

# **The Performative Politics of Ethnocultural Nationalism in India: Thespian and Quotidian Performances of Hindu Nationalism**

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Submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

by

**Sushant Kishore**

Under the Supervision of

**Dr. K.A Geetha**



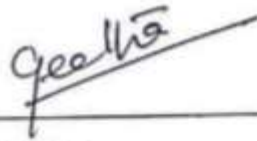
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## CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled "The Performative Politics of Ethnocultural Nationalism in India: Thespian and Quotidian Performances of Hindu Nationalism" and submitted by SUSHANT KISHORE ID No 2013PHXF0412G for award of Ph.D. of the Institute embodies original work done by him/her under my supervision.



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## DECLARATION

I, Sushant Kishore, declare that this thesis titled "The Performative Politics of Ethnocultural Nationalism in India: Thespian and Quotidian Performances of Hindu Nationalism" submitted by me under the supervision of Prof. K.A. Geetha is a bonafide research work. I also declare that it has not been submitted previously, in part or in full, to this University or any other University or Institution for award of any degree.

Signature of the Student

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*In this world which we enter, appearing from a nowhere, and from which we disappear into a nowhere, Being and Appearing coincide... Nothing and nobody exists in this world whose very being does not presuppose a spectator.*

-Hannah Arendt



## ABSTRACT

The dissertation explores alternative configurations of Ethnocultural nationalism in India that complicate the discourse of India as a multiethnic nation and Indianness with an infusion of majoritarian *Hindutva* based imagination of India as a Hindu nation. The original contribution of the dissertation is the examination of performative processes that constitute self, belonging, identity and citizenship in Hindu nationalism. I further the idea of nation as a performatively constituted community, forged through embodied acts. All identities, whether secular or communal, have to be continually re-cited, reiterated and embedded within the dominant discourse of the nation. A citizen, through this daily plebiscite not only reaffirms and legitimizes the territory and the state, but also asserts their own constituent role in it, thereby, seeking a quid pro quo legitimization.

I explore the quotidian embodied and spectatorial acts through which the organizations of the Hindu Right construct the Hindu nation employing play, assemblies, parades, symbols, songs and invented traditions. Through literary and dramaturgical analysis, I examine the experiences of this ethnocentrism and their condensation on stage. The three plays, stretching over three decades and three events crucial to the rise of the *Hindutva*, serve for organizing the performance of Hindu nationalism in contemporary India. Coupled with the ethnographic sections, it also illustrates an opening up of the performance paradigm that the discipline advocates enabling me to examine the multiple configurations of Hindu nation in theatre and the theatricality of quotidian Hindu nationalism.

The second chapter is an exposition of the performance paradigm as an instrument of transdisciplinary analysis. Here I propose performance as a heuristic tool breaching and bridging the divide between theatre and lived culture. A singular study of culture, through the keyhole of literature, that discounts the larger lived and embodied realities can benefit from a performance paradigm which would shift the skewed status quo of ‘the word’. The chapter surveys theories of performance and performativity whose appeal lies in their attempt to elevate the body to the same status as the word, tracing performatives of identity, culture, history, myth and more, and offering a holistic critique of culture through this kaleidoscope. Since performance theory proposes identity as a citational and reiterative “doing” of associated approved and prescribed norms, the chapter positions performance as a lens for undoing the ethno-cultural politics of Hindu nationalism.

In the third chapter I explore quotidian experiences, aspirations and methodology of the Hindu Right embedded into their affiliates. It is a reflexive ethnography of the community based on data triangulated from (i) propaganda literature, (ii) unstructured interviews and observation, and (iii) extra-ethnographic artefacts. Using the performance paradigm the chapter explores performatives of self/other and belonging/alienating and the construction of affective ethnic communities and *communitas* through embodied, theatrical and spectatorial performances of nationalism.

The fourth chapter looks at the different configurations of this ethnic-nationalism in plays. It explores the transformative and subversive theatre representations of *Hindutva*'s politics — social, linguistic, religious, cultural and electoral — and its response to the cyclic violence it usually inspires. Thus, I use the performance paradigm to illustrate the quotidian and the thespian as the sites where Hindu nationalism is performed.



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At the age of thirteen I discovered a Hindi translation of Maxim Gorky's *Mother* in my parents' small collection of books. A long struggle to comprehend this "grown-up's book" was my introduction to the world of literature. I am indebted to my parents for exposing me to a habit of reading and allowing my incessant obsession with Harry Potter and Agatha

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Full form</b>
ABVP	Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BKS	Bharatiya Kisan Sangh
BMS	Bharatiya Majdoor Sangh
CPI	Communist Party of India
INC	Indian National Congress
Janam	Jana Natya Manch
NDA	National Democratic Alliance
ONB	Opera Nazionale Ballini (Trans. - National Youth Group)
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh
UPA	United Progressive Alliance
VHP	Vishwa Hindu Parishad
VKA	Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram
YDMMG	Yeh Dil Maange More Guruji!

## LIST OF SELECT WORDS IN NON-ENGLISH LANGUAGES

<i>Ahimsa</i>	Non-violence
<i>Akhada</i>	Open air gymnasium
<i>Akhand Bharat</i>	Undivided India
<i>Avaidya</i>	Non Vedic
<i>Bharat Mata</i>	Mother India
<i>Dhwaj Pranam</i>	Flag salute
<i>Ek Chalak Anuvartitva</i>	Follow One Leader
<i>Ekatmata Stotr</i>	Ode of Identity
<i>Gana Pramukh</i>	Group Leader
<i>Ganvesh</i>	Uniform
<i>Hindu Rashtra</i>	Hindu Nation
<i>Hindutva</i>	Hindu-ness
<i>Kadi</i>	Chain (game)
<i>Karyakarta</i>	Personnel
<i>Mlechcha</i>	Foreigner
<i>Niyudh Siddh</i>	Martial arts
<i>Paarpaan</i>	Upper caste
<i>Paraiyan</i>	Lower caste or outcaste
<i>Pracharak</i>	Promoter
<i>Samarasta</i>	Equanimity
<i>Samata</i>	Equality
<i>Sarsanghchalak</i>	Supreme Leader (of RSS)
<i>Shakha</i>	Branch
<i>Suryanamaskar</i>	Sun salutation in Yoga
<i>Swayamsewak</i>	Volunteer
<i>Vibhag</i>	Department
<i>Vishwa Guru</i>	Leader/Master of the World

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Nationalism, whether civic or ethnocultural, has an inherent theatrical dimension. Nation is a contested concept but a working definition would include the will of the people to elect or appoint a sovereign state to govern a geographical territory on their behalf. The nation is therefore an assemblage of geographical, sociocultural and political elements — the territory, its people and a state. Nationalism is the nature of relationship between these elements (Zizek, 1993, p. 201). If the relationship favors myths of common ancestry, common blood, culture, ethnicity and kinship as the criteria of citizenship it can be explained as ethnic or ethnocultural nationalism (Baycroft & Hewitson, 2006, pp. 3-6; Motyl, 2001, pp. 151, 422; Anbarani, 2013, p. 64; Brown, 2000, p. 51). If it prioritizes voluntary citizenship and a mutual contractual relationship based on “commitment to state and civil society” and an acknowledgement of equal rights and duties it is identified as “civic nationalism” (Nikolas, 1999; Motyl, 2001, p. 151; Brown, 2000, p. 52). While civic nationalism aims at creating a pragmatic and communitarian nation-state with the agenda of comprehensive development, ethnocultural nationalism is based on romanticized historical memories and myths of the past and is characterized by a construct of an *a priori* ethnically pure nation, i.e, a nation which pre-exists nationalism (Brubaker, 1996, p. 113). Nationalism can take the form of “feeling, identity, idea, [social] movement and process” (Hearn, 2006, p. 6).

## **Culture in Nationalism: From Civic to Ethnic**

Many social and political theorists argue that a purely civic nationalism is a liberal idealist myth (Lichtenberg, 1999; Yack, 1996; Hall, 2002, p. 28). Kal Nielsen suggests that “Cultural Nationalism” has either infused or replaced civic nationalism making the new constructivist-essentialist alternative more problematic (Nielsen, 1999; Goode & Stroup, 2015). Mary Nikolas also suggests that civic and ethnocultural nationalism are not opposites but “collaborators in the journey towards nationhood and in the pursuit of the establishment of a nation state” (Nikolas, 1999). Nations do not appear out of a vacuum but emerge through a processual construction from available raw materials including elements from shared past, shared history and memory. Stuart Hall argues that even, “civic nationalism...requires belongingness on the part of its citizens; it requires identification. Identification cannot be constructed in relation to a political system alone; it has to be constructed on cultural meanings” (Hall, 2002, p. 28). Nations are molded through cultural politics and collectively “imagined” through popular narrative (Anderson, 1983/2006). These inventions, imaginations and constructions produce affective lived experiences of nation and nationalism, that “are real enough to inspire people to die [and kill] for their country” (Singh R., 2010, p. 11).

Nationalism, civic or ethnic, has evolved in the form of a religion, albeit more political and affective than metaphysical. In the process of nation building, a discourse of national culture is constructed by the cultural and political elites through selective historiography, curriculum, public discourse and mass media (Inda & Rosaldo, 2002; Waters, 1995). A.D. Smith contends that while nations are indeed modern inventions, ethnic and cultural elements seep into the most genuine civic national discourses

committed to “pluralism and cultural toleration” (Smith, 1986, p. 147). Smith attributes this to the “ethnic situation” or the positionality of the national elites (Smith, 1986, 147). Traditions are invented, symbols are exhumed and a liturgy of the nation in the form of anthems, museums, monuments and commemorative rituals is developed around the authority of the state and the iconography of the flag (Anderson, 1983/2006; Hobsbawm, 1983/2013; Bryan, 2016; Kishore, 2015). Aligned with this discourse of national congruence, a political and anthropological “imagination” of the nation is perpetuated through print capitalism, and increasingly, through electronic and digital communication (Anderson, 1983/2006; Kishore, 2016; Lutz & Toit, 2014). Benedict Anderson popularly defines nation as an “imagined community” where the population, across demographic strata, share an image of “communion” and “a horizontal comradeship” in their minds (Anderson, 1983/2006, pp. 5-6, 7). This imagination is not exclusively cognitive or intellectual it is also embodied, visceral and affective. Nations are not simply imagined, but they are “performatively constituted imagined community” (Menon J., 2004, p. iv). The newspaper reading, watching the ‘national news channels,’ electoral participation, museum-*flanerie*, dignified conduct of national symbols are all performative acts of consuming, constituting and embedding oneself in the national imagination.

Forms of ethnocultural nationalism have emerged across the world, anchored in beliefs of primordial continuous national traditions and cultures, often incompatible with the modern constitutional forms in respective countries<sup>1</sup>. While cultural elitism organically

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<sup>1</sup> David Brown attributes it to the failure of civic state elites to fulfil their development promises. Disillusioned citizens, Brown argues, “became receptive to the new social justice claims by aspiring political elites, which depicted ethnicity as the alternative imagined kinship community” (Brown, 1998, p. 1).

and innocuously seeps into and becomes a part of secular narratives in pluralistic nations, ethnocultural nationalism demands an overhaul of state, sovereignty, politics and citizenship, and their redefinition based on race, religion, blood-ties and kinship. Claims of ethnocultural nationalism are legitimized by a backward gaze into the infinite realms of past, in history and in memory. A grand historical narrative is constructed that naturalizes and anchors the territorial and political claims of a particular, usually majority, *ethnie*. In the Indian context, *Hindutva*-based majoritarian ethnocultural nationalism operates on similar principles of exclusivist belonging. The aims of the *Hindutva* movement are threefold — 1) to organize the Hindus 2) to galvanize them to establish a *Hindu Rashtra*, i.e, a Hindu State, in India 3) to establish *Akhand Bharat*, a mythical geopolitical territory attributed to the Vedic Period that extended from present day Afghanistan in the east to Myanmar in the West (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2015).

### **Ethnocultural Nationalism in India**

In the context of India, nation and nationalism emerged in reaction to its colonial history. The colonial influence on nation building was multi-fold. On the one hand, the exploitative experience of British imperialism forged a common history of struggle and suffering. It positioned the British as an absolute ‘Other’ with no overlap in terms of language, race, religion or culture. On the other hand, India’s cultural elites acquired their education through European mediation. These cultural elites, elemental in imagining the Indian nation and securing its freedom, from Bal Gangadhar Tilak to Jawaharlal Nehru were educated in British universities, whether in India or the metropole. They borrowed,

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Karl Umbrass attributes it to a “narcissistic injury on vulnerable groups” inflicted by globalization and increase access to communication systems to perpetuate this perceived injury (Umbrass, 2017, p. 29).



as Anderson would say, modules from the European nation-building experience (Anderson, p. 113). Partha Chatterjee disputes this Eurocentric modularity and argues that while new nations might have borrowed the material aspects — technology, economy, administration, etc. — from the West, they evolved the “spiritual domain ... bearing the ‘essential’ marks of cultural identity” closely guarded from European intervention (Chatterjee P., 1991, p. 522). The difference is analogical to Bhabha’s “pedagogic” and “performative”. The European materialist models constitute a pedagogy of India through orientalist Indology, surveys, census and administrative documents, while the nation constitutes the performative inner spiritual and cultural imagination. This sovereign inner domain acquires its own modernity, in reaction to the colonial state, and expresses itself in language, literature, novel, drama, art and family. However, Chatterjee also recognizes the “root of our post-colonial misery” in the internal cultural politics of this performative (Chatterjee P., 1991, p. 524). The nationalist elites’ post-colonial project of nation building was one of cultural “normalization” and hegemonization that either ignored or subsumed the performative fragments of history.

While subaltern historians like Chatterjee, social scientists like G. Aloysius, Kancha Ilaiah and minority rights activists argue that the postcolonial state in India is always inclined towards the majoritarian elites, *Hindutva* has propagated its own discourse of a victimized majority and robbed cultural pride. The postcolonial state, although based on civic principles, is responsible for both (Nandy, 1997). The worldview of the nationalist elites was inherently majoritarian but the European exposure had also furnished them with ideas of socialism, secularism and a scientific temper — ideas that *Hindutva* finds foreign and offensive (Aloysius, 2008, p. 8).

In postcolonial India, classifying ‘elitism’ has been problematic, the political elite and the cultural elite have had a complicated relationship with conflictual understanding of religion, culture and the past. The political elite has included the post-independence architects of the secular country from the Indian National Congress<sup>2</sup> (INC), while the cultural elite included those who espoused the idea of Hindu Nation. Although their ethnocentric aspirations could find no place in postcolonial politics for decades, they persisted in grassroots cultural activism towards achieving their goal (Cover Story: Being Hindu, 2018). Symptomatic of the rising popularity of their discourse, their emergence to political power is recent. Drawing from David Brown’s proposition, it can be argued that the lapses of the postcolonial state to deliver equitable development, led to the populace’s alienation from a pragmatic kinship with the secular-state to the alternative of a romantic ethno-cultural kinship (Brown, 1998).

In India, *Hindutva*-based ethnocultural nationalist ideology has persisted for over ninety years since the publication of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar’s formative exposition, *Essentials of Hindutva*, in 1923. Savarkar espoused a theory of Hindu-ness, i.e., *Hindutva*, as the defining characteristics of national identity. This national identity is based on the principles of birth and belief. It is premised on birth within the territory between the Indus River in the north and the Indian Ocean in the south, and belief that this territory was “the Fatherland” and “the Holyland” of the indigenous people (Savarkar, 1969/1923, pp. 91-111). In this theorization of the Hindu people and the Hindu nation, citizenship is qualified

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<sup>2</sup> It would be inaccurate to compartmentalize and remove INC from Hindu nationalist aspirations. If Political elites and Cultural elites were to be represented mathematically in sets there would be an intersection of members sympathetic to the other cause. In set: Political Elite  $\cap$  Cultural Elite. (Kothari, 1967)

by common birth and common religion excluding communities whose Holy lands, might lie outside this realm of the “*Hindu Rashtra*” (Hindu Nation). These principles of *Hindu Rashtra* were adopted by the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) in 1925, as its foundational ideology. Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar, the second *Sarsanghchalak* (Supreme Leader) of RSS, echoes Savarkar’s sentiment asserting – “All those not belonging to the national i.e. Hindu race, religion, culture and language *naturally* fall out of the pale of real ‘national’ life” (Golwalkar M. S., 1939, p. 99, emphasis added). It advocates the idea of India as a *natural* primordial nation of the Hindus, corrupted and perverted by subsequent Muslim and Christian (British/French/Portuguese) invasions (Golwalkar M. S., 1939, p. 1966; Gopal R., 1994, p. 1994).

The movement has struggled to establish political relevance and secure administrative and gubernatorial control since its formation (Khilnani, 2003/2012, p. 5). This period of ideological struggle is rich in paradoxical experiments in appropriation as well as rejection of republican and democratic systems. For instance, from 1947-1960 the RSS relentlessly rejected the Constituent Assembly and the Constitution they formulated. It demanded *Manusmriti* (Laws of Manu) to be accepted as the Constitution of India. In 1951, the Sangh launched, Jana Sangh, its first experiment with “political power within the very constitutional framework it rejected” (Teltumbde, 2006, p. 252). It came to a favorable conclusion with the Bharatiya Janata Party’s (BJP) victory in the 2014 general elections. BJP contested the 2014 general election on a two-pronged platform of *Hindutva*, i.e. Hindu nationalism, and economic development, and secured an unprecedented electoral mandate. Four years into its administration, twenty out of India’s twenty-nine states are governed by BJP and their allies. In a democratic nation, the elections manifest the closest

approximation of public sentiment and the Indian Federal and State elections clearly illustrate the contagious popularity and acceptance of *Hindutva*.

BJP, RSS's political wing, is one of the sister concerns of the ever expanding Sangh family whose collective efforts contributed to this unprecedented victory. The Sangh family, extends across sections and intersections of student, labor, tribal, caste, religion and gender politics. Thirty seven sister organizations, and hundreds of other affiliates constitute this conglomerate and perpetuate the core ideology of the Hindu Nation. Walter Anderson and Shridhar Amle, longtime members, observers and chroniclers of the RSS, announce its penetration in "almost all areas of society" (Andersen & Damle, 2018, p. 1). Their rising popularity can be attributed to the strategic reification of *Hindutva* through inventive strategies of networking, organizing and galvanizing Hindus into a body politic of the Hindu Rashtra (Andersen & Damle, 2018, pp. 21-22)<sup>3</sup>.

The RSS, a self-proclaimed cultural organization, is the torchbearer of Hindu nationalism that has fostered *Hindutva* and has kept it afloat through three federal bans (Barthwal, 2014). It has also expanded from its domicile in Nagpur, Maharashtra, to the other twenty-eight states through its affiliates and evolved to influence multiple social, political, religious and cultural domains. Although multiple organizations have emerged to claim the principles of *Hindutva*, the RSS has the largest membership and the deepest reach into the society. It has constructed a myth of a primordial Hindu Nation and invented an elaborate liturgy of routines and rituals around symbols and heroes claimed from a

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<sup>3</sup> Andersen and Damle submit that the RSS expanded into different segments of the society to not only address contingent issues but also avoid any state imposed restrictions or bans (Andersen & Damle, 2018, pp. 21-41).

Sanskritic-Brahminical upper caste culture. Members of the Sangh convene daily assemblies (*shakhas*) where their imagination of the Hindu Nation is performatively constituted in an embodied and public spectacle. The RSS has galvanized millions of volunteers across its fifty-six thousand *shakhas*. How did the RSS manage to normalize and popularize a homogenizing ethnocultural discourse of *Hindutva* in a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural nation like India?

This dissertation is primarily an explorative exercise that deploys the theorization of nation as a performative community into a critical exposition of the theatricality of quotidian *Hindutva* and its thespian, or theatre, configurations. It is concerned with *Hindutva* identity politics and the ways, in which Hindu nationalism is manifested, articulated and debated through multiple embodied configurations. Through this dissertation, I propose that the theoretical lens of performance can be employed to study the lived experiences of Hindu nationalism. At the locus of this study is the *shakha*, the daily congregation of Sangh's volunteers and its stylized, reiterative and embodied spectatorial practices. The perspective of performance also allows to comparatively study other performative critical configurations of Hindu nationalism on what Schechner calls a "continuum of human actions"<sup>4</sup> (Schechner, 2004). The objective of this study is to 1) expound a theory of nation as a performative community<sup>5</sup>, 2) employ the paradigm of performance and dramaturgical analysis to study the quotidian politics of Hindu

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<sup>4</sup> Discussed in detail in later sections and Chapter 2.

<sup>5</sup> Jisha Menon postulates the idea of nation as a "performatively constituted 'imagined community'" in the abstract of her doctoral dissertation titled, "Rehearsing the Partition: Performing Nation, Gender, and Violence". She employs this theorization to study different accounts of the partition in spectatorial rituals of the state, theatre and cinema, and their re-imagining of the Nation and its Other (Menon J., 2004). This dissertation develops the idea, and extends it to include rituals and performances of non-state populist and unofficial nationalisms, particularly Hindu nationalism.

nationalism, 3) explore critical configurations of Hindu nationalism produced in the 'conventional' performance genres.

This introduction is divided into two parts addressing these objectives. Part I introduces the notion of performance as a continuum of human activity and ways of being, a somatic practice of producing the self and the other, creating identities, constructing subjectivities, fostering discourse and challenging them. It discusses the relevance of performance paradigm in the study of cultural phenomenon in postcolonial societies and introduces theories of performance and performativity as heuristic tools of "genre-blurring" and transdisciplinary research (Bachmann-Medick, 2016, p. 39). Part II surveys existing research that has explored the cultural politics of Hindu nationalism and its mobilization. It identifies the gap in existing studies on Hindu nationalism that the performance paradigm can adequately address. It also discusses the methodology developed to examine them.

### **Part I**

Performance is a contested concept that typically connotes artificiality, affectation and play-acting. Tracing its genealogy to Plato's canonical *Republic*, all art is mimetic and hence suffers a creative distance from reality. Performance, which gets conventionally bracketed into 'art' is also removed from reality and is often perceived as "antithetical to 'reality'" (Taylor, 1994, p. 276). Performance was perceived as artifice, pretending and play-acting. Performance theory proposes that we "inhabit a performance based dramaturgical culture," where constitutive acts construct reality (Denzin, 2003, p. 81). Performance lies at a cross-section of all human, and animal, activity that produces meaning, culture and cultural politics through the body. It is in this context that I use

‘performance’ in this dissertation as a comprehensive process of ‘being’ through mimesis, poesis and kinesis, “keeping with its etymological origins... a carrying through, actualizing, making something happen” (Taylor, 1994, p. 276). Schechner defines performance as “twice-behaved” or “restored” behavior, i.e., actions and behaviors that are learned and reproduced by individuals according to a cultural lexis of the body (Schechner, 1985, pp. 33-36; Schechner, 2013, p. 28). Besides art and ritual, human beings imitate sociocultural norms, reconstruct them from available metaphors and symbols and give shape to identity, both individual and collective. Identities of race, religion, gender, ethnicity, culture, community and nationality are reiteratively performed in a process of “Self”-fashioning.

### **Performance and the Hermeneutics of Culture: Mimesis, Poesis, Kinesis**

Erving Goffman introduced the perspective of performance as *mimesis* in social theory. Applying the analogy of theatre, Goffman, whose primary interest was social interactions, defined a frontstage and backstage in the quotidian performance of self. He theorized social relationships as a drama of “role playing and impression management” through a conscious enactment of social roles (Conquergood, 1992, p. 84). A Goffmanesque world is made up of distinct frames that “possess a distinctive ethos, a spirit, and emotional structure, that must be properly created, sustained, and laid to rest [by the individual participant]” (Goffman, 1956, p. 19). Goffman’s seminal work, *The Presentation of Self*, implied a conscious imitation of norms and behaviors to fit in everyday social situations (Goffman, 1956). The idea of performance as *poesis* was introduced by Turner’s theorization of human being as *homo performans*, “in the sense that man is a self-performing animal — his performances are, in a way, *reflexive*, in

performing he reveals himself to himself” (Turner, 1987, p. 81, emphasis original). Performances are the constitutive processes of *becoming* a self, and a part of culture and society. He introduced performance to constructivist perspectives on culture and asserted that performance is “making, not faking” (Turner, 1982, p. 83). Growing up, Schechner suggests, is a process of subliminal training and learning “culture specific bits of behavior” that they reiterate and *re-cite* in order to conform to respective cultural categories or groups. Not only conformity and compliance but also dissidence to these norms is performed (Schechner, 2013, p. 29). In *Bodies That Matter*, arguing about queer-subjectivity, Butler proposes that even “contentious practices... might be understood not only as an example of citational politics but as a specific reworking of abjection into political agency” (1993, p. xxviii). Individuals rework the normative lexical of the culture in form and content as a method of protest. Places, symbols and metaphors are constantly appropriated by those in power and those who oppose. Butler has explored drag culture as a disruption of socially constructed categories of gender. Public protests and outrages have also been explored as the contest between the state and the people to appropriate symbols of the nation as those of sovereignty and democracy (Kishore, 2015). This particular point will become relevant when we discuss theatre configurations as a critique of culture and hegemony in Part III and Chapter Four.

Conquergood terms this attribute of performance as critical agency to counter social, cultural and political hegemony as *kinesis*. He borrows from Bhabha, the theorization of ‘performativity’ as the ubiquitous tension with dominant ‘pedagogy’. Bhabha defines pedagogy as the structured systems of acculturation and the authoritative master-discourse “based on the pre-given or constituted historical origin or event”



(Bhabha, 1990, p. 297). The performative, Bhabha postulates, is the “scraps, patches, and rags of daily life... [the reiterative] process of signification” that continually constitutes people (Bhabha, 1990, p. 297). Drawing from Bhabha, Conquergood adds, “performativity refers to discursive acts that insinuate, interrupt, interrogate and antagonize” the pedagogical (Conquergood, 1992, p. 84). Bhabha theorizes performativity as a peripheral cultural formation that challenges the hegemony of the pedagogy. Pedagogy can be the ideology of the state or the narrative of the cultural elites while the performative remains at the periphery of power constantly challenging those who wield it. Erica Fischer-Lichte and Jon Mckenzie underscore the power of performance to produce social, cultural and political transformations (Fischer-Lichte, 2008; Mckenzie, 2001).

### **Performance-Performative-Performativity**

Although frequently used interchangeably, or synonymously, the concepts of ‘performance’ and ‘performative-performativity’ are heavily contested keywords. Butler tries to develop ‘performativity’ as a theory of how “the social world is made” (Butler, Laclau & Zizek, 2000, p. 14). She proposes that a performative is a “stylized repetition of acts” that “produce a series of affect” leading to the social construction of identity (Butler, 1990/2007, pp. 190-191). In the “Preface” of *Gender Trouble* she writes, “My theory sometimes waffles between understanding performativity as linguistic and casting it as theatrical. I have come to think that the two are invariably related, chiasmically so...” (Butler, 1990/2007, p. xxv). In “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,” Butler ponders, “the body is a historical situation...and is a manner of doing, dramatizing and reproducing a historical situation” (Butler, 1988, p. 521). She employs the dramaturgical analogy in the ontology of being but goes on to warn, “Performativity is neither free play

nor theatrical self-presentation; nor can it be simply equated with performance” (Butler, p. 59). This tension, frequently repeated in her later omnibus, summarizes the theoretical debate over the alleged difference between ‘performativity’ as world-making or meaning-making through a subliminal and “constrained reiteration of norms” and ‘performance’ as cognizant and theatrical role-playing or play-acting (Butler, 1993, pp. 60, 178; Osborne & Segal, 1994). However, performance theorists and anthropologists, like Richard Schechner and Victor Turner, have tried to dispell this conventional theoretical prejudice against ‘performance’ as something staged and purely ‘dramaturgical’<sup>6</sup>. Schechner, Turner and Conquergood, among others, have established performance as not only a cultural product but also an ontological medium and process of being, and a method of cultural heuristics.

‘Performativity’ has been at the center of this impasse with some theorists, ironically poststructuralist, trying to *fix* its meaning. However, keywords are always unstable, controversial and contested, and it is this problematic oscillating connotation that contributes to them immense theoretical possibilities (William, 1976/1983, p. 13; Bala, 2013, p. 12; Bell E., *Theories of Performance*, 2008, p. 15).

Schechner alludes to this theoretical potential —

“Performance Studies resists fixed definitions ... does not value purity. It is at its best when operating amidst a dense web of connections ... Performance studies is open, multivocal, and self-contradictory. Therefore, any call for a “unified field” is, in my view, a misunderstanding of the very fluidity and playfulness fundamental to performance studies.” (Schechner, 2013, p. 24)

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<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that chronologically Performance Studies was born as an inter-disciplinary department in the 1960s at the New York University and predates Foucault, Derrida and Butler’s theorization.

## **Performance in the Study of Culture: Paradigm Shifts**

*With performance as a kind of critical wedge, the metaphor of theatricality has moved out of the arts into almost every aspect of modern attempts to understand our condition and activities, into almost every branch of the human sciences—sociology, anthropology, ethnography, psychology, linguistics. (Carlson, 1996, pp. 6-7)*

The paradigm of performance succeeded in bridging the epistemological gap between the body and the word and, paved the way for interdisciplinary research endeavors. Every human activity from the conventional *texts* like literature, poetry, history — to embodied practices like folklore, festivals, rituals and everyday life is opened to the purview of academic interpretation. It expands the scope of the “textual object,” decenters the western academic obsession with textuality and opens it to all embodied processes of cultural production that Mikhail Bakhtin quite literally terms “bodies of meaning” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 6). Conquergood argues that the performance paradigm would contribute to “epistemological pluralism that will ... extend understanding of multiple dimensions and a wider range of meaningful action” (Conquergood, 1998, p. 26). Performance Studies offers an interpretative framework to study a spectrum of meaning-making processes aptly illustrated in Schechner’s web model. Owing to its malleability and wide range applicability, the analogy of performance has affected a “performative turn” in humanities, social sciences, anthropology and cultural studies (Bachmann-Medick, 2016, pp. 73-95; Conquergood, 1989). In anthropology and cultural studies the performative turn was not intended to disown textuality, as perhaps Conquergood would prefer (Conquergood, 1998, p. 26), but instead, to destabilize its authority, secure an equal status

for body-action and establish an “interpretative dialectic ... of text and performance” (Geertz, 1986, pp. 377-378). At the end of the twentieth century, this to-and-fro became even more evident with cultural theorists’ insistence that there was in fact a ‘cultural turn’ in performance studies (Strine, 1998, pp. 6-7). At the time this dissertation enters this academic discourse, culture and performance are irrevocably intertwined (Madison, 2011, p. 150). Strine proposed through Conquergood, that “this culture-performance matrix... signaled a paradigmatic shift from performance as a distinctive *act* of culture to performance as an integrated *agency* of culture” (Strine, 1998, p. 7, emphasis original). Performance is not only a product of culture but its constant constitutive medium. It emerges from cultural norms and naturalizes them through repetition.

This paradigmatic shift, the ingress of the performative body and the discourse of the body into the domain of cultural exegesis has decentered academic elitism in favor of subaltern and democratic sites of culture and power. “Textual attitude” has always been the domain of the cultural elite, in colonial and post-colonial societies (Said, 1979, p. 83). The European orientalists constructed the orient in textual archives. They assessed the historicity or historical aptitude of the oriental civilizations on the basis of available archives. Existing indigenous knowledge was judged against European enlightenment ideals of knowledge, archive and disciplinarity<sup>7</sup>, and deemed inconsequential<sup>8</sup>. In his critique of “scriptural economy” of occidental cultures, Michel de Certeau states, “progress

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<sup>7</sup> What Michel Foucault says about enlightenment should be kept in mind — “The Enlightenment that discovered liberties also invented the disciplines”. The academic discipline is not very different considering its aims to “to define, classify, control, and regulate” research and to make docile subjects out of them (Foucault, 1980)

<sup>8</sup> Dwight Conquergood suggests that the enlightenment project of modernity (re)situated objective knowledge against local know-how. This (re)situation resonates with Foucault’s “subjugated knowledge”. Scriptocentrism for Conquergood “blinds researchers to meanings that are expressed forcefully through intonation, silence, body tension, arched eyebrows, blank stares, and other protective arts of disguise and secrecy” (Conquergood, 2002).

is scriptural... the ‘oral’ is that which does not contribute to progress... here to work is to write, or here only what is written is understood” (De Certeau & Mayol, 1998, p. 134).

However, in precolonial India, discourse was predominantly performative and oral in the Bardic, Puranic and Shramanic traditions (Thapar, 2013, p. 50). Scriptural conservation was selective and endorsed by the cultural elites and it was usually tainted by their politics. Following the occidental scriptocentric tradition, Hegel declared that both philosophy and history could not exist in India because Indians, had not “arrived at that period of development ... [to] possess self-consciousness” (Hegel, 1837). J.S. Mill, E.J. Rapson and A.A. Macdonell, British historians, settled that India had no historical sense because it was not chronicled and archived like the European histories of Herodotus and Livy (Mill, 1826; Rapson, 1922; MacDonell, 1971). It followed Mill’s arbitrary periodization of Indian History into Hindu, Muslim and British Period which attributed both Indian history and historiography to the British pioneers. This determinist authority of the text has also been inherited, and has prevailed in post-independence imagination of nation and nationness in postcolonial India, even as they challenged the European perceptions of “no historical sense”. The texts studied and promoted at this liminal stage of colonialism and decolonization were patently in Sanskrit, the language of upper caste Hindu elites and, sometimes, Buddhists. Sanskrit was romanticized as the “*ur-language*” in European, particularly German, Indology (Thapar, 2013, p. 31). These texts formed the canon in the early epistemology of India. F. Schlegel’s *On the Language and Wisdom of India* (based on his Sanskrit scholarship), Paris Schlegel and William Jones’ translation of the *Ramayana*, *The Laws of Manu*, *Bhagavadgita* and Kalidasa’s *Shakuntala*<sup>9</sup> reinforced

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<sup>9</sup> F. Schlegel and Paris Schlegel’s translations were in German and William Jones’ in English.

this canon as more Sanskrit texts were added to it. The inherited faith in written archives becomes much more problematic when appropriated by the colonized.

In the project of nation building, the search for a civilizational essence and national pride excavates these texts from a period when selective communities had access to knowledge and power. They catered to one another to produce a discourse of mutual validation. The political and cultural elites, who led the movement for national self-determination – Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru – all seek historical and cultural legitimacy through this canon (Kosambi, 1946; Gopal S. , 1976, p. 299; Ludden, 1993; Kanwar, 2005; Sharma J., 2015). Ideologues inclined to Hindu nationalism also borrowed these orientalist perspectives on India, most importantly, Mill’s tripartite periodization of history. It validated their claims that Indian/Hindu civilization was homogenous that had wholly matured before the foreigners invaded the territory and perverted its culture (Savarkar 1923/1969, 1971; Golwalkar 1966). The Hindu period is evoked as the Golden Age of national history, a period of “renascent Hinduism” invulnerable to historical change when Hindu rulers ruled the land, *Sanatan Dharma* flourished and Vedic-Sanskritic *Hindutva* was the dominant way of life (Thapar, 1968; Prakash, 1990).

While writing as archiving was the privilege of the affluent, popular cultures were largely performative, oral and visual. “Not everyone comes to ‘culture’ through writing” (Taylor, 2003), instead they constitute culture through repertoires — rituals, *dastangois*, folk songs, folk tales, moving theatre, puppetry, Ram Lilas, etc. Social and cultural performances facilitated the transmission of cultural meanings, collective memories, socio-symbolic order. Performance was so central to Indian traditions that the theory of *Maya-*

*Lila*, i.e., the world and the cycle of life as a cosmic play, was a central philosophical precept in Indian philosophy, theosophy and worldview. *Maya*, i.e., illusion, is held as the foundational principle in the creation of the world and *Lila* is literally the play of Gods and metaphorically the intersection of the metaphysical with the material. While the absence of textuality allowed and sustained vernacular sub-cultures, the production and emphasis on text has in effect imperialized and subsumed these subcultures allowing homogenizing ideologies of the cultural elites to flourish. “Subjugated knowledges have been erased because they are illegible; they exist, by and large, as active bodies of meaning, outside of books, eluding the forces of inscription that would make them legible and thereby legitimate” (Conquergood, 2002).

Academic and intellectual criticism of Hindu nationalism remains confined within its textual foundations and scriptural trails analyzing the treatise, manifestos and speeches produced by its ideological patriarchs. John Zavos (2000/2009), Jose Kuruvachira (2006), Christophe Jaffrelot (2007) and Jyotirmaya Sharma (2015) have produced genealogies of the movement through emerging ideological discourses in pre-independence India. Perspectives on contemporary developments remain archival, top-down and etic with very few exceptions. Thomas Blom Hansen and Jaffrelot’s fieldwork in Maharashtra, Delhi and Madhya Pradesh have also been with the intent of producing a macro-analysis prioritizing the political operations of organizations over its constituent individuals (Hansen, 1999; Jaffrelot, 1996/1999).

There was a perceptible shift towards the spectacle and embodied aspects of the ideology with Shubh Mathur’s (2008) seminal ethnographic account based on her fieldwork with RSS and BJP electoral campaigners in Rajasthan. John Zavos (2004) also

identified “performative politics” while working on Shiv Sena, a regional Hindu nationalist political party in Maharashtra. However, his perspectives have not been adequately explored. The changing scope of the ‘textual attitude’ has barely started to permeate these works to include repertoires of culture — “not only what is written but what is voiced, what is expressed, what is invented, in whatever form” (Marcus & Sollors, 2009).

Existing research on Hindu nationalism has primarily focused on its ideological foundations and its political and sociological implications. However, the convolutions of its daily mechanisms remains largely unexplored. The everyday experience of *Hindutva*, fostered by RSS or its affiliates, is immensely visceral and visual. Its quotidian activities exhibit a flair for spectacle and kinesthetic. The performance paradigm offers a malleable theoretical lens to explore this banal yet formative aspect of Hindu nationalism. A performance-centric research also allows for an interdisciplinary and trans-genre inquiry into culture through its “poetics, play, process and power” (Conquergood, 1989, pp. 82-84). It focuses on “cultural fabrications” that produce meanings and reveal that culture and people are “more than created; they are creative”. By shifting focus from “cultural performances” to “culture as performance” it also exposes inherent ambiguity, artifice, processuality and the contest for power (Conquergood, 1989, pp. 82-83).

## **Part II**

Hindu nationalism is one of the most widely written phenomenon in India. Research on Hindu nationalism has dealt intensively with its politics, power, ideology and indoctrination, while the banalities and empirical experiences of such nationalist sentiment<sup>10</sup> remain relatively unexplored. Bottom up perspectives and on-ground academic

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<sup>10</sup> As briefly discussed in Part I



engagement with processes, practices and experiences of Hindu nationalism are few. In one such analysis, Arvind Rajagopal discovers television as a medium of ideological dissemination. He explores ritual TV-watching as a means to create an imagined community, foster a sense of collective participation and mobilize masses across the nation to empathize with a Hindu-*Hindutva* cause. He illustrates the impact of the televised production of *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* in creating a ritual of communal, cultural and religious gathering (Rajagopal A., 2004). It created an environment which was promptly appropriated by the political agents leading to the demolition of the Babri Masjid. The role of television-mediated collective ritual played an indisputable role in orienting the public to *Hindutva*. However, empirical cultural transformation that *Hindutva* advocates is far more ubiquitous than *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. A holistic picture of this ubiquity is not possible via etic studies, genealogies and ideological textual analysis. They provide answers for the origin of *Hindutva* and the functioning of the RSS. While these are crucial and legitimate questions they emphasize on a centrality, a loci of *Hindutva*'s politics away from its field — the everyday life. Shubh Mathur observes —

“...crucial to the success of the Hindu Right are not pronouncements of its leaders on religion, nationhood, identity and religious minorities, but that these ideas are repeated by grandmothers and school children, by entrepreneurs and wage labourers, by farmers and bank tellers, in the elite drawing-rooms of the urban middle class and in the tribal villages, by journalists and academics” (2008, p. 6).

*Hindutva* manifests in public spaces — *shakhas*, streets, schools, offices. It is these banal taken-for-granted spaces that are the crucibles of Hindu nationalism and where notions of

nation, nationality and belonging are reproduced everyday. One must turn their gaze to this “ordinariness...[of] ‘all very normal people’” to understand what has sustained and strengthened Hindu nationalism for almost a century (Mathur, 2008, p. 6). Although, Mathur attempts a challenging ethnography with members of the Hindu Right in Rajasthan from 1990-1994<sup>11</sup>, her research is based on fieldwork with RSS, VHP and BJP workers campaigning for the Rajasthan Assembly elections in the aftermath of the Ramjanmbhoomi movement and consequent nationwide riots. Therefore, one of its limitations is that it deals with hyperbolic and augmented expressions of rhetoric, typical of election campaigns.

The banality of Hindu nationalism is, perhaps, best captured in theatre and cinematic reproductions. Jisha Menon applies the paradigm of performance as mimesis to study the rehearsed reproduction of the Partition, at Wagah border in reality, and its representations in theatre and cinema. Menon recuperates the idea of mimesis as a remembering and reproduction of political history and historical relationship between India and Pakistan to evoke a historic other and sustain patriotism. It is in context of these state sponsored commemorative rituals and cinematic reproductions that Menon identifies the performative dimensions of national experience (Menon J., 2004). However, the perspective of performance has the potential to reveal aberrations in ideology and the subliminal processes through which the idea of cultural homogeneity is constructed, perpetuated, contested and, over the time, reinforced into the national collective consciousness of a multi-cultural nation like India. I attempt to extend the paradigm of performance to banal popular, populist, non-state nationalist formations of *Hindutva*.

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<sup>11</sup> Her research explores why subordinated communities — *dalits*, tribals and backward castes to participate in the narrative of *Hindutva*. They participate to secure some form of symbolic capital, acceptance and mobility within the mainstream Hindu society.

## Methodology

The dissertation explores the multiple configurations of Hindu nationalism on a conventional theatrical setting as well as in everyday life and, therefore, attempts to use a composite methodology rooted in theories of performance and performativity. The dissertation examines informal and everyday performative processes that constitute self, belonging, identity, and citizenship in *Hindutva*. It explores the quotidian embodied and spectatorial acts through which the organizations of the Hindu Right construct the Hindu nation employing plays, assemblies, parades, symbols, songs and invented traditions. Through literary and dramaturgical analysis, it examines the experiences of this ethnocentrism and their condensation on stage. The plays chosen for analysis, stretch over three decades and three events crucial to the rise of the *Hindutva*.

Studying the ordinary and banal experiences and enactments of Hindu nationalism required an ethnographic approach towards data collection from the organization. This part of the dissertation relies on ethnographic data, on the operations of the RSS, triangulated through 1) propaganda literature, 2) unstructured interviews and observations, and 3) extra ethnographic sources. Following a pilot study with members of the Sangh family from Delhi, Bihar, Jharkhand, Goa and Karnataka it was concluded that the Sangh follows a standardized curriculum in its organization in an attempt to establish a kind of ideological and cultural homogeneity. Hence, a sample data of any region is largely representative of the organization's national politics. Unstructured interviews were then conducted with office-bearers, *pracharaks*, regional physical and ideological trainers, and two focus group discussions were conducted with young *swayamsewaks*.

