Hindutva: Formative Assertions

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Abstract

This article is the first of three in a series surveying research on Hindutva (Hindu nationalism or political hinduism), focusing on seminal articulations that set the stage for later debates, and define the directions of later politics. I review accounts of hindutva's ideological origins, from the pre–independence racialist articulations to the humanist emphases of post-independence years, to the strident culturalism of the 1990s. 'Hindutva' is formed through these successive phases of ideological assertion, as much as it precipitates and participates in a wider culture of identitarian assertions. The second essay of three focuses on prominent rhetorical constructions deployed to address hindutva polemically, and the third on hinduva as praxis.

Introduction

What is hindutva? Loosely translated as Hindu-ness or Hindu nationalism, the term has become commonplace in scholarly analyses of India, with a vast corpus of research focused specifically on cultural, religious, and ethnic nationalisms in the subcontinent, and frequent allusions to hindutva politics in the general literature besides. Hindutva, one quickly learns, is a phenomenon that shapes everything from national security to gender, science and economics to secularism and identities in diaspora. It is organically linked to Hindu*ism*, though the nature of its relationship to religious practice remains indefinite. Its politics are strategic, calculating, instrumentalist, troubling, polarizing, and seem routinely to precipitate intense debate, at best, rioting and violence, at worst. Its modalities of operation, its reliance on state complicities, and particularly its use of theories of primordiality liken it variously to ethno-nationalism, religious fundamentalism, and fascism. At the center of its organizational structure is the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh or National Volunteer Corps), around which its political wing (the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party)), its economic forum (Swadeshi Jagaran Manch), its 'world council' (the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP)), and various other groups are arranged both nationally and internationally into a *Parivar*: a family of the Sangh. It mobilizes a support base through discourses of 'othering', particularly of Muslims and other minorities, but its theories of Hindu emasculation also build into an argument avowing the need for masculinist strengthening. It oftentimes 'communalizes' pre-existing caste relations and thus significantly reconfigures social dynamics. It is predicated on an imagination of a Hindu *rashtra* (nation), personified in the figure of Bharat Mata or Mother India. It thus has an 'agenda', and even a 'lab'.

The three essays presented in this issue lift a narrative about 'hindutva' from a survey of the extensive scholarship on this topic—which highlights, above all else, its historically particular, and consequently shifting, manifestations. The sub-sections of each essay demarcate the periods in which distinct ideas, metaphors, or modes of collective action take definitive precedence over others. In the present essay, I review accounts of hindutva's ideological origins, from the pre-independence racialist articulations to the humanist

emphases of post-independence years, to the strident culturalism of the 1990s that (re)solidifies ideological stances so as to precipitate equally forceful counter-assertions. During this last phase, hindutva gains somewhat discreet political expression as assertively concerned with boundary-making and prone to violence. The second essay discusses a body of research that is, as a result, often explicitly oriented toward opposition: scholarship on hindutva becomes a prime means by which to define an increasingly urgent political opposition to hindutva as fascism and later as hate politics. The third set of studies (reviewed in the final essay) occasionally comment on origins and often hint at opposition or express ambivalence but these are generally fine-grained ethnographic accounts that document the now commonplace nature of the logics and political strategies associated with hindutva. Far more than the prior two bodies of work, these point to the emergence of a religio-cultural politics that is often so well integrated into local practices such that it becomes difficult to cordon off and categorize, thus calling for new approaches to the study of hindutva.

Taken together, these three essays track 'hindutva' in a roughly chronological arc, documenting its political forms as it variously adapts, extends, or virtually abandons classic ideological positions. The vast and varied corpus of literature on this subject can, Simpson cautions, have the ultimate ironic effect of "fool[ing] us into thinking we know what Hindutva is," while "reifying and homogenizing it and to some extent by using the same encompassing framework as its proponents" (2004, p. 136). Bearing this in mind, the three surveys that follow treat hindutva as lens on contemporary socio-politics that suggests an evolving commentary on the present (Rajagopal 2001, p. 118) a logic of seeking effective alliances, modulating ideological stances, and thus expressing outrage in a manner inflected by the pressures and demands of the time.

