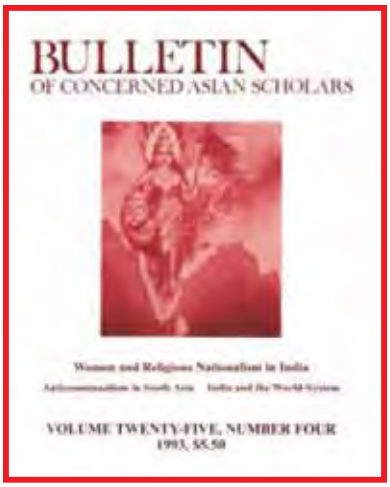

BCAS/*Critical Asian Studies*
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BULLETIN
OF CONCERNED ASIAN SCHOLARS

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Vol. 25, No. 4: October–December 1993
"Women and Religious Nationalism in India"

CCAS Statement of Purpose

Critical Asian Studies *continues to be inspired by the statement of purpose formulated in 1969 by its parent organization, the Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars (CCAS). CCAS ceased to exist as an organization in 1979, but the BCAS board decided in 1993 that the CCAS Statement of Purpose should be published in our journal at least once a year.*

We first came together in opposition to the brutal aggression of the United States in Vietnam and to the complicity or silence of our profession with regard to that policy. Those in the field of Asian studies bear responsibility for the consequences of their research and the political posture of their profession. We are concerned about the present unwillingness of specialists to speak out against the implications of an Asian policy committed to ensuring American domination of much of Asia. We reject the legitimacy of this aim, and attempt to change this policy. We recognize that the present structure of the profession has often perverted scholarship and alienated many people in the field.

The Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars seeks to develop a humane and knowledgeable understanding of Asian societies and their efforts to maintain cultural integrity and to confront such problems as poverty, oppression, and imperialism. We realize that to be students of other peoples, we must first understand our relations to them.

CCAS wishes to create alternatives to the prevailing trends in scholarship on Asia, which too often spring from a parochial cultural perspective and serve selfish interests and expansionism. Our organization is designed to function as a catalyst, a communications network for both Asian and Western scholars, a provider of central resources for local chapters, and a community for the development of anti-imperialist research.

Passed, 28–30 March 1969
Boston, Massachusetts

BULLETIN
OF CONCERNED ASIAN SCHOLARS

Women and Religious Nationalism in India

Anticommunalism in South Asia **India and the World-System**

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Women and Religious Nationalism in India

guest editor Amrita Basu

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The picture on the front cover is of Bharamata, a goddess used by Hindu nationalists to symbolize their model of femininity and the territoriality of the Hindu nation. Such a visionary image contrasts sharply with the weeping Muslim women on the back cover who have suffered very real repercussions of the Hindu nationalist dream. This special issue of the Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars *focuses on the implications of women's activism for Hindu nationalism, and the effects of commmunal bigotry and violence on Hindu and Muslim women.* *For more on this picture of Bharamata, see p. 40 of this issue.*

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Our deepest appreciation to Amrita Basu for her outstanding work in guest editing this special issue on women and religious nationalism in India, including finding the four articles in the main section and the six selections on anticommunalism in South Asia for the *Notes from the Field* section, as well as most of the pictures in the issue. We also want to thank Robert Lester for serving as a consultant, and *India Today,* Kali for Women, the *Times of India, Sydasien,* Jana Everett, and Hari Sharma for exceptional help in providing graphics. —ED.

Women and Religious Nationalism in India: An Introduction

by Amrita Basu

Over the past several years, India has witnessed the phenomenal growth of what has been variously termed Hindu nationalism or communalism.* Women have figured prominently in this nationalist mobilization, both as victims and agents, symbols and activists. This special issue of the *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* explores the implications of women's activism for Hindu nationalism, and the effects of communal bigotry and violence on Hindu and Muslim women.

Before turning to this complex relationship, some historical background: On 6 December 1992 Hindu militants destroyed a sixteenth-century mosque in Ayodhya in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, thereby marking the culmination of a long movement. Hindu organizations claimed that in the sixteenth century the Muslim ruler Babar had destroyed a temple at "Ram *janambhoomi,*" the birthplace of the deity Ram, and constructed a mosque at the site. The Ram Janambhoomi movement, as it came to be known, gained its first major victory in 1986 when the Congress government authorized Hindus to conduct prayers at the site. Encouraged by their capacity to pressure the government, Hindu groups then intensified their struggle.

An excellent opportunity for the Hindu nationalist party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), to gain further political leverage occurred in 1989 when the left-leaning Janata Dal government implemented the recommendations of the government-appointed Mandal commission to provide quotas in public education and employment for the castes officially designated "Other Backward Classes." Enraged by the likelihood that the government's actions would heighten consciousness of caste cleavages and thereby undermine Hindu solidarity, the BJP organized a *rath yatra* (procession) through India that reached Ayodhya on 30 October 1990. Although the V. P. Singh government arrested the major leaders of the movement and saved the mosque, Singh's government collapsed in the process; two years later, with Congress back in office, Hindu nationalists completed the job they had set out to do years ago and destroyed the mosque.

Leadership of the Ram Janambhoomi movement rests with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a paramilitary, non-party Hindu nationalist organization. Since its creation in 1925, its major objectives have been the promotion of Hindu culture and the ultimate creation of a Hindu state. In order to achieve these goals, the RSS organizes *shakhas* (daily meetings) that provide its members with both ideological indoctrination and paramilitary training.

The RSS is a parent body to a number of other organizations, most notably the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), which it formed in 1964 as a religious organization, and the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, which was formed in 1951 as a political party and changed its name to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in 1980. In fact, these organizations have functioned in virtually interchangeable fashion and have continually sought to fuse religious and political concerns. The highest ranking leaders of the affiliated organizations are trained in *shakhas* and generally remain committed to RSS ideals throughout their lives.

In contrast to most religious fundamentalist movements, which have a clear vision of the kind of society they are trying to create and of how they might attain their vision—whether through religious orthodoxy or the domestication of women—the RSS vision of a Hindu *rashtra* (nation) is deliberately vague and its appeals to religion highly selective. Indeed, the very promotion of Hindu nationalism necessitates refashioning Hinduism, which is an extraordinarily diverse set of beliefs and practices, into a unified, centralized, and hierarchical doctrine.

As it sought to extend its reach, the Hindu nationalist project found itself beset with a number of serious obstacles. Its brahmanical conception of Hinduism found little sympathy among the rural poor, and its assertion of the primacy of religious identifications overlooked deep-seated caste, class, ethnic, and regional loyalties. These problems proved especially serious by 1989, when the BJP had become increasingly ambitious politically.

Against the backdrop of these constraints, two forces have come to provide the cementing force of Hindu nationalism: its ability to galvanize hatred toward the state and the minority Muslim population. Both the Ram Janambhoomi campaign and ensuing riots might be understood in this light. Each time the national government or the state government of Uttar Pradesh attempted to block the Ram Janambhoomi movement, the BJP proclaimed the repressive and intolerant character of the government. Indeed, the BJP often depicted itself as a besieged nationalist movement confronting a colonial state. The BJP's argument

*The term communalism refers to partisan loyalties, prejudices, and conflicts arising from religious identities, generally between Hindus and Muslims. For more detailed descriptions of communalism, see n. 1 on p. 25, and the paragraph with n. 10 in it on p. 32 of this issue of the *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars.*

about appeasement served to popularize the notion that Muslims were a "pampered lot," despite widespread knowledge of their secondary status in economic and political life. At the same time, the argument about appeasement channeled popular antipathy to the state in an anti-Muslim direction.

This strategy paved the way for the "riots" that occurred in many parts of northern India in 1990–91 and 1992–93. Although the term riot is replete with notions of atavistic, irrational, spontaneous violence, in fact most riots in contemporary India have been organized rather than spontaneous and have often entailed the complicity of the government and major political parties. The timing of the 1990–91 and 1992–93 riots demonstrates that they were not spontaneous but orchestrated by Hindu organizations. As the BJP procession wound its way to Ayodhya, it triggered riots in many of the cities and towns through which it passed. Similarly, riots in Bhopal, Surat, New Delhi, Bombay, and other cities in December 1992 and January 1993 were closely associated with the destruction of the mosque. The objective and effect of these riots was to isolate, intimidate, and cripple the Muslim community while bringing new strata of Hindus into the BJP's electoral fold.

The 1993 state assembly elections marked a decline in the BJP's fortunes. Although it was elected by a wide margin in New Delhi, it was voted out of office in Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh, and just retained its seat in Rajasthan. While these elections results reinforce our belief that the BJP's earlier rise did not mark a groundswell of Hindu nationalism, neither do they signal the BJP's steady decline. More likely, the BJP will remain a major player on the Indian political scene; whether in office or in the opposition at the state level, it will continue to significantly influence the Indian political agenda.

Hindu nationalists have used both Hindu and Muslim women as vital symbols of community identity. Indeed, they speak interchangeably of the government's appeasement policy and of the Shah Bano case, which are discussed in Zoya Hasan's article, "Communalism, State Policy, and the Question of Women's Rights in Contemporary India." In 1985 the Supreme Court granted Shah Bano, an elderly Muslim woman, maintenance payments from her ex-husband under the provisions of the penal code. When conservative segments of the Muslim community expressed outrage at the court's decision and its disparaging comments about Muslim law, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi succumbed to their pressure and overturned the Supreme Court decision by introducing a bill in Parliament that greatly restricted the rights of Muslim women.

Hasan directs attention away from communal or fundamentalist organizations to emphasize the role of the state in strengthening both Muslim and Hindu community identity. In the 1950s the state strengthened religiously defined community identities by refusing to pass a uniform civil code. In the 1980s the state simultaneously strengthened Muslim fundamentalism and Hindu communalism by making concessions to Muslim groups around the Shah Bano issue and to Hindu groups by permitting them to worship at Ayodhya. Hasan analyzes the ways in which the state, Muslim fundamentalists, and Hindu communalists all denied Shah Bano's rights as a woman by making her a symbol of community identity. By contrast, women's organizations, like Shah Bano herself in demanding maintenance from her ex-husband, emphasized their overriding commitments to women's rights.

In exploring the conditions under which the RSS agreed to create a women's organization, the Rashtra Sevika Samiti, Tanika Sarkar's essay, "The Women of the Hindutva Brigade," considers the ways Hindu women serve as symbols of community identity. She shows that the creation of the Rashtra Sevika Samiti served a vital function for the RSS. Responding to the challenges of secularism, socialism, and feminism, women's service to the RSS became symbolic of the RSS's service to the nation. Although its upper caste and class character has limited the reach of this organization, women have contributed to the image of the RSS as a mass movement.

The focus of the essays by Amrita Basu, "The Gendered Imagery and Real Women of Hindu Nationalism: Feminism Inverted," and Paola Bacchetta, "All Our Goddesses Are Armed: Religion, Resistance, and Revenge in the Life of a Militant Hindu Nationalist Woman," entail two interrelated shifts in emphasis. Both pieces explore the roles of particular Hindu women in the Hindutva movement in the recent past. Partly because of this focus, both papers depict women more as agents than as victims of religious nationalism. In fact, the female activists whose lives they explore, ranging from women in leadership positions in "The Gendered Imagery and Real Women" to an "ordinary" Hindu woman in "All Our Goddesses Are Armed," become empowered by espousing violence against Muslims.

Despite their differences in focus and interpretation, all the papers converge around two central issues that suggest how a focus on women helps illuminate the broader logic of Hindu nationalism. All the papers concur that although religious appeals, symbols, and laws occupy a central place in both Muslim fundamentalism and Hindu communalism, what is at stake has more to do with politics than religion. Hasan accords the Indian state responsibility for promoting the idea that community identity consists of the maintenance of religious laws, thereby setting an important precedent for Hindu and Muslim organizations. Sarkar dispels the notion that Hindu women are drawn into the Rashtra Sevika Samiti on the basis of its religious appeals, and suggests that woman are responding to the reinterpretation of faith by the high-tech modern media. Bacchetta and Basu find that Hindu women interpret religious symbols and precepts in unorthodox ways in order to achieve freedom for themselves as women. If women, who are generally considered more devout than men, are not drawn to Hindu nationalism by its religious appeals, it is unlikely that men's commitment to the movement can be attributed to religious faith.

The second point all four authors agree on is that although struggles to assert community identities and interests have called upon women as symbols and participants, they have not contributed to women's emancipation. Indeed, the very notion that the interests of women and the community are inseparably linked obscures gender inequalities and women's gender interests. Analytically this suggests that movements like Hindu nationalism must be understood not in the monolithic terms they use to describe themselves but as fragmented by gender, class, and caste identifications. Politically, Hindu nationalism points to the power and danger of a movement that enables one historically oppressed group to acquire empowerment by victimizing another such group. The lessons of this apparently simple point reverberate.

December 1993

Communalism, State Policy, and the Question of Women's Rights in Contemporary India

by Zoya Hasan*

One of the striking features of the contemporary scene is the overall growth of religious revivalism and fundamentalism both in India and elsewhere. India's recent history has been punctuated by intercommunity conflicts, escalating violence, and a heightening of communal consciousness. The intensification of communalism+ culminating in the demolition of the Babri Mosque at Ayodhya on 6 December 1992, as well as the widespread communal violence that followed, highlighted the potential for using religious symbols to forge communal solidarities. These events also raise questions about the role of the state and government in coping with contentious religious issues, the future of secular values and institutions, and the place of minorities within the parameters laid down by India's constitution.

The renewed growth of communal politics and the sharpening of religious identities have resulted in a noticeable subordination of gender loyalties. Most notably, the politics of religious self-assertion, claiming to speak in the name of majority and minority rights, seeks to negate and suppress divergent interests and rights of individuals and social groups. In general, the social, cultural, and political concerns of movements for religious revivalism play a key part in legitimizing gender differences embodied in traditional attitudes and perspectives of family and gender relations. Many of the movements following from this phenomenon impinge not just on the areas of marriage, divorce, inheritance, sexuality, and reproductive rights, but also define the place of women and assign them a certain status within the community. These roles cannot be understood without recognizing the link between gender relations and state policy (which has a major role to play at different levels of society), the ways in which the state accords to women an unequal status in relation to men, and the contradictory notions of equality and citizenship practiced by the state and by communal and fundamentalist groups.

The central concern of this article is to understand the processes through which community identities have been created in modern India,[1] the manner in which gender and community intersect with each other, and the way in which these two elements interact with government policy. This article highlights the mutual complementarity of the government and religious leadership in reinforcing community identity, and the effect of this mutualism on legal reform. The article also explores these questions in relation to the debates about personal law and legal reform generated by the Supreme Court judgment in the Shah Bano case, exploring its meaning and strategic importance for minority identity, women's equality, and secularism.

The main argument that emerges is that religious ideology and leadership more than legitimize patriarchal practices in that they play a vital role in the construction of "Muslim identity," understood as a codifiable phenomenon with specific doctrinal commitments of personal law that distinguish Muslims from others. This misdescription and misconception of community identity constitutes a specific legal and political commitment to

*This is a modified and revised version of a paper presented at the "State, Women, and Cultural Identity Conference" held in Columbo, Sri Lanka, in March 1992, and the "Berkshire Conference on Women's History" held at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York, in May 1993. I am grateful to Amrita Basu, Ritu Menon, and Imrana Qadeer for comments and suggestions.

+For descriptions of communalism, see n. 1 on p. 3, n. 1 on p. 25, and the paragraph with n. 10 in it on p. 32 of this issue of the *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*.

1. On the construction of community identity, a term used to convey the active participation of those involved in defining elements of identity, see Sandria Freitag, *Collective Action and Community: Public Arenas and the Emergence of Communalism in North India*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990).

the "unity of Islam," and is designed to homogenize the Muslim community through a set of common religious symbols. What is more, this narrow construction of community identity is reinforced by government policies that continually reaffirm support for practices and institutions that see identity as a code of principles. From the standpoint of women the difficulty lies in the constant emphasis on the unity of community identity defined in terms of family codes that restrict the articulation of gender interests. Whatever rights these women might have achieved are sacrificed at the altar of "Muslim identity."

Legal Reform

There is no denying that legal reform is imperative for women to achieve a measure of equality in India. Property, inheritance, and marriage reforms introduced by the Hindu Code Bill have combined with economic and educational advancement to further women's participation in society. The Hindu Code Bill was first debated in the Central Legislature in 1943–44, and a revised draft was discussed by the Constituent Assembly in 1951. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was forced to abandon the bill because of opposition within the Congress Party. Law Minister B. R. Ambedkar then resigned in protest. After the 1952 elections Nehru used his popular mandate to secure the passage of the bill, but it was divided into five separate acts before it was finally passed in 1956.

The Hindu Code Bill made significant departures from the principles of traditional Hindu laws in that it allowed intercaste marriage, reinforced monogamy, and made divorce possible.[2] Nevertheless, the constitution distinctly anticipated a single civil code for all citizens of India, and the Hindu Code was only a halfway house to this end; the issues of marriage, divorce, and inheritance are still part of a system of personal laws, applicable solely on the basis of religious identity.[3] In spite of limitations and anomalies, the Hindu Code Bill nevertheless conferred a semblance of equal rights on Hindu women in the sphere of property, marriage, and so on.

As far as Muslim women are concerned, an important obstacle in the process of establishing equality before the law is the complete absence of reform in family laws, that is, Muslim personal laws pertaining to families.[4] Although personal laws are only one form of discrimination, they constitute a significant disadvantage for women. Besides, legal equality is not inconsequential. Women's lack of rights in law was a crucial factor in maintaining their subordination to men, and a sanctioned device for limiting their access to property and inheritance. Muslim family laws after Independence have remained virtually unchanged. Most modern states in the Arab world, while remaining within the framework of Islamic law, have sought to expand women's rights. Such changes have not taken place in India.

The government, for its part, has made virtually no attempt to reform Muslim personal law: in fact, it has consistently adopted a policy of noninterference. In this, while professing secularism the postcolonial state nevertheless responded to the Muslim minority community in much the same way as the erstwhile colonial government did with its policy of noninterference in the domestic and religious affairs of its subjects. Muslim personal law in India was indeed codified in 1937 but within the framework of the Shariat, a body of Islamic laws based on the Koran and the traditional teachings of the Prophet Mohammed, and Muslims strongly opposed any further change or attempts by the state to bring about reform within it.

There is little reason to doubt that denying Muslim women rights that are available to women of other faiths is a violation of the constitutional provision that the state shall not discriminate against any citizen on religious grounds; yet the allowances made to accommodate personal laws were directly related to the government policy of respect for all religions.

The Jamait-al-Ulema-i-Hind, an all-India Muslim revivalist organization of clergymen, took the lead in opposing changes in personal law, stressing the need for safeguarding the sanctity of the Shariat, which became not only a symbol for representing Muslim identity but also the basis for claims to establish a status for the community commensurate with its substantial minority position. A powerful section of the Muslim leadership, pre- and post-Independence, has consistently tried to politicize religion as a means of safeguarding the community's religious identity. As Gail Minault has pointed out, political movements among Muslims in the 1920s used religious and cultural symbols that were relevant to all strata of the community.[5] This was done deliberately to foster unity among the "believers" and to enhance their bargaining position in the constitutional wrangling. In the post-Independence period this symbolism has come to rest entirely on personal laws pertaining to women and the family.

2. See Robert Baird, "Uniform Civil Code and the Secularisation of Law," in *Religion in Modern India*, ed. Robert Baird (Delhi: Manohar, 1981); and Duncan M. Derret, *Religion, Law, and the State* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), chap. 15. For example, Nehru emphasized the progressive social attitude behind the bill: "I do not refer to any particular clause of the bill—but rather to the spirit of liberation and of freeing our people and more especially our women from outworn customs and shackles that bound them." Quoted in D.E. Smith, *India as Secular State* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 281.

3. Robert Baird, "Religion and the Legitimation of Nehru's Concept of the Secular State," in *Religion and the Legitimation of Power in South Asia*, ed. Bardwell J. Smith (Leiden, the Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1978).

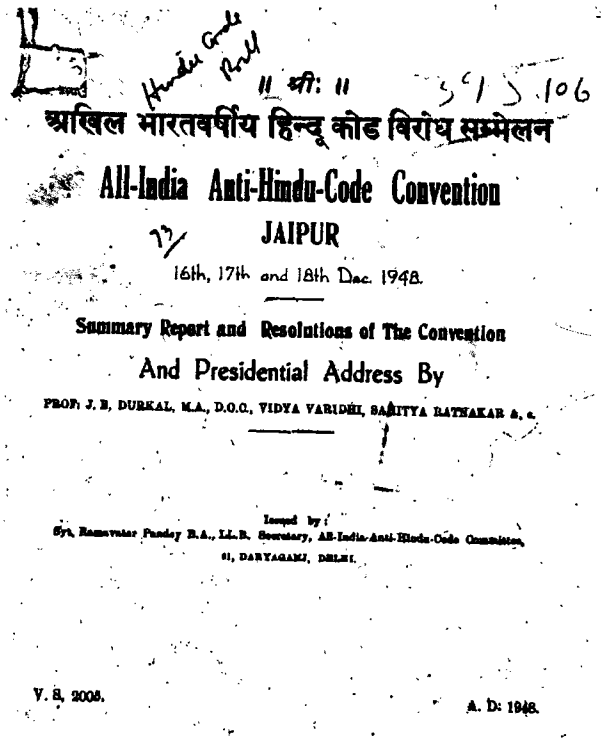
4. For a discussion of personal laws, see Archana A. Parashar, *Women and Family Law Reform in India* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1982), chaps. 2 and 5.

5. Gail Minault, *The Khilafat Movement, Religious Symbolism, and Political Mobilisation* (Delhi: Manohar, 1982).

The Directive Principles of State Policy, however, expected the state to endeavor to secure a uniform civil code for citizens.[6] Nehru believed that such a code was inevitable, but he was reluctant to press the issue in the difficult circumstances after Partition.[7] His government's hesitation was compounded by the opposition of the Muslim members of the Constituent Assembly to a uniform civil code.[8] They opposed it on the grounds that the Islamic community, rather that the state, should initiate legal change. "Secularism will become meaningless if Parliament discusses a common civil code applicable to Muslims as well as other communities and gets it passed with the help of non-Muslim votes. Indeed Muslims being in a minority, their representatives in Parliament cannot stop the passage of any bill," observed Asad Madani, then president of the Jamait-al-Ulema-i-Hind.[9] The essence of this objection lay in the claim that only the *ulema* (learned scholars of Muslim law and religion) are competent to approve reform measures.[10] In the imagination of the Muslim community, religious precepts and legal codes are inextricably interwoven. The government accepted this construction of the community and in effect admitted that the legislature, in which Muslims are a minority, cannot amend laws Muslims believe to be part of their religion.

In light of the fairly strong opposition from the Muslim community, the government did not think it wise to enact a common civil law. Nehru felt that the prime responsibility of his government, in the aftermath of Partition, was to provide minorities with a sense of security rather than insist on policies that would exacerbate their anxieties about their status in independent India. However, this policy of subordinating religious identity to uniform citizenship was qualified by prohibiting polygamy only for Hindu men and granting divorce and new inheritance rights only for Hindu women. In his keenness to win the confidence of the Muslim community, Nehru failed to ensure equality before the law to all Indians.[11] Nehru said, "If anybody else brings forward a Civil Code Bill, it will have my extreme sympathy. But I confess I do not think that at the present moment the time is ripe in India for me to push it through."[12]

It is true that large sections of Muslims were extremely critical of a common civil code, but large sections of Hindus, too, had been opposed to the codification and reform of Hindu


अखिल भारतवर्षीय हिन्दू कोड विरोध सम्मेलन

All-India Anti-Hindu-Code Convention

JAIPUR

16th, 17th and 18th Dec. 1948.

Summary Report and Resolutions of The Convention

And Presidential Address By

PROF. J. B. DURKAL, M.A., D.O.C., VIDYA VARIDHI, SAHITYA RATNAKAR &c.

Issued by :

Sri. Ramavatar Pandey B.A., LL.B. Secretary, All-India-Anti-Hindu-Code Committee,

61, DARYAGANJ, DELHI.

V. S. 2005. A. D. 1948.

Although anticipated in India's constitution, the establishment of a single civil code that would make all citizens of India equal before the law has been opposed by both Hindus and Muslims, and to this day these groups have different sets of religion-based laws when it comes to personal matters like marriage, divorce, and inheritance. Nevertheless, the Hindu Code, first introduced by Nehru in the 1940s and finally passed in a modified form in 1956, went against traditional Hindu law by allowing intercaste marriage, reinforcing monogamy, and making divorce possible. This picture from the National Archives of India is of the cover of a report from a 1948 convention protesting the bill and recommending "religious and cultural protection" and that the legislature not interfere in personal law.

laws. The point is that in the 1950s the Hindu community was just as unprepared for divorce as the Muslim community was for monogamy. The government used its latitude to reform Hindu law, and used the same latitude to allow the preservation of personal laws that claimed religious sanction. There is little reason to doubt that denying Muslim women rights that are available to women of other faiths is a violation of the constitutional provision that the state shall not discriminate against any citizen on religious grounds; yet the allowances made to accommodate personal laws were directly related to the government policy of respect for all religions. This notion of secularism had certain limitations, most notably that religious freedom has priority over other considerations. In this sense, the denial of cultural diversity could violate the principle of equal respect for all religions.

6. See Robert Baird, "Secular State and the Indian Constitution," in *Religion in Modern India.*

7. Ibid.

8. Baird, "Uniform Civil Code."

9. Quoted in Mushirlul-Haq, "'Secularism?' No. Secular State? Well—Yes," in *Islam in Secular India* (Simla, Himachal Pradesh: Institute of Advanced Study, 1972).

10. The Jamait-al-Ulema-i-Hind was founded in 1919 for "the exclusive purpose of safeguarding the Shariat." See Zia-ul-Hasan Faruqi, *The Deoband School and the Demand for Pakistan* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1963), p. 68.

11. Much of Nehru's hesitation derived from his fear of upsetting the minorities, whose feelings were still raw regarding Hindu-Muslim conflicts in the recent past. Nehru felt that in the early years after Partition minorities needed special treatment, and for this reason he demurred from insisting on common civil laws that were opposed by them. See S. Gopal, "Nehru and the Minorities," *Economic and Political Weekly,* Nov. 1988.

12. Quoted in D. E. Smith, *Nehru and Democracy: The Political Thought of an Asian Democrat* (Calcutta: Orient Longman, 1958), p. 65.

Moreover, the policy on Muslim personal law cannot be fully separated from government policy on other issues, such as the 1966 ban on cow slaughter. Nehru agreed with Gandhi that the ban on cow slaughter, taken as an isolated decision, would appear to be a concession to Hindu sentiment.[13] Consequently it was listed as one of the Directive Principles of State Policy, part of a series of policies adopted under pressure of circumstances that did not allow the government to throw its full weight behind secularism. In effect, "a tacit bargain has been struck in modern India whose terms are that Muslims will not be permitted to violate Hindu feelings by slaughtering cows, while the Muslims have a right to have a separate system of civil laws."[14]

Thus Muslim personal law became a symbol that was used by Muslim political elites to bargain with the state, in the same way that Hindu political elites bargained with it regarding some of their religious interests. The cow was used to symbolize Hindu identity in a manner similar to the use of the Shariat by the Muslims.[15] Cow protection may not have been central to the nationalist political elite, but it was central to Hindu religious leaders, for whom the cow was the symbol of a Hindu definition of Indian nationalism.[16] The highly emotive demand for a ban on cow slaughter constrained the options of both the secular Congress elite and the Muslim religious and political elite, who deferred to Hindu opinion in this regard. This paved the way for an accommodation of the two most powerful symbols of community identity in contemporary India.[17]

Over the years, then, the salient features of minority identity have found expression in maintaining the status quo on personal laws, defending places of worship, and promoting the Urdu language.[18] While the future of Urdu and religious sites hangs in the balance, the Muslim leadership clearly succeeded in resisting attempts to change personal law. It has succeeded because the issue of reforming the family laws enshrined in the Shariat is an emotive one. It arouses fears in large segments of the community, and raises serious apprehensions about the loss of the *millat*'s (religious community of Islam's) identity. Such

13. Gopal, "Nehru and the Minorities," p. 2,466.

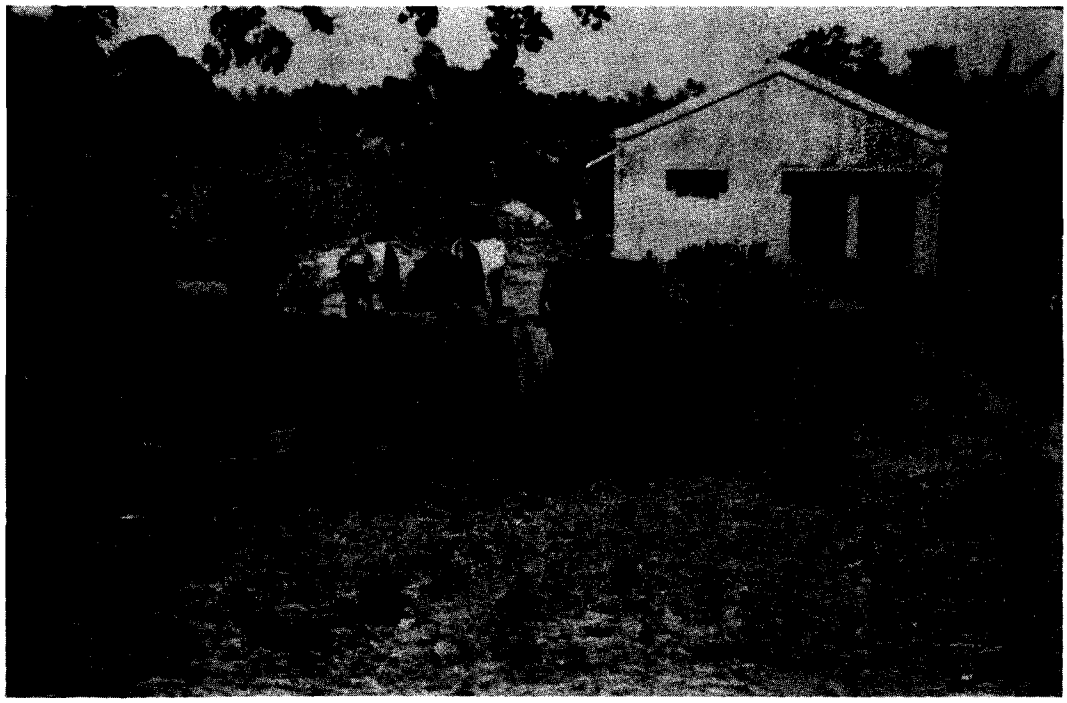
14. In the Constituent Assembly in December 1948 the Muslim League leader Mohammed Ismail suggested a formal explicit bargain of this sort. Tahir Mahmood, *Muslim Personal Law: Role of the State in the Subcontinent* (Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1977), p. 95.

15. Paul Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison* (Delhi: Sage Publications, 1991), chap. 3.

16. Sandria Freitag has shown how the symbol of the cow was used by Hindu organizations in defining a Hindu community. *Collective Action and Community,* chaps. 5 and 6.

17. Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism.*

18. Paul Brass, *Language, Religion, and Politics in North India* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974).



The 1966 ban on slaughtering cows might be considered a concession to Hindu sentiment, but it was actually an important compromise—Muslims would not be allowed to violate Hindu feelings by slaughtering cows, but they would have the right to have a separate system of civil laws. In this way India's two most important symbols of community identity—the cow symbolizing Hindu identity and Muslim personal law symbolizing Muslim identity—were accomodated and preserved. This photo of a few of the seemingly ubiquitous free-roaming cows of India is by and courtesy of Bill Doub.

Solidarity with Shah Bano, Delhi, 1985. In April 1985 India's Supreme Court upheld a lower court's verdict that under the Criminal Procedure Code a destitute seventy-three-year-old woman, Shah Bano, should be supported by her ex-husband. This controversial judgment was perceived by conservative Muslims as a threat to Muslim identity and the authority of Muslim personal law, and by Hindu organizations as an opportunity to attack the conservative nature of the Muslim community (using as evidence the "backwardness" of those opposing the judgment), the divisiveness of the cultural pluralism that gave rise to personal law, and the secular state itself for tolerating such a situation. This photo and the next one are by Sheba Chhachhi, and they appeared in Radha Kuma's The History of Doing: An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India, 1800–1900 *(New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1993), pp. 166, 169, reprinted here courtesy of Sheba Chhachhi and Kali for Women.*

feelings simultaneously provide the space for the community to become internally modified and distinguished from other religious groups.

But what is often ignored is that Muslims are by no means a homogeneous community. They do not exist in Indian society as separate and isolated entities but as segments of a composite social framework. Equally significant is the tendency toward pluralism in matter pertaining to the Shariat, a feature of Muslim societies in different parts of the Islamic world. As Maxine Rodinson remarked, "one is not dealing with 'Islam', a single coherent doctrine, but with several ideologies, several Islams."[19] Similarly, Akeel Bilgrami emphasizes the diversity and differentiation in the Islamic community and notes that interpretations and practices are determined by particular historical and cultural contexts.[20] "Indian Islam" is a product of the circumstances it emerged and crystallized in, and in the process adapted to the indigenous environment. However, for the *ulema* who were primarily concerned with Islamic norms, the maintenance of Muslim identity in a secular society required an increasing emphasis on the acceptance of these norms. Adherence to the Shariat for them becomes the central symbol in the preservation of Muslim identity and an idiom for integration.

The Shah Bano Case

The difficulties of achieving equality and justice for women were made clear during the controversy generated by the famous Shah Bano case.[21] In April 1985 India's highest judicial body, the Supreme Court, made the momentous judgment that maintenance should be granted to Shah Bano, a divorced woman. The case became notorious and involved a seventy-three-year-old Muslim woman who had sued her ex-husband for maintenance under the Criminal Procedure Code and had been awarded very modest maintenance by the High

19. Maxine Rodinson, *Marxism and the Muslim World* (Delhi: Orient Longman, 1980), p. 152.

20. Akeel Bilgrami, "What is a Muslim? Fundamental Commitment and Cultural Identity," in *Hindus and Others: The Question of Identity in India Today,* ed. Gyanendra Pandey (Delhi: Viking India, 1993).

21. For details, see C. J. Chandrachud, "The Judgment," in *The Shah Bano Controversy,* by Ashgar Ali Engineer (Delhi: Orient Longman, 1987).

Court of Madhya Pradesh. Her ex-husband challenged that verdict in the Supreme Court, arguing that he had abided by the provisions of Muslim personal law in repaying her dowry and in maintaining her for the period of *iddat* (approximately three months following the divorce), and hence he was no longer liable to pay her maintenance. The Supreme Court, in upholding the lower court verdict, addressed and reflected on the conflict between Muslim personal law and the criminal code that applies to all religious communities. The Supreme Court ruled that a Muslim woman unable to maintain herself was entitled to take recourse in Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code, which requires husbands having sufficient means to pay maintenance to wives or ex-wives who are unable to support themselves. The Supreme Court's judgment was based on the understanding that Muslim personal law, which limits the husband's liability to provide maintenance to the period of *iddat*, does not deal with a situation of destitution, the prime concern of the provisions of the Criminal Procedure Code.[22]

In general, the social, cultural, and political concerns of movements for religious revivalism play a key part in legitimizing gender differences embodied in traditional attitudes and perspectives of family and gender relations.

The Shah Bano judgment evoked widespread controversy.[23] Conservative elements in the Muslim community led an outcry against this judgment that seemed to criticize Islamic law. Many of these Muslims considered it an assault on the Shariat, which in their opinion makes no such provision of maintenance in the event of divorce. They took to the streets in protest and accused the Supreme Court of trespassing into a field that had been out of bounds for it in the last few decades. Z. R. Ansari, minister of state in the central government, condemned the judges for presuming to interpret the Quaran (Koran) and the Hadith (a body of Islamic traditions): "If you have a *tamnboli* [pan vendor] doing the work of a *teli* [oil seller], things are bound to go wrong," he said in Parliament.[24]

For conservative opinion the troubling aspect of the judgment was the way in which the justices addressed the issue of Muslim personal law and the uniform civil code; indeed the issue was framed exclusively in terms of personal law and thus was resented by the *ulema* who condemned the judgment as an attempt to undermine the Shariat.[25] The conservative reaction was most pronounced in opposing the reference to Article 44 of the Indian constitution, which provides that "the State shall endeavour to secure for citizens a uniform civil code." By bringing this up the judgment broadened the scope of the debate from an interpretation of a precise point of law to a general consideration of the validity of Muslim personal law.[26] For many Muslims this was an infringement of the "covenant" of composite nationalism and secularism that binds different communities together in India.[27] The basic argument in opposing a uniform civil code has remained virtually unaltered and has been put forward most clearly in the Jamiyat al-Ulema's position that "the demand for a uniform civil code is tantamount to a fundamental departure from the position that in the present-day situation where the Muslim community is deeply entangled in a struggle for the search and safeguard of its self-identity, it is only the personal law that can be a permanent guarantee for its preservation."[28]

Not surprisingly, the crusade against the judgment was spearheaded by the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board and supported by Muslim politicians in centrist parties, including the Congress and the Janata Dal. This widespread movement galvanized Muslims in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Kashmir, Andhra Pradesh, and Kerala by invoking the symbolic vocabulary of protecting minority identity and reminding the state that it should be committed to their protection.[29] The campaign spread through religious institutions, mosques, newspapers, and local community leaders who repeatedly stressed the apprehension that "the Supreme Court verdict was a death warrant for Muslim identity in North India."[30] Many Congress members of Parliament shared platforms with the *ulema* and stressed the need to clear doubts in the minds of Muslims about

22. Section 125 is part of the Code of Criminal Procedure, not of the civil laws that define and govern the rights and obligations of the parties belonging to particular religions. Section 125 was enacted in order to provide a quick and summary remedy to a class of persons who are unable to maintain themselves. What difference would it then make as to what religion is professed by the neglected wife, child, or parent? Neglect by a person of sufficient means to maintain such people and their ability to maintain themselves are the objective criteria that determine the applicability of Section 126. Such provisions, which are essentially of a prophylactic nature, cut across the barriers of religion. True, they do not supplant the personal law of the parties, but, equally, the religion professed by the parties or the state of the personal law by which they are governed cannot have any repercussions on the applicability of such laws unless their application is restricted within the framework of the constitution to a refined category of religious groups or classes.

23. For details of the movement, see Zoya Hasan, "Minority Identity, the Muslim Women's Bill Campaign, and the Political Process," *Economic and Political Weekly,* 7 Jan. 1989.

24. *Sunday* (Calcutta), 9–15 March 1986.

25. Gail Minault, "Legal and Scholarly Activism: Recent Women's Studies on India—A Review Article," *Journal of Asian Studies,, no. 4 (1988).*

26. Ibid.

27. See Mushirul Hasan, "Indian Muslims since Independence: In Search of Integration and Identity ," *Third World Quarterly,* April 1988.

28. Zia-ul-Hasan Faruqi, "Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy," *Seminar,* April 1983, p. 23.

29. *Telegraph* (Calcutta), 8 March 1986.

30. *Statesman* (Delhi), 10 October 1985.

threats to personal law. Muslim politicians were most effective behind the scenes in negotiating with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and the Congress government, impressing upon them the need to introduce new legislation on maintenance rights for Muslim women to assuage minority feelings regarding their rights.

There is no doubt that many urban Muslims were worried that the Shah Bano judgment impinged on personal law, but this concern was translated into fears about minority identity as a result of the anti–Shah Bano agitation mounted by the All-India Personal Law Board, the *ulema*, and political leaders stirring emotions through an obfuscation of the central issue of women's rights and deflecting it into a new emphasis on minority rights. This consequent displacement and transfiguration relocated women exclusively within the community. The agitation over the Shah Bano judgment changed the terms of discourse by raising misgivings regarding minority status and minority identity in a secular society. The discourse had moved out of the law courts into the public arena where the much larger issue of minority identity could be raised for rallying Muslims on a united platform. The issue of women's rights was thus turned into a major confrontation between the majority and minority communities.[31]

Opposition to the judgment was abetted by the strident support the judgment got from Hindu organizations. For the Hindu Right, the renewed emphasis on legal reform, triggered by the Shah Bano controversy, signaled a new positioning of reform vis-à-vis the state and the Muslim community. For such Hindus, women's rights could be turned into ammunition against the secular state, which was prepared to revoke the judgment to mollify Muslim fears. Singling out Muslim women as the group most oppressed by religion contributed to a powerful critique of Muslims as backward and obscurantist, and of the state as one that not only countenanced this but perpetuated it through protection and appeasement. All in all, the Shah Bano judgment created a communal controversy and a remarkable opportunity for the organizations of the Hindu Right to press their claims on the disputed Babri Mosque site in Ayodhya and launch their attack on cultural pluralism and the secular view embodied in the protection of minority rights, arguing that such pluralism and cultural distinctiveness is harmful for national integrity.

