



## New Wine, Old Skins: The Sangh Parivār and the Transformation of Hinduism

JAMES G. LOCHTEFELD

The Hindu Right has risen from virtual obscurity to become a significant force in modern India. The major agent for this has been the Rashtriya Svayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and its affiliates, particularly the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP). The Sangh 'family' emphasis has been empowering Hindus and affirming Hindu identity, exemplified by their struggle to construct the Ram Janam Bhumi temple in Ayodhya. Yet even though the Sangh family claims to speak for all Hindus, and characterizes its platform as 'Hindu-ness' (*Hindutva*), its goals and assumptions often diverge sharply from traditional Hindu ideas. Despite the rhetoric of reclamation, it is redefining what it 'means' to be Hindu.

© 1996 Academic Press Limited

### Introduction

The past ten years have seen the rapid, sometimes explosive growth of *Hindutva*, and the equally vehement criticism of its opponents, some of whom have characterized it as a 'fascist' movement. Whether or not one agrees with *Hindutva* ideas and methods, its recent prominence makes it all the more important to examine and genuinely address. Labeling it 'fascism' (or any other name) may reflect the perception of these critics, and perhaps give them emotional satisfaction, but this does little to help us understand its recent success, after nearly fifty years as a marginal force in Indian life. Nor does this indicate its prospects for further success, or the ways that its influence is shaping modern Indian life and understandings of India's past.

This shaping stems directly from its affirmations on Hindu identity and religion, and has been most pronounced in two dimensions. On one hand, it has attempted to transform the term 'Hindu' into signifying political rather than religious identity, (somewhat as the U.S. religious right has appropriated 'Christian'), and explicitly equate this Hindu identity with Indian nationalism. At the same time, it has also been actively reshaping the tradition's religious forms, to cement this identity by providing new symbols, images, ceremonies, and institutions. These new forms have been carefully chosen, often delivered in highly innovative ways, and have usually been introduced using the rhetoric of reclaiming the past, to disguise how much of this identity has been newly constructed. This understanding reflects definite changes in what it means to 'be' a Hindu, and critics have charged that this rhetoric of reclamation masks an attempt to impose an arbitrary (and artificial) systematization, hierarchy and order on the tradition. None of this has taken place in a vacuum, and in assessing these changes one must consider a variety of issues, including the *Hindutva* movement's increasingly international character.

### Major Players

The major players in the contemporary *Hindutva* movement are all members of the so-called Sangh 'family' (*parivār*). The 'parent' organization is the Rashtriya Svayamsevak Sangh ('National Volunteer Corps', hereafter RSS), which was founded in Nagpur in 1925. The RSS is an unabashedly elitist organization, whose self-proclaimed mission is to produce the leaders for a renaissance Hindu India. It is highly autocratic, run by a single leader (the *sārsanghacālak*) whose decisions are never questioned, who is

appointed by the previous *sārsanghcālak*, and who normally holds this position for life.<sup>1</sup> RSS training stresses obedience, discipline, loyalty, and ideological formation; one observer notes that the last relies not on mastering any text, but is ‘preached in a style that deliberately avoids complexities and debates, and inculcated simultaneously via a whole battery of rituals and symbols’.<sup>2</sup>

Since its inception the RSS has been almost exclusively an urban phenomenon, whose membership has largely been drawn from ‘the salaried lower middle-class and small-scale shopkeepers . . . groups whose social and economic aspirations are undermined by inflation, by scarcity of job opportunities, and by their relative inability to influence the political process’.<sup>3</sup> At the local level its greatest attraction seems to have been its ability to create a sense of community among such alienated (and often newly urbanized) people, and for many these personal relationships are their strongest tie to the organization.<sup>4</sup>

Throughout its history the RSS has shunned overt political activity—claiming that its mission was cultural and character-building—but has exercised considerable influence through its affiliated organizations. At present there are at least 19 such affiliates, ranging from trade and student unions to charitable and educational societies, for which the RSS provides the leadership cadre.<sup>5</sup> This cadre is disciplined, dedicated, spartan in lifestyle, energetic, and mobile; the hierarchical structure of the RSS also tends to promote what one writer describes as ‘the social skills of the company man’, who can work productively with others in varying capacities.<sup>6</sup>

The most important affiliates in the recent Hindutva resurgence are the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a political party, and the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), whose mandate has been more explicitly religious issues.<sup>7</sup> Both are committed to the RSS world view, but their different functions have given them different imperatives, which occasionally creates tension between them. Because it aspires to govern, the BJP strives to project an image of discipline, stability, and responsibility; it must also respond to its constituents’ needs.<sup>8</sup> More recently, the BJP has also been constrained by court judgments limiting the party’s ability to invoke religious issues for political ends, or for BJP candidates to appeal to religious loyalties during elections.<sup>9</sup> The threat of legal sanctions or disqualification of its candidates has forced the BJP to modify its tone considerably, as have its internal needs to be perceived as more than a single-issue party.

The VHP is not bound by any of these concerns, and can therefore take a much harder line, particularly in its disdain for the rule of law, as shown most clearly by its role in demolishing the Babri Masjid in December 1992. Whereas the BJP’s most visible figures are politicians, the front men for the VHP are mainly ascetics. The VHP also has its own affiliate, the Bajrang Dal, whose primary function is to support the VHP’s campaigns by supplying manpower and muscle.

In theory these are completely separate organizations—which allows them to shift responsibility to the others—but in practice their interests, actions, and even personnel coincide: leaders for both the BJP and VHP have long-standing ties with the RSS; BJP parliamentarians include officials from the Bajrang Dal and the VHP, and the VHP is the only RSS affiliate in which the RSS chief sits on the board, providing further evidence of their links.<sup>10</sup> They are all members of the same ‘family’, and as in any idealized extended family, have only the interests of the family at heart. Much of what follows will be focused on the VHP, but these interconnections make it virtually impossible to discuss any one of them in isolation. This is particularly true because the VHP has recently taken up certain issues—such as opposition to the Dunkel proposals,

Bangladeshi infiltration, and Kashmir—that until now have been handled by the BJP, thus blurring these organizational distinctions even further.<sup>11</sup>

### **Hindutva Ideology**

The word *Hindutva* literally means ‘Hindu-ness’, the quality of being Hindu. It began with the writings of Veer Savarkar, whose central thesis was that the Hindus were a nation, despite their linguistic, social, and regional differences. Savarkar defined a Hindu as anyone regarding India as fatherland and holy land, and to this day these remain the litmus test.<sup>12</sup> This defines the Hindu nation on cultural criteria—as a people united by a common cultural heritage—and from the start Hindutva proponents have insisted that the word ‘Hindu’ refers to a cultural rather than a religious community.<sup>13</sup>

Hindutva is sometimes presented as a simple majoritarian argument: Hindus are 85% of India’s population, and therefore India is a Hindu nation, just as Great Britain is a ‘Christian nation’.<sup>14</sup> Although no one can deny that the Hindu ethos has an unmistakable presence in Indian life, the Hindutva claim is not ultimately about numbers, but about value. It projects Hindu culture and values as India’s sole cultural foundation, and the only appropriate model for national life. This explicitly rejects the ‘composite culture’ idea—the notion that Indian culture grew from a variety of sources—which was one of Nehru’s fundamental assumptions.<sup>15</sup>

By seeking the lowest common denominator, Savarkar’s definition can accommodate almost anyone, a decided advantage in a tradition so diverse and decentralized to render any criteria for Hindu identity problematic.<sup>16</sup> Critics charge that disregarding such sharp differences imposes a facade of Hindu unity on communities with nothing in common, and it is interesting that certain groups who fit these criteria, such as the Sikhs, vehemently deny that they are Hindus. This definition’s lack of real substance also makes it difficult to discover meaningful connections when one gets to concrete individuals and communities. The Sangh’s response to this, as we shall see, has been to cement this Hindu identity by creating new symbols and rituals that do not compete with established ones, allowing people to take on their new ‘Hindu’ identity without unduly disturbing their present one.

