

JANUARY 2002

COMMUNALISM in OPERATION

Present Situation Report –2001-2002

This report, prepared by Sabrang Communications & Publishing Private Limited contemporises the issues raised by **Communalism-- A Backgrounder** in the context of specific related developments. It looks closely at the last calendar year while detailing incidents from 1998 onwards, related to attacks on minorities, on an annual basis.¹ It locates the whole question of the state and rights of the religious minorities and Dalits. It addresses policy issues that have arisen thanks to the acute influence and domination on the present National democratic Alliance by the Hindu rightwing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) that has been responsible for the misuse of religion and religious symbols for political ends.

It deals with the issue in several parts. The specific issues and questions that affect minority-majority relations, especially related to a post-September 11, 2001 India and Sub-Continent given the declaration of war and voices of hysteria on many sides of the divide. We will be shortly sending a special report on the analysis of the liberal voice from within the Muslim community.

One aspect of an issue that arose out of the fallout of Sept 11 (but in fact related to events like 'cross-border terrorism' before that) is the imposition of ban on Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) by the government of India on grounds that it was linked with cross-border terrorist outfits; as also it's alleged links with pan-Islamic outfits. The spill over of the post-WTC attacks and the ban on SIMI within India has already spilt into inter-religious (communal tensions) in Hubli (Karnataka), Mangle, Shirala and Malegaon (Maharashtra --there was brutal police firing in Malegaon which will form the substantial bit of the second report), Gujarat and Rajasthan—all regions in western and southern India.

This report is accompanied by a detailed backgrounder on provisions within Indian law on the question of minority rights; that is statutory protection guaranteed to every citizen irrespective of religion, gender, caste and creed.²

The report deals with the attacks on minorities, region-wise and locates these within the question of

- The Wider Context of Inter-Community Relations in India. This question needs to be located within the context of developments both *within* India, the Indian subcontinent and internationally. Within India, the dominance politically of a party with clearcut allegiance to a *narrow* and limited notion of Indian nationhood has impacted sharply on developments in public discourse, rank physical and violent provocations against religious minorities and attempts to alter school curriculae.
- The Attack on WTC on September 11 itself made an impact given the balance of Indian subcontinent and the demography and history. Followed by the ban

¹ Annexure List, **The Blood Trail-1998, The Bloody Trail-1999, The Bloody Trail-2000**

² Indian Law on the Issue of Right to Life, Equality and Protection before the Law, annexed here

- on Students Islamic Movement of India, selectively³, while violent activities of unlawful outfits like the Bajrang Dal and the VHP continue unchecked achieve two results. They tell and remind the minority that the present government is not concerned about parity or non-discrimination; it views 'Hindu outfits and Hindu crimes' differently from 'Islamic ones'. At the ground level it achieves sharp and dangerous polarizations between communities.⁴
- The above incidents need to be understood in the context of the systematic militarisation of Indian civil society by right wing extremist groups cynically manipulating religion and religious symbols for political ends *and* the renewed attempts to revive the movement for the construction of a temple at Ayodhya, a town in northern India—the new date set for the act of building a temple on the site of a demolished mosque is March 12, 2002.⁵ This movement in the mid-eighties and early nineties had not only led to the demolition of a 400-year old mosque but the nationwide campaign had been accompanied by systematic hate speech and demonising of India's largest minority; in several instances resulting in widespread and targeted loss of life and destruction of properties.⁶
 - The present government controlled by the ideology of the RSS, a fascist organization with admiration for Hitler's cultural nationhood⁷ has launched clearcut attempts to change the basic framework of Indian education policy,⁸ of introduce non-creative and non-questioning history for future generations⁹ and actually *delete* portions of history textbooks authored by eminent and internally acclaimed historians like Romila Thapar, R.S.Sharma among others.¹⁰ These steps are the culmination of systematic efforts to 'take over' institutions like the Indian council for Historical Research and others by placing at their helm not educationists but persons belonging to the RSS worldview.¹¹

Two events, the attack allegedly by militants on the state legislature on October 1 and a similar one on a larger scale, on December 13, 2001 on Indian Parliament, have accelerated the anti-Islamic/Muslim hysteria. Along with September 11, they

³ The state governments of Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh had asked for a *simultaneous* ban on both the Bajrang Dal and the SIMI:

Times Of India, September 30, 01 'Bajrang Dal may be banned if proof is given: Maharashtra'

The Hindu, September 30, 01, Gehlot seeks ban on Bajrang Dal

The Deccan Herald, October 16, 2001, Ban on Bajrang if it crosses limits: Home Minister of Karnataka, Mallikharjuna Kharge said that if Bajrang Dal and other organisations were to threaten societal and national interests, they would be banned.

⁴ Statements of both home minister L.K.Advani and BJP President Venkiaiah Naidu, The Times Of India, September 30, 01 Advani rules out ban on Bajrang Dal; 3 October 2001

Times Of India, September 01, "No ban on RSS, Bajrang Dal: Mahajan: Union Communication and Information Technology Minister Pramod Mahajan said the government will not impose a ban on the RSS and the Bajrang Dal.

"These organisations do not indulge in anti-national activities and hence there is no question of imposing a ban on them, Mahajan told reporters after releasing a commemorative stamp on Mahatma Gandhi here.

⁵ VHP Pronouncements supported by the RSS and widely carried in the Indian media

⁶ **Citizens Tribunal on Ayodhya, 1993, RathYatra Retraced**, Teesta Setalvad, *Communalism Combat*, May 2001

⁷ **Marzia Casolari**, Economic and Political weekly, January 2000

⁸ **NCERT New Curriculum Framework on Value education**, December 2000

⁹ **Education In Values**, Teesta Setalvad, *Communalism Combat*, January 2000

¹⁰ Indian express clippings through November 2001, Sahmat-Sabrang Document *against saffronisation of Education*, August 2000

¹¹ Refer to **Communalism A Backgrounder** to understand the full implications of the ideological underpinnings of the RSS

provide the ideal opportunity for the community and religion bashing that these occasions have also offered other parts of the world. Within India the three incidents looked at together have amounted to a communalization of terrorists and terrorism, never mind the fact that 'terrorists' have not always worked on a religious identity alone.¹²

In fact, increasingly, a small but vocal section of the population, consisting of Opposition parties and civil liberties groups have been criticizing the Indian government strongly for *communalizing* the issue of terrorism; that is selectively applying it to only one religious community.¹³

Already the Indian part of the subcontinent was reeling under the impact of a narrow and fascist world view making attempts to grapple with and change the character of Indian democracy.¹⁴ Since the eighties attacks on the person and properties of religious minorities were accompanied by a blatantly partisan behaviour witnessed in the functioning of the Indian police force.¹⁵ Since the coming of the BJP driven by the RSS to power in 1998 these sharp biases have taken a more subtle and institutionalized form.¹⁶ Attacks on minorities have *not* ceased; in fact the Christian minority began to be attacked specifically and pointedly since 1998.¹⁷ Large scale destruction of property has accrued belonging to the Muslim minority; and the attacks especially in Gujarat and Rajasthan have resulted in deep polarizations within local communities.¹⁸

In the period between August-October 2001 that this report covers, not insignificant attacks on Christian religious persons and their institutions were witnessed in different parts of India. This trend in violence has been visible in India especially since January 1998. (There were stray brutal attacks from 1991 onwards and the brutal Bombay riots of 1992-1993 had the Shiv Sena displaying boards that read, "Aaj Kasai, Kal Isahi" (Today the barbers, tomorrow the Christians).¹⁹

These attacks were regionally widespread though the states of Gujarat, UP and Bihar saw the most brutal of them all. Madhya Pradesh as the locale of the brutal murder of Sister Rani Maria and the rape on the nuns in Jabua to which the Indian home minister, L.K. Advani had made the most callous reference, "Many of the rapists

¹² Look at *India Today, Jan 2002*, Osama Bin Laden –The Man Who Brought Terror issue

¹³ The Hindu, dated Oct 13, 2001 'Govt. giving communal twist to anti-terrorism campaign' carried a statement of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) that alleged that the Bharatiya Janata Party and the saffron brigade were prepared to sacrifice the unity and communal harmony of the country for partisan electoral gains and that the Hindu and Islamic fundamentalists were feeding on each other. It said the response of some Islamic fundamentalist organisations only added "fuel to the fire". Referring to the situation after the September 11 attacks in New York and Washington, the CPI(M) said the U.S. was seeking to utilise the worldwide legitimate anger against terrorism to strengthen its "hegemonic grip over the world and put in motion a more authoritarian domestic rule, where rights and freedoms are to be curtailed in the name of fighting terrorism". In an editorial comment in the latest issue of the party organ, People's Democracy, the party said a different type of "sinister agenda" was being furthered in India. It alleged that the RSS- led saffron brigade was making all efforts to channel the anti- terrorist sentiments among the people on communal lines.

¹⁴ Refer **Communalism A Backgrounder** prepared by Teesta Setalvad for Sabrang Communications

¹⁵ *Bombay Brutalised*, Business India, Teesta Setalvad, January 1993

¹⁶ *Communalism Combat, Welcome to Hindu Rashtra, October 1998*

¹⁷ Human Rights Watch, Attack on Christians, 1999-2000

¹⁸ *Communalism Combat, Welcome to Hindu Rashtra, October 1998*

¹⁹ Photograph carried in *The Sunday Observer*, Jan 1993 and Cover Story in Business India, January 1993

were Christians!"²⁰This background is necessary to understand the dynamics and treacherous thinking behind the assaults.

Muslims, the largest religious minority has been victimized in one fashion, the Christians in tactically a different way. Muslims psychologically and culturally have been made to bear the brunt of the guilt of the partition of the subcontinent (that in fact numerically reduced their strength in the Indian population from 25 per cent pre-Partition to 10-12 per cent now).²¹Every bout of inter-community violence resonates with this anger from the past with systematic rhetoric of the Hindu right wing attempting –and in the recent past, unfortunately succeeding to make a community ‘pay for what a section of it’s elite aided by the Hindu elite, aided by the British, of course, did—Partitioned the land.²² The entire movement to construct the Ram temple at Ayodhya that was accompanied by hate campaigns and violent bouts against the minorities from the late eighties into the early nineties of the last century was accompanied by this justificatory hate speech.²³‘Revenge for past wrongs’ straddled the centuries in the rhetoric of the Hindu right wing with history being distorted to show that the Mosque that was destroyed in full public view on December 6, 1992 was in fact built by Mughal Emperor Babur over the spoils of a temple (a fact disproved by independent historians) and hence it’s destruction in violation of the Indian Constitution and in contempt of the apex court, the Supreme Court of India, was justified.

The discourse peddled by the Hindu right wing in this period has cleverly collapsed manipulated historical discourse around the ‘Islamic invaders’ and subsequent more modern Islamic/Muslim behaviour in being ‘traitorous to the India (read Hindu) nation by betraying it and demanding it’s partition in the name of a homeland for Muslims.²⁴

The attack on Christians has concentrated significantly on violent assaults on Christian religious persons (priests and nuns) and on institutions run by them.²⁵ The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom in its 2001 report, directed its attention to India in the light of the disturbing increase in the past several years in severe violence against religious minorities in that country. The violence is especially troubling because it has coincided with the increase in political influence at the national, and in some places, the State level of the Sangh Parivar, a collection of exclusive Hindu nationalist groups of which the current ruling party, the Bharatiya Janata Party, or BJP, is a part," the Report of May 2001 said.²⁶One of the core aspects of the 2001 Report as it pertained to India was that while there was the acknowledgement of the country's religious diversity, there was also the call on the Bush administration to pressure the powers that be in India to come to terms with violence against members of religious minorities. Specifically, the Commission took

²⁰ Indian Home Minister Advani’s statements after five nuns were sexually assaulted in Jhabua, Madhya Pradesh, 1999

²¹ Slogans in processions that have led to outbreaks of violence, Bhiwandi-Bombay 1970, Ranchi 1979, Jabalpur 1971, Ahmedabad, 1969.

²² Slogans in processions that have led to outbreaks of violence, Bhiwandi-Bombay 1970, Ranchi 1979, Jabalpur 1971, Ahmedabad, 1969.

²³ *Rathyatra Retraced*, Teesta Setalvad, Communalism Combat, May 2001

²⁴ *Anatomy of a Confrontation*, Edited by S. Gopal, New Delhi 1992-1993

²⁵ US State Department Report, May 01, Human Rights Watch, 1999-2000

²⁶ *U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom-May 2001 Report*, released by Elliot Abrahams, it’s Chairperson

note of the fact that the violence against the Christian Community has increased dramatically in India since January 1998. "The U.S. Government should make clear its concern to the BJP- led Government that virulent nationalist rhetoric is fueling an atmosphere in which perpetrators believe they can attack religious minorities with impunity," the Commission said.²⁷

The discourse surrounding the attacks, and used as a justification of the violence is a discourse that links their activities to colonial Christianity and the missionary's impulse to convert the heathens.²⁸ The discourse deliberately obfuscates between the *motive of the proselytizer* and the impulse of the *proselytized*. In the case of the subcontinent, while not disregarding the iniquitous notions within the Church hierarchy and the worldview and mindset that wishes to convert others to their own faith, the work of the Christians, religious persons and institutions has taken them to working with the most marginalized of Indians. The sections of populations that they work with, educate and empower and provide health services too hail from those sections of the problems that are wittingly and unwittingly ignored by the social structures, and religious hierarchies within India—most notably the tribals and most deprived sections of the caste hierarchy—the Dalits (untouchables). The kind of discourse used to justify attacks on Christians has been a manipulated discourse that their sole motive remains one of conversion (Independent demographic figures show a declining rate of population growth among Christians in India) and a goading to 'Indianise their faith.'²⁹

In August 2001, there were half a dozen brutal attempts to terrorise Christians. Four of these took place in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh. "The period from mid-July 2001 to December 01 has seen an increase in the attempts by the Hindu extreme right, in particular the Vishwa Hindu parishad and the Bajrang Dal to target places of worship, businesses, homes of Muslims, Sikhs and Christians in Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh apart from Punjab."³⁰ Following the next two sections on Militarising of Indian society and the Post-WTC Indian subcontinent scenario, there is a region-wise breakup of attacks on minorities.

Militarisation of Indian Civil Society

Over the past three years, different wings of the Hindu right wing have proclaimed publicly that they are training their cadres in the use of arms.³¹ While at one level the statements proclaim that the training is in the use of air guns only, the threat of violence, and the rhetoric that accompanies these pronouncements portend ill for internal peace in India. Since August 01 even the pretence of using 'harmless airguns' has been given the go-by. The Bajrang Dal has through its distribution of

²⁷ *Ibid*

²⁸ *Conversions*, Teesta setalvad, *Communalism Combat*, January 2000

²⁹ RSS Leader Sudarshan declaring in June-July 2001 that Christians and Muslims both need to Indianise their faith: The Hindu (27 Oct 2001), Re-interpret your scriptures, Sudershan tells minorities:" The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh chief, Mr. K. S. Sudershan, today asked both Muslims and Christians to "re- interpret" their scriptures and change their leadership which had remained in the hands of "conflict-mongers". The history of Islam and Christianity was "soaked in blood" and this was because their leaders had opted for the "path of conflict," instead of paying attention to those verses in their scriptures which preached tolerance and goodwill. The RSS 'sarsanghchalak' was delivering his important Dussehra day address at Nagpur, viewed by lakhs of 'swayamsevaks' as the annual message spelling out the policies and attitudes of the RSS - parent organisation of the Bharatiya Janata Party, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the Bajrang Dal and a host of others.

³⁰ *The Deccan Herald*, a national daily published from Bangalore reporting on the trend

³¹ *The Hindu*, September 30, 01, Gehlot seeks ban on Bajrang Dal

trishul programmes, actually been systematically arming young men with knives that can stab and kill.

