

Re-thinking India

Perceptions from Australia

Editors

Lance Brennan

Auriol Weigold

Readworthy

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Editors' Introduction

The essays in this collection represent diverse views with a common theme expressed in its title, Re-thinking India: perceptions from Australia. The collection continues a tradition in the contribution to the literature on India from Australia in that its contributors are Australians, Anglo-Australians, Indian Australians, Indian students undertaking advanced studies in Australia and domiciled there—at least for their period of scholarship—as well as Indian scholars working in India, with links into Australian institutions, a welcome innovation.

From the 1960s academics in Australia have had a wide range of interests in India and the subcontinent. This has been well documented in a snapshot of academic engagement in this period, and has continued into the present day. That interest has developed—in line with India's rapid growth towards major power status—to include an increasing concern with India's foreign relations, and especially those with Australia.

Many of the chapters in this collection were first given as papers at the conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australia held at the University of Western Sydney in July 2012. Other scholars generously contributed papers on their current research. The varied fields of endeavor thereby brought together in this book might well have been mapped for us by Nobel Prize winner, Amartya Sen, who describes his country as 'immensely diverse', with 'disparate convictions' and 'divergent customs.' The reader of this book will find that while its chapters range widely they all attempt to maintain a concern with what is important in India today: from foreign policy to theological understanding.

Part 1: India and the World

With different approaches—'divergent', 'to borrow from Sen—Auriol Weigold and Christopher Kremmer examine the relationship between Australia and India acknowledging that such relationships are a two-way proposition. Weigold examines

Chatterji shows that the political cultures of the three regional elites dominated the different processes that shaped their ultimate and divergent forms.

Part 2: Local Power, Communities and Religion

Amartya Sen's argument about diversity manifests in Peter Mayer's examination of the variation between the Indian states of the impact of the power of village elites on the well-being of the rural population. Mayer explores the connection between local violence and the concentration of land ownership, and reminds us that this was common in the post-bellum southern states of the USA, and remains in southern Italy. He then demonstrates the inverse relationship between the extent of violence and the degree of good local governance—as indicated by measurable outcomes such as high literacy, and infant and maternal mortality. The theme of the malign influence of the concentration of local power is explored further in Mohammad Bhuyan's chapter on the problems of restoring the embankments in a district of southern Bangladesh following a cyclone in May 2009. In his analysis Bhuyan associates economic inequity with the connections between the civil engineers, the land-holding and shrimp farming stakeholders, and local and central politicians. He relates how the people of the villages see corruption as an integral part of the negotiations between the major actors, and how it delayed—for years—the reconstruction of the embankments, to the immediate detriment of all the inhabitants, but especially of the poorest. This is local violence in another form.

Four papers in the collection examine one of the crucial identifiers of Indian society: community. In Ian Copland's study of Hyderabad from the 1920s to today, we have one of the few long term studies of regional communalism. Copland's analysis of the transformation of Hyderabad from a peaceful—even harmonious—city, to a cockpit of communal violence highlights the role of electoral politics, but also points to the impact of reckless political choices by the Nizam in the period around Independence. The manipulation of communal issues as electoral

tools is also explored by Rizwana Shamshad's paper focussing on the use of the problems emerging from the substantial immigration of Muslim Bangladeshis into India by various elements of the Sangh Parivar, the group of Hindu-nationalist organizations. It is unclear whether the claim that this influx was a demographic threat to India has been effective as an electoral weapon: what Shamshad shows is that among important members of various elements of the Sangh Parivar there is a variety of views, and no clear strategy about how to solve the problem. One might argue, however, that the lack of consensus does not make the issue any less dangerous as a trigger for communal violence.

The other two papers that deal with community bring us closer to the bed-rock of society. The Koli tribal fishers of Mumbai, who worship Muslim saints as well as animistic, Hindu, and Christian figures, are further evidence of the diversity of India. Moreover, Marika Vicziany, Jayant Balchandra Bapat and Sanjay Ranade, show us how these fishermen and their families are able to resist both Hindu and Muslim fundamentalism in a city fraught with communal tension. In this case, the strength of community—and, perhaps, the inherent danger of their vocation—support a broad view of the spiritual universe, rather than the opposite. Sanjay Ranade and Sneha Subedhar expand our understanding of the nature of caste and community by tracing the history of a set of artisan castes that, because they worked together sharing their skills, amalgamated into a single caste. This left them well-placed to throw up talented entrepreneurs who responded to the challenges and opportunities that emerged as the economy around Mumbai expanded in the twentieth century, and to transform their traditional skills into those that will provide employment into the future. This chapter demonstrates that caste can be an agent of change as well as of tradition.

The collection concludes with two papers addressing theological issues: or rather how theological issues should be addressed. Gidi Ifergan, by considering the work and lives of two great scholars and teachers—the Hindu Sankara, from the 8th century CE, and the 14th century CE Tibetan Buddhist Longchenpa—shows us how to come to grips in the present with

the essential problem of monism: in Sankara's terms, how to access the idea that Brahman and the individual are one; or, for Longchenpa, how to realize the Buddha's mind and your own. Ifergan solves the problem by taking us back to the way these scholars themselves taught these ideas. Giovanni Arca discusses another aspect of theological thinking when he takes issue with the use of the term 'esoteric' to describe various practices in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism. He demonstrates how instead of describing these practices in their own terms, some western scholars see them as corresponding with models of behaviour— at times, magical— confined to the inner circles of medieval Judaism, Islam and Christianity. This chapter reminds us that, in general, importing western terminology, and indeed ideas, into the description and understanding of Indian issues is fraught with danger.

The papers in this collection have attempted to re-think— mainly from an Australian perspective—a few of the myriad aspects of life in India. Though some of the papers include analytic approaches developed elsewhere to explain similar problems, we are confident that the foundation of each is secured in the bedrock of Indian experience and evidence. The strong representation of papers considering the historical and contemporary relationships between Australia and India is an indicator of how India is becoming of greater significance 'Down-under'.

