail. A feeling of euphoria took us over—we who had worked so tirelessly to vanquish Indira Gandhi, her son Sanjay Gandhi, and their autocratic rule. RSS organized jubilant meetings all over the country. A reward was also bestowed upon me—I was appointed the joint secretary of the West Bengal provincial unit of the Vidyarthi Parishad. Our heretofore deserted office, at 27/1B Bidhan Sarani in North Calcutta, became crowded for the first time—many students (both swayamsevaks and non-

Mukherjee, with Sanjay Gandhi's blessing, broke up many peaceful protest meetings of the opposition including the one in Calcutta in April, 1975, where Jaya Prakash Narayan was scheduled to speak. I was present at that meeting. The Youth Congress and Chhatra Parishad thugs did not allow J.P. to enter the auditorium.

I know of at least two popular principal teachers of RSS shakhas in Calcutta who joined and worked for Youth Congress during that time of difficulty. Right after coming back from the Burdwan OTC—filled with and boastful of Sangh doctrines—I found myself in sole charge of the once-crowded Goabagan sayam (evening) shakha in North Calcutta. I would stand for the hour-long shakha, literally all by myself. This happened again during the Emergency. I would be there all my myself for an hour, then go out to meet swayamsevak friends at their homes, encourage and inspire them to come back to the “sanghsthan”. It would take me months to get a few swayamsevaks back to the venue.

swayamsevaks), including some women, came in and joined the Vidyarthi Parishad. In spite of the fact that the Vidyarthi Parishad was never a force to reckon with in West Bengal, except for some patchy days during the sixties when a Parishad student was shot and killed by the police on a Central Calcutta college campus, we now managed to put up a strong show in various student union elections in districts such as Howrah, Medinipur, Maldah, and Murshidabad, and North Bengal cities such as Siliguri, and Hindi-speaking areas of Calcutta. I remember spending many hours talking to students at their homes or college dormitories. At times, I would be accompanied by one or two strongmen of Jana Sangh who acted as bodyguards for me and my co-workers. I addressed student rallies and meetings at various college campuses and the positive response was unprecedented.

We laid out plans for a provincial conference to be held in Calcutta. National ABVP leaders such as Govindacharya (who is now a national BJP leader and ideologue) joined us during the three-day conference. Govindacharya's speeches included praise for youths' "patriotic" activities in Israel and U.S. RSS leader K. S. Sudarshan also spoke extensively at the conference, so much so that it became a problem and matter of conflict between him and our Calcutta ABVP president Prof. Nibaran Chakrabarty,⁷¹ the latter being dismayed by Mr. Sudarshan's religion-laced speeches to young students. Prof. Chakrabarty wanted revolutionary fire instilled in the students instead of religious spirit. Govindacharya, Lakshmi Bhala, and I gave speeches in front of the (less-than-expected) crowd of students from all over West Bengal. A couple of Hindu right-wing student leaders from the newly-liberated country of Bangladesh spoke too—they narrated the "Islamic atrocities" in Bangladesh. The relatively low level of attendance was compensated for by bringing in delegates from the

⁷¹Prof. Chakrabarty was previously in Hindu Mahasabha, an extreme right-wing group now almost extinct. Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, the Jana Sangh founder came from this group. During the days of euphoria, many such individuals joined the Sangh expecting political rehabilitation.

neighboring state of Orissa. On the final day of the convention, we took out a street procession to the Calcutta University campus where we managed to collect a big crowd of students—mostly outsiders. I introduced the then national Jana Sangh celebrity Dr. Subramanian Swamy as the main speaker who spoke in Hindi. This was perhaps the only Vidyarthi Parishad public meeting that was ever featured on the front page of Calcutta daily newspapers. On the following day, Dr. Swamy and I addressed another Vidyarthi Parishad rally held in a North Calcutta auditorium—it was an overflow audience, again! This time, it was mostly sympathizers and cadres of RSS, Rashtra Sevika Samiti, Jana Sangh, and ABVP. Opposition came from the audience when Dr. Swamy chose to speak in English, at my request, primarily in order to cater to the English language newspaper reporters present there. (Most RSS people are avidly pro-Hindi—they would not entertain English even at an indoor student rally in Bengal).

RSS was happy to see the Vidyarthi Parishad drawing big crowds in West Bengal. However, to many of us, it was a matter of displeasure and disappointment that the student swayamsevaks were not sufficiently motivated by Sangh leaders to join the Parishad activities. RSS' need for students was over—it badly needed politically motivated students during the Emergency to take the beating on the streets and fill Indira Gandhi's jails—now it could afford to put its non-political face back on again.

CHAPTER SEVEN

WOMEN AND THE SANGH: FEMINISM TOPSY-TURVY

On the day of Vijaya Dashami in 1936, eleven years after the core RSS for men was formed, Mrs. Lakshmibai Kelkar founded Rashtra Sevika Samiti, the chief Sangh group for women, in the city of Wardha in Maharashtra. Mrs. Kelkar was asked by Dr. Hedgewar to begin the organization (the "Sevika" group was founded shadowing the Mahila Congress, the women's organization in Congress party), primarily as a spouses' group to work as caretakers for the family while their husbands were away on "patriotic" duties; it also acted as a volunteer body to help out with cooking, etc., at camps and meetings. However, the main difference between the Congress and Rashtra Sevika Samiti has been that while many Congress women actively participated with their men in pro-Gandhi passive freedom struggle, the RSS women always kept their identity separate from their men. In my long tenure as a swayamsevak, I failed to see a single woman taking part in "mainstream" all-male RSS activities—in some places in India, the spouses were there to cook, clean and do all the other chores at Sangh meetings and camps. Moreover, BJP and VHP stalwarts such as Uma Bharati and Sadhvi Rithambara were unknown in the first fifty years of RSS history. Only very rich female personalities such as Maharani (Queen) Gayatri Devi of Udaipur and Rajmata (Queen Mother) Vijaya Raje Scindia of Gwalior were known to us. A handful of Sevika Samiti volunteers would be mentioned sporadically at inner-core meetings. Since the rise of leaders such as Uma Bharati and Rithambara in the late eighties, the Sangh women have made

some headway in their activities. Both these women have made a name for themselves by their fiercely anti-Muslim, anti-government rhetoric.⁷²

I have in my collection a few Hindi speeches by these two Sangh women—the message is loud and clear—Islam is the number one enemy, and the woman's real place is the home. In spite of the Sangh claim to be in favor of equality for women, Uma Bharati and Rithambara re-assert the well-known RSS position that women should remain number two in society.⁷³ In order to reduce conflict in the society, the Sangh Parivar recommends that women be given the number one position in the family. However, this is only a ploy because in a historically patriarchal society such as in India, regardless of religion, women have always been the

⁷²One cannot help but draw a parallel between them and conservative American women such as Bay Buchanan, the sister of Pat Buchanan. Both Bay and Pat Buchanan's far-right politics have now been legitimized by mainstream American media such as CNN and NBC—both Buchanans are hosting "TV shows with balancing opinions" (example: Equal Times on CNBC). The far-right in the USA has long espoused anti-immigrant views—they have been busy with their conservative Republican and Democratic friends in the Congress and Senate to curtail benefits even to legal immigrants—of course RSS-minded Indian immigrants do not like that.

Phyllis Schlafly, head of the Eagle Forum, is another American woman on the extreme Religious Right. She led her group to crush progressive women's forums such as the Equal Rights Amendment movement. Schlafly, among other views, holds that liberal women are to blame for much of the harassment directed at them, up to and including rape. (Source: Cynthia Leenerts, pers. comm.)

⁷³ *Hindu Visva* 23:1. From: Eva Hellman. *Political Hinduism: The Challenge of Visva Hindu Parishad*. Uppsala, 1993.

underdogs. Without a radical shake-up in the social system, their position will remain that way.⁷⁴

Historically, organized-chauvinist religions worldwide have attempted to downplay and neutralize the dialectics and confrontations in the society to achieve and retain their supremacist and authoritative role. Hinduism in particular has purposefully diffused the uprising of the oppressed against the privileged social and political hegemony by bringing forth the concepts of “punarjanma” (reincarnation) and “niyati” (fate).⁷⁵ The underlying message of these concepts drives the subaltern to inaction and dejection as nothing can be changed, reshaped, or improved—everything in a man’s or a woman’s life is pre-determined based on actions in his or her past lives.

Rashtra Sevika Samiti however served a vital purpose for the Sangh. Responding to the challenges of secularism, socialism, and feminism, women’s service to the RSS became symbolic of the Sangh’s service to the nation. Scholars such as Tanika Sarkar and Amrita Basu dispel the notion that Hindu women are drawn into the *Rashtra Sevika Samiti* on the

⁷⁴ The theory of a secondary position of women in the society has been brought up again by current fundamentalist groups such as Promise Keepers of USA. Tony Evans, a Promise Keepers organizer, advises the Christian woman:

“For the sake of your family and the survival of our culture, let your man be a man if he is willing. Protect yourself, if you must, by handing the reins back slowly. But if your husband tells you he wants to reclaim his role, let him. God never intended for you to bear the load you’re carrying.”

[From: Mary Stewart van Leeuwen. Servanthood or soft patriarchy? A Christian feminist looks at the Promise Keepers movement. *The Journal of Men’s Studies* 5:248, 1997]

⁷⁵ Bhupendranath Datta, one of the pioneering socialist leaders of India and brother of Swami Vivekananda, observes this in his book *Bharatiya Samaj Paddhati* (in Bengali), Vol. 3. Nababharat Publishers, Calcutta. 1984.

basis of its religious appeals, and instead suggest that the women are responding to the reinterpretation of faith by the high-tech yet conservative Indian media. This notion has merit as nationally televised series Mahabharat and Ramayan drew a large number of women and turned them into Sangh sympathizers.⁷⁶ Actors and actresses on these shows subsequently won elections on BJP tickets.

As Amrita Basu observes, "If women, who are generally considered more devout than men, are not drawn to Hindu nationalism by its religious appeals, it is unlikely that men's commitment to the movement can be attributed to religious faith".

As with many other fundamentalist organizations across the globe, the RSS women are very conservative—even more so than some of their male counterparts. Religious myths and miracles among their circles are frequently narrated and used to glorify the Hindu gods and goddesses—the emphasis being the subordinate role of the woman in Hindu society.

The internationally ridiculed fiasco of Ganesh idols "drinking" milk was taken up by the women of RSS and VHP in a big way. All the "non-believers" and scientists who de-mystified the story were greatly ridiculed by the RSS men and women, and branded as atheists, even communists.

Feminism has always been a downright taboo and an intensely hated concept among the Sangh women. The singular glaring example of RSS' refusal to let its male and female members work together tells us a lot about the Sangh's mindset. Rashtra Sevika Samiti's signature prayer

⁷⁶ Two Hindu religious-mythological films, *Jai Santoshi Ma* (Hindi, 1975) and *Baba Taraknath* (Bengali, 1977) "engendered a religious revival and indicated a modernity of the religious turn"—these movies consciously helped sway the Hindu middle class women to the right. From: Vijay Prashad, *Emergency Assessments, Social Scientist*, September-October 1996.

is also differently worded. Obviously, the Samiti's mission is one of servitude and does not match the "heroic mission" of its all-male sibling organization.

Through the Rashtra Sevika Samiti (and its sister groups such as the Durga Vahini), the Sangh is trying hard to keep Indian women segregated and purposely underprivileged. It is the subservient position of women under fundamentalist Islam that the Sangh decries, but one detects a not-so-hidden undercurrent of jealousy: These Muslim men really have control while we still haven't quite managed to bring "our women" to heels.

"Women are inferior"

Women indeed seem to be second-class citizens in the Sangh vocabulary. A BJP-produced textbook (1992) on social change and development in the state of Uttar Pradesh says:⁷⁷

"Legislation which has given rights to women is also responsible for family disorganization. All such acts have raised the status of women. The total result of these progressive legislative measures by the Government in favor of women is tension and strife in the family".

Mridula Sinha, President of BJP's Mahila Morcha (women's forum) announced in 1993:

"We in the Bharatiya Janata Party are opposed to women's liberation because it is against men. We tell women to be more adjusting, because they will have nowhere to go if they leave their husbands."

Compare this with the previously-cited quote from Tony Evans of the Promise Keepers.

⁷⁷ Niraj Pant. Look Ma! Sangh girohs gone progressive! *Sanskriti*, New York, 1996.

Swami Muktananda Saraswati, member of a VHP committee to “reform” the Indian Constitution, said in 1992:

“By giving inheritance rights to women the unity of society gets broken”.

Progressiveness, equal rights, and cultural freedom are rejected outright by the Sangh Parivar . They believe that the ideals for a woman must be Sita, Savitri, Gargi, or Damayanti. Sangh literature brand these women to be “fitting examples of allegiance, set for ideal womanhood”.⁷⁸

It is interesting to note that all of these legendary Hindu women, in spite of their strong personality, wisdom, and the occasional courage to voice opposition, ultimately yielded to their male cohorts or superiors. In “mainstream” Hindu epics such as the Ramayan and Mahabharat, women’s voices of opposition to male dominance have been silenced. As Cynthia Leenerts points out, “one must remember that in ... Ramraj, Sita is not present for long: inconvenient women disappear, and the queen essentially becomes a golden statue.”⁷⁹ When the statue—the conservatives’ symbol of purity and chastity—was alive, the “supreme god of dharma” Rama harshly rejected her, “Go then, with my permission, wherever you may wish. The world is open before you, but I will have nothing to do with you, nor have I any attachment to you any more. How could I take you back, straight from Ravana’s lap?”⁸⁰

Along with these women from legend, historical figures such as the warrior queen Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi are

78 *Sanghshakti Vijetreeyam*. A Sangh publication. December 1995. Ahmedabad.

79 Cynthia Ann Leenerts. 1997. *Epic Transformations: Reinscriptions of Sita and Draupadi in Twentieth-Century Indian Literature*. Ph.D. dissertation, George Washington University.

80 Kamban’s Ramayana text. Cited in 79.

frequently invoked by the Sangh—Lakshmibai fought a heroic battle against the British army. However, Muslim leaders such as Tipu Sultan who fought against British imperialism with extreme gallantry are not admired. A more recently-cited example of the "liberated" woman—by the Sangh's definition—dwells on the Hindu scriptural debate between Shankaracharya and Mandan Mishra where the latter's wife assumed the role of the moderator and delivered the verdict in favor of Shankaracharya whose school of thought is virulently male chauvinistic.

In addition, the RSS considers Manu as one of the chief proponents of the "correct" Hindu social system. Manu established social codes that undermine the Hindu woman to a point where she does not have any human rights and is treated as man's marketable property. Manu also forbids remarriage for widows (no such proscription is placed on the marital freedom of men). Both Manu and Yajnavalkya (the "Guru" of Gargi) prescribed lifelong subordination of women.⁸¹

"Modernity"—defined by the Sangh as a "western" dress code and/or an "immoral" lifestyle—is equated to sexual perversion and deemed unacceptable. Thus, BJP and RSS leaders in January 1998 rejected the notion that the deceased Princess Diana be elevated as a role model for Indian women. BJP policy supports women in their traditional and conservative family roles.

Dr. M. Lakshmi Kumari, an RSS woman leader and a former president of the Vivekananda Kendra, writes:⁸²

"Much is talked about these days on the empowerment of women. What does it really mean? Economic self sufficiency

⁸¹G. Shastri. *A Treatise on Hindu Law*. Cited in Bhupendranath Dutta, *Bharatiya Samaj Paddhati* (in Bengali) Vol. 3. Nababharat Publishers, Calcutta, 1984.

⁸² *Sanghshakti Vijetreeyam*. A Sangh publication. December 1995. Ahmedabad.

and independence no doubt bring a lot of self confidence, stability and solace to women but doesn't equip her to face up to challenges at a deeper level within herself, within the family or in the society..."

Therefore, Dr. Lakshmi Kumari continues,

"Empowered...women can show the way how to encounter hatred with love, callousness with carefulness, violence with nonviolence and compassion and self interest with selflessness."

In other words, according to Dr. Kumari, Indian women must be more subservient and yielding to violent, selfish, and callous men. That would be, according to the Sangh, reflective of women's emancipation and empowerment.

