Chapter IV

Legitimating Hindu Nationalism

Secularism Under Siege

Introduction:

The strategic shift on the part of the Hindu nationalist campaign from an advocacy of cultural nationalism \textit{per se} to a more diffused emphasis on a majoritarianist political agenda appeared to yield results later in the '80s when it was finally able to mount an effective challenge to the secular ethos. The skilful use of the political discourse by Hindu nationalist leaders and ideologues in creating a synthetic sense that there was a crisis of legitimation facing the secular Indian state, helped expand political space for the strategic advance of Hindu cultural nationalism.

It is argued in this chapter that the strategic decision of the BJP, mainly conceived of by Advani, to make the attack on the secular ethos the centrepiece of its majoritarian campaign, seeking to undermine its moral authority by questioning the manner of its application rather than challenging its conceptual essence, paid off in the expansion of the BJP's influence among middle class constituencies. The BJP's increased appeal to the middle classes was helped in a large measure by the disaffection that had set in among sections of the upper castes in North India, as a result of the anti-reservation stir of 1990 which had
erupted in response to the National Front's decision to implement the recommendations of the Mandal Commission. The launching of the Ramjanmabhoomi agitation against this background of sharp upper-caste disaffection, enabled the BJP to position itself as challenging the conventional wisdom on social justice and secularism, projecting the upper castes and the middle classes as victims of the "vote-bank politics" of the Congress and the Janata Dal. The BJP which had been supporting the Janata Dal-led National Front began to distance itself from the coalition, as the anti-Mandal agitation intensified, with Advani sharply criticising the V.P Singh-led Janata Dal Government for its "vote politics" and "power games" at the expense of "principles and values" in the unilateral announcement of the 27 per cent caste-based reservations. Recognising the potential in the consolidation of upper caste sentiments on the reservations issue, the BJP embarked on an ambitious programme of mobilising the Hindu majority around the articulation of demands relating to cultural symbols, most notably the Ayodhya temple.

Parties like the Congress had also begun to experiment with different political strategies including majoritarianism, especially since the 80s. The perceived dalliances with religious fundamentalism on the part of Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi, reflecting in their political approaches to the Khalistan agitation in Punjab, the Babri Masjid dispute and the issue of Muslim personal

1 "Advani warns Govt.," Report from Bhopal, The Hindu, September 15, 1990
2 James G. Lochtefeld has observed that the affirmations on Hindu identity and religion have included an attempt to transform the term 'Hindu' into signifying political rather than religious identity and explicitly equate this Hindu identity with Indian nationalism. At the same time, the Hinduva movement had "been actively reshaping the tradition's religious forms, to cement this identity by providing new symbols, images, ceremonies and institutions". These new forms were "carefully chosen" and had "usually been introduced using the rhetoric of reclaiming the past, to disguise how much of this identity has been carefully constructed." (Lochtefeld, "New Wine, Old Skins: The Sangh Parivar and the Transformation of Hinduism", Religion, (1996)Vol 26 No. 2, 101-118, <http://www.sas.upenn.edu/~dludden/lochtefeld.pdf>)
3 Zoya Hasan, "Communal Mobilisation and Changing Majority in Uttar Pradesh", Making India Hindu: Religion, Community and the Politics of Democracy in India, Ed. David Ludden, (Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1996) pp. 90-91. Hasan observes that during this period, the Uttar Pradesh Congress had begun to experiment with different methods of gaining legitimacy. The Congress first changed its strategy in the early eighties, especially when it faced the prospect of losing power. The new design for regaining support was clearly majoritarian. Uttar Pradesh provided an active field for the trial of this project."
law, fed into the Hindu majoritarian narrative, with the Congress itself being perceived as legitimising political strategies that it had traditionally opposed. A particular instance of this trend was the Rajiv Gandhi administration's enactment of the Muslim Women's Rights Act in 1986, overriding a Supreme Court judgment granting alimony in the Shah Bano case, which evoked sharp controversy, with the BJP immediately declaring it an instance of vote-bank politics and appeasement.

Adding to the pressure on the secular consensus from this new set of challenges, was the high-profile mobilisation of Hindu sentiment by a series of yatraS organised by the VHP, especially the Ekamata Yatra.\(^4\) The organisation of mass rallies such as the Virat Hindu Sammelan in 1981, which followed the Meenakshipuram incident in Tamil Nadu, in which some 1500 Dalits converted to Islam and which became a major casus belli for the Hindu nationalists seeking new symbols to rally Hindu sentiment, also paved the way for the high-profile Ramjanmabhoomi movement and the invocation of the metaphor of Ram, the Maryada Purushottam, to revitalise the moribund imagery of Hindu cultural nationalism.\(^5\)

But while considerable emphasis was placed on the campaign for the restoration of Hindu cultural symbols, of greater significance and providing far

\(^4\) Manjari Katju's study of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad has pointed out, these yatras which were "heavily devotionalised" and based on "organised religious fervour" used Hindu symbols for mobilisation, beginning and ending at major Hindu pilgrimage centres. But more importantly these programmes had strong anti-Muslim and anti-Christian undertones. (Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Indian Politics, Orient Longman, 2003.) Katju's study also quotes Ashok Singhal, then joint general secretary of the VHP as complaining in 1983 that "the Hindus today, are being subjected to numerous insults and humiliations in their own homeland" and that the aim of the ekamata yatra is social harmony and brotherhood." It was "because of social discord and poverty that foreign powers such as Islam and Christianity with their monetary strength are conspiring to divide Hindu society." (pp.44-45).

\(^5\) Pralay Kanungo notes in his study of the RSS that the Meenakshipuram incident "brought a metamorphosis in the VHP. In the RSS strategy for the coming years, it was going to be the torchbearer." The VHP "took the assignment and raised the alarm of 'Hindusm in Danger'. It warned that, unless the conversions were immediately banned and reversed, Hindus would become minorities in India." (RSS's Tryst With Politics, Manohar, New Delhi 2002, pp. 190-91.)
more traction to the movement's efforts to consolidate middle class Hindu sentiments around its goals, was the highlighting of the "dangers of Islamic terrorism". It was evident from the emphasis placed on this issue in the propaganda campaigns of the Hindu nationalist organisations that they believed that this theme had far more of a consolidating effect than the other strategies that they employed. Topping an agenda of expressed concerns such as mass conversions to Christianity, the cultural orientation of education, dispute over religious sites, was the issue of Islamic terrorism. This issue was seen as having far more polarising effect than any other subject on the Hindu nationalist agenda and hence of much greater utility in the search for increased salience in the public arena.

As is known, the high-profile Ramjanmabhoomi campaign, its start dramatically illustrated by Advani's cross-country Rath Yatra culminated disastrously in the violent destruction of the disputed Babri Masjid, provoking nation-wide outrage and international concern. The demolition of the Babri Masjid in December 1992 was the first indication to the world outside that the four decades of national commitment to communal harmony and secular coexistence had been rudely shaken by this unilateral act of willful destruction of a site held sacred by a religious minority. Therefore, given the BJP's disinclination to be perceived as acting against the spirit of the Constitution, there was indeed a strategic interest on its part to de-link the incidents of rioting and the acts of terror such as the bomb blasts that shook Bombay and later Coimbatore following the demolition of the disputed Babri Masjid by Hindu extremists. To acknowledge that there was a sequence of provocation and retaliation reflecting in these acts of terror and violence militated against the strategic interest of the BJP and its Hindu nationalist allies. As will be elaborated upon in the next chapter, it was this same tendency which reflected in the Hindu nationalist response and handling of the Godhra incident, where the acts of
arson and killings by terrorists identified as Muslims were disconnected from the larger context of continuing communal provocation by the Ayodhya campaigners, that led to the torching of a coach of the Sabarmati Express, in February 2002. This enabled the Hindu extremist organisations to mobilise majoritarian retaliatory anger as regards the Godhra incident and paved the way for the violence against Muslims in this subsequent carnage in Gujarat.

The Hindu nationalists had a two-pronged focus in their sustained reiteration of the argument that Godhra as also the earlier bomb blasts in Bombay, Coimbatore and other sites were individual acts of terror by Muslim extremists rather than part of a larger pattern of majoritarian assertion and minority retaliation. The aim on the one hand was to legitimate its pitch for Hindu cultural nationalism and on the other, to project Islamic terrorism as a fast emerging danger, thereby kindling fears among the majority community. It also enabled the BJP and its allies to extend the argument on the danger of Islamic terrorism, suggesting that the main protagonists were Pakistan and its supporters in the Indian Muslim community with the implication thereby that the threat essentially emanated from their desire to target India because it was a nation of Hindus.

This chapter also looks at the strategic utilisation of the demolition of the Babri Masjid by the Sangh Parivar at different levels with particular reference to the claims that the Ayodhya issue was about repudiating "Muslim hegemony". The main argument in this chapter is that a substantive part of the Hindu nationalist strategic focus in this period after the Babri Masjid demolition was on highlighting Muslim terrorism as a phenomenon independent of and prior to the advent of Hindu majoritarian mobilisation. Considerable political energy was spent in constructing a stereotype of the Indian Muslim as a terrorist with strong links to Pakistan, a willing tool in its designs to undermine Indian national integrity. This section draws from narratives pertaining to the bomb blasts in
Bombay (1993) and Coimbatore (1998), derived primarily from interviews with Shiv Sena leaders and Hindu nationalist leaders from Coimbatore.

Also significant in this context was the ideological underpinning sought to be given to this campaign by several Hindu nationalist ideologues. A significant indication of the shift in the political climate in the period of the '80s and the '90s, was the renewed critical scrutinising of the settled postulates of the secular ethos by Hindutva ideologues. The secular state was perceived by the Hindutva campaigners as the most formidable obstacle to the return of Hindu cultural nationalism to the national agenda and the Nehruvian consensus which was the main focus of ideological attack in this period was seen as responsible for the hegemony of the secular ethos. Thus while describing secularism as "pseudo-secularism", particular ire was directed at its "practitioners" such as the Congress and third front parties, the intent of which was to challenge the political credibility of these forces in the public arena. The kindling of majority fears about Islamic terrorism was strategically linked to the campaign against secularism, suggesting that terrorism was the consequence of "appeasement" of Muslims and "pseudo secular politics". Beginning with Advani's Rath Yatra, the BJP and its allies focused all their political energies on building a sense among the middle classes that the four decades of Congress party policies of secularism and protection of minority rights were nothing but appeasement of minorities, which was emboldening them to reveal their separatist mindsets and adopt terrorist tactics to achieve their goals.