Lance Brennan
Auriol Weigold

Acknowledgements

Grateful acknowledgement is made to the contributors to this book for their chapters, rapidly submitted, and their attention to the wise suggestions by the group of referees who double-reviewed each paper. Our gratitude goes to the referees for their expert comments and suggestions - that also ran to omissions on the part of the editors!

We are grateful for encouragement from the South Asian Studies Association (SASA) in getting the project started, and for ongoing encouragement and advice from Marika Vicziany, SASA President and until recently Director of the Monash Asia Centre. The Call for Papers that drew in our contributors was organised by Michael Gillan, University of Western Australia and Secretary of SASA and we thank him for this.

We would also like to acknowledge the assistance received by writers in this collection coming from Universities, Libraries, Archives and South Asian institutions in Australia and India, and the India Office Library. This is greatly appreciated by us all.

From the start, Shalaj Mittal, Director of Readworthy Publications, New Delhi, was enthusiastic about the book and the areas it addresses, and we are grateful that he will see to its rapid publication and entry to the public arena. Shalaj and Surya Mittal at Readworthy are committed to gaining attention for the Australia-India relationship which they see as important, and this is one in a series of collections they have published over recent years.

Lastly we acknowledge patience and tolerance for long working hours from our support teams at home.

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Contributors

Giovanni Arca: “‘Esoteric abuse’ in Indo-Tibetan traditions and beliefs”. (Ch 14)

Giovanni Arca has studied Eastern Languages and Civilizations at the Institute of Oriental Studies, Naples, with a major in Tibetan language and literature. He has worked for the publishing industry for more than two decades, as editor and translator of texts related to Indo-Tibetan and Far-Eastern cultures. He is currently undertaking a PhD at Monash University, Melbourne, examining how Western esoteric discourses have misrepresented Asian religious traditions and beliefs.

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Jayant Bhalchandra Bapat holds doctorates in Organic Chemistry and Social Anthropology and is an Adjunct Research Fellow at the Monash Asia Institute, Monash University, Melbourne. His current research interests are Indology, Hinduism, Jainism and sociology of religion. He has published research papers on temple priests, the fisher community of Mumbai and goddess cults and has contributed to encyclopaedias of anthropology, sociology, religion and culture. He is co-editor of *The Iconic Female: Goddesses of India, Nepal and Tibet* (Monash University Press, 2008) and co-authored *The Indian Diaspora: 150 Years of Hindus and Sikhs in Australia* (in Press). He was recently awarded the Order of Australia Medal.

Mohammad Harunur Rashid Bhuyan: “Corruption after the cyclone: a case study from Bangladesh”. (Ch 8)

Mohammad Bhuyan, a Fulbright scholar, completed his Master of Arts in Sociology from the New School University of the United States of America in 2007. His doctoral studies at Monash University, as an Endeavour scholar, examine peasants’ perceptions and responses to natural disasters. A Research Associate at the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies since

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Dr. Lance Brennan has a B.Ed. and M.A. from the University of Western Australia and a D.Phil. from the University of Sussex. He has published on the social, economic and political history of Uttar Pradesh, the history of famine in the Indian Ocean region, and the anthropometric history of India. From 1973-1999 he was a member of the History discipline at Flinders University, Adelaide, and has maintained academic status as an associate professor since then. He has co-edited this book with Auriol Weigold.

Tathagata Chatterji: "Globalisation and Urban Transformation in India: Regional Political Cultures and Governance Responses". (Ch 6)

Tathagata Chatterji is a PhD candidate at the University of Queensland, Brisbane, where he also teaches urban governance and planning in developing countries. His research interest focuses on the politics of urban economic competition and comparative urban governance. He has written extensively on contemporary urban issues in India. He studied architecture at the Bengal Engineering College and urban design at Kent State University.

Ian Copland: "Place and Polity in the production and mitigation of Hindu-Muslim violence: lessons from Hyderabad". (Ch 9)

Professor Ian Copland is a graduate of the University of Western Australia and Oxford University, and is currently an Adjunct member of the History Department of Monash University. His publications include *The British Raj and the Indian States: Paramountcy in Western India 1857-1930*, *The Princes of India in the Endgame of Empire, 1917-1947*, *State, Community and Neighbourhood in Princely North India, c.1900-1950*, and (with Ian Mabbett, Asim Roy, Kate Brittlebank and Adam Bowles) *A History of State and Religion in India*.

Gigi Ifergan: "Approaching Cultural Icons of the Past: Śankara and Longchenpa". (Ch 13)

Dr Gidi Ifergan gained his PhD at Monash University, Melbourne, where he is currently an adjunct research fellow. His

thesis on Longchenpa, a 14th century Tibetan Buddhist thinker titled "The Man from Samye: Longchenpa on Praxis, its Negation and Liberation". His MA in Religious Studies focused on the study of Sanskrit and Indian Philosophy, at Tel Aviv University.

Christopher Kremmer: "White Australia, Backward In The Challenge of Perceptions in Australia-India relations". (Ch 10)

Christopher Kremmer is the author of four books on history, politics and culture of modern Asia including *The Car Wars*, *Bamboo Palace*, and a memoir of the years he lived in India *Inhaling the Mahatma*. A former foreign correspondent for Australian Broadcasting Corporation, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, and *The Age*, in New Delhi, 1990-93 and 1997-2002. He is a contributor to *The Monthly* magazine, and has taught literature studies and communications law and ethics at the University of Western Sydney, where he is completing his doctoral research. In October 2012 he joined the staff of the Australia India Institute as its Director of Communications and Publishing.

P.R. Kumaraswamy: "India's Energy Security and Implications for Australia". (Ch 2)

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Peter Mayer: "Mapping the Strength of Village Elites in India". (Ch 7)

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and social capital in the human development performance of the Indian states; India's engagement with economic reforms; long-term trends in the real wages of agricultural labourers in the Kaveri Delta, and an analysis of political patterns underlying communal violence in India. In 2012 he published a major study of the sociology of suicide in India.