Ratna Kapoor and Brenda Cossman point out⁸³ that wages for household work and lesbianism are both considered by RSS to be antithetical to Indian womanhood—defined in and through women's "natural roles" as mothers and wives. Wages for housework and lesbianism undermine these roles, thus they cannot be supported. The so-called moderate BJP leader Atal Bihari Vajpayee says, "Women who want to become men and want to make other women (like) men are worthy of ridicule."⁸⁴ As Kapoor and Cossman explain, this statement implies the assumption that women and men are inherently different vis-à-vis their roles in society, and this assumption can then be strategically deployed to justify any discriminatory treatment and subjugation.

We have seen such dictums on women throughout the history of all patriarchal religions—Brahminic Hinduism,

⁸³Ratna Kapoor and Brenda Cossman. Communalising gender engendering community. Women, legal discourse and the saffron agenda. *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, December 1993.

⁸⁴Cited in 83.

Christianity, Islam, Judaism—a very recent extreme example being the forcibly imposed measures on women in Afghanistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Bangladesh.⁸⁵ Ironically, the Sangh is vociferous about “women’s woes” in these Islamic countries and never mentions the situation in predominantly Muslim countries where women are more independent and the Islamic Shari’a has not had much of an effect against them. Malaysia, Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Indonesia, and Turkey are just some examples. Black Muslim women in the United States could also be included in this latter list.

The Sangh has blatant double standards when it comes to freedom and equal rights for Hindu women. They ardently oppose the practice of polygamy lawful in the Shari’a under extremely restrictive conditions, but are silent about the unlawful polygamy still practiced in Hindu societies.

[*Note: Current census data indicate that polygamy is practiced by Hindu men in India at rates substantially higher than that for Muslim men—in absolute numbers, in India, there are about ten to twelve times as many Hindu men who have multiple wives than there are Muslim men (Black Sunday, Manas, Sampradayikta Virodhi Andolan, New Delhi. December 92).*]

The Sangh is vociferously against the borkha (or veil) for Muslim women but mute about the Devdasi system that causes lifelong social and sexual enslavement of young girls at Hindu temples. The Sangh is vocal against the Shari’a laws, that by not yielding to the uniform civil code (UCC) create a dilemma for the Indian administration; yet it fails to mention the sacramental Hindu marriage system that does not even legally register the marriage thus creating a whole host of social and legal problems.

The “Sangh Parivar” also does not raise its voice in solidarity with Hindu women on landmark cases that uphold

⁸⁵These measures include the imposed dress code, etc. on women, and in Afghanistan, denying rights to have education or work.

the UCC such as the one fought by a Hindu woman named Lata Mittal where she won equal property rights for herself. Yet, at the same time, the Sangh has been supportive and exploitative of similar cases involving other religions such as the Shah Bano (Muslim), or Mary Ray (Christian) cases.⁸⁶

The episode of Taslima Nasreen

A stunning example of such double-standards and hypocrisy was the episode involving Taslima Nasreen, a doctor and author from Bangladesh. Ms. Nasreen, in her novel *Lajja* (Shame) denounced the Islamic clergy of Bangladesh for their role in oppressing Muslim women of that country. As a progressive author, she also championed equal rights for all sections of Bangladeshi society and severely condemned the Islamization of Bangladesh by religious fanatics and concurrent destruction of non-Islamic places of worship. Consequently, the author became a political target of Islamic zealots, and under death-threats, left Bangladesh—a situation that parallels the saga of the British author Salman Rushdie. However, BJP, RSS, and VHP jumped on this case. They translated *Lajja*, printed thousands of copies in various languages, and to create communal passions, distributed them free of charge—primarily in West Bengal, Tripura, and Assam—states adjoining Bangladesh and sharing a common ethno-cultural heritage. What the Hindu supremacists failed to tell the recipients of the book was that their own ideology is no different from the Islamic zealots when it comes to women's causes and their socio-political and economic stance. It is obvious that Rashtra Sevika Samiti, Durga Vahini, and the other women's groups associated with Sangh Parivar will disempower Hindu women and drive them deeper into subservience.

⁸⁶Source: Sashwati Ghosh. June-July 1996. We want equal laws for everybody. *Khoj*, a tri-monthly Bengali magazine for women, Calcutta.

Bride burning and dowry deaths in RSS' heartland—Why can't they stop it?

What have the Sangh women done to prevent tens of thousands of Hindu brides from being gruesomely burnt to death by their husbands and in-laws?⁸⁷ The epicenter of the problem of bride burning and other forms of dowry-related violence against women is Delhi (the Indian capital), Urban Uttar Pradesh (cities such as Kanpur, Lucknow and Agra have witnessed the highest number of deaths), and places adjoining Delhi (Haryana, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Punjab) follow close behind. The problem has largely been concentrated among the upper caste, economically privileged, Hindu communities. These areas and people have also traditionally been supporters of the right-wing and patriarchal parties such as RSS-BJP and Congress. But now the problem has spread rapidly to other traditionally incidence-free areas and classes—South Indian states such as Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka, western states such as Maharashtra and Gujarat; and eastern states such as Bihar and Bengal (the latter being a bastion of leftist politics in India) have lately witnessed a rapid surge in the number of incidents being reported (see Table 2).

From Table 2, we observe the following:

- (i). The incidence of dowry deaths has surged since 1987 (the reason could also be greater press coverage and uncovering of facts by feminist organizations and lawyers).
- (ii). The numbers are the highest in the "Hindu-Hindi Heartland" (popularly known as the "Cow Belt") and "Affluent West" areas that are traditional strongholds of RSS-BJP and Congress.

⁸⁷Partha Banerjee. April 1996. *The Burning Bride*. *Deolog*, New York. Paper also read at the *South Asian Women's Conference*, Los Angeles, September, 1997.

(iii). The traditionally incidence-free non-Hindi-speaking south Indian and eastern states (such as West Bengal) have seen a rapid rise of dowry deaths since 1987.

At the same time, surprisingly, some other places in India are almost incidence-free. This could be attributed to the following reasons:

(a) Preponderance of non-Hindu religions that forbid dowry- and caste-based marriages;

(b) Preponderance of older (pre-Brahminization) social systems of dowry-free marriage (visible in Assam and Tripura);

(c) Preponderance of tribal societies that have dowry- and caste-free social system (e.g., the far-eastern areas of India).

It is worthy of note that the areas with the least number of deaths are also those that have the least influence of the right-wing fundamentalist parties. On the other hand, it must be mentioned that one of the main fighters against dowry deaths is the Janvadi Mahila Samiti (AIDWA), a women's group affiliated to CPI(M).

Uma Bharati, Sadhvi Rithambara, and Vijaya Raje Scindia—The celibate trio (and their burning message of hate)

Over the years, these three women have emerged as some of the most powerful orators of the Sangh Parivar. Mrs. Scindia comes from the old-guard Jana Sangh whereas Uma Bharati and Sadhvi Rithambara both surfaced during the Rama movement of the late eighties and early nineties. All these women explicitly espouse hatred and violence against Muslims. They all have a celibate lifestyle—Scindia being an elderly widow and the other two being

"sanyasins".⁸⁸ Scindia is from the royal family of Gwalior and called the "Rajmata" or queen-mother (her son Madhav Rao Scindia is a Congress party stalwart), but the other two women leaders are from poor, lower-caste families. All of them have been involved with Rashtra Sevika Samiti, VHP's woman front Durga Vahini, or BJP's Mahila Morcha. Their image as celibate, pious women with an aura of renunciation gives them a greater prominence both among the Sangh circles and the Indian mass media. The factor of renunciation still musters huge popularity in India—Gandhi is a prime example; the Sangh pracharaks also fall into this category—their single, dedicated, sagely lifestyle bring in a nuance of sacrifice and selflessness that is ordinarily so invisible in the Indian population. What hides under the ascetic lifestyle is that these people often are adamant in their beliefs, ruthless in their acts, and not having any stake in their future (in the form of families and children), do not care if they spread misery and cause destruction. Often asceticism is merely an opportunistic public front for a host of corrupt and depraved politicians.

I have a few cassettes full of Uma Bharati's and Rithambara's speeches at public meetings. Both women are fiercely anti-Muslim, anti-socialist, anti-American, and anti-Indian government. Both heap abuse on people the Sangh considers its arch-enemies—personalities like the former Indian prime minister V. P. Singh, former Uttar Pradesh chief minister Mulayam Singh Yadav, former Bihar chief minister Laloo Prasad Yadav, and the Shahi Imam of Delhi, Syed Abdullah Bukhari. Indian Muslims as a group come in for the most abuse.

I cite an example of a typical Rithambara speech⁸⁹:

⁸⁸ A person who claims to have renounced all worldly pleasures and family ties.

⁸⁹ Amrita Basu. "Women and religious nationalism in India: an introduction", *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, December 1993.

***"Hindus, who can never be communal
are today being branded as communal.
They (Muslims) murder with impunity
and people are silent.
But we are defamed when we cry out in pain!"***

Amrita Basu attended a VHP rally in New Delhi where Rithambara spoke. Basu remembers that Rithambara's speech was melodic in original Hindi: "Muslims, like a pinch of sugar, should sweeten a glass of milk; instead, like a lemon, they sour it. What they do not realize is that a squeezed lemon is thrown away, while the milk that has been curdled solidifies into paneer (cheese)." Therefore, Rithambara asserts, Indian Muslims have two choices: either they assimilate like sugar or they will be discarded like a squeezed lemon.⁹⁰

Here is the translation by Madhu Kishwar⁹¹ of a speech by Uma Bharati:

"The Koran exhorts them to lie in wait for idol worshippers, to skin them alive, to stuff them in animal skins and torture them until they ask for forgiveness. Our heritage enjoins repentance even if an ant is killed underfoot."

Let us briefly discuss the much-talked-about case of Roop Kanwar.⁹² In a remote village in Rajasthan in 1987, she is said to have committed "sati" (self-immolation with her dead husband). The available evidence indicates that she was drugged and forcibly immolated by her in-laws. This should have created a furor all across India but not much

⁹⁰Same as 89.

⁹¹*Manushi*, No. 60, 1990.

⁹² Details about this case can be found in:
Radha Kumar. 1993. *The History of Doing*. Kali for Women, New Delhi, and,
Elisabeth Bumiller. 1990. *May You Be the Mother of A Hundred Sons*. Fawcett Columbine, New York.

happened except for some protest marches by a few women's groups. The Rajmata Vijaya Raje Scindia defends the immolation of Hindu widows on their husband's funeral pyres "as long as it is voluntary". Uma Bharati, on the other hand, opposes all kinds of sati and feels quite justifiably that the practice has more to do with property than religion. Scindia speaks the language of Hindu conservatism while Bharati speaks of women's rights albeit from a Hindu standpoint. BJP and VHP are shrewdly making use of both leaders.

The Sangh Parivar gradually bestowed greater prominence on these women leaders as they (especially the young ones) became more militant and managed to incite organized communal riots. Currently, "Rithambara and Bharati are vital to the Sangh's attempt to eschew its elitist character. Both women seemingly embody a subaltern perspective: they are low caste, relatively poor, and female." They thereby serve to bolster the Sangh's fallacious contention that the organization operates at the grassroots level. Also, RSS cannot maintain that in India, Muslims dominate Hindus today. But it wants to justify that Hindu violence incited and carried out by its men and women is indeed against the "sexually predatory Muslim men" preying on the "vulnerable Hindu women".⁹³

The hate-mongering by the Sangh is gradually converting the apolitical Hindu woman into a zealot who is remorseless and without compassion even for a neighbor she has known for many years—perhaps they have borrowed spices and oil from each other for many years. But no more friendship. Times are not the same.

Before we leave this chapter, I want to share the following with the reader. A young friend of mine who grew up in America narrated this story to me. I quote my friend here:

While I was in India in 1993-94, I heard a cassette tape of a woman (maybe Rithambara) calling on Hindu men

⁹³See Amrita Basu's article (in 89 and 90).

to go and rape Muslim women. I remember raising this (issue) with my cousin who calls herself a feminist and who used to have a Marxist politics, but who now is extremely anti-Muslim.

Do you know what she told me when I asked her, "How can you be a feminist and support an ideology, a political party, a movement that calls for the rape of Muslim women?"

She responded to me, "No, I don't support that."

I was relieved.

She continued, "Why would Hindu men want to pollute their bodies with Muslim women?"

Partha, you can imagine how disgusted, shocked I was.

My young friend was disgusted, shocked. She had every reasons to be. Because she did not realize how all-pervasive the doctrine of hate has been—how the Indian air has become thickly polluted with the poison of contempt. Hate has now pervaded the mind of a self-proclaimed "feminist, a former Marxist." Sangh Parivar has succeeded in converting her too. Now she also hates "Muslims"

We have our reasons to be worried. Very worried.

CHAPTER EIGHT

EPILOGUE

GLOBAL FUNDAMENTALISM AND SOCIAL MOVEMENT ORGANIZATIONS: HOW RSS FITS IN THE PARADIGM

They are real—but so are we

The surge of fundamentalist movements around the globe and their changing world-views, ideologies, and ongoing programs are unprecedented and overwhelming. The variety of organizational and functional styles within the religious impulses we call fundamentalism is simply intimidating. The Sangh Parivar forms an important component of this global variety, especially when we consider the number of people it affects in the vast, politically and socially sensitive, regions of South Asia. This variety within the religious movements around the world gives us “a testimony to the remarkable innovative capacity of religion and ultimately says something about the general human condition. It may well be that within the context of the modern world, fundamentalist religion appears as a generic human reaction.”⁹⁴

⁹⁴ R. H. Williams. *Movement dynamics and social change: transforming fundamentalist ideology and organizations*. In: *Accounting for Fundamentalism*. Eds. M. E. Marty and R. S. Appleby. University of Chicago. 1991.

However, there is a problem. The problem is that their actions are taking advantage of man's and woman's spirits and emotions toward religion. To meet their social and political agenda, the movements are creating in their analogous ways a world of fragmentation and separation. As a result, the human race, instead of moving forward to achieve universal fraternity and citizenry, is going back to the days of prejudice, intolerance, and discrimination—the end result of which, unless carefully dealt with, is destruction of the race itself. Science and technology have provided us with tools of mass destruction—with the elements practicing bigotry and violence promoted to political power, it is only a matter of time before such destruction is brought about.

Unlike the proponents of Christian apocalyptic narratives and the subsequent Second Coming or the Hindus awaiting the arrival of "Satyayug" at the end of the current "Kalayug"—enlightened people should not believe in doomsaying. Instead, we must believe in man's power to stand up against the disunion and dissonance prophesized and planned by the fundamentalists. We must also remember the extent of mass destruction we have seen in recent history. Whether it is the horror of Hitler and Nazi Germany executing the Jews and all other "undesirables", mass political purge of innocent civilians in Stalin's Russia, America's "Agent Orange" and extermination of "communists" in Vietnam, "ethnic cleansing" of Bosnian Muslims by the Serbs, mass rape of Bangladeshi women by Pakistani soldiers in 1971, extirpating democracy in Chile, Guatemala, or El Salvador, throttling the voice of freedom and human rights in apartheid South Africa and confederate USA, the age-old insults heaped on women and "untouchables" by the Hindu society, or Shiv Sena's recent genocide of poor Muslims in Bombay slums—we see a pattern of hate. This hate arises out of a mindset of supremacy—social, political, or religious, and with a deliberate disregard for democratic principles. Politically enlightened people must work against it, globally, and remain united. Only sustained and unified action against the forces of divisiveness and bias will keep the human soul alive. There is no easy way out.

RSS and other Social Movement Organizations: their similarity, heterogeneity

Social Movement Organizations (SMOs) such as the RSS of India, Christian Coalition of USA, or Taliban of Afghanistan “exist explicitly for the purpose of sponsoring social change, and are thus ideologically and instrumentally driven.”⁹⁵ SMOs not only vary from each other in their theories or mode of action, in spite of being based on a universal theme of supremacy and exclusivism, they may in fact be competitors and enemies within the context of a country or continent as they vie with each other for members, financial resources, and legitimacy with the public or the government. Thus, for instance, the “Sangh Parivar”, despite being superficially fraternal to Shiv Sena in Maharashtra or Shiromani Akali Dal in Punjab, have inbuilt mutual vexation and are destined for physical and ideological collisions in the coming days. It is likely that non-RSS elements in the Sangh Parivar will have more severe confrontations in the near future. We have witnessed such melees in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and other places in recent years. As BJP is gaining ground as a national party and coming to political power in various states, the controlling grip that the Sangh once had on BJP’s political agenda and recruitment is steadily slipping, and nasty episodes a la Congress are surfacing—episodes that would be unthinkable in the Sangh’s “silent, powerless” days.