Racialism

The originary ideological codification of hindutva is generally credited to Savarkar's influential tracts, "Essentials of Hindutva" (c. 1922) and later *Hindutva: who is a Hindu?* (1923 [1989]), that together represent a point of departure for much contemporary analysis. Savarkar (1923 [1989], pp. 38–44) disassociated hindutva from religion, arguing that at its core was an identification with India ('Sindhustan') as simultaneously *pitribhu* (fatherland) and *punyabhu* (Holyland). The former contains the idea of a common nation and a common *jati* (which Savarkar translates as race), while the latter encompasses *sanskriti* or culture, the "rites and rituals, ceremonies and sacraments" (1923 [1989], p. 44) as well as an identification with the "sacred geography" (Eck 1998) of the land itself. In this, Savarkar allows that "Bohras, Khojas, Memons and other [Indian] Mohammedan and Christian communities" (1923 [1989], p. 43) can partially possess the attributes of hindutva, but avers that they cannot be counted among Hindus for the one reason that their holylands are elsewhere, their love divided (1923 [1989], p. 113). There is some tension, then, between Savarkar's notion of hindutva as a racialized nationality and hindutva as centered by Hindu religious belief and praxis or *sanskriti*.

In their collations of the wide-ranging 18th/19th century intellectual engagements that established the orientations of present-day hindutva, both Bhatt and Jaffrelot point to the historical context in which Savarkar's ideas were formulated: the sharp conflict between the Sanatana Dharma movement that defended prevailing caste orthodoxies and the reformist, modernizing Arya Samaj, which had as a result "asked to be classified outside Hinduism in the colonial census prior to 1911" (Bhatt 2001, p. 84).[1] It is likely, Bhatt argues, that Savarkar's separation of Hindu*tva* from Hindu*ism* was a response to the near

impossibility of defining the latter without somehow addressing the ''bitterly, often vio-lently, opposing worldviews of Sanatanists or Aryas'' (2001, p. 85; Jaffrelot 1996, p. 13–25; Zavos 2001a). In contrast to Arya Samaj insistence on caste reform, Savarkar evokes a pre-existing fraternity based on the overriding significance of ''common blood'' which treats caste hierarchies as interdependent and fundamentally harmonious—a fact that has lead theorists to suggest that 1920s Hindutva was in good measure a defense of Brahmini-cal hegemonies that anticipate the development of caste tensions in later decades (Brosius 2005, p. 72–4; Jaffrelot 1996, p. 13, 32; Zavos 1999, p. 74).[2]

The importance given to a common identification with a single *jati/*race notwithstand-ing, Bhatt notes, Savarkar's displacement of religion from his conceptualization of hindu-tva is necessarily partial. The broader collective identification with the *pitribhu* (territorially demarcated fatherland) is by itself insufficient in determining hindutva, and it is the compulsion for the 'fatherland' to coincide with the 'holyland' that is definitive. The result is a persistent tension between racialism territorially defined and racialism defined by the *felt* ''own[ership of] a common blood'' (2001, pp. 85–6, 94–8; cf. also Jaffrelot 1996, pp. 25–33). One could *feel* Hindu and therefore be Hindu, but feeling also requires a religious predisposition. Religion, in a form naturalized by blood and 'feeling' alike, ultimately is critical to Savarkar's hindutva. Jaffrelot concludes from this that hindu-va of this period ultimately uses primarily ''cultural criteria'' to reinvent hindu-ness in the guise of ethnic nationalism (1993; 1996, pp. 31–2; 2007).

As seminal expositions on hindutva, Savarkar's articulations have provided a founda-tional vocabulary to emergent hindutva movements, informing such other important trea-tises as the RSS leader Golwalker's *We, Or Our nationhood Defined* (1939 [1945]). ''Golwalker's distinctive contribution'', as Bhatt notes, ''was to link Savarkar's concep-tions of Hindutva, Hindu nation and Hindu war with both a political sociology of the nation state, democracy, rights, citizenship and minorities, and an ideology of xenophobic racism'' (2001, p. 126). Indeed, Golwalker's description of the unity of the *rashtra* (nation) relies in no small measure on Savarkar's racialist thinking: it insists that national belonging is predicated on race, defined as ''a *hereditary Society* having common customs, common language, common memories of glory and disaster [and] common origin under one cul-ture'' (1939 [1945], p. 21, emphasis added). Golwalker's focus on the commonalities or ''unassailable unities'' that define a nation then, in turn, have been critical to the building of RSS ideology and therefore also to defining hindutva as praxis.

