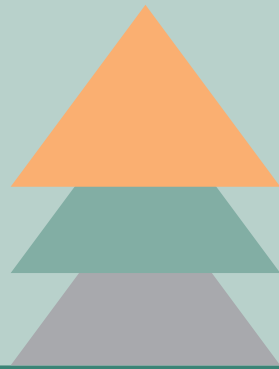


Religions and Development Research Programme

Religious Political Parties and their Welfare Work: Relations between the RSS, the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Vidya Bharati Schools in India

Padmaja Nair



Working Paper 37 - 2009



Religions and Development

Research Programme

The Religions and Development Research Programme Consortium is an international research partnership that is exploring the relationships between several major world religions, development in low-income countries and poverty reduction. The programme is comprised of a series of comparative research projects that are addressing the following questions:

- How do religious values and beliefs drive the actions and interactions of individuals and faith-based organisations?
- How do religious values and beliefs and religious organisations influence the relationships between states and societies?
- In what ways do faith communities interact with development actors and what are the outcomes with respect to the achievement of development goals?

The research aims to provide knowledge and tools to enable dialogue between development partners and contribute to the achievement of development goals. We believe that our role as researchers is not to make judgements about the truth or desirability of particular values or beliefs, nor is it to urge a greater or lesser role for religion in achieving development objectives. Instead, our aim is to produce systematic and reliable knowledge and better understanding of the social world.

The research focuses on four countries (India, Pakistan, Nigeria and Tanzania), enabling the research team to study most of the major world religions: Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism and African traditional belief systems. The research projects will compare two or more of the focus countries, regions within the countries, different religious traditions and selected development activities and policies.

The consortium consists of six research partner organisations, each of which is working with other researchers in the four focus countries:

- University of Birmingham, UK: International Development Department, Department of Theology and Religion, Centre for West African Studies, Centre for the Study of Global Ethics.
- University of Bath, UK: Centre for Development Studies.
- Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, New Delhi.
- Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research, Ibadan.
- University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.
- Lahore University of Management Sciences, Pakistan.

In addition to the research partners, links have been forged with non-academic and non-government bodies, including Islamic Relief.

Religions and Development Working Paper 37

Religious Political Parties and their Welfare Work: Relations between the RSS, the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Vidya Bharati Schools in India

Padmaja Nair

ISBN: 0 7044 2772 9
978 0 7044 2772 3

© International Development Department, University of Birmingham

DFID Department for
International
Development

This document is an output from a project funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) for the benefit of developing countries. The views expressed are not necessarily those of DFID.

Rad

Contents

Acknowledgements

Summary	1
Glossary	3
List of acronyms	4
1 Introduction	5
2 The political system and structures in India	8
2.1 From a single to a multi-party system and the increasing prevalence of coalitions	8
2.2 Regional parties: political parties riding on the wave of regional and caste concerns	10
3 Religion in politics	13
3.1 Legitimizing political power	13
3.2 The post-independence constitutional mandate of a secular state	14
3.3 Religious political parties	16
4 The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS): the evolution of a political power in relation to a social organization	19
4.1 Emergence of the RSS as a ‘social service’ organisation	19
4.2 Confirming the ‘Hindu’ orientation of the RSS	20
4.3 Emergence of RSS affiliates and the concept of the ‘Sangh Parivar’	25
4.4 Bharatiya Jan Sangh and the BJP: a growing need for a political stake	29
4.5 The BJP: its ‘Hindutva’ trajectory and electoral politics	35
5 Relationships between the BJP and Vidhya Bharati Akhil Bharatiya Shiksha Sanstha (VBABSS): a case study	50
5.1 Origin and growth of the Vidya Bharati network of schools	50
5.2 Organizational structure of VBABSS and its affinity to RSS	54
5.3 Resources: dependency on donations and state largesse	55
5.4 A core curriculum based on Hindu values	57
5.5 An uneasy relationship with the BJP	60
6 Concluding comments	62
Notes	65
References	70
Annex 1: List of interviews	72
Key terms: schools, Hinduism, Hindutva, India, political party, social welfare	

Acknowledgements

I would like to place on record my sincere thanks to a number of people, especially Professor Surinder Jodhka (Indian Institute of Dalit Studies), Prof Pralay Kanungo (JNU), Dr Sanjay Kumar (Lokniti), Dr. Mohindar Singh (National Institute of Punjab Studies), Mahesh Sharma (DG, Council of Science and Technology, Bhopal) and Prof.H. M. Mishra (Noronha Academy of Administration, Bhopal) for sharing their knowledge and understanding of the RSS and BJP and putting me on track in the initial days of the study. I would also like to thank Prof Richard Batley and Dr. Masooda Bano for their support.

Summary

Religious forces that attempt to gain political power may establish political parties, often leading to conflicts in states based on secular principles, such as India. Some of the main religious political parties in South Asia are also engaged in the provision of welfare services. Their reasons for doing so are often suspect, although evidence on their motives and strategies is scarce. As part of a larger study of the welfare wings of religious political parties, this research examined the Indian context.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which as head of a coalition has held power at the national level and by itself in several states, is not a religious political party as such. However, it has strong historical and ideological bonds with the self-proclaimed 'social organization', the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS), which pursues a *Hindutva* agenda and has established a large network of affiliates, many involved in social welfare activities.

Based on existing sources and extensive interviews with key informants in Madhya Pradesh, where the BJP was in power at the time of the study, and Uttar Pradesh, where it had been ousted some years previously, this study seeks to understand why the BJP and RSS have a compelling need for each other and to what extent the BJP, as the political offspring of the RSS, is influenced by it. In addition, it examines the relationships between the BJP and Vidya Bharati Akhil Bharatiya Shiksha Sansthan (VBABSS), the educational affiliate of RSS, in order to obtain a better insight into the BJP's role in furthering RSS's *Hindutva* agenda.

The study found that

- The RSS promotes the idea of a Hindu religious nation through its use of the cultural concept of *Hindutva*, a doctrine that holds that the Indian identity and nation is defined by Hindu culture, which is closely linked to the Hindu religion. It reflects the aspirations of a section of the Hindu community by responding to perceived threats to Hindu culture and seeking to sustain the supremacy of the Hindu upper castes.
- Some of the RSS's organizational offshoots (the *Sangh Parivar* network) have adopted militant and communally exclusive tactics, but many are involved in the provision of social welfare services, including the Vidya Bharati, which has developed a vast network of schools – both the RSS itself and these affiliates are faith-inspired.
- The BJP and Vidya Bharati are two of several organizations through which the RSS promotes the idea of a Hindu *Rashtra* (nation).

- The BJP was formed to advance the political ambitions of some RSS members and has acquired access to power at the national level through its coalition strategy. Today it has an ideological but somewhat fractious relationship with the RSS: the latter seeks political power to push its agenda of cultural nationalism, whereas the BJP is willing to dilute some aspects of that doctrine to widen its political support base and has become less dependent on RSS members.
- There is a familial kinship between the BJP and the Vidya Bharati, whose schools seek to groom young minds towards the concept of a Hindu nation. For BJP members, links with Vidya Bharati are a means of reinforcing their ideological moorings and gaining acceptance for the BJP in the larger *Sangh Parivar*, although some in VB fear that some members of the BJP do not adhere to the core *Hindutva* ideology.

Some implications of these findings are that

- The BJP will have to address the contradictions that arise from its relationship with the RSS and the place of the *Hindutva* agenda in its political platform, in order to maintain its political support and win office.
- The national and state ministries dealing with education must deal with the pressure to 'saffronize' the curriculum to reflect *Hindutva* ideology (including a re-writing of Indian history), in both government and Vidya Bharati's schools, many of which are registered with the central and state education boards.
- The relationships between the organizations studied are fragile and, while the RSS and Vidya Bharati's determination to achieve their goals will continue to reinforce their desire to work together, the BJP may find itself having to part ways with them or to re-invent itself.

Glossary

<i>dalits</i>	low caste groups
<i>dharma</i>	duty
<i>gurdwara</i>	Sikh place of worship
<i>Hindu Rashtra</i>	Hindu nation
<i>Hindutva</i>	Doctrine that the Indian identity and nation is defined by Hindu culture, which has geographical, racial, cultural, religious and linguistic elements.
<i>Lok Sabha</i>	directly elected lower house (central government)
<i>mandal</i>	locality
<i>mandir</i>	temple
<i>nagar</i>	city
<i>panchayat</i>	local government unit
<i>pracharak</i>	promoter
<i>rath yatra</i>	journey by chariot
<i>sadhana</i>	sacrifices and rituals that mark <i>samskaras</i>
<i>samskara</i>	Vedic rite of passage that marks the various stages of a Hindu's life, traditional norm
<i>sangchalak</i>	preacher
<i>sanghathan</i>	organization
<i>Sangh parivar</i>	'family' or network of organizations associated with Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS)
<i>sanghathans</i>	organized groups
<i>sangathan mantries</i>	organizing ministers
<i>sanskriti</i>	culture
<i>sarsangchalak</i>	most senior preacher and philosopher in RSS
<i>shakha</i>	unit
<i>Shishu Mandir</i>	Children's Temple (VB primary school)
<i>swayamsevak</i>	member of RSS, volunteer
<i>Vidya Mandir</i>	Knowledge Temple (VB secondary school)
<i>yatra</i>	journey

List of acronyms

ABVP	Akhil Baharatiya Vidhyarathi Paris (All India Students' Union)
AGP	Asom Gana Parishad (Assam People's Association)
AIMIM	All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BJS	Bharatiya Jan Sangh
BMS	Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh
BSP	Bahujan Samaj Party
DMK	Dravida Munnettra Kazhagam
IUML	Indian Union Muslim League
LSS	Lok Sangarsh Samiti
NAG	National Agenda for Governance
NDA	National Democratic Alliance
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh
SAD	Shiromani Akali Dal (or Akali Dal)
SC	Scheduled Castes
SGPC	Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee
SP	Samajwadi Party
ST	Scheduled Tribes
TDP	Telugu Desam Party
UPA	United Progressive Alliance
VB	Vidya Bharati
VBABSS	Vidya Bharati Akhil Bharatiya Shiksha Sansthan
VHP	Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council)

1 Introduction

Religious forces appear to use welfare services to achieve their goals. Globally, views about the political goals of religious groups vary widely: at one extreme, the view that religion is inseparable from politics leads to advocacy (and some practical examples) of theocracy; at the other it is believed that states should have a secular foundation and religion should be a purely private affair. Attempts by religious forces to gain or influence political power lead to conflicts with states and governments that are based on secular principles, especially if the strategy they adopt is to establish political parties. The involvement of religious organizations, especially those with political aspirations, in providing welfare services gives rise to particular concern and suspicion. However, there is little understanding of their motives and practices or analysis of how their provision of welfare services affects their relationships with the state. This study is one of a series that aims to understand how religious forces use welfare services to achieve their goals and how they operate vis-à-vis the state in South Asia, namely in Pakistan, Bangladesh and India. In order to understand the mechanisms that religious forces adopt, the comparative study first looked at the question of why religious groups seek political power and why they set up political parties to achieve this aim. It then went on to examine the relationships between the religious group and its associated political party, as well as the nature and role of the welfare activities the party supports.

The overall approach adopted by the study was to focus on the largest national religious political party and its engagement with its associated religious group on the one hand and its welfare wing on the other (Bano, 2009). Applying this approach in India is, however, problematic because apart from a couple of smaller parties like the Sheromani Akali Dal (Punjab), Shiv Sena (Maharashtra), All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (Andhra Pradesh) and the Indian Union Muslim League (Kerala), there is no national level religious political party of any significance: the constituencies of all the above-mentioned parties are largely limited to a single state. In contrast, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which has a national presence, is technically not a religious political party.

Nevertheless, based on an analysis of the observations of several political historians and commentators, the author takes the position that the BJP, although not a religious political party as such, has strong historical and ideological bonds with the Hindu movement, the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS), and as such, many of its moves have *Hindutva* overtones (see below). The study seeks to understand why RSS and BJP, one a self-proclaimed 'social organization' and the

other a political party, have a compelling need for each other and to what extent the BJP, as the political offspring of the RSS, is influenced by it. In addition, the study examines the relationships between the BJP and Vidya Bharati Akhil Bharatiya Shiksha Sansthan (VBABSS), the educational affiliate of RSS, in order to obtain a better insight into the BJP's role in furthering RSS's *Hindutva* agenda. In doing so, the analysis attempts to address the following key questions:

- Why do religious groups seek state power?
- What are the relationships between the religious group and the political party to which it is linked?
- Why do religious political parties establish or support social service wings?
- To what extent is the welfare activity supported by a religious political party linked to the political mobilization work of the party?

Underlying the analysis are two key assumptions: firstly, that the cultural concept of *Hindutva* is closely linked to the Hindu religion and hence, the RSS may be defined as an organization that is furthering the cause of a 'Hindu' religious nation; and secondly, that a symbiotic relationship exists between the RSS, the BJP and the VBABSS. The following sections consider whether these assumptions are valid, as a basis for answering the questions raised above.

The BJP, although a national level party, has traditionally been present for longer in some of the northern states like Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. It has also had a long innings in Uttar Pradesh, where of late, however, the party has taken a beating from caste-based parties like the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and the Samajwadi Party (SP). Hence, although the study has a pan-India focus, in order to better understand the dynamics of the relationships between the political party and the religious group, it looked more specifically at Madhya Pradesh, which was under BJP rule at the time of the study, and Uttar Pradesh, where the BJP had been ousted some years previously.

The report is divided into four sections, apart from the introduction: Section 2 first discusses the evolution of the political system and structure in India, while the subsequent section looks at the specific engagement of religion in politics. Considerable attention is given to the historical development of the political system in India, in order to establish the context and provide necessary background for understanding the specific organizations under study. Section 3, after an overview of the ideology and nature of RSS as a 'faith based organization', traces the establishment and growth of the BJP as a

'religious political party' and its dynamic relationships with the RSS. Section 4 then examines the relationships between the BJP and its kin within the Sangh Parivar to further understand the welfare orientation of the BJP. A case study of the Vidhya Bharati Akhil Bharatiya Shiksha Sanstha (VBABSS) is presented in Section 5, and the paper ends with some concluding comments.

The study was based on a review of the relevant literature, documents produced by the organizations under study and extensive interviews with key informants in the RSS, BJP and Vidya Bharati between December 2007 and April 2008 (see Annex 1). Interviews were also held with some political commentators and academicians.

2 The political system and structures in India

This section gives a brief overview of the evolution of the political structure and system in India in the six decades since independence - a period marked by three significant processes: the transition from a single to a multiple party system, the emergence and growing predominance of regional and caste-based parties, and an increasing tendency for the formation of coalition governments. It also briefly touches upon a fourth and equally important issue of relevance to this study, that of a visible dilution of the ideological framework of parties over the years, which is perhaps a reason as well as an outcome of the changes in the party system. The concept of a 'religious' political party in India is examined within this context.

2.1 From a single to a multi-party system and the increasing prevalence of coalitions

India is a constitutional democracy with a parliamentary system of government. It is a union of states¹ that is intended to function within the framework of a defined constitutional mandate² to ensure social, economic and political justice, freedom and equality to every citizen. Designed as a federal polity, the political structure has developed around an elected representative form of government and universal adult suffrage. While the President is the nominal head of the government, executive powers in reality are vested in the Council of Ministers³ led by the Prime Minister. A similar arrangement (a State Council of Ministers led by a Chief Minister) exists in each State.

Within this constitutional structure of governance, India has witnessed fourteen general elections to the *Lok Sabha* since independence. During this period the country has evolved from a single dominant party system into a multi-party structure, in which elections are increasingly being fought on party lines. While politics is party-dominated, the party system itself has been witnessing transformation in its size and profile, especially in the decades since the 1970s. Not only has the number of parties participating in elections increased fourfold, from 53 in 1952 to 230 in 2004⁴, but there have also been significant changes in the electoral strength of individual parties and their links with others.⁵ Contemporary politics has thus been characterized by splitting of parties, old parties in new avatars and the emergence of several new political forces.

Suri (2005), examining the pressures on political parties in India, has identified broad overlapping phases in the evolution of the political structure and the multi-party system. According to Suri, the early 1950s to the mid-1960s was dominated by the Congress Party. However, discontent within the

Congress had set in even in the early days, leading to some of the members disassociating themselves to form new parties. These, together with other parties that existed during the period and were traditionally anti-Congress⁶, gradually became a force to be reckoned with, gained momentum, forged alliances and even formed the government in some states. The years from the mid-1960s to the end of the 1980s was thus a period of consolidation of the non-Congress parties. Subsequently, throughout the 1990s, the party system has become increasingly fragmented and competition between the parties has intensified. Several new national and regional parties have been formed and some established parties have acquired new shapes: the Bharatiya Jan Sangh re-structured itself as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and began to provide competition to the Congress at both national and state levels; caste-based groups like the Bhujan Samaj Party in the north (representing the dalits), the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) in Andhra Pradesh, and the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) in Assam, all formed earlier in the 1980s, began to gain strength and make their presence felt at both the state and national levels.

Fragmentation of the party system had, in fact, come to stay and finally culminated in the emergence of a coalition government in 1998. This year was thus a milestone in the history of Indian politics, in which the two major national parties, the Congress and the BJP, polarized as rival coalitions because, as Suri (2005) points out, no single party, especially at the national level, has been able to respond to the multiplicity of class, caste, linguistic, ethnic and religious interests. Hence, the larger parties have had to collaborate with smaller regional ones to gain legitimacy at the national level. The general elections of 1996 and the three subsequent elections (1998, 1999 and 2004) validate these observations. Pre- and post-poll alliances between national and regional parties have now become an integral feature of Indian politics, with the nature of the alliances varying from state to state and from time to time.

An outcome of alliances forged for political convenience, the resulting coalition structures have been both amazingly large in size and also fragile and varied in their ideological profile. Thus, from 1999 to 2004 the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) led by the BJP was in power at the centre, supported by 25 coalition partners. Subsequently, the last general election in 2004 saw the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) led by the Congress coming into power with a pre-poll coalition of 16 parties.

2.2 Regional parties: political parties riding on the wave of regional and caste concerns

Regional or state level parties have thus come to play a deciding role in the Indian political scene. Who then are these regional parties? They are those political groups who largely operate within the sphere of a single state and with an obvious focus on regional issues. By definition, in contrast with those who function against a larger voter canvas or, as Palshikar (2004) describes, on a 'catch-all' basis, the regional parties in India are said to represent a range of ideological beliefs and attitudes and generally seek to promote the interests of particular social groups. Technically, the Election Commission of India designates a political party as a state party if it has secured a prescribed minimum percentage of the total valid votes, at least two of its members are returned to the state Legislative Assembly, or it has won at least 3 per cent of the total number of seats in the Legislative Assembly. The national parties, on the other hand, have to demonstrate their electoral strength across a minimum of four states.⁷

How did the regional parties emerge? A multiplicity of state parties is said to be the manifestation of pluralism in politics. The ethnic diversity within India⁸, together with a federal system that enables parties to secure power by championing regional concerns, has proved to be a fertile ground for their growth. While the Congress, which faced tensions within its own party leading to massive defections, is held responsible for the birth of numerous political fronts in the 1960s and 1970s, dynamics within the Janata Party⁹ are said to have led to the formation of new political groups in subsequent years. With the decline of the Congress, the Indian polity is believed to have become more competitive, while on the other hand the dearth of a second nationwide party encouraged small regional and sub-regional groups to establish themselves (Palshikar, 2004; Suri, 2005). Subsequently, when the BJP emerged as the alternative to Congress, the third front in the political space was occupied by the state and regional parties. The state level is thus believed to have become the platform where "...party politics now unfolds" (Palshikar, 2004).