Communalism Combat had launched a nationwide campaign against the militarisation of Indian civil society that was supported by Parliamentarians of different political parties, leaders in business and governance.³² Annexed in support of this campaign addressed to the President of India, Shri K.R. Narayanan were a list of press clips in support of the initiative.³³

³² *Communalism Campaign*, July 2001

³³ June 29, 2001, Desi Mossad is getting ready at Bajrang Dal's Ayodhya camp

India Abroad News Service

AYODHYA, JUNE 29: "I, as a member of Bajrang Dal, swear in the name of Lord Hanuman to always remain prepared to protect my country, religion and culture," 150 young men, between 15 and 21 years of age, recite in unison. After practising target shooting with air guns at Karsevakpuram for the past one week, the group is attending the convocation function presided over by the national co-convenor of the Dal, Prakash Sharma. The training camp ended last evening amid loud chants of '*Jai Sriram*' and '*Jai Bajrangbali*'. "We are empowering a cadre of Hindus so that no one, not even the Prime Minister, should bow before the Pope to apologise for false attacks on Christians in India," Sharma told *The Indian Express*.

Asked what he did at the camp, an activist whispers, "I am from the secret service of Bajrang Dal. Israel's Mossad is my inspiration. I can't tell you more." Dal leaders claim this is not the first time that they were imparting arms training to their workers. "We are training them in handling firearms since 1996. Ayodhya is only one of the 25 such camps planned between May 10 (in Karnataka) and July 30 (at Guwahati),"

The camp at Karsevakpuram, which is being supervised by Sachan, is not the first to be conducted in Uttar Pradesh. "Similar Camps have been held in Varanasi, Mathura and Meerut. Some residents of Ayodhya suspect that the groups are clandestinely training their cadres to fire more sophisticated weapons.

June 19, 2001

Bajrang Dal held arms training camps in Bengal too

The Times of India

KOLKATA: While the country looked awe-struck at the recent Bajrang Dal camp in Lucknow where its activists were imparted arms training, two similar camps were silently organised in West Bengal recently where 114 activists of the Bajrang Dal and the Durga Vahini were also trained in the use of guns. The first camp was held at the Kamalpur High School in Chakdah in Nadia between May 26 and June 9. Fifty-two young men, aged between 15 and 25, were imparted training there. Apart from yoga, karate and the use of lathis, the Dal activists were trained to use rifles... The second camp, organised by the Durga Vahini, the women's wing of the VHP, was held at Kashimbazar in Murshidabad from May 30 to June 7. In all, 62 women participated in the camp where they obtained similar military training as their male counterparts. Admitting that the camps were indeed held, state general secretary of the VHP, Ajoy Kumar Nandi, said on Monday that such training camps were being regularly held in the state for the last 10 years.

June 13, 2001

Bajrang Dal activists take up arms, *The Times of India*

LUCKNOW: Guns boom periodically at Sarojini Nagar here. Bajrang Dal workers, about 100 of them, are being given firearms training. These sessions, according to Bajrang Dal and VHP leaders, are for galvanising the public for construction of the Ram temple.

"We are preparing these able-bodied persons to fight any eventuality. With the ISI spreading its tentacles, these people are being trained to challenge the anti-Hindu forces," said Ved Prakash Sachchan, joint convener of the state unit of the Bajrang Dal.

Majority of trainees camping in Lucknow for the last three days are students between 20 and 25. They have been drawn from 22 districts of Uttar Pradesh. Their instructor is Sardar Bhupendra Singh of Kanpur.

These camps, which have almost become a routine affair, were first held in Ayodhya last June. Women will be trained in firearms by the Durga Vahini, an offshoot of the VHP, in Kanpur from June 24. Meanwhile, the Bajrang Dal has chalked out an elaborate training programme for Hindu youth. In August, about 50,000 Bajrang Dal workers, drawn from all over the state, will be taught trishul warfare. "We have a target of enrolling over two lakh Hindus as members by the end of next June," says Sachchan.

September 29, 2000, Of guns and a Hindu 'rashtra', *The Times of India*

Over the past two years, major national dailies have frequently reported, with photographs, brazen attempts by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Bajrang Dal (BD) to form private Hindu armies. Arms training camps have been organised by them in different parts of the country, where young men and women are trained in the use of guns as well as *trishuls*, sword and other martial arts.³⁴

Under the Indian Constitution, private militias arming themselves represent a threat to law and order and the peace and tranquility that the State is bound to preserve. The Indian Arms Act, 1959 expressly prohibits the possession of arms by private parties without license. The only exception made is for security agencies. The possession of a license *before* a firearm is owned is a legal requirement. Such licenses are given or granted only if there is reasonable apprehension of aggression.

The Bombay Police Act is similarly stringent on the question of possession of arms by citizens. The police are empowered to demand production of a license (section 19 of the Arms Act), arrest persons conveying arms etc under suspicious circumstances (section 20), confiscation of arms etc on possession of unlicensed arms (section 20).

In the section on fundamental rights, the Indian Constitution guarantees the freedom of expression, faith, belief and worship (Article 25) and equality before the law (Article 14). Taken together, these articles of the Indian Constitution guarantee the Indian State's secular and democratic nature.

By their numerous statements and actions, the VHP, Bajrang Dal, RSS and the Shiv Sena are guilty of violating the Indian Constitution, the Arms Act and the Indian Penal Code. Are these criminal antecedents not ground enough to impel the Indian state into putting an immediate stop to these blatantly illegal and provocative camps, seizing the illegally held arms, and if necessary, arresting the chief agent provocateurs — the leaders of the Bajrang Dal, VHP and the Shiv Sena? So far, only the CPI (M) and the Congress have demanded a curb on these activities. Last year, through an ordinance enacted on January 21, 2000, the Left Front government in Kerala had imposed strict restrictions on the kind of martial training imparted to *shakha* goers at RSS shakhas all over the country. The ordinance had made compulsory any organisation that wants to give martial arts training, the acquisition of a license. It also empowers police to inspect such training centres.³⁵

SITAPUR: Rat-a-tat-tat. The deafening sound of gun shots disturbs the serene surroundings with uncanny regularity. Tracing the source through overgrown shrubs and grass, one comes across 15 men in the 22-30 age-group lying on their stomach with firearms in their hands. They are practising on different targets comprising chiefly glass bottles... Their dictum is simple: tooth for a tooth and eye for an eye. 'Hindu' power flows from the barrel of the gun for them. They are members of the newly-floated Hindu Rashtriya Mukti Army, an offshoot of the Shiv Sena, and are attending an arms training camp over the past 15 days at a destination about 90 km from the state capital... Says Jai Dev Verma, a Shiv Sainik and a participant at the camp: "The outfit is month-old and we are acting on directions of Bal Thackeray. Hindu pride has to be restored and arms training is a step in this direction."

April 2000, VHP, Bajrang Dal set up private army, *Communalism Combat*

INTERNATIONAL general secretary of the VHP stated at a press conference in Lucknow on March 26, 2000 that the VHP and BD have decided to set up private armies by deploying activists in the villages along the country's borders in the north, north-east, Punjab, Rajasthan and Gujarat. These volunteers of the *Prateyak Suraksha Samiti* (People's Defence Committee) will ostensibly help people in their fight against ISI-spawned terrorism. These volunteers were being trained in Brindaban (the same place that *kar sevaks* who demolished the Babri Masjid were trained).

The Union government – defence and home ministries — has reacted in alarm at this attempt to raise a private army. A defence ministry spokesman told a correspondent of *The Asian Age*: "Once a Hindu army is allowed to come up, what is there to stop a Muslim army from being raised. This has dangerous and sinister implications."

³⁴ Campaign in *Communalism Combat*, July 2001

³⁵ *Communalism Combat*, February 2000

In August 2001, alarmed at the fact that his state, Rajasthan in western India was being especially targeted by the extreme Hindu right wing, chief minister Ashok Gehlot made the following observations. This statement of Rajasthan chief minister, Ashok Gehlot is self-explanatory³⁶

"The language and tone of the proclamations made by Bajrang Dal in its public meetings sharply reflect the non-secular and fundamentalist nature of its ideology which will undoubtedly lead to disruption of peace and tranquility of our country. It is necessary that these measures are not one-sided and that an objective view is taken of the insidious activities of the Bajrang Dal which are equally dangerous." Referring to the "Trishul Diksha" programme of the Bajrang Dal, Gehlot said addressing the Prime Minister of India, Atal Behari Vajpayee in a letter on the issue. "This distribution had 'all the potential of creating a dangerous situation in the country.'" The trishuls (tridents) were sharp weapons measuring 10.16 cm which could kill but at the same time escape the provisions of Section 4/25 of the Arms Act, 1949, and other notifications. Offering to send a sample of the trishuls recently distributed in the State to Mr. Vajpayee for his personal examination, Mr. Gehlot said the trishuls were crafted to escape the provisions of the law but could be used as dangerous weapons against innocent people. Mr. Gehlot warned the Prime Minister that there was a major potential threat to the whole country in Bajrang Dal. "We have examples elsewhere in the world where the forces which encouraged terrorist groups have themselves had to face attacks from the same groups. If the Government is lax in dealing with organisations such as the Bajrang Dal, there may come a time when these very organisations will prove to be a threat and danger to your party, the BJP itself, and the whole country," he said.³⁷ Many sections of the Indian media have been reporting on this ominous trend.³⁸

Attack on WTC, Indian Parliament Ban on SIMI and the Indian Situation

There can be no more poignant and tragic illustration of the fragile and suspicion-driven relationships between communities in India *and* the shaky manner in which the state implements (or rather, does *not* implement), the principles of equity and non-discrimination than in the reactions and events following the attacks on the WTC and now, the bombings of innocents in Afghanistan.

The home minister, L.K. Advani seized the opportunity to impose a ban on the Student's Islamic Movement of India (SIMI), an outfit blamed by intelligence agencies of at least two prominent states in the country – Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh – for inciting communal hatreds, espousing undemocratic and

³⁶ *Ibid*

³⁷ *Ibid*

³⁸ *The Statesman*, dated Sept 9, 2001 documents the systematic arming of Indian civil society:

"Trishuls' given to Rajasthan youths with govt consent ... The state government has given permission to the VHP and Bajrang Dal to donate 'trishuls' (tridents) to youngsters during its 'Trishul Diksha' programme in public places of Bhilwara district which recently saw a spate of communal violence. Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Maharashtra—four states in India have seen an ominously similar pattern emerge in small towns and villages following the *trishul diksha* programmes and the *jalabhishek programmes* launched by the Bajrang Dal and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad since August 2001. Ostensibly arming civil society (read Hindus) in preparation for the programme to build the temple, crass and violent anti-minority rhetoric accompanies these programmes that results in direct and long-term damages to minority life and property. In this scenario, the WTC attack, the ban on the Students Islamic Movement of India by the Indian government and the subsequent bombing of Afghanistan has further hardened attitudes and provided one more issue for the Hindu right wing to stereotype and demonise the minority community with.

fundamentalist ideals and having direct links with some militant outfits fomenting terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir. However the chiefs of intelligence in both states were clear in also demanding a ban on the Bajrang Dal an outfit also responsible for creating terror and fomenting violence.³⁹ Needless to say the unilateral action of the government in banning *only* the SIMI has further confirmed the sectarian and prejudicial thinking that lies at the very root of the current political dispensation.

Advani scoffed off the idea that there could ever be a demand for a ban on the BD. Muslim leaders and political parties representing minority interests were open in condemning the ban. The reactions to the ban are illustrative of the deep polarisations and schisms that are the reality of India after a lived experience of Hindu right wing rule.⁴⁰ The BJP vice-president V Rama Rao made a public statement on September 29, 01 in which he clearly declared that Hindu and Muslim outfits should be treated differently.⁴¹

The day that the government announced its decision to ban SIMI, the home ministry issued a detailed statement justifying the decision. This statement was reproduced widely in the Indian media. According to the statement, "SIMI is opposed to secularism, democracy and nationalism and is working for an international Islamic order. It supports secessionism and advocates violence of its aims, the ideas were clearly manifested in the speeches of its leaders...It has been found to be involved in communal riots and disruptive activities....As early as 1992, the Home Ministry alleges, SIMI's links with militancy were clear. Recently, investigation of 14 cases of terrorist violence which had caused 15 deaths and injury to 80 others in UP and Delhi in 2000-2001 exposed a deep nexus between SIMI and Hizb-UI-Mujahiddin." "More recently," the statement says, "SIMI organised protests against alleged burning of Quran in Delhi in March 2001. Its units gave wide publicity to the issue by utilising the Internet. Also, posters and pamphlets were distributed in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Karnataka. It printed provocative posters in Ahmedabad in August 2001. It also issued press releases which resulted in communal tensions and riots. SIMI activists have been found distributing pro-Taliban leaflets and pamphlets in Delhi and major cities of India." Beside, the Home Ministry has accused SIMI of maintaining links with international organisations like Muslim Students' Union, "a pro-Hamas union of Palestinian students in India and Pakistan." Incidentally, this is the second time that the Home Ministry has, under Advani, banned a Muslim organisation. The earlier one was Deendar Anjuman, banned in May

³⁹ *The Times of India*, September 30, 01: "The criterion for the ban imposed on the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) could not be applied to Hindu organisations like the Bajrang Dal. (*The Times OF India*, September 30, 2001).. "It was bad to equate the action of organisations of Hindus with Muslim extremist outfits," he claimed. The state governments of Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh had asked for a *simultaneous* ban on both the Bajrang Dal and the SIMI:

Times Of India, Septembet 30, 01 'Bajrang Dal may be banned if proof is given: Maharashtra'
The Hindu, September 30, 01, Gehlot seeks ban on Bajrang Dal

⁴⁰ Statements of both home minister L.K.Advani and BJP President Venkiaiah Naidu, The Times Of India, September 30, 01 Advani rules out ban on Bajrang Dal; 3 October 2001

Times Of India, September 01, " No ban on RSS, Bajrang Dal: Mahajan: Union Communication and Information Technology Minister Pramod Mahajan said the government will not impose a ban on the RSS and the Bajrang Dal. "These organisations do not indulge in anti-national activities and hence there is no question of imposing a ban on them, Mahajan told reporters after releasing a commemorative stamp on Mahatma Gandhi here.

2001 on the charge of engineering bomb blasts in churches in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh in a bid to discredit Hindu organisations.⁴²

Under law, within 6 months, the Government will now have to refer the decision to a special tribunal headed by a sitting High Court judge. The tribunal will, after hearing SIMI's defence, can either cancel the ban or endorse it in which case the ban remains valid for two years. If the Govt wants to extend the ban, it will at that stage have to issue a fresh notification and go through the same procedure with another tribunal. Despite arrests that follow the banning of an organisation, it often manages to stay alive as some of its members either go underground or operate through other fronts. The law also penalises anybody who funds or otherwise extends support to any banned organisation.⁴³

The day that the government announced the ban, five protesting youth were shot dead in police firing in the capital of Uttar Pradesh, Lucknow. These youth were shot above the waist when they had gathered to protest the government's decision to ban SIMI. The state police in the most populous state in the country—UP—is the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) that is notorious for its conduct especially with regard to religious minorities.⁴⁴ It has been directly indicted for the brutal massacre of Muslims in the late eighties in Meerut-Maliana in UP (1987) and earlier in Kanpur, Muradabad and Aligarh.

Such action by the state authorities represented by the police can only harden attitudes farther and alienate the minority from the state more acutely. An article by one of India's foremost votaries for human rights, Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer, is worth putting on record. "SIMI and the Constitution (Opinion) By V. R. Krishna Iyer : 'Preventive detention of a person is subject to Articles 19, 21 and 22. Associations of citizens enjoy the collective human right under Article 19 as a fundamental freedom of association. Arbitrary action against it is violative of Articles 14, 19 and 21. Discrimination in application offends Article 19. The right to form an association can be denied or suspended by the State only in the interest of sovereignty and integrity, public order or morality. Article 21, guaranteeing personal liberty, can be curtailed only if the conditions relied on are `just, fair and reasonable'."⁴⁵

All these propositions have Supreme Court support regardless of person, parties, religions and regions. The simple issue that springs from the ban on the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) is whether it can stand constitutional scrutiny, if violative, it is void, apart from the judicial invigilation provided for in Article 22 by other law.