The Sangh's aversion to academic scrutiny was apparent in their concerted efforts to stonewall my fieldwork. Often, a senior office-bearer would assertively prevent me from having personal access to the volunteers stressing that his opinions should suffice. Appointments with a very senior member were rescheduled several times through the length of a year and finally did not culminate. Pracharaks would assure on calls to arrange visits to Sangh-run schools, *shakhas* and *shivirs* but suffered the same fate of vicious postponement. Hence, the methodology had to evolve to by-pass or substitute successive deferments. The research, therefore, draws significantly from a number of documentaries, such as Lalit Vachani's *The Boy in the Branch* and *The Man in the Tree*, Anand Patwardhan's *In the Name of Rama* and Nikhil Varshney's *Muzzaffarnagar Baaki Hai*, as secondary ethnographic sources. Propaganda digests, behavior manuals and other literature published by the Sangh were also scrutinized as ethnographic artefacts.

The other section deals with what is conventionally understood as performance — theatrical representation of Hindu nationalism. It looks at the different configurations of Hindu nationalism in curated plays. It explores the kinetic representation of its politics — social, linguistic, religious, cultural and electoral — and its response to the cyclic violence it usually inspires. The three plays - Indira Parthasarathy's *The Legend of Nandan*, Mahesh Dattani's *Final Solutions* and Jana Natya Manch's *Yeh Dil Maange More, Guruji!* (henceforth, *YDMMG*) are curated for enacting three crucial episodes in the rise of Hindu nationalism in post-independence India. While *the Legend of Nandan* was written in response to the language politics of the 1970s, it stays relevant even today in its treatment of linguistic and casteist hegemony of the Hindu Right. *Final Solutions* was produced in response to the riots that broke out across the country after a Hindu nationalist mob

demolished Babri Masjid in Ayodhya and *YDMMG* was performed as a reaction to the 2002 Gujarat riots. Through a pastiche of quotes and statements from Hindu nationalist ideologues, it recreates and caricatures a plebian culture of violence that the Hindu right espouses.

Amalgamating theatre with ethnography, the dissertation also illustrates an opening up of the performance paradigm that the discipline advocates. It enables a comparative examination of the multiple configurations of Hindu Nation on stage and the theatricality of quotidian Hindu nationalism. At the crossroads of the ‘body’ and the ‘word.’ it is an exercise employing, and advocating, theoretically an “integrative approach” (Wolff, 1988), “a typology of discourse and a theory of the relations (both mimetic and non-mimetic) between literature and the other modes of discourse” (Culler, 1976), to study inscriptions of popular culture. The disciplinary divide, or the “genre trouble” (McKenzie, 1998; Bachmann-Medick, 2016), is breached and bridged through a performance paradigm that negotiates between different products on a cultural continuum.

### **Summary of Chapters**

The Performative Politics of Ethnocultural Nationalism in India examines performative processes that constitute self, belonging, identity, and citizenship in the discourse of *Hindutva*. It furthers the idea of nation as a performatively constituted imagined and emotional community, forged through embodied acts. All identities, whether secular or communal, have to be re-cited, reiterated and embedded within the dominant discourse of the nation. A citizen, through this “daily plebiscite” not only reaffirms and

legitimizes the territory and the state, but also asserts their own constituent role in it thereby seeking a quid pro quo legitimization (Renan, 1990, p. 19).

I explore the quotidian embodied and spectatorial acts through which the organizations of the Hindu Right construct the Hindu nation employing plays, assemblies, parades, symbols, songs and invented traditions. Through literary and dramaturgical analysis, I examine the experiences of this ethnocentrism and their condensation on stage. The three plays, stretching over three decades and three events crucial to the rise of the *Hindutva*, serve for organizing the performance of Hindu nationalism in contemporary India. Coupled with the ethnographic section, it also illustrates an opening up of the performance paradigm that the discipline advocates enabling me to examine the multiple configurations of Hindu Nation on stage and the theatricality of quotidian Hindu nationalism.

The second chapter is an exposition of the performance paradigm as an instrument of transdisciplinary analysis. Here I propose performance as a heuristic tool breaching and bridging the divide between theatre and lived culture. A singular study of culture through the keyhole of literature, that discounts the larger lived and embodied realities, can benefit from a performance paradigm which would shift the skewed status quo of ‘the word’. The chapter surveys theories of performance and performativity whose appeal lie in their attempt to elevate the body to the same status as the word, tracing performatives of identity, culture, history, myth and more, and offering a holistic critique of culture through this kaleidoscope. Since performance theory proposes identity as a citational and reiterative “doing” of associated, approved and prescribed norms, the chapter positions performance as a lens for undoing the ethno-cultural politics of Hindu nationalism.

In the third chapter I explore everyday experiences, aspirations and methodology of the Hindu Right embedded into their affiliates. It is a reflexive ethnography of the community based on data triangulated from (i) propaganda literature, (ii) unstructured interviews and observation, and (iii) extra-ethnographic artefacts. Using the performance paradigm, the chapter explores performatives of self/other and belonging/alienating and the construction of ethnic communities, and *communitas* through embodied, theatrical and spectatorial performances of ethno-centric nationalism.

The fourth chapter looks at the different configurations of this ethnic-nationalism in plays. It explores the representations of Hindu nationalism's politics — social, linguistic, religious, cultural and electoral — and their mimetic response to the cyclic violence it usually inspires. I analyze intertwined politics of caste and language embedded in religious aesthetics in Indira Parthasarathy's *The Legend of Nandan*. I also investigate the two pronged politics of postcolonial India where living or leaving caste are equally problematic. Through Mahesh Dattani's *Final Solutions* I read the banality of chauvinism and discrimination that is apparent in conservatives but more inconspicuous in those who would call themselves liberal. I also inquire the experiences of middle class urban family and their engagement with Hindu nationalism from/in their living room. The third play, *Yeh Dil Mange More Guruji!* (This Heart Desires More, Master!), is a street-play produced by Jana Natya Manch. The form and content of the play are equally crucial to the study. Shocked by the 2002 Gujarat riots this play simulates the ideological mechanism of Hindu nationalism and attempts to take the discussion to the people. In the perforated lived-staged space it highlights the absurdity of an ideology that not only demonizes the 'Other' but also dehumanizes its subjects. I am interested in the play as an exercise in performatively

sensitizing the audience and establishing a dialog with them. The selection of plays also allows to illustrate a theoretical opening up of performance from conventional closed space entertainment to vernacular and plebian discourse of everyday space.

Thus, I use the performance paradigm to illustrate the quotidian and the thespian as the sites where configurations of Hindu nationalism is performed. In employing the performance paradigm the dissertation performs a deconstruction and denaturalization of the essentialist idea of ethnocultural nationalism, in general, and Hindu nationalism, in specific. It highlights the constructivism that forges identity, subjectivity, memory and history that bring into effect the imagined nation.



## **CHAPTER II**

### **(UN)DOING ETHNOCULTURAL NATIONALISM: PERFORMANCE PARADIGM AND THE STUDY OF HINDU NATIONALISM**

#### **Introduction**

Hindu nationalism has had a dynamic history of over 90 years, a period where the movement has evolved in response to multiple contingent socio-political milieu of the subcontinent and worldwide. There have been periods of popularity and unpopularity characterized by submissive activism and explosive radicalism<sup>12</sup>. The most recent rise in the popularity of Hindu nationalism comes with the election of Bharatiya Janata Party (henceforth BJP), the political wing of Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (henceforth RSS) family, in 2014 and the succession of Mr. Narendra Modi as the Prime Minister (PM) of India.

In recent times, the National Flag has been a subject of several controversies, with the Ministry of Human Resource Development releasing instructions to erect flag of specific configurations in all University Campus's (Raman, 2016). It has become a

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<sup>12</sup> At different moments in history different organizations have borne the flag of Hindu nationalism in India, the earliest being the Hindu Mahasabha. The Hindu Mahasabha could never secure mass support despite several internal, formal and political reformations. Its predecessor, the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh has had several tussles with law and administrations and has been banned thrice. The first ban was imposed after its, alleged, ex-members were arrested for Gandhi's assassination in 1948. The second ban was during the Emergency of 1975. The organization was banned for the third time after defying the Supreme Court's orders and demolishing the Babri Masjid in 1991 and inciting riots. The Sangh's popularity has been affected with each ban. It was also affected after the 2002 riots and was visible in the BJP's electoral loss. The decline in Sangh's popularity was also a result of modernity. For more details refer (Widmalm, 2016; Kolodner, 1995; Badhwar, Agha, & Ansari, 1993; Jaffrelot C., 2005; Noorani, 2017; Jha P., 2015; Ramaseshan, 2009).

punishable offence to not stand up<sup>13</sup> while the National Anthem plays and the National Song was made mandatory in Independence day celebration in *madarasas* in the largest Indian state (Radhakrishnan, 2016, p. 2016). They were also required to videotape the celebration as a kind of ‘patriotism test’ (Rashid, 2017, p. 2017). Dissidence and differences of opinion have been vilified as either an ‘anti-national’ or ‘anti-Hindu’ that are used almost synonymous, or worse as a Pakistan sympathizer (Jaffrelot, 2017). The BJP website proclaims, “The future of Bharat is set. *Hindutva* is here to stay. It is up to the Muslims whether they will be included in the new nationalistic spirit of Bharat. It is up to the government and the Muslim leadership whether they wish to increase Hindu furor or work with the Hindu leadership to show that Muslims and the government will consider Hindu sentiments. The era of one-way compromise of Hindus is over, for from now on, secularism must mean that all parties must compromise” (*Hindutva: The Great Nationalist Ideology*, n.d.). The BJP government successfully declared 21<sup>st</sup> June, International Yoga Day. The move garnered widespread accolades from RSS volunteers, as homage to RSS’s founder, Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar’s birthday. A majority of the Cabinet<sup>14</sup> is constituted of members of RSS who assemble every year in a Sangh coordinating committee meeting to present a report card of their annual policies. The Minister of State for HRD confidently asserted that *bhagwakaran* (saffronization) and *sanghwad* (RSS doctrine) is good for the country and will be implemented at all costs (PTI, 2016). An article in Hindustan Times summarizes the situation of Rajasthan, a BJP governed state,

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<sup>13</sup> On November 30, 2016, a Supreme Court bench headed by Justice Deepak Misra had ordered the mandatory playing of National Anthem in cinema halls. It had also made it mandatory to for movie-watchers to stand when the Anthem was played, as a sign of respect. In January 2018, the apex court withdrew its judgement making the National Anthem directive and not mandatory. (Rajagopal K. , 2018)

<sup>14</sup> At the time of writing the office of the President, the Vice President, the Prime Minister, and nineteen other Union Ministers have been members of the RSS.

“School textbooks have been rewritten. Akbar is no longer great because Maharana Pratap defeated him at Haldighati. Students perform ‘surya namaskar’ (sun salutation) during morning prayers at government schools. From July, the colour of their uniforms will be same as that of RSS trousers. There is a minister for cows and university is setting up a cow research centre” (Goswami, 2017, p. 2017).

While this is a cross-section of government and legislative policies, Hindu nationalism, empowered by a conducive government at the center and a favorable climate of opinion, has become assertive in the plebian sphere. Vigilante groups have emerged to police, administer and impose each of these policies. Academics and journalists are persecuted for expressing opinions antithetical to the status quo (Singh M. P., 2017; Lather, 2017). The Jawaharlal Nehru University was virtually under seize following the Afzal Guru-protest<sup>15</sup> incident in February 2016, and even auto drivers decided to boycott the students. A number of people were attacked under suspicion of transporting cattle for slaughter. A majority of them, including a twelve year old boy in Jharkhand and a fifty-two year old in Uttar Pradesh, succumbed to their injuries. Violence has become so normalized that there “is no alarm ... about the tales of holy-mobs expressing with murder and loot their devotion for whatever is holy for the day — the flags, the national house wife, beef, cremation, anti-love, the heroes of old television serials” (Dwivedi & Mohan, 2017).

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<sup>15</sup> Student union parties had conducted an event to protest the “constitutional killing of Afzal Guru,” a Kashmiri separatist convicted for the attack on Parliament (Sebastian, 2016, p. 2016). The event concluded in a clash between ABVP and the organizers and large scale political and media outrage against the institution.

These events exhibit a pervasive populist<sup>16</sup> expression of *Hindutva* based nationalism in a rhetorical, discursive as well as embodied forms. The former marking an institutionalization of the rhetoric of a Hindu India and the latter its vernacularization. These were not achieved through new inventions. The popular consensus that BJP could secure was a culmination of the Sangh's ninety years of ground work into ideological identity politics that it calls "character building". The Sangh, since its inception, has relied on embodied and collective practices of organization and *communitas* through *shakhas* (branches), *shivirs* (camps), rallies and *rath yatras*. It has relied on stylized expressions of Hindu nationalism manifested through reinvention of old and an invention of new rituals and performances. These rituals and performances involved actions that, as Woods and Tsang write in a global context, "originated among elites and masses, that were scripted and spontaneous, and self-aware at times but also unconscious at others" (Tsang & Woods, 2014, p. 2). The RSS that, as always, fostered not only leadership but also a large ground force of volunteers for election campaigning, acquired symbiotic gains from its participation in BJP's campaign. An organization whose popularity was dwindling<sup>17</sup> since the 2004 elections, started gaining momentum as the 2014 election campaign accelerated<sup>18</sup>. What urged individuals to collectively channel their emotions by wearing or waving symbols of Hindu nationalism to participate in elaborate rituals of belonging and othering?

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<sup>16</sup> Populism is "a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic camps, "the pure people" vs "the corrupt elite"" (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 5). Mudde adds that "populists view their mission as "essentially moral". And given their moral framing, populists believe that they *alone* represent "the people". See (Mudde, What Is a Populist?, 2017). In the context of contemporary India the affiliates of Sangh parivar are the populist forces and Hindu nationalism is the expression of their 'morality' and 'value system'.

<sup>17</sup> While the RSS had over 48,794 *shakhas* (branches) across the country, the number dropped to 35,000 in subsequent years. In 2012, the number of *shakhas* was 34,761. (Jha P. , 2015)

<sup>18</sup> The *shakhas* increased to 37,125 in 2013, 39,396 in 2014, 51,332 in 2015 and 56,859 in 2016. (Jha P. , 2015; ENS, 2016)

What is the significance of such behavior in the importance of nation identity in the modern age? What are the different configurations of this identity? What are the everyday or quotidian acts through which the organizations of the Hindu Right construct the Hindu nation employing visceral and visual strategies of play, assemblies, parades, symbols, songs and invented traditions? Through literary and dramaturgical analysis, I examine the experiences of this ethnocentrism and their reproduction on stage. The objective of this dissertation is to explore and analyze performative configurations of Hindu nationalism in quotidian as well as thespian spaces, i.e. off and on stage.

The dissertation does not claim that an investigation of performances alone would suffice to explain the significance of Hindu nationalism in contemporary politics. However, to properly understand the persistence of such communal ideologies in the age of globalization, we need to pay more attention to the enactment and stylized expressions of Hindu nationalism through its followers. To provide a theoretical and structural framework for the study of ethno nationalism, this chapter extends the fundamental premise of performance theory that identity is essentially embedded in the individuals' bodies and performed through culturally choreographed "bits of behavior". The chapter attempts to theorize nationalism as 'performed belonging' and nation as a 'performative community'.

### **Why Performance?**

Performance has been central to humanities and social science research for a long time. Emile Durkheim introduced the idea of "collective effervescence" — an intense, but transient, feeling of emotional exaltation arising from the collective performances of rituals (Durkheim, 1912/1995). Durkheim wrote, "[o]nce the individuals are gathered together, a

sort of electricity is generated from their closeness, and quickly launches them to extraordinary height of exaltation” (1912/1995, p. 217). Victor Turner borrowed the Durkheimian premise while studying the Ndembu tribes. He believed that rituals constituted a liminality<sup>19</sup> where social roles and hierarchies would dissolve. Turner called this stage of collective and effervescent ritual performance “communitas” and theorized its transformational potential<sup>20</sup> (Turner, 1969/1991). Turner observed that rituals reiterate social and cultural norms in order to re-create, re-experience and re-legitimize socially established meanings. While Durkheim and Turner focus largely on pre-modern sacral religio-cultural rituals and only apply their observations to comment on the mundane, Erving Goffman proposed the theoretical premise that a theatrical aspect underlies everyday life (Goffman, 1956). Individuals put on roles and embody cultural behavioral norms to enact these roles. Although it is not the same sense of an actor portraying a character, everyday roles require learning a “repertoire of actions” and performing them in appropriate social frames (Goffman, 1956, p. 74). Goffmanesque performance of self is a self-conscious role-playing in social situations that constitutes an individual into a constituent of a community.

The method and metaphor of theatre and theatre research that was gradually permeating across disciplinary boundaries received a significant push from postmodernist

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<sup>19</sup> In his early research Turner coined the word “Liminality” in reference with pre-modern societies. In later works he observed a liminality-like or “liminoid” phenomenon in complex post-modern societies as well. A general distinction could be that modern “liminoid” activities such as countercultural movements, concerts, initiation rites, etc. involve voluntary participation while liminal activities were obligatory.

<sup>20</sup> Turner argues that the liminal space of the ritual transforms its participants. For example, in *rites de passage* the acolytes emerge transformed not only in their social position but also psychologically as an active member of the social group. The rituals reiterate the social and cultural norms and structures, and revitalize not only the individuals but also the social group. For more see (Turner, 1991).

developments in notions of text, archive and culture<sup>21</sup>. It led to a ‘performative turn’ — a paradigmatic shift in social, cultural, aesthetic and political theories — that puts emphasis on embodiment, event, experience and agency. Clifford Geertz acknowledged this agency of the body and all “human behavior...[that] is symbolic action” that creates culture, an “acted document” (Geertz, 1973, pp. 10,17). Judith Butler borrowed Turner’s proposition that social actions require reiterative performance of norms to secure legitimation, and offered a performative theory of identity, specifically gendered identity. Butler proposed that gender identity, just as social norms, require reiterative performance to be legitimized<sup>22</sup> (Butler, 1988).

Victor Turner argued that if man is a *homo sapiens*, “a tool making animal, a self-making animal, a symbol making animal, he is no less a performing animal, a *homo performans*...” (1987, p. 81). Alluding to the Goffmanesque performance of self, he adds, “... *homo performans*, not in the sense, perhaps, that a circus animal may be, but in the sense that man is a self-performing animal — his performances are in a way, reflexive, in performing he reveals himself to himself” (Turner, 1987, p. 81). The vast body of inter/transdisciplinary research into performance has not only brought theorizing ‘body’ into vogue, it has also evolved new notions of embodiment — literary, artistic, or digital.

### **What is Performance?**

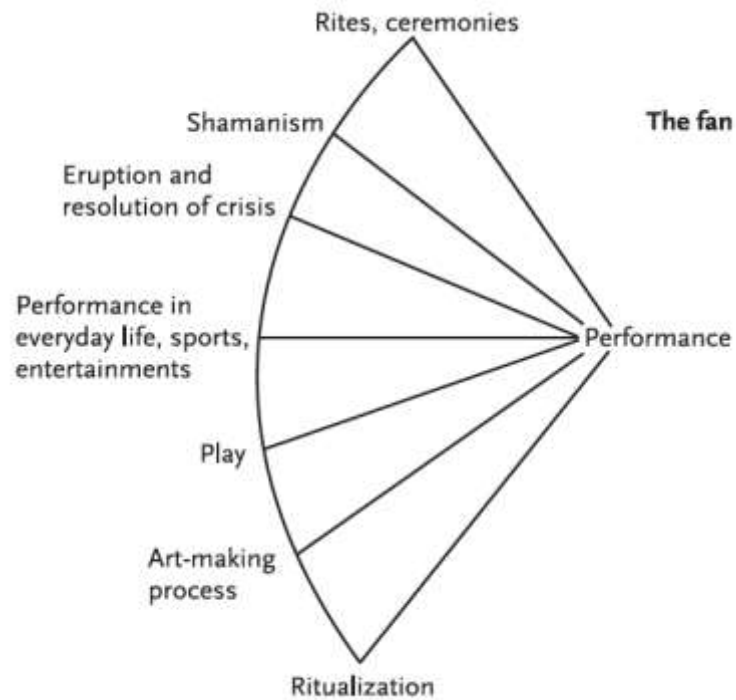
If the domain of performance is so expansive how could one define “performance”? Schechner writes, “Performances — of art, ritual and ordinary life — are “restored behavior,” “twice behaved,” performed actions that people train for and rehearse”

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<sup>21</sup> For more see the debate between Searle and Derrida over the performative nature of language in (Searle, 1969; Derrida, 1971; Searle, 1977).

<sup>22</sup> A detailed discussion follows in later sections.

(Schechner, 2013, p. 28). While it is obvious that artistic practices involve training and rehearsal, we are often oblivious of the years of “training and practice, of learning appropriate culturally specific bits of behavior, of adjusting and performing one’s life roles in relation to social and personal circumstances”<sup>23</sup> (Schechner, 2013, pp. 28-29). Performance therefore is all expressive behavior — often stylized, as on stage and in rituals, but more ubiquitously normalized through repetition — enacted within established conventions or norms of a contingent culture.



*Figure 1. Schechner's Fan Model*

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<sup>23</sup> Schechner's formulation can be read in collusion with Charles Taylor and Axel Honneth's theorization of the development of self in relation to others around us (Honneth, 2005). Honneth argues that this "self-relation [is]...from the beginning, dependent upon the help and affirmation of others" (Honneth, 2005, p. 51). The recognition of self as a contingent constituent of society implies a recognition of others, a recognition of power structures and hegemonies that permeate the social system.



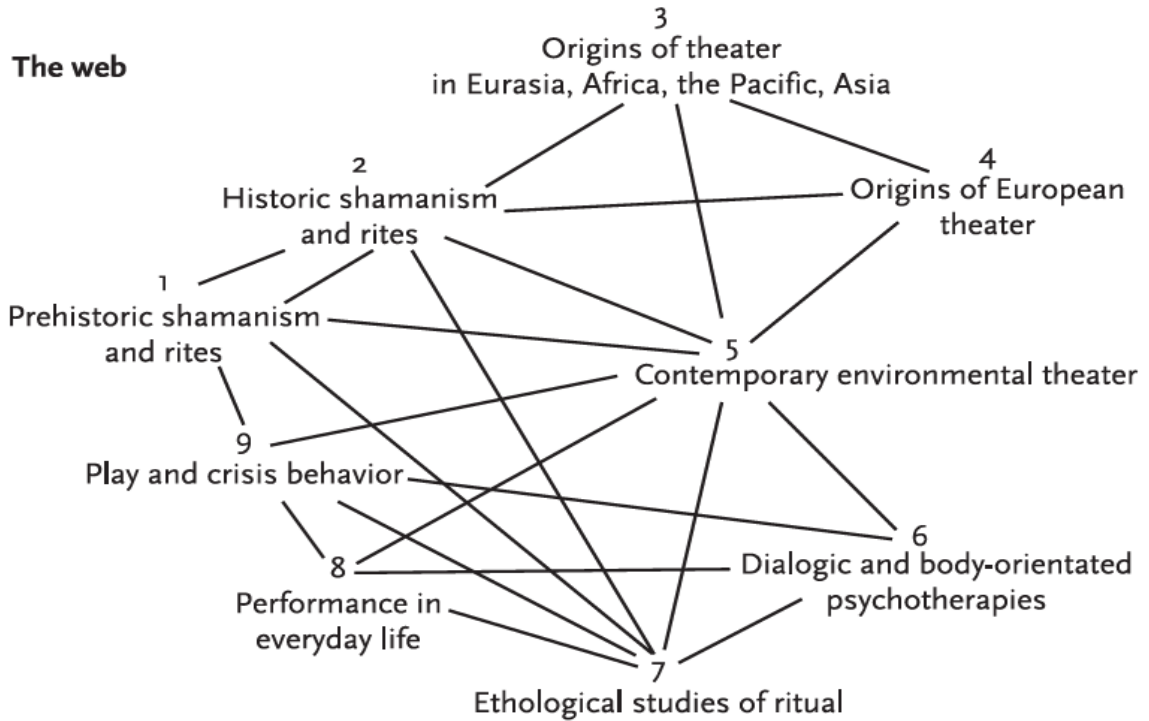


Figure 2. Schechner's Web Model.

If we start with this understanding of performance, what can it offer to the study of nation and nationalism? The first and fundamental proposition of Performance Theory is that “a theatrical dimension underlines all human activity. Therefore, *any* event, action, or behavior can be studied *as* a performance, and a researcher can investigate the various processes that go into making it up” (Komitee, 2006, 4)<sup>24</sup>. While Literary Studies or Theatre Studies are object oriented, in the sense that they have a definitive sense of an object, the novel, the story, the poetry or the play that has to be studied, ‘performance’ is paradigm oriented, “there is no object(s) called performance(s)... rather there is an idea, performance, that serves as a paradigmatic starting point for any inquiry” (Auslander, 2008, pp. 2-3). Schechner proposes a flag model (Figure 1) that charts a continuum of

<sup>24</sup> If man is a tool making animal, a *homo sapient*, a narrative making animal, “*homo narrans*” (Myerhoff, 1980, p 272), man is also a self-making animal, a performative animal, *homo performans*.

performance. He illustrates how performance *as* symbolic action connects a series of apparently unrelated activities like “ritualization,” “art-making process,” “Play,” “performance in everyday life, sports, entertainment,” “evolution and resolution of crisis,” “shamanism” and “rites/ceremonies”. As a more dynamic illustration, his web model (Figure 2) illustrates more detailed and intricate lattices of inter-relations between these activities that performance theorists can explore (Schechner, 2004, p. xvi). The figures illustrate a wide assortment, often estranged in academic discourse and conventionally compartmentalized into “antagonistic nation states” of departmental disciplines (Appadurai, 1996, p. 33). The “policing of boundaries ... and rampant intellectual protectionism” enforces these disciplinary division among these networks and hyperlinks of embodied and discursive practices (Appadurai, 1996, p. 33). Performance theory proposes “bits<sup>25</sup> of behavior” as culturally-coded semiotics of “being” and “doing” in a social context. These bits of behaviors, that are socially and culturally constructed, communicate and constitute “universal expression of human signification, akin to language” and can expose the intricacies of cultural practices and phenomenon (Phelan, 1998, 3).

Social relationships — parent-child, teacher-student, leader-follower, government-citizen —, collective memories — traditions, culture, national movements, national holidays —, and individual identities — sexual, gendered, racial, ethnic — are embedded into a lexical of the body. As an individual a child absorbs the contingent socio-cultural norms and attempts to embed itself within them as a boy, or a girl, a black, a white or

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<sup>25</sup> Smallest repeatable strip of action. (Schechner, 2004, p. 321)

colored<sup>26</sup>. National identity, and specifically, ethno-national identity, is also embodied and enacted through prescriptive behavioral norms and restored behavior. Deviations from these norms often result into symbolic punishments such as queering, social outcasting and bullying. However, "... some persons," Schechner proposes, "more comfortably adapt to the life they live than others who resist or rebel. Most people live the tension between acceptance and rebellion" (Schechner, 2013, p. 29). And the philology of both conformity and rebellion is embedded dialectically within culture.

### **Culture and Identity in Performance**

Not only humans but animals and inanimate objects also show performative behavior (Barad, 2003). Animals employ ethological and evolutionary bits of behavior to communicate dominance, playfulness, territoriality, or to raise an alarm (Schechner, 2013, pp. 58-59, 99-102, 59-65). This premise of performance theory challenges the metaphysical ontology of 'being' and 'doing' and by extension similar objectivist notions of Nation and belonging. If all identities are performative, i.e. embodied or linked to actions of a subject, there can be no essentialism to them, despite what the dominant discourse would propose. "Being" is thereby dynamically constituted by a permutation of "doing" bits of behavior.

Performance opens a theoretical terrain where a researcher can access diverse genres and disciplines and engage with "the archives and the repertoires" of culture even-handedly in order to produce nuanced interpretations of culture (Taylor, 2003, p. 2003). It "textualizes" the quotidian, through the body (Dolan, 1993, p. 430). The body is the site

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<sup>26</sup> Both Butler and Fanon argue, through Lacan, that gender and race, respectively, are socially constructed. Identification with social categories like gender or race involves the inscription of the subject in the Symbolic Order during the mirror stage of psychosexual development. For more, see (Lacan, 1977; Butler, 1990/2010; Fanon, 1952)

where ideology is embedded, where discourse operates, where power manifests in gestures, gait and gaze, and where multiple identities (of sexuality, gender, class, caste, age, race, ethnicity, nation, community) are *done*. Performance deconstructs grand narratives of communication that consider language as the only medium of communication. It recognizes the myriad devices of communication that beings — human as well as non-humans — have evolved. Devices that not only express messages or emotions but also identities, ideologies, beliefs, tradition and culture through a semiotics of the body. Borrowing from a wide range of discipline — from ethnology, anthropology, ethology, linguistics, psychology and more, it attempts to analyze meanings that are deeply encoded and communicated through a pervasive, and yet, obscured medium.

The dynamism of culture is best embodied in its actors. To quote a platitude, culture(s) are “ways of living” and they are lived through the body. This relationship is crucial, as it involves both choreography and contingency. What is performed is compliant with socio-cultural norms of being, it is scripted by collective cultural memory, and the individual’s interpellation into respective ideological traditions. Also, it is contingent and a “performance’s only life is in the present” in the sense that it can never be “saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the representation of representations” (Phelan, 1993, p. 146). “Performance’s being,” Phelan adds, “becomes itself through disappearance” (Phelan, 1993, p. 146). Indeed, each performance is unique in the sense that it cannot be exactly replicated, but it is also reiterative, as it borrows its constitutive elements from performances that have happened before. Diana Taylor, improves the definition by proposing that performance is not just that which disappears, but also that which persists, “through nonarchival systems of transfer... the repertoire” (Taylor, 2003,

p. xvii). While talking about non-scriptocentric indigenous communities in Latin America, Taylor expounds how embodied and performative infrastructure of “storing and transmitting knowledge” were subjugated under the European conquests.

“Non-verbal practices — such as dance, ritual and cooking to name a few — that long served to preserve a sense of communal identity and memory, were not considered valid forms of knowledge. Many kinds of performance, deemed idolatrous by religious and civil authorities were prohibited altogether. Claims manifested through performance ...[e.g.] tying of robes to signify marriage ... ceased to carry legal weight. Those who had dedicated their lives to learning cultural practices, such as carving masks, or playing music, were not considered ‘experts.’ a designation reserved for book learned scholars” (Taylor, 2003, pp. 18-9).

The foreign dominant culture not only repressed the indigenous culture and the mediums through which these were practiced substituting them the hegemony of the text, it also supplanted its own performances to replace those that existed before<sup>27</sup>. When the first Orientalists<sup>28</sup> — European historians and ethnologists — turned their eyes towards India, they claimed that the indigenous people had no past and the lives they lived had disappeared. Whatever was left lacked authenticity since they had no writing and therefore the burden of discovering and constructing India fell on its colonizers. James Stuart Mill,

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<sup>27</sup> The observation reverberates across the world in another former colony, India, although the colonial powers and European Indologists have not been the sole proprietors of this culture politics, and have been posed tough competition from indigenous Upper Caste elites.

<sup>28</sup> European writers and academics who studied the colonized empires of the East. Implicit in their works was a dichotomy of West vs East which posited the Western subject as the superior, enlightened being whose interest in the East was similar to that of the sailors, merchants and military of the West — to imperialize the cultures of the East.

wrote with an authoritative pride that the history of India began with the British. The entire epistemic exercise of giving a shape to genesis of the land exemplifies the privilege that the written word has had over all other kinds of expression and how it has colonized all indigenous methods of knowledge production, transmission and preservation. The dissertation disagrees with this western perception in its entirety but argues that writing has been an immanent mnemonic aid in ancient Indian cultures, albeit secondary to embodied performances. These writings have been interpreted, misinterpreted, translated, transcreated within European Indology. It is institutionalized as an epistemology of India, a primary source of cultural history, to suit the memorializing and historicizing needs of elites, while reducing popular performances to the primitive category of the *sacer ludus*. Prior to these European interference, these ‘texts,’ though the privilege of a few, were constantly read, memorized, interpreted, analyzed and expounded at length among their scholars. Commentaries were written and taught to neophytes that explains the independent and contradictory schools of Vedic thought that have survived (Mehendale, 2001). Cultural history was precariously performed through rituals, folk tales, *dastangois* and folk theatre like *Ramlila*.

Taylor theorizes this as a conflict between “the *archive* of supposedly enduring materials (i.e. texts, documents, buildings, bones) and the ... ephemeral *repertoire* of embodied practice/knowledge (i.e. spoken language, dance, sports, ritual)” (Taylor, 2003, p. 19). While the archive remains true to its etymological limitations of unchanging, unevolving epistemology textured through politics and power and frozen in time, performance constitutes a “repertoire” of “performances, gestures, orality, movement ... in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge”

(Taylor, D., 2003, p. 20). The repertoire of the somatic is at once the realm of the individual and the culture. Behavior, emotions, gestures, expressions, intonations, pitch, accent, the presentation of self are all culturally produced artefacts encoded in the subjectivity of the individual. They are “twice-behaved” inherited from a culturally informed semantic of non-verbal, non-legible communication. Even in scriptocentric societies cultural meanings are communicated through embodied practices that are governed by cultural politics similar to literary and historical archiving. They are accessible to larger participants and audiences engaged in constitutive acts — conscious, or oblivious of their agency within them — that inscribe them as members/subjects/citizen of that culture/state/nation.

### **Performativity, Discursive Performativity and the Making of a Subject**

These constitutive acts, or “bits of behavior,” the fundamental units of performance, have been theorized as performatives, and performativity as “what-is-to-be-done” under the disciplinary threat of culture. (Elin Diamond quoted in Pollock, 2006, p.7). The concept originated in the works of J.L. Austin, who etymologically evolved the term as an adjective form of “perform”. Conceptually, he proposed that utterances (first person, present tense, indicative mood, active voice) *do* what they express (Austin, 1962). For instance, utterances, like “I do,” “I apologize” or “I promise” perform a social contract. By saying “I pronounce thee man and wife” a priest formalizes a marriage according to socio-cultural norms. These speech acts produce social realities. Austin concluded that whether these utterances are constative or performative depends on their context. Derrida added that meaning is dependent on citationality of discursive norms, so any speech act makes sense in a particular context only, because its meaning has been reified through citation. Butler explores that these discursive norms are both constituted and constitutive of human beings.

Performativity emerged as any act, linguistic or somatic, that consciously “refers to itself, is part of itself” (Schechner, 2013, p. 166). Performativity, therefore, to commit an undesirable reductionism, is the citational cultural norm that discursively constitutes subjects. Therefore, abstractions of identity, morality, culture and ideology become visceral, are legitimized and naturalized through citations and repetitions.

Butler, quotes Simone de Beauvoir, “one is not born, but rather becomes a woman,” as she advances to trace the production of identities of gender and sexuality as “stylized repetitions of acts” (Butler, 1990/2007, p. 191). In the act of declaring, “it is a girl” the doctor/nurse embeds the hetero-normative history of *girlness* on the baby and creates it as a subject of the discourse of sex and, in a metalepsis, gender and sexuality. An identity that would be enforced and governed by the norms of embodied practices that would “ensure certain girling,”<sup>29</sup> and that would need to be cited by it “in order to qualify and remain a subject” (Butler, 1993 177).

Discursive performativity, writes Butler,

“...appears to produce that which it names, to enact its own referent, to name and to do, to name and to make. Paradoxically, however, this productive capacity of discourse is derivative, a form of cultural iterability or rearticulation, a practice of *resignification*, not creation *ex nihilo*. Generally speaking, a performative functions to produce that which it declares. As a discursive practice (performative “acts” must be *repeated* to become efficacious), performatives constitute a locus of *discursive production*. No “act” apart from a regularized and sanctioned practice can wield the power to produce that which it declares. Indeed,

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<sup>29</sup> Before the act of naming, the baby is an “it.” an asexual and agendered entity.



a performative act apart from a reiterated and, hence, sanctioned set of conventions can appear only as a vain effort to produce effects that it cannot possibly produce.

(Butler, 1993, p. 70, emphasis original)

Discursive performativity employs discourse and discursive practices to produce meaning and construct social reality through a programmed reproduction of cultural codes. Any performative act, to successfully affect its audience has to be situated in the cultural system of signification of normativity, hierarchy and power. It has to reiterate those codes to acquire any validation from subjects of that system. An *a priori* discourse of a subject pre-exists their body. This discourse acts as an instrument of power through which “the body is cultivated and formed” (Butler, 1993, p. 8). Coupled with Louis Althusser’s theory of ideology<sup>30</sup>, discursive performativity can be said to reproduce the conditions of production. Ideology operates by denegating its ideological nature and thereby assuming an ahistorical, eternal and immutable status in relation to the subject (Althusser, 1976, p. 175). Subjects of ideology internalize this denegation and are transposed, unwittingly, into agents of the ideology and reproduce the conditions for its sustenance.

### **Subject, Subjection, Subjectivation**

A subject is an individual with certain values, views and orientation towards an ideology who has internalized the processes of reproduction of this subjection. Althusser argued that, “individuals are always-already subjects,” interpellated, even before birth, into the imagined relations and expectations of their social, cultural and political positionality

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<sup>30</sup> Althusser defines ideology as the “imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence”. He argued that ideology is an ahistorical socio-political mechanism that ensures an individual’s discipline and cooperation in its own perpetuation and reproduction. It operates through the interpellation of the individual into the subject. (Althusser, 1976, p. 162)

(Althusser, 1976, pp. 175-176). This process of a reification of a subject continues through processes of rearing, schooling, etc, comparable to Schechner's allusion to cultural and normative training of growing up. Butler borrows from Althusser this process of subject-formation, or "subjection", and appends to it an etymological understanding of the word as, "the process of becoming subordinated by power as well as the process of becoming a subject ... by interpellation" (Butler, 1997, p. 2). Implicit in this concept of the formation of the subject is the lexical understanding of the word as 'submission' – the state of being subjected to power. Individuals can be subjected to other human, non-human or suprahuman "Absolute Subjects," for instance, God, in case of religion, or the Nation, in case of nationalism (Althusser, 1976, pp. 178-180). Subjects recognize themselves, and other subjects, within this discourse by a mutual process of "ideological recognition," continually reaffirming each other's positions with respect to the ideology (Althusser, 1976, pp. 172-173). Subjection is, for Althusser, a passive submission, and fabrication, of an individual into a constituent site and agency of ideology. Michel Foucault's theory of subject formation overlaps this idea of fabrication as a passive effect of disciplinary forces. However, Foucault also implies that there is an element of active and conscious self-forming in the formation of a subject. Foucault calls this process "*assujettissement*" in French, (translated to subjection, subjectivation, or subjectivization). Subjectivation represents the self-driven discursive development of subjectivity. Unlike subjection, which is the internalization of ideology and power using external force of interpellation, subjectivation is an inward process of self-formation.

The issue of the subject has been at the center of Foucault's work. In *Subject and Power*, published in 1982, Foucault points out that the goal of his twenty years of theorization,

“has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects” (Foucault, 1982, p. 777). In his early works, Foucault explores the techniques of the state – creating an epistemology of the individual and organizing them in relation to others – as the constitutive processes of the subject. In later work, he focuses on the “technologies of the self,” i.e. methods and processes by which an individual can effect on “their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality” (Foucault, 1988, p. 18). Individuals can reinvent themselves or transform their subjectivities by “ethopoiein” which “means making ethos, producing ethos, changing, transforming ethos, the individual's way of being, his mode of existence” (Foucault, 2005, p. 237). However, ethopoiein is not outside ideology or discourse, and subversion might not imply a reversal of power structures. It involves a conscious fashioning of docile bodies that are disciplined, obedient and aligned with the expectations of the contingent social and political discourse.

Bodies are always already inscribed with power relations. Discourse can be said to produce “regimes of regulatory production” that include prescriptive normative definitions of identity (gender, sexuality, race) (Butler, 1993, p. xxv). These norms have to be reiteratively performed to situate the subject within the discourse. Butler, however, rejects any determinist allusion to the formation of subject borrowing the idea of autonomous self-subjectivation from Foucault. Focusing on gender, Butler argues that if identity is an “act...inscribed on the surface of bodies”, it has a potential of queering – parodying and resistance – through the embodiment of alternate or abject “acts” (Butler, 1990, p. 136). However, Butler concedes that this autonomy is a dependent agency that a subject acquires

by subjection into the discourse and its effects are contingent on how other subjects interpret it (Butler, 1997, p. 83; Butler, 1997, p. 29).

Although Butler's emphasis is on gender and sexuality, and partially race, her theorization of identity can be extended to include other identities. For instance, national or nationalist ideologies too prescribe embodied ideals of national self-hood. Ideological apparatuses and discourse, through highly regulated performative acts of citizenship, fabricate the Nation as an Absolute Subject and citizens as subordinate subjects. Perspectives of subject, subjection, subjectivation coupled with performance and performativity can be developed to study the semioticity of performance that manifests in embodied everyday practices and gets embedded in legible as well as illegible discourse.

### **Performance in the Exegesis of Nationalism**

Performance paradigm can help shift the skewed status quo of 'the word'. The appeal of performance studies lies in its approach of elevating the body to the same status as the word, tracing performatives of identity, culture, history, myth and more, and offering a holistic critique of culture through this kaleidoscope. Performance assumes the attribute of a ligand between multiple genres and disciplines, and a heuristic tool with immense possibilities. It is crucial in understanding the intricate ways culture operates in creating constitutive subjects, *Fixing of Identity* (Meyer and Geschiere, 1999), *Construction of the Other* (Edward Said, 1978), and *the Invention of a Tradition* (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983), that eventually constitutes the experience of nation, national community and nationalism. Viewing the everyday life and identity through the lens of a performance paradigm allows access to ubiquitous operations of knowledge. Power is naturalized by continual repetition in discourse, and made invisible by their ubiquity.

Performance does appear, although tangentially, in existing approaches to the study of nationalism. In early research “nationalism is seen as a secular religion premised on the worship of the nation, with attendant rituals and beliefs” (Tsang & Woods, 2014, p. 6). Secular or religious, nationalism invents its collective rituals, festivals and sacred symbols. Carolyn Marvin and David Ingle’s observation, in the context of the USA, that nations require ritualistic “sacrificial death” around a ‘sacred flag’ to “give expression and witness to faith,” can easily be transposed elsewhere to any other nation (Marvin & Ingle, 1996, p. 769)<sup>31</sup>. For primordialists<sup>32</sup>, nationalism emerged from primordial notions of community and kinship lived through generations and embedded in a people’s collective consciousness. For modernists, “nations... are a contingency” imagined, perpetuated and invoked by the elites in order to establish a cultural homogeneity that could serve modern industrial societies (Gellner, 2008, p. 6). Whether ancient or modern, organic or invented, nations are a performatively constituted imagined community and nationalism, citizenship and belonging are lived, enacted, and embodied. Nation is indeed a “large-scale solidarity ... a daily plebiscite” (Renan, 1882/1990, 53), and no matter where its historical roots lie its present is pivoted on consent of its constituent elements, i.e. the people who have to routinely ascribe to conventions of citizenship and *patrie*. Micro behaviors and actions like reading a national daily, watching national news, applauding soldiers, applauding a national sports team, instinctively showing due respect and etiquette to the national flag or

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<sup>31</sup> For instance, in India, recently, academic freedom was sought to be regulated and sanitized with proposals to affix two hundred and seven feet flags and battle tanks in Campuses. The deaths of civilians in ATM queues was equated to soldier’s sacrifices were legitimized as another ritual sacrifice in service to the nation. The army that volunteers to sacrifice its life is the epitome of nationalism and the flags, or the battle tanks, the totems risen out of their sacrifice, command the subservience of all.