One must also look at who this definition excludes. Savarkar’s definition of a Hindu is plastic enough to include everyone in a notoriously polyform tradition, but the condition that one regard India as the holy land largely excludes both Muslims and Christians. This definition equates Hindu identity and Indian nationalism, meaning that religious minorities are not only ‘aliens’, but because of their ‘extraterritorial loyalties’ (to holy lands in Arabia and Israel) they are also potential traitors.<sup>17</sup>

This is particularly true for Muslims, for several obvious reasons. The trauma of Partition is still well in living memory, and Indo-Pakistani conflicts since then have reinforced the image of Muslims as enemies. Muslims also form the largest and most visible minority community, and this community identity is the real problem. Hindutva proponents give no place to any other community, claiming that religious differences are merely a matter of personal piety, which must not be allowed to isolate people from mainstream (i.e. Hindu) culture.<sup>18</sup> Although individual Muslims have joined the BJP, most have rejected the demand to give up their community identity. Reaction to this resistance can be seen in the Sangh’s schizophrenic attitudes toward Muslims: since most Indian Muslims are converts, they are sometimes claimed as Hindus, albeit with differing customs and worship, yet at other times they are portrayed as identifying with (and thus metaphorically descended from) outsiders, pillaging invaders, and conquerors.

Despite its claim to speak for 85% of the population, there is also a pervasive sense of insecurity. Hindutva proponents affirm both that Hindu identity is endangered, and also a history of oppression by ‘aliens’—first the Muslims, then the British, and finally and most subtly by a westernized Indian elite. According to the Hindutva narrative, this last group has ruled not by force, but by taking advantage of ‘vote-bank’ politics. This is the claim that these leaders have cultivated certain groups—in particular, the minorities—who vote *en bloc* for them in exchange for upholding and protecting their interests. Hindutva proponents claim that this solidarity gives minorities disproportionate influence, because the Hindu electorate has been so fragmented by caste, linguistic and regional factors that politicians have been able to ignore it. Hindutva’s clarion call is for Hindus to affirm their Hindu identity—a tenuous proposition, given the aforementioned differences—throw out their oppressors, and take back their nation.

These are not arguments open to proof or refutation, but articles of faith about the world.<sup>19</sup> Yet any cultural narrative must have supporting evidence if its proponents hope to convince others, and this the Sangh has adroitly provided. Evidence that Hindu identity was endangered came from the much-publicized conversion of Harijans to Islam in Meenaksipuram, Tamil Nadu, which first surfaced in 1981. The Sangh admitted several factors behind these conversions, including discrimination by caste Hindus, but alleged that the ultimate goal—lubricated by Islamic petrodollars—was to convert so many people that Hindus would become a minority in India.<sup>20</sup>

Two (in practical terms) insignificant but highly symbolic events were paraded as proof that minorities were ‘appeased’ in ‘vote-bank’ politics—the ill-considered response to the 1985 Shah Bano case by Rajiv Gandhi’s government, and that same government’s decision to ban *The Satanic Verses*, on the grounds that it was offensive to Muslims.<sup>21</sup> The Shah Bano issue was the more potent—whether or not divorced Muslim women were entitled to financial support from their ex-husbands, which Indian law mandates but Islamic law forbids. The lower court verdict that they were so entitled was overturned by the Prime Minister, enraging many Hindus and sparking the Sangh’s persistent call for a uniform civil code.<sup>22</sup>

The most potent symbol of Hindu oppression has been the Ram Janam Bhumi—first in the oft-repeated claim that Muslim invaders destroyed the original temple at Ram’s birthplace, and erected the Babri Masjid in its place as a visible symbol of their conquest. This has been reinforced by various governments’ efforts to protect the Babri Masjid, particularly in November 1990, when police fired upon a crowd attempting to storm and destroy it. In addition to the Ram Janam Bhumi, there have also been periodic demands for the restoration of sites in Benares and Mathura, as well as the more general call for restoring thousands of temples claimed to have been destroyed or converted into mosques.

### ***Reasons for Hindutva Success***

None of this would have mattered had there not been other factors extraneous to the Sangh. The most important cause for the advent of Hindutva has been the pervasive conviction that Nehruvian socialism has been an utter failure, which even the Congress(I) has implicitly admitted by its recent economic policies.<sup>23</sup> Indians have an overwhelming sense that the government has failed to deliver, a sense of failure heightened by pervasive corruption, by the social and economic dislocation since Independence, by the internal instability in various regions, and by comparisons with other, newly prosperous Asian countries.

This disaffection is particularly strong in the educated urban poor, who behold the abyss between their expectations and their possibilities. In bad economic times people look for scapegoats, and those who provide them will receive a measure of support, whether or not these targets are the actual root of the problem. Like Ross Perot, the Sangh has successfully tapped this vein of popular discontent, and their well-formed world view provides people with quick and easy answers. This economic disaster has also eroded the Congress Party's political standing, allowing them to be displaced by other forces all over North India.

Yet another factor in legitimating Hindutva has been the Congress(I)'s own amoral flirtation with it for electoral gain. In her last years Indira Gandhi followed a 'soft Hinduism' strategy aimed at winning Hindu support without completely alienating Muslims, a strategy that included building informal bridges with the RSS.<sup>24</sup> In his quest for votes Rajiv Gandhi was even willing to adopt Hindutva rhetoric—his opening speech for the 1989 election was in Faizabad, Ayodhya's neighboring city, and in it he promised voters 'Ram's rule' (*rām rājya*).<sup>25</sup>

The Sangh did not control the actions of the Congress(I) leaders, or the track record of their governments, although it has used these factors to its advantage. Yet one of the strongest factors for its steadily growing support has been the way that the Sangh Parivār, for which the VHP has been the most visible agent, has selected and manipulated images to implant, uphold, and reinforce its world view, showing a media mastery and an eye for symbols that would put most ad agencies to shame.

A look at the VHP's first successful campaign reveals the care to correlate the images presented with the target population. After the Meenakshipuram conversions, the VHP responded by crisscrossing Tamil Nadu in two vans converted into mobile temples. These so-called 'Jnana Rathams' ('Wisdom Chariots') were intended to counter caste discrimination, by allowing low-caste people to bathe the images of Murugan in the vans.<sup>26</sup> Murugan was an astute choice for the environment—he is an important regional deity whose six major shrines span the Tamil country, thus appealing to Tamil pride and identity.<sup>27</sup> The Jnana Rathams were an innovative and unusual way to bring these images directly to the people, and especially in small villages the novelty alone would ensure a ready audience. They provided an opportunity for a public denial of caste, at least in ritual matters, and the publicity successfully enhanced the VHP's public image.

This was followed by the 1983 Ekatmata Yajna ('Sacrifice for Unity'), which transposed several of these elements to an All-India level. Here too the symbols presented, the Ganges and Mother India, were carefully chosen to appeal to Hindus across the spectrum. The Ganges is the paradigmatic sacred river, to which many other Indian rivers are homologized, yet it is seldom a devotee's primary object of worship.<sup>28</sup> In the same way, although many people can feel loyalty to the notion of Mother India, in everyday worship she is nobody's goddess.<sup>29</sup> In both cases, people could easily assimilate these symbols by simply layering them over their existing loyalties, with which these symbols did not conflict.