SIMI is prima facie communalist organisation with strong Islamic slant in its utterances. This vice, by itself, cannot validate a total ban without being guilty of totalitarian and ultra vires. Fundamental rights are fundamental and cannot be wished away by governmental displeasure. Otherwise, the existence of all organisations will be precariously dependent on the whim of the party in power. The validity of subjecting SIMI to a banishment is liable to challenge from day one if personal liberty and associational freedom, which are paramount values, are flouted. Assuming that any one in power totally disagrees with the Islamic genre or

⁴² Home Minister L.K.Advani reading out the official Indian government statements giving grounds for the ban on SIMI, September 23, 24, 01

⁴³ *The Hindu*, September 28, 2001

⁴⁴ Star Television News Telecast, September 23-24, 01

⁴⁵ *The Hindu*, October 4, 2001

propensity of SIMI, can it be put down? No, unless just, fair and reasonable grounds exist, coming within the mischief of the restrictive provisions.

Every person has a right to know why a group is governmentally suppressed since freedom of information is itself implicit in Article 19. In short, the reasons for clamping down a functional prohibition on SIMI is justifiable provided they rest on offending grounds and the grounds are brought within the ken of the public, which has the right to be informed about the `why' of the negation of the group right.

I do not defend in the least the SIMI. Nor do I, in the least, approve of its communal postures, if any. I am opposed to organised communalism in politics, but because I dislike it I cannot use State power to rob it of its right to existence unless its operations fall within the vice of Article 19 (3). Indeed, democratic disposition is tested by our tolerance of what we hate, if it does not breach constitutional bounds. However, if SIMI poses a clear and present danger to national integrity, public order or offers other moral menace, it may attract the `prohibition' power of the State. A blanket ban blindly imposed is incompatible with constitutional liberalism. Since the Central Government, so far as I know (I may be wrong) has not through appropriate publicity to the public or the affected organisation, made out sufficient cause falling within the constitutional clauses, my juristic conscience protests. The proper thing for a fair administration, before exercising the extreme imposition, is to reveal the grounds sufficient to convince society that there is a case of violent or violative activity, which desiderates a death sentence on the freedom of association. SIMI may deserve complete manacle if it become a clear and present danger, not otherwise.

Moreover, SIMI is an organisation of the minority community and should not be blocked or blacked out unjustly lest there be panic based on minority discrimination. In such matters, an explanatory memorandum, not kept secret but publicly announced comports with constitutionalism. Human solidarity of a billion and odd Indians is of utmost gravity today and, therefore, anything done which is apt to disrupt the unity of the people, unless compelled, must be obviated. If the impugned body falls foul of the constitutional limitations, it deserves no compassion, whatever its communal or political colour. If the grounds fall short of the mandatory conditions, any ban by the authority will be authoritarian."⁴⁶

By the end of September 2001, the tense public atmosphere being generated by outfits of the extremist parties, began to use anti-Osama Bin Laden language to further aggravate the situation. Media reported widely and from across the country, how an anti-Osama march in south India –Hubli in the state of Karnataka—turned violent largely because of the provocations caused to Muslims and their places of worship by the extreme Hindu right wing on the guise of of protesting Taleban and Osama Bin Laden.⁴⁷ Malegaon in Maharashtra was a slight exception; since a large

⁴⁶ *The Hindu*, October 4, 2001

⁴⁷ *The Times of India*: "Anti-Osama march turns violent in Hubli : Protesters rioted in a Muslim area of Hubli in Karnataka, shouting slogans against Pakistan and the Taliban in a protest prompted by terrorist attacks in the United States. Two people were killed and dozens injured, police said on Sunday. The violence occurred on Saturday during a march of some 50,000 Hindu protestors in Hubli, a city that has been the scene of numerous religious riots. Police spokesman M.D. Singh said the march turned violent when some participants began shouting angry slogans against the Taliban leaders of Afghanistan and neighboring Pakistan for supporting the main suspect in the US attacks, Osama bin Laden. A few hundred marchers broke away, rushing police positions around open land reserved for Muslims to pray and setting fire to several vehicles, including a police jeep, police said. One man was fatally shot by police and another died of stab wounds, Singh said. About 50 people were injured, many from stabbings. Detailed investigations by the media that followed revealed that the VHP and Bajrang Dal were *directly* blamed for the violence. This report in *The Deccan Herald* dated September 18, 01 says: "Labour and District-In-Charge Minister A M Hindasageri today criticised the VHP and the Bajrang Dal leaders for blaming the State Government for the sporadic

procession was called by the Muslim leadership at which posters in support of Bin Laden were proudly displayed. A constable reacting to this started firing; 12 persons were killed in the firing. The Hindi extreme right got the situation it desired. Hindus in Malegaon who account for 30 per cent of the population live in fear of the Muslim majority here.⁴⁸ For the next five days, in retaliation violence was let loose by the RSS/VHPO/BD in the villages in and around Malegaon where Muslim business and property was destroyed.⁴⁹

Ayodhya Re-enacted?

The wider context of inter-community relations within India, given the dominance of aggressive and dominant Hindu rightwing parties in and outside seats of power, needs to be understood. The kind of specific attacks and assaults, verbal and physical, that have taken place in the space of three months and before that, the kind of atmosphere prevalent within India before and after December 6, 1992 (when the 400 year old Babri Mosque was demolished) points to an overt legitimization of a *politics of aggressive dominance that implies a position of inferiority and threat for religious, caste, tribal and ethnic minorities.*⁵⁰

The continuing justification of the criminal act of demolishing a place of worship in 1992 and thereafter⁵¹ has been accompanied by the blatant justification of the event *and* the rhetoric of construction of a Temple on the site of the Mosque's destruction by the perpetrators of the deed. Both the Bajrang Dal and VHP supported by the RSS have set the "final date for construction of the temple at March 12, 2002."⁵² It is apprehended that this lead-up to yet another *communal* mobilization, this time with the accompanying militarisation of Indian civil society may just result in yet another round of bloodletting around the set date.⁵³ The fact that elections in one of the most populous northern Indian states, Uttar Pradesh, are scheduled for February 2002, and that this violence and polarization may be *used* by the ruling BJP to garner votes since its performance has been sorely wanting is also not a factor to be ruled out.⁵⁴

Following the demolition of the Babri Masjid in full public view and in blatant violation of Indian and international constitutional and criminal law, on December 6, 1992, the Indian government at the time had set up the Justice Liberhan Commission to investigate the gross violation of the Indian Constitution. For several years the proceedings of this judicial commission of inquiry were stagnant or semi-stagnant but over the past nine months especially the hearings and recording of evidence have gathered some momentum. During the proceedings prominent icons of the Hindu right wing (that include India's central home minister, L.K. Advani and his colleague in the union human resources development ministry, Dr Murli Manohar

incidents of violence which took place in Hubli City on Saturday, during the procession of Bajrang Dal activists in connection with 75th birthday celebrations of VHP supremo Ashok Singhal. Talking to the press persons here, after visiting the trouble-hit areas in the city, he said, "it is common that such statements are made by those who were involved in incidents of violence. There is no truth whatsoever in the statement made by the leaders of those two organisations that the government is squarely responsible for Saturday incidents".

⁴⁸ Nirbhay Bano Andolan and Ekta Factfinding Report, November 01, details in Maharashtra report

⁴⁹ Committee for The Protection of Democratic Rights report, November 01

⁵⁰ Teesta Setalvad, Champa Foundation Memorial Lecture, December 1998 (Communalism A Deepening Challenge to Human Rights)

⁵¹ Depositions of senior government functionaries before the Justice Liberhan Commission of Inquiry

⁵² Widely reported statements in the press since June 2001

⁵³ The Statesman, December 2001

⁵⁴ The Statesman, Outlook, December 01

Joshi and leaders of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Vinay Katiar and Ashok Singhal have appeared before the Judge. They have blatantly touted statements that celebrate their politics of destroying places of worship of *one* section of the population and celebrating the victory of another etc. etc.⁵⁵

Behind the violent acts led by street fighters like the BJP, the Shiv Sena, the BD and the VHP is the cleverly constructed idea of restrictive and discriminatory nationhood propagated by the RSS. This nationhood not only posits *only* the Hindu as the true legatee and heir of the Indian nation, nationalism and Indian culture are synonymously equated with religion and birth into the upper caste, Sanatani Brahmanical Hinduism (upper caste Brahmanically dominated Hinduism) The past few years has witnessed significant statements by stalwarts of the BJP who hold prominent positions in the government of the NDA, executive posts within Indian democracy that lend legitimacy and credibility to the undemocratic politics that the RSS statements.

The present Indian Prime minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee's views on his links with the ideological hardliner father organisation –RSS, had created when an earlier article was reproduced soon after his appointment “ *The sangh is my soul.*” But none less than L.K. Advani have been found according more and more legitimacy to the RSS and other extremist outfits, misusing their executive positions and office.⁵⁶

It is this inherent, basic dispute about notions of a nationhood that is not hegemonistic and monocultural that lies at the heart of the intense battle raging within India. The extreme Hindu rightwing propagate their definition of a constructed Indian nationhood, not based on the reality of the peoples who actually live under the geographical terrain of the Indian nation that is *not* inclusive or composite – comprising of different peoples, speaking different languages. For this idea to move forward and gain further legitimacy.⁵⁷

At his appearance before the judicial commission inquiring into the demolition of the Babri Masjid, the president of the VHP, Vishnu Hari Dalmia justified the demolition of the Mosque on December 6, 1992 and said it was done to pave way for the construction of Ram temple. In a statement before the Justice Liberhan Commission, Mr. Dalmia said the kar sevaks pulled down the structure even though it was a functioning temple, to pave way for the construction of a temple of Lord Ram, and, as a stop- gap arrangement, erected a small makeshift temple, where the existing idols could be installed. He described as a myth the disputed structure being referred to as a mosque. He said this had been falsely propagated by the pseudo-secularists

⁵⁵ Cassettes of LK Advani and Sadhvi Rithambara making speeches

⁵⁶ *The Daily Pioneer* published from Delhi carried this recent report titled 'Nationalism is the lesson, RSS the teacher': "Union Home Minister L K Advani has hailed the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) for imbibing the spirit of nationalism in the Bharatiya Janata Party. His remarks assume significance with regard to the BJP's ongoing love-hate relationship with the Sangh.

"The BJP has learned the spirit of nationalism from the RSS; of internal democracy from Dr S P Mookerjee and that of Swadeshi, self-sufficiency and compassion for the poor from Pt Deen Dayal Upadhyaya," Mr Advani told a training camp of Delhi BJP workers at Jhinjoli, Haryana, recently. Addressing the cadre on the penultimate day of the three-day "shivir", the senior BJP leader said all these qualities had now helped the party form a Government at the Centre since its birth in 1951 as the Jana Sangh. "We have been able to reach where we are, only by relentless and uncompromising pursuit of our ideology. Till the time we continue in the party, let me assure you that nationalism and patriotism will not be lost at any cost," he added.

⁵⁷ Refer to **Communalism A Backgrounder** that accompanies this

as part of their vote-bank politics. Going into the history of the structure, Mr. Dalmia said it was only a victory monument constructed by a foreign invader after destroying the existing Hindu temple at the same place to humiliate the Hindus. He said even in the extracts from Babur- nama, Babur had not described the structure built by him as a mosque. While so how could anyone give a different interpretation to it, he asked.⁵⁸

Dalmia an ideologue of the extremist VHP said, " The Vishwa Hindu President, Mr. Vishnu Hari Dalmia, today told the Liberhan Commission that activists, who were infuriated over the delay in the construction of the Ram temple, pulled down the Babri Masjid. Deposing before the Commission, Mr. Dalmia said the `activists came to Ayodhya in the hope that something tangible would be done towards the temple construction, but every time they had to return after performing only a symbolic `kar seva'. The `kar sevaks' became desperate and infuriated as the Allahabad High Court judgment was also getting delayed and they broke all barriers of discipline taking the matter into their own hands, he said in a statement."⁵⁹

The rhetoric of the Hindu right wing in not just justifying the destruction of the temple but glorifying the politics of victimisation and brutalisation of a section that went in it's wake has been cleverly sustained by manipulated statements by leaders who claim that the site chosen for the temple (the exact spot where the destroyed Mosque once stood) is threat from Muslim fundamentalists etc. This is indeed a clever tactic since almost all opinion polls after the regrettable incident have shown that while a large majority of Hindus may have wanted *some* temple in the northern town of Ayodhya in memory of their God, ram, they certainly did *not* support or subscribe to a politics that would build such a temple on the site of a deliberately destroyed Mosque.

In the midst of the tense intra-community situation that governs India today, the VHP, taking law into it's own hands, actually stormed the site that housed the Mosque and is today under Court jurisdiction on October 17, 01.⁶⁰ The guilty party – VHP and Bajrang Dal—brazenly justified it's breaking of Indian Constitutional and Criminal Law. Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) international president Ashok Singhal was on record stating that his forced entry into the makeshift temple at the disputed site in Ayodhya recently was intended to give a "shock-treatment" to both the Centre and the state government to accede to its demand for allowing "meaningful darshan". "We wanted to give shock-treatment to awaken the Centre and state governments as the eight-point charter of demands given by the VHP to the government about having darshan at the make-shift temple in Ayodhya was yet to be fulfilled", Singhal told newsmen here while justifying his controversial action.⁶¹

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee condemned the unlawful action of Hindu extremists but Indian home minister, L.K.Advani half-justified it.⁶² While conceding that there may have been some 'security lapse', the Union Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, today said he did not know whether any law had been violated by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad leaders they forced their way into the sanctum sanctorum of the makeshift Ram temple on the disputed site in Ayodhya even as they disregarded the police which had tried to stop them.

⁵⁸ Report of his deposition carried in *The Hindu*, dated Sept 3, 01

⁵⁹ *Ibid*

⁶⁰ *The Hindu*, October 23, 01:

⁶¹ *The Times of India*, October 2001

⁶² *The Hindu*, Advani Not sure whether the VHP broke the law, October 20, 01

On October 19, 01, the Central Reserve Police Force, in-charge of inner cordon security at the makeshift temple at the Ramjanma Bhoomi-Babri Masjid complex, in Uttar Pradesh filed an FIR against Vishwa Hindu Parishad leaders in connection with the storming of the sanctum sanctorum on Wednesday even as proposals have been made for declaring Ayodhya a 'no-flying zone' and strengthening of police deployment. The CRPF Deputy Commandant, Mr. Tarmeh Singh, lodged the FIR under Section 186 of IPC for violation of security cordon at the disputed complex against the VHP president, Mr. Ashok Singhal, its vice-president, Mr. S.C. Dixit, and 40 others, official sources told PTI. According to official sources, the FIR described the incident as obstruction of public servants while discharging their duties. It said the VHP activists led by Mr. Singhal had forced their entry into the gate-way area of the disputed complex. "misbehaving and pushing security personnel in the prohibited area" in front of the temple.⁶³

Attacks in Rajasthan state

In Rajasthan several towns like Beawar, Jhazpur, Asind, Beawar, Sikar witnessed an attack on Muslim populations. A state in western India, the government agencies, administration and police, severely strained by the concentrated actions and campaigns being conducted by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the Shiv Sena (SS) –a new and visible presence in this region—the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Bajrang Dal (BD) brilliantly aided by the parliamentary wing of the Hindu extremists—the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).⁶⁴ Of immediate concern to both the government and the administration is the systematic distribution of a few hundred thousand 'trishuls' – cleverly disguised sharp Rampuri knives six-eight inches long that can kill to-- 'every Hindu household' in the villages where the Trishul Diksha Samaroh is conducted. 40 lakh 'trishuls' distributed nationwide by the Bajrang Dal over the past 4-6 months, 01.⁶⁵ These 'trishuls' are sharp 6-8 inch Rampuri knives that when used with such intention, can kill.⁶⁶ Trishul Distribution and other arms training camps by the BD and VHP has also been reported in significant numbers in Gujarat, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh.⁶⁷ *Jalabhishek* programmes conducted by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad where by their own admission they seek to approach 'every Hindu home in 10,000 villages countrywide' and the BD's Trishul Diksha Samarohs suggests a sinister repeat performance of the divisive mobilisation of the whole country through the Ramshila poojans of the eighties and Advani's *rath yatra* of the nineties.⁶⁸

The distribution of these sharp knives is the latest in a string of attempts to militarise Indian civil society. This campaign is raising serious ethical and legal questions,

⁶³ *The Hindu*, October 20, 01

⁶⁴ Rajasthan has had nine year of BJP rule and is therefore facing the question of ideologues of the RSS in the administration

⁶⁵ Chief minister, Rajasthan Ashok Gehlot, made this statement in Jaipur on November 19, 01; reported in *Communalism Combat*, Teesta Setalvad, November 2001

⁶⁶ The *trishul*, like the *kirpan* . weapons of the Hindu and Sikh communities, have been allowed exemption of provisions of Indian law on grounds that they are symbols of a faith.