Some recent cases that have occurred in BJP-run states, or in BJP strongholds, must be mentioned (other than the very recent fiasco in U.P. in late 97)—(1) Dhapu Bai, an adivasi woman in Rajasthan, was gang-raped by liquor contractors in 1996. An international petition demanding justice sent to the

⁹⁵D. Knoke and D. Prensky. What relevance do organizational theories have for voluntary associations? *Social Science Quarterly* 65: 3-20. 1984. In, *Accounting for Fundamentalism*. Eds. M. E. Marty and R. S. Appleby. University of Chicago. 1991.

chief minister B. S. Sekhawat, an RSS stalwart, was ignored; (2) the son of a BJP legislator in Rajasthan threw acid on a schoolgirl in 1997 and disfigured her permanently—the perpetrator was never brought to justice (as of June 97); (3) a chaos broke out in BJP ranks in Gujarat in 1996, when members of one BJP faction publicly stripped a rival BJP legislator naked; (4) “horsetrading” of legislators was engineered by the BJP in 1995 to capture power in Uttar Pradesh; (5) In 1996, Phoolan Devi (the “Bandit Queen”) seeking elections in Uttar Pradesh, was attacked by armed BJP men (source: New York Times, May 1996); (6) In 1997, intra-party squabble forced the BJP chief minister of Delhi, Madan Lal Khurana, to resign in favor of rival BJP leader, Saheb Singh; (7) In April 1998, celebrated artist M. F. Hussain’s house was broken into and ransacked by Bajrang Dal goons—a barbaric and cowardly act supported by Shiv Sena chief Thackeray.

Similarly, VHP’s recent recruitment of “tough” men and women through Bajrang Dal, Durga Vahini (women of Durga Vahini are now taking rifle training), and other ephemeral groups—has worried, and often embarrassed, a number of Sangh leaders. The demolition of the Babri Masjid has caused a deep intellectual division in the Sangh rank and file regarding its actions however unexposed that division may have been. Old-time stalwarts, swayamsevaks such as Shankar Singh Vaghela of Gujarat, have challenged the authority of the RSS and openly revolted; in Vaghela’s case, breaking away from the parent organization and forming rival parties—thus posing a serious threat to the once-disciplined “Sangh Parivar” and its hierarchy. Even many diehard swayamsevaks do not like these developments—developments most Indians view as “politics as usual”—something they have experienced during decades of corrupt and inefficient Congress regimes.⁹⁶

A glaring example of this BJP “politics Congress style” was the recent “horse-trading” by the Kalyan Singh government in U.P. when the lower-caste party BSP

⁹⁶I can attest to this contention based on conversations with my father, uncle, and some other old-time swayamsevaks.

withdrew its support from their coalition with BJP. Only days later, after the fall of the I. K. Gujral government, Vajpayee and Advani bragged that they “had” scores of Congress M.P.’s in Delhi, and wanted to form their own government with help from these breakaway opportunists. Even the RSS’ central leadership has resolved to resort to any means to stay in power—now they assert that “staying in power is important”!

Why are they what they are—now

Why are SMOs, gathered around religious doctrines and faiths, gaining ground around the world and what are their common causes? Be it the RSS or Christian Coalition, or Taliban, or the Nurculuk movement of Turkey, Jamat of Bangladesh, Russian Orthodox Church, the nationalist Yeshivas of Israel, or the Shiite fundamentalists in Iraq; some common grounds are present that might explain their ascendancy. Some underlying reasons are: **(One)** inefficient and corrupt governments (such as the Congress governments in India) unable to meet basic economic needs of the people—SMOs (such as the RSS) fill in the vacuum created by huge public disappointment; **(Two)** a consequent public disloyalty toward the state, carefully orchestrated and manipulated by the SMOs, to a degree where the demarcation between the state and its corrupt machinery is blurred; **(Three)** SMOs demonize a certain section of the society and blame them for all national problems—largely false allegations that instigate the racial, religious, or linguistic majority to act against these “evil aliens” (in the Indian scenario, it is the Muslims, Christians, and “socialists” who are targeted by the RSS) thus diverting people’s attention from gross injustices the SMO’s themselves commit against the so-called “mainstream” people (such as the upper castes Hindus’ historical oppression of women and dalits); **(Four)** SMOs forge a false sense of security, via conservative social and religious dogmas where the goal is to bring people together on a common platform based on so-called family values and mores, religiosity, and reactionary social and political agenda. However, these values are purposefully slanted and

inherently oppressive—oppressions that historically have contributed to society's ills in a significant way; and (Five) the failure of the progressives and liberals to counter religious fundamentalism in an effective way (historically, Indian liberals' and leftists' aversion to religion or spirituality and rejection of nationalist-religious leaders such as Ram Mohan Ray or Swami Vivekananda, has resulted in an inability to fight fundamentalists' on the latter's turf). Hindutva proponents, with their sustained adherence to their own ideology and propaganda, have been successful in branding progressives as anti-religion, "pseudo-secularists" "minority appeasers", and as elitists detached from "traditional Hindu" sentiments. Unfortunately, the allegation of elitism and detachment is true for many Indians who call themselves liberals—within the country and outside.

The role of liberals and conservatives in India since 1989

Conservatives and fundamentalists have been successful (with a lot of help from the media) in diverting people's attention from the fact that it is the liberals and leftists of India who have historically fought in favor of the oppressed, whether it was for the abolition of "sati", earning property rights for Hindu, Muslim, and Christian women against ancient patriarchal laws, or the lower-caste underprivileged's right to find work proportionate to their numbers in the Indian society. In fact, in 1989, it was the Sangh Parivar that began the so-called Rama Rathyatra to whip up upper caste Hindu sentiments against the then Indian government's decision to set apart a proportionate number of public sector jobs for the historically oppressed and underprivileged lower castes. This episode is now known as the "Mandal" after the Mandal Commission whose recommendations were implemented by the then government. Massive caste violence followed the Rathyatra around the country—some upper caste youths even immolated themselves to protest against the reservation for the "untouchables". On this issue, BJP withdrew its crucial support to the government (of which it was a part) paving the way for its dissolution. One could compare this event with the beginning of the

American Civil War in 1861 between the conservative South and liberal North on the abolition of slavery. Indeed, a de facto civil war-like situation has prevailed in India since 1989. Chances are, it will escalate into a full-blown civil war in the coming years now that the Sangh Parivar has ascended to national power through its political machinery, the BJP, enabling it to implement its ultraconservative social, political, and economic agenda.

On the religio-cultural front, whether it is the Indian artist M. F. Hussain's stylized painting of Goddess Saraswati in the nude, or Salman Rushdie's belletristic "insult" on Islam, however sporadic these "sins" are, the Bal Thackerays, Ashok Singhal (Singhal is the VHP chief), or Ayatollahs have made big issues out of them with their organized radical right-wing forces. The antipathy of the bourgeois elite, and of some progressives towards religion and the associated cultural mores practiced by the otherwise apolitical and peaceful mass, has provided an additional powerful tool to the bigot. Through sustained campaigning against the progressives' and elitists' so-called "repugnance for traditions and cultural values", the right-wing extremists have succeeded in hammering a wedge between the subaltern and the liberal activist, while hiding their own doctrine of exclusion and hate.

Opportunistic forces, within and outside national borders, have historically exploited this intrinsic discord of the people and consequently destabilized the nation by contriving social and political disturbances. Eventually, the nation in turmoil and its people have fallen prey to economic bondage imposed by national and international "big brothers". Religion thus far has not helped the common man earn his bread, the woman mend her home, or the child to play in the innocence of his childhood—the "traditional" role of the components of a family that conservatives so dearly want everyone to be in.

Many forms of fundamentalism across the globe use the gaps between the subjective experience of religious truth and organized religion to gain independence from established religious organizations. These SMOs then use religion's

accompanying cultural power in their war against secular civil society and government structures. Perhaps the most transparent example of a fundamentalist group drawing on “culture” for its legitimacy and particular agenda is the Sangh Parivar. As we have seen in the previous chapters, the Sangh is taking the heretofore generalized association between Hindu practices and Indian culture as the basis for propounding and legitimizing its own set of religious and political beliefs, and firmly locating Hinduism’s cultural power under their organizational umbrella. Whereas many fundamentalist movements have undermined and in effect diversified institutional religious authority (such as the Moral Majority, Christian Coalition, Promise Keepers, and Nation of Islam), the Sangh Parivar is doing just the opposite. Van der Veer⁹⁷ notes that the Sangh’s attempt at producing a homogenized, conformist Hinduism is a travesty of the existing traditional cultural associations, especially since the Sangh is tied to the political interests of particular groups of Hindus such as the upper caste patriarchs—the traditional kings and kingmakers of India. It is a clear expression of cultural power—movements designed solely to attain political goals. In the Indian context, the immediate goal of the Sangh Parivar is to grab national administrative power through its political front, the BJP. It seems, Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar’s much-preached vision of “making a man and his character” through Sangh association and indoctrination is a matter of the remote past.

Fact-mutilation, miracles, and myths—the three elixirs for brainwashing

Historical distortions are bound to cause trouble for the Sangh—we have seen in the past that even pro-Hindu historians have come out openly against its outrageous

⁹⁷P. van der Veer. Hindu nationalism and the discourse of modernity: the Vishva Hindu Parishad. *Accounting for Fundamentalism*. Eds. M. E. Marty and R. S. Appleby. University of Chicago. 1991.

mutilation of facts.⁹⁸ Some Sangh enthusiasts even claim that the Taj Mahal was built by Hindu kings! And we are now quite familiar with the Ayodhya episode where a planned bloody episode was orchestrated around the shabby claim that an old mosque (now destroyed) was the birthplace of the mythical Hindu God-king Ram. We have seen in previous chapters how this claim is strongly questioned even by pro-RSS columnists.⁹⁹

However, other propaganda around the premises of myths and miracles is very much in vogue. Attempts to expel “aliens” (i.e., Muslims) at the Ayodhya shrine are said by Hindus to have been divinely mandated by the miraculous discovery of a sacred image of the deified Ram.¹⁰⁰ In response to Christians’ “unearthing” crosses in Kerala, the RSS men have fought back with counter-miracles of “discovery” of “lingas” (the phallic icon for Shiva). In Tamil Nadu, there was rioting in July 1990 between Hindus and Muslims in and around Nagore “dargah” (Islamic shrine), a complex that is said to be endowed with the “miraculous power” of its entombed Pir Shahul Hamid Naguir, whose annual festival attracts thousands of Hindus, Muslims, and Christians from all over South India. Hindu Raj workers became embroiled with Muslims in riots when a fakir at the “divine site” allegedly exhorted the crowd to

⁹⁸Even a pro-Hindu historian like Dr. R. C. Majumdar was annoyed when the RSS promoted a theory that the great Delhi and Agra monuments were built by Hindu rulers. He wrote to them saying that since they had given space to such nonsense he was not going to contribute to *The Organiser*. Opinion: Distortion of history. V. Krishna Ananth, *The Hindu*, January 8, 1997.

⁹⁹Koenraad Elst. 1991. *Ayodhya and After—Issues before the Hindu Society*. Voice of India, New Delhi.

¹⁰⁰Susan Bayly. Christians and competing fundamentalisms in South Indian society. In: *Accounting for Fundamentalism*. Eds. M. E. Marty and R. S. Appleby. University of Chicago. 1991.

exact vengeance for the killing of Muslim slum-dwellers in Bombay (four months ago previous to the festival).

In 1995, a rumor about clay idols of Lord Ganesha drinking milk was floated by the Hindu orthodoxy—Hindu temples worldwide suddenly became busy “demonstrating” the divine miracle. The fact that children from many poor Indian families did not get milk for weeks because of the Indian milk-industry’s and vendors’ insistence on selling milk only to temples at exorbitant prices, the incident exemplifies the extent to which a primitive anti-science version of religion can harm the least powerful in a society. Indian scientists quickly tried to disprove the “miracle” by showing capillary action and surface tension at work on the clay idols, but temple organizations and priests condemned them as non-believers, atheists, and communists! The British science journal *Nature* published a short article on the Ganesha “miracle”—the author described how Vishwa Hindu Parishad workers worked full time to justify the “miracle”. The workers described the “miracle” to be a sure proof of a Hindu revival.¹⁰¹

Conclusion—fundamentalism is a reaction to failure; it is also a reaction to apathy

Fundamentalist movements worldwide have been called “a reaction to failure”, i.e., they arise out of failures in the larger society. The Sangh Parivar’s understanding of its position in modern India is as follows: Hindu India suffered from Muslim invaders and British imperialism for one thousand years. Then it suffered at the hands of Gandhian and Nehruvian nationalists and socialists since political independence in 1947. The RSS contends that after independence, the Congress party failed to build a new society because of their allegiance to the “false dogma of secularism”, intended to appease the Muslims and Christians to win their electoral support. The Sangh Parivar believes

¹⁰¹K. S. Jayaraman. India's "milk miracle" is hard to swallow. *Nature*. 28 September 1995.

that it is in this situation of repeated failure that the RSS offers the Indian people a message that can truly be called “fundamentalism” since it draws on the timeless message of the “old-glory” of Hinduism. K. R. Malkani, the influential editor of *“The Organiser”* declared, “it was Gandhism yesterday, and it can only be the redoubtable RSS tomorrow.”¹⁰²

As we have discussed earlier, the repugnance of some sections of the liberal-left toward simple religious sentiments and mores has contributed to the ease with which the RSS has engineered a fundamentalist reaction from large sections of Indian society. The average, down-to-earth Indian citizen cannot clearly distinguish between the “morally depraved”, westernized opulence of the Bombay or New Delhi mansion dwellers and the educated westernized elite—both detached from the work-a-day hardship of the average Indian. Reactionaries add to that discontent, and the average Indian feels that he has been marginalized and abandoned by the urban elite. To him, the elite have deserted the old values of religion and have become “westernized” which to him is synonymous with atheism and/or moral degradation.

To a large extent, the Indian liberal-left, specially the one from the social and economic upper-class, in spite of its political enlightenment, has not made a conscious effort to dissociate its image described above from that of the morally depraved rich. The aversion and/or apathy of the leftists towards socio-religious reformers such as Ram Mohan Ray, Swami Vivekananda, Ramakrishna Paramhansa, Keshav Chandra Sen, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, Dayananda Saraswati, Jotirao Phule, or Bhimrao Ambedkar, has not helped the common Indian to understand their agenda. To a poor, unskilled laborer such as a rickshaw-puller or a landless farmer, international leftist slogans sound all too vague. The westernized Indian Marxists’ undermining of

¹⁰²This paragraph is paraphrased after Ainslie T. Embree. The function of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. In: *Accounting for Fundamentalism*. Eds. M. E. Marty and R. S. Appleby. University of Chicago. 1991.

religion has only created distance between the common man and these "City Babus".

Of course, there have been leftist groups in independent India such as the IPTA (Bharatiya Gananatya Sangha), Sahmat, and Jan Natya Manch; progressive filmmakers such as Ritwik Ghatak and Anand Patwardhan; poets, authors, artists and scholars such as Birendra Chattopadhyay, Mahasweta Devi, Habib Tanveer, and Irfan Habib; left leaders such as E. M. S. Namboodiripad and Hare Krishna Konar; labor leaders such as Sankar Guha Niyogi, and the entire Dalit intelligentsia who have worked tirelessly to promote the ideals of secularism, equal opportunity and justice, and social progressiveness. But their ceaseless and selfless work have not been accepted and promoted by the overwhelmingly conservative upper caste patriarchs; the Hindu elite; "centrist" politicians; the press; and even by a section of the "mainstream" Indian left.

A recent example of this rejection has been with the contemporary progressive poet-singer Suman Chatterjee of West Bengal. In spite of his remarkable musical talents and huge appeal to the young generation, he has been continuously undermined and ridiculed by the "mainstream" establishments including the press, the conservative and elite Bengalis, as well as by a section of left politicians in the state.

