Chapter V

Cultural Nationalism in Practice

Violence in Gujarat, 2002

Introduction:

As has been seen, the consolidation of upper caste and middle class consciousness as a result of the backlash against policies increasing the quota of reservations for Other Backward Classes (OBC), created ready-made constituencies for the Hindu majoritarian campaign. Further, the dismantling of the Nehruvian consensus which reflected in the profound reforms in economic policies and the sense that the political framework required substantial updating in order to be able to respond to emerging middle class aspirations, provided the political space for the re-entry of other discourses of nationhood. As has been argued in the preceding chapter, aiding the resurgence of Hindu nationalism was a discourse that relied heavily on a discrediting of the secular national culture by a consistent portrayal of secularism as being tantamount to the appeasement of minorities with all its attendant consequences, particularly the emergence of Islamic terrorism. This appeal to the Hindu middle classes was made, using potent and incendiary imagery of minority groups particularly Muslims and typecasting them as terrorist separatists, endangering national security because
of their trans-national loyalties. The central aim of this Hindu cultural nationalist discourse was to ensure that by consistently portraying the Hindu majority as real "nationals" and "responsible defenders" of the national interest, the idea that the interests of the majority were tantamount to the national interest, would be embedded in the psyche of the Hindu community. This, too, was designed to stand out in contrast to the alleged subversive behaviour of minority groups. The project of Hindu nationhood was considerably boosted by the canvassing of this theme. This chapter explores the impact of the percolation of this discourse in the ranks of the Sangh Parivar organisations and their middle class supporters. The argument here is that the organised violence targeting Muslims on an unprecedented scale in Gujarat in early 2002 was a result of the widespread assimilation of the elements of this discourse. The events in Gujarat which, in the purposeful targeting of the Muslim community, had overtones of ethnic cleansing, were a pointer to the fact that when the discourse of cultural nationalism was broken down into rudimentary, street-level stereotypes, it had the potential of generating this communally-directed violence.

As explained in the preceding chapter, the Hindu nationalist campaigners had managed to successfully incorporate in their discourse the reactive incidents of the bomb blasts at Bombay, Coimbatore and other sites, glossing over the originary cause of provocation—the demolition of the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya—and suggesting that these were examples of Pakistan-sponsored Islamic terror, executed by Indian Muslims. By raising alarm in the public arena about the growing menace of Islamic terrorism, the Hindu cultural nationalists sought to de-emphasise their own contribution to the escalation of tension. This ultimately provided the political space and ideological cover for the pogrom against Muslims in Gujarat between March and May 2002, involving killings, rape and injury of several hundred Muslim men, women and children. As in several other cases where cultural nationalist campaigns managed to gain hegemony, such as
the Nazis in Germany or more recently, the Serbian aggression in Bosnia, the
ascendancy of Hindu cultural nationalism in the late '90s paved the way for the
unprecedented scale and intensity of brutality against minority communities,
something that could not easily happen under the aegis of a secular and
democratic governing dispensation.

Some of the imagery constructed by Hindu nationalist propagandists and
ideologues in the late '90s and in this decade, that was used to suggest that
Muslims in India were developing a "Jihadi mentality" and under the "protection
of secularism" were seeking to advance their own political agenda of separatism,
had the obvious effect of intensified communal polarisation. The second aspect
of the Hindutva propaganda against Muslims was the canvassing in the public
arena, of the theme that Muslims were inherently unable to coexist peacefully
with other communities. Hindutva propagandists making these claims, including
the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee and the Deputy Prime Minister, LK
Advani, saw their arguments as being bolstered by the debate in the Western
capitals, after September 11, 2001, when the World Trade Center was bombed
in the United States. In the wake of the 9/11 bombings, a spate of theories,
particularly a revival of the "clash of civilisations" thesis declaring the Muslim
community as being inherently incompatible with people of other faiths, was
seized upon by various Hindutva commentators and propagandists to assert that
a similar situation existed as regards Muslims in India. Thus by the public
stigmatisation of Muslims, a large-scale desensitisation process took effect
among sections of the Hindu middle classes, making it possible for Sangh
Parivar activists and cadre to carry out assaults on minorities with impunity.

For instance, that the Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, who was at
the heart of the entire controversy won the subsequent Assembly elections by a
landslide, purely on the basis of hard hitting and communally partisan rhetoric
that not only sought to discredit the Muslim minority but also consciously
denigrated secularism and secular parties, enabled the Hindutva propagandists to make larger claims that the death knell of secularism had indeed been sounded. The media and the "secularists" who had been perceived as being highly critical of the happenings in Modi's Gujarat were targeted in an intense ideological campaign by Sangh Parivar ideologues and columnists. This indicates that the Gujarat events were perceived by the Hindu nationalists as part of a larger battle for Hindu nationhood, with secularism being seen as the principal impediment in achieving that objective.

However the triumphalism that followed Modi's election victory in Gujarat in December 2002 was short-lived as the Lok Sabha elections of 2004 saw a decisive defeat for the BJP-led NDA. This lent substance to the claim that the original vision of Indian nationhood had indeed survived this major assault from the forces of cultural nationalism. The reaffirmation of the Indian people's faith in secular nationalism caused some of the BJP's key allies in the NDA to hastily distance themselves from this platform, even as they began to attribute their respective defeats to the Gujarat events. The scramble among some of the NDA allies, particularly the Telugu Desam to dissociate themselves from the BJP because of the Gujarat factor showed a fear on their parts, of a possible erosion of minority voter support. It also suggested that the Gujarat electoral success had resulted in an overreach and a complacency on the part of the Hindutva campaign which failed to see the ground reality that the Indian voter, despite the perceived disenchantment with various aspects of governing policies, was not persuaded to the cause of a reopening of the issue of national identity or nationhood.

Yet cultural nationalism while vanquished might not have disappeared from the political landscape. Some of the core elements of the cultural nationalist discourse, particularly the linkages that were made between terrorism, "appeasement of minorities" and "pseudo-secularism" appear to have been
retained by the BJP and its Hindutva allies and these remain central themes in
electioneering, as the recent controversy over the BJP's circulation of a compact
disc during the Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections in April 2007 indicated. This
study draws from interviews with the key figures in the Hindu nationalist
constellation to argue that while the most serious challenge to the secular-
democratic framework from Hindu cultural nationalism might have been
overcome as reflected in the repudiation of the BJP-led NDA in the 2004
elections, the forces of the Hindu Right perceive that in order for Hindu cultural
nationalism to make inroads in the settled consensus over India's secular
nationhood, the normative value of secularism would have to be diluted by
criticising its practice rather than its conceptual essence. It is argued here that
the Hindu nationalist forces continue to acknowledge that the critique of
secularism as camouflaged minority appeasement and its implied conclusion that
even national security is at risk as a result of this policy, remains Hindutva's
most powerful mobilisational weapon. This formulation with its polarising edge
helps the Hindu nationalists maintain the pressure on secular formations and
minority groups, even as it ensures that their majoritarian platform remains at
the core of their political and electoral mobilisation processes.

The Utility of Antonyms: 'Jihadi' versus 'Patriot'

It was imperative to construct a stereotype of the Muslim community as
inclined towards terrorism and secessionism for the Hindu cultural nationalists
to bolster their claims that Hindus as original inhabitants of this country were its
only 'true' nationals. Hence as it has been pointed out in the preceding chapter,
the allegation of an Indian Muslim-Pakistan connection was a critical

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1 During the BJP's campaign for the Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections in April 2007, the BJP leader
Lalji Tandon released a campaign CD meant for distribution in elections containing fictionalised scenes evoking
stereotypes of Muslims as terrorists, slaughtering cows and kidnapping Hindu girls. A similar CD released earlier
by the BJP in December 2006 intended for these elections highlighted the same themes of cow slaughter,
"Muslim appeasement" and "softness" towards the SIMI on the part of the then Chief Minister, Mulayam Singh
Yadav. (Reports in The Hindu, April 5, 6, and 7, 2007 and December 22, 2006).
component of the Hindutva discourse as it helped validate this majoritarian platform. Peddling the thesis of a Pakistan-Indian Muslim axis also helped the Hindutva campaigners to argue that terrorism was the next stage of the war of Islam and Muslims with India, in the perennial quest for hegemony. As earlier studies have also pointed out, the conceptual space for the idea of a Hindu Rashtra could be created only by discrediting the secular state and suggesting that the Muslim community was philosophically conditioned to be intolerant, and harbouring fantasies of making India into an Islamic state.²

While the anti-Muslim rhetoric was a perennial feature of the Hindu cultural nationalist discourse, as the political processes of mobilising Hindu majoritarian sentiment intensified in the post-Babri demolition context, a parallel effort to provide an ideological underpinning for the next phase of communal polarisation was in place, encouraged by RSS leaders like H.V Seshadri, K.S Sudarshan and executed by ideologues like Sita Ram Goel, Ram Swarup and Devendra Swarup. These Hindutva ideologues directed their efforts to expanding the existing imagery of the Muslim community as "terrorist" and "separatist", integrating this conceptualisation into a larger canvas that was more hospitable to the strategic compulsion of intensifying communal polarisation. Several pamphlets and tracts from the RSS-affiliated publishing centres³ carried

² One of the earliest studies of the Hindutva phenomenon, *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags* (1993) had noted that "Hindu tolerance is always counterposed against supposed Muslim fanaticism, relying on the unstated and unproved assumption that the philosophical postulates of a particular religion (which are in this case arbitrarily taken for granted) constitute the exclusive, unchanging organisational principles for an entire people across all kinds of spaces, times and historical changes." Further, "if Hinduism is more tolerant (which is stated as an axiom and is nowhere really expounded) then all Hindus at all times will be peace-loving. Whatever the provocation, since Islam is a proselytising religion, all Muslims are necessarily intolerant, so the argument goes, whereas a Hindu Rashtra is a safe repose for all creeds and sects. A Muslim-majority India, or a secular state which takes Muslim support into account, must be dedicated to the conversion of Hindus and to turning India ultimately into a fanatic Islamic state which will root out all other beliefs." (Tapan Basu, Pradip Datta, Sumit Sarkar, Tanika Sarkar, Sambuddha Sen, *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags: A Critique of the Hindu Right*, (Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1993)

³ Another feature of the resurgence of Hindu nationalism was the emergence of publishing centres or houses, oriented towards Hindutva ideology, notably *Voice of India*, founded by Ram Swarup in 1983, joined in by Sitaram Goel which declared its aim as "providing an ideological defence of Hindu society and culture through a series of publications" because there was a "united front of entrenched alien forces--Islam, Christianity, Communism, Nehruism--to disrupt and discredit the perennial values of the Indian ethos." (Description taken
purported and most often inaccurate translations of so-called injunctions from Islamic teachings, including the Quran, to claim that Muslims were religiously mandated to conduct "jihad" against non-Muslims and that Hindus in India, and thereby Hindu India were natural targets of Islamic "terrorism" and "imperialism". Here below are some samples of the arguments in the pamphlets and books written by leading Sangh ideologues that were churned out from the Hindutva-friendly publishing centres, and became part of the received wisdom of the cadre of the Sangh Parivar organisations--the RSS, the VHP and the Bajrang Dal. Also to be noted is that these arguments which reflected in newspaper columns targeted Hindu middle class audiences. One of the earliest of these pamphlets to openly target the Muslim community was a tract with the loaded title "The Story of Islamic Imperialism in India" by Sita Ram Goel, admiringly described by Hindutva sympathisers as an "intellectual Kshatriya". The excerpts cited below from Goel's tract illustrate the new dynamic of confrontation that the Hindutva ideology was attempting to put in place in the public arena.