⁶⁷ Media reports carried in *The Asian Age*, *The Indian Express from Ahmedabad and Mumbai*

⁶⁸ *Communalism Combat*, Rajasthan, November 2001

especially given the fact that it is accompanied by clever rhetoric bandied in speeches and in print that exhorts Hindus to beware of dangers, to arm themselves and in short to prepare for violence.⁶⁹ In mid-November 01, the Rajasthan government took the decision to seize a pamphlet jointly published by the VHP-BD, an action that the state intelligence had recommended in the last week of September 01.⁷⁰ A case was filed against the publishers of this pamphlet, under article 153a by the Rajasthan police at the end of September 01, after which the police applied to the state government, under section 95 of the Criminal Procedure Code that empowers the police with the power to seize any objectionable material. By November 12, 01 the state government took a decision to seize copies of the pamphlet titled, *Hathon mein talwaren, seene mein hai toofan; raksha kare desh ki, Bajrang Dal ke jawan*, ('The Bajrang Dal volunteers are defending the nation with swords in their hands and a brewing storm in their hearts').

In year 2001, there were clear-cut attempts by right wing chauvinistic groups like the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Bajrang Dal to target places of worship and the homes, businesses and properties belonging to the religious minorities –Muslims-- in the western state of Rajasthan.⁷¹

These groups are sustained philosophically by the father organisation called the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), founded in the 1920s, that then and now acknowledges ideological affinity to the Hitlerian philosophy of the superiority of race and of mono-coloured nationhood.⁷²

All these groups are the real mind and heart of the present dominant partner in the national democratic alliance (NDA) that rules India. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) that controls the coalition is the parliamentary wing of this extreme rightwing ideology and the key office bearers of the party began their political life as full time workers with the RSS. The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, the home minister, L.K. Advani and the minister for human resources development, Murli Manohar Joshi –controlling key portfolios in government – are unashamed in acknowledging their political mentoring—within the RSS.⁷³

Several towns like Beawar and Asind in Rajasthan witnessed clearcut attempts by these right wing outfits to implement in practice their idea of a selective and superior nationhood. By late August, these attempts were accompanied by an ostensibly religious programme called *jalabhishek* in small towns and villages of Maharashtra that inevitably was followed by systematic violence directed against religious minorities. After September 11 and the worldwide demonisation of Muslims and Islam as a sub-text to the international discourse, this came in handy for the Islam and Muslim-baiters within India that seized the opportunity to foment and aggravate communal (inter-community) violence in other parts of Maharashtra and Karnataka – western and southern states.

In Nasirabad, Ajmer district, violence erupted on April 4-5, 01, the day of Moharram and Mahavir Jayanti. According to state intelligence agencies and the investigations

⁶⁹ *Winds of Change, Communalism Combat*, July 2001

⁷⁰ *The Hindu*, November 12, 2001

⁷¹ PUCL Report, Rajasthan

⁷² *Khakhi Shorts and Saffron Flags*, Orient Longman, 1993

⁷³ Subir Bhaumik in *The Outlook, Sangh is My soul*

carried out by the state unit of the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL),⁷⁴ in the middle of the night of April 4, identified persons stoned the Laxminarayan temple and some of the idols on the outside were damaged. Though the Moharram procession was disallowed, local Muslims kept their cool. However the VHP brazenly burnt one *taazia* and upturned another when the *tazia juloos* was finally permitted. The police had to resort to lathi charge to control the situation. Curfew was declared. Some local advocates were charged with the offence for burning the *taazia*; to protest and pressurise all local lawyers in Nasirabad declared a *bandh* of the Courts that continued for a month and a half.⁷⁵

On April 11 and 16, 01, at Beawar and Sawar in Rajasthan violence broke out after the administration tried to pull down an unauthorised Mosque (Masooda Masjid) at Ravla Baria and was prevented from doing so by the local Muslim villagers.⁷⁶ This incident is a good example of how the selective application of the law turns on one section including the Ashapura Mata mandir constructed by the VHP have been allowed their unlawful existence. In a society divided by sharp religious polarizations, the selective application of the Religious Places of Worship Act (that requires prior permission for construction of a religious place of worship and is in place in Rajasthan and West Bengal) is seen as one more attempt to show Muslims their place.

On July 28-29, 2001, and again in August, a Mosque located at Asind in Bhilwara was attacked and demolished and attempts made to construct a temple in its place.⁷⁷

Incidentally, the district president of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad Amrit Lal Khemka has no qualms in admitting the Sangh outfit's hand in the demolition. "Around 10-12 activists of the VHP and our RSS friends were in Asind and helped the Gurjars in the demolition. The mosque was an illegal structure like the Babri Masjid and it deserved to be knocked down. All illegal structures like this one should be demolished, aisa hona chahiye."⁷⁸

There were other spate of incidents in Rajasthan in year 2001. Put together, these have put fear in the minds of the minority community as the overall mobilization of Hindus and polarization of communities is seen linked, intrinsically to the forthcoming plan to revive the Ayodhya construction of the temple (on the site where

⁷⁴ PUCL Report on Communal Violence in Rajasthan, 2001 and *The Indian Express*, April 4-8, 2001

⁷⁵ *The Times of India*, May 2001; the Muslim minority lives here in a state of abject fear today

⁷⁶ Ram Prasad Kumavat a local activist and Journalist did a local investigation that revealed that there were as many as 4,000 unauthorised Hindu temples are allowed untouched or unquestioned by the authorities.

⁷⁷ This report in *The Indian Express*, dated August 1, 2001, describes the events that took place in Bhilwara on July 28-29, 01. "Until last Friday, there was a 16th century single walled Kalandari style mosque with three minarets in Asind, 55 kms from Bhilwara. Today, after a smooth and swift demolition job by a 300-strong mob of Gurjars, assisted by activists of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and RSS, there's a marble platform with a Hanuman statue in its place. The structure even has a name: 'Mandir Peer Pachar Hanumanji': the god who defeated the Muslim peer (Badiawale Baba who's buried in the nearby dargah). A police cordon rings the 'temple' whose sudden appearance last Friday has fanned communal tension in an otherwise peaceful district. Muslims number 5,000 in a 20,000-strong population in Asind. Though two FIRs were lodged against the Gurjars, no arrests have been made so far, since, says Bhilwara's SP K C Bhagat, the police haven't been able to identify more than four people, all of whom are absconding. The main accused is one Mansukh Singh, a member of the Rajesh Pilot Brigade. Both the mosque and neighbouring Sawai Bhoj temple were built over 70 bighas of land by Emperor Akbar's army on its return from a battle in Chittorgarh. Police say the first seed of trouble was sown at the annual three-day Urs festival in Asind this year. The entrance to the dargah, which is in the rear of the premises, was blocked by a boundary wall built by the Gurjars around their temple. The Gurjars wield a great deal of power here — the BJP MLA from the area is Ramlal Gurjar.

⁷⁸ *The Indian Express*, *Ibid*.

the Mosque stood so the symbolic message to the minorities is clear) which in turn is linked to the forthcoming elections in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh.⁷⁹ Conversely events that have arisen after Sept 11 have vocalized a small section among the Muslim minority that is in turn also challenging those among the administration and the police who are trying to function in a polarized fashion.⁸⁰

In July 16, a shrine (*mazaar*) at the Mosque (*durgah*) of Hasrat Sayed Baba Vithal in Jahazpur in southern Rajasthan, was destroyed (again by three squads of the Hindu right wing.. A member of the BD was arrested but then, through the pressure put by the local BD and VHP to terrorise locals into closing markets, the accused was released by the administration.⁸¹ After that on August 10, 01, at Vindhya Bhatar also in Jahazpur, another shrine concerned with *Sufi Islam*, a shrine, was also destroyed.

The role of the media surrounding these actions is interesting. Both the local media and the administration projected this incident as a non-incident by claiming that the site was the shrine of Bhoot Bapji and Meena community worshipped there and therefore, by implication what was destroyed was not a *mazaar/durgah* at all ! The fact that a shrine (*mazaar*) built by member of the Meena community (in memory of Pir Babaji Baba) had to be destroyed by organizations who thereafter wanted to claim the site for cultural re-interpretation escaped even the public statements of the administration, initially. However due to energetic interventions from citizens and groups locally and from Jaipur, the administration had this *mazaar* repaired promptly. Soon after, even the idol installed was removed. Civil liberties groups are now pressing for a reconstruction of the *Masjid* at Asind. In the same area, on August 12, 01 at Pandher Kasba, some miscreants destroyed the inside of the Mosque, and copies of the Koran were burnt. Until today no one has been indicted for the incident.

In another incident in southern Rajasthan in May 2001, tribals attackd Christians.⁸² Christian priest David Mashih and another person were attacked by assailants at the tribal-dominated Panrwa township in this district of Rajasthan late Thursday night, Deputy Inspector General of Police (DIG) S N Jain informed the media. The priest though injured seriously escaped with his life. The activity of the Hindu rightwing in tribal areas in Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh,, Rajasthan and Orissa is related closely to claiming them, original animist worshippers, as 'Hindu.'

Gujarat

Gujarat state in western India has been often termed as the 'laboratory of Hindu rashtra (nation).⁸³ As the backgrounder shows, the fact that a BJP state has existed here in conjunction with the same Hindu extreme rightwing's rule in New Delhi at the

⁷⁹ Statements of Opposition Parties wwhile adjourning parliament on the Issue of proposed construction of temple at Ayodhya, December 2001

⁸⁰ Interview with senior police and intelligence officials, by Teesta Setalvad, Rajasthan, September 2001

⁸¹ Kavita Srivastava, office bearer of the Rajasthan unit of the PUCL at Workshop in Rajasthan Sept 22, 01

⁸² The Daily Pioneer, June 1, 01

⁸³ RSS Term used in Speeches and Publications, Organiser and *Paancjaanya*

Centre has been used by the cadres of the RSS/BJP/VHP and BD to subvert the law,. Attack minorities and in fact violate the Indian Constitution.⁸⁴

The state of Gujarat saw once again in August and September 2001 attacks on Muslim families in Ahmedabad city and in smaller villages in rural Gujarat, spearheaded by the sword-wielding activists of the Bajrang Dal and Vishwa Hindu Parishad. Villagers from Chanasma have been living in fear since August 21, dis-housed from their homes and their sources of livelihood forcibly snatched away. Between August 22-26, 01 violent riots rocked Ahmedabad when activists of the extremist Bajrang Dal tried to forcibly extract money for a religious procession of Hindus from Muslim shop owners and rickshaw pullers. When the latter declined their monetary support, a youth belonging to the Muslim community was brutally attacked and killed. Similarly, in villages of north ⁸⁵Gujarat attacks on the Muslim minority have resulted them in not only being *dis-housed* but also shorn of means of livelihood.⁸⁶This incident epitomizes the acutely polarized and divisive state of affairs in Gujarat today. Gujarat since 1998 has been in the control of the rightwing BJP and two weeks ago heralded political change of an even more extremist kind. A few months ago, in late 2000, there was a change of guard in the chief ministership of the state and Narendra Modi who was brought in to replace the earlier CM is an active worker of the RSS, the parent extremist rightwing organization. Newspapers commented that for the first time an active *pracharak* (*campaigner*) of the RSS being brought in to assume an executive position. This report in the national media,⁸⁷ sums up, evocatively the plight of the Muslim minority in BJP-ruled Gujarat. The journalist from the paper had met with Muslim families who fled their village after being 'threatened' by the VHP. "Ayesha Bibi was feeling nauseated and was preparing to get some sleep on the night of August 21. It was two a.m. as the seven-month pregnant resident of Chanasma village in Patan district, North Gujarat, lay down. But soon enough, her mother shook her awake and whispered something into her ear. Within minutes, the women had sneaked out of the house through the back door into the Dalit colony. Ayesha Bibi and her mother joined 200 other women, as they lay hidden in corners of Dalit houses. They stayed there till the day broke out, cowering with fear from the threat of rape that their timely action had just prevented. The village was under threat from VHP activists, who stood outside the Muslim-dominated Indira Nagar village and reportedly pelted stones, spat out expletives and threatened to rape the women. In all, 130-odd Muslim families fled; while over 40 families migrated to a nearby village called Gulsanagar,⁸⁸ The VHP State unit president, Prof. Dr. Keka Shastri refuted charges that VHP activists were harassing Muslims in Chanasma. "We are not violent at all. It is the Muslims who indulge in violence and then put the blame on us," said Shastri. "Christians are of the same nature," he added. "The fact is, no Muslim is bothered about the country."⁸⁹

⁸⁴ ***Welcome To Hindu Rashtra, Communalism combat, Oct 1998, Face to Face With Fascism, CC, April 2000, Attacks on Christians, National alliance of Women, year 1999, Saffron on the Rampage, Report into the Violence Against Muslims, Aug 2000***

⁸⁵ *The Asian Age, August 01*

⁸⁶ ***The Asian Age, February 2000*** reported how VHP-BD and BJP leaders had placed bombs within housing premises built and sold to Muslims in their bid (that turned out to be successful) to scare Muslims out of cosmopolitan area

⁸⁷ published by the *The Indian Express* dated October 7, 2001

⁸⁸ The Ahmedabad-based Council for Social Justice, has filed a petition in the Ahmedabad High Court seeking justice on behalf of the Muslim families

⁸⁹*The Indian Express* dated October 7, 2001

In another, more recent, chilling incident, five hundred and fifty Muslim men, women and children of a small town Chanasma of Patan district in Gujarat have been forced to migrate and move to Patan with only the sky as their shelter. "Dead bodies of Muslims have been dug out and the land well surfaced with saffron flags flying high over it," says an enquiry committee's report on Chanasma's atrocities committed in September.

A report was released by the Ahmedabad based Council for Social Justice in the second week of September 01 within weeks of the incidents occurrence. It has been authored by Indu Kumar Jani (Editor – Naya Marg), Valjibhai Parmar (Secretary, Council for Social Justice) and Raju Solanki, a journalist-activist.

"Chanasma's age old Muslim-owned Dargah land called Navgajapir has now been forcibly taken over by a saffron gang of local Bajrang Dal's lathi wielding men," the report states. "The green sheet spread over the Navgajapir Dargah has been replaced by a white one; a Hindu temple has been constructed after removing a tomb shaped light-house after colouring it in saffron and covering it with white flag and a Bajrang Dal symbol of a trident. An iron pagoda ('chabutaro') has been constructed and a saffron flag fixed over it; a slogan like "Bharatmataki Jai" has been written down all around the Dargah; a new fencing of bricks without plaster can be seen having been constructed afresh to grab this land belonging to the *Wakf* board."

The intimidation of the minority through this assault on a shrine which is symbolic of a syncretic tradition did not stop there. According to this fact-finding report, a few Bajrang Dal volunteers had surrounded Indiranagar's Muslim homes with naked swords in their hands, hurling violent threats at the Muslim women. "If local Dalits had not come to their rescue and sheltered them for a night, we may have yet seen a repeat of the gruesome events that took place in Surat in December 1992. (The mass rape of Muslim women within days of the demolition of the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya, was a chilling illustration of what the *Ramjanmabhoomi* campaign was really about –not building a temple for a revered God; but manipulating the name of a God and a faith to spread intimidation and terror and actualize these through rapes and killings.)

Speaking to the members of the fact-finding team, the fear-stricken Muslim families presently abiding in Patan reveal how the plans of the *hindutva* brigade have been successful. "we are not now ready to go back to Chanasma. Our mothers, sisters and daughters would never be safe over there."