What then are the concerns of the regional parties? Espousing the cause of the lower castes in the strictly hierarchical caste system in India is believed to have been a major trigger for the growth of regional parties, initially in the southern states of the country, for example Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) in Tamil Nadu. Subsequently, this process of party formation is said to have gradually spread to the northern states of the country, with a growing focus on the Scheduled Castes

and Tribes (SC and ST), leading to the formation of such political parties as the Samajwadi Party and Bahujan Samaj Party in the 1990s. Others include the Shiv Sena, a political force to be reckoned with in the western Indian state of Maharashtra, and variously described as representing the interests of native Maharastrians, a self-appointed cultural godfather of the Hindu nation, and even a militant Hindu communal organization; the Samajwadi Party, which attempts to project a secular image, especially with reference to the *Hindutva* politics of the BJP, and thus by default espouses the cause of the Muslims; the Akali Dal, born out of the need to establish a Sikh identity in post-independence Punjab; the Telugu Desam Party of the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, which has carved out an image for itself as an upholder of Telugu pride; the Assom Gana Parishad, which rose to power on the crest of Assamese nationalism spurred on by concerns over the large scale immigration of Bengali Muslims from neighbouring Bangladesh in the late 1980s; and the National Conference of Jammu and Kashmir that was a response to feudal and autocratic rule in the pre-independence state of Jammu and Kashmir.

Palshikar (2004) and other political scientists, however, point to the self-annihilating characteristics of many a regional party whose influence remains limited to a small constituency. They attribute this to "...self-imposed representational choices", meaning that the tendency of regional parties to focus on specific sections of society and draw boundaries round their support base, especially in terms of caste, limits the potential for them to expand their voter base. Thus, while many regional parties have been established in India in the last six decades, only 36 are currently recognized as state level parties.

At the same time, a noticeable element has been the fact that both national and regional political parties are believed to have somewhere along the line compromised on their basic ideological framework. Palshikar (2004), referring to this as "...ideological fuzziness...", says that ideological boundaries become blurred because of the parties' compulsion to represent specific communities rather than making ideological claims. Others, like Suri (2005) and the advisory panel constituted under the National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (2001), have gone further to state that over the years parties have begun to ignore - at least for the time being - their ideological stands in return for a share in political power at the state or national level. Hence the coalitions, far from being based on ideological compatibility or common objectives between the parties concerned,

reflect strange alliances between parties with ostensibly different ideologies. In practice, it is often difficult not only to assess if a party is ideology or personality-based, but also keep track of its seemingly shifting ideological allegiances.

Although, excluding the groups that lay claim to a Marxist ideology, all other political parties in India refer to themselves as 'socialist', 'secular' and 'democratic', Palshikar (2004) concedes that some broad "ideological zones" do exist amidst all the fuzziness: they refer to social justice, regional identity, developmental logic, political Hindutva, neo-liberalism and also anti-globalization. Palshikar's classification, however, does not include a 'religious' ideological zone, although there are some parties like the Muslim League and the Shiromani Akali Dal that were initially based on religious identities and came into existence to provide separate political spaces to specific faith communities. Interestingly, Palshikar locates BJP, along with the Congress, within the neo-liberal ideological group.

What emerges from the above is that, while regional parties have gained in significance, their agenda appears to largely revolve around caste and specific regional issues. As Jaffrelot (2003) notes, there is competition between the religious and caste-based identities in political campaigns, especially in the northern Hindi-speaking states. However, he suggests, "The emergence of caste based politics has blurred religious divisions". What then is the role of religion in politics in India? What space do the Indian constitution and political system provide for religious parties? And are there any defined religious political parties with significant influence at the national level? The following section attempts to address these issues, briefly describing the political groups that are perceived to have a religious agenda.

3 Religion in politics

3.1 Legitimizing political power

Religious parties are generally described as political parties that base their ideology on a specific religion and mobilize their supporters on the basis of their religious affinity.¹⁰ In India, religion and politics have, like elsewhere, co-existed since historical times. However, there has been a change in the nature of the relationship over the years. Buultjens (1986) observes that, in a country that for many years was subjected to invasions by numerous would-be rulers, religion apparently became a means of establishing political legitimacy when force alone did not work. Religion also allowed governments to expand the jurisdiction of their political power, especially in ancient India, as according to the Hindu philosophy it was believed that not only was the ruler the protector of his people but it was his *dharma* (duty) to extend the glory of his kingdom by conquest. At the same time, the various later religions like Buddhism, Jainism, Islam and Sikhism, which came in from outside or were spawned in Indian soil were, if not actively propagated, protected by one or the other ruler of the time. Buultjens (1986) thus concludes that religion and politics anchored each other and that "...the principal needs of traditional government in India were underwritten by the authority of religion. As part of the exchange, religion received its due from the traditional state".

With the advent of the British, the anchoring relationship between the state and the two major religions - Hinduism and Islam - is believed to have undergone a change, like everything else, "...and religion instead became the legitimizer of Indian nationalism and political protests..." (Buultjens, 1986). Displaced by Christianity and denied any official political role, Hinduism and Islam found new legitimacy as platforms for promoting nationalism. Leaders who spearheaded the fight against British rule in the initial years of the struggle, prior to and immediately after the Mutiny of 1856, were in fact political figures as well as social reformers, who sought both political and religious liberation from the British. The movement for liberation and self- government was further consolidated in the early 20th century by the advent of Gandhi. Buultjens (1986) observes that Gandhi, while promoting various concepts that had their origin in Hindu philosophy, was also particularly passionate about accommodating other religions. However, this apparently secular stand did not help stem the deepening cleavage between Hindus and Muslims and the final partition of the sub-continent on religious lines. Religion thus once again played a deciding role and, interestingly, those leaders who were more secular in their approach had many fewer followers.¹¹ In fact, the British had in recognition of the existence of numerous religious and social groups, given separate political representation to

specific religious groups and communities¹², and this is said to have contributed to the unique definition of ‘secular’ in the Indian Constitution (Mahajan and Jodhka, 2009).

3.2 The post-independence constitutional mandate of a secular state¹³

After independence in 1947, changes in the demographic and social profile of the country, with 80 per cent of the population being Hindus, led to more fundamentalist Hindus voicing the need for a “... a special place for Hinduism and a special recognition for traditional Hindu practices...” in the new Republic (Buultjens, 1986). However, growing demand for a democratic and egalitarian state, together with the secular philosophy and economic ambitions of the country, meant that ‘democracy’ and ‘secularism’ were the central pillars for the new political order. While democracy tried to ensure equality, secularism was translated into freedom for all religions to co- exist and the absence of any concept of a national religion, unlike many other countries in the region (including Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal). According to Buultjens, in the Indian political context, secularism thus meant a separation of the state from religion and consequently, a visible dilution of the official legitimizing role of the latter. However, unlike the western concept of secularism, this separation did not mean the relegation of religion into the private domain. Instead the constitution recognized the existence of religious diversity and provided space for all the faiths to co-exist on an equitable basis. Nehru explained this as a state which “...does not allow itself to be attached to one faith or religion...narrow religious nationalisms are relics of a past age and are no longer relevant today” (Nehru as quoted in Buultjens, 1986). Some, for example Kapila (2008), distinguish between ‘political’ secularism and ‘existential’ secularism (said to have existed in India for centuries), seeing the insertion of this form of secularism into the Constitution as the move of an unsure Congress Party keen to retain a captive vote bank after 1947.¹⁴ Various provisions in the Constitution (Articles 14, 15(1), 17, 25, 26 and 30) and subsequent amendments ensured that equality before the law and non-discrimination, irrespective of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, were also mandated.¹⁵ In fact, the Model Code of Conduct for political parties issued by the Election Commission of India (2007) specifically states that “There shall be no appeal to caste or communal feelings for securing votes.”

Buultjens (1986) is of the opinion that, although the Constitution had diluted the legitimizing role of religion, religious issues have continued to influence political life and some political parties have from time to time used religious issues to gain visibility and strength, in a way continuing to uphold the

legitimizing role of religion, albeit in a much diluted form. Buultjens attributes the subtle but continuing role of religion in politics to several factors, including the complicated and multi-layered structure of the Hindu religion, which allows for the co-existence of the modern and traditional; the fact that religion continues to be a means of securing political returns; and the insecurity of minority communities like the Muslims and even the Sikhs. However, he adds that in most cases such a religious focus has been more of a local phenomenon, with few instances of a religious issue gaining sustained national political importance.¹⁶ At the same time, Buultjens predicted that India's commitment to secularism would only be shaken if there was a major upheaval or 'Hindu assault', given the predominance of the Hindu population. The upheaval itself, he suggested, might be the result of several factors, one of the most significant being a possible disintegration of the Congress or its takeover by Hindu fundamentalist groups. Buultjens appears to have spoken with some foresight, as since the 1980s the country has witnessed the flip flop fortunes of the Congress as being closely aligned to the rise and fall of the BJP, which is often accused of being a Hindu fundamentalist party.

On a more constructive note, Mahajan and Jodhka (2009, p. 10) attribute the existence of religion in the political domain to the fact that the Constitution recognized that people with strong religious commitments should be allowed to participate in political activities. This was an appreciation of the fact that "...religion was an important marker of personal identity..." and recognition that it was inevitable that people belonging to different communities would bring the concerns of their groups into the political and public domain. However, as secularism in the Indian context implies neutrality and equidistance, Mahajan and Jodhka argue that it allows for individuals from different religions to have shared concerns and also to campaign for these with existing or explicitly formed political parties. Thus while on one hand this allows for religious political parties to co-exist with secular political groups, on the other it makes space for so-called secular groups to make demands on behalf of specific religious communities. While the secular parties attempt to create a large support base through a 'coalition of interest' and by cutting across religion and caste, religious parties focus on the concerns of the specific target community they profess to represent. However, this distinction is not always clear and both types of political party succumb to the demands of democratic and competitive politics, resulting in any one of the multiple identities (of caste, religion, language and region) being brought to the fore as and when the situation demands.¹⁷ Moreover, most parties canvas for votes from various religious and social groups. Mahajan and Jodhka conclude that this leads to a complex situation in which it is difficult for a single identity-based political party to attain hegemony over others.

As a result, “even though religion occupies a central place in individual and social life and there is space for religious parties, that space is by no means secure” (2009, p. 16).

3.3 Religious political parties

It is perhaps this unique interpretation of secularism and hence the equal space provided for all religious communities and social groups in the public domain that has led to a scenario in which, as Mahajan and Jodhka (2009, p. 15) conclude, “while there are a few [religious] political parties that claim to be the voice of a particular community, many more claim to represent the interests of particular religious communities.” Hence, while religious groups like the Christians and Muslims, who are in a minority as a percentage of the population, are not represented by separate religious parties, even a majority religion like Hinduism cannot lay claim to a political party that is exclusively Hindu-focused. Instead, there are political parties which on a sustained basis or from time to time claim to take up the cause of a specific religious or social group (for example, the Samjwadi Party on behalf of Muslims). Thus, while only the BJP at the national level has the label of ‘religion’ attached to it, the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD or Akali Dal) in the Punjab, Shiv Sena in Maharashtra, All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) in Andhra Pradesh and the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) in Kerala - all state-level parties - are the only real religious political parties in terms of their ideology and identity. However, their influence is almost always limited to their state of origin and, in some cases (like the Akali Dal), to a marginal extent in a neighbouring state.

While the Akali Dal (1920) and the AIMIM (1927) were founded well before India gained independence, the IUML was inspired by the better known and influential Muslim League of India and was formally established in 1948. Shiv Sena, on the other hand, is a product of post independence India, coming into existence almost two decades later, in 1966, in the State of Maharashtra.

The Akali Dal came into existence when the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), a religious body that had previously been formed to coordinate the upkeep of the Sikh *gurdwaras* (places of worship), found it necessary to have a political presence in the Punjab region to further its cause. The Akali Dal subsequently launched an agitation for the formation of a Sikh majority state, leading to the formation of the State of Punjab in 1966. The party claims to represent the political rights of the Sikhs and aims to preserve and promote their cultural heritage. Although the Akali Dal¹⁸ has come into power several times in the state, it not only had to continuously confront the Congress¹⁹ but also deal

with lack of faith in its project on the part of its own constituency, as well as party in-fighting. The result has been that over the years the party has split into several contesting factions and has only been able to extend its influence beyond Punjab to Haryana and, to some extent, Himachal Pradesh.

The Shiv Sena evolved out of a 'sons of the soil' ideology, at a time when there was large scale unemployment in Bombay. This was attributed to large numbers of in-migrants seeking economic and livelihood opportunities, primarily from the southern states of India and Gujarat. Although Shiv Sena opened its political scoreboard by winning the local municipal elections in 1967, it came into power with a broader base in the 1980s when it changed its stance from the 'sons of the soil' to a *Hindutva* ideology, and came to be associated with an anti-Muslim and 'revival of the Hindu culture' agenda. As Mahajan and Jodhka (2009, p. 43) point out, Shiv Sena:

...targeted Muslims and constructed a Hindu national identity by excluding the Muslim community or representing it negatively. In this process, the Shiv Sena began to view itself as the custodian of Hindu culture This religious and cultural divide was part of the official discourse of the party...

In 1989 the Shiv Sena entered into an electoral alliance with the BJP and eventually, in 1995, formed a coalition government in Maharashtra. Since then it has been a key player either as part of the governing party or as the main opposition in the state. However, like the Akali Dal, its influence is limited to one region.

The All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen, a political party with an Islamist ideology, is even smaller in reach and has not been able to extend its presence beyond the city of Hyderabad in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh. The Majlis had come into existence when it advocated the setting up of a Muslim dominion in the erstwhile princely state of Hyderabad, rather than integration with India. Banned soon after India gained independence, the Majlis, however reorganized itself in the late 1950s and made a political comeback in the 1970s, when it visibly distanced itself from the ideology of Hyderabad as a separate state.

Similarly, the Indian Union Muslim League, regarded as a Muslim nationalist political party, has an electoral presence only in northern Kerala.²⁰ The IUML, founded in 1948, has its roots in the Muslim League of Jinnah and claims to be the political organization of all Indian Muslims. Since 1960, the IUML has been part of various coalition governments in Kerala, led by both the Congress and the

Communist Party of India (Marxist).²¹ IUML won two Parliamentary seats in the *Lok Sabha* elections of 2004 and today it is part of the United Progressive Alliance at the centre, despite its support base being marginal beyond parts of Kerala.

The Akali Dal, AIMIM and IUML were each thus clearly linked to a religious minority group, while Shiv Sena was born out of a need to promote the interests of the Marathi people. The fact that the latter eventually grew to be associated with the *Hindutva* movement and came to represent a faction that was considered to be more 'right' than BJP itself, was a reflection of the changing party alliances and the dilution of ideology in electoral politics. The history and growth of the now almost defunct AIMIM, and to some extent the IUML, also speaks more of political opportunism than of a religious ideology.

BJP, on the other hand, has a national presence and has been accorded the status of a national political party by the Election Commission of India. It is not a religious political party by constitution or mandate. At the same time, it was born as Jan Sangh out of the political needs of some of the members of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which itself was founded as a social organization with the principal objective of establishing India as a Hindu *Rashtra* or Hindu nation. In addition, because of its continuing informal and organic rather than formal and functional relationship with RSS, BJP has acquired the mantle of a 'Hindu fundamentalist' organization. Having said that, BJP's religious credentials, like those of the RSS, are both underlined and vehemently contested across the political spectrum, within and outside the country.

4 The BJP and the RSS – the evolution of a political power in relation to a social organization

An overview of BJP's origin and evolution, and more importantly, the history of its relationship with RSS, an organization described as "...probably the most controversial organization in contemporary India" (Kanungo, 2002), is critical to understanding the former's contested reputation as a 'religious' political party, prior to unravelling its relationships with any welfare organizations it supports. Besides, it is also important to unpack *Hindutva* as defined by RSS and BJP and to assess its religious content. As the following section will describe, RSS itself emerged as a response to the socio-political conditions prevailing in late 19th and early 20th century pre-independence India. This section seeks firstly to establish the 'Hindu' orientation of RSS and its contested ideology, and secondly to examine RSS's role in the establishment of the Bharatiya Janata Party and the dynamics of the relationship between the two.

4.1 Emergence of the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) as a 'social service' organization

The 'communalization' (Basu et al, 1993) of politics under the British in India in the early 1900s is stated to have been one of the primary reasons for the emergence of RSS, ostensibly as a social organization with the sole objective of freeing 'Hindustan' and saving the 'Hindu' culture. In reality, a combination of factors, which included rifts in relationships between Hindus and Muslims and between upper caste Brahmins and non-Brahmins, as well as fears of the influence of Western culture, provided a fertile ground for the foundation of RSS.

Certain events in the early years of the 1920s not only brought to the forefront the religious differences between Muslims and Hindus in India, but also introduced communal tensions into the realm of Indian politics. Tensions between the two communities intensified in the following years (1923-1926), with each trying to protect its religious interests and identity in various ways. Political historians often describe this period and the formation of RSS as the culmination of 'Hindu revivalism', wherein social and political movements and *sanghatans* (organized groups) like the Arya Samaj²² and the Hindu Mahasabha²³ emerged and played critical roles. The Hindu Mahasabha spearheaded the *sanghatan* movement and brought together different Hindu groups, including some leaders of the Congress, on a common platform, promoting the cause of a strong Hindu community to equal the strength of the Muslims.²⁴ The Hindu nationalist leaders "...cashed in on a new Hindu feeling of vulnerability and...exploited it by launching the RSS" (Jaffrelot, 2005a). It was amidst this communal upheaval that RSS was formed in 1925 in Nagpur, the intellectual capital of the Central Provinces, by Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, a Maharashtrian Brahmin.

Hedgewar devoted himself to politics - in principle with the Congress - but with a Hindu perspective. However, he saw the collapse of the 'Non-Cooperation Movement' and riots in the subsequent years as a result of Muslims in India proving to be "...Muslims first and Indians only secondarily..." (from an official publication of RSS, quoted by Basu et al, 1993), apparently underscoring Muslims' allegiance to their community rather than the nation. Hence, Hedgewar came to believe that only Hindus could free the country and save its Hindu culture; he was also convinced that Muslims were 'anti-national' and the enemy of Hindus and that the two communities could never come together as a fraternity on a common national cause. He also believed that, although Hindus were more able than Muslims and the British in terms of manpower and resources, what they lacked as a community was a sense of "...national consciousness and cohesion", when what was needed was "national solidarity" against both the British and the Muslims. Hindus hence, in his view, needed to be organized into a dedicated and disciplined structure to counter the devious moves of Muslims and ensure a Hindu *Rashtra* or nation with a Hindu culture. The RSS was an outcome of this perceived need.

Some socio-political observers are sceptical about Hedgewar's concerns about Muslims' supposed treacherous attitude. They believe that for Hedgewar, the key issue was the conflict of interests between Brahmins and non-Brahmins and suggest that the formation of RSS was actually an "...an upper caste reaction to efforts at self-assertion by down trodden groups within the Hindu fold" (Basu et al, 1993), particularly as the mid-19th century also saw an upsurge of anti-Brahmin and *dalit* movements in Maharashtra under Ambedkar. Bidwai (2004) observes that the RSS largely appealed to the Maratha Brahmins and notes that its membership was initially predominantly confined to Brahmins from Western and Central India. In addition, the two architects of the concept of *Hindutva* and of RSS – V.D. Sarvarkar and Golwalkar - were Maratha Brahmins. Thus, a conflict of interest between Brahmins and non-Brahmins, as much as tensions between Hindus and Muslims, appears to have been the reason for the establishment of RSS and the propagation of Hindu nationalism as its ideology. The fact that even today RSS appears to be a bastion of upper caste Hindus supports this theory.

