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Introduction

The Invention of an Ethnic Nationalism

The Hindu nationalist movement started to monopolize the front pages of Indian newspapers in the 1990s when the political party that represented it in the political arena, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP—which translates roughly as Indian People's Party), rose to power. From 2 seats in the Lok Sabha, the lower house of the Indian parliament, the BJP increased its tally to 88 in 1989, 120 in 1991, 161 in 1996—at which time it became the largest party in that assembly—and to 178 in 1998. At that point it was in a position to form a coalition government, an achievement it repeated after the 1999 mid-term elections. For the first time in Indian history, Hindu nationalism had managed to take over power. The BJP and its allies remained in office for five full years, until 2004.

The general public discovered Hindu nationalism in operation over these years. But it had of course already been active in Indian politics and society for decades; in fact, this *ism* is one of the oldest ideological streams in India. It took concrete shape in the 1920s and even harks back to more nascent shapes in the nineteenth century. As a movement, too, Hindu nationalism is heir to a long tradition. Its main incarnation today, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS—or the National Volunteer Corps), was founded in 1925, soon after the first Indian communist party, and before the first Indian socialist party. In fact, Hindu nationalism runs parallel to the dominant Indian political tradition of the Congress Party, which Gandhi transformed into a mass organization in the 1920s. Indeed, Hindu nationalism crystallized as an ideology and as a movement exactly at the time when the Congress

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became imbued with Gandhi's principles and grew into a mass movement. It then developed an alternative political culture to the dominant idiom in Indian politics, not only because it rejected non-violence as a legitimate and effective *modus operandi* against the British in the wake of the discourse of Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856–1920) and his apologia in favour of a Hindu tradition of violent action,[1] but also because it rejected the Gandhian conception of the Indian nation.

Mahatma Gandhi looked at the Indian nation as, ideally, a harmonious collection of religious communities all placed on an equal footing. He promoted a syncretic and spiritual brand of the Hindu religion in which all creeds were bound to merge, or converge. Even though the leaders of India's minorities—especially Muslims—resisted this universalist appeal—in part because Gandhi articulated his views in a thoroughly Hindu style—the Mahatma insisted till the end that he spoke on behalf of all communities and that the Congress represented them all. In the early 1920s he even presided over the destiny of the Khilafat Committee, which had been founded to defend the Khilafat, an institution challenged after the defeat of the Ottoman empire in the First World War.[2]

Gandhi's universalist definition of the Indian nation echoed that of the man he regarded as his guru in politics, Gopal Krishna Gokhale (1866–1915), and, more generally speaking, of the first generation of Congress leaders. For the founders of Congress, the Indian nation was to be defined according to the territorial criterion, not on the basis of cultural features: it encompassed all those who happened to live within the borders of British India. Therefore, it was not perceived as being within Congress's purview to deal with religious issues which, in fact, were often social issues—such as child marriage and widow re-marriage—all such issues being those that came under the personal laws of different denominations. Moreover, the early Congress had started for

[1] See C. Jaffrelot, 'Opposing Gandhi: Hindu Nationalism and Political Violence', in D. Vidal, G. Tarabout, and E. Meyer, eds, *Violence/Non-Violence. Some Hindu Perspectives* (Delhi: Manohar-CSH, 2003), pp. 299–324. On Tilak, see R. Cashman, *The Myth of the Lokmanya* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).

[2] See Gail Minault, *The Khilafat Movement: Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilization in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

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this latter purpose a National Social Conference which met at the same time and in the same place as Congress did, during its annual session, but as a separate body. In contrast with the founders of Congress, Gandhi acknowledged religious identities in the public sphere, even as he viewed the nation as an amalgamation of many different communities. In the 1920s and after, however, the legacy of the first-generation Congress leaders was still pursued and deepened by major Congress Party figures: the Nehrus, i.e. Motilal Nehru (1861–1931) and his son, Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964), who advocated a liberal nation-building process based on individuals, not groups. For Motilal, who was elected president of the Congress in 1919 and 1928, and for Jawaharlal, who—before independence—occupied the same post in 1929, 1936, and 1946, and who was to become Gandhi's spiritual son, the construction of the Indian nation could only be rooted in secular, individual identities. The Nehrus represented a variant of the universalist standpoint, quite different from that embodied by Gandhi.

Hindu nationalism, like Muslim separatism (a movement which in India was formed around the same time), rejected both versions of the universalist view of nationalism articulated by Congress.[3] This ideology assumed that India's national identity was summarized by Hinduism, the dominant creed which, according to the British census, represented about 70 per cent of the population. Indian culture was to be defined as Hindu culture, and the minorities were to be assimilated by their paying allegiance to the symbols and mainstays of the majority as those of the nation. For Congressmen like Nehru this ideology—like that of the Muslim League or of Sikh separatists—had nothing to do with nationalism. They branded it with the derogatory term 'communalism'. But in fact the doctrine that was to become known by the name 'Hindutva' fulfilled the criteria of ethnic nationalism.[4] Its motto, 'Hindu, Hindi, Hindustan', echoed many other European nationalisms based on religious identity, a common language, or even racial feeling.

All the same, the essential characteristics of Hinduism scarcely lent themselves to such an 'ism'. This is, first, because Hinduism has no

[3] On this typology, see Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990).

[4] I have made this argument in *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1999).