The history of tension in Chanasma, having a predominantly Patel population (80 % of the residents belong to this caste) goes back two years. The town had seen a wanton attack on a Muslim of Vadavali village at the Chanasma bus stand, in late 1999. The local Muslim *Wakf* owned Dargah land was passed over to a Lok Kalyan Trust of Hindus of Chanasma by the local municipality resolution of December 12, 1999. "One can easily imagine the condition of the minorities people when the local body itself commits an illegal and intimidatory act," says the report.

Once again, the response of the administration has been found wanting. Local Muslims petitioned the Patan district collector on Aug. 17, 2001 against the illegal action. He has, however, sat over the file and moreover done nothing else either to protect the minority community. Finally, the Muslim families have rushed to the

Gujarat High Court in a writ petition urging judicial directions to assure protection of their land and lives!⁹⁰

During Ganeshotsav (a Hindu festival) celebrations in Ahmedabad in late August 01, the Bajrang Dal activists went on the rampage, murdering a Muslim youth after members of the Muslim community simply refused to shell out money for the Ganesh celebrations.⁹¹ The violence that spilled over three days saw the police machinery paralysed in inaction simply failing to do it's job and protect those subject to attack. Three hawkers were attacked with knives—and two succumbed to their injuries—after a mob attacked them near Cadila bridge when they refused to pay hafta to the Bajrang Dal. Demands for complaints to be registered against Bajrang Dal members also fell on deaf years, since the outfit enjoys political patronage.

The Christian minority in the state was not spared in the state either. The complaints lodged by the All India Christian Council record that incidents of attacking Christian religious persons and churches, as well as desecrating of the Bible have been reported from different parts of Gujarat in September and October.

In Dahod district of south Gujarat, on September 19, 01, Christians were forcibly prevented from watching a film on Christ by the powerful Patels and *sarpanchs* of the village. When the victims went to register their complaint at the Limkheda police station the next day, the police turned on them. "Why did you not take our permission to show this film in public? You are now criminals because you did not take our permission!" The film show was in a home and the screening was underway without the use of microphones. In another incident symptomatic of the methods that the Hindu extreme rightwing functions, the VHP denied burial rights to Christians in Gujarat.⁹² The matter was taken up and condemned by the state minorities commission.

The National Human Rights Commission has issued notices to both the Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh governments for failing to protect the lives of the Christian minority in the state. It was alleged by a complaint filed by the All India Christian Council that in the past 38 months of BJP rule In Gujarat, there have been more than 200 attacks on Christians.

⁹⁰ The Ahmedabad-based Council for Social Justice factfinding report

⁹¹ *Asian Age*, August 26, 01

⁹² *The Times of India*, June 11, 01 : "The Christain community in India is shocked and alarmed by the manner in which VHP members by force refused to allow the burial of one Daudbhai Lazarusbbai Solanki's body in a Christian cemetery in Kapadwanj taluka of Kheda district of Gujarat on May 28," the state minorities' commission stated in a press release.

Madhya Pradesh

The fortnight between mid to end August 01 witnessed at least three incidents targeting Christians in the Malwa (Indore-Ujjain) region of the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh. Though the state is ruled by the Congress(I), Malwa is a stronghold of the BJP. In Ujjain district, a nun, Sister Leena Verghese, was shot at and seriously wounded. In a village in the Jhabua district, unknown miscreants stoned a prayer meeting at the church. Minor injuries were sustained by the devotees. In Badwani district, a Christian priest was assaulted and robbed.⁹³

District collector Bhupal Singh said the administration hopes to make a breakthrough in a day. "The problem is, there is no one who can identify the assailants or the motorbikes on which they came," Singh said. "It all happened in less than a minute. It was dark, cloudy and drizzling. Visibility was poor and the nun was standing there alone, guarding the vegetables and grocery, which she and another nun had purchased for the week from a market in Ujjain. The four assailants came in two motorbikes, one of them took out a pistol and shot her in the face. Then they sped away. No one was around. Only three village youths who were standing at a distance saw the motorbikes and the youths. They rushed to the nun after hearing her scream for help. But by that time the miscreants were out of sight," the district collector added. Even the victim, Sister Leena, has not been able to identify her attackers. "Why did they do this to me? I did not harm them. I don't even know them," she had told the police while she was being transferred to a hospital in Indore. Sister Leena's lower jaw was shattered. According to the doctors attending on her at Choitram Hospital in Indore, her face has been operated upon successfully and she is recovering. Doctors had previously thought a plastic surgery would be necessary, but now don't think so. Father Stanley said on behalf of the Bishop of Ujjain that the Catholic church there was shocked. "We have very cordial relations with the local people here. There is no enmity with anyone and we cannot even remotely suspect anyone for this.... This is the first such incident in Ujjain," Father Stanley said.⁹⁴

Meanwhile the Madhya Pradesh chief minister Digvijay Singh has issued the strongest possible instructions to his police administration in the event of any further incidents taking place.

Four missionaries were seriously injured when a group of miscreants attacked them near Himmatgarh village of the Dhar district in Madhya Pradesh. The Additional Superintendent of Police, Mr. K. C. Jain, said here today that the missionaries were assaulted by about 10 persons when they were returning after viewing a movie on Jesus Christ last night. The injured were admitted to a hospital. (UNI) Madhya Pradesh chief minister Digvijay Singh has ordered police to arrest anyone caught circulating posters and handouts in the Dhar-Jhabua tribal belt with messages branding Christians "anti-nationals". Pamphlets with slogans like "*Rashtra birodhi Isai samudai ke khilaf awaaz uthao* (raise your voice against the anti-national Christian community)" are already doing the rounds. "The posters have no name of any printer on them. But the culprits have been identified. We have registered cases under Section 153A of the Indian Penal Code (promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion and race) and they will be arrested," the chief minister said. The needle of suspicion points to the RSS, which has declared a Dharam Jagran Abhiyan in Dhar and Jhabua districts of south-west Madhya Pradesh. In the massive campaign to Hinduise tribals, nearly 3,000 RSS swayamsevaks will hit villages in the

⁹³ The Telegraph, August 8, 9 2001

⁹⁴ The Hindu, August 14, 01

tribal belt with Hanuman, Ganesh and Shiva idols and portraits. Though the RSS official version says less than 3,000 volunteers will be at work, a BJP's spokesman told the media that nothing less than "11,000 Sangh parivar workers" who have been given the job of preaching tribals the virtues of Hinduism. The seven-week mission's prime objective will be reaching Hanuman to every Bhil and Bhilala tribal home. Bhils and Bhilalas, who make up the majority in Dhar and Jhabua, belong to the Hindu community. But they do not worship the main Hindu gods. Nor do they keep pictures of Hindu deities in their homes. Each Bhil tribal village has its own adivasi idol, which they call the "gram devta". Most of these idols are placed beneath a mahua tree. The Bhilalas, who are offspring of Bhils and Paramar/Solanki Rajputs, believe in worshipping their "kuldevta", who is nota caste Hindu deity.⁹⁵

Chhatisgarh

A teacher in a school run by a Christian missionary was raped and murdered in Balrampur district of Chhattisgarh, the police said here on Sunday. Twentytwo-year-old Sorita Toppo, a Christian, went to forest to collect woods on November 28 when she was criminally assaulted and murdered, superintendent of police, Balrampur, B S Thakur said. Toppo's body, recovered from the forest, bore multiple wounds, he said, adding one person had been detained for questioning. The SP said Toppo was employed in a school run by Father James Minz in a village, some 500 km from state capital Raipur.⁹⁶

Maharashtra

While the literature being distributed by the Maharashtra unit of the VHP in far flung villages and districts indicates a systematic religious mobilization of local communities around the issue of the *Ram mandir* construction on the unilateral date announced by the VHP –March 12 (Maha Shivratri day), 2002 and a series of 'preparatory *jalbhisheks* and other semi-religious functions planned to mobilize cadres for the event—it is the ban on SIMI following international events and the crude demonisation of the Muslim minority put together ("All Muslims are not *jehadis* but all *jehadis* are Muslims"—MG Vaidya, RSS) that is providing a tailor-made situation for the actions to get viewed in a completely twisted manner.⁹⁷

On the night of October 9, 01 a mob from the village of Mangle in Shirale taluka of Sangli district (western Maharashtra) set on fire 10 homes, two timber marts and one saw mill belonging to the minority Muslim community, burning to death 80 year old Zainuddin Muhammad Sattar at 11 p.m. The immediate 'provocation'? The fact that members of the Muslim minority had dared to approach the Maharashtra State Minorities Commission in connection with the use of intimidatory tactics, abuse and threats by other villagers, a month earlier.

In Mangle village, on August 8, 01, four wrestlers were taken into police custody over the alleged desecration of a Ganesh idol. Among these were Yunus Moosa Shaikh, Santaji Khambkar, Gopi Khumbhar, Sanjay Patil and two others. Following police interventions a peace committee consisting of Dada Patil, Prahlad Ankush, Satish Nilkanth, Vilas Mhaske among others was formed, and it was ironically, the peace committee that issued the diktat on curtailing Muslim's from religious

⁹⁵ *The Telegraph*

⁹⁶ PTI, December 3, 01

⁹⁷ *The Hindu, Communalism Combat, October 2001*

observances on September 7, 01. On the following day, September 8 at a gramsabha meeting of the villages held within the premises of the Mahadev temple at 9. 30 a.m. at which 1,500 villagers were present, Muslim members were terrorized through filthy abuse against them and their faith. In utter fear, the Muslim members shaved off their beards off before attending the gramsabha meeting. Tensions simmered until the victims approached both the State Director General of Police (DGP) Subhash Malhotra as also the Maharashtra State Minorities Commission.⁹⁸ However with the recent round of arson and murder the situation in this village remains far from normal.

What was the content of the *fatwa* (diktat) issued against Muslim residents of Mangle village? On September 7, 01 Sattar's family members and the heads of all 35 families who were Muslim (total homes in the village number 1,000) had been summoned by other villagers and asked to forcibly shave off their beards; not dress with 'Muslim appearance'; not wear a cap during *namaaz*; perform *namaaz* only once, not five times a day; have no *azaan* on the speaker; and finally, all Muslim members must sign a *hukmnama* ordering that the three uncles along with the families of Yunus Shaikh (detained by the police) should be driven out of the village.

In a bid to tide over the tensions in the village, the administration and police had persuaded the affected parties to sign a statement stating that 'the shaving of the beard had been done voluntarily.' After a visit by the State Minorities Commission team in the third week of September to the village, member Munaf Hakim observed: "Like in other states, especially Gujarat there is a systematic plan to terrorise Muslims where they live in the minority, attack their homes and businesses and eventually squeeze them out of a livelihood by taking over their enterprises. It is dangerous trend that needs to be nipped in the bud."⁹⁹

On October 9, 01 after the arson and brutal killing, the state police imposed curfew on the district and detained 56 persons responsible for the arson until October 18. "There was anger in a section because of the idol desecration," SP of the district, Ritesh Kumar said to the media. "But things are under control now. It is not Hindu extremeist elements but members of different parties involved here," he added. As we go to press there were reports of mounting pressure on the local police to release those guilty of criminal conduct, arson and murder.

In another incident in the village of Saswad, barely forty kilometers out of Pune, serious tensions, reminiscent of the fires lit by the *Ramshila poojan* programmes of the nineties and Lal Krishna Advani-led *rathyatra* between 1990-1992 resulted after a *jalabhishek* programme held in the town on October 7, 01, called by the VHP and Bajrang Dal. With no provocation at all, the mob gathered ostensibly for a religious programme attacked a dargah (and sheds) located within a graveyard and moreover spread so much venom and terror against the Muslim minority in the small village that bakeries, shops and establishments and homes were destroyed in the planned destruction that followed. Saswad has not had a history of communal tensions before this incident.¹⁰⁰

The crowd allegedly raised demeaning slogans against a particular community and demolished a shed constructed at a cemetery before the arson attack. Thirty persons

⁹⁸ Report of the Maharashtra State Minorities Commission that visited the area.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*

¹⁰⁰ *Maharashtra Times daily*

have been arrested in this connection by the police who are on records stating that 'it was clearly the hands of extremist elements like the Bajrang Dal and the VHP who instigated the attack" ¹⁰¹

On August 6, 01 the Maharashtra Bajrang Dal had also mercilessly beat up Father Oscar Mendonca of the St John's Baptist Church in Thane that had resulted in a statewide protest from Christian schools. While arrests were made promptly by the police, it remains to be seen whether prosecutions against the offenders will be prompt.

The other similar attack took place in Thane, a township north of Mumbai –Father Oscar Mendonca was brutally beaten up by rabid activists of the Bajrang Dal. The Maharashtra State Minorities Commission played a proactive role and a large protest meeting in Thane was organized on August 10, 01. The Maharashtra police arrested 18 activists belonging to the Hindu rightwing outfit. They have been charged under Section 120 (b) of the Indian Penal Code, which deals with criminal conspiracy. The priest, Father Oscar Mendonca, had been attacked by a mob of 50-odd persons around 8.30 p.m. The mob, belonging to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Bajrang Dal, were returning after attending a condolence meeting in front of Thane railway station. The meeting, where fiery speeches were apparently delivered, was organised to condole the reported killings of four Sangh activists in Tripura two years ago. According to Thane police commissioner S.M. Shangari, soon after the meeting, the group dashed off to the St. John Baptist Church, where they attacked Fr Mendonca, who was returning from a dentist's appointment. He ran into the church premises for cover but could not open the door of the house and was beaten up by the mob. He suffered injuries on his head and legs and was hospitalised at the Thane civil hospital.

Meanwhile, the assault has evoked strong reaction from the Catholic community, which is feeling apprehensive after the attack. This editorial in the national media illustrates the fear experienced in the tiny Christian minority:

The local Shiv Sena in Thane also went on the rampage destroying a hospital there after their leader Anand Dighe died within it's premises on August 26. While the police have been lax in their probe, the Maharashtra State Human Rights Commission is independently investigating the breakdown of law and order and systematic arson that followed.

Christian evangelists distributing pamphlets in the region of Borvli in north Mumbai were also illegally detained by the local police following tip-offs from none less than the Bajrang Dal! It took the intervention of Abraham Mathai, member of the Maharashtra State Minorities Commission to get them released at 1 a.m. on October 6, five hours after their detention.

This editorial in a prestigious national daily, *The Hindu* sums up the situation.¹⁰²

"Incidents of attacks on institutions run by Christian missionaries and the justification of such barbarism by the leaders of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) are taking place once again. The recent attacks of such nature have been reported from

¹⁰¹ Maharashtra state Director General of Police, Subhash Malhotra to Teesta Setalvad, *Communalism Combat*

Ujjain (in Madhya Pradesh) and Thane (in Maharashtra) and it is distressing that the civil administrations in these two places have done nothing to apprehend the culprits.

By not doing anything to deal with the perpetrators of such violence, the civil administration as well as the political masters of the Executive in these States will only intensify the sense of insecurity among the minority communities apart from encouraging the lunatic fringe within the majority community to indulge in such activities in other places too. The state machinery can in no way let this happen for the simple reason that the freedom to profess and practice the religion of one's choice is a right guaranteed by the Constitution and the Executive is ordained by the Constitution to ensure that this right is not infringed upon. In this sense, the civil administration shall not lose any time, at least from now on, to enforce the pluralistic spirit of the Constitution...Be that as it may, there may not be any direct evidence (that could be sustained in the courts) to establish that those indulging in these acts of violence are the members or the cadre of such outfits as the VHP or the Bajrang Dal as it happened in the case of the grisly killing of Graham Staines and his two sons in Orissa.

These outfits, as it emerged at that time, do not maintain any membership registers. But then, it is obvious that the acts of violence are indeed a fallout of the vicious propaganda unleashed by the VHP and other sangh parivar outfits and add to it the ``certificate of good conduct'' issued by the top leaders of the BJP (the Home Minister in particular) to the members of such outfits. It is this attitude of the political masters that encourages the cadre to engage in such hate campaigns and violence. And for this reason, it is now imperative for the political leadership of the ruling combine to come out against the hate campaign carried out by the VHP-Bajrang Dal combine; it is also necessary that Mr. Advani, in his capacity as the Union Home Minister, place on record any such ``information'' regarding abuse of the provisions of the FCRA and clear the air of the tales. By remaining passive when such rumours are being spread, the Home Ministry will be seen as subtly reinforcing and encouraging the majoritarian propaganda, and its horrific consequences.