Nevertheless, the Sangh Parivar, with its long-learned lesson about the pro-religion psychology of the average Hindu Indian, has taken advantage of the extant cultural void with a carefully orchestrated theory and a newly-adopted functioning style. Their own elements of hatred, primitiveness, and prejudice have been hidden behind their new public face that superficially shows care and respect for their primary constituency—the urban, middle-class, upper-caste Hindu who is sick and tired of the misrule, corruption, and heavy-handedness, as well as the apathy of the elitist-left. As Flavia Agnes indicates, some Indian trade union members in Bombay believe that even the extremist "Shiv Sena has been able to provide a space for the workers for cultural assertion, however narrow and exclusionary in nature it might be. On the other hand, the left organizations

had rallied mainly around economic and political issues which had resulted in limiting their scope.”¹⁰³

History teaches us that whoever works steadfastly for the people and shows true compassion for their needs is paid attention to and given a vote of confidence. That is also the reason why Indian liberal and progressive activists such as Jaya Prakash Narayan, Asghar Ali Engineer, or Datta Samant, environmentalists Sundarlal Bahuguna and Medha Patkar, or Swami Agnivesh of the Bonded Labour Liberation Front have won the people’s trust, however confined their demographical influence might have been. On the other hand, “left-of-center”, “centrist”, and elitist personalities who are either out-of-touch with people or smudged by corruption and muscle-power politics, have been shunned. This contention is supported by the behavior of the supposedly left-of-center or centrist administrations in Bihar (Laloo Prasad Yadav/Rabri Devi), U.P. (Mulayam Singh Yadav), and Tamil Nadu (Jayalalitha, who recently made a successful electoral alliance with the BJP). The heavyhanded behavior of Beant Singh’s “centrist” Congress government in Punjab paved the way for a right-wing Akali-BJP coalition in the state.

Of course, this is not to say that right-wing and opportunist governments such as the one headed by Kalyan Singh of BJP in U.P. or the Shiv Sena government in Maharashtra are any better. The Kalyan Singh government has proved our assertion that the so-called party of difference, the BJP, is nothing but a party of chaos, corruption, opportunism, and hooliganism.

However, to the urban, middle-class Hindu, the Sangh swayamsevak in his neighborhood may seem to be a religious zealot, but at least he appears to be a “better” man than those seen during the Congress Raj. But we must remember that this image is a hoax the Sangh has successfully perpetuated among the politically naive. This is

¹⁰³ Flavia Agnes. Redefining the agenda of the womens’ movement within a secular framework. *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, December 1993.

indeed a delusion because the patriarchal, conservative, and oppressive characters of members of the Congress and Sangh are identical. With attainment of power, either at home or in the government, each behaves in the same oppressive manner. We have seen glaring examples of this in recent years.

Further, the Sangh and BJP leadership have been unable to provide a clean and efficient administration in places where they have been in power for a long time (such as in Delhi and U.P.). During my recent visit to Delhi, New Delhi, and Varanasi (U.P.), I was appalled to see the squalor in these cities. People said the level of corruption skyrocketed in recent years (not that the Delhi administration was ever clean). Especially, Varanasi, the sacred Hindu city the VHP plans to "liberate" along with Mathura, has become a nightmarish place to live. I have never seen so much pollution, power cuts, lack of transportation for common people, and general administrative callousness in Varanasi—it used to be a beautiful place to live. Varanasi and its adjacent Buddhist sacred city, Sarnath, have become conspicuous examples of BJP administrations' inefficiency and malfunction.

The Sangh Parivar's confidence in victory over the secular state can only be countered if the politically enlightened engage in a sustained battle against them on the Sangh's own grounds—in other words, if their bigoted, distorted, and divisive version of Hinduism is countered by the all-inclusive version taught to us by philosophers like Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa.

"This is the message of Sri Ramakrishna to the modern world," says Swami Vivekananda in his lecture on My Master delivered in New York in 1896: "Do not care for doctrines, do not care for dogmas, or sects, or churches, or temples; they count for little compared with the essence of existence in each man, which is spirituality; and the more this is developed in a man, the more powerful is he for

good. Earn that first, acquire that, and criticize no one, for all doctrines and creeds have some good in them.”¹⁰⁴

This is what the common decent Indian still believes in. This is where we still have hope.

104 *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. IV. Advaita Ashram, Calcutta.

APPENDIX I

"ALL CAN BE SACRIFICED FOR IDEALS BUT IDEALS ARE NOT TO BE ABANDONED"

An autobiographical essay by my father Jitendranath Banerjee, a lifelong and dedicated Sangh swayamsevak

(Translated from Bengali)

[*Note:* My father is much respected in the Sangh Parivar for his sincerity, dedication, and lifelong sacrifice. In spite of my renunciation of the Sangh ideology, a fact that has caused him deep disturbance and sadness, he generously allowed me to use his essay for this book. I am also indebted to him for the other references he sent me from Calcutta — Author.]

It was the Vijaya Dashami Day of 1938. I got stranded by the roadside to watch the parade of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in the locality of Godhulia of the city of Varanasi—a "Route March" by the swayamsevaks in their glittering military uniform, accompanied by an excellent band¹⁰⁵. The neatly ironed uniform of the

¹⁰⁵Route Marches or parades are held once or twice a year on auspicious days by all the local RSS branches of a given city or district—mainly to show off to the common people their numerical strength and militaristic disposition. It also helps in attracting young boys and men of the various neighborhoods that are chosen for this march. Like the author of this essay, many youngsters then start checking out the activities of the organization. Some of them, mainly the ones looking for friendship and free games and sports, get involved. Those who stay long enough slowly become indoctrinated. Indoctrination works well for the ones with no previous

volunteers, their shiny boots, belt, shoulder badges with an RSS emblem on them, bugles, side drums, bass-drums, their gallantry and flawless marching, all this completely took over my young mind. I was in the eighth grade at that time. Immediately after the puja holidays, I started visiting the Jangambari Shakha (an RSS branch) of Kashi (Varanasi). One day, when I was standing at a distance and watching the swayamsevaks playing games, the principal teacher of the shakha invited me to participate. It became my habit since to go there everyday for an hour. The invigorating games of the sanghsthan (the venue), the marching, the patriotic songs, the discipline, and above all, the sincere love and affection from everybody—all this imperceptibly drove my aimless life in the direction of a well-defined, great goal.

Over time, I was fortunate enough to become well-acquainted with responsible Sangh workers and leaders. Every now and then, there would be wide-ranging discussions during the meetings, and these theoretical discussions encouraged the swayamsevaks to nurture their thoughts and intellect. In addition, picnics, winter camps and other such fine programs left a deep impression of samskar (culture) in our minds. All this would lead to a strong character, good manners, patriotism, dutifulness, and the ability to take responsibility. Gradually, I was given the duties of a gatnayak (leader of an age-group), a teacher for the pre-teen boys, and a teacher for the teenage boys. Now it was no longer a matter of only one hour—much more time would be spent in Sangh activities.¹⁰⁶

personal or familial political/ideological attachment—in most Indian families, there is none. People from left-leaning families leave after a short stint—people of conservative upbringing stay longer.

¹⁰⁶Most young boys in India do not have any political lineage in the family. Their minds thus get taken over by the so-called intellectual discourses at RSS shakhas on a daily basis. Most discourses are rabidly pro-Hindu, pro-men, and very conservative—however, most young boys cannot even relate the factors of discrimination, racism, or hate with RSS.

Close friendship with other Sangh members, the opportunity to help others in need, all this goes a long way in influencing the hearts of the swayamsevaks. Once I got the typhoid after my annual school examinations. When my family saw the sincere care given to me by the swayamsevaks and leaders, they rapidly reversed their negative opinions about the Sangh. At that time, I got the chance to become close to a provincial pracharak (whole-time worker) of Uttar Pradesh—the revered Bhauraoji Deoras. He had come all the way from Nagpur, and was enrolled in Lucknow University solely to promulgate the work of the Sangh. He graduated in B.Com and L.Lb, standing first in both examinations. While studying at the university, he first made Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay a swayamsevak and then nurtured his great talents. Later Deendayalji became the deputy provincial pracharak of Uttar Pradesh, the President of Bharatiya Jana Sangh (founded by Dr. Shyama Prasad), and a famous theorist. I had developed a close relationship with Deendayalji. My whole attitude toward life changed upon knowing these people.¹⁰⁷

The daily schedule works fine. Further, whether rich or poor, most youngsters and their families look for fun at no or minimal cost—RSS' uniform, winter camps, picnics, etc. are cheaply priced where every participant chips in his share—although the local branch may cover the costs of a needy participant.

¹⁰⁷For most youngsters, young leaders who go to the university and/or pass with distinction (sometimes the achievement is overblown) are regarded as heroes as most ordinary workers are average/below-average students with little ambition. Anything out of the ordinary—an accomplishment, a different and sophisticated voice or talking style, the ownership of a bicycle or a scooter makes a strong impression on the ordinary that is hard to undermine. I remember an RSS pracharak named Balkrishna Nayek who was said to be a returnee from a California university. I was completely bowled over by the fact that such a "brilliant person who sacrificed an excellent career in America" was among us, talking to us in person, and that too, very nicely.

In 1942, there was an RSS Officers' Training Camp (OTC) in Lucknow—the first month-long camp outside Nagpur. The camp greatly helped young workers like me to increase our efficiency in carrying out the Sangh responsibilities. At the camp, we would wake up very early in the morning at the sound of the bugle. Thereafter, there would be the Pratahsmaran (the morning ritual of remembering great Hindu men and women), and various physical exercises at the sanghsthan. This would be followed by breakfast, some discussions, then shower and lunch. After a little rest, there would be short get-acquainted meetings, followed by speeches and theoretical lectures. Then, there would be programs at the sanghsthan where everyone was required to wear uniforms. Finally, in the evening after snacks, there would be discourses on the lives of great and historic (Hindu) men, etc.¹⁰⁸ Everyday, we would have lectures, during which eminent leaders working all over the country would speak on various subjects. The revered Guruji (the Sarsanghchalak); the honorable Babasaheb Apte (the chief executive of theoretical discussions), the honorable Bhauraoji Deoras, Sri Dadaji Parmarth and many other eminent executives would inspire us with their speeches. Get-acquainted meetings and informal chats with them were very helpful to the trainee-swayamsevaks. My own opportunity to learn the aanak (side drum) was much expanded at this camp.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ I have never heard a woman leader discussed at winter or summer camps or the OTC.

¹⁰⁹ OTC's are one of the most important events where carefully chosen workers are trained and groomed to be future executives. Promising workers are hand-picked and sent to the month-long camp—sometimes their expenses are subsidized. There are three camps—the first year's camps are now held provincially, the second year's camp in the respective geographical region, and the third year's OTC's are held mainly in Nagpur, the nerve-center of RSS. The programs and schedules at the camp are rigorous, and for the common attendee, there are no simple facilities such as a toilet—many campers get sick.

At a winter camp in Kashi (Varanasi), Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan (who later became the president of India) spoke. At that time, he was the vice chancellor of Kashi Hindu Viswavidyalay (Benaras Hindu University). Incidentally, the founder of that university Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya donated a playground and two attached rooms to the Sangh.¹¹⁰ He had a close relationship with Dr. Hedgewar, the Sangh founder.

The revered Sri Guruji would visit Kashi periodically. It was my duty to serve him tea, etc. Thus I was fortunate to be in close touch with him. Except for the times set aside for his rest and meditation, any swayamsevak could come to visit and sit by him. At these informal meetings, his ever-cheerful attractive personality and brilliant conversations would enthrall everyone. I am sure, it was the fruit of my many births that I had the fortune to have the affection of such an extraordinary saintly man. It might be mentioned here that I had the good fortune to see and touch Dr. Hedgewar and talk to him briefly. I also received the affection of Sri Guruji's personal secretary Dr. Abaji Thate who dedicated himself (to Sangh) right after graduating from medical school.

In the year of 1945, I left home to work as a Sangh pracharak (full-time worker) and the revered Bhauraoji Deoras appointed me as the Pratapgarh district pracharak of

¹¹⁰The Sangh Parivar keeps bragging about these respected men participating and/or addressing at their meetings and camps. Names such as Dr. Radhakrishnan, Gandhi, Subhas Bose, General Kariappa, Sardar Patel, historian Ramesh Chandra Majumdar are frequently and proudly mentioned in the RSS literature to impress upon the people the admiration of the Sangh by these national leaders. However, many such propaganda are skewed, partially stated, and even distorted. Most importantly, the negative comments about RSS made by these leaders and the latter's secular messages are never disclosed. For some exemplary quotes and messages of such leaders, see Appendix III.

Uttar Pradesh. In the entire district, only one morning and one evening shakha were running. I was very young in age and in experience. But I was carefully tutored to be an efficient worker by the honorable Lakshman Srikrishna Bhide. Later he was put in charge of expanding the Sangh work outside India—Africa, Europe, Canada, United States, and other countries; now he is the chairman of the Deendayal Research Institute.¹¹¹ He taught me how to cook on a wood stove. As a pracharak, I had to do all the cooking, dish washing, laundry, house-cleaning by myself.¹¹² At that time, the present Sarsanghchalak (the supreme RSS chief) Prof. Rajendra Singh (Sri Rajju Bhaiya) was the head professor of nuclear physics at the Allahabad University. From time to time, he would visit Pratapgarh to guide and encourage me. His congenial nature greatly inspired me. When he was at his residence in Prayag, his mother would make us some truly unforgettable warm bread and curry. At this time, I also became well-acquainted with Sri Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the former prime minister of India.

¹¹¹The Deendayal Research Institute (DRI) is a conservative think tank comparable to the Heritage Foundation, Family Research Council, Kato Institute, etc. of the United States.

¹¹²From an Indian standpoint, for a man to cook and house-clean for himself is a real arduous task as most men are not accustomed to do chores—women do it for them. I have seen my father even cleaning the bathroom—a socioreligious taboo for a Brahman and an upper caste like him—in some parts of India, he would be banished for such an “outrageous” act. My father’s self-reliant nature is much to be applauded—contrary to some other men I have seen in the Congress or in the left parties who make their wife’s, daughter’s, or servant’s life miserable by unreasonable household demands. However, it must be highlighted that this patriarchal mindset transcends all walks of life in India—left, right, saffron, or colorless—many other RSS members and sympathizers are no exception to this rule. Further, I would like to add hesitantly that my father has always been a conservative patriarch supporting practices such as dowry. He also has not been in favor of equality for women.

In 1946, I went to Nagpur for the third year's training (at the Sangh OTC). About a thousand selected swayamsevaks from all over the undivided India, including the Sindh and Punjab provinces participated in this OTC. The present president of Bharatiya Janata Party, Sri Lal Krishna Advani, also attended this training camp coming from the Sindh province. I was put in charge of chanting the prayers. I also had the opportunity to sing solo songs before speeches.¹¹³ It was perhaps a forty-day camp during those times. At the camp, we had the rare opportunity to witness a miniaturized version of the whole Bharat. My abilities of being an able worker were greatly developed due to this camp's intense physical and intellectual training.¹¹⁴

By 1948, the Sangh had already spread all over India.¹¹⁵ The escalation of Sangh's strength in the society caused

¹¹³At the Burdwan OTC in 1971, I was also put in charge to chant the prayer, pratahsmaran, and sing solo songs. "Guruji" Golwalkar, upon carefully listening to my chanting of prayer, asked his personal secretary Dr. Aba Thate to help me improve my Sanskrit pronunciation. Dr. Thate also helped me understand the intricacies of the Sanskrit prayer—its grammar, meaning, and all.

¹¹⁴The 1946 camp was significant in that it had campers from all over the undivided India—perhaps for the last time before the partition. Like millions of other Indians, partition came as the worst nightmare—an event they could never envision, accept, or adjust to. Numerous Indian men, women, and children have suffered from lifelong emotional and physical traumas—a case of mass depression that was never looked into by the Indian or international communities.