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'book' which can truly be said to serve as a common reference point. As Louis Renou points out, in Hinduism 'religious books can be described as books written for the use of a sect.'[5] Moreover, Hinduism has often been described not as a religion but as a 'conglomeration of sects'.[6] In fact the term 'Hindu' derives from the name of a river, the Indus; it was used successively by the Achaemenids, the Greeks, and the Muslims to denote the population living beyond that river,[7] but till the medieval period it was not appropriated by the people themselves.[8] A 'Hindu' consciousness apparently found its first expression in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the empire of Shivaji, and then in the Maratha confederacy. But the conquests of the Marathas in the direction of the Gangetic plain 'did not imply the existence of a sense of the religious war based on ethnic or communal consciousness';[9] they resulted from a motivation that was ritual in character—to restore to the Hindus certain holy places, such as Varanasi, which were revered throughout India. The development of Hindu nationalism is therefore a modern phenomenon that has developed on the basis of strategies of ideology-building, and *despite* the original characteristics of a diverse set of practices clubbed under the rubric of Hinduism.

An Ideological Reaction to the Other: From Reform to Revivalism in the Nineteenth Century

The first expression of Hindu mobilization emerged in the nineteenth century as an ideological reaction to European domination and gave

[5] L. Renou, *Religions of Ancient India* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1972), 2nd edn, p. 50.

[6] R. Thapar, 'Imagined Religious Communities? Ancient History and the Modern Search for a Hindu Identity', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 23, no. 2, 1989, p. 216.

[7] R.E. Frykenberg, 'The Emergence of Modern Hinduism as a Concept and as an Institution: A Reappraisal with Special Reference to South India', in G.D. Sontheimer and H. Kulke, eds, *Hinduism Reconsidered* (Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1989), p. 30.

[8] See, for instance, J.T.O'Connell, 'The Word "Hindu" in Gaudiya Vaishnava Texts', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 93, no. 3, 1973, pp. 340–4.

[9] C.A. Bayly, 'The Pre-History of "Communalism"? Religious Conflict in India 1700–1800', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 19, no. 2, 1985, p. 187.

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birth to what came to be known as 'neo-Hinduism'.[10] To begin with, Europeans fascinated the local intelligentsia. In Bengal, where the British first settled, the East India Company used the services not only of *compradores* but also of the local literati, who came from the Hindu upper castes—these *bhadralok*, who were mostly Brahmins and, as a result, a new elite of upper-caste British-trained white-collar workers took shape.[11] This intelligentsia often admired Britain for its remarkable scientific, technical, legal, and social achievements.

Yet most members of this intelligentsia also regarded the West as a threat. They were inclined to reform their traditions along modern lines but not to the extent that they would abandon or even disown them; in fact they often wanted to reform these traditions in order to save them. Reformists, therefore, became revivalists by pretending that, in emulating the West, they were only restoring to pristine purity their own traditions via eliminating later accretions.

Within the Hindu milieu this transition from reform to revivalism took place in the course of the nineteenth century. This is well illustrated by the contrast between the Brahmo Samaj and a later—but not unrelated—organization, the Arya Samaj. The former was founded in 1828 by Ram Mohan Roy (1772–1833), the renowned Bengali Brahmin who had been employed by the East India Company and who looked at the British presence in India as a providential development.[12] Roy supported Western reformist ideas, including the abolition of sati. At the same time, he was very critical of the proselytizing work of Western missionaries. He steadfastly vindicated Hinduism against Christian expansionism, though in the reformist way. He admitted that missionaries were right when they stigmatized polytheism, the caste system and the condition of Hindu women. But he argued that these retrograde practices were latter accretions in Hinduism, that in its original form Hinduism did not lay itself open to such opprobrium.

[10] On neo-Hinduism see K. Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); and A. Copley, ed., *Gurus and their Followers: New Religious Reform Movements in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[11] On this peculiar category, see J.H. Broomfield, *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society: Twentieth-century Bengal* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968).

[12] S.D. Collet, *The Life and Letters of Raja Ram Mohan Roy* (Calcutta: Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, 1962).

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It had ignored idol worship—in fact it was even more monotheistic than Christianity, which admitted the Trinity—and it was an egalitarian creed emphasizing unmediated access between the individual and God. Roy argued that he had discovered all these virtues in the Upanishads—a late addition to Vedanta, the most recent part of the Veda.[13] He suggested that, according to these sacred texts, each man is endowed with an *atma*, which is nothing other than a part of Brahma—the divine substance that supports the world. Therefore, the Vedic religion relied on an unmediated relation between man and God. He fought with Unitarian missionaries to hammer home this point during long public debates. The notion of a Vedic 'golden age' when Hinduism was superior to Christianity can be seen to crystallize at this time.[14] This idea was embodied in the doctrine of the Brahmo Samaj (Society of Brahma), the organization he founded in 1828 and which survived Roy's death in 1833 (in London, where he had travelled as the first major Hindu reformer).[15]

The Brahmo Samaj attracted Hindu reformists from various regions, including the Bombay Presidency. This was the region from which Swami Dayananda Saraswati came. Dayananda was a Gujarati Brahmin who had embraced *sanyas* (asceticism). He travelled to Calcutta in 1873, meeting Keshab Chandra Sen—the most famous Brahmo Samaji leader of the time—who had just returned from England and was especially critical of the moral decay of that otherwise modern country.[16] Sen promoted the idea that India was technically less advanced but spiritually superior.[17]

[13] See B.C. Robertson, *Raja Rammohan Ray: The Father of Modern India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995).

[14] See H.C. Sarkar, ed., *English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy*, vol. 1 (Calcutta: Brahmo Samaj Centenary Committee, 1928).

[15] On the Brahmo Samaj, see D. Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance* (Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1969) and idem, *The Brahmo Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

[16] See M. Borthwick, *Keshub Chandra Sen: A Search for Cultural Synthesis* (Calcutta: Minerva Associates, 1977).