Similar currents were at work among Muslims. Some were in reaction to militant Hindu movements, while others were in response to the relentless communal violence of the 1980s and the systematic official neglect of Muslim interests by successive governments.[32] The failure of the state to provide economic and social security had become a critical component in the growing distrust of the state, whose communal bias in general, and during communal riots in particular, aggravated the social divide. The visible escalation of communal conflicts and the concomitant insecurity gave a new lease on life to traditional practices.

The rising incidence of communal violence has strengthened the tendency of Muslims to highlight certain features of minority identity as symbols of their continued cultural survival in India. Although this process has taken some time to mature, it became most pronounced during the anti–Shah Bano campaign, when many Muslim women actively sought to assert their faith in religious laws. They rejected the Supreme Court judgment because it had the backing of Hindu right-wing organizations, and rallied around the religious leadership that was opposed to "external" interference in their religious domain. In some sense, however, their resentment was not directed as much against the judgment as against the enthusiasm of these organizations that were known to have anti-Muslim proclivities. The view was widely shared that the Hindu Right capitalized on the Shah Bano affair to foster its image of the Muslim community as conservative, inward-looking, and backward. The opposition of these women to the judgment can then be located in those social and political processes wherein minority and gender identities get embodied and contested. Such broader political processes may at times produce shifting and cross-cutting loyalties of class, community, and gender. These contending identities can also become the focus of resistance and reassertion of a progressive agenda.

The Muslim Women's Bill

In response to the controversy over the Shah Bano judgment, the Rajiv Gandhi government introduced the retrograde Muslim Women's (Protection of Rights in Divorce) Bill, and it was passed by Parliament in 1986. This bill relegated Muslim women to the status of second-class citizens by denying them the option of redress under Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code, and incorporated the arguments of the All-India Personal Law Board that a woman's natal family rather than her husband should maintain her after divorce since she would have ceased to be his wife.

Muslim women were not indifferent to the various conflicts in the political domain, and many women were in the forefront of struggles to secure and safeguard women's rights. When the Muslim Women's Bill was passed by Parliament, opposition from Muslim women was a significant feature of the country-wide protest of the bill. The campaign against the bill generated a new trend of active participation in the struggles and actions of women's organizations such as the All-India Democratic Women's Association, the National Federation of Indian Women, and the Mahila Dakshata Samiti. Several Muslim women's groups in Kerala, West Bengal, Bombay, and Delhi reaffirmed the right of indigent women to be supported by their husbands, and derided the *mullahs* (Muslim teachers or interpreters of religious law) for turning religious law into an instrument of injustice. The formation of the Committee for the Protection of Rights of Muslim Women in Delhi, Calcutta, and Trivandrum expressed concern for safeguarding sexual equality under the law.[33] Women confronted both state and community leadership over this law that played a dual rule by legitimizing unequal relations as well as challenging them. The results, though mixed, meant an increased self-confidence for women, an expanded political consciousness, and questioning of community construction of gender roles. Their resistance also served to alert both

31. Zakaria Pathak and Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan, "Shah Bano," *Signs* (Chicago), vol. 14, no. 3 (1989).

32. On this aspect, see Hasan, "Indian Muslims since Independence."

33. See Hasan, "Minority Identity."

By focusing on Shah Bano's identity as a Muslim, all but women's organizations and Shah Bano herself neglected her rights as a woman. In the midst of the controversy over the Shah Bano judgment, the Rajiv Gandhi government gave in to the pressure from Muslim conservatives and overturned the Supreme Court decision by passing a bill in May 1986 that greatly restricted Muslim women's rights. Muslim women were active in the countrywide protest of this bill, and the campaign against it generated a new trend of active participation in the struggles of women's organizations for women's rights. This picture shows an older woman demonstrating against the Muslim Women's Bill in 1986.

community and state to the fact that women would no longer remain silent in the face of obvious injustice and discrimination.

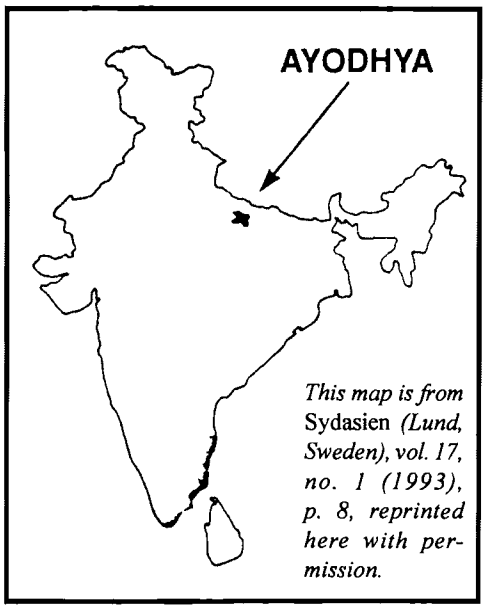
The Rajiv Gandhi government had capitulated to the demands of some Muslims when it introduced the Muslim Women's Bill in the midst of growing controversy. By disregarding the views of many Muslim politicians, intellectuals, and women's organizations who opposed the bill, the government accorded legitimacy to a small fundamentalist section as sole representatives of the community.[34] At issue, ultimately, was the nature of collective identity and its representation. Ideology, organization, and mobilization by the religious leadership had sought to homogenize the community on the contested issue of Muslimness. However, to translate the religious anxiety that informed the anti–Shah Bano campaign into a more legitimate broad-based identity, the Muslim leadership had to turn to state support for community action. What began as an expression of unease and misgivings acquired the form of distinct markers of identity only as a result of government intervention and the exigencies of the power struggle in the public arena.

Government Use of Religion

Why did the government succumb to fundamentalist pressures? The compromise the government made in surrendering women's rights has to be seen as part of a rightward shift in India's politics and economy in the 1980s,[35] resulting in a marked decline in the state's commitment to secularism, equal opportunities, and social welfare benefits for the underprivileged and disadvantaged. This reversal is a feature of contemporary politics all over the world, and in India its early contours were delineated by the Congress Party in response to its successive defeats in several state assembly elections in 1985–86 after the Supreme Court judgment. These defeats in Assam, Bijnor, Kishanganj, Bolpur, Kendrapara, and Baroda were sharp reminders that the Muslim vote, angered by the Shah Bano verdict, tipped the balance in favor of opposition parties everywhere it was

34. Danial Latifi described the recognition of the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board in this way: "The college of cardinals of Indian Muslims is not only against Islam but is also the most flagrant exercise of the power drunk bureaucracy," *Sunday Observer* (Bombay), 1 June 1985.

35. On the rightward shift, see James Manor, "Parties and the Party System," in *India's Democracy,* ed. Atul Kohli (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, pp. 80–91.



This map is from Sydasien *(Lund, Sweden), vol. 17, no. 1 (1993), p. 8, reprinted here with permission.*

The controversies over the 1985 Shah Bano judgment and the 1986 Muslim Women's Bill fanned the communal conflict to the point where the Hindu nationalists felt they could move forward with their demand to worship at the alleged site of their god Ram's birthplace in Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh, which developed into a determination to replace the Babri Mosque there with a Hindu temple. "Bricks were transported from various parts of India and, with great fanfare, large crowds converged on Ayodhya in October 1990. The result was clashes between Hindus and Muslims all over the country, with over a thousand deaths in a few months." This cartoon emphasizes the militant mood of the Hindu procession as it is led by BJP leader L. K. Advani toward the mosque at Ayodhya, with the way blocked by a group of Muslims led by the then-chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, Mulayam Singh Yadav. Although the mosque was saved at that time, "urns alleged to contain the ashes of those [Hindus] killed at Ayodhya were carried to all the villages, and it was planned to recruit a million villages and to demolish nearly 3,000 mosques in various parts of the country." The quotes are from Sarvepalli Gopal, ed., Anatomy of a Confrontation: Ayodhya and the Rise of Communal Politics in India *(London; and Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Zed Books, 1993), p. viii, and the cartoon is by Ajit Ninan and from* India Today, *reprinted here courtesy of Ajit Ninan and* India Today.

strong enough.[36] The Congress Party responded to the unprecedented crisis by appropri ating pro-Hindutva themes that were gaining popularity in northern India. This won it some new Hindu support but yet again alienated Muslims, the traditional supporters of the Congress Party, who were dissatisfied with the party's failure to ameliorate their long-standing grievances. Their disenchantment was further aggravated by the Ram Janambhoomi movement started by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad in 1984 for the liberation of the Ram temple in Ayodhya, the temple that is said to have existed at Ram Janambhoomi, the alleged birthplace of the Hindu deity Ram and later the site of the Babri Mosque. Against this background of declining support, the Congress government decided to open the locks of the disputed Babri Mosque in February 1986.[37] Together these two decisions—in other words, the introduction of the Muslim Women's Bill and the reopening of the disputed shrine in Ayodhya—were part of a "grand" Congress strategy of using religious issues and sentiments to regain its hold over the Hindu and Muslim vote.

A former associate and minister in the Congress government who opposed the new bill stated that he had "unimpeachable evidence" that a deal had been struck between Rajiv Gandhi and Maulana Ali Nadavi, a noted and influential theologian of Lucknow. According to this former minister, Rajiv Gandhi agreed to concede to Nadavi's demand to revoke the Shah Bano verdict on his express assurance that he and the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board would not involve themselves in the Babri Mosque dispute.[38] Muslims would obtain a revocation of the court verdict through Parliament, and Hindus would be granted *darshan* (could pay respect to the deity) at the Ram Janambhoomi by unlocking the gate of the Babri Mosque. The *Statesman* reported the disclosure by a senior Vishwa Hindu Parishad leader that Rajiv Gandhi has indicated clearly that the gates of the disputed structure must by opened to devotees before the Hindu religious festival of

36. On the sequence of developments leading to the decision to bring in the Muslim Women Bill, see Neerja Choudhary, "The Political Fallout, *Statesman,* 18–20 April 1986.

37. *Sunday Observer,* 11 October 1992.

38. *Telegraph,* 15 May 1988.

Shivaratri on 8 March 1986.[39] The "Ayodhya Strategy" was masterminded by the Congress government to appease the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and an organization devoted to the "liberation" of the Ram temple, the Ram Janambhoomi Mukti Morcha, which had carefully crafted an emotive movement; indeed this strategy was a central part of the new communal tactic adopted by the Congress government to arrest its declining support in the country.

The Muslim Women's Bill reflected the government's effort to pacify ruffled Muslim sentiments over the reopening of the disputed site and to quell objections of conservatives to the Supreme Court verdict. The Congress government exaggerated the strength of the opposition manipulated by the politically ambitious Muslim leadership. The government's approach was flawed on several accounts. In the first place it was assumed that the *ulema* and the Muslim political leadership represented on the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board were the sole arbiters of Muslim interests.[40] Liberal and progressive opinion within the community was ignored, allowing the *ulema* to appropriate the task of defining the overarching concerns and interests of Muslims. Admittedly, the objective of the Muslim divines was to defend the Shariat and resist legislation that would in their perception lead to a change in divinely ordained laws. But the government should have known better. Interpretations by the *ulema* were neither final not irrevocable; there were other trends of thought, other interpretations that the government chose to disregard. The government seemed to assume that Muslims are a religious community, that the theologians are its sole spokesmen, and that there exists a clear equation between religious law and community identity.

This assumption raises several questions about representation, a perennial problem in Indian Muslim politics. Ayesha Jalal argues that the whole debate in the course of the struggle for Partition viewed Mohammed Ali Jinnah as the "sole spokesman" of the demand for Pakistan.[41] Farzana Shaikh suggests that the claim to exclusive representation owed its ideological authenticity to the conviction that Muslims ought to be bound by a substantive consensus and that such a consensus demanded a sole representative or a single Muslim medium. "This position of the Muslim League in the 1940s rejected the Congress claim to be the majority party and therefore the principal wielder of political power in Independent India."[42] This kind of debate or position is wholly untenable under India's constitutional regime because the idea of "sole representation" militates against the democratic spirit of the constitution. Nevertheless, the idea of sole representation was revived, and this time it had the imprimatur of a secular government's approval.

The political considerations behind this strategy were revealed in the course of the debate in Parliament on the Muslim Women's Bill. Law Minister A. K. Sen justified the introduction of the new legislation by stating that it was "the consistent policy of the government that in matters pertaining to a community, priority would be given to the leaders of the community."[43] The Congress Party insisted that the government was constrained to introduce the bill because Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code was perceived by Muslims as an interference in their personal law: "We have to tread very carefully for Muslim personal law is linked to the Muslim religion in the minds of most Muslims. We might have our views, but we cannot deny the perception of the Muslims," observed a government spokesman.[44] In a similar vein, Minister of State for Home Arun Nehru, a powerful confidant of Rajiv Gandhi at the time, reasoned, "If the majority of Muslims feel that the Bill is in their interest, we cannot impose our views on them."[45] This argument assumed that Muslims constituted a self-contained and monolithic community whose interests were represented by the Muslim members of Parliament and a section of the *ulema*.

The agitation over the Shah Bano judgment changed the terms of discourse by raising misgivings regarding minority status and minority identity in a secular society. The discourse had moved out of the law courts into the public arena where the much larger issue of minority identity could be raised for rallying Muslims on a united platform. The issue of women's rights was thus turned into a major confrontation between the majority and minority communities.

Inevitably, in the Muslim Women's Bill the multiple identities men and women possess were ignored, as was the distinction between minority identity and gender identity. Though the issue was one of women's rights, the state only acknowledged a nongendered identity for Muslim women. The government presented the situation as a conflict between Muslims who wanted preservation of Muslim personal law and reformists whose demands were either irrelevant or opposed to mass opinion, as well as between Muslims and women.

Called upon to adjudicate between these contending interests, the state sought to present the Muslim Women's Bill as

39. *Statesman,* 20 April 1986.

40. This recognition was implicit in the government's decision to prepare the legislation in consultation with the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board and the *ulema.* See the *Times of India,* 28 December 1985.

41. Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League, and the Demand for Pakistan* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

42. Farzana Sheikh, "Muslims and Political Representation in Colonial India: The Making of Pakistan," in *India's Partition: Process, Strategy, and Mobilization,* ed. Mushirul Hasan (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993).

43. *Telegraph,* May 1988.

44. *Times of India,* 28 December 1985.

45. *Telegraph,* 15 May 1986.

legislation that would allay Muslim fears about threats to their identity and at the same time protect the interests of Muslim women. This claim was contingent on the acceptance of the fundamentalist argument regarding the liberal provisions of the Shariat for divorced women. Furthermore, the government accepted the so-called Muslim perception that their identity was threatened by the Shah Bano judgment. The All-India Muslim Personal Law Board claimed to voice these sentiments on behalf of the entire Muslim community. This synecdochic substitution was effected through state intervention that put Muslim personal law in the foreground as the sole basis of community identity.

Conclusion

In the aftermath of the demolition of the Barbri Mosque the issues discussed in this essay acquire a renewed urgency. The Muslim leadership's insistence on a distinct identity signified by the passage of the Muslim Women's Bill led eventually not just to reinforcement of legal and gender inequality, but also to the growing power of communalism in contemporary Indian politics that added to the troubled history of Hindu-Muslim relations since then. The huge outcry against the "appeasement" of minorities in the wake of the bill lent a measure of credibility to the charge that Muslims were being pampered. Clearly, Muslims are not a pampered lot, but the charge has stuck because of the Muslim leadership's stubborn insistence on a narrow definition of community identity. These markers of minority identity magnified images and stereotypes about the Muslims and their innate religious bigotry that were used to perpetrate communal aggression against them. Readiness to accept reform by overcoming acute defensiveness about community identity can encourage women's rights and strengthen the forces of secularism, modernity, and India's pluralism. ★

The Women of the Hindutva Brigade

by Tanika Sarkar

The demolition of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya on 6 December 1992 and the subsequent explosion of anti-Muslim pogroms all over India have highlighted the very real possibility of a right-wing takeover of the Indian state in the name of the Hindutva (Hindu nationalist) movement.[1] Any such transition would involve the redefinition of the state as Hindu rather than as secular or multicultural. It would also initiate a shift of state policies in a considerably more authoritarian, centralized, and militaristic direction than they are at the present moment.[2]

The organizations that collectively adhere to such an agenda have been founded, trained, and led by the paramilitary, nonparty Hindu nationalist organization, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is the electoral wing of the RSS, while the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) mobilizes religious institutions and personages, and in recent years has been in charge of coordinating a violent campaign against Indian Muslims. The different bodies have different responsibilities, but the purposes and the personnel are shared, and all owe allegiance and obedience to the ideological inspiration and training of the RSS.

In this article I shall explore the location of women within this neofascist movement[3] through a study of the women's wing of the RSS, the Rashtra Sevika Samiti. Elsewhere I have discussed its organizational structure and its historical development,[4] but here the focus will be on the larger political and theoretical issues that are involved in such a political formation. An elaboration of the women's component of the Indian Right—almost entirely neglected so far—ought to be a significant help in understanding the broad nature of the Right as a whole.

The questions will relate to the nature of the present conjuncture when suddenly the Right feels impelled, for the first time in its history, to feature its women combatants in visible and leading positions. The audio-cassette speeches of Sadhvi Rithambara, a woman ascetic of the VHP, were the single most powerful instrument for whipping up anti-Muslim violence.[5] Uma Bharati, another woman ascetic and a BJP member of Parliament, played a leading role in all the campaigns. Vijayraje Scindia, another BJP member of Parliament, has come into enormous prominence within the party organization during the Ram Janambhoomi movement to destroy the Babri Mosque and build a Ram temple at the site.

1. Hindutva, in the sense in which the Hindu Right uses it, is not to be confused with Hinduism as a religion or with Hindus as a religious category. It is the banner under which the Right is fighting for state power, using the myth that the site of the now demolished Babri Mosque had been the exact spot where the epic hero Ram had been born, and that it was the duty of every Hindu to demolish the mosque and construct a temple at that site. The temple project was promoted through a virulent and violent anti-Muslim campaign from the late eighties.

2. For a discussion of the Hindutva agenda, see Tapan Basu, Pradip Dutta, Sumit Sarkar, Tanika Sarkar, and Sambuddha Sen, *Khaki Shorts, Saffron Flags: A Critque of the Hindu Right* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1993). On the Ram Janambhoomi movement, see Sarvepalli Gopal, ed., *Anatomy of a Confrontation: The Babari Masjid–Ramjanambhoomi Issue* (Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1991), republished with an updated preface and a new subtitle, *The Rise of Communal Politics in India* (London: Zed Books, 1993).

3. See Sumit Sarkar, "The Fascism of the Sangh Parivar," *Economic and Political Weekly* (Bombay), 30 Jan. 1993. For a different perspective, see Achin Vanaik, "Situating the Threat of the Hindu Right: Problems with the Fascist Paradigm" (Unpublished paper).

4. See Tanika Sarkar, "The Woman as Communal Subject: the Rashtrasevika Samiti and the Ramjanambhoomi Movement," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 31 Aug. 1991.

5. This was an audio cassette that contained a call for violent war against Indian Muslims in order to "salvage" Ram's birthplace. In 1991 it was repeatedly played at VHP-controlled temples and also at many public places in northern Indian cities and towns.

Sadhvi Rithambara, a woman ascetic of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), the religious organization of the Hindu nationalist movement, stirring up a crowd at a massive VHP rally in New Delhi on 4 April 1991. In recent years the VHP has been in charge of coordinating a militant campaign against Indian Muslims, and audio-cassette speeches by Rithambara have been its single most powerful instrument for whipping up anti-Muslim violence. This photo by Sharad Saxena is from India Today, *30 April 1991, p. 32, reprinted here courtesy of Sharad Saxena and* India Today.

In an ironic inversion of women's former invisibility in the domain of public violence, large numbers of women have been extremely active and visible, not only in the rallies and campaigns but even in the actual episodes of violent attacks against Muslims.[6] The complicity has also involved an informed assent to such brutalities against Muslim women as gang rapes and the tearing open of pregnant wombs in Bhopal and Surat in December 1992 and January 1993[7]—informed, because these episodes had been widely reported and publicized and there was no way that these women could have escaped knowledge of them. In fact, the politicization of right-wing women involves a painful surrender of a cherished article of faith about the relationship between women and violence. In most studies of communal violence in India women have been predominantly conceptualized as victims and healers—a position that is generally considered representative of their roles and experiences in society as a whole.[8] While there is a lot of truth in that image, we now need to modify and enlarge the possibilities of the political role of women. We will explore the factors in their social experiences that have enabled their politicization on precisely these issues and agendas, and reflect on the larger meanings and implications of women establishing themselves as political subjects through an agenda of hatred and brutality against a besieged minority.

The Samiti: Founding, Growth, and Dynamics

Indian women have participated in almost all forms of political agitations and mass campaigns from the turn of the century. They were notable activists in anticolonial, tribal, and peasant and working-class mass struggles, and from midcentury they have formed their own autonomous groups for struggles around women's rights. So far it has been the Hindu Right alone that had kept its women in obscure and unknown positions, in keeping with its generally orthodox gender perspective. The RSS is an all-male organization that has thus far steadfastly ignored all appeals for opening its doors to women. Even though the RSS was founded in 1925, when women were already active in all shades of anticolonial movements—nonviolent as well as revolutionary terrorist—it did not even develop a women's front for the next eleven years. Lakshmibai Kelkar, the mother of a Maharashtrian RSS veteran, had approached Dr. Keshav Baliram Hegdewar, the founder and leader of the RSS, many times

6. Sarkar, "The Woman as Communal Subject."

7. Sudhir Chandra, "Communal Consciousness and Communal Violence: Post-Riot Surat," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 4 Sept. 1993.

8. Uma Chakravarti and Nandita Haksar, *The Delhi Riots: Three Days in the Life of a Nation* (New Delhi: Lancer International, 1987).

in the early thirties for the admission of women, but he was not responsive. At last in 1936 he agreed to her proposal and advised her to set up a separate women's wing. And so the Rashtra Sevika Samiti was founded.[9]

Why did Hegdewar depart from the RSS's past practice and relent? We must remember that this was a time of rapid left advance and consolidation within peasant and trade-union fronts, and of unity among socialistic elements both inside and outside the Indian National Congress. The United Front strategy of the Communist International, which advised the communist parties of the colonized countries to join mass-based anticolonial movements even under a nationalist bourgeois leadership, helped the Indian communists establish themselves as a national presence.[10] This, in turn, led to a right-wing countermobilization, especially because the RSS had stayed away from the national movement and had dedicated itself exclusively to an anti-Muslim agenda. The problem RSS leaders faced was that their social base was crucially limited at that time because until fairly recently they had mobilized their recruits principally from high-caste, middle-class, urban sections.[11] In order to expand their base within these limits, they turned to women of their own class, even of their own families.

As a counterpoint to such developments within the family itself, the Samiti has methodically fed its members on the intoxicating prospects of an apocalyptic violence against the enemies of the community, an impending battle that requires single-minded preparation from all activists and that promises equal participation to the women's contingent.

Yet the departure did not lead to a significant broadening of the RSS gender ideology as a whole. We must note that while the name Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh means "Nationalist Volunteers," the term *rashtra sevika* denotes women who serve the nation. The difference in the names is significant in several ways. It not only relegates women's work within the Samiti organization to a domestic role, but also consigns their domestic labor firmly to the sphere of humble service. The sense of autonomy and self-choice that are associated with the word "volunteer" are notably missing. In the formative period of the Samiti, neither Hegdewar nor his successor, M. S. Golwalkar, the supreme ideologue of the RSS, attached much importance to women's formal organizational work, and the Samiti led a low-priority, noninnovative, routine-bound existence. In Golwalkar's corpus of writings, women are predominantly mothers who could help the Sangh cause most by rearing their children within the RSS framework of *samskaras*—a combination of family ritual and unquestioning deference toward family elders and RSS leaders.

The initial thrust was clearly toward consolidation of RSS values and principles within their own families, and the training of small children who were too young to join the RSS *shakhas* (daily assemblies) for physical and ideological training. The women, unlike their counterparts in the national movement, did not plan to embark on public political activity, but concentrated on informal work within family, kin, and neighborhood groups. In their own *shakhas* they replicated the RSS schedule and did not innovate at all. Women's issues and problems were not discussed, and no moves were made to initiate or join in movements on gender issues. No experiments were made with ways of overcoming the original middle-class, upper-caste confines.

The major concentrations of Samitis are still within regions of RSS strongholds, and they clearly occurred as a fallout of RSS expansion.[12] As a result, growth has been relatively slow and socially limited when we compare it with that of left women's organizations or autonomous women's groups. The Samiti is the second oldest women's organization in the country, but its growth rate has been the lowest.[13] Although the Vishwa Hindu Parishad has spread enormously in recent years through the Ram Janambhoomi campaign and has spawned its own women's groups like the Durga Vahini and Matri Mandal, many of whose cadres and leaders were trained directly by the Samiti for the Ram Janambhoomi movement, they have not departed from the perspective of the Samiti. Unlike the women's wings of the left parties and organizations, which have remained their major growth areas in recent years, the BJP has given little priority to the growth of its women's wing.

This deliberate limitation on expansion offers certain advantages. Since recruits are from the same class, the initial mobilization proceeds rapidly, with considerable unimpeded communication and mutual understanding between recruits and older cadres. This is more difficult to achieve in cross-class/caste situations, where old members, often starting out from a more privileged background, frequently go through a long process of self-preparation to reach less-privileged sisters because even though the old members have total commitment and sympathy for their sisters' cause, they sometimes have little knowledge of the conditions involved. Outside the Samiti confines, the *rashtra sevikas* ""work hard to develop ties with the new families of recently married members. In fact, most of their activities are informal and are carried out within familial circles. The plan seems to be to use each member as an entry point into a larger

9. Sarkar, "The Woman as Communal Subject."

10. See Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India, 1885–1947* (New Delhi: Macmillan, 1987).

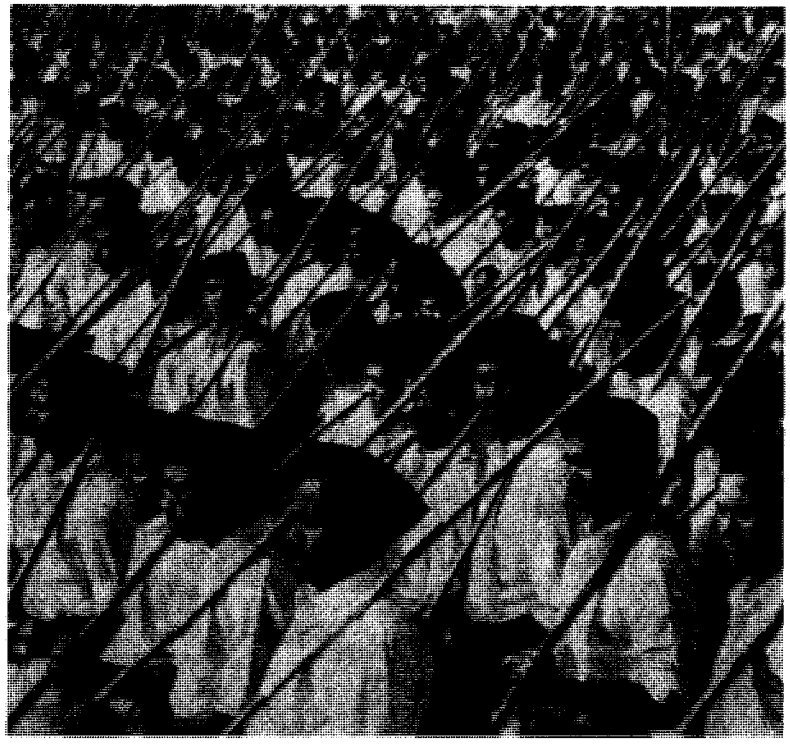
11. Tapan Basu et al., *Khaki Shorts,* p. 80.

12. In Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Delhi, the Samitis are firmly located within localities dominated by the RSS or BJP.

13. In 1991 the Samiti's all-India membership was approximately one lakh (100,000 women). In the same year, the total membership of the All India Democratic Women's Association, associated with the Communist Party of India (Marxist), was twenty-nine lakhs (2,900,000 women), although it had been founded as late as 1981.

unit, and through her to gain access to new kin groups and neighborhoods. [14] These methods work effectively to attain a horizontal rather than vertical spread, and to mesh the existing constituency with RSS aims and purposes. It is a person-by-person, inch-by-inch advance on the Gramscian molecular model of hegemony that places more importance on a totalitarian conquest of the existing base rather than on a thinly spread numerical expansion.

This mode of progress does not expose the women of the Hindutva brigade to polluting lower class/caste milieus or take them away from familial environs. It does not confront them with the larger problems of their socially exploited sisters, so that the Hindutva women are never forced to choose between gender and their own class/caste privileges. It keeps them tied to family interests and ideology while spicing their lives with the excitement of a limited but important public identity. The Samiti seeks to deepen the conformist character of its constituency by diverting their attention away from concern about victims of social oppression and their own class/caste complicity with existing orders of power relations to an alleged nonconcretized notion of Muslim oppression of Hindu women through the ages. From Savarkar's formative writings on Muslim rule in India, the stereotype of an eternally lustful Muslim male with evil designs on Hindu women has been reiterated and made a part of a historical common sense.[15] The stereotype helps to restrict the concerns of women within the desired framework. The women of the RSS combine (the RSS, BJP, VHP, and affiliated groups) have reasons to fear an imminent breach of their upper-caste status and privileges—both from the militant lower-caste movements and from certain government measures to extend the scope of affirmative action for some lower-caste groups. Their caste and class positions therefore ensure that they lend their commitment exclusively to a highly militant yet socially conservative movement.[16]



One of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)'s neighborhood shakhas *(daily assemblies), 35,000 of which existed in 1992. The Rashtra Sevika Samiti, the RSS's women's wing, was set up very much along the lines of the RSS, and like the RSS the Samiti's main activities are ideological and paramilitary training during the* shakhas. *The schedules and training are the same for both groups, with regular physical training focusing on the martial arts, including the use of weaponry. This photo is by Chaya Kendra, and it is from* India Today, *31 December 1992, p. 52, reprinted here courtesy of Chaya Kendra,* India Today, *and Jana Everett.*

It is interesting that on their daily training grounds the identical schedule has always been followed by both the RSS and the Samiti. There are regular physical training programs for women, with a special focus on the martial arts, including practice in shooting. RSS-run schools, similarly, teach exactly the same courses to their boys and girls. When the Samitis were first set up, it was certainly most unusual, if not a transgression, for respectable women to go through such exercises. The only parallel in those times would have been with the terrorist women of Bengal. Those women, however, were prepared to leave home and immediately undertake assassinations of colonial officers, while the Samiti originally had no plan of direct political action.

Lakshmibai Kelkar, the founder of the Samiti, was keen that her girls must have strong, trained bodies. The aspiration seems curious, given the fact that it was put to no active or public use for a long time to come. We shall see later that the cult of the strong physique came to include an extra meaning for women, over and above that inscribed within the organization by the founders. At the same time, body-centered practices for women have old and varied meanings and values within different currents of Hindu patriarchy. A variety of physical rites and rituals meant to preserve her virtue and family welfare are taken to constitute nearly the entirety of prescribed religious activity for the pious Hindu woman. Late nineteenth-century Hindu revivalist-nationalists, from whom the RSS drew much inspiration, added another meaning to such practices. The Hindu woman's body, hemmed in with scriptural ritual, was imagined as a pure space that escaped the transformative effects of colonization, whereas the Hindu

14. For details of the Samiti's organizational functioning, see Sarkar, "The Woman as Communal Subject."

15. In 1990 we interviewed B.L. Sharma, a VHP leader and later a BJP member of Parliament from East Delhi, for two hours. This theme was the mainstay of what he had to say to us for the entire period of time. See Pradip Dutta, Tanika Sarkar, Sumit Sarkar, and Sambuddha Sen, "Understanding Communal Violence: The Nizamuddin Riots," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 10 Nov. 1990.

16. In August 1990 the Indian government announced a plan to grant the reservation of a certain proportion of central government jobs for a specific category of low-caste groups. The announcement led to hysterical reaction among upper-caste groups all over northern India. In many states the agitation of upper-caste youths was led by the BJP. Since then any discussion of social justice for lower castes has been a particularly sensitive and embarrassing issue for the RSS combine.

man, seduced by the operations of Western power and knowledge, had surrendered himself and had lost his autonomy.[17] The woman's body, having passed through the grid of Hindu ritual exercises, therefore alone remained, for these Hindus, the site of an existent freedom as well as the future nation.

The Samiti has preserved the accumulated meanings but transformed the essential rituals. The symbolic function of ritual has been interpreted literally with the mystical notion of female virtue and power materialistically translated as sheer physical strength. Possibly the influence of contemporary eugenics was at work; a healthy feminine body would bear strong children. From the turn of the century, many high-born militant Hindus have been anxiously preoccupied with the supposedly higher fertility rate of Muslims and low-caste Hindus that seemed to doom the leadership of upper-caste Hindus in Indian society.[18] The incarcerated and leisure-softened bodies of upper-caste women would also be regarded as inadequate vessels to bear the soldiers of the imagined Hindu nation. Since all fascist movements cast their men as able soldiers and killers, their women are invariably asked to ensure exceptionally healthy bodies that would guarantee the production of the most efficient combatants.[19]

A national executive meeting of the RSS's political party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), in Calcutta. The woman is Vijayraje Scindia, a BJP member of Parliament who has come into enormous prominence within the party organization during the Ram Janambhoomi movement. This was the first meeting since the destruction of the Babri Mosque, and Yubaraj Ghimire reported in the 30 April 1993 issue of India Today *that the mood was "cheerful, defiant, generally hawkish, and dependent as ever on the Ram plank." This photo is by Saibal Das and is from the same issue of* India Today, *reprinted here courtesy of Saibal Das and* India Today.

At the same time, the recent complicity of women in violence indicates a significant departure from classic fascist gender norms. Now women are endowed with the role of comrades in arms, full-fledged soldiers in their own right, at least in moments of crisis. Nevertheless, the limits of equality must be noted. There is no doubt that the RSS continues to lead and direct every step of the movement. Its men move among the different affiliates and subaffiliates—the BJP, the VHP, and their wings—and join and lead them. This rules out the participation of women in the highest decision-making bodies since that capability is reserved for the RSS alone, and the RSS remains an all-male body. A woman may achieve an extremely important position within the BJP and the VHP, but her exclusion from the RSS would ensure a totally effective absence from real power and responsibility.

In a sense, the dazzling visibility of that spectacular triad of women—Sadvi Rithambara, Uma Bharati, and Vijayraje Scindia—is meant to blind us to the very crucial absence of women in the heart of effective action and thinking. Also, by the novel role and function now given to women leaders, an older division of labor is ensured and enforced that is more profound and more fundamental to RSS gender ideology: let the women fulfill their training schedule for it has always had a marked martial cast, with its worship of the armed Durga,* its military training, and its constant invocation of the theme of war.[20] Although women come out on the streets and scream for violence, and even engage in it, the reins of the campaign remain surely and inexorably in the hands of an all-male squad. Even the new public role as priestesses of the cult of bloodshed, however, has been a hard-won victory. A Samiti officeholder told me in Delhi that even within the Samiti the decision to train the *kar sevikas* (women "temple volunteers" who have gone to Ayodhya as part of the Ram Janambhoomi movement) was made after much initial reluctance and because of the insistence of the younger cadres.[21] One might argue that in effect this is true of

17. On this, see Tanika Sarkar, "Rhetoric against Age of Consent: Resisting Colonial Reason and Death of a Child Wife," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 4 Sept. 1993.

18. See Pradip Dutta, "Dying Hindus: Production of Hindu Common Sense in Early Nineteenth Century Bengal," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 19 June 1993.

19. See Claudia Koonz, "Mothers in the Fatherland: Women in Nazi Germany," in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, ed. Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1977).

*For more on Durga, a goddess used by the RSS to represent the territoriality of the Hindu nation, see p. 41 below.

20. Asha Sharma, interview with the author, Delhi, Dec. 1990.

21. Sharma, interview, Dec. 1990.

most political groups—that they are, on the whole, male dominated, especially in the higher reaches of power. Although there is nothing structured in the RSS constitution that permanently ensures exclusive male control, such control is built into the Indian Right because the RSS is in fact an all-male body and leads the Hindutva movement.

Implications for Gender Ideology

Far too often the gender ideology of the RSS combine, including that of its women's wing, is unproblematically classified as fundamentalist, since the overarching political framework aggressively espouses religious revival. It is true, as we shall see later, that there are deeply orthodox compulsions within the movement that lately have been becoming more explicit and demanding. At the same time, uneasy negotiations go on inside the Samiti between an orthodox patriarchy and certain modernistic pulls. On the whole, it seems, the original parameters worked out by the founding father have proved to be fairly flexible, and *rashtra sevikas* have traveled a long way without overtly resisting the initial prescriptions. We have to take note of the fact that for a certain section of affluent upper-caste and middle-class urban women of northern Indian cities and small towns, where women's education and professional opportunities have come rather late, the Samiti does provide a public political identity and a limited yet real sense of empowerment. It is only after an acknowledgment of that fact and possibility that we need to start building our critique by going more deeply into the political conditions enabling this empowerment.

There are many examples of the growing sense of empowerment among Samiti members. Vidushi, a young Samiti member, stridently attacked the custom of widow immolation and refused to accept that it could ever be genuinely voluntary.[22] The Samitis regard higher education and professional careers for women as desirable, even though strictly conditional upon parental consent. Articles in the Samiti journal, *Jagruti* (Awakening), applaud global women's movements and demand an extension of property, legal, and political rights for women.[23] Physical training for women is often given an immediate value and purpose that makes the official aim of fighting against the Muslim appear remote and marginal. *Rashtra sevikas* come from upwardly mobile trading- or service-sector families that are the breeding ground for dowry murders. Since women's education and career prospects have recently opened up, women have been thrust into mixed company in public for the first time and have encountered new forms of covert and overt sexual discrimination and violence. It is small wonder, then, that the physical training programs, with their promise of strong, hardened bodies and the self-confidence that they generate, would prove extremely attractive to Samiti women.

The possibilities are strictly limited, however. Parental consent and discipline are revered as the ultimate court of decision, and Samitis see themselves as an arm of, rather than brake on, family control. All claims to an enlarged identity are made on the grounds of the need for greater respect for women that covertly substitutes for, and ultimately displaces, a demand for equal rights. And here we come to a crucial point about the Right as a whole. It depends, as do a range of much more radical political formations, on a seemingly radical critique of "modern secularism," a critique that opposes liberal theories of rights it considers "alien, imported, Western" notions. The Right tries to postulate in their place ahistoric notions of a natural affinity among individuals and communities, which it misleadingly terms indigenous. This image of a sustaining, nurturing community is then used to undercut all left attacks on political and social hierarchies—be it the demands of the states for greater autonomy or of the lower castes, classes, and women for equal rights and affirmative action. Instead of countering such demands frontally and therefore proclaiming itself to be on the side of social oppression and hierarchy, and hence reducing its prospects for a mass base, the Right concentrates its attack on the liberal theory of rights, arguing that this theory is of contaminated historical origins or came to India in colonial times through the agency of Western education. A nationalist-indigenist reasoning thus contests demands for civil, human, and democratic rights, and appropriates for itself a spuriously radical anticolonial mantle rather than a socially regressive one.

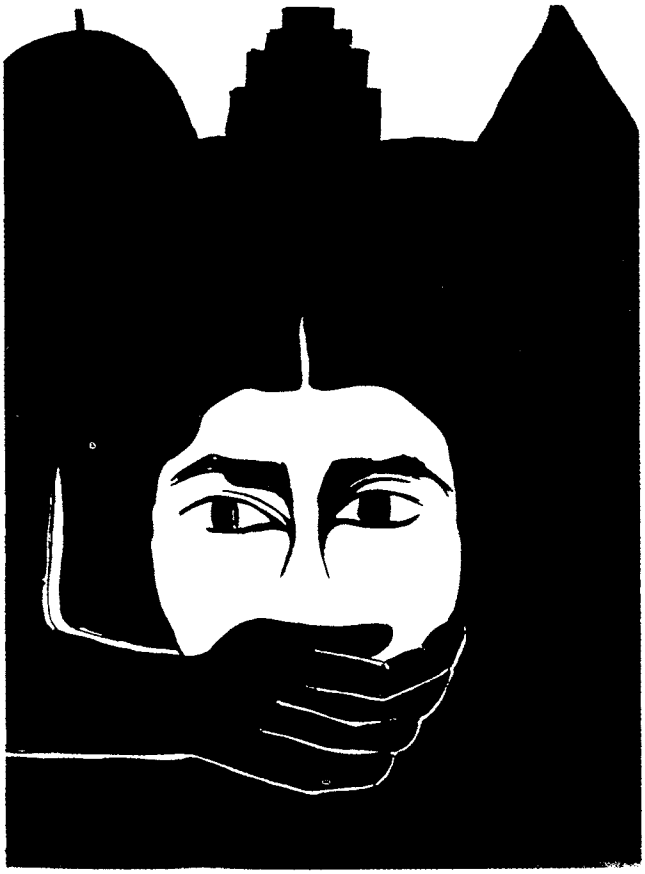
The Samiti seeks to deepen the conformist character of its constituency by diverting their attention away from concern about victims of social oppression and their own class/caste complicity with existing orders of power relations to an alleged nonconcretized notion of Muslim oppression of Hindu women through the ages.