Sanjay Ranade: (co-author) "Muslim Saints and the Koli tribal fishers of Mumbai in the context of Hindu Fundamentalism". (Ch. 11)

He is also co-author of "The journey of an Indian Śudra caste from artisans to entrepreneurs to capitalists: the Viśvakarmā Pāñchāls". Dr Ranade has a PhD in Politics. He is Associate Professor in the Department of Communication and Journalism at the University of Mumbai. As an adjunct research fellow at Monash University, Melbourne, he has studied the Koli fisherfolk in Mumbai since 2008 as part of the Monash-Mumbai Koli Research Project.

Rizwana Shamshad: "Akhand Bharat and the Demographic Threat: Positions of the Sangh Parivar on Muslim Bangladeshi Migration into India". (Ch 10)

Dr Rizwana Shamshad completed her PhD at the Monash Asia Institute, Monash University, Melbourne, in 2012. She was a recipient of Monash University's Arts Faculty Postgraduate Publication Award upon completion of her PhD. Rizwana has worked with some leading think-tanks, research institutes and academic departments in Australia, India and Bangladesh. Currently Rizwana is working on migrants, communal and ethnic conflicts in Assam with a Mumbai based research institute.

R.F.I. Smith: "How do international pressures affect federal governance in India?" (Ch 5)

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Christopher Snedden: "India and Pakistan: Finding Agreement". (Ch 4)

Dr Christopher Snedden is an Australian politico-strategic analyst and thought leader on South Asia. His consultancy, Asia Calling, works with governments, business and universities. He frequently visits Jammu and Kashmir and has interviewed many elder statesmen involved in the Kashmir dispute. He is author of Kashmir: The Unwritten History (2013), The Untold Story of the People of Azad Kashmir (2012) and Understanding Kashmir and Kashmiris (forthcoming).

Sneha Subhedar: (co-author) "The journey of an Indian Śudra caste from artisans to entrepreneurs to capitalists: the Viśvakarmā Pāñchāls". (Ch12)

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Marika Vicziany: (co-author) "Muslim Saints and the Koli tribal fishers of Mumbai in the context of Hindu Fundamentalism". (Ch 11)

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Auriol Weigold: "Australia-India relations in insecure times: Malcolm Fraser's engagement". (Ch 1)

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it has consistently captured the lion's share of the City Muslim vote. Since everywhere else in the country the Muslims generally vote for the Congress,⁵⁶ this makes Hyderabad quite unique in terms of Muslim politics in contemporary India. Moreover, the strength of this ethnic allegiance and the close links that the Majlis has forged with its constituents in the inner City neighbourhoods, have served to give it an enormous sway over local Muslim behaviour. Not to put too fine a point on it, when the Party wants riots to happen, they do. In the early 1970s the MIM was still building up its strength. For tactical purposes it had concluded an alliance with Congress. These circumstances induced it to keep the peace. But after the ruling party, in 1976, cynically changed the Assembly electoral boundaries in the City in a bid to advantage Hindu electors, the MIM withdrew from the arrangement and began to flex its muscles. Two years later during the next Assembly elections, bloody violence erupted in the Hyderabad streets.

⁵⁶ The only other significant exception is Kerala, where the Muslim League enjoys niche support.

10

*Akhand Bharat*¹ and the Demographic Threat

Positions of the Sangh Parivar on Muslim Bangladeshi Migration into India

Rizwana Shamsi^{ad}

'Infiltration': A Political Campaign

Migration of Muslim Bangladeshis into India is portrayed by the Hindu nationalist Sangh Parivar as 'infiltration'.² Bangladeshi migrants in India are undocumented as there is no mechanism to regulate migration. However, in the Sangh Parivar's Bangladeshi migration discourse, Hindus from Bangladesh are 'refugees' and Muslims are 'infiltrators'. The Sangh Parivar claims that Muslim Bangladeshi migrants pose a threat to India's economy, demographic makeup and security. The Hindu nationalists have accused Muslim migrants of involvement with Pakistan's intelligence agency (the ISI) and with Islamic terrorists.³ They further claim that Muslim Bangladeshis vote for pseudo-secularist

- 1 Un-partitioned India.
- 2 The combined force of Hindu nationalists in India work as a family called the Sangh Parivar or the 'Family of the Sangh' built around the parent organisation, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The family includes the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), the Bajarang Dal, the Durga Bahini and many more. The BJP is the political face of the Sangh Parivar.
- 3 Michael Gillan, 'Refugees or infiltrators? The Bhartiya Janata Party and Illegal Migration from Bangladesh', in *Asian Studies Review*, Vol. 26, no. 1, 2002, pp. 73-95.

political parties in India. The Sangh Parivar has argued for the deportation of Muslim Bangladeshi migrants since the early 1990s, and made this issue an element of its electoral campaigns.

According to a BJP Rajya Sabha⁴ member, Vijay Mathur, Bangladeshi 'infiltration' is no longer an issue for the BJP.⁵ However, another BJP politician and a former editor of *Panchajanya*,⁶ Ajay Ranade, in his interview said, 'Bangladeshi infiltration is still very close to our hearts and the whole Sangh Parivar is united on this issue'.⁷ This BJP politician thus contradicts the other's claims. Their comments indicate that some Sangh Parivar members have divergent views on the issue.

This paper investigates the current positions of the Sangh Parivar on Muslim Bangladeshi migration to India by comparing the views held by various Sangh Parivar members. It does so by analysing the author's interviews with Sangh Parivar members on two major components of the Bangladeshi 'infiltration' campaign: (a) the demographic threat arising from the number of Bangladeshi 'infiltrators' present in India; and (b) the solutions to this problem. This paper argues that although the Sangh Parivar appears united on the issue of Bangladeshi 'infiltration', in fact there are considerable differences within the Parivar about these two components.