Earlier, on August 25, women officials and children from the I P Mission orphanage at Jobat village in Madhya Pradesh were on their way for a picnic at Kali dam in Dahod, were attacked by the Bajrang Dal and the VHP as well as by the police according to a complaint monitored by the AICC. When the children were washing their faces at a hand pump, Bajrang Dal and VHP activists surrounded them, took the keys of their jeeps and allegedly beat up women with sticks. The orphanage officials then went to the local police station, where, secretary of the AICC, Samson Christian alleges that, instead of registering a complaint, the policemen beat up the women and asked them to leave Dahod immediately. As the Dahod police refused to register a complaint, a FIR was lodged at the Jobat police station where the orphanage is based.

Nearby Orissa and Rajasthan have also witnessed simmering incidents over the past few months. CC plans to maintain a close monitor on these developments in the months ahead.

It appears clear that these systematic attacks on religious minorities are being orchestrated given the forthcoming elections in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, polls that are critical for the political future of the ruling BJP, leader in the NDA alliance at the Centre. A polarized electorate on religious grounds is calculated to deliver the result that poor governance and corruption militates against. The

¹⁰² *The Hindu*, August 29, 01

proclaimed date for the construction of the Ram temple also coincides perfectly with this broader design.

The moot question is that we have all, country and people been held to ransom on the same conditions before. Will we fall susceptible to this connivance, having just recently lived through it, all over again?"¹⁰³

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India and the All India Christian Council have condemned the attack on two Catholic missionaries in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra on Monday.¹⁰⁴

The Archdiocese of Mumbai closed all Catholic schools within its jurisdiction closed on August 13 as a mark of protest. While Sister Leena of Nirmala Hospital was shot at and injured in Ujjain on Monday, the priest, Fr. Oscar Mendonca, was attacked and injured in Thane the same day. The CBCI secretary general, Archbishop Oswald Gracias, had said: "I was beginning to think that attacks on Christians were becoming a thing of the past, but these attacks on the same day in two different States have sent distressing signals to the Christian community in the country." The AICC urged the Prime Minister to rein in Sangh Parivar vigilantes 'who have taken the law into their own hands and have attacked Christian religious persons'. In protest, over 150 schools and colleges run by the Catholic community closed their doors on August 14, 01 in protest this attack on a priest.¹⁰⁵

Meanwhile, The Global Council of Indian Christians, in a protest memorandum addressed to Dr Rajendran, Governor of Orissa strongly condemned the assault on the fundamental freedom of the right to worship by activists of the sangh parivar (*the family of Hindu extremists.*) They were referring to an attack on praying Christians in that state.

The memorandum reads: ¹⁰⁶"In the afternoon on Tuesday the 9th Oct, at around 3 pm twenty members belonging to Sangh Parivar lead by Vinod Behari forcefully entered into the house of Mr.Nanda at Kodapally village in Bargarh district and attacked eleven Christians worshipping inside the house. The Sangh Parivar activists have torn seven bibles and trampled on them before setting the bibles ablaze. The attack on the persons continued unabated till two of the victims were very badly injured. Santosh Malik and Arbindo Saru were taken to the hospital in Deeptipur and are being treated. Before fleeing from the house the Sangh Parivar activists sprinkled cow dung on the worshippers and forced them to leave Christian faith. The small Christian population living in and around Kodapally village is terrified and fear that fresh attacks will follow soon.

Your Excellency may be aware of atrocities committed by Bajrang Dal and other Sangh Parivar activists against Christians, including murder of Graham Staines and his children, Fr. Arul Doss and other members of Minority community in Keonjar district of Orissa.

When the global sentiment is to eradicate all kinds of terrorism against non-combat personnel, we are shocked and pained by the unrelenting attitude of Sangh Parivar

¹⁰³ *The Hindu*, August 29 01

¹⁰⁴ Press statement issued by the CBCI

¹⁰⁵ Press statement issued by the All India Christian Council

¹⁰⁶ Full text of the memorandum

determined to destroy the peace and harmony in the society. We believe that the tribal villages in Orissa are being used by the fundamentalist organizations to incubate the terror for cross border terrorism in the neighboring states. We are disturbed and upset that Christian workers carrying out humanitarian works with the tribals and other oppressed castes on issues of health and poverty alleviation are targeted with impunity. We are concerned about the starvation deaths reported from Keshpur and other tribal areas in different parts of our country despite of 65 million tons of rotting in the go downs. We urge your government to provide cultivable 5 acres of land to each tribal family with adequate crop loans through UNDP and other agencies. We are prepared to adopt Keshpur district for a holistic development. We are also intrigued by the attitude of district administration, many times Christian workers are harassed under OFRA when they are carrying out humanitarian assistance in the villages. We are afraid that the provisions of OFRA are used to protect the existing power structures aimed at looting the poor tribals and oppressing them. We once again appeal to you to prevail upon your government to repeal OFRA." ¹⁰⁷

With the greater exercise of power by right wing Hindu extremists in the Indian political and social sphere over the past years, refashioning of our liberal and broad based Indian laws with a view to introducing sectarianism and policing of freedoms has become a growing tendency.

One direction that this wider trend has taken is on the question of introducing legislation that seeks to police or scrutinize every individual or collective decision (in tune with the fundamental freedom of faith enshrined in Article 25 of the Constitution) to *convert or change faith*. Orissa and Madhya Pradesh are two states of the Indian union that have legislation that requires the police and courts to be intimidated of any such change of faith. It has been argued that these laws are violative in essence of the fundamental rights guaranteed in the Indian Constitution. *There have been sharp and clear-cut attempts particularly in the past three years to bring in such legislation as a national law, in Parliament, which have been criticized.* ¹⁰⁸

Punjab

There were a spate of incidents of destruction of the Sikh Holy Book in the Punjab in October 01. Tension prevailed as people from various communities blocked traffic on the National Highway No.1 for more than seven hours on October 1, 01 to protest against the burning of seven copies of a holy book at village Tarkhan Majra in Fatehgarh Sahib district, about 40 km from here, last night. ¹⁰⁹ On October 5, the desecration of the Guru Granth Sahib, the Holy Book of the Sikhs led to widespread protests ¹¹⁰

The Dal Khalsa International leader, Mr. Kanwarpal Singh Bittu, charged, on October 6, 01 that the Punjab Government had not taken any action on the various incidents of sacrilege reported from various parts of the State. Mr. Bittu said it had been

¹⁰⁷ Full text of the memorandum

¹⁰⁸ Attempts to bring in state and national laws to *restrict* the freedom of religion/faith, that is the freedom to convert have been consistent but have so far been resisted in Parliament and in Gujarat. Orissa and MP already have such legislation, however.

¹⁰⁹ Hinduonnet, October 1, 01

¹¹⁰ 6 Oct 2001, The Hindu

decided to organise a State-wide strike and also to "seal off" Chandigarh on Saturday. The events of sacrilege were reminiscent of the incidents of 1978, when the Nirankari-Sikh clash led to sectarian tension, articulated in the years of terrorism. Agitated Sikh leaders, who took out a protest rally here this morning, accused the Badal Government of soft-peddalling the issue for electoral considerations. The Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee chief, Mr. Jagdev Singh Talwandi, alleged that the culprit and self-styled godman, Baba Piara Singh Bhaniara, was being protected and patronised by Ministers and leaders of the Shiromani Akali Dal as well as senior bureaucrats.

On October 10, 2001, yet another incident of the burning of Guru Granth Sahib bir occurred at Gharuan village near Morinda in Ropar district on Wednesday morning, sparking tension in the area. This is the second such incident to happen in the village within a week.¹¹¹

Assam

Three Salesian priests of Son Bosco were brutally killed in Manipur on May 8, 01. The killing was condemned worldwide.
(The Hindu, May 20, 01)

Malegaon

Violence raged for over a week in the powerloom town of Malegaon after 12 persons were killed in a police firing following a pro-Osmala Bin Laden procession led by Nihal Ahmed, leader of a political party.

The violence erupted after a police officer tore up a pamphlet that was being distributed by a group of people outside the mosque after Friday prayers. It was not known what the pamphlet said, and if it was linked to protests against the US-led strikes in Afghanistan. Police said 14 people were injured and were in hospital.¹¹² "The September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States provided a heady cocktail to the city youths. On the very next day, a college youth was arrested here for pasting Osama's poster in the campus. The reaction of the community to the strikes, however, was muted and barring a few cases, no one came out openly in support of the attacks and Osama.

The beginning of American bombardment on Afghanistan removed the slightest inhibitions. The former Janada Dal (S) state president and local MLA Nihal Ahmed, who swears by socialism and lectures on secularism, lost no time to organise a morcha to protest against the bombings. It was exactly a week before the riots, on Friday, that the morcha was planned and many people carrying Osama's posters participated in it. Talking to Deccan Herald, Mr Ahmed admitted that some persons had brought Osama's pictures, but refused to take responsibility for the same. The morcha was ostensibly to protest American bombings, but turned to be a glorification of the most wanted terrorist. Although the police blocked the morcha, it raised the communal temperature and the residents were living in the shadow of fear for the next few days. The next Friday,

¹¹¹ *The Times of India*, October 11, 01

¹¹² The Deccan Herald (30 Oct 2001)

Communal build-up led to riots
Fresh violence in Malegaon, toll 12

brainwashed Muslim youths were freely distributing Osama's pictures with a message to boycott American products such as Coca Cola and Pepsi. "Be Indian, buy Indian," was the message on those handbills.

When an SRP jawan snatched those handbills from a youth and questioned him, the people returning from the Friday prayers immediately turned violent and indulged in stone throwing on police, looting and arson.

The violence spread so fast as if to make one wonder whether the riots were planned before. The entire township literally burnt, smoke billowing out of alleys and bylanes. In old township, shops, restaurants and industrial units as well as vehicles of other communities were set on fire. The roads were strewn with soda water bottles and stones. Over 50 policemen were injured in the violence. More than 200 cases of fire were reported in one day, and property worth over Rs 100 crore has been gutted in fire. As the situation went out of hand, police fired 20 rounds, in which four persons were killed. Three more were killed in rioting. Two more succumbed to injuries the next day. Mr Ahmed, against whom all fingers are now pointed, remained stoically indifferent and washed off his hands of any responsibility for the situation. He did not even attend the peace committee meeting convened the next day.

During their interactions with people, a forceful demand was made for arrest of Mr Ahmed. In Muslim areas, complaint were made against what was perceived as excessive use of force, and in Hindu areas, residents asked why so much time was wasted in firing at rioters. Meanwhile, there have been reports of sporadic violence in neighbouring areas. In Dhule, a mosque and a madarsa was targetted by rioters. Property worth hundreds of thousands of rupees belonging to Muslims in surrounding villages was subsequently targeted. There were also unconfirmed reports of sexual assaults.¹¹³

Uttar Pradesh

If any evidence were needed of the tit-for tat nature of intra-community violence on the Indian subcontinent, the series of events that took place in Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh in April 01 provide it. After the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan in February 2001, the Hindu extremist Bajrang Dal outfit led a protest in Delhi that carried offensive photographs and comments about the Holy Quoran. Copies of the Holy book were also burned. Photographs of this were flashed in several towns of India (the police say that the SIMI was responsible for this). Violence was just prevented in Mumbai, Maharashtra but the northern Indian town of Kanpur erupted in bloody violence. Over a dozen lives were lost in the brutal police firing.¹¹⁴

"The administration in Kanpur alleged that members of the SIMI had sophisticated weapons supplied by the ISI of Pakistan. A magistrate was killed allegedly by shots fired from inside a mosque. It has also been alleged that the riots were further aggravated because of a clash between senior officers in the police. The truth about the whole situation can be established only through a full-fledged judicial inquiry. The PAC (Provincial Armed Constabulary), which is notorious for its anti-minority bias, was called in to control the situation. The result is well-known. It opened fire indiscriminately resulting in the loss of a dozen lives and injuries to many more people.

¹¹³ Factfinding reports of civil liberties groups, CPDR and Nirbhay Bano Andolan, November 01

¹¹⁴ *Communalism Combat*, May 01

The PAC is invariably called out to control communal riots in Uttar Pradesh despite its known anti-minority bias. This force had killed several youth from the minority community at Hashimpura and Malyana during the Meerut riots in 1987. No action has been taken against the PAC for these killing by any Government, including that headed by Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav. This time too the Rajnath Singh Government did not call out the Army and instead deployed the PAC.

The SIMI leaders claim they are not responsible for the riots and that they were totally unarmed and that the police ignited the situation by firing on unarmed protesters. But the SIMI cannot disown responsibility for the riots. It could have achieved the same objective by submitting a memorandum peacefully to the Collector or meeting the Governor. The students, however, preferred street demonstrations, in a communally-charged situation, triggering events beyond their control. One does not expect the SIMI leaders to have wisdom but the senior Muslim leaders should have known better and done everything possible to restrain the youngsters in time; and if they did not listen to them they should have publicly disowned the unwise actions.¹¹⁵

Assaults on Education and Culture

One of the areas that the present Indian government has concentrated its energies has been in the area education and culture. To date, Indian central government policies on education had, with whatever limitations the textbooks had, stressed the need for a pluralistic dimension of history with a strong emphasis on social justice, equity and secularism.¹¹⁶

In a sharp departure from this basic principle enshrined in the Indian Constitution, the present ND government led by the right wing BJP attempted to introduce a National Curriculum Framework for Value education that makes an ominous departure from these basic principles.¹¹⁷ The first such attempt had been made in November 1998. That had caused a furore with many chief ministers and education ministers that support the ND lodging a furious protest.¹¹⁸

Undeterred the government presented a *fait accompli* to the nation: Its union human resources ministry introduced the National Curriculum Framework for Value Education, *without consulting Parliament or the Central Advisory Committee* and has proceeded to announce that the new syllabus and new textbooks (in line with a clearly hegemonistic outlook) would be out shortly.

The secretary of the Indian ministry (human resources development that deals with education is MK Kaw. On the eve of introducing the New Policy, he said,¹¹⁹ "The greatest damage to our intellectual freedom has been caused by traditional religions especially by those which have a single holy book from which they derive their authority!"

¹¹⁵ Kanpur Riots A Wake Up Call, Dr Asghar Ali Engineer in *The Hindu*, May 01

¹¹⁶ Indian Government's National Education Policy, 1986 reaffirmed in 1992

¹¹⁷ The National Curriculum Framework for Value Education, December 2000, see *Communalism Combat*, January 2000

¹¹⁸ Chief Minister's Conference, November 1998

¹¹⁹ In his article in the official NCERT journal on Value Education, titled 'Education in Human Values, released at the Jawaharlal Nehru stadium barely a week after the policy document, on December 20, 2000, Kaw tells us that,

Academics and activists working in the field of educational curriculum content have been analyzing the content of Indian textbooks especially since the early eighties and been finding them wanting. Teesta Setalvad's research through KHOJ an education for a plural India programme has been widely published and disseminated analyzing the content and thrust of Indian textbooks. An extensive part of this work was published in the October 1999 issue of *Communalism Combat* that resulted in a Parliamentary Committee being appointed to study the Gujarat state social studies textbooks in particular.¹²⁰ The findings researched by KHOJ were held to be objectionable and the central government enjoined to recommend substantive changes but these have not yet taken place.