[17] This aspect of neo-Hinduism is scrutinized in T. Raychaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered: Perceptions of the West in Nineteenth-Century Bengal* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988).

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Dayananda Saraswati capitalized on the intellectual legacy of Roy and Sen in the 1870s, but he also took it several steps further, and in a somewhat different direction. While the Brahmo Samajis focused on the religious dimension of the Vedic 'golden age', Dayananda argued that, in addition to its spiritual glory, Indian antiquity was imbued with cultural and social greatness. The Vedic epoch was in his construction no longer embodied only in spirituality but also in a people—in its culture and its land. Dayananda maintained that the 'Aryas' of the Vedas formed the autochthonous people of Bharat, the sacred land below the Himalayas. They had been endowed by their god with the most perfect language, Sanskrit, the mother of all languages. This claim was strengthened by British Orientalism, whose most famous eighteenth-century exponent William Jones argued that it was the fount of an Indo-European family of languages. The idea that Europe's languages originated in Sanskrit had by this time become widespread.[18] Last, but not least, Dayananda depicted Aryan society as endowed with robust egalitarian values. He did not ignore the caste system, but he reinterpreted it, arguing that, to begin with, this social system did not rely on hereditary hierarchical relations but on a merit-based division of labour, each *varna* fulfilling complementary functions. In the original Aryan society, for Dayananda, children were assigned to different *varnas* by their gurus according to their aptitude and inclination, a novel idea which reflected the influence upon him of Western individualism.

In fact, Dayananda's revivalism inaugurated a specific combination of stigmatization and emulation of the threatening 'Other'. In contrast to the old reformists *à la* Ram Mohan Roy, Dayananda did not look upon British colonialism as a providential development but rather as posing a threat to Hindu civilization, including its caste system. In order to defuse this threat Dayananda recommended some emulation of the West. In this respect he followed Roy. His idea of reform was not to make India like the West, but to make its standards acceptably Western. His effort was to dissuade the British from changing Hindu

[18] See P.J. Marshall, ed., *The British Discovery of Hinduism in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), and W. Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Philosophical Understanding* (New York: State University of New York, 1988).

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customs by law, as well as to dissuade Hindus from admiring the West and/or converting to Christianity. This was best done by arguing that what fascinated Hindus about the West existed already, deeply buried, in their own ancestral traditions. Dayananda's interest was thus to emulate the West in order to more effectively resist its influence.

It followed that the conversion of Hindus—including the Untouchables—to Christianity was perceived by Dayananda as a challenge to Hinduism. By the end of his life he introduced a ritual of reconversion—something no one could find in the Hindu scriptures as having previously existed. For this purpose he adapted the old ceremony of *shuddhi*, by which upper-caste Hindus who had been defiled could reintegrate with their caste. Shuddhi was therefore a purification procedure which Dayananda transformed into a reconversion technique, drawing inspiration from Christianity.[19] Dayananda presided over the 'shuddhization' of a few Christian converts who wished to return to Hinduism during his lifetime, but even at that time, and more so after his death, the prime target of the Shuddhi movement's disciples were Muslims and Sikhs.[20]

Dayananda founded the Arya Samaj in 1875, in Punjab, the province where Hindus, more than anywhere else, felt a strong sense of vulnerability because of their demographic weakness *vis-à-vis* Muslims (51 per cent of the local population) and Sikhs (7.5 per cent). After Dayananda's death the Arya Samaj continued to develop in Punjab and became politicized.[21]

The Political Turn: The Hindu Sabhas Movement

In Punjab the Arya Samaj attracted upper-caste notables who were involved in trade and commerce. This social milieu appreciated the

[19] R.K. Ghai, *Shuddhi Movement in India* (New Delhi: Commonwealth Publishers, 1990).

[20] K. Jones, 'Ham Hindu Nahin: Arya–Sikh Relations, 1877–1905', *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 32, no. 3, May 1973.

[21] On the Arya Samaj, the best source remains, K. Jones, *Arya Dharm—Hindu Consciousness in Nineteenth-Century Punjab* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976). See also Lajpat Rai, *The Arya Samaj: An Account of its Aims, Doctrine and Activities, with a Biographical Sketch of the Founder* (New

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sect's reformist creed because it did not recognize any sort of supremacy by Brahmins—on the contrary it denied the role of Brahmins as intermediaries between man and God. Hitherto, Brahmins had here claimed to occupy the upper rungs of society, even though the merchant castes had, in fact, become the dominant force in society.

The merchant castes had indeed become so powerful that they played the role of moneylenders for the entire Punjab peasantry. When debtors failed to pay their dues, as often happened, merchant castes bought their land. This phenomenon accelerated by the late nineteenth century to such an extent that the British—who wanted to protect rural society as it had supported their rule—introduced in 1901 the Punjab Alienation of Land Act, a piece of legislation protecting 'rural tribes' from such transfer of property.[22] The British further antagonized the Hindu elite in 1906 when Lord Minto promised a Muslim delegation—which was to spawn the Muslim League by the end of the year—that the Muslim minority of India would be granted a separate electorate. This announcement did not materialize all over British India until 1909, in the framework of the Morley–Minto constitutional reforms, but in Punjab it led the Hindu urban elite to organize as early as 1907: Hindu Sabhas (Hindu associations) were formed throughout the province, mostly under the impulse of Arya Samaj leaders, including Lal Chand, who formulated the standard expression of Hindu anxiety regarding British policy in 1909, in a series of articles in *The Panjabee*.[23]

While Arya Samajis, thus far, did not view themselves as 'Hindus' but as followers of the Vedas—so much so that they did not declare themselves 'Hindus' in the census—British policy convinced them to give up this claim and join hands with the other streams of Hinduism,

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Delhi, D.A.V. College, 1914); S.K. Gupta, *Arya Samaj and the* Raj (New Delhi: Gitanjali Publishing House, 1991); D. Vable, *The Arya Samaj: Hindu without Hinduism* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1983); Saraswati Pandit, *A Critical Study of the Contribution of the Arya Samaj to Indian Education* (Delhi: Sarvadeshik Arya Pratinidhi Sabha, 1975); and V. Dua, *The Arya Samaj in Punjab Politics* (New Delhi: Picus Books, 1999).