The Yajna's focus was three caravans carrying Ganges water: one from Kathmandu to Rameshvaram, one from Ganga Sagar to Somnath, and one from Hardwar to Kanyakumari. The caravans traveled across the continent on pilgrimage routes, converging at midpoint in Nagpur, the headquarters of the RSS. Along the way the Ganges water carried by the caravans was mixed with water from local rivers, to demonstrate symbolically the country's unity. The Yajna went smoothly, in large part through massive support by RSS volunteers; it was conducted amid extensive publicity, and sales of Ganges water along the way generated considerable revenue.<sup>30</sup>

Certain features of the Ekatmata Yajna have been a regular part of the VHP's subsequent campaigns. Many have involved travel, often converging on a single location, and the travel time itself becomes a means to build tension, and rally support along the way. These campaigns have usually had considerable media attention, which the Sangh has artfully manipulated to catch and hold the public eye, using every possible medium—from the printing press, to video and audio cassettes, to stickers.<sup>31</sup>

On a superficial level, one could compare these to campaigns in the freedom movement, such as the salt *satyagraha*, but aside from the truth that Gandhi was also adept at using the media to create public spectacles, this comparison breaks down.<sup>32</sup> At times the Sangh has been frankly mendacious, as in claims about temples destroyed in Kashmir which were later reported to be undamaged, or 'martyrs' from the 1990 shootings at Ayodhya who have turned up alive and well.<sup>33</sup> On a less overt level, the Sangh has often misrepresented a well-scripted program as a spontaneous upwelling of popular support. The most dramatic example of this is the destruction of the Babri Masjid, which was portrayed as the unfortunate action of an uncontrolled mob, but was in fact meticulously planned.<sup>34</sup> The dissemination of these images is just as carefully planned; note the simultaneous attacks on journalists and photographers during the first stages of the destruction of the Babri Masjid, to give the Sangh complete control over which images could be used.

They have also—and this is vitally important—conveyed their messages through unconventional and easily accessible religious symbols, which are largely unconnected to traditional brahminical forms. I have already mentioned the Jnana Rathams, which combined aggressive outreach with an explicit anti-caste message, and the Ekatmata Yajna, which symbolized the country's unity by mixing vats of water. Many of the other innovative images have been connected with the struggle to build the Ram Janam Bhumi, which has been the most tangible symbol of Hindus as an oppressed majority, and their will to revitalize themselves: traveling around the country with a statue of Ram in an iron cage; worshipping bricks for the temple and carrying them in procession to Ayodhya; L. K. Advani's Rath Yatra, in which he traveled from Somnath across North India in a 'chariot' made from a DCM-Toyota van, and taking the cremated ashes of the 1990 'martyrs' around the country for memorial ceremonies.

These are very evocative symbols, but hardly conform to traditional ritual. Rather, they are a shorthand symbolism with tremendous emotional appeal to India's television generation.<sup>35</sup> Each of these carefully structured campaigns has been accompanied by a media blitz, portraying these campaigns as an upwelling of Hindu unity, and a rebellion against the 'oppression' of Hindus.

Aside from using new and unconventional symbols, another break with tradition has been de-emphasizing brahmin ritual privilege, as the Jnana Rathams clearly showed. The RSS has historically condemned untouchability as a pernicious practice dividing Hindu society, and in keeping with the Sangh emphasis on publicity, the VHP has demonstrated this in highly visible places. During the *Rām Shila Pūjan* in the fall of 1989, when the consecrated bricks were being transported to Ayodhya, they were taken in procession through all parts of the villages, including the Harijan areas where traditional religious processions have never gone.<sup>36</sup> Other highly visible gestures have been that a Harijan performed the *śilanyās* ('laying the foundation stone') for the Ram Janam Bhumi temple, and in the summer of 1993 Mahant Avaidyanath, a VHP leader and BJP legislator, supported the installation of a Harijan priest in a Patna temple.<sup>37</sup> All these examples seem to show that the Sangh has no reservations about who may perform *pūjā*,

and in many cases these rites have not required a great deal of formal training, which makes it possible for a non-specialist to perform them.

Aside from creating and manipulating new symbols, the VHP has also used traditional strategies to reinforce its legitimacy and spread its message. Ascetics have been a visible part of the VHP since its inception in 1964, and as the VHP's 'front men' they have been an important presence in legitimating its claim to speak for the Hindu community. The most prominent ascetics provide the sound bites and photo opportunities that promote the Sangh's message in a national forum. At the grass-roots level its (reportedly) 25,000 ascetic members spread the Sangh's messages in their travels through village India, playing on their traditional status as teachers and authorities.

Yet despite this conspicuous presence, one could legitimately question whether ascetics have any genuine clout. Both of the VHP's General Secretaries have been RSS men, and in 1993 the 51-member Governing Council had only one *sanyāsī*, Swami Chinmayanand, who died that August.<sup>38</sup> Equally instructive is what sort of ascetics the VHP has managed to attract. Most of them are independents or small-time *mahants*, characterized by one source as 'a more pliable second line of the Hindu religious leadership'.<sup>39</sup> Many of these are ascetics without significant personal position or resources, for whom the VHP has provided both status and patronage.

Festivals have been another important element in the VHP strategy, both as a vehicle for transforming itself into a source of patronage, and as a setting to promote more explicit political goals. In doing so, they are clearly taking a cue from the RSS, whose six annual festivals coincide with festivals in the Hindu calendar, but which have been reinterpreted to serve their own ends.<sup>40</sup> The VHP has carefully cultivated relationships with festival organizers, which are then used to get more desirable spots for its supporters, thus transforming the VHP into a source of patronage.<sup>41</sup> Festivals have also been used as a theater for explicit political goals, such as scheduling *kar seva* in Ayodhya during the *pañcakrośī yātrā*,<sup>42</sup> using the Amarnath pilgrimage as a vehicle to assert a Hindu presence in Kashmir,<sup>43</sup> or planning a 1994 '*sant yātrā*' during the Dussehra festival, during which 25,000 ascetics were scheduled to travel through the country, bearing the Sangh's message on a variety of issues.<sup>44</sup> In each of these cases, festivals have provided the VHP with a highly visible arena in which to carry out their activities, and to publicize concerns on their larger agenda.

### 'Semiticization'

The Sangh's success in creating and conveying symbols has led people to accuse them of trying to 'Semiticize' Hinduism—to impose order and uniformity on a notoriously pluriform tradition. It is curious that despite its exaltation of Hindu culture and its disdain for all who fall outside it, the VHP has also taken on some of the characteristics of religious minorities, perhaps to counter their perceived organizational advantages. For instance, the Marg Darshak Mandal (Advisory Board) is parallel to Christian—particularly Catholic—ecclesiastical organization, and like the Catholic hierarchy the VHP claims to speak for the entire Hindu community. The difference here, of course, is that the Catholic church has had a well-established hierarchical organization for centuries, whereas there is no precedent for this in the Hindu tradition.

With regard to religious behavior, others have remarked on the VHP's 1979 call for all Hindus to adopt certain symbols and practices: for ritual, morning sun worship; the OM as the common sacred symbol, and the Gita as the sacred book.<sup>45</sup> As with the symbol of Mother India (nobody's goddess in actual worship, and thus a readily acceptable symbol) all these symbols can appeal to a wide spectrum of Hindus, and they

can be easily assimilated by simply being added onto existing practice. In particular, the Gita has gradually been taking on the symbolic role as the Hindu sacred book—witness that it is the text upon which Hindus take the oath in Indian courts. Here too the symbols have been carefully chosen not to conflict with actual practice or loyalties.