In very recent times the accent on conservative domesticity threatens to drown out the modernistic elements and to return women to a far more rigidly and sternly defined homemaking role that begins to smack of a determined fundamentalist patriarchy. The veteran VHP leader Bamdev has demanded the restoration of polygamy and the abolition of divorce among Hindus, and BJP women leaders like Vijayraje Scindia and Mridula Sinha have defended widow-immolation and dowries and have asked women to retire from paid employment into domesticity. This could be dictated by the growth and spread of radical and leftist women's movements in northern India that may stimulate stirrings of discontent among women of their own circles. At Khurja, a small town in western Uttar Pradesh, we found women in leading RSS families complaining about their early marriages and heavy domestic burdens.[24]

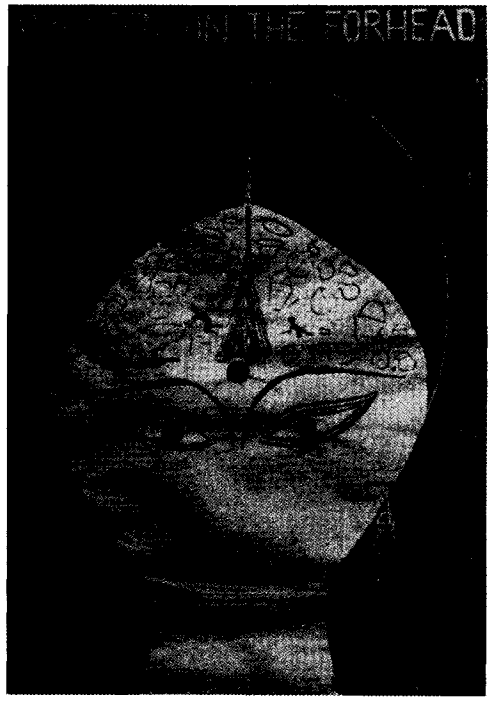
22. Vidushi, interview with the author, Delhi, Dec. 1990.

23. See Sarkar, "The Woman as Communal Subject."

24. Uma Chakravarty, Prem Chowdhury, Pradip Dutta, Zoya Hasan, Kumkum Sangari, and Tanika Sarkar, "Khurja Riots, 1990–91: Understanding the Conjuncture," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2 May 1992, pp. 951–65.



This 1981 poster by the Saheli women's group in Delhi shows religion entrapping and exploiting women. Although the women in the Hindutva movement enjoy new freedoms and prominence and are incredibly outspoken on many issues, they still must keep within the bounds of policies and thought approved by the men of the RSS, the all-male body that runs the movement. Both pictures of posters on this page were attributed to Sheba Chhachhi when they appeared in Radha Kumar's The History of Doing: An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India, 1880–1990 *(New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1993), pp. 162, 147. These pictures are reprinted here courtesy of Sheba Chhachhi and Kali for Women.*



Another poster by a women's group shows domesticity "written on the forehead" of an Indian woman. As Indian women have begun to savor their new freedoms, the men in the Hindutva movement appear to want to return them to a "far more rigidly and sternly defined homemaking role that begins to smack of a determined fundamentalist patriarchy." It becomes imperative for the men to reinforce the boundaries of control over these women and keep their activism within the limits of older political priorities.

Furthermore, the recent huge growth of urban consumerism, so much of which caters specifically to women, enhances the prospects of their expanded mobility and their claims to a bigger share of the family budget. This certainly puts new strains on older ways of relating to women. While the few educated and professional women threaten to be empowered with unprecedented self-reliance, even housewives, with their discovery of the shopping arcade and its endless lure of consumer goods, step out of their homes and begin to seek things that are meant specifically for themselves and not for common household requirements. Both ways, older forms of female domesticity and patriarchal control begin to weaken.

The new political identity of Hindutva women, which is important in establishing the mass character of the Right, exacerbates the process and makes it imperative both to reinforce the boundaries of control over women and to freeze the new-found political activism within an intensified restatement of older political priorities. At this peak moment within the right-wing mass movement, when women of its own circles need to be mobilized for the spread of the movement, when the movement itself grants women an unprecedented visibility and voice, it becomes even more imperative to recover, gather, and articulate the submerged patriarchal assumptions, to tighten them up and indicate firmly that the new public role needs to be contained within a war against the Muslim. The televised version of the Ramayana epic, which was made to coincide with the building up of the Babri Mosque issue,[25] simultaneously proclaimed and helped to establish Ram as a figure of supreme national importance for all Indians, and restated the basic codes of Hindu patriarchy—of the irresistible appeal of the meek and obedient wife. And if an invigorated and frank patriarchy becomes suspect among women, the Hindutva protagonists can always point to the far more limited legal rights of Indian Muslim women. The Hindutva movement, then, positively depends on an unreformed Muslim patriarchy.

It is, therefore, as a counterpoint to such developments within the family itself that the Samiti has methodically fed its members on the intoxicating prospects of an apocalyptic violence against the enemies of the community, an impending

25. On the importance of the televised epic to the Ram Janambhoomi movement, see Dutta et al., "Understanding Communal Violence."

battle that requires single-minded preparation from all activists and that promises equal participation to the women's contingent. For many decades now, myths about an insatiable Muslim lust for the Hindu woman has been one of the staples of RSS propaganda, and selective memories of rape during the Partition riots are invoked and kept alive with great diligence.[26] The Hindu woman is given an externalized enemy to focus on that helps obliterate and displace personal and immediate experiences of oppression within the family.

Once communal violence erupts, all sorts of Hindutva myths about the violent and lustful Muslim become a self-fulfilling prophecy. In the ensuing climate of hysterical fears and doubts, all familiar archetypes find acceptance without having to wait for proof. Riots are, therefore, structured into the very logic of the Hindutva's long-term mobilizational strategy.

Conclusions

One important way of looking at women's relationship to the Right—and it is a way that the RSS itself prefers to project—has been to obliterate the political movement from the frame of references and to fill up the space exclusively with the religious compulsion. The political movement, since it is in Ram's name, presumably then ceases to be political, and only then becomes a movement women can identify themselves with. The visibility of women coincides, we must remember, with the simultaneous visibility of ascetics in the movement. Both are there to make the same point. It would seem that people who have been traditionally aloof from the realm of power politics are now "spontaneously" coming forward to assert the Hindu faith, and that professional politicians of the BJP are humbly and faithfully following the commands of the whole people.

There are three sets of underlying assumptions behind this opinion. First of all, women are depicted as a homogeneous mass and are identified with the common folk or the whole people. Women's presence in the movement is then used as a sign of the movement's ubiquity, its universality. The social base of the women of the Hindu Right, however, is easily identified as overwhelmingly upper caste, middle class, and urban. A Delhi officeholder has, for example, frankly admitted the middle-class character of the movement.[27]

The second and third unstated assumptions are interrelated. There is a notion that faith is timeless and above historical change and political manipulation and use. It further assumes that any demand made in the name of a religious issue always harks back to this timeless faith and not to any modern variant that can be open to political appropriation. There is also a conviction that women are custodians of this eternal faith, and that they can respond to a call that emanates from such faith alone. The women's presence is thus considered proof that the Ram Janambhoomi demand is one that comes from the heart of age-old Hindu beliefs.

Here we need to remind ourselves that prior to the Ram Janambhoomi movement, no traditional text, ritual, or myth ever made a statement that Ram's birthplace had been made into a mosque, or that it was a matter of religious duty to build a temple on the site of the Babri Mosque. The most sacred vernacular version of the Ramayana that is in use in northern India and is revered by the VHP was written after the presumed destruction of the alleged temple, and yet there is no mention of that event in the text, nor any injunction laid on Hindus to build the temple.[28] Women are, therefore, not responding to a call of eternal Hindu feelings, but to certain contemporary transformations that are grafted onto a crucial cluster of Hindu institutions—temples, big religious foundations, and monastic establishments that are now acting as auxiliaries of political parties and organizations. They are not acting according to a time-honored ritual or texts or devotional traditions; instead they are accepting versions of faith that have been created by high-tech modern media—video films, audio cassettes, the televised version of the epic. Recognition of this puts a very different complexion on both the presumed immutability of faith and tradition and women's relationship to them.

Now women are endowed with the role of comrades in arms, full-fledged soldiers in their own right, at least in moments of crisis. Nevertheless, the limits of equality must be noted. There is no doubt that the RSS continues to lead and direct every step of the movement.

Finally, there remains the vexing question of whether this movement, despite women's growing commitment to it, authentically expresses the empowerment of women or reflects a manipulated, constructed, "false" consent and intentionality. Two separate questions and problems are tied to this—the question of "real" interests, and the question of power. No feminist can possibly argue that the movement can contribute anything to the broad rights of women. We have explored its uncompromising orthodox compulsions as well as the positively fundamentalist tendencies. Yet among women of a specific conservative milieu it certainly has bestowed a degree of empowerment and a sense of confidence and larger solidarities. It has brought them into activist, public roles, and has thereby probably increased their bargaining power within their homes, as political activism invariably does to some extent. It has allowed them to go beyond a purely domestic or feminine identity. At the same time, this limited yet real empowerment leads them to a complicity with fascist intolerance and violence, toward the creation of an authoritarian, antidemocratic social and political order. Eventually, it is going to lead these women, in the name of the feigned authenticity of indigenism, to resisting notions of justice, even for

26. Ibid.

27. Rekha Raje, interview with the author, Delhi, Dec. 1990.

28. See Sushil Srivastava, *The Disputed Mosque: A Historical Inquiry* (New Delhi, Vistar Publications, 1991).

their own sex. In Iran, masses of women have supported compulsory incarceration of women, and in Nazi Germany women agreed to give up their right to vote.

This brings us to the question of manipulation. Gender, like class, does not have an emancipatory potential that is "natural" or innate. Gender power grows from a sense of solidarity to being a force for itself only through intervention, contestation, and an exercise of and struggle over choices. Certainly, a feminist consciousness does not nestle within a woman, ready to attain progressive self-realization within a congenial environment, but is acquired through bitter conflicts and problems of choices—within herself, most of all. The point about the women of the Hindutva brigade is not that they are simply being conned into belief, for the same applies to men. Our interviews with women demonstrators at Ayodhya convinced us that their affirmation of the Ram Janambhoomi issue was no mindless gesture but a highly informed conviction. The point is to assess the nature of the issues they assent to.

The demolition of the Babri Mosque by militant Hindus on 6 December 1992. It took a day and a half for them to destroy the mosque and build a "temple foundation," and yet they were able to leave the city on special buses and trains without being apprehended. Although no women can be seen in this picture, women were also there. Large numbers of women in the Hindutva movement have been active and visible in violent attacks on Muslims as well as in advocating violence during rallies and campaigns. This photo is from and courtesy of India Today. ★

Feminism Inverted: The Real Women and Gendered Imagery of Hindu Nationalism

Amrita Basu*

If one was to imagine the gendered imagery and female leadership associated with Hindu "communalism," the images that would come to mind are of women as self-sacrificing, long-suffering, nonviolent victims.[1] Such images find fullest expression in both Hinduism and Gandhian nationalism, but associations of women with pacifism persist even within many agrarian social movements, a prime example of which is the Chipko movement against deforestation.[2] These images derive their force partly from their singularity: to represent the diversity of women's life experience might undermine their roles as icons.

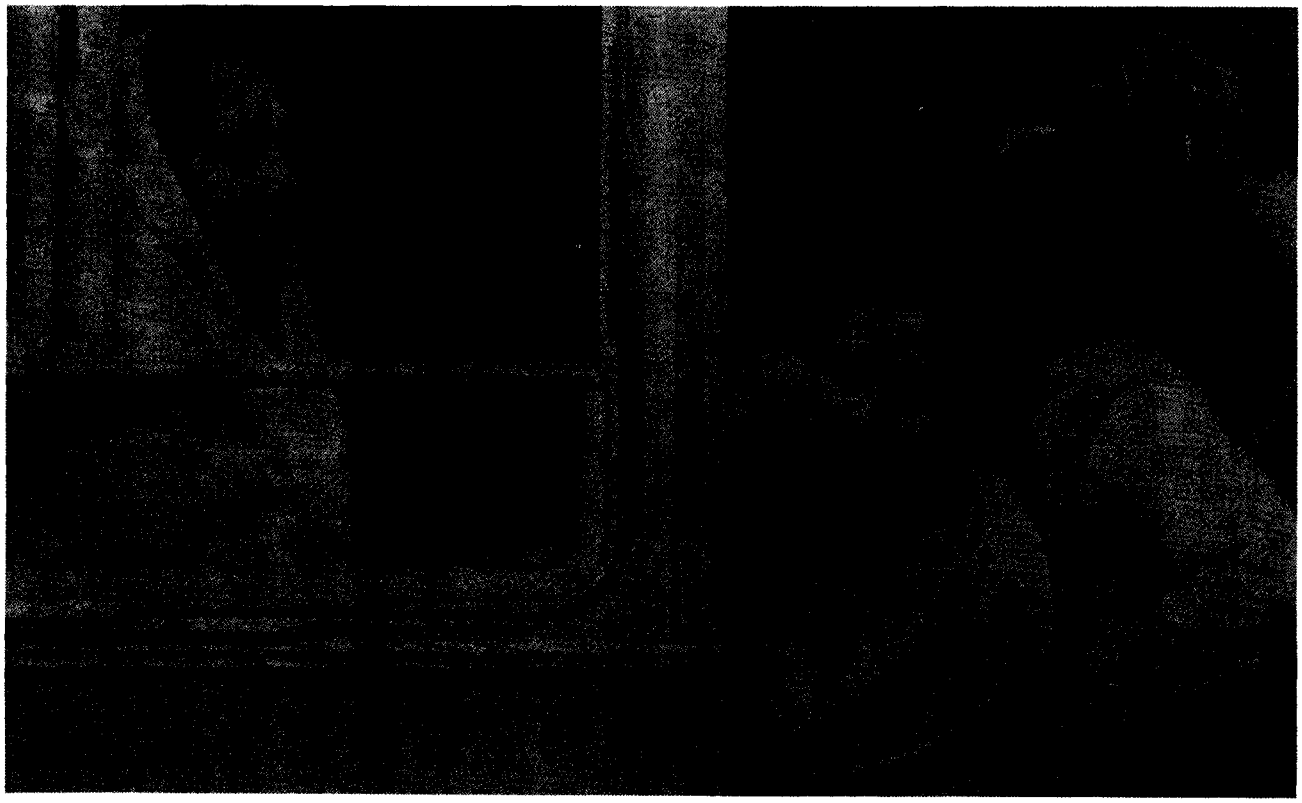
Like the anticolonial movement and subsequent social movements, Hindu nationalism has sought legitimacy in notions of selflessness, sacrifice, and martyrdom. Like its predecessors, it has liberally employed gendered images and appeals. However, in its use of gendered images and the place of real women Hindu nationalism reflects a further extension or arguably a departure from earlier forms of social mobilization in two respects. First, although even the most powerful women in the Hindutva (Hindu nationalist) movement are less powerful than the male leadership, they enjoy more prominence and exercise greater influence than women have in most other national and social movements in India. Second, the female leadership of the Hindutva movement does not advocate pacifism. While their directives are most specifically targeted at Hindu men, the female leadership implicitly sanctions and indeed encourages women's use of violence.

Vijayraje Scindia, Uma Bharati, and Sadhvi Rithambara, the three women who have emerged as the most powerful orators of Hindu nationalism, defy the gendered images of earlier movements in a number of ways. None of them are particularly nurturing; only one among them is a mother and her estrangement from her son is widely known. Regardless of the personal hardships they may have experienced, they depict themselves as powerful agents rather than passive

*Paola Bachetta, Mary Katzenstein, Mark Kesselman, and Pavel Machala provided insightful comments on an earlier draft of this paper. I am also grateful for research and writing support from the Amherst College Research Award and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

1.The term communalism refers to partisanship or chauvinism deriving from religious identity; communal conflict occurs between members of different religious communities, most often Hindus and Muslims. The term is misleading, among other reasons, because of its assumption that such prejudice and conflict is religious in nature. However, I use the term in part to differentiate Hindu nationalism or communalism from religious fundamentalism, with which it is often confused. The distinction between communalism and fundamentalism is elaborated further below on p. 32 in the paragraph with n. 10 in it. Amrita Chhachhi analyzes the gendered imagery and the implicit communalism of the nationalist movement in "Forced Identities: The State, Communalism, Fundamentalism, and Women in India," in *Women, Islam, and the State,* ed. Deniz Kandiyoti (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).

2. Associations of women and nonviolence in the context of the Chipko movement provide a central theme in Vandana Shiva's *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development* (London: Zed Press, 1989). Madhu Kishwar provides a sobering analysis of the limited gains women have achieved in most agrarian social movements and of the disjunction between gendered imagery and women's interests in "The Nature of Women's Mobilization in Rural India: An Exploratory Essay," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 23–31 Dec. 1988, pp. 2,754–63. Although Gail Omvedt provides a more positive appraisal of women's gains from these movements than Kishwar, she recognizes their shortcomings from the perspective of women. In her most recent book she argues that the invention of new cultural symbols remains a critical challenge confronting the new social movements. See Gail Omvedt, *Reinventing Revolution: New Social Movements and the Socialist Tradition in India* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1993).



Vijayraje Scindia and Uma Bharati after their arrest during a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) rally. Two of the three most powerful women orators of Hindu nationalism, Scindia is a sedate elderly upper-caste woman who dresses in white, while Bharati is a lively young lower-caste woman known as the "sexy sanyasin*" (celibate). Despite their visibility, Scindia and Bharati have never openly challenged the men who run the BJP, and some feel they mainly serve as icons to mobilize dutiful sons into politics. This photo is by Hari Om Gulati, and it is from the* Sunday Times of India*, 28 February 1993, p. 20, reprinted here courtesy of Hari Om Gulati and the* Sunday Times of India.

victims. Most strikingly, all three women openly espouse violence against Muslims.

Moreover, these women's backgrounds and life histories do not conform to a single model of Indian womanhood. While Vijayraje Scindia is a member of an affluent, upper-caste, princely family, Uma Bharati and Sadhvi Rithamabara are from relatively poor, lower-caste, rural backgrounds. Vijayraje Scindia, who has long been active in party politics, joined the Jan Sangh, the predecessor of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), because of her disillusionment with the Congress Party; by contrast, Uma Bharati and Sadhvi Rithambara were afforded their first opportunities for political activism through the Ram Janambhoomi campaign to destroy the Babri Mosque at Ayodhya.

Even the personal appearance and demeanor of these women are strikingly different. Vijayraje Scindia is an elderly matron who dresses in white, as is customary for widows, and radiates an aura of piety and sobriety. By contrast, Sadhvi Rithambara exudes a passionate rage that is said to have instigated riots in many places where she has delivered public speeches; Uma Bharati is a spirited, extroverted woman who seems to revel in the role the press accords her of the "sexy *sanyasin*" (a person who has taken religious vows, including vows of celibacy). As I left her apartment after an interview, Bharati was striking the poses of a film star for a photographer who was doing a feature story about her for a glossy Hindi magazine.[3]

I decided to focus on Rithambara and Bharati because as single, militant, young women of modest backgrounds they mark a striking departure from women both in positions of leadership and in fundamentalist movements in South Asia. I included Vijayraje Scindia in my analysis because of her prominence in the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Bharatiya Janata Party, as its former vice-president. The difference in her background compared to that of the two other women fruitfully suggested the diversity of female images and roles in the Hindutva movement.

My comparison of these three women leaders of the Hindutva movement prompted me to raise a number of questions. As noted earlier, in contrast to most other movements, in which women have figured only as symbols, images, and abstractions, the Hindutva movement seemed to challenge the most important iconic representation of women, namely their association with nonviolence. How did women's espousal of violence further the cause of Hindu nationalism? Conversely, were women's interests served by a movement that advocated violence against a relatively powerless minority community? Or did Rithambara, Bharati, and Scindia, as "real" as they

3. Uma Bharati, interview with the author, 17 Dec.1991, New Delhi. All subsequent quotes from her that are not attributed to her cassettes were taken from this lengthy interview.

Sadhvi Rithambara campaigning for the BJP in the parliamentary elections of May 1991. The third of the three most powerful women orators of Hindu nationalism, Rithambara, like Bharati, is from a relatively poor, lower-caste, rural background and became active in politics through the Ram Janambhoomi campaign. She exudes a passionate rage that is said to have instigated riots in many places where she has delivered speeches. In fact, "as the Babri Mosque came crashing down, the elation of Sadhvi Rithambhara was blatant and well deserved. Personally, she had done more than most other leaders of the Sangh family to instill murder in the hearts of large masses within the Hindutva constituency. . . . and to redefine the foundation of a rich and ancient religion as simple and brutal hatred of another." This quote is from Tanika Sarkar, "The Crucible that Moulds Firebrands like Rithambhara," The Pioneer *(New Delhi), 23 December 1992, p. 10, and the photo is by Jayanta Saha and is from the* Sunday Observer *(Bombay), 3 January 1993, reprinted here courtesy of Jayanta Saha and the* Sunday Observer.

appeared to be, mainly serve as icons within the Hindutva movement?

I attempt to unravel the puzzle concerning the prominence of these three women in Hindu communalism by analyzing the peculiarities of communalism in India. As I will suggest, in contrast to fundamentalist parties and movements that are preoccupied with restoring women to their traditional roles, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) "combine," which is governed by expediency, presents itself as a champion of women's rights.[4] However, from a feminist vantage point women figure only as a means of furthering an electorally driven communal strategy. My interest in Rithambara, Bharati, and Scindia precludes confining attention to any single organization, for these women have been active in the Rashtra Sevika Samiti (the women's organization affiliated with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh), the Durga Vahini (the VHP-affiliated women's organization), and the BJP's *mahila morcha* (women's organization). However, since I am primarily interested in the explicitly political dimensions of women's activism, I devote greater attention to the BJP than to its affiliated organizations.

The Powers Of Renunciation

There is, amidst their many differences, one striking similarity between Scindia, Bharati,and Rithambara that is critical to the project of Hindu nationalism. All three women are celibate: Vijayraje Scindia is a widow and Uma Bharati and Sadhvi Rithambara are *sanyasins* (*sadhvi* literally means celibate). Their chastity heightens their iconic status for it is deeply associated in Hinduism with notions of spirituality, purity, and otherworldliness; these qualities also make these women reliable spokespersons for the future Hindu *rashtra* (nation).

Renunciation—both sexual and material—exercises enormous moral force in India. Its most important exponent historically, Mahatma Gandhi, could unify diverse regional, caste, religious, and class groups because he seemed to transcend their particularistic loyalties. The claims of RSS *pracharaks* (single, celibate, full-time volunteer workers and preachers for the RSS)

4. The term "RSS combine" refers to the paramilitary nonparty Hindu nationalist organization, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), and its affiliates: the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), and the groups affiliated with these organizations. I use this term when ideas or actions must be attributed to all three organizations rather than any one of them.

to be nationalist similarly rests partly on their ascetic life style, which in turn connotes sacrifice, martyrdom, and selflessness. Simply put, it is difficult to imagine that people who eat, dress, and live simply could be corrupt, ambitious, and cruel.

Further elaborating the implications of renunciation, the BJP distinguishes itself from other political parties by its supposed indifference to power. Thus it can accuse the Congress Party, without a trace of irony, of engaging in "vote bank politics" or appealing to particular caste, ethnic, and religious communities out of electoral expediency.

That the BJP, as a parliamentary party, should be so openly and closely associated with the VHP, a religious organization, and the RSS, a paramilitary organization, constitutes an anomaly within the Indian political context. One might speculate that women's mediating or liminal roles help to harmonize relations between these organizations. Furthermore, the very contrasts between these three women are critical to the RSS combine's attempt to reconcile diverse organizations and constituencies. While Vijayraje Scindia presents herself as a seasoned politician with a memory of the history of what the Congress Party once promised and has failed to deliver, Bharati and Rithambara reflect the impatience of youth. Whereas Vijayraje Scindia appeals to the declining feudal classes, Bharati and Rithambara appeal to the upwardly mobile lower-middle classes. "The BJP is a natural choice for people like us who do not have name or fame but are drawn to the party by our commitment to the cause," Bharati observed in an interview.

Judged by feminist standards, the acid test of the BJP's intentions is whether women stand to gain from the stances it has taken. The uniform civil code that the BJP envisages seems to be modeled after Hindu law; in its present form it would be unlikely to significantly benefit Hindu women.

Flouting the constitution's secular injunction to keep religious organizations out of electoral politics, Uma Bharati and Vijayraje Scindia assert that their political activism grows out of their commitment to their religious and cultural heritage. Similarly, their militance is a constant reminder that the BJP is not only a parliamentary party but also a potentially subversive mass movement.

If male *pracharaks* are highly respected, the status of female *sanyasins* is even more elevated. Hinduism considers women's sexuality both powerful and dangerous.[5] Conversely, a celibate woman may be freed from numerous social conventions and restraints to denounce the political class. Rithambara has called Mulayam Singh Yadav, the former chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, *ullu ka patha* (a curse that translates as "son of an owl"), former prime minister V. P. Singh a hypocrite, and the Shahi Imam of the Jama Masjid (Mosque) a buffalo; she often uses the term *napunsak* (eunuch) for politicians. In one cassette she reviles Mulayam Singh Yadav for calling members of the VHP and Bajrang Dal (the VHP's youth organization) drunkards when, she alleges, he himself is intoxicated by his love of power.

The popularity of Rithambara's cassettes seems to reflect a widespread hatred of politicians, which is rooted in turn in Hindu conceptions of the inferiority of the worldly domain of political life compared to the otherworldly domain of religion. The tapes allege that women are well suited to make this critique of the political world from the distance afforded them by the protective inner sanctum of the home. But according to the tapes, Muslims with the support of some Hindu traitors now threaten to shatter that private domain by violating both Hindus' sacred places and Hindu women. This betrayal justifies Rithambara's rage and her irreverance to authority, no doubt inspiring confidence in those who are angry but disempowered.

The power of Rithambara's appeals also seems to lie in her ability to combine allusions to classical myths, legends, and poetry with the symbols of everyday life. I attended a VHP rally outside New Delhi where Rithambara spoke in couplets that were melodic in the original Hindi: "Muslims, like a pinch of sugar, should sweeten a glass of milk; instead, like a lemon, they sour it. What they do not realize is that a squeezed lemon is thrown away, while the milk that has been curdled solidifies into *paneer* (cheese)." So Muslims have two choices: either to live like sugar or like squeezed lemons.

These couplets paraphrase the writings of the famous poet Tulsidas in which lemons figure as symbols of selfishness. By contrast, milk is associated with the cow and the mother, both of which connote selflessness and are revered in the Hindu tradition. The image of a lemon curdling pure milk might even be interpreted as a sexual metaphor in that it alludes to the defiling of the feminine purity associated with cows and milk. The verses imply that even a minority can bring ruin to society. Thus Muslims must choose between assimilation and death.

Far from repudiating the cassettes of Uma Bharati and Sadhvi Rithambara, as these women became more militant and vociferous the BJP accorded them greater prominence by nominating them to run in the parliamentary elections. Rithambara and Bharati are vital to the BJP's attempt to eschew its elitist character. Both women seemingly embody a subaltern perspective: they are low caste, relatively poor, and female. They thereby serve to bolster the BJP's fallacious contention that the Ram Janambhoomi campaign originates at the grass-roots level. Furthermore, their dismissal of reason in favor of raw emotion provides a powerful affirmation of the BJP's attack on what it considers the Congress Party's pseudosecularism, rationalism, and Westernization.

The BJP is faced with a serious contradiction between its need to foster Hindu-Muslim violence in order to gain Hindu votes and its desire to depict Hindus as victims whose violence is defensive and reactive. Given the realities of economic and political life, the BJP cannot plausibly allege that Muslims dominate Hindus today. But it can justify Hindu violence by pointing to the sexually predatory Muslim male and the vulnerable Hindu woman.

5. Susan Wadley, "Women and the Hindu Tradition," *Signs* (Chicago), vol. 3, no. 1 (Autumn 1977), pp. 113–25.

However, the more difficult question remains why Uma Bharati and Sadhvi Rithambara, who have themselves suffered as a result of their class and gender, should advocate genocidal violence against a relatively powerless minority community. Although Vijayraje Scindia's participation in the Jan Sangh might be attributed to her coming from a large landowning, princely family, why has she become a leading exponent of Hindu nationalism? Furthermore, to what extent do Rithamabara, Bharati, and Scindia appeal to "ordinary" Hindu women?

The Gender Logic of Women's Violence

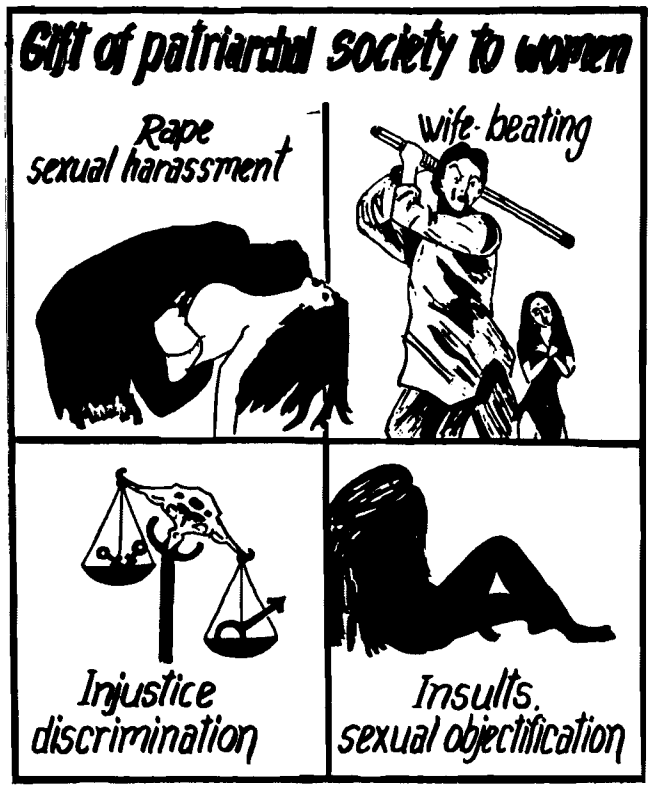
If feminism entails some recognition of gender inequality and expression of solidarity with other women, it is difficult to accommodate Scindia, Bharati, and Rithambara in even the most expansive definition of feminism. At their most benign they render Muslim women invisible; more often they seek to annihilate Muslim women. Yet all three women have found within Hindu nationalism a vehicle for redressing their own experiences of gender inequality and for transgressing sex-typed roles.

Let us begin by analyzing the attributes of Rithambara and Bharati that have brought them into the public eye, namely, their speech. (Although Scindia is not highly visible as a public orator, she spoke in an extremely militant fashion when interviewed.) It may be liberating for women, who are continually enjoined to be decorous, to be praised for their good citizenship when they deliver loud, angry, and coarse public speeches. As women they may have particular license to speak from emotion rather than reason. For example, when Uma Bharati tells Hindu men to act like lions rather than frogs, she assumes the tones of a wife chiding her negligent husband. In public speeches, their use of vulgar expressions and their ability to address men with familiarity and condescension transgresses traditional gender roles and expresses both their anger and their power.

The concept of displacement may help explain Hindu nationalists' aggression toward Muslims. Pursuing the view that enjoyment is ultimately enjoyment of the Other, Slavoj Zizek argues that conversely hatred of the Other is a hatred of our own excess of enjoyment. He suggests:

> We always impute to the "other" an excessive enjoyment; s/he wants to steal our enjoyment (by ruining our way of life) and/or has access to some secret, perverse enjoyment. In short, what really bothers us about the "other" is the peculiar way it organizes its enjoyment: precisely the surplus, the "excess" that pertains to it—the smell of their food, their "noisy" songs and dances, their strange manners, their attitude to work.[6]

What makes this argument so germane is the preoccupation of Hindu nationalists with the supposed strength, virility, and aggression of Muslim men. Hindu communalists speak incessantly of how much meat Muslims consume, the numbers of children they bear, and their physical stamina. These images must be set against the colonialist images of effeminate, weak Hindu men that Mahatma Gandhi so ingeniously inverted. They particularly connote envy when expressed by *pracharaks* who have renounced meat, sexuality, marriage, and family.



The Hindu nationalist movement has made the raped Hindu woman symbolic of the victimization of the entire Hindu community. What makes this symbol so effective is that it recalls the violence that women routinely suffer, some of which is illustrated in the above poster by an Indian women's group. Women within the Hindu nationalist movement seem to displace their frustration with Hindu men onto Muslim men, and in this way justify the violence that is needed by their movement to gain Hindu votes. This picture is from Radha Kumar's The History of Doing: An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India, 1800–1990 *(New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1993), p. 147, where it is credited to Vibhuti Patel. It is reprinted here courtesy of Vibhuti Patel and Kali for Women.*

The BJP has made the raped Hindu woman symbolic of the victimization of the entire Hindu community. What makes this symbol so effective is that it recalls the violence that women routinely suffer. Paradoxically, by according recognition to the issue of violence against women, the BJP pays a backhanded tribute to the Indian women's movement. Recall that the catalyst to the emergence of a nationwide feminist movement was the rape of a tribal girl in 1979. By castigating violence against women, the BJP also co-opts one of the major grievances of the women's movement, which it deeply resents for supposedly contributing to the disintegration of the Hindu family.

In the case of Hindu women militants like Bharati and Rithambara, it would appear to be anger against Hindu men in their own community that is displaced onto Muslim men. Recall their fury at the rape of Hindu women—which is actually far more often committed by Hindu than by Muslim men. Note their mockery of Hindu men, and their assertion of

6. Slavoj Zizek, "Eastern Europe's Republics of Gilead," *New Left Review,* no. 183 (Sept.–Oct. 1990), p. 54.

their own strength as women. When Rithambara repeatedly states that Hindus have been exploited because of their selflessness, passivity, and pacifism, she is restating a widely held grievance by women about their relationship with men.

There were few issues that Uma Bharati said enraged her more than sexual exploitation. She spoke vehemently against the exploitation of women's bodies in advertising and the media and favored strict censorship laws to control pornography. Above all, she expressed outrage about rape: "In my constituency, a twenty-five-year-old boy raped and killed a six-year-old girl and threw her body into a well. The police are looking for him. I have announced that if I find him, I will kill him myself with my bare hands, and I mean it, I would. I think that rape has declined in my constituency because people know how it enrages me."

Displacement may also assume another form for Bharati and Rithambara: their own assumption of the activist roles they advocate for Hindu men. Most writers on the subject assume that nationalist appeals to defend the motherland are directed at dutiful sons. However, this supposition neglects the strength of the mother-daughter bond in favor of the much vaunted mother-son relationship. When asked what had politicized her, Rithambara responded: "If Shahabuddin has drunk his mother's milk, I have also drunk my mother's milk."[7] Thus while the overt pretext for her speeches may be to goad men into activism, she is suggesting that devotion to the motherland is as much an inspiration to dutiful daughters as to filial sons.

When I asked Uma Bharati what had politicized her, she spoke at length about the powerful influence of her mother. Uma's father had died when she was eleven years old, leaving her mother to support her and five older siblings. Difficult as this would be under any conditions, matters became much worse when some relatives attempted to take over the land her father had intended for his wife and children. Her mother was determined to retain the land. One day she set out on foot to appeal to the chief minister for help. It took her a month to reach Bhopal, some three hundred kilometers from their village. Uma Bharati recalled,

> When she reached the cm's [chief minister's] bungalow, she kept requesting appointments to meet with him, but he would not give her the time. For weeks she sat by the gate and watched his car come and go; he would not even look in her direction. Finally she lay down on the road in front of the gate and said that she would rather be killed by his car than sit there unnoticed. In the end the cm saw her and helped her regain the land.

In this account the land figures not as an abstraction but as the source of the family's material sustenance; similarly, the link between the mother and the land is not figurative but real. For Uma's mother to fulfill her maternal responsibilities, she had to depart from conventional female roles to fight for her rights. The story reveals why Uma came to believe that access to power was critical to attaining independence as a woman.

Vijayraje Scindia said that her mother died when she was a baby; the Hindu *rashtra* had taken the place of the mother she longed for. She also spoke of how her relative appreciation of her own son and daughter had changed over time. She admitted to having shown favoritism toward her son when he was young. But once her children grew up, her relationship with her son had become embittered. By contrast, her daughter, Vasundhara Raje, divorced her husband and lived with her mother and child in the family compound. Most importantly, she followed her mother's lead in politics and was elected to Parliament on a BJP ticket.

Vijayraje Scindia, Sadhvi Rithambara, and Uma Bharati have all transgressed gender roles in both private and public domains. Unlike the vast majority of Indian women, none of these three women are economically dependent on fathers, husbands, or sons; none of their identities are defined by their roles as wives and mothers. All three women have realized considerable political ambition and yet have masked it with the aura of religious and nationalist commitment.

Religious devotion has always provided Hindu women the opportunity for some degree of collective identification and freedom from domestic drudgery. While Hindu nationalism may heighten these possibilities, it does not necessarily entail a deepened understanding of gender asymmetry. The differences here between Uma Bharati and Vijayraje Scindia are informative.

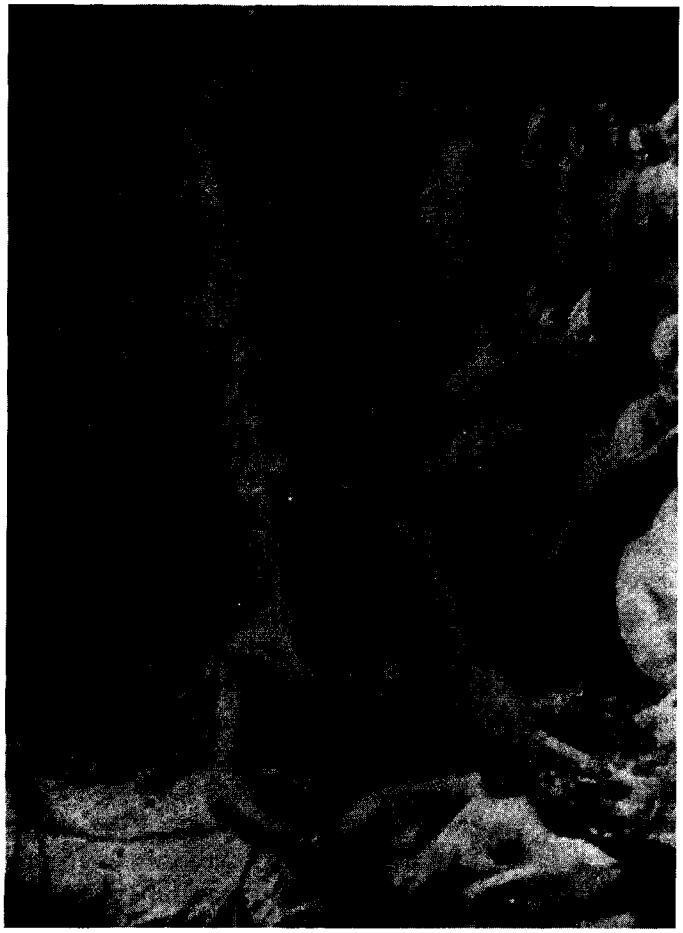
While the RSS may idealize women from the epic literature who embody notions of suffering and forbearance, it also celebrates brave and powerful women who use violence if necessary to protect their communities. Nor has the BJP opposed women's legal and political rights that would accord them greater equality with men.

Reiterating a position that she had made publicly, Vijayraje Scindia defended *sati* (immolation of Hindu widows on their husbands' funeral pyres) in an interview with me. Referring to religious scriptures, she drew a highly questionable distinction between voluntary *sati,* to which she attributed a glorious tradition, and the coerced *sati* of recent times, which she considered immoral. She was evasive when asked how she would describe Roop Kanwar's *sati,* saying that it must have been wrong if in fact it had been coerced. In other respects, too, she questioned the equality of the sexes, for instance by emphasizing women's primary duties as wives and mothers.