¹¹⁵It is interesting to observe that my father is silent here about the Indian Independence Day and its memorable celebrations on the 15th of August, 1947. Both the extreme left and right (including the RSS) condemned the Indian independence and following partition. To the fanatics of the extreme right, Gandhi, Nehru, and Jinnah (the "Father of Pakistan") became personalities hated for their role in the partition.

many headaches for the high-level political leaders. That year on the 30th of January, the prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru incriminated the Sangh in the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, and took the opportunity to ban the Sangh. On the 4th of February, 1948, the RSS was banned and the Sarsanghchalak Sri M. S. Golwalkar (Sri Guruji) was arrested and imprisoned. At the same time, numerous workers like me all over the country were arrested. In the same year on the 4th of May, a special tribunal was formed under the leadership of Justice Atmaram to investigate the Gandhi assassination. After examining all the witnesses and testimonies, the special tribunal delivered the unequivocal verdict that the RSS was not involved in Gandhiji's murder. The Punjab High Court also upheld this verdict. On the 6th of October, Sri Guruji was released from prison. Following the murder of Gandhiji, many swayamsevaks were killed and injured, a lot of properties robbed and destroyed due to the barbarism of the Congress workers and other so-called secularists.¹¹⁶ Even Veer Savarkar (the Hindu Mahasabha leader) was severely tortured.¹¹⁷ In spite of the court's

¹¹⁶This is a credible narration especially in the light of the fact that after Indira Gandhi's assassination, Congress hooligans terrorized and massacred thousands of innocent Sikhs everywhere (Indira Gandhi was murdered by her two Sikh bodyguards). And the perpetrators were never fully brought to justice—BJP, in fact, later helped to incriminate a few of them, mainly to appease its Sikh supporters. However, it is also noteworthy that in 1984, just prior to Mrs. Gandhi's assassination, RSS and BJP actually supported the Operation Blue Star carried out by Indira Gandhi's army to flush out Sikh terrorists from the Amritsar golden temple—an episode directly responsible for the act of vengeance on Indira Gandhi. This prior support of the Operation Blue Star is completely downplayed by the BJP now that they have formed a coalition government with the Akalis in Punjab who were and are totally opposed to that military operation.

¹¹⁷Savarkar was a radical Hindu Mahasabha leader. It was not a surprise (although surely deplorable) that he was tortured by Congress thugs because Nathuram Godse, the man convicted of assassinating Gandhi, and his brother Gopal, were both in the Hindu Mahasabha at the time of the assassination.

acquittal of the Sangh, the ban was not repealed. Therefore, a massive Satyagraha movement (a civil disobedience movement where volunteers court arrest) was launched on the 9th of December, 1948. Sri Guruji was put behind bars again. Like many other workers, I also directed the Satyagraha movement in my own area. Thousands of swayamsevaks took part in the movement and voluntarily got imprisoned. I also got arrested. Finally, on the 11th of July, 1949, the ban on RSS was lifted. Sri Guruji was also released from jail.

Once the ban was lifted, Sri Guruji was publicly felicitated in the big cities across the country. In Kashi, during the welcoming meeting held at the big football ground of our Anglo-Bengali College, Sri Atal Bihari Vajpayee held everyone spellbound with his forceful poem "Aaj Sindh mein jwar uttha hai" (there is a tidal wave in the ocean today). Sri Guruji in his eloquent speech asked the swayamsevaks to involve themselves in Sangh work with a patient mind and a heart free of vengeance. After the lifting of the ban, the work of the Sangh rapidly expanded.

During the imposition of the ban on the Sangh, a secret network was in effect within the organization. The revered Bhauraoji would send me from Lucknow to the secret office in Calcutta. Dattopanth Thengadi was then the West Bengal provincial pracharak in hiding. I got to know him intimately. He was one of the theorists of the Sangh who later became a parliamentarian and founded the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, the Bharatiya Kishan Sangh, and others. I was also fortunate to receive the affection of Sri Balasaheb Deoras, the third Sarsanghchalak.

In 1950, in the months of May and June, I was a teacher at the Kanpur OTC. The east regional pracharak, honorable Sri Eknath Ranade (who later became the chief executive and founder of the Vivekananda Kendra and Vivekananda temple at Kanyakumari), was present at the camp, and requested Sri Bhauraoji Deoras that I be sent to West Bengal as there was a need there for a Bengali pracharak. I was appointed the

district pracharak of the Nabadwip district (the district of Nadia, and Kalna and Katowa subdivisions of Burdwan). Upon the directives of the honorable Sri Amal Kumar Basu, the provincial pracharak of West Bengal, I enthusiastically began my work. In the year of 1952, I was brought to Calcutta to work in the multilingual all-India news agency Hindusthan Samachar.

After Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee established Bharatiya Jana Sangh, I carried out the responsibilities of the office secretary of Jana Sangh's West Bengal office. On the 23rd of June 1953, Dr. Shyama Prasad died mysteriously in the Srinagar prison of Sheikh Abdullah, and his body was brought back to Calcutta. The last respects that the Calcuttans paid to him are not to be easily forgotten. In the city of Calcutta, all shops and markets, offices, factories, schools and colleges were closed. I also took part in the huge funeral procession that traveled from Dum Dum (airport) to Shyama Prasad's residence at Bhawanipur. Millions of men and women lined the sides of the streets and stood in balconies, on roofs, windows and treetops to bid a tearful farewell to the much-respected leader of the country.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸Other than the fact that Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee was the founder of Bharatiya Jana Sangh (the predecessor of Bharatiya Janata Party or BJP)—a matter of little importance at his time, he was the son of the famous conservative educationist and administrator Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee (popularly known as the "Bengal Tiger" for his overpowering character). The Mukherjee family was one of the most celebrated families of Bengal because of its wealth, eloquence, and political and social status during the British Raj. Shyama Prasad was hand-picked by M. S. Golwalkar to float Jana Sangh—mainly to politically counter the uproar against RSS after the Gandhi assassination. Shyama Prasad was never a volunteer of RSS. In the early 1950's just before his death, he earned a reputation for his fiery parliamentary speeches that caused severe discomfort to Jawaharlal Nehru who was otherwise savoring a great moment as the first prime minister of a very young free India. Shyama Prasad's mysterious death in the Kashmir prison (he was put in jail by Sheikh Abdullah, the chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir, for a civil

In 1954, I entered my private household life from the life of a pracharak. But my relationship with the Sangh has remained unbroken and this relationship will never be severed.¹¹⁹

disobedience movement in the state) caused a massive uproar in a place like West Bengal—a state that had just come out of an incredibly horrible communal bloodshed during and after the partition. Shyama Prasad left a deep impression upon the educated Bengalis because of his oratorical skills and his role in salvaging some district land in West Bengal from the grips of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) during partition negotiations. **However, it must be mentioned that Shyama Prasad also was instrumental to bring about the partition and was a negotiating party in the partition process, a fact most Sangh supporters would not want to admit.**

¹¹⁹My parents got married in the year of 1954. My father came to know my mother through one of my maternal uncles who was associated with RSS. Other than this uncle, my mother's family members were traditionally supporters of the Congress—they were sympathizers of the party's "secular and non-violent" platform. My mother, grandmother, aunt, and uncles, in spite of their scant formal education, were secular in nature with a broad-minded liberal outlook that did not exclude or undervalue the lower castes, women, or Muslims the way the RSS did—this was so in spite of the fact that my mother's was a Brahman family from a very orthodox Hindu area in Bengal named Bhatpara. There was always a subtle political tension and disagreement between my parents—my mother never liked the social patriarchs and the chauvinist big talkers of the RSS. She also never liked the rich doctors, lawyers, and businessmen in RSS who she thought used my father, yet never valued his sacrifice for the organization. My father, for his share, has struggled all his life on the career front. This is partly due to the fact that he quit college to work for the Sangh; and the resulting lack of formal training made him unable to find a secure job. He was also victimized by the employers for his connection with the RSS and a record of multiple imprisonment—a history that prevented him from getting government jobs. In spite of entering family life from the life of a pracharak, his first priority had always been the Sangh and its activities—a fact of much strife

in the family.

I must confess that my father (known as Jitendra-ji or Jiten-da in RSS circles) never made any serious attempts to familiarize himself with Bengali or Indian liberalism, thanks to his indoctrination in ultraconservative Sangh thoughts. By his own admission, he, like many other RSS workers, always had an anathema for secular and/or liberal thinkers such as Rabindranath Tagore, Gandhi, and the celebrated film-maker Satyajit Ray. My father now regrets that he chose not to go to see Tagore during the latter's visit in Benaras. He had also been very much anti-Gandhi ("Gandhian Socialism" is now strongly espoused by BJP as a political ploy to please the Gandhians and undercut the socialists in India—a ploy similar to Hitler's espousal of "National Socialism") and other pro-Gandhi leaders such as Vinoba Bhave. Once he wrote a strong letter of protest to Satyajit Ray (he still keeps the reply from Ray) for not showing Netaji Subhas Bose at the inauguration of Bose's brainchild Mahajati Sadan auditorium in Calcutta in his documentary film "Rabindranath". My father called it an intentional omission of Ray to please anti-Bose Nehru—an assertion Ray denied. Presently, my father is busy compiling volumes on the life of Shivaji, a book that is remarkably rightist and full of Hindu-supremacist jargons. I must confess that I have never seen my father trying to understand the non-Hindu religions or the people who practice them. Liberal thinkers of ancient or modern India and Bengal such as Sri Chaitanya, Ram Mohan Ray, Lalan Fakir, as well as dalit heroes such as Birsa Ho were never discussed at our home—I never heard of Birsa or Lalan until after I entered college. I almost never heard of the great liberal Bengali poets and authors such as Jibanananda Das, Buddhadev Basu, or Mahasweta Devi during my school days; left-liberal-secular poets such as Nazrul Islam were unpopular at our home, i.e., my father's home. Women's contributions were never talked about at our dinner table. As a result, I grew up as an anti-Muslim anti-Christian patriarch although in a moderate Bengali way, thanks to the liberal social climate in West Bengal and thanks to my mother and grandmother's espousal of openness. I still remember how I disliked my Muslim or Christian school-mates and took every opportunity to denigrate them. My otherwise friendly school-mates called me the lone emissary of the Sangh.

APPENDIX II

COMMUNAL VIOLENCE IN INDIA: RHETORIC AND ROLE OF THE SANGH PARIVAR AND SHIV SENA

In the history of post-1947 India, thousands of innocent people were brutally killed and injured in violent riots. Many women were tortured and raped, many children were orphaned. Homes of poor people were destroyed, their land looted. On Dec. 1, 1997, Ranbir Sena, a private army for big landowners, was responsible for the killing of sixty-one poor, lower caste people in Lakshmanpur-Bathe village of Bihar's Jehanabad district. Ranbir Sena is said to have direct links with BJP.

Still, it is often emphasized by the Sangh Parivar that there has been no direct evidence of involvement of the RSS in communal riots. On the other hand, Sangh critics cite many indirect but solid circumstantial evidences that implicate them in riots and disturbances all over India, and that too over a period of quite a few decades.¹²⁰

¹²⁰ Dr. Asghar Ali Engineer and his Bombay-based organization Centre for Studies of Society and Secularism (CSSS) have compiled many reports on communal riots in India and many of these, he mentioned during our recent conversations in USA, implicate the RSS and the Shiv Sena in orchestrating riots. Some instances where the involvement of these organizations has been documented are the bloody carnages that took place in Bhagalpur, Ahmedabad, Surat,

But why are there so few, if any, direct evidences? There are three main reasons for this confusion. We discuss those reasons here.

The RSS's involvement in communal riots¹²¹

(a) The RSS keeps no register of membership and therefore there is no way of legally establishing whether a particular individual is connected with the organization or not.

(b) The RSS often operates not in its own name but under the cover of front organizations, some of them created locally for a specific purpose. For example, during one Ahmedabad riot, they worked under the cover of one Hindu Dharma Raksha Samiti. During a Bhiwandi riot, it was the Rashtriya Utsav Mandal, and in Jalgaon, it worked under the banner of the Shri Ram Tarun Mandal. Even many honest and peace-loving members and sympathizers of the Sangh are not aware of these facets of RSS, and thus the allegations seem concocted to them.

(c) No organization however communal would pass a resolution about creating communal tension or send circulars to its members to indulge in communal violence. The participation of individual members spread over

Bombay, and Jamshedpur during the periods of 1989-1993, including the riots following the Mandal Commission Report implementation by the V. P. Singh government. The Srikrishna Commission has recently submitted its report on the 1992-93 Bombay riots allegedly implicating the Shiv Sena and Sangh Parivar. As of May 1998, the report has not been made public by the right-wing Maharashtra government.

¹²¹The section on RSS' involvement in communal riots in India is paraphrased from D. R. Goyal: *Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh*. Radha Krishna Publishers, New Delhi, 1979.

different areas should be considered sufficient proof unless there are reasons to believe that these members have been disowned, repudiated or punished at the appropriate time; and that has never been done by the RSS. The complicity and modus operandi of the RSS and its front organizations such as the VHP and BJP, become absolutely clear from the findings of Justice Madan about the riots in Bhiwandi and Jalgaon. The judge's findings are as follows:

"The organisation which has both directly and indirectly provoked the disturbances which took place in Bhiwandi, Khoni and Nagaon on May 7, 1970 and thereafter is the Rashtriya Utsav Mandal, the majority of the members of which belonged to the Jana Sangh or were pro-Jana Sangh, and the rest, apart from a few exceptions, belonged to the Shiv Sena."

Giving summary of facts and conclusions in Vol. VI of the report the commission has made observations which make the responsibility clear and specific:

"The behaviour of a section of Hindu processionists, particularly the RSS and PSP (Praja Socialist Party) sections, was calculated to provoke and humiliate the Muslims. Provocative and anti-Muslim slogans were shouted, and gulal (colored powder) was thrown in such excess that it annoyed even the police officers and men present there."

"The younger Hindu elements, most of whom were either members of the Jana Sangh or were pro-Jana Sangh, not only insisted in the meeting of the Peace Committee that the procession should go past the Nizampura Jumma Mosque but also emphatically demanded that there should be no restrictions whatever on the throwing of gulal or the shouting of slogans."

"The Rashtriya Utsav Mandal (RUM) was founded on May 23, 1969 by Dr. B. P. Vyas, the President of the Bhiwandi Branch of the Jana Sangh and a group of nineteen Hindus who had walked out of the Shiv Jayanti Utsav Samiti meeting on April 6, 1969 and had subsequently

tendered their resignation from it in protest against the imposition of any restrictions on the Shiv Jayanti procession. Of these 19 persons, 15 belonged to the Jana Sangh or were pro-Jana Sangh, 1 belonged to the Shiv Sena and the remaining 3 did not belong to any political party at that time. Right from its inception the RUM followed a communal line. It held weekly prayer meetings and public meetings in which communal speeches were made and political leaders from outside Bhiwandi and others who were well-known for making communal speeches were invited to be guest speakers. ... The RUM played a leading role in the communal history of Bhiwandi and was responsible for bringing the communal tension in Bhiwandi to a pitch."

"In all matters likely to create communal tension the RUM adopted a militant and aggressive attitude and set itself up as the champion of what it considered to be the rights of the Hindus against the Muslims, and so to say, to teach the Muslims their place and if they were not willing to learn their place, to teach them a lesson."

"A majority of the processionists had participated in the Shiv Jayanti procession carrying lathis to which Bhagwa Flags and banners were tied in order to circumvent the ban under section 37(1) of the Bombay Police Act, 1951, prohibiting the carrying of weapons. ... There were thus prior preparations for disturbances by the processionists..."

[...]

On the Jalgaon violence, the Inquiry Commission says:

"An organisation which played a prominent part in the communal history of Jalgaon was the Shree Ram Tarun Mandal (RTM). ... The RTM was formed in 1966 or 1967. When Zare [P. K. Zare, former Secretary of the Jalgaon City Jana Sangh] was the Secretary of the RTM he either belonged to the Jana Sangh or was pro-Jana Sangh. ... When the Jalgaon City Jana Sangh began displaying boards of a communal nature and against municipal administration

the RTM followed suit. The RTM was established, controlled and managed by the Jalgaon City Jana Sangh and the Jalgaon District Jana Sangh and followed their policies. It was in reality merely an organisation to carry out the politics of the Jalgaon City Jana Sangh and the Jalgaon District Jana Sangh under a different label."

"The communal harmony and amity which prevailed in Jalgaon was shattered by the Jana Sangh on October 1, 1970."

Shiv Sena's murders and rhetoric

Following are excerpts from a recent article in the magazine *Granta*, published from London and New York.¹²² The article is based on a series of interviews with Shiv Sena people in Bombay who killed Muslims in the 1993 January riots.