4.2 Confirming the 'Hindu' orientation of RSS

If RSS was any other social organization, it would merely be known as one of the largest and best organized non-governmental development organizations (*Sangh Parivar*) in the country today, working in areas as diversified as education, health, tribal welfare, empowerment of women, labour unions,

disaster management and relief work, amongst others. However, the vision, ideology and constitution of the organisation, as well as its use of specific Hindu symbols of worship, give it a definitive 'Hindu' character and a unique Hindu profile.

4.2.1 'Hindu Rashtra' and 'Hindutva' as a vision

The *Hindutva* agenda of RSS was set when Hedgewar urged a Hindu *Rashtra* or Hindu nation, and his successor M.S. Golwalker, while on one hand extolling the catholicity of Hinduism, on the other defined the Hindu nation as a place where:

...the non-Hindu people... must adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and revere Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but the glorification of the Hindu nation,...they must cease to be foreigners or may stay in the country wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation... (From Golwalker *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, quoted in Basu, T, et al, 1993).

Golwalker (1906-73) strongly believed that religious minorities had to show respect to Hindu symbols because he regarded them as synonymous with the identity of the nation and not merely the religion. He argued that society in India is Hindu because Hindus had inhabited the area stretching from the Himalayas to the southern ocean for thousands of years; moreover, he asserted that it was the Hindu forefathers who had established standards and norms and fought against foreign invaders. Hence, he claimed, only a Hindu could claim to be a "child of this soil." Religious minorities were therefore counselled to pledge allegiance to the Hindu symbols of the nation and to restrict their own religious rituals and practices to the confines of private space.²⁵ Thus for Golwalker, the 'nation' was constituted of geographical, racial, religious, cultural and linguistic elements.

Later, RSS leaders voiced similar views, believing that the "Hindu culture contains within it the essence of Indian identity" (Jaffrelot, 2005b). As Jaffrelot noted, RSS writers like Patenge (n.d.) observed that Hindus who converted to Islam and Christianity were not only forced to change their mode of worship, but also their style of dressing, names, culture, value system and lifestyles. Patenge believed that conversion led to a simultaneous change in nationality, "and that was the root cause of all their problems" (Patenge in a meeting of RSS officers on the subject of "Outlook of the Sangh towards the Non-Hindus"). Patenge added that the 'problem' of non-Hindus like Muslims and Christians is, therefore, not the problem of faith, alleging that it "transcends the barriers of faith and worship and tends to create social and political tensions in an anti-national perspective." He observed that it is

difficult to bring non-Hindus into mainstream politics, thus the only answer is *Hindutva*, which will protect everyone's common interests.

Other RSS thinkers and supporters of the concept of *Hindutva* today believe that it is Hinduism that prevents India from being a theocratic state. They are convinced that Hinduism is a way of looking at the universe, with a value system that encompasses all aspects of life. They regard it as the only binding matter in India, without which society would get dispersed and lost like that of the ancient Greeks.²⁶ For K.N. Govindacharya, the one-time General Secretary of the BJP, the 'Hindu *Rashtra*' and 'Hinduness' are synonymous with 'Bharatiyata' or Indianness. He urges that exclusivist thinking must be shed and believes that the solution to communal tensions and co-existence in India is the 'Indianization' of all religions. Arguing that sectarianism is not in India's ethos and that an Indian type of 'Protestantism' will emerge in due course, in an interview given to the *Times of India*, January 30, 1999, he concludes that India is already a Hindu *Rashtra*:

If you accept that the nation and state are not co-terminus, then geo-culturally we are a Hindu nation. This is because a sense of belonging is embedded in the spirit of Hinduness, which, in turn, is the result of living together and sharing the same *sanskriti* [culture] for a millennium.

Govindacharya sees a future where 'Hinduness' will exist even if individuals' mode of worship differs and this is what he believes will motivate respect for all religions. To strengthen their collective argument, RSS supporters often refer to the 1995 judgement of the Supreme Court of India, which observed that "... *Hinduism* or *Hindutva* are not necessarily to be understood and construed narrowly, confined only to the strict Hindu religious practices unrelated to the culture and ethos of the people of India, depicting the way of life of the Indian people."

Thus the concept of Hindu *Rashtra* as propounded by Golwalkar and others after him²⁷ appears to accommodate the practice of other religions, at least theoretically, but with the rider of this being confined to private space and combined with allegiance to the Hindu nation. Golwalkar was attracted towards the idea of Hindu solidarity, as propounded by Ramakrishna Paramahansa (a Hindu religious leader of the 19th century), according to which every different sub-group would have its own rituals but would be reconciled within an overarching Hindu solidarity. However, the catch was that Hindu symbols and festivals were adopted by the followers of *Hindutva* as representing a common culture

and civilization, so that Muslims and Christians are suspect if they fail to recognize this common culture and accord due reverence to its symbols (Basu et al, 1993).

Thus, for RSS, while the Hindu *Rashtra* forms the centre of its ideological base, it does not claim to be religious, because it does not aim to establish a religious Hindu state. Instead, it considers it to be a 'cultural and emotional' concept, with the nation at its centre. Thus while the "...nationals of this nation may have different religious faiths, ... they all have to subscribe to *Hindutva* or Hinduness, which is the cultural ethos of the nation..." (Kanungo, 2002). In this view, a Hindu is "any person born in this country, irrespective of his or her religion" and Lord Rama and Krishna are seen as national heroes (Kanungo, 2002). It is this that is controversial: are the symbols associated with *Hindutva* purely cultural, or do they have religious significance? It is critical to understand this definition of *Hindutva* in order to assess whether or not the Bharatiya Janata Party is a Hindu religious political party.

4.2.2 *Borrowed symbols and rituals*

As evidence of RSS's Hindu orientation, many researchers observe that "...RSS draws liberally from the Hindu past to construct its belief system,... Hindu thought and practice inform the verbal symbols, signs and rituals which the RSS employs" (Andersen and Damle, 2005). According to Andersen and Damle, the founding fathers of RSS based their concept of a strong society on the Vedanta (Advaita), in turn based on the Upanishads, from which Hinduism draws much of its knowledge and wisdom. Like the Hindu belief that *dharma* can only be realised through the acquisition of knowledge and selfless devotion to duty and worship, RSS too subscribes to the concept of worship, but with a difference: while the Hindus worshipped idols, RSS demands the worship of a 'living God' identified as the 'Hindu *Rashtra*' or nation. The nation itself is identified with the 'Divine Mother Goddess' and referred to as *Bharat Mata* or Mother India. In addition, RSS believes in following the *samskaras* for developing the 'character' of its members, for which in turn *sadhana* is critical. *Samskaras* are Vedic rites of passage that mark the various stages of a Hindu's life, including a series of sacrifices and rituals which are broadly termed *sadhana*.

RSS's affinity to the Hindu religion is also visible in the festivals that it celebrates. Every year it observes festivals like Raksha Bandhan,²⁸ Makar Shankratni or the winter solstice, and Dasera, the Hindu festival of victory of good over evil. In fact, RSS itself was founded on Vijay Dashmi day, the last and most important day in the week-long Dasera celebrations. Some of the other festivals celebrated

include the coronation day of Shivaji, the great Maratha warrior king; the victory of the Hindus over the Mughals; and the Guru Dakshina day, when the RSS flag is worshipped as a guru or teacher, another concept borrowed from Hinduism. The flag itself is said to have belonged to Lord Rama and used by Shivaji. The two most telling evidences of the Hindu religious orientation of RSS, however, are the facts that its official website states that 'Any Hindu male'²⁹ can become a member of RSS (www.rss.org) and at the time of taking the oath a *swayamsewak* (member of RSS) promises to work for the "... betterment of [his] sacred Hindu religion, Hindu culture, and Hindu community..." and to devote himself to the prosperity of the 'Holy Motherland' (Andersen and Damle, 2005).

Thus, RSS espouses an ethno-religious concept of nationalism, wherein Hindu society needs to be reorganized to produce a unified nation that reveres and respects its comprehensive Hindu culture, while non-Hindus need to be assimilated into this culture. However, the fact that much of this culture reflects the philosophies and practices of Hinduism makes it difficult for RSS to completely divorce itself from the religious implications of its beliefs and to promote itself as a secular organization. Further, its interpretation of the word *Hindutva* as representing an ethnic community with similar racial characteristics that occupies the land between the Himalayas and the Indian Ocean does not hold much strength.³⁰

4.2.3 A hierarchal and Hindu 'family'-based organizational structure

Finally, a Hindu *sanghathan* (organization) is the framework of reference for the pyramid-shaped organizational structure of the RSS. For the purpose of management, the *sanghathan* is organized at the national, provincial or state and local levels, with each level being headed by a team leader whose mandate is to build and strengthen the various units or *sakhas* of the *Sangh*. At the top of the pyramid is the *sarsangchalak*, the overall guide and philosopher of RSS³¹, supported by an assembly of representatives from the various state-level assemblies, the state *sangchalaks*, *pracharaks* (preachers and promoters) and members of the central working committee. Below this, at the level of the state, is an elected assembly headed by a state *sangchalak*, who is generally an influential person from the region, to provide credibility to the organization and facilitate the generation of resources. At the local level is a *mandal* committee, which is responsible for a group of *shakhas* from a specific locality, and above this is a city (*nagar*) committee.

The *shakhas*, located at the bottom of the pyramid and forming the base of the Sangh, are the most important units, each consisting of about 100 male members known as *swayamsewaks* (volunteers), and headed by a Secretary and a Chief Teacher, apart from various unit heads. The *shakhas* meet regularly and follow a set of routine activities, guided by their team leaders. As the purpose is to build up both the physical and mental strengths of individuals and to mould them into the fold of Hindu culture and tradition, the activities necessarily include physical training and team building through group games and exercises, in addition to regular discussions on themes related to the history, geography, philosophy and culture of the Hindu *Rashtra*. A familial bonding exists between the *shakha* members, with the leader of the *shakha* playing a role somewhat similar to that of the head of a Hindu extended family, including providing support at times of need. Kanungo (2002) refers to this as a “unique brotherhood” that is bound together by common observation of rituals, attire, vocabulary, discussions and participation in group games.

The RSS’s strategy is to penetrate the social structure of the country and reach out to every individual in order to build a nation that will not only be morally and socially sound but also be mentally and physically fit and united in a single national culture. An expanding network of *shakhas*, with their disciplined routine, proved to be a successful strategy for reaching out to the furthest corners of the country. Starting with a small group of *swayamsewaks* in Nagpur in 1925, the *shakhas* have grown steadily over the years.³² According to the RSS annual report for 2009, at present there are 43,905 *shakhas* in 30,015 villages and urban areas across the country. At the same time, the official website also adds that, as RSS does not keep a formal record of membership or a register of *swayamsewaks*, their exact number is difficult to count (www.rss.org).

4.3 The emergence of RSS affiliates and the concept of the ‘Sangh Parivar’

The *shakhas* were only the first step in the RSS roadmap to influence every sphere and sector of Indian society. The other critical components were the sectoral affiliates that have emerged over the years, which many critics refer to as ‘fronts’, ‘offshoots’, ‘off spring’ or ‘branches’ of RSS.³³ While the development activities of the *Sangh* itself are restricted to relief work and assistance during times of natural or man-made disasters, its ‘affiliates’ focus on specific sectors, ranging from education, empowerment of women and tribal welfare to the concerns of farmers and industrial workers, with the

common purpose of nation-building in all walks of life. While the organizations do provide support to socially and economically marginalized communities, more importantly they provide a foothold for the RSS in critical sectors and hence, a means of promoting the core agenda of the Hindu *Rashtra*.

It is believed that the emergence of the organizations was need-based, often depending on the interests and efforts of individuals or groups within the RSS.³⁴ While in most cases new organizations were established, at times the RSS *pracharaks* also penetrated existing ones.³⁵ The need for such a strategy became especially urgent after the country gained independence in 1947 and disruptive activities became menacingly obvious. Thus,

- In order to confront and dissipate the energies and growing impact of the Communists in parts of the country, especially amongst student unions in the universities, Balraj Madhok, an RSS activist, formed the All India Students' Union (ABVP) in 1948. The emphasis was not building up student power but bringing all the different elements of a university onto a common platform to effect overall change; hence, the ABVP also brought teachers into its fold. Today, the organization is one of the largest student unions in the country.
- The Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (an Indian trade union) was the other affiliate that emerged in response to the activities of the Communists amongst the working class. The BMS had its origin in the late 1940s when, under Golwalkar's direction, one of the *pracharaks* (D.P. Thengadi) joined the INTUC, a labour union affiliated to the Congress, revived its Madhya Pradesh branch and subsequently in 1955 set up the BMS in Bhopal. In keeping with the RSS theory of assimilation of all social groups into one Indian culture and a cohesive social order, the mandate for BMS was to counter the communist ideology of class struggle and instead promote the concept of a collaborative socio-political society in which members live in harmony with each other.
- Similarly, to give shape to its objective of strengthening the minds and bodies of children and young people, RSS entered into the field of education in 1952 when Nanaji Deshmuk, a Maharastrian Brahmin, opened the first school - the Sarswati Shishu Mandir - in one of the most backward areas of Eastern Uttar Pradesh. The network of schools spread to the remotest parts of the country and was subsequently federated under an umbrella organization called the Vidhya Bharathi, which is today the largest single educational network in the country (and the focus of the case study in Section 5 of this report).
- In the same manner, the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram (tribal welfare centre) was set up in 1952 in Jashpur by R.K Deshpande, primarily to counter the influence of Christian missionaries amongst the tribals and to

reconvert those who had become Christians. This was done by establishing free residential schools and hospitals and providing training and support to improve livelihoods.

- The Bharatiya Kisan Sangh was set up in Vidharbha in 1960 by Bhau Saheb Bhushkute, another RSS *pracharak*, with the primary objectives of undertaking value-added research and ensuring better prices for farmers.
- In 1964, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) or World Hindu Council was launched, to bring together the different Hindu sects and their leaders under a common structure and in order to make the religion more comprehensive. Although this was not a very effective strategy, the VHP itself has evolved to be the militant arm of the RSS, spearheading several controversial movements aimed at establishing the Hindu way of life and culture, including leading the call for the construction of a temple at Ayodhya, the birthplace of the Lord Rama.³⁶
- Seva Bharathi was set up by Vishnu Kumar, another RSS *pracharak*, with the objectives of eradicating un-touchability and promoting culture and literature, as well as providing support to economically and socially marginalized communities, without any form of caste, regional or language-based discrimination. Through the Seva Bharathi, RSS is able to directly reach out to the lower castes.
- Rashtra Sevika Samiti, the first of the affiliates to have been set up in 1936 by Laxmibai Kelkar, an admirer of Hedgewar is, however, different from all the above. This is a parallel women-only organization, set up on similar lines to that of the RSS, which is open only to male Hindus.
- Finally, there is the political affiliate, the Bharatiya Jan Sangh, established in 1951, just before the first general elections, not only to protect itself as an organization but also to promote the cause of the Hindu Rashtra through the machinery of the state. The Bharatiya Jan Sangh (BJS) subsequently gave birth to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Thus, while over the years the RSS *shakhas* spread throughout the country, the network of affiliates also grew. Although the above organizations are the better known ones, the RSS website lists a total of nineteen organizations that it states are RSS-inspired.³⁷ Each organization is technically autonomous and both RSS and the affiliates are at pains to convince the world of their independence.³⁸ Analysing the relationship, Jaffrelot (2005b) observes not only that many of the RSS leaders are reluctant to even acknowledge the idea that a network exists but also that divergent views exist within the RSS community itself. While RSS members like L.K. Advani (the current leader) and Govindacharaya (a previous leader of the political affiliate, the BJP) defend the concept of the *Sangh parivar* and state that it is a means of 'harmonizing' the divergent interests of the various

organizations, K.S. Sudarshan, who was the *sarsangchalak* until recently, objected to the use of the term '*parivar*'. Instead, he believed that the network was a group of allied organizations that are commonly inspired by the 'Hindu thought process' but are otherwise independent. The significant but subtle influence of the RSS over the affiliates or allied organizations clearly comes through in Sudarshan's statement that the RSS, unlike the head of a family, cannot impose its decisions on other organizations; instead, he asserts, "...we can only suggest." It is the *swayamsewaks* who consider whether a suggestion is "...valid and get it accepted" by the concerned organization." Interestingly, this view was endorsed in the course of this study by several RSS members associated with the VBABSS and even BJP. The *swayamsewaks* ensure that "balance and cooperation is maintained", reinforcing the importance of *swayamsewaks* and the process of *shakha* building.

The RSS's agenda clearly emerges as one of 'nation building' with a 'Hindu' orientation. Over the years, RSS has stood firmly by its argument that 'Hindu' in this case refers not so much to the religion as to the people living in a specific geographic area and their culture, values and practices. The people themselves are in turn identified not so much by their religion, caste or community, but by virtue of their relationship to the nation state. However, the conditionalities attached to these values and practices are so closely identifiable with the religion and its philosophy that it is difficult to convincingly separate the organization from the religion. The perpetuation of these defined values and practices is the core purpose of RSS, for which it spreads into every sector of the society, including the political life of the nation. While RSS itself solely focuses on the task of nation building, the 'affiliates', which have no apparent functional linkages with the parent organization, nevertheless contribute to taking the core agenda forward, although perhaps with varying degrees of commitment. In addition, affiliates like VHP and Bajrang Dal have taken the Hindu *Rashtra* and nation-building agenda to the realms of communal militancy, which makes it even more difficult for RSS to retain its professed cultural, non-religious image.

The next two related questions that need to be answered are how RSS's political affiliate, the BJS-BJP, emerged and how closely it is aligned to the agenda of building a Hindu nation.

4.4 Bharatiya Jan Sangh and the Bharatiya Janata Party: a growing need for a political stake

The Bharatiya Jan Sangh, and subsequently the Bharatiya Janata Party, thus emerged during the expansion of the RSS's agenda to influence every sphere of society with its ideology of a Hindu Rashtra. Both the constitution of RSS and its leaders claim that RSS is just a cultural organisation, with no political ambitions or, as noted above, a religious agenda. However, these claims have again and again been debunked by political writers. This section firstly describes and analyses the reasons for RSS's attempts to seek political power through its political affiliates, the Jana Sangh and subsequently the Bharatiya Janata Party. Secondly it describes the evolution of BJP as a national party and the nature and extent of its engagement with RSS's core Hindutva agenda.

4.4.1 *The initial years of political reticence*

In the initial two decades of its existence (in fact until the end of the 1940s), RSS painstakingly tried to keep itself out of active politics, apparently fearing that such involvement would corrupt the minds of the *swayamsewaks*, encourage personal ambitions and result in rivalry and discord within the organization. Hedgewar, although linked to political parties like the Congress and Hindu Mahasabha, was wary of any involvement that in his eyes would compromise the agenda and work of RSS. Perhaps the single greatest political act in his life, soon after the establishment of RSS, was his participation in the 'Dandi March' in 1930³⁹, which resulted in his arrest and a year in jail. While in prison, however, Hedgewar established a good rapport with fellow Congress inmates, which subsequently helped him to expand the RSS network. Similarly, Hedgewar was not only inspired by some of the leaders of the Hindu Mahasabha (Sarvakar, Monjee) but, through his association with the Mahasabha, a mutual benefit association, was also able to expand the influence of RSS into the northern and north-western parts of the country. Hedgewar's apparent strategy was to impress the Hindu leaders with the strength and skills of RSS's trained and highly disciplined volunteers by lending them for the Mahasabha sessions and subsequently, encashing the goodwill generated, rather than joining the Mahasabha as a political entity. Basu et al (1993) observe that Hedgewar wanted RSS to remain a 'cultural' organization pursuing long term goals through "...quiet but sustained physical-cum-ideological training of cadres." Basu et al add that this 'cultural'/'political' tension has persisted throughout the history of RSS.