By contrast, Uma Bharati vehemently opposed *sati* of any form and denied that it was sanctioned by Hinduism. She recalled that many esteemed widows in the epics, including Ram's mother, Kaushalya, in the Ramayana, had not become *satis*. "When women commit *sati*," she commented bitterly, "it has more to do with property than religion," alluding to in-laws' attempts to prevent their widowed daughters-in-law from gaining control over the dowry they brought with them at marriage.

Uma Bharati explained that her religious training, which began when she was only six years old, had provided her the opportunity for a formal education, extensive travel within India and Europe, and an escape from both arranged marriage and manual labor on the family land. "Religion earned me my

7. P. Nagarjuna, interview in the *Sunday Chronicle,* 5 May 1991.



Young woman with her husband's dead body, just before she is immolated. A September 1987 incident of sati *gave rise to a furious debate that "spanned not only the rights and wrongs of Hindu women, but questions of religious identity, communal autonomy and the role of the law and the State." Vijayraje Scindia defends the immolation of Hindu widows on their husband's funeral pyres as long as it is voluntary. Uma Bharati, on the other hand, opposes all kinds of* sati *and feels it has more to do with property than religion. In keeping with their different backgrounds, Scindia thus speaks the language of religious conservatism, while Bharati speaks the language of women's rights, although only as applied to Hindu women. This photo is from a private family album from Sitapur, date unknown, and it and the above quote are from Radha Kumar's* The History of Doing, *p. 173, where the photo is credited to Sheba Chhachhi. The photo is reprinted here courtesy of Sheba Chhachhi and Kali for Women.*

freedom," she commented wryly: "It doesn't always work that way; my mother did not want me to become a *sanyasin* so I only began wearing saffron after she died in 1982. She wanted me to remain an independent woman and to fight for my rights. She used to tell me that marriage is not everything; sex is not a sin. Maybe she was a Christian in a former life."

Bharati denied that Hinduism was responsible for the oppression of women: "In India, women are oppressed because people are uneducated and deceived into believing that religion dictates women's inferiority. I am very religious and I don't believe that is what Hinduism says. After all, look at Sita. She did not always obey. Sita went her own way and committed suicide in the end rather than following her husband's orders. So why should women demean themselves?"

The aura of religious devotion even enabled Bharati to carve out a distinctive personality and appearance. Her saffron robes always looked brighter than most, and she sported a jaunty short haircut that she claimed was necessitated by her religious devotion. She claimed that the only way she might have entered the disputed structure in Ayodhya on 30 October 1990, when it had been cordoned off to the public, was by shaving her head and dressing like a young boy. In her speech at the Jaipur plenary of the BJP that I attended in the winter of 1990, she described the circumstances as follows: "I was feeling guilty about not having reached Ayodhya on October 30th and I had to repent. I loved my hair. But I went into a temple and called a barber. He did not understand that I wanted him to shave my head; he thought I wanted a bob cut. Once my head was shaved, even though the security at Ayodhya was very tight, I sneaked through."

At their most benign, Scindia, Bharati, and Rithambara render Muslim women invisible; more often they seek to annihilate Muslim women. Yet all three women have found within Hindu nationalism a vehicle for redressing their experiences of gender inequality and for transgressing sex-typed roles.

Hindu nationalism provided both Bharati and Scindia the opportunity to pursue their ambitions and develop their capabilities as women. However, in keeping with the differences in their age, class, and caste backgrounds, these women held strikingly different positions on women's issues. Whereas Scindia spoke the language of religious conservatism, Bharati spoke the language of women's rights, although her seemingly liberated views pertained only to Hindu women. It is difficult to reconcile her bigotry towards Muslims with feminism or any other form of humanist thinking.

Two questions remain to be explored: first, to what extent do Rithambara, Bharati, and Scindia speak to women activists within the Hindutva movement? Second, what aspects of the RSS combine's ideology and platform have encouraged their militance? Conversely, does their expression of their own personal identities conflict with the logic of Hindu nationalism?

Interviews with the BJP women's organization and Durga Vahini members in numerous cities in northern India revealed that they held Bharati, Scindia, and Rithambara in great esteem and rarely found their positions extreme. Many women praised their strength, courage, and oratorical powers, and claimed to have been inspired by their leadership. Indeed, the president of the local women's organization in the town of Kotah[8] said that their Durga Vahini had responded to Rithambara's calls by

8. Prema Rao (pseudonym), interview with the author, 12 Jan. 1991, Kotah, Rajasthan.

training its members to use guns in preparation for the final battle in Ayodhya. In the riots that spread across northern India following the destruction of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya on 6 December 1992, Hindu women often goaded crowds to attack Muslim families and properties.[9]

One of the most important ways in which Bharati and Rithambara have reached women is by politicizing the domain of personal life. Their attention to questions of public and private morality appears to hold great appeal for women. Furthermore, their cassettes have enabled housebound women to become intimately familiar with their views. The closest historical parallel is Mahatma Gandhi's ingenious involvement of women in spinning, *swadeshi* (boycotting foreign goods while encouraging the use of domestic products), and other anticolonial activities that could be performed within the home. The government's halfhearted attempt to ban the controversial tapes only increased their desirability. I accompanied a group of BJP party workers during a house-to-house electoral campaign in the Chandni Chowk constituency of Delhi in preparation for the 1991 parliamentary elections. On the streets, party workers shouted the standard electoral slogans. But when they entered the courtyards of people's homes, shouts of "*Jai Shri Ram*" (Victory to the god Ram!) and *Mandir vahin buneyengeh* (We will build a temple at that spot!) filled the air. Cassettes blasted the speeches of Rithambara and Bharati. Significantly, men predominated on the streets, women in the inner courtyards of the houses.

The Political Logic Of Hindu Nationalism

In different ways, Bharati, Rithambara, and Scindia have all used the opportunities offered by the Ram Janambhoomi agitation to advance their personal and political agendas. However, their emergence within the particular context of Hindu nationalist mobilization is not merely fortuitous. While the BJP is in important respects deeply patriarchal, it has sometimes advanced women's rights in order to fulfill its more critical objective of isolating and vilifying the Muslim community.

Since the BJP is often mistaken for a fundamentalist party, it may be useful to elaborate on the distinctions between fundamentalism and communalism.[10] Fundamentalist parties' attempts to reorder society are guided by an orthodox, or what they would consider an authentic interpretation of religious scriptures. One important aspect of this attempted return to tradition concerns the resurrection of older forms of family organization and women's roles within them. Notions of community honor thus become contingent upon safeguarding women's sexual purity and domestic roles. By contrast, the use of religious appeals, the role of the high priests of Hinduism, and references to the authority of religious texts is at best ornamental to the BJP's designs. Even its conception of a Hindu *rashtra* is ill-defined and idiosyncratic. Familial imagery plays an important part in the BJP's nationalist ideology, but strengthening the family and women's domestic roles is not an intrinsic part of Hindu communalism. As a result, both the gendered imagery and the actual roles of women in Hindu nationalism are far more diverse than in fundamentalist depictions. While the RSS may idealize women from the epic literature who embody notions of suffering and forbearance, it also celebrates brave and powerful women who use violence if necessary to protect their communities. Nor has the BJP opposed women's legal and political rights that would accord them greater equality with men.

Unlike the vast majority of Indian women, none of these three women Hindutva leaders are economically dependent on fathers, husbands, or sons; none of their identities are defined by their roles as wives and mothers. All three women have realized considerable political ambition and yet have masked it with the aura of religious and nationalist commitment.

As a result, at several gatherings of women that the BJP convened, its leaders challenged women's subordination. For example, at the BJP plenary in Jaipur in 1991 some of its top-ranking leaders, including M. M. Joshi, A. B. Vajpayee, Vijayraje Scindia, and Uma Bharati, acknowledged women's suffering and extolled their strength. Atul Behari Vajpayee wryly commented: "We have created only two roles for women: as either *devis* or *dasis* (goddesses or slaves), to the exclusion of other roles. But women are above all human beings who deserve respect and justice." He spoke of the hardships that working-class women endured because laws requiring employers to provide day-care at work sites and equal wages had not been implemented. Tara Bhandari, a prominent *mahila morcha* member, spoke about the problems of child marriage, dowry deaths, and sexual harassment, and said that only if women organized collectively to assert their interests would the government be responsive to their problems. M. M. Joshi, who had just become president of the BJP, stated:

> You greeted me with the slogan "Dr. Joshi, we are with you." But I would change the slogan to say: "*Mahila shakti* [Woman power], we are with you in struggle!" for the struggle should begin with you. In India, as in other parts of the world, women face discrimination. . . . I have been inspired by my mother who struggled a lot with her in-laws. . . . Mother struggled for eighty-four years to put an end

9. When I visited a locality in the BHEL industrial township of Bhopal in January 1993, the residents described how a woman who was a member of the city council and a BJP member had rushed to the scene of a riot a few weeks earlier and goaded Hindu male youth into further violence against Muslims. Madhu Kishwar describes similar forms of women's violence in the Bombay riots in December 1992 and February 1993, and Kalpana Shah et al. describe the complicity of Hindu women in the Surat riots in December 1992. See Madhu Kishwar, "Safety is Indivisible: The Warning From Bombay Riots," and Kalpana Shah, Smita Shah, and Neha Shah, "The Nightmare of Surat," *Manushi,* nos. 74 and 75 (1993).

10. Dipankar Gupta elaborates on the distinction between communalism and fundamentalism in an essay entitled "Communalism and Fundamentalism: Some Thoughts on the Nature of Ethnic Politics in India," *Economic and Political Weekly,* vol. 26, nos. 11 and 12 (Mar. 1991), pp. 573–82.

to outdated traditions in her in-laws' home. . . . That's why I am telling you to struggle too. . . . Please forgive me for saying that you have to struggle to change yourselves, for women change when they become mothers-in-law. Many homes celebrate when a boy is born and grieve when a girl is born. . . . You have to change all of this.

These statements by no means demonstrate the BJP's commitment to women's liberation; some of the speakers held more conservative views. However, these speeches demonstrate the BJP's recognition that its popularity among women rests at least partially upon its appeals to their interests as women.

The most important BJP stance concerning women is its support for a uniform civil code on matters governing the family, which is presently governed by religious law. The BJP's support for the uniform civil code is designed not only to gain women's support but also to highlight the repressive aspects of Muslim law. "I feel for my Muslim sisters," Uma Bharati commented, "but they do not seem to feel for themselves. How can they agree to wear the *burqa* [full-body veil]? How can they abide by Muslim law?" The BJP decries the "pseudosecularism" of the Congress Party because it shied away from passing a common civil code. Furthermore, personal law, Uma Bharati argues, defies the spirit of the constitution. Unlike the Congress Party, we say "one people, one nation, one law," boasted Mridula Sinha, the national president of the BJP women's organization.[11]

Judged by feminist standards, however, the acid test of the BJP's intentions is whether women stand to gain from the stances it has taken. The uniform civil code that the BJP envisages seems to be modeled after Hindu law; in its present form it would be unlikely to significantly benefit Hindu women. While Bharati spoke privately against women's oppression, and Tara Bhandari and others paid lip service to it in public speeches, the BJP women's organization has not organized around issues like rape, female feticide, dowry deaths, and the real violence that women confront in their everyday lives.

The very metaphor of the nation as family obscures hierarchies of power in both contexts. Just as a nation must be ruled by powerful, centralized, authoritarian leadership, so, too, might one assume the necessity for patriarchal domination of the family. Furthermore, the idea that the nation, like the family, is an organic construct suggests that women's roles within the family are biologically determined. Mridula Sinha stated emphatically, "For Indian women, liberation means liberation from atrocities. It doesn't mean that women should be relieved of their duties as wives and mothers." Mohini Garg, the all-India secretary of the BJP women's organization, echoed her thoughts: "We want to encourage our members not to think in terms of individual rights but in terms of responsibility to the nation."[12] Set against the statements of Atul Behari Vajpayee are those of K.R. Malkani, another top-ranking BJP national leader, who extols the elevated position of women in Indian society and concludes that women's primary responsibilities are to their families.[13]

If in some respects the BJP seeks to strengthen the family, it also seeks to redistribute patriarchal authority among Hindu men. Acharya Giri Raj Kishore, the joint general secretary of the VHP, recalled that as the *kar sevaks* ("temple volunteers" who have gone to Ayodhya as part of the Ram Janambhoomi movement) returned from Ayodhya, they stopped at homes along the way where women would wash their feet.[14] Normally, he continued, women would wash only their husbands' feet, but the *kar sevaks* were god's disciples. Thus all Hindu men became deified

A joyful kar sevak *("temple volunteer" who has gone to Ayodhya) after the destruction of the Babri Mosque, with "Jai Shri Ram!" (Victory to the god Ram!) written on his skin with his own blood. When the* kar sevaks *were returning from Ayodhya, they stopped at homes along the way where women would wash their feet, something women would ordinarily do only for their husbands. Thus all Hindu men were to be honored as if they were husbands, and conversely, all Hindu women became subordinated as Hindu wives. This photo is by T. Narayan and is from* India Today, *reprinted here courtesy of T. Narayan and* India Today.

11. Mridula Sinha, interview with the author, 7 Feb. 1991, New Delhi. All other statements attributed to Sinha are also based on this interview.

12. Mohini Garg, interview with the author, 11 Apr. 1991, New Delhi.

13. Malkani made this statement to a group of women journalists and activists in New Delhi. It was reported in the *Times of India*, 15 Feb. 1992.

14. Acharya Giri Raj Kishore, interview with the author, 19 Mar. 1992, VHP headquarters in New Delhi.

as if they were husbands, while conversely all women become subordinated as Hindu wives.

If the RSS combine has fostered activist roles for women around the Ram Janambhoomi issue, it has also undermined the long-term prospects for women's activism. While the speeches of Bharati and Rithambara may have great popular appeal, at a deeper level they doubtlessly intensify fears of women's irrationality in the public domain.

Furthermore, while Rithambara, Bharati, and Scindia often subvert their iconic status by expressing their personal ambitions and fears, the BJP also upholds unsullied images of femininity. For example, the Sita who was featured in the famous television series of the Ramayana was silent, decorous, glamorous, and subservient. The BJP actually nominated Deepika Chikalia, the actress who played the role of Sita, to run on the BJP ticket in the 1991 parliamentary elections. Throughout the campaign her demeanor remained exactly the same as in the television series: unable to represent herself, she had to be represented.

The unique contribution of Hindu nationalists is to couple their trenchant critique of the existing state with implicit support for a stronger and more paternalistic state.

As a result of its deep-rooted misogynism, women who join the BJP often find their political ambitions frustrated. When Uma Bharati and Sunderlal Patwa, the former chief minister of Madhya Pradesh, became embroiled in a conflict that made Bharati the object of a rumor campaign, Bharati's opponents claimed that she was having an affair with Govindacharya, the former BJP general secretary. Bharati further sensationalized the drama by informing the press that she had taken an overdose of sleeping pills and that her secretary had saved her just in time. "People are very narrow-minded and old-fashioned, especially when it comes to women," she told a reporter from the *Indian Express*.[15] The vendetta against Bharati may have reflected resentments on the part of the entrenched upper-caste male leadership of the party at the meteoric rise of a lower-caste woman.

Conclusion

Are there Uma Bharatis, Sadhvi Rithambaras, and Vijayraje Scindias in other religious nationalist movements, or do they emerge from the unique circumstances of Hindu nationalism? What significance do these models of female leadership have for "ordinary" Hindu women? It is difficult to hazard any generalizations about the extent to which the "*sadhvi* phenomenon" of female militancy exists elsewhere without undertaking comparative analysis. Women's identification with moral and religious concerns finds some parallels in reform movements dating back to the nineteenth century in diverse national locations. The forms of women's activism I have described also resemble right-wing racist movements in Germany, France, and the United States. However, at least in the contemporary context, there are few accounts of comparable forms of women's leadership in religious fundamentalism and right-wing racist movements.

My project has been to explore how Bharati, Rithambara, and Scindia emerge from the Indian political and religious context. From the preceding discussion, three factors appear to be of particular significance. First, at the broadest level of generalization, the decline of the paternalistic state with the advent of economic liberalization, along with the moral decay of Indian political life, creates the space for the growth of xenophobic militance. Politicians and political parties no longer seem accountable to their constituencies for their words or deeds. They also seem to find it less necessary to conceal their crass greed for power.

This context has seemingly contradictory implications for the emergence of militant female leadership. On the one hand, the overall decay of the political system has made that leadership's cruel injunctions to violence much less shocking today than they would have been even a decade earlier. One might even speculate that Indira Gandhi inspired figures like Rithambara through her appeals to a Hindu constituency, strong-arm tactics, and subtle attempts to depict herself as Mother India. On the other hand, these women's popularity appears to be linked to their vehement hatred for the state. Indeed their antipathy for the state and for Muslims is often difficult to disentangle. The very concept of appeasement, for example, blames both the state and Muslims for their opportunism, and conversely implies that Hindus are victims of both forces.

Other political groups, particularly on the far left, have provided equally forceful critiques of the state. The unique contribution of Hindu nationalists, however, is to couple their trenchant critique of the existing state with implicit support for a stronger and more paternalistic state. Female ascetics can claim to recognize greed and corruption from their position of selflessness, suffering, and martyrdom. But given their vulnerability to sexual exploitation, they also recognize the need for law, order, and morality to reinvigorate political life.

One of the central themes that runs through Rithambara's cassettes is the notion that India has lost its moral bearings. As to when and why this crisis began, she provides no analysis; she is equally critical of Mahatma Gandhi and V. P. Singh. Rather, she implies that the political arena is synonymous with selfishness, the religious arena with selflessness. Ostensibly—and ostentatiously—locating herself outside the domain of political power, she is well situated to make her critique. Her speeches also imply that the present crisis is the product of modernity. Things have deteriorated to the point that everything is now bought and sold, she cries out: minds, bodies, religion, and even the honor of our elders, sisters, mothers, and sons. In a sweeping gesture she thereby links commercialization, the commodification of labor, and sexual exploitation. The antidote to this evil is intense political engagement combined with asceticism, which renounces material possessions, sexuality, and physical labor.

In her exhortations against corruption, immorality, materialism, and modernity, Rithambara speaks the language of

15. Reported in the *Indian Express* (New Delhi), 19 Feb. 1992.

religious fundamentalism. However, the movement that has supported her rise—and that she has helped generate—is not fundamentalist. Rather, its political expediency has enabled Hindu nationalism to decry the degraded position of Muslim women in order to demonstrate its own superiority in a manner that is reminiscent of colonialist depictions of degraded Indian womanhood.[16] At the same time, Hindu communalism has allowed its women activists to express their own personal identities.

The BJP's stance on female seclusion illuminates these themes. The BJP decries the system of female seclusion as a product of Muslim rule in two ways: ignoring social structural bases of seclusion among Hindus, it argues that Muslims brought *purdah* (seclusion of women from public observation—literally "curtain,") to India, and Hindu men also secluded their women to protect them from Muslim male aggression. The prominence the BJP accords to Rithamabara, Bharati, and Scindia seems designed in part to signal the greater liberation of Hindu than Muslim women (which is ironic because Scindia practised public seclusion until she was widowed in 1957). Similarly, the BJP's support for a uniform civil code seems designed to depict the Muslim community as retrograde.

Thirdly, and most specific to Hindu nationalism, the "*sadhvi* phenomenon" of female militancy finds inspiration in certain aspects of Hinduism. This does not mean that Hinduism is responsible for the rise of these militant women. However, it would be equally myopic to claim that there is nothing Hindu about Hindu nationalism. Although its growth is primarily a political phenomenon, it has skillfully appropriated certain aspects of Hinduism in ways that have some important implications for women.

Hinduism provides a rich terrain for gendered nationalist imagery since it closely associates the land with female properties. Furthermore, unlike many religions, Hinduism rejects the notion that women are inherently weak and passive; indeed, they are often dangerous because they are powerful and vindictive. The varied personalities of female deities in Hinduism may inspire a range of male persona in political life. While men dominate organized religious worship, women orchestrate religious observance within the home. Indeed, religious observance has always allowed women considerable opportunity to express their personal identities as women. Hinduism also enables renunciation, which may be especially liberating for women since it allows a rare opportunity for escaping domination by parents, husbands, and in-laws.

The acceptance by Hindu men of women's political activism may be related to their belief that we are experiencing a period of chaos that has both religious and political underpinnings. The political uncertainty associated with the breakdown of the Congress Party provides evidence that we have entered the chaotic age of *kaliyuga,* in which normative restraints on social conventions can be relaxed. Paradoxically, Hindu nationalists have helped bring about the chaos they talk about to legitimate their actions.

Women may be especially well situated to restoring harmony because of their liminality. In patriarchal, patrilineal societies like India, women are considered outsiders to the family; similarly their class status is indeterminate until they marry, at which point it is determined by their husbands. As liminal beings, women are ideally suited to the nationalist project of reconciling the interests of diverse classes, castes, and organizations.

Women may also have license to challenge the unethical nature of political life because of the widely held belief that women possess a higher morality than men. Bharati, Scindia, and Rithambara may particularly inspire confidence because they appear to have been forced into political activism by their religious devotion—appearing, often deceptively, to have no axes to grind or personal ambitions, they can act as the moral guardians of (Hindu) society.

The account I have provided makes it difficult to sustain the notion that women are less violent than men. To assume, as some scholarship on both women and nationalism does, an organic connection between women, morality, and pacifism reflects a gross oversimplification. But as unethical as they may be, all three women are greatly concerned about moral questions and deeply troubled by the erosion of moral values from the political sphere.

More broadly, Hindu nationalism shares with pacifist movements a preoccupation with questions of private and public morality. They both also uphold organic conceptions of citizenship that in turn often associate femininity with nature. Indeed, the moralistic character of Hindu nationalism, particularly its sexual puritanism, encourages women's espousal of violence to rectify the unethical nature of the social order.

As different as the styles of Bharati, Rithambara, and Scindia are, I have argued that an underlying "gender logic" informs their positions. The gains that these women have achieved through their involvement with Hindu nationalism would be foreclosed or at a minimum less likely by virtue of their sex were it not for their political activities. Unlike most South Asian women who achieve political prominence because of their relationships with influential men, these three women are relatively independent of men in both their personal and political lives. The ironies of their realizing their personal identities as women through Hindu nationalism might be attributed in part to the very nature of patriarchal domination, as it denies women both a self and a cohesive, proud collective identity. Conversely, the realization of women's personal identities and political ambitions may well be premised upon their denial of collective identification with other women.

If a gender logic underlies women's militant leadership, what is its relationship to the broader logic of Hindu nationalism? The position that these women occupy seems to partially serve both their own purposes as well as those of the BJP. From the BJP's perspective, their iconic status is useful in mobilizing dutiful sons into politics while keeping women out of "real" power. Although at times they may pose an embarrassment or inconvenience because they are too loud or too ambitious, these women have never openly challenged the men who run the BJP.

Viewed from the perspective of these women, we find within their gendered appeals the resonance of their real life experiences as mothers and daughters, victims and agents. In

16. For a very perceptive analysis of this theme in the colonial context, see Lata Mani, "Contentious Traditions: The Debate on *Sati* in Colonial India," in *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History,* ed. Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990).

Riot victims in the ashes in Seelampur, Delhi, December 1992. Over a thousand people died in the riots that spread across northern India after the destruction of the Babri Mosque. In Seelampur a constable was killed during the riots, and in retaliation the police set fire to the Muslims' houses and forced the men to leave, beating many and killing some. The women were gathered in one place, and when they came back their houses were empty shells. The women knew from stories of pervious riots that they would be vulnerable to sexual assault if they remained there, and so they formed groups and went off to stay with relatives in safer areas; whatever they left in their houses was stolen in their absence. Many Hindu women expressed neither compassion nor remorse about the devastation of the riots since for them the Muslims couldn't be victims. This photo is by Manish Swarup and it, along with the above information about Seelampur, is from Urvashi Butalia's "Women Bear Brunt of Post-riot Traumas," The Pioneer, *23 December 1992, p. 10. This photo is reprinted here courtesy of Manish Swarup and* The Pioneer.

some respects their religious aura protects them from the slander that women often face when they enter political life. It also enables them to mask their personal ambitions and thereby partially conform to conventional gender roles. However, their iconic status also confers upon them the illusion of power. The Hindutva wave has already crested, and it is likely to sweep Bharati and Rithambara away as it recedes. As a result of her class and caste background and her political history, Scindia's power in the RSS combine is more secure.

If part of my project is to explain the emergence of militant female leadership, another is to explore the differences in the ways in which their messages are received among the varied social groups that constitute the RSS combine. The public speeches of Bharati, Scindia, and Rithambara seem to chide and challenge men while comforting and inspiring women. The message they convey is that women can assume activist roles without violating the norms of Hindu womanhood or ceasing to be dutiful wives and mothers. The support of prominent men in religious and political life not only legitimates their roles but also bridges the chasm between good citizens and devoted wives and mothers.

In visiting riot-devastated communities in which Muslim women were raped and their children butchered, I often wondered why most Hindu women who were present expressed neither compassion nor remorse. As the voices of Rithambara and Bharati echo through my mind, the answer becomes clearer: Hindus are victims, they tell us; by virtue of being Hindu, they can neither be communal nor aggressive. According to this perverse and tragic logic, the rape of Muslim women is not "real" violence because Muslims can never be victims. The disembodied words of Rithambara are filtered through a cassette recording:

> Hindus, who can never be communal,
> are today being branded communal.
> They [Muslims] murder with impunity
> and people are silent.
> But we are defamed
> when we cry out in pain!

Uma Bharati adds: "The Koran exhorts them to lie in wait for idol worshippers, to skin them alive, to stuff them in animal skins and torture them until they ask for forgiveness. Our heritage enjoins repentance even if an ant is killed underfoot."[17]

What makes the logic of the Hindu women who have framed this appeal so chilling is that it is wholly self-serving: not only does it respond to their deep sense of injury, but it also provides the pretext for their activism. In other words, the identities of Rithambara, Scindia, Bharati, and their countless Hindu sisters are seemingly constituted by the thrill of squeezing imaginary lemons to destroy real human life.

17. This translation of a cassette by Uma Bharati appears in Madhu Kishwar, "In Defence of Our Dharma," *Manushi,* no. 60 (1990), p. 4.

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All Our Goddesses Are Armed: Religion, Resistance, and Revenge in the Life of a Militant Hindu Nationalist Woman

by Paola Bacchetta*

Recent scholarship on women and right-wing movements has attempted to explain women's participation in anti-Other organizations in a range of modes. Some of the earliest literature on the subject maintained that right-wing women are simply alienated from their own interests, and their actions represent coherency with the interests of their male counterparts.[1] A second current put forth the notion that women join primarily out of a desire for community with other women who share their background, and not because they adhere to the anti-Other stance of the organization.[2] In a third tendency, which I find the most pertinent, scholars see women's adherence as motivated by, in the words of Claudia Koonz, "conviction, opportunism and active choice."[3]

Here I would like to push that last analysis one step further by exploring some of the modalities and one of the factors, the symbolic dimension, that are operational in the "active choice" made by women militants in the Hindu nationalist context. In order to do so, I shall focus on the life of Kamlabehn,[4] one particularly committed and dynamic member of the Rashtra Sevika Samiti (hereafter, "the Samiti"). I gathered the data in interviews I conducted with her sporadically during a period spanning four years, from 1987 to 1990, in Kamlabehn's hometown, Ahmedabad, in Gujarat.[5]

Kamlabehn is in her thirties, and her main role in the organization is teaching other members paramilitary skills such as riflery, karate, and *lathi* (heavy stick) wielding. She is visibly physically tough and highly self-confident. She is an atheist, and she believes that women are as able as men, even as warriors. In many ways, Kamlabehn is not so different

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1. See, for example, Andrea Dworkin, *Right-Wing Women* (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1978).

2. Kathleen M. Blee, *Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920's* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991). Blee stresses the "solidarity" argument throughout her text, concluding that "the Klan's appeal to women of the 1920's also lay outside the realm of traditional nativism and racism: in its purported quest for women's rights and in its offer of collective support, friendship, [and] sociability among like-minded women" (p.180).

3. Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family, and Nazi Politics* (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1987), pp. 4–5.

4. The names of the informant and those in her entourage have been changed to protect the privacy of all concerned, and because I do not wish to cause a witch-hunt that would target one or two individuals while missing the point as to why women adhere to Hindu nationalism.

5. The interviews were nondirective, conversational, and sporadic. The first two interviews took place in a collective atmosphere in which another Samiti member and an Ahmedabadi friend of mine were present. Later I conducted the interviews alone. The time of the interviews ranged from two hours to two days. In the first two interviews the language was mainly Gujarati (with my friend translating) and Hindi. Subsequently the interviews were mainly in English with some Hindi.

from most of the other young *sevikas* (Samiti members, also meaning "workers") whom I have met. Her age and upper-caste and middle-class background place her at the average of the Samiti's membership. However, I would not like to claim that she is a "typical" *sevika,* for there is no such thing as a typical *sevika.* I have demonstrated elsewhere that the Samiti accommodates a wide range of personalities, statuses, life-styles, modes of adherence, and strategies and mechanisms for action.[6] Kamlabehn is simply among those who go furthest in revolting against standard models for domesticated femininity and in rewriting her own identity as a fierce and fiercely independent woman. In what follows I would like to explore how and why she does this.

One of the means Kamlabehn uses to legitimize her resistance to normative femininity involves the skillful manipulation of the language of Hindu nationalism to formulate that resistance in terms that can be understood and accepted in her environment. A major point of reference in that language is hatred of the designated Others of Hindu nationalist discourse, notably "the muslims."[7] Indeed, I shall argue that Kamlabehn's notion of the feminine self and the space of relative freedom she carves out for herself absolutely depend upon constructing "the muslims" as demonic and threatening—in particular, threatening to Hindu women. I shall explore this dimension in depth, but first, a brief discussion of the Samiti and its conception of the self is in order, since the Samiti provides much of the material Kamlabehn uses to reformulate her own notions.

The Rashtra Sevika Samiti and the Self

The Samiti is the women's wing of the paramilitary, non-party Hindu nationalist organization, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (the RSS or "the Sangh").[8] The women's wing was established in Wardha, Maharashtra (then the Central Provinces) in 1936, eleven years after its male counterpart and in close geographical proximity to the latter's birthplace, Nagpur. Its founders were Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, the first *sarsanghchalak* (supreme leader) of the Sangh, and Lakshmibai Kelkar, an ex-Gandhian activist and widowed mother of eight. The Samiti was the first organization of the Sangh's now-massive network known as the Sangh Parivar. The latter consists of hundreds of affiliates that mobilize various sectors of society according to their profession (in unions) or around issues (cow protection, temple "reconversion," and so on).

From its inception the Samiti adopted the Sangh's overall goal, structure, and technique. The shared short-term objective of both organizations is to abolish the present secular Indian state and to impose a Hindu nation in its place. The Hindu nation would exclude non-Hindus from the citizenship body (Indian Muslims, of course, but also Parsis, Christians, Jews, and so on), as well as a great many people who call themselves Hindu but who do not conform to the Sangh's ascetic and macho Hindu nationalist ideals. The latter category includes members of certain tantric and shakta sects, secular Hindus, gay Hindus, and many other sectors of people within Hinduism.

Here the woman who choose independence through celibacy, dedication to other women (the Samiti) and an ideal (the Hindu nation) in place of dedication to an individual male, and her own spatial mobility and the process of becoming a space for herself over functioning as a space for a man to come home to is respected and provided with the means to realize such choices, albeit solely within the parameters carved out by the organization.

In conformity with the Sangh, the Samiti's structure is rigidly hierarchical, with positions of power edging downward from the national to the local level. Similarly, its basic units are neighborhood cells that hold *shakhas* (daily, or in some cases weekly, assemblies). Like the Sangh, the Samiti's primary activities are the ideological and paramilitary training it offers its members during the *shakhas.* On an ongoing basis the Samiti also runs extensive programs designed to attract middle-class women (art shows, yoga classes, and so on) or low-income women (explained below), or both (for example, its public celebrations of its self-designated national Hindu festivals).

6. Paola Bacchetta, "On the Construction of Identities in a Hindu Nationalist Discourse: The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the Rashtra Sevika Samiti" (in French and English) (Ph.D. dissertation, Institut d'études du développement économique et social [IEDES], Université de Paris I, Panthéon-Sorbonne, Paris, forthcoming).

7. I use the term "the muslims" in the lower case, in quotes, and in the plural to designate a nonentity, a projection, in the sense of Hitler's "the jews" as understood by Jean-François Lyotard in his *Heidegger and "the jews,"* transl. Andreas Michel and Mark Roberts (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990). Lyotard argues that the term "the jews" stands for the unrepresentable in Western thought, for what is forgotten in it, for the debt the West does not acknowledge and cannot repay and so must destroy. The term "the muslims" in the Sangh and Samiti discourse similarly stands for what is unrepresentable in the Hindu community, but also for what the Sangh believes must be sacrificed by it in order to conserve the integrity of the community itself. Thus the term "the muslims" does not signify real Muslims; rather, it stands in for them and displaces them. It functions in the discourse of the Samiti, the Sangh, and Kamlabehn as a screen upon which the fantasy of evil threatening the integrity of the Hindu nation is projected. But more on this below.

8. The Sangh has been the object of much research by social scientists, and several monographs on the organization exist. For a critical overview of them, an alternative historiography of the Sangh, and a first historiography of the Samiti, see Bacchetta, "On the Construction of Identities."

Bharamata, a goddess both the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and its women's wing, the Rashtra Sevika Samiti, use to symbolize their ideal model of femininity and the territoriality of the Hindu nation. In this colorful 1989 postcard issued during a celebration for the first head of the RSS, Dr. Hedgewar, Bharamata is shown holding the saffron flag of the RSS over a territory that includes all of South Asia. Although she looks benevolent and is making a gesture of blessing with her other hand, she is backed by a lion, implying that this mild-looking figure also has strength and has resemblances to the fierce Durga, the mythic goddess who often rode a lion when battling demons. The writing at the bottom of the card says "Whether I live or die, may your glory be immortal!" This postcard is still in circulation, and it is reprinted here courtesy of Paola Bacchetta.

Today the Samiti has about one million members operating out of *shakhas* based in at least sixteen of India's states and several countries abroad. The *shakhas* are concentrated in areas where the Sangh is particularly active. In that sense, they reflect the Samiti's original membership, which consisted largely of the women relatives of the *swayamsevaks* (Sangh members, literally "self-workers" or "volunteers"). These women relatives continue to monopolize positions of power at the higher echelons of the organization. Today, however, with the reorientation of the Sangh and some of its family organizations toward populism and mass recruitment under the leadership of Sarsanghchalak Balasaheb Deoras (since 1973), the Samiti has likewise strategically expanded its membership downward to include women of broader sections of society. Some of the activities it carries out for these purposes include the establishment of income-generating and job-training projects in urban slums, involvement in housing struggles among the poor, running shelters for homeless women, organizing free *puja* (prayer ritual) and Sanskrit classes in villages, and disseminating information on hygiene and health to the urban and rural poor. Indeed, the Samiti posits itself as an "authentic" and "indigenous" alternative to Indian feminist and developmental organizations, which, it maintains, come from "outside."[9]

Both the Samiti and the Sangh are intimately concerned with questions of religious and gender identity, and they envision them as interdependent. The investment in the notion of identity is reflected in the Sangh's name, which includes the word "self," whereas it is repressed as a signifier in the Samiti's name. That is, the Sangh's name means literally National (Rashtriya) Self (Swayam) Worker (Sevak) Association (Sangh). The self in question is the material-self-acting-in-the-world as opposed to the immaterial, spiritual self (the atman or the brahman). Indeed, in the Sangh's ideology, the realization of the Hindu nation depends upon the individual and collective realization of Hindu males on the material plane. In an obvious translation of orthodox Brahmanical modalities for spiritual self-realization to fit its material goals, the Sangh puts forth that each Hindu male is to peel back the layers of *maya* (the illusory world of the senses) that are blinding him to his essential Hindu nationalist self, and this is to be done individually and collectively through *seva* (service) in the Sangh itself. Once enough Hindu men realize themselves in that manner, they will be able to "resurrect" the ideal Hindu nation. In contrast to the Sangh's open statement about itself in its name, the Samiti's name means simply Nation (Rashtra) Workers (Sevika) Association (Samiti). Despite the effacement of the signifier "self," the Samiti is very much engaged in constructing ideal models for powerful symbolic femininity and material womanhood.

Indeed, it is in their ideal models for femininity/masculinity and women/men that the Sangh and the Samiti diverge most sharply.[10] Briefly stated, the Sangh assigns mainly passive qualities to Hindu femininity and womanhood, while the Samiti tends to represent them more widely in terms ranging from domesticated to fierce to out of control. The major unspoken reference for such qualities is the *Devi Mahatmya,* an ancient Sanskrit text the Samiti draws upon but the Sangh ignores.

The characteristics designated as feminine put forth by the Samiti are reinforced in the organization's symbolism in the form of two goddesses: Bharatmata and Ashta Bhuja.

9. Samiti officer Promila Mehta, interview with the author, 7 March 1990, Samiti headquarters in Nagpur, Maharashtra.

10. For an analysis of the processes, sources, and logic at work in the construction of the Sangh's and Samiti's discourses, as well as the divergence in the content of the discourses where gender is concerned, see Paola Bacchetta, "Different Choices/Different Voices: The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the Rashtra Sevika Samiti, and Their Respective Concepts of the Hindu Nation," a paper presented at the "South Asian Conference on Women, the State, and Cultural Identity," held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, in March 1992, and forthcoming in a volume as yet untitled (New Delhi: Kali for Women).

Ashta Bhuja, an eight-armed goddess invented by one of the founders of the Samiti as a symbol to unify members, has even more similarities to the mythic Durga, shown here mounted on a tiger as she confronts a demon adversary. One of the most popular and formidable Hindu goddesses, Durga's primary role is to combat demons who threaten the stability of the cosmos. She often has eight arms like Ashta Bhuja, with each arm holding a weapon given to her by the gods. Without any other male assitance she always wins her battles against male demons. This picture from the collection of C. L. Bharany is an eighteenth century gouache on paper, and it is from Ajit Mookerjee, Ritual Art of India *(London: Thames and Hudson, 1985), fig. 89.*

Bharatmata is a goddess the Samiti inherited from the Sangh. For both organizations she represents the territoriality of the Hindu nation. Elsewhere I have demonstrated that the Sangh has historically attempted to curb powerful symbolic femininity by depicting Bharatmata as benevolent and violated by the enemies of the Hindu nation, raped and vivisected by "the muslims."[11] The Samiti, in contrast, adopts Bharatmata as a symbol but opens up the field of representation to include even the most ferocious of traits as her qualities. In addition, Samiti publications refer to Bharatmata alternatively as Parvati and Durga, thereby concretizing the gamut of possible interpretations and subtly linking her to the *Devi Mahatmya,* in which the latter play key roles (as explained in a section below).

Ashta Bhuja (literally, the eight-armed goddess), in contrast, belongs solely to the Samiti. She was invented by Lakshmibai Kelkar as a symbol to unify members,[12] and an icon of this deity was installed at Wardha, the earliest site of the Samiti headquarters. The literature describes Ashta Bhuja as "an integral combination of Mahakali, Mahasaraswati and Mahalaxmi."[13] She represents "co-ordination of Strength, Intellect and Wealth," that "elevates the nation to a higher plane."[14] In her iconographic representation she carries "weapons in all eight hands" that "symbolise the qualities necessary for an ideal Hindu woman"[15]—a saffron flag (Bhagwa Dhwaj, the Sangh-appropriated symbol of its Hindu nation), a lotus, the Bhagavad Gita, a bell, fire, a sword, a rosary, and the eighth hand is empty but posed in a gesture of blessing.

11. Ibid.

12. The creation of Ashta Bhuja and her symbolism is discussed in a number of Samiti publications. See especially Rashtra Sevika Samiti, *Karmayogini vom Mausiji, Rashtra Sevika Samiti Ki Sansthapika Pramukh Sanchalika, Srimati Lakshmibai Kelkar Ki Jivani* (a biography of Lakshmibai Kelkar) (Nagpur, Maharashtra: Sevika Prakashan, 1989).

13. Rashtra Sevika Samiti, *Preface to the Rashtra Sevika Samiti Organization of Hindu Women* (Nagpur, Maharashtra: Sevika Prakashan, undated but post-1978).

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

Finally, the Samiti suggests the way members are to relate to Ashta Bhuja: each *sevika* "takes inspiration from her and exerts [herself] for just cause[s] and service to humanity."[16] A Samiti prayer is offered to her at the *shakhas;* it refers to her as "the eight-handed goddess who rides a tiger" and specifically calls her the "Mother Durga who slays the enemies,[17] thereby emphasizing her fierce qualities and, again, suggesting a connection between her and the fierce form of the goddess in the *Devi Mahatmya*. In addition, many *sevikas* (but not Kamlabehn) worship her at home as their personal deity.[18] Indeed, the qualities assigned to her and the instructions on how to relate to her are sufficiently flexible to allow for their translation into practice in a variety of ways. In what follows I shall discuss Kamlabehn's subjective interpretation of these. But first, I should like to provide some background information on Kamlabehn, her significant Others, and her milieu.