Still others have noted this trend on a more theological level, in which Brahman—or more recently, Ram—is projected as the universal Hindu God, and Ayodhya as either the Hindu Rome or the Hindu Jerusalem.<sup>46</sup> These are more substantive claims that demand real allegiance from people, and here the Sangh has had dramatic but limited success. The symbolism of Ram and Ayodhya has been very successful in North India, and remains a potent possibility for regional politics, particularly in Uttar Pradesh. Yet in the South people have been largely unmoved by Ram imagery, and there the Sangh has been compelled to focus more on local issues, particularly corruption.

This strategic syncretism also extends to methods: the VHP has aggressively funded schools, hospitals, charities, social uplift projects, and disaster relief, all of which have transformed it into a general source of patronage.<sup>47</sup> They have also promoted the ‘homecoming’ (*parāvartan*) of groups who have adopted some Muslim practices, such as burying the dead, performing the *nikah* (marriage contract) ceremony, and celebrating Muslim festivals; one writer notes that the oath taken upon ‘homecoming’ does not stress belief, but abandoning ‘wrong traditions’ (i.e. Islamic ones) and taking up ‘pure Hindu practices’.<sup>48</sup> The word itself implies a return to a pre-existing status that one has never actually renounced, rather than the change of loyalties implicit in conversion. This implicitly supports the Sangh’s position that most Indian Muslims, as converts, have been and remain Hindus. Such ‘homecomings’ are often marked by conspicuous largesse—building temples, schools, etc.—which makes them a significant source of patronage, especially in underdeveloped areas. Given the VHP’s accusations that the Meenaksipuram conversions were spurred by financial incentives, it is interesting that it seems to see no parallel here.<sup>49</sup>

The Sangh is clearly trying to shape the tradition, although when a tradition is not well-set one can easily clothe innovations in the rhetoric of rediscovery, as Krishna himself says in *Gita* 4.1–3. Yet in doing so the Sangh is not only following the example of Lord Krishna, but earlier reform movements as well. Selecting a normative text is nothing new—Ram Mohan Roy picked the Upanisads as the single repository of truth, while Swami Dayanand chose the Veda. The Arya Samaj foreshadows many elements of the VHP: the *havan* as the sacred ritual, *śuddhi* (‘purification’) as a parallel to ‘homecoming’, and militant opposition to Muslims and Christians, who were seen as a threat to Hindu identity.<sup>50</sup> One might add that the Arya Samaj was also sharply critical of ‘mainstream’ Hindu practice, whose proponents saw the Samaj as a genuine threat.

One major difference is that the VHP—as a representative for the Sangh’s general interests—claims to speak for all Hindus, which neither of the earlier bodies would have done. The Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj were both conscious of being a small but committed vanguard, who pointed out how Hindus should be, but hardly as they actually were. Yet the crucial watershed between the VHP and these earlier movements is its explicitly political dimension.<sup>51</sup> The VHP is not trying to reform Hindu religious practices by purging them of alien influences, but trying to reshape Hindu society as a whole. Although some figures associated with the Arya Samaj took part in political activity, the primary thrust behind the movement was not to promote political ends, but to reform and revitalize Hindu religious life.

All of the VHP’s recent campaigns have clearly been driven by political concerns, and many have either preceded or coincided with important elections: the Ekatmata Yajna

and the 1984 start of the Ram Janam Bhumi campaign were focused on the 1984 elections; the *śilanyās* for the Ram Janam Bhumi came less than two weeks before the 1989 elections; the denouement of the 1990 Rath Yatra was the fall of V. P. Singh's Janata Dal government, and further campaigns preceded the 1993 elections in the four states in which BJP governments had been dismissed following the destruction of the Babri Masjid. In the last case all of the trademarks surfaced: blanketing the states with a media blitz, here using 'video *raths*', a slickly produced election video disparaging the Congress, using *sādhus* as grass-roots political agents, and using the Dussehra festival as an opportunity to disseminate political messages.<sup>52</sup> Given this history, one can readily expect to see some or all of these elements during the legislative elections in 1995, as well as in the national elections the following year.

In the process the Sangh Parivār has been trying to make the term 'Hindu' a political signifier, and this political dimension is the essential context for understanding the whole. This struggle uses religious symbols, such as regaining and rebuilding destroyed temples, but the real issues are not the right to build a temple at the Ram Janam Bhumi, or to reclaim temples at Benares and Mathura. The real issues are political—asserting and defining a national identity, spelling out who belongs and who does not in an attempt to polarize the electorate, and gain political power. Pious calls for the separation of religion from politics, and recent descriptions of Hinduism's 'increasing monotheism', as if this was a purely religious movement, focus on the symbols alone, without examining how these symbols have been chosen as a focal point to unify the target population.<sup>53</sup> This 'expression of how religion is utilised for partisan political interests' has led one writer to characterize it as 'pseudo-Hinduism', an obvious allusion to the BJP's claim that all other political parties practise 'pseudo-secularism'.<sup>54</sup>

This makes a very different claim about what it means to 'be' a Hindu. It is not at all about worship or theology—about which there is little worry. We have already seen that few of these symbols make real claims on people, and can often be assimilated with little dissonance or demand. In fact, this is about defining and marking one's political identity. Religious minorities may be the focus for much of this discourse, but the real battle is not with them—L. K. Advani once virtually admitted that the Muslims were pawns—but with those Hindus who did not, do not, and will not buy into Hindutva assumptions.<sup>55</sup> As Ainslee Embree aptly noted, this is the unfinished agenda from partition, and the struggle is for what sort of country India is and will become.<sup>56</sup>

### ***Dissonant Voices***

Any cultural narrative can maintain its integrity only by ignoring or dismissing dissonant evidence. Given the emphasis which the Sangh has placed on the political identity of Hindus, one can reasonably expect that any inconsistencies would also be visible there, and these are not hard to find. The notion that Hindus have been duped for the past 40-odd years makes the electorate sound impossibly stupid, while the assertion that successive governments have ignored Hindu interests is simply laughable, since certain sectors of the Hindu electorate have traditionally supported the Congress(I). One could rephrase the 'vote-bank' theory as the truism that communities support those who defend and promote their interests. The Sangh Parivār derides democracy as a 'vote-bank' exercise precisely because it divides Hindus according to their real interests, showing the fractures and fissures in its idealized Hindu community.<sup>57</sup>

In fact, this Hindu community is deeply divided, as the Sangh's own base of support clearly shows. The BJP has done best in the Hindi belt, where the RSS is strongest, but

has had only marginal success elsewhere. Its most impressive foray in South India came in Karnataka during the 1994 legislative elections, where the BJP won 40 seats to become the major opposition party. Yet even in the heartland it faces a serious challenge from the Janata Dal and the SP/BSP coalition, which are angling for votes from the backward classes by pointing out caste and status differences the Sangh's narrative glosses over. Indeed, the Sangh's emphatic stress on a Hindu identity that transcends all obvious differences, and its continuing focus on emotive issues such as the Ram Janam Bhumi, serve to obscure which groups actually wield power in it.