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6 Nigam, op.cit., notes that this period saw the rapid movement of intellectuals to the side of the Hindu right. "So widespread was the appeal of the Hindutva platform in its new incarnation that the turn of the decade saw not merely sections of the intelligentsia shifting sides but the overall shift in the intellectual climate made the hitherto unspeakable, respectable and chic "(p.128).
Preparing the Ground

With the ideological shifts of the '80s, it became easier for the Bharatiya Janata Party and its allies to develop an effective critique of secularism. It was apparent that the BJP and its allies realised the enormity of the challenge that they were taking on, primarily the fact that secularism was an intrinsic aspect of Indian democracy. The widespread consensus underlying the Indian state's adoption of civic nationalism and secularism as fundamental principles of governance remained a formidable obstacle to the spread of Hindu nationalism. Secularism was too firmly entrenched in the national psyche as a fundamental feature of Indian nationhood to be easily dislodged. 7

The BJP was clearly determined not to repeat the mistakes of its Hindu nationalist forbears, including the erstwhile Jana Sangh, in questioning the very premise of a secular state, an exercise which was seen to have had virtually no public resonance. The BJP therefore shifted the emphasis of its critical scrutiny to what it described as the flawed implementation of the principle on the ground, arguing that 'cynical' politicians had so debased the concept in practice that secularism could no longer be a meaningful instrument of democratic governance. A trend was discernible especially in the late '80s, in which the BJP and its allies began to consistently pitch the argument that what was being followed by the Congress governments at the Centre in the name of secularism

7 Rajeev Bhargava in his paper, "Liberal, Secular Democracy and Explanations of Hindu Nationalism", (Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics, 2002, op.cit.,) has pointed out, "the discursive field set out by liberal democracy continues to shape, enable and constrain the political strategies and discursive performance of Hindu nationalists...liberal democracy is part of the standing discursive conditions in Indian society and...therefore, Hindu nationalists frequently possess a motive to legitimate their actions in terms of its normative vocabulary..." He also notes that the "discursive field created by the Constitution continues to hem in Hindu nationalists in the sense that they are continually compelled to justify their unseemly acts in terms of the normative vocabulary of the Constitution."
was nothing but appeasement of minorities. Its suggestion that what was being followed was "pseudo-secularism" and that what was needed instead was "positive secularism" was also anchored to the old Hindu cultural nationalist claim that India, because of its Hindu majority was "naturally" secular.

The BJP's election manifesto for the Lok Sabha elections of 1984, ambitiously titled "Towards A New Polity" declared --" In Indian tradition, since time immemorial, the State has always been a civil institution which makes no distinction between one citizen and another on grounds of his religion. So when India became independent in 1947 we very naturally declared ourselves a secular state, unconcerned that Pakistan had opted for theocracy." 8 The manifesto went on to underline that "it is this positive concept of secularism to which the BJP is committed. Secularism should not be allowed to become a euphemism for appeasement, alternately of this community or that, or a sordid political device to garner bloc-votes." 9 Implicit in this statement was the old Hindu cultural nationalist argument that secularism was a principle relevant to citizenship rather than nationhood. This allowed space for the conclusion that a Hindu nation could adopt secular governing policies because it was naturally tolerant unlike its neighbour, Islamic Pakistan.

It was evident that the BJP's appeals to the electorate on the basis of critiques of secularism could not make headway until much later, when it was linked to other grievances pertaining to the implementation of social justice measures like reservations. The marginalisation of the BJP was sharply evident in the elections of 1984 which saw the Congress (I) sweep to a landslide victory, reducing the BJP to just two seats in the newly elected Lok Sabha. Rajiv Gandhi's nation-wide election campaign, stressing national unity, claiming that the various agitations in Assam, Kashmir and Punjab reflected threats based on

9 Ibid.
religion, regionalism and language, with the eventual aim of dismembering the country, tapping also into a massive sympathy wave for the Congress in the wake of Indira Gandhi's assassination, showed that the Indian voter's primary concern was for the stability and integrity of the Indian Union.

The debacle of 1984 saw the BJP replace Vajpayee with Advani as its president. The new leader was clear in his mind that Hindu nationalism could not advance unless and until new constituencies could be created around the need for a new national culture. This could not happen until the prevailing secular national ethos was challenged and discredited. Thus virtually at every public forum thereafter, Advani's main emphasis was on an attack on secularism. Reiterating the claim that India's secularism was a product of the Hindu cultural ethos, BJP leader LK Advani, addressing a party conclave in January 1987 asserted that "It is a historical fact that the basis of this country's partition in 1947 was religion. This also must be appreciated that Pakistan declared itself an Islamic State because it was Muslim and India gave to itself a secular constitution because it was Hindu. Theocracy was alien to traditional Hindu polity..."\

Advani's assertion that India's secularism flowed from its Hindu ethos was at variance with the historical record that the adoption of a secular national ethos was the direct outcome of a recognition by the Constitution framers of the heterogeneous base of the Indian nation. Yet this glossing over the historical reality of the origins of the secular ethos allowed Advani and his colleagues to construct an elaborate critique of the practice of secularism. Advani's presidential address at Vijayawada in 1987 demanded that the country "reject pseudo secularism." The truth, he declared, was that "for many politicians and intellectuals, secularism is only a euphemism to cloak their allergy to Hinduism."

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Indifference to "India's common culture on the one hand and the conscious pampering and promotion of a minority complex in the minorities on the other have led to dangerous strains in society. Minorities harbour a persecution complex and the majority in turn has begun to feel neglected and taken for granted... It is the duty of the State to guarantee justice and security to all minorities--religious, linguistic, ethnic. But it is also imperative for national integration that minorities do not develop a minority complex..."\textsuperscript{11}

It was in the 1990s that Advani's denunciations of secular politics and parties became more trenchant and pointed. Indicating that the campaign for Ayodhya which he was highlighting in his undertaking of a \textit{Rath Yatra} was designed to launch a high-profile Hindu majoritarian challenge to the prevailing national culture, Advani explained his \textit{yatra} as being "principally aimed at removing the perverted secularism being practised in the country's political and social life."\textsuperscript{12} The second part of Advani's strategy was to link secularism to what he called "vote bank politics", thereby claiming that the Ayodhya agitation was not just for the Ram temple, but also to stress a larger point that secularism had come to mean appeasement of Muslims by the Congress and other parties.

Speaking at a convention titled "Nationalism versus Pseudo-Secularism" in December 1990, Advani asserted that "secularism for all political parties except the BJP, continues to remain a means to acquire votes" Further, it was the "pseudo-secular" attitude of the leaders which had contributed to the weakening of the nation's unity and integrity, he said.\textsuperscript{13}

What was noteworthy was that the BJP was virtually appropriating the political idioms of the Congress party. The newfound concern for national unity and integrity, and the suggestion that the meaning of secularism had been

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{12} "Advani lauds Supreme Court order", report from Pune, \textit{The Hindu}, October 3, 1990.
\textsuperscript{13} "Pseudo-Secularism has weakened unity: Advani", report from New Delhi, \textit{The Hindu}, December 25, 1990.
distorted by dishonest political approaches enabled the BJP to send a double-edged message to its potential constituencies in the middle classes. It was a message that at one level was meant to reassure its audience that it had a commitment to uphold the same set of political values that had underpinned the success of India’s development, yet at another level it was designed to unsettle the faith placed in the sincerity of the political approaches of other parties like the Congress. The critiques of secularism were also intended to provide a springboard for the unveiling of the real agenda—a re-launch of the campaign for Hindu nationhood. At a press conference also in December 1990, Advani spelt out this majoritarian claim. Asserting that a country-wide debate on nationalism and secularism would "clarify the stand taken by secular and pseudo-secular forces", and that the Ayodhya issue "had precipitated this debate" which was long over due, he also said that if nationalism was "delinked" from the cultural heritage of the majority community, it would not promote national integrity and unity.14

The BJP also took care to interlink its campaign against "pseudo-secularism" with the resurrected programme of cultural nationalism which involved the calculated organisation of mass religious fervour in the majority community. The earliest elucidation of the BJP’s interest in making use of the Ayodhya issue was the resolution that its national executive adopted in Palampur in June 1987. An important element of that majoritarian perspective that is set out in the Palampur resolution is the assertion that a matter involving Hindu sentiments cannot be adjudicated by law. According to the resolution—

The BJP holds that the nature of this controversy is such that it cannot be just sorted out by a court of law. A court of law can settle issues of title, trespass, possession etc. But it cannot

adjudicate as to whether Babar did actually invade Ayodhya, destroy a temple and build a mosque in its place… 15

Referring to two court decisions of 1951 and 1986 in respect of the Ayodhya dispute, the Palampur resolution noted caustically that "the 1951 order had provoked little reaction. Till then secularism had not yet become a euphemism for Hindu baiting as it has become today" but "by the time the second court order of 1986 came, secularism had come to be equated with an allergy to Hinduism and a synonym for Muslim appeasement." The Palamupur resolution was scathing in its criticism of the Rajiv Gandhi administration's enactment of the Muslim Women's Bill in order to nullify the effects of the Supreme Court judgment in the Shah Bano case. The resolution said -- "the Muslim League lobby in the country had acquired a new militancy and aggressiveness. The campaign launched by this lobby against the Supreme Court's judgment in the Shah Bano case in 1985 had brought it rich dividends. A panic stricken government had amended the criminal law; the Supreme Court judgment was legislatively annulled." Linking this explicitly to the dispute over Ayodhya, the BJP alleged further that "having thus tasted blood, this lobby set up the Babri Masjid Action Committee and mounted a vicious assault on the decisions of the Faizabad Court and went to the length of boycotting Republic Day celebrations in protest against these orders… 16

A concomitant of the new campaign interlinking the Ayodhya issue with the newly unveiled challenge to the secular national ethos was the resurrection of the stigmatising stereotype of the Muslim community as intrinsically separatist, by the extremist flank of the Hindu nationalist brigade. The RSS thought this a propitious moment to bring back the long forgotten slogan of Hindu Rashtra to be the crest of its new campaign for Hindu majoritarian

16 Ibid.
nationhood.\textsuperscript{17} By the turn of the decade, the BJP and its allies in the Sangh Parivar had incorporated in its platform of majoritarian nationalism some of the core elements of the pre-Partition discourse, particularly the critical focus on the "separatist" instincts of the Muslim community. The polarising thrust of this discourse sharpened as the Ayodhya agitation intensified.\textsuperscript{18}

**Ayodhya: Kernel of a New Narrative**

The top leaders of the BJP have always preferred to distance themselves, at least publicly from defending or taking responsibility for the demolition of the Babri Masjid on December 6, 1992, leaving it to the VHP and the RSS to declare that the destruction of a symbol of religious importance to the minority community was a victory for Hindu cultural nationalism. Interviews conducted for this study with senior leaders highlighted a disinclination on their part to identify the Ayodhya agitation as the defining moment of their campaign for the legitimisation of Hindu cultural nationalism in the public discourse, preferring to treat this issue as one of the several milestones in the narrative of "Hindu awakening". When asked, during an interview conducted for this study, as to

\textsuperscript{17} The case for Hindu Rashtra was aired once again in a pamphlet containing the arguments of leading RSS ideologues, circulated widely in the early '90s. In the pamphlet *Why Hindu Rashtra?* (Suruchi Prakashan, New Delhi, 1990), K.S Sudarshan, the Sangh's future Sarsangchalak raised again the bogey of minority separatism, asserting that "those who demand special rights on the pretext of being 'religious minorities' only weaken the collective will of the nation. They will also by their refusing to join the mainstream as equal partners, become suspect in the eyes of the others. The shining example of Parsis is before such people as a corrective model." In an attack on secularist parties and politicians, another RSS ideologue, K Suryanarayan Rao lamented that "the tragedy is that it is only these bitter critics of Hindu Rashtra who boast themselves as secularists and are encouraging communalism and fundamentalism to grow in this country" and "by always harping upon the interests of minorities and appeasing them, these political leaders have encouraged minorityism and have never allowed Muslims and Christians to identify themselves with the national mainstream."