As part of its effort to introduce an alternate approach and content to history and social studies teaching in India, Teesta Setalvad authored an alternate set of teachers history handbooks for the Don Bosco group of schools in Mumbai. These were being successfully implemented until a handful of parents approached the rabid Shiv Sena outfit that agitated because of a certain interpretation of the Maharashtrian leader, Shivaji. The author has, through authenticated historical sources simply traced the facts of Shivaji's caste background in the context of a rigid Brahmanical hold on Indian society—a controversy that even dogged that ruler's official coronation. But even in Maharashtra, a state ruled by the Congress (I) an avowed secular party, the school and the author were both targeted. The matter now lies before the Maharashtra State Human Rights Commission. In late 2001, an expert academic committee appointed by the state minorities commission has cleared the author's texts saying that 'no offence was meant to Shivaji.'¹²¹

The issue of the content of history taught in right wing schools of the Hindu and Muslim variety have been the subject matter of government scrutiny. The 1993 report of a high-powered NCERT Committee that investigated both RSS schools and *madrassas* "identified textbooks brought out by the Saraswati Shishu Mandir Prakashan and the Markazi Maktaba Islami as representative of historical distortions". These text-books continue to be used by these outfits as if an acquiescent government is in power.¹²²

However, today the Hindu rightwing is through the RSS, an organisation that controls *the* single largest education enterprise in the country. Through the Vidya Bharati Akhil Bharatiya Shiksha Sansthan, the RSS runs anywhere between 14,000-20,000 Saraswati Mandirs and Shishu Mandirs all over the country.

Of these, it is reported that as many as 5,000 are recognised by and affiliated to either the CBSE or state education boards, most of them in states with BJP governments in power! However, there are also hundreds of RSS schools using textbooks with a completely motivated and vicious syllabus functioning in states with so-called 'secular' political dispensations.

In stark and revealing contrast to the hold that the RSS has over education, the Central Board for Secondary Education (CBSE) itself has a total of 5,391 schools affiliated to it (805 Kendriya Vidyalayas, 1,400 government schools, 2,817 independent schools and 369 Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas).

¹²⁰ Parliamentary Forum for Education and Culture formed, *Asian Age*, April 2000

¹²¹ *The Times of India*, *The Indian Express*, *MID_DAY*, September-October 01

¹²² NCERT Report on RSS and Madrasa level education, 1993

The RSS-affiliated Vidya Bharati organisation has an overwhelming 18 lakh pupils under its tutelage, annually, and employs 80,000 teachers across all states, except for Mizoram. It also controls 60 colleges of graduate and postgraduate studies and 25 other institutions of higher learning.

If the example of Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh are anything to go by, the assumption of political power by the BJP has made it possible for this party to use its political clout to promote its worldview of India's past, present and future, on who and what constitute Indians and Indianness and what constitutes Indian culture.

The changes made in the textbooks used in the state-run schools in Gujarat, UP and even other states are stark, worrying, reflections of this trend. We also know that the VHP, has been busy setting up its own brand of schools, encouraged by the political patronage of the BJP. It is the same outfit that has proudly led the demolition of the Babri Masjid and violent campaigns on the life and property of Indian citizens. Today, it endorses the outrageous idea of disenfranchisement of Indian religious minorities.

For example:

“Arabs were barbarians who advanced to convert other people to their religion. Wherever they went, they had a sword in one hand and the Quran in the other. Houses of prayer were destroyed. Mercy and justice were unknown to them... Innumerable Hindus were forcibly made Musalmans on the point of the sword. The struggle for freedom became a religious war. We never allowed foreign rulers to settle down but we could not reconvert our separated brethren to Hinduism.”¹²³

“Lakhs of foreigners came during these thousands of years... but they all suffered humiliating defeat. There were some whom we digested. When we were disunited, we failed to recognise who were our own and who were foreigners, then we were not able to digest them. We were not able even to digest those who for some compulsion had separated from us. Mughals, Pathans and Christians are today some of these people”.¹²⁴

“Islam spread in India solely by way of the sword. The Muslims came to India with the sword in one hand and the Quran in the other. Numberless Hindus were forcibly converted to Islam on the point of the sword. This struggle for freedom became a religious war, Numerous sacrifices were made in the name of religion. We went on winning one battle after another. We did not let the foreign rulers settle down to rule, but we were not able to reconvert the separated brothers to Hinduism”¹²⁵

Does Mr Joshi describe these RSS texts as conveying the message of tolerance? Is there no generation of hatred here?

“The Kshatriyas, followers of the Vedic religion, were-feeling frustrated. The ruler of Magadha was a Buddhist. So he did not come forward to fight. But then was the country enslaved. Did the enemy become victorious in the birthplace of Bhagwan Rama? No, no”.¹²⁶

“With the finds of bones of horses, their toys and *yajna* altars, scholars are beginning to believe that the people of the Harappa and Vedic civilisation were the same”.¹²⁷

¹²³ (*Gaurav Gatha*, published by RSS Shishu Mandirs for Std IV).

¹²⁴ (*Itihaas Ga Raha Hai*, for Class 5 in Shishu Mandir schools).

¹²⁵ (*Itihaas Gaa Raha Hai*).

¹²⁶ (*Gaurav Gatha* p. 31).

¹²⁷ (*High School Itihaas Bhaag 1*, p. 43, history textbook for secondary schools, Government of U. P. revised in 1992 to suit the communal interpretations of Indian history. This book deals with the history of India from pre- historic times to 1526.)

Aryan culture is the nucleus of Indian culture, and the Aryans were an indigenous race. But about the Aryans who were the builders of Bharatiya Sanskriti in Bharat and creators of the Vedas, this view is gaining strength among the scholars in the country that India itself was the original home of the Aryans.”¹²⁸

Some more:

“Ashoka advocated *ahimsa*. Every kind of violence came to be considered a crime. Even hunting, sacrifices in yajnas and use of arms began to be considered bad. It had a bad effect on the army. Cowardice slowly spread throughout the kingdom. The state bore the burden of providing food to the Buddhist monks. Therefore people began to become monks. Victory through arms began to be viewed as bad, Soldiers guarding the borders became demoralised”.¹²⁹

Is this not a deprecation of non-violence that suggests restraint and dialogue?

History making and teaching does not exist in a vacuum. A singular feature of the growth of the Hindu rightwing in India has been their gross manipulation of historical fact and myth to enable the demonisation of religious minorities.¹³⁰ Their notions history, past and present, including Murli Manohar Joshi, through the spoken word and in writing – pamphlets, books and school textbooks perpetuating the RSS worldview incidentally challenges pluralism, and violates the Indian Constitution.

These text-books are in circulation and use in a staggeringly large number of schools, influencing no doubt the outlook of a significant section of its 18,000,000 students annually.

Here are some of the more glaring statements made by the leadership of the Hindu right wing:

“This is yet another epic war — between Hindus and anti-Hindus, a veritable *Mahabharat* in which sometimes Abhimanyu will fall, sometimes Ghatotkacha, or it may be Jayadratha’s turn yet another day.”¹³¹

“Christianity is not a religion, it is a devious conspiracy to serve colonial interests. You dream of building a church in every village and taking a Bible to every house. The Bajrang Dal activists will destroy your dream completely.”¹³²

“Muslims can never be trusted. They are like snakes, you can never know when they can turn around and bite you”.¹³³

“There can never be harmony or peace until the Koran is drastically revised.”¹³⁴

“I reiterate my commitment towards the construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya and the day a BJP government is installed at Delhi, we will remove all hurdles for temple construction”.¹³⁵

It is within this wider scenario that the New Curriculum framework must be situated. A policy document that emphasises education about religion, stresses value

¹²⁸ P. 48, *Itihaas Bhaag 1*

¹²⁹ (*Gaurav Gatha* p. 30).

¹³⁰ KN Panikkar and Romila Thapar, eminent historians in seminar with Vikas Adhyan Kendra, 1993

¹³¹ (KS Sudarshan, newly appointed RSS chief in the *Organiser*, April 2000)

¹³² (Ashok Singhal, VHP working president, addressing a BD camp at Vrindavan aimed at setting up a special people’s security force (*Prateyak Suraksha Samiti*), in the *Frontline*).

¹³³ (Bal Thackeray, SS chief lashing out at top film stars, Khans and Mohammed Azharuddin in *The Asian Age*, June 2000)

¹³⁴ (Vinay Katiyar, chief of Bajrang Dal, Lucknow, July 1999)

¹³⁵ (LK Advani, *The Asian Age*, July 4, 1997).

education as that which obtains exclusively from religious frameworks, drastically reduces the quantum of social studies/sciences and history syllabi and accords a disproportionate and compulsory place to Sanskrit.

In November 1998, The New Policy Framework said that: ¹³⁶

“The content of education from the primary level to the higher education stage should be “Indianised, nationalised and spiritualised”;

“Courses at all levels, including vocational training courses, should incorporate the essentials of Indian culture”;

“Sanskrit should be made obligatory for students between classes III and X”.

“Moral and spiritual education” should be introduced that would inculcate “desirable social and national values.”

Today, in 2000-2002, the new and finalised policy document¹³⁷ on education says:

There should be an emphasis on “Education about religions” (p vii) and “values with an emphasis on religious values”. The “Inherent values of all religions to be taught at all stages of school education”;

“A profound sense of patriotism and nationalism tempered with the spirit of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (being one of the world/earth family) must be infused into the students”;

There should be an emphasis on our “own philosophical cultural and sociological tradition” and “an indigenous Indian curriculum that would celebrate the ideas of the country’s thinkers such as Sri Aurobindo, Vivekananda, Dayananda Saraswati, Mahatma Phule, Gandhi, Tagore, Zakir Hussain, Krishnamurti and Gijubhai Badeka.” (Ambedkar and Periyar are given the go-by, as are so many others!)

There is a clear-cut promotion of Sanskrit (2.8.3) and Hindi (2.8.4) and their compulsory inclusion within the syllabus all over the country at the primary stage. Clear pointers to attempted cultural hegemony as also to the backward looking vision that guides this sectarian worldview.

“Sanskrit has a special claim on the national system of education because it

Has consistently been used in India for thousands of years and is still inextricably linked with the life, rituals, ceremonies and festivals of vast Indian masses; (it was just such an emphasis on Sanskrit hegemony that had been angrily resisted by representatives of so many states in India, especially the South, in 1999);

Contains a great store of knowledge and wisdom that needs to be revived, reformulated and enriched with whatever is the best in modern disciplines of knowledge;

Has the universal appeal all over the country;

Has very close structural, lexical, and semantic relationship with Hindi and most other regional languages of India which makes the learning of these languages easier and better; and

Has been internationally accepted as the most scientifically structured language and is increasingly being acknowledged as the best suited language for computer use”.

For all these reasons, the new policy states that it is important to provide for and encourage the study of Sanskrit: “It may be introduced as part of a composite course of Hindi and the regional languages as mother tongue at a suitable point of

¹³⁶ From the 1998 policy document

¹³⁷ From the December 2000 policy document

the primary or upper primary stage...Open school courses for Sanskrit may also be designed for learners at all levels".

The New Curriculum Framework accords Hindi a special place, too, on grounds that "the Indian Constitution has given it the place of the Official Language of the Union...it is necessary that courses in Hindi are suitable for opening up channels of integral communication in all parts of India."

Sister bodies under the control of the HRD ministry that include the Indian Council for Social Science Research (ICSSR), the Indian Council for Historical Research (ICHR) and even the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), in varying degrees and through different actions, have had their representatives once again publicly declare their allegiance to the parent organisation to which Joshi, Vajpayee and Advani belong – the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh.

In the same month (December 2000), the director of the ICHR made a declaration that embarrassed even the body he heads. He stated that since the Babri Masjid had been an unused structure and had no religious significance, the site should be handed over to the Hindus on the premise that as "the location of Rama's birthplace cannot be changed, the temple cannot be moved."

The same ICHR has also been embroiled in a serious controversy for withdrawing mid-way through publication a volume, *Towards Freedom*, authored by two renowned historians, Sumit Sarkar and KN Panikkar, in late 1999. The reasons are not far to seek. Among other things, the book offered incontrovertible evidence (including British intelligence records) to show that the RSS was not merely a non-participant in the Indian freedom struggle; it actually collaborated with the colonial powers!¹³⁸

The director general of the CSIR, RA Mashelkar was felicitated by the RSS' Rashtriya Suraksha Mahashivir last month. This created some public discomfort for the ministry because it was more evidence (if any were needed) of the growing influence of *swayamsevak* Joshi's influence over the orientation of the CSIR.

There have been widespread protests to the New Curriculum Framework and the latest attempts to delete and change history books written by eminent historians.¹³⁹ In response, *Communalism Combat* published a report 'Education With Values'¹⁴⁰ and petitioned the chief ministers and education ministers of different non-BJP states. Several nationwide seminars on the issue have been held.

On August 4-6, 01, Sahmat, an organization battling against communalism for some years organized a national consultation in New Delhi. On the final day, the education ministers/chief ministers of eight non-NDA ruled states affirmed their commitment to fight this blatant attempt to distort and hegemonies the approach to education in this country.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Reports from *The Asian Age*, *The Hindu*

¹³⁹ Romila Thapar and RS Sharma's CBSE texts have been summarily changed with no consultation with historians

¹⁴⁰ January 2001, Independent Member of Parliament Shabana Azmi petitions different non-BJP states endorsing *Communalism Combat's* campaign

¹⁴¹ *The Indian Express*, August 7, 01

Media coverage of the three day conference that culminates in non-BJP chief ministers issuing a statement *rejecting the policy* is widespread. 'We Don't Need your saffron education, say non-ND states': ¹⁴²The NCERT's much-hyped National Curriculum Framework has run into its first major obstacle with nine state education ministers jointly adopting a resolution demanding the immediate withdrawal of the document.

Without the concurrence of the State Governments, the National Curriculum Framework drawn by the NCERT cannot be introduced in any school, including those controlled by the CBSE.

The resolution also demanded that the UGC circular introducing an 'indigenous system of knowledge' as university level courses (like vedic astrology and yoga), while starving the universities of funds, should be withdrawn. Today's development — which came about on the last day of the three-day convention organised by Sahmat on the communalisation of education — is significant in that it's the first concerted effort by non-NDA state governments to oppose the Centre's new education policy.¹⁴³

Apart from asking the HRD Ministry to withdraw the curriculum framework, the resolution also demanded that no other documents should be released till a national consensus is evolved. Instead, they demanded, the Central Government should initiate the process of consulting states on national education policy by immediately convening a meeting of state education ministers and to constitute the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE).

The CABE is the apex body which has to pass any new education policy framework before it can be adopted by the states or introduced in the schools.

The states were represented by Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Ajit Jogi and education ministers Satyanarayan Sharma, Kanti Biswas and Mohammad Salim from West Bengal, Ramchandra Purve from Bihar, C.P. Joshi from Rajasthan, Ratnesh Solomon from Madhya Pradesh, H. Vishwanath from Karnataka, A.V. Subramaniam from Pondicherry and Narendra Nath from Delhi.

“We express our deep sense of regret that the partners and allies of the BJP in the present government have remained mute spectators to the policies and programmes which, by destroying the secular character of education, undermine the foundations of India's nationhood,” the joint statement said. It accused the NCERT and the UGC of tampering with the core curricular area and the scientific temper of the Indian education system in the guise of introducing value education and reviving indigenous knowledge.

Another report in reads¹⁴⁴:

'Education Ministers from nine non-NDA governed States today threw in their lot with the movement against saffronisation of education by calling for a withdrawal of the

¹⁴² The Hindu. The Times of India, Aug 7, 01

¹⁴³ From the statement of nine ministers

¹⁴⁴ *The Hindu* "Education ministers want 'curriculum framework' withdrawn" August 7, 01

'National Curriculum Framework for School Education' and the 'indigenous systems of knowledge' introduced by the University Grants Commission (UGC). A joint statement at the end of the three-day convention against communalisation of education here, the signatories - who included a number of politicians and academics - took exception to partners and allies of the BJP in the NDA Government remaining mute spectators to its policies which seek to destroy the secular character of education and undermine the foundations of India's nationhood...It grossly violates the National Policy on Education (1986, 1992) in which the thrust was on the promotion of strictly secular values." Demanding withdrawal of the 'National Curriculum Framework', participants at the convention organised by SAHMAT added that no other document should be released in its place without a national consensus. As for the UGC circular that introduces the 'so-called indigenous systems of knowledge', the resolution describes this move of the commission as a bid to foster revivalism and destroy the scientific academic character of higher education in the name of traditional knowledge."