The RSS was originally formed as a brahmin response to an anti-brahmin movement in Maharashtra. Although the RSS dismisses all inquiry into its members' antecedents, claiming that they are 'only Hindus', all the *sārsanghacālak*s have been brahmins, and the bulk of its support and leadership have come from brahmins and merchant classes.<sup>58</sup> Historically, RSS political affiliates have drawn most of their support from these same groups, who have also run these parties. Although the VHP has put low-caste people in some visible ritual contexts, aside from these highly symbolic gestures they have done very little of substance. The Sangh doesn't mind low caste people doing *pūjā*, because they don't care very much about *pūjā*. Sharing power, however, is a completely different matter, and here they have usually been aligned with traditional elites.<sup>59</sup> There are few backward leaders of any consequence, although in recent elections electoral compulsions have forced the BJP to field more backward candidates.<sup>60</sup> One could make similar observations about the status of women. Women such as Sadhvi Rthambara and Uma Bharati play very visible roles—addressing meetings in India and going on fund-raising missions abroad—but the only woman with real power is Vijaye Rajee Scindia, by virtue of her wealth and royal status.<sup>61</sup>

Finally, the VHP's assertion that they are speaking for the Hindu community is being challenged not only by 'secular' Hindus, but by dissident ascetics. The present *sārsanghacālak*'s comment that 'for want of direction' many ascetics in Uttar Pradesh supported the SP/BSP coalition (instead of the BJP) indirectly concedes that many ascetics do not support the VHP.<sup>62</sup> The most influential holdouts have been the Shankaracaryas, who have remained aloof at best.<sup>63</sup> The reasons for this are easy to see—as people with their own resources and status, they have little to gain from associating with the VHP, and much to lose.<sup>64</sup> The only one firmly in the Sangh camp is the Shankara of Jyotirmath, who is also in the weakest position, since his seat is also claimed by the Dwaraka Shankara, Swami Swaroopanand Sarasvati.

This distance became even clearer in the summer of 1993, with the nearly unprecedented meeting of the Kanchi, Dwaraka, Puri, and Sringeri Shankaras. After the meeting they issued a joint statement calling for the Ram Janam Bhumi temple to be built by 'apolitical religious men', rather than the VHP.<sup>65</sup> Since then several of the Shankaras, along with other religious leaders, have announced the formation of the 'Sri Ram Janambhoomi Ramalaya Trust', whose express purpose is to oversee building the temple at Ayodhya.

The Sangh was quick to dismiss the meeting (and subsequent trust) as a Congress-led attempt to hijack the Ram Janam Bhumi issue, and neutralize its political value. It is true that the Dwaraka seer has long-standing connections with the Congress, and that he has already tried to upstage the VHP—in spring 1990, when he tried to perform a second *śilanyās* in Ayodhya. It is also clear that the Congress would like to remove Ayodhya as a political issue, as Chandra Swami's 1993 Som Yagna clearly shows. Nor can one deny that ascetics are becoming increasingly involved in politics; one *sādhu* said that they would support whoever gave them two *laddoos* more.<sup>66</sup>

Yet this does not rule out other motives behind the Shankaras' actions. Whether or not Swaroopanand was put up to this by the Congress, he is also defending his own real interests. Although ascetics have renounced the world, many of them are acutely status-conscious, and zealously protect their status. Given the VHP's growing influence in the past decade, it is only natural that the Shankaras would take some action to regain the initiative, and it is not surprising that the Dwaraka Shankara has been the most vocal and politically aligned Shankara. The Sangh has had little influence in either South or East India, but it has a strong presence in Gujarat. Because Swaroopanand has felt its growing power far more directly than the other Shankaras, he might well feel a greater need to reassert his own status and authority.<sup>67</sup> In any case, the Hindu community is nowhere near as unified as the Sangh would claim, as the dissonant voices from religious and political figures alike clearly show.

### ***The Future?***

No one can deny that the Sangh Parivār has seen robust growth in the past decade, even though its electoral fortunes have been mixed. The BJP's meteoric rise in 1989 was followed by sharp setbacks in 1993, and although it seems unlikely to form a national government soon, it may well come to power in some of the states. Moreover, its presence as the main opposition party has meant that the Sangh's larger agenda has been presented. In recent years BJP speakers have had to temper the Hindutva message, particularly the vitriol against Muslims, partly from the pragmatic imperative to project a responsible image, and partly because of recent court cases that have curtailed its ability to appeal to religion for political gain.

At most they have been able to do this in a less overt way, such as its recent campaign to raise the tricolor over the prayer ground at Hubli. To those who would interpret this as thinly veiled Muslim bashing, the BJP could ingenuously invoke the claim of nationalism—after all, what good Indian citizen could object to raising the national flag on a national holiday? Critics might well claim that the true object was to foster communal prejudices by casting doubts on Muslim patriotism, given the initial reluctance to give in to this demand. Given the premises of the Hindu nation, Muslims must continually 'prove' that they belong in India, whereas Hindus are never subject to such pressures.

Such limitations on the BJP mean that the VHP will remain the 'pit bull' of the Hindutva movement, although it has also altered its focus. Since the summer of 1994 the VHP has muted its demand that it be the organization to build the Ram Janam Bhumi temple, and seems to be content to delegate the work to the Shankaracaryas. For the VHP, this is no-lose situation. If the temple is built, they can take credit for starting the process, whereas if the trust does nothing the VHP can revive the issue, and claim that it is the only organization with the political will to carry it through.

In the meantime, the VHP has been able to focus its energy and resources on other projects. One of these has been its 'uplift' work with tribals, philanthropic activity that gives it good press, and also allows it implant its world view.<sup>68</sup> Yet it has also taken up more explicitly 'political' concerns—the government's recent economic policies, Bangladeshi infiltration, and the situation in Jammu and Kashmir—that until now have been the purview of the BJP. It may be doing this to articulate these issues in a harder tone than the BJP can do, to aid the latter's electoral prospects. Certainly the Congress(I)'s recent economic policies have created enough dislocation and disaffection to make this fertile soil for generating support, and the VHP's campaigns have been a major force in putting and reinforcing the Hindutva world view in the public eye.

The VHP's recent activities are all the more remarkable when one considers that it has been operating illegally since December 1992. It was banned for two years immediately after the destruction of the Babri Masjid, and the ban was reimposed in January 1995. The ban does not seem to have affected its operations—it has called Dharam Sansads, given press releases, and attracted media attention in a way that seems incompatible with an illegal organization, which (one would presume) would want to keep a much lower profile. The most striking example is the VHP's Sant Sammelan during the Allahabad Ardh Kumbha Mela in January 1995, in which the organization met openly, and its members 'challenged the Government to arrest them for defying the ban'.<sup>69</sup>

Why has the government not enforced this ban? Perhaps it does not want to drive the VHP underground, on the premise that a visible opponent is preferable to a hidden one. The RSS history of successful underground operation—in 1948–49 and during the Emergency—leads one to suspect that the VHP would be equally successful. It is also likely that political considerations weigh strongly here. The Congress(I) is riven by dissension, and may not feel that its hold on power is strong enough to allow it to enforce this ban aggressively. The BJP would certainly attack any such enforcement as the 'oppression' of Hindus, and with a general election coming in 1996, Narasimha Rao may be reluctant to take any action that could further polarize the Hindu electorate. A much publicized ban with little enforcement may be Rao's best political choice. It throws a sop to the secular lobby, but gives no grist for the Sangh's publicity mill.

The other point is that given the increasingly international nature of the VHP, a strict Indian ban might have little real effect. The VHP-America currently has 36 branches, and does much of its recruiting on college campuses.<sup>70</sup> Here too there has been an acute eye for symbols, and a careful assessment of their target population. The VHP-America says very little about politics, but stresses Hindu culture and values to an affluent diaspora community facing the existential anxiety of maintaining an identity. In all likelihood many of these people would not support the VHP in India, and have little concern for Hindu Rashtra, but they are very worried about themselves or their children losing their cultural roots.