\textsuperscript{18} Ashish Nandy, Shikha Trivedy et.al., suggest that the Hindu cultural nationalist ideology "works on the basis of a number of conspicuous polarities--genuine secularism as opposed to pseudo secularism, genuine history as opposed to false history, true nationalism as opposed to false or effete patriotism..." (Ashish Nandy, Shikha Trivedy, Shail Mayaram, Achyut Yagnik, *The Ramjanmabhumi Movement and Fear of the Self*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1995) p. 63.
whether the Ayodhya campaign was the key catalytic event to jumpstart the Hindu cultural nationalist agenda, the BJP leader L.K. Advani's reply was "I think, if you start with the Ayodhya movement, you are starting very late," maintaining that if "it had not been for politics and the temptation created by electoral vote banks, the combining factor in what remained after Partition was nothing but culture.--Indian culture, Bharatiya culture or if you were to think only of its content, essentially Hindu culture." The main distortions that had come about was the manner in which Indian political parties had dealt with Muslims as "vote banks", he said. 19

The response of former BJP leader and Hindu nationalist ideologue KN Govindacharya was more explicit in distancing the BJP from the actual act of demolition. In an interview for this study, asked for his view on the Babri Masjid demolition, Govindacharya said: "I neither condone nor condemn it...because it was neither desired nor planned...I neither say it is a kalank divas (blemished day) nor a shourya divas (day of valour), if at all it is, it has to be a atmachintana divas (self-introspection day) for everybody...I feel all have to retrospect...the galaxy of leadership of Sangh Parivar was seated on the dais and they were crying hoarse and appealing to the kar sevaks to come down...they never wanted it but it happened.. Advani was so sad, so frustrated, it was done against the whole Sangh Parivar decision." 20 As in the case of Advani, Govindacharya appeared disinclined to imbue the Ayodhya events with the significance of being the key catalyst in the growth of Hindu nationalism. In the interview, the former BJP ideologue asserted that the real turning point for the growth of Hindu nationalism in the '80s and the '90s was the Meenakshipuram incident in which more than a thousand Dalits were converted to Islam. "The watershed was the

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19 LK Advani, former Union Home Minister, interview by author, tape recording, New Delhi, February 3, 2007.
Meenakshipuram conversions in 1981... which was tom-tommed not only all over the country but elsewhere also as a major victory of Islam in this country. The religious clergy of this country claimed this as a major victory and that shook the majority community to the core psychologically.”

It was clear that Advani, Atal Behari Vajpayee and other senior BJP leaders did not want the party to be perceived as running afoul of the Constitution and the rule of law, especially as the strategic game plan was to gain more acceptability and legitimacy in the political arena. But while being cautious in respect of the actual act of demolition of the Babri Masjid in the face of the worldwide outrage that the event had sparked, the BJP shared the political understanding of its counterparts—the VHP, the RSS and the Bajrang Dal, that the political symbolism of the mosque coming tumbling down was too powerful and valuable an imagery to be lost to the narrative of new Hindu "empowerment". The responsibility of carrying forward the communally polarising agenda of various Hindu cultural nationalist agitations for the "liberation of temples" and other "hegemonic" representations offending Hindu sensibilities, was entrusted to the VHP, RSS and the Bajrang Dal. It was left to these organisations to draw out the political capital from the Babri Masjid demolition, by publicly projecting that the demolition was an act of revenge for centuries of Muslim hegemony.

The BJP for its part, took up the task of integrating these developments into its larger agenda of challenging the foundations of secularism and civic nationalism. The disinclination to project the Ayodhya agitation as a 'watershed' was part of the larger strategic design of retaining respectability and legitimacy within the parliamentary arena, where the BJP did not want to be too closely identified with an act that was clearly anti-Constitutional and illegal. At the same

21 Govindacharya, interview by author.
time, the party recognised that it would have to push forward the agenda of Hindu cultural nationalism by suggesting that the 'unplanned demolition' of the Babri Masjid was only a reflection of the fact that Hindu frustration was going out of control as a result of 'pseudo-secularist' and 'appeasementist' policies of the Congress and other parties. As part of the strategy to deflect the pressure building on it as a result of the Babri Masjid demolition and the nation-wide outrage, the BJP brought a no-confidence motion against the Narasimha Rao administration on December 17, 1992 on the basis of the dismissals of three BJP-ruled State Governments and the ban on the RSS, VHP and the Bajrang Dal. Vajpayee who initiated the debate was clearly on the defensive as regards the demolition of the Babri Masjid and its aftermath. While maintaining that neither the BJP, the RSS nor the VHP had "planned or stealthily demolished the structure" and that their top leaders, including the RSS chief were "strongly against the action" 22, Vajpayee went on to assert that it was not a "fight for the temple but one of psyche." 23

Vajpayee's remarks during the debate on the no-confidence motion echoed the key themes of the emerging majoritarian narrative. Suggesting that the Babri Masjid demolition was only a belated retaliation for the destruction of temples centuries ago by Muslims, Vajpayee said "We entertained hopes that our Muslim brothers would say a wrong had been done at that time. But this did not happen and they exhibited intransigence. This went on. During this period certain developments took place in the country which had its effect on Hindu community and Hindu psyche. The terrorist and secessionist activities in Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab and Assam compelled the majority community to wonder as to what was happening in our country. Shah Bano case made this question

23 Ibid.
more fundamental..."24 In another indirect defence of the demolition of the mosque, Vajpayee's speech suggested that this was a reflection of majority anger at the 'appeasement' of minorities. "There has never been differences in this country on the basis of religion. But now those signs are visible. I am worried about it...By appeasing and compromising with one set of fanaticism you cannot stop the other type of fanaticism. I regret the demolition of the structure but such persons have also met me who have said that this structure was a black spot of 400 years old and there was no other way of removing it. I am afraid of these kind of feelings. We should find solutions to these problems in a peaceful manner and through discussion but we should not allow such problems to remain hanging for long. They should not be allowed to develop into a cancer."25

The idea that the Ayodhya issue was only a metaphor for the greater malaise of "pseudo secularism" in the Indian polity was brought out sharply in the BJP White Paper on Ayodhya, released by the party in April 1993, which itself was an explanation of its position, having come under severe pressure in the aftermath of the Babri Masjid demolition, with three of its State Governments being dismissed. In his foreword to the White Paper, Advani expanded on the theme that the secular Indian state had practised the appeasement of minorities. "The manner in which the State bent to fundamentalists and terrorists, the manner in which self-styled leaders of minorities sought to revive the politics of separatism which has led to the Partition of this country and even more so the manner in which Prime Ministers and others genuflected to them; and the double standards which came more and more to mar public discourse in India to the point that the word 'Hindu' became

something to be ashamed about, to the point that nationalism became a dirty word--these ignited a great revulsion among the people. As all this was being done in the name of "secularism", it led people to feel that what was being practised was not Secularism but a perversion. The people began to search for what true Secularism meant, they began to wonder how our country could at all survive if Nationalism was to be anathema." Advani's foreword further said "Reconstructing the temple for Sri Rama became the symbol of this rising consciousness--ridding the country of the perversities to which it was being subjected in the name of Secularism, forging a strong and united country. The object of the movement thus became not just to construct yet another temple, the object became to put our country back on its feet, to purify our public life, our public discourse."

With Vajpayee and Advani adhering to broader formulations, ensuring that their presentations did not directly target Muslims but were seen as pointing largely at the Congress leaders who had been at the helm of the post-Independence Indian state, the BJP as a party was emphatically clear that it saw the Muslims as the direct beneficiaries of these "pseudo-secular" policies. It was critical for the credibility of the majoritarian paradigm that secularism not be attacked in essence, but the political point that its practice was flawed, be emphasised. Thus the ideologue Govindacharya explained in his interview for this thesis that what the BJP was referring to was the fact that "secularism is being practised merely as minorityism and minorityism meant special treatment for Muslims with respect to law and order, protection of religious fundamentalism in the name of secularism and giving a free hand for mismanagement in the name of minority rights."27

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27 Govindacharya, interview by author.
It was evident as Govindacharya's explanation makes clear, that the BJP did not want to be perceived as questioning the rationale of secularism as a governing policy but preferred to unsettle the middle classes in their faith in the capacity of the other political parties, notably the Congress, to implement secular governance. Thus the BJP's White Paper set out a long list of issues which reflected the "effect of distorted secularism." Each of these issues pertained to the Muslim community. While the BJP claimed to be seeking a correction of the national perspective in relation to all the minorities in general, it was evident that the BJP's main problem was only with the Muslim community. The summary of 'grievances' as listed in the BJP's White Paper, makes this clear. Here below is an extract--

How did this dishonest and distorted secularism translate itself in practice? A separate--rather separatist--Article 370 and Constitution and Flag for the only Muslim-majority State (Jammu and Kashmir) in India; a proclaimed and uncontested statement that the Muslim League and that too in Kerala (where it had a bigamous and alternating political alliance with the Congress and the Marxists) is secular; the legislative reversal of the Supreme Court finding that the Aligarh Muslim University was not a minority institution, to proclaim its minority character; the creation and legitimisation of Muslim majority Mallapuram District; the silent acceptance of the right of Muslims to riot in religious matters like Hazrat Bal and Al-Aqsa mosque; and even non-religious matters so long as they could be given a religious column--like the hanging of ZA Bhutto in Pakistan; the legislative reversal of the Shah Bano ruling; the banning of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* on the ground that it was liable to offend Muslim sentiments; the Muslim militancy in Kashmir which rendered non-Muslims refugees in the streets of Delhi and Jammu for whom no Prime Minister, neither V.P Singh nor P.V Narasimha Rao, cared even to utter a word of consolation; the confession by the UP Government of its inability to abide by the binding judgment of the Supreme Court on the Varanasi burial ground case on the ground that the Sunni Muslim might riot; the setting up of a Minorities
Commission to please essentially the Muslims; the undeclared political faith that the Personal Law of Muslims is inviolable and the constitutional directive of common civil code is not sacrosanct; the secularist opposition to the Assam movement against infiltrators and the deafening silence of the pseudo-secular parties on the Bangladesh infiltrators who have usurped large tracts in Assam and elsewhere. The list is unending, bearing undeniable testimony to the national drift.  

This litany of complaints implying that under the guise of 'secularism', the Muslim community was being appeased was followed by the assertion--"The theory and practice of secularism...resulted in greater erosion of our national identity and national consciousness than even under the rule of the invaders." The Hindu nationalist narrative had now linked the alleged wrongdoings of the past to the Original Sin, as it were. In other words, the debate on nationhood was sought to be reopened. As observed in earlier chapters of this study, the discourse of Hindu cultural nationalism hinged on three postulates--prior antiquity, sacred geography and numerical preponderance. By reviving the contentious claim that the Hindus were the original inhabitants and Muslims "invaders" who came only threafter, the idea was to question once again the stakes of Muslims in Indian nationhood.

The diatribes of the Hindu nationalist campaigners who constantly exhorted their cadre to see the Babri Masjid as a symbol of the past hegemony of Muslim rulers, suggesting that Hindus were "conquered" and their temples "razed", enabled new rationales to emerge from the majoritarian discourse that could justify fresh confrontation with the Muslim minority. An interview for this thesis of Vinay Katiyar, founder of the Bajrang Dal which played an active part in the demolition of the Babri mosque offered a flavour of this majoritarian narrative. "Though innumerable temples were razed to the ground by Muslim

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invaders in the past, we do not want to create an issue about that but we certainly want to liberate at least the three places--Ayodhya, Lord Ram's birthplace, Mathura, Lord Krishna's birthplace and Kashi Vishwanath temple at Varanasi--because when Hindus look at these demolished temples, they feel that they are still not liberated. A feeling of being enslaved still persists in their minds. These places remind Hindus of Mohammed bin Qasim, Babar and Aurangzeb and the atrocities inflicted by these invaders..." In this interview, Katiyar also offered his analysis of why Muslim "invaders" attacked Hindu temples. "Muslim invaders were clear in their aim of destroying the social cohesion of the Hindus. Naturally, places of worship which are looked upon with great devotion by the Hindus became the target of Muslim rulers. The famous temple of Somnath was one such place where Hindus of every caste and region thronged. In the hallowed atmosphere of Somnath, Hindus used to come together as devotees of Lord Shiva. All feelings of differences were easily forgotten in such a place. Invaders like Mohammed bin Qasim identified these places sacred to Hindus as the power centres of our society and therefore demolished them. Thereafter, every Muslim invader right from Mohammed bin Qasim to Aurangzeb attacked and demolished innumerable Hindu temples all over the country. These included the temples of Somnath, Madurai, Ayodhya, Mathura, Varanasi... These are but a few examples. These Muslim invaders demolished more than 6500 temples.... Why did these alien Muslims carry out these demolitions? They believed that if Hindus were unable to visit their temples, Hindu society would be fragmented into different castes..." 