It is worth noting that although Golwalker drew much from the conceptual vocabulary of Savarkar's *Hindutva*, the question of whether or not to orient hindutva politically strained the relationship between the Hindu Mahasabha (an all-India Hindu nationalist congress formed in the early 1900s) and the RSS. Savarkar was interested in moulding the Mahasabha for a political debut, whereas Golwalker located the RSS and its work emphatically in the realm of the 'cultural', *non-political*. The tensions between the two lead Savarkar to remark once that ''the epitaph of an RSS member would be of one who was born, joined the RSS and died having achieved nothing'' (quoted in Bhatt 2001, p. 119). Such disagreements and divergences within hindutva point to the need to view the links between Savarkar's ideology and those of other key figures associated with hin-dutva as affinities rather than exactly aligned intellectual trajectories (cf. Jaffrelot 1996; Zavos 1999). The best we can say is that Savarkar's religio–racialist orientation harmonizes well with Golwalker's more clearly hereditary conception of the *rashtra*. These formula-tions then combine into a ''strand of 'religious' nationalism'' that guides RSS founder K.B. Hegdewar's initial organization of volunteers in the 1920s, and finds consonance in the 1960s with political ideologue Deendayal Upadhyaya's 'organicist' view of state and

civil-society relations as fundamentally governed by *dharma*, the innate law that naturally holds the nation together (Bhatt 2001, pp. 155–6; 2007, p. 103).

Integral Humanism

Upadhyaya's 'integral humanism' saw the human body, and therefore the body politic, as driven by four constitutive needs: *kama* (desire) and *artha* (material wealth), by *dharma* (morality or ethics), and *moksha* (liberation). Of these, *dharma* represents the integrative force, at once innate law, love, loyalty, principled judgment, and nationalism par excellence. If, in this, Upadhyaya "developed many of Savarkar's and Golwalker's ideas into a simplistic corporatist social and political philosophy" (Bhatt 2007, p. 103), it is telling that the racialist overtones of those earlier formulations are notably subdued, if not absent. Instead, the integrality of Upadhyaya's approach stems from his use of Shankaracharya's advaitic non-dualism as an expression of an underlying *ekatmata* or unity—of human needs, of national objectives, of Bharatiya culture itself—ethically and therefore politically held together by the principles of *dharma*.

Integral humanism both reflected and spoke directly to post-independence political compulsions, recasting Golwalker's explicitly 'Hindu rashtra' as "Bharatiya [Indian, in an Indian idiom] culture"—a formulation that, Corbridge notes, still implicitly asserts the existence of Akhand Bharat or the Greater India that includes Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Burma (1999). Roughly two decades after Indian independence, and despite sweeping land reforms, feudalism had still not been dismantled, and slackening economic growth was fueling the cynical view that the only ones to reap the rewards of *swaraj* (self-rule under independence) were capitalists, landlords and, of course, politicians. A disenchantment with the Indian state's "so-called socialist planning and policy-making" was setting in (J.P. Narayan, cited in Jaffrelot 1996, p. 264), and the new opportunities for critique were missed neither by activists on the Left nor by those associated with the RSS or Jana Sangh, the political precursor to the BJP. Indeed, several writers have pointed to the consonance of socialist and hindutva ideologies that emerged at the time (Bhatt 2001, pp. 161–8; Hansen 1999, pp. 85–6; Jaffrelot 1996, pp. 255–81). Key Gandhian 'thematics' such as *swadeshi* (indigenous manufacture and consumption), *sarvodaya* (self-help or welfare), and *gram swaraj* (village self-governance) were "selectively appropriated to establish discipline and give primacy to cultural-national values based on the subservience of the individual to society" (Hansen 1999, p. 85; Rao 2005, p. 125). The RSS/Jana Sangh's support of the Gandhian movement led by Jaya Prakash Narayan ('JP') was partly a consequence of the arithmetical pragmatics of coalition politics, and partly an index of the mutual ideological affinity for what the Narayan had dubbed *sampoorna kraanti* or "total revolution": the "purification of government and politics" directed at "fighting to reform as well as to limit State power [by] arguing that *rajniti* (State rule of law) had become corrupt… and the time for *lokniti* (people's rule of law) had come" (JP quoted in Jaffrelot 1996, p. 262; Kumar 1993, p. 103).