...It is in the living memory of this ruling class that Islamic imperialism became a blood-thirsty monster and carved out large limbs of the motherland on our East and West. It is in the living memory of this ruling class that Islamic imperialism "cleaned up" its separate state of Pakistan from the "curse" of Hindu infidels. And it is under the very nose of this ruling class that Islamic imperialism, aided and abetted by petro-

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from Voice of India website <http://www.geocities.com/voi_publishers/?20079>) A more recent publishing house with links to the Hindutva movement is the India First Foundation, the trustees of which include Dina Nath Mishra, former Rajya Sabha member, editor and columnist affiliated to the R.S.S, Balbir Punj, a columnist and Rajya Sabha member from the BJP and Devendra Swarup of the R.S.S. The India First Foundation describes itself as "a humble component of the comprehensive effort that commenced over a century ago and that has since been ceaselessly striving to recapture and reinstate our national identity." (Description from India First Foundation website <http://www.indiafirstfoundation.org/Vision_m.htm>)

4 N.S Rajaram, a Hindutva columnist noted in a tribute to Goel on his 80th birthday in December 2001 that "while the Marxists and the anti-Hindu 'secularists' are running for cover, desperately clinging to what is left of their perks and positions..., many of the positions advocated by Shri Goel are moving into the mainstream." (Article in Bharatiya Pragna, February 2002, <http://www.hvk.org/articles/0202/174.html>)
dollars, has started claiming for itself the rest of India as well, by a right of conquest in the past...\(^5\)

The same theme that Indian Muslims were receiving financial support for their hegemonic ambitions from Islamist nations in West Asia was echoed again in this tract, clearly alleging extra-territorial loyalties on the part of Indian Muslims. "Islam in India is still suffering from the high fever of self-righteousness, though lately it has shifted its claim from 'the only true religion' to the 'only human brotherhood'. Powered by petro-dollars, it is again dreaming of an empire in India. Hindus, on the other hand have learnt no lesson from history as is evident from their slogan of \textit{Sarva Dharma Sama Bhava} vis-à-vis Islam which is only a totalitarian and terrorist ideology of imperialism."\(^6\) Goel's tract also reasserted the Hindu cultural nationalist position that Hindus had prior antiquity in the country, casting Muslims as invaders. In a passage that contained an unsubstantiated and tendentious narrative of medieval Indian history, Goel launched the theme of 'patriotic' Hindu versus 'imperialist' Muslim. To quote Goel--

\begin{quote}
...The record leaves no doubt that the medieval period under Muslim rule was a period of continuous conflict between Hindus and Muslims. The Hindus were patriots fighting for the freedom of their ancient homeland and the preservation of their cultural patrimony. The Muslims, on the other hand, were imperialist marauders inspired by a criminal creed which they were trying to impose on the Hindus by force...\(^7\)
\end{quote}

It was clear that the burden of this entire diatribe was to unleash a critique of the secular national ethos and to suggest that the secular national culture was masking Muslim designs for aggrandizement.

\begin{quote}
...In plain and simple language, therefore national integration has come to mean only one thing, namely that a meek Hindu
\end{quote}

\begin{flushleft}
\(^6\) Ibid, p.87.  
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society should get integrated with a militant Muslim *millat*.

One waits in vain for a voice which so much as whispers a 'why' in the face of boisterous Muslim bigotry. Muslims have a God-given right to go on raising accusing fingers at the Hindus for refusing to give them this or that. And the Hindus have a God-given duty to go on conceding every exclusive and imperialist claim of an incurable fanaticism...8

A tract by Abhas Chatterjee, one of the most popular references for Sangh activists and frequently quoted by Hindutva-friendly writers, titled "The Concept of Hindu Nation" brought out by the publishing house *Voice of India* in 1995, outlined this framework which became the core of the Hindu nationalist attack on "secularists" and echoed in the political diatribes against the Congress and other secular parties, by several BJP leaders, including Advani and Modi. The excerpts of Chatterjee's remarks containing this conceptual framework are here below:

The purpose of promoting the concept of composite culture in India is simple...it is that we should accept Islamic (and to some extent Christian) culture also to be our own culture, a part of our own heritage. The reality is just the reverse. Even after a thousand years of coexistence, Hindu and Islamic cultures have not only remained parallel cultures but have also come into conflict on every conceivable point... Islamic culture was brought to this country by barbaric invaders and tried relentlessly for a thousand years to extirpate the national Hindu culture...9

The second part of Chatterjee's analysis which painted a threatening picture of Muslims, suggesting that they did not consider themselves part of the Indian State because of their loyalty to the *Ummah* and that they were only waiting for an opportune moment to attack Hindus, was combined with a blistering attack on the secular vision of nationhood. The tract argued that "As per the Quran, the Muslims by themselves constitute a separate nation, the

8 Ibid, p.3.
9 Abhas Chatterjee, *The Concept of Hindu Nation*, (Voice of India, New Delhi, 1995), pp.15-16

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"Ummah," and "according to the Quran this land of ours is a Jihiliyyah, a land of darkness. It will remain a Jihiliyyah till the rule of Islam is fully established here." Muslims "believe the Quran to be the words of Allah himself and as adherents to the Quran, they have no freedom to believe that in the present stage of history, when India is still predominantly Hindu, they are part of the Indian nation."10 This tract went on to suggest that it was mandatory for Muslims not to consider themselves part of a non-Islamic nation until they could conquer it. "The Hadis gives even clearer instructions, namely that if Muslims are compelled to live in a Jihiliyyah, their foremost duty is to wage war and slaughter the kafirs so as to conquer the land and establish Islam there. If such conquest is not possible at present, Muslims should bide their time and continue to build their strength..." Further, "if any Muslim really considers himself to be part of this nation on the basis of equality with you and me, he would be doing so only by an implicit repudiation of the Quran and the Hadis, by violating a basic tenet of Islam, by staying away from the cardinal principles laid down for a true Mohammedan."11 The next part of Chatterjee's exposition reflected the Hindutva theoretical framework that was fast consolidating itself in the discourse, a framework that asserted unhesitatingly that as a result of his philosophical and religious moorings, the Indian Muslim had no hesitation in turning to violence and terrorism in order to undermine the Indian nation. But preventing the rulers of this country from acknowledging this reality was the "secular national vision". In Chatterjee's words--

Therefore the concept of a composite nation combining Hindus and Muslims is false to its very core. But the affairs of our State have been conducted since 1947 entirely on the basis of this false perception of nationality. To sustain this fundamental untruth, the system has to take recourse to other untruths on every conceivable issue. Bangladeshi Muslims are

11 Ibid, pp. 18-19.
infiltrating into Assam, Bengal, Bihar and other parts of India in millions but you cannot say that the infiltrators are Muslims. In Kashmir, Muslims have waged what is avowedly a *Jihad* and tyrannised the entire Hindu population out of the Valley but you have to say that the strife in Kashmir is not communal, it is a battle for Kashmiriyat! Muslims carried out devastating bomb explosions in Bombay and Calcutta but you have to say that this was the handiwork of Pakistan or underworld dons...

...It seems to me that all our national weaknesses and problems today spring from this basic mischief. The artificial vision of nationality on which our system is functioning is quite different from our real nationality. The grave consequence of the basic dichotomy has been a complete evaporation of national inspiration in this country...12

The Hindutva publishing houses brought out a series of books and pamphlets on Islamic *Jihad*, all with the theme of the philosophical incompatibility of Muslims and Hindus and with the inevitable conclusion that unless Hindus realised that Muslims would not rest content until India was made an Islamic nation, there would be catastrophic consequences. The literature that emanated from these publishing houses which was strongly Islamophobic in orientation, appeared to goad Hindus towards confrontation, offering hypothetical constructs, each featuring angry *Jihadi* Muslims, who if not waging war, would at least start religious riots. One writer, Suhas Majumdar, in his book titled "*Jihad: The Islamic Doctrine of Permanent War*", again published by the *Voice of India*, had this to say--"An important question relating to the subject of *jihad* is this: in mixed populations consisting of Muslims and non-Muslims alike, should this sanguinary creed not inevitably lead to religious riots? Certainly the Quran furnishes us with verses which have the appearance of extremely provocative utterances aimed at rousing the Mussalmans to a state of

12 Ibid, pp.18-20.

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murderous mob-fury…"\textsuperscript{13} Majumdar's lurid portrayal of Quranic injunctions, suggesting that these were inciting Muslims to rioting and violence, was incendiary at the very least, as the passages using loose translations of verses from the ninth chapter of the Quran, quoted below indicate:

"..."Go forth light armed and heavy armed and strive with your wealth and your lives in the way of Allah" says the Quran (9/41). A verse of this kind does look like being more in the nature of a rabble-rousing ejaculation than a proclamation of pre-planned and premeditated warfare. "Slay the idolaters wherever you find them" (9/5) is again to all appearances, a call to lawless violence rather than a general's directive to draw the battle lines with discipline and forethought. Indeed, the whole group of the so-called Immunity Verses (9/1-12) of the Quran seems for all practical purposes to indicate a sort of abdication of the Islamic state's responsibility for law and order by asking the Muslim masses to destroy the infidel population by whatever means available to them...

...The Islamic concepts of \textit{Dar-ul-Islam} (territory of Islam) and \textit{Dar-ul-Harb} (territory of war), which originated from the jihadic provisions of the Quran and the Hadis seem to have grown out of this very dilemma. These concepts presuppose the extermination of Arabian idolaters by the power of the state while in non-Arab Islamic states, the practice is to spare the lives of idolaters on payment of the poll-tax. Such an arrangement dispenses with the need for religious riots in Islamic states for the simple reason that the state on its own does the work of conversion or refrains from it according to its own convenience. In these states, the populace is absolved from its duty of 'slaying the infidels' indiscriminately.

By the same token, non-Islamic states with a large body of Muslim population must of necessity give rise to religious riots if the Ulema declare these states to be \textit{Dar-ul-Harb}. The Immunity Verses of the Quran, must, in the nature of things,

\textsuperscript{13} Suhas Majumdar, \textit{Jihad: The Islamic Doctrine of Permanent War}, (Voice of India, New Delhi, 1994), p 56.
come into full play in such states. In this restricted sense at least jihad and religious riot are one...  

Directly applying to the situation in India this tendentious theory that the Quran decrees that Muslims must riot and cause violence in non-Islamic states, Majumdar's words were clearly intended to fuel a sense of insecurity among Hindus. "Coming to India, the future of Hindus who form the bulk of the population of this country seems grim indeed if their obstinate refusal to face the reality of the current Islamic Revival with its pronounced jihadic overtones continues as before." Hindus, he said, "should clearly understand that the doctrine of jihad is absolutely fatal to their life and property, not to speak of the honour of their womenfolk." Virtually goading Hindus to act with violence against Muslims on the basis of a false proposition that Muslims were wedded to the doctrine of jihad, Majumdar declared "If the Hindu does not make a serious and determined effort towards persuading his Muslim brethren to renounce the doctrine of jihad, if he does not devote his heart and soul to devise adequate means of achieving that end, ... then he is most certainly proceeding towards self-destruction and that too in a not very distant future,... Muslims all over the world are hell-bent on reviving the jihadic frenzy of seventh century Islam. That Mussalmans of India should continue to feed on such frenzy and that Hindus should persist in their delusion regarding the feasibility of peaceful coexistence with such a frenzied folk, does no longer make sense."  