[22] N.G. Barrier, *The Punjab Alienation of Land Bill of 1900* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1966).

[23] Lajpat Rai, *A History of the Arya Samaj* (Bombay: Orient Longman, 1967).

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including the orthodox, who paid allegiance to Sanatan Dharma (the Eternal Dharma), which had criticized the reformist zeal of Arya Samajis against idol worship, the caste system, and Brahmin priesthood.[24]

The Sanatanis had developed major strongholds in the United Provinces (the region rechristened Uttar Pradesh after independence), this being the crucible of Hindu orthodoxy and home to holy cities such as Haridwar and Varanasi, where the Arya Samaj only had substantial pockets of influence in the western areas. Sanatanis were therefore primarily responsible for the formation of the Hindu Sabha of the United Provinces in the mid-1910s, which happened as a reaction against the extension of a separate electorate in favour of Muslims at the municipal level. The leader of this Hindu Sabha, Madan Mohan Malaviya, was a well-known Sanatani, famous for his orthodoxy and his interest in educational matters.[25] Malaviya is indeed best remembered as having initiated the foundation of the Banaras Hindu University (BHU) in 1916.[26]

The Hindu Sabha movement spread beyond Punjab and the United Provinces into Bihar, Bengal, the Central Provinces and Berar, and into the Bombay Presidency. Some of these regional branches sent delegates to Haridwar for the founding of an All India Hindu Sabha, or Hindu Mahasabha, in 1915. But this intended umbrella organization was still-born, not only because of persisting difficulties between Arya Samajis and Sanatanis over social reform, but also over British rule: the latter continued to pay allegiance to the British in spite of everything, while Arya Samajis resented their politics and even indulged, sometimes, in radical forms of resistance.

The Hindu Sangathan Movement: Hindu Nationalism Crystallizes

The Hindu Mahasabha was rekindled in the 1920s. At this time the ideology of Hindu nationalism was codified and acquired its distinctive

[24] See Lal Chand, *Sanatana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book of Hindu Religion and Ethics* (Benares: Central Hindu College, 1904), 2nd edn.

[25] See the 1000-page-long biography of Malaviya by Parmanand, *Mahamana Madan Mohan Malaviya. An Historical Biography* (Varanasi: BHU, 1985), 2 vols.

[26] S.L. Dar and S. Somaskandan, *History of the Benares Hindu University* (Banaras: BHU, 1966).

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features. This development followed the same logic as the initial stages of socio-religious reform movements: Hindu nationalism crystallized in reaction to a threat subjectively felt if not concretely experienced. This time the threatening Other was neither Christian missionaries nor colonial bureaucrats, but Muslims, not only because of their special equation with the British—as evident from the separate electorates issue—but also because of their mobilization during the Khilafat movement.

This movement had developed in the wake of World War I as a sequel to the peace treaties which abolished the Muslim Khilafat—a word deriving from the title 'Khalifa' (Caliph), held till then by the Ottoman sultan, one of the defeated rulers. In India, Muslims demonstrated against the British, who had naturally taken part in the post-War negotiations. But their mobilization also affected Hindus, who were a more accessible target, and with whom they sometimes happened to be locked in socio-economic conflicts locally. In the early 1920s riots multiplied, including in South India, where inter-communal relations had been traditionally much less tense. In fact the first large riot occurred in what is now Kerala, caused by economic frustrations among the Mappilas or Moplahs (Muslim peasants) *vis-à-vis* Hindu landlords.[27]

The wave of riots which spread over India in the early 1920s fostered a Hindu reaction that resulted in a relaunching of the Hindu Mahasabha. While the movement had stopped organizing regular sessions after 1919, it met again at Haridwar in 1921 and became the crucible of the collaboration between Arya Samajis and Sanatanis, who now agreed that Muslims were posing such a threat to Hindus that they could not afford to fight each other any more. This convergence found expression in the collaboration between Malaviya and Lajpat Rai, the latter being one of the most important Arya Samaji leaders in Punjab.

Hindu Sabhaites then emphasized the need for an organization (*sangathan*) for the majority community. However, for the Arya Samajis sangathan meant something more than it did to Sanatanis. For Swami Shraddhananda, for instance, the Shuddhi movement needed to be revived and directed more towards Untouchables to make them feel

[27] R.L. Hardgrave, Jr., 'The Mappilla Rebellion, 1921: Peasant Revolt in Malabar', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 11, no. 1, 1977.