At such a juncture, asserting hindutva becomes less important than seeking to transform the actually existing nation-state, in an Indian idiom, according to essentially Indian principles: it is *Bharatiya* culture that Upadhyaya stresses, not hindutva, whether out of pragmatism or idealism. Even *dharma* is "neither religion nor any particular sect or path towards God" (Bhatt 2001, p. 155) but an intuitive method of ethical and political integration. Sectarianism is thus overshadowed by Upadhyaya's universalism, into which Gandhian commitments to ethics, social upliftment, anti-poverty activism, and so on are incorporated seamlessly, "without committing the [Jana Sangh] to abandon its Hindutva

foundation'' (Bhatt 2001, p. 165). This part pragmatic, part idealistic but certainly culti-vated syncretism has a lasting impact on later articulations of hindutva: it allows the BJP to institute 'Gandhian socialism' as its founding ideology (Bhatt 2001, p. 165), and institutes dharma (and its opposite, *adharma*) as a central logic by which to measure state failures and inconsistencies—prefiguring the centrality of Rama to the hindutva move-ment in later phases, as we shall see.

Culturalism

Richard Fox dubs the Jana Sangh's appropriation of the authority of Gandhian idioms an ''ideological hijacking'' (quoted in Hansen 1999, p. 85). That that characterization, how-ever, suggests an insular view of political ideologies as genealogically owned rather than fluidly opportunistic, and, more importantly, misses the point that Gandhian idioms were valuable not just for their authority, but for their new-found use as a *critique* of state socialism: the Jana Sangh's identification with the Gandhian thematic was one substan-tially based on a shared critique.[3] The culturalism of the hindutva movement—its use of history to claim cultural beliefs and practices as political rights—rests very significantly on its ability to formulate an effective critique of the prevailing social order in historical terms.[4] If ideas of 'unity in diversity' working in tandem with Gandhian socialism enable this process in the 1960s and 1970s, Personal Law reform and the figure of Rama himself enable it in the years following.

It is worth recalling at this juncture that much of hindutva ideology beginning with Savarkar takes the form of historical critique. Almost without exception, early ideologues relied on an argument about past Hindu degeneracy to define hindutva as a platform for further action—a rhetorical strategy which resonates with that of pre-independence social reform initiatives as well, on sati, for example, widow remarriage, and women's rights in general (Kumar 1993; Mani 1987). Early hindutva accounts focus on the decline set in motion by Buddhism, whose focus on non-violence weakens, makes it impossible to withstand the onslaught of Muslim invasions, and is ultimately ''disastrous to the national virility and even the national existence of our race'' (Savarkar [1923] 1989, pp. 18–9). Hindutva as a form of critique is keenly conscious of both great continuities great rup-tures, of ''the story of our flourishing Hindu National life for thousands of years and of a long unflinching war continuing for the last ten centuries'' (Golwalker [1939] 1945, p. 13). And yet, it is precisely rupture that represents the greatest historical continuity; it is the on-going ''war of centuries'' that underscores the need for a reformulated nation-building.[5]

In the years following Indian Independence, Hindu degeneracy starts to matter less than the failures and even betrayals of the Indian State: hindutva critique turns signifi-cantly outward, and, as several authors report, starts to coalesce around a deepening sense of indignation tending toward outrage (Blom & Jaoul 2008; Jaffrelot 1996; Rajagopal 2001). The flashpoints are many, from the Meenakshipuram conversions of 1981, when some 1000 Dalits in Tirunelveli District (Tamil Nadu) converted to Islam, drawing atten-tion to the problem of conversion and the role of proselytizing organizations, interna-tional fund transfers, and so on, to the Congress Party's role in creating the problem of Sikh separatism in Punjab, to the passionate debate over the need for a Uniform Civil Code sparked by the Shah Bano case.[6] These and many other lesser incidents played no small role in precipitating a widespread Hindu sense of vulnerability and discontent that would form the very ''matrix'' of Hindu nationalism—that consequently ''shares the attri-butes of both a social movement and a political party,'' as Basu suggests (1996, p. 57;

Jaffrelot 2008, p. 3). It is in this sense that Hansen describes the emergence of popular hindutva as a largely ''unintended consequence of the structural transformations of the Indian polity during the 1980s'' (1993, p. 2270) which shape the BJP's political stances in two ways. Two of the three issues at the core of the BJP's hindutva agenda over the years are a commitment to developing a Uniform Civil Code as an affirmation of India's secular democratic ideals, and the removal of Article 370 of the Constitution granting special rights to Kashmir, on the grounds that it thwarts nationalist integration by calling India's claim to the state irredeemably into question. These are policy items that speak directly to a post-independence context, in sharp contrast to the third issue on the BJP agenda: the distinctly culturalist claim to compensatory justice in the pledge to build a Rama temple on the site of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya.