The Sangh Parivar Organisations

The Sangh Parivar is a number of interconnected organisations that strive to advance Hindu nationalism in India. There exists a well-structured division of labour between the organisations it encompasses. The core of Hindu nationalism is the ideology of Hindutva which is different from the Hindu religion. Hinduism is a diversity of assorted faiths and ways of life by which the majority of Indians live. Hindutva, on the other hand, is the ideology of sections of the upper-caste and upper and lower-middle classes,

- 4 Council of States or the Upper House in the national parliament of India.
- 5 Interview with Vijay Mathur (not his real name) on 9 April 2010, Delhi.
- 6 A Hindi weekly published by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).
- 7 Interview with Ajay Ranade (not his real name) on 3 March 2010, Delhi.

as well as many urban middle class Hindus.⁸ Hindutva seeks to create a Hindu nation and restore its version of Hindu culture which it views as deeply rooted in the land *Bharatvarsha*, the land between the Indus and the seas.⁹ Membership across its organisations is fuzzy and often members from one organisation join and work for other organisations within the Parivar. The interviewees in this paper are (or were) influential members of three Sangh Parivar organisations: the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP).¹⁰

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) is the nucleus of the Sangh Parivar. The RSS was formed in 1925 to train and masculinise Hindu youth in order to fight and protect Hindus against Muslims. Nineteenth century Hindu nationalists believed that Hindus were subordinate to Muslims and the British because they were weak, vulnerable and not masculine enough.¹¹ The RSS provides the BJP with its ideological foundation. All the prominent leaders of the BJP including the former Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Ministers of the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government and the current Chief Minister of Gujarat were trained in the RSS. The RSS played a key role in founding the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS), which later became the

- 8 Ashish Nandy, 'Hinduism versus Hindutva: The Inevitability of a Confrontation', *The Times of India*, 18 February 1991, accessed on 24 December 2012, <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/southasia/Socissues/hindutva.html>.
- 9 Christophe Jaffrelot, *Religion, Caste and Politics in India*; London: Hurst and Company, 2011, p. 287.
- 10 All the interviews used in this paper were conducted between February and May 2010 in Delhi at the BJP party Head Office, the RSS Unit, National Parliament MP Hostel, and at the offices and residences of the interviewees. Due to reasons of confidentiality I have used pseudonyms for all interviewees. The designations of the interviewees and their affiliations with the Sangh Parivar organisations were not changed.
- 11 Tanika Sarkar, 'Imagining a Hindu Rashtra: The Hindu and the Muslim in Bankim Chandra's Writings' in David Ludden (ed.), *Making India Hindu: Religion, Community, and the Politics of Democracy in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2nd Edition, 2005, pp. 162-184.

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The RSS has immense influence on the BJP's politics and party affairs.

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) was created by the RSS in order to organise the various sects of Hinduism under one umbrella. The diversity within Hinduism was seen as a weakness by many Hindu nationalists. Jaffrelot argues that the VHP is a Hindu church structured to emulate the centralised structure of the Catholic Church in order to organise Hindus.¹² The VHP is a radical organisation and is the extreme face of Hindu nationalism. It supports the BJP and expects its religious agenda to be carried out by the party. One such agenda is to construct a Ram Temple on the disputed Babri Mosque site in Ayodhya and reclaim the land for Hindus. The VHP's agitational role was instrumental in the Babri Mosque demolition in 1992 and it is known for its hate campaigns against Muslims. The phrase, *Musalmanoka do hi sthan, Pakistan ya Kabrasthan* (Muslims have only two places to live, either Pakistan or the graveyard) was created by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP).¹³ The VHP played a key role in instigating the 1990 Nizamuddin riot in Delhi which left two Muslim Bangladeshis killed.¹⁴ The VHP senior leader Babu Lal Sharma Prem was at the forefront of the Bangladeshi 'infiltration' campaign before the 1993 Delhi State Assembly election. Later Prem founded another organisation called *Akhand Bharat*.¹⁵ It is part of the Sangh Parivar, and will be discussed later.

The BJP is a national political party with Hindutva as its ideology. It rose in the 1990s and formed a coalition federal

12 Christophe Jaffrelot, 'Hindu Nationalism: Strategic Syncretism and Ideology Building', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol 22, no 12, 20-27 March, 1993, pp.517-524.

13 Gyanendra Pandey, *Routine Violence: Nations, Fragments, Histories*, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006, p 189.

14 Pradip Datta, Pati, B, Sarkar, S, Sarkar, T and Sen S, 'Understanding Communal Violence: Nizamuddin Riots,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 25, no. 45, Nov.10, 1990, pp. 2487-2495.

15 Praful Bidwai, 'Confronting the Reality of Hindutva Terrorism', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 43, no. 47, Nov. 22 - 28, 2008, pp. 10-13.

government three times.¹⁶ The first two coalition governments were short-lived. One of the successes of Hindu nationalists in the 1990s was the demolition of the Babri Mosque. Following the demolition the BJP gradually shifted from its hard-line mobilisation centred on the Babri Mosque-Ram Temple movement to a softer policy. The leaders of the BJP feared that extreme forces, such as the VHP, would overshadow them and the party would lose in the elections. After the demolition of the Babri Mosque the Sangh Parivar adopted a dual policy where its extreme face, represented by the VHP, dehumanised all Muslims as 'infiltrators' and 'invaders',¹⁷ while its political face, the BJP, represented an apparently 'moderate' stance by toning down its rhetoric against Indian Muslims and switching its target to Muslim Bangladeshi migrants. It was then that Bangladeshi 'infiltration' became a major political campaign expanding from regional Assam and West Bengal to the national level.¹⁸

Migration from Bangladesh (or the current territory of Bangladesh) to Assam is more than a century old and has a particular trajectory. It started even before Partition. The Assam Movement against foreigners (1979-85) was hostile to the non-Assamese people in the state, including the Bengalis, both Hindus and Muslims from former Bengal, the Nepalis and the Marwaris. Bangladeshi migration has been a persistent political issue in Assam since the late 1970s.