The Hindu nationalists, possibly to pre-empt criticism that it was their attempt to stir Hindu majoritarian sentiment that was creating social tensions, escalated their rhetoric in this vein, consistently linking the present demolition

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30 Vinay Katiyar, founder and former president of the Bajrang Dal, interview by author, tape recording, New Delhi, February 2, 2007.
31 Katiyar, interview by author.
of the Babri mosque to the destruction of Hindu temples centuries ago. While this was a clear signal to the minorities that the majoritarianists were "settling scores" for perceived past wrong-doings, it was also a signal to the Congress and other secular parties that the new majoritarian stirrings were also aimed against the idea of civic nationhood and secular democracy. An editorial in the RSS weekly *Organiser*, written just one month after the Babri demolition, argued:

Was not the Centre duty-bound to inform the outside world that Babar was an aggressor and alien to our culture? It was also incumbent on the Muslim leaders and their protectors to educate the Muslims in India. Unfortunately those who have come to represent the Muslim community and their political protectors have shamelessly treated this poor and ignorant minority as nothing more than a vote bank...Motivated by political considerations, Muslim leaders and the Congress succeeded in perpetuating a system that will not allow any change in the attitude of Muslims towards this country or the majority community.

...The Muslim self-assertion which was rewarded with a separate 'homeland' was matched by a Hindu self-assertion...

...once the Hindus started asserting their political rights, history began to change and change for the better. The innumerable cases of appeasement--the Shah Bano case, the declaration of a public holiday on Prophet Mohammed's birthday (unknown even to the Arab world)...were only the proverbial last straw on the camel's back.

Event after event, the Hindu began to realise the enormity of the deceit perpetrated against him. The *Jan Jagran* after the Meenakshipuram incident, the *Ganga Yatra*, the *Shilapujan*, the *Shilanyas*, all this at the grass-root level reposed in the Hindu society a sense of pride and prepared it to fight injustice, of which the Babri mosque became a constant reminder.  

At one level, the BJP leadership might have been reluctant to be perceived as endorsing the act of the Babri Masjid demolition, for fear of the...

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legal consequences of its participation in a criminal act that violated the rule of law and the Constitution. But in the wider political arena, it showed little hesitation in joining its extremist allies in the Sangh Parivar in the building of a strategic response that would utilise the communal polarisation that followed the Babri mosque demolition.  

Thereby, the BJP and its allies hoped, the moribund debate on nationhood could be revived.

Even as BJP spokespersons continued to maintain that the demolition of the Babri Masjid was not planned or intentional, their more extremist counterparts in the RSS, VHP and Bajrang Dal were openly exultant. The Organiser carried an interview of RSS general secretary H.V Seshadri, shortly after the demolition, highlighting the new mood of defiant assertion sharply at odds with the outrage being expressed nationwide at the Babri Masjid's destruction. Asked by the weekly's special correspondent for his assessment of the event of December 6, Seshadri's reply was--"It was nothing less than assertion of the nation's innate shraddha (faith) in its destiny...the December 6 event remains essentially the nation's invincible resolution to uphold its eternal spirit, the very raison d'etre of its existence." When the Organiser's correspondent asked pointedly whether it meant that "the Constitution, the law, the discipline and all that would have no meaning hereafter", Seshadri's response was "On the contrary, the present trauma, the December 6 explosion is bound to infuse a new meaning, a more purposeful and fulfilling content into all such external structures and their guiding principles. The 'Babri structure' exemplified in a most provocative manner all the unseemly perversions and anti-national

33 Thomas Blom Hansen has pointed out that "The final layer in the Ramjanamabhoomi agitation was the discourse on the danger and the demonic character of the Muslim other, both as a geographical other (Pakistan and the Muslim world) and an internal other, the Indian Muslims with extra-territorial loyalties....It was the Muslim otherness that by its threat(s) engendered a Hindu positivity as a self-conscious culture, blocked by the permanent 'insult' of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, as a territorial bounded state, threatened by Pakistani aggression; as a cohesive state unity threatened by Kashmiri separatism..." (The Saffron Wave, op.cit, pp.177-178)

propensities that have crept into them. Also behind them lay the power-thirsty mindset of de-nationalised politicians. The demolition of that symbol has signalled the *Ram ki sougandh* (sacred vow in the name of Ram) of the nation to do away with all that..."\(^{35}\) It was clear from the same interview that the dispute over Ayodhya and its violent conclusion had now been assimilated in the Hindu nationalist discourse as one element fortifying the perception sought to be highlighted in the public arena—that the Indian Muslim's commitment to Indian nationhood was not what it ought to be.

According to H.V Seshadri, in that interview, the "present notions" the Indian Muslims had about their identity, would have to be "drastically modified." An identity "which makes them look upon a barbaric foreign invader as their hero, an identity which makes them go on a spree of destruction and killings of Hindus in our country for something printed in some foreign publication about their Prophet...or an attack on their mosque in a foreign country by some other foreigners...for example the attack on the Al Aqsa mosque or the hanging of Bhutto in Pakistan, an identity which provokes them to rebel against every point of national honour—the *Vande Mataram*, the cow, Chhatrapati Shivaji or Sri Ram, an identity which makes them identify themselves with Pakistani and Bangladeshi infiltrators into our country—definitely such an identity can have no place in our body politic."\(^{36}\)

The aftermath of the Babri Masjid demolition saw the VHP, RSS and Bajrang Dal openly articulate arguments that the demolition was a necessary act of liberation of a Hindu holy site and thereby a symbolic victory for Hindu cultural nationalism which had to be reinstated as the essence of Indian nationhood. In an interview for this study, explaining the rationale of the events leading to the demolition, RSS ideologue S. Gurumurthy argued: "The long

\(^{35}\) Ibid.
\(^{36}\) Ibid.

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suppressed nationalist stream in India required a vent, an outlet, Rama in jail in Ayodhya became the symbol and that was why the massive explosion...Can you believe that a mosque in which there was no worship became the symbol of secularism in India?" Former VHP president, Vishnu Hari Dalmia made the same argument when asked whether the demolition of the Babri Masjid was not a provocative act-- "Babri Masjid has no religious significance for them. It is just like any other mosque. Their main important thing is Mecca and Medina. So for Hindus it has got its importance while for Muslims it is insignificant. So why should they start fighting so much for a place which is insignificant for them...there are so many mosques being shifted even in Muslim countries for ordinary purposes like widening of roads. This clearly proves the fact that shifting a mosque is not prohibited in Islam. In this case they wanted to prove their supremacy."  

There was a determination on the part of the Hindu nationalists to utilise the symbolism of the Babri demolition to suggest that it was the pent-up frustration of the Hindu majority at the decades of "appeasement" of the Muslims and other minorities, that had led to this violent outcome. Dalmia, for instance, maintaining that the demolition was not planned, asserted that it was the frustration of the kar sevaks which had precipitated this situation. "...It was hoped that the court judgment would have come by that time but for reasons known to the court, the judgment did not come and this enraged the kar sevaks who wanted to do something."  

However, the nationwide outrage at the demolition of the mosque, reflecting in the eruption of communal riots and violence, the dismissal of three State Governments in the North and finally, the fact that India faced severe

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38 Vishnu Hari Dalmia, former president, VHP, interview by the author, tape recording, New Delhi, December 24, 2006.
39 Dalmia, interview.
embarrassment internationally as a result of this episode, put the BJP on the
defensive. There was now pressure on the party and its allies in the Sangh
Parivar to implement a damage limitation exercise of sorts. One urgent
imperative for the Sangh Parivar was to ensure that this act of unilateral
belligerence on the part of the Hindutva campaigners was not seen as an isolated
episode but was projected as part of a larger sequence in which the Muslim
community would be perceived as the primary instigator of the current national
crisis. It was clear that the BJP was in a dilemma of sorts. On the one hand, it
recognised its own limitations in terms of being able to give public vent to
extremist positions that would fall out of the pale of the parliamentary system.
But it also acknowledged that its own political growth depended critically on the
mobilisation and communal polarisation generated by the platform of Hindu
majoritarianism or Hindutva. It would therefore have to "ride two horses", as it
were.

One tactical route out of this dilemma for the BJP was to ensure that the
cataclysmic events like the Babri demolition were not allowed to dampen the
increasing appeal of Hindutva to its Hindu middle-class supporters. By ensuring
that the Babri Masjid demolition was seen as an act of retaliation for "centuries
of humiliation" and by suggesting that "appeasement" and "pseudo secularism"
were providing space for the "revival of Muslim ambitions to hegemony", the
strategy of the BJP-led majoritarian campaign was to deflect some of the
worldwide sympathy that would naturally accrue to the Muslim community in
the context of the trauma of the Babri demolition. The outbreak of communal
riots, nationwide, immediately after the demolition of the mosque was seized
upon by the BJP and its allies to claim publicly that the eruption of violent
protest was a clear-cut demonstration of the inherently subversive instincts of
the Muslim community. The Hindu nationalists had recognised that this was
possibly the right strategic moment to put into high gear a campaign against what was dubbed the "dangers of Islamic terrorism."

**Painting Muslims as the Primary Aggressors**

As has been discussed above, the Hindu nationalists saw an urgent need to redeem their own quest to legitimate their majoritarian campaign in the context of the Babri mosque demolition and the widespread public revulsion that followed this episode. It was recognised that the campaign for Hindu nationalism could not risk the opprobrium of being seen as acting against social peace and the national interest. It was therefore critical for the Hindu majoritarianists to position themselves in the post-Babri discourse, as being responsible defenders of the national interest, as befitting a national majority. This would buttress the theme being assiduously canvassed, that the Hindus were the 'natural' majority in India and therefore the true arbiters of Indian nationhood. One corollary of this projection was to suggest publicly that Hindu communalism, being the reflection of the sentiment of the 'natural' majority could never harm the country whereas Muslim communalism was the ever present danger to the nation. The first hint of this approach was discernible in Vajpayee's speech in the Lok Sabha, during the debate on the no-confidence motion of December 21, 1992, when he was arguing against the dismissal of the BJP-ruled State Governments in Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. Invoking the fable of the Hindu deity Shiva who was said to have swallowed deadly poison in order to save the world, Vajpayee said: "...Whenever the communal poison spreads in the country, we are always held guilty. If we have spread this poison then we are the devotees of Lord Shankar who can keep this poison in our own throats and it will only do good to the
country." The implication of Vajpayee's ringing assertion of majoritarianism was that-- Hindu communalism was a wholesome and responsible phenomenon as opposed to the subversiveness and anti-national Muslim communalism. Just as the Hindu deity Shiva would save the world, so would Hindu communalism save India from the nation's enemies.

The riots and communal clashes that erupted all over North India yielded fresh political space for the Hindu majoritarianists to develop their post-Babri narrative that painted the Hindus as natural defenders of the nation against anti-social and anti-national Muslims. However the actual ground realities were different. Sumit Sarkar's scholarly account written in January 1993 soon after the outbreak of post-Babri riots, nationwide, was one of the first analyses to underline that what was being unveiled in the public arena was nothing but emerging fascism. Sarkar's description of the sequence of events starting with the Babri demolition and deteriorating further into riots and clashes, is an evocative description of the terror that was being struck by the Hindu nationalist campaign. "A mosque is systematically reduced to rubble over five long hours in total violation of a direct Supreme Court order and repeated assurances given by the leading opposition parties and its allies, and the central government does not lift its little finger. Countrywide riots follow, marked by blatant police partiality, with the guardians of the law not un-often turning rioters themselves."