<sup>32</sup> Primordialists and Modernists represent two strands of theories on Nation and Nationalism. Primordialists believe that the roots of Nations, are ancient, natural and biological. Modernists contest that nation is a modern invention.

the national anthem, participating in national mnemonic practices through museums, speeches, education systems, rallying for social or political reforms, or choosing one's representatives are all collective rituals and performances imagining, enacting, reproducing and recreating communion, belonging and cohesion as a nation.

Since ethnocultural nationalism typically lays more emphasis on the notions of race, ethnicity, heritage, faith, tradition, culture, kinship and ancestry as rightful belonging, its rituals and performances tend to be equally amplified and emphatic, if not extremist. The Nazis, for example, employed the idea of a “sacred space” that was frequently filled with parades, marches, gymnastics, exercise and ritual speeches where uniforms, greetings, rhetoric was used to reproduce and establish a common and group identity based on a nationalistic myth of the Volk and their homogenous identity (Mosse, 1975, p. 208; Koster, 2003; Document Center, n.d.). The Italian Fascists borrowed their salute from the Roman legionnaires in a performance to claim direct ancestral heritage and construct a myth of the Romanity — Roman ethnies. *Fascio littorio* (the Axe and the bundle), just like the Nazi Swastika became symbols of the people and was featured on everything from coins, medals to sewer covers, and “Mussolini is always right,” like “Hail Fuhrer,” became the national greeting. Both Nazism and Fascism espoused an idea of citizen-soldiers perpetually at the service of the nation and its leader<sup>33</sup> and that involved a re-invention of the “Italians’ style, their way of living, attitudes, habits, and character (Falasca-Zamponi, 1997, pp. 89, 100-18). The fascist ideologues realized the importance of style and presentation to affectively embed the ideology in popular culture and maneuvered to cultivate the same in their subjects.

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<sup>33</sup> *Wehrbauer* or peasant-soldiers were the Nazi counterpart of Mussolini's citizen-soldiers.

Stephen Totosy in his paper, “From Comparative Literature Today to Comparative Cultural Studies,” writes that “the discipline of comparative cultural studies would implicitly and explicitly disrupt the established hierarchy of cultural products and production similar to the disruption cultural studies itself has performed. Among others, the suggestion is to pluralize and parallelize the study of culture without hierarchization” (Totosy de Zepetnek 1999). For this research, I postulate the paradigm of performance, in response to Totosy, to pluralize and parallelize the study of culture. ‘The body’ and ‘the word’ that appear as a crossroads in critical traditions are in fact a helix that run along parallel shaping, producing and reproducing culture and society. It could provide an integral heuristic method of enquiring into a phenomenon as pervasive, ubiquitous and affective as Nationalism. If national identity, like all other identities, is an embodied enactment, i.e. a *doing* of prescriptive norms, the lens of performance and performativity allows for an *undoing* of their cultural politics. Performances are epistemic and constitutive in the sense that they communicate systems of meanings and constitute culture. Elizabeth Bell argues that performances are also critical lenses through which culture and its structures of power can either be challenged or analyzed (Bell E., 2008, pp. 25,145).

### **Classifying Performance: Thespian and Quotidian**

Performance has been categorized by different scholars in differently ways befitting their research focus. The scope of this dissertation requires a broader classification as it looks for configuration of ethnocultural nationalism that would inevitably include a range of social, cultural and political actions. The classification this chapter proposes is, therefore, not schematic or thematic, but generic. The different configurations that are interrogated in this dissertation are different because of their ‘staging’. One is staged on

the conventional performance space, i.e., the theatre, or a simulation of the theatrical space in the streets. The other is staged in the banal spaces of the everyday, i.e., from streets to schools and playgrounds, from the corridors of democracy to the pages of dailies and from temples to technology. Both comply with the conventions of their corresponding performance space. The first is referred to as ‘Thespian’<sup>34</sup>, purely referring to the conventionally understood creative and performance space, and the latter, ‘Quotidian’<sup>35</sup> — the etymological synonym of ‘everyday’ which is used as a dialectical opposite of Thespian, and refers to all relevant spaces that are not thespian.

Since the emphasis of the dissertation is on Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS), ‘quotidian’ here refers to the relational everyday spaces occupied by its members and affiliates, i.e. *shakhas* (branches), *shivirs* (camps), *ashrams*, rallies, etc., and the activities staged therein. The distinction allows to illustrate the “all human behavior is a continuum of performance” premise. It also juxtaposes the *theatricality* of everyday Hindu nationalism with theatrical configurations of Hindu nationalism. Keeping in mind that theatre and everyday life are parts of a continuum of performance that conveys cultural meaning, individual and social relations, archetypes, hierarchies, norms and hegemonies, the distinction between them is more functional. Theatre employs cultural meanings, popular archetypes, collective memory and history to produce a thematic mimesis of the society. This schematic condensation of a social scenario is framed and presented on an elevated stage within an intended structure — conventionally as beginning, middle and end. The stylization or exaggeration is partly generic, partly for affect and partly to create

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<sup>34</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary explains Thespian (adj.) — of relating to drama and the theatre.

<sup>35</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary explains Quotidian (adj.) - Of or occurring everyday; Ordinary or everyday; mundane.



a didactic distance, a willing suspension of disbelief, between the object and the subjects. The audience is aware that what is being staged is not ‘real’ in the absolute sense of the word, at the same time there is an awareness that it indeed imitates a larger ‘truth’. Performativity, theatricality and the ‘real’ share an ambiguous relationship contrary to the belief of being dialectical opposites. Everyday life is in no way less dramatic or less framed. Social relationships — teacher-student, employer-employee, waiter-diner, electorate-candidate, etc. — are always bracketed within contingent frames and are governed by their own conventions. Social or cultural performances are also mimetic in the sense that they imitate cultural norms, but they are also poetic as they produce material realities, construct relationships and communities. Theatre plays a crucial role by adapting the mimetic and poetic performances of culture and producing a critical change agency, or kinesis.

### **A Brief Genealogy of Hindu nationalism: Ethno-Religious Politics and Freedom Movement**

The quite flexible and ambiguous definition of ethnicity stretches across visible physical differences of skin color and physical features to socio-cultural differences of language, region, religion, culture and tradition. Europe, which is believed to be the cradle of the modern notion of nation and nation state, is divided into nations along these linguistic-ethnic lines (Greene, 1978; MacNamara, 1971). India, where nationhood evolved through and in reaction to its colonial experience, is a union of multiple ethnicities, in terms of these differences. Hindu nationalism advocates the centrality of a subset of these ethnicities — Hindi (language), Hindu (religion) and *Hindutva* (religio-cultural) — in the definition of nationhood and nationality. It asserts that India is the ancient nation of the Hindus that has existed for millenniums before it was desecrated by the arrival of

foreigners — Muslims and Christians. Based on this primordial imagination of the nation, independent India could only reclaim its ‘self’ and self esteem if it turned back to its ancient roots. These roots were traced to the Vedic Era which was invented as the Golden age of Hindu Civilization when India held the status of a *Vishwaguru*, i.e. a World Leader (Jaffrelot, 2007, p. 8). Before the idea of *Hindutva*, the concept that offered the framework of an ideological coherence to Hindu nationalism was formally publicized by V. D. Savarkar in early nineteenth century, religious nationalism had often erupted in regional pockets in response to contingent socio-political milieus. During the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengal renaissance, the internal politics of Brahma Samaj resulted in the formulation of a regional religious nationalism based on Hinduism. In response to Keshab Chandra Sen’s call to “Christianize Hinduism<sup>36</sup>,” Rajanarain Basu and Nabagopal Mitra articulated and promoted an exclusivist and supremacist nationalism centered around Hinduism (Bhatt, 2001, p. 23). In 1909 Colonel U.N. Mukerji published a pamphlet titled “Hindus — a Dying Race” where he used the 1901 census to argue that the rapid increase in Christian missionary activities and rise of Muslim population would annihilate the entire Hindu population within four hundred years (Bhatt, 2001, pp. 21,62). Similar trends could be observed elsewhere as well. For example, in nationalist movements in Maharashtra in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century began in an attempt to save the Hindu religion from the burgeoning missionary activities. The earliest nationalist acts included public theosophical debates between *shastris*<sup>37</sup> and missionaries (Tucker, 1976, p. 322). These first matured into legal battles before exploding into a religio-political movement and finally culminating into

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<sup>36</sup> Keshab Chandra Sen was a stalwart of the Brahma Samaj. Influenced by Christian myth and religious structure he aspired to amalgamate it with Hinduism, and thus, Christianize Hinduism. He popularly proposed that assimilating Christian doctrine and Christian missionary methods could strengthen Hinduism.

<sup>37</sup> Brahmins adept at *Shastras*, Hindu religious texts.

extremist and violent riots against the missionaries, the converts and even the anglophile Hindus<sup>38</sup>, the product of the British-Christian education complex. The British State would often intervene on behalf of the Christian missionaries for its own interest in “saving souls for Christ” and perpetuating Western civilization (p. 323). This further infuriated and estranged the Hindu revivalists and added fuel to their fear of total religious, cultural and civilizational subsumption. The census statistics and the rise in evangelical activities, like proselytization and the spread of missionary schools, were often utilized to stoke fear and mobilize middle-class upper caste population. The period also witnessed the first stage in the process of ethno-religious consolidation and organization although they could barely get past factionism.

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the formal elements of these revivalist movements was replicated across India (Jaffrelot, 1999; Rao P. V., 2010, pp. 172-213). From a reformist movement, Brahma Samaj and Arya Samaj acquired a political character. Samajis, who considered themselves as followers of *Vedas* and vehemently denied to be ascribed as ‘Hindus.’ joined hands with Sanatanis who in turn had believed that reform was corrupting the Sanatan Dharma, i.e. the Eternal Religion. This period of nationalist movement remains extremely problematic if looked through the lens of ethnicity, culture and religion. The yet undefined and fluid status of ‘Hindu’ and ‘Hinduism’ makes Hindu nationalism painfully inseparable from a secular nationalism (Thapar, 1989; Gould, 2004, p. 4). If Arya Samaj was advocating the Vedic way of life, and Tilak’s *rashtavadis* were justifying and asserting the importance of caste system, of patriarchy and of the supremacy

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<sup>38</sup> I use the contemporary understanding of the word ‘Hindu’ here and repeat John Zavos’ words, “Defining Hinduism is still a matter of debate for contemporary academics; in the late eighteenth century it was a barely articulated concept.” (Zavos, 2004)

of the Brahmin men, the Indian National Congress was frequently employing religious symbolism and metaphors. The vastness of the Congress should account for its heterogeneity and although in its policy the INC did not advocate for special rights for the imagined Hindu community, individual leaders “acting in its name could and did produce political ideas that evoked religious community” (Gould, 2004, p. 4). By the 1890s Tilak’s extremist faction, the *rashtravadis*<sup>39</sup> attempted to setup a Hindu Senate as a parallel government. Although, they failed to bring about this political change, Tilak brought two cultural changes that would prove crucial to upper caste Hindu mobilization and the rise of Hindu nationalism — 1) “The political recruitment of God Ganapati” (Cashman, 1970), and 2) Shivaji festival. Both festivals laid the groundwork for religio-political mobilization in Maharashtra. Tilak was also the first ideologue to suggest the term *Hindutva*, although, implying pride in the *varna* system and caste hierarchy (Rao P. V., 2010, pp. 281-2).

Since the leaders that dictated the freedom struggle and nation formation largely belonged to Hindu upper caste cultural elite with western education, the definition of India and Indian Nationalism, naturally evolved through their positionality. It acquired a distinctly upper caste character in their imagination conceived in dialog with British and German Orientalism, German Romanticism, Spenserian evolution, Aryanism and more<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> i.e. Nationalists. “In the Bombay Presidency, Tilak and his anti-reformist group called themselves nationalists and criticised the reformer-Congressmen as moderates. The reformer-Congressmen called themselves Congressmen and criticized Tilak and his supporters as extremists.” (Rao P. V., 2010, p. 49)

<sup>40</sup> British and German Orientalists constructed an idea of India anchored in an atemporal Hinduism. Hinduism was interpreted as a primordial, processual way of life that had remained unchanged and unaffected by events external to it (Bhatt, 2001). Ashis Nandy accuses the “political arrogance of” western orientalist hermeneutics “which sought to define not only the ‘true’ west but also the ‘true’ east” (Nandy, 1998, p. 74). One of the orientalists, James Mills, divided the history of the subcontinent into three periods — The Hindu Civilization, The Muslim Civilization and the British Period. The caste system was interpreted as a system of race based segregation (Thapar, 2012, p.32). The portrayal of such static, un-evolving history benefited the narrative of the civilizing modernising Occident. It also inspired the Hindu Nationalist belief that before the ‘foreigners’ arrived, India had a long and homogenous Golden period of flourishing Hinduism (Nanda, 2004). A myth that has been exploited by Hindu nationalists like Dayanand

(Bhatt, 2001, pp. 10-28; Kumar N. N., 2017; Sen, 2005; Prakash, 1990, p. 385) (Bandyopadhyay, 2014, p. 245). Although, Dietmar Rothermund and Christophe Jaffrelot categorize this trait of upper caste cultural elitism in the Indian freedom struggle as “Hindu traditionalism” (Rothermund, 1979, p. 194; Jaffrelot, 1999, pp. 83,203), William Gould argues that these were the innocuous roots, the lowly historical beginnings, of what would eventually emerge into Hindu nationalism. Indeed, contemporary Hindu nationalism constantly borrows and appropriates these elements, and their proponents, in order to legitimize its own historicity and agenda. Hindu traditionalists — reformists and revivalists — of the nineteenth century such as Dayanand Saraswati, Sri Aurobindo and Swami Vivekananda, are selectively cited as antecedents of Hindu nationalism. Secular and composite Nehruvian and Gandhian policies were seen as minority appeasement and different offshoots emerged from Congress advocating for the superior and rightful claim of Hindu population over nationhood. Demand for separate Muslim electorates, scare of declining Hindu population and Gandhi’s strategic political support<sup>41</sup> of the Khilafat (Caliphate in Turkey) proved an important catalyst in wedging the two faction of congress.

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Saraswati and M.S. Golwalker. Hegel wrote, “[India] has always been the land of nostalgia and appears to us still as a wondrous kingdom, as a magical world” (quoted in Murti, 2001, p. 4). He also proclaimed, “The Hindus are the gentlest branch of humanity... moderation and calm a soft feeling and a silent depth of the soul characterize their work and their pleasure, their morals and mythology, their arts...” (quoted in Sen, 2005, p. 152)

Schlegel popularly declared, “It is in the Orient that we must search for the highest Romanticism”(quoted in (Said, 1979, p. 98). German Romanticists discovered in India “a locus of spirituality, of imagination and mysticism” as an exact contrast to the materialism of the West (Hansen, 1999, p. 67). Sen quotes Herder, “These perceptions are often revived to proclaim moral, metaphysical and spiritual legitimacy superiority of Hindu nationalism”.

They also borrowed the Aryan race theory and expanded it into a myth of self-definition and racial, biological, martial and civilizational superiority.

The Hindu cultural elites, e.g. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, were exposed to European ideologies and theories through their British education and that became apparent in their discourse on Indian/Hindu nationalism.

<sup>41</sup> Gandhi was motivated to back the movement because, “A pan-Islamic symbol opened the way to pan-Indian Islamic mobilization [against British]” (Gail Minault quoted in Bandyopadhyay, 2014, p. 299)).

Advocating a pan-Islamic cause alienated the orthodox Hindu revivalists, whose explicit antagonism alienated the Muslim League as well. In 1921, the Moplah massacre on the Malabar coast claimed a number of Hindu lives. Following the decline of Khilafat movement, which was deemed an experiment of Hindu-Muslim unity between 1923-1927 there were eighty-eight riots in United Provinces alone, followed by several in Calcutta and other parts of the country. The Hindu Mahasabha evolved within Congress, out of these circumstances, between 1915-1922, as an ideological pressure group to secure Hindu interests within colonial politics. The federal Mahasabha acquired information from smaller *sabhas* spread all over India. In 1923, B.S. Moonje reported and advocated “to remove the docility and mildness from the temper of the Hindus and make them imbibe the aggressiveness of their neighbours... [to end] the un-vedic principle of ahimsa ... [and rehabilitate] the vedic institution of *yajñathag* [animal sacrifice]...accustoming a Hindu to the sight of spilling blood and killing” (Jaffrelot, 1993 p. 520; 2010 p. 61). Another suggestion was to promote gatherings and collective rituals, specifically a sacrificial assembly, where people from all spectrum could meet as equals and participate in a discourse of common suffering and common aspirations. Although the Mahasabha could never recuperate from Congress’s shadows, Moonje and Savarkar, who presided over Hindu Mahasabha between 1937-1943, shaped the foundations of Hindu nationalism, that were later borrowed by the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS), a more (Andersen & Damle, 2018, p. 260). Moonje’s reports and letters and Savarkar’s doctrine, *Essentials of Hindutva*, inspired from German ethno-nationalist Bluntschli’s *The Theory of the State*, remain till date the cornerstone of popular Hindu nationalism.

In 1925, Dr. Baliram Hedgewar left the Mahasabha to establish the Sangh. The fundamental premise of the Sangh was *Hindutva* — a characteristic political definition of ‘Hinduness’ based on a territorialization of the people and a homogenization of their culture. Savarkar posited a theory of belonging and citizenship based on *pitrbhoomi* (fatherland) and *punyabhoomi* (holyland). Those whose fatherland and holyland was between the *Sindhu* (Indus in the North) and *Sindhu* (Indian Ocean in the South) were Hindus. The definition naturally excluded Muslims and Christians. Anchored in the myth of a five-thousand-year old civilization, his proposition also marginalized indigenous cultures that did not comply with these Vedic ideals. Hedgewar acknowledged the issues Moonje and Savarkar point out and started an organization that — i) had a fixed place where its members could meet, irrespective of caste, ii) would promote Hindu solidarity and similitude, iii) would create a space of ideological as well as physiological training in order to produce a paramilitary Hindu force, iv) dispense a narrative of history that could cater to a future Hindu Rashtra.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter elaborates the theoretical framework deployed through this dissertation. In the first section of the chapter, I discuss the stylized and exaggerated state of contemporary nationalist discourse in India. The section also traces the impact of colonial epistemology in the changing attitude of postcolonial societies in favor of textuality and script over visceral and oral cultural repertoire. The second section discusses performativity and discursive performativity as processes that constitute individuals into subjects. This section illustrates the utility of deploying the performance paradigm in the study of nationalism and ethnonationalism. In the third section, I propose a generic

categorization of performance as Thespian and Quotidian. The final section of the chapter briefly surveys the genealogy of Hindu nationalism through India's movement for independence and self-determination. This section introduces the events, circumstances and ideological milieu that led to the formation of the RSS and in the next chapter I explore the performative practices that constitutes its everyday processes of nationalist assertions.



## CHAPTER III

### QUOTIDIAN PERFORMANCES OF HINDU SELF AND HINDU

#### RASHTRA

##### Introduction

On February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2017, Nivedita Menon presented an inverted political map of India while addressing a conference titled *History Reconstructed through Literature: Nation, Identity, Culture* at Jai Narain Vyas University in Jodhpur, Rajasthan. The innocuous act was blown to enormous proportions of anti-nationalism and treason with the ABVP calling a statewide ban demanding a criminal prosecution of the speaker. Mrs. Menon is a Professor of Political Thought at the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) and her talk was extremely performative in its stance against the existing political status quo and its definitions of Nationalism. It was one in a series of performances from her colleagues and herself challenging the narratives of nation and nationalism by ultra-nationalist forces. Three issues were widely contested in regional newspaper from her presentation at JNVU — the use of an inverted map, her rejection of the iconography of *Hindutva* inspired Bharat Mata, and her appeal to assess Kashmir issue objectively. The core of her argument was to destabilize Hindu Right's imagination and definition of India. Since the Earth is round, the idea of inversion only becomes disrespectful when the map is anthropomorphized as The Mother. The idea of Kashmir as a “contention” also becomes threatening since it would mean the mutilation of Bharat Mata (see 2.1.2b). Menon attempted to problematize this anthropomorphization of territory which, consistent with the theme of the conference, has been a perennial concern in academia (Newell & Ramaswamy, 2011; Ramaswamy, 2010;

Jha S., 2004; Mahanta & Mahanta, 2015). What was unprecedented was the scale and magnitude of reaction it evoked in the non-academic world, with state-wide *bandhs*, First Information Reports and virulent threats of rape and murder on social media.

This exemplifies the everyday life of Hindu nationalism perpetuated by Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh, its sister organizations. Hindu nationalism defines, disseminates and defends its metanarratives of nation and nationalism through any means necessary (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2015, p. 77). The chapter attempts to explore how these ideas of nation are forged and how communities are forged around these ideas. Focusing primarily on the RSS, the chapter would analyze the processes of dissemination of a discourse of Hindu Nation and the indoctrination of people into this discourse. The Sangh uses an elaborate liturgy of informal institutional pedagogy to indoctrinate its volunteers and embed them as “foot soldiers” of a Hindu Rashtra (Jha D. K., 2017). This is achieved through routine rituals of ideological and physical training in the RSS’s *Shakhas* — the smallest unit of the organization organized twice a day at strategic quotidian locations. The chapter ethnographically explores these routine performances as mediums and mechanisms of cultural production — meaning making, myth making and self-making. The RSS aims at “character building, man building and nation building,” however, coming from a position of historical cultural privilege and often social and political power, its monolithic notions of ‘character,’ ‘man’ and ‘nation’ acquires an orthodoxy and chauvinism typical of conservative ideologies. It would seem polemical to call Menon’s case as the everyday life of Hindu nationalism. However, these are (frequent) incidents where the discourse of Hindu nationalism manifests itself affectively and performatively, and starts to infringe on

the rights of others. The chapter explores the quotidian configurations and manifestations of *Hindutva*.

### **Ethnography in an Urban Tribe: The Method is the Message**

“Humans are tribal,” writes Amy Chua, “We need to belong to groups” (Chua, 2018, p. 8). We craft shared norms and values, invent rituals and traditions, construct myths and histories in order to create a semantic of identifiable abstractions that compiles individuals into groups. Once a part of this tribe, individual identities and interests are subsumed within the group. “But the tribal instinct is not just an instinct to belong. It is also an instinct to exclude” (8). The RSS is an ethno-centric tribe that perpetuates an ideology of exclusive territorial belonging to the Indian subcontinent. Its precursors and founders — *zamindars* (landowners), businessmen, civil servants — emerged within urban colonial India and in its 90 years the Sangh has largely operated within urban spaces. Its membership is voluntary but effectively permanent - “once a *Swayamsewak*, always a *Swayamsewak*” (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2015, p. 59). Its membership today extends across careers and sectors - civil servants, politicians, students, teachers, etc. — that are united under the ideological banner of *Hindutva*. In persistence it is compared to a hydra and has not only survived state-imposed bans and public outrages but has also evolved and succeeded in multidimensional expansion, diffusing its ideology across a formidable network of volunteers.

Ideology is produced at multiple sites — in publications, dictums and ideological speeches and in the routine communions and narratives of the smallest unit of a community, in the case of *Hindutva*, the *Swayamsewaks*. The methodology of ethnography enables a reflexive analysis of discursive and cultural production of ideology brewed in the Sangh’s

smallest unit — the Shakha. Aimed at navigating these processes of ideology and identity production the subject of this ethnography are the Hindu men who constitute the rank and file of the RSS — an assortment of the urban middle class demographic<sup>42</sup>. The study employed field observation and unstructured interviews for qualitative data collection wherever possible. However, it also significantly relies on other ethnographic artefacts like newspaper and magazine articles, interviews, documentaries, and propaganda publications. The ethnographic artefacts furnished information that was either curtailed, inhibited or denied to me for several reasons. The interviews were conducted over a period of eighteen months with members and office bearers of the Hindu Right organizations who were the key participants. Focus group discussions were also conducted with young member of the Sangh. The RSS remains the focus of the study as it has positioned itself at the center of contemporary Hindu nationalism movement and has produced a significant ripple in realpolitik using its large voluntary membership. Though the RSS remained at the focus of the study, ethnographic fieldwork was also conducted with *Sanatan Sanstha*, an extremist Hindu Nationalist organization, activities of similar organizations like Hindu Janjagruti Samiti, Hindu Yuva Vahini and other affiliates were closely monitored through media and social media channels, in order to curate the diverse ideological manifestations of *Hindutva*. Owing to issues of access, ethnographic fieldwork and data collection has only

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<sup>42</sup> The urban origins of *Hindutva* and Sangh Parivar have been extensively discussed. It was mainly in “urban environments, rich in education, associational life...’civic engagement’ and ‘social capital’ that the Hindu Nationalist movement has found its most receptive audience” (Hansen, 1999, p. 7). The resentment of the urban middle class with the Minto Morley reforms catalyzed the rise of the Sangh’s earliest precursors, the Hindu Sabhas (Jaffrelot, 2007, p. 11). Not only was the Sangh itself formally constituted in an affluent colonial city, Nagpur, its influence within similar environments has consistently been chronicled over the years. See (Curran, 1950, p. 96; Hansen, 1999; Jaffrelot C., 2007; Nandy, 1997, p. 63; Bhatt, 2001, pp. 32-3,57,169, 190; Basu A. , 1996, p. 61; Pinch, 1996, p. 158; Frietag, 1996, pp. 216-17; Sarkar S., 1996, p. 290; Basu, Datta, Sarkar, Sarkar, & Sen, 1993, pp. 36,68,80). Manisha Basu traces the growth of a new cadre of “metropolitan *Hindutva*”- a cadre of educated, affluent, technocratic and digitally-enabled men adept in a “pan-Indian, Anglophone discourse ... of Hindu India” (Basu M. , 2017, p. 15).

been undertaken with the male members of the organizations. Attempts made through official channels, to engage with other organizations like the Hindu Mahasabha and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad were unfortunately either ignored or denied without explanation.

Although substantial portions of fieldwork have been carried out in Goa, pilot studies were undertaken in other regions like Delhi, Muzaffarnagar, Nagpur, Siwan and Jamshedpur. The objective for this selection was to get a broader empirical perspective in the operations and experiences of Hindu nationalism. It also exposed an exceptional homogeneity and consistency in ideas and beliefs amongst this diverse group of *Swayamsewaks* in markedly different socio-cultural milieus. The credit for which is owed to the Sangh's curriculumized pedagogy employed in the informal environment of its routine shakhas. The rhetorical similarities amongst my interviewees clearly revealed an ideological conditioning across all sections. For example, while conducting a focus group in Bal Bharti, an RSS run school in a small semi-urban town Siwan, Bihar, a fourteen year-old *Swayamsewak* asserted, "the Muslims can never be truly Indians. They marry several women, deliberately Hindu women, and breed several children in order to increase their population and eventually would ask for a new Muslim territory. Just like they asked for East Bengal and Pakistan. I have read somewhere that Nehru's ancestors were also Muslim, which is why their family has been looting and selling the country since independence" (Personal Communication, June 2015, Siwan). If not in so many words, the sentiments in the *Hindutva* camp remained the same whether it was Delhi, Nagpur, Jamshedpur, or Goa. My contention that 'the rise of Muslim population is a myth,' or 'Love Jihad has been disproven.' or that Nehru in fact belonged to a Kashmiri Pandit family were dismissed as "lies of the media," and/or "lies of these communists" (Personal Communication, May

2016, Goa). The sentiments reverberate across the *Hindutva* spectrum. In Reshimbagh, I had the opportunity to access and acquire the material that goes behind the making of these Hindu Nationalist *Swayamsewaks*. The Sangh publishes a number of behavior manuals, introduction to Sangh's form and structure, instruction manuals for shakhas, code of conduct for *Swayamsewaks*, and their families, history booklets and propaganda digests that furthers the Sangh's ideology.

### **In Pursuit of Data: Negotiating Access and Interviews**

Writing about his experiences with organization ethnography Attila Bruni notes, “the negotiation of access may, per se, be an important moment of observation in that it reveals some of the principal characteristics of the organizational processes that the ethnographer is about to study” (Bruni, 2006, p. 146). The liminal period of “ethnographic immersion” (Emerson, Fretz, & L, 2011), i.e. entering an organization as a researcher, is rich with possibilities and probabilities. The researcher has to “resocialize” with the ways of the group, their behavior, morals and values (Emerson, Fretz, & L, 2011; Spradley, 1980). The researched assesses the intent and character of the researcher and the value of the proposed exercise. In the moment of introduction the roles are reversed and it is the observer who becomes the subject of scrutiny as the “gatekeepers” of the organization evaluate and gauge whether, and to what extent, should he be allowed to access their members and resources. What often comes as an unexpected shock to new researchers is that although it depends significantly on one's social, sociability and inter-personal skills, innumerable contingencies could be at play. This moment, and process, of gaining access are often taken for granted, but have to be continually negotiated throughout the process of data collection and reveal intricate details about “what is profane and open to investigation

and what is sacred or taboo and closed to investigation unless the appropriate respectful stance or distance is assumed” (Barbera-Stein L. quoted in Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 42).

As an outsider to the Sangh, negotiating access for me involved maneuvering similarities and characteristics that would evoke similitude or empathy, to explicitly state that my research does not intend to denigrate the organization, and that they can choose to be anonymous. I had to leverage my caste, my family’s political affiliation and pivot my own indirect connections to the Sangh Parivar. Most Hindu nationalist organizations have a distinctly paramilitary nature and are often averse to academic ‘study’. Although a majority of Sangh’s operation is a public spectacle enacted in mundane spaces like parks and playgrounds, the Sangh maintains a furtive division between its ideological, strategic and executive functions and their consequent public operations. This distinction between the profane and the sacred of the Sangh was innumerable reiterated. The RSS, however, has been the most cooperative, in spite of being extremely cautious and suspicious of my endeavor. Despite the hassles and curtails exercised by them, I share Norman Denzin’s belief that, “doing interview is a privilege granted us, not a right that we have” (Denzin, 2001, p. 24). Interviews are a privilege that the ‘researched’ chooses to bestow on the researcher and in that choice willingly submits to a mutual dialog. “The interview is an active text, a site where meaning is created and performed” (Denzin, 2001, p. 25). Acquiring information, establishing contact, breaking the ice, establishing a workable relationship and discussing issues of contention is a reflexive process. This process is affected not only by the interviewer and the interviewee, but a series of teleological events preceding the interview. The organizational structure of the group, its collective memory,

their past experience with similar exercises, their ideological views on them, and their expectations<sup>43</sup> from the exercise often affects the interview process. Biases on the part of the interviewer can steer the outcome of the interview as well. As a product of liberal and secular education, I share an academic and ideological rejection of the ethnocentric ideas that RSS postulates. As a researcher, I have tried to set aside this cognitive bias. That does not imply, however, that I had to compromise my opinions and views. The interviews were reflexive in the sense that they attempted to ascend from generic objective questions like “What is a Hindu Rashtra?” or “What are the Sangh’s objectives?” to specific questions that required further interrogation or provocation without being accusatory, “Why do you feel the need of declaring India a Hindu Rashtra?” or “How do *karyakartas* like you further this goal of RSS?” and “Are violence and aggression the best medium to achieve it?”

An interview is itself a performance event with two parties circumambulating through ideologies, beliefs, perspectives and ambitions. “The interview is a simulacrum ... [It] functions as a narrative device which helps persons, who are so inclined, to tell stories about themselves. In the moment of storytelling, teller and listener, performer and audience, share the goal of participating in an experience” (Denzin, 2001, p. 25). It is a performance event when the interviewer and the interviewee contest biographical, ideological and cultural discourses. It can also be an event where both parties engage in a politically correct dialog offering mutual understanding (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997, p. 305).

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<sup>43</sup> For instance, if the interviewee aims to create empathy and appeal in order to increase their organization’s audience or to manage its public image, they will avoid controversial issues, or stick to populist issues in their responses. For more see *Social desirability bias* (Collins, Shattell, & Thomas, 2005; Lewis-Beck, 2004)



### **Breaking the ice**

I spent months trying to establish contact through official and formal channels. My emails would go ignored and telephone calls deferred. Harrowed, I interviewed a close acquaintance (henceforth Respondent One or R1<sup>44</sup>) who has been a Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh volunteer since childhood. It was through him that I was able to enter the community. With his reference and introduction, I was able to meet a regional office bearer (henceforth Respondent Two, or R2). A government administrative staff, he suggested that I visit him at his office for our first interview. As I arrived at the public office, I was escorted by the peon to his desk. Respondent Two, dressed in a typical shirt and trousers sat in a row of work desks surrounded by cupboards. He was engaged in what could be an informal conversation with his colleague who sat on the adjacent desk. At the end of the row was a cubicle which was their supervisor's chamber. Surrounded by people on all sides, it was obvious that this would not be a private interview. The ambience — public office, an audience of people with unknown affiliations and unpredictable temper — demanded caution and constraint. Since this was my first break I was already disposed to be particularly cautious. Following the conventional exchange of pleasantries, I took my place opposite the Respondent. The desk was minimal. A card-calendar with the image of Lord Rama was slid under its glass top and on top laid a weathered volume of Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram Magazine. R2 was composed and courteous throughout our conversations. Amidst wary eyes and curious ears of our neighbors we discussed everything from the basics of the Sangh — its structure, its ideology and its practices — to specifics as their involvement in Ayodhya dispute, Babri demolition, elections, etc. Without being

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<sup>44</sup> All respondents were offered anonymity. Most felt more comfortable with being anonymous. Therefore, Respondents, where mentioned, are addressed as Respondents One, Two.. Etc.

defensive, he would steer away from controversial issues and attempt to divert all questions to the welfare activities the Sangh undertakes. I realized, the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram magazine was a prop to the same ploy, when he repeatedly started referring to it. The magazine was not there accidentally. It was consciously choreographed into this interview, which was itself a performance. My introduction was naturally precluded, I presume, with caution. This interview was formally my introduction into the RSS, leading to a series of challenging but productive interviews and focus group discussions.

### **Sangh's Publications**

Unfortunately, my access to RSS was neither unrestrained nor complete. For instance, my request to visit schools and shakhas would mostly get dismissed and often outright rejected. The common excuse was one person's account and opinion was representative of the entire community. A statement I discovered to be remarkably true across my interview sample. Temperaments, behaviors and zeal would differ from people to people, but ideological and historical notions and perspectives were alike.

On a visit to the RSS headquarters at Reshimbagh, Nagpur I discovered the source of this ideological unison. The Sangh publishes an expansive catalogue of literature that includes periodicals, biographies of ideologues, history, codes of conduct, behavior manuals, and propaganda digests. An early interviewee had once lent me one of the books, which was a primer to all regional office bearers and acolytes, but I was only exposed to the full catalogue when I visited the headquarters. The publications employ the Sangh's methods of propaganda discussed in Chapter Two. With the aims of "emulating threatening others" (Jaffrelot, pp. 11-34; Chapter 2), the Sangh publishes literature on Love Jihad, Islamic and Christian conversions, *madarasas* (Islamic schools) and missionaries, as a threat to Hindu existence. There are volumes that discuss *samajik samrasta* or social

similitude and Hindu way of life or invoke the fear of ‘Others’ with the aims of mobilizing Hindus under the banner of *Hindutva* and Hindu Rashtra. In a small book shop within the complex of a Sangh-run school, these digests lined the glass windows, facing outwards, aimed at children walking by. The books are not only distributed all over India in RSS-run school campuses and *shakhas* but are also extensively discussed during ideological/intellectual exercises. As we shall discuss later, the Sangh firmly believes in drawing young children into its fold and instructing/indoctrinating them.

### **Other Ethnographic Sources**

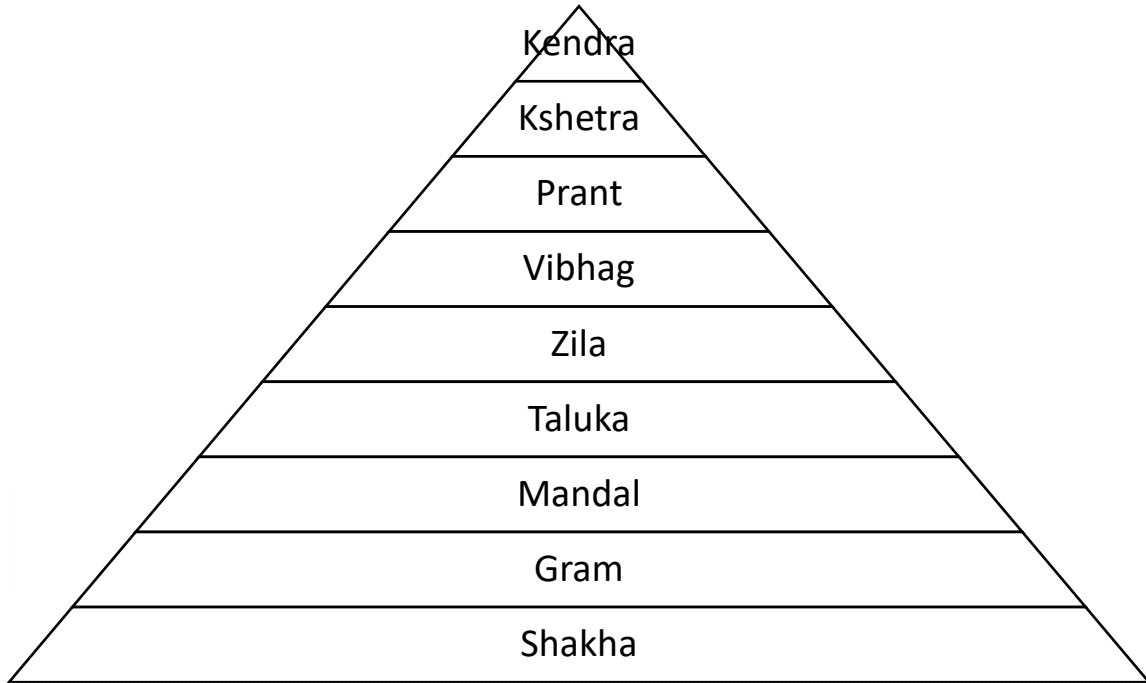
In the event of resistance or curtails on access, a researcher has to resort to ancillary sources of information. Secondary sources not only help to circumvent contemporary hurdles in access, they also endow enriching material that might have been available to prior researchers or might have been archived in a multifaceted medium. Multiple sources of qualitative data are also helpful in ensuring “integrity and enhancing the findings’ internal validity” (Given, 2008, p. 191). An assortment of audio visual secondary sources — documentaries and videos, curated to triangulate and test the validity of the primary data obtained through interviews, observations and propaganda literature. In this web 2.0 age when, “people’s everyday domestic and public lives worldwide are increasingly happening and being recorded online” (Thin, 2014, pp. 39-40), it was imperative, and unavoidable, to borrow information from social media and blogs. The triangulated data, thus collected, enables to cross check what the participants perform and the respondents explain and what gets omitted with a host of information that is beyond their control or influence and allows for a holistic analysis of the Sangh’s structure, ideology, pedagogy and practice. The evolution of the method and the dependence on secondary sources also illustrates the

implicit irony in Sangh's claims of being a public institution and yet maintaining, suspiciously, a safe distance.

### **Organizational Structure — *Ek Chalak Anuvartitva* (Follow One Leader)**

The Sangh's structure is a geo-political imagination of India divided into administrative units, at the center is the *Kendra*, the Headquarter at Reshimbagh, Nagpur. India is divided into eleven *Kshetras* (regions) along each cardinal and ordinal direction, which are further divided into *Prants* that roughly translates into 'state'. There are forty *Prants* that are further divided into *Vibhag* (sector), *Zila* (district), *Taluka* (subdivision), *Mandal* (*Panchayat*), *Gram* (village) and finally the smallest unit, the *Shakha* (branch). There is a National Executive Body that manages the administrative functions of the Sangh. A *Sarsanghchalak* (Supreme Leader) presides over these divisions through the executive body. The Sangh follows an autocratic system, *ek chalak anuvartitva* (following one leader), analogical to a Hindu joint family structure. The *Sarsanghchalak* as the patriarch of the Sangh family is showed absolute reverence and allegiance and is addressed with the title, *Param Pujya* (equivalent to His Holiness/Highness). Since the tenure of the patriarchate is lifelong, or until voluntary retirement, the *Sarsanghchalak* is the bearer of tradition and the bringer of change. He preserves the ideology, policy and praxis and defines it in his own subjectivity. For instance, Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar, the second *Sarsanghchalak*, held the position for thirty years. He presided over crucial defining moments like Gandhi's assassination and the subsequent ban. During his regime, the Sangh started a horizontal expansion, diversifying into other realms of social and political life. Unlike Hedgewar, Golwalkar compiled the Sangh's constitution, delivered speeches and

published essays that were compiled in twelve volumes as *Bunch of Thoughts* and to this date remain the source of Sangh's rhetoric and discourse.



*Figure 3* Sangh's Geopolitical imagination of India

<b>Kshetra</b>	<b>Prants</b>
Southern Region	Kerala, South Tamil Nadu, North Tamil Nadu.
Central South Region	South Karnataka, North Karnataka, West Andhra Pradesh, East Andhra Pradesh.
Western Region	Konkan (Goa), West Maharashtra, Devgiri, Gujarat, Vidarbha.
Central Region	Malwa, Central India, Mahakoshal, Chattisgarh.
North Western Region	Chittod, Jaipur, Jodhpur.
Northern Region	Delhi, Haryana, Panjab, Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal.

Western UP Region	Uttaranchal, Merut, Braj.
Eastern UP Region	Kanpur, Awadh, Kashi, Goraksh.
Eastern Region	Utkal (Orissa), South Bengal, North Bengal.
Assam Region	North Assam, South Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur.

Figure 4. Sangh's Geopolitical imagination of India - Kshetras and Prants. Source: (RSS Baudhik Vibhag, 2013, p. 74)

The constituent of the smallest unit i.e. the *Shakha* are called *Swayamsewaks* (volunteers). The *Swayamsewaks* come from an assortment of social backgrounds and age. “Any Hindu male” can become a *Swayamsewak* and that remains the only eligibility criteria (RSS, 2017). Senior members, or full-time volunteers, are designated *karyawah* (in-charge) and *pracharaks* (propagator), respectively to overlook routine activities and perpetuate the Sangh’s ideology. As full time volunteers, *pracharaks* are required to shun their families and remain bachelors and celibate<sup>45</sup>. By precedent only *pracharaks* can be promoted to crucial executive designations. Each *kshetra*, *prant*, *vibhag*, *zila* has a *Sanghchalak*, *Karyawah* and *Pracharak* who are governed by the *Akhil Bharatiya Karyarini Mandal* (All India Executive Body) — the national collegium of three-four *Seh Sahkaryawah* (Joint General Secretaries). The *Sarsanghchalak*, or the Supreme Leader, assisted by *Sarkaryawah* (General Secretary), chairs this collegium. Each *Sarsanghchalak*

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<sup>45</sup> Celibacy and sacrifice of familial life is ascribed as the sole reason for the Sangh’s initial expansion. An oft repeated anecdote recollects a meeting between Gandhi and Hedgewar at Wardha —  
Gandhi : In spite of being a doctor how do you manage time for such organizational work?  
Hedgewar: I do not practice.  
G: How do you sustain your family then?  
H: I do not have a family.  
G: Now I know the mystery behind the rapid expansion of the Sangh. (Personal Communication, August, 2016, Goa)

appoints his successor who holds the position for life, or until he voluntarily desires to retire.