The Babri Masjid in Ayodhya was built in the 16th century by a general of the Mughal emperor Babur, on what is believed to be the site of a temple marking the birthplace of the Hindu deity, Rama (*Ramjanmabhumi*). The legend of the temple and its destruction, and stories of the use of the disputed site were well known in the colonial period, may even have been a product of colonial historiography whose political orientations flattened the dispute into the mould of a simple 'Hindu-Muslim' conflict (Freitag 1996; Gopal 1991; van der Veer 1994, pp. 152–62). The modernity of the dispute over the Babri Masjid as the site of Rama's birthplace seems hardly in question, in other words, though the dispute itself calls upon a history that stretches back into the 16th century, and then to the indeterminate (mythic?) time of Rama's birth. In this narrative, the Babri Masjid metonymically stands in for the widespread destruction of Hindu temples by Islamic invaders, and of the deep *cultural* wounds historically inflicted on Hindus by Muslims as a result. The conflict then acquires a primordial and emotive dimension: as much of van der Veer's writing on this topic avers (in response to primordialist readings of ethnic violence in vogue at the time), there are no inherently primordial attachments, only political processes that create such attachments at specific historical junctures (1987, p. 284; 1994). By drawing on a homogenized history of conflict, injustice, and wrongdoing, and by drawing myth and belief into debates on historical facts and archaeological evidence (Ratnagar 2004), the Ramjanmabhoomi movement thus creates and deploys certain cultural givens (van der Veer 1987, p. 299) to create a rallying point around some very contemporary feelings of disenfranchisement and minoritization.

These historical theories of political vulnerability invariably dovetail with another modern sense of weakness: as virtually all Indian history textbooks unfailingly note, Hindu society was vulnerable to Islamic invasions because of its own internal disunities, both political and caste based. From this second linkage of the historical with the contemporary comes the need to incontrovertibly unify a historically caste-fractured community into one that is a genuinely secular socio-political force to reckon with, vulnerable neither to Islamic threats nor to political corruptions, confidently *swadeshi* in an age of global economic liberalization (Biswas 2004).[7] In September 1990, then BJP president L.K. Advani began a *rath yatra* or 'pilgrimage on a chariot' visiting not Hindu shrines, but sites at which Hindu temples had been destroyed by Muslim invaders and rulers of various dynasties, sometimes replaced by mosques. His journey began at Somnath, another (albeit undisputed) temple site of destruction and plunder, to crisscross northern India and culminate at the Babri Masjid. This was not the first time that the *rath yatra* model had been used to recreate an organic whole from otherwise dispersed and diverse Hindu communities: the VHP's *Ekatmata yatra* in 1983 had distributed water from the Ganges and other sacred rivers, the inter-mingling of which was ''intended to symbolize Hindu unity'' (Jaffrelot 1996, p. 360; van der Veer 1987, pp. 292–4). Advani's *rath yatra* was unique,

however, in its strident focus on unification specifically for the purposes of redress and retribution. With slogans like *Laathi goli khaenge, par mandir vahin banayenge* (Beatings and bullets we will take, but a temple we will build *there*), and *Marenge, mar jayenge, mandir vahin banayenge* (We will kill, we will die, a temple we will build *there*) becoming the popular war cries of the Ramjanmabhumi movement, violence and controversy naturally followed the *rath* almost from the outset, and Advani never completed his journey.[8] Advani's *yatra* was but an episode in the Ramjanmabhumi movement, however, so his arrest did not put an end to the agitation which seemed by then to have a momentum all its own. Despite a Supreme Court injunction barring any action on the site of the Babri Masjid, *kar sevaks* of the Sangh Parivar succeeded in demolishing the structure on December 6, 1992. Waves of riots followed, with some of the worst occurring in Bombay in early 1993.