The strategy of portraying Muslim Bangladeshis as 'infiltrators' gave the BJP an entry point into Assamese and West Bengali politics, where previously it did not have a base. In Assam, the BJP managed to garner the support of Bengali Hindus, especially of those who migrated from Bangladesh, by seeking to shift the debate from the migration of all Bengalis to the migration of Bengali and Bangladeshi Muslims into the

16 1996, 1998 and 1999-2004.

17 Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics, 1925 to the 1990s: Strategies of Identity Building, Implantation and Mobilisation (with special reference to central India)*. London: C. Hurst and Company Ltd, 1996, p.390, 485.

18 *Ibid*, p. 483.

state. Similarly in West Bengal in the 1998 Lok Sabha election the 'infiltration' campaign won the BJP the seat of Dum Dum constituency, which has a considerable population of Hindu refugees from Bangladesh.¹⁹

The phrases 'illegal Bangladeshis' and 'infiltrators' gained wide and regular coverage in almost all the national newspapers during the 1990s.²⁰ It was a popular campaign in the 1993 Delhi State Assembly election for the BJP under the leadership of Madan Lal Khurana who was known as 'the BJP face in Delhi' at that time. He was the driving force behind this campaign. He led a deportation protest march called the *Elan-e-jung* to evict undocumented Muslim Bangladeshi migrants from Delhi slums in January 1993. The BJP won that election and Khurana became the Chief Minister of Delhi.

In 1999 when the BJP-led federal National Democratic Alliance (NDA) came to power their anti-Muslim agenda once again came to the fore. As the dominant partner in the NDA regime the BJP sought to 'make India Hindu'.²¹ With their political arm in control of the national government the Sangh Parivar took control of countless government agencies and offices including the Indian Council of Historical Research and Ministry of Education in order to rewrite the history of India in government schoolbooks. In the Hindu nationalists' historiography, Hindus are indigenously Indian, distinct from Muslims and Christians who are alien conquerors and exploiters of Hindu India. Thus 'official Hindutva gave communalism cultural validity that made Hindu violence against Muslims seem a natural manifestation of Hindu rage'.²²

19 Michael Gillan, 'BJP in 1998 Lok Sabha Election in West Bengal: Transformation of Opposition Politics', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 33, no 36/37, 1998, pp. 2392-95.

20 Sujata Ramachandran, 'Operation Pushback: Sangh Parivar, State, Slums and Surreptitious Bangladeshis in New Delhi', *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, Vol. 23, no. 3, 2002, pp. 311-332.

21 David Ludden, 'Preface to the Second Edition', in David Ludden (ed.), *Making India Hindu: Religion, Community, and the Politics of Democracy in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2nd Edition, 2005, pp: vi-xviii.

22 Ibid.

One of the most notorious acts of the Hindu nationalists during the NDA regime was supporting the BJP-led state government of Gujarat in the 2002 riots against Muslims. Gujarat is often described by scholars as the 'Hindu Rashtra laboratory' and the riots as 'state-sponsored'.²³

The BJP lost the 2004 Lok Sabha election. Since then, the BJP has been trying to tone down its 'communal' image seeking to adopt a neutral stance towards Indian Muslims.²⁴ Muslim leaders within the party regularly vouch for the BJP as non-communal in order to establish this stance.²⁵

Bangladeshi 'infiltration' is still an election campaign issue for the BJP nationally as well as in West Bengal and Assam. Curbing 'illegal' migration from Bangladesh and strengthening India-Bangladesh border security have appeared in the BJP's election manifestos before every Lok Sabha election.²⁶ The campaign possibly lost its momentum in Delhi after the expulsion of Madan Lal Khurana from the BJP in 2005.²⁷

The portrayal of Bangladeshi Muslim migrants as 'infiltrators' by the Sangh Parivar is inextricably tied to their Muslimness. The next section will discuss two key Hindutva concepts related to Muslimness. These concepts will help to clarify the current position of the Parivar on Muslim Bangladeshi migrants.

23 Ram Puniyani, *Religion, Power and Violence: Expression of Politics in Contemporary Times*. New Delhi: Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2005, p. 24.

24 Kamal Sandesh, 'BJP is Anti-minorityism, Not Anti-minorities: Advani', 1-15 August, Vol. 3, no. 15, 2008, p.21.

25 The Organiser, 'Secularists Dividing Hindus and Muslims: Syed Shahnewaz Hussain, BJP MP', 24 August 2004, p. 2.

26 BJP Election Manifestos, 1998, 2004, 2009.

27 Daily News and Analysis, 'Madan Lal Khurana expelled by BJP for six years', 6 September 2005, accessed 24 March 2013, <http://www.dnaindia.com/money/1358/report-property-queries>.

Some Relevant Concepts from Hindutva

(a) The Exclusion of Muslims

Creating and recreating a despised, hated or malevolent 'Other' has been crucial to the formation of Hindu nationalism, and to its many political campaigns. This 'Other', is mainly the Indian Muslim minority as opposed to the majority 'Self', which is the Hindu community.²⁸ Hindu nationalists hold the view that since Muslims created Pakistan as their holy land, all Indian Muslims should go there. In Hindutva discourse Pakistan is an eternal enemy-state which Muslims created by dismembering the sacred motherland. Indian Muslims are often accused of being crypto-Pakistanis, loyal only to Pakistan, they are 'foreign', 'aggressors' and will demand another Partition.²⁹ This second partition will be realised through demographic expansion. For the Sangh Parivar, Muslims are not to be trusted in the Hindu Rashtra (state) that is Bharat (India). Bangladesh was part of Pakistan at Partition and as a Muslim majority country became part of Hindutva's anti-Muslim rhetoric in the 1990s.