A study by Thomas Blom Hansen has noted that some of the most violent confrontations between demonstrators and authorities took place in

40 Vajpayee, Hindus Betrayed, op.cit., p.22.
41 Sumit Sarkar, "The Fascism of the Sangh Parivar", (Economic and Political Weekly, Vol.XXVII No.5, January 30, 1993, pp.163-167). He also pointed out that "the Bajrang Dal thugs often openly declare that anyone who criticises the destruction of the Babri Masjid will have to go to Pakistan, while in the selectively curfew-bound Muslim pockets of Seelampur in east Delhi, the police had rounded up all Muslim men in some areas, beaten them up unless they agreed to say Jai Shri Ram..."
Bombay where the police force clamped down with considerable brutality on Muslim protests. Hansen also notes that while the police shot and arrested Muslim demonstrators, the Shiv Sena was allowed to hold large public celebrations of the demolition, even to construct a makeshift *butatma* (martyrs) column in the Marathi-speaking area of Dadar listing the names of Hindus killed in the December 1992 riots. When a Hindu family was burned to death by unidentified arsonists in a Bombay suburb of Jogeshwari, in early January 1993, Thackeray ordered the Shiv Sainiks to "defend Hindus" and over the next few days, groups of Hindus, led by Sainiks went on a rampage, targeting Muslim establishments. Hansen observes that "For the Muslims who had borne the brunt of police brutality and ethnic rage from militant Hindus in both rounds of violence, the riots marked the final step in a long process of political marginalisation."43 Indicating that the strategy of communal polarisation had begun to pay off for the Sangh Parivar, the stigmatisation of Muslims, a process that had been virtually dormant in the decades of harmony and coexistence in independent India, began. Sumit Sarkar has pointed out that what made all that possible was "a wide, though very far from universal, degree of consent where large numbers may keep away from communal riots, maybe even sincerely condemn them and yet be participants in a kind of communal consensus in which a whole set of assumptions and myths have turned into common sense. Far from being a spontaneous or 'natural' product of popular will expressing a legitimate 'Hindu hurt' however, as the organised forces of Hindutva sedulously propagate, this consent is something constructed and carefully nurtured."44

The strategies of communal polarisation appeared to pay off for the Shiv Sena, as after the riots, it consolidated its position and came to power in the 1995 elections in the State. The new discourse of Hindu majoritarianism had given a

43 Ibid, pp.121-127.
44 Sarkar, op.cit.
fresh lease of life to organisations like the Shiv Sena, which until then, despite
the polarising tenor of its politics, whether directed at non-Maharashtrians or
Muslims, had not really been able to pick up momentum. The Sena was said
to have been pleased with the new salience given to their visceral anti-Muslim
prejudices by the discourse emanating from the BJP and the Sangh Parivar.

Interviews for this study with the top brass of the Shiv Sena which
included discussions of their perspectives on the events of 1992-1993 that
culminated in the bomb blasts of March 12 in Bombay, offer a flavour of their
strategic perspective, particularly their resistance to any conceptual linkage
suggested between the Babri demolition and the riots. There was also a
categorical rejection of the proposition that the riots and bomb blasts were a
reflection of minority rage against acts of singular provocation. The former
Chief Minister of Maharashtra and Shiv Sena leader, Manohar Joshi had this to
say when asked whether the bomb-blasts were not a consequence of the Babri
demolition:

The issue must be understood in proper perspective. The
Babri Masjid issue came only because the Government then
did not take the initiative to settle the issue at the right time.
Now there was contention from both the parties. And the
people wanted that the Government should give that land to
the Hindus which was not done... On such issues, top
priority has to be given... when one community acts, the other
also acts and gets united... Whatever happened on the day of
the demolition of the Babri Masjid... there was a strong
reaction after that... unfortunately the reaction was also in the

45 It has been pointed out in a study by Mary Fainsod Katzenstein et al., that in the 1990s, "the Shiv
Sena capitalised on an opportunity that was more discursive than material. The absence of any major change in
the economic or social conditions structuring Hindu-Muslim relations could not be more striking... Muslims
were not portrayed as traders whose wily ways were suspect or as privileged professionals... Muslims were--
according to the Sena's creed--seditious. It was their presumed lack of political identification with the Indian
nation rather than their societal position that was the subject of the Shiv Sena's diatribes." (Mary Fainsod
Katzenstein, Uday Singh Mehta and Usha Thakkar, "The Rebirth of the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra: The
Symbiosis of Discursive and Institutional Power, Community Conflicts and the State in India, (Ed) Anurita Basu and
Atul Kohli, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1998, pp.215-238.)

46 Katzenstein et al., note that "the sense of satisfaction among Shiv Sena leaders that at long last, their
appeal to Hindu nationalist loyalties had gotten a hearing among the Maharashtrian populace was transparent."
city of Bombay...and because of that reaction, the communal clashes resulted in a strong bitterness between the two communities...47

Also indicating an unwillingness to apportion equal blame to the two communities and underlining that in his view, the primary reason for the violence was not the Babri demolition but Hindu anger against the "appeasement" of Muslims, Joshi said "This is not the only reason why those clashes came... it is connected with the vote banks. Muslims unitedly have voted for the Congress for the last several years and in order to keep their votes intact, the Government has given them a lot of facilities and the original people get hurt... it is not only a political issue, it has become a psychological issue..."

Asked by this researcher whether he was asserting that Hindus were the "original people of the country", Joshi reaffirmed his statement, adding that "Nobody has said so far, fortunately that Muslims are the original people of this country!" He went on to claim that it was a "historical enmity" between Muslims who "came from outside" and Hindus that had surfaced in the 1992 clashes. "They attacked this country and therefore the seeds of this thought are from ancient ages. The enmity between Hindus and Muslims is not a matter of today...and because of appeasement and because of giving them lots of facilities, this increased and now the state is such that I am afraid that the political parties may remain outside and there will be two thoughts in this country--the Hindu thought and the other--the Muslim thought. Therefore if any Government wants to stop this, they must stop appeasement."48

Indicating the importance placed on the idea of "Muslim appeasement" by the Hindu nationalists, as a key instrument in the consolidation of a Hindu consciousness, the Shiv Sena leaders were at pains in their interviews for this

47 Manohar Joshi, former Chief Minister of Maharashtra, interview by the author, tape recording, Mumbai, January 3, 2007.
48 Manohar Joshi, interview by the author.
thesis to stress that Islamic terrorism was a direct result of the policies of "appeasement" practised in this country. Thus Sanjay Raut, editor of the Saamna and Rajya Sabha M.P argued in his interview that "Muslim history is a history of aggression and violence. Having realised that the rulers of democratic India can be forced to bend to meet any demands, Muslim leaders have always bargained with the government at the cost of Hindu interests and national interest as well." Raut expanded on his view of the dynamics of Muslim aggression which, he asserted, instilled fear in the psyche of those ruling the country. "Muslim leaders very often challenge the Government, stating that they obey only the Shariat (Islamic law) and not the Indian law...they openly defy policies of population control...this aggressive stance is only part of Islamic terrorism...Muslim leaders challenge our judicial system and the Constitution itself, as in the Shah Bano case. The Government succumbs to the implied threat--'What will happen to India if 14 crores of Muslims come on the streets?'... Muslim leaders have already expressed their sympathy for the cause of terrorists. That is why Shiv Sena has expressed concern about terrorism and will continue to do so."

The suggestion that Muslims were inherently aggressive and that they were getting their way in this country because of fearful Governments was part of a carefully cultivated perspective, designed to reach Hindu middle class audiences. Subhash Desai, a senior leader of the Shiv Sena also interviewed for this study echoed this perspective. "It is said that Muslim anger came out after the Babri Masjid incident. But we don't believe that...because that is a process and which has started years before the Babri incident...there is a split carefully manipulated by the Congress. Earlier the British initiated this process of divide and rule. They gave this 'chocolate' to Muslims by offering a separate nation to

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49 Sanjay Raut, editor of Saamna and Rajya Sabha M.P, in written replies to questions by the author during interview on January 5, 2007.
the Muslims and there was this seed sown in the minds of the Muslims that 'if we become aggressive, we get more and more'. So that is the starting point."50

The reality could not have been more different, as the Justice Srikrishna Commission probing the Bombay riots, discovered. Although the Srikrishna Commission report was not accepted by the Shiv Sena and the BJP, its findings now form an essential part of the historical record. The Srikrishna Commission was clear in its conclusion that "...the irresponsible act of the Hindutva parties in celebrating and gloating over the demolition of the Babri structure was like twisting a knife in the wound and heightened the anguished ire of the Muslims."51 More significantly, the Commission concluded that "the immediate causes of the communal riots on 6th December 1992 were (a) the demolition of the Babri Masjid (b) the aggravation of Muslim sentiments by the Hindus with their celebration rallies and (c) the insensitive and harsh approach of the police while handling the protesting mobs which initially were not violent."52

The Commission's finding that Muslims bore the larger part of the brunt of the savagery served as a reality check to the lurid portrayals being canvassed by the Sena and its Hindu nationalist counterparts, of Muslims as not only being anti-national and separatist but with a growing propensity to terrorist activities. But as has been pointed out, the eventual ineffectiveness of the Commission's indictment of the Shiv Sena, reflecting in the failure of state machinery to prosecute the perpetrators of communal violence53, reinforced the cynicism of

52 Ibid, p.21. The Commission also observed that out of the 900 people killed between December 1992 and January 1993 in the riots, 575 were Muslims and 275 Hindus, the rest of unknown identity; likewise, out of the 2036 injured, 1105 were Muslims and 893 Hindus, the rest of unknown identity. (p.19)
53 Zoya Hasan argues in respect of both the Mumbai violence of 1992-1993 and the Gujarat pogrom of 2002 that "since the episodes of large-scale communal violence are usually fomented by political elites to advance their own political agenda, shielding the guilty is an accepted part of the post-conflict political process." Not only has this "alienated minorities", but it "signals to the public at large that immunity for grave crimes is the rule in India." (Hasan, "Mass Violence and Wheels of Indian [In]Justice", Violence and Democracy in India, (Ed) Amrita Basu and Srirupa Roy, Seagull Books, 2007, p.213)
the minority community and opened up the space for a much more dangerous genre of reprisal. The series of 13 bomb explosions which rocked Bombay on March 12, 1993, said to have been masterminded by Dawood Ibrahim, 'Tiger' Memon and others in retaliation for the demolition of the Babri Masjid, marked the next and more deadly stage of communal polarisation.