Scholarly observers of these unfolding events have generally used them as opportunities to reflect on the causes of communal or Hindu-Muslim conflict that mark South Asian politics of 1980s and 1990s (Das 1990; Ludden 1996). Several focus on understanding contemporary conflict as yet another aspect of India's colonial heritage, looking to the role of the state, both colonial and modern, in inviting the emergence of adversarial, ethnicized identities via its strategies of enumeration and classification (Chakrabarty 2002; Nandy *et al.* 1995; Pandey 2006; Tambiah 1996; Washbrook 1989).[9] Other studies have honed in on detailed readings of the texts and contexts of the Ramjanmabhumi agitation itself. For the success of this movement in unifying a fractured Hindu community around such themes as historical hurt and political wrongdoing, did not owe only or necessarily to its stridency or to its violent tactics, but equally to the visual cultures that coalesced around it. Tele-serials like Sagar's *Ramayana*, which aired in the late 1980s on the state-sponsored Doordarshan channel, providing both context and vocabulary for the then-incipient Ramjanmabhumi movement (Farmer 1996). Rajagopal's important work on this subject argues further that the "rhetoric of market reform and that of an insurgent cultural politics went public together, and interacted to express a new historical conjuncture" (2001, pp. 1–3). Communication, now at once personal and societal, offers multiple publics multiple modes of engagement in a retailed form of hindutva that ropes together both the partial, shifting identifications of the "non-committed" voter and the ideological commitment of "the dedicated convert" (2001, pp. 32, 2, 63–71). Brosius' analyses of political videos make a far more direct connection between re-organized ways of seeing and "political mobilization and ideological indoctrination": video technologies are simply effective means by which to appropriate both traditional and popular ideas and icons and, by means of fetishized visions and hyperbolic spectacles, to monitor, control, "fix and standardize ways of seeing" (2002, p. 268; 2005, p. 4; cf. also Davis 1996). Basu counter-balances this somewhat overly top-down assessment by drawing attention to the undeniable idealism, utopianism, and the focus on Rama as a personification of the Good and the Just—*dharma* itself in the form of *rashtra purush*, or idealized national man—that is just as central to the Ramjanmabhumi movement's representational strategies as are its more abrasive methods (2008). It is undeniably this wider affective/emotive appeal of the figure of Lord Rama, the (primordialist) idealization of character and virtue in the face of so many (modern) quotidian corruptions that enables so forceful a culturalist articulation of hindutva.

Counter-Assertions

The culturalist assertions of the 1990s cannot be lifted from the wider culture of assertions building in the subcontinent at the time, most significantly that of caste. Caste politics of

the time ran quite parallel to hindutva: centered on a growing Dalit awareness of victim-ization and a critique of the Indian social polity. In 1984, Kanshi Ram established the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP, literally, Party of the Majority), seeking to forge a political unity between Dalits, OBCs (Other Backward Castes), and indeed also religious minori-ties against the 'Brahminical' ruling ideologies of the time (Omvedt 1996, p. 343). The BSP's initial successes came in fits and starts, suggesting that the idea of a caste-centered politics had not yet fully taken root—but this changed dramatically with the Mandal agi-tations of 1990. The Janata government's decision to implement the recommendations of the 2nd Backward Classes ('Mandal') Commission raising OBC reservation quotas by a considerable margin was met with shocking protests from upper caste hindu youth, sev-eral of whom took to the streets dousing themselves in kerosene and setting themselves alight. Images of burning and charred bodies were a regular feature of all the dailies, accompanied by a storm of rhetoric about the brain drain the country would suffer in the absence of any consideration of merit. Evidently picking up on protesters' sense of *hindu* minoritization and vulnerability, the Sangh Parivar strongly opposed the implementation of the Mandal recommendations—at almost exactly the same moment as the BJP sought to mobilize lower caste groups and unite fractured Hindu communities under the Ram-janmabhoomi banner.

Shani (2007) documents the alternating acceptance and distancing of Dalits from the Hindu fold in 1980s Gujarat, arguing persuasively that the so-called communal tensions between Hindus and Muslims stemmed (almost counter-intuitively) from intensifying ten-sions between caste groups over issues like reservations. Such processes as Shani describes were likely not limited to Gujarat, nor were the implications of such contradictory asser-tions of communal boundaries lost on the Dalit intellectual community: as Hyderabad-based Dalitabahujan theorist Kancha Ilaiah remarks cynically, in the ''Mandal Yuga (era of Mandal)…[upper caste Hindus] abuse us as meritless creatures, but in their Ramrajya [ideal State] we are defined again as Hindus'' (1996, p. 166). So fierce was the rhetoric and so powerful the images, that it is hardly a wonder that the word 'Dalit', and with it an entirely new *political* understanding of caste, came into vogue following the Mandal-Masjid years, as the early 1990s are commonly remembered.