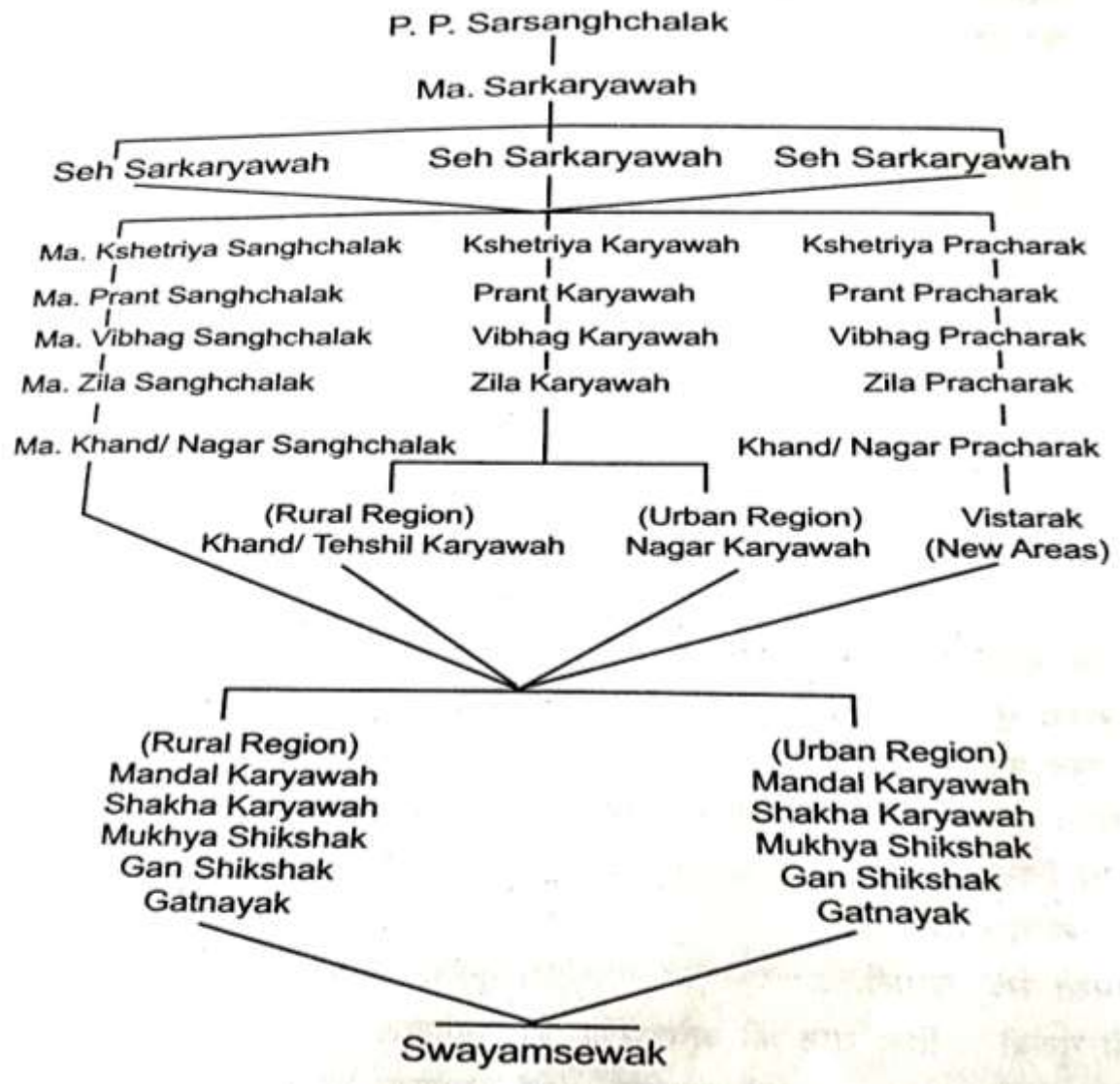


Figure 5. RSS Organizational Structure. Source: (Barthwal, 2014, p. 61)

### Setting the Stage: Quotidian Hindu nationalism

Nation is a geopolitical entity within an established territory and a constituent population unified by a common history, ethnicity, culture, tradition or language, or by a common contract. Nationalism, is the sentiment of attachment and an idea of belonging

and allegiance to this geopolitical entity. Hindu nationalism is the ethnocentric belief that India is the primordial land of the Hindus. By definition, non-Hindu demographic are its eminent others — outsiders and invaders. The definition of Hindu and Hindu nationalism, both academically contested categories, is borrowed, constructed and synthesized from an assortment of archaic theosophical tracts, cultural practices and romantic orientalist characterization of ‘Indianness’. Implicit in this synthesis is the cultural politics that elevates a monolithic definition of India evolved to compliment a status quo. The chapter explores the ideology of Hindu nationalism, manufactured and peddled routinely, that are performed in RSS operations across India. Since ideology interpellates subjects and motivates them to act according to approved or prescribed norms (Dhanagare, 2016, p. 185; Daldal, 2014, p. 155; Carnoy, 2014, p. 92), for heuristic convenience the Sangh’s everyday is categorized into three analytical paradigms — Discourse-Ideology, Subjects and Action — superimposed with dramaturgical concepts — Script, Characters and Acts — that are analyzed through a performance paradigm.

### **The Script: Discourse-Ideology**

Traditional Marxist theory defines ideology as “popular but misguided beliefs” or “false consciousness” as opposed to a “true” knowledge (Eagleton, 1991; Dijk, *Ideology and Discourse*, 2013; Dijk, *Ideology and Discourse Analysis*, 2006; William, *Marxism and Literature*, 1997)<sup>46</sup>. Contemporary theorization attempts to recover the concept from

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<sup>46</sup> Dijk summarises this confrontational view of ideology as the “negative notion...that presupposes an Us vs Them... WE have true knowledge, THEY have ideologies” (Dijk, *Ideology and Discourse*, 2013, pp. 7-8). Conventionally, ‘ideology’ has an essentialist malevolent connotation. It is false, dominant, distorted and a manipulative rationalization of status quo. Contemporary theorists like Dijk, Williams, Maatta argue for a neutral understanding of ‘ideology’ as axiomatic systems of ideas and belief that inform and control worldviews and social practices of a group of people (William, 1997; Dijk, 2013; Dijk, 2006; Määttä, 2014).



polemical constraints and explain it as a cognitive process by which an individual makes sense of the world (William, 1997; Dijk, 2013; Määttä, 2014). Ideologies are socio-cognitive belief systems shared by an epistemic community i.e. subgroups of people. Since, they constitute heavily disputed notions, they are often aggressively contested — defended by followers and attacked by others (Dijk, 2013, pp. 175-177). Discourse is the medium through which ideology is designed, dispersed, preserved and perseveres. It includes contingent social, cultural and political systems of meanings and knowledge — anecdotes, histories, narratives, scriptures, symbols, memories and structures. Discourse, through its reiteration in society, produces a logic of *apriori* and a-historical normativity that creates, recreates, legitimizes, normalizes and naturalizes ideology (Adams, 2017). Through such reiterative and citational ideological discursive formations, Butler argues, individuals are cognitively and affectively “constituted in and by discourse” (Bell V., 1999). Discourse subjectivates and “sutures”<sup>47</sup> individuals to identify with the group’s values, norms, hierarchies, beliefs and collective desires and impulses. The subjects are constituted and constitutive of discursive formations that manifest in their quotidian performances of the self — “acts, gestures and enactments” ... “produce[d]... on the *surface of the body*” (Butler, 2007, p. 185). Butler argues that these embodied acts are “*performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through ... discursive means” (Butler, 2007, p. 185). Butler calls this phenomenon “discursive performativity” and suggests that this constructivist “capacity of discourse is derivative, a form of cultural iterability or rearticulation, a practice of *re-signification*, not creation *ex nihilo*” (Butler, p. 70).

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<sup>47</sup> Stephen Heath argues that individuals are sutured into “structures of meaning”.

The discourse of Hindu nationalism, centered on ethnic and cultural identities, emerged in an amalgamation and reaction to colonial modernity — Christian evangelism, English education, census, urbanization and western Individualism — and the desire of social, cultural, political and legislative independence, sovereignty and decolonization (Sarkar S., 2005; Kinnvall & Svensson, 2010; Zavos, 2001, p. 121; Pandey, 1997, p. 236). The Samaj and Sabha precursors of the RSS largely responded to social changes being affected by the colonial presence in the country. Their campaign was against British policies concerned with religious practices and Christian missionaries’ proselytization. Anchored in emerging, and often imperial orientalist (Jordens, 1978, p. 56), interpretations of Vedic period, these movements attempted to resolve the inherent issue in ‘Hinduism’ — the diversity of practices in its innumerable faiths and the resentment they bore against one another. A popular solution to this was a canonization of texts and standardization of religious practices (Prakash, 2000, p. 290). For instance, Dayananda Saraswati, the founder of Arya Samaj, called for a “return to the Vedas” for the Vedic age was the Golden Period of Hinduism. It was the age when Aryans, the Chosen people were handed down the Vedas, the word of God. He proclaimed that his exegesis of the Vedas was absolute and the *Sanatana Dharma* (Eternal Religion) that Arya Samaj propounded was the One true Hinduism while ridiculing other religions and subsects. This marks the beginning of political revivalism — an attempt to homogenize Hinduism, invigorate ethnic pride, and organize people in their name. The ritual of cleansing, *Shuddhi*, that Dayananda invented and institutionalized to “purify” and re-convert Muslims and Christians to *Sanatan Dharma*, is re-invented in the Sangh’s *ghar wapsi* — homecoming.

The sentiment of Hindu victimhood had been simmering in the upper caste leaders of the Congress. Following the Mopilla riots of 1896 and Morley-Minto reforms of 1909, political leaders' and Gandhi's support to the Khilafat movement in 1920<sup>48</sup> animated ethnic mobilization. Leaders like Balkrishna Shiram Munje, leader of Hindu Sabha, observed that the sectarian and *varna* system have segregated the Hindu society and made them vulnerable to outside attack, while Muslims, "form one organic community, religiously well-organized and disciplined so that any injury done to any part of the community anywhere is felt as keenly all throughout" quoted in (Jaffrelot, 1999, p. 20). He proposed that all castes should be dissolved "with a view to bind the four sections of the society in blood connections and thus bring about organic unity" (Jaffrelot, pp. 20-21). Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, Moonje's protégé and disciple, set out to achieve this "organic unity" through the Rashtriya *Swayamsewak* Sangh.

Respondent Three (henceforth R3), an ideologue and *baudhik* (intellectual) instructor explained, "There was a time when India was *Vishwa Guru* (World Leader). We at RSS aim at reclaiming that position and the only way to do this is through *Hindu Sangathan* (Hindu organization). We do not do anything radically new, our methodologies are borrowed and reinvented from tradition" (Personal Communication, August 2016, Goa). Hindu Organization remains the primary objective of RSS and all its actions, whether publically recognized or denied, are just means to this end. In order to achieve this, the Sangh employs a cultural politics of systematic reconstruction of 1) a Self — an umbrella

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<sup>48</sup> In the Mopila rebellion of 1896, Muslim peasants revolted against their Brahmin landlords, in an armed and violent protest resulting in the death of several Upper caste landlords and their families. The Marley-Minto commission in 1909 recommended separate electorates for Muslims. In 1920, Indian Muslims pressured the British Government to preserve the Ottoman Sultan's authority as the Caliph of Islam. The movement was endorsed by Gandhi and the Indian National Congress.

concept of *Hindutva* 2) and an essentialized “threatening Other” (Jaffrelot, 1999, pp. 11-34). Culture is an autonomous system of “*pretexts*,” a cornucopia of semantics, myths, metaphors and symbols from where “scripts for [social and cultural] practice” emerge (Taylor, 1994, p. 300; Alexander & Mast, 2006, p. 16).

***Hindutva: Theorizing a National Race.***

*We, Hindus, are all one and a nation, because chiefly of our common blood.*  
(Savarkar, 1969, p. 39)

*To keep up the purity of the Race and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of the semitic Races — the Jews. ... a good lesson for us in Hindusthan to learn and profit by.* (Golwalkar M. , 1939, p. 35)

Bal Gangadhar Tilak used the word ‘*Hindutva*’ for the first time in 1884, to represent *Varnasharam Dharma* ... caste privileges and conservative gender roles of the Upper Caste society (Rao P. V., 2010, pp. 280-2)<sup>49</sup>. As an upper caste cultural elite Tilak believed that caste was “the basis of Hindu Nationality” (Tilak quoted in Rao 282-3), and he would often use “Indian Nationality, Hindu Nationality, *Hindutva*, and *Varnashrama Dharma*” synonymously (Rao P. V., 2010, pp. 283-6). Vinayak Damodar Savarkar published *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu*, attempting to develop *Hindutva* as a blanket concept of ethnic identity and ascribing Tilak’s casteist concept to a narrow “Sanatan Dharma — Shruti-Smriti-Puranokta sect” (Savarkar, 1969, p. 110). Published in 1923, Savarkar’s *magnum opus* quickly became, and still remains, the *vade mecum*<sup>50</sup> of Hindu nationalists. Golwalkar

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<sup>49</sup> Rao observes, Tilak’s opposed teaching English, Mathematics and Science at the girls’ high school or in other institutions indiscriminately, citing that as a reason for “insecurities of the landed class” (Rao P. V., 2010, p. 281).

<sup>50</sup> An instruction book.

is the only other ideologue who is accorded a profound influence in the Sangh. Golwalkar borrows a broad understanding of nationalism — a universalist and essentialist “spiritual... corporate sentiment” — from Ernest Renan, Arthur Norman Holcombe, Burgess and Bluntschli. The Sangh’s definitions of the Hindu Self, *Hindutva*’s Others and Hindhusthan Vs India are largely borrowed from these ideologues.

***Hindu Self.***

*The word ‘Hindu’ refers to nationality, culture and race. Almost all Indians today are Hindus because either their ancestors were Hindus or most of the blood in their veins is of Hindu race. (Shakha Darshika, 2015, p. 87)*

Savarkar, the proponent of modern *Hindutva*, proposed a master narrative of ethnicity anchored in normative sources like scriptures, orientalist Indology (Savarkar, 1969, p. 4), mythology, language, religion, and empirical factors, such as, topography and blood-relation. *Hindutva* is, he says, “the resultant of countless actions of our whole race ... *Hindutva* is not a word but a history. Not only the spiritual or religious history of our people ... but a history in full” (Savarkar, 1969, p. 3). Savarkar contends that the Aryans who moved across the Indus had severed ties from their land and culture i.e. Persia, and laid the foundations of “a great and enduring civilization,” in India, much before the Egyptians and Babylonians. The Aryans, Savarkar claims, had already developed a sense of nationality and named the territory “*Sapta Sindhus*” (seven rivers) — “an epithet [also] applied to the whole of Vedic India,” after the alluvial delta of the seven rivers (Savarkar, 1969, pp. 5-6). Vedic Aryans, who dispersed across the Indian subcontinent, eventually

came to be known as ‘Hindus’<sup>51</sup> by Persians, Europeans and, Savarkar also assumes, “by thinly scattered native tribes”<sup>52</sup> (Savarkar, 1969, pp. 7-8). Savarkar attributes, to Rama, the mythical Prince of Ayodhya, the achievement of consolidating the nation, and expanding it from Himalayas to Ceylon. He cites Ramayana, Vishnu Purana, Mahabharata to trace the evolution of more profane names “Bharatvarsha” or “Bharatakhanda” after another mythological King Bharata, but asserts that the region was still known by its ancient name, Sindhustan (Savarkar, 1969, pp. 14-18). He cites unrelated sources like Manusmriti and Huen Tsang<sup>53</sup>, in no teleological order, to establish that a race of people that lived by a religio-cultural code, the ‘Hindus’ inhabited the realms between the Sindhu River, the Sindhu Mountains and the Sindhu Ocean<sup>54</sup>. Throughout his tract Savarkar plays with the words, Hindu, Sindhu, Sindhustan and circumambulates their context and meanings sometimes as a Vedic religion and often as a secular way of life. He appears partial to the names ‘Sindhustan’ and ‘Aryavarta’ and denounces other names like ‘Bharatvarsha’ as transient and unpopular. Golwalkar also wrote that Bharat or ‘Bharatiya’ imply a broad definition of ‘Indians’ that includes Muslims, Christians, Parsis and Communists, whom he considers, “internal threats” (Golwalkar M., pp. 166-194). It is misleading and the word Hindu connotes “our particular society” (Golwalkar M., p. 98). Such rhetoric serves to

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<sup>51</sup> A phonetic adjustment of ‘S’ in ‘Sindhu’ to ‘H’ in Persian and European languages to ‘Hindu’ and ‘Indos’ respectively.

<sup>52</sup> Savarkar’s repeatedly emphasizes that “thinly scattered native tribes” inhabited an almost “virgin but thinly populated continent” alluding that the subcontinent was merely “a vast, waste and very thinly populated land” that was largely populated by the migrating Aryans (Savarkar, 1969, pp. 8,9,10). The indigenous tribes were always-already an insignificant and passive minority. The allusion legitimizes the narrative that equates the primordial Vedic Hindu/Aryan identity with a contemporary Indian one.

<sup>53</sup> Savarkar claims Tsang called Indians ‘Shintoos.’ a homonym of ‘Hindus’. No sources are available to verify this claim. He did call Indians “T’ien-tz’u 天祠 (Deva Temple), I-tao 異道 (heretics) and T’u-hui Wai-tao 塗灰外道 (ascetics who cover themselves with ashes) (Kuwayama, 1975, p. 93).

<sup>54</sup> The Sindhu River, now known as the Indus River, the Sindhu mountains, also known as the Himalayas and the Sindhu Ocean, also known as the Indian Ocean.

confound its readers and affectively develop an unquestionable correlation between a territory — India, its inhabitants — the Hindus, and a religion — Vedic Hinduism. The allusion to a ‘Church<sup>55</sup>,’ borrowing from our colonial masters, in relation to nation or national self-consciousness further confirms his belief in a historic and homogenous race of Hindus embedded within a primordial nation. Savarkar does not attempt a functional definition of ‘nation’ to which erstwhile India or Sindhustan would be compatible. He assumes the landmass as a unified nation and ignores the history of internal differences, diversities, disputes and wars<sup>56</sup>. All whose Fatherland and Holyland was Hindustan were clubbed as Hindus. Nationality was determined by topography and faith.

Savarkar characterizes the Hindus as a proud and adventurous race that expanded into the subcontinent, built civilizations, setup kingdoms unified under the banner of Vedic Sanatan Dharma. Buddhism had corrupted the ideals and instincts of the society with its “opiates of Universalism and non-violence” (Savarkar, 1969, p. 28), and left the nation open to attacks by the *mlechchas* – the foreigner Hunas and the Shakas. Its folly was realized soon and the necessity of institutions like *Varnashrama* in the construction of a national self-consciousness and polity was achieved. Machismo, valour and strength would define and sustain the nation and people — “Vaidik or Avidik, Brahmana or Chandala ... [who] ... have inherited a common culture, common blood, common country and common polity” (Savarkar, 1969, pp. 25-33). Savarkar is trying to create a unifying theory of kinship and nationality which, though homogenizing, is redeemed by his denunciation that the

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<sup>55</sup> Savarkar extensively refers to systems of thoughts and theosophy as Church, - ‘Buddhist Church’ or ‘Vedic Church’.

<sup>56</sup> The only internal conflict Savarkar confesses to is between the *Vaidiks*, i.e. the believers of Vedas and Buddhists, to intently marginalize and obfuscate Buddhism.

Varna system has outlived its use and that all Hindus are unified “by blood, by race, by country and by God” (Savarkar, 1969, p. 39). However, Savarkar’s complete argument springs from his social positionality. A Maharashtrian Chitpavan Brahman, Savarkar cannot shake off his cultural inheritance and premises his theory of nation and national culture from this vantage point (Jaffrelot, 1999, pp. 30,45).

Besides legends, mythology and Indology, Savarkar also uses language — a crucial determinant in post-industrial nation building in Europe — to fortify his proposition of Hindu nation and *Hindutva*. Sanskrit and Prakrit, early form of Hindi and other Indian languages, became the backbone that unified and strengthened national consciousness. Savarkar argues that Sanskrit was the mother of all languages and must “remain the cherished and sacred possession of our race” (Savarkar, 1969, p. 40). Sanskrit, however, has a higher and almost sacred purpose “of ennobling our aspirations and purifying the fountains of our being” (Savarkar, 1969, p. 40). It was Hindi that became the common currency of communication, known and spoken by people from “Rameshwaram to Haridwar” across the corridors of power to the most plebian *bazaars* (Savarkar, 1969, pp. 41-42).

M.S. Golwalkar, the second Sarsanghchalak of RSS<sup>57</sup>, for the first time explained *Hindutva* as Cultural nationalism, in contrast to the dominant Secular/Civic nationalism that the erstwhile Congress advocated. Golwalkar argued that a nation was a “cultural unit,”

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<sup>57</sup> Golwalkar assumed the position of Sarsanghchalak in 1940 and presided over the Sangh until his death in 1973. In the 33 years of his leadership, he left an indelible mark on the ideology of the Sangh. While Hedgewar, the founder of the Sangh, is only known as ‘Doctorji’ a professional title, Golwalkar is regarded as ‘Guruji,’ or ‘The Master’. Though Savarkar espoused the concept of *Hindutva*, Golwalkar dominates how it evolved and was absorbed by the Sangh.



substantiating it by an abstruse “National Soul”<sup>58</sup> that shapes and delineates it (Golwalkar, 1939, p. 4; 1968, 22-32). Quoting Carlton Joseph Hayes, he writes, “nationality is a psychological phenomenon — a state of mind. It has its origin in essentially a uniformity of outlook, a common range of ideas, a common way of thinking and common preferences” (Golwalkar, 1939, pp. 16-7). With Golwalkar, *Hindutva* evolved a more religious character. Hindus were bound to Brahminic religious practices and beliefs. Defining Hindus as non-Muslims or non-Christians was unacceptable to him. He theorized that Hindus were a race of people who believed in rebirth, *dharma* and *sanskar*<sup>59</sup>. *Hindu Rashtra* — the Hindu nation, and the territory was deified into Bharat Mata (Mother India) who was the mother of all Hindus. The Hindu nation was the “Matrubhoomi (Motherland), Dharmabhoomi (the land of moral piety), Karmabhoomi (the land of actions), Punyabhoomi (Holy land) ... Devabhoomi (land of gods) and Mokshabhoomi (land of salvation)” (Golwalkar, 1968). To serve the objective of establishing a Hindu nation was *Dharma*<sup>60</sup> to object to it was *Adharma* (Sharma J., Terrifying Vision: M. S. Golwalkar, the RSS, and India, 2007). Volunteers proudly proclaim, “In India, *Hindutva* is the other name for citizenship,” a sentiment chosen verbatim from Sangh’s manual, *Shakha Darshika* (Personal Communication, August, 2016, Goa; Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2015, p.

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<sup>58</sup> Golwalkar borrowed the idea of a “National Soul” from Hayes’ and Ernest Renan’s essentialist understanding that nationality was essentially a ‘Spiritual principle’. “Two things ... constitute this soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, one in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form” (Renan, 1996, p. 52). Renan argued that collective memory and common heritage were the “conditions for being a people” (52). Ironically his formative ideas are borrowed from European scholars but he denigrates civic secular nationalism as a materialist European theory incompatible with India.

<sup>59</sup> Connotes an assemblage of civilization, culture, moral, values and ethos.

<sup>60</sup> The Brahminical notion of moral duty.

101). Although, both Savarkar and Golwalkar argued that *Hindutva* is not a religious idea but a cultural one, religion and culture are intricately, and indivisibly, woven into its fabric.

*Hindutva's Others.*

Discourses of self and “identities are constructed through, not outside, difference” (Hall, 1996, pp. 4-5). The periphery of identity is defined and fortified in relation to its ‘Others’ — those it seeks to exclude, the “constitutive outside” (Butler, 1993, p. 140). This constitutive outside is not only the “unspeakable [and] the unviable,” it is also “the enemy” and the “threatening outside” that represents the danger of what lies beyond the excesses of identity and against which one must organize (Butler, 1993, pp. 140, 67; Eco, 1995). Ethnocultural ideologies construct and fortify essentialist racial identities and organize masses through an appeal to their love for the common *patrie* coupled with xenophobia. In the context of ethno-cultural and fascist movements, Umberto Eco also concludes that, “...the only ones who can provide an identity to the nation are its enemies... thus at the[ir] root ... is the obsession with a plot, possibly an international one. The followers *must feel besieged*” (Eco, 1995, emphasis added).

The “besieged” Hindu identity is reinforced by inventing and defining its ‘Others’. The indigenous tribes — *Mlechchas* and *Avaidyas* — were assimilated into this discourse of self and belonging. The Buddhists were condemned as idealists who dampened the triumphant and masculine spirit of the Vedic people and by advocating docility and non-violence left them exposed and vulnerable to attack. Late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century rise in Hindu-Muslim religious politics resulted in a mobilization of Hindus<sup>61</sup>. Savarkar’s *Hindutva*, was a manifesto aimed at mobilizing people under a common banner not only

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<sup>61</sup> Refer Chapter 2.

identifying with each other but also differentiating the enemy, the outsiders. Savarkar warns, "... nations and civilizations fell in heaps before the sword of Islam of Peace!!" (Savarkar, 1969, p. 43). In a polemical amalgamation of history and present, he proclaims, "Nothing makes Self conscious of itself so much as a conflict with non-Self ... Hatred separates as well as unites [*sic*]" (Savarkar, 1969, pp. 42-3). The distinction between the Hindus and Muslims, Self and non-Self is explicit and so is the objective of outlining differences. Savarkar's partiality to vitriol as a method of unification, mobilization and action is also unequivocal. He argues that *Hindutva* has evolved through generations of conflict with Islam and implies that, under the contemporary circumstances, it must evolve along the same trajectory. Muslims are after all outsiders, "their names and their outlooks smack of foreign origin ... their love is divided" (Savarkar, 1969, p. 113). Although most of Indian Muslims were born in India, the Khilafat movement had proved that "they were Muslims first and Indians only secondarily" (Bal, 2017). Their allegiance laid with their Holyland — Mecca and the Caliphate, far away from India.

Madan Mohan Malviya, a two-time president of the Indian National Congress and patron of Hindu Mahasabha movement<sup>62</sup>, asserted that Hindus must be galvanized so the Muslims would not think to, "safely rob and dishonor Hindus" (Bal, 2017). Hedgewar started the Sangh with the same purpose. "Hindus had become self-centered and individualistic, and had not only forgotten their glorious history, tradition and culture but also their suffering at the hands of the foreign invaders" (Personal Communication, August 2016, Goa). The RSS with its origin in the *akhada*, and the structure of a *Shakha*, aimed at

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<sup>62</sup> Malviya also founded the Benaras Hindu University, one of the earliest North Indian venues for the RSS *shakhas*. It was also the place where Golwalkar, the second Sarsanghchak, was recruited.

rekindling their glorious past and reviving a racial pride imbibed with this narrative of collective suffering at the hands of a foreign ruler (Constitution of RSS, 2008; Appendix D). Jaffrelot recapitulates the initial days of RSS — still in their liminal *akhada/shakha*<sup>63</sup> form — when successive religious processions would turn into vindictive agitations and violent riots. Shakha trained and indoctrinated volunteers of the Sangh indulged in sloganeering, provocation and attacks on Muslim localities and establishments under the guise of Ram Navami, Mahalakshmi or Ganesh Chaturthi processions. The mutual respect once accorded to rituals and processions of each other had turned into reactionary opportunities of retaliation (Jaffrelot, 1999, pp. 38-40). Golwalkar doubts whether “the Muslims and Christians dwelling in this land ... remember that THEY are the children of this soil” and acknowledge their Hindu ancestry and heritage. He laments that with conversion of faith “gone is [their] spirit of love and devotion for the nation” (Golwalkar, 1968, emphasis original). If Mohammad Qasim’s first attack across Indus was a skin deep wound, widespread conversions, partition and rapid growth in Muslim population has created pockets of enemy territories — Muslim ghettos, often colloquially called ‘Mini Pakistan’ — within the country (Savarkar, 1969; Golwalkar. 1968; Kirmani, 2008; Personal Communication, November 2015, Goa; Personal Communication, July 2016, Goa; Personal Communication, August, 2016). Muslims are the primary “internal threat” — besides the Christians and the Communists — and are increasing their population in a planned progression in order to demand independent countries for their new population (Golwalkar, 1968). Political opponents or activists that oppose *Hindutva* strand of politics

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<sup>63</sup> For a detailed discussion on similarities and distinctions between *akhada* and *shakha* see J. Alter’s *The Wrestler’s Body: Ideology and Identity in North India* (1992)

are often branded “*Babur ki aulad*” or “the sons of Babur” not only implying that they are foreigners but also infiltrators (Sarkar S., 1993, p. 165; Kumar P., 2013, p. 93).

While Muslims remain the primary “non-self” of *Hindutva*, the category remains malleable and has evolved over the course of time to envelop Christians, Buddhists, Gandhi, Marxists, Sikhs, Congress and everyone *adharmic* who challenges the Sangh’s narrative (Savarkar, 1969; Golwalkar, 1968; Personal Communication). Golwalkar made an appeal to look up to Nazi Germany and learn from them “Race pride at its highest” and the lengths to which they went “to keep up the purity of Race and its culture” (Golwalkar, 1939). This master narrative of a *Hindutva* based national identity — an assemblage of culture, religion and language — animates in the quotidian discourse of Hindu nationalism.

#### ***Hindusthan<sup>64</sup> v/s India.***

The idea of Hindu Rashtra or “Hindusthan” (the place of Hindus) is anchored in the notion of the Golden Age of Vedic India. An age when India excelled at trade, arts, architecture and science and was already experimenting with an idea of republic. India was a *Vishwa Guru*, i.e., World Leader. This utopian age is not clearly defined chronologically. While sometimes it explicitly refers to Vedic and Puranic age or the age of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, and often to the period of the Guptas (4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> century). In all cases it refers to periods, mythical or historical, of Brahminical supremacy. Inspired by James Stuart Mill’s periodization of Indian History — Hindu Period, Muslim Period and the British Period — the Golden Age certainly corresponds to the pre-Muslim era — an era of eugenic and ethnic purity (Thapar, 2014, pp. 9, 62-3). The nostalgia about this imagined

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<sup>64</sup> Although Hindustan remains the popular vernacular name of the country, the Sangh prefers ‘Hindusthan.’ the Sanskritization of ‘Hindustan.’ a colloquial Urdu term (Golwalkar, 1968).

past manifests itself in the Sangh's revivalist notions of nation, state and governance. Sangh's idea of Hindusthan is antithetical to the idea of "India, that is, Bharat," a modern constitutional secular democratic republic (Government of India, p. Art. 1). It prefers a nation based on racial purity, a state based on *Manusmriti* and *Dharma* and a centralised monarchic government.

Golwalkar rejected the expression, 'Bharatiya,' because it clubbed together the indigenes and the invaders, the abused and the abuser, the victim and the perpetrator. 'Bharat' has emerged as a culture-neutral translation of 'India' that waters down its Hindu heritage and the cultural memory of heroes and kings like Prithviraj and Shivaji who fought for 'Hindu Swaraj' (Hindu Self-rule). It was tainted with Anglophilic and Western notions of secular and civic citizenship that must not only include all foreign invaders but give them equal privileges, and appease them, to the detriment of the Hindu majority. Preferring India and Indian, or Bharat and Bharatiya, as the reference to nation and nationality essentially demands Hindus to assimilate the Muslims and submit to the history of their "vandalism and atrocities" (Golwalkar, 1968. p. 150). Golwalkar imagines citizenship as a Leviathan-like figure of *Virata Purusha* — "the Almighty manifesting Himself," a composite imagination of Hindu People (Golwalkar, 1968 pp. 25-6). He substantiates his argument by alluding to the *Purusha Sukta*<sup>65</sup> — a tract that has been at the center of caste struggle in India. While Dalit and subaltern ideologues regard it as the root of ideological violence, castiest hierarchies, discrimination and untouchability, Golwalkar and other

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<sup>65</sup> *Purusha Sukta* is the Puranic tract that personifies Vedic society. It imagines the Brahman as the Head, Kshatriya as the arms, Vaishyas as the midsection and the Shudras as the feet.

Sangh ideologues implore it to allege an ancient sense of well evolved symbiotic social organization, and the basis of nationality.

To add to this notion of primordial ethnic nationality, Golwalkar recommends the compatibility of Manusmriti and monarchy instead of a constitutional democracy (1968, pp. 212-15). Democracy, he proclaims, is reactionary and it emerged in a materialist response to the despotic rulers of Europe. He believes the democratic idealism of equal power to constituents is a myth and, “Democracy deteriorates into mediocracy and is often reduced to mobocracy” (Golwalkar, 1968, p. 21). As a product of reactionary materialism, democracy addresses the need of equality, self-sustenance and “material desires” on the “physical plane” (1968, pp. 14-7). Golwalkar argues that, “equality is only applicable on the domain of the Supreme Spirit [and]... disparity is an indivisible part of nature and we have to live with it” (1968, pp. 18). The belief pervades the Sangh’s discourse as it is argued even today that *Samata* (equality) is impossible but we should strive for *Samrasta* (equanimity). It is incompatible with the ethos of India, where pre-Muslim rulers had ruled their kingdoms based on *Dharma*. *Dharma* is the spiritual and moral principle that shall guide people to be righteous, check their self-centered propensities, and mold them to sacrifice for the greater good. Electoral democracy relies on “a counting of heads” and it is feared the Islamic and Christian proselytizing could lead to a demographic imbalance. This “demographic problem” is blamed for the partition of Bangladesh and Pakistan and seems to be a perennial secessionist threat to Hindu India (Moonje quoted in Oddie, 1998, p. 73).

Another bone of contention between Hindusthan and India is the idea of secularism that is embedded in the Constitution. The Constitution, “has absolutely nothing which can

be called our own” (Golwalkar, 1968, p. 227). Golwalkar argued that the Hindus are fundamentally a tolerant nation and the special use of the word ‘secular’ is redundant in the context of a Hindu nation. Though the RSS has been stigmatized as a communal organization for advocating *Hindutva* and Hindu Rashtra, all political organizations, including the Congress, are insidiously Hindu, because Hindu values are inherent to our nationhood. While secularism in its Western cradle meant a separation of religion and state, in India it has substituted anti-Hindu sentiments and an appeasement of the religious minorities. The constitutional notion of religious minorities is “a source of disruption of our body politic” (Golwalkar, 1969, p. 133). The Muslims and the Christians must give up the notion of being “religious minority... their foreign mental complexion” and assimilate into the mainstream culture. In comparison with the Semitic faiths, Hinduism has an inherent culture of toleration and acceptance. The Jews crucified Christ, the Christians reciprocated in violence, Islam has had a “long story of ‘Sword and Koran’... its latest chapter Pakistan” (134). The Hindus, Golwalkar alleged, have done no harm to other faiths. He inverts the allegations of communalism laid against *Hindutva* and the Sangh, and incriminates almost every faction that has resisted their hegemony — “neo-Buddhists ... Sikhs ... *Dravida Kazhagam* ... linguistic minorities ... [and Dalits]” (139-140).

Hindusthan, or Hindu Rashtra is the site of these achievements and ancient glories. Hindus not only excelled in society, culture and polity, but also in medicine and science. Mythology, fables and scriptural anecdotes are contorted into literal history. Real contributions — Aryabhata’s zero, the decimal system, Sushruta’s surgical science, the oldest university at Nalanda — are mixed with imaginary ones and perpetuated in the name of racial and national pride. The legend of Ganesha’s human head transplanted with an



elephant head is, allegedly, the beginning of plastic surgery. The *Pushpak viman* of Ramayana sets precedent for aeronautical engineering. Rama's arrows were the first missiles. Karna's birth is equated to modern in-vitro fertilization and test-tube babies<sup>66</sup>. It is also claimed that the crescent and the star of Islam is borrowed from the Sanskrit symbol of 'Om'. Hindu missionaries had reached the shore of Americas much before the Buddhists started venturing out. (Sharma, Nair, & Harikrishnan, 2015)

These discourses of *Hindutva* are embedded in the collective memory of the Sangh, embodied in its volunteers and performed in the routine life of *Hindutva*. The Sangh's objective is 'nation building' and 'character building' by a process of reiterative and persistent indoctrination of *Swayamsewaks*. Ideological indoctrination of subjects is achieved through an elaborate multi-tiered system that employs a selection of mundane actions, adaptations of popular games, invented rituals and traditions, and a banal mythopoesis of history and fiction. In a Barthean sense myth implies "a system of communication... a message... a mode of signification" (Barthes, 1972, p. 107). Barthes argues that a myth is a second-order semiotic system that takes a constituted sign and converts it into a signifier (1972, p. 113). Unlike a linguistic sign, myths are never arbitrary. They are always anchored in history and carry an established analogy. For instance, slogans like "Jai Shree Ram" or "Vande Mataram" literally signify 'Victory to Lord Ram' and 'Prayer to Mother'. As mythological "signification" they signify the insistence to identify the nation with Rama and Mother India. The history of the 'politicized Rama' is marred by its dialectical opposite, Babar, while '*Vande Mataram*' is borrowed from Bankim Chandra

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<sup>66</sup> The claims were repeated by Prime Minister Narendra Damodardas Modi in 2014 at a Science congress. (ENS, 2014)

Chatterjee's *Anandamath*, a book that endorses the Hindu Vs Muslim narrative and calls for its genocidal resolution (Chakraborty, 2005). It suggests, "a kind of knowledge, a past, a memory, a comparative order of facts, ideas, decisions" (Barthes, 1972, p. 115). The interpellation of Sangh's mythologies and ideological values is facilitated by a meticulous usage of appropriated and re-invented symbols and iconography.

### **Symbolism and Iconography.**

Symbols are performative condensations<sup>67</sup> of collective memory, assemblages of paradigms and cultural representations of reality. Analogical to Saussurean theory of Signs, symbols also have a bipolar structure, i.e. they have an "external form ... along some sensory modality" and a "cognitive component" (Lizardo, 2016, p. 192; Turner, 1967, p. 20). The external form is perceptible visually, aurally or kinesthetically, and can either be an object, an image, a gesture, a catchphrase/slogan. The cognitive component is culturally sensitive and is established by citational consent and reiterations of the concerned cultural group. The relation between the external object and the cognitive meaning is subjective and partially relies on contingent discursive bricolage. Symbols are dynamic and continually evolve according to socio-cultural exigencies. The Sangh borrows symbols from the cornucopia of Vedic religion, mythology, medieval practices and reinvents them to perpetuate its ideology. Symbols characterize the Sangh's festivals, parades, rituals and rhetoric. Volunteers sport prescribed symbols to perform allegiance to the Sangh and its ideology. Hindus are advised to mark their houses in Hindu symbols<sup>68</sup> (Seshadri, Ketakar,

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<sup>67</sup> In Freudian psychology a condensation is when an image, an idea or an object synthesizes multiple ideas and displaces them in a dream, or in this context, discourse.

<sup>68</sup> In communal situations these marking have allegedly been used to distinguish between Hindus and non-Hindus — the Self and the non-self.

& Bhagwat, 2013, p. 15). These symbols of membership invoke *communitas* and belonging on one hand, and on another construct visible, palpable differences from its Others.

*The Saffron Flag.*



*Figure: The Saffron Flag and Dhwaj Pranam (Flag Salute) ritual*

The most prominent of the Sangh's symbol is the *Bhagwa Dhwaj*, or the Saffron Flag. The RSS constitution states that the Saffron flag, "is the age-old symbol of Hindu *Sanskriti* (Hindu culture) which Sangh regards as its Guru" (Constitution of RSS, 2008, Article 5). Hedgewar believed *Gurus* had divided the country in sects and did not want to be one of those godmen. The flag was espoused to substitute a *Guru* and embody the immense and intangible pantheon of Hindu culture. The two-pronged saffron Flag emulates the flames of a sacrificial fire that recur extensively in History and Mythology. While

saffron has been symbolic of sacrifice and valor in Vedic *Varnashram* system, the oldest appearance of a saffron flag is allegedly in Valmiki's *Ramayana*. The flag was also adopted by the Rajput King Maharana Pratap, the Maratha warrior king Shivaji and the Sikh Guru Gobind Singh, and later by Hindu revivalist and nationalist organizations (Sarkar J., 1997, p. 106). Savarkar suggested, "Gerva [Saffron] Flag shall be the flag of the Hindu nation. With its Om, the Swastika and the Sword, it appeals to the sentiments cherished by our race since the Vaidik days" (quoted in Bapu, 2013, p. 99). Except the shape and color, other elements of the flag remain flexible.

The RSS firmly believes that the saffron flag is the "cultural flag of Hindustan," as opposed to the state flag which is the tricolor<sup>69</sup>(Personal Communication, August 2016, Goa; Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2015, p. 104). Borrowed from the celebrated Golden age of Vedic civilization, "Hindu nation, Hindu society, Hindu religion and Hindu culture, Hindu way of life and Hindu philosophy" are all embodied in the Saffron flag. It represents the epitome of Hinduism and is sacrosanct to the members (Personal Communication, June 2016, Goa). It is an essential part of the Sangh's ritual. Each Shakha begins with a ceremonial flag hoisting followed by *Dhwaj Pranam* — a salute of allegiance, proclaiming the grandeur of *Hindutva* and stimulating complete submission to its spirit into the volunteers.

The flag has been adopted by other sister organizations of the Sangh Parivar — Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS: Indian Labor Corps), Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP: All Indian Student Council), Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP: World Hindu

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<sup>69</sup> In the initial days of India's independence, RSS vehemently rejected and protested against the tricolor that was chosen to be our national flag. They did not hoist it on their headquarters until recently. (Ramaseshan, 2016; Teltumbde, 2005, p. 50; Bhatt, 2001, p. 20)

Council), Bharatiya Kisan Sangh (BKS: Indian Farmers Corps), Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram (VKA: Tribal Development Organization). In fact, the Saffron flag was intentionally adopted by the BMS and BKS “to counter the internationalist politics of Marxist labor and farmer unions across the country and to indigenize and Hinduize” some of the largest mass movements in independent India (Personal Communication, August, 2016, Goa; Anand, 2008). Other non-affiliated organizations that borrow the *Hindutva* ideology also use the flag to rally their forces. The flag emblemizes not only the history of Hinduism, but also its history of conflict with foreign cultures, and becomes a convenient proxy for their imagination of the Hindu nation. An oft repeated anecdote, that legitimizes the iconic status of the flag for *Hindutva*, retells Shivaji’s promise to his mother that someday “the green flag of the Mughal rulers would be replaced by the Hindu saffron flag” (Personal Communication, August 2016, Goa).