The VHP-America addresses these needs by providing various services, programs and institutions to counter these fears. One example is the summer camps run by the Chinmaya mission, in which Indian children can be implanted with good Hindu values, and through which their parents can ease some of this anxiety.<sup>71</sup> Other examples of community outreach can be found in announcements by the Hindu Svayamsevak Sangh (HSS) sponsoring religious festivals during the year, or announcing the formation of schools in two Bay area communities 'that will provide opportunity for children to meet other children of like mind, make friends and learn Hindu values all in an enjoyable manner'.<sup>72</sup> Aside from community service, the VHP-America has also concentrated on sponsoring events such as the 1993 Global Vision 2000, to create a favorable public image in the larger American context.

The HSS, VHP-America, and countless other Hindu organizations and societies are responding to the very real needs of their constituents. To raise the specter of a hidden agenda would do most of these organizations a grave disservice, but for Sangh affiliates these questions are less easily dismissed. Speakers for the VHP-America are careful to stress that their organization has no legal connection with the VHP, with the implicit claim that since there are no legal connections, there are no connections of any kind. In the same way, the VHP and the Chinmaya mission have been careful to stress that the

summer camps were cultural rather than religious, aimed at teaching the children 'positive values'.<sup>73</sup>

Still, questions remain. Although there may be no legal connections between the VHP and VHP-America, the guest list for the Global Vision 2000 celebration included many prominent members of the Sangh Parivār—Murli Manohar Joshi, RSS leader K. C. Sudarshan, Uma Bharati, Vijaya Raje Scindia, and Ashok Singhal—and in one of his lectures, Joshi described the day the Babri Masjid was razed as the most memorable day in his life.<sup>74</sup> Similarly, the stress on the 'cultural' nature of the summer camps could be interpreted as a code word for Hindutva ideals, just as 'state's rights' were a cover for segregation, although many of the participants may have come for other reasons. It is also noteworthy that such claims of independence mark the Sangh's organizations in India. This has allowed them to shift responsibility and blame upon one another, under the fiction that each organization is completely independent of the others. This pattern of deniability makes one wonder about affiliate organizations in other countries as well.

The area most open to question is fund-raising, particularly given the allegation that 'southern California has always been a gold mine of funds for the BJP'.<sup>75</sup> Financial connections between the VHP-America and the VHP are difficult to assess, but what is indisputable is that the VHP-America has been quite adept at fund-raising, and has been quick to adapt to the local context. In March 1994, a brief newspaper article noted that the VHP-America had tied up with AT&T under the Association Rewards Program, under which it would 'receive 5 percent of the total amount spent on residential direct-dialed international long-distance calls made by VHP members or people who support the organization'.<sup>76</sup> A much better known incident, at least in certain academic circles, was the announcement that the VHP-America had been given a Donor Choice Agency Code with the United Way, through which United Way Donors could direct their tax-deductible contributions to the VHP-America. When a notice about this was posted in INDOLOGY, an academic electronic discussion group, it generated a passionate defense of the good work done by the VHP-America.<sup>77</sup>

Even if there are financial links between the two organizations, as one might suspect, it is unlikely that many of the VHP-America's supporters are aware of them. For many of these people, the organization addresses very different needs, and they may be unaware of or unmoved by the possibility of other links. Aside from tapping a lucrative economic market, the Sangh may also be looking to legitimize and consolidate its international presence, against the day that the Indian government feels itself more able to enforce the ban more strongly, or finds it more politically expedient. In an address to the participants at Global Vision 2000, Ashok Singhal asserted that 'America will realise with this programme that Hindutva has asserted itself and now there is no force that can stop it'.<sup>78</sup> Perhaps it is time to consider the possibility that this is no merely rhetorical claim.

## Notes

This paper was originally delivered at the 1993 annual meeting of the AAR/SBL in Washington, D.C. Since that time it has been revised and expanded, in the course of which I owe thanks to Dr A. M. Shah, Ivan Strenski, Lise McKean, and an anonymous reviewer.

- 1 The first two *sārsanghacālak*s held the position for life. The third stepped down in March 1994, citing failing health.
- 2 Tapan Basu (1993, p. 36 and ff.). This training is one of the features that prompts comparisons to fascism; a second is that M. S. Golwalker, the second *sārsanghacālak*, has been portrayed as an admirer of Hitler (see Yechury, 1993a, p. 14). Even though the latter assertion seems credible, it does not follow that modern RSS leaders would express similar admiration, and Andersen and

- Damle (see 3–5) (1987, pp. 82–83) notes some of the differences between the RSS and European fascism.
- 3 Andersen & Damle (1987, p. 248).
  - 4 Andersen & Damle (1987, p. 7, 248) Masud (1984, p. 18).
  - 5 Andersen & Damle (1987, pp. 108–44).
  - 6 Gold (1991, p. 562).
  - 7 The Bharatiya Janata Party and Vishva Hindu Parishad can be translated respectively as ‘Indian People’s Party’ and ‘World Hindu Organization’.
  - 8 Tarun Basu (1993, p. 4); Chhaya (1993, p. 4).
  - 9 Agha *et al.* (1994, p. 34, 36). In upholding the dismissal of four BJP governments after the destruction of the Babri Masjid, the Supreme Court asserted that secularism was an integral part of the Indian Constitution, and that anti-secular acts by a state government could be grounds for dismissal.
  - 10 Andersen & Damle (1987, p. 154, note 109).
  - 11 Ghimire (1994a, p. 22), see also Awasthi (1994, p. 39).
  - 12 Andersen & Damle (1987, p. 34); Datta (1991, p. 2517) notes that Savarkar adds native land and realm for action (*karmabhūmi*), and that these four criteria were quoted by an RSS *pracārak*.
  - 13 See, for example, Deshmukh (1990, p. 9).
  - 14 In fact, many minorities would claim that this has already happened. Duara (1991, p. 44) notes that official government language is highly Sanskritized, which many religious minorities see as imposing Hindu culture upon them. One could also point to the televised *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*; even if one views them for pure entertainment, their origins and messages are still Hindu.
  - 15 It is interesting that even though Hindutva proponents consider Partition the ‘rape’ of the Motherland, they essentially bear out Jinnah’s ‘two-nation’ theory—that Muslims are not secure in a Hindu majority nation, and therefore need their own country.
  - 16 One solution has been to define Hindus by exclusion—they are Indians who are not by religion Muslims, Christians, Parsis, or Jews—and as Derrett notes (1963, p. 18) this is one of the ways Hindus have been defined according to modern Indian law. Of course, knowing who Hindus are not gives little indication who they are, and why, and the other legal definition Derrett mentions, ‘being Hindu by religion’, does nothing to clarify these issues.
  - 17 For instance, see Goradia (1991, p. 7) or Sharma’s interview with Ashok Singhal (11/18/90, p. 13).
  - 18 An oft-cited quote (here from Banerjee, 1991, p. 99) is Golwalker’s warning that minorities should ‘either merge themselves in the national race and adopt its culture, or live at its mercy so long as the national race may allow them to do so’.
  - 19 This is plain from the Sangh’s written material, which freely mixes mythic references with more standard, historical, footnoted material, as if all sources were equally reliable. They have also been co-opting scholarly voices (such as Leuven’s Koenrad Elst, who has written several books and gave an American speaking tour in early 1993) to give their message the sheen of academic respectability.
  - 20 This goal is still alleged, although the means have changed: now it is by the higher Muslim birth rate, and illegal immigration from Bangladesh (Onkar, 1990, p. 5).
  - 21 One cannot deny that both incidents were a transparent play by the Congress (I) for votes from the Muslim community, yet soon after the Shah Bano case this same Congress government was instrumental in opening the gates of the Babri Masjid, which had been kept locked since Independence, so that Hindus could worship there. It is noteworthy that this latter act was portrayed not as ‘appeasement’, but as giving Hindus their rights.
  - 22 In theory, a uniform civil code sounds perfectly reasonable, but in practice this is a coded expression for making Muslims conform to Hindu practice. As one opponent pointed out, the call for a uniform civil code does not envision abolishing laws particular to Hindus, such as the Hindu Undivided Family Act (Yechury 1993b, p. 10).
  - 23 Lourdasamy (1990, p. 126) notes that since Independence India’s position in the world economy has deteriorated steadily.
  - 24 See Thakur (1984).
  - 25 This was a transparent attempt to attract the Hindu vote, and it backfired badly—Hindus sympathetic to the appeal were already more likely to vote for the BJP, while Muslims deserted the Congress(I) wholesale.