Emergent Dalit identitarian assertions of this period then coalesced around specific pro-grammatic objectives, each cutting across religious, racial, and *jati* boundaries in ways that, directly or by implication, ''denie[d] the efficacy of the Hindu nation'' (Zavos 2001b, p. 87; Wyatt 1998).[10] The Dalit Human Rights Campaign, for instance, sought to bring the Indian state's failure to adequately address caste injustices to the UN's atten-tion at the 2001 World Conference against Racism, by likening these to racial discrimi-nation based on descent (Greenough & Natrajan 2009; Immerwahr 2007; Reddy 2005). Another campaign to extend Scheduled Caste status to Dalit Christians received unprece-dented support from the All-India Catholic Union and the Catholic Bishops Conference of India. This latter move played handily into hindutva anxieties for having been articu-lated just when largely American-based and funded movements (such as 'AD2000 and Beyond' and the Joshua Project) evidently intended to adopt policies of evangelization in India (Zavos 2001b, p. 76). Indeed, as Zavos avers, the campaign opened ''a constellation of issues which [we]re fundamentally threatening to the discourse [and mass base] of Hindu nationalism'': as an example of the ''independent assertion of marginal groups'', it disassociated dalit identity from Hinduism and thus gave ''primacy to the commonality of the dalit predicament'' (Zavos 2001b, p. 87; also Menon 2003, p. 43). Hindutva rhetoric, however, turns such ''assertive margins'' into the ''defenseless margins'': adivasis (tribals), dalits, and the otherwise unsuspecting disenfranchised who are ''unable to understand the

significance of their own 'Hindu' identity'' and therefore susceptible to being duped or ''seduced by material inducements'' (Menon 2003, p. 45; Zavos 2001b, p. 88). In other words, even as Sangh Parivar organizations assert religious boundaries by vehemently opposing evangelization, and, indeed, embarking on reconversion projects from the mid-1990s onward, Dalit assertions from the margins unsettle and challenge this logic of boundary-making (cf. Kanungo & Joshi 2009; Sarkar 1999; Shah 1999).[11] In this sense, Dalit and hindutva identities are to a degree dialogically constituted, the one politics providing the impetus and the ''rough material of outrage'' to the other (Blom & Jaoul 2008, p. 12).

Rethinking Secularism

The culturalist articulations that build into the Ramjanmabhoomi movement and culminate in the Babri Masjid demolition then considerably influence on-going ruminations on the place of the secular in Indian liberal democracy—which, despite their differences, produce a broad operating consensus. Acknowledging the histories that make secular and Hindu nationalisms natural adversaries, the events of late 1992 refocus attention on rescuing Indian models of religious tolerance both from the charges and counter-charges of popular political debate, and, more importantly, from the grip of a Western-style secularism that appears squarely unequal to the challenge mounted by Hindu majoritarianism (Bhargava 1998; Chatterjee 1998; Nandy 1990). 'Principled' Nehruvian secularism unraveled hand-in-hand with the organizational decay of the Congress Party, argues Varshney (1993), producing unprincipled and arrogant secularism (the 'pseudo-secularism' of public debate) that fostered separatism and provided ample room for Hindutva to gain full expression. Searching for inspiration to fill the gaps unilaterally claimed by hindutva, several scholars look to Indian sources for alternatives: Varshney both to the ''pluralistic and syncretic heroes of India's past'' (1993, p. 254) and to contemporary civil society forms of engagement that make violence less likely (2002; cf. also Bharucha 1998), Nandy to Gandhian models of religious tolerance (1998), and Madan to forms of religio-sociality that transcend simplistic secular/sacred binaries (1995, 2003). Equally concerned with fostering ''interreligious understanding and the equality of citizenship rights'' (Madan 2003, p. 64), Chatterjee sees the solution to India's dilemmas less in a carefully cultivated traditionalism, however, than in paring state intervention down to the simple insistence that various religious communities become internally democratic (Chatterjee 1995, 1998).

   Discerning which of these alternative strategies might ultimately prevail remains as unclear now as it was in the mid-late 1990s. In the meantime, such theoretical moves to reclaim the civic spaces occupied by hindutva were matched by a second approach increasingly concerned with mobilizing public opinion *against* hindutva's brand of ethno-nationalism. It is to these parallel efforts to capture hindutva both conceptually and legalistically to which the second paper in this series turns.