1. Interview with Raghav, a private taxi operator in Bombay

"Raghav was not officially a member of Shiv Sena, but he was called upon by the leader of the local branch whenever there was party work to be done."

"...He led me through Jogeshwari, the slum where, on 8 January 1993, ... a Hindu family of mill workers had been sleeping in a room in Radhabai Chawl, in the Muslim area. Someone locked their door from the outside and threw a petrol bomb in through the window. The family died screaming..."

"He led me to an open patch of ground by the train sheds...Raghav remembered. This was where he and his

¹²² Suketu Mehta. Mumbai. *Granta*, Spring Edition, 1997. New York and London. Excerpts published with kind permission from *Granta* and the author.

friends had caught two Muslims. "We burnt them", he said, "We poured kerosene over them and set them on fire".

"Did they scream?"

"No, because we beat them a lot before burning them".

I asked him, ...if the Muslims they burnt had begged for their lives.

"Yes, they would say, "Have mercy on us!" But we were filled with such hate, and we had Radhabai Chawl on our minds."

"But what if (he was) innocent?"

Raghav looked at me. "He was Muslim," he said.

2. Interview with Sunil, deputy leader of the Jogeshwari shakha, or branch, of the Shiv Sena.

He came with two other Sena boys to drink with me in my friend's apartment. They all looked around appreciatively..."It's a good place to shoot people from", he said. I had not thought of the apartment that way.

Sunil insisted on referring to the riots as a "war".

During the riots, the government sent tankers of milk to the Muslim areas. Sunil, with three of his fellow sainiks dressed as Muslims, put a deadly insecticide in one of the containers: the Muslims smelt it and refused all the milk. Sunil's men also shut off the water supply to the Muslim quarter. After six days, he said, the Muslims were forced to come out..."That's when we got them", he recalled.

"...we marched to the Muslim side. We met a pau wallah (bread-seller) on the highway, on a bicycle. I knew him, he used to sell me bread every day. I set him on fire. We poured petrol over him and set light to him. All I thought

was that he was a Muslim. He was shaking. He was crying, "I have children, I have children." I said: "When your Muslims were killing the Radhabai Chawl people, did you think of your children?" That day we showed them what Hindu dharma is".

Sunil, the deputy leader of the Shiv Sena's Jogeshwari branch, could afford to be relaxed. "The ministers are ours", he said. "The police are in our hands. They cooperated during the riots. If anything happens to me, the minister calls." We have "powertoni" (power of attorney).

Suketu Mehta writes on:

Saamna's editor (*Saamna* is Shiv Sena's mouthpiece, published in Marathi and Hindi), Sanjay Nirupam (a Member of the Indian Parliament) put the case (artist Hussain painting Goddess Saraswati naked) clearly: "Hindus", he wrote, "do not forget Hussain's crime! He is not to be forgiven at any cost. When he returns (from his exile in London) to Mumbai he must be taken to Hutatma Chowk and be publicly flogged until he himself becomes a piece of modern art. The same fingers that have painted our Mother naked will have to be cut off."

What's striking about the writer's notions of punishment is that they seem to be derived straight from the Shari'a (Islamic law)—(Shari'a is ridiculed by Shiv Sena and RSS at every opportunity).

Shiv Sena took decisive action. It changed the name of the capital city to Mumbai; the station Victoria Terminus became Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus. Ironically, Thackeray (the last name of Shiv Sena godman Balasaheb) himself has an English name: his father anglicized the spelling to chime with the novelist he most admired.

Ramesh Kini...was a supervisor in a eyeliner factory, a middle class Maharashtrian resident of Matunga, such as form the core of Sena support. He was also the victim of a campaign of harassment by his landlord, who was trying to

get his family evicted from his rent-controlled flat. His landlord also had connections in the Sena. One morning Kini came to the Sena office; by midnight he was dead. ...His widow went public and named Raj Thackeray, ...the Saheb's (Balasaheb) twenty-eight-year-old nephew (the Shiv Sena heir-apparent of Bal Thackeray), as one of the murderers.

He (Raj Thackeray) told me (the author Mehta) about the Shiv Sena's answer to Bombay's problems. "There should be a permit system to enter Mumbai, just like a visa. This would be checked at the railway stations, airports, highways. The constitution should be changed, if you want to save the city. ...Outsiders should be stopped from immigrating. Who are they? They are not Maharastrians."

QUOTABLE QUOTES

The following quotes are included to illustrate and challenge the Sangh Parivar's misuse and distortion of Indian leaders' views on social subjects and also to counter the Sangh's narrow interpretation of Hinduism and its practices. Quotes by secular leaders of India, quotes that are purposefully overlooked by the Sangh, are also included. Further, information regarding the role of the Sangh during the Indian independence movement is provided.

Mahatma Gandhi on RSS:

"A member of Gandhiji's party interjected that the RSS people had done a fine job of work at Wah refugee camp. They had shown discipline, courage and capacity for hard work. 'But don't forget', answered Gandhiji, 'even so had Hitler's Nazis and the Fascists under Mussolini. He characterized the RSS as a 'communal body with a totalitarian outlook'."

[Pyarelal. Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase. Quoted in D. R. Goyal: *Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh* Radha Krishna Prakashan, New Delhi. 1979.]

Swami Vivekananda, on Islamic conversion of Hindus:

"The Mohammedan conquest of India came as a salvation to the downtrodden, to the poor. That is why one-fifth of our

people have become Mohammedans. It was not the sword that did it all."

[*Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Ramakrishna Mission, Vol. 3: p.294]

Swami Vivekananda, on Vedanta and Islam:

"Our experience shows that if there is one religion that followed true socialism, that religion is Islam. Therefore, we strongly believe that Vedanta, without the help from Islam, is meaningless to mankind. We want to take humanity to a goal where there are no Vedas, no Bible, no Koran. For our country, a combination of Islam and Hinduism is the only hope."

[Collection of Vivekananda's letters. Bhupendranath Dutta, *Swami Vivekananda*, Nababharat Publishers, Calcutta. Translated from Bengali]

Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, on the Hindu caste system:

"In however way it was originally planned, the caste system creates a false feeling of pride among the upper castes who undermine the lowly placed. In Ramayana, Lord Rama even killed (the untouchable) Shambuka for the latter's Brahminic way of worshipping. Kalidasa in *Raghuvansa* and Bhavabhuti in *Uttarramacharita* made him (Shambuka) heaven-bound."

[Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, *Religion and Society*, 1942. From Bengali.]

Subhas Chandra Bose, on Muslims being an integral part of India:

"My mental attitude towards Muslims in general was largely, though unconsciously, influenced by my early contacts. The quarter in which we lived was a predominantly Muslim one and our neighbours were mostly Muslims. ...We took part in their festivals, like the Moharrum, for instance, and enjoyed their akhara (physical sports on Moharrum festival). Among our servants were

Muslims who were as devoted to us as the others. As school I had Muslim teachers and Muslim classmates with whom my relations—as also the relations of other students—were perfectly cordial. In fact, I cannot remember ever to have looked upon Muslims as different from ourselves in any way, except that they go to pray in a mosque.”

[Subhas Chandra Bose: *An Indian Pilgrim*, Asia Publishing, 1965, p. 44]

M. S. Golwalkar, on Muslims’ allegiance to other lands:

“They have also developed a feeling of identification with the enemies of this land. They look to some foreign lands as their holy places.¹²³ ... That is because they have cut off all their ancestral national moorings of this land and mentally merged themselves with the aggressors. ... So we see that it is not merely a case of change of faith, but a change even in

123 Even if this contention, in spite of its far-fetchedness and gross generalization, is taken as true, this is no different from the way Hindus living overseas (such as the immigrant communities in USA, Europe, or Africa) remember and revere holy places in India. At Hindu ceremonies at temples in USA, for example, the priest would still ask the devotees to pray in the name of holy places or people in the “Hindu land” India. Therefore, by Hindu way of life itself, the Muslim way of worshipping facing Mecca cannot be termed “anti-national”—all overseas Hindus (including supporters of RSS, BJP, and VHP working in USA or Europe) should then be charged with treason against their adopted land. And in fact, right-wing groups such as Christian Coalition of USA bring in this allegation about “foreigners” living in America.

Also note that similarly, Nazis charged that they were not against Jews because of their Jewishness, but because they were not “Germans”—that they were Jews first and Germans second, and identified more with non-German Jews than with German non-Jews.

national identity. What else is it if not treason, to join the camp of the enemy leaving their mother nation in the lurch."

[M. S. Golwalkar, *Bunch of Thoughts*, Jagarana Prakashan, Bangalore]

M. S. Golwalkar, on Muslims' citizenship of India:

"From this standpoint sanctioned by the experience of shrewd old nations, the non-Hindu peoples in Hindusthan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence the Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but the glorification of the Hindu race and culture, i.e. they must not only give up their attitude of intolerance and ungratefulness towards this land and its age-old traditions, but must also cultivate the positive attitude of love and devotion instead; in one word, they must cease to be foreigners or may stay in the country wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment, not even citizen's rights."

[M. S. Golwalkar, *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, 1938]

The Organiser (RSS' English mouthpiece), on the positions of the president and chief justice of India:

"All that the Hindu wants is that our culture should flower forth into greatness. He is scandalised that after installing one Muslim as President and another as Chief Justice, he is told that he is not giving jobs to Muslims." In the same article it said, "Muslims must accept the fact that India is as much a Hindu country as Pakistan is a Muslim country or Britain is a Christian country. Anybody who does not accept this way of life is an ostrich today ... and he will be dead as a dodo tomorrow." [*The Organiser*, 4th January, 1970]

The Organiser, on Buddhism and Jainism:

"So far as Jainism and Buddhism are concerned they have never made any contribution to social and political thought as such. We have not inherited any arthashastras (politics and economics) or dharmashastras (social laws) from them. All we have from them are the various moksha-shastras pertaining to the supreme salvation of the individual soul."

[The Organiser, 10th June, 1963]

British civil servants of pre-independence India on RSS' "good conduct" during freedom struggles:¹²⁴

E. J. Beveridge of the British Government's Home Department had given a good conduct certificate to the RSS: "In pursuance of its policy of gradual development and preparation the Sangh has as a general rule taken care to keep on the right side of the law and avoid any clash with authority." Only two exceptions to this general rule have been noted: "Firstly, owing to the high communal nature of the organisation it is inevitable that from time to time some of its members should have been involved in communal riots and incidents. The most recent instances occurred in March 1942 at Jalgaon in the East Khandesh district of Bombay Province when two persons were killed and thirty seven injured. Second, the Sangh has given cause for complaint in the attitude towards the ban imposed in 1940 on the wearing of uniforms and the performance of drill."

[It is evident from the above that the RSS kept away from the mainstream freedom struggles and came into action mainly to create communal violence. In the opinion of the British administration, that was no cause for anxiety about the Sangh. This is contrary to what the Sangh now wants Indians to believe that it took a big role in the freedom struggle and that

124 From: D. R. Goyal: *Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh* Radha Krishna Prakashan, New Delhi. 1979.

its leaders and workers had been active in the movement. — Author.]

As far as Sangh's "direct" role in the freedom struggle, here is another report. The Bombay-based weekly *Blitz*¹²⁵ published a long report showing that Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee "had betrayed his revolutionary colleagues in the 1942 freedom struggle by disclosing their names to the police and apologized his way out of jail." The report gave details of the whole case and the court proceedings of the time. *Blitz* was sued by RSS leader Nana Deshmukh, but the case was dismissed. Vajpayee himself did not either try to defend himself or file a case of defamation.

Very recently, the Congress party has also brought these allegations against Vajpayee and BJP.

[*Note: As swayamsevaks, we were always told that during the pre-1947 days, the Sangh's main goal was to build men so that they could take care of an independent India—we never bragged about the Sangh's role in freedom struggles. Sangh propaganda has changed now. — Author.*]

¹²⁵*Blitz*, 26 January, 1974, Bombay. Quoted in D. R. Goyal: *Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh*. Radha Krishna Prakashan, New Delhi. 1979.

**THE SANGH PARIVAR GOES
HIGHTECH: THE GLOBAL DISPERSAL
OF “HINDUTVA” DOCTRINE ON THE
INTERNET¹²⁶**

The following are informercials from the Vishwa Hindu Parishad website and other pro-RSS sites on the Internet. The impact of the ever-expanding Internet on the young generation both in India and abroad is enormous. The RSS, VHP, BJP, and their offshoot organizations such as the Hindu Student Council (HSC) have their own homepages now. The Sangh has also set up the Global Hindu Electronic Network or GHEN to propagate its views.

Some information from these sites would be relevant here. Other than “information” and “analyses” on these sites, Sangh members and sympathizers have been posting pro-RSS, pro-BJP, and pro-VHP materials in the various discussion groups on the Internet such as soc.culture.indian, soc.culture.bengali, soc.culture.indian.marathi, and so on.

¹²⁶Internet website or homepage information is browsed through by hundreds on a regular basis—especially in America and Europe. In the near absence of progressive views on Indian social and political games and their players, the Sangh Parivar’s international dispersal of biased information has a far-reaching effect particularly among the young people studying or living abroad. One website, however, gives the viewpoints of *progressive Indians*: <http://www.foil.org>

Opposing views in these newsgroups are rejected and ridiculed by them, and often the critics of the Sangh are branded communists—a clever ploy to undermine their intellectual credibility before the worldwide participants of these newsgroups.

Certain websites (URL) Sangh and its sympathizers have created:

<http://hindunet.org/rss/> (RSS homepage)
<http://www.vhp.org/vhp/> (VHP homepage)
<http://www.bjp.org/> (BJP homepage)
<http://www.shivsena.org> (Shiv Sena homepage)
<http://www.swordoftruth.com/>
<http://www.hindutva.org/>
<http://hindunet.org/hvk/> (Hindu Vivek Kendra homepage)
<http://www.voi.org/> (Voice of India homepage)
<http://http.tamu.edu/~r0k5147/html/India.html>
(a very heavily Hindutva-emphasized homepage—mentioned in New Yorker magazine, June 23-30, 97)
<http://hindunet.org/prajna/> (Homepage of Prajna Bharati, an RSS outfit for “intellectuals”)

Profile of Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America:¹²⁷

Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America, Inc., (VHP) is the National organization of Hindus enjoying global contacts. Parishad enjoys contacts with many sister organizations. With

¹²⁷Parts-only cited from the original text, as found on various websites as of June 1997.

To know a non-VHP version of the organization and its activities, please look up this website:

<http://www.rediff.com/news/1998/jan/03vhp.htm>

Also, to know the true colors of Hindutva groups in USA, read an important article: *The Saffron Dollar—Pehle Paisa, Phir Bhagwan*, by Biju Mathew and Vijay Prashad, *Himal South Asia*, September 1996.

active member families in at least forty states of the USA, Parishad started its activity in 1970.

[...]

Parishad is a non-profit registered tax exempt organization. It enjoys this privilege under the Internal Revenue Service regulation 501-(C)-(3).

***Family is our Focus:* Parishad believes that a strong family makes a strong society. Maintaining strong, moral carrying, ethical individual & family units is very important for society. [...] Special programs of the Parishad support the needs of Young Americans, thus aiming to mold the deal citizens fired with zeal and patriotic spirit.¹²⁸ Parishad is working to instill a true human pride in its members thus bringing closer to reality the American dream of a kinder, gentler nation.¹²⁹**

[...]

128 VHP is trying to make its recruits in America “patriotic”—question is: what kind of patriots do they want to make—American or Indian? In America, a patriot is the one who believes in the American dictum “One nation under God”—the concept has always been that of a Judeo-Christian God. How does VHP fit in there? The conservatives in America (i.e., the champions of right-nationalist patriotism) have always been conformists and against the founding principles of secular America and its diversity—i.e., the separation of the church and state. People of the Sangh Parivar in USA—the conservative Indian immigrants—do believe in the separation between the two institutions and enjoy the religious and cultural freedom. In the Indian context, therefore, what is their moral ground to blur the boundaries between Hindu culture and Indianness?

129 American president George Bush pushed this phrase during his election campaigns in 1988. The same Bush in 1990 inflicted an “oil war” on Iraq upon the excuse of “liberating Kuwait”, bombed Iraq violently, and killed many civilians.