Golwalkar carried this concept further, aspiring to make RSS the “radiating centre” (Jaffrelot, 2005a) of all the ideals of (Hindu) society. He thought that politics could never build a patriotic nation of people; instead believing that culture “... moulds a nation on right lines” (Bhishikar, 1999). Thus Golwalkar concluded that there was no need for a conscious entry into the political sector in order to further the cause of the Hindu *Rashtra*. Instead, cultural *samskaras* (traditional norms) and a selfless cultural organization would, in his view, bring about a state of “chaste nationalism”. In other words, it appears that Golwalkar aimed at influencing political power in the long run by establishing a Hindu *Rashtra*, the ideals of which would encompass all spheres of life. Thus, in the decades after its establishment until 1950, although RSS was not actively involved in politics, it cleverly used its political connections to expand its network and outreach, while cautiously engaging with political parties. It also took pains not to antagonize the British rulers and tried to keep away from the limelight.

Interestingly, the first decisive brush with the government came soon after independence, when RSS was banned because of its (past) association with Nathu Ram Godse⁴⁰, the assassin of Mahatma Gandhi. RSS was declared unlawful in 1948 and a large number of its members were arrested. In spite of persistent negotiations with the government (led by Nehru), attempts to raise the bogey of Communist insurgencies and the promise of support, the government did not lift the ban until 1949, when RSS agreed to organize itself as a duly registered body, with a written constitution, confine itself only to the cultural field and function with transparency.⁴¹ RSS did not oppose the conditions set, again perhaps because it did not want to attract undue attention and obstacles to its work; however, the demands of some RSS members for it to actively participate in politics became louder and more persistent, with the RSS leadership finally succumbing to popular demand.

In its early years, therefore, RSS emerges as an organization that was wary of attracting undue attention from the British-ruled state, perhaps out of fear of retaliation from a stronger force and obstruction to its own agenda. RSS’s association with the Congress and even the Mahasabha, with whom it shared an ideological kinship, was limited primarily to expanding its own network. Even when faced with a total ban by the independent Indian government, it chose to quietly accept the ban and negotiate a revocation of the order, rather than enter into a position of open confrontation with the state. The subsequent strategy of establishing a political affiliate hence appears to be a well thought out move that paved the way for an initial association with the Bharatiya Jan Sangh (BJS) and the eventual formation of the Bharatiya Janata Party.

4.4.2 *Association with Bharatiya Jan Sangh: self preservation or propagation of an ideology?*

While its own existence was a primary reason for associating with a political party, putting a stop to what some of the thinkers within RSS called the 'un- Bharatiya and anti- Bharatiya' policies of the government was another reason. What, however, was most significant was the articulation of a need to forward the cause of Hindu *Rashtra* not only through its own efforts but also through the state machinery. It was also emphasized by some members of the RSS that it "... must develop a political wing for the more effective and early achievements of its ideals."⁴² Several people from within and outside the organization, especially the younger *swayamsewaks* and *pracharaks*, were certain that RSS had to confront the powers that be with its own political party, whereas the more traditional elements, including Golwalkar, were reluctant to step directly into the political arena.

According to Bhishiker (1999), Golwalkar remained firm in his resolve of not entering into politics; however, at the same time he "... did not think it proper to suppress the workers' desire to participate in politics. So, while keeping the organisation ... fully aloof from politics, gave the workers the freedom to enter the political field."⁴³ RSS workers were therefore allowed to join Shyama Prasad Mukherjee⁴⁴ and help him to set up the Bharatiya Jan Sangh (BJS) in 1951. Mukherjee himself had been trying to persuade Golwalkar for several years to support him in his political endeavours, to set up the BJS as a Hindu nationalist alternative to the Congress, but until then had failed to make any headway. With the RSS and BJS joining hands, the latter found itself equipped with a trained and disciplined organizational cadre. Soon not only did the young RSS cadres become the backbone of the Jan Sangh, but through them the RSS headquarters in Nagpur is also believed to have had close contact with and control of the political party.

Several accounts⁴⁵ reiterate the compelling and influential role played by RSS in the 25 years of its existence and how BJS became dependent on RSS on several scores, especially related to organizational development and manpower. When Mukherjee died in 1953, soon after the creation of the party, Deendayal Upadhyaya, an RSS *pracharak*, took over as secretary of the party and marginalized the non-RSS members. Upadhyaya evolved a strategy of appointing trusted RSS workers as *sangathan mantries* or 'organizing ministers' in key positions at the national and state levels in the party. The *sangathan mantries* were the channel that allowed RSS to monitor the pulse of

BJS and mould it accordingly, and this is a strategy that has been continued with the BJP, the successor of BJS. In fact, the concept of the *sangathan mantries* was subsequently introduced into the other affiliates of RSS and became, despite vehement denial by RSS to date, a subtle means of control.

Subsequently, under Balasaheb Deoras, who succeeded Golwalkar, the BJS gathered more strength and established itself as a tough competitor to the Congress, with considerable reach. In fact Deoras is credited with bringing the RSS into open politics when he realized the need for a 'national ideology' after independence. Deoras reorganized the RSS to respond to the political requirements. Thus, the hierarchical structure of the RSS was re-formatted and aligned with electoral constituency boundaries; the *shakhas* were given a bigger role in elections to the legislature as well as other bodies, including trade unions; and the area of work of RSS, the parent body, and its affiliates was divided up, with RSS managing and controlling the affiliates. In addition, attempts were made to improve the funding situation, with RSS full-time workers to be employed by educational and other institutions at no cost to the RSS and some transparency introduced into the fundraising process. Apparently, more funds were collected in BJS-ruled constituencies, indicating the advantage of linking up with a political party. Deoras also drew other affiliates like ABVP and the BMS into the political activities of RSS and groomed them to topple 'corrupt and inefficient' governments like that in Gujarat and Bihar in the late 1960s and 1970s.

Obviously, BJS also gained from its association with RSS. According to the political historian Bipin Chandra (1998), BJS "drew its organised strength, centralised character and ideological homogeneity from the RSS." However, as Bruce Graham (2005) concludes, in describing the crisis of leadership and organization of the BJS, the party was also greatly handicapped by its image as being close to, if not dependent on, the RSS; its image as an extremist organization with intolerant views on the relationship between Hindus and other religious communities; and inexperienced leadership that worked in relative isolation and anonymity. Besides this, tensions between the RSS and non-RSS members of BJS were reported, for several reasons, including the RSS's controlling style as against the open democratic style favoured by BJS, leadership issues and the introduction of communal elements into the party agenda. Some within the BJS felt (justifiably) that the party was being used and that the RSS was "...working its way into the political arena through the Jan Sangh" (Graham, 2005). In fact, the control of RSS over BJS was so complete that the power of parliamentary leaders of the

party appeared to be over-ridden by the central organizational group (under the control of RSS). So while, largely by virtue of its association with the RSS, the BJS became an organized party, perhaps also because of this association, it could not make much progress.⁴⁶

Many political historians (for example, Curran and Gold, cited by Kanungo, 2002; Graham, 2005) believe that RSS's advocacy of a Hindu state, its rightist orientation, and its anti- Congress stand, apart from its organizational structure and the militant nature of the organisation, all point towards the fact that it had political ambitions from its inception. RSS was very much concerned with political power, but approached politics as a 'battle for the cultural heart of the nation' rather than quarrelling about 'party programmes'. It preferred to play the role of an 'institutional guru' to the nation, while keeping its own image clean. BJS was the first opportunity that RSS got to test this approach. Subsequently, as part of its strategy, from time to time RSS also mobilized its other affiliates, like the ABVP, BMS and VHP, to lead specific movements, instead of solely depending on its political affiliate.

4.4.3 Merger with the Janata Party: ideological and political accommodation

The post-Nehru era (mid-1960s), as stated earlier, saw the monopoly of the Congress being challenged after it had peaked during the reign of Indira Gandhi in the mid-1970s. The RSS, like many others, began to object to Gandhi's authoritarian style of functioning and supported Jayprakash Narayan's movement of 'total revolution', without being obviously involved in political activities. Again the association was mutually beneficial because, while RSS acquired the support and sanction of a respected Gandhian leader, Narayan got the benefit of the RSS cadres. As a result, when the opposition parties gathered together to put up a united front (Lok Sangarsh Samiti - LSS) to carry forward the movement initiated by Jayprakash Narayana against Indira Gandhi, Nanaji Deshmukh, who had earlier been a *pracharak* and was at the time the Organizing Secretary of the BJS, became the General Secretary of the LSS. The struggle intensified and ended in the declaration of an internal emergency, the arrest of several opposition leaders and also another ban on RSS (1975). There are conflicting versions of RSS's reaction to the ban: some suggest that it was cautious, did not want to take a confrontational position with Indira Gandhi and kept a low profile; but on the other hand it is supposed to have played a key role, working closely with LSS and providing support from its leaders and cadres at the cost of large scale arrests of its members.

The political activities of RSS thus became more pronounced and visible. As a result of its interactions with political parties, after the emergency, RSS became ideologically more accommodating and was quite instrumental in the formation of the Janata Party (JP).⁴⁷ The BJS, which by that time was faced with internal leadership problems, was merged with the Janata Party, which subsequently came to power in 1977 as a result of its courageous stand against authoritarianism and the excesses during the internal emergency declared by Prime Minister Gandhi between 1975 and 1977. Some of the prominent RSS members of BJS became cabinet ministers in the newly formed government led by the Janata Party. Subsequently, RSS also tasted victory in the Assembly (state level) elections later in the year, when some of its *swayamsewaks*, as members of the Janata Party, became chief ministers of states like Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.⁴⁸

However, the non-RSS members of the Janata Party, fearing that the RSS would again attempt to take control as it had in the case of the BJS, tried to persuade RSS to merge with the youth wing of the party. Deoras rejected the move, ironically on the grounds of the need for RSS to maintain the purity of its long term cultural objective. RSS, he thought, should never become a part of the government - although he did not seem to have any qualms in associating with political fronts like the BJS and the Janata Party to influence the government. Instead, Deoras is said to have used his links with the ruling Janata Party to strengthen the RSS presence in sectors like adult education and social welfare, perhaps ensuring access to resources as well as expanding his support. Kanungo (2002) adds another dimension to this reasoning, suggesting that his strategy was also a way to prop up the flagging resource position of a fast-growing RSS and its affiliates and accommodate its full-time workers in remunerative projects. The effects of the two-pronged strategy was to expand the outreach of RSS as well as its influence in the government.

The victory of the Janata Party was, however, short-lived, as it was in turn plagued by internal conflicts and power struggles. As a result, the party lost its electoral mandate in the mid-term general elections in 1980 and when the blame game started, the issue of 'dual membership' of the RSS faction represented by the Jana Sangh within the Janata Party again raised its head. The detractors of RSS alleged that the Janata Party's association with RSS through its Jana Sangh members gave it a communalist image and wanted the latter to merge with the youth wing of the Janata Party. The RSS refused and instead opened its door to non-Hindus, while at the same time continuing with its mission of uniting the Hindu community. However, as no mutually acceptable solution could be arrived at, the

national executive of the Janata Party took a decision to expel all former Jan Sangh (RSS) members from the party. Meanwhile, the RSS leadership, disillusioned with the internal fights, had also come to the conclusion that it was best for the Jan Sangh members to move out of the Janata Party and form their own political group. The expelled members thus came together and formed the Bharatiya Janata Party in April 1980.

4.5 The Bharatiya Janta Party: its ‘Hindutva’ trajectory and electoral politics

4.5.1 *Hindutva ideology with Gandhian socialism: the beginnings of inclusive politics*

The decision to support the formation of a separate political party with a more direct link and identification with RSS was not an easy one for the RSS leadership. The RSS members were divided into two camps: the traditionalists were apprehensive about opening the door to the non-Hindus and also were uncomfortable with the way that the organization was being brought into the limelight through factional politics and controversies, so alien to its philosophy and culture of discipline. On the other hand, the opportunities offered in terms of greater visibility, a national status and a decisive role in national debates attracted the organization into full-time politics, although through front agencies. Thus, caught between its commitment to its ideology on the one hand and the temptations of its very obvious political potential on the other, it decided to support the creation of a separate political party, the BJP, as the best possible way of fusing the ideology of the Hindu Rashtra and political accommodation.

The newly formed party had a distinct identity, which also reflected its RSS parentage⁴⁹ and, to some extent, its past links with the Bharatiya Jan Sangh and the Janata Party. Admittedly keen to chart a new course while retaining links with the past - perhaps to cash in on the goodwill of the erstwhile BJS and JP - the founders of the party, after much debate, called it the Bharatiya Janata Party, thus proclaiming its links with both the BJS and the Janata Party (Advani, 2008). BJP acknowledged Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee (founder of BJS), Pandit Deendayal Uphadyaya (an RSS *pracharak* and subsequently general secretary of BJS) and Jaya Prakash Narayan as its ideological gurus, chose the lotus flower as its election symbol and adopted a green and saffron flag - somewhat similar to the flag of the Janata Party - as its banner. The organizational structure saw a shift from the democratic

centralism of the RSS and the cadre-based structure of the Jan Sangh to a mass-based composition or participatory democracy. The party also thought it necessary to move beyond the RSS constituency of upper caste, urban middle class households of the Hindi-speaking belt in the northern parts of the country. However, while non-RSS and non-Jan Sangh leaders were co-opted into party positions, the key posts were occupied by RSS members, with A.B. Vajpayee becoming the first President and L.K. Advani sharing the responsibilities of the General Secretary with two others.⁵⁰ Advani (2008) claims that this change in organizational structure and growth strategy was necessitated by the large number of non-RSS activists who had been attracted to the BJS and subsequently the Janata Party between 1974 and 1980 because of the latter's bold stand against the Congress during the period of the emergency. However, some critics suspect that this might have been a strategic move to steer the party into more active national level politics and to accommodate a range of people, in order to project itself as a national alternative.

Apart from organizational restructuring, BJP's move towards an apparently more inclusive politics was also visible in the adoption of a fuzzy mix of ideology – the 'Integral Humanism' of Deendayal Upadhyaya and 'Gandhian Socialism'. Advani (2008) describes this as a "...subtle but significant ideological re-projection of the new party." He gives several reasons for this critical decision: firstly, BJP was formed after the forced split from the Janata Party; secondly, the new party had begun to attract a number of people who were not associated with the Jan Sangh (or the RSS) but had great appreciation for their work during the emergency; thirdly, according to Advani, Gandhian socialism was fully compatible with 'Integral Humanism' (see below) and at the same time very different from the Marxist concept of socialism; and lastly the new party wanted to counter the claim of the Communists to be the sole champions of the poor. There was thus a visible shift from the cultural ideology of the RSS to an ideology dictated by the politics of convenience and accommodation, or what Advani chose to call the ideology of 'nationalism'.

Thus, a new affiliate of the RSS came into existence, with an ideological restructuring tailored to suit the needs of a political party with national ambitions. The links with the RSS were maintained because the BJP could not afford to sever them (Kanungo, 2002). However, it chose not to unduly "showcase this umbilical cord that tied it to the RSS" (Dasgupta, 2004). Instead, until the elections of 1984, the party focused more on forging alliances with other parties to create a strong anti-Congress front. The founders of BJP, especially Vajpayee, were also more inclined to follow in the secular and coalition footsteps of the Janata Party, rather than the Jan Sangh.

Since its formation, the BJP has participated in eight general elections and several state assembly elections. Each reflects both the party's ambivalent relationships with *Hindutva* ideology and the RSS and its rising political ambitions. In the initial years, it did not achieve any major electoral gains. Its primary mandate was to topple the Congress from its monopolistic rule, although the latter continued to hold sway at the national level for various reasons. Subsequently, BJP did make some gains in a few state elections⁵¹ (Karnataka in the south and Himachal Pradesh in the north) but surprisingly lost out in Jammu and Kashmir, considered to have been the traditional stronghold of the Jan Sangh. While the party leaders attributed this defeat to Indira Gandhi's stand against Sheik Abdullah, the one-time separatist leader from Kashmir, some political historians attributed it to Gandhi cleverly playing the Hindu card. It is also speculated that Gandhi's Hindu plank won the approval of the RSS, which tacitly supported the Congress at the cost of the BJP!

In 1984 the BJP contested the general elections independently for the first time, but did not fare well in the polls. However, it consoled itself with the fact that the Congress had gained from the 'sympathy wave' generated by the assassination of Indira Gandhi. At the same time, BJP realised that its attempt to project a secular image, in the process promoting a somewhat 'diluted' *Hindutva*, was a wrong move. It therefore quickly began to adjust, making changes in its constitution and strategy to become a 'party with a difference', to ensure that the Congress would never again overshadow BJP's own Hindu image.

4.5.2 'Integral Humanism' and electoral gains

A significant change that was brought about in its quest to be a 'party with a difference' after the 1984 elections was that the working group of BJP decided to retain the philosophy of 'Integral Humanism', as its only basic philosophy, while the ambiguous 'Gandhian Socialism' was diplomatically explained away as an over-arching concept that was integral to BJP's overall philosophy. As part of this change, it adopted five basic principles: nationalism and national integration; democracy; a Gandhian approach to the socio-economic system, i.e. a society based on equality and freedom from exploitation; positive secularism; and value-based politics. Thus, a subtle shift back towards the RSS ideology was effected and when L.K. Advani took over from A.B. Vajpayee as the party president in 1986, he strategically cashed in on several opportunities to project the party as an upholder of Hindu society. In the process it soon became a prominent constituent of the opposition. The Shiv Sena's win on a

Hindutva platform in a by-election (Bombay) in 1986, finally ensured a central place for the concept in the BJP's strategy.

By the time of the next general elections in 1989, the BJP had become a more confident political player; had a strong presence in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra; and was negotiating to strike a strategic alliance with an equally interested Janata Dal in the elections. Although the alliance could not be brought about because of disagreement on the sharing of seats and joint campaign arrangements, the Janata Dal emerged as the single largest party and formed a coalition (National Front) government with support from BJP. In return for its support, the BJP managed to get its own people appointed as governors in key states, including Jammu and Kashmir. More importantly, the number of parliamentary seats that the BJP had won had increased from 2 in 1984 to 86 in 1989. Similarly, during the assembly elections held in eight states soon after, in 1990, it increased its tally from 162 to 496, all on the basis of its aggressive pro-Hindu stand and loud support to issues like Article 370 of the Constitution, which grants special rights to the state of Jammu and Kashmir, the country's only Muslim majority state; and for the enactment of a uniform civil code that would apply to members of all religions. Advani, however, attributes this success to the party's philosophy of 'positive secularism', which he interprets as 'Justice for All, but Appeasement of None', obviously referring to the Congress policy of appeasement of minorities (Advani, 2008).

The subsequent years saw the BJP strengthening its pro-*Hindutva* stand in line with the philosophy of its mentor. The National Executive Committee of the BJP (in 1989) had decided to take an active part in the so-called 'Ayodhya movement', which was led until then by the VHP, as it sensed the potential of the issue to create a Hindu vote bank while restoring its hard-line Hindu image. Advani played a lead role in the subsequent events, which also included a '*rath yatra*' (journey by chariot) from Somnath⁵² to Ayodhya. According to Advani, the purpose of the *yatra* was to meet and interact with the people, while at the same time creating mass support for the construction of a temple in Ayodhya. Political scientists like Kanungo, however, believe that the *yatra* was more the brainchild of the RSS than the BJP, that it was the RSS which was responsible for meticulously planning the journey and that the motive was more political than religious. The fact that in the course of the *yatra*, Advani did not lose any opportunity to criticize the 'pseudo-secularism' of the Congress, the Janata Dal and the Communists, and to express his party's anguish at the havoc caused by the impending implementation of the Mandal Commission Report⁵³ that gave an additional 27 per cent job reservation

to the backward castes, in a way endorses the hidden political agenda of the *yatra*. The *yatra* was, however, brought to an abrupt end almost at the close of the journey, with the arrest of Advani, the killing of a number of volunteers who had joined the *yatra* to lay the foundation of the Ram temple, the consequent withdrawal of BJP's support to the Janata Dal and the fall of the government. In fact the Janata Dal split into two and the splinter group - the Janata Dal (Secular) - formed the next government for a short period of 7 months (with the outside support of the Congress) until it too fell in March 1991, this time after the Congress withdrew support.