An indication of the considerable investment that was being made by the Hindu cultural nationalist campaign in the attempt to persuade the Hindu majority that its interests were in danger was the ease and openness with which many Sangh-affiliated columnists and writers were able to express aloud in public their misgivings about Muslims, who were their fellow citizens. This

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14 Ibid, pp.56-57.  
15 Ibid, pp. 69-70.
trend was more discernible during the BJP-led NDA rule between 1999 and 2004. For instance, Prafull Goradia, a prolific columnist affiliated to the BJP, whose writings were published in mainstream English language dailies, openly canvassed the thesis, more than half a century after Partition, that Muslims in India were given to rioting because they were not allowed a Dar-ul-Islam or an Islamic state in India. In a book titled "Muslim League's Unfinished Agenda", Goradia argued-- "Equally tragic are the riots that have continued even in independent India. Godhra and elsewhere in Gujarat are only the most recent examples. The Muslim in India is seldom at ease. At the best of times he is uncomfortable and at worst, he is shaken. In the absence of leadership and direction, he is unaware of what really ails him. In fact he is missing his Dar-ul-Islam. He is not getting the space he needs to fulfill himself as a momin or a devout Muslim. If only there was someone to remind him that he needs to follow the line laid down by the Muslim League led by Quaid-i-Azam Jinnah, i.e emigrate to his Dar-ul-Islam." 16 In other words, the columnist was actually demanding that Muslims leave India. The second part of the writer's argument, again aired publicly with surprising ease, contained a tendentious suggestion that "riots are an expression of a deep-rooted frustration suffered by the Muslims who are in a minority in a country, or rather a society, where the writ of the sharia does not run...if however jihad is not possible or the prospects of its success hopeless, the momin should resort to hijrat (migration to a land of Islam)." 17 This kind of rhetorical taunting which not only suggested that Muslims had no stake in the Indian nation and was in essence an incitement to ethnic cleansing and the other examples of such harsh characterisations of Muslims quoted above, can be seen to have provided the ideological basis for the violence that erupted against Muslims in the Gujarat pogrom of 2002.

17 Ibid, p. 236.
The preoccupation of Hindutva-allied writers\textsuperscript{18} with building the case that Indian Muslims like their counterparts elsewhere were merely waiting to launch a \textit{jihad} against Hindus under the protection of a secular dispensation reflected the two-pronged strategic approach of the cultural nationalists--on the one hand seeking to drive a wedge between the Hindu majority and the Muslim minority, using this fearful stereotype of Muslims and on the other, sustaining intense ideological pressure on the secular framework of Indian nationhood. Interviews conducted for this thesis with Hindu nationalist ideologues like Devendra Swarup and S. Gurumurthy brought out this twin-pronged approach clearly. Both Swarup and Gurumurthy repackaged the Hindu cultural nationalist claim that the theological foundations of Hinduism made Hindus more pacific in outlook than Muslims who were theologically oriented to being war-mongers. According to Swarup, Islamic ideology "does not believe in territorial nationalism" because "Islamic ideology believes religion is the basis of community formation, of communal identity" unlike Hindus for whom, he said "the form of worship has never been central to the collective identity...it has been a personal domain...I can worship any isht (personal deity)...for Hindus, it is a personal affair, and not central to our collective identity..." whereas for Muslims, "the way they react to the Quran and Prophet throughout the world, they react equally on these issues, but they don't react on the issue of territory." Muslims do not "believe in nationalism", Swarup said, "the Muslim mind in Bangladesh, the Muslim mind in Pakistan and the Muslim mind in India, have common origins, common grounds...their psychological grounds are the

\textsuperscript{18} The proliferation of titles emerging from publishers of a Hindu nationalist orientation testified to an overwhelming interest in linking what was seen as Islamic theological injunctions to Indian Muslims, thereby hoping to render more effective the overall argument that Indian Muslims would necessarily put religion before nationhood. Ram Swarup's \textit{Understanding Islam through Hadis: Religious Faith or Fanaticism?} (Voice of India, New Delhi, 1983), Kanayalal M Talleja's pamphlet on \textit{Concept of Jihad against Kafirs in Holy Quran} (Rashtriya Chetana Sangathan, New Delh, 2002), Jaydeep Sen's 'monograph' on \textit{Jihad in India}, (Hindu Writers' Forum, New Delhi, 2001) and Krishnaswami's diatribe on \textit{Islam and Pseudo-Secularists}, (Shradha Prakashan, New Delhi, 2004), were examples of this ideological trend.
same...the very concept of *jihad* is in the Quran." On the other hand, Hindus, he asserted, had a sense of "gratitude to the motherland." 19

Likewise, Gurumurthy argued in his interview for this study that "the basic problem" was that "Islam and Christianity are religions that believed in war whereas Hinduism believed in war only as an exception." The "basic drive" of the two religions, Islam and Christianity had to be understood. For them, terrorism was "not an exception but an offshoot." On the other hand, there could not be Hindu terrorism "because there is no theological root for it, you can have a reactive terrorism but not an originating terror in Hinduism." There was "no theological basis for war or violence" in Hinduism but as for Islam, "one of the mandates is *jihad* in the cause of Islam which is not a mandate on an Islamic king but on every Muslim." 20

In an unpublished manuscript, Gurumurthy has developed further the thesis of the incompatibility of Hinduism with "Abrahamic faiths' like Islam and Christianity, drawing the inevitable conclusion that Hinduism and thereby Hindus have a morally superior outlook and way of life and by implication, the other faiths that exist in India, do so by the sufferance of Hinduism. Excerpts from this manuscript illustrate the linkages sought to be made between the assertion of the right to a Hindu nationhood and the suggestion that other religious and cultural groups are basically alien presences in an intrinsically Hindu nation. Asserting that "Hindu Dharma represents the potential energy of the Indian people", Gurumurthy argues that "without the manifestation of that potential energy in an active form, it (the Indian people) was unable to gather together its adherents to face the challenges. Hindutva is the kinetic aspect of Hindu Dharma." Gurumurthy also argues that "while Hindutva did not and will not collapse in the face of Christianity, it has been hurt and hurt grievously in

19 Swarup, interview by the author, December 2006.
many areas...the Hindu belief that all faiths are sacred human experiences is fundamentally incapable of handling a faith like Christianity which completely denies validity and legitimacy to any faith other than itself..."21 His criticism of Islam is sharper. "The Islamic belief in exclusive validity is identical to that of Christianity. But the problems of Hindus in their interface with Islam are even greater. Islam came into Bharat mainly as an invading faith; it was imposed here through statecraft and military, both of which were driven by faith."

Gurumurthy's conclusion was—"Thus both Islamic and Christian theologies constitute the mightiest problem and pose the greatest challenge to Hindus and Hindu tva, to the security and life and culture of the Hindus." 22

Another point made by Gurumurthy in his interview was that Islam and Christianity being global religions receive global backing unlike Hinduism which has a presence only in India. "A national minority and a global majority" he said, referring to the Christian and Muslim minorities in India "and a national majority and a global minority" referring to the Hindu community, "is the bane of India." The "whole world rises in support of Christians and Muslims in India but there is no support for Hindus, not even in India! The secular opinion will not back Hindus in India!"23 This suggestion that Hindus, despite being a majority in India, were vulnerable because minorities here had links with global powers, was part of the ideological basis for campaigns such as against "conversions" which became focal points of controversy.

A constant preoccupation of the Hindu nationalist discourse has been the issue of Christian and Muslim proselytisation, which has been at the heart of the controversial claims by Hindutva organisations that this had demographic implications. Thus sounding the alarm on these themes found a resonance in several Hindu middle class drawing rooms. The interview with KN

21 Gurumurthy, unpublished manuscript.
22 Ibid.
23 Gurumurthy, interview.
Govindacharya for this study offered a flavour of this perspective. Govindacharya argued that "fundamentalism and terrorism are the very bane of Semitic religions" Both Islam and Christianity, he said, believe in proselytisation. "Those who believe in proselytisation are those who believe themselves to be the chosen people to deliver mankind...this is the basic psychology built by Islam and Christianity today. That is why both the religions in the recent past have stated that their God is the only god and all other gods are Satans and that their way is the only way...this exclusive Judaic thinking is the problem."  

Adding to the problem, Govindacharya said, were the concepts of "Ummah, Quom, Ittihad, Milli" which added up to "pan-Islamism" and this in tum gave strength to the proselytisation process. He alleged that besides funds coming in from the "Gulf" countries, referring to the Persian Gulf, "donations were being sought and were given for the construction of grand masjids in India." Therefore Islam did not remain a "localised phenomenon". Christians too had the "extra advantage of getting financial and other back-up". This global support to these two religions was denied to Hindus, he said.

This narrative that painted Hindus as naturally "tolerant" and "peaceful" unlike Muslims and Christians who were inclined to a more "martial" view of life, percolated into the political arena. Shorn of the semantics, it became a direct assertion of the superiority of the world view of Hinduism and Hindus, with the implicit suggestion that non-Hindus because of their religious conditioning could not have a similarly responsible approach to the Indian nation. An interview with Murli Manohar Joshi, former Union Minister for Human Resource Development, for this study highlights this trend. Joshi's analysis showed how the Hindu cultural nationalists see Pakistan and Indian Muslims as interchangeable entities, as if to say that there is no difference

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24 Govindacharya, interview by author, December 2006.
25 Govindacharya, interview.
between the attitude of Pakistan, an 'enemy' in the eyes of Hindu cultural nationalists, and Indian Muslims. Referring to Chaudhry Rahmat Ali, one of the leading original proponents of the idea of Pakistan in the 1930s, Murli Manohar Joshi hinted that there was a conspiracy theory in place, operating from Pakistan and Bangladesh to "Islamise" India. The idea, said Joshi, following Rahmat Ali's dream, was to "de-Hinduise" various parts of India, particularly Kashmir and Assam. "Terrorism has been advocated in the Islamic concept of warfare...so first, terrorise the Hindu Pandits in Kashmir, throw them out, terrorise the Hindus in the Jammu-Doda area, throw them out. Create a situation in Assam that 'outsiders' in Assam should get out. So a large number of people who have gone from UP, Rajasthan or Bihar will be forced to flee and thus the population of Hindus is diminished and Muslims gain a majority in these areas. This is the pattern that is emerging. de-Hinduisation of certain areas slowly. This is terrorism mixed with demographic aggression. Not an aggression through military but through demography. Change the demography and control the area. Move on, move on, inch by inch, it may take a thousand years, it doesn't matter but keep moving on!" Painting a grim scenario suggesting an encirclement of Hindus in India, Joshi claimed that the ultimate aim of all this was "as Rahmat Ali had said, after Pakistan is formed, we will form Pakasia!" The concept was "to convert India into a totally Islamic land... Rahmat Ali wanted 'Pakistani' culture...of course he didn't define what he meant by Pakistani culture but it can be understood as some form of Islamic culture because Pakistan is an Islamic state...he said that this culture should dominate India and become the dominant culture...this means that the existing culture-- call it Indian culture,

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Hindu culture, Vedic culture, Bharatiya culture—has to be demolished, destroyed and a new culture has to be imposed on this land."\(^{27}\)

Beneath all the ire that was being directed at the "Abrahamic" faiths—Islam and Christianity, the scoffing at the "war-mongering" tendencies of Muslims and the propensities of Christians to "mass conversions" was a clear-cut agenda to assert the superior claims of Hindu majoritarianists to decide the definition of nationhood. Thus one writer of an elaborate treatise on "Secessionism in India" published by a Hindutva-affiliated printing house said "Unless you pinpoint the malady and its causes precisely, you cannot cure it completely. Those who beat about the bush or speak vaguely to escape the wrath of wrong-doers are hypocrites and enemies of the nation. Those who adopt the policy of appeasement and surrender to the seditious and the separatists, and connive at the secessionism of the secessionists are traitors... Who demanded the partition of the country on the basis of religion? Muslims! Who are clamouring for secession of Kashmir? A major section of Muslims! Who have launched armed insurrection in the north-east of Hindustan to demand a separate sovereign Nagaland? A major section of Christians! Who instigate, aid and abet a section of misguided Sikhs to demand Khalistan? A major section of Muslims of Kashmir and Pakistan and Christians of Western countries! ... We therefore come to the conclusion that the problem of secessionism and separatism, disruption and destruction, erupts at a place, where Hindus have lost majority, or are on the verge of losing it. It is therefore in the interest of the integrity and solidarity of the country that the Hindus should maintain their majority in each district of Hindustan."\(^{28}\) In other words, these assertions summoned up visceral communal fears that were clearly at odds with the ground realities of largely harmonious coexistence of different communities.