- 26 McKean (1992, p. 99).
- 27 See Clothey, 1972.
- 28 For instance, the Cauvery is referred to as the 'Southern Ganges', as is the Godavari.
- 29 The image of Mother India is a well-known RSS symbol, see Andersen & Damle (1987, p. 77).
- 30 McKean (1992, pp. 107–13). Estimates on the number of pots of Ganges water sold range from 60,000 (L. McKean, personal communication) to 1.5 million (Sonalkar, 1984); at ten rupees per pot this would have raised between 600,000 to 15 million rupees.
- 31 Tapan Basu (1993, pp. 92–109).
- 32 Dasgupta (1990, p. 13) compares the VHP's use of popular symbols to Gandhi's. For further objections, see Datta (1991, p. 2523).
- 33 See Baweja (1993) and Singh and Ramakrishnan (1991). Despite Baweja's article, one of my Indian advisers has told me that people are ill-informed about the destruction of temples in Kashmir (Dr A. M. Shah, personal communication).
- 34 Awasthi (1993, pp. 36–37).
- 35 Tapan Basu (1993, pp. 62–63). In doing so they have not been shy about breaking established traditions, such as selling Ganges water.
- 36 Gold (1991, p. 574).
- 37 UNI (1993, p. 14).
- 38 Tapan Basu (1993, p. 63). Chinmayanand was one of the founding members of the VHP, which may have accounted for his presence. I do not know whether more *sanyāsīs* have been named to the Governing Council since then.
- 39 Staff Writer (1994b).
- 40 Gold (1991, p. 548). For instance, the Dussehra festival emphasizes not the victory of Ram over Ravana, but a 'martial tone, with . . . military exercises and the worship of weapons associated with Shivaji'.
- 41 McKean (1992, p. 100).
- 42 For many years campaigns in Ayodhya did not coincide with major pilgrimage times, to keep from alienating the locals. By 1990 the VHP had grown powerful enough to disregard local sentiment, and scheduled the *kar sevā* during the *pañcakrośī yātrā*. This also had significant political potential, for when the government restricted movement to Ayodhya, the VHP billed it as disregard for Hindu religious sentiments.
- 43 Joshi (1993, p. 8) reports that since 1990 the number of Amarnath pilgrims has gone from 10,000 to 100,000; in 1993 pilgrims were attacked in Pahalgam after chanting the slogan: 'If you want to live in India you will have to say Rām Rām'.
- 44 Awasthi (1994, p. 39).
- 45 McKean (1992, p. 102). One might also note the Shiv Sena's Bombay Mahaaratis as a new form of congregational worship.
- 46 Thapar (1985, p. 18); see also Bakker (1991) and Datta (1991 pp. 2518–19).
- 47 Andersen & Damle (1987, pp. 140–1).
- 48 Singh (1992, p. 3).
- 49 See Singh (1992, pp. 2–5) and McKean (1992, pp. 97–8).
- 50 See *Satyarthaprakash*, chapters 13–14.
- 51 The Ram Janam Bhumi is the quintessential politically driven issue. It may be wishful thinking, but Hindus and Muslims in Ayodhya have been emphatic that they could have reached some agreement if outsiders had not interfered.
- 52 Jain and Bhimal (1993). These 'video *raths*' are trucks carrying a television and VCR, which drive around showing the BJP's election film. Particularly in small villages, the novelty alone would ensure that most of the people would watch. This is an innovative, highly effective way to broadcast an election message, and one that does not presuppose a literate audience.
- 53 Bakker (1991) describes this exaltation of Ayodhya as if it involved purely religious issues, without addressing the political factors behind it. Abdi (1992, p. 32), *Organiser* 8/26/90, p. 1 and Nupur Basu (1993, p. 8) all point out the political factors implicit in Ram's valorization.
- 54 Yechury (1993b, p. 4). Even while decrying other people's vote-bank politics, Jain (1990, p. 7) describes the Ram Janam Bhumi as a Hindu vote bank.
- 55 In an interview with Saroj Nagi (1990, p. 28) Advani stated 'My quarrel is not with the Muslims. . . . I blame the Hindu leaders of the so-called secular parties.'
- 56 Quoted in Haniffa (1993, p. 12)
- 57 Datta (1991, p. 2520).

- 58 See Tapan Basu (1993, p. 87ff.), Andersen & Damle (1987, p. 74, 171), and Bidwai (1991, p. 15).
- 59 For instance, their recent success in Karnataka is largely because they gave 86 tickets to Lingayats, the state's dominant caste (Ghimire, 1994c, p. 47).
- 60 Ghimire (1993).
- 61 See Tapan Basu (1993, p. 80ff.).
- 62 Ghimire (1994b, p. 24).
- 63 In the past the Kanchi Shankaracarya has blessed the Sangh in the most general terms, but the VHP has actually tried to distance itself from the Puri Shankaracarya, whose opinions on untouchability have been deemed politically inexpedient.
- 64 This tension is showing up in other, lesser known *sanyasis* as well, often triggered by status questions. At the 1992 Simhastha fair, Swami Shanti Swaroopanand was displeased that the VHP was giving its own *sādhus* the best seats, and stormed out in a huff.
- 65 Singh & Biswas (1993, pp. 68–9).
- 66 Awasthi (1993, p. 47). A *laddoo* is an Indian sweet about the size of a golf ball.
- 67 Certainly the difficulties Swaroopanand has given the government since that time, and his uncompromising independence from any association between the government and the Ramalaya trust, have weakened the charge that he is simply a Congress(I) stooge (see Ghimire & Agha, 1994).
- 68 Ghimire (1994d).
- 69 Gidwani and Ghimire (1995, p. 15).
- 70 Dutt (1993, p. 33).
- 71 Anand (1993, p. 40e). As one parent noted, 'My son is learning about Hindu religion, which as a working parent I do not get the time to teach him'.
- 72 Sastry (1995). Andersen & Damle (1987, p. 95) lists the Hindu Svayamsevak Sangh as a British RSS affiliate, and one suspects that this is also true in America.
- 73 Anand (1993, p. 43e).
- 74 Anand & Kakaria (1993, p. 48c).
- 75 Jha (1993, p. 56g).
- 76 Staff Writer (1994a p. 48). As an incentive to promote the scheme, the Parishad was offering a video titled 'Glimpses of Global Vision 2000', as well as the writings of Swami Vivekananda.
- 77 The exchange was conducted on the INDOLOGY electronic discussion group, and has been indexed in the group's archives as 'Archive Indology Indology.9411'.
- 78 Anand & Kakaria (1993, pp. 48c–d).