Thus within a span of ten years, the BJP had created a significant space for itself and had become a party to be reckoned with. Meanwhile, the RSS as an organization had grown with the BJP. By the end of the 1980s, the number of RSS *shakhas* had increased to 25,000 across 18,800 cities and villages and the RSS had managed to establish its presence in some of the southern states, like Kerala. Moreover, the RSS was able to make inroads into the core of Indian politics and expand its base beyond the urban middle class to rural areas across the country, giving it a 'pan-Hindu' identity (Kanungo, 2002).

4.5.3 Temple politics and the increasing role of RSS

The general elections of 1991 saw the Congress shattered by the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, but able to form a minority government. The BJP, however, again improved its electoral tally from 86 in 1989 to 121 in 1991 and scored remarkable victories in Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi, even gaining votes in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, although the numbers of seats it held fell. And like RSS, the BJP for the first time made some inroads in the southern states of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh and the eastern state of Assam, thus expanding its overall support base. With BJP becoming the largest opposition party, Advani became the leader of the opposition. What was significant, however, was the fact that the RSS, together with VHP, played a crucial role in the 1991 election campaigns, with Murli Manohar Joshi, an RSS member, as the new President of BJP. The promise of a temple in Ayodhya and Ramrajya ('Rule of Lord Ram', denoting justice, equality, peace and prosperity for all) was the central theme of the campaign, which was one of the most communally charged since Independence. What was more, the BJP's victory was based on its own credibility, as it did not enter into a pre-poll alliance with any other party. Ayodhya and the temple issue, as well as its stand against the

implementation of the Mandal Commission report, helped the party to consolidate the upper caste Hindu vote; in addition, the decline of the Congress in the north Indian states favoured it.

Encouraged by its performance, the BJP continued with its apparently 'religious' campaigns and *yatras*. The activities around Ayodhya intensified, and culminated in the now well-documented and infamous demolition of the mosque, leading to unprecedented communal riots across the country in December 1992. Several leaders of the BJP, including L.K. Advani and Murli Manohar Joshi, were arrested for inciting communal violence and the RSS, together with VHP, the Bajrang Dal and the Jamaat-e-Islami, were banned for their role in the demolition and the riots that followed.⁵⁴ The BJP, however, tried to distance itself from the demolition and, while some members in the party claimed that it was the hand of 'outside elements', Advani called it the 'saddest day of my life'. Advani declared that, although the BJP could be faulted for failing to gauge the impatience of the people participating in the movement, it could not be blamed for the demolition and what happened thereafter. Obviously there was political fallout, including the dismissal of BJP-led governments in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh and the resignation of the Chief Minister of the BJP-led government in Uttar Pradesh.

The RSS, certain that the BJP could turn the Ayodhya issue and the demolition to its own advantage, demanded that the government hold assembly elections in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh and at the same time mobilised the BJP to launch a public awareness programme in preparation for the mid-term general elections. However, the BJP lost the assembly elections in these states in 1993, partially because of its suspected role in the demolitions, although it was able to form governments in Gujarat and Maharashtra in 1995 (with the Shiv Sena). It is significant that despite some political losses, at the same time the Ayodhya issue enhanced the profile of the BJP to that of a national political player and the 'only alternative to the Congress' at the centre.

4.5.4 'Good governance' vs Hindutva ideology

In the subsequent general elections in 1996, although BJP's manifesto promoted *Hindutva* and 'cultural nationalism' and promised to build the temple at Ayodhya when it came into power, its campaign speeches focused on such development issues as economic reforms; smaller, tighter and cleaner government; decentralization and more financial autonomy for the *panchayats*; and separate

statehood for parts of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar. This platform was the result of the party's realization that it had to be more inclusive to confront the Congress and compete with other regional parties that supported specific castes (BSP and SP). At the same time, however, the BJP also had to deal with the unhappiness of RSS and conflicts within its own party between those who wanted to retain the centrality of its *Hindutva* agenda and those who wanted to downplay the *Hindutva* angle in order to widen its vote base. Thus, while on one side the head of RSS exhorted the electorate to vote against 'anti-Hinduism', on the other, with great sagacity, Vajpayee, as the moderate face of the party, was projected as the prime ministerial candidate, and the more militant *Hindutva* advocates were kept out of the election campaign.

In spite of these internal disagreements, the BJP fared well in the 1996 general elections. Emerging as the single largest party in the *Lok Sabha*, for the first time it went on to form a government under the Prime Ministership of A.B. Vajpayee. However predictably, the government lasted only for a brief period of 13 days, as the BJP could not muster enough support in the *Lok Sabha* to prove its majority. The ensuing years were tumultuous for Indian politics, with the new United Front alliance led by the Janata Dal governing at the centre and two changes of prime minister during its tenure of a little over two years. Within the BJP itself there were more debates about the wisdom of diluting the *Hindutva* agenda, which the RSS hardliners claimed was the reason for the party's poor performance in the assembly elections of 1995-96. While the RSS thought that the BJP should not hesitate to use the word 'Hindu' and should make the concept of Hindu nationhood its primary political plank, those within BJP opposed the concept of social engineering introduced by Govindacharya and the strategy of downplaying *Hindutva* in order to woo the dalits.⁵⁵

In 1997, to mark the golden jubilee of India's Independence, Advani undertook another cross country *yatra*. Advani also wanted to use this opportunity for purely political reasons i.e. to project BJP as a party committed to good governance. The *yatra* was in a way the reference point for the next *Lok Sabha* elections, which were held in early 1998, with the United Front government falling as a result of the Congress withdrawing support. These elections were a watershed in the history of Indian politics in general and for the BJP in particular. The BJP won 182 out of the 384 seats that it had contested and had, according to Advani, "redrawn the political map of India" (Advani, 2008). The BJP did better than the Congress, its arch enemy, on many scores: it had representation from more states than the

Congress and had expanded its social and geographical base, capturing seats in Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Assam for the first time; it also boasted the highest number of women members in Parliament and the largest number of members from both the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. While the *yatra* had left its mark, what actually contributed to the party's success was its election manifesto and alliance strategy. The manifesto was based on the theme of 'A stable government and an able Prime Minister' and reflected BJP's commitment to its now traditional issues of the repeal of Article 370 of the Constitution, a Uniform Civil code, etc. It also promised to create the new states of Chhattisgarh and Jharkand, amongst others, 8-9 per cent annual growth of GDP, protection for the small scale sector, increased spending on education and free education for women.

The promise of local alliances with a diverse range of regional parties in various states was central to BJP's 1998 victory. In addition, the party had also made efforts to woo the minorities. In the process, the *Hindutva* agenda was deliberately relegated to the backseat, although not jettisoned completely, apparently with the reluctant consent of the RSS. This did not prevent the RSS claiming credit for BJP's win and attributing it primarily to the *Hindutva* ideology and the work of the dedicated RSS cadres. RSS leaders like Rajendra Singh had reportedly appealed to its workers to expand their work in the 'pro-*Hindutva* atmosphere' that the BJP government was expected to provide. He hoped that under BJP's umbrella, the RSS and its associated organizations would expand at a faster rate (Kanungo, 2002).

4.5.5 The 'New BJP'

BJP's brilliant performance in holding together a crowd of demanding regional allies under the banner of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and keeping a relatively low profile on its core *Hindutva* agenda enabled it to run the government for 13 months and then win re-election in 1999. The alliance was based on an agreed programme that came to be known as the National Agenda for Governance (NAG) or the Common Minimum Programme, in which the BJP deliberately refrained from including its traditional ideological core issues of construction of the temple in Ayodhya, enactment of the Uniform Civil Code, and repeal of Article 370, although all of these were included in its election manifesto of 1998. While admitting that the decision to keep the BJP's core issues out of the NAG disturbed the "ideological fraternity" of the *Sangh Parivar*, Advani (2008) denied that the BJP had in any way acted in an "opportunistic and unprincipled manner." Instead, he put forward a new and clever approach: as the leader of a coalition government, BJP would be guided by the NAG; but as a political party, Advani

advocated continuing with a peaceful, constructive and assertive debate on the core ideological issues. The RSS fraternity was also consoled by the fact that BJP had negotiated with its allies to include within the NAG two issues close to its heart: firstly, a re-evaluation of the nuclear policy of the country, including exercising the option of inducting nuclear weapons; and secondly, pursuit of the economic reform agenda that had been initiated at the beginning of the decade without external influence or aid.

Advani called for a 'New BJP' with a focus on good governance. Although initially received with some scepticism, 'good governance' soon became BJP's new mantra (Dasgupta, 2004). Advani believed that in the sphere of governance, what mattered were intelligent policy choices, superior managerial skills and commitment. Ideology had a nominal part to play in this scenario. Instead, what was important was the national interest; moreover, good governance is deemed possible only when it is 'de-politicized'. In this scheme of things, Advani warned that the interests of the coalition at the centre always had to come before the interest of the party and the party's strategies in the states had to be subordinate to the national strategies. On the organizational front, this meant that the BJP had to transform itself into an inclusive party, bringing all the regions and sections of the society within its scope. In a way portending the new directions being chalked out for the party, Advani stated that the "New BJP' will be guided "... not by the issues of yesterday, but by the agenda of tomorrow" (Advani, 2008).

The BJP under Vajpayee managed its alliance partners well and the coalition was sustained despite some ups and downs. However, the good relations between the RSS and the government began to sour soon after its formation. The RSS is believed to have forced the government to allot some key ministries to its trusted men, especially those related to education and human resource development (see Section 5). It also tried to control governments in the states where BJP was in power (Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Rajasthan, Bihar) and to ensure that its own *pracharaks* and *swayamsewaks* were given the key portfolios. In fact, RSS's interference in government was, to some extent, a cause for friction between the organization and its political affiliate.

The government in general and Vajpayee in particular became the target of RSS ire for some of their liberal economic policies, like opening the door to the insurance sector, for not seriously working for the national interest and for failing to implement even the least controversial *Hindutva* issues like

banning cow slaughter. The RSS also began to target Christians as the enemy of *Hindutva*, perhaps also indirectly targeting Sonia Gandhi, whose increasing presence was posing a threat to the BJP. As a result, during a BJP government at the centre, attacks against Christian missions and protests against conversion, initially in Orissa and Gujarat and subsequently in other states like Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and Goa, became an RSS strategy, with VHP in the forefront. The Swadeshi Jagran Manch and the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sabha, affiliates of the RSS, took the lead in these protests and there were loud demands from the *Sangh Parivar* for the RSS to keep the BJP under control. There were also rumblings from the RSS hardliners within the party. Vajpayee, however, stood firm and at the party's National Executive meeting, let it be known that he would brook no interference from either the party or the RSS in running the coalition government. He was also instrumental in condemning the attacks on churches and thus distanced BJP from the activities of the VHP. Vajpayee was therefore able to assert himself and put governance and development at the core of government policy rather than purely *Hindutva* issues.

This, however, did not mean that either Vajpayee or the BJP had moved away from the RSS or its core ideology either then or thereafter. *Hindutva* continued to be BJP's 'ideological mascot', while Vajpayee was RSS's 'political mascot.' It was a politically sound strategy designed to strike a balance between overtly *Hindutva* issues and the good governance agenda, reflected in Advani's counsel to party workers to march ahead with the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) coalition agenda in one hand and the party flag in the other. In fact, the RSS continued to play a critical role in most of the subsequent assembly elections: some instances were calling upon voters to defeat the dalit agenda of the Congress Chief Minister in Madhya Pradesh, ensuring ideological indoctrination of the BJP assembly members in Rajasthan, and openly defending a minister in the central government who had accepted donations in the name of re-conversions in Chhattisgarh. In addition, another affiliate of RSS - the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram - was instrumental in helping BJP win two-thirds of the assembly seats reserved for the tribals (Rangarajan, 2004).

Towards the end of 1998, however, the BJP lost the assembly elections in some of its key states, like Delhi, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. During this period the Congress itself began to destabilize non-Congress state governments, until one of the NDA's key allies withdrew its support in April, 1999 and the Vajpayee government lost a confidence motion in Parliament by one vote. The 12th Lok Sabha was dissolved soon after, in April 1999.

The 13th Lok Sabha elections, however, could be held only in September-October, after the country had dealt with the devastating Kargil war with Pakistan.⁵⁶ This time, instead of post-poll alliances, the BJP contested on a common NDA manifesto, which did not include the RSS-BJP traditional core mandates. The alliance had expanded to 24 members and the focus of the campaign was security, stability and development. The Kargil war and the way the Vajpayee government had handled the crisis stood the caretaker government in good stead and the NDA won a majority, with 306 seats (out of a total of 545), with the BJP securing 182. BJP performed well in several states including Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana, Goa, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and even Bihar and West Bengal, all with local allies, although it surprisingly lost out in Uttar Pradesh. Again a BJP and Vajpayee-led government was formed and, with a clear majority, ran for almost its full tenure of five years. The RSS meanwhile had learnt two lessons: that its political affiliate, the BJP, could not win power alone and so a coalition was necessary; and that, while it could not gain absolute control of the government at the centre, it could strategically control happenings in the states, especially through ensuring that its own members were in key positions.

The BJP-led coalition under Vajpayee had notched up many successes and handled a number of issues, including external relations, with considerable competence. It continued with the market-oriented reforms initiated by previous governments and wooed corporate India as well as the middle class, initiated dialogues with insurgents in Nagaland, came to an agreement with the Bodos, agreed to talk with the All Party Hurriyat Conference in Kashmir, held elections in Kashmir for the first time in 2002, expanded the reservation list prepared by the Mandal Commission, formed three new states as it had been promising in successive elections, opened a new chapter of relationships with the US and China, and struck an easy chord with its South Asian neighbours, except for Pakistan. However, as mentioned earlier, there were also incidents like the terror attack on the Indian parliament in 2001, the communal riots in Godhra in Gujarat in 2002, several smaller communal skirmishes in parts of Rajasthan, and attacks on Christians in Madhya Pradesh.

4.5.6 Increasing BJP distance from its electoral, organizational and ideological constituencies

On the whole, pleased with its economic and diplomatic achievements and the by and large favourable response from voters, the BJP-NDA alliance decided to hold the next elections five months ahead of the expiry of its tenure in early 2004. 'An India Shining' campaign, again with a focus on good

governance and stability, was expected to comfortably take the alliance into a third term. However, the results were shocking for the BJP, which won only 138 of 364 constituencies, while the NDA as a whole had only 186 seats. The Congress, which became the single largest party, fared marginally better and formed the government with another coalition under the banner of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA).

The BJP attributed its defeat to shortcomings in alliance management, a combination of state-specific factors and the negative campaign waged by the Congress. Advani on the other hand, in a more introspective and candid mood, ascribed the party's poor performance in the polls primarily to its failure to nurture its "electoral, organizational and ideological constituencies." He observed that, while power had made many elected members of parliament insensitive and unapproachable and thus made its "electoral constituency" unhappy, the lack of co-ordination between the party and the government had resulted in party workers - the "organizational constituency" - being ignored to some extent. But his most significant admission was that the defeat at the polls was also because when in power, the party had neglected its "core ideological constituency."⁵⁷ This includes the many organizations with whom the BJP shares a common goal and who are part of the larger *Sangh Parivar*. In the process of ensuring a stable coalition government, Advani conceded that the party had failed to pay due attention to its ideological allies in the Sangh Parivar, thereby implying that all was not well within the *Sangh Parivar*. Over the years the BJP-RSS relationship appears to have become somewhat stifling for the former, although predictably the senior leaders loyally squashed any such allegations. Significantly, it has also affected BJP's relationship with others in the network or *Sangh Parivar*.

4.5.7 BJP's relationships with the Sangh Parivar

In spite of objections from several quarters within the RSS and its affiliates to the use of the term 'Sangh Parivar', the BJP's official website claims that it is today the most prominent member of the family of organizations known as the *Sangh Parivar*, a prominence perhaps accorded to it by virtue of its political power and greater visibility. But it is also clear from the forgoing description that the relationships between the two have not always been free of tensions. What then is the nature of these relationships?

RSS can be described as the lead agency of a non-state network, the goal of which is to create a nation united by a single culture largely understood as embodying a Hindu way of life. To achieve this goal, RSS engages with the wider community by facilitating several other civil society organizations, ranging from labour unions and student federations to tribal welfare centres and educational institutions. This enables the RSS itself to focus on reinforcing its core ideology through systematically organizing itself and training the minds and bodies of its members. In order to legitimize the movement, provide state sanction and also to scale up its activities, RSS supported the establishment of a political affiliate - the BJS and subsequently the BJP. However, by virtue of its very definition⁵⁸ and political compulsions, over the years, the BJP has charted a course of its own which is necessarily not only different from that of other members of the network, but also brings it into the public arena and makes it more open to scrutiny and criticism. More significantly, again by virtue of its political compulsions, the political affiliate (BJP) is often in a position of conflict with the lead agency (RSS) and other members of the network.

At the beginning of the relationship BJS, as the political affiliate, was able to establish an equation with RSS as a "...mentor, ideological guide and political master... [as well as] organisational gate-keeper" (Bidwai, 2004). In the initial days of its political work, while the BJS depended on the RSS for organization and generating votes, the RSS in turn needed the BJS as a political representative to push its agenda and safeguard its interests in the field of power and politics. At that time the RSS had the upper hand in decision making, although BJS retained some form of face saving autonomy. The balance began to change when the BJP came into existence, with its initial fuzzy mixed ideology and the first sign of dilution of the core *Hindutva* philosophy espoused by RSS. Tensions between the two increased almost in tandem with the BJP's growing presence and performance in the various national and assembly polls and its tendency to use or downplay the *Hindutva* agenda as dictated by the electoral environment. The BJP subsequently gained an edge over RSS when it formed a coalition government at the centre and the leaders of the party made it clear that they would not brook any RSS interference in governance at the national level. However, the RSS had a free rein in some of the states where the BJP was in power.

Many political observers feel that gaining power at the national level changed BJP's ideological and political orientation and outlook on crucial issues of governance like economic and foreign policy, which in turn has perhaps changed its relationships with the other components of the *Sangh Parivar*,

including the RSS. Both Vajpayee and Advani have from time to time indicated that to integrate into mainstream politics, the BJP needs to distance itself from the RSS, without necessarily disowning it. On the other hand, the *Sangh Parivar* is visibly peeved at the fact that the BJP did not use its six years in power at the centre to vigorously promote the common core agenda of Hindu nationalism that binds the network together. The relationship is different today and the BJP does not appear to be completely dictated to by the RSS, especially when issues of governance at the national level are at stake. The party seems to have moved on and become larger in scope, size and influence. As a BJP assembly member from Uttar Pradesh stated: “They (RSS) do not dictate to us, but we do consider their feelings... besides, unlike the RSS we also have Muslims as members of our party and have formed a minorities wing.”⁵⁹

At the same time, however, it is obvious that the BJP cannot afford to sever its historical ties or ‘umbilical cord’ with the RSS, for it is this relationship and the core ideology that it shares with its mentor that not only makes it a ‘party with a difference’ but perhaps keeps it from breaking into splinter groups at any hint of dissension. In fact, Dasgupta (2001) observes that the debate within the BJP was never about its ties with the RSS, but about the extent to which it should enjoy ‘functional autonomy.’ In addition, the tone of the relationship largely depended on individual leaders and was ‘negotiable’. Moreover, on a more practical note, the trained and disciplined RSS workers constitute BJP’s large workforce during elections, and hence the cooperation and support of the *Sangh Parivar* is critical to BJP’s electoral performance. Thus, the BJP gets indirect benefits from its association with the other organizations of the *Sangh Parivar*. However, unlike political parties like the Communist Party of India, which also undertakes social activities, but where politics remains the meeting point, in the *Sangh Parivar* it is RSS and not BJP which is the coordinating point.⁶⁰ It is perhaps because of this mix of ideological commitment and practical political requirements and compulsions that the senior leaders of BJP are sometimes at pains to re-iterate their fundamental and strong moral relationship with the RSS, while at the same time insisting that there is no ‘organic’ link between the BJP and RSS, because while one is a cultural and social organisation the other is a political one (Jaffrelot, 2005a).