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\(^{27}\) Joshi, interview by the author.
in the country, but were given respectability in the Sangh Parivar ideological circles.

A new dimension entered the framework of the Hindutva strategic conceptualisation as a result of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, and the consequent formation of an international coalition of terror. The Sangh Parivar perceived these events as providing a major political opportunity to link the internal war on the Muslim minority with the larger global context of America's war with Osama bin Laden. With BJP leaders such as Vajpayee, Advani and Jaswant Singh claiming publicly that "terrorism" was something that India had been facing for a long time, the Hindutva strategic argument in operation since the Babri Masjid demolition was in full view. The changed global context, with the escalation of pressure on terrorism, targeting Afghanistan, tied in with the Hindu nationalist internal strategy of highlighting the claimed linkages between pan-Islamism, Pakistan and Indian Muslims. The then Prime Minister, Vajpayee, in an address to the nation on September 14, three days after the World Trade Center bomb blasts in New York, said "the world must join hands to overwhelm (terrorists) militarily, to neutralise their poison" and "every Indian has to be a part of this global war on terrorism." Clearly echoing the Hindutva strategic formulation that refused to see the Bombay bomb blasts as a retaliatory strike for the destruction of the Babri Masjid, Vajpayee painted the serial explosions as an instance of Pakistan-sponsored terror, in which of course Indian Muslims were the inevitable collaborators. "What happens in Mumbai one day is bound to happen elsewhere tomorrow, the poison that propels mercenaries and terrorists to kill and maim in Jammu and Kashmir will impel the same sort to blow up people elsewhere."

Without referring to Pakistan by name, he appeared to invoke the Sangh argument that Pakistan was collaborating with Muslims to create terror in India.

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"We must strike at the roots of the system that breeds terrorism. We must stamp out the infrastructure that imparts the perverse ideological position by which the terrorist is fired up," he said, evidently invoking the Sangh's favourite imagery of Muslims linked to Pakistan in a conspiracy to wage *jihad* on the Indian State.

The then Home Minister, LK Advani saw in it an opportunity to employ the "clash of civilisations" thesis to suggest that predominantly Hindu India had a natural empathy with the United States against the common enemy--Islam. "The threat of terrorism is not against one particular country. It is a menace against the entire civilised world..." he said, and reiterating what he had said after the Bombay bomb blasts in 1993 suggested again that the Bombay blasts were not part of a larger pattern of inter-communal violence, but reflected Pakistan-instigated terrorism. "We saw a trailer in Mumbai in March 1993 when 253 innocent people lost their lives in serial blasts." Drawing a parallel with the United States' campaign against Afghanistan and its identification of Osama bin Laden as the prime offender, Advani went on to say "...After the Mumbai serial blasts we said that one person who was a prime accused...had been given shelter by one country."32

The RSS and the VHP were more explicit in their linking the internal battle with Muslims to the global context of the war on terror. Balraj Madhok, writing in the RSS weekly, *Organiser*, a month after the World Trade Center bombings reiterated the Sangh's highly coloured version of Islamic theological injunctions as regards "*Jihad*", "*Dar-ul-Harb*" and "*kafirs*", saying darkly that as long "as Islam remains wedded to these fundamentals that are basically political and have nothing to do with any kind of spiritualism and way of worship, it is not possible to draw a line between Islam and terrorism." Once again the onus

30 Ibid.
32 Ibid.

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was placed on Muslism to prove their patriotism, again demanding that Muslims accept Hindu majoritarian tenets. "Those Muslims who are really honestly serious about their opposition to terrorism being perpetrated in the name of Islamic *jihad* must openly distance themselves from these barbaric and inhuman concepts, publicly disown and reject them and own and accept the concept of *Sarva Panth Sambhava*...That would make them good Indians and good Muslims at the same time."

The BJP's and the Sangh Parivar's narrative of a sinister Islamic terror unfolding in India, in tandem with the terror attacks on the United States, was reinforced by the October 1 and December 13, 2001 attacks on the Srinagar Legislative Assembly complex and Parliament House in New Delhi, respectively. There was substance in the concern over the escalation of terrorism and merit in the observation that this was the result of cross-border infiltration by militant groups operating from Pakistani territory. But the partisan manner in which the Hindu cultural nationalists seized upon elements of this scenario to mount pressure on Indian Muslims, suggesting publicly that they were collaborators in this terrorist activity served to isolate the community and rendered it more vulnerable to belligerent action from majoritarian chauvinists. The relentless stereotyping of Muslims as being theologically mandated to launch a *jihad* in a non-Islamic country in order to gain hegemony and alleging that they were a 'de-nationalised' group owing more loyalty to a pan-Islamic network, translating into a willingness to collaborate with Pakistan, led to a dangerous deadening of sensitivities. The remarkable extent to which a broad middle class consensus was


34 Paula Chakravarty and Srinivas Lankala, in their paper "Media, Terror and Islam" note that the BJP administration moved quickly in its attempt to equate terrorism in America with "Islamic terrorism". Also, "while the articulation of these two distinct discourses of nationalism might appear forced, it depends on two shared assumptions: the construction and demonisation of a violent and medievalist Islam on the one hand and the modernist discourse of nationalism and patriotism on the other... the Indian Government and its Hindu fundamentalist supporters have tried to frame the American crisis as an opportunity to target a common enemy of civilisation." (Chapter in Amrita Basu and Srirupa Roy (Ed) *Violence and Democracy in India*, Seagull Books, 2007), p. 178.
scripted around the singular horror of the Gujarat developments, rationalising extreme violence against fellow citizens and the lionising of Narendra Modi, calling him a Hindu Hriday Samrat (emperor of Hindu hearts) was a direct outcome of the hate campaign that had built up against Muslims as a result of the strategic mobilisation by Hindu cultural nationalism.

The Gujarat Pogrom

Several reports of human rights organisations and commissions of inquiry have established that the mass violence that erupted in Gujarat between March and May 2002 which took a toll of several hundred lives and injured thousands, following the burning of a coach of the Sabarmati Express in Godhra on February 27 when 58 kar sevaks returning from Ayodhya were killed, constituted a state-sponsored pogrom against the minority community, marking it as one of the darkest episodes in the history of independent India. This thesis builds further on frameworks of previous studies of the Gujarat events which have noted distinct elements that make up a pogrom or organised violence against one community. There were also shades of 'ethnic cleansing' in the actions of mobs from the majority community which directly targeted Muslims.

35 The official figures of the toll in the post-Godhra violence in Gujarat, as given in a written reply in the Rajya Sabha by the Manmohan Singh Government on May 11, 2005, were 790 Muslims, 254 Hindus, 2548 injured, 223 missing, 919 rendered widows and 606 children orphaned. Unofficial estimates place the figures of those killed as much higher, in the range of 1000 to 2000.

36 Yet this account of a coach of the train being set on fire by an angry mob of 800-1200 has been sharply questioned on technical grounds. The interim and final reports of the Justice UC Banerjee Committee have categorically ruled out the allegation that the fire originated externally and said the fire had clearly originated in the coach itself. The Banerjee Committee's conclusion was that both the "petrol theory" and the "miscreant activity story" were both "totally absurd" and that the fire on Sabarmati Express, that day "cannot but be ascribed to be an accidental fire... and not a deliberate attempted event." (Interim Report of J.Banerjee Committee Report, <http://www.combatlaw.org/print.php?article_id=537 & issue_id=21>) After the submission of the interim report on January 17, 2005, the final report of the Committee upheld the same conclusion, also noting that there were no crowds at the station on that day as had been alleged.
with a view to eliminating them or driving them out. As Bhikhu Parekh observed in his analysis, one of the first to essentialise the exceptional features of the events in Gujarat, several aspects of the violence were totally new or had taken novel forms. Parekh's listing of these features indicate that what had happened in Gujarat was nothing short of a communally-driven pogrom. He pointed out that "burning people alive in a systematic and gruesome manner is new", but that was not the whole explanation. "The mode of violence derives its logic and legitimacy from the overall framework within which violence is conceived and justified. When violence is not interpersonal but inter-communal and part of one community's collective hostility against another, as was the case in Gujarat, burning people alive has sinister advantages and a macabre logic not available to usual forms of killing."  

The second feature, Parekh noted, was that the Sangh Parivar was much more publicly active than had been the case in previous riots and the government much more "patently partisan", giving up the "pretence of neutrality" and openly encouraging Hindu violence. The two other striking features marking an ethnically or communally driven pogrom were these--the razing to the ground of several sacred Muslim places such as mosques and dargahs, and replacing them with saffron flags and statues of Hanuman. "This was highly symbolic", Parekh observed, "for it was a way of humiliating Muslims and telling them that their religious and other liberties were not a matter of right but a Hindu gift that was conditional on their continuing gratitude and evidence of good behaviour." The rhetoric too was directed not only at those held responsible for the Godhra incident but against all Muslims. "The latter were linked to Pakistan and presented as an internal enemy."  

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38 Ibid.
sponsored was also clear from the details recorded by the commissions of inquiry and human rights groups, pointing to active direction by state officials.

This thesis seeks to take the examination of the Gujarat developments further in the context of the cultural nationalist discourse. The reductionist form of the themes of cultural nationalism as they reflected in the political tirades against Muslims by Modi and his followers—the local Muslim acting at the behest of Pakistan, encouraged to do so by craven secularists—served to instigate mob fury against hundreds of hapless citizens. The pogrom in Gujarat was one reflection of the high costs of the strategic course of Hindu cultural nationalism. This thesis looks in particular at how the themes of this discourse played out in the killing fields. It was clear that the strategy at work was the canvassing of the two cardinal objectives of the Hindu nationalist agenda—the assertion of the right of the Hindu majority to make India a Hindu nation, requiring the devaluation of the stakes of minority groups in Indian nationhood, and ensuring that Islamic terror rather than majoritarian Hindu communalism was perceived as the primary cause of the prevailing social tensions.

The extraordinary attention given by Hindu nationalist leaders to the theme that Pakistan was instigating acts of terror in India, that were executed by willing collaborators in the Muslim community was seen as having a considerable impact on polarising the Hindu majority and the minorities, with more and more middle class Hindus becoming conscripted into believing this fallacious conjecture. As noted in the preceding chapter, after the Babri Masjid demolition, when the bomb blasts took place in Bombay, Calcutta and Coimbatore, suggesting a pattern of retaliatory strikes in a larger context of majoritarian provocation, the BJP leaders and their Sangh Parivar allies made repeated claims that these were the handiwork of Pakistan with the aid of local elements. A similar trend was discernible in the Hindutva strategy vis-à-vis the Gujarat carnage. The burning of a coach of the Sabarmati Express, killing 58 kar
sevaks, or Sangh activists, on February 27, 2002, allegedly by an "angry mob" of Muslims in Godhra became the trigger of a more deadly spiral of bloodletting and violence as revenge-seeking Hindu mobs went into suburbs and villages in Gujarat to target Muslims, committing the worst atrocities on an unprecedented scale, as has been documented by various human rights groups.