During past twenty years of selfless service the Parishad group has undertaken the following programs:

- * Supported youth camps for the past ten years**
- * Run Balvihar - Children's education programs since 1979**

[...]

***Collected & offered \$1,400,000+ in service of society.¹³⁰**

- * Run Hindu Students Council for college youths.**
- [...]

*** Arranged Global Vision 2000¹³¹ festival in 1993 at various locations.**

Current programs/activities and projects of Parishad: local, statewide, regional, national and international programs and activities are offered such as:

- * Chapter Programs & Activities - Family gatherings**
- * Balvihar - Children's language & cultural classes.**
- * Regional Conferences - Community meetings for studies.**
- * Youth Camps - Weeklong cultural experience for children.**

¹³⁰It does not describe the nature of the service it offered.

¹³¹Global Vision 2000 was organized by the VHP in 1993 to commemorate Swami Vivekananda's 100th anniversary of his famous speeches at the Chicago Parliament of Religions. However, the real focus was to strengthen RSS activities in the U.S. My father who is an ardent admirer of Vivekananda was in USA at that time and wanted to participate in this convention which was held in Washington, D. C. However, he was disheartened to see that the convention organizers he contacted did not show any enthusiasm in inviting him. Like most other Indian social and cultural bodies in America, the VHP also exhibits a mercenary zeal in pampering the privileged and ignoring others who are not potential donors.

[...]

Vishwa Hindu Parishad (Bharat)

VHP Bharat - Highlights

[...]

(3) Schools to make priests. Interesting fact is that 50% of these would be priests are from lower castes.

4) Programs to convey the message of unity of all different sects of Hinduism.

A current news item: Singhal lashes out at Gandhi's "xenophilia" theory (Calcutta Online, www.calonline.com, May 9, 1998)

The Viswa Hindu Parishad president, Mr. Ashok Singhal, mounted a scathing (attack) on Mahatma Gandhi stating that his theory—all invaders who settled here (in India) are Indians, has destroyed the identity of the country. Addressing a meeting at Salt Lake in Calcutta on Thursday (May 7, 1998), Mr. Singhal unveiled a plan to reconvert Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe people in order to woo the lower castes of the country. He said India must choose between the theories of Mahatma Gandhi and the Rashtriya Swyamsevak Sangha. He announced that 10,000 workers of the VHP will try to reconvert the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and will also resist the attempts of the Muslim and the Christian communities to bring the people of the lower caste into their folds.

APPENDIX V

THE ORIGINAL "PRATAHSMARAN" OR "BHARAT BHAKTI STOTRA"—TEXT AND TRANSLATION

[*Note:* This collection of verse is included here to provide the reader with the opportunity to compare the newly-composed ES with the original Bharat Bhakti Stotra (BBS). The English translation by the author is based on the Sangh's interpretation of the stanzas. The reader is invited to find the elements of comparison, inclusion and exclusion, and their relative importance.]

*Karagre basate lakshmi karamule saraswati
Karamadhye tu govindah prabhate karadarshanam ||1||*

The front-palm is Lakshmi's, mid-palm is Saraswati's, and hind-palm is Govinda's seat. In the morning, one needs to observe his palm (palm represents man's virtue).

*Samudravasane devi! parvatastanamandale
Vishnupatni! namastubhyam
padasparsham khsamaswa me ||2||*

Oh goddess in ocean-clothing! The mountains are your breasts—likewise the earth who is the wife of Vishnu! I bow to thee. I touched you with my feet (in irreverence)—hence forgive me.

*Brahma muraristripurantakari
Bhanuh shashi bhumisuta budhascha |
Gurushcha shukrah shani-rahuketavah
Kurvantu sarve matma suprabhatam ||3||*

Brahma, Murari (Vishnu), the demon-slayer Shiva, and the nine planets sun, moon, mars, mercury, jupiter, venus, saturn, rahu, ketu—all of them may bid good morning for me.

*Sanatkumarah sanakah sanandanah
Sanatanoptyasuripingalau cha |
Sapta swarah sapta rasatalani
Kurvantu sarve mama suprabhatam ||4||*

Brahma's spiritual sons Sanatkumar, Sanaka, Sanandana and Sanatana; the initiator of Sankhya-philosophy Kapil's disciple Asuri, the founder of the subject of phraseology Pingal, the seven musical notes and the seven abyss may wish good morning to me.

*Saptarnavah sapta kulachalascha
Saptarshayo dwipavanani sapta |
Bhuradikritwa bhuvanani sapta
Kurvantu sarve mama suprabhatam ||5||*

The seven seas, seven mountains, seven sages (Kashyap, Atri, Bhradwaj, Vishwamitra, Gautam, Jamadagni, Vashistha), seven islands, seven forests, seven earths may bid good morning for me.

*Prithvi sagandha sarasastathapah
Sparshi cha vayurjwalan cha tejah |
Nabhah sashabdam mahata sahaiva
Kurvantu sarve mama suprabhatam ||6||*

The fragrant earth, sweet-taste water, sweet-touch air, illuminating fire, sound-filled sky—may these make my morning well.

*Mahendro malayah shajhyo debatatma himalayah |
Dhyeyo raivatako vindhyo girischarabalistatha ||7||*

Mahendra mountains, Malaya mountains, Sahyadri, the soul of god Himalay, the playground of Srikrishna Raibatak, Bindhyachal and Araballi mountains,

*Ganga sindhuscha kaveri jamuna cha saraswati |
reba mahanadi goda brahmaputra punatu maam ||8||*

Ganga, Sindhu, Kaveri, Jamuna, Saraswati, Reba, Mahanadi, Godavari, Brahmaputra—all these rivers may make me virtuous.

*Ayodhya mathura maya kashi kanchi avantika |
puri dwaravati chaiva shaptaita mokshadayika ||9||*

Ayodhya, Mathura, Maya (Haridwar), Kashi, Kanchi, Avantika (Ujjain), and Dwarikapuri—these seven places are divine.

*Prayagah pataliputram vijayanagaram purim |
Indraprastham gayam chaiva pratyushe pratyaham smaret ||10||*

Prayag, Pataliputra, Vijaynagar, Jagannathpuri, Indraprastha, and Gaya must be remembered every morning.

*Arundhatyanashuacha savitri janaki sati |
Tejasvini cha panchali vandaniya nirantaram ||11||*

Vashistha's wife Arundhati (ideal husband-devotee), Atri's wife Anasua (great husband-devotee), Savitri, Janaki, Sati (Daksha's daughter), and courageous Panchali (Draupadi) be always revered.¹³²

*Lakshmirahalya channamma meera durgavati tatha |
Kannagi cha mahasadhvi sharada cha nivedita ||12||*

Jhansi's queen Lakshmibai, Ahalyabai Holkar, Karnatak's brave woman Channamma, Meerabai, Garmandal's queen Durgavati, Tamilnadu's well-known wife-devotee Kannagi, Ramakrishna Paramahansa's lifelong associate and wife Sharada, and Sister Nivedita (Vivekananda's disciple)—are always revered.

132 The phrase "tejasvini panchali" is replaced by "Draupadi" in the ES—the adjective is now missing. Also, the official Sangh familiarization of Arundhati and Anasua does not portray them now as "ideal husband-devotees" ("adarsha pativrata") in the ES—obviously, the Sangh does not want to be branded as favoring domestication of women. However, to appease the ultra-conservatives, these and other "pativrata" women such as Savitri and Sati are retained.

*Vainyam prithum haihayamarjunam cha
Shakuntaleyam bharatam nalam cha |
Ramam cha yo vai smarati prabhate
Tasyarthalabho vijayashcha haste ||13||*

King Ven's son Prithu, the Haihay dynasty's mighty Sahasrarjuna, Shakuntala's son Bharat, Nala and Lord Rama are remembered by those in the morning who have fortune and success.

*Dadhyam manurbhrigurasau haripurvachandro
Bhishmarjuna-dhruva vashistha shukadayascha |
Prahlad-narad bhagiratha-vishwakarma-
Valmikayotra chirachintashubhavidhanah ||14||*

Dadhichi, Manu, Bhrigu, Harishchandra, Bhisma, Arjun, Dhruba, Vashistha, Shukra, Prahlad, Narad, Bhagirath, Vishwakarma, Valmiki—these names are always remembered.

*Ashvathwama balirvyaso hanumanashcha vibhishanah |
Kripah parashuramashcha saptaita chirajivinah ||15||*

Ashvathwama, Bali, Vyas, Hanuman, Bibhishan, Kripacharya, and Parashuram—these seven are immortal.

*Saptaitan samsmaretinyam markandeya mathasthamam |
Jived varshashatam sagrampamrityuvivarjitah ||16||*

These seven and eighth sage Markendeya are remembered by those who will live a hundred years without a chance of an accidental death.

*Punyasloko nalo raja punyasloko judishthirah |
Punyasloko videhascha punyasloko janardanaah ||17||*

The virtuous Nala, Judhisthir, king Janaka, and Janardan are illustrious.

*Buddho jitendro gorakshah shankarscha patanjalih |
Ramanujath chaitanyah kabiro gurunanakah ||18||*

*Jnaneshwarastukaramah samartha maddhavallabhau |
Narasistulsidasah kambah sadhukulattamah ||19||*

*Nayatmaralavarashcha thiruvallavarastatha |
Virantu sadaivaite daivim me gunasampadam ||20||*

Buddha, Mahabir, Gorakshnath, Shankaracharya, Charak, the great narrator Patanjali, Ramanuja, Chaitanya, Kabir, Nanak, Jnaneshwar, Tukaram, Samarth Ramdas, Maddhvacharya, Vallabhacharya, Narasi Mehta, Tulsidas, Kamba, Nyanmar and Alwar's saint traditions, Thiruvallavar and other great saints and their traditions—all be given divinity by us (for stanzas 18, 19, 20)¹³³

*Agastyah kambukaundinyo rajendrascholabhushanah |
Sarve digjainah khyatah shailendro bapparavalah ||21||*

Agastya, Kambu, Kaundinya, king Chola, Shailendra, Bappa Raval, et al. are famous world-conquerors (to spread Bharatiya culture within and abroad).

*Chanakyaschandraguptascha vikramah shalivahanah |
Ashokah pushyamitrascha kharavelah sunitiman ||22||*

Chanakya, Chandragupta, Vikram, Shalivahan, Ashoka, Pushyamitra, Kalinga Chakrabarti Kharavela,

*Hunajeta jashodharma samudro guptavanshajah |
Shrikrishnadevarayascha pradata harshavardhanah ||23||*

The Hun-conqueror Jashodharma, Samudragupta, Vijaynagar's great emperor Srikrishnadevaray, the benevolent Harshavardhana

*Sadhuh shankaradevascha tatha sayanamadhavau |
Pratapah shivarajascha govindo vasaveshwarah ||24||*

¹³³Both Manu and Shankaracharya have been synonymized with extreme forms of patriarchal directives in the Hindu scriptures—both have relegated the status of women to practically nothing.

Assam's Vaishnav saint Shankardev, Veda's narrator Sayanacharya, Madhavacharya, Maharana Pratap Singh, Chhatrapati Shivaji, Guru Govinda Singh, Sri Vasaveshwar

*Ramakrishno dayanando rabindro ramamohanoh |
Ramatirthaharabindascha vivekananda uddashah ||25||*

Ramakrishna, Dayananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Ram Mohan Ray, Ramtirtha, Aravinda, Vivekananda¹³⁴

*Tilako ramanaschaiva sudhirnarayano guruh |
Mahamana malaviyo mahatma gandhireva cha ||26||*

Lokmanya Tilak, Maharshi Raman, Kerala's saint Narayan Guru, the great soul Madanmohan Malaviya, Mahatma Gandhi,

*Keshavah sanghanirmata hedgewaravanshajah |
Santatam chintayedetan hindubhumisutottaman || 27||*

¹³⁴Ramakrishna Paramhansa, Rabindranath Tagore, and Ram Mohan Ray are perhaps the three most secular and liberal philosophers India has seen in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Ramakrishna was almost illiterate whereas the other two teachers were highly educated although Tagore quit formal schooling in childhood—they all preached secularism, tolerance, and philosophy of cultural pluralism. Rammohan Ray established Brahmoism—thousands out of sheer disgust for the upper castes and Brahmans converted to Brahmoism the latter becoming the driving force behind the celebrated social movement called “Bengal Renaissance”. This movement was instrumental in spreading science and western liberal education to fight dark-age Hindu social malpractices and superstitions. Ram Mohan Ray's biggest contribution was to make the barbaric custom of sati (bride immolation) abolished through religious, social, and political discourses. It is worth mentioning here that Sangh leaders such as Vijaya Raje Scindia have been in favor of the sati system (see chapter on RSS and women). Rabindranath Tagore was also a Brahmo—he was the icon of egalitarianism and philanthropy in the golden era of Bengal. It is hypocritical that RSS includes their names first in the BBS and now in ES.

The Sangh-founder Keshav Hedgewar, and all other abovementioned great sons of the Hindu land are to be always remembered.

*Anukta ye bhakta haricharanasamsaktahridaya
Abijnata veera adhisamaramuddhvastaripavah ||
Mahatmanah santo bharatabhumi ye santi cha pare
Namastebhya bhuyadushasi sakalebhyah pratidinam ||28||*

Those devotees who have been with god but not mentioned here—those who conquered the enemies but remained unknown, those who worked for the welfare of the society, and those who are known for their wisdom in various subjects—all these great men be worshipped.

*Ratnakaradhautapadam himalayakiritineem |
Brahma rajarshiratnadyam bande bharatamataram ||29||*

Bharatmata or Mother India, whose feet are washed by ratnakar, whose crown is the himàlay, whose treasures are the great saints and monks and other gems—be worshipped by us.

*Pratah smaranmetad yo
Viditvatdaratat pathet |
Sa samyag dharmanisthah syat
Samsmritatkhandabharatah ||30||*

Those who will read and appreciate this Pratahsmaran will be fully committed to religion and remember the Akhand Bharat for ever.

|| Bharat mata ki jay ||

Glory to Bharatmata.

APPENDIX VI

EXCERPTS FROM “THE SANGH IS MY SOUL” BY ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE

[This article was originally published and republished in *The Organizer*, and later posted in the BJP website in early 1998 only to be promptly withdrawn when it drew severe criticism. We downloaded it before it was withdrawn. The article is noteworthy for Vajpayee's radical stand against Muslims, a controversial image of the so-called moderate Vajpayee the RSS and BJP do not want to perpetuate. The article also shows how deep-rooted Vajpayee's connections are with the Hindu supremacist organization. Also, notice the similarity between this essay and the one by my father. — Author.]

I came in contact with the RSS in 1939 through Arya Kumar Sabha, a youth branch of Arya Samaj, in Gwalior—then a princely state which was not part of any province. I came from a strong 'sanatani' family. But I used to be at the weekly 'satsang' of Arya Kumar Sabha. Once Shri Bhoodev Shastri who was a senior worker of Arya Kumar Sabha, and a great thinker and an expert organiser, asked us: "What do you do in the evenings?" "Nothing", we said, because the Arya Kumar Sabha used to meet in the morning on every Sunday. Then he recommended us to go to the shakha. Thus I started going to the Shakha in Gwalior. It was my first association with the RSS. At that time the shakha in Gwalior had just begun. It had only Maharashtrian boys, and naturally all the swayamsevaks used to speak only Marathi. I started going to the shakha regularly. I liked the games played in the shakha as well as the weekly 'bauddhiks' (intellectual discourses).

A pracharak, Shri Narayanrao Tarte had come from Nagpur to start the shakha. He was indeed a superb human being; a very simple man, a thinker and an expert organiser. What I am today is the making of Shri Tarte. Next to him I was inspired by Deendayal Upadhyaya and Bhaurao Deoras. Gwalior was then not within the field of Bhauraoji. But once he had come to Gwalior with Shri Balasaheb Apte who was the then Bauddhik Pramukh. Apteji was very soft-spoken. We were soon drawn towards him. I had talked with him for only a few minutes. But the same year (1940) when I went to see the first year Officers' Training Camp (OTC), I came in close contact with him. I went there just to attend the valedictory function of the camp, not for training. Dr. Hedgewar had also come there for the some time. I first saw him there. When Doctorji was ill I went to see him. In 1941 when I was in High School I did my first year OTC. In 1942 when I was in Intermediate class I did my second year OTC, and I did my third year in 1944 when I was doing my B.A.