Launching the Terror Stereotype

As noted in the preceding chapter, the portrayal of the Muslim community as anti-social and riot-prone was the precursor for a more incendiary characterisation of Muslims as anti-national terrorists, who would not hesitate to collaborate with Pakistan's subversive designs in relation to the Indian Union. Also, as pointed out earlier, it was imperative for the project of Hindu nationhood to establish that Muslims were anti-national rather than merely anti-social. Thus, the Hindutva leaders were disinclined to classify the acts of terror carried out by a few angry Muslim extremists as retaliatory gestures directed at the perceived majoritarian belligerence, preferring instead to flag these instances of terrorism as examples of pan-Islamic terror rearing its head in India, instigated by Pakistan and executed by Indian Muslims. After the bomb blasts in Calcutta, Bombay and other sites, the Hindu nationalists recognised that they now had a powerful strategic opportunity to enhance the legitimacy of their majoritarian platform by launching campaigns highlighting the "terrorist" and "anti-national" activities of Muslims. Further, the pattern as had emerged in the aftermath of the Babri Masjid destruction, reflecting in a sharpening communal polarisation, was perceived as opportune for the larger agenda of Hindu cultural nationalism. As has been observed by earlier studies of Hindu
nationalism and other such monocultural assertions, the strategy and tactics of movements for cultural nationalism require the stigmatisation of minority cultures or groups, effected through potent stereotyping.\textsuperscript{54}

While as has been highlighted in the charge sheet prepared by the CBI and the proceedings in the designated TADA court hearing the 1993 bomb blasts case,\textsuperscript{55} this reflected the handiwork of a group seeking revenge for the demolition of the Babri mosque with active instigation from Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI)\textsuperscript{56}, the entire Muslim community was virtually held to account for the actions of a core group from the Bombay 'underworld'. Following the blasts, the discourse shifted into a higher gear with the Shiv Sena leading a sharp attack on Muslims, alleging a nexus between Pakistan's hegemonic designs and Muslim terrorism. The relentless campaigning by the Sena, VHP and the Bajrang Dal on the theme of Muslim terrorism was ultimately aimed at the construction of a powerful stereotype of Muslims as pro-Pakistani terrorists. Encapsulating the Hindu nationalist propaganda, Subhash

\textsuperscript{54} Sumit Sarkar, op.cit., has pointed out that "far more central to Hindutva as a mass phenomenon ... is the development of a powerful and extendable enemy image through appropriating stray elements from past prejudices, combining them with new ones skilfully dressed up as old verities and broadcasting the resultant compound through the most up-to-date media techniques." Rajeev Bhargava also observes that "Hindutva cannot survive without a real or imagined enemy. The smallest action of Muslim extremists energises Hindu nationalism, revives or exacerbates the inter-communal syndrome, and gives popular legitimacy to Hindu nationalists. When the Muslims don't play ball Hindu extremists are compelled to invent their enemy...Ideally, Hindu extremists want the Muslim enemy neither to disappear altogether nor to become too strong. The presence of a real but weak antagonist suits their purposes perfectly and this is precisely what Indian politics and society now present to them." ("The Cultural Nationalism of the New Hindu", \textit{Dissent}, Fall 2003 issue <http://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/?article=451>)

\textsuperscript{55} In an extraordinary sequence detailed by the media, during the proceedings in the designated court at Mumbai in February 2007 after their conviction in the 1993 bomb blasts cases, some of the accused persons gave out letters to the media which started with a reminder of the Babri Masjid demolition and said that "in the riots Muslims were massacred not only by the Hindus but also by the policemen. Nothing happens to them. However Muslims are picked up and booked in false cases and made to rot in jail till they die. The anti-Muslim saffronised lobby is further becoming red by Muslim blood." The letters also ended with the appeal that they be given 'death sentences' if they were going to be 'termed terrorists'..." One accused Shanawaz Khan in his letter pleaded that he was a "true Indian" and his wife and two small children could not "live with the label of terrorist." (Report by Staff Reporter, Mumbai, in \textit{The Hindu}, February 24, 2007.)

\textsuperscript{56} Praveen Swami (\textit{Frontline}, Volume 23 No.19, Sept 23-Oct 6, 2006) gives a detailed account of the links that were established after the Bombay riots, between Dawood Ibrahim in Dubai and several key 'mafia' leaders in Bombay including Yaqub Memon which resulted in the plan to conduct terrorist strikes in Bombay. On January 9, 1993, the first consignment of ISI-supplied weapons landed on a beach on the Raigad coast. Meanwhile at least 27 members of the Bombay 'mafia' were taught in an ISI-training camp "to assemble explosives, use assault weapons and throw grenades".
Desai posed the rhetorical question "They say now—every Muslim is not a terrorist. But then how is it that every terrorist is a Muslim?"\(^{57}\)

The Hindu nationalist campaign was quick to internalise the propaganda potential in the March 12 bomb blasts and use it to its strategic advantage. Much before the CBI had begun piecing together the evidence, the Hindu nationalists had already reached the conclusion that it was the ISI which in concert with Indian Muslim terrorists had done the deed. Immediately after the bomb blasts, L.K Advani, then the Leader of the Opposition, was quick to distance the blasts from the context of the Babri demolition. "The needle of suspicion clearly points to the ISI. This is not a communal problem but an international one... if I were to put it bluntly, I would like to emphasise that this is not a Hindu-Muslim problem but an Indo-Pak problem."\(^{58}\) After visiting the devastated sites, Advani reasserted at a press conference the next day, that while he did see "Hindu-Muslim overtones", he did not see the assault as a retribution for the demolition of the Babri mosque. "I suspect the Inter Services Intelligence of Pakistan", he said.\(^{59}\) By March 22, Advani was more assertive in his rejection of a linkage between the Babri demolition and the bomb blasts of Bombay and Calcutta. He was quoted as saying that any suggestion that these blasts "had something to do with the Ayodhya issue would amount to legitimising the outrageous act of terrorism."\(^{60}\) What this indicated was that the Hindu nationalist forces had now recognised that a new script would have to be written to factor in the phenomenon of terrorism as a response to communal conflict but not allow the perception that terrorism was only another link in a chain of inter-community violence.

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57 Desai, interview by the author.
The *Organiser*, in an editorial titled 'Devil's Dance', shortly after the blasts set out a perspective that contained several invidious allusions to the presumed Pakistan-Indian Muslim connection. It said:

...When a series of bomb blasts rocked Bombay on Friday, the 12th March, people of the metropolis were stunned not so much by the blasts as by the audacity of the powers bent on destabilising India...

...Sometime back when the prime city of Mumbai was up in flames and the devil in form of communal frenzy split the city into communal groups perpetrating the worst carnage, the ruling elite was busy settling scores with one another...A discredited and demoralised police force was curtly told not to exceed their brief and they were only too willing to hold themselves back even going to the extent of negligence of duty. This was a godsend and a situation which the agent provocateurs were eagerly waiting for. The whole destabilisation conspiracy was elaborately hatched and executed.

All this has left a badly-bruised India which became the target of terrorists and separatists of every hue...

..Today we have millions of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis in every major town and city of the country, sitting pretty in their shops, below the bridges, in their madrasas and innumerable mazars that dot the major highways of the country. The whole country can be blown up in a matter of minutes. But talk of it and you are branded a communalist and anti-Muslim. Only the other day more than 44 bombs were found in a burial ground (*kabristan*) close to the national highway in Ayodhya.

...It is clear as daylight, if only one would care to see that Pakistan is at war with India. The invasion is no longer silent: it is deafening, devastating and decimating. It is right in the heart of towns and cities...⁶¹

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This editorial has been quoted at length here to indicate the emerging contours of the new majoritarian paradigm. There are several elements worth noting here since these came to constitute a core discourse that would represent the underpinning of Hindutva's political strategies of mobilisation and polarisation henceforth. First was the categorical refusal to link the communal riots in Bombay to the Babri demolition, thereby suggesting that Muslim terrorism was *sui generis* and unrelated to acts of provocation by the majority community. The second was the exoneration of the police force, which by all eyewitness accounts, had not been the helpless spectators as was suggested, but were often active participants in the carnage directed at the minority community. The third and most politically consequential point was the unsubstantiated assertion that Pakistanis and Bangladeshis lurked in every corner of India, waiting to blow up the country. This implied that Indian Muslims were cooperating with these sinister designs. Such imagery was certain to have had the impact of heightening the insecurities of the majority community, in a political context strained by the recent catastrophic events—-the Babri demolition and its aftermath of nationwide riots and the bomb blasts in Bombay. Another editorial in *Organiser* a few weeks later made clear that such an effect was intended. Posing the question "What ails the Muslim?", the RSS weekly made it plain that the Hindutva strategy was to pin the responsibility for the new strains on national security, on the Muslim community. "Major events in the past few months have set the common man thinking. Who is responsible for Partition of the Motherland? In spite of his best efforts if the average Muslim finds himself isolated how can the VHP or the RSS be held responsible for it? In spite of repeated bans and a virtual witch-hunt if the Hindu social and cultural organisations continue to grow and flourish, it is plainly because they are in tune with the nationalist current and in live contact with the deep sense of unity and oneness that runs through the blood of every citizen of Bharat. A large and self-
conscious section of the Muslim community has failed to assimilate with the national mainstream running uninterrupted for ages..."62

The discourse of the Shiv Sena, the VHP and the Bajrang Dal did not mince words in describing what they publicly claimed was the next phase of Muslim aggression. The imagery that was put out by the Sena, particularly its leader Bal Thackeray, contained strong elements of historical antagonism, majoritarian assertion and Hindu chauvinism. Some of this narrative can be distilled from the interview of Bal Thackeray for this study. Interestingly, Thackeray’s exposition managed to uphold the traditional emphasis on linguistic identity while staking a claim for a united Hindu identity. If not for the presence of the enemy, Muslim terrorism, this seeming contradiction between individual linguistic-cultural identities and the united Hindu identity would not appear to be resolved. Here below are relevant excerpts from Thackeray’s interview explaining the emergence of a united Hindu response to Muslim terrorism, for which he took the credit:

...Fortunately or unfortunately, we have linguistic states...this is to preserve the culture of each state...we have these walls in between which we started treating as if it is our personal property. Because of these linguistic states, the one country Hindustan is dying. Who is there for the country? A time was there when there was a *trishul* called Lal (Lajpat Rai of Punjab), Bal (Bal Gangadhar Tilak of Maharashtra) and Pal (Bipan Chandra Pal of Bengal). This was the *trishul* of our freedom. They all fought together and delivered that *azaadi* (freedom) to you. I was thinking, yes, in Maharashtra, I am a Maharashtrian and I am proud of that. In Gujarat everyone must be a Gujarati, they have to be proud of that and in Punjab and so on. But the question is--after seeing the increase in terrorism, Pakistani terrorism in India, they have got lots of branches like SIMI (Students Islamic Movement of India)...the ISI is their main body...they have a wonderful terrorism network...we don’t have such a network.

Then I saw that Maharashtra alone cannot fight Islam. The Islamic tendency in the Muslim blood is growing and growing very fast and Maharashtra alone cannot fight, neither Punjab can fight alone nor Bengalis. nor can other States do it alone. Then who is to face the challenge?... So unless and until we abort this linguistic state partition, unless we are united, only that 'French fist' will give a blow to Islam, otherwise not. So how to do it? Do we have any miraculous remedy to unite all these people together? I found one word and that is 'Hindu'. So only the word 'Hindu' can play that miracle. I have given a power.. I have said.. 'come on, let's unite as Hindus!'.. And it is working. 63

Thackeray rejected this researcher's suggestion that the March 1993 bomb blasts was a retaliation for the demolition of the Babri Masjid and reflecting one episode in a vicious circle of majority and minority communalism. The Shiv Sena chief's response was--

Babri Masjid was not a beginning. They were doing all this mischief even before. The main issue is Kashmir. They (Pakistan) captured a very huge chunk of our land long before when Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was alive. Our army could have won it back in no time but Nehru ordered them to stop. This allowed Pakistan to occupy that territory...They started sending terrorists to the Kashmir Valley and lots of atrocities began taking place....