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better integrated in society once they had been 'purified'. This was something Sanatanis continued to accept reluctantly, as a temporary response to Muslim militancy.[28]

The Hindu Mahasabha was not a party in its own right but a subgroup of Congress members. It worked as a lobby within Congress.[29] Such a position weakened its general stand—especially after Gandhi rose to power in Congress—introduced a more centralized decision-making process, and made it embody a broad-based Hindu brand of politics. Because his style and programme were based on a universalist and reformist Hinduism, Gandhi did not leave the Hindu Sabhaites much room for manoeuvre in Congress and, more generally, in the Indian public sphere. Eventually, therefore, the Hindu Mahasabha had to part company with Congress. It became a full-fledged party in the late 1930s under the leadership of V.D. Savarkar, who made its ideology so radical that Congress leaders like Nehru were not prepared to cohabit with what they saw as a communal and fundamentalist variety of politics. Savarkar was a Maharashtrian Brahmin from Nasik; but even before he took over as president of the Hindu Mahasabha, the centre of gravity had shifted from North to Central India, more especially to the Central Provinces and Berar, and to the Bombay Presidency.

The Maharashtrian Crucible of Hindu Nationalism

Hindu nationalism as we know it today was born in Maharashtra in the 1920s, in the context of reaction to the Khilafat movement. Its ideology was codified by Savarkar much before he joined the Hindu Mahasabha. A former anti-British revolutionary, Savarkar wrote *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* in the early 1920s while still a prisoner of the British at Ratnagiri in Maharashtra. His book was the first attempt at endowing what he called the Hindu Rashtra (the Hindu nation) with a clear-cut identity: namely Hindutva, a word coined by Savarkar

[28] G.R. Thursby, 'Aspects of Hindu–Muslim Relations in British India: A Study of Arya Samaj Activities, Government of India Politics, and Communal Conflicts in the Period 1923–1928', PhD dissertation, Duke University, 1972.

[29] R. Gordon, 'The Hindu Mahasabha and the Indian National Congress 1915 to 1926', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 9, no. 2, 1975.

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and which, according to him does not coincide with Hinduism. Declaring himself an atheist, Savarkar argued that religion was only one aspect of Hindu identity, and not even the most important. In fact he draws his definition of Hindu identity out of Western theories of the nation. The first criterion of the Hindu nation, for him, is the sacred territory of Aryavarta as described in the Vedas, and by Dayananda, whose book *Satyarth Prakash* Savarkar read extensively.[30] Then comes race: for Savarkar the Hindus are the descendants of 'Vedic fathers' who occupied this geographical area since antiquity. In addition to religion, land and race, Savarkar mentions language as a pillar of Hindu identity. When doing so he refers to Sanskrit but also to Hindi: hence the equation he finally established between Hindutva and the triptych: 'Hindu, Hindi, Hindustan'. Hindu nationalism appears for the first time as resulting from the superimposition of a religion, a culture, a language, and a sacred territory—the perfect recipe for ethnic nationalism.

For Savarkar, who invented this new doctrine in the wake of revivalists *à la* Dayananda, Hindu Sabhaites, and Sangathanists, the Indian identity is epitomized by Hindutva: the majority community is supposed to embody the nation, not only because it is the largest but also because it is the oldest. Hindus are the autochthonous people of India, whereas the religious minorities are outsiders who must adhere to Hindutva culture, which is the national culture. In the private sphere they may worship their gods and follow their rituals, but in the public domain they must pay allegiance to Hindu symbols. This applies especially to Muslims and Christians, the proponents, in his view, of truly un-Indian religions. Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs are not considered non-Hindus by Savarkar—they are followers of sects closely linked to Hinduism.

Because Savarkar wrote *Hindutva* in reaction to the pan-Islamic mobilization of the Khilafat movement, most of his thought derives from his deep-rooted hostility to Islam and its followers. For Savarkar the Muslims of India constituted fifth-columnists whose allegiance was to Mecca and Istanbul (the political capital of the Umma until the

[30] While in England in 1906–10 Savarkar stayed at India House, a guesthouse founded by Shyamji Krishna Varma, who had been a close disciple of Dayananda. See D. Keer, *Veer Savarkar* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1988), p. 29.

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1920s). Though in a minority, Muslims were a threat to Hindus because of their pan-Islamism, and because, being more aggressive and better organized, they could outmanoeuvre Hindus, who remained effete and divided into many castes and sects.

While Savarkar provided Hindu nationalism with an ideology, he did not outline a plan of action by which Hindus ought to react to the Muslim threat, or reform and organize themselves. This task was taken up by another Maharashtrian, Keshav Baliram Hedgewar (1889–1940), who paid a visit to Savarkar in the mid-1920s and then founded the RSS in his home town, Nagpur.[31] This organization—which quickly developed into the largest Hindu nationalist movement—was intended not only to propagate the Hindutva ideology but also to infuse new physical strength into the majority community.

To achieve this twofold objective the RSS adopted a very specific *modus operandi*. Hedgewar decided to work at the grassroots in order to reform Hindu society from below: he created local branches (*shakhas*) of the movement in towns and villages according to a standard pattern. Young Hindu men gathered every morning and every evening on a playground for games with martial connotations and ideological training sessions. The men in charge of the shakhas, called *pracharaks* (preachers), dedicated their whole life to the organization; as a part of RSS cadres they could be sent anywhere in India to develop the organization's network. At the time of India's independence there were also about 600,000 *swayamsevaks* (volunteers).[32] The RSS soon became the most powerful Hindu nationalist movement, but it did not have much impact on public life in India simply because it remained out of politics. M.S. Golwalkar, who succeeded Hedgewar as *Sarsanghchalak* (head) of the organization in 1940, had made apoliticism a rule. Savarkar, who revived the Hindu Mahasabha after being released by the British in 1937, asked Golwalkar for support at a critical juncture—when the Mahasabha left Congress and became a full-fledged party—but in vain.[33]

[31] B.V. Deshpande and S.R. Ramaswamy, *Dr Hedgewar the Epoch Maker* (Bangalore: Sahitya Sindhu, 1981).