[...]

Till 1947 I did the RSS work at the shakha level and carried on my studies. I also participated in the Quit India Movement in 1942 and was jailed. I was then studying for my Intermediate examination. I was arrested from my native village Bhatেশwar in Agra district. I was then 16.

[...]

The RSS has a two-fold task before it. One is to organise the Hindus. To build a strong Hindu society, well-knit and rising above caste and other artificial differences. Some differences will persist but then variety is the spice of life. Like, we have the differences of the language. We don't want to destroy this diversity. The other task is to assimilate the non Hindus, like Muslims and Christians in the mainstream. They can follow the faith of their own conviction. No one can object to it. We worship trees, animals, stones, and what not. We have hundreds of ways of worshipping God. They can go where they want. But this country must be looked upon as the Motherland for them. They must have a feeling of patriotism for this country. But

the Islamic division of the world into 'Darul Harab' and 'Darul Islam' comes in the way. Islam has yet to learn the art of existing and flourishing in a country where Muslims are in a minority. They cannot convert the whole of India to Islam. After all, they have to live here. So they have to recognise this fact. And today it has become a matter of grave concern and deep thinking in the Muslim countries. Because Quran offers no guidance in this regard. It only talks of killing kafirs or converting them to Islam. But they cannot do it always and everywhere. How can they do it where they are in a minority? If they try to do it, a major clash will take place and only the members of the minority will be killed. But Muslims themselves have to change this state of affairs. We cannot change it for them.

Congress has not correctly understood the Muslim problem. They continue to carry on their policy of appeasement. But to what effect? The Muslims of this country can be treated in three ways. One is 'tiraskar' which means if they will not themselves change leave them alone, reject them as out compatriots. Second is 'puruskar' which is appeasement, i.e., bribe them to behave, which is being done by the Congress and others of their ilk. The third way is 'parishkar' meaning to change them, that is, restore them to the mainstream by providing them samskaras. We want to change them by offering them the right samskaras. Their religion will not be changed. They can follow their own religion. Mecca can continue to be holy for the Muslims but India should be holier than the holy for them. You can go to a mosque and offer namaz, you can keep the roza. We have no problem. But if you have to choose between Mecca or Islam and India you must choose India. All the muslims should have this feeling: we will live and die only for this country.

[...]

We (Hindus) did pull down the structure in Ayodhya. In fact it was a reaction to the Muslim vote-bank. We wanted to solve this problem through negotiation and legislation. But there was no puraskar for burai (evil act). We change burai also with parishkar. Now I think, the Hindu society has

been regenerated which was the prime task of the RSS. Earlier Hindus used to bend before an invasion but not now. This change in Hindu society is worthy of welcome. So much change must have come with the new-found self-assertion. This is a question of self preservation. If the Hindu society does not expand itself it will face the crisis of survival. We have to expand ourselves.

[...]

The simple reason for my long association with the RSS is that I like the Sangh. I like its ideology, and above all I like the RSS attitude towards people, towards one another which is found only in the RSS. I remember an incident, when I was in Lucknow. The Socialist movement was its peak. Suddenly a senior socialist activist fell ill. He was lying alone in his house, and nobody went to enquire after his well-being. Then Acharya Narendra Deo came to know and he went to his house to see him. The Acharya then said, "What fraternity is this in the Socialist Party? Nobody has come to see you. It can never happen in the RSS. If a swayamsevak does not go to the shakha only for one day the same day friends will promptly reach his house to enquire about his well-being."

When I was ill during the Emergency, my family members did not turn up to see me. They were afraid of being arrested for any such action. Only the RSS workers helped me. See, how much living contact and fraternal feeling is in the RSS. Actually the Sangh is our family. We are all one.

In the beginning we could not spread our work in all sections of the society because we did not have enough workers. "Man-making" is the prime job of the RSS. As we now have more workers, we are covering all sections of the society in all fields of life. Changes are taking place in all spheres. But the work of man-making will not be discontinued, it will go on. It must go on. That is what the RSS movement is.

INDEX

- Abdullah, Sheikh 13, 125
ABVP (Vidyarthi Parishad) 3, 4, 10, 26, 31-34, 36, 74, 77, 80, 81, 83, 84
Acid throwing 104
Advani, L. K. 7, 14, 18, 23, 74, 104, 122
Agnes, Flavia 112
Akali 47, 54, 103, 113
Akhand Bharat 20, 27, 28, 153
Agnivesh, Swami 113
Ambedkar 54, 71, 111
American Civil War 106
Ayodhya 4, 16, 55, 61, 65, 109, 149
- Babri Masjid 16, 104
Bahujan Samaj Party 17
Bajrang Dal 3, 7, 104
Banavasi Kalyan Ashram 7, 39
Banerjee, Jitendranath 116
Bangladesh 17, 32, 39, 40, 83, 93, 94, 102, 105
Bano, Shah 94
Basu, Amrita 87, 88, 98
Basu (Bose), Subhas Chandra ("Netaji") 71, 72
Bengal 4, 13, 28, 31, 36, 44, 46, 52, 74, 76, 78, 80, 82-84, 94-96, 112, 124, 125, 142
Bhala, Lakshmi Narayan 77, 83
Bharat Bhakti Stotra (Pratahsmaran) 53, 59, 63, 147
Bharat Sadhu Samaj 3
Bharati, Uma 85, 86, 96-99
Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh 3, 10, 22, 26, 35, 124
Bhide, Lakshman Srikrishna 121
Bhopal (Union Carbide gas tragedy) 35
Bihar 33, 95, 97, 113
Birsa 8, 47, 54, 68
Black Muslim 93
Bombay (Mumbai) 17, 22, 31, 32, 36, 38, 44, 102, 109, 111, 112, 131, 132, 135, 140, 141

Brahman (Brahmin) 7, 43, 47, 56, 61, 137
Bride burning 40, 95
Buchanan, Pat 37
Buddhism 54, 140

Calcutta 1, 4, 25, 28, 37, 39, 72, 75-80, 82-84, 116, 124, 125
Caste system (in Hinduism) 3, 7, 8, 15, 17, 18, 24, 46, 47, 54-56, 61, 62, 80, 95-97, 99, 104-106, 112, 128, 137, 146
Chatterjee, Suman 112
China 23, 38
Christian (Christianity) 10, 39, 40, 47, 48, 53-55, 93, 94, 102, 103, 105, 106, 108-110, 139
Christian Coalition 39, 40, 103, 105, 108
CIA 18, 22, 34, 35
Communal riots (communal violence) 7, 15, 17, 61, 77, 99, 128, 129, 140
Congress Party 13, 14, 33, 34, 71, 78, 82, 85, 97, 110, 141
Cossman, Brenda 92
CPI (Communist Party of India) 74
CPI(M) (Communist Party of India, Marxist) 35, 74, 78, 96
CPI(ML) (Communist Party of India, Marxist-Leninist) 78

Dalit 54, 112
Datta Samant 31, 113
Deb Sharma, Ganesh 75
Deendayal Research Institute 121
Deoras, Balasaheb 8, 52, 74, 124
Deoras, Bhaurao 52, 118-120, 124
Deshmukh, Nana ("Nanaji") 14, 141
Devdasi 93
Dilip Kumar 22
Dixit, Keshav 75, 80
Dowry deaths 40, 95, 96
Draupadi 66, 149
Durga Vahini 3, 89, 94, 97, 104

Ekatmata Stotra 8, 27, 51-53, 59, 63, 64
Elst, Koenraad 16, 52
Emergency, the 13, 35, 73-78, 80-82, 84
Engineer, Asghar Ali 113
Enron 22

Fascist 2, 12, 15, 19, 32, 136
Feminism 85, 87, 88
Festivities 41, 47

Fundamentalist (Fundamentalism) 8, 15, 40, 88, 89, 96, 101, 102, 105-108, 110, 111

Gandhi (Mahatma) 6, 9, 13, 33, 50, 71, 74, 85, 110, 111, 123, 136, 152

Gandhi, Indira 13, 14, 33-35, 73-75, 78-80, 82, 84

Gandhi, Sanjay 34, 82

Ganesh (Ganesha) 88, 110

GATT 22, 38

Global Vision 2000 145

Godse, Nathuram 9

Goel, Sita Ram 52

Golwalkar, M. S. ("Guruji") 8, 10, 12, 13, 20, 23, 49, 52, 55, 60, 72, 123, 138, 139

Govindacharya 32, 83

Great Britain 74

Gujarat 31, 33, 36, 46, 47, 68, 95, 103, 104

Guru-Dakshina 14, 45

Guru Purnima 45

Hedgewar, K. B. ("Doctorji") 6, 9, 10, 20, 28, 42, 43, 46, 49, 72, 85, 108, 120, 152, 153

Hellman, Eva 54

Hindi 7, 12, 28, 43, 52, 59, 75, 83, 84, 86, 95, 96, 98, 134

Hindu Mahasabha 9, 11-13, 32, 123

Hindu Rashtra 15

Hindu Samrajya 43, 50

Hindu Student Council 3, 15, 40, 142

Hindu summer camp 15

Hindutva 3, 4, 8, 32, 46, 54, 61, 106, 142, 143

Hitler 10, 12, 23, 32, 44, 46, 102, 136

Hussain, M. F. 127, 134

Independence (political) 9, 23, 48, 110, 136, 140

Inheritance rights 90

Internet 21, 142

INTUC 36

IPTA 112

Islam 8, 16, 23, 30, 44, 69, 83, 86, 89, 93, 94, 107-109, 134, 136

Israel 23, 83, 105

Itihas Sankalan Samiti 39

Jackson, Michael 22, 38

Jainism 54, 140

Jamat-e-Islami 39, 40, 105
Jana Natya Manch 112
Jana Sangh (Bharatiya Jana Sangh) 6, 7, 13, 14, 22, 23, 28, 33,
35, 74, 77, 79-84, 96, 118, 125, 130-132
Janata Party 35, 79, 80
Janavadi Mahila Samiti (AIDWA) 96
Jaya Prakash Narayan ("J.P.") 14, 33, 73, 113
Jesus Christ 6
Judaism 93

Kapoor, Ratna 92
Kashi (Varanasi) 4, 55, 61, 65, 117, 120, 124, 149
Kashmir 13, 69
Kelkar, Lakshmibai 85
Kishwar, Madhu 98
Koran 98
Kosambi, D. D. 65

Lesbianism 92
"Lower caste" 8, 15, 17, 54, 61, 62, 80, 106, 128, 146

Madan Das 33, 37
Madhok, Balraj 23
Mahila Morcha (of BJP) 3, 89, 97
Makar Sankranti 47
Malkani, K. R. 111
Mandal Commission 61, 106
Mangeshkar, Lata 22
Manu 67, 91
Mathura 4, 18, 55, 61, 65, 114, 149
May Day 48
Mittal, Lata 94
Modi, Sushil 32, 33
Moral Majority 108
Morarji Desai 35, 74, 79
Mother Teresa 39
Mukherjee, Shyama Prasad 13, 50, 125
Muslim 6, 10, 12, 15-17, 20, 32, 43, 44, 47, 48, 54, 55, 61, 62,
68, 69, 77, 86, 89, 91, 93, 94, 96-100, 102, 105, 106, 109,
110, 128, 130-133, 137-139

NAFTA 22, 38
Nagpur 6, 10, 18, 46, 53, 59, 118, 119, 122
Namboodiripad, E. M. S. 74, 112
Nasreen, Taslima 94

Nation of Islam 108
Nav Nirman 73
N-Bomb 15, 18
Nehru, Jawaharlal 16, 82, 142
New York Times 104
Niyati (fate) 87
Nurculuk 40, 105

Officers' Training Camp (O. T. C.) 27, 52, 119
Organiser 111, 139, 140
Orthodox Church 105
Overseas Friends of BJP 3, 15, 40

Pakistan 17, 18, 23, 102, 139
Patkar, Medha 113
Phoolan Devi ("Bandit Queen") 104
Polygamy 62, 93
Pracharak (of RSS) 75, 77, 80, 97, 118, 120, 121, 124-126
Praja Socialist Party 130
Prarthana (the RSS prayer) 51, 52, 57
Pratijna (the RSS pledge) 51
Promise Keepers 89, 108
Pseudo-secularist 106
Punarjanma (reincarnation) 87

Quotes 136

Radha Krishnan, S. 120, 137
Rajasthan 36, 38, 46, 95, 98, 103, 104
Rajendra Singh ("Rajju Bhaiya") 21, 121
Raksha Vandhan 45, 46, 50
Ramakrishna Paramhansa 8, 49, 66, 70, 111, 114, 149, 152
Rama Janmabhoomi 15, 46, 61
Ram Mohan Ray 8, 106, 111, 152
Rama Rathayatra 106
Ranade, Eknath 124
Rape 15, 32, 78, 100, 102, 103, 128
Rashtra Sevika Samiti 3, 46, 77, 84, 85, 87-89, 94, 97
Ray, Mary 94
Roop Kanwar 98
RSS calendar of holidays 48-50
Rushdie, Salman 94, 107

Saamna 134
Sadhvi Rithambara 4, 85, 96

Sahmat 112
Sangh Parivar 2, 5, 8, 15, 16, 19, 20, 23, 24, 31, 43, 47, 52, 54-56, 61, 81, 86, 90, 93, 94, 96, 99-101, 103, 104, 106-108, 110, 112, 114, 116, 128, 136
Sanskrit commands (in RSS) 27, 28
Sarkar, Tanika 87
Sarsanghchalak (Supreme leader in RSS) 20, 21, 42, 119, 121, 123, 124
Saraswati, Muktananda 90
Sati (the outlawed practice) 7, 99
Savarkar (Veer Savarkar) 11, 49, 52, 71, 123
Scindia, Vijaya Raje 7, 85, 96, 99
Serbs 102
Seshadri, H. V. 60, 68, 69
Shakha 1, 19, 25-29, 41, 43, 51, 52, 117, 121, 131
Shankara 45, 67, 91, 151
Shankar Guha Niyogi 36
Shari'a (Shariat) 93, 134
Shiite 105
Shivaji 31, 43-45, 49, 69, 134, 152
Shiv Sena 7, 10, 12, 21, 22, 31, 32, 36, 38, 44, 102, 103, 112, 113, 128, 130, 132-135, 143
Sikh 35, 47, 48, 54, 55, 61
Singh, V. P. 61, 97
Singhal, Ashok 124
Sinha, Mridula 89
Sister Nivedita 50, 137, 149
Sita 90
Socialist 4, 14, 16, 23, 33-35, 73, 79, 80, 97, 105, 110
Social Movement Organizations (SMO's) 103, 105, 107
Supremacist 2, 7-9, 24, 87, 94
Swadeshi Jagaran Manch 21, 37, 38
Swamy, Subramanian 84

Tagore, Rabindranath 46, 55, 60, 70, 152
Taj Mahal 109
Taliban 103, 105
Tamil 31, 67
Tamil Nadu 36, 52, 95, 109, 113
Tests, nuclear 18
Thackeray, Bal 7, 12, 44, 107, 135
Thengadi, Dattopanth 41, 43-45, 60, 143

Union Carbide 35, 36
Upadhyay, Deendayal 13, 50, 52, 118

Urdu 12

USA 4, 15, 21, 23, 37, 39, 40, 74, 102, 103, 143

USSR 23

Vaghela, Shankar Singh 104

Vajpayee, Atal Bihari 7, 13-15, 18, 23, 74, 92, 121, 124, 141

Vande Mataram 77, 78

Varnekar, S. B. 52, 53, 59

Varsh Pratipada 42, 49

**VHP (Vishwa Hindu Parishad) 3, 4-6, 10, 15, 16, 18, 19, 26,
45, 55, 61, 81, 85, 88, 90, 94, 97-99, 104, 107, 114, 129,
142, 143, 146**

Vietnam 102

Vijaya Dashami 6, 46, 50, 85, 116

**Vivekananda, Swami 49, 60, 62, 66, 70, 91, 106, 111, 124,
136, 137, 152**

Wages 92

Yadav, Mulayam Singh 97, 113

Yadav, Laloo Prasad 97, 113

Yeshivas 105

Youth Congress 29