An RSS spokesperson has observed that the relationship between RSS and its affiliates, including the BJP, was built on two pillars: a shared ideological commitment and an ‘emotional’ bond between the cadres of the various affiliates by virtue of their having been groomed in the environment of a common *shakha* (Vyas, 2005). However, each affiliate is supposedly independent in terms of organization and

management. It is the ideological and emotional bonds that are invoked by the RSS to support the BJP at the time of elections. Jaffrelot (2005b) describes the network and the relationships between its members as a “matrix and its affiliates”, wherein the affiliates work as ‘fronts’ to subtly promote the ideology of RSS. The affiliates therefore project themselves as independent political, social or religious organizations and never as subsidiaries of RSS, enabling them to attract those who otherwise disapprove or are wary of the RSS. Bidwai (2004), on the other hand, describes the association of the components within the *Sangh Parivar* as a “hub-and-spokes” relationship, wherein the affiliates (the spokes) relate to each other through RSS as the hub rather than directly. Within this relational framework, the affiliates tend to be closer to the RSS than the BJP.⁶¹

The Vidhya Bharati Akhil Bharatiya Shiksha Sanstha (VBABSS) is one such affiliate, which focuses on promoting the RSS ideology through the medium of education. The VBABSS was not a creation of BJP, but like BJP has grown out of the RSS ideology and hence has a symbiotic relationship with the RSS. It is within this framework and in the context of BJP’s own contested image as a religious political party that we examine the relationships between BJP and VBABSS. In the process, an attempt is made to understand why a political party supports a faith-based social service organization.

5 Relationships between the BJP and Vidhya Bharati Akhil Bharatiya Shiksha Sanstha: a case study

The Vidhya Bharati Akhil Bhartiya Shiksha Sansthan (VBABSS) is one of the most dynamic and longstanding affiliates of the RSS and has been growing steadily over the years. In the RSS scheme of things, education is key to its strategy of influencing young people to bring about desired changes in society. As described in Section 4.3, this strategy found expression in the establishment of two youth-focused affiliates early in the history of the organization - the Akhil Bharatiya Vidhyarathi Parishad (ABVP) or All India Students' Union and the Vidya Bharati Akhil Bharatiya Shiksha Sansthan (VBABSS). While the ABVP was formed to organize and empower students in colleges and universities and establish a system of collaboration between teachers and the taught, a network of schools was started in 1952 to groom young children and prepare them, both mentally and physically, for the envisaged Hindu *Rashtra*.

5.1 Origin and growth of the Vidya Bharati network of schools

In 1952, Nanaji Deshmuk⁶², a committed RSS *pracharak*, started the first of a network of schools in Gorakhpur, one of the most backward districts of the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. Named after the Hindu goddess of learning and knowledge (Saraswati), the Saraswati Shishu Mandir (Saraswati Children's Temple) was set up at a time when the RSS was struggling to recover from the ban imposed on it by the Congress government after the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, while at the same time trying to manage discord within its own organization. Its activities were, as a consequence, on a slow track, its morale was at its lowest ebb and it was helplessly watching the rapid rise of the Communist Party and the eclipse of its own upper caste based right wing agenda. Under such circumstances a planned process of education emerged as an effective and non-controversial way to propagate the ideology of Hindu *Rashtra* while at the same time developing alternative models of education through a network of schools. The RSS feared that education in free India might evolve around the concepts of democracy, secularism and socialism, as propagated by the Congress, and hence would not be rooted in a national ethos - a fear which they believe has been proved right.⁶³

However, some writers are also of the opinion that the establishment of schools by RSS was prompted on the one hand by the perceived threat of 'corruption' of young minds posed by Christian missionaries and western culture, and on the other as part of a more subversive agenda to 'saffronize' the education system (Ramakrishnan, 1998).⁶⁴ The idea of an educational affiliate, coming soon after

the success of the ABVP, appealed to the RSS leadership. Gradually the single school in Gorakhpur was extended out of a rented building, multiplied several fold, spread across almost the entire length and breadth of the country and became the largest organized RSS-affiliated movement. The primary schools were called *Shishu Mandir* (Children's Temple), while the high schools came to be known as *Vidya Mandir* (Knowledge Temple). They were also known by other names, such as Geeta Vidyalaya and Bharatiya Vidya Niketan, all of which reflected the links with Hindu culture and cultural nationalism.

It is perhaps just a coincidence that the first school was set up more or less at the same time that RSS joined hands with Shyama Prasad Mukherjee and the Jana Sangh and formally ventured into the political arena. Some RSS observers believe that the Jana Sangh, and subsequently BJP, played a minimal role in setting up and nurturing the schools and that in fact those RSS members who were not interested in politics took to the path of education, implying that the two had nothing in common. They however acknowledge that Jana Sangh and the BJP contributed to the growth of the schools in terms of the allotment of land on a priority basis. At the same time, they are quick to point out that such favours have also been extended by some leaders of the Congress party who supported the cause of propagating Hindu culture, as is evident from the growth of the schools in the traditionally non-BJP states or in states like Uttar Pradesh, where the BJP has been out of power for long periods.⁶⁵

In the initial years, most of the educational activities were confined to the state of Uttar Pradesh. In 1958, as the number of schools increased and operations expanded across various states, a committee (Shishu Shiksha Prabandak Samiti) was set up to co-ordinate activities at the state level. Similar initiatives were subsequently launched in Delhi, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh in the north and Andhra Pradesh in the south, with each state having its own separate committee. The schools continued to grow rapidly in the 1970s, especially during the period of the Emergency and the short period during which the RSS was banned for a second time.

In 1978, two years prior to the formation of the BJP, an all-India body, the Vidya Bharati (VB) was set up as an apex body to coordinate between the states, with its headquarters in Delhi.⁶⁶ This was followed by the establishment of a National Academic Council, the immediate objective of which was co-ordination at the macro level, development of an alternative curriculum, and above all generation of resources. It is also believed that such a move was prompted by the need to safeguard the interests of the institution, as during the Emergency in the mid-1970s the Congress government had taken over

some of the *Shishu Mandirs* and appointed administrators for a period of two and half years as well as dismissing some of the teachers, alleging that these schools were RSS dens or *addas*. The Council claims to have eminent educationists on its board, not all of whom are associated with RSS, and also to enjoy the trust of the National Council for Educational Research and Training, an influential Government of India institution.

By the end of 1991, Vidya Bharati was second only to the government in terms of the numbers of schools it was running. It was managing around 4,000 schools with 36,000 teachers, catering to over one million students (Sarkar, 2005). It only managed to penetrate into some of the more remote areas of the country, especially the eastern region, which was dominated by Christian missionaries, in the mid-1980s, by means of specially designed interventions like the 'Haflong' and 'Uprangsu' projects that targeted the local population. By 1998, it was running 14,000 schools in all the states of the federation, with the exception of some of the north eastern states and Lakshadweep. The fact that by then the BJP had become a national level player to be reckoned with and had also been in power in some of the north Indian states perhaps contributed to the steady growth. Today, not only has the number of schools reportedly increased to an amazing 20,000 (of which about 100 are residential), together with 12,000 *Samskara Kendras*⁶⁷, managed by almost 100,000 teachers⁶⁸, but schools have also been opened in the remote areas of the north eastern states and even outside India in countries like Mauritius, Indonesia and the USA, although under different names. Schools have even been established in states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu, where neither the RSS nor the BJP have much influence. The Vidya Bharati also controls over 250 intermediate colleges and about 25 institutions of higher education and training colleges in Jaipur, Ahmednagar, Lucknow and some other cities. About 5,000 of the schools, especially in the BJP-dominated states, are recognized by and affiliated to the Central or respective State Boards of Secondary Education (CABE, 2005), so that the children have access to mainstream education and employment opportunities.

While a majority of the children in these schools are from Hindu families, mostly from middle class households, Vidya Bharati claims that a small but significant number of non-Hindus (primarily Muslims) also send their children to the schools.⁶⁹ The number of children from better off families has drastically declined over the years because Hindi continues to be the medium of instruction. Vidya Bharati claims that the quality of education in its schools is far better than in many government-run

schools. This is reflected in the fact that every year, out of around 25,000 children from the Vidya Bharati network who take the board exams, around 60-65 per cent pass with merit, irrespective of the political party in power.⁷⁰

As mentioned earlier, not only was the first *Shishu Mandir* set up in the state of Uttar Pradesh, but in the initial years much of the activity was also concentrated in this state, perhaps capitalizing on the existence of a strong caste system and upper caste dominance. Today, Uttar Pradesh continues to take the lead and is reported to have around 4,000 schools catering for 9 lakh [900,000] children.⁷¹ The sheer size of the network in the state can be gauged by the fact that in one of the four zones (Avadh Pranth) there are reported to be more than 980 schools and 473 *Samskara Kendras*, 182,560 students and about 7,940 teachers. There appears to be a bias towards male teachers: the *Samskara Kendras* in the Avadh Pranth have no female teachers, and even in the schools only a little over 11 per cent of the teachers are female.⁷² In line with this, in 2007-08 girls accounted for only 26 per cent of students in the regular schools and 15 per cent in the *Samskara Kendras*. In the same state, the organization also runs a teacher training institute, a college for equipping teachers with a graduate degree in education and another exclusively for physical education, in line with the importance accorded by RSS to physical education.⁷³ Many of the schools are affiliated to the relevant government examination board.

In Madhya Pradesh, Vidhya Bharati set up its first school towards the end of the decade in 1959, long after the Jan Sangh had come into existence with RSS support. Madhya Pradesh is a large state, so Vidhya Bharati divided it into Madhya Bharat, with its headquarters in Bhopal, and Mahakaushal, with its headquarters in Jabalpur. As in the other parts of the country, the schools have been grouped into urban, rural, tribal (Vanvasi and Ekal Vidyalayas) and *Samskara Kendras*. Data obtained for the Madhya Bharat region indicates that in 2007-08 there were 355 schools in urban areas under the Sarswati Vidya Prathisthan, 1,800 schools in rural areas under the Gram Bharati Shiksha Samiti as well as 560 Ekal Vidyalayas, and about 700 *Samskara Kendras* in the slums and some rural areas. The total number of students was around 1.47 lakhs [147,000] and the number of teachers was 5,975.

5.2 Organizational structure and affinity to RSS

Like the RSS, Vidya Bharati is a well structured organization with hierarchical coordinating bodies. At the national level, the Vidya Bharati Akhil Bharatiya Shiksha Sansthan is a registered society under section 21 of the Societies Registration Act (1861). For effective coordination, administrative convenience and implementation, the country has been divided into operational regions.⁷⁴ Each region consists of several states; however, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Bihar have each been given the status of an independent region, reflecting the spread and intensity of activities in these states.

Each state has a state level committee (32 in all), which controls and supervises all the Vidya Bharati schools in the state. The state level committees are affiliated to the Vidya Bharati and also have their own Academic Councils that provide guidance to the national council. It is interesting to note that the various state and regional level bodies set up for co-ordination adopted different names depending on the socio-political allegiance of the respective state. Hence, in Delhi, where at one point in time both the RSS and the BJP had considerable clout, the state level body came to be known as the Hindu Shiksha Samiti (Hindu Education Committee), while in Orissa and Punjab it was the Shiksha Vikas Samiti (Education Development Council), in Haryana the Sarva Hitkari Development Committee (Development Committee for Universal Benefit) and in the hilly tribal region of Jharkhand it was the Vananchal Shiksha Samiti (Forest Region Education Committee) (Ramakrishnan, 1998)

The states have been further divided into zones and districts for ease of functioning, each with its own committee duly registered under the Societies Act. While the national body sets norms and broad guidelines, the state and district committees are responsible for operational issues and also decisions on the fee structure, salaries, etc. At the same time, each school is also registered with the relevant Board of Education in its state so that the children from these schools are eligible to appear for the state-managed exams. It was noted that some schools have also obtained income tax clearance from the state government on the grounds that they are non-profit educational institutions.

In Vidya Bharati, the key link to the RSS, as well as the flag bearers of its philosophy and ideology, are RSS *pracharaks* and *sangathan mantris*. Like the RSS, it was observed that in VB women are conspicuously absent at the management level, although a larger proportion of the teachers employed

are women. VB vehemently denies any interference from RSS, claiming that the organization is RSS 'inspired' but not RSS 'managed'. Emphasizing its managerial autonomy and indirect relationships with the RSS, some of the senior functionaries of Vidya Bharati suggested that the 'Sangh' should not be seen as a 'parivar' or family, but as a 'philosophy' of life and that, although Vidya Bharati's basic and fundamental thoughts are linked to the RSS, it is neither managed nor funded by it.⁷⁵ Dinanath Batra, Joint General Secretary of VHP Delhi, concluded in an interview conducted during this research that "we are close to the RSS ideology, but are independent of it". Further, while interviews with teachers indicated that not all of them are members of the RSS, some stated that the RSS was their 'mother' organization and said that they had to salute the RSS flag. However, all the teachers are given an intensive orientation and training in the traditions and specific Vidya Bharati curriculum, in addition to skills training on their subject and school management, with all the training focusing on the values and principles of the Sangh.

5.3 Resources: dependence on donations and state largesse

All the schools visited in the course of the study in Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh had large campuses with well maintained buildings and infrastructure. Even the school in Phanda Kala, a village near Bhopal, was better equipped than many a government school. Funds for establishing and running the schools are generated through donations from the community, individuals and philanthropists, and from fees.

On principle Vidya Bharati does not take aid or grants from the state, as this would mean interference as well as having to comply with cumbersome stipulations and procedures. The schools are apparently funded and sustained through donations mobilized from the local community, often with the support of local RSS members, and the minimal monthly fee (less than US\$2) that is charged to the students. 80 per cent of the fee income goes towards the salaries of teachers (\$22 to 32 per month) and other employees and 20 per cent to other development activities. Only a small proportion of schools (fewer than 15 per cent, according to an official of Vidya Bharati, Bhopal) are able to raise adequate money through fees, and some have to depend on donations for both operational and capital costs. In the last few years, there have also been allegations of funds received from overseas, primarily routed through the RSS, in the guise of charity and development.⁷⁶

Interestingly, even though the Vidya Bharati does not avail itself of state aid in terms of regular grant-in-aid, it does not appear to be averse to accessing one-off benefits like priority in the allocation of prime land, support from the School Games Federation of India, which gave a grant to organize state and national level sports meetings in two consecutive years, and MP-LAD funds. It was, moreover, pointed out that the School Games Federation grant was given while the Congress government was in power and not the BJP. Some schools have benefited from Local Area Development grants, a fund that is managed exclusively by the local Member of Parliament and hence is open to favours and nepotism. While the Bhopal office of Vidya Bharati insists that it did not receive any funds from the BJP during the 6 years of NDA rule, a *Sanghathan Mantri* in Uttar Pradesh, conceded that because BJP was ideologically related to Vidya Bharati, the latter's work is easier whenever and wherever the BJP is in power. Reacting to allegations of favouritism in the allocation of land in Delhi during BJP rule, Dinanath Batra, conceded that while it had been allotted land by the Delhi Development Authority, it had paid the stipulated market price (\$65,000). He added that subsequently, when the NDA government fell, the UPA government that took power in Delhi wanted the land to be returned on the grounds of irregularities in the allocation.⁷⁷

VB schools have therefore been developed as and when the organisation is able to raise funds. As a result, in the initial years most Vidya Bharati schools are small, with minimal infrastructure, and are only marginally better equipped than government schools. For instance, the residential school managed by the Sharada Vihar Kalyan Samiti, an NGO started by some RSS workers, is affiliated to the Vidya Bharati in Bhopal. The NGO was started in 1985 and the school itself opened in 1989 to mark the centenary of Hedgewar's birth. Part of the land for the school was purchased from a local Muslim, who apparently wanted to sell it only to an educational institute. Subsequently, over the years, more land was acquired, resulting in a sprawling campus of over fifty acres located on the outskirts of Bhopal, where the organization also implements other livelihood projects. Funds were obtained from various sources, including donations, long term loans from some individuals, and from other *Shishu Mandirs*. The school also reportedly succeeded in getting some land allotted through the State Housing Board with the help of BJP, when it was heading a coalition government at the centre.

Approvals and sanctions for the purchase of land, permission for construction or even recognition from the state examination board is difficult to obtain without the unofficial support of government.⁷⁸ Rent seeking is common and at such times the schools seek the intervention of influential BJP

ministers and at times even politicians from other political parties to get their work done without having to pay for favours rendered:

We do not give [bribes] on principle, but instead use our political connections to make them [officials] understand. Then our senior management talk directly to the Zilla Shiksha Adhikari [District Education Officer] and manage to get the work done without paying bribe. We try to establish good relationship with the DEO rather than the government, because the DEO will remain whatever the government.⁷⁹

On the other hand, there is apparently less harassment of managers from these schools since officials know that it is difficult to raise 'rent' money from the Vidya Bharati schools for services rendered, because of their political connections and the fact that they are not-for-profit schools, as well as perhaps their staunch adherence to their own principles and values.⁸⁰

5.4 A core curriculum based on Hindu values

The aim of Vidya Bharati is the promotion of:

...a national education system which will develop generations of young men who will have complete faith in Hindu values and ideals, will be nationalists to the core, be fully developed from the physical, mental and spiritual angles, who can successfully meet the challenges of modern life and whose lives will be dedicated to the eradication of social ills, exploitation and injustice among our brethren living in villages, jungles, hills and urban slums in order to promote equity, prosperity and culture throughout the country.⁸¹

Critics view the curriculum and pedagogy of Vidya Bharati as a 'socialization process' and hence an extension of the RSS strategy. Overall, a school follows the syllabus and books prescribed by the respective state or central examination board to which it is affiliated. However, schools differ from the official curriculum in two respects: in the inclusion of additional subjects like yoga, physical education, music, Sanskrit and moral and spiritual education, as part of their 'core curriculum', and in the pedagogy itself. The *Hindutva* agenda is promoted through the core curriculum. During the interviews several key persons⁸² within Vidya Bharati emphasized the importance of the 'core curriculum' and the need to develop an alternative model of education based on the philosophy and culture of India. 'Prabhu bhakti' and 'desh bhakti' (devotion to God and the nation), according to them, are the backbone of Vidya Bharati's concept of education, which aims at inculcating a sense of respect for self and the nation, hence the emphasis on past history and glory. In contrast, a review undertaken by the National

Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) in 1996 observed that many of the books being used by the Vidya Bharati schools were designed to promote “bigotry and religious fanaticism” in the guise of culture. Despite this, some of these text books were subsequently introduced in government schools in BJP-run states.