[32] J.A. Curran, *Militant Hinduism in Indian Politics—A Study of the RSS* (N.P.: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1951).

[33] W. Andersen and S.D. Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron—The Rashtriya*

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However, soon after independence, the RSS leaders realized they could not remain out of politics. In January 1948 Mahatma Gandhi was killed by a former RSS swayamsevak, Nathuram Godse, and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru immediately imposed a ban on the organization, whose leaders then realized that they could not expect help from any party in the political arena. A section of the movement's leaders who were already favourably inclined towards involving the RSS in politics now argued that this state of things justified the launching of a party of its own by the RSS. Though reluctant, Golwalkar allowed them to discuss the matter with Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, who had been president of the Hindu Mahasabha. These negotiations resulted in the creation of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (forerunner of the present Bharatiya Janata Party or BJP) in 1951, on the eve of the first general elections.

The Sangh Parivar Takes Shape

At its inception, the Jana Sangh was Janus-faced, with former Hindu Sabhaites like Mookerjee and RSS members like Deendayal Upadhyaya at its helm.[34] After the untimely death of the former in 1953, Upadhyaya took over the party organization and eliminated the Hindu Sabhaites. Upadhyaya, however, was not only an organization man: he was first and foremost an ideologue, probably the last major Hindu nationalist ideologue. In the 1960s his doctrine of 'Integral Humanism' became the official platform of the Jana Sangh. Not only did Upadhyaya draw inspiration from the Hindutva ideology of Savarkar, his eulogy of the organic unity of the varna system harked back to Dayananda: a century of ideology-building then culminated in Upadhyaya's conservative thought.

The xenophobic dimensions of the Jana Sangh were, however, more evident in the writings of Balraj Madhok, president of the Jana Sangh

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Swayamsevak Sangh and Hindu Revivalism (New Delhi: Vistaar Publications, 1987).

[34] B. Graham, *Hindu Nationalism and Indian Politics: The Origins and Development of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

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in the late 1960s. Madhok's views echoed those of Savarkar and Golwalkar inasmuch he exhorted minorities to 'Indianize'—meaning they should adopt Hindu cultural features and assimilate into a 'Hindian' nation.[35]

The Jana Sangh was only one of the front organizations set up by the RSS, the latter's aim no longer being merely to penetrate society only through shakhas but also to establish organizations working within specific social categories. Thus in 1948 RSS cadres based in Delhi founded the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP—Indian Students' Association), a student union whose primary aim was to combat the communist influence on university campuses. (The ABVP currently ranks first among student unions in terms of membership.) In 1955 the RSS gave itself a workers' union, the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS—Indian Workers' Association) whose primary mission was also to counter the 'red unions' in the name of Hindu nationalist ideology, this being a doctrine that also sought to promote social cohesion over class struggle. (In the 1990s the BMS became India's largest trade union.)

In addition to these unions the RSS developed more targeted organizations. In 1952 it founded a tribal movement, the Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram (VKA—Centre for Tribal Welfare),[36] which aimed above all to counter the influence of Christian movements among the aboriginals of India, proselytism and priestly social work having resulted in numerous conversions. The VKA applied itself to imitating missionary methods and thus achieved a number of 'reconversions'.

[35] On this notion, see R.G. Fox, 'Gandhian Socialism and Hindu Nationalism: Cultural Domination in the World System', *The Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, vol. 25, no. 3, November 1987; and R.E. Frykenberg, 'The Concept of "Majority" as a Devilish Force in the Politics of Modern Asia', *The Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, vol. 15, no. 3, November 1987.

[36] Hindu nationalists translate 'indigenous peoples' as 'vanavasi', literally, 'those who live in the forest', instead of the more commonly used term throughout India, 'adivasi', in other words 'those who were there first'. From the Hindu nationalist ideological standpoint the initial inhabitants of the country were 'Aryans' and not aboriginals: the latter they argue were driven away or conquered by Aryan invasions.

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In 1964, in association with Hindu clerics, the RSS set up the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP—World Council of Hindus), a movement responsible for grouping the heads of various Hindu sects in order to lend this hitherto unorganized religion a sort of centralized structure. Here too, Hindu nationalists took Christianity, particularly the notion of 'consistory', as a model. For a long time the VHP only attracted gurus who had founded their own ashrams. Such gurus used the VHP as a soapbox, even a form of legitimacy, with the main sect leaders remaining purposefully at a distance.[37]

Another subsidiary, Vidya Bharati (Indian Knowledge), was established in 1977 to coordinate a network of schools first developed by the RSS in the 1950s on the basis of local initiatives. Lastly, in 1979 the RSS founded Seva Bharati (Indian Service) to penetrate India's slums through social activities (free schools, low-cost medicines, etc.). Taken together, these bridgeheads are presented by the mother organization as forming the 'Sangh Parivar', or 'the family of the Sangh', that is, of the RSS.[38]

Hindu Nationalism and Political Strategy

The Jana Sangh always wavered between two strategies: one, moderate, involved positioning itself as a patriotic party on behalf of national unity, as the protector of both the poor and of small privately-owned businesses, deploying a populist vein. The other line, more militant, was based on the promotion of an aggressive form of 'Hinduness', symbolized by the campaign to raise Hindi to the level of India's national language and protecting of cows (by banning cow slaughter), the cow being sacred for Hindus but not for Muslims. The latter were in fact the implicit target of an agitation against slaughtering cows set off in 1966, in the context of the fourth general elections campaign.