The strategic course of the Hindu nationalists as regards Gujarat was similar to their course vis-à-vis the Ayodhya events. The tactics of political mobilisation were the same. When an incident occurred, as in the case of the bomb blasts in Bombay and Coimbatore or the torching of a railway coach in Godhra, the Hindu nationalists would invariably refuse to acknowledge that the pattern of majoritarian assertion invited minority retaliation. Instead, this incendiary situation would be encapsulated in a narrative that would serve to legitimize the stand of the majoritarian campaign against the minority, putting it on the defensive in the public arena. Injecting fresh pressure into a tense social situation, the Hindu nationalist campaigners would then take to the streets claiming that "terror" was being unleashed by the Muslim minority with the support of the "national enemy" Pakistan. This narrative of 'external and internal enemies' ganging up to besiege 'Hindu' India, heavily influenced by the constructs of ideologues like Gurumurthy and Murli Manohar Joshi, speaking direly of an inevitable confrontation with Islamist forces, was a necessary

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39 The VHP's Vishnu Hari Dalmia argued in his interview for this study that just as the demolition of the Babri Masjid was the "outcome of the delayed court decision", the Gujarat violence was the "outcome of Godhra" and that Hindus who were "by nature peace-loving citizens" were forced into a situation where there was no other remedy but to take the law into their own hands. "We Hindus know that Muslims are being appeased, therefore Government will do nothing to punish them even if they are at fault...Could this terrorist activity be performed without the help of any Indian Muslim? Every investigation has proved this point," he claimed.

40 Tanika Sarkar points out that "the communal fascism of the Sangh is not simply an ethnic cleansing. The minorities will not be extinguished in a single apocalyptic gesture but the possibility of exterminating at will is going to be displayed and demonstrated again and again with spiralling sadism. This is a structural necessity for the Sangh. By producing violence, it holds aloft the threat of Muslim reprisal, terrorism, war. The originary or dominant source of violence is overshadowed by fears of Muslim retaliation to such an extent that further terror against Muslims becomes a necessity in large Hindu circles, especially in places where Muslims had been butchered," ("Semiotics of Terror: Muslim Children and Women in Hindu Rashtra", published in Economic and Political Weekly, July 13, 2002. <http://depts.washington.edu/webwomen/archived%20Materials/FemDialog/Sarkar2.doc>)
condition precedent for the legitimation and expansion of Hindu cultural nationalism. In the case of Gujarat, this entire strategic sequence took on much deadlier overtones as has been exhaustively documented. For the purposes of this study, some of the important details are summarised below.

The detailed evidence presented to three most authoritative fact-finding missions that have documented the horror of the Gujarat violence in entirety—the Concerned Citizens Tribunal, the National Human Rights Commission and the New York-based Human Rights Watch has made clear that the carnage in Gujarat was the result of an organised pogrom against Muslims, the scale and intensity of which was unprecedented. The Concerned Citizens Tribunal which released its report in November 2002 noted how in contrast to the initial reaction of Prime Minister Vajpayee at noon on February 27, who sought restraint after the news of the Godhra train burning, the Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi appeared to be eager to make a major public issue out of the incident. The Tribunal noted that at 7:30 that evening, Modi made a public broadcast in which he put forward the theory that the "ISI hand" was behind the Godhra train attack. Following suit, Vajpayee stepped up his rhetoric the next day calling the Godhra incident "a national shame" and Advani ominously pointed to the "ISI hand" again. Thus "what could have been confined to Godhra and Godhra alone was taken and broadcast to all of Gujarat state. All

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41 Sarkar notes that "a serious inadequacy plagues our known vocabularies of horror...the problem is that we naturalise, domesticate, make somewhat bearable and comfortable Gujarat events when we stretch old words to cover radically new meanings." What was "at issue in Gujarat" was "not simply a recurrence of the perennial communal tension, but a fundamental political transformation: the installation of Hindu Rashtra".

42 Amrita Basu and Srirupa Roy observe in their essay "Beyond Exceptionalism: Violence and Democracy in India" that "what happened in Gujarat was not a riot that resulted from the spontaneous 'upsurge' of angry crowds. Instead the incumbent state government led by the...BJP was directly involved in acts of commission and omission. There is overwhelming evidence that state agencies and personnel actively orchestrated and facilitated the violence and pointedly refused to prevent its escalation." (Chapter in Violence and Democracy in India, op. cit), pp. 1-4.
that followed was directly related to Modi's decision to carry Godhra to the whole state instead of containing the issue therein.\textsuperscript{43}

The report of the Tribunal and the NHRC team's report noted the involvement of several members of Modi's Cabinet in the orchestration of the killings. At a meeting of these senior Ministers, "a diabolical plan was drawn and disseminated to the top 50 leaders of the BJP, RSS, Bajrang Dal and the VHP on the method and manner in which the 72-hour long carnage was to be carried out". Further, "these instructions were blatantly disseminated by the government and in most cases, barring a few sterling exceptions, methodically carried out by the police and the IAS administration." There was no way, observed the Tribunal "that the debased levels of violence that were systematically carried out in Gujarat could have been allowed had the police and district administration, the IAS and the IPS stood by its constitutional obligation and followed Service Rules to prevent such crimes."\textsuperscript{44} The indifference of the State administration in saving the life of the former Congress party MP, Ahsan Jaffri has also been recorded by various groups.\textsuperscript{45} The NHRC report affirmed the same fact of the involvement of the Government in the organisation of the violence.\textsuperscript{46}

The selective targeting of Muslims in the enactment of brutal and bestial attacks during the carnage was a feature noticed by all these human rights groups. The NHRC team observed that "while the riots in the past involved


\textsuperscript{44} Ibid, p. 18.

\textsuperscript{45} The NHRC team, headed by Justice JS Verma, which visited Gujarat between March 19 and 22 noted that Amarsinh Chaudhary, former Chief Minister of Gujarat had sought police help and even drawn the attention of Chief Minister Modi to the imminent danger to Jaffri's life when he was surrounded by a violent crowd but to no avail. Ultimately Jaffri was burnt alive along with his family and 38 others. \texttt{<http://nhrc.nic.in/guj_annex_1.htm>}

\textsuperscript{46} According to the NHRC team's report, the "involvement of some Ministers and MLAs in these riots" was alleged, mentioning the names of Gujarat Home Minister, Gordhan Zadaphiya, Health Minister, Ashok Bhatt, said to be monitoring the progress of the riots from the City Police control room. A number of victim families also mentioned the names of Mayaben Kudnani, MLA and former Deputy Mayor of Ahmedabad and VHP leader Jaideep Patel.
both the communities in group clashes resulting even from minor incidents, the
ingidents following the Godhra incident are characterised by assaults by huge
Hindu mobs on the members of the minority community... The size of the
marauding crowds involved in the major incidents was found to be between five
to 15,000 and the scale of violence and brutality of methods of killing and
looting indicated long planning and indoctrination.\textsuperscript{47} The Concerned Citizens
Tribunal noted that "from the extensive evidence recorded by the Tribunal, it is
clear that Muslims from all social strata, rich and poor, were the prime targets
for the state-sponsored pogrom unleashed all over the state of Gujarat. From
cities and towns to villages, be it the question of life, dignity or
property...Muslims were the sole target."\textsuperscript{48} The evidence recorded by these
commissions of inquiry showed explicit rhetorical hostility towards Muslims,
besides the brutal and bestial acts of physical violence on men, women and
children. Human Rights Watch said that they were told by numerous
eyewitnesses to the Ahmedabad incidents that "police gunfire paved the way for
the violent mobs", and that "marching in front of the mobs, the police burst
tear gas shells and aimed and fired at Muslim youths seeking to defend their
families and their homes." \textsuperscript{49} One victim told Human Rights Watch that they
had managed to handle the crowd until the police joined in. "Our spirit was
broken. They were shouting "Kill them, cut them, look for Miyabhai (Muslim
man)". The police burned the houses with their own hands."\textsuperscript{50} Another Muslim
youth whose 23-year old brother was deliberately targeted and killed in the
police firing testified to the police leading the crowd which was shouting "Go to
Pakistan. If you want to stay here, become Hindu!"

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\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{48} Concerned Citizens Tribunal, op.cit, p.23.
\textsuperscript{49} Human Rights Watch, April 2002, Vol.14, No.3 (C),
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
Of course, the grimmest tales from the Gujarat violence emanated from Naroda Patiya, which had borne the brunt of the violence in Ahmedabad. The intensity of the hatred directed against Muslims that reflected in several barbaric acts of violence has been documented in all the reports of the various commissions of inquiry. At the risk of repetition, some details are reproduced here in order to underscore this study's main argument that the discourse of cultural nationalism in its reductionist form of hate speech, could also manifest in the distorted logic of hate crimes against targeted communities. The Naroda Patiya incident, replicated in other places in Gujarat as well, showed clear features of communal hatred and strong elements of ethnic cleansing.

According to the NHRC account of the sequence of events, on the morning of February 28, a 5000-strong mob attacked Naroda Patiya around 9 am, damaged a masjid, razing one of its minarets to the ground, hoisting a saffron flag, burning a heap of books including the Quran. When the terrified residents sought police help after being turned away from a relief camp, they were surrounded by the mob. The worst happened with men and women being segregated, young girls stripped, gang-raped, lynched and thrown into the burning fire. No man was spared. Slogans were shouted such as "Babar ki aulada, Hindustan chod do". A number of Muslim shops were also burnt en route by the rampaging Hindu mob. The Concerned Citizens Tribunal observed that there was an actual attempt at ethnic cleansing or physically attempting to eject Muslims from various areas. "Evidence before the Tribunal shows that guided by leaders, the trained mobs first sprinkled the targeted buildings with fuel drawn from cans or barrels or even a tanker in some cases, followed by a spray of acid. Immediately thereafter a gas cylinder brought along by the mobs was unsealed and tossed into the flame. The result was a deadly explosion that ripped buildings apart and killed a large number of persons on the spot." Also "across Gujarat, over 1100

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51 NHRC team report, op.cit.
Muslim-owned hotels, the homes of not less than 1,00,000 families, over 15,000 small and big business establishments...were badly damaged or completely destroyed in the attacks. These figures...indicate the attempt to economically cripple a community on a scale unprecedented in the post-independence history of communal violence in the country." 52

The Citizens Tribunal also noted that there was active state sponsorship of this drive against Muslims."...Large mobs running into thousands were led by well known elected representatives from the BJP, leaders of the VHP, Bajrang Dal and RSS and even cabinet ministers...Field operations were coordinated by a central command using mobile phones." 53 Another indication that what was in motion was a full-scale pogrom against Muslims was available in the evidence before the Tribunal that "scores of key actors " led "large mobs fully aware of what they had to do and achieving their task with precision".