Kamlabehn's Background and Qualities

Kamlabehn belongs to the first generation of her family to be born in Ahmedabad; her parents and her maternal and paternal ancestors are Maharashtrian Brahmans who migrated to Gujarat. She perceives herself as intimately connected to her personal ancestors, but, like most Sangh and Samiti informants, she places them in a wider network of relations. That is, she conceptualizes herself as a link in a genealogical chain that began prior to her birth and will continue after her death, but is expanded to include the whole of the "Hindu people" in the past, present, and future. Within this scheme, she values her immediate family and their Hindu nationalist activities above all. She points out that she was "a *sevika* from before birth" since her family has always been an "RSS family." In Hindu nationalist parlance, an RSS family is one in which elder family members of both genders, and in particular the parents, belong respectively to the Sangh and the Samiti. Kamlabehn's family certainly qualifies since both parents and all her siblings are members, although they are active in varying degrees. Of all the family members, Kamlabehn certainly has invested the most time and energy in Hindu nationalist activities. Her parents and siblings (all of whom are married) are very much occupied by their nuclear and joint familial responsibilities. In contrast, Kamlabehn has reduced her familial responsibilities to a minimum in order to devote more time to the Samiti.

Kamlabehn's natal home is located in a middle-class "all-Hindu area" of the city. The neighborhood is largely inhabited by Maharashtrian Brahmans and RSS families. In Ahmedabad, a disproportionate percentage of local Sangh and Samiti leaders and highly active members come from such a background. Kamlabehn describes the neighborhood as "like a family." There is a visible flow of children and adults from home to home and street to street in an atmosphere of trust and familiarity. Even other family's guests are treated as part of the neighborhood, and this extended to me. Each time I visited Kamlabehn's household I was greeted by neighbors on terraces or in the streets and offered tea and conversation.

Despite this obvious closeness and its extension backwards in time through her childhood, Kamlabehn's narrative on her early life is centered on her relationships with members of her immediate household. Kamlabehn's natal household was nuclear, consisting of both parents, an elder brother, two elder sisters, and one younger sister. Her father worked as a government administrator who, due to the nature of his work, was often absent from Ahmedabad. Her mother was not employed, but "she managed the whole house and gave service to the Samiti too." Kamalabehn points out that her father "was educated for a career," while her mother, who is intelligent, was "prepared for motherhood only." Kamlabehn explains this difference in their upbringing not in terms of gender but rather as due to the fact that her father's side of the family was an RSS family while her mother's was not. In this, she expresses a common view among *sevikas*: they see membership in an RSS family as more liberating than the non-RSS context.

Kamlabehn's self-appropriation of her space and time and her acquisition of skills with weaponry are justifiable only in the name of self-defense (of her own chaste Hindu femininity) and self-sacrifice (for the Hindu nation where ultimately men rule) against the projected threat constituted by "the muslims."

Kamlabehn admires both parents for their active commitment to Hindu nationalism, but emphasizes her mother's merits and the strength required to break with her "traditional upbringing." Her mother's rupture with her past and reconstruction of her present in Samiti terms served at least partially as a model for Kamlabehn's own dynamic process of identity reformulation, albeit consistently within the context of the Samiti.Unlike some of my informants, but in coherence with Gananath Obeysekere's observation on modes of self-representation among his Hindu informants,[19] Kamlabehn does not emphasize the earliest years of her life. Instead, she speaks glowingly about her most recent years, and in that context about her friendships and travels.

When Kamlabehn came of age, like her elder siblings and most of the other children in her neighborhood, she was sent to a local school where the instruction was in English. Despite their

16. Ibid.

17. The text of the prayer is printed in a variety of publications. See, for example, *Deep Sthambh, Rashtra Sevika Samiti Akhil Bharatiya Trayopdesh Traivarshik Sammelan, 1986* (Nagpur, Maharashtra: Sevika Prakashan, 1986).

18. This observation is based on interviews I carried out with *sevikas* from 1986 to 1990 in Ahmedabad, Nagpur, and Pune.

19. Gananath Obeysekere, *Medusa's Hair: An Enquiry on Personal Symbols and Religious Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 22, 27.

anti-Western discourse, middle-class RSS families commonly send their children to such schools and later abroad for their studies, if possible. Early on, Kamlabehn showed an aptitude for the natural sciences. Her father encouraged her in this domain until finally she pursued higher education in engineering. He often supported her entrance into areas traditionally confined to men.

As a child Kamlabehn's most significant young feminine Other was a school friend named Gita, who also came from an RSS family. Unlike Kamlabehn, Gita was not enthusiastic about her studies but made good marks in order not to disappoint her parents. Both girls attended *shakhas:* the attraction was "playing games and the stories about famous Hindu women." Shortly after the girls matriculated from school, Gita's marriage was arranged by her family, and Kamlabehn, who had no desire to marry, began to attend a local engineering school. She lived at home, commuted on her motorbike, and was rarely accountable to her family for her time. Once, in a discussion of that period, Kamlabehn's mother complained to me that her daughter "has always gone galavanting around as she pleases." Indeed, there is some tension in Kamlabehn's relationship with her mother, and it has crystallized around issues of time, presence or absence, and physical self-representation.

At that time Kamlabehn dressed in a manner that was remarkable given her sex, age, and the Hindu nationalist context. She wore trousers (usually blue jeans), an oversized man's shirt or a *khadi kurta* (handwoven cotton tunic), and sneakers or men's Kolhapuris (sandals from Kolhapur). These items were selectively drawn from male attire, including from two representational systems exterior to the one considered by family and friends to be proper for Hindu nationalist women: one was Western (trousers, shirts, sneakers) and the other Gandhian (*khadi kurta*). But, I shall argue, in Kamlabehn's conception of things they had little to do with their original significance. Her particular use of what appeared as imitation was such that the imitated, once displaced into her representational system, was reproduced there as an original. The Western items no longer signified the West, and the Gandhian items were no longer connected to Gandhianism.

This loss of their original symbolism first became clear to me as I watched Kamlabehn's clothes being observed and commented upon by others in her surroundings. Men, and in particular her father, were indifferent to her dress. Her critics were mainly elderly women family members (her mother and aunts)—the people directly in charge of socializing her, including controlling her representation of her sexuality, and who presented themselves as models for her to emulate. They were bothered by her dress not so much because of its origin in extra-Hindu representational systems, but rather primarily because they presumed she was violating what they had constructed as the "naturalness" of the sari (or *kurta* pajama) for Hindu women. Indeed, the critics were right. She was attempting to create for herself a new structural position to occupy: that of a perpetually single but tough and respected woman who would impose herself in the public space without definite sexual, gender, or (Indian) regional connotations. Once when her mother complained about her clothes in front of both of us, Kamlabehn turned to me to say: "What nonsense. So many of our goddesses are half naked. You tell me what difference does dress make to a real Hindu woman?"

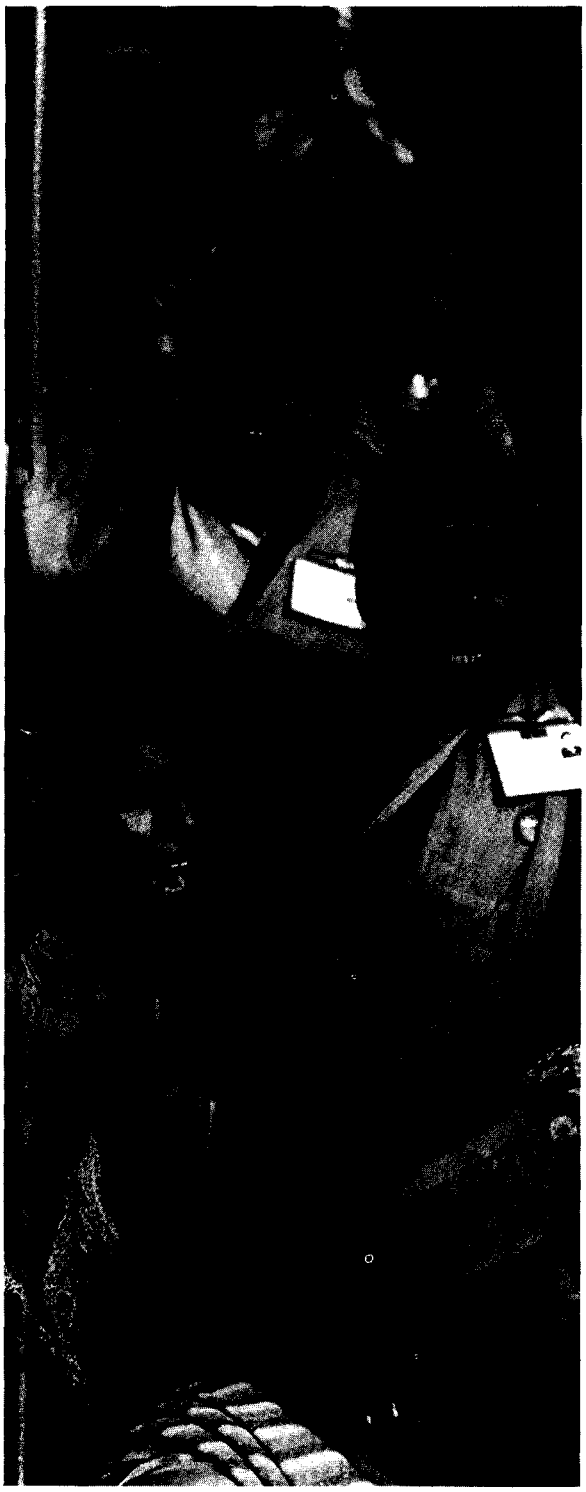
During the period of her engineering studies, Kamlabehn devoted much time to the Samiti. This meant that she would spend a great deal of time in the company of an elderly Samiti leader, Nilabehn. The two women developed a very close relationship. With her father's express approval and her mother's tolerance, Kamlabehn often spent weekends with the elderly *sevika* to do Samiti work. The precondition for this freedom was that Kamlabehn keep good grades. Over time, she extended the time devoted to the Samiti and began spending week nights at Nilabehn's.

In one of her classes at engineering school, Kamlabehn encountered a young man whom she would most often refer to as "a dedicated *swayamsevak*" (Sangh member), and she began to meet with him from time to time. They sometimes studied together, and sometimes "met to discuss politics." After they had known each other for approximately one year, he proposed to her. She was "surprised," and immediately refused: "I told him, I am already married—to the Samiti. I am married to the nation, not to any man." She went on to explain that she had decided to become a *pracharika* (single, celibate full-time volunteer worker and preacher for the Samiti). He respectfully accepted the idea of continuing to think of her as a sister, and according to her, held her in even greater awe.

Kamlabehn has managed to render her extreme engagement with the paramilitary aspects of the Samiti acceptable to initially reluctant family members by formulating them in the language of religion and in conformity with the goals of Hindu nationalism.

In the Sangh-Samiti perceptual grid, the position of *pracharika* is a prestigous one; it implies a high level of skills, a strong personality, and the capacity to take on responsibility and live humbly. *Pracharikas* are responsible for moving into new areas, establishing new *shakhas,* training other *sevikas* in physical or intellectual skills, and organizing campaigns and carrying them through. They must be able to defend themselves physically, for they are expected to travel, often alone, on public transportation (trains, buses, and so on). The *pracharikas* I have met have all impressed me as particularly assertive and serious. Not one ever expressed regret at "giving up" a householder's life. Kamlabehn, at that point, seemed a perfect candidate for such a position.

Beyond Kamlabehn, the existence of *pracharikas* evokes a number of questions about the Samiti's capacity to include a range of personality types and lifestyles. The position has several indirect functions, one of which is to provide a legitimate space for revolt against the reproduction of the same lifestyle as their mothers, grandmothers, and so on in their feminine genealogies. Here the woman who chooses independence through celibacy, dedication to other women (the Samiti) and an ideal (the Hindu nation) in place of dedication



Kar sevikas *(Hindu women who have gone to Ayodhya as part of the Ram Janambhoomi movement) showing their militancy at Ayodhya in 1990 as they demand "an eye for an eye." Although the RSS assigns mainly passive qualities to Hindu feminity and womanhood, the Samiti tends to represent them more widely in terms ranging from domesticated to fierce to out of control. Trained to be militant and physically tough in their opposition to Muslims, Samiti women have in the process gained some personal independence and strength through their participation in the movement, even though men rule that movement. This photo is by Pramod Pushkarna, and it is from* The Best of India Today, *1975–1990, p. 151, courtesy of Pramod Pushkarna,* India Today, *and Jana Everett.*

to an individual male, and her own spatial mobility and the process of becoming a space for herself over functioning as a space for a man to come home to[20] is respected and provided with the means to realize such choices, albeit solely within the parameters carved out by the organization.

Kamlabehn and the young man she considered a dedicated *swayamsevak* graduated from engineering school with high marks. He found a job with an engineering company in Bombay, but Kamlabehn was unable to find one anywhere because "people prefer male engineers." Eventually she obtained part-time employment as a science teacher at a local school. She expressed contentment at being able to earn money, but complained that she did not earn much. The wages were sufficient to support her while she lived partially at her natal home and partially with Nilabehn. The hours were not demanding. As a result she had extended stretches of time to travel around the country "to give service to the Samiti and our nation."

Religion for Kamlabehn

Kamlabehn's journeys across India occupy a place in her life akin to pilgrimage for the deeply spiritual. However, since she is not inclined towards spirituality, in accordance with her own symbolism she invests her journeys with a nonspiritual, political meaning. They are important time/spaces of her "self-realization" as a Hindu nationalist woman. In them she enacts her right to spatial mobility, thereby directly challenging the de facto rule that traditional upper-caste middle-class women should be confined to the domestic space or protected by male family members in the public space. The journeys also function as a mode of performing her role in the organization and distinguishing herself from her natal environment. They sometimes reflect an unconscious aggressive stance against her parents for not socializing her enough in "Hindu culture."

One trip in particular made a lasting impression on Kamlabehn and revealed much about her relation to Hinduism: in 1985 she went to Manipur to give a talk for the Samiti and "discovered Hindu culture. Manipur is the only area I've known that's not polluted by other religions. I grew up in a cosmopolitan city. We don't have our own culture. We are ignorant of Hindu culture." Given her upbringing in an RSS family that is supposedly well-immersed in proper "Hindu culture," the statement can be read as a critique of her natal home and the Sangh-Samiti version of Hindu culture. However, there are several other meanings inherent in the statement. Her comments reflect the essentialist notion that rural

20. Luce Irigaray, *Éthique de la différence sexuelle* (The ethics of sexual difference) (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1984), pp. 16–18. Irigaray argues that women in contexts of male domination have no space of their own. As mothers, women represent a space for men's self-realization; as wives they subsist in movement toward the Other (the husband). A precondition for gender equality is woman's appropriation of herself and of space and time for herself. The position of *pracharika* allows women a certain form of detachment from the individual male (as husband) and modifies their relationship to space within the overall male-dominated Hindu nationalist context.

spaces constitute the "real India," while urban spaces are simply abberations of India. This limited view coincides with static colonialist conceptions of rural India as the essence of India. The concept that mixture with other religions is polluting (or otherwise destructive) reflects the polarizing way the Sangh and the Samiti construct their notions of selfhood, which I shall explain in detail below.

What Kamlabehn stressed about her experience of Manipur was that much of what she had been told about Hinduism earlier was unsubstantiated: "The people eat fish. They're not vegetarians. They don't sit cross-legged like us. They fold their legs into a stooping position to eat. That is Hindu culture. Over here we don't know anything about Hindu culture." Again, her critique of the space she inhabits in Ahmedabad is evident. For Kamlabehn, like a sizable percentage of Samiti (and Sangh) informants I have interviewed, the ideal is perpetually elsewhere in relation to where they are located. It belongs to another space, or another time, or both, but always to another world in which they are already perpetually displaced as outsiders. The sense of rootlessness combined with an obsessive search for roots is particularly acute among the most active of the *sevikas* and *swayamsevaks* I have interviewed, regardless of their gender and class.

I shall argue that Kamlabehn's notion of the feminine self and the space of relative freedom she carves out for herself absolutely depend upon constructing "the muslims" as demonic and threatening—in particular, threatening to Hindu women.

In Kamlabehn's discourse, "Hindu culture" and "Hindu religion" are nearly synonymous terms. The difference between them is that the former signifies an overall way of life, while the latter refers more specifically to a system of representation and a particular class of rituals within that way of life. For Kamlabehn, Hindu religion is "scientific and rational": "One can be a Hindu and not believe in any god because Hinduism is a culture and a science of living. Hinduism is scientifically advanced. We had airplanes and helicopters in the time of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana." Again, despite the symbolic references, Kamlabehn, like some (but certainly not all) *sevikas* and *swayamsevaks,* considers belief in gods or goddesses and related rituals as "superstition." Indeed, she informed me that in her family, only her mother "believes in all that and does *puja* every day."

Kamlabehn's comments should not be taken to mean that she rejects gods and goddesses. On the contrary, she integrates selected deities in her life: Bharatmata and Ashta Bhuja, as stated above, but also Kali as represented in the *Devi Mahatmya,* or rather as represented in Kamlabehn's interpretation of the text among *sevikas* at the upper echelons of the local Samiti hierarchy. Kamlabehn has never read the text herself. In order to understand her mode of relating to the goddesses, one must separate the question of faith from the social and individual functions of the deities as symbolic references.

Bharatmata and Ashta Bhuja have an obvious social role for the organization and for Kamlabehn within it: they are simply

The third goddess important to the Samiti is Kali, also famous for destroying demons but even better known as a threat to stability and order. For some sevikas, *Kali is a model for ridding the world of evil by destroying demons, in their case Muslims. This is especially significant given Kali's reputation: "More often than not she becomes so frenzied on the battlerfield . . . that she herself begins to destroy the world she is supposed to protect. Thus, even in the service of the gods, she is ultimately dangerous and tends to get out of control. In association with other goddesses she appears to represent their embodied wrath and fury, a frightening, dangerous dimension of the divine feminine that is released when the goddesses become enraged or are summoned to take part in war and killing." In this picture from the Gular School, ca. 1820–30, from the hills of Western Punjab, Kali is shown in a characteristically dominant activity of dancing on her consort Siva, with Sava (Siva before he becomes real) underneath. As usual she is holding the head of a demon she has conquered and is portrayed as having a terrible, frightening appearance and as black or dark, naked, with sharp fangs, clawlike hands, long hair, and adorned with severed arms as a girdle, freshly cut heads as a necklace, children's corpses as earrings, and serpents as bracelets. The above quotes and information about Kali are from David Kinsley,* Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition *(Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA; and London: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 116 and 120, as is the information about Durga in the caption on p. 41. This picture is from a private collection, courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art.*

common symbols binding the *sevikas* together, Kamlabehn with them. Beyond that, Bharatmata, Ashta Bhuja, and Kali function at the individual level in Kamlabehn's life: they serve as frameworks, as models, and as limits, or as Luce Irigaray would probably describe it, as spaces and as horizons, for the construction of her own ideal identity. Kamlabehn conceptualizes each of them diversely and assigns them different roles: Bharatmata provides a maternal space for her self-realization, while Ashta Bhuja and Kali provide identity models to emulate. Kamlabehn associates Ashta Bhuja with warrior qualities, and Kali specifically with her role in destroying or neutralizing the *rakshasas* (demons).

Resistance for Kamlabehn

In Kamlabehn's discourse, the fierce goddesses and other fragments selected from religious discourse are instrumental; one of their functions is to legitimize her unconventional choices while disguising them as points of resistance to normative domesticated femininity. For example, she has managed to render her extreme engagement with the paramilitary aspects of the Samiti acceptable to initially reluctant family members by formulating them in the language of religion and in conformity with the goals of Hindu nationalism. While all family members encouraged her to learn self-defense, they were not enthusiastic about her intensive involvement with weapons until she "explained things properly." She told them that as a dedicated *sevika* she needed to travel to do Samiti work, and in order to travel she needed to know self-defense. Her family fully agreed. Then she explained that "a woman cannot fight a man with her bare hands alone. And why should I? Did Kali fight the *rakshasas* with her hands? All our goddesses are armed. Why should I not be armed?"

It is likely that such arguments resonated particularly with the male members of the family, who are accustomed to hearing a similar well-known Sangh slogan: "all our gods are armed." Indeed, its appropriation and feminization reveals the place of the particular feminine symbolic references in question in the overall Hindu nationalist project. Here the armed goddesses function not as independent femininity but rather as discursive representations of the "other of the same." That is, they are *like* the gods and simultaneously the *counterparts* of the gods, but have no existence independent of them. The inversion (feminine version) of the slogan implies remaining within the context of the male monosexual economy, where the ideal qualities and the ultimate goals are those proposed by the Sangh. However,what is important to note for now is Kamlabehn's succesful strategic use of the elements in that context to widen her own relative space of freedom within it.

Kamlabehn's mother prefered not to discuss her daughter's paramilitary skills with me, while her father openly expressed pride in his daughter's warrior traits. He seemed almost relieved about them, perhaps because they alleviated some of the fatherly burden of protection. He was fond of stating that she could "take care of herself." One day, during a conversation on violence, like a concerned uncle he asked me if I had ever been bothered by men in Delhi. I proceeded to explain that I was once harassed at a bus stop, but when I began to describe my response, he cut me short to ask whether or not I had killed the offender. I answered that I did not think it was appropriate to take a life in that situation. With apparent astonishment he began to question me on my capacity to use various arms (knife, gun, rifle). When I told him that I am not in the habit of carrying arms around Delhi, he stated: "Kamla will teach you to shoot even if you have only a few hours a week. You should never be unarmed."

Ultimately, Kamlabehn's paramilitary skills justify her spatial mobility, and her spatial mobility justifies her need for the skills. She travels alone second-class on trains, in or out of the ladies' compartment, and her family "never worries." She maintains that "if any man bothers" her, she will not hesitate to "bash him up." She has had occasion to use her skills "many times. People feel shocked when they see this, a woman who bashes up a man." She has "never killed any, not yet," but has "no fear of killing in self defense." "Physically and mentally prepared," Kamlabeh feels that if more women would learn self-defense and travel alone, it would become more acceptable and women would be less subject to harassment. Unfortunately, "people think a woman alone on a train is a prostitute. Earlier, women from our background could not travel alone, but I am doing this for our nation. This is how the Rashtra Sevika Samiti will change our country." In that sense the Samiti serves as a space where members can escape constraints that otherwise may have been imposed upon them as women within their milieu. They do so not only without directly rebelling against their environment, but also with its express approval as long as their demands are formulated not in terms of themselves, but rather in terms of self-sacrifice in the service of a higher common cause, the Hindu nation.

Kamlabehn was attempting to create for herself a new structural position to occupy: that of a perpetually single but tough and respected woman who would impose herself in the public space without definite sexual, gender, or (Indian) regional connotations.

A second example of Kamlabehn's skill at disguising resistance to norms is in the reversal of her decision concerning marriage. After she and her "dedicated *swayamsevak*" friend had graduated from engineering school and he had moved to Bombay, he wrote to her declaring that, like her, "he too would remain celibate." This was not for the Sangh, he explained, but rather because of his fidelity to her, the only woman he had ever been able to envisage as his wife. Kamlabehn "thought about this for a long time." She did not meet him again, but they remained in contact periodically by letter. At some point during her travels on Samiti work, she fell seriously ill, and for the first time had nothing to do with herself except think. She realized she could not be happy as a *pracharika* because she had "emotional needs."

Some time after she recovered, Kamlabehn asked the *swayamsevak* to visit her in Ahmedabad. Then, in a skillful reversal of the norms in her milieu, where males dominate and arranged marriages are the rule, she "decided to propose to him,

and he accepted." She told her parents only later. They "approved" of her husband, her decision to marry him, and her active role in carrying it out. Her father rationalized it as his daughter's expression of the wisdom held by those who realize themselves in the Sangh-Samiti set-up: "She has reached the stage where she knows what is best for herself and our nation. You see that she has chosen a devoted *swayamsevak*." Indeed, he closely echoed Kamlabehn's own words in describing his new son-in-law. Her father did not mention it, but the *swayamsevak* belongs to a similar caste background, and a similar but wealthier class background than Kamlabehn's natal family. Nilabehn integrated the event into her own value system by continuing to refer to it as an "arranged marriage," which she told me was "arranged by Kamalabehn. . . . Kamalabehn arranged her own marriage." Having already carved out a space for herself in her environment as a positive embodiment of feminine Hindu nationalism, her initiatives, which otherwise might be interpreted as acts of rebellion, were instead perceived as consistent with the ideals in her environment, albeit at times differently by each person concerned.

The effects of marriage on Kamalabehn looked extreme, but they were mostly external. Her appearance changed abruptly as she abandoned her former attire for a sari, bangles, ankle bracelets, and *bindi* (the dot of sandalwood paste worn on the forehead by married or eligible women). The first time I met her after this change, Kamalabehn explained to me that "this is only for convenience." Indeed, it meant little in terms of her inner landscape or her behavior in the world. She formulated it thus: "This doesn't matter. Was I any less a woman before this? This dress has not made me a woman. It is a matter of convenience. This is our culture, that women wear this dress." Thus there was a radical disjunction between the signs of bound feminine energy through her attire (bangles, ankle bracelets, and so on) and her discourse on its irrelevance combined with the overwhelming reality of continuity in her pre- to postmarriage conduct. The attire did not change her relationship to spatial mobility or her self-appropriation of her own time. It simply reassured those in her environment by signaling that she occupies a space that in reality she does not occupy. Her new representation of herself can be seen not as a step toward conformity, but rather as part of a strategy in her further legitimation of future potential resistance to norms that do matter more to her. Changes in dress are strategic insofar as they are easy concessions to make. For Kamlabehn, other characteristics, especially behavioral, are not subject to negotiation. Ultimately, Kamlabehn's acceptance of the symbols of bound femininity combined with her refusal to be bound in this way subverts the symbols themselves.

Today Kamlabehn works as a full-time science teacher in a well-regarded school outside of Ahmedabad, while her husband has retained his job in Bombay. She lives in a flat provided by the school, independently from her husband and her family. She meets her husband regularly, but feels "no need to stay together now." He has not become the focal point of her spatial mobility, nor have the roles been reversed. They alternate between meeting in her space and in his, and neither "interferes" in the other's activities, whether professional or Hindu nationalist. Kamlabehn states that they "will have children if we decide to," but as yet they have not done so. Since marriage, her engagement in the Samiti continues to be a primary factor in her life; she continues to teach paramilitary skills, and her symbolic references have remained the same. Thus, paradoxically, marriage has been a factor in the expansion of her space of relative freedom. Her family presumes that she no longer needs their collective protection or surveillance for they expect her to come under the individual surveillance of her husband. But in reality her husband is rarely there, and she is not answerable to him. Thus she is now even less directly accountable to others for her time and her spacial mobility than earlier.

Revenge for Kamlabehn

Ultimately, however, Kamlabehn's space of relative freedom has a double meaning and a double function. She pays for it by her entrapment within the walls of Hindu nationalist discourse, where she is obliged to be complicit with the rule of Hindu males. The existence of such a space depends directly upon a particular construction of Hindu femininity in relation to "the muslims": the former is fabricated as essentially vulnerable to attacks by the latter. Kamlabehn's self-appropriation of her space and time and her acquisition of skills with weaponry are justifiable only in the name of self-defense (of her own chaste Hindu femininity) and self-sacrifice (for the Hindu nation where men ultimately rule) against the projected threat constituted by "the muslims." Such an entity as "the muslims," I shall argue after Girard and Irigaray,[21] is a required production of the Regime of the Same, of the regime of Hindu nationalist "brothers" who strive to be identical to one another as perfectly realized Hindu males. In this scheme, the violence internal to the regime (the self-hatred, misogyny, aggressiveness, and violence that would otherwise cause trouble between Hindu males, and between them and Hindu women) is projected onto the entity "the muslims." Indeed, elsewhere I have shown that in its publications, the Sangh describes the unity of the Hindu nation as based upon "the knowledge of a common impending enemy."[22] I have also demonstrated that the Sangh's identifying models for Muslim males contain

21. Luce Irigaray's reading of René Girard's text on sacrifice has served as a point of departure for my reflections here. See Luce Irigaray, *Sexes et parentés* (Sex and kinship) (Paris: *Les Éditions de Minuit*, 1987), pp. 90, 91, 102; and René Girard, *La violence et le sacré* (Violence and the sacred), (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1972). Girard demonstrates that societies based on sacrifice maintain order by expelling their internal violence in the form of the sacrificial victim. Irigaray adds that in Girard's explanation the progression from order to chaos back to order, in which sacrifice is the precondition for the return to order, corresponds to the model of male sexuality described by Freud (tension, discharge, homeostasis). Irigaray also questions whether or not the sacrificial victims in question are in fact substitutions for a more archaic sacrificial victim who cannot be named as such: woman as mother. Both Girard and Irigaray deal only with masculine discourses. In my own reading, the Sangh, the Samiti, and in this instance, Kamlabehn, conceptualize "the muslims" according to their own gendered grids. The Sangh assigns the violence of Hindu nationalist males to "the muslims," and then expels that violence through immolation of the Muslims in riot situations. However, for the Samiti and Kamlabehn the mechanisms are more complicated. I contend that, albeit unconsciously, they add all male violence against women to the Sangh's violence (see below).

22. See Bacchetta, "On the Construction of Identities."

characteristics opposite those assigned to the model for ideal Hindu males.[23] In that sense, the Sangh displaces the undesirable from within the Hindu community onto a rejectable entity, "the muslims." Finally, the Sangh shifts the characteristics it assigns "the muslims" onto the Muslims, and according to this logic, the violence ascribed to them can be expelled only when the latter are neutralized. In other words, in the Hindu nationalist framework, the acting out of violence against Muslims is a way of restoring the internal Hindu nationalist order.

In Kamlabehn's discourse on Muslims, the Sangh and Samiti positions are a point of departure. Although they differ on some fine points, the two organizations share the notion that Muslim identity is essentially embodied in the Muslim male, while Muslim women are potential objects of communal and (hetero-) sexual appropriation.[24] Further, they both associate "muslimness" fundamentally with the "memory" of violence against Hindus, and the notion of "justice" that is used to legitimize revenge. The "memory" in question, however, is selective; it requires forgetting whatever may question the unity or the legitimacy of the Hindu community. At times the Sangh and Samiti name the original violence as "Muslim invasions"; in other instances it is the "vivisection" of the territory and the rape of Hindu women during Partition. Whatever the case, the original violence is always generalized, and out of it is extracted the notion of "Muslimness." Each subsequent conflict where Hindus and Muslims clash is constructed in a chain of substitution as metaphorically related to the so-called original violence. In Kamlabehn's discourse, these aspects are personalized through the "memory" of two massive local riots that occurred within the time and space of her life, although she did not witness them personally. I would like to briefly explain these instances, discuss Kamlabehn's thinking on them, and finally arrive at an analysis of their relation to Kamlabehn's space of relative freedom from entrapment and their symbolic meaning for her.

The first instance took place in Ahmedabad when Kamlabehn was still a child. She refers to it simply as the "1969 Muslim riot" after the year of its occurrence and the entity she deems responsible. In it 1,500 lives were lost and over 30,000 people (mostly Muslims) were left homeless. Those who suffered, whether Muslims or Hindus, were the most economically destitute of the city's population and located in its most crowded quarters, far from Kamlabehn's middle-class neighborhood. In Ahmedabad, poor women have consistently participated to varying degrees in communal violence by discreetly gathering stones in shopping bags and the folds of saris during temporary relaxing of curfews, by helping to fabricate gasoline bombs at home, and in some instances by throwing them. In 1969, however, middle-class women did not themselves participate in the actual battles. In contrast, some of the latter were active in post-riot relief work, but Kamlabehn was too young for such activities. In her immediate family, only her elder brother participated in a Sangh relief team designed to aid Hindus affected by the riots.

The second set of riots occurred in 1985–86. The conflict had started in 1985 as caste-based, around the issue of reservation (affirmative action quotas), but by 1986 local Hindu nationalist groups managed to shift the focal point to Hindu-Muslim communalism. The riots touched the same population and were concentrated mainly in the same areas of the city as in 1969, except that this time they involved a wider range of people. The most significant difference in 1985-86 was that in these riots for the first time Hindu nationalist women of all classes, including middle-class members of the Samiti and the related Hindu Mahila Sabha, actively and in significant numbers participated in the violence in a meticulously organized and extensive way.[25] Kamlabehn was old enough to participate, but she was absent from Ahmedabad on Samiti work when the riots first erupted and remained absent for the duration of the open conflict. In contrast, her brother and father had participated in the Sangh's relief work in between curfews.

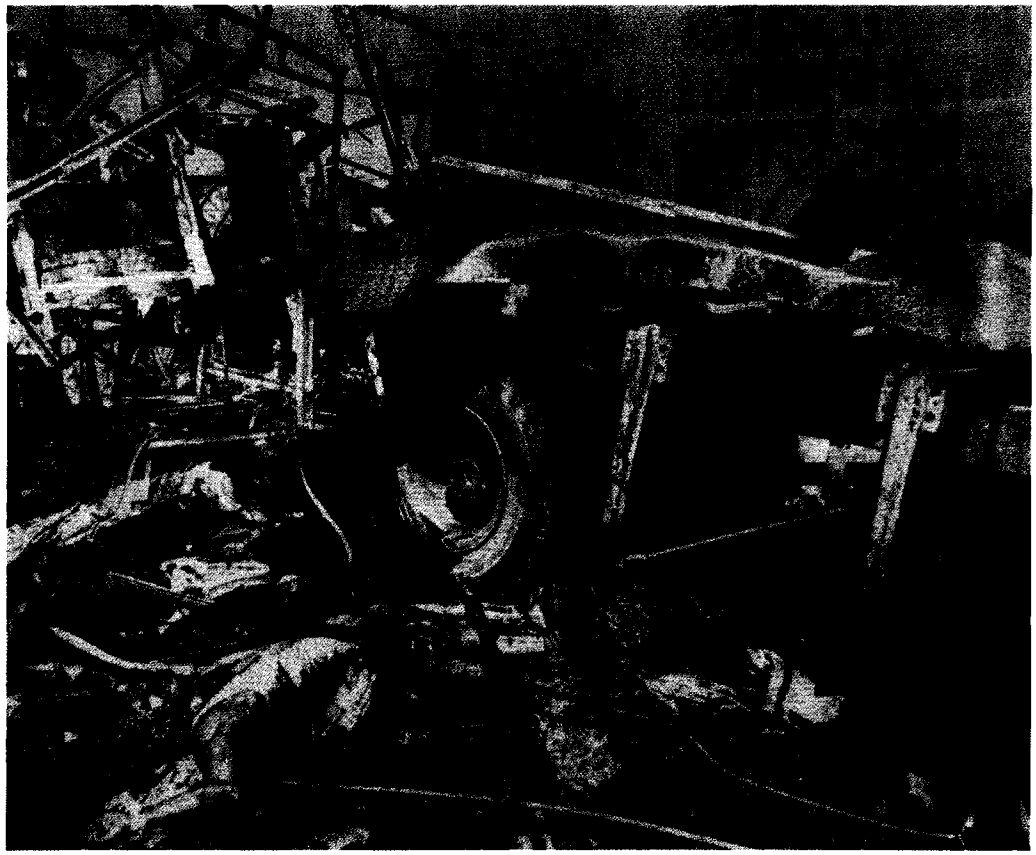
In Kamlabehn's discourse the two sets of riots, albeit separated by a period of sixteen to seventeen years, are almost indistinguishable. Her "memory" of both sets is mediated by her brother and father's experience, discussions in *bauddhik* sessions in the Samiti *shakhas,* the opinions of other family members and friends, the Sangh Parivar, and other media coverage, and the distorting effects of the passage of time. On this subject her speech and its contents range from calm to agitated in nature, and this is often simply a function of the exigencies of the moment or of the subject matter leading to the discussion of the riots. Despite this variance, which I shall discuss below, there are a number of constants. For example, throughout she holds onto Hindu nationalist clichés as markers: "muslims on the warpath" and "muslim barbarism" are commonly repeated phrases. She also consistently attempts to explain the riots in archetypal terms: "They humiliated our men. They raped our women. They destroyed our property. It was just like Partition all over again."

In her least extreme speech on the riots, which is most often connected to the first set of riots, she says she feels thus about Muslims: "I have nothing against them. Earlier they were Hindus but they turned traitors. They could become Hindus again, but you see what they have done to our people. That is why we don't like them." Here as elsewhere, she differentiates almost unconsciously between her personal attitude as an individual ("*I* have nothing against them") and her attitude as part of a larger group

23. Ibid.

24. For an analysis of the Sangh's conception of Muslim women, see Paola Bacchetta, "Communal Property/Sexual Property: On Representations of Muslim Women in a Hindu Nationalist Discourse," in *Identity, Politics, Community, and Gender: Muslim Women in India,* ed. Zoya Hasan (New Delhi: Kali For Women, forthcoming).

25. Hindu nationalist women's role in the 1985–86 riots have been documented and analyzed in Paola Bacchetta, "From the Mother Goddess to the Warrior: On the Shifting Place of Women in Communal Riots and Communalist Discourse in Contemporary Ahmedabad, Gujarat," (original in French) (master's thesis in sociology, Institut d'études du développement économique et social [IEDES], Université de Paris I, Panthéon-Sorbonne, Paris, France, 1986). Also, on middle-class women's actions against reservation in the 1985 riots, see Ila Joshi, "Women and Anti-Reservation Stir in Ahmedabad," (paper presented at the "National Conference for Women's Studies," Chandigarh, Haryana, India, 1986), p. 2. On Hindu nationalist women's actions in the 1985–86 riots in Ahmedabad, see Chingari Nari Sangh, "Impact of Caste and Communal Riots of Ahmedabad on Women," (paper presented at the National Conference for Women's Studies, Chandigarh, India, 1986), pp. 9, 10, 14, 29, 33, 36, and 37.



In the Hindu nationalist framework, the acting out of violence against Muslims is a way of restoring the internal nationalist order. Only one of many places where violence erupted after the demolition of the Babri Mosque on 6 December 1992, Bombay experienced a "horrendous bloodbath unprecedented in the city's history." More than six hundred people, mostly Muslims, died as a right-wing Hindu nationalist group, the Shiv Sena, attacked Muslims and some Hindus all over the city, even in middle-class communities that had previously been untouched by communal violence. Both these photographs were taken by Sherwin Crasto during bombings in Bombay on 12 March 1993, with the picture below showing the results of the bombing of a bus filled with passengers. The quote and information about the Bombay riots are from "Bombay Continues to Simmer" and "Bal Thackeray's Wave of Terror," The Pioneer *(New Delhi), 16 January 1993. Both pictures are from the* Times of India *(Bombay), reprinted here courtesy of Sherwin Crasto and the* Times of India.

("*we* don't like them"). Indeed, the hatred seems to come into existence when raised to the collective level.

Kamlabehn's most extremely agitated speech is generally reserved for the second set of riots. It is as though the second experience of absence functioned to reinforce and extend the first. She communicates a certain frustration at again being in an inappropriate space and time while the battle raged without her. She articulates, in addition, self-guilt, expressing it in terms of her position in a network of relations among Hindus, and her failure to protect the weakest of the latter despite her cultivation of warrior skills.[26] Thus she asserts that those who suffered most among the Hindus "were the poorest of our people. They were the most backward. They lost everything. They even lost their lives. We did nothing to save them from the Muslims. I was outside." Her guilt is based on notions of her personal failure to fulfill what she perceives as her duty, and not on a self-critique of her caste-class position. Indeed, here as elsewhere she rationalizes the latter by adhering to the Sangh-Samiti presupposition of the inherent "backwardness" of the poor, the counterpart of which is the notion of her own merit. Further, in this instance the "we" of the Hindu community that "did nothing" is placed in a relationship of disjointed identity to the "I" who could do nothing because she was absent from Ahmedabad.

In her most intensely aggressive renderings, Kamlabehn makes use of the same clichés, some of which I have cited above, and connects them in an associational chain that progresses from notions of Muslim violence to Hindu humiliation to threats of revenge. In our dialogues, often it was the very mention of Muslims as possible victims that provoked her rage. For example, when I specifically asked her about the fate of Muslims in the 1986 riots, she replied with anger: "Why do you ask about them? Look at what they have done to our people. They deserve to die. They should all be killed. They spill our blood. They rape our women. Let their blood be spilled, the bloody bastards. Just as Kali did not spare even one *rakshas*."