[37] C. Jaffrelot, 'The Vishva Hindu Parishad: A Nationalist but Mimetic Attempt at Federating the Hindu Sects', in Vasudha Dalmia, Angelika Malinar, and Martin Christof, eds, *Charisma and Canon: Essays on the Religious History of the Indian Subcontinent* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[38] For more details, see C. Jaffrelot, ed., *The Sangh Parivar: A Reader* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005).

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Although the militant strategy was more in keeping with RSS wishes and the feelings of its activists, it ran up against India's constitutional rules of secularism and prevented the Jana Sangh from broadening its base and striking up alliances with other parties. This strategy changed in the 1970s. In 1977 the Jana Sangh resigned itself to following a moderate line and merged with the Janata Party, which had just defeated Indira Gandhi's Congress Party. However, the former Jana Sangh had not broken with the RSS, to the great displeasure of some of its new partners in power, particularly the socialists. This latter group, associated with the government's second-in-command Charan Singh (who sought to destabilize Prime Minister Morarji Desai—all the better to take his place), drew their argument from an upsurge in Hindu–Muslim riots within which RSS activists were involved, to demand that the former Jana Sanghis break with the RSS. The Jana Sanghis' refusal precipitated the break-up of the Janata Party, paving the way for Indira Gandhi's return.

In 1980 the former Jana Sangh leaders started a new party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which remained faithful to the moderate strategy. The BJP, which had Atal Behari Vajpayee as its first president, diluted the original ideology of the Jana Sangh in order to become more acceptable in the Indian party system and to find allies in this arena. This more moderate approach to politics was considerably resented by the rest of the Sangh Parivar.

The RSS kept its distance from the BJP and made greater use of the VHP to rekindle ethno-religious political activism. This more militant strategy found its main expression in the launching of the Ayodhya movement in the mid-1980s. Ayodhya, a town in Uttar Pradesh, is described in the Hindu tradition as the birthplace and capital of the god-king Lord Rama. The site was supposedly once occupied by a Rama temple until destroyed in the sixteenth century on the orders of Babur, the first Mughal emperor, and replaced by mosque, the 'Babri Masjid'. In 1984 the VHP called for this site to be returned to the Hindus. In 1989, throughout the entire summer, with the logistical support of the RSS, the VHP organized Rama Shila Pujan festivals, which involved worshipping bricks (*shila*) printed with Rama's name. These holy bricks were to be used to rebuild the Ayodhya temple.

The BJP rallied to the call of this ethno-religious mobilization strategy and even participated in the processions which took place all over

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India: the agitation contributed to its success at the polls, taking it from 2 to 88 parliamentary seats and from 7.4 to 11.6 per cent of the votes cast. In 1990, while the party was a major component of the coalition in power that had just ousted the Congress Party, its president, L.K. Advani, went on a 10,000 km 'chariot-journey' or Rath Yatra that was to culminate in the construction of the Ayodhya temple. Advani was stopped before entering Uttar Pradesh and during the repression of activists who attacked the mosque some dozen were left dead. This episode reinforced the champion-of-Hinduism image that the BJP had been trying to acquire among the majority community. The 1991 general elections actually enabled the party to win 20.08 per cent of the vote and 120 seats in the Lok Sabha. Paradoxically, its success in Uttar Pradesh, where the BJP was able to form the state government, did not enable it to solve the Ayodhya issue.

Hindu nationalist militants put an end to this deadlock by demolishing the mosque on 6 December 1992. This operation and the ensuing Hindu–Muslim riots—1200 dead within a few days—prompted New Delhi to take a number of repressive measures, including the dissolution of assemblies in states where the BJP was in power (Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, and Rajasthan), and a ban on the RSS and the VHP. These proved temporary measures and did not affect the Sangh Parivar.

By the mid-1990s the BJP reverted to its moderate line, discarding the manipulation of religious symbols for political ends in favour of touting more legitimate issues such as national unity and economic independence. This was not only because it had lost elections in UP, MP, and HP in 1993—the voters obviously punishing the party for violent excesses related to the Ayodhya affair—but also because Sangh Parivar leaders admitted they could not acquire power unless the BJP formed political alliances with regional parties. Moreover, Advani, the party's president, allowed Vajpayee to take the forefront once again because Vajpayee was less marked by Hindu nationalist activism.

The BJP was able to build a coalition of more than fifteen parties in the late 1990s. This 'National Democratic Alliance' enabled Vajpayee to form a government after the 1998 and 1999 elections. The arrangement forced the BJP to put on the backburner contentious issues—such as the construction of a temple in Ayodhya; restrict Article 30 of the Indian constitution guaranteeing the right of religious and linguistic

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minorities to establish educational institutions; abolish Article 370 of the constitution granting a partially autonomous status to Jammu and Kashmir; promulgate a uniform civil code, primarily to put an end to the possibility given to Muslims to follow Islamic law (*sharia*).

Once in office, the BJP implemented some of the traditional items of the Hindu nationalist programme. Vajpayee's first major decision was the nuclear test of May 1998. The policy of the minister for human resources and development, Murli Manohar Joshi, was also well in tune with Hindu nationalist leanings: he appointed personalities who had been close to the Sangh Parivar as heads of the directive body of the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR),[39] the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), and the search committee for faculty appointments in the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) which was entrusted with the task of designing a new school curriculum. One of Joshi's priorities was to create new textbooks—including those dealing with Indian history—rewritten in a vein more in line with Hindu nationalist ideology.