A significant observation by the Tribunal in respect of the Gujarat carnage which indicates the penetration of the Hindutva discourse in middle-class Hindu households was that there was a "visible lack of remorse among a large section of the Hindu educated middle class about the enormous human tragedy..." and that "in many Hindu middle-class localities, Hindus who had social relationships with their Muslim neighbours, gave shelter and encouragement to their attackers." Right from the beginning of the violence, statements like "a lesson needs to be taught" and other justifications of violence were often heard from middle-class Hindus, ranging from university teachers to petty businessmen. 54 The Tribunal also noted that there was a public exultation on the part of Sangh Parivar leaders over the events in Gujarat. Both Ashok Singhal and Praveen Togadia, the working president and general secretary, respectively of the VHP "have revelled in repeated public utterances gloating

52 Concerned Citizens Tribunal, op.cit.
53 Ibid.
54 Ibid.
over the violence against Muslims, instigating further hatred against them and threatening to force all Indian Muslims into refugee camps, as in Gujarat." The Tribunal quotes Singhal as speaking in "glowing terms" of the fact that in the State of his dreams, entire villages had been "emptied of Islam". At a press conference on October 11, he had stated "What happened in Gujarat will happen in the whole of the country. Hindus were not born to be cut like carrots and radishes...the Hindukaran (Hinduisation) of the people of Gujarat was a direct result of the jihadi mentality of Muslims." 55

Combating the real enemy--Secular Nationalism

This study is primarily of the instrumental use of the Hindu cultural nationalist discourse in advancing the strategic objective of the Hindu nationalists to reopen the debate on Indian nationhood. Given that the debate over nationhood was effectively closed with the adoption of a secular Constitution in 1947, the Ayodhya movement and the Gujarat violence provided radical moments in which polarisation of the majority and minorities was intensified, allowing for several contentious doctrines of Hindu cultural nationalism to emerge and entrench themselves in the national discourse. The vehement debate that raged in newspaper columns, with several leading columnists and public figures, including the then Prime Minister, Vajpayee, striving to confer "respectability" on the widely criticised happenings in Gujarat between March and May 2002, gave Hindu cultural nationalism political space, as had not been possible before. This section offers samples of the cultural nationalist arguments and rationalisations that emanated after the Gujarat massacre which highlights the nature of the challenge that Hindutva had posed

55 Ibid.

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at that moment. Narendra Modi's own public campaigns after the violence and
during the elections showed his determination to politically encash the
majoritarian sentiment that had consolidated in his favour as a result of the
violence against Muslims. The argument here is that the cultural nationalist
agenda, spearheaded by Narendra Modi, supported by Vajpayee, Advani and the
more extremist voices such as Togadia and Singhal, required a frontal attack on
secularism and its practitioners. The idea was to launch a blistering attack on
secularism by strongly criticising its perceived "distortions" rather than entering
a debate on its conceptual essence. This was because the proponents of Hindu
nationalism had recognised that the Indian public which prided itself on its
modernity was unlikely to accept any overt repudiation of the basic secular
framework of the political structure, seeing secularism and democracy as being
major components of modernisation. Hence the tactical decision was to suggest
that what was required was "genuine secularism", not the "phony secularism"
that meant appeasement of minorities. Thus the main aim of the attack on
secularism and secular parties, led by Modi, Togadia and Singhal was to express
loud contempt for the practice of secularism as nothing but a camouflaging of a
dangerous collusion between anti-national Muslims and the main national
enemy--Pakistan.

As has been pointed out in the earlier section, the 9/11 event in the
United States and the consequent eagerness of the BJP-led NDA to adopt the
Western description of "Islamic terror" as the common enemy "confronting
civilisations", helped the Hindutva campaign intensify the stigmatisation of the
Muslim community, resurrecting the original pre-Partition narrative which
linked Muslims to Pakistan, thereby challenging their stakes in Indian
nationhood. Another strand of this discourse has sought to assert the hegemony
of Hindu cultural nationalism by suggesting that Christians and Muslims were
after all converts from Hinduism. Murli Manohar Joshi in his interview for this
thesis made this argument. "My view is that cultural nationalism in India is represented by one single word "Hindu". It is essentially Hindu because the history of this country is the history of those values which you can call as Hindu values." The idea of being India, he said, "is basically derived from this Hindu cultural nationalism. This is the only way to harmonise the people of this country." Muslims and Christians, he further said, were overwhelmingly "descendants of the same forefathers from whom I have descended." Therefore "I am telling my Muslim friends-' you are Muslim by religion but you are Hindu by culture'- a large number of people in this country have accepted Islam but it does not mean that they should delink themselves from their original cultural heritage." In this interview, the former Union Minister also criticised civic nationalism as not being "unifying" and "ultimately flowering into the conflict of civilizations." Nationalism is "not a political concept but a cultural one," he said.

Placing the Godhra carnage and the riots within the framework of a perspective that intensified the stigmatisation of the Muslim community, linking it to the larger campaign for Hindu nationhood, became imperative for the BJP and its allies. As the post-Godhra violence exploded, it became clear that the BJP and its allies were determined not to allow the unfolding catastrophe to undermine their own strategic course. On the contrary, the decision appeared to be to assertively project the happenings in Gujarat as the inevitable manifestation of the frustration and anger of the majority community at the failure of Government, driven by "vote-bank" calculations, to confront the emerging danger of Islamic terrorism, which was receiving international attention as a result of the 9/11 bombings.

56 MM Joshi, interview.
57 Joshi, interview.
As had been the case after the Bombay blasts, the Union Home Minister, Advani appeared to be in that same strategic mode as he tried to ride out the storm over the Gujarat riots. Speaking to reporters in Ahmedabad on March 3, 2002, when the violence was in full swing, Advani's remarks had a partisan tinge, marked as they were by a pointed silence on the unfolding horror of atrocities against Muslim men, women and children. While speaking very little on the ongoing attacks on Muslims, Advani dwelt on the attack on the Sabarmati Express, asserting that the "needle of suspicion" pointed towards the "involvement of some outside elements", hinting at Pakistan's involvement, and adding that those who had been threatening the country's borders but were finding themselves "cornered" all over the world in the last few months would feel "happy" over the turn of events in Gujarat. 58 Advani's formulation was endorsed by Modi, addressing a series of public meetings in mid-May. Modi said that he suspected the "hand of Pakistan" in the communal disturbances and hitting out at secular parties, also said that some leaders had "failed to realise Pakistan's sinister designs." Of greater political relevance was Modi's strategic assertion that the question of his continuance in office, which was by then in sharp controversy in the national arena, should not be decided by the "anti-social elements remote-controlled by a foreign government" 59 This statement alleging a nexus between Muslims and Pakistan, emanated against the backdrop of the pogrom. In effect, it also questioned the national loyalty of an entire community by suggesting that the shelter given by Pakistan to Dawood Ibrahim and Aftab Ansari, named by Modi as the "anti-social elements", had the tacit approval of the entire community. For a Chief Minister of a State that was

59 "Modi suspects 'Pak' hand", report by Special Correspondent, Himmatnagar (Sabarkantha), The Hindu, May 14, 2002.

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presently in the grip of communal frenzy to openly cast aspersions on the Muslim community was to render it more vulnerable to further assaults.

It was clear that Modi's strategic intentions were to consolidate behind him the majoritarian political support that had been generated as a result of the polarisation that had taken place, the pogrom against Muslims representing the apex of that process. In his controversial "Gujarat Gaurav Yatra" launched on September 9 that year, Modi's campaign targeted both the Muslim community and secular parties, particularly the Congress. The yatra represented another major exercise in majoritarian mobilisation with Modi's speeches again suggesting tauntingly that the Muslim community had links with anti-social elements and criminals. After communal riots in Vadodara, Modi directly linked the violence with the arrest of the international gangster Abu Salem in Lisbon, suggesting that "some people" were shocked at the arrest of the gangster, wanted in connection with the Bombay bomb blasts and hence wanted to disrupt communal unity. Adding insult to injury, Modi demanded that the minorities in the State and elsewhere condemn the Vadodara incidents to demonstrate that they were "not with the criminals." 60

The theme that Muslims were basically anti-social elements because of their religious indoctrination was aired afresh in the public arena with Vajpayee causing great public consternation by his remarks at a public meeting on April 12 in Goa, where he had gone to attend a BJP party conclave. Vajpayee's now oft-quoted remarks laid the blame squarely on Muslims, asserting that there was a conspiracy to burn alive the passengers of the Sabarmati Express and more controversially blamed Muslims for being unable to live anywhere "in coexistence with others" and being unable to propagate their ideas in a "peaceful

manner" but instead spreading their faith "by resorting to terror and threats." Following his lead, the Sangh Parivar and media columnists sympathetic to it, began an intense campaign on this theme, the tenor becoming sharper as the rhetoric intensified. The VHP's senior vice-president, Giriraj Kishore claimed that "Pakistani nationals" and "Dawood's men", referring to Dawood Ibrahim, the absconding accused in the Bombay blast, had "infiltrated the relief camps" and that the "global spread of Islamic terrorists" and their networks were responsible for the worsening violence. 

The worldwide reaction and the outraged indignation in many parts of the country at the happenings in Gujarat which had for the first time brought India's record of tolerance and pride in its diversity into international disrepute, put the NDA regime on the defensive but in contrast, in the internal context of Gujarat, the ideological and physical campaign against Muslims, seeking to discredit their national credentials intensified. In June 2002, Ashok Singhal, addressing a meeting of the VHP's central advisory board, its highest decision-making body, explicitly warned Muslims that "if they continue to take the country towards Partition, they would have to stay in refugee camps like in Gujarat." Expressing serious concern over "growing Islamic fundamentalism and ISI activity" Singhal claimed that the recent communal violence in Gujarat symbolised the first "positive response of Hindus to Muslim fundamentalism in 1000 years." Singhal's remarks amounting to an endorsement of the pogrom against Muslims and incitement to further violence were backed up by the VHP meeting which immediately adopted a resolution on "Jihad and conspiracy of another Partition of India". The resolution urged the Centre to ban madrassas "promoting Islamic terrorism" and alleged that there were about 100,000


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madrassas being run in the country, preparing millions of "Talibans--fundamentalists" who would work for another Partition. 64

The post-pogrom narrative that emerged from the Sangh and its defenders in the media adhered to the earlier pattern of fending off unwelcome scrutiny of the stance of Hindu majoritarianism that had triggered this major disaster. As in the earlier cases, the tactic was to deflect the public attention to what was claimed to be the underlying cause of the unrest--the suppression of Hindu cultural nationalism and its demand for an acknowledgment of India's "Hindu-ness". An effective way of reaching the middle-class audience was through mainstream newspapers and Sangh-friendly columnists were able to pitch the same themes articulated by Vajpayee, Advani and Modi with remarkable ease in several leading dailies. Lashing out at secular parties, particularly the Left parties, Balbir Punj, a columnist and a Rajya Sabha member from the BJP, took aim at several enemies of the Hindu cultural nationalist movement. "The way the Marxists are going out of the way to cover up these communal incidents from Godhra to Kolkata is simply outrageous. Similarly the endeavour of some other "self-styled secularists" to whitewash the ISI's inroads into Indian society is dangerous.. The 1993 serial blasts in Mumbai and Coimbatore clearly indicate what such links can do. The ISI is depending heavily on this linkage to magnify its capacity to damage the Indian State. If political parties in India are prepared to turn a blind eye to this link to get some vote bank advantage, they would indirectly be serving the ISI's interests." 65 A more acerbic commentary in the Free Press Journal of Mumbai declared openly "...a vast majority of the members of the largest minority community in the country... larger than the population of Pakistan use secularism only as a mask to hide

64 Ibid.
their jihadi mindset... the ostriches in the media play into the hands of the practitioners of Muslim vote-bank politics.\textsuperscript{66}

As much as Muslims were at the receiving end of this stream of rhetorical pressure, so too was secularism and its defenders, parties such as the Congress. Targeting Muslims and alleging they had extra-territorial loyalties, particularly to Pakistan, was an obvious priority for the Sangh Parivar but equally evident was that the Hindu nationalists had recognised that the real battle with secular nationalism had to be fought now on the terrain of Gujarat. The tenor of the discourse became as taunting towards secular parties as to minority groups, with rhetoric fiercely being directed at "secularists", the anger against them clearly visible as they were accused of being "products of dhimmitude", a sarcastic jibe at what was described as the servile state of non-Muslims in an Islamic State. Not only did such rhetoric paint a threatening picture of Muslims but also aimed to put pressure on Hindus who were unwilling to buy into this highly coloured worldview of the Hindutva campaign, virtually commandeering them to support this position, by the implicit threat--"you are either with us or against us"\textsuperscript{67}--in effect declaring those who did not support Hindutva as siding with the enemy. Words like "dhimmi", "kafir", and concepts like "Dinia" meant to trigger unsavoury memories of pre-Partition battles with the protagonists of Pakistan, were purposefully employed in the Hindutva rhetoric, the underlying calculation being that by holding aloft fanciful imagery of embattled Muslims, hungering for hegemony of the nation and having contempt for Hindus, it would become easy to impress upon the collective imagination of middle-class Hindus that Gujarat was not a case of majoritarian aggression but a case of settling scores with a