The green and the saffron have emerged as dialectical binaries in the quotidian discourse of Hindu nationalism, both being reduced to monocultural symbolism. In an assemblage of history, myth, rhetoric and ideology, an inanimate object, the flag becomes the quasi-divine patron of the tribe, worshipped in Shakhnas and flaunted on homes and possessions of volunteers. It is waved in parades, processions, protests, rallies and riots, printed on the covers of RSS publications and displayed on social media posts. The green on the other hand is demonized. RSS publications on love jihad, Islamic violence and religious conversions frequently portray demonized green hands or faces in skullcaps representing Muslims. (Annexure E)

*Bharat Mata/Akhand Bharat.*



The second most important symbol is the imagination and representation — both cartographic and anthropomorphized — of India. The Sangh believes India is a cultural nation that had in the past dominated the region between present day Afghanistan in the west to Myanmar in the east and Tibet in the north to Sri Lanka in the South. It therefore firmly believes that contemporary Indian political frontiers should extend to envelope these regions once more. This territory is referred to as *Akhand Bharat*, or Undivided India, whose geography is demarcated by an assortment of physical features and religious structures. It stretches “From Kailash [in Tibet] to Kanyakumari, and Attock [in Pakistan] to Cuttack” and is characterized by topographical features — eleven holy rivers, five lakes,

seven mountain ranges — religious structures — *Chaar Dhaam*<sup>70</sup> (Four Abodes), *Saptapuri* (seven holy cities), twelve *Jyotirlinga*<sup>71</sup> and fifty one *Shaktipeeth*<sup>72</sup> (Savarkar, 1969; Sharma J. K., 2015, pp. 1-15).

This mythopoesis of the metaphysical with the physical, the imaginary with the real creates a wholesome perception of the nation's body. The shrines, pilgrimages, rivers and mountains create a network of shared sites, symbols and sacred routes, and construct a persuasive idea of premodern India as a spiritual entity, though divided in kingdoms and estates, is unified by a common religious and cultural practice. Hindus travelled to sites across the country — from Rameshwaram in the south to Badrinath in the north and Dwarka in the west to Jagannathpuri in the east — in pursuit of salvation, and in the process creating performative communities of collective memory and identity. The religious act of pilgrimage is transformed into one of cultural and territorial belonging<sup>73</sup>.

This cartographic imagination of India is overlaid with an image of *Bharat Mata* (Mother India), an “anthropomorphic-sacred” representation of India (Ramaswamy, 2010, p. 121). This personification, has evolved over the years from Abanindranath's ascetic goddess-mother of harvest, prosperity and knowledge to the contemporary one adapted from descriptions of Goddess Shakti. From a pacifist, austere and altruistic “mother”<sup>74</sup> to an awe-inspiring and militant warrior one, well suited for ideologies that advocate

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<sup>70</sup> Four religious pilgrimages, namely Rameshwaram, Jagannathpuri, Badrinath and Dwarka that are believed to help attain salvation.

<sup>71</sup> Symbols of the Hindu God Shiva.

<sup>72</sup> Shrines of Shaktism, i.e. belief in the Hindu Goddess Shakti, Shiva's consort.

<sup>73</sup> This practice of cross country pilgrimage was initiated by Adi Shankaracharya, an 8<sup>th</sup> century “political sage.” in reaction to Buddhist monastic and evangelical practices. (Pattnaik, 2016) See (How Adi Shankaracharya United a Fragmented Land, 2016).

<sup>74</sup> “I show gratitude to thee, Mother, richly-watered, richly-fruited, cool with the winds of the south, dark with the crops of the harvests, The Mother!” — Vande Mataram. Translation by Rabindranath Tagore

machismo and vehemence<sup>75</sup>. At the center of this imagination is Sangh's belief that non-violence has vilified and doused Hindu virility and valor. Sangh's ideologues, from Savarkar to Mohan Bhagwat, believe that Gandhi and Congress' pacifist policies were responsible for the "bloodless vivisection" of the country (Savarkar, 1993, pp. 174-8). "Ahimsa is no doubt the ultimate duty but so is *himsa* in the service of *Dharma*"<sup>76</sup> (Savarkar, 1993). Sangh's Bharat Mata rides a lion, waves a saffron flag, wields weapons and blows a battle-horn calling Hindus to fight against Capitalism, Christianity and Islam slithering across the land (figure). "*Bharat Mata ki Jai*" (Victory to Mother India), has become an inveterate battle cry and an oath of subservience to the Hindu nation. Since Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Vande Mataram* alludes to a Mother-Goddess, the Sangh advocates that "*Vande Mataram* is the true National Anthem" that should officially replace Rabindranath Tagore's *Jana Gana Mana* (Personal Communication, March 2017, Goa). The narrative of Muslim tyrants, Hindu (Bengali) victims and the need for militant religious nationalism that runs across *Anandamath*, the source of *Vande Mataram*, certainly resonates with the Sangh's ideology contributing to such empathy<sup>77</sup>. Originally an anthem to Bengal Motherland, the Sangh extrapolates the reference to Bengal and partition of Bengal to stand for Bharat Mata and the several 'vivisections' of her body.

The eternal aim of the RSS is to bring together these parts of Akhand Bharat/Bharat Mata by all means necessary. The only way there can be peace in the subcontinent is if these

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<sup>75</sup> For more read DN Jha's "Far from being eternal..." (2016), Sadan Jha's "The Life and Times of Bharat Mata (2004), Sumathi Ramaswami's "The Goddess and the Nation..." (2010), Tapati Guha Thakurta's "Bharat mata..." (2016).

<sup>76</sup> Gandhi is known to quote this verse from *Mahabharata*, "अहिंसा परमो धर्मः" (Non-violence is the eternal *Dharma*) that eventually became the anthem for Gandhian philosophy. Hindu Nationalists claim that this is just one half of the verse and the other half says "धर्म हिंसा तथैव चः" (So is violence in service of *Dharma*). Incidentally this is another purely Hindu nationalist interpolation aimed at delegitimizing the "effeminate discourse of non-violence".

<sup>77</sup> See Sabyasachi Bhattacharya's *The Biography of a Song*.



parts rejoin and form a Hindu Rashtra (Sharma J., 2007). The present Prime Minister and his party's General Secretary — both RSS full/life time Pracharaks — have affirmed their faith in the same goal on several occasions<sup>78</sup>.

***Rama, the Cultural Hero of Hindutva.***

The figure of Rama prominently materializes in the rituals of the Sangh Parivar and also in the everyday lives of its members. Images of Rama are prominently displayed in Sangh hostels, offices and festivals. Rama is a deity of immense religious and spiritual significance in Hindu households and his images are ubiquitous in most places of worship. However, unlike common Hindu families who hold Rama as one of the deities in the vast pantheon of Hindu Gods, Sangh has a monotheistic political imagination of Ram. In the discourse of *Hindutva*, Rama figures in two forms — *Ramlalla* or infant Ram, and masculine warrior Rama (Bhatt, 2001, p. vii). The warrior Ram is a national and cultural hero, a vanquisher of evil, destroyer of enemies, and *purushottam* — the best among men. Ramlalla on the other hand is an infant whose rights and rightful place, the *Ramjanmabhumi*, has been usurped by the Mughal invader/plunderer Babar. Since Ram is a national hero, the loss of *Ramjanmabhumi* at the hands of a foreigner, is not only considered a national tragedy but a direct “attack on Hindu racial pride” (Personal Communication, July 2016, Goa). In the *Ramjanmabhumi* movement of the 1990s, that aimed to demolish Babri Masjid and reclaim the land for a Ram Mandir, Hindus across India were mobilized to “follow the footsteps of warrior Ram and reclaim their self- respect and history” (Personal Communication, August 2016, Goa; Vachani, The Men in the Tree,

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<sup>78</sup> In 1965 the Jan Sangh proclaimed, “Akhand Bharat will be a reality, unifying India and Pakistan.” In 2012, Narendra Modi, then Chief Minister of Gujarat echoed similar sentiments in an interview to Shahid Siddqui emphasizing the need for “popular consent” to achieve this. Ram Madhav, the General Secretary of BJP repeated the statement in an interview to Al Jazeera at the Oxford Union in 2015 (Kumar, 2016).

2002). Ram and Hanuman are the ideals for the “warrior spirit” and “masculine Hinduism” that *Hindutva* espouses (Personal Communication, August 2016, Goa; Bannerjee S. , 2005). In the name of Ram, *Swayamsewaks* and members of other allied organizations organized prayers, fundraisers and camps in their regions, collected funds and men to facilitate the movement (Chatterjee M., 1994; Vachani, The Boy in The Branch). In a ritual of populist collective possession, bricks were sanctified in constituencies and donated for the purpose of building the Ram Mandir over the demolished Babri Mosque.

A *pracharak* insistently argued that Rama was “the oldest *pracharak* who travelled across India from Ayodhya to Sri Lanka and proliferated the Vedic religion” (Personal Communication, November 2015, Goa). With Ram as the ideal Hindu man, Sita becomes the ideal Hindu woman, silently living in his shadows, and Hanuman becomes the symbol of an ideal devout. If Ram is the ideal *pracharak* for RSS and VHP, Sita is the model for Rashtriya Swayamsewika Samiti and Hanuman the patron of Bajrang Dal<sup>79</sup>. Much like Bharat Mata, Rama’s identification with the nation is complete and absolute and slogans like, “*Is desh me rehna hoga, Jai Shree Rama kehna hoga*” (If you have to live in this country you’ll have to chant Hail Lord Rama) have emerged as axioms of belonging. Political opponents are frequently compared to villains from Ramayana, and Ram Mandir has become central to the electoral politics<sup>80</sup>.

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<sup>79</sup> Rashtriya Sewika Samiti or the National Women Volunteers Society is a parallel women’s organization to the Sangh. Bajrang Dal or Hanuman’s Army is the paramilitary wing of VHP. Hanuman, a monkey, was the most ardent devout of Rama. He single-handedly burned down Lanka and was known for unquestioning devotion and indiscriminate destruction, ideals Bajrang Dal gladly replicates in contemporary politics.

<sup>80</sup> In February, 2018, the Prime Minister humorously compared Renuka Chaudhary’s, a fellow Member of Parliament, laughter to the demoness Surpanakha, Ravana’s sister (Iyer, 2018). In March 2018, Nand Kumar Gupta, a Cabinet Minister in the BJP cabinet, compared Mulayam Singh to Ravan, Akhilesh Yadav to Meghnad, Shivpal Yadav to Kumbhkaran and Mayawati to Surpanakha (Ahmed Q. F., 2018).

### *Weapons — Swords/Trishul.*

As we have already established, the Sangh is an organization that believes in a masculine nation under perpetual attack by foreigners and foreign culture, communists, booming Muslim population and rising Christian evangelism. To add to this victim complex is the belief that non-violence and pacifism emasculated Hindus making them so vulnerable that Mughals, British, Portuguese and the French could conveniently colonize our territory and convert our population. The Sangh, therefore, naturally advocates martial and paramilitary preparedness. It provides possession of weapons and provides for their training. Although baton is the weapon of choice for routine physical training, both traditional and advanced weapons are encouraged. An assortment of weapons is worshipped according to a quasi-Vedic ritual of *Shastra Pujan*<sup>81</sup>, on Founder's Day. Swords and *trishuls*<sup>82</sup> (trident) are distributed on Maharana Pratap Jayanti (Maharana Pratap's birthday) and Shivaji Jayanti (Shivaji's birthdays), which is also celebrated as *Hindu Samrajya Diwas* or Hindu Empire Day (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2015, p. 132). There have been alleged incidents when weapons were distributed days before coordinated pogroms to be used therein. Swords and trishuls are frequently brandished in protests and processions (Manchanda, 2009, p. 187). The *trishul*, a throwing weapon, is borrowed from the corpus of Hindu Gods and transformed into a short hand-held dagger intended for close combats. A *Diksha Samaroh*<sup>83</sup> is organized periodically where members of the Bajrang Dal are felicitated with this dagger-*trishul* marking their investiture as acolytes. These acolytes are instructed to always bear the *trishuls* on their person and use

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<sup>81</sup> Translation: Weapon Worship

<sup>82</sup> The *Trishul* is a theosophical symbol that refers to the centrality of triads in Shaivism. Conventionally it is a long-staffed pike mounted with a three-pronged spear.

<sup>83</sup> Graduation ceremony.

them to prevent “cow slaughter, Love Jihad and conversions” (Personal Communication, February 2018, Goa).

Organizations of the Sangh Parivar also provide routine training in handling advanced weapons like revolvers, shotguns and assault rifles to women and children. Weapons have played a symbolic as well as functional role in the Sangh’s rituals. Symbolically the traditional weapons embody a nostalgia to the Golden days of yore — the Aryan/Vedic days, the days of Maharana Pratap and Shivaji, an age of imperial dominance and martial glory for the Hindus. Functionally, the weapons have been used in riots, pogroms and similar incidents to wage wars against ideological ‘others’ (Anwar, 2018).

### **The Subject-Characters: The Swayamsewak**

*No nation can hope to survive with its young men given over to sensuality and effeminacy ... the Sangh [is] dedicated to forge our people into a pure, holy, benevolent and organized life, breathing the spirit of sacrifice and heroism, and based on the ... foundation of our ancient and glorious nationhood, that can be relied upon to protect and rejuvenate our nation.* (Golwalkar, 1968, pp. 229-30)

Since its inception the Sangh has firmly believed in initiating young boys into its folds. Exposure to ideological formations at a tender age enables an early and efficient subjectivization (Chapter 2). The children are introduced to the beliefs and norms of the Sangh and embedded into a discourse of ethno-centric kinship. Interpellated in a regime of hierarchies, hardcoded into the Sangh’s routine and organizational apparatus, morality, identity, cultural pride and masculinity. Introduced to an oblique identification of Sangh with the nation, the young *Swayamsewak* becomes a subject of the discourse. He is not

only constituted by this discourse, but also becomes an active agent in its proliferation. His subjection to the discursive regime, inaugurates him as a subject and transforms him into an instrument of further subjectivization.

Hedgewar's first Shakha started with around twenty-five boys aged between twelve to fourteen years. Instead of delivering motivational or patriotic speeches to these young minds, he would encourage them to play games like Kabaddi. Early shakhas would conclude discussions that now forms the core of the Sangh's ideology. One of the respondents explained, "Children at a young age are very impressionable. Their brains are like clay. They are skittish but curious and with little effort they can be easily molded into the Sangh's *vichardhara* [ideology]. Pre-teen years are the best time to train them into the Sangh's beliefs, customs and discipline" (Personal Communication, August 2016, Goa). K.S. Sudarshan, a Supreme Leader, suggests "*Shishus* (young kids) ... are malleable and receptive of the culture taught to them" (quoted in Vachani, 1993). At this age it is possible to achieve lifelong allegiance. Unsurprisingly, all *Swayamsewaks* and *karyakartas* I met and interviewed had been in the Shakhas for as long as they could recall. Numerous three to four year-old kids dressed up in the Sangh *ganvesh* (uniform) accompanied their proud selfie-clicking parents in the *Shastra Pujan* (Arms Worship) and Annual Founders day celebration on Vijay Dashmi.

The Shakha and the *Swayamsewaks* are the essence of the Sangh. At the time of writing, the Sangh has set up approximately 57,185 daily Shakhas, and has enrolled several million *Swayamsewaks*. It is impossible to approximate the number of *Swayamsewaks* since the membership remains unregistered and informal. The *Swayamsewaks* participate in voluntary social work, run schools for urban, rural and tribal regions, contribute in the

event of natural disasters and are the key agents in the Sangh's goal of organizing Hindus. "Lighting one candle with another," a *Swayamsewak* is expected and encouraged to perpetuate the Sangh's ideology, to represent the Sangh in his social circle and bring more people into the Sangh's folds. Student *Swayamsewaks* employ a subtle, emotional and affective method of "soft interpellation" into the Sangh's discourse of race, religion, culture, community and kinship (Pfister, 2016, p. 52). They are encouraged to be friendly and courteous to meritorious students in their classes and educate them about the merits of the Sangh's agenda. Incidentally, this is how Bhaiyaji Dani recruited M.S. Golwalkar who would ascend to be the second Supreme Leader of the Sangh (Sheshadri, Ketkar, & Bhagwat, 2016 (Reprint), p. 9).

It is often said, "The Sangh does nothing, the *Swayamsewaks* do everything [*sic*] (Personal Communication, August, 2016)," a quote I later discovered, verbatim, in one of Sangh's manuals (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2015, p. 62). While the quote is intended to illustrate the humility of the organization and infuse the spirit of belongingness among the *Swayamsewaks*, one cannot shake off an underlying ominous assurance of deniability<sup>84</sup>. In the past Godse, a *pracharak*, assassinated Gandhi, *Swayamsewaks* have also conspired to spark communal violence (Vachani, 1993), mobilized people from all over India to demolish the Babri Masjid in 1992 (Personal Communication, July 2016, Goa; Interview August, 2016, Goa; Patwardhan, 1992), and they also constitute the major force of election campaigners for the Sangh's political wing, the BJP.

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<sup>84</sup> The Sangh has been banned on three occasions but manages to evade conviction sheltered by this principle.

### **Vertical Expansion: Membership.**

The *Swayamsewaks* are also responsible for the steady expansion from Nagpur to the rest of India. After completing their Instructor's Training Camp and Officer's Training Camp, *pracharaks* headed outside Nagpur to expand the roots of the Sangh. As someone explained, "the *shakha* is like a Hydra, and the *Swayamsewaks* are like its spores<sup>85</sup> that are disseminated and emerge into new *shakhas* and new *Vibhags*" (Interview, November 2015, Goa). In 1928, Bhaiyaji Dani started a *shakha* in Benaras Hindu University, Varanasi, with the approval of Madan Mohan Malviya. After 1930, the *shakhas* expanded extensively in the rest of North India impinging onto organizations with familiar beliefs, such as the Arya Samaj or the Hindu Mahasabha (Personal Communication, August, 2016, Goa; Sheshadri, Ketkar, & Bhagwat, 2016 (Reprint), p. 9; Jaffrelot, 1999, p. 66).

Young *Swayamsewaks* are also induced to contribute at least 3-5 years of their lives as a full-time volunteer and invest this time in improving Sangh's presence in regions like North-East. "If Christian missionaries can come to north-east from miles away, why can't we, the sons of the *Bharat Ma* (Mother India) go and repay the debt of her milk" (Personal Communication, November 2015, Goa).

### **Horizontal Expansion: Sister Organizations of the Sangh-Family.**

Early *Swayamsewaks* are also encouraged to work with other organizations and learn their methods, strategies and worldviews and incorporate them within the Sangh's structure. With this aim, several offshoots have emerged catering to issues that span across student, teachers, women, tribal, labor, farmer and ex-soldier affairs. Members often join other organizations to learn about issues and methods of mobilization that can be replicated as a hybrid of *Hindutva*. A respondent, who has been a *Swayamsewak* for 40 years,

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<sup>85</sup> A factual clarification - The Hydra does not reproduce through spores.

informed that Dattopant Baburao Thengadi was sent to join the Communist Party of India (CPI) and learn from them the strategies of labor mobilization. Allegedly, he spent two-three years, learning their ways before starting the Bharat Mazdoor Sangh (BMS) — an association aimed at ‘nationalizing’ the workers as opposed to the CPI’s ‘internationalization’. Instead of class-struggle, the workers were inspired to work as contributors and stakeholders in “nation building”. BMS has been immensely successful in disrupting the communism-based class-politics and initiating workers into one that is based on *Hindutva*. The respondent pontificated, “We learned from them and we did it better” (Personal Communication, July 2018, Goa).

*Pracharaks* have set up over forty such subsidiary organizations that include schools, hostels, research centers, think tanks and publication houses, and perpetuate an ideological double helix of religio-cultural identity combined with issues of contemporary relevance such as religion, development, economy, education, farmers’ rights, women’s rights and more. This large body of sister organizations sprung from RSS is colloquially referred to as “*Sangh Parivar*” or the Sangh Family (Appendix A). Like any conventional Hindu family, the patriarch presides over the members, dictates goals, defines norms and issues value judgements. He embodies tradition and culture and affinity or affection is indistinguishable from deference and absolute subservience. BJP, the party that won the electoral mandate in 2014 and governs the country has made annual presentations and delivered reports to the National Executive Body of the Sangh (PTI, 2018). Recommendations from other sister concerns have also leveraged policy decisions. For instance, the Central Government, banned HPV vaccination<sup>86</sup> based on Swadeshi Jagran

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<sup>86</sup> A preventive measure for cervical cancer.



Manch's claim that it would "divert resources from more worthwhile health initiative" (Ghosh A. , 2018).

Besides the organizations directly established by Pracharaks, Sangh's ideology has inspired innumerable other organizations. To name a few, Bhonsala Military School, Sanatan Sanstha, Abhinav Bharat, Hindu Yuva Vahini and Sri Ram Sene borrow ideas and ideals of Hindu nationalism from the Sangh. These organizations work closely, share ideological and human resources, and organize camps that liaison an exchange of polemics and arms training. While working with Sanatan Sanstha, I was informed of a network of over four hundred similar organizations fervently working to realize the goal of making India a Hindu nation by 2023. It would be incorrect to suggest that all allied organizations are replicas of each other. There are dissonances among these organizations. For instance, the Sangh perceives Sanatan Sanstha as "a fanatic and superstitious cult" and distances itself from its activities while Sanatan Sanstha alleges that "the Sangh has become liberal and has emulated the western ideals it should oppose" (Personal Communication, August 2016, Goa). However, since they target the same demographic, there are frequent symbiotic correspondences. Horizontal expansion into different fields and methodologies, allows the Sangh access to a large army of volunteers that is divided, perhaps, by social situations, or even by methodologies, but united under the aegis of *Hindutva*. The administrative detachment between these allows the Executive body of the Sangh to distance itself, in case of an incident, and ascribe them the label of "reactionary Hinduism" or fringe. Rakesh Sinha, a Sangh Ideologue confesses, "The RSS attracts all kinds of Hindu activists" but credits its "organizational skill and flexibility ... [that makes it] ... an ideological melting pot" (Sinha, 2016).

## **The Act: Routine and Rituals**

*I have thought out a scheme based on the Hindu Dharma Shastra which provides for the standardization of Hinduism throughout India... this ideal cannot be brought to effect unless we have our own swaraj [self-rule] with a Hindu as a dictator like Shivaji of old or Mussolini or Hitler of present day Italy or Germany... this does not mean that we have to sit with folded hands until some such dictator arises in India. We should formulate a scientific scheme and carry on a propaganda for it.” (B.S. Moonje quoted in Islam, 2002, p28)*

*“The foremost task before us, therefore, is the moulding of ... disciplined and virile national manhood. And verily, this is the one mission to which the RSS is wholly and solely dedicated. (Golwalkar, 1968)*

Moonje, regarded by the RSS as *Dharamveer* (Religious Hero), firmly believed that a Hindu autocrat would eventually emerge in a conducive milieu to bring the rule of *Dharma* to the country. It was his intent to pave the way for such a quasi-political body of volunteers in service of this ruler. Moonje was immensely impressed by Mussolini’s Opera Nazionale Ballini (ONB; National Youth Group) while visiting Italy in 1931. He observed the weekly meetings and physical trainings of young ONB recruits and was “charmed to see boys and girls well dressed in their naval and military uniforms undergoing simple exercises of physical training and forms of drill” (Casolari, 2000, p. 220). He gushed, “The idea of fascism vividly brings out the conception of unity amongst people ... Our institution of *Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh* is of this kind” (Casolari, 2000, p. 220). Fascism was idealized by the founding members and chief ideologues of the Sangh as a movement of ethnic pride and cultural unity, ideas that were crucial for the military reorganization of Hindu community to fight its ‘internal enemies’. The Sangh identified with the *Fascisti* in

model, method and motive. The idea of a centralized nationalist organization with a powerful single leader resonates in the Sangh's *ek chalak anuvartitva*. Both agree on routine ideological and physical training that starts at an early age, and if Fascism believed in the purity of a non-white Aryan race, early ideologues of the Sangh firmly believed in the purity of a Vedic-Aryan race.

*Swayamsewaks* are educated into the Sangh's 'kinship' structure and identify with its prescribed notions of Self, Nation and Citizenship — Hindu, Hindusthan, *Hindutva*. The *shakhas* are the microcosm of the organization and the organization is analogous to the country — “India is Sangh, Sangh is India” (Personal Communication, August, 2016, Goa). They serve as an informal pedagogical apparatus that proselytize neophytes, embeds discursive and organizational discipline, exemplifies Hindu unity and perpetuates *Hindutva*. It adopts a psycho-somatic mechanism of training the mind and the body through repetitive ideological and physical exercises tantamount to the “Platonic System of Music and Gymnastics<sup>87</sup>” (Rao M. V., 1968, p. xxvii). The nationalist imagination of *Hindutva* is embedded into a reiterative logic of the body that creates, remembers and performs a deictic ethnic national identity.

### **Routine: Simulating the Hindu Nation**

*Shakha is a laboratory where we are engaged in building national and social character* - Manmohan Vaidya

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<sup>87</sup> The ideal system of education Plato proposes in *Republic* that must include Music and Gymnastic, along with Mathematics and Rhetoric. Music broadly covers what we currently categorize as Humanities, and Gymnastics, Physical Training.

It is evening and the sun is about to set. A group of young children have assembled in the public-school playground. Most of them still have their school uniform shirts on, some are in loose khaki shorts, the Sangh's uniform. Divided into random groups, some emphatically gossip about the 11th cricket world cup series, some are playing cricket while some dribble a football. A young man arrives on a cycle and calls the kids to order. The teams break up and around twelve to fourteen kids come and stand in rows while the remaining re-order and continue their games. The young man, a *Pracharak* in charge of this *shakha* and the *gana pramukh* (group leader), had eagerly agreed to conduct this *shakha* on my request. He was instructed to demonstrate and, if necessary, explain the proceedings to me. It was also mutually agreed that I do not interfere in the proceedings.

In a synchronized martial parade, the children are assembled into formations of rows in age-groups. This is followed by a choreographed *Dhwaj Pranam*, i.e. Flag Salute. The formation is brought to attention, a *Swayamsewak* steps forward with the folded Saffron Flag and the leader hoists it on a pole, and steps back. Following the leader, the *Swayamsewaks* perform a three-step salute — bringing their right hands to their heart, bowing their head and returning to the alert position. The flag salute is followed by a headcount that is performed on the leader's instructions. Every step starting with the row formations, flag hoisting, flag salute to the head count are precisely calculated.

The *Swayamsewaks* are now relieved from the formation as physical training and games ensue. Following a *Suryanamaskar* the instructor explains to the children they would be playing *Niyudh Siddh* (Martial arts), *Kashmir Kiska* (Whose Kashmir) and *Kadi* (Chain). The instructor explained that there are a number of Sangh-prescribed games that the instructor can choose from and since this is a relatively small group the three chosen

games can be allotted 15-20 minutes of the schedule. *Niyudh Siddh* is not a game but a self-defense training. The *Swayamsewaks* are instructed to stand in two rows and as the instructor/leader shouts “*Niyudh Siddh*” they jump into a wide legged stance and start throwing punches in the air. The training concludes in less than ten minutes after all stances, angles, actions and directions for dodging, defense and offense are covered. After a brief interlude of *Ekatmata Stotr*<sup>88</sup> (Identity Ode) the children are ready to play *Kashmir Kiska*. The group is divided into two *Ganas* i.e. divided according to age group. The young *Swayamsewaks* in each group form a circle and one of them stands at its center. The game begins as the instructor shouts “*Kashmir Kiska*”. The *Swayamsewaks* respond with the chant “*Kashmir hamara hai*” (Kashmir is ours) and try to push and replace the one at the center. Tumbling and collapsing over each other, the huddle emanates youthful energy, playfulness and excitement. If someone cannot hold the center for more than a few seconds, the instructor provokes and taunts him till he jumps back into the huddle with the zeal to reclaim Kashmir. With abrupt and intermittent chants of “*Bharat Mata ki jai*” (Hail! Mother India) the young boys reform and resume the contest for Kashmir. The others in the ground who are not a part of the *shakha* stand by and watch with curious eyes. The game and the chants go on as one after the other *Swayamsewaks* reclaim the analogical Kashmir. The game is brought to a halt by the instructor as it is getting late.

Some *Swayamsewaks* have to leave for tuitions. They take the instructor’s leave, walk up to the flag and perform the *Dhwaj Pranam* before leaving. The remaining sit in a

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<sup>88</sup> The “*Ekatmata Stotr*” or the “Ode of Identity” is a compilation of Sanskrit verses that count the characteristics, features and history of the Motherland, *Akhand Bharat*. It is a mnemonic exercise that lists religious values, topographical features, ancient cities, scriptures, religious offshoots, spiritual and heroic women and men from history and myth and concludes by enumerating Savarkar, Hedgewar and Golwalkar as the key revivalists of Hindu society.

circle. It is time to play *Kadi* — a kind of memory game. The instructor starts the game by naming a freedom fighter. Clockwise, the person sitting next to him adds another name to it and so it goes in the circle. The instructor starts with Mahatma Gandhi, which is followed by the obvious Dr. Hedgewar, the Sangh’s founder. Other popular names like Bhagat Singh, Chandra Shekhar Azad, Savarkar and even Shivaji are added to list. The young boys fumble with the names, forgetting and repeating them over and over again, and as the excitement in their voice dies down it is apparent they are getting bored. The instructor tries to engage them in a conversation. He enquires about those who had not come today. Fifteen-year olds talk about the need of Hindu organization, western influence/corruption, rise of Muslim population, cow slaughter. This part of the *shakha* is mostly a monologue, the instructor raises issues and asks the children leading questions like, “Should not we be united as a community?,” “The Muslims and Christians routinely meet in their Masjids and Churches, should not the Hindus come to *shakhas* as one?,” “The Muslims are entrapping Hindu women, should we not protect our sisters?” Two or three share the instructor’s convictions affirming with vigorous nods. Others are largely complacent, incongruous, and, mostly tired. Today’s *shakha* has come to an end. The exhausted *Swayamsewaks* are lined up in a formation again, brought to attention and they sing the prayer ‘*Namaste Sada Vatsale*’ (O Loving Motherland) in chorus, perform a parting *Dhwaj Pranam* and are dismissed for the day. The instructor explained, as we wrapped up for the day, how he needs to be aware of the children’s interests and pay attention to it —

*“Working with young children is an important part of Sangh’s expansion. But it has its own challenge. Kids are easily distracted. With cartoons, song, dance videos and video games on mobiles it is difficult, but all the more important to impart*

*sanskar to them. They are also bogged down by studies, and as they grow old, by entrance tests and corporate jobs. The practice of going out and playing in the field is not very popular. Even existing Swayamsewaks had stopped sending their wards to the shakha. Very few kids come to the grounds these days and it is important to keep them engaged and entertained, and still cultivate cultural values and organizational discipline effectively in the time they are with us. Lately interest in shakhas has piqued. Parents are showing interest in the Sangh. It is our job to ensure the interest persists.”* (Personal Communication, March 2018, Goa)

The *shakha* is like the candy hut of Hansel and Gretel, for lack of an indigenous allegory, it attracts kids, engages them with an assortment of enthralling activities, coated in ideological flavors, until they are subsumed within the discourse of the Sangh. It is the smallest unit, the microcosm and the public face of the Sangh that simulates its ideas of a Hindu nation embodying the ideals, ideology, values and discipline of the Sangh. There are over fifty thousand operational *shakhas* in India. While most are attended in person either in the morning or in the evening, there are virtual *shakhas* for those who cannot attend one *shakha* physically, and weekend *shakhas* for those in corporate jobs. Each *shakha* is expected to promote the Sangh and *Hindutva* in their respective areas. The Sangh believes in “promotion by example” which is achieved by *Swayamsewaks* and *pracharaks* individually and also as *shakhas* as a whole. Periodically, *shakhas* are held in areas where there are no routine *shakhas*. Besides word of mouth, this quotidian performance of embodied ideology and play evokes interest and attracts new *Swayamsewaks*. The *shakha* is also the first step of percolation where the neophytes’ commitment and conviction to the

ideology is assessed. The instructor pays special attention to incorporate him and observes his development. Those who show unwavering allegiance and indubitable faith are sent to annual thirty-days Shivirs (Training Camps) to graduate into the doctrine and practice of *Hindutva*.

The figure of the instructor is an assemblage of the mentor, the brother, the friend, the confidante as well as the proxy of the Supreme Leader. It is his job to educate his mentees, protect and guide them as his brothers, to be attentive to their interests as a friend, to listen to their woes as a confidante and offer solace within the brotherhood of the *shakha* and impose a sense of order and discipline to the Sangh's organizational structure. Kaali, a young *Swayamsewak* in Lalit Vachani's *The Boy in the Branch*, looks confused when asked if he can ever refuse his instructor. He replies, "I can never do that. He is elder to us and we must do what he asks" (Vachani, 1993, 04:00). Undoubtedly a noble thought, it is embedded into the *Swayamsewaks* until it transforms into, "*soochna se pehle sochna nahi*"<sup>89</sup> (Personal Communication, September, 2016, Goa). In the sequel, *The Men in the Tree*, a grown-up Kaali confesses his ideological incompatibilities. The *shakha* enacts a quasi-familial structure where loyalty and obedience to elders (read: superiors) is absolute. The *Swayamsewak* is not required to attend the *shakha*, there is no obligation to continue his membership, and yet the superior's gaze, their words, opinions and perceptions are important to him. He only risks losing this play-family and his playmates. The instructor exercises control through this most banal and innocuous instinct of the child.

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<sup>89</sup> Trans: "Do not think without a Notice". Those who had volunteered to demolish the Babri Masjid in 1992 were issued this instruction. It forbade independent thinking or action on the part of the volunteers before the superior's issued a Notice.



## Embodied Acts of Identity

*The body is also directly involved in the political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs.* (Foucault, 1975, p. 25)

The *Swayamsewaks'* body is the site of the Sangh's discursive power and its primary subject. A nationalist and a disciplined "*Wehrbauer*"<sup>90</sup> (Personal Communication, August 2016, Goa), he is the pure Hindu, and the ideal citizen. The subjectivation is so absolute that each interviewed *Swayamsewak's* response to ideological nuances was uncomfortably verbatim. How does the Sangh achieve this subjectivation? It is achieved through repetitive performances of "constitutive acts" — rituals (*Dhwaj Pranam*), Prayer (*Prarthna*), games, cognitive (*Baudhik*) and physical (*Sharirik*) training — embedded into the everyday life of *Hindutva* (Chapter 2). The *shakha* aims at instilling, "jouissance, machismo, fearlessness, discipline, dogmatism, team work, habitus, perpetual cooperation, self-confidence" (Shakha Darshika, 2015, p. 61). The Sangh's curriculum is enforced routinely through an elaborate liturgical performance of *Hindutva* norms, conventions and values. Every day the *Swayamsewaks* start their session bowing to the Saffron Flag — the Cultural Flag of the Hindus, and singing the *Ekatmata Stotr* and each day concludes by paying allegiance to the flag and pledging to the Hindu nation, the Motherland and Holyland of the Hindus, "*May my life ... be laid down in Thy cause ... We have girded our loins to carry on Thy work... May our victorious organized power ... be wholly capable of protecting our Dharma*" (Barthwal, 2014, pp. 5-6). Each act that follows employs signifying practices

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<sup>90</sup> The Nazi Germany category of elite farmer-soldiers trained to fight for "blood and soil," i.e. Kinship and Fatherland (Kakel, 2013).

that inscribe cultural meaning and identity on the bodies of the participants in the fulfilment of the same goals.

## Sharirik

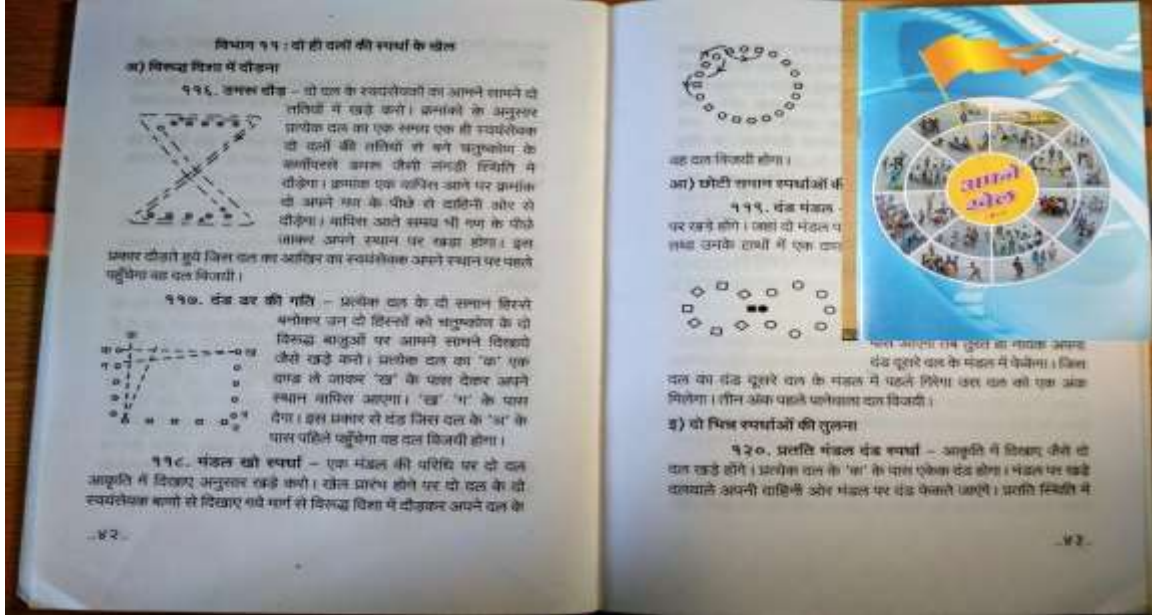


Figure 6. RSS Game Manual, an example.

Heroism, valor and machismo are cultivated by Yoga, physical exercises and a number of carefully assorted and customized games. *Suryanamaskar* (Sun Salutation), a composite Yoga exercise, choreographed with Sanskrit Shlokas (verses) is part of the daily ritual. Other physical exercises include defensive and offensive martial arts, baton-training and wrestling. In special *shakhas*, the *Swayamsewaks* are exposed to intensive paramilitary training that often includes weapon training. Each constituency of the Sangh has a Sharirik Vibhag (Department of Physical Education) that supervises and monitors physical training of the *Swayamsewaks*. The Sangh also publishes an expansive manual with precise directions on how about 150 games are to be conducted (Figure 6). It elaborates the ideology behind the game and illustrates the game plan, position of players, their movement and all possible permutations of customization. Seemingly playful, mundane and aimless,

the games in a *shakha* have “use-value” and involve dexterous planning (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2017). They are either adapted from popular indigenous games or are wholly invented to foster ‘character-building’ — the ideals of selfhood that Sangh espouses. “Physical training exercises require discipline, are repetitive and monotonous” (Personal Communication, August, 2016, Goa). “A sense of competition and the reward of victory creates more excitement. Games have special appeal to *Swayamsewaks* as well as instructors than any physical training exercise. But physical training is equally important. We practice yoga and martial arts that are essential primeval elements of Indian culture” (Personal Communication, August, 2016, Goa). Performing yoga or martial arts is as much a part of the simulation of Hindu *Rashtra* as the much favored indigenous games. To make physical training equally enjoyable, basic exercise like running or jumping are incorporated into chase and tag games like *Kho-Kho*.

Games, in *shakhas*, are accompanied by a narrative of sacrifice, valor, heroism and triumph. For instance, *Main Shivaji* (I am Shivaji), a tag game, capitalizes on the legend of Shivaji and his guerilla tactics. The game employs a rhetoric of challenge and bravado. One of the participants, the chaser, challenges any one from the group by taking his name, the runner, and the chase ensues. Other participants, shout, “*Main Shivaji*” and intervene the chase one after the other. The chaser has to chase the interceptor. On being tagged the roles reverse and the game goes on. The chaser signifies foreign forces and the interceptors bellowing “*main Shivaji*” sacrifices himself to save the runner and enacts ludic adaptations of Shivaji’s guerilla tactic and his bravery.

*Kashmir Kiska* addresses the Article 370 of the constitution that gives Kashmir the right to self-determination. The legislation has been an issue of contestation since its formation. The Sangh contests that Kashmir is an essential part of India and even thoughts of its secession from the mainland are blasphemous and should not be entertained. The game solidifies this stand. The question “*Kashmir Kiska*” (Kashmir belongs to whom?) is answered with a passionate chorus of “*Kashmir hamara hai*” (Kashmir is ours). But sloganeering and chanting is not enough and must be reinforced with force. Occupants are forcefully displaced in an endless loop of struggle that starts and ends with the leader’s command. Individuals struggling to push out the occupier would lead to squabble. Everyone on the outer circle collectively pushes out the aggressor. The game imparts a lesson crucial to the Sangh’s organizational structure — “*Sangathan me shakti hai*,” or “organization is power” — alluding to both the verb form of the word ‘organization’ i.e. ‘to organize’ and the noun epithet of the Sangh as *The Organization*. With each unison, the *Swayamsewaks* identify and ally themselves as ingredients of the organization. The intimate, tactile and embodied performance of the games fosters familiarity, kinship, group belonging; the narratives of history and myth create illusions of heroism; and the ever present voice or whistle of the instructor produces a Pavlovian disciplinary affect on these performative bodies.

Performativity, Butler argued, “is not a singular ‘act’ for it is always a reiteration of norms, or set of norms and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is the repetition” (Butler, 1993, p. xxi). Discourses of nation, nationalism, cultural memory, self and belonging are performatively constituted using the ludic structure and affect of play. The repetition of

these performative discourses in quotidian milieus like the playground naturalizes and normalizes these repertoire of actions that are strengthened by mental and cognitive conditioning that the Sangh calls *Baudhik*.

### **Baudhik**

Sangh officials claim that *Baudhik* exercises are ‘intellectual’ exercises. It is not intellectual in the sense of fostering critical thinking, scholarly engagement, research aptitude or autonomous cognitive abilities. It is intellectual in a very lay and reductive sense of the word as ‘relating to the mind’. From empirical experience, I must endorse what many have expressed that there is a strong sense of anti-intellectualism in the Sangh. The Sangh does not publish books. It publishes ideological digests and behavior manuals. Even these publications are not widely distributed and are mostly read by people who aspire to be *pracharaks* or Baudhik instructors. The Sangh has always considered writing and publishing as an elitist academic exercise in which “armchair communists” indulge (Personal Communication, September, 2016, Goa). The Sangh believes in grass root activism where publishing or reading texts serves no practical purpose. Their attitude towards ‘texts’ exposes the gap between the text-based academe and empirical lived experience that Dwight Conquergood, M Jackson and Paul Gilroy have pointed out<sup>91</sup>. Analogical to Gilroy’s views on black musical performances, identity in these everyday spaces “is fleetingly experienced in the most intensive ways and ... socially reproduced by means of neglected modes of signifying practices like mimesis, gesture, kinesis and costume” (quoted in Conquergood, 1998, p. 27)). Sangh’s activism is based on

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<sup>91</sup> Refer to Chapter 1 for a detailed discussion.

“involvement and intimacy” and “a flux of human interrelationships” that requires appropriate hermeneutics (Said, Jackson quoted in Conquergood, 1998, p. 26).