(b) Akhand Bharat

The second relevant concept is re-establishing an *Akhand Bharat* or an un-partitioned India. Territory is an integral part of Hindu nationalism. The RSS defines the territory, the natural homeland of the Hindus as undivided, un-partitioned India, *Akhand Bharat* or Hindustan. It is the sacred land of the Hindus, who are the bearers of a great and glorious civilisation.³⁰ The RSS seeks to create an *Akhand Bharat* or an un-partitioned, undivided India as it was before Partition.³¹ *Akhand Bharat* is not just the territorial

28 Gyanendra Pandey, 'Can a Muslim Be an Indian?' *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 41, no. 4, 1999, pp. 608-629.

29 G. Pandey, 'Routine Violence', p.128.

30 Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2nd edition, 2002, p. 75.

31 *The Indian Express*, 'Only Akhand Bharat: Mohan Bhagwat', 1 February 2007, accessed 4 January 2012, <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/only-by-akhand-bharat/22197/1>

integrity of undivided India; it is a way of re-establishing the glorious Hindu nation's hegemony.

The Sangh Parivar has an organisation called *Akhand Bharat*. Its mission is to restore an un-partitioned and undivided Indian subcontinent under Hindu supremacy. Re-establishing an *Akhand Bharat* has been a constant agenda item for the RSS. In 2009, RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat said, 'Hindutva is the binding force. Partition is temporary, it must go'.³² Bhagwat's statement reaffirms former radical RSS Chief Golwalkar's view that Muslims should agree to be absorbed into the Hindu culture if they wish to remain citizens of India.³³

In the following sections two significant components of the Sangh Parivar's campaign on Bangladeshi 'infiltration' are discussed: the demographic threat and the solution. For the Sangh Parivar the migration of Bangladeshi Muslims poses a demographic threat to Hindu India. The Parivar claims that 'infiltration' of Muslims from Bangladesh would change the demographic balance in India turning Hindus into a minority and lead to another Partition. Besides, a vast Muslim population is also a threat to a possible *Akhand Bharat* in a democracy which would allow Muslims to form a government making the Hindus subservient to them once again.

Demographic Threat and the Numbers Discourse

Initially the Sangh Parivar used the demographic threat of a rising Muslim population in the India-Bangladesh border regions in its 'infiltration' campaign. They argued that Bangladeshi Muslims were infiltrating the border areas and coming to India in millions to create a Pakistan or a 'Greater Bangladesh'. The interviewees from the Sangh Parivar expressed similar views. For example, Ram Prasad Devraj, a former Union Minister of the BJP-led NDA

32 *The Organiser*, 'Hindutva is the Binding Force: Partition is Temporary, It must Go: RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat', 20 December 2009, p. 20.

33 C. Jaffrelot, 'Religion, Caste and Politics in India', p.130, 134.

India's borders.⁴³ In February 2003, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam,⁴⁴ the then President of India, in a formal address to the parliament, said that there were 15 million Bangladeshis residing illegally in India.⁴⁵ A few months later, George Fernandes, the then Defence Minister of India, said that there were 20 million Bangladeshis in India.⁴⁶

In the national parliament, the number of Muslim Bangladeshis stated to be in India has been discussed frequently since the 1980s. In 2004, a BJP MP told the Lok Sabha that according to the federal NDA government the number of Bangladeshi migrants rose from 10 million to 20 million in the last few years.⁴⁷ In 2007, *The Organiser*, an RSS weekly claimed that there were 20 million 'infiltrators'.⁴⁸ In June 2009, a BJP MP in the national parliament said there were 30 million Bangladeshi 'infiltrators' in India who were associated with terrorist groups.⁴⁹ According to their figures the number of Muslim Bangladeshis increased by 10 million in five years.

The Sangh Parivar interviewees cite higher numbers of Bangladeshis than their colleagues had previously claimed. According to a senior RSS leader Ramesh Acharya, there are more than 25 million Muslim Bangladeshis in India. Current Rajya Sabha member from the BJP in Delhi, Vijay Mathur, thought the

43 Government of India, 'Reforming the National Security System Recommendations of the Group of Ministries', New Delhi, Ministry of Defense, 2001, pp. 83-84.

44 A.P.J. Kalam was the President of India during the BJP-led NDA government.

45 Ranjit Devraj, 'India Huffs and Puffs over BD immigrants', *The Dawn*, 19 February 2003, accessed on 23 December, 2012, <http://archives.dawn.com/2003/02/19/int11.htm>

46 *The Tribune India*, '2 cr Bangladeshis in India: Fernandes', 27 September 2003.

47 Lok Sabha Debate Text, 'Demographic Character of Divergent Communities', Third session, 14 series, Vol. 5, nos. 7-9, 1-23, 4 Dec 2004, pp.133-34.

48 *The Organiser*, 'Twenty Million Bangladeshis have been Welcomed into the Country for the Sake of Their Votes', 23 December 2007, p. 18

49 Lok Sabha Debate Texts, 'Infiltration from Bangladesh', Fifteenth Series, Vol. I, First Session, 8 June 2009, pp. 169-78.

number of Bangladeshis in Delhi alone could be up to four million. He claimed that in Assam and West Bengal, the Muslim population ballooned because of Bangladeshi 'infiltration'. The figure claimed by Ajay Ranade, BJP politician and a former editor of the RSS's weekly, *Paanchjanya*, was much greater than Mathur's. Ranade stated that there were 60 to 70 million Bangladeshi 'infiltrators' in India. The interviewee from the VHP claimed that there were 30 million Bangladeshis in India of which seven million live in Delhi. A former Union Minister and Chief Minister of Delhi from the BJP, Ram Prasad Devraj, claimed that crores (tens of millions) of Bangladeshi 'infiltrators' were in India.