The BJP has been supporting the VB agenda for several years, especially since it came into power in 1998. Although the BJP at the centre tended to take a moderate stance in most sectors because of the requirements of coalition politics, its policy and interventions in the case of the education sector were more on the lines of the philosophy of Vidya Bharati and clearly reflected its links with the *Sangh Parivar*. The BJP had promised quality ‘education for all’ in its 1998 election manifesto and thus when it took over the reins of government for the first time in 1998, it strategically allotted the critical education portfolios of the Union Minister and the Minister of State under the Ministry of Human Resource Development to two BJP hardliners. Murli Manohar Joshi, the Union Minister, was an academic by profession and an ardent RSS member at heart.

One of the first major policy initiatives of the new government was to organize a conference of state Education Ministers in October 1998, during which Joshi tried unsuccessfully to introduce a paper stating that teaching in schools should be based on national culture and values, similar to the pedagogy of Vidya Bharati and as promoted by RSS. Although he was voted down, with the ministers asserting that education was a state prerogative and that the central government could not interfere, Joshi took the issue up in earnest when the BJP came to power for a second time and he was again made Education Minister. He introduced the New Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE) in 2000 through the NCERT. The task was made easier because the BJP made sure that many of the key educational institutions, including the NCERT, were managed by people who subscribed to the right-wing ideology of the RSS.

The NCFSE sought to bring about a change in the national school curriculum, based on the philosophy of ‘Indianization, nationalism and spiritualization’, akin to the RSS right -wing agenda. Its goals were ambitious and it expected that ‘the essentials of Indian culture’ would constitute anything from 10 to 25 per cent of the syllabus at all levels of school education. It also brought in an element of gender discrimination by introducing ‘housekeeping’ as one of the subjects exclusively for girls at the secondary level. The mother tongue was to be the medium of instruction and Sanskrit was to be a

compulsory subject from class 3 to class 10. Moral and spiritual education was to be introduced in all schools and universities, and was to be based on defined social and national values, based on Hindu values. 'Vande Mataram', a hymn in praise of the motherland, was to be recited in all schools and a course on Indian philosophy was to be taught, especially in the higher education programme, in addition to the Hindu scriptures. Finally, Sanskrit universities were to be established in different parts of the country.

The two most significant structural changes in the education system pertained firstly, to the automatic recognition and affiliation (to the relevant state or central government agency) of educational institutions run by registered organizations which had been in existence for at least ten years; and secondly, a proposal for the amendment of constitutional Articles 29 and 30 to abolish the rights of minorities to establish educational institutions. Critics suspected that while reform of the first of these clauses would open doors to state funding for RSS schools like the Vidya Bharati network, the second would curtail the growth of Muslim madrasas and Christian schools.

However, there were loud protests from political parties, even within the coalition, and from scholars and educationists against what came to be known as the 'saffronization' of education. The Supreme Court of India stopped the government from implementing the Framework, declaring it as unconstitutional and violating the fundamental right to education, information and development. In spite of this, some of the smaller elements of the Framework like 'value education' and the introduction of a new style of writing the history of India by reducing the scope of social studies syllabi, particularly history, were adopted and new History and Social Studies course books were released for adoption by schools. In Madhya Pradesh 'Surya Namaskar', a yogic form of worship of the sun and biographies of the great leaders of the country, as defined by the RSS, were also introduced into the state-run schools. Thus, the BJP was successful in bringing about some changes in states like Rajasthan, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh where it ruled. When the UPA government took over in 2004, one of its first tasks was to set up a panel to review and subsequently look at the possibilities of withdrawing these controversial books. It revised the Draft National Curriculum Framework accordingly.

This time, it was the turn of Vidya Bharati and the Shiksha Bachao Andolan (SBA, Save Education Campaign), a network of 16 organizations that it had formed, to protest. They objected to the absence of value education in the curriculum, supposed dilution of the contents in the social sciences,

marginalization of Sanskrit, etc. Thus the fight to ensure that children imbibe cultural values and understand the history of the nation as understood by the *Sangh Parivar* continues, with the SBA filing a case in the Delhi High Court against the supposedly objectionable depiction of history and of national leaders in the course books of government schools and colleges. Dinanath Batra says that Vidya Bharati is not against modernization, as long as this does not take the country towards what he refers to as 'westernization'. He advocates the adage: "think globally but act locally," basing his argument on the fact that India was and is a great nation with a great history that needs to be known and appreciated. In early 2008, the Campaign had reasons to rejoice, as the Court ordered the NCERT to remove all the passages to which it objected in time for the new session beginning in April 2008. However, at the time of writing, this had not been done and the Campaign members were gearing up to take up pending issues related to the curriculum and the content of textbooks used by Delhi University and other schools, which they feel are against the honour of the nation and its people.⁸³

5.5 An uneasy relationship with BJP

The relationship between the BJP and Vidya Bharati is based on a common area of interest - that of promoting a national identity based on a common national culture that is largely defined by Hindu philosophies and values. Apart from this, they share a common origin and ideological mentor. This symbiotic relationship has led the BJP to support the growth of the network of schools, albeit discreetly, with allocations of land and other resources. In turn, Vidya Bharati appears to have had some influence on BJP's education policy; in fact the concept paper that Joshi presented at the conference of Education Ministers in 1998, which promoted the cause of a curriculum based on national culture and values, was said to have been drafted by Dinanath Batra, the General Secretary of Vidya Bharati and a close associate of Joshi.⁸⁴ The paper itself was based on Vidya Bharati's years of experience in implementing a curriculum based on Hindu values and culture.

However, both the BJP and Vidya Bharati strongly deny being influenced by each other and any relationship other than a common ideology: "The two are only similar in thought."⁸⁵ A BJP member of the Legislative Assembly in Uttar Pradesh observed that BJP, being a political party, cannot run schools or any other organizations. However, he noted, "we help", through the MP-LAD and similar funds. He concluded that to understand the BJP-Vidya Bharati relationship, one needs to understand

the philosophy and strategy of RSS. On the other hand some senior members of Vidya Bharati in Bhopal were certain that VB dominated the government, regardless of which party was in power; it is perhaps herein that the strength of Vidya Bharati lies. One of the *sanghathan mantri* of Vidya Bharati in Uttar Pradesh also added that, while the BJP had initially been closer to its way of thinking, the two had moved somewhat apart on the issue of the construction of the temple in Ayodhya. Thus, he suggested, Vidya Bharati was upset not so much at the temple not being constructed as by the BJP's false promises.

Vidya Bharati prefers to keep its *Sangh Parivar* kinship with BJP low key, even at times going to the extent of avoiding sharing the same platform during public functions organized by schools, so that the local community cannot easily link the two, as apparently a large proportion of the 3.5 lakh [350,000] parents who send their children to Vidya Bharati schools do not support the BJP. Gaining acceptance in local communities by under-playing some of its controversial characteristics appears to be a well thought out strategy, as seen in the case of Tamil Nadu. Here, Vidya Bharati directly controls only a limited number of schools in order not to draw attention to its upper caste oriented RSS linkages in a state where the Dravidian movement⁸⁶ had ensured that the upper caste Hindu cultural ambience is not widely diffused (Ramakrishnan, 1998).

By and large, people within Vidya Bharati felt that when any RSS member joined the BJP he underwent a change and became absorbed in the game of power and governance, as a result becoming less able to meet the demands of the RSS organization. In fact the opinion that, while some members of the BJP are genuine members of the *Sangh Parivar*, many others are mere opportunists, was widely expressed. The RSS is aware of the pulls of politics and hence, when a *pracharak* joins the party, he is relieved of the role of a *pracharak*.⁸⁷

6 Concluding comments

What emerges from the foregoing discussion is the existence of two sets of relationships. On the one hand, there is an ideological but somewhat fractious relationship between the RSS, a 'social service organization' that promotes a unique brand of cultural nationalism, and its political off-shoot, the BJP. On the other, there is a familial kinship between the BJP and the Vidya Bharati, representing a vast network of schools, geared up to grooming young minds towards the concept of a Hindu *Rashtra*. BJP and Vidya Bharati are two of several organizations through which the RSS tries to achieve its own single-minded mandate of a Hindu *Rashtra*. What binds the BJP and Vidhya Bharati is solely their relationships with the RSS.

RSS itself is, without doubt, the outcome of perceived threats to Hindu culture on the one hand and a means to sustain the supremacy of the Hindu upper castes on the other. As such, RSS is a manifestation of the aspirations of a section of the Hindu community. RSS's own definition of 'Hindu' as representing a land and its people rather than a religion is contested, especially as some of its organizational offshoots adopt increasingly militant and communally exclusive means for promoting the tenets of the so-called Hindu *Rashtra*. RSS supporters often quote the judgement of the Supreme Court of India, which in a way endorsed the universality of the word *Hindutva* and concluded that the term is related more to the way of life of the people in the subcontinent. They conceive of it as synonymous with *Indianization*, or "...development of uniform culture by obliterating the differences between all the cultures co-existing in the country..."⁸⁸ However, this argument does not have many supporters.

Further, the RSS is by definition a social welfare organization and not a religious group. When taken together with its network of agencies, it also has a functional social welfare orientation. Thus several of its affiliates, including Vidya Bharati, are involved in delivering services to poor and not so poor communities. The real welfare activities and services like education, health services and tribal welfare are, therefore, delivered through other arms of the network, while the RSS itself focuses on bringing about cultural and societal change and at times also engages directly in relief work. We can conclude therefore, that despite their self-designation as social welfare organizations, RSS and its network are faith-inspired and so can be categorized as faith-based organizations.

BJP, the political party, was born out of the political compulsions and ambitions of some RSS members. Even if we concede that the RSS was not politically inclined in its initial days, subsequent years clearly indicate its growing political agenda, not so much for the sake of political power, but primarily to push and legitimize its vision of a Hindu *Rashtra*. However, BJP, being a political party that has acquired a national stature through its coalition strategy, often finds itself in conflict with both its mentor and members of its extended family. In fact, as politics takes precedence, and as the BJP itself appears to have developed its own cadre of party workers, the RSS finds it more and more difficult to control and influence the BJP. The BJP's dilemma lies in the fact that it has to live up to its image as both a national level political party and a social movement striving for 'cultural nationalism'. The goals are not entirely compatible and balancing the two becomes even more difficult when the BJP's actions are seen as expressions of Hindu fundamentalism.

Tensions also exist between the RSS and the BJP, because while the two organizations claim to have only an ideological affinity, RSS expects more complete allegiance to its ideology, while the BJP feels that it is not only politically duty bound but also wise to dilute or even at times place its ideological agenda on the back burner in order to gain mileage with its coalition partners as well as voters. In addition, there is no apparent organizational linkage between the BJP and the RSS. The former has a substantial number of members and party workers who are not RSS members, widening the gap in terms of control and also resulting in a crisis of identity within the BJP. The political party thus frequently appears to be in a dilemma regarding both its image and its relationship with the RSS.

In the case of Vidya Bharati, while it is ideologically close to RSS, its relationship with the BJP is purely one of convenience, mainly fostered by like-minded individuals in the party, such as Joshi, the former Minister of Human Resource Development. Vidya Bharati's work is not linked to the political mobilization function of BJP. Instead its cadres, as in the case of other *Sangh Parivar* organizations, are used to bring the political party to power, not so much for its own sake but to further the cause of the RSS's core agenda. Vidya Bharati does not regard itself as secondary to the party and in fact nowadays appears to be unhappy with the BJP because, according to Vidya Bharati, people who have joined the political party have lost the core ideology. For the BJP, Vidya Bharati is a means of endorsing its ideological moorings and gaining acceptance in the larger *Sangh Parivar*.

In conclusion, the relationships between the organizations studied here are fragile and, while the RSS and Vidya Bharati's determination to achieve their goals will continue to reinforce their desire to work together, the BJP may find itself having to part ways with them or to re-invent itself.

Notes

- ¹ 29 States and 6 Union Territories.
- ² The Constitution of India was adopted by the Constituent Assembly in November 1949 and came into force a year later in November 1950.
- ³ The Lok Sabha is the directly elected lower house, while the Rajya Sabha, or House of States, is the upper house, consisting of members who are elected by the legislators of the states and union territories and some members nominated by the President. The President appoints the Chief Minister and two categories of ministers: Cabinet Ministers and Ministers of State.
- ⁴ www.lokniti.org/dataunit
- ⁵ Interestingly also, while the combined total of recognized parties at the national and state levels decreased from 53 to 43 in the same period, in disaggregated terms the decrease has been substantial (more than 50 per cent) in the case of the national parties whereas the state parties have shown only a marginal decrease.
- ⁶ For example, Shiromani Akali Dal in Punjab.
- ⁷ Suri (2005), however, contends that this definition is 'unsatisfactory' because a national party as currently defined by the Election Commission may have a minor presence in four or more states but yet not have a significant representation at the national level. Some state-based parties like Telugu Desam, Asom Gana Parishad, Dravid Munnetra Kazhagam, Shiv Sena or Shiromani Akali Dal, have largely refrained from crossing state boundaries, bound as they were by local culture and issues, and are recognized as a state party in only one state. Others, like the Samajwadi Party, Rashtriya Janata Dal and All India DMK, have expanded their sphere of operations into other regions and are recognized in more than one state. Finally, some, like the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), have acquired a national status.
- ⁸ India is estimated to have more than 2,000 ethnic groups, identified on the basis of religion, language group and shared identity and inheritance.
- ⁹ Founded in 1977 and itself a conglomeration of the Socialist Party, Bharatiya Lok Dal, Bharatiya Jan Sangh and a breakaway faction of the Congress (Congress-O).
- ¹⁰ Pushkar (2004) observes that religious political parties have clearly defined religious goals, promote the creation of a religious state and advocate the implementation of public policies in conformity with religious values. While generally trying to rise above class divisions, religious parties are also seen to have secular objectives (for instance they also focus on economic growth, human rights social justice), which over a period of time may take a precedent over obvious religious goals. However, they continue to mobilize citizens around religion and commitment to the two seemingly contradictory goals of secularism and religion.
- ¹¹ Like M. N. Roy and Subash Chandra Bose.
- ¹² The Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909 laid the foundation for separate representation, which was further consolidated by the recommendations of the Simon Commission (1927) and the Government of India Act 1935. As a result, elections to the local bodies and the Legislative Council between 1919 and 1946 were held on the basis of a Separate Electorate System (See Mahajan and Jodhka, 2007).
- ¹³ This section borrows substantially from the work of Mahajan and Jodhka (2009), which is one of the outputs of the RaD research programme.
- ¹⁴ The Congress feared that those who willingly came under a broadly constituted 'Congress umbrella' in the freedom struggle would not see it as an effective political party after independence. According to this reasoning, there was a clear distinction between the 'Congress umbrella' and the 'Congress Party'.
- ¹⁵ The state also went on to caution that political violence in the name of religion would be detrimental to the workings of a secular state. Hence, the Model Code of Conduct drafted for political parties cautions that: "...No party or candidate shall indulge in any activity which may aggravate existing

differences or create mutual hatred or cause tension between different castes and communities, religious or linguisti... There shall be no appeal to caste or communal feelings for securing votes. Mosques, Churches, Temples or other places of worship shall not be used as forum for election propaganda..." (Election Commission of India, 2007).

- ¹⁶ Buultjens paper was written a few years before the demolition of the Babri Masjid mosque in 1992 , which brought the BJP to power at the federal level and strengthened its reputation as a Hindu fundamentalist party.
- ¹⁷ This perhaps explains the "ideological fuzziness" that Palshikar (2004) talks about.
- ¹⁸ In the state election in 2007, the Akali Dal became the largest party in the Assembly and, in alliance with the BJP, formed the government in the state of Punjab. ¹⁹ While Congress has been its eternal opponent, BJP has been its principal ally.
- ²⁰ Apart from Kerala, IUML also has some presence in Tamil Nadu, where it is a member of the Democratic Progressive Alliance.
- ²¹ In 1970, IUML was part of the Governing Council under the coalition led by the Communist Party of India. However, in 1985 it re-united with its splinter group and became a member of the coalition of the United Democratic Front.
- ²² A Hindu reform movement founded in the last quarter of the 19th century (1875)
- ²³ A Hindu nationalist organization founded in 1915 as a counterpoint to the activities of the Muslim League . It thought that the Indian National Congress was too secular to protect the interests of Hindus in the process leading to independence from the British. It campaigned for social reforms and the re-conversion of Hindus from Islam.
- ²⁴ The votaries of the movement also advocated the construction of a Hindu national temple in every city devoted to the worship of the 'mother earth', 'mother cow' and the 'mother goddess' of learning (Saraswati), all of which were later adopted as symbols of Hindutva by RSS (Kanungo, 2002; Jaffrelot, 2005a).
- ²⁵ In an interview with this researcher, Chandan Mitra, a veteran journalist and member of the BJP, argued that Hindu symbols have been adopted to reinforce the Hindutva message and that in India such symbols are bound to be 'Hindu'.
- ²⁶ Discussions with Anil Dave, RSS member and spokesperson for BJP in Madhya Pradesh, and Chandan Mitra, political Journalist and BJP MP.
- ²⁷ Anil Dave, the BJP spokesperson in Madhya Pradesh and an RSS member, observed that Hindutva believes that there should be no division on the basis of religion and there is a need to look at India from the perspective of Indians. He adds that Hindutva and RSS aim to create an 'Aryan' universe: "We will teach them (non-Hindus) the way of life, not change their religion."
- ²⁸ A Hindu festival that emphasizes the ties of kinship between a brother and sister - in this case between the members of RSS and the nation
- ²⁹ According to R. Pateng, the Sangh's work is limited to Hindu society and so far there has been no need to accommodate non-Hindus in the Sangh Shakhas.
- ³⁰ This interpretation of the word originated in Sarvarkar's seminal work: Hindutva, Who is a Hindu?
- ³¹ Each Saarsangchalak nominates his successor in consultation with the central working committee.
- ³² There were some hiccups when the RSS was banned for a short time because of its association, albeit in the past, with Nathuram Godse, the assassin of Mahatma Gandhi. However, it was back on track after it adopted a Constitution in 1950.
- ³³ Somewhere along the line, the network of affiliates acquired the title of the 'Sangh Parivar' or the Sangh family, a name believed to have been coined by the media.
- ³⁴ Interview with Govindacharaya
- ³⁵ Interview with Govindacharya

- ³⁶ Babar, the founder of the Mughal dynasty, in the 16th century constructed a mosque now called the Babri Mosque, allegedly after destroying a temple purporting to be the birthplace of and devoted to the Hindu deity Lord Rama on the same site. Asserting that the mosque had not been used since 1936, Hindus took it over in 1949. In 1992 Hindu nationalists destroyed the disputed structure, with the intention of constructing a new temple on the site. The demolition triggered Hindu-Muslim violence in a number of cities and a large number of people were killed. A title suit on the disputed site has been pending for decades.
- ³⁷ www.rss.org/New_RSS/Parivar/History.jsp (accessed 20th May 2008).
- ³⁸ Interviews with senior functionaries of RSS and Vidhya Bharathi
- ³⁹ The Salt March to Dandi, led by Mahatma Gandhi, which was the first open act of defiance against British rule.
- ⁴⁰ Godse apparently quit RSS and joined the Hindu Mahasabha because Hedgewar had refused to turn RSS into a political organization.
- ⁴¹ Bhiskher's (1999) biography of Golwalkar indicates that some members of the Congress, like Sardar Patel, were of the opinion that the RSS was doing commendable social work and should join hands with the Congress, instead of opposing it. Golwalkar himself had stated that his 'heart's desire' was that "...there be only everlasting mutual love... between the Congress, ...[which was] capable of delivering goods in the political field andthe Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh in the cultural field, which has achieved success in creating a matchless spirit of patriotism, brotherhood and selflessness among the people...'. Golwalkar had hoped that the two would supplement and complement each other. (Golwalkar, quoted by Bhishiker, 1999) .
- ⁴² K. R. Malkani in Organise, quoted by Jaffrelot (2005a).
- ⁴³ This seems to be the stand adopted by RSS even today: that RSS as an organization does not manage BJP or any other political party; however, its members are free to associate with political parties.
- ⁴⁴ Mukherjee had resigned from the Nehru cabinet and subsequently the Congress party due to differences with Nehru on the issue of appeasement of Pakistan.
- ⁴⁵ See Jaffrelot (2005a), Graham (2005), Kanungo (2002), Bhishikar (1999), Basu et al (1993) .
- ⁴⁶ The influence of BJS was limited to the northern states and its performance was mediocre until it won 35 seats in 1967 after the other Hindu parties like the Hindu Mahasabha and the Ram Rajya Parishad had all but disappeared.
- ⁴⁷ An amalgam of the Congress(O), Bharatiya Lok Dal, Socialist Party, CFD and the Jan Sangh.
- ⁴⁸ These states continue to be a stronghold of BJP, the successor of BJS.
- ⁴⁹ 'One country, one culture, one flag' slogan
- ⁵⁰ Sikander Bakht and Suraj Bhan
- ⁵¹ But till 2008 it was unable to form a government in any of the southern states.
- ⁵² Located on the coast of Saurashtra in Gujarat, Somnath is famous for its historical temple, which was destroyed several times over by Mahmood Ghazni, a Turkish invader, between the years 1001-1026 AD and re-constructed by the Government of India soon after independence.
- ⁵³ The Mandal Commission Report, recommending reservations for the backward castes, had been submitted to the Gol almost a decade previously but no action had been taken until the Janata Dal government under V.P. Singh decided to implement it for obvious political gain. However, this move was detrimental to the BJP, which was trying to consolidate its upper caste support base.
- ⁵⁴ The ban on RSS and VHP was lifted in June 1993.
- ⁵⁵ The BJP had also entered into an alliance with BSP, the party with a dalit base and pro-dalit agenda.