But the BJP distanced itself from several other traditional mainstays of its ideology, such as economic nationalism—a notion encapsulated by the word 'swadeshi'. The government in fact opened new sectors to foreign investment. This new, sympathetic approach of 'liberalization' caused some concern within the Sangh Parivar. The Swadeshi Jagaran Manch—a newly created offshoot of RSS—and the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh complained to the RSS, whose governing body, the Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha, passed a resolution in March 2000 supporting an 'India-centric and need-specific' model of development.[40]

In May 2004, during the parliamentary elections, the NDA government led by the BJP was surprisingly defeated and replaced by a Congress-led coalition. The defeat was considered by most components of the Sangh Parivar to be that of the Vajpayee moderate line. The VHP leaders were especially vocal. For them the BJP-led government

[39] In February 2000 the ICHR 'suspended' two volumes of its series called 'Towards Freedom', namely those edited by Sumit Sarkar and K.N. Panikkar, both known for being highly critical of the Sangh Parivar.

[40] For more details on the Vajpayee government policies, see T. Hansen and C. Jaffrelot, eds, *The BJP and the Compulsions of Politics in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 2nd edn.

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had betrayed the Hindus by not building the Rama temple they longed for in Ayodhya. The compulsions of coalition politics had stymied the Hindutva agenda. Former socialists and other self-proclaimed secularist allies of the BJP-led coalition would not allow Hindutva-oriented objectives such as the building of a Rama Mandir in Ayodhya.[41] The BJP had become adept at coalition-making, to stay in power, but the rules of the coalition game had diluted the agenda.

As a result, Hindutva forces are today deeply divided. The BJP leaders consider that any return to a radical brand of Hindu nationalist politics by the party will alienate its allies and postpone *sine die* its comeback to the helm of political affairs in the country. The RSS and VHP leaders assume that the BJP lost the 2004 elections because the Vajpayee government had disappointed too many Hindus. They fear that any further dilution of the ideology of the party would widen the gap between the BJP and the rest of the Sangh Parivar. When such differences emerge between the political sector of the Sangh Parivar and the rest, the political wing eventually falls in line. In the late 1980s, for instance, Advani succeeded Vajpayee for the second time and took the party towards the Hindutva direction, as desired by the RSS. Undoubtedly, Advani departure as president of the BJP on the eve of new year's day 2006 was largely perceived as being at the behest of the RSS. The tensions between the RSS and the BJP cannot be taken lightly anyway. They affect two mainstays of the self-perception—and indeed the identity—of the Hindutva movement. First, while the Sangh Parivar claims to form a 'family', with its members playing complementary parts, the RSS and the BJP (and the VHP and the BJP) appear to be at cross purposes.[42]

Second, the experiment of the Vajpayee government has shown that the RSS could not really exert the influence it wanted over power, even when the BJP was in office. This failure, once again, puts into question a key element of the Sangh Parivar's identity. Certainly, the

[41] See C. Jaffrelot, 'The BJP and the 2004 Elections: Dimensions, Causes and Implications of an Unexpected Defeat', in Katharine Adney and Lawrence Saez, eds, *Coalition Politics and Hindu Nationalism* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

[42] C. Jaffrelot, *The Sangh Parivar: A Reader* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005).

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RSS aspires to reshape society in its own image at the grassroots level, in a long-term perspective. But it also wants to the 'Raj guru', the mentor of goverment.[43] The Vajpayee government episode has demonstrated that such an objective is very difficult to achieve. This realization may force the Sangh Parivar to change its functioning.

The present reader is divided into two parts. The first is intended to build upon the foregoing summary of the history of Hindu nationalism from the standpoint of ideology formation. Here I take into consideration a wide spectrum of thinkers, ranging from Dayananda to Upadhyaya, in order to analyse the different phases and modalities of this process. Such an exercise enables us to identify the continuities, recurrences, and discrepancies of Hindu nationalism. Indeed, this section makes it clear that the Hindutva doctrine resulted from an ambivalent reaction to the West and Islam. Hindu nationalists imitated features of the Other—to whom they attributed superiority—in order to resist the Other more effectively rather than become like the Other. Hindu nationalism also offers a conservative ideology imbued with Brahminical values at a time when the rise of plebeian groups—especially Dalits—are challenging upper-caste domination. As a result, social organicism is a part of this ideology which fulfills the criteria of ethnic nationalism—as reading the pages which follow should make clear.

The selection of the political thinkers, or ideologues, included in this anthology has been determined by a very simple consideration: those who have played a role in organized Hindu nationalist movements have been systematically preferred to individuals who have never been mentors to institutionalized socio-political associations. As a result, Sri Aurobindo and Swami Vivekananda—whose thought processes had affinities with Hindu nationalism—have been omitted.[44]

[43] For more details, see C. Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement*, op. cit., ch. 3.

[44] On the ideology of Aurobindo and Vivekananda, see D. Dalton, *Indian Idea of Freedom. Political Thought of Vivekananda, Aurobindo Ghose, Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi* (Gurgaon: The Academic Press, 1982). Two recent anthologies centred on, respectively, Aurobindo and Vivekananda, also

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The second part of this book focuses on issues which occupy major positions within Hindu nationalism. These issues, ranging from language to conversion, are central to the Hindutva movement's activities. Some of these issues have transformed themselves over a long span of time without losing their salience. This part of the book, by selecting about a dozen such issues, is therefore intended to assess the continuity of Hindu nationalist ideology over a century and more.

In order to contextualize the items that comprise this reader, they are all prefaced by short introductions giving information on respective authors and explaining the issues at stake.

The book ends with a detailed bibliography.

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argue that such thinkers cannot really be appropriated, without distortion, by Hindu nationalism. See Peter Heehs, ed., *Sri Aurobindo: Nationalism, Religion, and Beyond* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2005); and Amiya P. Sen, ed., *The Indispensable Vivekananda* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2006).

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