These numbers quoted in interviews and in print indicate that Sangh Parivar members neither have a practical estimate nor a consensus on how many Muslim Bangladeshi migrants are in India. Amongst the interviewees, the number of Muslim Bangladeshis varies from 20 to 70 million. The number varies so much because no one knows the exact or even an approximate number. One reason is identification of Bangladeshis is difficult due to the socio-cultural-linguistic-religious affinities of the region. According to the 2001 Census of India Migration Data Report, there are about three million Bangladeshi migrants in India. The Census claims that 65.2% of the migrants from the neighbouring countries including Bangladesh had migrated to India at least 20 years back, perhaps at the time of partition and also later during the Bangladesh war in 1971.⁵⁰ The Census does not provide the religious affiliations of migrants. A significant number of these migrants could be Hindus from Bangladesh who were persecuted or migrated, but for the Sangh Parivar Hindus Bangladeshis are not a demographic threat. Thus the Sangh Parivar's strategy is to create fear amongst Hindus by claiming that Bangladeshi Muslims are coming in their millions to invade India. The Parivar claims that only the Hindu nationalists can protect the country from these invaders.

50 Census of India 2001, 'Data Highlights: Migration Tables', Office of Registrar General and Census Commissioner, New Delhi.

Solutions: Deportation or Integration?

The Sangh Parivar defines a problem, a demographic threat to Hindu India posed by an avalanche of Muslim 'infiltrators'. This section will explore the Parivar's solutions to the problem that they define as 'infiltration'. There have been deportations of Muslim Bangladeshis from the slums of Delhi, Mumbai and in the bordering regions of Assam in the 1990s, and post-2000. Deportation measures such as Operation Pushback with the arrest of Muslim Bangladeshis in Delhi was an outcome of the Sangh Parivar's 'infiltration' campaign in the 1990s.⁵¹ While in power the BJP-led NDA government revived the India-Bangladesh Border Fence Project and succeeded in constructing a two-meter high double barb-wired fence around most of India's border with Bangladesh. There have also been random shootings and killings of Bangladeshi civilians by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) in order to stop 'infiltration'.⁵²

The BJP officially proposes deportation of all existing Muslim Bangladeshi migrants from India. In its 2009 Lok Sabha Election Manifesto, the BJP stated that it would launch a massive programme to 'detect, detain and deport illegal immigrants' from the eastern border within 100 days if it won office.⁵³ It was the party's key platform in its election campaign in Assam where the issue of Bangladeshi/Bengali migration can determine a poll result. Before the 2011 State Assembly election in Assam, the BJP promised to make Assam free of Bangladeshi 'infiltrators' if voted into power. In its 2011 State Election Manifesto, the party promised to complete the fencing of the India-Bangladesh border within a year, and form a special cell to monitor the detection, detention and deportation of 'illegal immigrants'.⁵⁴ But what do the interviewees who are influential members of the Sangh

51 S. Ramachandran, 'Operation Pushback', p. 311.

52 *The Economist*, 'Felani's Last Step: India's Shoot-to-kill Policy Claims One More Innocent', 3 February 2011, accessed on 2 February 2013, <http://www.economist.com/node/18073333>.

53 BJP Election Manifesto 2009.

54 *The Hindustan Times*, 'BJP Releases Manifesto in Assam', New Delhi, 21 March 2011.

Parivar suggest as solutions to the problem of 'infiltration' in India?

In an interview the VHP senior leader, Paresh Bajaj, suggested deportation of all *ghuspetias* or 'infiltrators'. He accused Bangladesh of being a *krititaghna* nation. *Krititaghna* refers to a person who harms someone who has helped him. According to this senior VHP leader, India helped Bangladeshi in the 1971 liberation war and now Bangladesh sends millions of people to undermine the Hindus by taking their jobs, and by engaging in 'infiltration':

Bangladeshi *ghuspetias* make money in India and save it in Bangladesh or Pakistan. We need to take the ration cards and voter ID from all these Bangladeshis and kick them out of India. No place for migrants in India.⁵⁵

This VHP leader does not see Bangladeshi migration as the poor moving in search of a better life, but as a Muslim conspiracy aimed at the vulnerable Hindus of India.

The divergence and contradictions in the positions of the Sangh Parivar came to the fore in an interview with the RSS senior leader, Ramesh Acharya. Rather than suggesting deportation he proposed that Bangladeshis in India should be detected, identified and their names deleted from the voter lists. He proposed an *Akhand Bharat*, a total unification of partitioned India under which Bangladesh would be absorbed into Greater India:

Before 1947, my grandfather was in Pakistan. He chose Pakistan over India in 1947 but my father could not live there. We had to come to India. Before 1947, Dhaka was part of Hindustan. India has three names- Bharat, Hindustan and India. Nationality should be on land but in some countries is based on religion like Pakistan. It is not a denominator of caste, it is the land. We South Asians have common ancestry, forefathers. We belong to the same nation. Partition was created by the British; those who supported Partition were fanatics and anti-nationalists. Partition should go. There should just be one *Akhand Bharat*.⁵⁶

55 Interview with Bajaj on 21 April 2010, Delhi.

56 Interview with Ramesh Acharya on 19 April 2010, Delhi.

In *Akhand Bharat*, the Muslims must be subservient to the Hindus. In this policy all Muslims in India must give up their culture, their religion, their identity and be assimilated into Hindu culture and Hindu civilisation.

A former Union Minister and a former Chief Minister of Delhi from the BJP, Ram Prasad Devraj, did not suggest any 'solution' for solving 'infiltration'. Instead he said:

If Bangladesh was with India, it would have done much better economically. Pakistan created this divide, the BJP [the Hindu nationalists before Partition] did not want Partition but we accepted it, [even though] the BJP did not want Bangladesh to go with Pakistan.⁵⁷

He draws a connection between the economic and political consequences of Partition and Bangladeshi migration. He holds the creation of Pakistan responsible for the economic inequality between Bangladesh and India. It is this economic inequality that drives the migration. This is different from the usual Sangh Parivar reasoning, which emphasises 'infiltration'. In the earlier section he said Bangladeshi migrants were an economic and security threat to India yet declared Bangladesh would do far better if it was integrated with India. This reveals the ambiguities in the Sangh Parivar's position. On the one hand they attack Muslim Bangladeshis for coming to India; on the other hand they want Bangladesh to return to India. Surprisingly as someone who was actively involved in the 'infiltration' campaign in Delhi in the 1990s, this Sangh Parivar member did not suggest deportation. He later candidly admitted, 'these days I am not interested in politics at all. In politics sometime we have to do things for political goals. I do not want to talk about it.'