The statements are open to many interpretations, and this is not the place to provide an exhaustive explanation of them. However, for now we can note that they reveal Kamlabehn's construction of Muslims as sexually aggressive to women, as the illegitimate offspring ("bastards") of the goddess Bharatmata, and as the origin of violence ("bloody" or having blood on their hands) and therefore deserving destruction through bleeding ("let their blood be spilled" as the *rakshasas'* blood was spilled). The preoccupation with blood and bodily dismemberment suggests the paranoid mechanisms at work in Hindu nationalist discourse in general.

Indeed, in Kamlabehn's mind, to kill a Muslim is to fulfill one's archetypal duty as a militant Hindu woman. She constructs it as a divine act modeled upon and explicable via Kali's ridding the world of evil in the form of demons in the *Devi Mahatmya*. She rationalizes anti-Muslim violence by Hindu women as a just act of direct revenge provoked by Muslim male sexual violation of Hindu femininity and womanhood, implied both in the notion of the bastard and in the direct charge of rape.

However, when questioned about her personal experiences with Muslim males, Kamlabehn states that she has never met any. Further, in her daily life, the only sexual harassment she has been subjected to has been by Hindu males. She explains that "among Hindus there are some who are not yet conscious. That is why we need the RSS, to teach them to respect women." Further, in a rare critique of the Sangh, Kamlabehn admits that even in the Sangh "there are some who do not respect women." There is never, however, the same emotional charge, the same anger when speaking of Hindu men who violate women as when speaking of Muslim men, and they are not associated with the same kinds of violations. That is, she links Hindu men with "Eve teasing" (sexual harassment in public) and threats, and Muslim men with rape and bloodshed. In that sense, she has more or less split masculinity in two: the Hindu male, who is essentially decent (unconscious Hindu males exist but are rare and always less threatening than any Muslim male), and Muslim males, who are essentially aggressive and violent, including sexually.

These constructions are of an arbitrary nature; their very existence depends solely upon the Hindu nationalist context and what therein is designated as an acceptable object of hatred for Hindu nationalist women. Indeed, by projecting such characteristics onto Muslim men, Kamlabehn is able to discharge emotion that might otherwise accumulate into an impossible and unacceptable rebellion against the macho Hindu men in her environment. Instead, her representation of Muslim men only concretizes her solidarity with Hindu men by rendering even the most offensive of the latter as less offensive than the former. Such an attitude functions to confine Hindu nationalist women within a Hindu community whose boundaries and landscape are determined essentially by Hindu nationalist men.

Concluding Remarks

In Kamlabehn's discourse, obviously, the role of the divine is not to be divine at all, but rather to enable her to work out two interrelated aspects of her identity within the Hindu nationalist context: fierce femininity and her antimacho stance. The former, as I have demonstrated, is articulated in terms of the warrior goddess Kali in the *Devi Mahatmya,* the latter in terms of the demons Kali neutralizes in the same text. The antimacho stance can only be partial; the enemy is displaced from communally unmarked masculine violence and aggressiveness onto the person of Muslim men.

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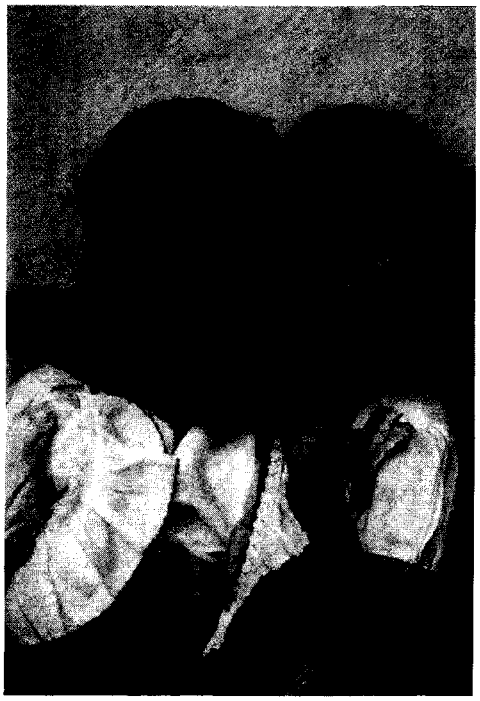
26. In an insightful article on the 1984 Delhi-area riots against the Sikhs following the assasination of Indira Gandhi, Veena Das discusses the emotional states of Sikh women survivors, including guilt. Das explains that the survivors articulated their guilt in terms of their perceived failure to protect their men and to properly accomplish the last religious rites after death in cases where the bodies were not recoverable. In that sense, the guilt is structured relationally, in terms of the survivors' perceived duties as wives. Kamlabehn's guilt, albeit in absentia, is similarly constructed around her perception of her failure to accomplish her self-designated duty of protection, but also around her consciousness of her own material privileges in relation to the dead. In Kamlabehn's case the relation is to the anonymous members of the Hindu people, for whom she feels it is her duty to sacrifice herself (and her material belongings). In both cases, the structuring factor is relational and is organized in terms of the subject's perception of her proper duty in relation to her Other(s). See Veena Das, "Our Work to Cry, Your Work to Listen," in *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots, and Survivors in South Asia,* ed. Veena Das (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 345–98.



"They hit my father with **lathis** *until he died. Then they sawed off my mother's head."*

Shabana, 8, and Shahana, 6

"The mob set our house on fire. As we ran out, they surrounded my parents, uncle, and aunt and thrust swords into them."

Taslim Banu, 12

The actual acting out of violence against Muslims has produced orphans like these whose parents were killed in the post-Ayodhya bloodbath. These photos and their captions accompanied Pramad Pushkarna's "Orphans of Ayodhya: Silence of the Lambs," India Today, *30 April 1993, pp. 103–7. The top two photos are by Pushkarna, and the bottom one is by Bhawan Singh, and they are reprinted here courtesy of Pushkarna, Singh, and* India Today.

"Why did no one help us? Where did so much hatred come from?"

Nasreen, 12

Kamlabehn's discourse, her use of the symbolic to further a nonspiritual agenda and the resistance and revenge motifs are not particular to Hindu nationalism. In India they are part of a contemporary tendency (among numerous other tendencies) in which religion has come to be used to deliver meaning in an increasingly meaningless environment. Thus, for example, some urban middle-class perceptions of dislocated identities are reflected in the multiplication of new "modern" and as yet nonpoliticized sects. Similarly, representations of women's ideal identity are steadily shifting to include forceful qualities and resistance and revenge motifs. The latter are produced, for example, again at the symbolic level, in a new genre of film in which women are portrayed as avenging villains to defend family and community honor.[27] Indeed, none of this necessarily signifies liberation for women. The feminine role in question, independently of the symbolic references made to intervene to justify it, is modeled upon machismo and exists for men to defend male-dominated family or community honor or the Hindu nationalist goals. Thus in the final analysis the space of relative freedom, the refuge from masculine domination provided by certain symbolic elements, collapses under the reality of the male-dominated framework that surrounds it. In the meantime, it functions as a buffer zone in which women such as Kamlabehn work out aspects of their spatial and temporal mobility while simultaneously adhering to their own ultimate negation.

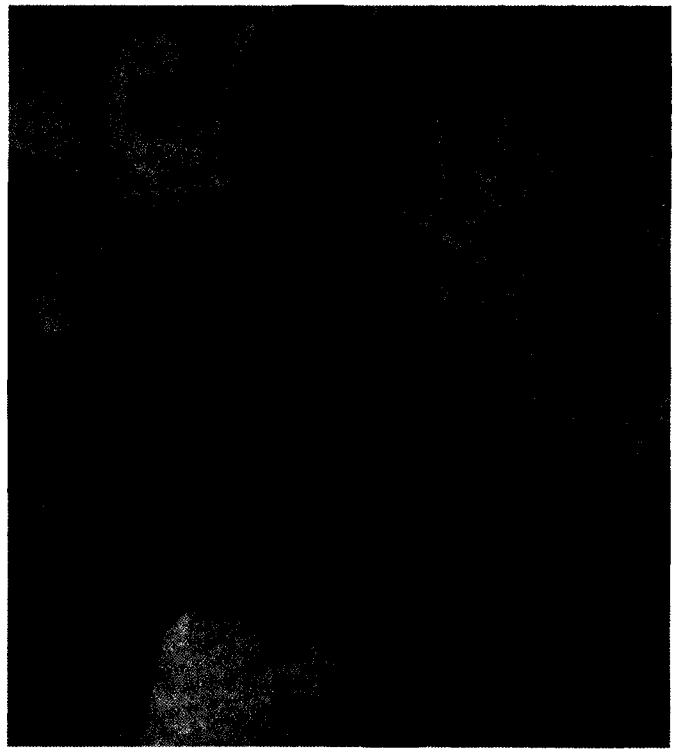
27. Some of these include *Sherni, Zakhmi Aurat, Mera Shikar, Gunahon ka Phaisla, and Aag ke Sholay.* For a discussion of some films in which women are represented in terms of revenge, see M.Rahman, "Hindi Films: Women Strike Back," *India Today,* 5 July 1988, pp. 124–26; and Madhu Kishwar and Ruth Vanita, "Male Fantasies of Female Revenge," *Manushi,* no. 48 (Sept.–Oct. 1988), p. 43. ★

Who Is Riding on Whose Shoulders?

After the demolition of the Babri Mosque on 6 December 1992, a gleeful, beaming Uma Bharati rides on the shoulders of Murli Manohar Joshi, then the president of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party. In the photograph Uma Bharati is bursting with joy, the joy of success. And Joshi's lips have the blissful smile of a cunning vulture.

This photograph appeared in newspapers all over India, producing a variety of reactions, one of which we present here because it eloquently underscores what the articles of this special issue have been emphasizing: The women of the Hindu nationalist movement may feel empowered by their prominence and seeming popularity and ability to speak out, but they are actually being used by the movement for its own ends, to the neglect and betrayal of their own issues as women and members of lower castes. In the end they, too, will be pushed aside by the movement—they, too, will be and are its victims.

In a March 1993 editorial in Hans, *a Hindi literary monthly from Delhi, Rajendra Yadav published the first paragraph above and the paragraphs that follow, here translated and adapted by Hari Sharma and excerpted by the* Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars. *We thank Rajendra Yadav for the use of his editorial, Hari Sharma for finding the photo and editorial and doing the translation, and* Sunday *(Calcutta) for granting permission to reprint the photo.*



Murli Manohar Joshi, smiling from ear to ear, has raised Uma Bharati above his head. After such destruction, blood bath, mass killings, rape, and arson, this picture has produced strange reactions in me. The photograph is not entertaining. It is pitiful, sad.

Floating in the air, doesn't Uma Bharati know why Murli Manohar Joshi has raised her above his head? In what box are the chess pieces put away once the game is over? But maybe from those heights Uma Bharati doesn't think about such things. All she knows is that it is *her* victory; she was part of undoing a history's wrong.

But no, Uma, it is not your victory. You are only one of those hit men who beat up their own brothers and sisters at the master's command, and get generous congratulations from him. You must continue to believe that you are a soldier ready to die for a religious cause. For this religious act, God will send you to heaven, Joshi has assured that for you, in order to assure his own heaven in this world. Essentially you have only cleared the way for Joshi to ride to state power. It is not you who is riding on his shoulders; he is riding on yours.

Have you forgotten, Uma, the Govind Acharya episode, when you were accused of having an affair with this leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party? Didn't they tell you that you were not a religious crusader, you were only a woman, and you were only a *lodhi* by caste. Why was the ground giving way under your feet? Why on that day were you desperately pleading for the cause of women and the *dalits* (untouchables) and other low-caste, oppressed peoples? Why were you sharing that "casteist" *lodhi* platform with the "irreverant monster" Maulayam Singh, who had gunned down your *kar sevaks* on their way to the Babri Mosque? I won't go into how they rehabilitated you after calling you a fallen woman, but don't forget for a moment that for them you are a woman and a *dalit.* They don't like talking about caste today; they even oppose its utterance. But smart as they are, they have placed you where they leave their shoes before entering a sanctuary. The day you protest, you will be condemned as suffering from "casteism." None of your merits and none of the sacred texts will give you an equal standing with them. For them, you have no right to bring up casteism and disrupt the social order.

Yes, Uma. You, not they, are casteist. Don't you dare raise the caste and gender issue again. Otherwise L. K. Advani or Joshi will organize another Ram Janambhoomi movement, riding most likely on your shoulders. And once again you will be used to crush the very people on whose stage you were once sitting, and where you will be thrown back again. Do not forget you are a woman. And because you are a woman, you are also a *dalit.*

You *must* indeed believe that you are "equal" to men, capable of everything they are. But don't you realize that the equality men assure you of is nothing more than an expression of concealed pity, lust, concession, encouragement, or simply a cultural mannerism of tolerance. You are equal, respectable, and honorable only as long as you remain a woman, a surrendered tool in the male order. Try one day to assert your independent will. Try to select a career for yourself against the wish, interest, and honor of the masters. Try to become an unwed mother, or show interest in some other man, or even bring your own personal friends into the social order. Then you will see where they will place you. One word of a man will tell you what your standing is, and you will find yourself out of the house, out of the society.

Uma, to be in a position where people touch your feet in reverence can be very tempting. Since people of low castes and standing have always been touching the feet of those above, it must have appeared to them as the ultimate honor one could receive. You couldn't have your feet touched by people while remaining an ordinary woman. That's why you had to take religious vows and become a celibate *sanyasin.* You had to deprive yourself of your natural being. Only then will you be given some of the leftovers of religious power. What comes to them naturally, you obtain only by "killing" yourself. How long will you allow yourself to be used in this absurd, irrational blood bath? Try once to find out who is benefiting from injecting this religious fanaticism into your system. Will you ever recognize the ever-changing face of the "ghost" who is today laughing while riding on your shoulders? ★

Review Essay: India and the World-System

INDIA AND THE SOVIET UNION: TRADE AND TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER, by Santosh Mehrotra. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991, ix + 242 pp. Hardcover, $54.95.

SOUTH ASIA AND WORLD CAPITALISM, ed. Sugata Bose. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991, vi + 405 pp. Hardcover, $36.00.

Anthony P. D'Costa*

Contemporary India is intriguing, if not outright incomprehensible. Its past is even murkier and its future indeed quite unpredictable. Sugata Bose's and Santosh Mehrotra's recent volumes on India trace and explain India's relationship with larger social orders, one during British tutelage and the other with the more recent Soviet system. Bose's book on South Asia situates the complexities of India in a long historical context, while Mehrotra's volume analyzes Indo-Soviet relations during the 1970–85 period. Standing on their own, these two books are quite unrelated. However, posing certain questions not only allows us to integrate them but also assists us in evaluating India's relationship to the economic and political order outside its national boundaries.

South Asia and World Capitalism

The volume edited by Bose resulted from the "South Asia and World Capitalism Conference" held at Tufts University in December 1986. This book's wide range of topics is summarized well on the inside flap by the publisher:

> The issues discussed include the character and dynamics of historical systems; relations of production and appropriation in agriculture and industry; politics and the state; and the connections between the world economy and the regional or national economies of South Asia. More concretely, the focus of interest falls on the boundaries of South Asian history and specific aspects of South Asia's historical experience; subcontinental trade relations with China, Russia, and the Middle East in the pre-modern and early-modern periods; the colonial legacy in India and Pakistan; village India and the nature of industrial development in the modern period.

Three of the chapters examine the question of how to situate South Asia in a global economic context. The next three chapters, respectively, discuss the historical roots of capitalism in the Indian Ocean region, social formation in northern India, and Indo-Russian trade in the eighteenth century. Three other chapters examine South Asian agriculture and industry in specific regions and sectors of India. Another three chapters are devoted to politics and the inter-state system, including discussion of early nationalism, Gandhian socialism, and the formation of the nation of Pakistan. The last section deals with the vulnerability of developing countries to fluctuations in the world economy, examining the particular case of India. The consolidation of the world economy and India's greater participation in the larger system are discussed with reference to the impact of the Great Depression of the 1930s, fluctuations in costs, prices, and output, and the general vulnerability of the Indian economy to world capitalist dynamics. In his introduction and concluding chapter the editor does an excellent job of tying these chapters together.

The most important concern of the volume is one of methodology. Do we study social change in a given society by identifying the general processes applicable to all societies, or do we focus on the particular dynamics underlying change in a specific society? This is an old and familiar debate between nomothetic deducing from general laws versus ideographic building from specific instances. I believe it is still an important debate that needs reexamination. Given the wide

*I would like to thank Ravi Palat, Janette Rawlings, and three anonymous *BCAS* referees for making both substantive and editorial suggestions. The usual caveats apply.

Indigenous capitalism at its best: A street vendor in Calcutta hawks calendars of great men and women, political leaders, and film stars. With the calendars on display showing faces of Indian leaders surrounding the Soviet Union's Stalin and Lenin and looking out over an assortment of film stars that includes Sylvester Stallone as the U.S.'s synthetic folk hero Rambo, this seems a particularly fitting picture for a review essay focusing on India's relations with the Soviet Union, Great Britain, and to a lesser extent the United States while "evaluating India's relationship to the economic and political order outside its boundaries." All the photographs accompanying this review essay were taken by Bob Erickson in 1987, and they are courtesy of Bob Erickson and Anthony P. D'Costa.

range of topics covered by the essays in Bose's book, it is difficult for a generalist like me to review each of them in great depth without being vulnerable to the particularists. Therefore, I will limit my discussion to the methodological issue of how to situate regional social change in a larger sociopolitical and economic order.

The context of this longstanding debate can be best articulated by the following interrelated questions: Is South Asia a particular entity produced by the general processes of world capitalism? Can changes in South Asia be explained by internal or particular dynamics originating in South Asia itself, or does one have to resort to global capitalist forces that emanated from Europe, which were obviously external to South Asia? How does South Asia, and India in particular, fit into the modern capitalist system in the postcolonial period? How did the indigenous actors resist external influences?

In addressing these questions I will focus on the essays by Immanuel Wallerstein (chapter 2), C. A. Bayly (chapter 3), David Washbrook (chapter 4), and Jayathi Ghosh (chapter 16). Wallerstein introduces the world-system process of "incorporation" to study social change in South Asia, while Bayly argues that there are many routes to participating in the modern world-system. Washbrook emphasizes the dynamics of regional social order, and using South Asia questions the dynamics and the structure of Wallerstein's modern world-system. Ghosh discusses contemporary vulnerabilities associated with increased participation of developing countries in the world economy by relating the interactions between the advanced capitalist and developing countries.

External versus Internal Factors in India's Capitalist Development

For many years Immanuel Wallerstein has pursued the methodological issue in great depth and breadth. However, his position is still not clear. While common sense dictates the marrying of the general and the particular (which he unequivocally suggests, pp. 24–25), much of his work continues to focus on the general and the external. He convincingly argues in this volume and elsewhere that both the general and the particular are social creations with artificial boundaries.[1] For example, he points out that South Asia is an invented term. However, since Wallerstein's historical systems are systemic in nature, they do not capture the nuances and caveats of global capitalism, especially regional variations. Despite long British rule, social groups in South Asia, especially in India, have resisted and stubbornly continue to shape, if not dictate, the terms of India's participation in the contemporary world-system. Indeed, Wallerstein's reliance on the process of incorporation of areas or zones outside

1. See Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Capitalist World-Economy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1984), chap. 1.

the center of capitalism (read Europe) as one way of interpreting capitalist dynamics is interesting and novel. But it falls victim to the very serious charges of being too general a process and too Eurocentric a view. As argued by both Bayly and Washbrook, the processes underlying Wallerstein's world-system perspective cannot easily accommodate the internal sociopolitical or economic dynamics of South Asia.

Wallerstein could potentially raise the question "internal to what" since his modern world-system encompasses all those zones incorporated under capitalism, a system that was essentially European in origin. Bayly challenges Wallerstein's Eurocentric view (p. 29), arguing that European incorporation was not the only way for South Asian regions to enter the modern world-system. India had its own linkages with other parts of Asia, resulting in the establishment of its own international network (p. 31). Moreover, Bayly shows that the expansion of the European system was possible because of (and not in spite of) contradictions arising from the segmentation of the Indian political order set in motion by different regional and social interests (pp. 36–39).

Bayly's arguments are generally convincing, but there are two points that deserve to be noted. First, India's linkages prior to incorporation were qualitatively different from those linkages that were established during and after incorporation. The difference was in the shift from simple trade to exchange based on capitalist production.[2] Second, the label Eurocentrism is ambiguous. One interpretation could be that changes in India were induced by changes in Europe, implying that Indian society lacked any dynamism of its own. This would be Eurocentrism in a pejorative sense. This charge, I think, is unfair to Wallerstein, given his sensitivity to non-European experiences. The other interpretation is based simply on historical facts—capitalism emerged first in Europe, and colonialism and imperialism were also European in origin. In this geographical sense, the interpretation is also Eurocentric. To label these facts as Eurocentric is acceptable, but using them to condemn an argument appears to be unfair.

David Washbrook (chapter 4) also challenges Wallerstein's generalized approach to understanding South Asia's relationship to world capitalism. Washbrook makes the case that British control over South Asia would not have been possible without the support of certain social groups and intermediary agents in India (p. 58). He argues that there was an explicit and symbiotic alliance between British and indigenous merchant capitalists that facilitated the incorporation of South Asia, in Wallerstein's use of the concept. However, Washbrook argues that the existence of active alliances, often accompanied by resistance to capital in general, requires a particular focus on the contextual basis of incorporation.

These contextual caveats notwithstanding, Washbrook, (and Bayly, for that matter) is underscoring the importance of internal sociopolitical alliances and giving credit to the intermediary groups. The implication is that had it not been for the British, a South Asian variety of capitalism might have emerged. Given my familiarity with the Latin American dependency school, for me this raises an intriguing question that has not been raised by Washbrook and Bayly. It has been argued that the existence of comprador bourgeoisie pulling in external capital to its advantage is a classic syndrome of underdeveloped economies. If that is the case, then to what extent were India's intermediary groups, in concert with British capital, responsible for stifling indigenous capitalism? Perhaps one can only hypothesize that as profiteering is legitimized under emerging capitalist institutions, protocapitalists and their descendants do not particularly care about their allegiances.

Perhaps Wallerstein's shakiest concept is that of semiperiphery. According to Wallerstein, the semiperiphery is a stabilizing locus for production that prevents polarization in the world-system by absorbing investments from declining sectors in the capitalist centers.[3] But as Washbrook points out, European capital did not always find penetrating South Asia easy, nor did South Asia act as a passive receptor for British capital. Much of the investment in the South Asian textile industry during colonial rule was indigenous rather than of British origin (pp. 47–48). Furthermore, despite incorporation and the resulting deindustrialization in South Asia, indigenous capitalists emerged at home and abroad. India contributed to the world-system not by attracting capital from the metropolitan centers but by supplying labor, and later, capitalists, to the other incorporated zones of the world economy (p. 49). This particular South Asian contribution to the world-system deviates from Wallerstein's archetypal semiperiphery, of which India is a part. India has not played out its semiperipheral role in the world economy in other ways as well, for example by producing leaders and ideologies that challenged the basic tenets of the global capitalist system (pp. 49–50).

Mehrotra's book underscores the attempt by India and the Soviet Union to resist the global capitalist system by forging independent relationships outside the larger system.

Washbrook further argues that markets do not always emerge only after incorporation, as the Polanyi-Wallerstein thesis would suggest (pp. 59, 70–71). Rather, in the particular Indian context, market mechanisms, or "protocapitalism" according to Bayly (p. 30), were already in place prior to the eighteenth century incorporation of South Asia (p. 71). The existence of scribal groups fluent in certain accounting and administrative tasks contributed to capitalist features present before incorporation (pp. 33–35). This raises another pertinent question, one that Wallerstein explicitly does not entertain: could India have developed indigenous capitalism without British imperialism (p. 25)? Historians may consider the question irrelevant. However, it is

2. See Immanuel Wallerstein, "Incorporation of the Indian Subcontintent into the Capitalist World-Economy," *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 21, no. 4 (25 Jan. 1986), pp. PE28–39.

3. Wallerstein, *The Capitalist World-Economy*, p. 70.

highly relevant because if we accept the existence of capitalist features before incorporation, it would mean capitalism (revolution in the means of production, wage labor, and market-based exchange) is not necessarily European in origin. Therefore the possibility of the simultaneous existence of more than one modern (capitalist) world-system challenges the Eurocentric view. The singularity of Wallerstein's modern world-system and his universal sequence of incorporation followed by a capitalist market could thus be seriously challenged.

I think both Washbrook and Bayly fail to distinguish between markets that are price making and others that are not.[4] Under capitalism, markets serve as the loci of exchange, but the terms of such transactions are based on supply and demand.

Sugata Bose attempts to resolve the tension between the internalists/particularlists (Bayly and Washbrook) and externalists/generalists (Wallerstein) by emphasizing the relational features of linkages between the world economy and South Asian economies.

Based on "scarcity," prices act as principal signals for the operation of price-making markets. However, in noncapitalist markets (they are markets because of exchange relationships) prices do not determine exchange value. Instead imperial authority, political and military conditions, local customs, and so on shape exchange relationships.[5] In other words, market exchange existed in India prior to incorporation, a feature correctly identified by Washbrook and Bayly. But these markets were regulated or administered rather than price making. Accordingly, noneconomic criteria and not "economic rationality" principally determined exchange value in South Asia prior to the arrival of British capital.[6] What this implies is the absence of price-making markets, the basis of autonomous capitalism in India.

During British rule, India's most intense and direct period of incorporation, certain social groups in India took advantage of the colonial situation. While British capital wanted to lay down the objective conditions for market-based surplus extraction, other needs, such as military and financial security, were given equal importance. British capital in India could not have succeeded without indigenous merchants, capitalists, and financiers (pp. 77–80). In fact, as Washbrook argues, this incorporation was really the process of "excorporation," by which various local interests pulled in British capital to use to their own advantage (pp.59–60).

Despite Wallerstein's emphasis on an externally induced process of incorporation, he is willing to concede that differences in internal structures need to be taken into account to understand differences in external influences (p. 6). I believe this accomodation arises precisely because of his recognition of the centrality of states in the world capitalist system. Wallerstein's modern world-system has a single division of labor with multiple polities. This means that politics as expressed through state-society and inter-state interactions become crucial to understanding how individual states relate to the larger politcal and economic world-system. This is especially true for politically sovereign states attempting to consolidate a home-grown variety of capitalism, internally through shifting social and political alliances and externally through participation in and insulation from the world economy.[7]

Postcolonial India and the World Economy

To what extent the postcolonial Indian state could insulate itself from the macroeconomic dynamics of the larger capitalist system as it attempted to consolidate capitalism in the late twentieth century is the subject of Jayathi Ghosh's essay (chapter 16). Ghosh disagrees with the generally accepted view that state policy in independent India created a closed economy (pp. 338–46). Links were forged during colonialism (p. 340), and new ones were established with the international economy in the post-Independence era. She contends that focusing on concepts such as a closed or open economy, and investigating typical economic ratios such as share of trade to gross national product, are unlikely to reveal the vulnerability of the Indian economic system, especially regional subsystems. In the case of India, these links include imports of food during shortages, oil and technology imports, and foreign capital. The repatriation of wages by migrant Indian labor from the oil-rich Middle East and subsequent decline of such repatriation created additional vulnerability for the Indian economy confronting foreign exchange shortages.

Ghosh analyzes how the Indian economy is subject to economic forces outside its borders as external links intensify. Since the mid-1970s the Indian state has been opening up the economy. Such an attempt toward increased integration with the world economy is motivated by the typical liberal theory of free trade promoting price efficiency. The results so far have been mixed. While some industries and consumers benefit from lower prices, many domestic productive units find themselves with excess capacity and rising costs (p. 344). Liberalization has also

4. This distinction is different from a mainstream economist's perspective where price making is understood to be an oligopolistic (or monopolistic) situation, and price taking to be a competitive environment. In both markets supply and demand operate and prices reflect scarcity.

5. See Karl Polanyi, "The Economy as Instituted Process," and Walter C. Neale, "The Market in Theory and History," in *Trade and Market in the Early Empires: Economies in History and Theory,* ed. Karl Polanyi, Conrad M. Arensberg, and Harry W. Pearson (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1957). I would like to thank Resat Kasaba for bringing this to my attention.

6. Wallerstein pointedly notes this when refuting Perlin's notions of "proto-capitalism" and "commercial capitalism," which are based on money and had been in existence centuries before capitalism. Wallerstein, "Incorporation," p. PE-34.

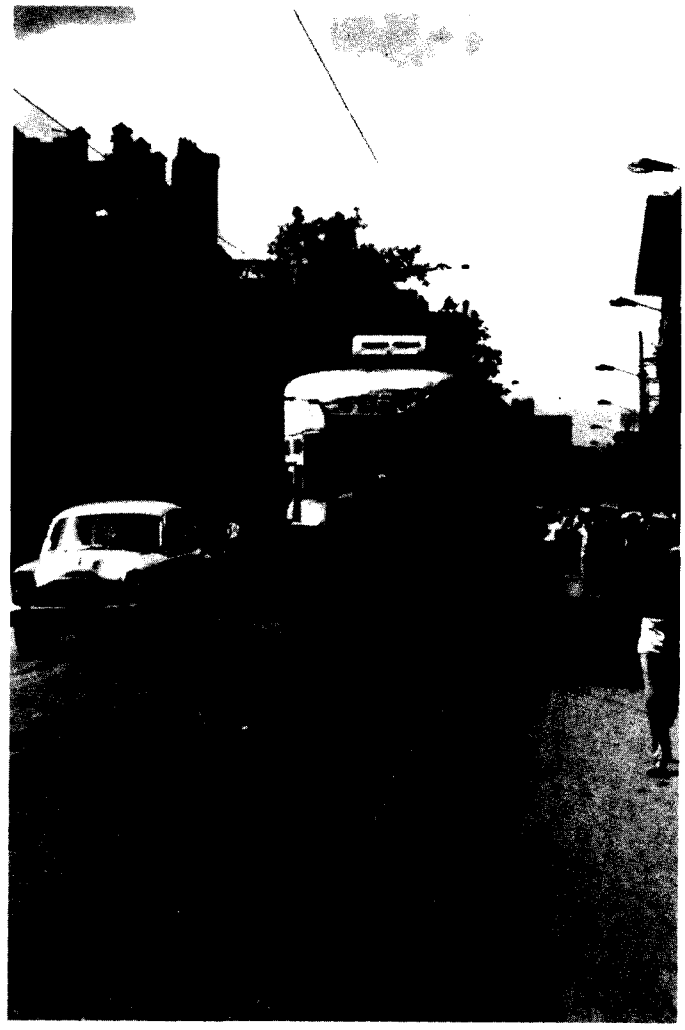
7. See Bruce Cumings, "The Abortive Abertura: South Korea in the Light of Latin American Experience," *New Left Review,* no. 173 (1989), p. 23.

raised domestic production costs by increasing imports of capital goods and encouraging import-intensive assembly of consumer-durable industries. The vulnerability of the economy is manifested in balance-of-payments problems and rising external debts. As a result, external financing has become the standard method of addressing the payments crisis. The liberalization process, presumably an outcome of certain class pressures on the state, has reinforced the vulnerability.

At the more general level, Ghosh treats the dependence of underdeveloped economies on the world capitalist system by examining the relationship between world interest rates and U.S. trade and fiscal deficits. The United States, the world's largest debtor nation, raised interest rates to attract Japanese capital to finance its deficits, resulting in reduced flows of capital to underdeveloped economies. U.S. debts, Ghosh predicts, are likely to dampen demand from poorer countries, while even the robust economies of Japan and Germany will not be adequate to pull the world economy out of the recession (pp. 346–48). At the same time, political stability in the advanced countries has been maintained by low import prices of primary commodities, much like English liberalism practiced in Britain through imperialism abroad.

According to Ghosh, the industrialized countries are expected to grow slowly since increasing demand and employment in the industrialized countries are likely to raise the prices of imports (wage costs and inputs) from developing countries and thereby set off inflationary pressures (pp. 349–51). As a result, industrialized countries will be reluctant to reduce unemployment and absorb exports (oil and primary commodities) from developing countries. Because of the tight integration of the world capitalist system, the slow growth in industrialized countries' demand will translate into reduced demand for the exports of developing countries. This outcome, combined with limited access to international capital (official development assistance and other external finance) and falling export revenues due to protectionism, will compel developing countries to cut back in vital imports and hence critical production (p. 352). Both industrialized and developing countries are thus likely to confront low growth in the future.

What do these macroeconomic dynamics mean for workers in general? Ghosh points out that since the impact of inflation is widespread and the business class is very sensitive to it, governments of industrialized countries are unlikely to promote policies that address locationally specific unemployment problems. This of course has serious implications for the working class in the industrialized countries. For industrial and agricultural workers in developing countries the situation is expected to be equally grim. Slow growth of exports would mean compression of demand even while the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank push exports through orthodox macroeconomic policies and austerity measures. The problem is that nominal currency devaluation (an IMF requirement) does not necessarily increase exports because of "managed" trade practices by the industrialized countries (p. 355). Furthermore, a reduced role of the state (another IMF requirement) would eliminate favorable incentives crucial for boosting exports in niche markets. However, exports by themselves are not a panacea for the balance-of-payments problems that many developing countries confront. Exports are limited by protectionist policies of the industrialized countries. In addition, the crowding of the international market by



The remnants of the process of "incorporation": Calcutta tram and a modified version of the British Morris. This review essay challenges the idea that India is simply a peripheral country that has been incorporated into world (European) capitalism, suggesting instead that prior to British tutelage India had its own form of capitalism, and that internal as well as external factors were significant in India's capitalist development.

numerous competitors leaves little for borrowing by less developed countries (LDCs). All of these factors mean recessionary tendencies for local economies in developing countries. Ironically, the United States as a self-appointed world policeman, Ghosh argues, will not undertake the kind of restructuring that the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund require of developing countries. According to Ghosh's assessment (written in 1986), one therefore cannot be sanguine about developing countries' greater participation in the world economy.

India's Relationship with the Soviet Union

Although India has been less vulnerable than other developing countries because of fairly diversified exports (p.354), its dependence on external capital for financing deficits and capital accumulation has continued. Writing in 1986, Ghosh understandably does not address the impact of the

reorganization of former Soviet republics and Eastern European states in discussing India's relationship with the contemporary world economy. Her references to the Soviet bloc focus on the potential for crowding out developing countries, reducing their access to capital from global markets. It is here that Santosh Mehrotra's book comes in handy to gauge the nature and degree of India's relationship with the Soviet Union. While he does not address the likely impact of changes in the Soviet Union on India given the altered political situation, his detailed analysis of the Indo-Soviet relationship provides the basis for another set of relationships, those between the internal and the external, and the potential hazards therein.

Mehrotra's objectives are well-defined. He primarily covers the Indo-Soviet relationship between 1970–85, demonstrating this relationship to be significantly different from Soviet relations with other developing countries (chapter 3). This special relationship with India arises from complex geopolitical dynamics (chapter 2). Despite a few factual errors,[8] Mehrotra has been able to demonstrate that the transfer of know-how (and not "know-why") by the Soviet Union to India has been effective, and this is reflected in the significant technological capability achieved by India. However, he does not cover what the alternative technological choices for India were, nor does he undertake any comparison between Soviet and Western technology on the grounds that India's choice of technology was limited at the time, and furthermore, comparison of technologies would entail a separate study (p. 4).

British capital in India could not have succeeded without indigenous merchants, capitalists, and financiers. In fact, as Washbrook argues, this incorporation was really the process of "excorporation," by which various local interests pulled in British capital to use to their own advantage.

Mehrotra discusses how the postcolonial Indian state's emphasis on public investments was influenced strongly by nationalist elements of the ruling class, Listian and Fabian socialists, and Soviet planning (chapter 2). The Soviet Union viewed the Indian state as anti-imperialist and the Indian ruling class as "progressive" against feudalism (pp. 24–26). The reluctance of the United States to participate in India's public sector allowed the Soviet Union to provide aid and loans coinciding with India's five-year plans. Mehrotra discusses Soviet aid flows (chapter 4) and argues that such aid was used to bolster bilateral trade with India (chapter 8). The Soviet bilateralization of the relationship with India has been explained in part by the foreign exchange problem faced by both countries (chapter 7). Trade with the Soviet Union was based on rupee-ruble exchange, allowing India to save hard currency for certain imports. The relationship was consolidated as the Soviet Union's relationship with China soured, and as Pakistan entered the Washington axis. India had a favorable balance of trade with the Soviet Union in part due to the limited availability of goods that India desired (p.145). The heavy emphasis on import-substitution industrialization and the bilateral relationship with the Soviet Union reduced the pressure on India to export to hard-currency areas.

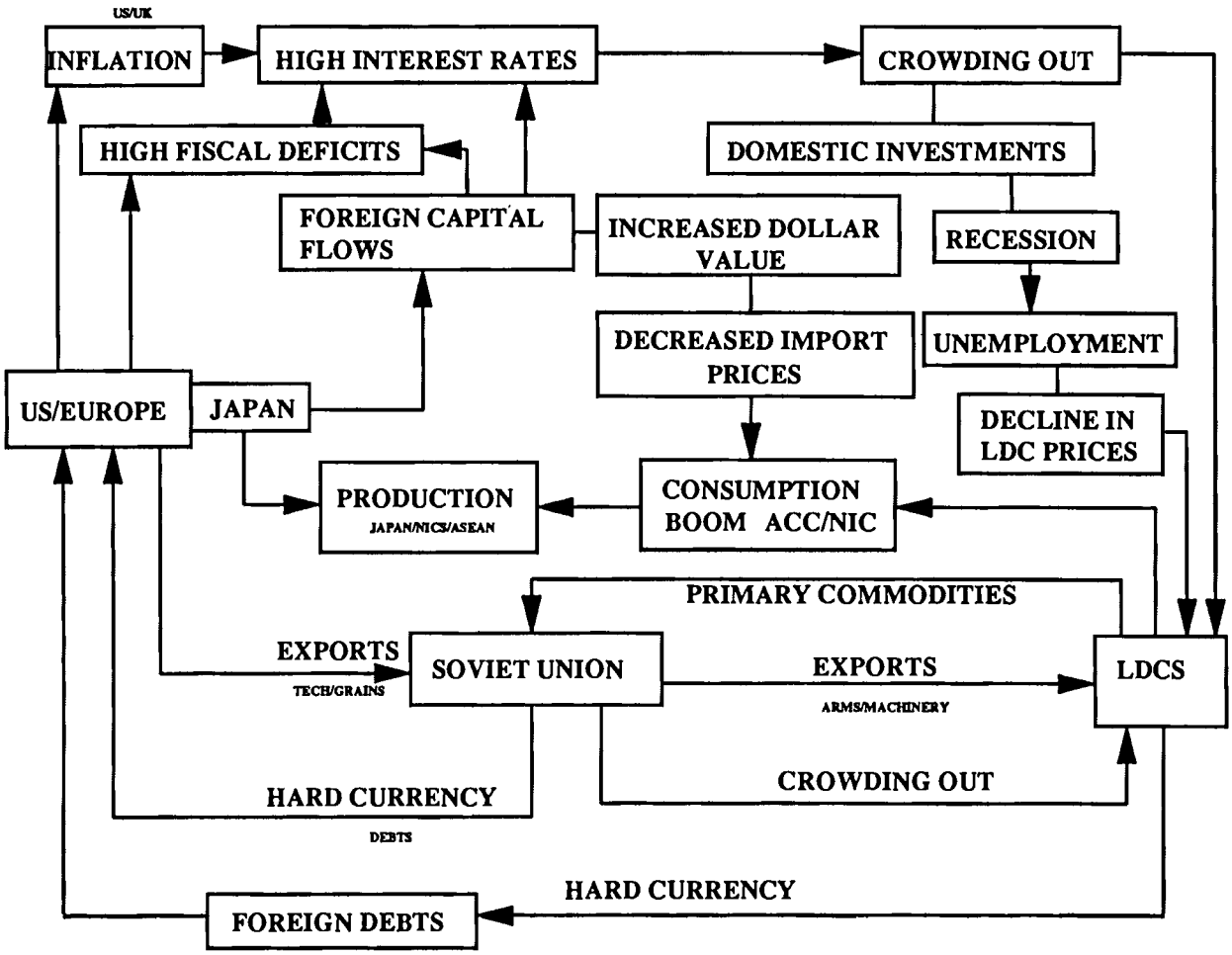
Centralized planning, aimed at rapid industrialization of the Soviet Union, created shortages in both agricultural and industrial sectors. Internal problems made the world market an important source for imports and hard currency. The Soviet Union's slow technological development compared with that of the West, as well as grain shortages, compelled its greater participation in the world capitalist economy (pp. 30–33). This meant that the Soviet Union needed a steady source of convertible hard currencies to pay for imports from hard-currency markets (pp. 36–38). One way of financing grain and technology imports was through arms exports to developing countries paid for in hard currencies. India was an exception to this for the geopolitical and economic reasons discussed above. According to Mehrotra it has not been proven conclusively whether the Soviet trade surplus with LDCs was used for paying off its debts to Western banks (p. 46).