The resolution has the backing of the Education Ministers of West Bengal, Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Nagaland, Karnataka, Pondicherry, Delhi and Chhattisgarh. The other politicians who have joined the chorus are the Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh, Mr. Ajit Jogi; Parliamentarians, Ms. Shabana Azmi, Mr. Mani Shankar Aiyer, Mr. Eduardo Faleiro and Ms. Bharati Ray; Mr. Arjun Singh of the Congress(I), Mr. Sitaram Yechury and Ms. Brinda Karat of the CPI(M), and Mr. A. B. Bardhan of the CPI.¹⁴⁵

Implementation of the Srikrishna Commission Report

One of the successful citizen's campaigns has been around the implementation of the Justice B.N.Srikrishna Commission Report that investigated the brutal Bombay riots following the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992-1993. The report indicted police officials and politicians, especially those belonging to the rabid extremist Shiv Sena for inciting riots.¹⁴⁶

In this connection, though delayed some action has been taken against policemen found guilty of a lack of neutrality and brazenly unprofessional behaviour. The case of the former joint commissioner of police R.D. Tyagi who shot dead nine innocent Muslim workers in a bakery believing and accusing them of being 'Kashmiri extremists' (the man later was promoted by the Shiv Sena-BJP regime to become Commissioner of Police in October 1995) received prominent attention in this period,¹⁴⁷ the case is still moving slowly.

Due to the active interest and protest by citizens groups, the Congress (I) ruled government in Maharashtra that has shown such a reluctance to implement the report actually opposed the ex-policemen's bail application and he was arrested and thereafter released on health grounds.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ *The Hindu* "Education ministers want 'curriculum framework' withdrawn' August 7, 01

¹⁴⁶ Justice BN Srikrishna Commission of Bombay Riots, 1992-1993

¹⁴⁷ *The Times of India, The Indian Express*

¹⁴⁸ August 2001

The Caste Issue

The fact that Dalits, nationwide had been mobilising successfully to make the issue of continuing untouchability, caste based exclusion and discrimination dominated news and discourse. The BJP-dominated NDA government bitterly opposed the inclusion of any discussion on caste based oppression and violence on the agenda of the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Intolerance, Xenophobia and Related Intolerances (WCAR-2000).¹⁴⁹

The debate around Durban dominated media and political discourse. Political parties like the CPI(M) and even the BSP supported the move as also did a host of cross party parliamentarians.¹⁵⁰ The Hindu right wing has revealed its inherent casteist mindset with the following reaction of Acharya Giriraj Kishore of the VHP in response to the Dalit demand for the abolition of caste and untouchability. "UN has no business to consider caste discrimination as form of human rights violation". Calling caste as denoting "what profession man has adopted" and a part of "ancient customs and system" which "should not be and cannot be abolished by any court". The Acharya believes "it is a violation of human rights to abolish caste" because caste "does not say to anybody to discriminate against each other".¹⁵¹

Even while the debate raged and the Durban conference was on, brutal assaults on Dalits across the country continued.

These news reports show the extent of caste violence in the country:

Dalit killings rock LS (PTI, August 1, 01)

'THE ISSUE of killing of Dalits in Uttar Pradesh today rocked the Lok Sabha with slogan-raising BSP members demanding immediate dismissal of the BJP-led state government, forcing abrupt adjournment of the house for the day. The BSP members, joined by their leader Mayawati, stormed the well of the house demanding that the house take up the issue for discussion forthwith. Efforts by Speaker G M C Balayogi to restore order proved futile as the members continued to stall proceedings. In the din, the papers listed on the day's agenda were tabled. A statement by Home Minister L K Advani on the killing of Samajwadi Party MP Phoolan Devi was also tabled. The house was earlier adjourned till 1400 hours on the same issue. As soon as the house assembled for the day, BSP members were on their feet shouting slogans against the state government charging it with being anti-Dalit. Congress members P R Dasmunshi, Santosh Mohan Dev and Naresh Pugalia and RJD member Raghuvansh Prasad Singh were heard demanding the presence of the Prime Minister in the house and a statement from him on his resignation offer made at the BJP parliamentary party meeting this morning.

Caste Hindus terrorise Dalits in MP's Mugalia (Deccan Herald, August 8, 2001)

BHOPAL, Aug 7: Upper caste members ran amuck, pulling down the huts of Dalits in village Mugalia, about 15 kms, from Indore on August 5, after a Dalit woman was cremated in the funeral ground reserved for the upper castes. The Dalits staged a demonstration at Indore on the same day threatening to 'take up arms' if the law

¹⁴⁹ Media Debate and Caste, April-August 01

¹⁵⁰ CPI(M) issued a press statement supporting the Dalit movements stand on Durban

¹⁵¹ The Times of India, June 9, 01

fails to protect them. The Bahujan Samaj Party held a day-long dharna at Bhopal on Monday to protest against the incident.

The Dalit woman was cremated at the funeral ground reserved for the upper caste Patidars as it was raining and the Harijan funeral ground did not have a sheltered area for cremation. That was on August 3. The next day, enraged Patidars, whose population in the village exceeds entered the Harijan basti and began pulling down the huts. The terrorised dalits were driven out of the basti and all the 65 huts were torched. The dalits took shelter in the open. Fearful of further reprisals, they are unwilling to rebuild their houses. The matter was reported to the police but no action, beyond deploying a posse of policemen in the village 'to prevent clashes', was taken.

The next day, an angry demonstration was held at Indore under the auspices of some NGOs at Indore. A memorandum was submitted to the divisional Commissioner. Speakers at the demonstration threatened that they would be forced to take to arms if the state fails to protect them. There is palpable tension in the area.

Caste's cruel: lovers hanged in UP (Indian Express, August 8, 2001)

MUZAFFARNAGAR/LUCKNOW, AUGUST 7: A 20-year-old youth and his 18-year-old beloved, belonging to different castes, were hanged to death by their family members at Alinagar ka majra village in Muzaffarnagar district in Uttar Pradesh, police said today.

District police chief B S Moriya said apparently annoyed with their affair, family members took the two lovers — Vishal and Sonu — to the roof of a house and hanged one after the other last night. The girl's parents and the boy's elder brother and sister-in-law were witnesses to the hanging, he said.

According to Moriya, Sonu and Vishal were warned earlier by their families that they would be punished if they did not stop meeting each other. Sonu was a Jat while Vishal a Brahmin, the district police chief said adding the entire village was opposed to the affair.

The police have arrested six persons including the parents of the boy and relatives of the girl besides a villager, Suarbhan, for aiding the family members in the crime. The police have suspended all the arms licenses in the village. PAC has been deployed in the village to prevent any further trouble.

Meanwhile, different versions are floating about the incident. One version said Sonu and Vishal had eloped on Monday night. The villagers launched a manhunt and caught them from the home of Kashi alias Kumhar. The crowd then decided to hang the two lovers.

Another report said Sonu and Vishal decided to end their lives because they could not meet in living and their bodies were found in Kanda river, which flows close to the village.

Dalits denied access to Bhojpur temple (The Times of India, August 15, 01)

'ARA: There was tension in Lahang-Dumariya village in Bhojpur after Dalits were prevented from entering a Kali temple, allegedly by some influential villagers. Some Dalit villagers alleged a few upper caste men prevented them from entering the temple and also misbehaved with their women.

In a letter to chief minister Rabri Devi, the Dalits sought immediate intervention of the administration, and said that they would have no option but to change their religion if punitive action against the guilty was not taken.

Meanwhile, two persons were seriously injured when rival groups opened fire following a dispute over fishing in the Ganga river, near Isarpura village under the Shahpur police station on Sunday.

According to the police, rival groups from Isarpura and Ojhawalia villages had been fighting for fishing rights in a rivulet of the Ganga. On Sunday, a few Isarpura villagers were fishing when Ojhawalia villagers opened fire, injuring two of them.

Meanwhile in an interesting official study conducted by the Tamil Nadu government in South India. As many as 140 of the 191 villages have been found prone to untouchability crimes and atrocities against Dalits. This report in *The Hindu* dated August 8, 01 reports:

'As many as 140 of 191 villages in the State are prone to atrocities against Dalits and untouchability crimes, according to an official study. The Prevention of Civil Rights wing of the State Adidraavidar department, has found in its analysis of untouchability crimes across the State, that about 140 of the 191 villages are ``highly sensitive''. The cases registered under the prevention of Atrocities Act, 1989 has also shown an increase in the past two years. While about 312 cases have been registered in the first four months this year, 996 cases were filed last year.

And, the ``dimension and the locus'' of caste clashes in the State is clearly changing. An analysis of the caste conflicts this year by the PCR wing showed that the ``caste menace'' which was prevalent mostly in southern districts, has spread across north Tamil Nadu, particularly Cuddalore, Villupuram, Dharmapuri and Tiruvallur.

A majority of the 15 caste clashes reported from January to June this year killing 15 people, took place in north Tamil Nadu, largely between the Dalits and the Vanniars. And, the largest number of atrocity-prone villages-as many as 30-have been identified in Cuddalore district, while Tirunelveli district considered to be the hot-bed of caste menace, has only 13 such villages. Amid the increasing caste tension, the State Government issued a directive on July 16 to the District Collectors to have ``tight control'' over installation of new statues.

The village vigilance committees in the districts have been asked to keep close vigil over the statues and ensure their safety. For, the common cause for caste clashes is the desecration of statues of leaders by anti-socials.

The Collectors have been directed to take effective steps to eradicate the ``two tumbler'' system in the villages, which is a ``main reason'' for escalation of caste tensions.

Report Prepared by

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Mapping of Communal Conflict in Rajasthan (Last three Years)

Jaipur 1989, 1990 and 1992

| | |
|------------------------------|------------|
| Beawar | 1990, 2001 |
| Jaipur Shastrinagar Golikand | 1997 *1 |
| Ajmer | 1998, 2001 |
| Banswara | 1997 |
| Jaipur (Baabu ke Tibe) | 1998 |

***1997, Jaipur**

The Jaipur police fired at the Shab-e-Barat procession heading towards a graveyard illegally claimed by encroachers and killed 6 Muslims and seriously injured 45. The then home minister commented, "Updravi Muslims will be dealt with in other way." Though not directly a communal incident, the non-neutral behaviour of the police has led the PUCL to classify the Shastrinagar firing as one among the list of violent incidents with distinctly communal overtones.

Ajmer, 1998

For the first time in its history, curfew was imposed in Ajmer in 1998 because of communal tensions. There was no violence but the conduct of the administration was suspect in the handling of the Tarashah incident in 1999. **On June 3, 1999** during the Kargil conflict, when the first martyr was brought back to Nasirabad in Ajmer district, the homes of 34 Muslims were broken calling them 'ghoospeti' Bangladeshi (illegal immigrants) and anti-social. The role of the media in the 'nationalist euphoria over Kargil' described the victims to the intruders on the borders. Investigations revealed that most of the victims were from Ajmer

March 14, 1999, Jaipur

At the Bairwa basti in Jaipur, Babu ka Teeba (Ramganj) tensions between children of the Bairwa caste and Muslims grew. The PUCL was active in reducing the tensions by frequent interventions. **On December 12, 2000**, tensions were palpable at Babu ka Teeba and then on **February 24, 01**. In all these incidents, the role of the administration has been questionable.

December 20, 1999, Phalodi,

Alleged incidents of cow slaughter fuelled tensions, poor migrants from other parts of the country.

Tonk, Malpura 2000, February 19, 2000

Imam killed in mosque

and around: Of the 34 families targeted, 8 were from MP, Odissa WB and Bengal; that is

July 10, 2000

Muslim youth murdered, in broad daylight, Kailash Maali a known criminal indicted for his role in 1992 riots in Malpura. A naked dance of violence followed in Malpura after this murder, that lasted until **July 11, 00**. During this violence, 12 children women and elderly people were killed.

The violence spread to neighbouring Tordi village where a woman and man lost their lives. Along with the killings, the local Mosque was attacked and religious books burned. By the evening of the 10th of July four Hindus going from Todaraysingh to Diggi were killed. Along with this four Muslim labourers working in neighbouring fields were murdered and in another part of the city one more person lost his life.

Tonk, Malpura July-September 2000

This was the first major riot in Rajasthan after the post Babri Masjid riots in 1992. These riots preceded the municipal elections. Kailash Mali was the man guilty of much of the violence in 1992 during which 25 people were killed. Of the 25 killed, 22 were Muslims. The Muslims responsible for the killing of 3 Hindus have received life imprisonment but Kailash Mali who was responsible for the murder of 22 people of one family was free.

On July 10,00 **Kailash Mali was killed leading to a riot. In September 2000**, the Todi Mosque was attacked and copies of the Koran burned.

Rajsamand, August 6, 2000

This communal incident began with stones being thrown on the Kanwad yatra. After the minor injuries to one Kavadiya were treated the procession carried on for one-two hours. After a few hours, a systematic rumour of the stone-throwing was spread, following which hotels, cars and godowns, belonging to

Muslims, were attacked. Muslim businesses were the target and an aggressive mob started advancing towards the Husseini Masjid. Filthy slogans against Muslims were shouted. The teargassing by the police of the procession nipped this incident in the bud.

Kotda, March 10, 01

A small incident on Holi day in Kotda in Udaipur zilla triggered this incident. A Muslim tenant had rented part of his home to a Hindu. Some miscreants, drunk climbed the house from the top and created a scene. There were only women present in the home at the time. Peoples came to blows and the kasbah was tense. Soon members of the BJP, BD and Vanvasi Kalyan Kendra collected tribals from outside and provoked them to attack Muslims. A mob of 250-300 beat up some Muslims; Muslim shops were looted and the fence of a grave yard and building were burned down. At 3 a.m, when the police official and distirtct official arrived things cooled down. This was the first incident of its kind that revealed the communalisation of tribals in southern Rajasthan.

Nasirabad, April 4-5, 01

Nasirabad in Ajmer district. The day of Moharram and Mahavir Jayanti (4-5 01) caused acute communal tension. At midnight of April 4, 01, during the *tazia* processions some persons stoned the Laxminarayan procession and some of the idols on the outside were damaged. The next day some others attacked the *tazia juloos* and even burnt one *taazia*. The police had to lathicharge to control the situation. Some local advocates were charged with the offence for burning the *taazia*; to protest and pressurise all local lawyers in Nasirabad declared a bandh for a month and a half.

Beawar, April 11-16, 01

The violence broke out in Beawar and Sarvar, over the attempts by the administration to pull down the Masooda Masjid at Ravla Baria village which the Muslim villagers violently resisted. There are a few hundred illegal temples also, built in violation of the Religious Places of Worship Act that the administration has let be, including the Ashapura Mata Mandir near Beawar built by the VHP. The VHP procession in protests against the beating of administration officials deteriorated into stone throwing, properties were attacked and the curfew remained imposed until May 7, 01.

Jahazpur, July 16, 01

The *mazaar* at the *durgah* of Hasrat Sayed Baba Vithal in Jahazpur was destroyed.

Asind, July 26-27, 01

After the Urs at the Badiya durgah was attacked and worshippers terrorised, the next day the Sawai Bhoj Masjid was pulled down. A Hanuman idol was sought to be installed there and proganda –in which the administration and media also participated attempted to call the *masjid* a *mandir*. However rigorous interventions from the citizens and other wings of the state made the administration remove the *chabootra* and the idol installed there.

August 9, 2001 Jahazpur

Another *Mazaar* broken

August 12, 01, Pandher

Some miscreants destroyed the inside of the Mosque, and copies of the Koran were burnt. No one has been indicted for the incident.

Mewat, August 24, 01

A bandh was called by the BJP and VHP together in Pahadi, Gopalgadh and Sikri after 35 cows and calves were found dead in different locales in Bharatpur district. Cow slaughter is another source of active rumour fuelling being indulged by the RSS/VHP/BD/SS and assisted by the BJP in the past two years. They have fuelled false allegations against the Mewat community.

Sept. 2001, Mandal

September 10 and 14, 01 Mandal a small city in Rajasthan that is a symbol of intercommunal harmony was targeted by the same forces.¹⁵²

¹⁵²List prepared by PUCL Rajasthan