When the Babri Masjid was demolished, I ask you, how far is that Babri Masjid and where is Mumbai? Muslims living in Mumbai had nothing to do with that territory. It was in Uttar Pradesh. Then why did they start rioting in Mumbai? The riots showed their spirit. They always choose one day, Friday, their day of namaaz when they gather together in large numbers. After having their namaaz in mosques in Mumbai, they gave a call for action and while dispersing after their namaaz, they began rioting and attacking Hindu homes and


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properties. I then thought, 'this is not the time to sit quiet or sit pretty.. we must move and we should also show them our muscle power as Hindus'. And we did. My Shiv Sainiks came right out on the streets and retaliated vehemently and absolutely. And they (Muslims) ran back. That is usually their tendency. They just pressurise you to see how soft or strong you are. If you are soft, they will just crush you. And if they feel or they know that you are very hard, they will withdraw. So we have shown our toughness, our muscle power. That was stopped there. All of a sudden on March 12 there were bomb blasts. Those were the worst bomb blasts... Also, so many people were killed in Radhabai Chawl in Jogeshwari. Earning members of families, the menfolk had gone out on their work; only women and children were inside their homes. They were locked inside and burnt alive...after these atrocities, one cannot just sit pretty at home. We cannot!

Anyway the bombs did their jobs and we also did our duty. This is not the beginning. It was there right from Kashmir actually.64

Thackeray went on to claim that as a result of the appeasement of Muslims "...we Hindus feel as if we are living in Pakistan and not Hindustan...hence I have to fight Muslim terrorism. That's my yeoman duty for my country Hindustan." Asked why if indeed Muslims were being "appeased" as was being asserted, why should they feel the need to resort to terrorism to achieve their ends, Thackeray's reply was--"They have a different dream actually. They want to capture Hindustan and make it another Muslim nation. That's their dream. That's why even if you do anything for them, even sacrifice yourself, they will not be satisfied.. it's a sort of hysteria...they have got that in their blood against Hindus and Hindustan."65

64 Thackeray, interview by the author.
65 Thackeray, interview.
Indicating that Hindu nationalists were mindful of the necessity of legitimating their political actions in a parliamentary democracy and that they could not risk being marginalised again as they were in the '60s and '70s, there was an eagerness on the part of the leading interlocutors of Hindutva to assert that these terrorist acts were independent of the context of the Babri demolition. Invariably all those interviewed for this study rejected this researcher's suggestion that terrorism reflected an escalated response to events such as the Babri mosque demolition. As excerpts from the interviews quoted below indicate, there were instead emphatic assertions that the phenomenon of 'Islamic terrorism' was *sui generis*. Former BJP leader and RSS ideologue, Govindacharya disagreed that terrorism was a consequence of the Babri demolition. "This is an international phenomenon", he said, "it is nothing but an extension or spill-over effect of Islam into the geographical territory of India also." Govindacharya also asserted that "Islamic terrorism" was "mainly focused on Jammu and Kashmir" where there were "pogroms against the Hindus" and an "exodus of Hindus on a large-scale in the '80s itself" because "Kashmiri Hindus were being targeted just because they were Hindus."

Another RSS ideologue and former editor of its Hindi weekly *Panchajanya*, Devendra Swarup asserted that terrorism reared its head in the context of Kashmir in the 1990s and claimed that the Hindu nationalist attention to the "problem of Islamic terrorism" stemmed from concern over the security situation in Kashmir. It was "because in 1990, Islamic terrorism pushed four lakh Kashmiris out of their homeland and made them refugees in their own

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66 Govindacharya, interview by author.
67 Govindacharya, interview.
independent country.\textsuperscript{68} When it was suggested to him that terrorism reflected the retaliatory anger of a fundamentalist section of a minority under siege, Swarup insisted that Islamic terrorism was a "worldwide phenomenon that cannot be isolated." Why was it that there were "bomb blasts in other countries? In Algeria, in Chad...that conflict was also a Muslim-Christian conflict. Why are there bomb blasts in Thailand?" \textsuperscript{69}

Swarup also reiterated the Hindu nationalist argument that Muslims were intrinsically hostile to 'Hindu' India. "We should be clear in our minds that during the last thirteen hundred years since the coming of Islam to India in the 8th century AD and until today, the Muslim mind has been fed upon what I would call anti-Hindu sentiment. Why? You see, this was the only country where the Muslims could not sweep away the ancient civilisation, could not destroy the ancient culture... all the Muslim reform movements during medieval times were aiming at weeding out whatever Hindu influences or traditional influences there were..." \textsuperscript{70}

The Bajrang Dal's Vinay Katiyar echoed the same theme in his interview for this study:

I would say that even today, the Muslim invasion that began with Mohammed bin Qasim in 712 AD is still continuing...The ideology that carried Qasim to India is still present although its external appearance may have changed. His followers, even today, continue to commit aggression upon Hindus. Even today Muslims living in India have not given up the dream of bin Qasim to enslave Hindus and convert India into an Islamic land. Muslims even today think of themselves as rulers and Hindus as slaves. This is the reason that led to the Partition of this country...there are preparations afoot for yet another partition. For example there are sinister plans to create a Muslim corridor from Pakistan to Bangladesh running through India. This has

\textsuperscript{68} Devendra Swarup, interview by the author, December 25, 2006.
\textsuperscript{69} Swarup, interview.
\textsuperscript{70} Swarup, interview.
almost happened. Parts of India like Kashmir, UP-Nepal border, Bihar and of course our borders with Bangladesh are victims of Islamic infiltration. Compounding the problem is our present political set-up which is bothered only about capturing minority vote-banks and safeguarding their chairs...these parties dish out sops to Muslims purely on the basis of their religion. Appeasement has directly resulted in a rise in terrorism.\footnote{Katiyar, interview by author.}

Asked what was the need for Muslims to turn to terrorism to achieve their ends if indeed they were being "appeased" in the form of jobs and educational facilities, Katiyar's reply was "I have no problem if you give jobs or better educational facilities to Muslims. But the problem lies in providing political protection and patronage to fanatic Muslims who have infiltrated with the sole purpose of creating terror and taking over the country. For example, no tough action is taken against terrorists crossing the borders from Pakistan and sneaking into India. They take shelter with Indian Muslim families who enjoy patronage of certain political parties who shield such anti-national elements...the Samajwadi party and the Congress protect the SIMI." Katiyar also expressed his view that "a majority of Indian Muslims have affection towards Pakistan." It was for this reason that "terrorists coming from Pakistan can easily find shelter in the homes of Indian Muslims." This was the reason terrorism could not be rooted out. "The day Indian Muslims decide that they will not henceforth provide shelter to any Muslim terrorist from Pakistan or Bangladesh, terrorism in this country will cease."\footnote{Katiyar, interview.}

The allegation of a Indian Muslim-Pakistan connection was a critical component of the Hindutva discourse, requiring as it did, the legitimation of its majoritarian stance. It enabled the Hindu nationalists to de-link the phenomenon of terrorism from the overall context of the Hindu majoritarian
aggression. It was also helpful in the validation of the cultural nationalist demand that Hindu 'prior antiquity' be acknowledged in an assertion that Muslims were essentially 'invaders' who had barged into the subcontinent, seeking to displace Hindus in their own 'natural' country. With this set of propositions as a base, the Hindu nationalist campaign began projecting the theme that Muslims had now taken to terrorism to escalate the pressure in their perennial quest for hegemony of the Indian nation, a quest that had not been abandoned with Partition. The interview of the former VHP president, Vishnu Hari Dalmia reflected this perspective. Echoing a favourite Sangh adage that "unfortunately, all the terrorists happen to be Muslims," he went on to assert that this was the case because "they are sponsored by the ISI of Pakistan and Pakistan wants to de-stabilise India and make India an Islamic state."73 He went on to argue: "Hindus are more than 80 per cent in this country. Muslims have their own country. There was a choice whether to go there or not to go. A large number of them decided not to go. But then why did they not go? No one stopped them. But then why should Hindus not have their own Hindu state? They have got their own Islamic state in Pakistan and Bangladesh. What's wrong then if the Hindus want a Hindu state in India?" When this researcher suggested that the national movement which had ultimately brought about independence had a heterogeneous base, and that the Constitution had committed India to a secular state, thereby enabling Muslims to stay on, Dalmia's response was "No, they stayed back because they wanted to Islamise India." It was "Pakistan's design" that was "really working". The terrorist organisations, he said, had openly stated that their objective was to "Islamise India." Kashmir was only a "springboard."74

73 Dalmia, interview by author.
74 Dalmia, interview.
The Hindutva campaign took recourse to simple but catchy sloganeering to accentuate their sinister portrayal of the Muslim community. Threatening imagery was also summoned which would be certain to create a sense of vulnerability not only among the majority community but in the Indian public at large, by suggesting that a sinister encirclement of India by Pakistan was taking place with the help of Indian Muslims, with the aim of breaking up the Indian Union. Shiv Sena leader, Subhash Desai, in his interview with this researcher sketched this dire scenario:

History shows that whenever there is a weakening of Hindu forces or Hindu population, with the fear of death, with onslaught, with invasions, with the attacks of terrorists, those areas were cut off from India in the past. Like Pakistan, like Bangladesh, and now Kashmir...almost all the Hindus, the Kashmiri Pandits were ousted... their lives are miserable, they are staying on the footpaths of big cities like Delhi, Goa and Mumbai. They were sons of the soil of Kashmir but they have been driven out because this larger population of Muslims with the help of terrorists have been able to do this. So it is our duty to protect this country and not allow terrorism to grow here, to spread here... At the same time, there should be a check on the Muslim population because now in states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, more and more districts are becoming highly populated by Muslims... More districts now have Muslim majority. So there is a threat that these districts may not remain a part of India.

The Hindutva leaders embarked on a calculated strategy of raising issues like what they called the Muslim community's "demographic aggression" by which they claimed that Indian Muslims were encouraging infiltration from

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75 Many of the VHP and Shiv Sena leaders interviewed for this study quoted the same anti-Muslim adage:"Hans ke iye Pakistan, lad ke lenge Hindustan" (We got Pakistan, laughing, we will get Hindustan, fighting). This adage was repeatedly cited by the Hindutva leaders to make the point that the territorial/political ambitions of Muslims would not be sated till they 'conquered' all of India. Subhash Desai of the Shiv Sena asserted in his interview to this author, "This is their philosophy and programme. Hindustan is a soft target." 76 Desai, interview by the author.
Bangladesh in order to swell their numbers\textsuperscript{77}, while also publicly expressing strong apprehension that Pakistan's ISI was building a network of support bases within India taking the help of Indian Muslims and the secular parties like the Congress and Mulayam Singh Yadav's Samajwadi party, formed in 1992. Part of this strategy was to project in the public domain a threatening scenario depicting the emergence of a sinister nexus between Pakistan's ISI, Muslim terrorists, "appeasementist" state administrations and a quietly collusive Muslim community.

An article in a March 1994 issue of \textit{Organiser}, titled "ISI Network in Uttar Pradesh" distils this perspective--

While Mulayam Singh is busy managing his vote-bank, Pakistan builds....

...A terrorist behind every tree in Terai. This is the sinister game-plan of Pakistan's intelligence agency, Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) which is out to build a solid base in the northern border areas of Uttar Pradesh.

...The dense Terai forest is a godsend and offers safe shelter to the terrorists in UP.

...The political power crisis in Uttar Pradesh and the Muslim appeasement policy of Mulayam Singh Yadav is also considered to be yet another contributory factor to the spread of ISI's tentacles in UP.

...Some Kashmiri Muslims, the so-called refugees who have migrated from Kashmir Valley due to the fear of terrorists now live in different parts of Saharanpur district...They are also said to be involved in the activities of the ISI. In return for their help ISI activists pay them handsomely. With the help of some Muslim leaders of Saharanpur, ISI activists help

\textsuperscript{77} The issue of Bangladeshi infiltration was a concern voiced particularly by Shiv Sena leaders in their interviews with the author. Thackeray alleged that Indian Muslims wanted to increase their population and hence they provided shelter for terrorists. "They want to make this country an Islamic country", he said. Calling the Bangladeshi influx as an instance of "demographic aggression", Sanjay Raut charged that "the Communist Government in West Bengal and the Central Government have miserably failed" to stop this "disguised aggression."
them obtain ration-cards and get their names registered in the voters list.