Bilateral aid and loans on soft terms from the Soviet Union to India remained at a high level throughout the first three five-year plans (1951–66), going directly to finance projects in the public sector (pp. 63–69). These projects covered steel, heavy machinery, mining, turbines, pharmaceuticals, and others. However, Mehrotra criticizes Soviet aid on several grounds (pp.74–87). Not only was aid tied to projects and to source, but the Soviets preferred near-turnkey projects, preventing Indian management from unpackaging the technology and hence the breakdown of costs. Most of these projects had no specific delivery schedules for machinery and other inputs, and no time period specified for completion of projects. There was also no time limit on how long Soviet engineers would remain in India to train Indian management, as well as little standardization due to frequent design changes in equipment and machinery, making indigenous technological development difficult.

The Indian public-sector units have been able to absorb Soviet technology despite these problems (pp. 130–31). Some of these public-sector units have been able to reverse-engineer Soviet technology, modifying and adapting it to Indian conditions. This was in part because the Soviets did not have commercial interests the way Western suppliers did, and hence there were fewer restrictions about how the technology was to be used. The Soviet Union also extended assistance for oil exploration when Western firms declined to refine cheaper Soviet crude. Two benefits of acquiring Soviet technology stand out: hard-currency savings by importing from the Soviet Union, and emphasis on using local resources. However, the cost of turnkey projects has been high for India, even though little foreign exchange was involved (pp. 133–35). Furthermore, like its Western counterparts, the Soviet Union did not transfer the most recent technologies. Additionally, inefficiencies resulted from the bureaucratic interactions between India and the Soviet Union.

8. These errors are pointed out in another review of Mehrotra's *India and the Soviet Union,* Bernard D'Mello's "Indo-Soviet Trade and Technology Transfer," *Economic and Political Weekly,* vol. 26, no. 29 (20 July 1991), p. 1,740.

Vulnerabilities in the Integrated World Economy



Source: Compiled by Author
Notes: ACC=Advanced Capitalist Country; NIC=Newly Industrializing Country

According to Mehrotra, the bilateral nature of Indo-Soviet relations was not sufficient to dampen the vulnerabilities inherent in external trade links. For example, India remained a participant in the classical international division of labor, supplying low-value-added manufactures to the advanced capitalist countries and primary products to the Soviet Bloc. The Soviet Bloc emerged as an important market precisely because the industrialized Western countries could not absorb such traditional exports from India (p. 164). Furthermore, quantitative restrictions limited Indian exports to the Western countries, making Soviet markets a natural target. There was the possibility that Indian exports to the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe were being redirected to hard-currency markets by the Soviet Bloc. However, the author disputes this view (p. 163). A large chunk of production in export processing zones was directed to Soviet markets (p. 185). However, with declining markets, many export-oriented units in India folded.

India's exports, on the whole, have not performed well. Several factors are responsible: a trade regime obsessed with internal development, an increase in the domestic consumption of traditional products, and the inelastic nature of primary cash crops (p.182). In the 1960s the dependence of Indian exports on the Soviet market exhibited similar fluctuations in export earnings and terms of trade (pp. 187–95). At a time when prices were rising, oil imports from the Soviet Union contributed to the adverse terms of trade (p. 200). However, the redeeming feature of Indo-Soviet trade is that no hard currencies are involved, hence fluctuations in export earnings have less of an impact on India's hard currency balance-of-payments position. But the vulnerabilities exist, especially the regional ones Ghosh discusses.

Writing before the Soviet collapse, the author predicts the continuation of the special relationship between the Soviet Union and India at the same or even increased levels. Credits

Marxism as an interlude to global capitalism? Both isms bypass this self-employed recycler who relies on local market forces. General processes and long-term trends of the world-system can be fully understood only by seeing how particular regional dynamics and patterns relate to them.

will be forthcoming, Mehrotra argues, from the Soviet Union for the purchase of machinery and other industrial equipment. However, the author could not have foreseen the turbulent changes that have taken place recently in the Soviet Union, and he does not account for the massive economic liberalization process underway in India.

Conclusions

While Mehrotra's analysis of Indo-Soviet relations is useful, it is very unlikely that the old patterns of Indo-Soviet relations will be a good guide to future relations. I would, however, add that there is reason to believe that existing relations will continue between India and the reconfigured republics of the former Soviet Union since both have hard-currency problems. With the economic crisis in the advanced capitalist economies, Western aid will be very limited for both the Commonwealth of Independent States and LDCs. While the commonwealth may crowd out the LDCs for international capital, countertrade between the two regions will likely continue to be mutually beneficial in some respects.

However, as the now former Soviet Union and its Eastern European bloc enter the world economy, their participation will be influenced as much by internal conditions as external links and the associated vulnerabilities. The integrative and often disruptive nature of international links between various regions of the world economy can be examined in the diagram on the previous page, "Vulnerabilities in the Integrated World Economy," which shows the interrelationships between LDCs, the Soviet Union, and the world economy.

The interrelationships and the potential disruptions associated with external linkages can be summarized as follows. The massive fiscal deficits of the United States, resulting from unproductive defense outlays among other things, compelled monetary authorities to raise the interest rates. The resulting recessionary policy was deliberately induced to control inflation in both the United States and Thatcher's Britain. Foreign capital, particularly Japanese, was drawn in by the high interest rates to finance the fiscal deficits. Skyrocketing interest rates crowded out both U.S. domestic investments and borrowing by LDCs. Furthermore, the high value of the dollar lowered import prices and boosted production in selected overseas locations, especially in certain market niches in Japan and Southeast and Northeast Asia. At the same time, low prices of imports from poorer LDCs, in conjunction with reduced availability of capital from the world market, slowed down potential growth in the LDCs. The possibility of the former Soviet Bloc crowding LDCs out of the capital market is real. However, the United States, the Soviet Union, and the LDCs have incurred unproductive expenditures on arms build-up and are now reeling under long-term trade and fiscal deficits. The specter of long-term debts also looms large.

The emerging linkages in the world economy involve both integration and differentiation, two sides of the same process of increasing international links. While integration may result in mutually beneficial linkages, the process of differentiation demonstrates that the global capitalist system leaves very few states sheltered from vulnerabilities, especially the poorer LDCs. If these vulnerabilities become generalized in various regions of the world economy, and if the

former Eastern Bloc is incorporated into the world economy, then Wallerstein, despite slighting and misspecifying internal dynamics, may be correct after all. For one thing, the singular nature of the world-system is indeed being consolidated as it reforms, reincorporates, and reintegrates various regions. This appears to be the general process. On the other hand, the particularists/internalists are also correct, since it was precisely the internal problems, as in the case of the former Soviet Bloc and changing class relations in India, that have made these two regions participate more in the global capitalist system on their own volition.

Theoretically, then, there is no correct combination of the weights to be attached to the general and the specific, just as no one really knows the best state-market mix for an economy. Furthermore, this mix is constantly changing. Should successive approximations resulting in abstraction be one way to include the most salient processes? Would this not violate the specific details and nuances of these processes? These questions can be asked repeatedly, as they are important methodological questions.

Rhetoric aside, a growing number of scholars would agree that middle-range approaches are the most appropriate for interpreting reality. In addition, rather than a dichotomous approach, such as core/periphery or internal/external, a more meaningful approach would be to synthesize the linkages between the global system and the region in question. Sugata Bose attempts to resolve the tension between the internalists/particularlists (Bayly and Washbrook) and externalists/generalists (Wallerstein) by emphasizing the relational features of linkages between the world economy and South Asian economies. His own study of agrarian social formations in colonial Bengal shows not only regional variations in their articulations with the world economy but also how "networks [through flows of capital, skill, and labor] were moulded, reordered, and rendered subservient by colonial capitalism but never quite torn apart" (p. 16).[9]

While Mehrotra's book is of a different genre, his work on Indo-Soviet relationship can be viewed as a link between the peculiarities of the relationship within the world economy context. It underscores the attempt by India and the Soviet Union to resist the global capitalist system by forging independent relationships outside the larger system. Large structures, big processes, and long-term trends of the world-system can be fully understood only when the complex patterns that emerge at the level of regions are acknowledged and seen as they relate to the larger system. Just as South Asia shaped and was in turn shaped by British capital, particular conditions in the contemporary world-system shaped the Indo-Soviet relationship. In both historical periods, the relationships have been and are subject to the general vulnerabilities of the world capitalist economy.

9. Sugata Bose, *Agrarian Bengal: Economy, Social Structure, and Politics, 1919–1947* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986). ★

Notes from the Field: Anticommunalism in South Asia

The following six *Notes from the Field* items have been assembled by our guest editor for this issue, Amrita Basu, as examples of the many attempts at opposing communalism in South Asia. The groups represented here approach communalism from a variety of perspectives, and their statements reach as far back as January 1989 and are as recent as December 1993. Most present issues that are of continuing concern, but some involve calls to action in response to specific incidents, such as the death threat to Taslima Nasrin, whose life is still endangered. Three of the selections focus on the Hindu nationalist movement in India, another is about its Muslim counterpart in Bangladesh, and two others address religious nationalism in South Asia more broadly. These six selections enable us to view communalism from different angles and provide additional information about certain aspects of it, such as the police and government complicity highlighted by one of the selections and mentioned in others.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the sampling isn't as broad or as varied as it might be. Although all the selections are about South Asia, half of them were written in New York! One of the authors in New York states that it is advantageous to be "far removed from the restrictions that govern the relations between citizens of the various South Asian countries," and that "here we have the space to begin to address these issues honestly and collectively." On the other hand, the Indian Citizens in India group questions the vantage point of Indians living abroad.

Likewise, some observers believe that the anticommunal struggles described here reflect the "secular elite" line of northern India, as opposed to the anti-Brahmanism line that is more prevalent in southern India. The anti-Brahmanism line challenges Hinduism as such, particularly the caste system, and has produced mass mobilizations in large parts of India involving *dalit* (untouchable or Scheduled Caste), lower-caste, and peasant audiences. This campaign gets much less publicity, even when it has a march like the one it had not that long ago in Kolhapur with about twenty thousand people! Some feel that whether political struggles assume the form of anti-Brahmanism rather than anticommunalism may well be related to the extent of caste as opposed to communal domination in southern in contrast to northern India. In any event, we hope that the *Bulletin* will be able to present the anti-Brahmanism perspective in a future issue.

It goes without saying that in our presentation of the communalism issue we have confined ourselves to *anti*communal activism. We open the *Bulletin* to dialogue with those who disagree with the views presented here, as long as they can convince us that their presentations will move us and our readers toward greater understanding and are intended to promote justice and freedom.

We have presented the six items chronologically. All but one of the pieces have been published or circulated previously, and we have edited them only lightly for the sake of clarity, ease of reading, and conformity with our format and the literary conventions we follow. We have also deleted some sections that we felt would be less relevant to general readers, and have indicated these places with ellipses. We hope the authors will agree that the integrity of their works has been preserved, and we thank them for the use of their material.

The Editors,
January 1994

Activists taking a moment to rest during a peace and anticommunal march in Ayodhya. In South Asia communal loyalties, prejudices, and conflicts arising from religious identities are threatening democracy as well as endangering people's lives, and thus a large number of groups have arisen to oppose this communalism, six of which are presented in this Notes from the Field section.

On the Struggle against Communalism

Published below is a document adopted at the founding conference of the Sampradayikta Virodhi Andodan (SVA) in January 1989.

by the Sampradayikta Virodhi Andolan,* January 1989

1. The SVA is a group of concerned individuals formed in November 1984 specifically to engage, to the best of our capabilities, in an all-around struggle against communalism. It shall expand through a process of co-option, with all members possessing the right to freely evolve and push for individual and specific points of view within the broad ambit of its program and perspectives. All decisions are to be made through open, democratic discussion, and as far as possible, through consensus.

2. It has begun its work by trying to evolve a framework and understanding through a process of debate among various persons and groups. The fact that this debate is likely to continue for a long time is not seen as a hurdle, but as a necessary and healthy aspect of the struggle.

3. Communalism must be understood, first and foremost, not in the Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh variants and manifestations, but in general as an ideological and political method. It is rooted both in the power-hungry delusions and fantasies of certain obscurantist intelligentsia, and in their common hatred for democracy and secular values. Communalists use the most intolerant and sectarian interpretation of their respective religious traditions to mobilize a mass following. During the national movement, neither the Indian National Congress, which was in the forefront of patriotic aspirations, nor other nationalist parties and groups could successfully combat communalism, which always worked in tandem with imperial interests. This weakness led to the wresting of state power in a vast part of the country by the communalist Muslim League (which began disintegrating at the first opportunity of democratic expression based on adult franchise), and the infiltration of obscurantist and communal elements of all hues into the ranks of the Congress Party. Why did all this happen, and what have been the consequences of this massive failure in nationalist tradition? Both sympathizers and critics of the Congress Party must search for serious answers to these questions.

4. Something went wrong long ago with the concept of Indian nationhood. Sectarian definitions of Indianness persisted through the decades, so that today it appears axiomatic that while Sikh extremism and Muslim obscurantism are antinational, Hindu communalism is synonymous with nationalism. Those who talk of "Khalistan" or the "Muslim nation" are considered traitors, but those who demand a "Hindu *rashtra*" (Hindu nation) are supposedly patriots. But Hindu communalism is not the philosophy of all Hindus and never was, nor is Khalistan or the Muslim nation the slogan of all Sikhs or all Muslims. It is highly dangerous, therefore, to allow Hindu communalism to gain currency as a "nationalist" ideology when in fact it spreads hatred and contempt against millions of Indian citizens. Hindu *rashtra* is a prescription for several more partitions of India.

5. While opinions differ as to the nature and deeper historical significance of caste and community in India, some broad agreement is possible around the understanding of communalism in its immediate aspect. Politically speaking, it can be seen as the form of mobilization of protofascist movements, whose aim is nothing less than the transformation of state power by solidifying authoritarian trends in society at large. It is used by both those who rule and those who aspire to rule. Its growth constantly corrodes the democratic institutions that were attained at great cost and are now the object of a tug-of-war between fascism and social democracy.

6. The reasons why we perceive communalism as the Indian form of fascism can be stated briefly. In place of a humanistic rationality and patriotism, it substitutes religious frenzy and emotionalism, irrationality, and concepts of nationality based on religion (Hindu *rashtra,* Khalistan, Muslim nation, and so on). It locates an "internal enemy"—just as Hitler located the Jews—and makes it the target of mass hatred. The instigators of such hatred then become the leaders of militant communal organizations. It legitimizes the murder of innocent people as part of a notion of retributive justice, and formalizes the links between criminals and politicians. It attaches the value of national pride and the rights of citizenship to communally defined groups, thereby undermining the very foundation of a liberal constitution, namely secular citizenship. And it uses democratic institutions and civil liberties to gain control of fragments of state power with the aim of subverting and destroying these same institutions and freedoms.

7. Communalism has had several important successes. The partition of India is one. But the creation of a theocratic state led

*This document was originally published in the *Lokayan Bulletin* (Delhi), vol. 7, no. 6 (Nov.–Dec. 1989), and it is reprinted here courtesy of the *Lokayan Bulletin.*

to social and political stagnation in Pakistan, immeasurably strengthened Hindu fascist groups in India, and far from resolving the problem, made it worse. The two-nation theory has demonstrably failed, but communalists in the subcontinent still cling to it. . . . Although the two-nation theory is discredited, communal attitudes persist and grow even in the high reaches of administration, including the organs of law, order, and justice.

8. The SVA firmly rejects and denounces any communalist definition of nationalism. It does not hold that religious belief necessarily leads to communalism, nor that one has to be an atheist in order to resist communalism. We do not consider the Muslim nation, Hindu *rashtra,* or Khalistan to be viable entities, and insist that questions of provincial autonomy be kept free from communalist interference. Indian nationalism would be far more healthy if it were grounded in the common experience of the people in struggling against British imperialism. We believe that the age-old popular *lokdharm* tradition of doing one's duty in the world according to the circumstances also plays an important role in the struggle against communalism.

9. Communalism has several roots and sources dispersed over historical time and contemporary reality. It is also a reflex of the all-around crisis that has been building up in the country over the past two decades. Deprived sections of the people are mobilized around obscurantist issues by the very same vested interests (both existing and emerging) that are responsible for the uneven, iniquitous, and unjust forms of national development. Certain sections of bureaucracy, political leadership, and landed, commercial, and industrial classes have encouraged and abetted communalists because they generate movements that can serve as a bulwark against the constitutional ideals of socialism, secularism, and democracy when these become inconveniently popular. Communalism can provide sanction to increased state militarization. For the rulers it can control the results of the economic and political crisis.

10. Movements that define themselves in terms of extreme hostility to specified communities, which justify and organize mass murder by reference to highly intolerant, inhuman, and irrational ideologies, can be said to be clearly protofascist. Support and protection from the state renders them a crystallized fascist movement. Such movements exist today, and are openly striving towards a political and ideological transformation of the state. . . .

11. Apart from its "normal" targets, fundamentalist resurgence is always highly oppressive of women. The quid-pro-quo between the government and two brands of fundamentalists over the Ayodhya dispute and the Muslim Women's Bill is a glaring example of this fact. The SVA firmly believes that all Indian women have a vested interest in combatting communalism.

12. Communalism in Punjab has a long history. . . . Partition (1947), the communalization of language, and the pragmatic use of communalism as a political tactic by certain parties and the central government have all contributed to the current situation. Only a mass movement by the common people of Punjab for democratic issues and to cleanse places of worship of unscrupulous and murderous elements can ultimately defeat terrorism. Today the Left in Punjab is engaged in such an effort. Its cadres have been waging a valiant struggle in defense of their basic humanist and secular values, for which all Indians owe a debt of gratitude. Their struggle, however, can never succeed in isolation, and citizens elsewhere have a duty to combat communalism wherever they may be. We must launch public pressure on the government for the implementation of relevant provisions of the

Activists in Delhi demonstrating against the use of religion to divide women. The Sampradayikta Virodhi Andolan (SVA) believes that all Indian women have a vested interest in combatting communalism. This photo and the previous one are by Sheba Chhachhi, and they are from Radha Kumar's The History of Doing: An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India, 1800–1990 *(New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1993), p. 164. They are reprinted here courtesy of Sheba Chhachhi and Kali for Women.*

Indian People's Representation Act and the Indian Penal Code for prosecuting communalists instead of appeasing them, and for cleansing the state structure of such elements instead of protecting them.

13. It is imperative that the communal issue be taken up in earnest by the numerous socially conscious and politically active citizens in the country. Efforts must be made to organize a linkup of all those who feel the urgent need for a strong resistance to communalism. Further successes in the current ongoing communal mobilization will represent steps in the fascist reconstruction of the Indian state, which is a grave danger to the democratic, socialist, and secular values enshrined in the Indian constitution. All those who have a vested interest in keeping democracy alive should try and set aside narrow considerations in order to construct an anticommunal movement.

14. The Sampradayikta Virodhi Andolan is an effort in this direction. It will attempt to subordinate ideological differences to the unity required for joint action over simple, secular, humanist ideals. Forms of organization and resistance will be clarified over time through activity, with the understanding that these will be peaceful and nonmilitaristic.

Political Implications of the Demolition of the Babri Mosque

by the Association of Indian Progressive Study Groups (AIPSG), New York, 13 December 1992

The destruction of the Babri Mosque on 6 December 1992 was not only a calculated affront to the honor and sentiments of all Indians but a deliberate attempt to prepare the ground for even greater tragedies.

Over one thousand people have been killed in incidents of violence throughout India. There has been a tendency to label these incidents as "Hindu-Muslim riots," but as is typical in most instances of communal violence, there is mounting evidence that many people killed have actually been the victims of police gunfire. Why has such violence been used against innocent people? One wonders what stopped the government and the security forces from maintaining the peace and preventing the demolition of the mosque as the terrible events of 6 December were unfolding. Why has such tolerance been shown toward the attackers in Ayodhya, who were permitted, for over a day an a half, to demolish the mosque, build the "temple foundation," and leave the city in special buses and trains without being apprehended, even after the state had been under direct president's rule for more than twenty-four hours? It is hard to understand how, despite such questions, the prime minister of India, P. V. Narasimha Rao, could claim at a recent news conference that he did not feel in any way responsible for what took place.

The Complicity of the Central Government

It should never be forgotten that it was a Congress (I) government that presided over the rekindling of the dispute in 1986 when the mosque was reopened. Successive central governments and the present Congress (I) government in particular deliberately presented the Ayodhya issue as a dispute between some Hindu and Muslim leaders and experts, with the government trying to "strike a deal" between the "two sides." This was one of the main ways this diversionary issue was willfully dragged out and communalized.

Official culpability must also be situated in another, more compelling context. It is unfortunate that the Indian state and its successive governments have, in various acts of commission and omission, been one of the main factors in the communalization of life in recent years. The Meerut (1987), as well as Nellie (1983), Delhi (1984), and Bhadalpur (1989) massacres are just some of the examples that have been well documented. What needs emphasis is that nobody has been brought to justice, especially not the police and the paramilitary who were involved. With the tone being set from the highest levels of society, it is hard to avoid reaching the conclusion that the Indian police and the paramilitary's well-known communal animus is, if not officially sanctioned, certainly tolerated in a broad way. If no one from the Uttar Pradesh police and the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) was charged with the Malliana and Hashimpura killings in 1987, despite overwhelming evidence of their involvement, is it surprising that the same security forces were seen egging on the destruction of the Babri Mosque? Why would the government not want to punish those involved in instances of communal violence?

The Role of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Leaders

For its part, the leadership of the BJP must be held fully accountable for the consequences of its irresponsible and malevolent politics. Now that a 450-year-old place of worship has been so senselessly demolished, all Indians and particularly the supporters of this party should ask themselves what problem this has solved for the people? For a time longer than since the BJP leaders have been pushing their divisive and diversionary agenda, the people of India have been struggling to establish a rule where their fundamental rights could be enshrined and realized. It is shameful that forty-five years after independence so many of our countrywomen and men are condemned to hover on the brink of utter destitution, and it is even more shameful that rather than making *this* the issue, the leaders of the BJP tried to divert the people's attention toward a nonissue. Besides sharing responsibility for countless lives lost in various incidents of violence, the leadership of the BJP must surely stand guilty of helping to ensure that the problems of our people remain unsolved.

On the Banning of the Rashtriya Swayansevak Sangh (RSS), Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), and Other Organizations

The Indian government has announced the arrest of Advani, Joshi, and various others for sedition and for inciting communal disharmony. Aside from the irony that such an indictment is being made by a man who was the home minister during the Delhi massacres of November 1984 and whose present cabinet contains at least one individual well-known to be directly involved in those massacres, it is pertinent to ask: is this the first time that Advani and associates have incited communal disturbances? It is well known, for example, that his *rath yatra* (procession) of 1990 was directly linked to the communal carnage that took place at various cities along his route. If the government has today chosen to charge him with some crimes, surely this could have been done before, especially since Advani and his supporters had long advertised their intention of tearing down the mosque. Why was this not done?

On 9 December the government of India announced its decision to ban the RSS (a paramilitary nonparty Hindu organization),

Muslims are turned back as they attempt to go out to get a few necessities during day curfew in Bombay toward the end of the January 1993 riots in Bombay after the destruction of the Babri Mosque. The Association of Indian Progressive Study Groups (AIPSG) questions why the government and its armed forces were passive during the demolition of the mosque but quick to shoot civilians, mostly Muslims, in its aftermath. Stressing the danger of further repression of all popular movements, the AIPSG points out that around that time many parts of the country were virtually under army rule. This picture is by B. B. Yadav, and it is from The Pioneer, *16 January 1993, p. 1. It is reprinted here courtesy of B. B. Yadav and* The Pioneer.

the VHP (the RSS religious organization), the Bajrang Dal (the VHP youth organization), the Jamait-i-Islami (an extremist Muslim political party), and the Islamic Seva Sangh (a Muslim service society). Our group, the AIPSG, completely dissociates itself from this action of the government. In our view, the move to ban these groups rests on the flawed logic that these various communal forces are the ones solely responsible for the disaster that has taken place and is continuing to take place, while the government with its trigger-happy security forces is completely above reproach.

In addition, we would like to strongly emphasize that criminal acts must be recognized as criminal acts, and ideological and political views, no matter how reprehensible, should not be confused with infractions of law. If crimes have been committed—and they undoubtedly have—by the leadership and activists of the VHP, BJP, and others, as well as by the security forces, they must be punished according to the full extent of the law. It is instructive to recall that even though the complicity of the Congress (I) Party in the 1984 communal massacres was so widely known, this party was not banned. The only conclusion one can draw from this is that the banner under which criminal and communal actions are performed is more important than the actions themselves. In other words, if the central government is involved, it is fine, but if some force that is temporarily in contradiction to the government is involved, it is not.

We must be extremely vigilant in not allowing this "militant" talk of banning organizations to be used to sidestep the demand that all those guilty of terrible communal crimes be swiftly brought to justice. Another legitimate concern is that the Indian government, which in previous years has raised its hand against individuals and organizations simply because of their ideological view or affiliation, is establishing yet another precedent that people's organizations across the country will find quite costly.

The Danger of Further Repression

With the demolition of the mosque, a very broad front of attack against the people has been opened up. While there have been many calls for Roa's resignation, we should have no illusions about the forces waiting in the wings. Various factions exist within the Congress (I) government at this time, many of which have well-known links with militarist and chauvinist elements inside, but by no means exclusively confined to, the country's armed forces. It is an indisputable fact that the army and paramilitary forces have been steadily playing a larger and larger role in the political affairs of the country. Many parts of the country are under virtual army rule today. While the growing role and brutality of the army is a reflection of the crisis-ridden rule of the civilian authority, it most certainly finds a resonance in the strategic and political aspirations of the military caste as well.

Behind all this, of course, lie the aspirations of sections of the Indian ruling circles who wish to make India into a major power by raising the question of an "Islamic threat" from within and without and by enshrining the supremacy of violence over politics. The question, therefore, of why the government and its armed forces were passive in the face of the demolition of the mosque and why they were so quick to shoot civilians, mostly Muslims, in its aftermath, or why they were so brutal in Assam,

Nagaland, Kashmir, and other places, has to be very seriously thought about. There is a method to this madness. If the situation continues to deteriorate, there is real danger of greater repressive measures against all popular movements, accompanied by an enhanced role for the military. With the political impasse continuing in various regions, and with the liberalization program not seeming to go anywhere, there are not a few among the Indian ruling circles who feel that some drastic change is necessary. In a sense, what is unfolding is the process of raising the politics of anarchy, violence, and terrorism that exists in Punjab to an all-India level. This is where the danger lies, and both the BJP and the Congress I leadership are busy preparing the ground.

Geopolitical Implications

The regional situation has been considerably inflamed by the demolition of the mosque. With the events unfolding in India and now in Pakistan and Bangladesh, a grave danger exists of an unending cycle of violence that is bound to have far-reaching implications for the stability of the entire region. Within these circumstances the growing role and position of the Indian army in the country's politics poses a great danger to the people of India and the region. It is important that people be very vigilant against any communal call for "revenge," either inside or outside India. We call upon the fraternal peoples of South Asia to see that this destructive process is stopped and that the manipulation of this issue by any force be firmly opposed. The United States and other powers will be extremely happy to watch the unfolding of a "Hindu-Muslim conflict" on a national and regional level, into which they may then feel "compelled" to intervene with their "humanitarian assistance."

Demonstrating in Delhi in 1989 against the Ram Janambhoomi agitation with the slogan "Ram's presence is everywhere; do not instigate violence in his name." The AIPSG feels that there is a fundamental flaw in the way political power is exercised in India, and that the people should have much more say in the country's affairs. This photo is by Sheba Chhachhi, and it is from Radha Kumar's The History of Doing: An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India, 1800–1900 *(New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1993), p. 165. It is reprinted here courtesy of Sheba Chhachhi and Kali for Women.*

The Need for New Politics

The 6 December events and their aftermath show that we cannot afford to be complacent. There is an urgent need for the country's problems to be solved in favor of the people. The first step should be to rally around the demand that those responsible for the appalling destruction of the Babri Mosque and for the subsequent violence across the country—whether by their direct action, inaction, dereliction of duty, or incitement—be held strictly accountable for the consequences.

Ideological and political views and stands, unless they find their reflection in cognizable offenses, can only be dealt with within the framework of political processes and discussions. Let the government and the ruling party tell the people of India what part of the political, economic, and social program of the BJP, VHP, and others they object to, and let them also explain to the people how their vision of the country is going to be any different. Most importantly, the government should end the persecution and imprisonment of those who disagree with both of these visions and who are striving for the renewal of the country on a democratic basis. In this context, we strongly condemn the assassination of Hirdai Nath Wanchoo, the respected Kashmiri human rights advocate who was gunned down in Srinagar on 5 December by "unidentified gunmen," widely believed to be from the undercover state security forces.

As events unfold further, it is clear that there can be no more returning to politics as usual. We cannot keep on pretending that events such as these are aberrations or that they were caused only by some fundamentalists, as the government is actually trying to suggest. People cannot and should not reduce their politics to a one-point program of trying to defeat a particular party, ideology, or trend in isolation from the impulses in the larger polity from which such forces derive and create their space for maneuvering.The Ayodhya tragedy and its aftermath, and the roles played by the BJP, Congress (I), the security forces, and others surely indicates that there is a fundamental flaw in the way political power is constituted and exercised in India. Every phenomenon that unfolds in the economic, political, or social sphere is indicative of how the interests of the people are being rendered superfluous within the existing political process. When a political process does not empower the people to articulate, amplify, and enforce their own demands, it can only create a space in which those with power, money, and influence are able to fully occupy the centerstage and launch a broad attack on the rights of the people. The activities of the BJP is one such thing that these conditions favor. The violation of human rights by the state is another. This rise of militarism is yet another. As long as the people do not win the right to have a say in the affairs of the country, a right that the authorities are reluctant to recognize, the situation will not change in their favor. This is the basis on which the Indian people must unite.

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An Appeal to All Our Brothers and Sisters in Southern California, U. S. A., to Place Facts, Not Pseudofacts, before Real Indians Who Live In (Not Just Visit) This Great Country of Ours

This advertisement appeared in the 26 January 1993 issue of the* Indian Express *in India in reply to an advertisement placed by a group of nonresident Indians (NRIs) from Southern California in the 16 January issue of the same paper. Feeling that the reply from the "Indian Citizens in India" brings out a lot of facts and puts things in the right perspective, the Concerned Nonresident Indians in America decided to pay to run the advertisement in the 12 February 1993 issue of* India Abroad *for the benefit of all NRIs.

by Indian Citizens in India

PSEUDOFACT: Injustice to 80 percent of the population to appease a 13 percent segment.
FACT: It is the majority that has been appeased (not the 13 percent minority). The government of India has reserved 25 percent of all jobs in government institutions for members of Scheduled Castes (SC) and Tribes (ST) *only if they are Hindus.* In other words, a *dalit* who converts to Islam or Christianity would lose his entitlement to SC/ST reservation (affirmative action quotas). The government has no reservations for Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, or any other community.

PSEUDOFACT: Different set of laws for chosen people.
FACT: Yes. The Hindus are not subject to a national civil code, but to a code legislated for them alone, which offers exclusive benefits to the Hindu Undivided Family. Similarly, Syrian Christians, Parsis, and others, too, have their own personal laws, as do the Muslims.

PSEUDOFACT: Special privileges to one state or one region over others.
FACT: No Muslim anywhere in India can own land in Kashmir—unless he is a Kashmiri. Similarly, no Hindu anywhere in India can own land in Kashmir—unless he is a Kashmiri. Moreover, articles 371 and 371A–371H contain special provisions in respect to Maharashtra, Gujarat, Nagaland, Assam, Manipur, Andhra Pradesh, Sikkim, Mizoram, and Arunachal Pradesh.

PSEUDOFACT: Suppression of a six-thousand-year heritage to buy favors from a few.
FACT: Our six-thousand-year-old culture includes *ghazals* (a kind of song), *kathak* dance, Christian chorale music, the Taj Mahal, the Khajuraho temple, the Jain temple at Shravanabelagola, and many others. Which one of these are *not* our heritage?

PSEUDOFACT: Denial of equal rights and privileges to all.
FACT: Yes, over 80 percent of Muslims as well as Scheduled Castes and Tribes live below the poverty line—as do a vast majority of Hindus and people from other communities. They do not have equal opportunity to work, live in dignity, and pursue a better life.

PSEUDOFACT: The banning of nationalistic organizations under a false pretext.
FACT: The government is right in banning pseudonationalistic organizations such as the Jamait-i-Islami Hind (a Muslim political party), Vishwa Hindu Parishad (a Hindu religious group), and other communal organizations to protect democracy.

PSEUDOFACT: The curtailment of freedom of individuals without cause or trial.
FACT: No individual's freedom should be curtailed unless s/he is engaged in criminal or communal activities. For example, smugglers, communal politicians, and so on.

PSEUDOFACT: Of the one million nonresident Indians living in the United States, over nine hundred thousand Hindus call Bharat their mother.
FACT: It's interesting to note that nine hundred thousand Indians who prefer to live in the United States claim to regard as home a country they chose to desert. Are these not pseudo-Indians? Is it not presumptuous of these Indians who left "mother Bharat" and caused a severe brain drain to dictate how we Indians who remained behind should run our country?

PSEUDOFACT: Hindus have only one place (other than Nepal) to call home. Their roots are in Bharat.
FACT: Wrong. Not just Hindus but all *Indians* have one place to call home. Their roots are in India.

PSEUDOFACT: Hindus want pure secularism, total pride in their heritage, and peace to all.
FACT: Wrong. All *Indians* want real secularism, total pride in their heritage, and peace to all.

PSEUDOFACT: Do we call the Jews fundamentalist when they practice their faith, worship their God, and call Israel their home?
FACT: Fundamentalists are those who deny others the right to practice their faith. Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Jains, Parsis, Buddhists, Christians, and Jews who practice their faiths in mutual tolerance and call India their home can never be called fundamentalists.

Gentle NRIs, please check your facts before wasting precious dollars to run full-page ads. Don't be pseudo-Indians. If you feel strongly about India, come back and live here.

SAHMAT Performance and Exhibit for Cultural Understanding Results in Criminal Charges: A Selection of Accounts

The material below has been excerpted from **From SAHMAT** *(New Delhi), October 1993*

A Little Night Music at Ayodhya: *Free Rhythm* Organized by the Safdar Hashmi Memorial Trust (SAHMAT)

A group of artists, actors, musicians, and dancers celebrated Independence Day this year with a concert in Ayodhya. The small town in Uttar Pradesh became a symbol of religious tension in India when Hindu fanatics destroyed a 464-year-old Muslim mosque there last December because they believed it occupied the site of a temple built on the birthplace of the Hindu god Rama. Their action fanned a blaze of riots across the land in which more than two thousand people died.

The show, *Muktnaad* (Free rhythm), was sponsored by the Safdar Hashmi Memorial Trust, named for an actor murdered in 1989 by a mob in Sahibad, an industrial township near Delhi. Since his death the organization has put together more than twenty exhibits and performances to promote secularism. . . .

Time

Ayodhya Comes to Delhi

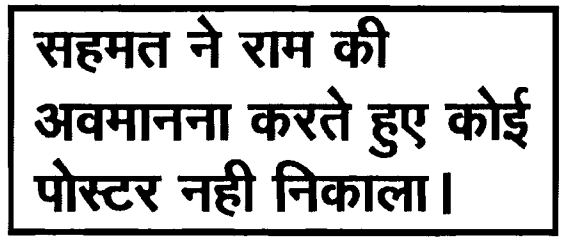
Organized as part of *Muktnaad,* the week-long program on the culture and traditions of India, . . . the exhibition, christened *Hum Sab Ayodhya* (I am Ayodhya), tries to understand the character of the religious city and what it has stood for. The emphasis is on the cultural and architectural aspects of the city. While the opening of the week-long cultural endeavor coincides with the golden jubilee celebrations of the Quit India Movement, it culminates at Ayodhya, along the banks of the Saraya River, on Independence Day. . . .

***The Hindu,* 10 August 1993**

Ayodhya

The exhibits seek to convey one message clearly: Ayodhya is not representative of just the temple-mosque dispute, neither is it the property of any one group, organization, or political party. It is representative of the Indian culture and belongs to all Indians. . . . .

***The Pioneer,* 11 August 1993**



Muktnaad, Ayodhya, 15 August, 1993, midnight to 9 A. M.

On the banks of the Sarayu, SAHMAT staged a unique performance and gathering of artists from all over the country. By the very fact of its being held, the concert posed a challenge to the forces of communalism who have sought to present Ayodhya, and the traditions associated with it, as their special preserve.

We had planned the event convinced that such a gathering of creative people would be a powerful symbolic counter to the narrow ideology currently being projected throughout the country.

Today the secular republic of India and the right of its citizens to freedom of thought, speech, and expression are under siege, and appear fragile as never before.

Muktnaad challenged this siege. Not by speeches. Not by *dharnas* or demonstrations. But simply by bringing together in performance, against the exquisite skyline of Ayodhya, some of our finest musicians, dancers, singers, theater persons, and painters.

Present at the Ram ki Pairi Ghats were about seven hundred creative artists, intellectuals, and media persons. They came from Delhi, Chadigarh, and Simla, from Calcutta and Patna, from Trivandrum and Bangalore, and also from the towns of Uttar Pradesh. Street theater groups from Lucknow and Patna performed along the way en route to Ayodhya. The latter even managed a popular and well-received performance in Faizabad despite prohibitory orders.

The program began at midnight. As the recording of Jawaharlal Nehru's speech, addressed to the nation forty-six years ago, was played, hundreds of *diyas* (floating candles) were lit and floated in the water. The performance, which continued till after nine in the morning, then began. . . .

SAHMAT, October 1993

On the *Hum Sab Ayodhya* Exhibit

. . . . The exhibition was held simultaneously between 9 and 15 August in sixteen cities other than Faizabad. It went off without a single unhappy incident. SAHMAT has received supportive reports and requests for taking the exhibition to other venues. However, there was an attack in the one city of Faizabad on 12 August, where a band of about fifteen people, identified as members of the Hindu nationalist Vishwa Hindu Parishad and its youth orgaization, the Bajrang Dal, came and tore down the exhibition, alleging that two references in the text panel titled Rama Katha were objectionable.

Subsequently the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leadership launched a campaign of lies where they dropped the context of the entire exhibition and spread the word that SAHMAT had issued a "poster" in Faizabad/Ayodhya "depicting" Rama and Sita as brother and sister. The exhibition had eighty-three display units with an extensive text and cross-referenced archaeological, art historical, and photographic examples on the history of the city and people of Ayodhya from ancient times to the present. The Rama Katha (the original story of Rama, which no longer exists but was rewritten as the Ramayana) was one text unit, and the reference objected to consisted of a few words under the subhead of Buddhist and Jaina versions.

The issue was debated in the Parliament for a week, leading to a statement by the speaker on 20 August that convinced SAHMAT that the BJP's vicious slander had for the moment shaken the faith: that there was not, perhaps for obvious reasons of political discretion (and expediency?), the will and the desire to resist the BJP—even among the more left, liberal, and secular parliamentarians.

On this account SAHMAT announced on 21 August its decision to withdraw the exhibition from the Nehru Museum, Teen Murti, Delhi, the only venue where it was scheduled to run longer. On the same afternoon the police, on behalf of the lieutenant governor of Delhi, came and confiscated the text panel on the Rama Katha under Section 95 of the Criminal Procedure Code.

Meanwhile, SAHMAT had already been charged in Faizabad under section 153 (wantonly giving provocation with intent to cause riot . . .); section 153-A (promoting enmity between different groups on account of religion and so on, and doing acts prejudicial to the maintenance of harmony); section 295-A (deliberate and malicious acts intended to raise religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs); section 298 (uttering words, and so on, with deliberate intent to wound religious feelings); section 505 (statements conducing to public mischief); and section 120-B (criminal conspiracy). The cases were filed on 16 August, and we came to know about it on 25 August.

Thus SAHMAT is legally designated as a criminal organization and its identifiable members and those who helped with the exhibition—artists and designers, eminent historians from Jawaharlal Nehru University, Aligarh, Allahabad, and the Indian Council of Historical Research in Delhi are liable for arrest if the state wishes to use its draconian powers. *Hum Sab Ayodhya* has not only been vandalized by the Sangh Parivar (the Hindu Right network), but also misrepresented by state action, in fact and in the conscience of the public.