\textsuperscript{66} Virendra Kapoor, "Secularism is a mask Muslims wear to hide their separatist agenda", \textit{The Free Press Journal}, April 14, 2002, <http://www.hvk.org/articles/0402/100.html>
\textsuperscript{67} The US President, George Bush, who made this declaration "You're either with us or against us in the fight against terror" in November 2001, months after the 9/11 bombings, attracted sharp criticism for its implied assertion that those who did not side with the war on terror would be considered to be with the enemy. ("Bush says it is time for action", November 6, 2001, <http://archives.cnn.com>)
troublesome and overambitious minority that did not know its place. The disconnect between the agony of hundreds of innocent Muslim men, women and children, at the receiving end of unprecedented brutality on the ground, documented so meticulously in scores of reports, and the rhetoric of Hindutva propagandists brimming with "moral indignation" could not have been sharper. Illustrating this point is this column by N.S Rajaram, a prolific commentator and an influential voice in Hindu nationalist ideological circles--

...Godhra is a symptom, not a culmination. It is a sign that the Hindus have had enough of 'secularism'. It is also a sign that a significant section of Muslims--or at least its leadership--believes that the threat of violence always works...The facts however are simple: the majority community has been made the scapegoat by an opportunist group of appeasing politicians and self-serving alienated intelligentsia. In the name of secularism, these products of dhimmitude have sought to treat the Hindus as contented slaves who should cooperate in their self-aggrandisement. The Hindus are rejecting...secularism which they have seen through as nothing but minority appeasement plus dhimmitva.

The imperial mindset of Muslims...continues to this day. This can be seen in their insistence on being ruled according to the Shariat, their insistence on the sacredness of imperial symbols like the Babri Masjid...Many Muslim leaders still believe that India should be run as an Islamic state with Shariat as the law of the land and Hindus as dhimmis. This is essentially the attitude of the secularists also, superficially Westernised but who vociferously argue for special treatment for Muslims. This is driven by fear of losing their privileged status among the dhimmis. This is what makes them see rising Hindu nationalism as the enemy--for Hindutva and dhimmitva are opposite in vision. Godhra is the beginning of the end of dhimmitva. 68

In the political field, it was Narendra Modi who became the main proponent of this combative discourse that targeted Muslims and secular parties and linked them to Pakistan. Modi's campaign strategy in Gujarat, throughout the gaurav yatra and for the Assembly elections, was to tap into the perceived insecurities of the Hindu voter by suggesting that Godhra and the attack on the Swaminarayan temple at Akshardham on September 25, 2002, were not acts of revenge for Hindu majoritarian aggression but were acts of Pakistan-sponsored terror, encouraged by the stand of the Congress party, which Modi began to call the "new incarnation of the Muslim League." As has been documented in numerous news reports, Modi's verbal attacks on the Congress party and deliberate references to Pakistan's President Musharraf as players in the Gujarat field, were calculated to instill fear in Hindu voters that the Congress was soft on terrorism. Modi's strategy to bring in Pakistan was intended to keep up the pressure on Muslims, and ensure that the communal polarisation remained.

During the gaurav yatra, passing through the South Gujarat region, Modi said the Congress party's "hunger for power" was driving it "to create divisions in the society to capture Muslim votes" and that the Congress was "behaving like a new incarnation of the Muslim League." After the terror attack on the Akshardham temple, Modi's attack on the Congress became more explicit and sharp. Addressing an "anti-terrorism" rally organised by the BJP in Ahmedabad on October 1, Modi said that the "dubious stand" taken by the Congress on the perpetrators of the Godhra carnage had "encouraged" the terrorists to attack the temple, as they realised that they had their "sympathisers" in the "new incarnation of the Muslim League." He went on to say that "Godhra was semi-terrorism " and that he had warned that "full terrorism will soon be seen on the land of Gujarat" but 'pseudo-secular" parties such as the Congress had ridiculed


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him and this was what had "encouraged the terrorist." The Congress", he alleged, had given "a red carpet welcome to terrorism in Gujarat."\(^70\)

The second part of Modi's strategy to discredit the Congress, which was the principal secular formation, was to question its patriotism by calling it a stooge of Pakistan. The Gujarat Chief Minister claimed at one stop of his yatra that Pakistan wanted to see the BJP unseated in Gujarat so that it could "implement its anti-Hindu agenda in the border State" and that it was for the people to "stand guard against such evil designs of Pakistan".\(^71\)

The Modi campaign in Gujarat which consisted of a ceaseless taunting of Muslims and a consistent denigration of the Congress party for its adherence to secularism, constantly holding up the bogey of Pakistan, whose leader was repeatedly referred to derisively by Modi as "Mian Musharraf" revealed the Hindu cultural nationalist discourse in its full potential. In a sense, all the preparation and all the mobilisation that had been undertaken for years, including the efforts to resurrect the pre-Partition postulates of Hindu nationalism, seemed to have been leading up to this moment. It was evident that the entire range of Hindu nationalist groups from the BJP to the RSS, VHP and the Bajrang Dal saw the experiment in Gujarat as a critical stage in the evolution of Hindutva. Considerable stakes had been vested in this experiment with polarisation. At one level, this polarisation reflected as a blistering attack on Muslims and the Congress party, linking them to Pakistan, thereby in one stroke conveying to the Hindu majority the impression that both the Muslim community and the Congress party, led by the Italian-born Sonia Gandhi, another target of Modi's taunts, had no sense of patriotism. The more deadly reflection of this experiment was of course the pogrom on the ground, wherein Muslims were physically assaulted and attempts were made to drive them out, in

\(^70\) "Modi blames it on Cong.," report by Special Correspondent, Ahmedabad, The Hindu, October 2, 2002.
shades of ethnic cleansing. The significance of the political opening for a redefinition of national identity in terms of Hindu cultural nationalism was not lost on the ideologues of Hindutva. It was seen as a fight to the finish, and the only historical moment when the Hindu majority could reassert its hegemony. Thus when Modi won the Assembly elections by a landslide, reflecting the results of communal polarisation rather than anything else, the Hindu nationalists were quick to pronounce the Gujarat victory as a vindication of Hindutva and a defeat for secular nationalism.

From BJP politicians to Sangh-friendly columnists, the public arena was subjected to a barrage of triumphalist and exultant claims that secularism was finished and "nationalism" had won. Modi declared that his election victory was "a vote for nationalism" and a "vote against the Congress' fatwa politics"; it was also "a slap on the face of pseudo-secularists who have emerged as the Congress' biggest allies". He went on to claim that Gujarat had "become a partner in the global battle against terrorism." 72 Praveen Togadia of the VHP said "Gujarat today is India tomorrow..." and that by keeping quiet about Islamic fundamentalism, and "even defending them in the name of human rights, pseudo-secularists have emerged as the biggest defenders of jihadi Islam." 73 Seshadri Chari, the then editor of the RSS weekly, Organiser, concluded that "the Gujarat verdict has signalled the end of the grand alliance of pseudo-secularists and infused new life into the BJP. This time the issue in Gujarat was not Modi's magic or for that matter, even Hindutva as the pseudo-secular brigade would want everyone to believe. Fifty eight kar sevaks were torched alive in a train at Godhra mercilessly... an act of terrorism as heinous as the one that brought down the World Trade Center twin towers but the entire gory episode was dismissed as though it was an attack on ticketless travellers returning from

say, some place called Ayodhya...But the trump card that Modi used was the threat of terrorism, which is eating into the vitals of the economy of a state populated by the most industrious people...His magic worked and the party was galvanised...The people of Gujarat through their verdict have brought real issues back to the centre-stage of politics. Those who launched a virulent campaign of calumny against the BJP in general and Modi in particular, allowed it to degenerate into an anti-Hindu jihad. The Gujarat verdict has thrown them into the junkyard of history.\(^74\)

The excitement was palpable among the Hindutva campaigners who believed that a symbolic victory for the goal of Hindu nationhood had been won. The Sangh-sympathetic columnists were not far behind in this characterisation of the Gujarat verdict. Balbir Punj proclaimed "...The contest was symbolic: the validity of nationalism against pseudo-secularism. Pakistan...took keen interest in this bordering State. Mr Modi was not joking when he said that if BJP won...the whole of India would celebrate, and if it lost, "Mian Musharraf" would himself burst crackers in Islamabad, Rawalpindi and Karachi. As the Gujarat elections have proved to be the flagship of nationalism, one hopes Pakistan will surrender its cracker-pile to us!" Punj also used the opportunity to decry the Congress' adherence to Nehruvian secularism, declaring that "the elections were a watershed event in the politics of independent India, when the Congress had to renounce its Nehruvian face and endorse Sardar Patel's. The party now realises by hindsight that it owes its defeat to being out of touch with the ground (and changing ground realities).\(^75\) So confident was the Hindu nationalist brigade that Gujarat marked a watershed vindicating the onward march of Hindutva and that Hindu nationhood was indeed an idea finding favour at long last in the majority community that the

\(^{74}\) Seshadri Chari, column in India Today, December 30, 2002, op.cit.
tenor of their public pronouncements became more derisive of secular parties and more combative towards the Muslim community. 76

Remnants of the Challenge

In what amounted to an ironic twist of Balbir Punj's remark derisively directed at the Congress, quoted above, that it was out of touch with the changing ground reality, the dramatic change in the national political context in the Lok Sabha elections of 2004 saw the Congress-led secular alliance storming back to power, showing the BJP and its Hindutva allies to have been out of touch with the realities on the ground. It was evident in the campaign for the 2004 elections, that the Hindu nationalists had no inkling that the Gujarat result was a short-lived triumph. Buoyed by the Gujarat election landslide, they were certain that their platform was gaining increasing acceptability and hence tried to employ the same tactics and strategies of mobilisation. Apart from the sharp attack on Sonia Gandhi's "foreignness", intended to kindle xenophobic sentiments among Hindu voters, the key themes of Islamic terror, appeasement and pseudo-secularism were played out by the BJP's Hindu nationalist allies, particularly the VHP. Clearly hoping to replicate the success of Gujarat, Praveen Togadia threw a challenge to the secular platform --"Indian politics has become slave to the Muslim votes. We have to change this tendency. The time has come when Hindus will have to decide who will live in India--Hinduism or jihad."77 As it turned out, the imaginary block of Hindu voters overwhelmingly rejected his

76 Immediately after the Gujarat election results, the VHP's Praveen Togadia told a press conference that "the Muslims here will enjoy the same place or status as Hindus enjoy in Pakistan." In the same press conference he said that Pakistan should be "dismembered" and in a virtual incitement to murder, said that all those opposed to Hindutva, including "secularists" should "get the death sentence" which would be left to the "people to carry out", (Neena Vyas "Hindutva storm will not be limited to Gujarat: Togadia", report from New Delhi, The Hindu, December 18,2002).

77 Praveen Togadia, speaking at the Dharma Sabha, a Hindu gathering in Varanasi, Organiser, April 4, 2004 <http://www.organiser.org/dynamic/modules.php>
call and such other appeals. In effect, the caravan of Hindu cultural nationalism appeared to have come to a grinding halt.