Another BJP politician, a senior Muslim leader who was also a former President of the BJP Minority Cell in Bihar, Zafar Shahid, argued that identification measures and deportation be applied to all Bangladeshis, whether they be Hindu or Muslim.⁵⁸ As stated

57 Interview with Ram Prasad Devraj on 21 April 2010, Delhi. Devraj is also an RSS member.

58 Interview with Zafar Shahid on 17 April 2010, Delhi.

earlier, the Sangh Parivar welcomes Hindus from Bangladesh as 'refugees' and advocates their right to Indian citizenship. This Muslim BJP leader's viewpoint contradicts the Sangh Parivar's desire to attain a Hindu nation and Hindu Rashtra. Paradoxically, later in the interview he advocated an undivided India, an *Akhand Bharat*, declaring 'Unification of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh is possible, they can all be united'.⁵⁹

Although the BJP officially declares deportation of 'infiltrators' and opposes migration of Muslim Bangladeshis, Rakesh Sharma, a former Union Minister, a BJP MP in the current Lok Sabha, and spokesperson suggests something else:

Bangladeshis can come but not in this way. India is not a *dharamsala* (charity accommodation) where anyone can come and stay. We did not permit. There is a need for proper regime so that people can come legally.⁶⁰

Similarly Vijay Mathur, a current Rajya Sabha member of the BJP, recommended that the existing migrants should be identified and given some kind of legal rights. Although he believed Muslim Bangladeshis in India were economic, demographic and security threats, he did not recommend their deportation. Mathur argued that detection of Bangladeshis in India based upon appearance is 'virtually impossible' due to the socio-cultural-religious affinities in the region. He suggested that a national registration⁶¹ of Indian citizens would help in detecting the Bangladeshis who came to India after 1971. He felt that through a legal mechanism, migration from Bangladesh can be regulated:

Formal work permit should be introduced then these people will eventually return to their home country.⁶²

59 Ibid.

60 Interview with Rakesh Sharma on 25 April 2010, Delhi.

61 One of the BJP's 2011 Assam Legislative Assembly election manifestos was to update the National Registration of Citizens (NCR) to detect 'illegal migrants'.

62 Interview with Vijay Mathur on 9 April 2010, Delhi.

Both the BJP politicians differ in their views from other interviewees from the Sangh Parivar.

The Sangh Parivar interviewees have assorted views on the policy mechanism to counteract Bangladeshi 'infiltration'. The members do not unanimously support a single policy. The VHP interviewee repeated the VHP hate speech against Muslims and wanted to 'kick them out'. The RSS leader suggested an *Akhand Bharat* integrating all Muslims and restoring Mother India's original sacred territory and glorious past. The interviewees from the BJP suggested work permits and legal mechanisms, which diverged from the views of other Sangh Parivar interviewees. Their suggestions also contradicted the BJP's policy of 'detection, deletion and deportation' as articulated in its election manifestos. The BJP's Muslim politician suggested deportation and rejected further migration of Muslim or Hindu Bangladeshis, a view which contrasts with his party's policy. Later in the interview, his proposition of an *Akhand Bharat* raised further questions about his position on Bangladeshi migrants.

Conclusion

These diverse views within the Sangh Parivar organisations about the number of Bangladeshi 'infiltrators' and their policy implications points to differences and ambiguities within the Parivar. In the beginning of this discussion, a BJP politician claimed that the whole Sangh Parivar was united about the Bangladeshi 'infiltration' issue. These interviews reveal that there is more ambiguity amongst Sangh Parivar organisations and members than is officially admitted.

In recent years there have been disagreements between the RSS and the BJP in choosing the BJP leadership. In 2012 the RSS Chief, Mohan Bhagwat, declared that the RSS would not intervene in selecting senior leaders in the BJP any longer.⁶³ Vicziany notes that while being an ally of the BJP-led NDA government and a Sangh Parivar member, the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra had

63 *The Indian Express*, 'RSS not BJP's "HR Manager": Mohan Bhagwat', 5 September 2012, accessed 23 December 2012, <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/rss-not-bjp-s--hr-manager--mohan-bhagwat/998062>.

apparent tensions with, and differed from the BJP on various issues.⁶⁴

It is not unusual for there to be tensions, but what is unusual is the level of ambiguity and lack of unanimity within the Sangh Parivar organisations on the number of Bangladeshis and the policy solutions. Although the interviewees expressed similar opinions justifying why Muslim Bangladeshi migrants are a demographic threat, the incoherence and lack of fact in asserting a wide range of numbers suggests a degree of political opportunism born out of the Sangh Parivar's ideological thinking. Ambiguity and inconsistency strengthen such activity.

The suggestion of an *Akhand Bharat* shows that Muslim 'invasion', infiltration', 'Greater Bangladesh' and 'terrorism' allegations against the Bangladeshi Muslims are just strategic political statements. On the one hand, the Sangh Parivar exaggerates the numbers of Bangladeshis to create anxiety about Bangladeshi Muslim migrants, in order to form and mould a large Hindu vote bank. Yet, on the other hand, it is ready to accept and absorb the additional 140 million Bangladeshis most of whom are Muslims, as long as the Muslim Bangladeshis become submissive to the Hindus in *Akhand Bharat*. In addition, some members imply that there is a need for a regulatory framework to legalise migration from Bangladesh. It may be the case that the practised inconsistency and ambiguity of the Sangh Parivar allows it to mask yet promote its deeper Hindutva nationalist purposes.

64 Marika Vicziany, 'The BJP and the Shiv Sena: A Rocky Marriage?' *Journal of South Asian Studies* (Special Issue on The BJP and Governance of India), Vol. 25, no. 3, 2002, pp.41-60.