All along there had been a strenuous effort on SAHMAT's part to give the facts, provide the original text of the Dasharath Jataka in Pali and in English, and invite the members of Parliament and the press to see the exhibition. But so contagious is the effect of malice and malafide propaganda that everyone simply assumed that there must have been a poster with some sort of an image, and that this was fly-posted in Ayodhya clandestinely by fools or mischief-makers from SAHMAT. It is amazing how, at least to begin with, even the disinterested intelligentsia believed this version, even those who should know how cunning the Sangh Parivar is at generating symbols of discontent and launching them as inversions, blatantly insulting the intelligence of their audience and yet "succeeding" in targeting truth and riddling it with lies.

Just before the exhibition closed, SAHMAT succeeded in getting about ten members of Parliament to come and see it. They were aghast at the way the disinformation had been allowed to mislead the House and it is then that Somnath Chatterjee, Bhogendra Jha, and Ram Vilas took up the cause, the latter in eloquent defense and direct confrontation.

A few points need to be made about the text panel on the Rama Katha that was so shamefully distorted by the Sangh Parivar. The text based itself on a contribution on the Rama Katha by Romila Thapar that appeared in the recently published book edited by Sarvepalli Gopal, *Anatomy of a Confrontation*. The panel referred back, via that course, to the sources available to ancient Indian historians of all ideological persuasions. Taking Valmiki's Ramayana, and Tulsi's Ramacharitamanas as "standard" versions, or at any rate the most popular and best known, it mentioned very synoptically, variations of the Rama story to suggest how, as a generative legend of ancient times, it adapts itself to different characterizations, to different moral and ethical purposes, and indeed to different norms of iconography. It proliferates into different stories of kinship, lineage, kingship with or without divine descent. In referring to the Buddhist's Dasharath Jataka, possibly one of the oldest versions of the Rama story, the sibling relationship of the couple that ruled for "sixteen thousand years" establishes the symbolic purity of the royal line within that particular tradition. The same tradition holds that Rama is a Bodhisattva, belonging to the same lineage from which the Buddha is descended. Hardly a denigration of the divine personage in that tradition, or on our part!

The criticism of the panel would rather be the fact that it was too sketchy, that it merely pointed out, in a brief line or two, the fact of affinity and transformation of mythic material within the long narrative stretch of this legend. The criticism would also come from the fact that this brief text implied that there can be no hegemonic discourse on the subject. Both of these criticisms are to my mind valid—it is true that there was a desire to release the narrative into its several layers of symbolic meaning that become, each in its own tradition, a source of pedagogy for people of all faiths and even beyond, and for the aesthetic contemplation of atheists as well. If this is considered culpable, then one admits to it while defying with all one's might the criminality imposed suddenly, and virtually for the first time in India, on such a transparently secular position. . . .

But this is precisely what has come in for mockery. Almost everyone is recommending to SAHMAT (on hindsight, let it be said) a dose of pragmatism on the ground of realpolitik and

Painters from Bengal and Patna setting up their giant canvases around the Ram Ki Rairi Ghats in Ayodhya the evening of 14 August 1993 before the Muktnaad *program and exhibit began. About seven hundred artists, intellectuals, and media people were involved in this exhibit of paintings, dance, music, and theater intended to challenge the forces of communalism that claim Ayodhya as their special preserve. This photo is by Pablo Bartholomew, and it is courtesy of Pablo Bartholomew and Ram Rahman.*

occasionally also on the plea of public sentiment. Both these issues need to be debated at length. Let me say only that if there is a question involved it is of principle, that in India we must fight to maintain the freedom to transmit knowledge as a foundation of that more controversial issue of the freedom of expression. If there is a politics to it, this should be distinguished from realpolitik, which cannot be built into the vocations of intellectuals and artists without serious peril to their practice and vision. Indeed, it is this pragmatism itself that would help destroy the minimal liberal space in which not only artists and intellectuals but our journalists and parliamentarians also operate.

So why dissemble and mock this freedom, why ask for self-censorship, which in this circumstance is more than a judicious act—it is a hasty retreat. And all this before the event; before the establishment of the Hindu *rashtra* (nation)! Aside from the exhibition, what is being recommended is intellectual chicanery and a poverty of spirit—when in fact that is all people like us can swear by, the courage of truthful and many-layered articulation. . . .

We are all asking, now that we have been embroiled in a national debate and criminal proceedings, what is our course of action. There is of course the court of law, and this will be moved by some eminent lawyers who have stood against bigotry and the compromise of the state before. There is the enlightened part of the press, which as you will have already seen in finely balanced and sometimes bold editorials, is beginning to understand the dangerous implications of allowing the triumphalism of the Bharatiya Janata Party to work in the field of culture as it has in politics, and they have chastised the state for its open partisanship with communal forces. There are finally, and not least, academics who have come forth with an appeal signed within the space of one morning by scores of scholars, writers, and journalists. Major figures in the intellectual field have addressed press conferences and student gatherings in the most passionate and fearless terms, stating that this case affects the free transmission of knowledge, and that they would want to participate in the act of taking the battle further afield through their teaching activities. . . .

As follow-up action these intellectuals have offered that together with SAHMAT they would like to help make people participants in the political and legal battle forced upon SAHMAT, thus making a chain of supporters alert to the progress of fascist pressures of which we shall all be victims sooner or later if we do not resist now. We should remember that defeat begins with equivocation, and then the fascist victory is seemingly inevitable.

It is for supporters of SAHMAT, who have participated in its activities and hold faith with its principles, to suggest what might be our course of cultural action given the current climate and circumstance. SAHMAT is not a monolith, it is persons and groups who join in and take its activities across different parts of the country. Above all else the concrete activity of resistance, which has taken on the irreversible movement called Artists against Communalism, has to continue in the smallest gesture as in large collectives. . . .

Geeta Kapur, October 1993

SAHMAT
8 Vitthalbhai Patel House
Rafi Marg, New Delhi 110001, India
Phone: 371-1276

Taslima Nasrin: A Background Paper

by Meredith Tax, Chair, International PEN Women Writers' Committee, New York, 5 November 1993*

Taslima Nasrin, thirty-one, is a Bangladeshi poet, novelist, and feminist journalist. Because of her writing she has been condemned by a Muslim fundamentalist group that put a price on her head and organized mass mobilizations in Dhaka aimed at her death or imprisonment. Nasrin lives in Dhaka and is unable to leave because the government has confiscated her passport. International action is required to save Nasrin's life and secure her rights.

Until this year, Nasrin was known mainly for her poems and her newspaper columns, which often focus on the condition of women and the role of religion in their oppression. Her most recent novel, *Lajja* (Shame), tackles an even more taboo subject, communal discrimination and hatred. *Lajja* describes events in Bangladesh following the December 1992 destruction of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya, India, which led to two months of communal riots during which two thousand people were killed. As Nasrin puts it:

> While Hindu fanatics were killing innocent Muslims, Islamic fanatics were killing Hindus in Pakistan and Bangladesh. As a human being, I tried to show how a Hindu family was persecuted by Muslim fanatics in Bangladesh. I also wrote that the administration was of no help to the minority Hindus. . . . I tried to say, shame to all dark aspects of fundamentalism. In the book I said, let's uphold humanism instead of using religion to kill each other.

Released in February during Bangladesh's biggest book fair, *Lajja* won critical acclaim and sold fifty thousand copies in six months. But Islamic fundamentalists considered the book blasphemous and unpatriotic, and a group of them even threatened to assault her at the fair. In July, after months of pressure, the Bangladeshi government banned the book on the grounds that it had "created misunderstanding between communities." The ban, seen as a sign of the growing influence of religious extremists, was publicly protested by many writers and human rights activists.

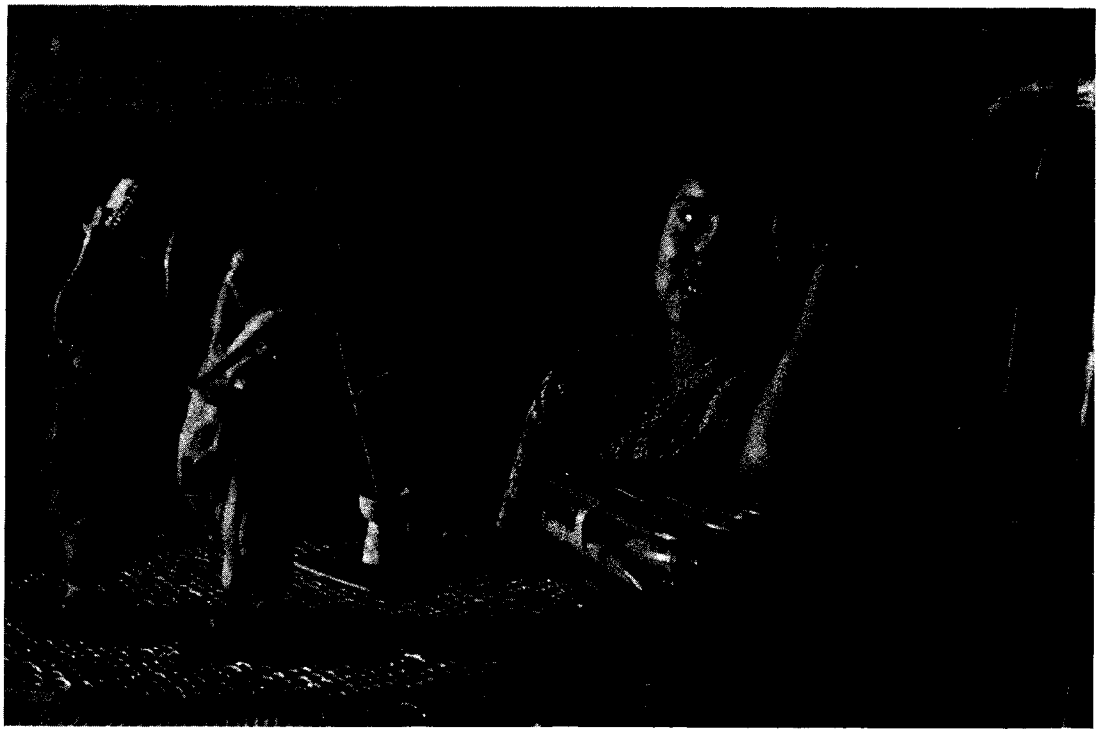
According to Bangladeshi women's rights organizations, there has recently been a noticeable increase in crimes of violence against women as *salish* (religious) courts have begun to take the law into their own hands, going back to punishments outlawed for many years. In January a newly married couple in Sylhet was buried chest deep and stoned for *zina* (adultery) because the woman had previously been divorced; in May a woman in Madhukhal was burned at the stake, also for *zina*. In response to such events, Nasrin's newspaper columns became more militant. On 1 September 1993, a *salish* court in Kaligani, led by the superintendent of the local *madrassah* (religious school), condemned a sixteen-year-old girl to being publicly beaten with 101 lashes; she had been accused of having an affair with a Hindu boy. After the beating, the girl died, allegedly a suicide. Taslima Nasrin called upon the government to indict the *mullahs* (Muslim teachers and interpreters of religious law) involved for premeditated murder.

On 16 September five hundred members of the Bangladesh Sahaba Sainik Parishad or Council of Soldiers for Islam (CSI), a militant group based in *a madrassah* in Sylhet, held a rally calling for Nasrin to be executed by the end of the month for "blasphemy and conspiracy against Islam, the Holy Koran, and its prophet." On 23 September they offered a bounty of $1,250 for her death within fifteen days. On 2 October they staged another march, this time threatening a general strike in Sylhet on 7 October unless she were arrested by that time. Strikes aimed at individuals are unprecedented in Bangladesh. The CSI also demanded the arrest of another prominent feminist poet, Begum Sofia Kemal, who is eighty years old, along with three male intellectuals, Ahmed Sharif, Kabir Chowdhury, and Sayedur Rahman, all of whom stand for the separation of church and state.

Nasrin appealed for police protection. She was denied it on the grounds that such a request would have to come from the home secretary. She approached the home secretary to no avail. Having no other recourse, she went to court. On 7 October the chief metropolitan magistrate ordered an investigation into the activities of the CSI and ordered the police to protect Nasrin. The police did not respond. Only on 20 October were two policemen finally stationed at Nasrin's home; according to Bangladeshi human rights activists, this was in response to letters from Amnesty International and the Writers in Prison Committee of International PEN.

On 21 October clerics who lead the CSI held a press conference in Dhaka to announce they were spreading the campaign against Nasrin throughout the country. They set 18 November as the date for mass mobilization in Dhaka to demand that the government execute her; if the government did not do so, they would try her by the Shariat (a body of Islamic law) in their own court. This is illegal, but the government has not been prosecuting such offenses. They also

*On 9 November 1991 the Assembly of International PEN voted to establish a Women Writers' Committee to enable women writers to know one another and act together to defend human rights. This committee aims to amplify the voices of women internationally by encouraging translation, initiating cultural developments, and resisting censorship. It now has members in over forty countries and has begun to publish a biannual newsletter, *Network/Le Réseau/La Red.*



Writer Taslim Nasrin with three dolls of working women that are usually on her desk in her home in Dhaka, Bangladesh. It is hard to believe that this is someone whose writing has so enraged some Muslims that they put a price on her head and have marched fifty thousand–strong to demand that she be tried for blasphemy, a crime they feel should be punishable by death. The International PEN Writers' Committee has organized a campaign calling on Bangladesh to protect Nasrin, prosecute those who have sought her death, lift the ban from her book, and restore her passport, which was confiscated in January 1993. This photo is by Saibal Das, and it is from India Today, *15 December 1993, p. 91, reprinted here courtesy of Saibal Das and* India Today.

announced the inauguration of a new campaign to rally Islamic clerics to demand the death penalty for crimes against Islam, the Prophet Mohammed, or the Koran. Members of the group have already brought charges against two of Nasrin's books in private legal suits, on the grounds that they question Islamic law and incite women against men; the Sylhet court has agreed to hear these complaints.

Bangladesh is currently led by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) under Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia. Closely aligned with the BNP is a Muslim party, the Jamait-i-Islami, which holds twenty seats in Parliament. The Jamait-i-Islami is rumored to be linked with the CSI. In the words of one Bangladeshi writer, "Islamic extremists have a small base in Bangladesh. By capitulating to their demands in order to preserve her electoral coalition, Prime Minister Zia is giving them the space and credibility to become a real threat to human rights." This is also the opinion of Taslima Nasrin, who says in a recent fax:

> I am in grave danger. Making a death threat and offering a reward to execute it is a serious criminal offense in our country; surprisingly, this offense went unheeded by the government, who have done nothing to take action against it as required by law. The court ordered the police to protect me, but this order was not carried out; I was given no protection. The fundamentalists are moving ahead with their program, and the government of Bangladesh itself has become part of this barbarism; they are trying to find a pretext to ban all of my fifteen books. But I am determined to uphold my ideals.

In January 1993 Nasrin's passport was confiscated at the airport as she was en route to a conference in India, on the grounds that she had lied about her identity because she listed her occupation as a journalist, not a doctor. Though she is known primarily as a poet and journalist, Nasrin has a medical degree and at that time was employed by the Ministry of Health. She has since tried to quit her job to protest seizure of her passport, but the Ministry of Health has refused to accept her resignation. Nor has she been able to get another passport. Some groups are now calling on the government to prosecute her on charges of espionage for India.

Editorialists—and fundamentalists—in Bangladesh frequently compare Taslima Nasrin to Salman Rushdie. Beyond gender, there are important differences in the situation of these two writers. Rushdie lives in England, and despite his dreadful danger, he has been able to rely on the protection of England, while it took international protests to win even two police guards for Taslima Nasrin. Rushdie is also world famous, while Taslima Nasrin, like her persecutors, is little known outside her own region and language group. Many feel that only a sustained international campaign can put enough pressure on the government to counteract pressure from extremists within it.

International PEN calls for strong, sustained international pressure upon the Bangladeshi government to restore Nasrin's passport; lift the interdiction upon her novel *Lajja;* give her real, effective, and continuous police protection; and prosecute those who are trying to have her killed.

Update

The case of Taslima Nasrin is now internationally known. Salman Rushdie mentions her wherever he appears, she had an op-ed piece in the *New York Times,* and she is a major news story in India and Bangladesh. The 31 December 1993 issue of *Time* magazine had a page on her, and as a result it was banned in Bangladesh. All this international attention has saved Nasrin's life for the moment, though she can seldom leave her apartment and not alone.

The whole affair is a substantial embarrassment to the Begum Khaleda Zia government, which says that the matter has been blown out of proportion by people seeking "to malign the total freedom of expression enjoyed by all" in Bangladesh (press release, 26 October 1993). Nasrin's book *Lajja* remains banned, however, and the government has still not given back her passport.

Under pressure, the Council of Soldiers of Islam have retracted the price they put on her head, claiming it was all a misunderstanding—they had intended the money for her psychiatric care, since she must be crazy! In December 1993, however, fifty thousand Islamists marched on Parliament to ask the government to jail Nasrin and try her for blasphemy. The march was broken up by the police. The religious right is now calling for legislation making blasphemy a federal crime punishable by death.

The Women Writers' Committee of International PEN has invited Nasrin to speak in New York on 16 May 1994, and she has accepted. We would appreciate cooperation in helping to get her passport back so she can travel freely. Letters should be sent to Prime Minister Zia and the U. S. State Department. We are also interested in hearing of other instances of gender-related censorship; please write to the New York address given below.

Meredith Tax,
February 1994

APPEALS SHOULD GO TO:

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia
Office of the Prime Minister
Dhaka, Bangladesh
Fax: + 880-2-881-0115 (PM's residence)
+ 880-2-813-244 (PM's office)
+ 880-2-813-243 (PM's press secretary

President Abdur Rahman Biswas
Dhaka, Bangladesh
Fax + 880-2-813-243

COPIES TO:

International PEN Women Writers' Committee
532 W. 111th Street, #75
New York, NY 10025, USA
Fax + 1-212-932-0678

International PEN Writers in Prison Committee
FAX + 44-71-253-5711

LETTERS OF SOLIDARITY TO:

Taslima Nasrin,
Flat No. 1/904
Eastern Housing Apartment
8 and 9 Shantinagar
Dhaka 1217, Bangladesh

Excerpts from the *New York Times* Op-Ed, 30 November 1993

Sentenced to Death
by Taslima Nasrin

. . . . I will not be silenced. Everywhere I look I see women being mistreated, and their oppression justified in the name of religion. Is it not my moral responsibility to protest? Some men would keep women in chains—veiled, illiterate, and in the kitchen. There are sixty million women in my country; not more than 15 percent of them can read and write. How can Bangladesh become a modern country and find its place in the world when it is dragged backward by reactionary attitudes toward half its people?

It is my conviction that politics cannot be based on religion if our women are to be free. Bangladesh must become a modern secular state; family laws based on Islamic principles should be replaced by a uniform code ensuring the equal rights of women.

The country has laws against religious courts and their *fatwas* [Mulim edicts to have people killed for religious reasons]. But they are ignored. This year, in the village of Chatakchara, a young woman was stoned to death on orders from a local court because she had married again after a divorce. In Kalikapur village *mullahs* accused another young woman of fornication and sentenced her to a public flogging with 101 lashes of a broom. She died soon after, allegedly a suicide. There are other such cases, girls from poor families in isolated areas, illegally sentenced by extremist interpreters of Islamic law.

For speaking out against such crimes, I too have been condemned to death. Why does the government not prosecute the fanatics who institute these *fatwas?* Many believe it is because the administration has come to power with the help of the fundamentalists. . . .

Is our prime minister, Khaleda Zia, afraid to stand up to the fundamentalists? Does she not see that by placating them she allows them to grow stronger, and the time will come when they turn upon her too?

Bangladesh is my motherland. We gained our independence from Pakistan at the sacrifice of three million lives. That sacrifice will be betrayed if we allow ourselves to be dominated by religious extremism. Bangladesh should stand for women's equality and harmony between people of different faiths.

The *mullahs* who would murder me will kill everything progressive in Bangladesh if they are allowed to prevail. It is my duty to try to protect my beautiful country from them. I call on all those who share my values to help me defend my rights. By doing so, they will help save Bangladesh.

A Report on the Concerned South Asians Coalition (CSA): One Year after Ayodhya

This is a report on the work of Concerned South Asians, a New York-based coalition of citizens' groups active in opposing communal (religion-based) politics in South Asian communities.[1]

by Radhika Lal, December 1993*

CSA is one of a number of groups that became active in North America in the wake of the communalization of politics that led to the destruction of the Babri Mosque in India in December 1992.[2] It aimed at opposing such communalization and facilitating the development of a pluralist, democratic perspective within the expatriate communities here in the United States, sections of which had ideologically and materially supported the religion-based nationalist politics responsible for the recent violence in India.

CSA has attempted to articulate this politics within a South Asian perspective. This has less to do with the assumption of common cultural identity than with a felt need to work collectively in dealing with the issue of the communalization of culture and politics in South Asian countries and in expatriate communities here. Whatever the reasons for the rise of communalism in these different countries, once in existence they have proved to be mutually sustaining. This process has complicated the resolution of existing intercountry conflicts over matters such as the sharing of common river waters, flood control measures, cross-country migrations, and so on (problems that by their very nature require collective as opposed to nation-based solutions), which in turn have fed back to heighten communal feelings. Many of us have come to feel that one of the luxuries of being away from our homes, far removed from the restrictions that govern the relations between the citizens of our various countries, is that here we have the space to begin to address these issues honestly and collectively.

CSA's membership is fairly mixed in terms of gender, politics, cultural background, religion into which individuals have been born, occupation, and the South Asian–South Asian American axis. For the past year we have been meeting regularly at least once every fortnight (and often weekly). In the beginning these meetings were mainly planning sessions for the public events and joint actions that CSA undertook with other anticommunal and progressive groups. Over time, however, our focus has changed. This is, in part, because we have begun to get burnt out by such activities and to doubt their efficacy, but also because many of us have come to believe that we need to deal much more with issues of culture, and perhaps deploy cultural strategies as well. Also, the difference in emphases and concerns between South Asians with a primary attachment to their home countries and second-generation South Asians here who are part of two worlds have begun to be seen as issues that need to be thought about and worked through as much as questions relating to the nature of our interventions. How far should we go in articulating political and cultural alternatives? What do we think about the idea that has been floating around of an "Indian Peace Corps"? Do we need to articulate positive solutions, or can we stop at more procedural recommendations? How can we push issues of diversity and democracy?

Three trajectories seem to have guided our activities thus far. They have been followed with varying degrees of emphasis,

1. CSA was initially comprised of the following groups: Ekta (New York), the Committee for Democracy in Bangladesh, Sakhi for South Asian Women, Manavi, the Indian Progressive Study Group (New York), the Consultative Committee of Indian Muslims, the Organization for South Asian Unity, the Pakistan Progressive, the South Asian AIDS Action, the American Federation of Muslims from India, the Organization for Universal Communal Harmony (TOUCH), the South Asian Gay and Lesbian Alliance, the Tagore Society, *Samar Magazine*, and Alami Urdu Markaz.

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2. Other coalitions active in anticommunal politics include the Alliance for a Secular and Democratic South Asia (Cambridge, MA), the Coalition for Communal Harmony (Washington, DC), the Coalition Against Religious Bigotry (Amherst, MA), India Alert (Madison, WI), Pittsburghers for Communal Amity in India (Pittsburgh, PA), the India Progressive Action Group (IPAG) (Austin, TX), the Coalition Against Communalism (Berkeley, CA), the Coalition against Communalism (Irvine, California), Canadians for a Secular India (Toronto,Canada), Desh Pradesh (Toronto, Canada), and Non-Resident Indians for Secularism and Democracy (Vancouver, Canada).

and that has also determined whether CSA has been more involved with South Asian politics or with South Asian–American concerns at any given point in time. The focus of the first has been the political and cultural struggles being waged in South Asian countries. Here the aim has been to develop an understanding of the situation and the processes through which the communalist/nationalist elements have managed to articulate hegemonic political and cultural strategies and "solutions" to underlying social problems and concerns involving cultural, social, and political identities. The second has involved the adoption of a considerably more oppositional stance against communal-nationalist forces. The third has had as its focus the need to articulate positive alternative forms of intervention.

In keeping with the first trajectory, CSA has organized numerous talks and public meetings. . . . As for the the second trajectory, our attention has been focused on exposing the links that communal groups in the South Asian countries have with some members of the expatriate communities here, in introducing a note of dissent and in questioning the legitimacy that supposedly purely cultural organizations such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council, VHP) enjoy here where many are unaware of the nature of their activities in India. A campaign with this focus was undertaken jointly by the different coalitions and culminated in a successful rally for communal harmony at the site of the VHP's "Global Vision 2000 Conference" in Washington this summer.

With its focus on pushing alternative modes of intervention in the South Asian countries as well as here, the third trajectory is one that CSA and other anticommunal coalitions in the northeast have progressively been turning their attention to, and a lot still remains to be done. This area is complicated given the diversity of the South Asian community itself—the least of which is the difference in life-worlds, possibilities, and concerns of those who are of South Asian parentage but live and work here as opposed to those South Asians who still have a primary attachment to South Asian countries. There are areas of overlap and areas of difference in the concerns articulated along this axis, and we need to spend some time to work through the issues and perhaps strike some sort of balance given the makeup of our groups and constituencies.

A start was made at the joint rally held on the occasion of the VHP's "Global Vision 2000 Conference." In keeping with the slogan "Dollars for Development, not for Destruction," one of the participating coalitions sought to provide conference attenders with a list of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) with whom they could work in a noncommunal fashion. Later, to a degree, some of these possibilities were actualized when funds and materials collected through grass-roots efforts here for those affected by the earthquake were channeled to them through NGOs and local groups in India, free of the politics of the aid agencies and with a more long-run stake in creating possibilities for people there.[3] CSA coordinated its efforts with the Nivara Hakk Suraksha Samiti, a Bombay-based shelter-rights group that has previously worked effectively to empower slum dwellers and to defuse communal tensions in the slums.[4]

As for articulating alternative forms of intervention or interconnections with progressive political groupings here, we have only just begun to have discussions on how we can be more responsive to the concerns of second-generation South Asian–Americans. In this context, we are lucky in that recently a number of South Asian activist groups (including CSA) in the New York–NewJersey area have been meeting to explore "progressive coalition building and creative strategies for activism."[5] These meetings have also raised the issue of whether the different groups can and should adopt one another's agendas and concerns. For CSA, the case of Taslima Nasrin in the Bangladeshi context* and the issue of personal laws in the case of India have also brought to the fore issues that we have faced on the gender question: How to take up gender-based concerns when opposing the communalization process? How can we deal with the potential conflict between minority rights and the right to equal treatment without regard to one's religion or gender when fundamentalists of another religion claim to be pushing a policy of equality as well? How might we oppose the activities of fundamentalist Muslim clergy without appearing to oppose Islam itself, especially at a point in time and place where Islam is perceived as being inherently problematic? While we have taken positions that we can stand by on these issues, we have not always had the space to work through the issues more generally.

It was helpful when a sister organization, Sakhi, organized a panel discussion on communalism's effect on South Asian women in their conference titled "South Asian Immigrant Women: Our Social Realities" in May 1993, and it is toward this end that CSA itself is organizing a community-based workshop in February 1994 concerned with issues of gender, religion, and social identity.

If you would like to participate in CSA or would like further information about CSA activities, please call:

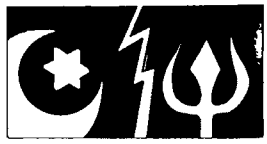
(212) 865-4934,
(212) 995-8206,
(718) 469-1728, or
(212) 724-3233.

3. For more information on internships with NGOs arranged by the India Development Service (IDS), contact Shiben Ganju at (708) 799-3305.

4. For a first-hand report on the working of this group, contact Anuradha Das at (212) 327-7664.

5. Some of the groups involved in this initiative are: Concerned South Asians; the Indian Progressive Study Group, New York; the Lease Drivers' Coalition (concerned with the organization of all lease drivers, a large majority of whom are South Asian); South Asian Aids Action, the South Asian Gay and Lesbian Alliance, *SAMAR* (*South Asian Magazine for Action and Reflection*), SAKHI for South Asian Women; and YAAR, a group concerned with issues of racism in this culture.

*For more on Taslima Nasrin, see the previous *Notes from the Field* selection in this issue, pp. 72–74. ★



Glossary

Ashta Bhuja: an eight-armed Hindu goddess invented by the Samiti as a symbol to unify members.

Bharamata: a Hindu goddess both the RSS and the Samiti use to symbolize their ideal model of femininity and the territoriality of the Hindu nation.

Bajrang Dal: the VHP youth organization.

BJP, Bharatiya Janata Party: the Hindu nationalist political party.

CSI, Council of Soldiers of Islam: a militant Muslim group based in a religious school in Sylhet, Bangladesh.

Bhagavad Gita: literally the Song of God, Krishna's message to Arjuna in the Mahabharata.

***Devi Mahatmya*:** an ancient Sanskrit text glorifying the goddess (feminine energy), used by the Samiti but ignored by the RSS.

Durga: a Hindu goddess famous for combating demons.

Durga Vahini: the VHP-affiliated women's organization.

***fatwa*:** Muslim edict to have someone killed for religious reasons.

Hadith: a body of Islamic traditions.

Islamic Seva Sangh: Muslim Service Society.

Jana Sangh: the Hindu nationalist party that was the predecessor of the BJP.

Jamait-al-Ulema-i-Hind: an all-India Muslim revivalist organization founded by clergymen in 1920.

Jamait-i-Islami: an extremist Muslim political party.

Kali: a Hindu goddess famous for combating demons but even better known as a threat to stability and order.

***kar sevak*:** a Hindu engaged in active worldly service, usually aggressive reform in society, here meaning "temple volunteer" who has gone to Ayodhya as part of the Ram Janambhoomi movement.

***kar sevika*:** a female *kar sevak*.

Mahabharata: a Sanskrit heroic epic poem made up of ancient stories, the first known written version of which goes back to the fifth and sixth centuries B.C.

***mullah*:** Muslim teacher or interpreter of religious law.

***pracharak*:** a single, celibate, full-time (male) volunteer worker and preacher for the RSS.

***pracharika*:** a single, celibate full-time (female) volunteer worker and preacher for the Samiti.

***rakshas*:** demon.

Ramayana: a Sanskrit epic from about 500 B.C. that tells the story of Ram and his wife, Sita, incarnations of the divine who are ideals of manhood and womanhood, with Ram an ideal ruler.

Ram *janambhoomi*: the birthplace in Ayodhya of the deity Ram, said by some Hindus to have had a temple to Ram before the Babri Mosque was constructed on the site.

Ram Janambhoomi movement: the Hindu movement to destroy the Babri Mosque and build a Ram temple at the Ram *janambhoomi* site in Ayodhya.

***rashtra*:** nation.

Rashtra Sevika Samiti: the women's wing of the RSS.

***rashtra sevika*:** Samiti member.

RSS, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh: the all-male, paramilitary, nonparty Hindu nationalist organization.

RSS combine: the RSS and its affiliates—the BJP, VHP, and affiliated groups—when ideas or actions are attributed to all of these associations together rather than to any one of them.

Samiti: the Rashtra Sevika Samiti, the women's wing of the RSS.

Sangh: the RSS.

Sangh Parivar: the RSS's now-massive network of affiliated organizations.

***sanyasin*:** a person who has taken religious vows, including vows of celibacy.

***sevak*:** (male) RSS member.

***sevika*:** (female) Samiti member.

***shakha*:** daily assembly of the RSS and the Samiti.

Shariat: a body of Islamic laws based on the Koran and the traditional teachings of the Prophet Mohammad.

***swayamsevak*:** (male) RSS member.

***ulema*:** learned scholars of Muslim law and religion.

VHP, Vishwa Hindu Parishad: World Hindu Council, the RSS religious organization that in recent years has been in charge of coordinating a violent campaign against Indians Muslims. ★

Books to Review

The following review copies have arrived at our office since the last issue. We strongly prefer review essays comparing two or more books and discussing problems of approach or analysis, and we will publish reviews of individual books only if we decide they are extraordinarily important or the reviewer has some very special contributions to make. If you are interested in reviewing some of these books, write to Bill Doub, BCAS, 3239 9th Street, Boulder CO 80304-2112, U.S.A. We also welcome review essays and reviews of important works on Asia that are not on our lists, and if you ask us to get particular books for you to review, we can usually do so. For more details on our preferences, please write for a copy of our "Guidelines for BCAS Authors."

General

Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

Arif Dirlik, ed., *What is in a R?I?M: Critical Perspectives on the Pacific Region Idea* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993).

Thich Nhat Hanh, *Love in Action: Writings on Nonviolent Social Change* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1993).

Karin Aguilar-San Juan, ed., *The State of Asian America: Activism and Resistance in the 1990s* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1993).

Saundra Pollock Sturdevant and Brenda Stoltzfus, *Let the Good Times Roll: Prostitution and the U.S. Military in Asia* (New York: The New Press, 1992).

East Asia

A. Doak Barnett, *China's Far West: Four Decades of Change* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993).

Yanjie Bian, *Work and Equality in Urban China* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994).

Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang, *Modernism and the Nativist Resistance: Contemporary Chinese Fiction from Taiwan* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993).

Sidney H. Chang and Ramon H. Myers, eds., *The Storm Clouds Clear over China: The Memoir of Ch'en Li-fu, 1900-1993* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Press, 1994).

Deborah Davis and Stevan Harrell, *Chinese Families in the Post-Mao Era* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993).

Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters: Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Sung Period* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993).

John Espey, *Major Heresies, Major Departures: A China Mission Boyhood* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994).

Melvyn Goldstein and Cynthia Beall, *The Changing World of Mongolia's Nomads* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994).

Sergei Goncharov, John Lewis, and Xue Litai,, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994).

Greg Guldin and Aidan Southall, eds., *Urban Anthropology in China* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1993).

He Liyi with Claire Anne Chik, *Mr. China's Son: A Villager's Life* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993).

Jude Howell, *China Opens Its Doors: The Politics of Economic Transition* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993).

Roger B. Jeans, ed., *Roads Not Taken: The Struggle of Opposition Parties in Twentieth-Century China* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1992).

Joint Economic Committee of Congress, *China's Economic Dilemmas in the 1990s* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1993).

Michael Kau and Susan Marsh, eds., *China in the Era of Deng Xiaoping: A Decade of Reform* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1993).

Nicholas R. Lardy, *Foreign Trade and Economic Reform in China, 1978-1990* (Port Chester, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

Keun Lee, *New East Asian Economic Development: Interacting Capitalism and Socialism* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1993).

Lincoln Li, *Student Nationalism in China, 1924–1949* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994).

Tonglin Lu, ed., *Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth Century Literature and Society* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1993).

Anchee Min, *Red Azalea* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994).

Robin Munro and Mickey Spiegel, *Detained in China and Tibet: A Directory of Political and Religious Prisoners* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1994).

Ellen Oxfeld, *Blood, Sweat, and Mahjong: Family and Enterprise in an Overseas Chinese Community* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993).

Robert S. Ross, ed., *China, the United States, and the Soviet Union: Tripolarity and Policy Making in the Cold War* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1993).

Martin Schoenhals, *The Paradox of Power in a People's Republic of China Middle School* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1993).

Seldon W. Simon, ed., *East Asian Security in the Post-Cold War Era* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1993).

Steve Tsang, *In the Shadow of China: Political Developments in Taiwan Since 1949* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994).

Xi Xi, *My City: A Hong Kong Story* (Hong Kong: Renditions Paperback, 1993).

Northeast Asia

Ch'ae Man-Sik, *Peace Under Heaven* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1993).

Sir Hugh Cortazzi, *Modern Japan: A Concise Survey* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994).

John Crump, *Hatta Shuzo and Pure Anarchism in Interwar Japan* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993).

John W. Dower, *Japan in War and Peace: Selected Essays* (New York: The New Press, 1993).

Andrew Gordon, ed., *Postwar Japan as History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993).

Donald Keene, *On Familiar Terms: A Journey Across Cultures* (New York: Kodansha International, 1994).

James F. Larson and Heung-Soo Park, *Global Television and the Politics of the Seoul Olympics* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994).

Stewart Lone and Gavan McCormack, *Korea Since 1850* (New York: Longman Cheshire, 1993).

Valerie Matsumoto, *Farming and the Home Place: A Japanese American Community in California, 1919–1982* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993).

Marshall R. Pihl, Bruce Fulton, and Ju-Chan Fulton, eds., *Land of Exile: Contemporary Korean Fiction* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1993).

Frederik L. Schodt, *America and the Four Japans* (Berkeley, CA: Stone Bridge Press, 1994).

Tokue Shibata, ed., *Japan's Public Sector: How the Government is Financed* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1993).

Conrad Totman, *Early Modern Japan* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993).

Jon Woronoff, *The Japanese Economic Crisis* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992).

South Asia

Romen Basu, *My Own Witness* (New York: Facet Books International, 1993).

Sara Dickey, *Cinema and the Urban Poor in South India* (Cambridge, England: University of Cambridge Press, 1993).

John Echeverri-Gent, *The State and the Poor: Public Policy and Political Development in India and the United States* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993).
Sarvepalli Gopal, ed., *Anatomy of a Confrontation: Ayodhya and the Rise of Communal Politics in India* (London: Zed Books, 1993).
Rekha Kaul, *Caste, Class, and Education: Politics of the Capitation Fee Phenomenon in Karnataka* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1993).
Baren Ray, *India: Nature of Society and Present Crisis* (New Delhi: Intellectual Book Corner, 1993).

Southeast Asia

Barbara Watson Andaya, *To Live as Brothers: Southeast Sumatra in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993).
Asia Watch Women's Rights Project, *A Modern Form of Slavery: Trafficking of Burmese Women and Girls in Thailand* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1993).
David P. Chandler, *Brother Number One: A Political Biography of Pol Pot* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992).
Levita Duhaylungsod and David Hyndman, *Where T'Boli Bells Toil* (Copenhagen, Denmark: IWGIA [Doc. no 73], 1993).
Luis H. Francia, *Brown River, White Ocean: An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Philippine Literature in English* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993).
Ben Kiernan, ed., *Genocide and Democracy in Cambodia: the Khmer Rouge, the United Nations, and the International Community* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1993).
Kim Oung, *Who Killed Aung San?* (Bangkok: White Lotus Co., 1993).
Marvin L. Rogers, *Local Politics in Rural Malaysia: Patterns of Change in Sungai Raya* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992).
Lauries Sears, ed., *Autonomous Histories, Particular Truths: Essays in Honor of John Snail* (Madison, WI: Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 1993).
Serge Thion, *Watching Cambodia: Ten Paths to Enter the Cambodian Tangle* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1993).
Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen: Marginality in an Out-of-the-Way Place* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).
Carol Warren, *Adat and Dinas: Balinese Communities in the Indonesian State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).
Jayne Werner and David Hunt, eds., *The American War in Vietnam* (Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program Series, 1993). ★

CCAS Statement of Purpose

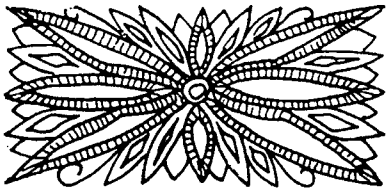
The Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars (BCAS) *continues to be inspired by the original 1969 statement of purpose of its parent organization, the Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars (CCAS). The* BCAS *board thus decided in March 1993 that even though CCAS has not existed since 1979, the* Bulletin *should include the CCAS statement of purpose at least once a year:*

We first came together in opposition to the brutal aggression of the United States in Vietnam and to the complicity or silence of our profession with regard to that policy. Those in the field of Asian studies bear responsibility for the consequences of their research and the political posture of their profession. We are concerned about the present unwillingness of specialists to speak out against the implications of an Asian policy committed to ensuring American domination of much of Asia. We reject the legitimacy of this aim, and attempt to change this policy. We recognize that the present structure of the profession has often perverted scholarship and alienated many people in the field.

The Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars seeks to develop a humane and knowledgeable understanding of Asian societies and their efforts to maintain cultural integrity and to confront such problems as poverty, oppression, and imperialism. We realize that to be students of other peoples, we must first understand our relations to them.

CCAS wishes to create alternatives to the prevailing trends in scholarship on Asia, which too often spring from a parochial cultural perspective and serve selfish interests and expansionism. Our organization is designed to function as a catalyst, a communications network for both Asian and Western scholars, a provider of central resources for local chapters, and a community for the development of anti-imperialist research.

Passed 28–30 March 1969, Boston



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The photo on the back cover shows Muslim victims of the riots in Kashmir following the 1990 attempt by Hindu nationalists to replace the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya with a Hindu temple. A key issue in the communalist struggles between Hindus and Muslims, the conflict over the Babri Mosque comes up in one way or another throughout the material in this issue about religious nationalism in India and South Asia. From 1990 until the present this conflict has resulted in thousands of deaths and much suffering and destruction. This photo is from The Hindu *(Madras), 3 February 1991, reprinted here courtesy of* The Hindu.

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