...The ominous ISI-Kashmiri-Punjab terrorist nexus is a recent one. A student organisation having a base in almost 80 per cent of colleges is being used by the ISI.

...In spite of the fact that many Muslim youth of UP are involved in activities of Pakistan's ISI, even after knowing their identity, Mulayam Singh Yadav is not taking any action against them due to his fear of their wrath and the sure loss of his vote bank...78

A concomitant of the Hindutva focus on 'Muslim terrorism' after the Bombay bomb blasts was its assertion that Pakistan's subversive designs were at work behind terrorism in India. The bomb explosions in Bombay in 1993 and Coimbatore in 1998 in which Pakistan's ISI was alleged to be a major instigator, were cited by Hindutva spokespersons as proof of this collaboration, designed to weaken India by targeting its economy. Manohar Joshi, the former Shiv Sena Chief Minister of Maharashtra, in his interview for this study, asserted that Bombay was targeted by the ISI "only because Mumbai is the commercial capital of the country".79 He asserted that terrorists sponsored by Pakistan in collusion with "some Indian Muslims" had perpetrated the blasts. Joshi also maintained that while "poor Hindus", who were often even "poorer than the Muslims" did not resort to terrorism, "Muslims go to terrorism as they are misguided by the Pakistani terrorists who come to our country." He also blamed the "madrasa" preachings for this orientation. "For Muslims, religion is first and nation, second."80

The next event to feed into this majoritarianist narrative laying emphasis on the stereotype of the 'colluding Indian Muslim', receptive to Pakistani

79 Joshi, interview by author.
80 Joshi, interview.
hegemonic designs, was the tragedy that occurred in Coimbatore on February 14, 1998, when a series of explosions struck the city. The series of bomb blasts, the first, barely 100 meters away from the site of an election meeting due to be addressed by the then BJP president, L.K Advani, was blamed on Muslim fundamentalist groups, Al-Umma and the Jihad Committee. The Coimbatore multiple blasts occurred within three months of the killings of 18 Muslims in a brutal pogrom launched by a section of the Tamil Nadu police in concert with Hindu militants, in reprisal for the killing of a police constable allegedly by Muslim youths. The Coimbatore tragedy unfolded in a pattern similar to the 1993 episode in Bombay. Hindutva organisations had begun to be politically active in Coimbatore triggering a deadly response from Muslim fundamentalist groups like the Al-Umma which had its base in Kottaimedu, a predominantly Muslim area in Coimbatore. As in the case of Bombay in 1993, where the serial explosions had followed the major communal riots of December 1992, the brunt of which had been borne by Muslims, the Coimbatore explosions followed a major communal conflict that took place between November and December 1997, which had resulted in killings and destruction of property, much of which had belonged to the Muslim community.

Yet just as had happened in the case of the Bombay riots and the consequent serial explosions, the Hindutva campaigners chose to treat the Coimbatore tragedy as an event occurring outside the framework of communal violence and reprisal. Once again, Pakistan-sponsored terrorism was held responsible for the Coimbatore blasts. It was evident that as the Hindutva campaigners stepped up their rhetorical attacks on Pakistan and targeted Muslims as "fifth columnists", the larger question of the role of the worsening inter-communal conflict was being side-stepped. Graphic accounts were

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82 All these details are taken from T.S Subramanian's report from Coimbatore, quoted above.
provided by Hindutva leaders, particularly from Coimbatore, of the alleged nexus between Pakistan's ISI and Indian Muslims, which was said to have brought forth this terrorist attack. The Organiser was quick to label this as an instance of collaboration between Indian Muslims acting as a "fifth column" and Pakistan. In an editorial titled "Combating the fifth column", the RSS weekly also blamed the DMK Government in Tamil Nadu for its laxity in combating terrorism. "The fact is that Tamil Nadu is virtually sitting on a volcano while the Government is not bothered much about the activities of the criminals, the subversives and the enemy agents in the State. The people of Tamil Nadu are fed up with the present Government's kid-glove attitude towards hard-core Islamic terrorists working in tandem with the ISI of Pakistan...The State Government's apathy has helped these outfits in spreading their tentacles further and wider into other States...Terrorist activities are no longer isolated incidents. They have become a proxy war sponsored by forces inimical to India's interest."83

The former Tamil Nadu state president of the BJP, CP Radhakrishnan, interviewed for this study asserted that "Pakistan wants to destroy all the economic centres of India. So they have chosen Mumbai, they have chosen Surat because it is a textile centre...then they have selected Coimbatore....and Coimbatore was easily reachable for the Keralite Malabar Islamic fundamentalists."84 He also pointed to Kottaimedu and Karambukadai, two areas in Coimbatore said to have large Muslim concentrations, and maintained that the Muslims of these areas had offered support to the terrorists. "There was collaboration between the local population and the terrorists...no doubt about it.. otherwise how can people move with weapons, with blasting materials?"85 A

85 Radhakrishnan, interview by the author.
similar narrative was given by SV Sridharan, a prominent voice in the Hindutva discourse, being a former leader of the Hindu Munnani and now active in the Hindu Makkal Katchi (HMK), in his interview for this study. Sridharan recalled that he had narrowly escaped the bomb explosion in the RSS office in Chennai in August 1993. Asserting that "ISI operatives" were active in Coimbatore, he maintained that without the help of "local Muslims", they could not function so effectively. In a graphic account, highlighting the partisan attitude of the State police, Sridharan claimed that because of a network of family connections, many Pakistanis had entered Coimbatore and merged with the local population, making it difficult for the police to identify and root them out.86 Asked for the proof of his assertion, Sridharan offered this analysis—

...There is plenty of proof. One S. Bilal Hajia, a Muslim leader who runs a well-known Irani hotel in Coimbatore city has married off his daughter in Pakistan...many such marriages have taken place and so many local Muslims have established family alliances in Pakistan. Based on this, many Muslims acquire visas, come to India, stay here and don't go back...60 people came from Pakistan on the pretext of visiting their relatives. Only 20 went back and 40 stayed here...the police wanted to find where these people were...

...As far as terrorism is concerned, it has sprung up in places where it did not exist earlier. Starting from Kashmir, it has spread to Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Madras and now Coimbatore and even in small villages too like Saliamangalam in Thanjavur district, about 8 kms from Thanjavur...it is a small village. About fifty per cent of the population there is Muslim. Police seized 20 grenade bombs and 8 AK-47s, 6 kg of RDX from such a small village...

..The father of Islamic terror is Pakistan...the one who targeted me was Imam Ali who was murdered in Bangalore.. he was trained in Pakistan...Bilal Hajia is the father of Islamic terrorism in Coimbatore, he has connections with Pakistan

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and because of him, Islamic terrorism has come to Coimbatore. The local Muslims have no loyalty to India, for them it is only Pakistan...

The Jamaat in Kottaimedu is very powerful... after any attack or murder incident or bomb blasts, they go straight back to the Jamaat... no police officer will dare to step into that Jamaat till now... it is the case in both Kottaimedu and Karumbukadai... the main accused (in the 1998 bomb blasts case)... Ansari and Basha both belonged to these areas. Every Muslim is under the Jamaat and every Jamaat has links with Pakistan... Many religious clashes have taken place but till date not a single leader from these Jamaats has come forward to condemn these incidents or even express regret for it. Advani openly apologised for the Ayodhya incident but no Muslim leader has ever apologised for the blasts at the RSS and the Hindu Munnani offices or for the Coimbatore blasts... so every Jamaat is controlled by Muslim terrorists.  

The Coimbatore blasts offered the Hindutva campaigners an opening to argue that Islamic terrorism had now become a nation-wide threat. The spectre of a deadly nexus between Pakistan and the Indian Muslim community threatening national security and indeed India's nationhood was an idea now in active circulation in the political discourse. In practice, this was a tactic to isolate the Muslim community by creating a fear in the public mind that there was indeed an active association of the community with terrorism, with Muslims being perceived generally as empathetic to Pakistan's hegemonic ambitions. Given that large numbers of India's middle-class citizens had identified strongly with the project of India's globalisation, the suggestion by Hindutva extremists that Pakistan, with the help of Indian Muslims was targeting the centres of India's emerging prosperity was bound to accentuate the suspicion and insecurity that now confronted Muslims. Thereafter, it was apparent that the Hindu majoritarian campaign recognised that in the idea of terrorism, it had

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87 Sridharan, interview by the author.
found a potent argument that could effectively isolate the Muslim community while projecting the Hindu majority as the only true stakeholders in the Indian nation. The Hindutva campaigners began arguing that by resorting to terrorism, Muslims and their alleged patron Pakistan were trying to regain control of a situation fast slipping out of their hands as India was moving towards becoming a global power.

The Shiv Sena's Subhash Desai argued in his interview for this study that Muslims wanted "quick results and now quick control of the country." He went on to offer his reasoning that "they know that India is progressing fast...there are signs that India can become a superpower in the world...they don't like it. They want to cut India into pieces...that is one reason...at the same time, terrorists want to establish their control...think, if we were not there to oppose them, what will they do? They will establish their kingdom, however small and it will grow...the country cannot tolerate this." 88 Desai's statement indicates that the effort of the Hindutva campaigners was to strategically position Hindutva as representing a platform that encapsulated a strong defence of the national interest, not only in terms of security but also its emerging global ambitions. It was an ambitious project to secure the approval of the Hindu middle classes for the larger design of reorienting India's nationhood in favour of a stronger Hindu identity.

The Hindu nationalist discourse, as it had established itself at the end of the'90s had also managed to create powerful linkages between the idea of pseudo-secularism, appeasement and terrorism, enabling it to showcase its argument that Hindu cultural nationalism could be the only enduring zeitgeist of the Indian nation. As has been seen, the polarising force of caste politics which had pushed to the foreground upper-caste resentment over the Mandal recommendations had aided the emergence of the BJP as a front for upper-caste

88 Desai, interview by the author.
and middle class interests. With this background of intensified polarisation, the BJP's critiques of secularism as 'pseudo-secularism' and 'minority appeasement' found new constituencies in the Hindu middle classes. This enabled the party to position itself as a key interlocutor in the political debate of the '90s, arguing for a different national vision, that of cultural nationalism as opposed to what was projected as 'discredited' civic nationalism. The way was also paved for a campaign against Muslims, casting them as the beneficiaries of distortions in the practice of secularism, by using the Ayodhya issue as a potent metaphor for mobilisation. With "Muslim terrorism" being projected as an independent phenomenon, unrelated to the larger context of majoritarian aggression, it became easier for the Hindu nationalist campaign to canvass the stereotype of Indian Muslims as being subversive and anti-national, colluding with the primary "enemy" of the Indian state--Pakistan. This sustained campaign that involved the invocation of imagery and concepts such as "jihad" and "Ummah" enabled the Hindutva campaigners to highlight a picture of a "denationalised" Muslim community, at loggerheads with the larger national purpose. Not only did this portrayal help de-sensitise large sections of the Hindu majority community to the implied violence in the narrative of Muslim perfidy, but it also provided ideological and political cover for a deadlier majoritarian assault on the minorities in the Gujarat pogrom of 2002. What effect these developments had on the ability of the Hindu nationalist campaign to realize its strategic goals of installing Hindu cultural nationalism as the national ethos, is the focus of the next chapter.

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