The Sangh’s anti-intellectualism has evolved in retaliation to leftist historiography and cultural critique that it perceives as not only passive, and elitist but, of course, anti-Hindu. Even new researchers have to bear the brunt of this attitude. The High ranking members would get agitated at questions, and defensive and deflective at counter questions I would raise, since in the Sangh’s hierarchy they are used to delivering monologues and speeches. In one of our meetings, as I tried to tease out nuances out of the abstractions of *Hindutva* and its political necessities, I was flung a curt reply, “because *people* have forgotten our culture and history,” his furrowed brows pointing at me implying I was one of those “*people*”. Intellectual activity is considered passive and ineffectual and relegated to the “armchairs of communists”. In an initiative to increase its base, Sangh members started an online books shop and a companion ebook-reader mobile app, Book Bharati, targeting “intellectual” and “fastidious readers”. Both the website and the app have been dysfunctional for months with severely derelict coding bugs. “The Sangh believes in action and to know the Sangh you must visit *shakhas* and see for yourself” (Personal Communication, August, 2018, Goa). The Sangh does believe in action and is partial to embodied ways of learning and doing to the extent that most publications are cognitive supplements of identity, conduct and action.

The strategy of cognitive indoctrination combines rote learning, group discussion, monologues to confabs on issues of contemporary socio-political relevance (Shakha Darshika, 2015, p. 58). The *Swayamsewaks* must learn by rote the prescribed songs, prayer, oath, odes and their meanings. They must also memorize “*amrit vachan*” — key ideas and

quotes — of founding fathers and ideologues and the organizational hierarchies and conventions (Appendix C). This constitutes the core of Sangh’s syllabi that is published, discussed and repeated over the course of Baudhik sessions at *shakhas* and the *shivirs*. Among the content of discussion are the Sangh’s fundamental ideological precepts of nation, nationality, nationalism, self/other and belonging as discussed in earlier sections. The doctrines are softened and diluted for convenient consumption by the neophytes. Nationalism, they are told, “is the resolute and absolute devotion to the country, its traditions, its heroes and its safety and prosperity” and “functionally the words national, Indian and Hindu are synonymous” (Personal Communications November 2015, July, August; Shakha Darshika, 2015, p. 59). To be a *Swayamsewak* means to be selflessly nationalist and serve the interests of the Hindu Nation and Motherland India in a disciplined structure.

Key issues of discussion include 1) the alleged historical distortions at the hands of the Congress Party and the Communist historians, 2) the rising minority population and the threat it poses to the fabric of *dharma* in India, 3) caste system and its consequent fracturing of Indian society, 4) the need for a unified and disciplined Hindu society to combat external and internal threats. Hedgewar’s decision to remain unmarried and sacrifice his family in devotion to this organization and Savarkar’s procurement of guns and his shrewd tactics in Lord Curzon’s assassination are frequently reiterated as ideals of nationalism. Anecdotes from their lives are eulogized —

*When Veer Savarkar was only 12 years old, some Muslims took a procession through his village. They created a ruckus and Savarkar organized a group of students to retaliate. They went into their area, attacked their mosque threw stones*

*and broke all its windows. When Muslims boys attacked them they retaliated with knives and sticks and fought till they chased the last one away and, like Shivaji, stealthily escaped from the scene.*

Savarkar is the tragic hero who sacrificed a promising legal career, his freedom and spent several years in imprisonment. When eventually freed, he continued his struggle against the internal threats to Hindu ethos — the “sissies” of Congress who were willfully seceding Hindu sovereignty indulging in minority appeasement (The Economist, 2014). Despite all his sacrifices successive, Congress governments ignored his contributions and his sincere politics of Hindu self-rule. The Sangh has been similarly vilified but it is the task of the *Swayamsewak* to work selflessly and silently in the service of the Hindu Rashtra. “India is essentially a Hindu Rashtra. Our culture, tradition, civilization, its history and its heroes are Hindus. *Swayamsewaks* would restore its glory to the days of yore” (Shakha Darshika, 2015).

The form of indoctrination in these *shakhas* is a calculated and strategic group activity. They are ideally suited for the construction of a new cognitive perspective since members are inclined to cohort expectations. The instructor is responsible for furnishing ideological belief systems as well as suggestions of behavioral acculturation in these groups. A *Swayamsewak* is a perpetual representative of the Sangh and his everyday life must manifest the values and behaviors of the Sangh. Not only must they be an exemplar-publicist of the Sangh they must also persuade their family and friends about the merits of *Hindutva* and the Sangh.

Although young acolytes are mostly taught through games, memorizing the Sangh’s *prarthna*, *pratigya* and songs are part of this acculturation. They provide an



illusion of ancient collective tradition and a framework of metaphors, myths and memory over which ideological subjection can be conveniently imposed through anecdotes, legends, monologues and group discussions. Baudhik sessions achieve mental conditioning and foster a cognitive worldview to assess and react to social, political and cultural issues and incidents. They embed a grand narrative of the Hindu self as homogenous constituents of the oldest, the purest and superior civilization — the *Vishwa Guru* (Master of the World). Palpable differences, dissonances and ideological disparities are appropriated as offshoots, rather than opponents, sharing a common civilizational ethos. Muslims and Christians are vilified as ‘others,’ a perpetual threat to Hindus, *Hindutva* and Hindudom (Hindu Rashtra). In the environment of Sangh’s *Hindutva* brotherhood, members produce and process meanings through shared representations. Cohort activities and discussions with other members — equals and superiors — fashions members to think, feel and act in sync with group consensus. The curriculumized delivery of ideology creates subjects with a shared ethnic consciousness and conjoined agency. Besides aligning individuals with the Sangh, this cognitive process actively constitutes their reality. Concurrent with the constitution of self, is the configuration of the ‘other’. The distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’ is induced cognitively through verbal and discursive interactions.

Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains and even tribal communities are appropriated as ‘us,’ while Christians and Muslims are reiteratively defined as ‘them’ and treated as lost souls of the Hindu civilization who must either return to their holy land, or at least acknowledge that they are Hindus culturally. “Demographic problems” — Christian or Islamic conversion, Love *Jihad* (inter-faith Hindu-Muslim marriages) and ‘Muslim perversion’ and ‘rising Muslim population’ — remain critical concerns of national crisis (Personal

Communication, August 2016). Formal acknowledgement of bonafide allegiance to Mother India was often postulated as a mandatory condition of citizenship and voting rights. Each *Swayamsewak* is encouraged for sacrifice and lauded as a champion of Hindu civilization. Words like ‘we,’ ‘us,’ ‘Sangh’ and ‘sangathan’ eclipse singular personal pronouns and are used interchangeably to create a perception of oneness with(in) the organization. The rhetoric of these discussions is majoritarian and voyeuristic. Sangh is postured as an example and the only method of self-preservation through Hindu unity. Socio-cultural differences within the ‘self’ are steamrolled into platitudes of homogeneity. Internal dissonances to Hindu homogeneity, like caste system and untouchability, are sanitized as “necessary social evils” and contingent “system of social stratification and division of labor” (Personal Communication, January 2016, Goa). However, on first meetings, I would introduce myself with only my first name, and on every occasion the *Swayamsewaks*, *Pracharaks* and office bearers would enquire about my surname — a key identifier and performative of caste in Hindu names. Although the Sangh insists it rejects caste, in day to day life caste is inseparable from its operations. Lower castes are romanticized for their “selfless service” to the society and called upon to persist with the same spirit. The repetitive indoctrination of Baudhik sessions transforms *Swayamsewaks* into the principles and agents of their own subjection — the embodied manifestation of the ideology.

## Rituals of *Hindutva*



Figure 7. Vijaya Dashmi, October, 2016.

On the last day of Dusshera in 2016, I walked along hundreds of uniform-clad baton bearing *Swayamsewaks* parading in regimental forms marching to the tunes of drums and bugles. The route covered a significant area around the Sangh’s headquarter in Reshimbagh, Nagpur, and concluded in its large ground. Members, followers and supporters had already assembled in the ground and were seated in the temporary pavilions erected around the ground. An elevated stage was built on one side of the ground in its background was an excerpt from one of the Sangh’s prayers — “Once again in the battle field, the Satanic forces will be destroyed. We have faith in our hearts of an inevitable victory” (Translation mine). Adjacent to the stage was another raised platform where other eminent guests sat under a canopy. Among the attendees were ascetics, godmen, gurus, BJP leaders, Members of Parliament, Chief Ministers and Union Ministers. On the other side of the stage was a high flag post flanked by large portraits of Keshav Baliram Hedgewar and Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar — the Sangh’s founder and chief ideologue

(Figure 7). In front of the stage at a strategic distance was the media pit where journalists and cameramen of a number of national media had set up their equipment. In between the media pit and the main stage, there was an assortment of weapons — swords, shields, bows, arrows, spears and handguns — laid out and showcased (Figure 7).



Figure 8. *Shastra Pujan*, Vijaya Dashmi, October 2016.

The assembly was called to attention and the Supreme Leader, Mohan Bhagwat arrived. In a show of respect, the cadre, divided into *ganas* (groups) performed a synchronized march past the stage and around the ground and came to rest at their positions. Everyone in the ground, the cadre, the guests and the audience were asked to stand in attention and participate in the ceremonial *Dhwaj Pranam*. The weapons were ritually worshipped with flower offerings and groups demonstrated yoga and *niyudha* to the music of the flute band. It was followed by an address by the Chief Guest Satyaprakash Rai and the Supreme Leader’s hour-long speech. The speeches were largely uncontroversial and politically correct. The speech articulated an idea of pre-colonial united India — from

Badgaon in Kashmir to Melkote in Karnataka — exemplified in legends about Bhaironath and Saint Ramanajucharya. The relevance of Sangh in perpetuating and preserving this idea was emphasized and eventually a warning was issued against the “selfish forces” — in politics and media — that hamper the Sangh’s ‘nationalist’ method and agenda.

The *Swayamsewaks* who were part of the parade formations had sat down in their places under the hot tropical sun. The older groups had shifted under the shades and were given chairs, the younger *Swayamsewaks* were getting restless, hunched over their arms, twitching and turning in their place, twirling the trampled grass stubs, throwing pebbles at one another to pass time. The stage was too far away, the leader could only be heard from their vantage point on the ground and the sun was too uncomfortably hot to feign sustained interest. The audience sitting around me, in the covered pavilions, was more attentive and responded to statements with vehement nods, sighs and, rarely, even applause. Around noon the speech concluded, the assembly was dismissed and the segregated crowds dispersed and dissolved. The journalists went after the guests, and friends and family members of the *Swayamsewaks* moved in to proudly click selfies and photos with their wards in uniform and the *Bhagwa Dhvaj*.

This year was significantly different for the organization. The Sangh had changed its *ganvesh* of 90 years from Khaki shorts to brown trousers. It might seem trivial to outsiders but critics have mocked the Sangh and *Swayamsewaks* for decades for their uniform. *Swayamsewaks* from all over the country had assembled to participate in the first ceremony in the new uniforms. The store in the Sangh headquarters had seen unusual footfall. Those who were not participating in the parades were politely asked to come the

following day. The next day a horde of *Swayamsewaks*, mostly aged, excitedly queued outside the Sangh's store to try the new uniform. They were relieved the long trousers would shield them the persistent ridicule of the liberals' condescending portmanteau for them — '*chaddi-gang*' or the 'underwear-gang'. Some were aware of the colonial baggage of their baggy shorts and discussed how the early uniform was inspired from the British police uniform. Many of them had raised these issues in subsequent meetings hoping for a more proper change.

The other crucial difference this year was the media coverage. Doordarshan, the national broadcaster of India, televised the full content while several other privately owned channels showed parts of the speeches. The coverage was comparable to those of national commemorations like Independence Day and Republic Day. Third year into the explosive electoral victory of BJP, this was the third consecutive broadcast by the publically owned channel despite vehement criticism and protest on the past two occasions (PTI, 2014). With consequent repetition, dissenters had become complacent, and all protests had died down. It signaled the Sangh's entrance into the mainstream with State sponsored, national scale legitimization and promotion of Sangh's ideology. The televised eulogy boldly elevated the festival to the status of national and constitutional festivals, and canonized the supreme leader of the organization as a leader, at par with the elected representatives and the heads of State who address the nation on national events.

*Vijayadashami* is the most important of the Sangh's festivals. It is a ritual of commemoration and a spectacle of the *Sangh Shakti* (Sangh's strength). It is celebrated as the founder's day since Hedgewar had formally initiated the Sangh on *Vijayadashami* in 1925. The supreme leader offers his respect to the founder's memorial situated within the

complex. *Shastra pujan*, and the march around the town, large swathes of *Swayamsewaks* parading across the city on martial drum beats, and the public performance of paramilitary drills is a ritualized pageantry of puissance repeated annually. It is an annual condensation of the daily *shakhas*, an exhibition of the structure of the organization and its systems of meaning to themselves and the audience. The repertoire of performance practices — the symbols, flags, uniforms, march-past, the paramilitary drills — and its soundscapes — the marching footsteps, the bands, the speeches from the pulpit come together in the liturgical form of a ritual — “consecrated behavior” (Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 1973, p. 112). They induce and reinforce in the participants and the spectators the sacrosanctity of their ideology and purpose. The assurance that “these many people cannot be wrong” convince and tether many sceptics.

Once, in a heated argument over the academic credibility and historical accuracy of Sangh’s publications, a *pracharak* slapped his palm on his crouched knees, looked straight into my eyes and exclaimed, “you want to say the books are lies, Bhagwat *ji*<sup>92</sup> is a liar, Thengde *ji*<sup>93</sup> did nothing!”. He shook his head vehemently breaking eye contact and getting up, suggesting the end of conversation, and concluded that the veridicality of an organization with over sixty-two lakh members lies in those numbers (Personal Communication, October 2017, Goa). The rituals and invented traditions of the Sangh are similarly legitimized and naturalized on the quantitative basis of its membership. In these rituals, “the world as lived and the world as imagined... turn out to be the same world” (Geertz, 1973, p. 112).

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<sup>92</sup> The current Sarsanghchalak (Supreme Leader) of the RSS.

<sup>93</sup> The founder of Bharatiya Majdoor Sangh (Indian Labour Council), RSS’s labor wing and the author of Ambedkar’s biography, *Samajika Krantisoorya* (Social Revolutionary).

Other important festivals adapted from the Hindu calendar include the celebration of hibernal solstice (*Makar Sankranti*), the Hindu New Year (*Varsha Pratipada*), Teachers' day (Guru Purnima) and *Rakshabandhan*. Sangh's literatures elaborate the ceremonial formula of celebrating each festival as an amalgamation of Hinduism and *Hindutva*. Hindu mythologies are re-invented and conventions are refurbished with rituals, symbols and metaphors of *Hindutva* and transformed from religious occasions to political ones. The metaphor of good vs evil and darkness vs light in *Vijayadashami* and *Sankranti* present the Sangh as the savior, the good and the light. The slow and steady change of the solstice is analogous to the Sangh's belief "in slow but enduring transformation" through daily *shakhas* (Shakha Darshika, 2015, p. 127). In *Varsha Pratipada*, Hedgewar is aligned with the Gods Brahma and Rama from mythology, Emperor Vikramaditya from history and Dayanand Saraswati from modern India. The beginning of the Hindu year, the beginning of Brahma's creation, coronation of Rama, formation of Arya Samaj and the birth of Hedgewar are fused into one commemorative event.

Guru Purnima is the day *Swayamsewaks* pay respect to their guru, the Saffron flag, and offer anonymous donations in its name to the Sangh. Besides reminding *Swayamsewaks* of the mythical, historical, religious and cultural significance of the saffron flag, the festival is also the most important even of fund raising.

Sangh's calendar includes 'invented traditions' as well such as Shivaji *Jayanti* (Shivaji's Birthday), *Hindu Samrajya Diwas* (Hindu Empire Day) and Maharana Pratap *Jayanti* (Maharana Pratap's birthday). The birthdays are celebrated as events of public outreach. In the summer of 2015, I accidentally stumbled into a Maharana Pratap Jayanti rally while doing fieldwork with the riot-displaced communities in Muzaffarnagar. A small



group of around twenty people with saffron scarves wrapped around their heads and banners of “Vishwa Hindu Parishad remembers *Hindva Surya* Maharana Pratap” in their hands took out a procession. Members of the procession gave away swords, daggers and dagger shaped tridents to Hindu pedestrians and shopkeepers. Shivaji Jayanti is also celebrated in a similar format across the country. The intent is to remind people of the importance of “Hindu self-rule” and the sacrifices Hindu heroes have made in its pursuit in the past. *Hindu Samrajya Diwas* is the purported day of Shivaji’s coronation. Shivaji’s coronation was the dawn of Hindu self-rule and the rule of *dharma* and is idealized by the Sangh. The song prescribed for this event announces the “dawn of Hindu Rashtra” and warns the Jayachands (critics , dissenters and other internal threats) that despite the betrayals “this was Hindu Rashtra, this is Hindu Rashtra and will always remain one” (Shakha Darshika, 2015, pp. 133-134). Hindus will reclaim the temples of Ayodhya, Kashi and Mathura, displace the symbols of their insults (Shakha Darshika, 2015, p. 135).

Although rituals and ritual-like events dominate the daily *shakhas*, ritual festivals like these are spectacles of *Hindutva* values and ideology. There is a contrast between the daily *shakhas* and these rituals. While *shakhas* project a perception of intimacy, revelry and rule-governed playfulness, the festivals are rehearsed and choreographed quasi-religious spectacles of sacral reverence, discipline and *communitas*. The synchronized embodied acts — the *dhwaj pranam*, parades, processions, regimental bands, prayers and song — are multifaceted sensory experiences that affects “a sense of condensed totality, to shape people’s experience and cognitive ordering of the world” (Bell C., 1997, pp. 158-61). It creates an acronymized simulation of culture and ideology through a performance

of condensed actions, ambiguous symbols and fluid narratives oscillating between Hinduism and *Hindutva* — the sacral and the profane, the cultural and the political.

### **Digital *Hindutva***

The digital technoscape and mediascape has emerged as an unavoidable quotidian part and instrument of ideological transmission for *Hindutva*. With the emergence of social media, microblogging, instant messaging and video sharing platforms the Sangh discovered a medium to overcome a growing apathy towards it. Equipped with mobiles, video games and social media, youth had turned away from playgrounds and transitively *shakhas*. Even long term members had been unsuccessful in motivating their wards to *shakhas*. RSS ventured into digital outreach with Facebook pages, Twitter handles and Whatsapp groups. For those who could not attend daily *shakhas* due to the constraints of their corporate jobs or for any other reasons, the Sangh started conducting online *shakhas* via Skype. The BJP's electoral machinery picked up the relay with the 2014 general election campaigns. A crowd of users, real and fake, and an assortment of virtual communities professing *Hindutva* and Hindu nationalism sprung up like mushrooms<sup>94</sup>.

If technology was the extension of the central nervous system in 1960s, the internet embodies the prosthetization of consciousness itself (McLuhan, 1964, p. 5). A consciousness that is rhizomorphic — networked and hyperlinked with infinite others, virtual and built/stored on inconspicuous servers yet personal and quantifiable with a cornucopia of information facts, fictions, news, rumors, data, memory easily retrievable through keyword searches. It enabled the formation of posthuman virtual communities

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<sup>94</sup> For instance, a Twitter audit report found that 55.4% of followers of RSS's official twitter handle were fake. <https://www.twitteraudit.com/RSSorg>

united by hashtags where identity and performativity is reduced to virtual actions and presentation of self — profile pictures, tweets, retweets, blogs, posts, likes and shares. In an overload of information “an inertia ... [of the] information highway” displaces cynicism or critical thinking with sensationalism and affect in formations of public opinion (Kishore, 2016).

Sangh exploited technology to change its public perception and dwindling interest by preaching the same message through a new medium. Social media became an intrusive instrument to engage youth within the discourse of *Hindutva* — the glorious past, the Muslim/British atrocities, the persecution of Hindus and appeasement of minorities, the rising population of Muslims, love *jihad*, etc. Internet also decentralized and democratized the discourse of *Hindutva* removing Sangh as the sole authoritative figure. Other more aggressive and militant organizations<sup>95</sup> and individuals like Shambhulal<sup>96</sup> have also taken control of the narrative and made digital *Hindutva* increasingly vicious.

Visual, verbal and textual messages are circulated through social media and instant messaging apps like Whatsapp (Appendix B). Personal details of interfaith couples are released on these pages and members are encouraged to “give them a piece of their minds” and bully them. A narrative is manufactured against Muslims, Christians, Marxists, secular, liberal and feminists, and portraying Hindu victimhood. While working with Hindu Janjagruti Samiti, I was repeatedly asked to participate in this process. Texts of tweets complete with hashtags (Appendix E) were shared with instructions to tweet at a precise time, share it via Whatsapp or post it in statuses. Events are assessed in binaries of *Hindutva*

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<sup>95</sup> Pages like @Shankhnaad, @Agniveer, Hindu Janjagruti Samiti, Sanatan Sanstha, Hindu Defence League, @Saffrontrooper, @SudarshannewsTV.

<sup>96</sup> See Shiv Visvanathan’s “Citizen Shambhulal Is the New Face of *Hindutva*”.  
<https://thewire.in/featured/citizen-shambhulal-new-face-Hindutva>

and non-*Hindutva*, and everyone is expected to participate by circulating the messages or by trolling people who challenged or questioned these fabrications.

### **Discipline And The Fringe: Performances of *Hindutva*'s Cultural Power**

Discipline is a core concept in the functioning of *Hindutva* that affects an insidious cultural power over members from different age groups, classes, caste, regions, linguistic groups and social spheres binding them through a narrative of commonality, kinship and culture. The *Bhagwa Dhwaj* and saffron turbans and headscarves, its popular adaptations, transform into totems of Hinduness, Hindu culture and Hindu nationalism. A synthesis of Bhagwa holding Durga and the topography of the nation is deified as its goddess and their militant defense become the national *dharma*. The organization is eulogized as the only medium and method of this *dharma*. In its everyday life — online or offline — Sangh *karyakartas* insist on absolute “discipline, allegiance and subservience” to the organization and, transitively, to the Hindu nation. The informal and voluntary nature of the Sangh requires pervasive cognitive and cultural control exercised through the symbols, structures and narratives performed in the quotidian *shakhas*. These performances not only mimic the norms, conventions and beliefs of the Sangh, they are also poetic. They constitute individuals into docile subjects, the *Swayamsewaks*, and accomplish patient and persistent, systematic and sustained discursive control on their bodies.

Incidentally, there are events that seem antithetical to this organized, ordered and disciplined *Hindutva*. The list of assassinations expands from Gandhi in 1948 to Gauri Lankesh in 2017. Since independence multiple places of worship have been vandalized. The Babri Mosque was razed by mobs in Ayodhya and there are nine other mosques that Hindu nationalists want to demolish. Missionaries were murdered in Kandhamal to prevent

religious conversion and communities massacred for weeks in Gujarat and Muzzaffarnagar in a reactionary show of might. More recently, individuals have been lynched for suspicion of consuming beef and several others for transporting cattle for slaughter (Rajput, Saha, Kumari, & al, 2018). But these events and actions are relegated to a “fringe” — feral and peripheral entities — dissociated from the Sangh (Bannerjee R., 2018). The idea of fringe is espoused as antithetical to the idea of disciplined action of the Sangh. The fringe is undefined, unaffiliated and unidentifiable. Publically the Sangh claims to be falsely accused in these incidents but privately people involved goad with pride for their participation. For instance, *karyakartas* proudly recounted how they worked tirelessly in raising funds and mobilizing people from their individual constituencies to tear down Babri Masjid (Personal Communication, August, 2016, Goa). An office bearer, who has been a member of the RSS for thirty years and deputed to VHP for another ten, recounted the moments before *karyakartas* breached the barricades and raided the mosque complex — “It was a moment of great pride. There were chants of Jai Shree Ram all around us. Our brothers had mounted the dome and within minutes we had pulled down that blotch on our history and pride” (Personal Communication, August, 2016, Goa). The sentiments resonate in Sripad’s claim that he was willing to sacrifice his life in the movement, and participating in Babri demolition has made him an unforgettable part of history (Vachani, 1993). The Babri Masjid demolition was an act of ethnic pride, a dramatic reclaiming of the glory and intrepidity of the primordial Hindus. Sripad is not alone in his beliefs. Vishwa Hindu Parishad has raised a cadre of *Ram Bhakta Balidan*, a cadre of “Ram devotees willing to die”. The *Bajrang Dal*’s foundational premise is removing foreigners and foreign influence from Hindusthan. At receiving end of their wrath, there have been

Muslims, Christians, Dalits, women, secular liberals. Vinay Katiyar, the founder-president of Bajrang Dal, often pontificates that “Muslims should go to Pakistan” and so should anyone who does not believe in *Hindu Rashtra* (Katiyar quoted in Express Web Desk, 2018).

The RSS fosters an ideological environment — replete with visual, aural and somatic cues — where nationalism or national belonging is a contest of races that ‘Hindus’ have been losing. Narratives of invading Muslim tyrants, Muslim and Christian encroachment of not only land but also culture and ways of living, creates insecure subjects that self-identify as victims. Insisting on machismo and force as essentials of Hindu pride and weapons of war over *dharma* and adding paramilitary combat training to this cauldron of paranoia and insecurity gives birth to the fringe. It also provides a cover of plausible deniability to the organization in the event of an action that the current juridical system might deem unlawful, unconstitutional or even criminal. Fringe, or otherwise, ideological violence is a crucial expression of *Hindutva*’s cultural power that manifests routinely in performative acts of ethnic belonging. The routine and rituals of the Sangh qualify as “cultural performance”. They “possess a limited time span, a beginning and an end, an organized program of activity, a set of performers, an audience and a place” (Milton Singer quoted in Madison, 2011, p. 154). Victor Turner allegorizes such cultural performances to a hall of mirror that not only reflects individual and collective ‘distortions,’ but actively constitutes who or what we are (Turner, 1982, p. 261). The exhibitionist and spectatorial nature of these performances provokes a reflexive correctional portrayal of the self, “for no one likes to see himself as ugly, ungainly or dwarfish” (Conquergood, 1982, p. 104). Cultural performances substitute “distortions” — attributes perceived as impractical, weak

or effeminate — incompatible with the norms and ideals of culture, society and nationality with ameliorative utilitarian attributes — strength, discipline and machismo. Conquergood writes, “when we act in everyday life, we do not merely re-act to indicative stimuli, we act in frames we have wrested from the genres of cultural performance” (Conquergood, 1982, p. 122). The ideals and inferences produced and drawn from these acts manifest somatically in quotidian spaces. They spill beyond the *shakhas* and the playgrounds, into streets, campuses, living rooms and, progressively more, into virtual spaces.

Drama draws the norms and aspirations of the movement from these somatic, reiterative, citational cultural performances. It produces mimetic — reproduced and re-imagined — and kinetic — critical and transformative — stylized configurations of these experiences of quotidian “believed-in” performances (Schechner, 1997). This schematic condensation of a social scenario is framed and presented on an elevated stage within an intended structure — conventionally, beginning, middle, and end. The stylization or exaggeration is partly generic, partly for affect and partly to create a didactic distance, a willing suspension of disbelief, between the object and the subjects. The audience is aware that what is being staged is not ‘real’ in the absolute sense of the word, at the same time there is an awareness that it indeed imitates a larger ‘truth’. The following chapter explores how experiences of Hindu nationalism are manifested, articulated and critiqued in drama. The three works of theatre, are chosen from crucial periods in the last thirty years, and curate and subvert the performatives of *Hindutva*’s hegemony.





## CHAPTER IV

### CRITIQUES AND CHOREOGRAPHIES: HINDU NATIONALISM IN THESPIAN PERFORMANCES

*I cannot conceive any work of art as having a separate existence from life itself.*

-Antonin (Artaud, 1938/2000)

At a time, when the real increasingly becomes theatrical and theatre becomes realistic the distinction between performance on stage and offstage is purely functional. The difference can be explained in terms of the actor-audience relationship and the spatiality of the performance. In real life performances are subliminal and normative. They produce real affects of ideology and constitute identity. The *shakha* subjectivates the *Swayamsewak* into its discursive, ideological and formal structures. The *Swayamsewak* internalizes and rehearses the organizational hierarchies, its beliefs and aspirations. The cognitive and physical exercises of the *shakha* are a “doing” of this subjectivity but this *doing* continues into life beyond the designated space of the *shakha*. Although it serves spectatorial purpose, the *shakha* is not a conventional performance space in the sense that the action does not come to an end there. The ‘actor’ merely moves on to other spaces and contexts of the quotidian. A conventional performance space implies a fictionality and distances itself from perceptions of exactitude of the ‘real’. At curtain-call, the performance on stage ends and performance off stage begins.

Theatre distances the audience from the actor and action, and requires a willing suspension of disbelief. The actor is consciously communicating a role through his “semiotic body” and the audience is aware that the action on stage is a stylized exaggeration

(Fischer-Lichte, 2005, p. 24). Bell theorizes the performative body into a “phenomenal body” and a “semiotic body” (Fischer-Lichte, 2005, p. 24). The phenomenal body is the medium of “being-in-the-world”; it is the real or the original body of the actor which is transformed into a semiotic instrument to deliver or reproduce a character. In everyday life, for instance, for the *Swayamsewak*, the semiotic body is merged with the phenomenal body embodying his identity. In theatre, however, the actor has to undergo a “disembodiment” so that only his semiotic body remains (Fischer-Lichte, 2005, p. 27).

The performative — culturally coded bits-of-behavior — is the locus where theatre and culture converge. Culture constitutes and is constitutive of a semiotics of the body that the theatre borrows and creatively imitates in its storytelling. Theatre borrows, and reproduces stylistically, these constructions of the self and the other, the individual and the community, the norm and the exceptional, and forges them into exhibitable archetypes. It is a transcription of these culturally constituted performatives condensed and compressed within a frame that the stage imposes. It is a performative text in the sense that it reimagines bodies and “bits of behaviour” within a context and emphasizes on reproducing embodied subjectivities and affect (Schechner, 2013, pp. 28-30). These archetypes constitute acts of signification in theatre performances. Theatre performance is framed and marked by heightened, embellished and stylized enactments to be significantly different in intensity from the everyday but at the same time retaining a suspension of disbelief. Judith Butler’s understanding of discursive subjection and subjectivation through Foucault and Althusser is used to attempt an ontological study of the character-subject — the theatrical materialization of subjects.

The subject, Butler argues through Althusser and Foucault, is constructed through “discursive performativity” (Butler, 1993, p. 70). Discursive performativity is the “productive capacity of discourse ... to produce that which it names” and embed individuals into culturally acceptable norms and categories of gender, race, ethnicity (Butler, 1993, p. 70). Norms, Butler argues, “operate within social practices as the implicit standard of *normalization* ... and when they operate as the normalizing principle in social practice, they usually remain implicit, difficult to read, discernible most clearly and dramatically in the effects that they produce” (Butler, 1999, p. 41). These effects are produced on the body of the subject, the “social actor” (Butler, 1999, p. 42). Norms create absolutist definitions of identity and prescribe conformative performatives. While gender remains Butler’s primary concern her insights can be “translated” to racial, ethnic and national identity that are arbitrary and subjected to similar processes of production (Byrne, 2006). However, unlike gender and race, which share a problematic link with anatomy and physiognomy, ethnicity and nationalism can be purely discursive.

### **From Discursive Performativity to Discursive Agency**

In the previous chapter we have explored the constitutive discourse of *Hindutva* and its kinesthetic processes of subjectivation through iterable and spectatorial performances. In this chapter we shall explore the theatrical configurations of Hindu nationalism. Hindu nationalism is premised on a notion of an intrinsic primordial and naturalized *sanskritik* or civilizational identity sutured into Hindu subjects. The RSS recuperates this civilizational identity that Hindus have, allegedly, surrendered over centuries of foreign rule and attempts to instill in its *Swayamsewaks* in its routine *shakhas*.

The routine and ritual of the *shakha* are designed and deployed to re-awaken, remind and reiterate these *a priori* claims of nation, nationality, belonging and citizenship.

Judith Butler rejects the notion that a subject possesses an *a priori*, prediscursive identity and argues that subjectivity is constituted by discursive performativity — the power of any discursive regime to produce that which it names. Although performativity, as an instrument of discourse, constitutes subjectivity it is not infallible and subsuming. In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler is optimistic of the “contemporary political promise” of performativity (1993, p. xxviii). Her optimism is anchored in “the possibility of a failure” to repeat performatives of identity, or to repeat them in parody (Butler, 1990, p. 191). While discussing queerness she argues that a “public assertion” of non-normative identity appropriates performativity to “resignify abjection... into defiance and legitimacy”. (Butler, 1993, p. xxix) Performatives are bits of behavior that can be re-appropriated and subverted to defy and critique the normative boundaries of ideology (Butler, 1997). Discursive agency is this possibility of subverting the discourse through its resignification. However, this agency is not inherent to the subject but an effect of the power of the discourse and the possibility of any such subversion is constrained by its discursive regime (Butler, 1997, p. 139). It is in this subversive potential that this chapter tries to situate theatre arguing that thespian performances are critical parodic resignification of discursive norms and cultural metaphors.

In this chapter we shall explore the political and discursive agency of theatre to subversively iterate the performatives of *Hindutva* and produce kinesthetic critiques of the ideology. The three plays discussed in this chapter have been produced in response to linguistic, cultural, communal and political manifestations of the ideology. The plays have

been curated deliberately for their formal staging and performance strategies. Indira Parthsarathy's *The Legend of Nandan*, a conventional proscenium play, portrays the double helix of linguistic and caste politics of Hindu nationalism. It explores the experience of caste-based exclusionary politics of Hindu nationalism and the emerging political need of acculturation which, in post-independence democratic India, seems to be a political necessity but a cultural inconvenience. Mahesh Dattani's *Final Solution* evolves the stage into a site of discourse. Beside aesthetic reproduction, the form and content of the stage is epistemic. It initiates the audience into an understanding of the semiotic of hate that textures all mundane and eventful behavior. The second strategy evolves into setting up the stage as a site of discourse, where the form and content of the stage are not only aesthetic reproductions but also discursive, invoking and initiating the audience into a semiotic of hate that textures all our mundane and eventful behavior. It presents a parallel play of such quotidian hate and *Hindutva*-invoked ritualistic riots. Jana Natya Manch's *Yeh Dil Maange More, Guruji! (YDMMG)* strips all the walls of a conventional performance space and, with it, its institutional structures of class, taste and access. It takes the trinity of the Hindu Right to the streets, imposing not only in the plebeian space, but also in their contemplations, lampooning these discourses.

The analysis is structured according to staging/framing, plot and characterization with a specific emphasis on spatial re-imagining, simulations, the somatic embodiment of ethno-chauvinist ideals, socio-cultural realities, and their affect and memory. The chapter also navigates towards an opening up of performances from their traditional stage-spaces to the everyday spaces.

## **Ideology and its Others in Indira Parthasarathy's *The Legend Of Nandan***

Indira Parthasarathy's play *Nandan Kathai* or *The Legend of Nandan* is the story of a *paraiyan*, Nandan who falls prey to the Brahminic hegemony. The story of Nandan has brewed over centuries in folk narratives and has been prone to ideological bending and blending from time to time. The first elaborate writing of the tale comes from Sekkizhar (*Periya Puranam*) in 12<sup>th</sup> century and is festooned with the contemporary Bhakti ideology. It offers a hope, proposed by the Bhakti Movement, of salvation — social and spiritual — through pure devotion to the God. The next extensive work comes from Gopala Krishna Bharati, a 19<sup>th</sup> century poet/playwright. G.K. Bharati introduced the characters of the Brahmin and the idea of a Foucauldian-Althusserian complex of power and ideology that infects the society, affecting and subjugating the lower classes/castes to the most sub-human stature. It is from this version that Parthasarathy has borrowed the plot for his play. First published in 1972 and translated in 2001, the play remains relevant almost for forty-five years since its conception.

### **Plot**

The play narrates the story of Nandan, who is born and brought up in a socially outcaste community, *paraiyan*<sup>97</sup>, but aspires to transcend the limits of his low birth. Exposed to the rituals and ceremonies of the temple, where he provides menial services, Nandan imbibes the Brahminical aesthetic sense which he associates with respect, honor and social status. Nandan's desire for access to this aesthetic sense starts a conflict of social order and individual aspirations. The community that derives its order from the *Purusha*

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<sup>97</sup> *Paraiyan* and *paarpaan* are the two extremes of the caste based Hindu social structures. While *Paraiyan* refers to the outcaste, *paarpaan* refers to Brahmin. Parthasarathy points out that both are expressions of disrespect. While *paraiyan* is the broader word for all outcastes, Nandan belongs to the sub-community (or caste) of *Pulaiya* that works with leather and plays drums in certain rituals.

*Sukta*<sup>98</sup> of the Vedas could not accept the feet to rise and take the place of the head. Nor could the members of his own community and subjects of the same oppressive system approve of Nandan's radicalism. The community conspires an elaborate scheme in which, ironically, both the *paraiyan* and the *paarpaan* participate to destroy Nandan and the radicalism he professed, and put everyone in their place. Nandan is lured into a trap of salvation and redemption, and manipulated into self-immolation.

The play is divided in two acts. The first Act is broadly laid out as an exposition where the characters and the circumstances are introduced. It establishes the main conflict of the story — the rise of Nandan, the resultant fear of the dominant castes for the conservation of traditions and the state of paranoia that characterizes the society's resistance to changing hierarchies and power relations. However, Parthasarathy, does not approve of this acculturation as a medium of social mobility and he offers authorial commentary on the issue through the Old Man. The Act ends with Nandan's divine acceptance as a devotee and his reward in the form of Abhirami, the *devdasi*.

The second Act marks the unfolding of VEDIYAR's conspiracy and the beginning of Nandan's destruction. The VEDIYAR exploits Nandan's desperation for social acceptance and his gullibility. VEDIYAR employs Nandan's 'reward,' Abhirami, to antagonize his fellow *paraiyans*. His unilateral affinity to the *paarpaan* aesthetics, and the *paarpaan* God, increases his estrangement from them. Nandan's decision to bathe in the fire seals his fate.

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<sup>98</sup> Footnote 65, page 90. A Vedic discourse that validates caste-based social order as the 'natural' classification of men. According to *Purusha Sukta* the Brahmin emerged from the head of the Supreme Being, Kshatriya from arms, Vaishya from thighs and Shudras from feet. At one end of this hierarchy is the Brahmin — intellect personified and on the other is his Other, the Shudra — abject and ignoble.

Sekkizhar apotheosized Nandan endowing him with a supernatural spirituality<sup>99</sup> and glorifying his immolation by imagining his metamorphosis into a *muni*. Parthasarathy portrays him in a realistic manner and inverts the Sanskritic metaphors of Nandi, the divine mount and the sacrificial fire as the divine tool of purgation into metaphors of deliberate exclusion and utmost ideological exploitation.

Situated in medieval India but written in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the plot is rife with this tension between an emergent contemporary political necessity to appropriate the subaltern and the residual socio-cultural obsession to preserve the caste hierarchies. This is another reason for Parthasarathy to humanize Nandan from Sekkizhar's martyred-saint. Imagining Nandan caught between these conflicts, Parthasarathy recreates him into a scapegoat. He reinforces the hierarchical order of/in the *Purusha Sukta*. Parthasarathy imagines Nandan's character as a trope to convey the incredulity of "Sanskritization" — an allusion of upward social mobility through the imitation of Upper class norms, rituals and aesthetics. It also critiques the ambiguous interpretation of caste as a cosmetic ontological system of social categories i.e. *Varna* and not *Jaati* system<sup>100</sup> (Srinivas, 1952/1965; Srinivas, 1996; Karanth, 1997).

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<sup>99</sup> In Sekkizhar's *Periya Puranam*, the statue of Nandi, the bull, at the entrance of the temple of Tirupunkur, moves in order to give Nandan a *darshan*. Nandan also emerges from the fire unscathed, "with the sacred thread dangling on his chest," transformed in a *muni* (Sage).

<sup>100</sup> *Varna* literally means color and category. The Varna system is a system of broadly categorised social groups. Derived from a Vedic history Varna system was not fixed and allowed social mobility. *Jaati* on the other hand is hereditary and fixed. The misinterpretation of modern caste system as *Varna* system creates a discourse distorted between contemporary India and Vedic culture. M.N. Srinivas and G.K. Karanth argue that this distortion is abused to create the impression that social mobility is possible through Sanskritization (Srinivas, 1952/1965; Karanth, 1997).



## Staging-Framing

Set on a conventional proscenium stage, the play is an eclectic counterhegemonic imagining of social realities into the archetypes of space, spirituality and people segregated by constructs of caste. The playwright constitutes, *paraccheri*,<sup>101</sup> the space that the *paraiyans* inhabit, with elements of depravity and debauchery. The space is dimly-lit and the constant whining and barking of street dogs is only interrupted by the whining and barking of drunk lascivious men, outbursts of hoarse euphemistic songs and the fading cry of a child. The arrival of Nandan is announced by the barks of puppies. In the uniform raucous of the ghetto there is a disturbance, an unease, a pervasive discomfort of not-belonging. The space is as averse to Nandan as he is to the space. This discomfort is emphasized by Nandan himself, who arrives beating himself on the forehead and announces to the audience, “Look! Sir! This is our *paraiyan* hamlet. These are fellows who think toddy is heaven” (Parthasarathy, 2003, p. 3). In the second act the *paraiyans* sing the glory of their hamlet. The song paints a rustic picture of the *paraiyan* slum with houses covered with bottle gourd vines, dogs barking and chasing away outsiders, swamps covered with wild flowers and fronds. The people are drunk but uncorrupted ‘noble savages’ going along life with little or no aspiration or remorse that is typical of upper caste city folks. Their gods are also modest — “a granite stone with cardboard markers in color to denote eyes, ears, mouth, and moustache ... stone god” or just “a big black stone” (Parthasarathy, 2003, pp. 10-11, 32) They have no pretense of purity or sanctity and they thank the Gods with what they have — crabs, meat, cooked rice and toddy. In contrast to this *paraiyan* locality, the *paarpaan* or the temple, which is rarely described in the play, is represented

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<sup>101</sup> Often referred to as *palla*, *para* or *cheri*.

with classical aesthetics — with a silhouette of the *Nataraja* posture or *Sivalingam* accompanied with the sonorous bell tolls.

Lighting plays an important role in *The Legend of Nandan*. Besides marking the change of scenes; conflict and contrast — between the *paraiyan* and the *paarpaan* way of life; and flashbacks — when Nandan recalls Abhirami's dance; it also reflects the mood of the protagonist and the mood of the play. When Nandan enters the stage the dim light not only represents dusk, it also reflects his repulsion and disgust of the place. When he walks into fire with Abhirami, there is a sudden darkness auguring the VEDIYAR's sinister plan, the horror of the event and the hypocrisy of this corporeal-spirituality and aesthetics that Nandan had come to admire and aspire. That which was a promise of deliverance has been turned into a weapon of annihilation.