With the dramatic change of political context in 2004, overnight the platform of Hindu cultural nationalism lost its potency as it became clear that the hard-sell tactics of Hindutva had not paid off with the Indian electorate at large, deeply settled as it was into the national traditions of pluralism, democracy and civic nationalism. It was evident that urban and rural Indians, preoccupied as they were with issues relating to livelihood and economic advance, had little interest in the issues flagged by the Hindu cultural nationalist platform. Besides, as philosopher Martha Nussbaum has pointed out in her recent book, "What the Hindu right has typically wanted most is subservience of mind and uniformity of ideology, an orthodox picture of history, a single view of national identity parroted by all. If its leaders thought they could get that in India, they were mistaken. Though stuffed full of propaganda like Tagore's parrot, the Indian public did not acquiesce. It argued back." 78 But given that the policy issue that really had primacy in the public debate at that time was the economic reform process, it would be overstating the case to claim that the 2004 election results, 79 reflected a conscious mandate in favour of secular nationalism 80. It was clear that the overwhelming message that emanated from the rejection of the BJP-led NDA was the repudiation of the "India Shining" platform. Along with that central message there were also signals that the Indian voter was not at all enthused by the BJP's controversial campaign against the "foreignness" of the

79 The Election Commission of India statistics of the 2004 elections show the Congress as having polled 26.53 per cent of the total votes as against the BJP which had polled 22.16 per cent of the total vote. <http://www.eci.gov.in/StatisticalReports/LS_2004/Vol_I_LS_2004.pdf>
80 Steven I Wilkinson, for instance, argues that "the view that the Congress victory was a firm vote in favour of secularism and against the BJP's divisive Hindu-nationalist politics is hard to square with several strong BJP performances in state elections in 2002 and 2003." and "moreover opinion polls have consistently shown that most Indians, most of the time, place communal violence and secularism far down the list of issues that determine their vote", ("Elections in India: Behind the Congress Comeback", Journal of Democracy, Volume 16, No.1, January 2005)
leader of the Congress, Sonia Gandhi. The BJP and its Hindutva allies had made Sonia Gandhi's foreign origins a major election theme but its cold-shouldering by the electorate showed that the discourse of Hindutva did not have the reach that had been imagined, despite its success in the Assembly elections of December 2002 in Gujarat.

But if the election data might not have lent itself to broader political conclusions such as signalling a total repudiation of the Hindu nationalist campaign, it was evident that the BJP's allies saw Hindutva and the Gujarat riots as a significant factor instrumental in their defeat. Chandrababu Naidu, former Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, whose party, Telugu Desam crashed to defeat in Andhra Pradesh in both Lok Sabha and Assembly elections in 2004 told an interviewer later that year--"...the communal riots in Gujarat had a very negative impact on us in Andhra Pradesh. In 1999, all the minorities in the state voted for us. In 2004, none of them voted for us." The alliance with the BJP, Naidu said, was "one of the reasons that led to our defeat."81 Recrimination started within the BJP too, with pressure mounting on Narendra Modi to step down from office as Chief Minister in the light of the 2004 poll outcome, from various quarters including the former Prime Minister, Vajpayee, who told a television channel in June 2004 that "not removing Modi as Chief Minister after the Gujarat episode was a big mistake".82 In effect, there was an acknowledgment within the BJP, even as its allies began to distance themselves, that the strategies of majoritarian mobilisation had their limits.

Overall, the message of the 2004 elections, coming as they did two years after the deeply divisive strategies of polarisation and majority consolidation which had resulted in the BJP's landslide victory in Gujarat was that--even if such strategies did produce short-term successes because of communal

polarisation, in the long-term these would not necessarily work. This is an indication that the stakes of the Indian electorate, a conglomerate of diverse identities, are heavily vested in a national vision anchored to the postulates of pluralism and secular democracy. This has been demonstrated time and again in several national elections. The question may be asked as to how it could be assumed that Hindu cultural nationalist mobilisation will not be able to replicate its 2002 Gujarat success and whether it would not be too early to assume that Hindu nationalism as a full-blown political phenomenon has peaked in India during the period of NDA rule. It is the observation of this study that the mobilisation by Hindu cultural nationalism has been successful only when it employs a combination of strategies-- putting in place a discourse or a narrative that would serve as an ideological cover and provide the political space for a programme of communal mobilisation on the ground as had happened in Gujarat in March 2002.

It has also been pointed out that mass communal violence is a phenomenon in which politicians have vested interests. Further, the fact that these episodes of unprecedented violence have not been responded to with exemplary punitive action suggests a lack of political will to confront the implications of this structurally destabilising phenomenon. Looking at the larger picture of the Hindu cultural nationalist campaign as it stood diminished by the results of Elections 2004, it was clear that while it had managed to put

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83 Steven I Wilkinson (Ed)Religious Politics and Communal Violence, (Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2005) argues in his introductory chapter that "in states where the party in government relies on minority votes, the government has a political incentive to protect minorities from communal polarisation and communal riots in return for their electoral support. Where, on the other hand, the governing party in a state relies on the support of voters from only one community, politicians have little electoral incentive to moderate communal appeals from their own community, suppress anti-minority polarisation or order the administration to take firm action to prevent communal violence."

84 Zoya Hasan observes that "the Bombay and Gujarat violence aftermath epitomise the irresponsibility of political parties and the broader inadequacies of their engagement in the justice process". She notes that "even parties who oppose communal politics have not had the courage to propose any specific reform, systemic or otherwise, to deal with the legal and political aspects of riots and to discourage parties from engineering mass violence for the sake of electoral advantage." (Hasan, "Mass Violence and Wheels of Indian [In]justice", in Amrita Basu and Srirupa Roy, op.cit, pp.214-15)
considerable pressure on the public discourse and had impacted upon the consciousness of sections of the Hindu middle classes, it was not really in a position to pose a serious challenge to the prevailing consensus on a secular nationhood. However, it must also be acknowledged that while the post-2004 political context has largely sidelined the Hindutva campaign, it would be a mistake to underestimate its continuing influence as a factor in the political field.

Interviews for this study with Advani and Modi, conducted in early 2007 showed that the ideological contours of the Hindu cultural nationalist narrative remain the same, despite the election reverses. It is clear too from the strategies employed by the BJP in the State Assembly elections that have taken place since the Lok Sabha elections of 2004, that there is the same reliance on the conceptual imagery of "pseudo-secularism" and "minority appeasement." While both Modi and Advani carefully eschewed any critical references to Muslims, both leaders were forthcoming in their criticism of the Congress and other parties like the Rashtriya Janata Dal and the Samajwadi party for what they saw as their vote-garnering tactics to woo the minorities. In his interview, Advani accused the Congress party of pursuing policies that prevented the integration of Muslims with the national mainstream. "After all Muslims have been here since 1947…that is those who didn’t go (to Pakistan)…today, if the Congress party tells us that their condition is very bad, is it because of Ayodhya? They have been ruling the country…why is the condition of the Muslims bad? It is because they have not been integrated and because they have been viewed separately…I have always said that if Indian political parties had not dealt with Muslims of the county as vote banks, Muslims would have been totally different."

Advani was especially critical of parties like the RJD which he claimed had paraded an Osama bin Laden look-alike, in order to attract Muslim votes, during Assembly elections in Bihar. "I wonder what sort of country is this which
seems to think that for the Muslims of Bihar, the role model is bin Laden! When I addressed gatherings of Muslims, I used to tell them 'if you want a role model, here is a country in which a great scientist has become our President who is a Muslim (Abdul Kalam). This is a country in which we have role models like Sania Mirza and cricketer Irfan Pathan. What does one say of political parties who present as role-models look-alikes of bin Laden?'  

Advani's assertion that apart from the BJP, all other political parties "encourage their (Muslim) separatism" indicates that while the thrust of the pressure is on the secular party formations, the basic thesis that Muslims are appeased and encouraged to be separatist, remains unchanged. In his interview, the BJP leader also criticised the current campaign to spare Mohammed Afzal, convicted in the case of the December 13, 2001 terror attack on Parliament, from the death penalty. "I cannot understand that there should be no capital punishment for a person who has been found guilty by the Supreme Court of having engineered the whole attack on Parliament...being against capital punishment only for one person at the cost of so many people...and yet this Government is not concerned about that and is only interested in votes."  

The Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, in his interview for this thesis, while guarded and restrained in his observations on Muslims, in line with his changed tactical approach, discernible after the BJP defeat in 2004, which has sought to de-emphasise these issues, however still outlined his basic strategic perspective linking Pakistan to Muslims and secularism to appeasement, with the inevitable conclusion that terrorism was a consequence of these linkages. "The Congress thought that unless and until we bring Muslims along with us, we will not attain success in the independence movement. But, for that, patriotism was an instrument. Yet they (Congress) did not choose patriotism, they chose

86 Advani interview.
appeasement... when you appease someone, it creates a separatist mentality"

Asked to expand on what he meant, Modi said: "If I appease you, I will give you one pen, and if someone comes and says—I will give two pens—you will leave me and you will go there. You will always think only of your own benefits and not bother about others...this mentality will increase...they will not think of the nation...they will always think in terms of sums...are you giving enough to my group?..."

Indicating that the strategic compulsion to link Muslims to terrorism remains central to the world view of Hindu nationalist leaders, Modi also attacked the repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) by the UPA administration, hinting that it reflected a gesture of appeasement of Muslims. "Who were complaining against the POTA? Is there any Hindu who has complained against POTA?" When it was pointed out that several civil rights activists and groups had indeed protested against POTA, Modi said: "Civil rights activists again are pseudo-secularists...all over the world they are creating laws against terrorists, India is the only exceptional case which is actually removing laws against terrorists...and who celebrated? In Pakistan, it was celebrated! In India, you are removing POTA and in Pakistan the event is being celebrated, what does it mean?" Modi's remarks in the interview for this study revealed that the basic ideological framework that underlay his actions in Gujarat in 2002 had not really changed, even if the words used about Muslims were more carefully chosen. While asserting that Pakistan's ISI was still active in India, he also returned to the old theme of Muslim collaboration. "The ISI network is getting the support from the locals, with the help of religious sentiments." Terrorists, Modi said, "are using religion as an instrument". Echoing the views of other Hindutva ideologues like Devendra Swarup and Gurumurthy, Modi asserted that the fault lay in the basic philosophical approach of non-Hindus. Making the

87 Narendra Modi, Chief Minister of Gujarat, interview by the author, tape-recording, New Delhi, April 2, 2007.
point that Hindu philosophy which believed that "Ekam Sat, Vipraha Bahudha Vadanti (Truth is one, the wise call it by many names), Modi characterised other philosophies as demanding that "unless and until you accept my God, unless and until you accept my book of worship, you cannot be a beneficiary". Thereby "the conflict starts", he said.\textsuperscript{88}

The interviews with Advani, Modi and Murli Manohar Joshi in early 2007 indicate that while their articulations are tempered by the fact of the BJP's being in the opposition in the national arena, its leaders and ideologues continue to rely upon faux imagery such as Muslim appeasement resulting in the increase of terrorism because of vote-bank politics by secular parties, for their political and electoral mobilisation. The basic premise that Muslims are suspect because of a natural affinity with Pakistan and because of their religious and cultural conditioning, has not been abandoned. But chastened by the electoral defeat of 2004, those representing the cultural nationalist stream in the mainstream political arena such as the BJP, have understood that the excesses and the huge costs of the discourse as it manifested in Gujarat in 2002 have produced a backlash. Thus if the more ambitious project to re-launch the campaign for Hindu nationhood appears to have been shelved for the moment, some of the core themes of Hindu nationalism--secularism as minority appeasement leading to terrorism and the natural affinity of Muslims for Pakistan as threatening India's security and integrity--are perceived by the BJP and its allies in the Hindu Right as integral elements of their present political platform. It is this platform which is seen as the base of any future agenda of mobilisation of Hindu cultural nationalism.

\textsuperscript{88} Modi, interview.