- ⁵⁶ The Kargil War was an armed conflict between India and Pakistan that took place between May and July 1999 in the Kargil district of Kashmir and elsewhere along the Line of Control. The cause of the war was the infiltration of Pakistani soldiers and Kashmiri militants into positions on the Indian side of the LoC, which serves as the de facto border between the two states. India recaptured a majority of the positions on the Indian side of the LoC that had been infiltrated by the Pakistani troops and militants and, with international diplomatic support, the Pakistani forces were forced to withdraw from the remainder.
- ⁵⁷ The ideology itself, according to Advani (2008), revolves around the concept of “national resurgence, based essentially on a non-sectarian Hindu ethos.” and it is this commitment that makes the BJP into an ideological movement and not just a political party.
- ⁵⁸ Being a political party it does not fall into the category of a civil society or ‘non- state’ organization.
- ⁵⁹ Suresh Srivastav, BJP Member of Legislative Assembly from Uttar Pradesh.
- ⁶⁰ Interview with Mahesh Sharma, Director General, Council of Science and Technology.
- ⁶¹ In fact some, like the VHP and BMS, appear to be designed to provide competition to the BJP and have often been an irritant to the party.
- ⁶² An upper caste Brahmin from Maharashtra.
- ⁶³ Interview with Mohan Lal, Office Secretary, Vidya Bharati, Delhi
- ⁶⁴ There have been moves to ‘saffronize’ the curriculum, for example by revising history textbooks, to promote the BJP-RSS ideology of Hindutva. ‘Saffron’ refers to the colour of the BJP flag.
- ⁶⁵ Interviews with Mahesh Sharma, DG, Council of Science and Technology, Bhopal; Dev Prasad, Vidhya Bharati, Madhya Bharat, Bhopal
- ⁶⁶ The registered office in Lucknow
- ⁶⁷ Kindergarten, literally ‘centre for young children’.
- ⁶⁸ Figure quoted by Vijay Agarwal, a much respected pracharak who has been associated with VBABSS for a long time; and the official web site.
- ⁶⁹ Various figures were quoted during interviews, with most of the schools visited claiming to have 4-5 students who are Muslims; while Shiv Kumar, a Sangathan Mantri in UP said that about 18 per cent of pupils across the country are Muslim, Vijay Agarwal stated that it was closer to a total of 7,000-8,000 children altogether.
- ⁷⁰ Interview with Shiv Kumar, Sangathan Mantri, VB, UP.
- ⁷¹ Interview with Shiv Kumar, Sangathan Mantri, VB, UP
- ⁷² This however does not appear to be a standard norm, for another study (Frontline, November 1998), observed that 90 per cent of the teachers in RSS-run schools in Kerala are women.
- ⁷³ Figures obtained from the office of Vidya Bharati, Avadh Region.
- ⁷⁴ (i) Northern Region; (ii) Northern-Eastern Region; (iii) Western Region; (iv) South-Eastern Region; (v) Southern Region; (vi) Dakshina Kshetra; (vii) Uttar Pradesh; (viii) Rajasthan; (ix) Madhya Pradesh; (x) Bihar.
- ⁷⁵ Interviews with Dev Prasad, Vidya Bharati Madhya Bharat, Bhopal; and Vijay Agarwal, Lucknow
- ⁷⁶ One of the most talked about funding organizations is SEWA International UK, which is reported to have channelled huge amounts of funding to the BJP-dominated state of Gujarat in the name of earthquake rehabilitation.
- ⁷⁷ Refer to ‘BJP- RSS Land Bonanza in Delhi’. People’s Democracy, XXVI(36), September 15, 2002. ⁷⁸ Interview with Manoj Gupta and Vilas Balkrishn, Sarswati Vidya Mandir, Sharda Vihar Jan Kalyan Samiti, Bhopal
- ⁷⁹ Principal, Saraswati Shishu Mandir, Phanda, Bhopal
- ⁸⁰ Shiv Kumar, Sangathan Mantri
- ⁸¹ Vidya Bharati Akhil Bharatiya Shiksha Sansthan: Alternative Model of National Education (1990).

⁸² Interviews with Vijay Agrawal and Mohal Lal.

⁸³ Interview with Dinanath Batra.

⁸⁴ In an interview by a journalist (Kaveree Bazmi, Indian Express, Sunday, October 25, 1998), Batra however, denied such allegations and said that the overwhelmingly “saffron colour“ of the conference was the result of “bureaucratic mischief.“ At the same time, he defended the recommendations on the grounds that many of them had, according to him, been suggested by people like Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru and the Kothari Education Commission.

⁸⁵ Interview with Kailash Viajyvergi, BJP Minister in charge of the Public Works Department, MP

⁸⁶ The ‘Self Respect Movement’ in Tamil Nadu, a political movement of Tamil speakers.

⁸⁷ Interview with Naryan Chauhan of Raja Bhoj Gram Bharati Shiksha Samiti, of Bhopal and teachers of the school.

⁸⁸ From the judgment delivered by J.S. Verma and others, in the Supreme Court of India Civil Appellate Jurisdiction, Civil Appeal No. 2836/1989 in December , 1995.

References

- Advani, L.K. (2008) *My Country My Life*, New Delhi: Rupa and Co.
- Andersen, Walter K. and Damle, Sridhar D. (2005) RSS: ideology, organization, and training. In Jaffrelot, Christopher (Ed) *The Sangh Parivar: a Reader*, Oxford and New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Bano, M. (2009) *Marker of Identity: Religious Political Parties and Welfare Work – the Case of Jama'at-i-Islami in Pakistan and Bangladesh*, Birmingham: Religions and Development Working Paper 34.
- Basu T., Data P., Sarkar S., Sarkar T. and Sen S. (1993) *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags: A Critique of the Hindu Right*, New Delhi: Orient Longman.
- Bhishikar, C. P. (1999) *Shri Guruji: Pioneer of a New Era* (Translated into English by Sudhakar Raje), Bangalore: Sahitya Sindhu Prakashan.
- Bidwai, Praful (2004) A critique of Hindutva. *The South Asian Media*, 29 May www.countercurrents.org
- Buultjens, Ralph (1986) India: religion, political legitimacy, and the secular state, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 483, pp 93-109.
- CABE (2005) Constitutional mandate and education, presented to the CABE sub- committee on "Regulatory Mechanisms for Text Books and Parallel Text Books Taught in Schools Outside the Government System"; edited and produced by KHOJ for a Plural India Programme, Sabrang, Mumbai.
- Chandra, Bipin (1998) Jan Sangh: The BJP's predecessor, *The Hindu Online*, May 11.
- Dasgupta, Swapan (2001) BJP: up for grabs, *Seminar*, 497 <http://www.india-seminar.com/2001/497/497%20swapan%20dasgupta.htm>
- Dasgupta, Swapan (2004) Whatever happened to Hindutva? *Seminar* (533), January <http://www.india-seminar.com/2004/533/533%20swapan%20dasgupta.htm>
- Election Commission of India (2007) *Model Code of Conduct for the Guidance of Political Parties and their Candidates*, Publication Division, www.eci.gov.in
- Graham, Bruce (2005) The leadership and organization of the Jan Sangh, 1951 to 1967. In Jaffrelot, Christophe (Ed) *The Sangh Parivar: a Reader*, Oxford and New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Jaffrelot, Christopher (2003) *India: caste stronger than religion?* IIAS Newsletter, No. 32, November www.iias.nl/iiasn/32/RR
- Jaffrelot, Christophe (2005a) The RSS: a Hindu nationalist sect. In Jaffrelot, Christophe (Ed) *The Sangh Parivar: a Reader*, Oxford and New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Jaffrelot, Christophe (2005b) Introduction. In Jaffrelot, Christophe (Ed) *The Sangh Parivar: a Reader*, Oxford and New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Kanungo, Pralay (2002) *RSS'S Tryst with Politics - From Hedgewar to Sudarshan*, New Delhi: Manohar Publishers.
- Kapila, Subhash (2008) India sick of over-dosage of "political secularism" <http://www.boloji.com/plainspeak/138.htm>, June 15
- Mahajan, Gurpreet and Jodhka, Surinder S. (2009) *Religions, Democracy and Governance: Spaces for the Marginalized in Contemporary India*, Birmingham: Religions and Development WP 26 http://www.rad.bham.ac.uk/files/resourcesmodule/@random454f80f60b3f4/1241771173_wp_26.pdf
- National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (2001) *Review of the Working of Political Parties Specially the Relation to Elections and Reform Options*, A consultation paper prepared by the Advisory Panel on Electoral Reforms; Standards in Political Life. <http://lawmin.nic.in/ncrwc/finalreport/v2b1-8.htm>
- Patenge, Ramesh (n.d.) The Sangh Parivar and the Non- Hindus; www.hvk.org/Publications/sangh.html

- Palshikar, Suhas (2004) Revisiting state level parties. *Economic and Political Weekly*, XXXIX(14), pp 1477-80.
- Pushkar, P. (2004) *Do Religious Parties Undermine Democracy? India and Turkey in the 1990s*. Paper prepared for the 2004 Meeting of the American Political Science Association (APSA), September 2-5, 2004, Chicago, IL. http://www.allacademic.com/metal_p_mla_apa_research_citation/0/5/9/6/5/pages59656/p59656-1.php
- Ramakrishnan, Venkitesh (1998) A spreading network, *Frontline*, 15(23), November 07-20 <http://www.hinduonnet.com/fline/fl1523/15230100.htm>
- Rangarajan, Mahesh (2004) Advantage Vajpayee, *Seminar* (533), January <http://www.india-seminar.com/2004/533/533%20mahesh%20rangarajan.htm>
- Sarkar, Tanika (2005) Educating the children of the Hindu Rashtra. In Jaffrelot, Christophe (Ed) *The Sangh Parivar: a Reader*, Oxford and New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Suri, K.C., (2005) *Parties Under Pressure: Political Parties in India Since Independence*; Paper prepared for the project on *State of Democracy in South Asia*, New Delhi: Lokniti (Programme on Comparative Democracy), Centre for the Study of Developing Societies.
- Vyas, Neena (2005) Choosing a President for the BJP, *The Hindu*, Online Edition, September 29.

Other references

- Echeverri-Gent, John (2001) *Political Economy of India's Fiscal and Financial Reform*, Stanford CA: Stanford University, Centre for Research on Economic Development and Policy Reform, Working Paper No. 105.
- Jaffrelot, Christophe (2008) Hindu nationalism and the social welfare strategy. In Clarke, Gerard and Jennings, Michael (Eds) *Development, Civil Society and Faith Based Organisations: Bridging the Sacred and the Secular*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Khare, Harish (2004) Waiting for the Atal Decade. *Seminar* (533), January <http://www.india-seminar.com/2004/533/533%20harish%20khare.htm>
- Lall, Marie (2005) *The Challenges for India's Education System*, London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs.
- Manor, James (1990) Parties and the party system, India's democracy. In Khohli, A. (Ed) *India's Democracy: An Analysis of Changing State Society Relations*, Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Pandey, Gyanendra (Ed) (1993) *Hindus and Others: The Question of Identity in India Today*, New Delhi: Viking.
- Taneja, Nalini (2002) BJP's assault on education and educational institutions <http://www.indowindow.com/sad/article.php?child=29&article=27>
- Zavos, John (2004) *The End of Hindutva? A Reflection on the General Election in India*, University of Manchester, UK; Paper presented at the European Institute for Asian Studies, Brussels, 28 May 2004; www.eias.org/luncheons/india280504/zavos

Annex 1

List of interviews

1. K. N. Govindacharaya, Ex. General Secretary of BJP; New Delhi, January 2008
2. Mahavir Prasad, ex. Governor of Madhya Pradesh; New Delhi, January, 2008
3. Mohan Lal, Office Secretary, Vidya Bharati, Delhi, January 2008
4. Narayanji Sharma, Sangathan Mantri, Vidya Bharati, Bhopal, February 2008
5. Devinandan Chourasia, Training manager, Vidya Bharati, Bhopal, February, 2008
6. Kailashji Choudhary, Superintendent, Vidya Bharati, Bhopal, February, 2008
7. Manoj Gupta, Principal, Vidya Bharati, Bhopal, February, 2008
8. Phadkeji, (Rural), Vidya Bharati, Bhopal, February, 2008
9. Rajendra Dixit (Ekal Vidyalaya), Vidya Bharati, Bhopal, February, 2008
10. Manoj Gupta, Sharda Viharjan Kalyan Samiti, Bhopal, February, 2008
11. Vilas Balkrish, Sharda Viharjan Kalyan Samiti, Bhopal, February, 2008
12. Anil Dave, (Swayamsevak), Spokesperson, BJP, Madhya Pradesh; Bhopal, February, 2008
13. Kailash Vijayvergi, Minister(PWD), BJP, Madhya Pradesh; Bhopal, February, 2008
14. Narayan Chouhan, Rajbhog Gram Bharati Shiksha Samiti, Bhopal, February 2008
15. Om Prakashji Chouhan, Saraswati Shishu Mandir, Panda, February 2008
16. Chandan Mitra, Journalist and BJP- Member Parliament, Delhi, 2008
17. Susresh Srivastava, BJP, Member of Legislative Assembly-UP ; Lucknow, April 2008
18. Shiv Kumarji, Sangathan Mantri, Vidya Bharati, Lucknow, April, 2008
19. Umakant, Deendayal Research Institute, Lucknow, May 2008
20. Vijay Agarwal, Vidya Bharati; Lucknow, May, 2008
21. Umashankar, Vidya Bharati; Lucknow, May, 2008
22. Dinanath Batra, Secretary, Vidya Bharati, New Delhi, June 2008

Religions and Development Working Papers

- 1 Shah, R., Larbi, G. and Batley, R. *Religion and Public Management Literature Review* 2007
- 2 Nkurunziza, E. *An Overview of Development Studies: Background Paper for the Religions and Development Research Programme* 2007
- 3 Jackson, P. and Fleischer, C. *Religion and Economics: A Literature Review* 2007
- 4 Tomalin, E. *Sociology, Religion and Development: Literature Review* 2007
- 5 Bradley, T. *The Relationships Between Religion and Development: Views from Anthropology* 2007
- 6 Tomalin, E. *Religious Studies and Development: A Literature Review* 2007
- 7 Alhassan Alolo, N. , Singh, G. and Marquette, H. *Political Science, Religion and Development: A Literature Review* 2007
- 8 Tomalin, E. *Gender Studies Approaches to the Relationships between Religion and Development* 2007
- 9 Rakodi, C. *Understanding the Roles of Religions in Development: The Approach of the RaD Programme* 2007
- 10 Religions and Development Research Programme, University of Birmingham. (Editors) *India: Some Reviews of Literature Related to Religions and Development* 2008
- 11 Mhina, A. (Editor) *Religions and Development in Tanzania: A Preliminary Literature Review* 2007
- 12 Bano, M. with Nair, P. *Faith-based Organisations in South Asia: Historical Evolution, Current Status and Nature of Interaction with the State* 2007
- 13 Bano, M. *Allowing for Diversity: State-Madrassa Relations in Bangladesh* 2008
- 14 Bano, M. *Contesting Ideologies and Struggle for Authority: State-Madrassa Engagement in Pakistan* 2008
- 16 Kim, K. *Concepts of Development in the Christian Traditions: A Religions and Development Background Paper* 2007
- 17 Alhassan Alolo, A. *African Traditional Religions and Concepts of Development: A Background Paper* 2007
- 18 Tomalin, E. *Buddhism and Development: A Background Paper* 2007
- 19 Tomalin, E. *Hinduism and International Development: Religions and Development Background Paper* 2009
- 20 Kroessin, M. R. *Concepts of Development in 'Islam': A Review of Contemporary Literature and Practice* 2008
- 21 Tatla, D. S. *Sikhism and Development: A Review* 2008
- 22 Zaman, A. *Islamic Economics: A Survey of the Literature* 2008
- 23 Kirmani, N. *The Relationships between Social Movements and Religion in Processes of Social Change: A Preliminary Literature Review* 2008
- 24 Iqbal, M. A. and Siddiqui, S. *Mapping the Terrain: The Activities of Faith-based Organisations in Development in Pakistan* 2008
- 25 Martin, F. *Psychology, Religion and Development: A Literature Review* 2008
- 26 Mahajan, G. and Jodhka, S. S. *Religions, Democracy and Governance: Spaces for the Marginalized in Contemporary India* 2009

- 27 Waseem, M. and Mufti, M. *Religion, Politics and Governance in Pakistan* 2009
- 28 Jodhka, S. S. and Bora, P. *Mapping Faith-based Development Activities in Contemporary Maharashtra, India* 2009
- 29 Bano, M. *Engaged yet Disengaged: Islamic Schools and the State in Kano, Nigeria* 2009
- 30 Kroessin, M. R. *Mapping UK Muslim Development NGOs* 2009
- 31 Roberts, F.O. N., Odumosu, O. and Nabofa, M. *Religions and Development in Nigeria: A Preliminary Literature Review* 2009
- 32 White, S. C. *Beyond the Paradox: Religion, Family and Modernity in Contemporary Bangladesh* 2009
- 33 Dugbazah, J. *The Relationships between Values, Religious Teaching and Development Concepts and Practices: A Preliminary Literature Review* 2009
- 34 Bano, M. *Marker of Identity: Religious Political Parties and Welfare Work - The Case of Jama'at-i-Islami in Pakistan and Bangladesh* 2009
- 36 White, S. C. *Domains of Contestation: Women's Empowerment and Islam in Bangladesh* 2009
- 37 Nair, P. *Religious Political Parties and their Welfare Work: Relations between the RSS, the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Vidya Bharati Schools in India* 2009
- 38 Odumosu, O., Olaniyi, R. and Alonge, S. *Mapping the Activities of Faith-based Organizations in Development in Nigeria* 2009



ORDERING PUBLICATIONS

Publications can be obtained by either telephoning Carol Fowler on **44 (0) 121 414 4986** or Email: c.a.fowler@bham.ac.uk and also downloaded as a PDF file from www.rad.bham.ac.uk