### **Bibliography**

- Abdi, S. M. N., 'The other disputed shrines', *The Illustrated Weekly Of India* 12/5–11/92 (1992), pp. 26–32.
- Agha, Z. *et al.*, 'Groping for direction', *India Today* 6/30/94 (1994), pp. 34–6.
- Anand, T., 'Instant initiation', *India Today* 7/15/93 (1993), p. 40e.
- Anand, T. & Kakaria, A., 'Gift-wrapping Hindutva', *India Today* 8/31/93 (1993), pp. 48c–d.
- Andersen, W. K. & Damle, S., *The Brotherhood In Saffron*. New Delhi, Vistaar Publications 1987.
- Awasthi, D. & Mahurkar, U., 'Orchestrated onslaught', *India Today* 12/31/92 (1992), pp. 36–7.
- Awasthi, D., 'Pilgrims' protest', *India Today* 3/15/93 (1993), pp. 46–47.
- Awasthi, D., 'Temple cauldron bubbles', *India Today* 8/31/94 (1994), pp. 38–40.
- Badhwar, I., 'Saffron setback', *India Today* 12/15/93 (1993), pp. 26–39.
- Bakker, H., 'Ayodhya, a Hindu Jerusalem', *Numen* 38 (1991), pp. 80–109.
- Banerjee, Sumanta, 'Hindutva—ideology and social Psychology', *Economic And Political Weekly* 1/19/91 (1991), pp. 97–101.
- Baweja, H., 'Damaging lies', *India Today* 2/28/93 (1993), pp. 22–5.
- Basu, Nupur, 'In the south, impact is limited', *India Abroad* 4/23/93 (1993), p. 8.
- Basu, Tapan, *et al.*, *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags*. New Delhi, Orient Longman Limited 1993.
- Basu, Tarun, 'A 3-year surge to national status', *India Abroad* 4/23/93 (1993) p. 4.
- Bidwai, P., 'The politics of hate', *The Illustrated Weekly of India* 5/18–24/91 (1991), pp. 14–5.
- Chhaya, Mayank, 'BJP softens its strident image', *India Abroad* 8/6/93 (1993), p. 4.
- Clothey, F., 'Pilgrimage centers in the Tamil cultus of Murukan', *JAAR* 40 (1972), pp. 79–95.
- Dasgupta, S., 'Hindu nationalism comes of age', *Organiser* 11/4/90 (1990), p. 13.
- Datta, P., 'VHP's Ram at Ayodhya', *Economic And Political Weekly* 11/2/91 (1991) pp. 2517–26.

- Derrett, J. D. M., *Introduction To Modern Hindu Law*. Bombay, Indian Branch, Oxford University Press 1963.
- Deshmukh, N., 'Secularism—a fresh look', *Organiser* 12/2/90 (1990), pp. 9–10.
- Duara, P., 'The new politics of Hinduism', *Wilson Quarterly* Summer 1991, pp. 42–50.
- Dutt, Ela, 'Political flavor at VHP meeting' and 'The young have their own forum', *India Abroad* 8/13/93 (1993), p. 33.
- Gidwani, D. & Ghimire, Y., 'Show of strength', *India Today* 2/28/95 (1995), p. 15.
- Ghimire, Y., 'A congress clone?', *India Today* 10/31/93 (1993), p. 49.
- Ghimire, Y., 'In the limelight, again', *India Today* 4/30/94 (1994a), pp. 22–4.
- Ghimire, Y., 'No Mosque can come up there', *India Today* 4/30/94 (1994b), pp. 23–4.
- Ghimire, Y., 'Life After Ayodhya', *India Today* 12/31/94 (1994c), p. 47.
- Ghimire, Y., 'Changing tack', *India Today* 12/31/94 (1994d), p. 15.
- Ghimire, Y. & Agha, Z., 'The tables turn again', *India Today* 9/30/94 (1994), pp. 44–7.
- Gold, Daniel, 'Organized Hinduisms: from Vedic truth to Hindu nation', in *Fundamentalisms Observed*, ed. Martin Marty and R. Scott Appleby. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, pp. 531–93.
- Goradia, P., 'Focus on extra-territorial loyalty', *Organiser* 2/10/91 (1991), p. 70.
- Haniffa, A., 'U.S. expert foresees no collapse', *India Abroad* 4/16/93, p. 12.
- Jain, M. K., 'Positive nationalism: an idea whose time has come', *Organiser* 12/30 (1990), p. 7.
- Jain, M. & Bhimal, S., 'Image Warfare', *India Today* 11/15/93 (1993) pp. 36–7.
- Jha, A. J., 'Saffron sees red', *India Today* 8/15/93 (1993), p. 56g.
- Joshi, B., 'Militants attack Hindu pilgrims', *India Abroad* 8/13/93 (1993), p. 8.
- Lourdusamy, S., 'Religious fundamentalism as political weapon', *Journal of Dharma* 15 (1990), pp. 125–34.
- Masud, I. 'Use and abuse of the past', *The Illustrated Weekly of India* 2/19/84 (1984), pp. 16–18.
- McKean, L., 'Towards a politics of spirituality: Hindu religious organizations and Indian Nationalism', Ph.D. Dissertation. University of Sydney 1992.
- Nagi, S., 'Stoking the fires', *The Illustrated Weekly of India* 12/15–16/90 (1990), pp. 26–9.
- Onkar, M. W., 'Disproportionate growth of muslim population', *Organiser* 11/18/90 (1990), p. 5.
- Sastry, M., 'electronic announcement on the India Interest' Group Digest, 1/27/95 (1995), Volume 2: Issue 737.
- Singh, N. K. & Biswas, S., 'Preaching a gospel tinged with politics', *India Today* 7/31/93 (1993), pp. 68–9.
- Singh, S., 'From muslims to hindus', *The Illustrated Weekly of India* 5/9–15/92 (1992), pp. 2–5.
- Singh, S. P. & Ramakrishnan V., 'When the dead came back', *Frontline* 5/11–24/91 (1991), pp. 12–6.
- Special Correspondent 'Raja's caste war', *Organiser* 8/26/90 (1990), p. 1.
- Sharma, M., 'Free India's worst brutalities perpetrated in Ayodhya on Nov. 2', *Organiser* 11/18/90 (1990), pp. 13–4.
- Sonalkar, S., 'In search of a Hindu identity', *The Illustrated Weekly of India* 1/8/84 (1984).
- Staff Writer 'Phone rebate for VHP', *India Abroad* (1994a), p. 48.
- Staff Writer, 'Top court holds off on Ayodhya', *India Abroad* (1994b) p. 4.
- Thakur, J., 'Mrs. Gandhi's Hindu connection', *The Illustrated Weekly of India* (1984), pp. 32–5.
- Thapar, R., 'Syndicated Moksha?', *Seminar* 313 (1985), pp. 14–22.
- UNI, 'Harijan is Temple Chief Priest', *India Abroad* (1993), p. 14.
- Yechury, S., *What Is This Hindu Rashtra?* Madras, Frontline Publications 1993a.
- Yechury, S., *Pseudo Hinduism Exposed*. New Delhi, CPI(M) Publications 1993b.

JAMES G. LOCHTEFELD holds an M.T.S. from Harvard Divinity School, an M.A. in Asian Languages from the University of Washington, and the Ph.D. in Religion from Columbia University. His work to date has focused largely on the interaction between texts, tradition, and modern Hindu life. He lives with his wife and children in Kenosha, WI, where he is an assistant professor of Religion at Carthage College.

*Department of Religion, Carthage College, 2001 Alford Drive, Kenosha, WI 53143, U.S.A.*