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Short Biography

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Notes

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[1] Bhatt and Jaffrelot are each concerned with documenting the major and minor threads that comprise hindutva's genealogical origins, while I focus here only on those distinctive ideas that continue to 'animate contemporary hindu nationalism' (Bhatt 2001, p. 4).

[2] Zavos in particular cautions against a straightforward reading of the Arya Samaj as critical model for 1920s hindutva (as in: Gold 1994; Jaffrelot 1996, p. 11), on the grounds that ''key elements of Arya reformism [particularly those associated with caste reform] were ultimately compromised by their association with Hindu nationalism'' (1999, p. 58; see also 2000).

[3] See Jaffrelot 1996, pp. 263–72; for an account of the RSS/Jana Sangh and the JP movement's opportunistic reclaiming of Gandhian idioms in the 1960s and 1970s. Rao (2005) suggests that the Jana Sangh was interested in this alliance as a means of rallying lower caste constituencies in its support.

[4] Shani (2007, pp. 3–12) uses the same term, but with different import: as a theory to explain communal conflict based on pre-existing and insurmountable cultural differences—an answer to and a revision of primordialist theories of ethnic conflict.

[5] cf. Pandey (2006, pp. 68–92), for an account of the 'Hindu history' at stake.

[6] The Shahbano case, as a metonym for the Indian state's handling of personal law reform, is a key example of an unresolved issue around which a deepening sense of hindu vulnerability coalesces (cf. Jaffrelot 1996, pp. 334–7). The Hindu Code Bill was written and ratified in a series of four Acts in the 1950s, but neither Muslim nor Christian Personal laws were similarly codified. Nearly three decades later, by the time the Supreme Court issued its verdict in the Shahbano case calling for a common civil code that would partially displace the Shariat, state-sponsored religious reform had become tantamount to interference in minority affairs. So intense were the protests, that Shahbano herself rejected the Court's verdict in her favor, and the Rajiv Gandhi government passed the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, returning decisions on divorce and maintenance to the exclusive purview of the Shariat. To many observers of such unfolding events, the state's uneven handling of reform revealed incontrovertibly that its commitment to secularism was disintegrating into an entirely self-interested vote-bank politics. The state's positions on the question of personal law reform seemed to draw a contrast between the liberal Hindu majority amenable to reform and the illiberal minorities (represented primarily by Muslims) resistant to it, such that (in the hindutva account) it was liberalism and tolerance that produced weakness and vulnerability. The result was a critique of the state that was deflected onto its perceived beneficiaries, India's Muslims, and an overall hardening of positions and boundaries that gives hindutva a distinctly semitic (closed, dogmatic) character (cf.

Nandy *et al.* 1995, p. 57). For writings on the Shahbano case as well as the impact of emergent hindutva on the articulation of women's issues, see: Agnes 1995; Engineer 1987; Jayawardena & de Alwis 1996; Pathak & Sunder Rajan 1989; Sarkar & Butalia 1995; Sunder Rajan 2000.

[7] The term 'swadeshi' derives from the nationalist movement as corollary to 'swaraj' (self-rule), emphasizing therefore economic independence as well as indigenous production. In the mid-1990s, as the Congress government was taking steps to liberalize the economy, RSS affiliated groups such as the Swadeshi Jagaran Manch, Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (Indian Workers' Association), and the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP; a student group active on many college campuses), were instructed to "take the message of swadeshi to 100,000 rural villages" in opposition to Congress policies (Biswas 2004, p. 12). The BJP has remained, however, fairly ambivalent about just how much to hold on to Upadhyaya's commitment to the 'Bharatiya' in economics at least, leading Biswas to remark that the Sangh Parivar's swadeshi rhetorics appear more 'a smokescreen than a platform' (2004, p. 127).

[8] Tellingly, he was arrested in Bihar on orders issued by Chief Minister Laloo Prasad Yadav, whose opposition to the BJP and the Rath Yatra were caste based.

[9] Important polemical characterizations of hindutva also emerge at this juncture, and are surveyed in the second essay of three, 'Capturing Hindutva'.

[10] Tharamangalam (2004) adds that Dalit Christian assertions contest community boundaries defined both by hindutva and by Sanskritized, brahminized, and elite Christian theologies.

[11] I describe the literature on reconversion projects and their relation to the Sangh Parivar's development work in the final essay on hindutva as praxis.

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