### **Character**

As an onto-aesthetic element of theatre, a character can constitute any notion of subjectivity. The character is the site at which the operations of power and ideology manifest and it is through the study of these subjectifications that the fissures of social constructions can be exposed and analyzed. Borrowing from Butler the idea that “the subject is not just ‘there’ from the beginning (i.e. from the moment it is born) but *instituted* in specific contexts and at specific times” (Salih, 2002, p. 10), the analysis of the processes of subjectivation reveal that identities are not *sui generis*. In another text, Butler posits how our lexical limitation in the understanding of the word “construction” hampers the exploration of these subjectivities as realities contingent to social and cultural processes. These contingent processes produce subjectivities that are intelligible, discursive and

privileged as well as subjectivities that are malformed, unthinkable and abject. (Butler, 1993, p. x; Delgado-Garcia, 2015, pp. 48-52)

The play figures three archetypes of the latter — *paraiyan*, portrayed by — (i) Nandan and his fellow followers, (ii) the Old Man, (iii) the conformists. Nandan embodies the Foucauldian-Althusserian subject whose discursive agency is situated in the marginal space, and limited by the taxonomy of the *varna* system. He is steeped in the inescapable and constitutive relations to power. Born in a *paraiyan* family, Nandan's individuality is always-already interpellated with the ideologies of the caste system. Nandan conscientiously tries to break free from the category he is born into but his subjectivity is so subsumed by the system that the only window of escape he can see leads through the same system. The proliferation of power is evident in his subjectivity and also in the infrequent raptures of revolt and dissent that occur in surges, but dissipate under the influence of that invasive and invisible power of the caste system. His idea of transcendence is an interpellation of Brahminism and its slightly-radical offshoot, the Bhakti Movement. Idealizing the Brahminic culture, Nandan struggles to achieve salvation and redemption from his low birth through a Sanskritic aesthetics of beauty and devotion. Foucault calls this process of transformation, “transsubjectivation” or “ethopoiein,” or the poesis of ethos, the reconstitution or the transformation of a subject's ethos, “producing ethos, changing, transforming ethos, the individual's way of being, his mode of existence” (Foucault, 2005, p. 237).

This transsubjectivation of Nandan becomes visible in his presentation of the self, his distaste and gradual distancing from the *paraiyan* way of life and his affinity for the *paarpaan* way of life, their classical performing arts, music and aesthetics. This split

subjectivity is suggested, portrayed and performed from the very commencement of the play when a man of “dark physique” with “sacred ash drawn across his forehead” appears in complete contrast to his acrimonious surrounding. The contrast is not only to the environment but also to the “dark physique”. Here is an abnormal subject who knows his place in the social order but denies to accept his contingent subjectivity being reified into a stunted identity. His resistance is however determined by his limited discursive agency. When he goes to meet Abhirami for the first time, he dresses up as a Brahmin. This act paralleled with his brief soliloquy where he acknowledges his pedigree inferior to even dogs, who are “*Bhairava*,” is a moment of performative rebellion against his own internalized structures of apartheid (Parthasarathy, 2003, p. 8). The only people he can see removed from the rut are the Brahmins. They are the sociocultural elites who have access to property (as landlords), wealth (as property owners), culture (as connoisseurs), education (as the cultured) and spirituality (as everything aforementioned) while the *paraiyan* are subaltern subjects whose function is limited to being the invisible, unheard farm hands and craftsman, ironically whose harvest feeds the upper castes while they remain untouchable, and whose craft (leather percussion instruments) constitute a part of the temple prayers while they are not even allowed a *darshan*. Nandan understands his social and cultural subjection but instead of challenging the validity of an iniquitous system that dehumanizes a majority, his sense of reform constitutes a condescension towards his own kind and a desperate adulation towards his oppressor social class/caste and cultural aesthetics.

Aesthetics, as Bourdieu posits, is a practice through which social differences are made manifest. It is an invention of specific social groups that enjoy a position of privilege and the privilege of canon-formation. It is “the practical affirmation of an inevitable

difference” that unites people from the same social sphere while excluding and denigrating the others. In fact, the superiority of one aesthetics is always “asserted purely negatively” by condescension towards others. Bourdieu emphasizes that “tastes are perhaps first and foremost distaste, disgust provoked by horror or visceral intolerance (“sick-making”) of the tastes of others” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 56).

Through his benign understanding of the temple aesthetics Nandan perceives the imitation of *paarpaan* aesthetics to be the only alternative that can affect a social change. Nataraja, the *paarpaan* god, who presides over this aesthetics becomes the entity through whom these demands of social mobility can be addressed. He fails to see, as Parthasarathy points out in the course of the play, that both *tantram* (ideology) and *mantram* (spirituality) go hand in hand. The *paarpaan* and their Gods are mutually constitutive and the obeisance to one is obeisance to the other. The Vedyar exploits this vulnerability in Nandan’s habitus to sabotage his transcendence into a *paarpaan*. In his desperation to elevate his social status, Nandan falls prey to the Vedyar’s connivance with almost a childlike naivety and literally walks into a fire, though one wonders if this infantilization of the *paraiyan* is a representational ploy or the playwright’s subliminal prejudice. Parthasarathy’s characterization creates a performative identity of a *paraiyan* subject, conscious of his position, his subjection, his exploitation and dehumanization, whose relationship to power is complicated by this identification and yet its idealization. However, he does not acknowledge that his subjectivity not only precedes his birth it also exceeds it and as convenient as it might appear to imagine a discursive progression through the system, the system itself resists this change. Though he challenges the Brahminical dogma of the *varna* system, and resists the space he has been allocated in it, he willingly concedes the status of

the Vedyar, second only to God, as the custodian of faith and culture. The social order has not only marginalized him spatially, denied him the status of citizenship or humanity and completely excluded him from political subjecthood, it has also restrained his agency of thought and dissent. His stubborn affection towards the Brahmin aesthetics is representative of a deep internalization of social and cultural hierarchies.

The old man is suspicious of this Brahminization that Nandan has affected in the slums. He argues against the embellished bourgeois theological rhetoric of deliverance and counters it with the proletariat alternative “*palla* way of life” (Parthasarathy, 2003, p 18). He acknowledges his subalternity but he is comfortable and unpretentious in his identity. As the authorial mouthpiece he raises some pertinent questions challenging the Sanskritic cultural hegemony. He dances and sings of labor, agriculture and the *palla* Gods. He celebrates the fact that though they are economically dependent on the overlord, they are free from the mundane discipline, morality and hypocrisy of the Upper castes.

OLD MAN: Who said God is in the temple? For us, the field is God.

NANDAN: So you're satisfied with the God of the field. Do not you want beauty for the eye to behold?

OLD MAN: Is not the paddy crop swaying in the wind beautiful to the eye? Tell me.

NANDAN: Will paddy bring *mukti*?

OLD MAN: What is *mukti*?

NANDAN: Deliverance (...) The secret that we are not slaves to the overlord.  
The miracle of ourselves becoming God.

(...)

OLD MAN: So *mukti* is just dying? Is this what is called *bhakti*?

In his short exchange with Nandan, the Old Man deconstructs his interpellation and offers him the alternative of his own culture that Nandan has been antagonizing. The discourse progresses from aesthetics and beauty to spirituality and deliverance, liberty and libertarianism, discipline and libertinism. Nandan advocates the *paarpaan* way of life and admires their sense of art, their model of metaphysics and their professed sense of discipline — of the mind and the body. The Old man is his materialist antithesis who, despite his subordinate position in the *savarana* system of production, cherishes his cultural and personal freedom which remains unaffected by the Brahminical norms of morality and discipline.

The conformists are the perfect subjects whose doxic acceptance of the socio-cultural system persuades them to resist change. They are the ones who wallow in toddy and are so indoctrinated in their routine of serfdom that the disruption that Nandan causes leaves them unaffected. Their conformity to the *varna* system is so reified that Nandan's attempt to facilitate their upward mobility and improve the conditions of the *para* does not trigger the slightest concern to their own empowerment. On the other hand, VEDIYAR, MUDALIYAR and UDAIYAR are able to buy their contribution to abase Nandan with the promise to “finish Nandan” (Parthasarathy, 2003, p. 41). Identified only as numbers (Man 1, Man 2, Man 3, Man 4), they speak no more than single sentences in unanimity and as one entity,

“we”. They characterize the Everyman of the *palla*. Their dialogue suggests that unlike the paarpaan, they have a profounder sense of community and as a community their cognition, intellect and agency is stifled. Nandan’s transgressions to the norm has already estranged him. The Thiruppunkur “*prasadam*” Abhirami, the beautiful *devdasi*<sup>102</sup>, makes his peers envious and extends his alienation from the community “we”<sup>103</sup>. Nandan has been excluded partially because of his own resentment towards the *palla* way of life, but also because the community resents his ‘privilege’ of having married a *devdasi*, Abhirami. Nandan exemplifies how cultural chauvinism excludes a community from the society and an individual from the community.

The Vedyars, Mudaliyar and the Udaiyar are the cultural elites whose only role is to preserve the ethno-cultural status quo. They are the embodiments of cultural memory and ideology. Ideologies are structures of ideas and beliefs emerging from and serving specific political interests in particular socio-cultural and historical contexts. The ideology of the caste is largely traced back to the *Purusha-sukta* of Rig Veda, which validates the caste system by suggesting that there is an inherent, ‘natural’ classification amongst men in a society. The idea of hierarchy is suggested by the mind/body metaphor that remains prominent in most vedic literature. The Brahmin emerged from the head of the Supreme Being, Kshatriya from Arms, Vaishya from thighs and Shudras from feet. This idea of hierarchy becomes more prominent in latter *Vedas* and *Suktas* (Ambedkar, 2014). At one end of this hierarchy is the Brahmin — intellect personified and on the other is his Other, the Shudra — abject and ignoble. Since, the three upper castes possessed some agency

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<sup>102</sup> A girl designated to the deity of a temple.

<sup>103</sup> The ideals of community that is suggested in the dialogues of Man 1-4 that are often simultaneous and sometimes running into each other and is emphasized by their addressing themselves as “We”.



(Brahmin - spirituality and knowledge; Kshatriya - politics and military; Vaishya - commerce), they have exchanged patronage to establish and legitimize each other's social station at different points in history. This ideology of casteist segregation is always-already interpellated in the subjects. So much so that, in Althusser's words, it "obtains from them the recognition that they really do occupy the place it designates for them as theirs in the world, a fixed residence" (1971, p. 178). The people in the *paraccheri* have internalized the system of social stratification that has pushed them to the periphery. They acknowledge the "sin" of being born a *shudra*, and even Nandan, who believes that knowledge and aesthetics will redeem him, surrenders to the ploy of purgation through fire to be worthy of that sacred thread of *upanayana*. They have also coopted the naturalized sovereignty of the Brahmins.

The play is structured as a cultural conversation between these two discursive performatives. At one end of the spectrum is the old man and the conformists and at the other are the Vedyars, Mudaliyar and Udaiyar. Throughout the play the Vedyars typify the *Purusha Sukta* metaphor of the Brahman. They are the brains of the society and the focal point of ideology that they perform through rhetorical exchanges, constantly questioning, answering, repeatedly defending and asserting their positions. The first exchange between the four Vedyars is borderline hysterical — short single sentences almost bursting with frenzy at the breach in the fabric of social structure that Nandan's progression portends. The threat to ideology and transitively the threat to their social position is perceptible in these fast-paced brief outbursts. The discourse begins with an insecurity of the *paraiyans* trying to improve their living conditions to the concern of their encroachment of the *paarpaan* spirituality — their *poosam*, *darshan*, *sankranti* and

*upanayan* — and quickly escalates into a full-blown paranoia of the obliteration of the *jaati dharma* and transitively of the upper castes (Parthasarathy, 2003, pp. 6-7). Subsequently, Vedyar 1 uses this fear to mobilize other Vedyars and landlords — Mudaliyar and Udaiyar.

The figure of Vedyar 1 typifies the privileged and empowered Brahmins and Parthasarathy makes no pretense in his typification by naming the character after the community. However, the typification is located within a “recognition of a constitutive and constituting process of social and historical reality” (Williams, 2010, p. 102). Within this contingent reality, the Vedyar is an expert manipulator driven by a paranoia and desire of cultural ‘Self’ preservation. Parthasarathy imagines a sinister portrayal of the Vedyar, and other Vedic Brahmins, with his body painted in red and sacred ash rubbed on his forehead, he presents a grim and gruesome face of the religious apparatuses he represents, and the cultural hegemony he embodies and perpetuates. He identifies Nandan’s vulnerability in his need for acknowledgement and approval from the system that indoctrinates him into abjection and crafts a cunning plan to con Nandan. For a con to succeed the mark must be convinced by both visible and verbal rhetoric. Truth or reality are immaterial, what matters is the persuasion of the mark towards the fiction of quasi-truth that the con tries to build around the mark. Vedyar 1 convinces the other Vedyars to unite against Nandan’s ascension. He assures the priest of Thiruppunkur that there is “no use rapping [Nandan] ... One must win by craft” to assimilate the dissenter’s ideas into the tradition (2003, pp. 22-23). The Mudaliyar and Udaiyar help him construct a fool’s paradise for Nandan and make him a *bhakt* because “by trick alone one can win” (2003, p. 14). The men from the *cheri* are tricked into a fiction of cultural crisis between the traditional and emergent. While

Nandan represents the emergent Sanskritized faction all others represent the protectors of the traditional, the status quo. Through the contest between *pallu* and *Bharatnatyam* within the *cheri*, he succeeds in further alienating Nandan from the community. With all his co-conspirators VEDIYAR 1 convinces Nandan of the main con. The astral voice and dreams are employed as tropes to legitimize this play within the play of convincing Nandan that he has been confirmed by the Lord himself as a *bhakt* (devotee) and leading him to “bathe in fire and come back with Brahminical resplendence” that ends in a “non-human wail of a man-beast” (2003, p. 48).

### **Performing Memories of Violence: The Individual, Family and Society in Mahesh Dattani’s *Final Solutions***

While Parthasarathy’s *The Legend of Nandan* is a retelling of a legend, Mahesh Dattani’s *Final Solutions* follows an anecdotal retelling of history through the eyes of Hardika/Daksha, a nobody and yet Everybody. Unlike a novel where the author can spend pages to describe the setting, a play has to use condensed staging techniques, metaphors, symbols and iconography, not telling but initiating the reader into a quasi-perceptual experience. Written in 1993, Dattani’s *Final Solutions* condenses the unstable socio-political milieu of post-Babri India which was remarkably characterized by an echoing performance of the violence that marked the conclusion of a long tryst with colonialism. Unfortunately from the vestiges of colonialism emerged another ghoul — the partition. In the wake of partition the nation found itself torn between ethno-cultural violence that continues to resurrect itself time and again (Menon & Bhasin, 1998, pp. 5, 246; Butalia, 2000, p. 4; Zamindar, 2007; Ansari, 2005; Hasan, 2000, p. 12; Nandy, 2003, p. 2). Interestingly, performances of the play were met with similar violent response from the Hindu Right in Mumbai and had to be cancelled.

## **Plot**

*Final Solutions* is Mahesh Dattani's imagination of how communal violence evolves in a multicultural society with an incongruous past. The plot essentially follows a linear structure periodically interrupted by characters' analepsis revealing a detailed diagnosis of the characters. The plot opens when a Hindu ceremonial chariot is attacked in Kareem Bagh, a Muslim locality. This highly public, political and communal incident is witnessed through the private space of a middle class drawing room where Dattani intricately unwinds the pathology of contemporary communal violence. It opens a Pandora's Box of memories, generations of mutually exchanged violence and manipulations that the characters have both experienced and expended.

Alyque Padamsee calls it "a play about transferred resentments" (quoted in Dattani, 2000, p. 161). Though Daksha and Javed are on the opposite sides of the spectrum but are more similar than they can acknowledge. Daksha's bigotry is the result of her childhood experiences of partition and it gets amplified by her experiences in her husband's family. Daksha resents her subjection into her husband's dogmatic patriarchal family and unable to voice or express her resentments on her immediate perpetrators she transfers it to a scapegoat, Zarine, her family and by extensions their entire community — the Muslims. Javed's bigotry too is the result of the symbolic violence he experiences at the hands of his neighbor. Ramnik's resentment for his family's dark deeds are transferred to Hardika. Smita resents her mother's religiosity and her father's masculine chauvinism apparent in his constant denigration of Aruna. In an interesting turn of events resulting from a full blown communal riot all these repressed resentments reveal their fault lines and a seismic process of transformation takes place.

Dattani, however, does not aim to deliver a didactic conclusion or a solution to the controversial issue. He demonstrates that ethno-cultural violence is in fact motivated by seemingly secular forces of electoral politics, and market, that manipulate the repressed resentments of the masses and channels it into incendiary incidents. The transformation in the play only proposes a bottoms up approach of social change where the individuals, mostly the youth, have to unpack generations of misplaced resentment in order for the society to attain stability.

### **Staging/Framing**

Dattani opts for an unconventional use of the stage. He creates a chronotope-spectacle that oscillates temporally between 1940s and 1990s, and spatially between Hussainabad and Amargaon. It constitutes at its different levels the societal, familial and the individual contours while constantly fiddling with the fabric of history and memory.

“The stage is dominated by a horseshoe or crescent shaped ramp ... Most of the action of the Mob/Chorus takes place on the ramp ... within the confines of the ramp is a structure suggesting the house of the Gandhis ... on an elevation is a detailed kitchen and a pooja room ... On another level is a room with a roll top desk and an oil lamp converted to an electric one, suggesting that the period is the late 1940s.” (Dattani, 2000, p. 164)

Daksha-Hardika’s journal becomes allegorical to the palimpsest of individual memory and how it archives history. In the condensed time and space of the stage Hardika reminisces the historical moment in August, 1947 — “a most terrible thing ... independence” (2000, p. 166) — that she, as Daksha, witnessed clinging to her mother who, in turn, clung to an

idol as they were faced against a lynch mob in Hussainabad, a distinctly Muslim town, characterized by the nomenclature, of pre-independence Sindh. Dattani ingeniously locates personal history within the national history. The scene is juxtaposed with another mob that is gradually evolving into its equally violent, though temporally and spatially distant, counterpart. Hardika, observes, “Yes, things have not changed that much [in the forty years since independence]” (2000, p. 167). The journal, coupled with the switches between Daksha and Hardika embodies the phenomenology of memory — of remembering, historicizing, archiving and forgetting.

The journal is a mnemonic device that records the individual’s anecdotal memory and like dots on a paper makes it easier to cohere the evolution of the individual’s subjectivity. In the monologic stream of conscious recitation, Daksha not only records the mundane world she constitutes, but also how this world constitutes her, her identity and her subjectivity. We have at our hands, “a young girl’s childish scribble... [and]... An old woman’s shaky scrawl” (2000, p. 167). The journal reveals not only what Daksha wants the reader to discover, but also within the writing, the scribbles, the strikethroughs, the illegible sentences written in emotional duress, an ontology of the character that is Hardika now. The change in her name is patriarchy at its play, but it also marks the initiation of her domestication and indoctrination in the masculine, bourgeois, Hindu family and ideology of the Gandhis, “no relation to the Father of the Nation,” as Ramnik points out (2000, p.170).

By portraying the plot through Hardika’s perspective Dattani brings her into the spotlight, makes her vulnerable to scrutiny and criticism but at the same time he has given her the agency to overturn her subjectivation and expose the underlying incidents in her

memories that have been repressed by hegemonic forces in order to make sense and legitimize their validity and righteousness by what Paul Connerton refers to as “repressive erasure” (Connerton, 2008). Drawing from Milan Kundera’s oft quoted statement “The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting” (Kundera, 1999, p. 2), Connerton argues that memory is constituted by the powers at play in a system that dictates what should be preserved and what should be erased in order to maintain an agreeable and proselytizing narrative of those power structures (Connerton 2008, p. 60). The Noor Jehan songs stand for romance and aesthetics and the nubile innocence of a growing girl. The Noor Jehan songs are metaphors of a pre-independence harmony, which Daksha rediscovers in her friendship with Zarine. While the mob threw the stone that shattered the gramophone and her collection of records, the final blow is delivered by her in-laws who prohibit her from even singing those love songs, insisting implicitly an erasure of all associated memories.

Another incentive of this perspective is a reflection on the social, the political and, in this case, economic foundations of communal violence from the frame of the domestic. The social is observed through its most elementary and most mundane component, the family. And the family has had an intimate share in communal violence as victims and as perpetrators. Daksha’s room located at a higher level than the stage where the contemporary action takes place serves as a dream sequence, as a past that persists and constitutes the present. The motif of this coexisting past is accentuated by placing Hardika on the same level. The ubiquitous presence of Daksha and Hardika anchors the narrative within the domestic sphere. All extra-domestic information is collated by her (selective) empirical memory.

Throughout her journal, Daksha has chronicled her individual and familial history. She records suggestions of her family's guilt, and her own subliminal responsibility in being complicit with their commercial greed and criminal manipulations, that they conveniently hide under the cover of religious chauvinism and difference. She records how Zarine's father had lost his shop and their family was in financial trouble (Dattani, 2000, p. 197); his claims that the shop "was burnt down purposely" (Dattani, 2000, p. 202); their demeanor towards her turned from respect to hostility (Dattani, 2000, pp. 202,220-1); she perceives her husband and in-laws were keeping a secret from her; she sensed the anxiety in Hari's behavior when she asked him to lend Zarine's family some money and help them, the dumb and meek Hari loses his mind and starts shouting and abusing Daksha when she cross-questions him and despite having sensed their horrendous deed she tries to cajole him. Her "cheeks went red ... Not with shame but with anger at [herself]" (Dattani, 2000, pp. 215-216). Despite a conscientious awareness of her family's guilt she chose to believe in the concoction that Kanta, her chinwag maid, tells her. To rationalize her own righteousness and validate her newly discovered resentment towards Zarine and her community, she holds on to the story that Hari and Wagh tried to help Zarine's family by trying to buy their shop "at half its value" (Dattani, 2000, pp. 221, 226). When her in-laws confine her to her room, Daksha finds it convenient to channel her resentment to the 'others' than acknowledge its more proximal origins.

Much like Clementis' fur hat on Gottwald's head (Kundera, 1999), there are always remnants, fissures, lacunae in this politics of memory and forgetting. No matter how intense and meticulous are these exercises of repressive erasures, the smallest lapse leaks



out and unwraps the intricate structures of memories that are constructed to replace these repressions. Ramnik confirms to Hardika her darkest fears —

Ramnik - It's their shop. It's the same burnt-up shop we bought from them, at half its value. And we burnt it. Your husband. My father. And his father. They had it burnt in the name of communal hatred. Because we wanted a shop ... It was not that those people [Zarine's family] hated you. It was not false pride or arrogance. It was anger.

Hardika (*crushed*) — Why did not you tell me? All these years.

Ramnik — You have to live with this shame only for a few years now. (Dattani, 2000, p. 226)

Hardika's indoctrination is challenged only when 'outsiders' Javed and Bobby knock at their door seeking refuge from the mob. Ramnik takes them in the hope that his act would redeem him from the sins of his family. Hardika foregrounds their arrival and murmurs, "It had destroyed me before and I was afraid it would destroy my family again" (Dattani, 2000, p. 172). And indeed it does. It destroys the constructs of this dysfunctional affluent middle class Hindu family. It pulls apart Ramnik's coy liberal secularism and brings him face to face with his own resentments and hypocrisies. It challenges Aruna's delusions of purity and sanctity and confronts her with her daughter's more contemporary and rational sensibility. Most importantly it liberates the repressed memories of Daksha and by corollary unshackles Hardika from the chains of ill-conceived prejudice and hatred.

## Character

The play is narrated from the perspective of Hardika-Daksha and the play progresses into an exposition of her hyphenated identity. Forty years since she first started writing the journal she observes, "... things have not changed much" (Dattani, 2000, p. 166). The same cannot be said of her. The young, spirited, lively Daksha whose childhood innocence allowed her to outgrow the trauma of a lynch mob throwing stones through her windows and shattering her gramophone, her favorite records and killing her father has transformed her into a nihilistic old woman with no faith — in God or man, bitter and bigoted with her constructs of "us," — the Hindus — and "them" — the Muslims. Married at the tender age of fourteen, she gives playful nicknames to her parents-in-law, Gajanand and Wagh; she looks for friends to play with and she seeks in Hari, her husband, a friend who understands her puerile needs of companionship. However, under the unsympathetic guardianship of Gajanand and Wagh her innocence is throttled and she finds an escape in Zarine's company. Aware but unaffected by their differences what binds Zarine and Daksha is their uncorrupt childhood and their love for Noor Jahan songs. However, in the light of the shop burning incident she goes through a conflict of her observation of Hari, Wagh and Gajanand's body language and the repressed prejudice for the cultural others — Zarine, her family and the Muslims. Torn between "us" and "them" where the "us" has influence over her, the kind of influence that Bourdieu and Wacquant suggest "is exerted, quite simply by the *order of things*" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2003, p. 272, emphasis original), she redirects her hostility towards "them". Over the ages of mulling over these events she has been consumed with hate and in her bitterness she irons out differences of time and space in that brief moment of Freudian slip when she confuses Tasneem (Javed's sister) with Zarine (Dattani, 2000, 222).

Ramnik, Hardika's son, on the other hand, is a modern educated liberal man who welcomes two strangers into his home and protects them from a vitriolic mob. However, he belongs to that liminal generation and the privilege of majoritarianism and cultural chauvinism leaks through his speech acts and actions. His empathy to the boys is largely driven from his own guilt of his family's murky deeds. On Aruna's resistance to help them, Ramnik asserts forcefully, "*I have to protect them! I need to protect them!*" (Dattani, 2000, p. 182, emphasis added) Indeed he defies an angry crowd, but he can only do so because he *is* one of them. His exchange with his wards largely remains shrouded in suspicion, interrogational and patronizing. He offers them milk and remarks, "Perhaps the offering could have some symbolic significance" (Dattani, 2000, p. 191). Dattani almost directs the audience to connect the dots and find the implicit symbolic significance. Moments ago, a lizard had fallen near the milk vessel and Aruna had declared the milk unconsumable. Moreover, Ramnik serves them milk in the glasses they drank water from. The milk incident is a strip of the performative ritual that Ramnik and Aruna perform, challenging each other's ideas, stands and notions. Ramnik tries to prove his modernity and liberalism against Aruna's dogmatic religiosity and his protest against the milk being thrown is just a part of that performance. Angelie Multani observes, "it is largely through food habits and taboos that we all draw the lines that separate us from each other" (2010, p 2). Placed in the context of his Muslim refugees and in congruence with his overall conduct, the episode exposes his shallow ideals.

Aruna is another character that belongs to this liminal generation. She is a devoted Hindu who prays several times a day and teaches her daughter to "always be pure," in mind and in deed, but does not care to hide her contempt for Bobby and Javed. Her disdain for

the Others, and its implicit ideological violence, is fused with her religiosity and she seeks its refuge to prove her piety. She emotionally rejects allegations of being a participant to “all this violence. How can [she], when [she] wo not even harm a goat or chicken” (Dattani, 2000, p. 210). She would rather have them dead at her door than alive inside. She is the embodied manifestation of not only othering, but complete alienation and dismemberment of people on the basis of ethno-cultural difference. In her, the binaries of “us” and “them” are not only discursive and symbolic, but embodied, somatic and affective. Though she is compelled to serve them water, she is shocked that they drank it and is disgusted to touch the glasses on the side their lips touched them. She has an inherited idea of sanctity and purity that she must impose and enforce — in the domestic space, because that is where she has agency as a woman and a wife; and on Smita, because she is her child, her subject, her subordinate in that domestic space. The power relations in the family do not allow her to question her husband but she will not accept her daughter snubbing her faith, “the path of truth” her mother showed Aruna (Dattani, 2000, p. 211). But Smita’s rebellion shatters her the most and she is left distraught and unable to acknowledge the bigotry of her own faith she conveniently lays the entire blame of the eventful night on the “outsiders”.

Her reified idea of *sanskar*, sanctity and purity is distressed when Javed and Bobby enter the house — her space, and when Smita expresses her nausea and embarrassment at her faith but her impassioned resistance to them is lulled down into an apostrophe of weak and fragile surrender towards the end when Bobby holds up the image of Krishna — “Oh! Is there nothing left that is sacred in this world?” (Dattani, 2000, 225).

On the other end of the spectrum are Bobby and Javed, as ‘outsiders’ in this domestic space, an ‘other’ in the community, a minority in the society and an exile and

misfit in their own country because peace is a privilege of the ethnic majority. Ramnik has this privilege to “have an angry mob outside [his] house ... [and he] can play the civilized host” because he knows he has “peace inside his armpit” (Dattani, 2000, p. 192). Bobby and Javed embody the persistent fear, the insecurity, the mistrust, the paranoia of minorities in India, and elsewhere, of being persecuted at the hands of the majority. They were both different as children and as they grew their institutionalization subjectivized them differently. Bobby with his college education embodies the performative of a liberal educated apologetic Muslim who has despised his identity for all that it stands for in the collective memory of the nation. He adopts a modern Anglophone name Bobby, instead of his given name Babban. He is not disillusioned with his faith because of his education, he is disillusioned because what faith represents to the majority. Javed on the other hand is a troubled character, an embodiment of a misfit. As a passionate child, he faces ostracization at the hands of his Hindu neighbor who would ring the holy bell to purify his surrounding, but had denied this young child humanity. This episode of exclusion lays the foundation of an angry young man with an unstable idea of identity. The dependence to find peace in “the armpits of the majority” ethno-cultural community and the quotidian acts of scorn, rejection and abjection by them compares with a rejection by the civic nation itself. This crisis of identity makes Javed vulnerable to the patronization of divisive agents — of his faith and of political parties. He confesses of “delusions of valour and heroism. Of finding a cause to give purpose to his existence” (Dattani, 2000, p. 205). He finds a cause.

JAVED ... ‘The time has come,’ somebody would say. ‘This is jihad — the holy war! It is written!’ ‘Yes!’ I would say. ‘I am ready. I am prepared!’

*(Pause. Moves away)* On the bus, there were a dozen of them ... Everyone

approved. We were one. United. I really felt proud. Oh, what a fool they must have thought me to be! We got off at the outskirts of the city ... talking casually as if on a picnic. We went straight to a bootlegger's shack. ... I actually felt that that is where I belonged.

He finds acceptance, communion, equality and fraternity amongst sectarian groups only to be disillusioned by the fact that he is nothing more than a mercenary mentored into violence and blinded by exaggerated insecurities, aggravating his alienation from the society. Both Bobby and Javed are the subjects of the same system of “stigmatizing and emulating ‘threatening Others’” (Jaffrelot, 1999, pp. 11,459), and offer the two alternatives that such subjects have — to dissolve their identity and seek majoritarian patronage or to find/construct a cause debilitating this system and blindly align with it. Javed is not only the corporeal manifestation of the minority but also of the functional-illiterate bourgeois youth.



*Figure 9.* Naatak borrows the binary of Saffron and Green (Chapter 3) to perform Hindu and Muslim mob in an adaptation of Final Solution. Source: Naatak.org.

Juxtaposed with the characters the Mob/Chorus serves as a fluid metaphor. Dattani ensures that the Mob/Chorus, which is made up of five men and ten masks, lingers throughout the action of the play. The men show no religious characteristics, wear black and become a Hindu Mob or a Muslim mob by holding the mask. It reflects and reproduces

how cultural hysteria affects the masses and how collective effervescence built up on a rhetoric of hate creates segregations, exclusivity, and chauvinism and sprouts violence. It simulates the formation of an “emotional community: groups in which people adhere to the same norms of emotional expression, and value — or devalue — the same emotions” (Rosenwein, 2007). The Hindu mob embodies the personal prejudices, crisis, hate, paranoia and schisms of individuals within a majoritarian collective. It traces the evolution of violent frenzied mobs from hurt and resentment to loathing, revulsion and full blown hostility.

CHORUS 1. The procession has passed through these lanes every year,  
For forty years!

CHORUS 2, 3. How dare they?

CHORUS 1,2,3. For forty years our chariot has moved through their mohallas.

CHORUS 4,5. Why did they?

Why did they today?

(...)

CHORUS 1,2,3. This is our land!

How dare they?

CHORUS 1. It is in their blood!

CHORUS 2,3. It is in their blood to destroy!

CHORUS 4. Why should they?

CHORUS 5. It could have been an accident.

CHORUS 2. The stone that hit our God was no accident!

CHORUS 3. The knife that slit the poojari's stomach was no accident!

CHORUS 4,5. Why should they? It could have been an accident. (Dattani, 2000, p. 168)

The Chorus puts on the Hindu masks and begins with an incredulity at the turn of events, escalates to a possessive historical claim to these lanes and mohallas for their procession. The procession has been passing through these lanes of Kareem Bagh for forty years but this year something unfortunate has happened. Someone hurled a stone at the chariot and in the chaos that ensued someone murdered the priest. Chorus 1, 2 and 3, who represent the vast emotional community that believes in ethno-citizenship and persecution of others, since violence “is in their blood,” are blindly resolute that it was the Muslims who have done this sacrilege. Chorus 4 and 5 represent the doubtful few rationalists who would rather think through the matter before escalating it. However within the course of moments, even these voices of doubt are annulled in the loud aggressive chants of the majority until “their questions become statements and by the end of it they are an unruly mob crying out for blood” (Dattani, 2000, p. 169).

Dattani paints a very vivid picture of how collective effervescence is built in a mob and any dissenting voices of reason are subsumed in the ritualistic tirades of a shared anger, hatred and xenophobia towards the common enemy, in this case the Muslims. Though it might seem like a hyperbole but tragically, over the years, in India, communal riot has become a ritual — a ritual of exerting an idea of “nationalistic totalitarianism” — “a general



will arising not out of a common citizenship but out of a cultural essence, based on ethnicity, race, religion, language or some other form of a primordial intimacy specific to an entity that by definition excludes others” (Ahmed A., 2000, 318). In fact these rituals are not just abstractions, they are performances enacting a choreographed set of behaviors. In *Final Solutions*, the mob is rendered with a distinct exaggeration in behavior that becomes increasingly intense with rhythmic repetitions of acerbic rhetoric. The ‘othered’ are not only the stigmatized anymore, they are the enemies, the anti-nationalist and the traitors. What starts as an agitation ends up in an orgiastic frenzy with mobs combing the streets baiting for blood, threatening to “kill the sons of swine!” and “set an example” by killing the young boys who have wandered into their snare (Dattani, 2000, pp. 169-181). Dattani’s clever title, “Final Solution” evokes the Nazi exercise of ethnic cleansing and the mob serves as the force that takes upon itself the task of purgation, of extermination of those who do not belong. Dattani does not imply that the mob is homogenous and monolithic. Time and again, there are voices of doubt but they are questioned, suppressed and subsumed within the consensus.

Dattani uses the Muslim mob to portray the state of mind of the persecuted community. In the first Act, the situation in the Muslim community reciprocates that of the Hindu one. There are a mix of individuals with different demeanor, attitudes and response to the incident. In the first act, when the Chorus enacts the Muslim mob for the first time, there are traces of chauvinism mixed with a predominant fear of impending persecution. The mob as a whole is afraid that the blame would fall on them collectively. But there is also an air of loathsome disrespect. Chorus 1 says, “Their chariot *fell* in our streets” to which Chorus 2 adds, “Their God now *prostrates* before us” (Dattani, 2000, p. 171,

emphasis added). This exchange emphasizes the arguments that Dattani reiterates throughout the course of the play. There are jingoist elements in both communities, there are differences, disagreements, incongruities amongst them. Subliminally there is a lacunae in mutual social respect, but there is no doubt about acceptance, acknowledgment and tolerance of opposed, contrary and diverse beliefs. There is a tension in the social fabric of the nation which is exploited and harnessed as electoral capital. People like Javed are preyed, cherry-picked on both sides, incited and angered, and their anger is harnessed for political opportunism.

Using the same people to portray both the Hindu and the Muslim mobs serves multiple purposes, besides the obvious aesthetic and logistic ones. The act explicitly reverberates the idea of equality amongst men and suggests that religious and cultural bigotry is just a mask that binds people into superficial wholes uniting them in their pride and their fear and making them vulnerable to political trickery.

**Opening Up the Stage: Kinesis and Activism in Jan Natya Manch's *Ye Dil Maange More, Guruji*.**

Both the plays discussed earlier carefully demarcate an evolution of the stage — an opening up of performances — allowing and involving audiences' proactive and dynamic engagement. From *The Legend of Nandan* to *Final Solutions* the stage opens up slightly, becomes more interactive, giving the audience some interpretational agency and space if not actual stage-spaces. It not only represents “appropriate” milieu but also constitutes three generations of memories, amnesia, state of minds; simulates riots, the psyche of a scorned collective and the cornered minorities. It invites the reader into a postmodern, expressionist reading of the stage. The levels and the horseshoe ramp that slopes to the

stage almost merging with the audience creates an illusion of a transitional but not distant truth. It affirms to the audience that the stage is only an extension of the routine, the mundane, the profane — the everyday. Jan Natya Manch's (henceforth referred to as Janam, its official acronym) *Ye Dil Maange More, Guruji* (henceforth referred to as *YDMMG*) carries this metaphor further.

### **Staging/Framing**

*YDMMG* is a street play, therefore, it literally takes 'performance' to the streets. Unlike conventional theatre, street theatre is more populist; it makes use of a vernacular language and diction, rhythmic poetic prose, of commonplace metaphors and popular symbolism derived from mediums to which the common non-theatre going audience has access to, e.g. "Cable television, Hindi cinema, numerous religious congregations or *jagrans* ... other religious festivals" (Ghosh A., 2008, pp. 119-121). To add to Arjun Ghosh's list are catchy marketing taglines and advertisement jingles often repeated in print, hoarding and electronic media, which *YDMMG* specifically exploits. Street theatre is an eclectic hybrid of drumbeats, dialog, poetry, farce and satire that attempts to instill a public debate and transform its performative space into a discursive-didactic space of political dialog. Towards this aim the language of the play has to be vernacular, colloquial and didactic. The circumstances are chosen from contemporary events and socio-political happenings. The characters are crafted to be relatable and palatable by the masses who are not only the spectators but co-participants, bodies intersecting each other's aural and visual expanse, becoming "witnesses, celebrants ... a partner in the action, or even an actor" performing quasi-roles (Haedicke, 2011, p. 38).

Street theatre, on most occasions, occupies and transforms a tedious Orwellian urban space into a lively and engaging stage of discourse. It infiltrates the urban space-time monotony and enforces a 'circle' of rupture and rapture where a Derridean play of corporeality and meanings displaces the perfunctory everyday activities (Auslander, 1997; Zarrilli, 2005; Goffman, 1956). The actor at once posits the characteristics of the character and distances himself from it; he at once embodies an ideology, an archetype, and an individual within the context of the play and firmly establishes his own being as a victim-subject of that archetype. Street theatre is more activism than theatre and the actors' activist-agency characterizes the critique of the ideology/archetype/individual involved. Unlike proscenium theatre, street theatre is not concerned with transcendental ideas or an aesthetic obsession to create a timeless piece of art. Its rudimentary objective lies in its contingent awareness and critique of social injustices.

*YDMMG* is an agit-prop play. Agit-prop or agitation propaganda theatre's origins lie in Lenin's understanding of propaganda and agitation borrowed from Plekhanov through Lemonosov-Martynov. Lenin proposed that propaganda is "the revolutionary explanation of the present social system, entire or in its partial manifestations" and agitation is "the call upon the masses to undertake definite concrete actions and the promotion of a direct revolutionary intervention of the proletariat in social life" (Lenin, 1978, p. 66). Plekhanov also asserted that propaganda, in an attempt to draw a comprehensive picture, deals with a number of concepts that are often exclusively intelligible to the elite minority whereas agitation co-opts and accentuates selective issues and makes them understandable and relatable to a large mass. Propaganda, whose medium is the printed word, has a selective, educated bourgeois audience and appeals to intellectual

intelligence. Agitation, on the other hand, operates through the medium of the spoken word, engaging a larger audience of plebeians and proletariats, who are often excluded from propagandist material owing to their social position, and appeals to an emotional intelligence. Combined, agitation and propaganda constitute an indispensable tool of political education (Walzer, 2007, p. 135). Vsevolod Meyerhold, a Bolshevik actor-director came up with a twofold objective of effective agitprop theatre — i) “clarity of the message conveyed from the stage ... ii) to awaken and strengthen in him [the common man] a militancy strong enough to conquer oblomovism, manilovism, hypocrisy, erotomania, and pessimism within himself” (Meyerhold, 1995, pp. 98-100). Erwin Piscator achieved it by advocating the relationship of man to the society, not himself or God, and “to take reality as its point of departure and to magnify the social discrepancy making it an element of our indictment, our revolt, our new order” (Piscator, 1995, p. 102). The West has a conservative idea of agitprop theatre, as means of indoctrination into a singular ideology and doctrinal transmission, drawn from its Bolshevik baggage. However, the motive, methodology, content and praxis of agitprop theatre so as to address the new clientele — the proletariats — radically changed the character of theatre, of the stage, the actor and the spectator. The emphasis on the need to rouse and connect the common man to larger social contexts by catering simpler issues in a comprehensible and relatable form; on an affective response over an intellectual one makes it a crucial medium of counter-ideological and counter-hegemonic propaganda of political mobilization. However, unlike Europe, US and Soviet Russia, street theatre in India evolved differently and more ambitiously. The theatre scene in India, Safdar Hashmi iterates, has always remained weak and even conventional theatres have had limited audience even amongst the urban affluent middle class. Theatre itself, in

its content, form and dramaturgy, has desisted to evolve into a cultural force taking up the cause, hopes, aspirations and struggles of the common people. Street theatre in India has evolved to fill in these lacunae that conventional theatre has left behind. (Hashmi, 1998, p. 32)

*YDMMG* opens with standard tactics of attracting an audience and educating them with facts and figures of the context in which this agit-prop piece makes a theatrical intervention. This is achieved by the cast carrying placards, the standard prop of street protest, that spell out “Gujrat 2002” on one side and on the other, related stats — “240 *dargah* and 180 mosques destroyed,” “20,000 two-wheelers burnt,” “4000 cars burnt,” “a loss of 12.50 crores to the state transport corporation,” “a loss of 600 crore to Ahmedabad hotel industry,” “More than 12000 shops destroyed,” “more than 10,000 homes destroyed,” “Total incurred loss: More than Rs. 2,000 crore” (translation mine) (Jana Natya Manch, 2002). Though the statistical precision is disputable, the purpose of this dissertation is not the numbers but their performative role in this drama and the affect they are supposed to induce. It is significant to note that though material loss is documented extensively, none of the placards mention loss of lives. The intent is perhaps to appear reckless yet cautious, tempestuous yet calculative and serve measured amounts of agitation in order to control the reaction, as in a thermonuclear reactor, of a crowd already polarized by the communal violence. The purpose of these placards is to draw attention and engage a crowd and fixate them to bear with the course of the play. Death can be a topic that can drive away a crowd instead of building it (Deshpande & Kishore, 2017). Exploding effervescence can throttle the more potent arguments that the play would subsequently make.

The chorus progresses to a dramatic recitation of Vimal Kumar's poem "*Ek Jalte Hue Sheher ki Yatra*" (The Journey through a Burning City) that serves as the play's prelude. While the placard strategy is designed to be more journalistic and fact-based, the poem produces an affective magnetism evoking empathy and sympathy of the crowd, challenging them for their touristic detachment and provoking them towards an active ideological critique. The poem paints a dismal picture of a city burnt in the fire of communal violence and extends a sardonic invitation to the audience to a tour of a "burning and, like glass, melting" city "of the shrieking trees and wailing rivers," a city whose stretch has witnessed the most abhorring violence against humankind (translation mine) (Jana Natya Manch, 2002, p. 116).

### **Plot**

The plot of *YDMMG* follows the trajectory of a mock heroic quest. Guru Gol Gangol, with his two acolytes, Buddhibali and Bahubali, is on a Quixotic quest to establish a Hindu State. There is a call to arms to establish a Hindu way of life that has been corrupted by outsiders — the Mughal and the British. On the quest hero, Guru Gol and his followers face multiple obstacles — both, internal and external. There are hurdles of parliamentary democracy that have to be dodged and there is the republic that stalls their authoritarian intentions. Internally, Baahubali, who has been indoctrinated into a discourse of resentment, anger and cultural hubris, embodies the restlessness of a jittery mob baiting for blood. The plot unpacks the ideological forces — myth-making, history-making, historicization of myths, producing paranoia-based nationalism — and repressive forces — bureaucratic, martial and police state — through which the agenda of a Hindu nation is furthered. The characters simulate navigating through the terrains of constitution and

legality before Baahubali loses his patience and starts demanding explicit use of force and is reminded that the main tool is a strategic arrogation of existing structures.

The plot is an assemblage of creative imagination with historical social and political facts. Hyperboles of a “sapno ka rashtra [a dream nation]” modeled on an ancient myth are coupled with contemporary facts of *Rath yatra*, Babri demolition, thirteen-days National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government of 1996, the thirteen month NDA government of 1998 and the culminating event — Gujarat riots. Complex narratives of ideology-formation and hegemony are intertwined into plebian exchanges. Myths and legends are mixed with history. Cultural chauvinism and economic and consumer self-sufficiency are mixed with consumerist neo-liberal ad taglines. Such eclecticism creates an impression of an unscrupulous pervasive, routine, repetitive and reiterative political discourse of an exclusivist civil society edging towards parliamentary validation not only through ideological subversion but also through carefully crafted and choreographed rituals of violence.

The mock heroic form of the play not only makes it ebullient and curious for the lay audience but also reveals the irony and sinister absurdity of the characters’ plans. It creates an array of contrasts between political actualities and dramatic buffoonery, heroic valorization and roguish aptitude, the making of legends and the making of violence, and values of cultural preservation and preservation of constitutional values. The irony is bolstered when the comic epic plot is interrupted with the intense imagery of mournful poetry.



## Characters

Following the prelude, the three leading characters walk in the play area — “Guru Gol in Khaki nickers and black round cap; Baahubali with a huge mace; Buddhibali, dressed in saffron, with a trident nib pen”. Guru Gol, an onomatopoeic cognate to Madhav Sadashiv Golwalker, the second *Sarsanghchalak* (Supreme Leader) of RSS, also addressed as ‘Guruji,’ embodies the characteristics of his real life counterpart — not just the name, or the uniform but also his declamatory verbiage, his authoritative and sententious grandiloquence, and the influence and discipline he exercises on the other two archetypal characters. Guru Gol, in vernacular Hindi, also connotes a Janus-faced stock character, primarily a braggart. Those familiar with Janam will also agree that Guru Gol is a stock character in their productions e.g. *Gadha Puran*. Their stock character is an assimilation of both — the ideologue and the braggart. This assimilation is important in the context of a street play. The use of vernacular stereotype, particularly a parody, makes it convenient to retain the audience’s attention and honey coat the ideological character, to whom people might have undecided feelings, making it conveniently ingestible as it goes on to take down the ideology one step at a time equating it with the buffoonery already identified by the audience.

Guru Gol is also the embodied metonym for the RSS — the proponent organization of *Hindutva*, the ethno-centric ideology based on the essentialist premise that India is primarily a Hindu nation — and the purpose of his life is to bring in the monopoly of “Hindi, Hindu and Hindustan” —

एक धर्म हो, एक ही भाषा,  
राष्ट्र की हो एक परिभाषा

एक संस्कृति, एक रंग हो  
जीने का बस एक ढंग हो  
तिलक, तराजू और तलवार  
फूले फले इनका व्यापार  
वर्ण जाती के ही अनुसार  
सब जन का होवे व्यवहार  
जो भी मेरे वचन न माने  
नष्ट यकीनन होगा जाने

[One religion, one tongue  
A Nation with one definition  
One culture, one color  
Only one way of life  
*Tilak, Tarazu, and sword*  
May their business prosper  
Only the caste system should  
instruct everyone's practice  
Whoever does not abide my words  
will face obliteration.]

Well within the norms of street theatre each character introduces himself to a lay audience establishing the dialogic character-spectator relationship essential for an agit-prop street play. These introductions are also designed to enlighten and educate the audience of concepts using analogies and familiar references. His agenda is to establish a religious, linguistic and cultural sameness where the nation has only one definition and there is a uniform way of life. Unlike proscenium theatre where conventions of aesthetics dictate didacticism to be obscured in subtlety and nuance, the street play makes no pretense of hiding its real target by concealing it in layers of mystical symbolism and iconography. The verses in Guru Gol's introduction are cherry picked from statements of various RSS

ideologues from Hedgewar, Golwalkar and Savarkar to Mohan Bhagwat and reiterates the ethnic chauvinism they advocate and foster — the idea of an exclusive Hindu nation, of one language, religion, race, ethnicity where the caste hierarchy is cherished. His last sentence is an explicit threat to anyone who would not conform to his idea of nation, culture and history.

The other two archetypal characters, Baahubali and Buddhibali, are embodiments of Althusserian state apparatuses — repressive and ideological, respectively (Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, 2001, p. 96). Buddhibali introduces herself as “consensus builder” and she achieves this through newspapers, radio, television, education system, textbooks and wit. Baahubali’s introduction appears more like an intimidation and he declares that those who evade the ideological stratagems of Buddhibali have to face him and his destructive, oppressive force. Common Hindu iconography, such as the mace, the trishul and *bhagwa* (saffron) attire, are conspicuously used to imitate the proponents of *Hindutva* politics and simulate their ideological and repressive maneuvers.

The play goes on to trace how a discourse of nation is constructed, how myths are manufactured and legitimized with pseudo-science, and how these historicized aporetic myths valorize the idea of an ancient ethnic nation. The play amplifies the absurdity of such historicization by Buddhibali’s hyperboles like “the nation our ancestors built 20 lakh years ago,” “even dinosaurs were Hindu” (Jana Natya Manch, 2002, p. 117). The hyperboles seem pretty far-fetched, but a play produced in 2002 not only reiterates these 20<sup>th</sup> century myths, it successfully foretells, in its absurdist fashion, many myths that would be made subsequently in all seriousness. It augurs Hindu Mahasabha’s call to every woman

to birth healthy sons who can serve the Sangh, the affective obsession and political misappropriation of National song and flag (Jana Natya Manch, 2002, p. 118). Such remarks have been made time and again and their intensity has only magnified over the past couple of years. The play in its expanse and intertextuality stretches across time and space into a palimpsest of ethnic chauvinism, paranoia of the different and the other, narcissistic supremacy of a mythical past and an unapologetic valorization of force and violence, both physical and ideological.

The three characters are not all and sundry, the attire is not a cultural attire and the tropes are not innocent. They constitute a performative whole of RSS and its associated organizations. As mentioned previously they are characterized in order to invoke the audiences ridicule and an empathetic detachment. It is not Hinduism or being Hindu which is questioned here, but being politically so in order to claim the rightful control of the state. These ideas of cultural pride and sentiments of victimhood fuel the agenda of an ethnocentric nation and nationalism that has been used to mobilize masses of ideological and martial combatants. Guru Gol's ritualistic dialog to Baahubali, "You are an ass," followed by a kick simulates the high-handedness of militant nationalist groups affiliated to this ideology. A high handedness, which almost always gets a mild slap-on-wrist response from those higher up the ladder, whom Guru Gol represents. The exchange mocks the routine play of the violence of the indoctrinated violent and publically performed charade of reprimand. The jibes that Buddhibali and Baahubali exchange reflects the incompatibility and lack of organizational control which often leads to frenzied surge of effervescence. The characters and the situations are relatable even to a lay audience which is familiar with the anglophile uniform of Guru Gol, the *bhagwa* of Buddhibali which has

been immensely politicized by a number of Swami and Sadhvi politicians and the mace of Baahubali, in the form of Bajrang Dal, Shiv Sena and Ranvir Sena, that has very often struck dissent and difference. The discourse that plays within this play is a pastiche of all tenets of Hindu nationalist movement in India. *YDMMG* plays with poetry and jingle, facts and fictions, truths and hyperboles, witty sarcasm and dry humor, comedy and farce, to create a potent agitation propaganda street theatre that grips the audience and deconstructs the discourse of the dominant ideology, layer by layer to expose its toxic foundations. Breaching the illusions of ‘the fourth-wall’ theatre, stripping down the stage to the streets and inviting the audience in its performative space, *YDMMG* responds to societal prejudices and attitudes, and thrusts the issues of ethno-cultural chauvinism and its inherent violence into the public eye.

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Nandan, Zarine, Javed and Bobby are all victims of an ideology of nationalism designed and dominated by a caste Hindu cultural chauvinism perpetuated by those akin to the triumvirate of the Hindu Right — Guru Gol, Buddhibali and Baahubali. Nandan is the representative figure of thousands of Dalits who are literally and figuratively immolated for trying to trespass on upper caste culture. Zarine’s family can be conveniently silenced, their burnt shop bought for a pittance by the people who arson it, because they do not belong here. Javed is conditioned by the rebuke of his majoritarian peers to hate and despise them, and Bobby is conditioned by his exposure to education and media to hate and despise himself and his community. *YDMMG* chooses to take the critique of the *Hindutva* forces to the plebeian spaces where they operate in and with the help of gags, lampoons, silences

and sarcasm it foregrounds the absurd yet violent undertones of their reiterative routine performances.

The performance paradigm diffuses the boundaries between theatre and the theatrical enabling a critical dialog between both. The quotidian spectatorial performances of national identity in RSS *shakhas* constitute a performatively imagined community. National identity and national life are dictated in terms of homogenous and hegemonic definitions of belonging, based on language, culture, race and religion. These majoritarian and culturally elitist performatives of *Hindutva* are countered with performances from theatre. The three plays creatively postulate and reproduce the experiences of *Hindutva*'s social, cultural and political engineering. They critique the cultural politics of Hindu nationalism's discourse. Nandan's subjectivation and eventual immolation echoes the real life strategic assimilation and deployment of underprivileged groups as expendable foot soldiers in communal incidents (Mathur, 2008, pp. 41-43; Jha D., 2017 ). Smita Gupta calls this phenomenon the "Dalit-*Hindutva* paradox," i.e. the political necessity of social unification and the cultural aversion of assimilating the "outcaste" and disrupting the status quo (Gupta S., 2016). *Final Solutions* dramatizes the nuanced domestic, political and economic conflicts that motivate communal disharmony (Engineer, 1984; Kumar A., 1991). The absurdity of ethnic violence is best captured in the silences of *YDMMG*. Sudhanva Deshpande, the director, submits that there was no other trope that could have communicated the horrors of the 2002 Gujarat riots better than somber silences (Deshpande & Kishore, 2017). These silences juxtapose a dialog that is a pastiche of the quotidian discourse that originates in the Sangh's *shakhas*. These plays appropriate *Hindutva*'s

performatives of self/other, and produce their critical resignifications challenging its hegemony and denaturing its claims to the nation.





## CHAPTER V

# CONCLUSION: NATION AS A PERFORMATIVELY IMAGINED COMMUNITY

### **The Thing Done — Performative Nations**

What is a Nation? A territory, the people that inhabit that territory, or the state that administers the territory and the people? An accurate definition would involve all these elements. Different theories of nation prioritize different elements. For instance, theories of civic nation, i.e., modernist theories, prioritize the state as the upholder of a civic contract between the people; theories of ethnic nation, i.e., primordialist theories, prioritize the people as a historic entity with a genealogical claim to the territory. Anthony D. Smith conclusively stated these polarities as false-dichotomy insisting that nations are at once primordial and modern, territorial and demographic, civic and ethnic. Nations do not appear out of a vacuum. Construction, narration and imagination of a national community is only possible by deploying existing discursive raw material. This process of construction and imagination is the domain of the cultural and political elites who excavate essentialist abstractions of blood ties — tradition, culture, ancestry — or civil contract — liberty, equality and fraternity. This narrative of the nation is perpetuated through cultural artefacts (visual, textual, aural or electronic), institutions (state, schools and curriculum), and monuments (museums, and memorials).

The efficacy of this imagination is dependent on the participation of people, whether voluntarily or enforced. The people must metonymize themselves as constituents of the nation. This metonymy, the subjective experience of the imagined community, is

embodied and performative, and its naturalization is achieved and reinforced through reiteration. The nation is therefore a performatively constituted imagined community where the masses perform the norms of nation and national belonging laid out in elite discourses. Commemorative holidays, parades, sports and election constitute the national experience. *Le lieux de memoire* i.e. places of memory — Museums, Mausoleums and Monuments — furnish the infrastructure and the altar of performing the nation (Kishore, From the Rajghat to India Gate: Places of Memory, Sites of State Sovereignty and Public Dissent, 2015). At these altars the stakeholders of the nation — the elites and the masses — contest for authority, sovereignty and dissent (Kishore, 2015).

Nationalism is the ideology of the nation. Teleologically, nationalism precedes the nation and creates a conducive discourse for the emergence and popular acceptance of nation. It is in the body of the subjects that the ideology of nationalism becomes manifest. These discourse(s) of nation gain momentum and affect through the bodies of its citizens. A generic definition of nationalism would be flawed as it has emerged in different places from different contexts and into different forms. For instance, while in the European context, nationalism emerged to protect mercantile interests, in colonial India, it emerged as a movement of political self-determination. Nationalism is a contingent ideological discourse that synthesizes a dominant theory of the nation from a repertoire of available social and cultural meaning. It produces a narrative of integration, homogeneity, common history and mutual interests that affects a shared consciousness into a geographically scattered population. Benedict Anderson terms this ideology of shared comradeship among the dispersed people within a geopolitical border and a sovereign state as an “imagined community” (Anderson, 1983/2006). The dissemination of this imagination, Anderson

argued, was catalyzed by print and electronic capitalism, and through the state's own apparatuses. However, this imagination is not purely scriptural, legible and literate as Anderson implies. While the elites dictate the discourse of official nationalism, it is experienced viscerally and expressed kinesthetically in its constituents. This imagined community comes to life through performance.

Emblems, anthems, symbols, songs, ceremonies, sports, parades and an assortment of embodied activities constitute the nation every day. The nation is a daily plebiscite, "embedded in routines of life" (Billig, 1995, p. 38) and proclaimed through the bodies of the citizen. National identities are reiteratively replicated through prescribed rituals of the state, elections, commemorating events, sporting events, responses to foreign/terror attack. The performative newspaper-reading ritual that Anderson exemplifies is substituted and supplemented by radio and television (Rajagopal, 2004), and social media. Nations are anthropomorphized and deified, and nationalism takes the form of populist religion with its own, perhaps secular, liturgy. This study therefore argues that the nation is not only an imagined community, but a performed and a performative community.

Similar to official or state-sponsored nationalism, unofficial nationalisms or ideologies that make parallel claims of national identity also employ a similar praxis. This study deals with majoritarian ethnocultural nationalism based on *Hindutva*, or Hindu nationalism, in India. It is assumed that as an alternative emergent ideology, these claims are often more amplified, stylized and exaggerated. The research aimed at exploring the performative politics of Hindu nationalism. Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh was chosen as the object of this study since it is the largest volunteer organization with in-roads into class, caste and gender politics. Sangh employs the method of spectacle to affect a Hindu

cohesion in the country. Its politics is largely public and relies on routine haptic and tactile exercises, the *Baudhik* and the *Sharirik*, to forge an intimate psycho-somatic bond between its volunteers. One of the primary objectives of this study was to explore the performative politics of these exercises. A significant portion of the study is an exploration of the cultural phenomenon of Hindu nationalism which relies on ethnographic data triangulated from unstructured interviews and observations, propaganda literature and secondary ethnographic sources. It inaugurates a performance-based epistemology of quotidian ethno-nationalisms through an investigation of the spectatorial and the performative politics of *Hindutva*.

### **Hindu Rashtra: Performing Claims to the Nation**

The objective of *Hindutva* is to displace or transform the idea of a syncretic modern India into a *Hindu Rashtra*, i.e. a Hindu nation. The foundational premise of this ideology is that Hindus have a historical and genealogical claim to the territory and the state. This claim is premised on a nebulous definitions of nation, state and 'Hindu'. The Hindu nation of *Hindutva* is ideally *Akhand Bharat*, the primordial India that stretched from Afghanistan in the West to Myanmar in the East, but would be content with the present territory. The state should be based on *Manusmriti*, Manu's manual of policy and praxis, and Dharma, an ambiguous principle of ethics. The citizens of this Hindu nation must be Hindus, a slippery term that the Sangh deploys to suit its contexts. A Hindu is a racial and geographic entity, born within the realms of Hindusthan and descendant of indigenous people (Figure). They are also a cultural entity and, more problematically, a religious entity. Being a cultural Hindu implies adhering to the *sanskriti* (tradition and civilizational ethos) of this geographic territory.

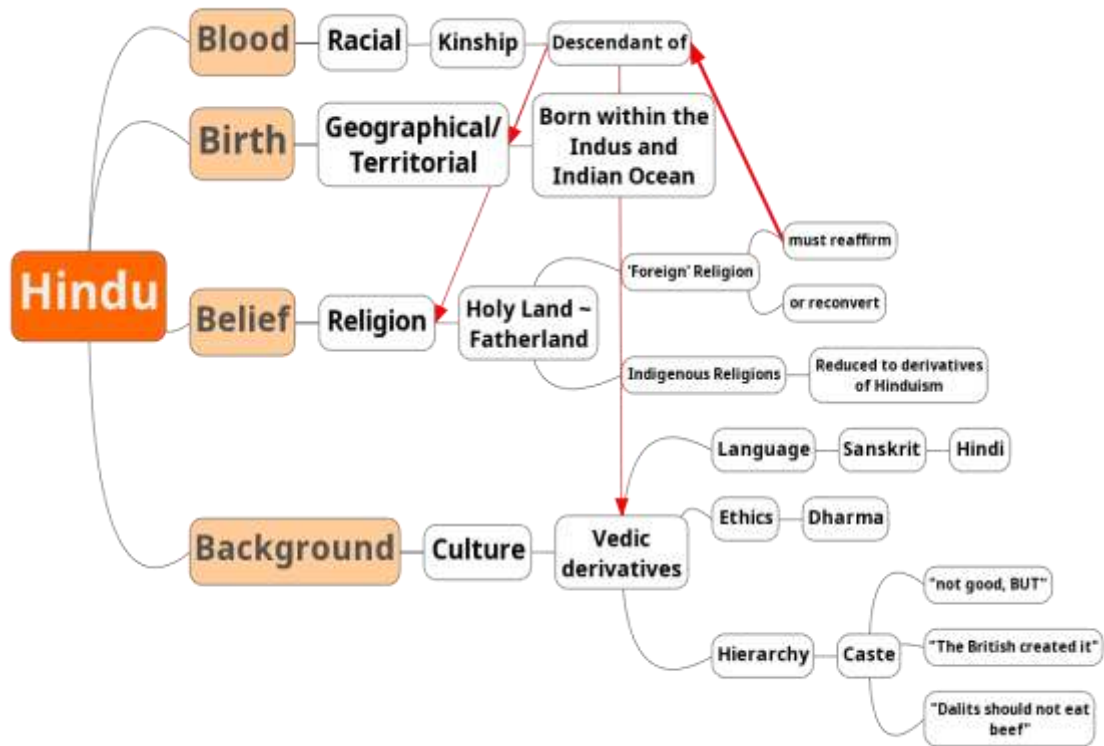


Figure 10. Theorizing a "Hindu" national identity

This cultural or civilizational ethos that *Hindutva* transposes as an element of the national identity, is excavated and re-appropriated from the Vedic antiquity through a colonial orientalist intervention. It is exclusively Sanskritic and Brahminic, and evokes the orientalist binaries of spiritual superiority of the East over the materiality of the West. It is a reformation and re-assertion of caste hegemony through the double helix of language and culture. It often ignores the material cultures of the indigenous working classes, termed the Scheduled Castes in postcolonial seriality, and subsumes the alternative material-spirituality, pantheism or animism of indigenous tribes. Cultural diversity within this territory is enveloped into a homogenizing Hinduism that is arguably caste hegemony. In terms of religion, the Sangh, on one hand, rejects "Hindu" as a religious category and on another hand fosters an affiliate, the VHP (World Hindu Council) that represents the interests of religious Hindus. The religious connotation is also inseparable in the assertion

that the holyland and the fatherland of Hindus must be within this territory. This qualification overrules all other criteria of identity while automatically alienating the Christian and Muslim minority.

This discourse of Hindu nationalism is routinely performed in the thousands of *shakhas* (daily congregations) organized all over the country. For ninety years since its formation, the Sangh has patiently and persistently perpetuated the ideology of the Hindu nation. It has expanded in terms of membership (horizontally) and in terms of allied and affiliated organizations (vertically) that adopt and espouse its ideological claims. It has appropriated and embedded itself into the calendar of Hindu festivals producing a unique hybrid of religio-national rituals. The saffron flag is hallowed as the cultural flag and the spiritual guru of the nation as opposed to the official National Flag, the Tricolor. The Guru Purnima is celebrated in veneration of this incorporeal guru in whose name the RSS calls for an anonymized fund-raiser. The allegorical celebration of good vs evil in *Vijaya Dashmi*, the tenth day of *Dussehra* when the RSS celebrates its Founders Day, is turned into a spectacle of Hindu power and gung-ho machismo. Rakshabandhan is renovated into a unique ritual of kinship where each *Swayamsewak* ties a Raksha to the other, as opposed to the traditional sister-brother ritual of promise.

The repetitive, reiterative and routine *shakhas* affects a naturalization of the discourse of *Hindutva*. Abstractions of history, tradition, culture and identity are condensed into performatives — stylized acts and behavior — that are routinely reproduced and recited in the body of its subjects. The *Dhwaj Pranam* (flag salute), *Ekatmata Stotr* (Hymn to Oneness) and the paramilitary commands (in Sanskrit), yoga, physical and cognitive training simulate a liturgy of the saffron flag and the Vedic Bharat Mata (Mother India).

Rituals and routines of the Sangh subjectivate *Swayamsewaks* into docile and disciplined agents of cultural and political revolution. They are embedded into a mythopoeia of Hindu victimhood, a selective historiography of cultural encroachment at the hands of the foreign aggressors and a perpetual threat of neglect and extinction at the hands of the contemporary threat - Muslim, Marxist, missionary, materialists and Macaulayist. These categories are recurrently conjured, and new labels invented, by *Hindutva* in an identitarian search of national heroes/villains to be juxtaposed over Self/Others. All political, cultural or social opposition to *Hindutva* or dissent against its hegemony can be bracketed under these categories and maligned.

RSS proposes that Hindu ethnocultural assertion is the panacea to organizing the Hindus, spreading the doctrine of *Hindutva*, defeating its enemies and eventually establishing *Akhand Bharat* (Undivided or Greater India). As champions of Hindu nationalism, the RSS actively adapts, appropriates and participates in this mythopoeia and its preservation through a curriculumized and quasi-pedagogical repertoire in its daily *shakhas* (branches). The Sangh is fashioned as the modern model and manifestation of the ancient Hindu nation. The *shakhas* are the microcosms of the Sangh, and transitively of the Hindu nation. The membership, “open to all Hindu men,” epitomizes its notions of citizenship and belonging. The *Swayamsewaks* are trained as paramilitary-citizens, “Wehrbauer”<sup>104</sup>, vigilant and cautious of perpetual threats that *Hindutva* identifies and disciplined to follow the commands of the one leader. They are the examples of character, discipline and nationalism that affects public perception of *Hindutva* and recruit more youth into the fold. Their indoctrination employs a two pronged psycho-somatic strategy

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<sup>104</sup> See Chapter 3.

of “character building” — ludic rituals and games — and ‘intellectual’ sermons that deploy its narratives and discourses. It exports its informal pedagogy of character building across India into multiple domains (student politics, farmer and labor politics, tribal areas, etc.) in an attempt to engineer an overarching Hindu identity that substitutes or subsumes all other identities.

This authoritarian identity is somatically reimagined through the bodies of the *Swayamsewak*. It is reproduced in movements, gestures, costumes, cohort activities, rituals, skits and conduct that the Third Chapter expounds. The *Swayamsewak* worships and idolizes the Hindu warrior-kings and abstemious Vedic scholars totemized in the saffron flag. He prays to an antinomous deification of the Motherland — fair, opulent, assertive, who mounts a lion but requires blood sacrifices to survive — and pledges to self-sacrifice. Perceptions of comradeship and solidarity are cemented in sweat, if not blood, through close tactile contact — touch, pushes, shoves and huddles — of the bodies of his companions engaged into routine instructional strategic serious-play.

### **The Incongruity of Hindu Rashtra and Critical Theatre Interventions**

To cite and extend Anderson’s example again, analogical to news-paper reading, the *shakhas* are coordinated choreographed acts whose participant is “well aware that the ceremony he performs is being repeated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident” (Anderson, 1983/2006, p. 35). However, unlike newspaper readers, the Swayamsewaks are not always anonymous and disembodied mental images. They are widely networked and might meet one another in routine training camps organized by the Sangh, in disaster relief operations or in mass mobilization drives



such as the Babri-Masjid demolition. This awareness interpellates the performative imagined community of regimental-militant Hindus, to whom the nation belongs.

Sangh's idea of India as a singularity — one nation, one religion, one culture and one language — and an ethnocentric *dharmocracy*, is incompatible with the empirical realities of India. Even the national serialization project, tasked with creating enumerative categories, recognizes seven hundred and twenty dialects, six hundred and forty five tribes and nine recognized religions. While these numbers do not represent exactitudes of social, cultural and religious diversity and are problematic in their own right<sup>105</sup>, they are close approximations. The historical experience across the vast territory has been equally varied (Kaviraj, 2010). Ethnocentric exercises of assimilative social engineering and claims to the nation have resulted in crisis exposing the fault lines of such projects. In these moments of crisis, theatre has emerged as a critical form of resistance that extracts *Hindutva's* performatives of identity and belonging, and subverts them into didactic thespian imitations and caricature. If discourse, identity and national belonging is naturalized through performative embodied acts, theatre employs the same medium to denature and deconstruct them. The other objective of this study was to explore these thespian interventions of Hindu nationalism and situating them on the 'continuum of being' that Performance studies theorizes — from poesis to kinesis. The dissertation analyses a selection of plays that borrow from the quotidian discourse and spectacles of *Hindutva* and creatively reimagine them into critical thespian performances. The dissertation attempts to

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<sup>105</sup> A detailed problematization of the colonial and nationalist exercise of mapping "Fuzzy communities" into "Enumerative communities" thereby embedding them into a politics of categories is explored in (Kaviraj, 1995; Kaviraj, 2010; Osuri, 2013).

illustrate the theoretical proposition that all human action constitutes a continuum of performance that performance theory espouses.

The impulse of the dissertation is theoretical and exploratory. On one hand it attempts to explore the banality of its subject — Hindu nationalism, the majoritarian ethnocultural nationalism in India. On the other, on a theoretical level, it attempts to illustrate the proposed continuum of performance as a heuristic tool, and an ontological perspective to understand ‘being in the world’. The dissertation starts with the *shakha*, a routine, public and seemingly ludic but liturgical, choreographed and rehearsed performance of ethno cultural national identity. This performance is spectatorial and performative but constructs a *real* discourse of identity and affects a naturalization of territorial, cultural, social and political claims. It concludes with the discussion of *YDMMG* a street theatre that occupies similar plebian spaces as the *shakha*, but subverts its performatives to interrogate its assertions, and lampoon its discourse and exhibit its effects.

### **Limitations and Future Scope**

This dissertation is a transdisciplinary exercise that can be categorized, if it must be, as a comparative cultural study of the multiple performative configurations of Hindu nationalism. The study adopts the performance paradigm and attempts to develop a method of transdisciplinary cultural studies. Employing this perspective on the phenomenon of ethnocultural nationalism, specifically Hindu nationalism in India, it furthers the concept of nation as a performed and performative community. The method can be employed to study other identitarian movements in India or elsewhere. Ethnic movements appropriate history and memory to make claims of natural belonging i.e. rights based on blood and birth over a territory. The performance paradigm problematizes all essentialist definitions

of identity and belonging and therefore denatures their claims. While RSS remains the torchbearer of Hindu nationalism in India, there are numerous other organizations working towards the same goal. A *Sanatan Sanstha* activist disclosed a network of over four hundred regional organizations and factions actively mobilizing for the cause of a Hindu nation. Although the principles and ideology of the phenomenon is borrowed from the Sangh and its literature, the modus operandi might be different. In many cases, for instance, *Sri Ram Sene* and *Sanatan Sanstha*, ex-Sangh members who believe the RSS to be too liberal, have launched proactive and extremist *Hindutva* offshoots.

The study does not address concerns of gender within the organizational structure of the RSS. In conversations, *Swayamsewaks* would argue that Sangh does not allow women into the *shakha* because “men and women cannot work together without distractions” (Personal Communication, November, 2015, Goa; August, 2016, Goa). I discovered this belief to be widely accepted. The only time the Sangh and the Rashtriya Sevika Samiti share stage was the founder’s day celebration. Women organizations that subscribe to the Sangh’s ideology have a restricted access policies. The RSS’s engagement with gender is extremely problematic. Its *shakhas* are exclusively masculine because men and women cannot work together. “Women will distract men” (Personal Communication, November, 2015, Goa; August, 2016, Goa). Sevika Samiti is an allied organization but is not treated as an affiliate. Due to a lack of data it was not appropriate for the study to comment on gender issues within the movement. Durga Vahini, the women wing of VHP, trains women to be docile-warriors. Unlike their men counterparts, the women are not trained in public spaces. Kalyani Devaki Menon has produced an elaborate ethnographic account of how women are recruited into the agenda of the Hindu Right (Menon K. D.,

2010). Nisha Pahuja tried to chronicle Durga Vahini's process and routine of interpellation of girls (Pahuja, 2012). Unfortunately she was not allowed to record these activities. Women scholars, who can secure access to these women organizations, can adopt the theoretical framework and methodology of this study to analyze the gendered performances of ethnocultural identity.

The Sangh is rapidly expanding into tribal areas. *Hindutva* organizations have set up a number of *Ekal Vidyalaya* (One-Teacher school) and Vanvasi Kalyan Ashrams (Tribal Welfare Center). They are aimed at providing "functional, ethical and value education" to tribal children. These schools and centers employ a hybrid pedagogical methodology of school and *shakhas*. They celebrate the Sangh's festivals and symbols, build temples of Ram and Hanuman where there were none. The tribals are not only educated but they are educated into the discourse of pan-Indian Hindu identity, quite similar to Nandan. This interaction between *Hindutva* and indigenous tribal culture would be of interest and can be explored through the framework of performance.

I was often charged with "liberal bias" by *Swayamsewaks* for choosing to investigate Hindu nationalism. However, since it is a majoritarian movement its effects are incommensurable and visible. My position within the majority community provides perspective and enables more access than I would have had in any other community. While doing a pilot study in the displaced camps of riot-hit Muzaffarnagar, I was always perceived as "one of the perpetrators" and kept at a safe distance. It was impossible to hold a conversation while working alone, and people would only communicate if some members of *Astitva*, an active regional NGO, accompanied me. This was a logistical issue that future studies can avoid by working in mixed groups and interdisciplinary collaborations. It must

also be noted that there are no other identitarian movement in India that seek a national redefinition comparable to the idea of a *Hindu Rashtra*. There are, however, various secessionist movements and emerging movements of caste, class and language. While this research is a product of my social positionality and logistical limits of a doctoral research, and focuses on majoritarian identity politics, the approach can be extended to study other forms of identitarian community politics. Ratna Pathak and Naseeruddin Shah, theatre and Bollywood personalities, anecdotally note that youth in 21<sup>st</sup> century has become increasingly performative – “Girls are doing *karva chauth!* ... girls as young as two are wearing hijabs. Muslim boys are growing beards claiming it’s a sense of identity” (Unny, 2014). These are renascent performatives of identities that warrant wider exploration but were beyond the scope of this research.

The theoretical framework of Performance Theory is still new and new methodologies are being developed as I write this dissertation. My own work has benefited from those who pioneer the performance paradigm in the study of culture and, humbly aspires to contribute to this emerging niche. The relevance of the study lies in its marginally explored intersection of performance and nationalism, two equally contested and slippery concepts. It evaluates the radical potential of performance in questioning, studying and destabilizing dominant ideological formations and cultural discourses.



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## APPENDIX A

### Sangh Parivar: Sister Organizations

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Area</i>
<i>Adhivakta Parishad</i>	Lawyer and Legal concerns
<i>Arogya Bharati</i>	Health and Medicine
<i>Kutumb Prabodhan</i>	Family Welfare
<i>Kushth Rog Nivaran Samiti</i>	Leprosy patients
<i>Krida Bharati</i>	Sports
<i>Gau Samvardhan</i>	Cow protection and conservation
<i>Grahaak Panchayat</i>	Consumer welfare
<i>Deendayal Shodh Sansthan</i>	Rural development
National Medical Organization	Doctors
<i>Purva Sainik Sewa Parishad</i>	Ex Servicemen
<i>Pragya Pravah</i>	Ideology
<i>Balgokulum</i>	Child development
<i>Bharat Vikas Parishad</i>	Social Service

<i>Bharatiya Itihas Sankalan Yojana</i>	History
<i>Bharatiya Kisan Sangh</i>	Farmers
<i>Bharatiya Janta Party</i>	Parliamentary politics
<i>Bharatiya Majdoor Sangh</i>	Labour
<i>Bharatiya Shikshan Mandal</i>	Education reform
<i>Rashtriya Shaikshik Mahasangh</i>	Teachers
<i>Rashtriya Sikh Sangat</i>	Sikhs
<i>Laghu Udyog Bharati</i>	Small-scale industry
<i>Sahkar Bharati</i>	Cooperative industry
<i>Samajik Samarasta</i>	Promote social equanimity
<i>Sahitya Parishad</i>	Literary
<i>Sewa Bharati</i>	Social service
<i>Seema Jankalyan Samiti</i>	Border community welfare
<i>Sanskar Bharati</i>	Art and culture
<i>Swadeshi Jagaran Manch</i>	Economic development
<i>Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram</i>	Tribal Welfare

<i>Vidya Bharati</i>	Education reforms and schools
<i>Akhil Bharati Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP)</i>	Student union
<i>Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP)</i>	Religious
<i>Vigyan Bharati</i>	Science
<i>Saksham</i>	Physically handicapped



## **APPENDIX B**

### **Sangh's *Pratigya* (Oath)**

In the name of the Almighty God and our ancestors, I hereby vow that I have become a member of the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh to protect our holy Hindu religion, Hindu civilization and Hindu society and the development of Hindu Nation. I shall do Sangh's work with complete veracity, selflessness, body, mind and wealth. I shall observe this oath till death. *Bharat mata ki jai!*

### **Sangh's *Prarthna* (Prayer)**

O loving Motherland, I bow to thee,  
O land of the Hindus, you have brought me up in comfort.  
O sacred and blessed holy land, may my life be laid down in your service,  
I bow before you again and again.  
O Almighty God! We the children of Hindu Nation  
bow to you in reverence.  
We have girded our loins to carry on your work.  
Grant us your blessings for its fulfilment.  
O Lord! Grant us such strength that no power can challenge,  
such purity of character that would command the world's awe,  
That would make our chosen thorny path easy.  
May the spirit of heroism inspires us,  
for valor is the name of the highest spiritual bliss.  
May energy and allegiance to mission enthuse our hearts.

May our victorious organizational power,  
be capable of protecting our religion  
and lead our nation to splendor and glory.

*Bharat Mata ki Jai!*



## APPENDIX C

### *Amrit Vachan* (Motivational words) for Baudhik (All translations author's)

#### **For Vijaya Dashmi (Founder's Day)**

No matter how superior our religion and culture might be, if we do not have the power to defend them they will not be respected in the world. We are powerless, and that is why our religion and race has reached this pitiable condition. The only response to all the invasions and injustices we have sustained in past, and are still suffering, is that we attain immense power. We can only achieve this kind of power by organizing. There is no other way to produce such strength.

– Dr. Hedgewar

#### **For Makar Sankranti (Winter Solstice)**

We have sworn to serve the nation. All countrymen are our brothers. We will not rest till we reinvigorate in them the pride of being the sons of *Bharat mata*, our motherland. We will make *Bharat mata* truly glorious. She will become a ten-armed Durga to destroy the demons; she will become Lakshmi and make everyone prosperous; she will become Saraswati, remove the darkness of ignorance and spread the light of knowledge. We will bring true Solstice to this land lapped within the Indian Ocean and the Himalayas. Our resolution will not be accomplished till there is equanimity, equality, diligence, knowledge, happiness and peace.

– Deendayal Upadhyay

### **For Varsh Pratipada (New Year)**

Param Pujaniya Doctorji's [Dr. Hedgewar] life of difficulty, struggle and sacrifice serves as an ideal for common people. Regardless of poverty, obscurity, apathy of elders, unfavorable circumstances, obstacles, resistance, indifference and rebuke if one keeps their goal in mind and fulfil their duty they will inevitably succeed.

### **For Hindu Samrajya Dinotsava (Hindu Empire Day)**

As long a Hindu is a Hindu, he can dedicate his life to serve India. He can hope to sacrifice his life to the adored Motherland and achieve salvation. But if he converts to Islam or Christianity why would he sacrifice his life for this landmass? His holy land will change from Kashi [Varanasi] to Mecca-Medina. Therefore, we must understand that a true nationalist, and actual patriot was always Hindu and will always be Hindu.

– V.D. Savarkar

### **For Guru Purnima (Teacher's Day)**

May this, our work, progress at such speed that once again the world submits to this flag, which was once called the Master of the World, and get compelled to worship it and sacrifice its life at its feet. May this passion swell in our hearts!

– M.S. Golwalkar

### **For Rakshabandhan**

For the next fifty years we shall have only one center of meditation – our great Motherland India. India, our nation, is the only deity that is alive; that has arms and feet, and ears everywhere; it is rich in all resources. All other Gods are asleep. Why should we impractically pursue other Gods? Why should we not worship that magnanimous deity that we see all around us? When we have worshipped him we will deserve to worship all others.

– Swami Vivekananda

**For Gurudakshina (Fundraiser) Ceremony**

Worship does not mean only offering fruits and flowers. Worship means expressing the sentiment of complete submission. Surrendering the object of immense personal greed is the highest form of submission. In personal lives we need money to achieve our self-interests. Comfort, luxuries and other commodities can be acquired through wealth. To surrender that wealth at the feet of our deity is true submission. This is the most sincere kind of worship.

– M.S. Golwalkar



## APPENDIX D

### “Preamble to the Constitution of the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh”

#### “Preamble

Whereas in the disintegrated condition of the country it was considered necessary to have an Organisation:

- (a) To eradicate the fissiparous tendencies arising from diversities of sect, faith, caste and creed and from political, economic linguistic and provincial differences, amongst Hindus.
- (b) To make them realise the greatness of their past.
- (c) To inculcate in them a spirit of service, sacrifice and selfless devotion to the Society.
- (d) To build up an organised and well-disciplined corporate life.
- (e) To bring about an all-round regeneration of the Hindu Samaj on the basis of its Dharma and its Sanskriti.

And whereas the famous Organisation known as ‘Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh’, was started on the auspicious Vijaya Dashami Day in the year Yugabd 5027, Vikram Samvat 1982 (1925 A.D.) by the late Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar.

And whereas Shri Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar was nominated by the said Dr. Hedgewar to succeed him in the year Vikram Samvat 1997 (1940 A.D.).

And whereas the Sangh had till now no written Constitution;

And whereas in the present changed conditions, it is deemed desirable to reduce to writing the Constitution as also the Aims and Objects of the Sangh and its Methods of Work; The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, hereby adopts the following Constitution:

## **ARTICLE 1**

### **Name**

The name of the Organisation is, 'Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh'.

## **ARTICLE 2**

### **Headquarter**

The Head Quarter of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh is located at Nagpur.





## **ARTICLE 3**

### **Aims and Objects**

The Aims and Objects of the Sangh are to organise and weld together the various diverse groups within the Hindu *Samaj* and to revitalise and rejuvenate the same on the basis of its *Dharma* and *Sanskriti*, so that it may achieve an all-sided development of *Bharat Varsha*.”

## APPENDIX E

### Digital *Hindutva* Examples

	
<p>Prof. Rakesh Sinha, a Sangh ideologue.</p>	<p>Jagrati Shukla, a journalit and pro-BJP, pro-<i>Hindutva</i> voice.</p>
	
<p>In 2016 a social media campaign began identifying interfaith couples as cases of Love Jihad, who were targeted and harassed. (Photo and Names of victims partially blurred by author to protect their identity)</p>	<p>A routine anti-Islam tweet from Shankhnaad, a leading Hindu nationalist twitter handle.</p>





## List of Publications

- "From the Rajghat to India Gate: Places of Memory, Sites of State Sovereignty and Public Dissent." *Annales Universitatis Apulensis: Series Historica* 19.2 (2015): 43-57. [SCI-indexed]
- "Incredible India: The Aggressive Campaign and its Regressive Tendencies." *International Journal of Communication*. Vol. 20. Issue 1-2 (2016). 93-106.
- "Of *Bhaktis*, Deplorables and more: Posthuman Communities Performing Political Partisanship in the Age of Social Media," *Flow*. Vol. 23. Special Issue. (2016) <http://www.flowjournal.org/2016/12/of-bhaktis-deplorables-and-more/> [Texas Uni]
- "*Jana Natya Manch* Performing Hindu Fascism in India." *Indian Theatre Journal*. Vol 1.2 (2017) [Intellect Pub.: UGC indexed]
- "Performing Ethnocultural Nationalism: Choreographies of Hindu nationalism in Theatre Performances." *Indian Theatre Journal*. Communicated (Expected March 2019) [Intellect Pub.: UGC indexed]

## Papers Presented

- "A Play of Reiterative Violence: The Global Performance of Self/Other and Belonging/Exclusion through Terror and Counter-Terror." at Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam Conference (August 2016), on "Livability of Planet Earth".
- "At the Crossroads of the Body and the Word: Interrogating Culture Through a Performance Paradigm" at the XIII CLAI Biennial International Conference, on "Comparative Literature: At the Crossroads of Culture and Society" Visva-Bharati University, Shantiniketan, West Bengal (March 2017).
- "The Crucibles of Hindu nationalism: Games, Playgrounds and Propaganda" at the Eighth International Conference on Sports and Society, Imperial College, London, UK (July 2017).
- "Performing the Hindu Nation: Quotidian Simulations of Hindu nationalism" at the 25<sup>th</sup> International Medieval Congress, University of Leeds, UK (July 2018).



## **BIOGRAPHY**

### **Biography of Student**

Sushant Kishore has studied Literature and Critical Cultural Theory over the course of his Undergraduate and Master's programs from Delhi University, Delhi and Panjab University, Chandigarh, respectively. He is currently a Research Fellow at BITS Pilani, where he is working on his doctoral research on the performative politics of Hindu nationalism.

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K.A. Geetha has nearly two decades of experience in teaching different modules in English literature and language. She completed her PhD from Indian Institute of Technology, Madras. Her doctoral research analyzed the production and reception of Tamil Dalit literature and its English translations. It focused on the evolution of Tamil Dalit writings from the early decades of the 20th century to the contemporary times, and explored their impact on the academia. She is currently working as an Associate Professor at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, BITS Pilani, K. K. Birla Goa Campus, India. Her research interests are Dalit writing, Post Colonial literatures, Cultural Studies and Women Studies.