

# The changing use of violence by the Bharatiya Janata Party in India

*“The Party with a difference” and its different forms of violence*

by  
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*For Santiago, who,  
on the day they were to kill him  
got up at five-thirty in the morning  
to wait for the boat the bishop was coming on*

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## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>I A theoretical approach to communal violence.....</b>	<b>12</b>
Working definition.....	13
The function of <i>Othering</i> in ethnic conflict.....	18
<b>II Bharatiya Janata Party .....</b>	<b>21</b>
Party origins.....	22
Rise to power and campaigning.....	25
Years in office.....	27
Out of office.....	30
<b>III The case of Ayodhya (1992) .....</b>	<b>31</b>
The Hindu history of Ayodhya .....	31
Ayodhya beyond <i>Hindutva</i> .....	33
Events of 1992 .....	36
After Ayodhya .....	40
<b>IV The case of Gujarat (2002).....</b>	<b>42</b>
The Gujarat pogrom.....	45
Electoral effects .....	49
The Self and Other .....	50
<b>V Conclusion.....</b>	<b>53</b>
Hindu-violence paradox .....	54
Production of communal violence .....	56

## List of figures and charts

**Figures:**

**Figure I:** *Map of India* ..... 6

**Figure II:** *Babri Masjid, December 1992* ..... 39

**Figure III:** *Godhra train burning, March 2002* ..... 46

**Figure IV:** *2009 Parliamentary elections* ..... 58

**Charts:**

**Chart I:** *Seats Won by the BJP and Percentage of Vote, National Elections, 1984-99* ..... 28

**Chart II:** *Seats Won by the BJP and Percentage of Vote, Uttar Pradesh (General Elections), 1984-99* ..... 29

## Glossary of terms and abbreviations

*avatar*—human form taken by a Hindu god or goddess

*bhuta*—spirit possessing a Hindu soul

*BJP*—Bharatiya Janata Party

*Hindu rashtra*—Hindu nation

*Hindutva*—Hinduness

*kar sevak*—volunteer at the Ram temple construction in Ayodhya, and here, a victim of the  
2002 train burning at Godhra

*masjid*—mosque

*Ramjanmabhoomi*—movement to build a temple to the Hindu god Ram on the site of the  
Babri Masjid mosque in Ayodhya

*RSS*—Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh

*Sangh parivar*—umbrella term for the RSS family of organizations; includes the BJP

*Shiv Sena*—far-right political party in India

*VHP*—Vishwa Hindu Parishad

*yatra*—Hindu pilgrimage

Figure I. Map of India



Source: India Map, GeoCities website, [www.geocities.com/tour\\_map/tour\\_map.html](http://www.geocities.com/tour_map/tour_map.html).

## Introduction

Under the influence of the Hindu religious nationalist party, the Bharatiya Janata Party, Hindu militants destroyed the Muslim Babri Masjid mosque at Ayodhya in 1992. Exactly ten years later in 2002, Hindu pilgrims on a train for a religious pilgrimage stopped in the state of Gujarat, and were burnt alive on board in the city of Godhra by an ensuing riot involving a Hindu-Muslim altercation. The government at the time, led by the Bharatiya Janata Party, was sluggish in its reaction to the violence, while hundreds of Muslims lost their lives in the ensuing riots across the entire Gujarat province.

Yet to merely look at these two cases of Hindu-Muslim violence would not draw any sort of conclusion about their relation to the Bharatiya Janata Party. The function of my thesis will be to incorporate a theoretical approach to the party's changing use of violence to achieve political goals with a focus on two specific case studies from the past two decades.

I have divided my thesis into five chapters following the introduction. Chapter I will be devoted to a theoretical approach to violence. Here I will outline my working definition of the term, and offer a slightly more nuanced approach to the way in which I will be using the term throughout the thesis.

From here I will move onto a historical study of the development of India's nationalist party, the BJP. Chapter II will focus on the party's rise to power, its time in office, and its subsequent period out of office. Elections and voter patterns will be taken into account, and the chapter will serve as a historical dialectic of the party so an understanding of its political narrative may serve as a basis for later discussions concerning its practices. Clearly the treatment of such a prolific party must take into account its often fragmented approach to



political rule, and a portion of my thesis will serve to clarify the divisions within the party. Only through expounding the BJP not as a single entity, but rather a somewhat disjointed unit comprised of neo-liberals and fundamentalists alike, will I be able to provide a clear understanding of its changing use of violence over time.

Chapters III and IV will deal specifically with the case studies I have chosen, Ayodhya and Gujarat, respectively. The beginnings of these chapters will outline the events in 1992 and 2002, and will conclude with a treatment of the BJP's involvement in both cases. By choosing two distinct cases of violence in India, I am giving my thesis an empirical underpinning. The reasons for choosing Ayodhya and Gujarat are numerous, the least of which is the amount of literature on both cases since they have been so well documented in academia and the media. The main force of my argument, however, derives from the difference in which these two events came to be. Ayodhya in 1992, was, generally speaking, the result of a build-up of Hindu-Muslim antagonism (if such a mild term can be used) that climaxed with the destruction of the Babri mosque. Gujarat, on the other hand, was quite the opposite sort of violence. It began with an event—the burning of the train of Hindu pilgrims in Godhra—that filtered down into weeks of violence and rioting. Where Ayodhya was antagonism built up to an extreme act of violence, Gujarat instead *began* with an act of violence. It is therefore not solely due to the amount of literature on these two cases that I have chosen to use them as the empirical underpinning of my thesis. They represent two distinct cases of Hindu religious nationalist-incited violence; two cases disparate in their coming about, and unique in the ways they were utilized by the main Hindu nationalist party in India, the Bharatiya Janata Party.

Finally, my concluding chapter will incorporate the previous chapters into my final argument on how the BJP utilized communal violence for its benefit, and the dilemmas with the perpetuation of such wrongheaded ideas about the nature of communal violence. The thrust of my thesis will be concerned with outlining not only the ways in which the BJP changes its use of violence over the years, but the problems associated with common perceptions of such violence.

After mapping the historical dialectic of the BJP, analyzing the cases of Ayodhya and Gujarat, the main focus of my thesis will be to examine whether violence is a necessary and inherent tool in BJP electoral strategy, and to examine the changing use of violence as used by the party in various periods of political power: before coming to power, while in office, and out of office.

As Sudhir Kakar points out, in most religions, violence is constructed as a “positive and even necessary force for the realization of religious goals.”<sup>1</sup> Almost every religion therefore has a legitimized form of violence, which I will explore with the case of Hinduism through the *Ramayana* epic and the ways the epic was incorporated into my first case study at Ayodhya. In a religion such as the Hindu faith, with its higher levels of toleration and emphasis on nonviolence, particularly through the teachings of Gandhi, if and when violence does emerge, it is as part of a cycle. For example, the *Kali Yuga*, or Age of Kali, is an era of destruction, which is followed immediately by the *Satya Yuga*, or Golden Age of truth and goodness. It is this cyclical nature of Hinduism that allows for controlled forms of violence to surface as part of the organic religious process. Is there something inherent, then, in the Hindu faith and subsequently the politics of the BJP that makes violence a necessary tool to

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<sup>1</sup> Sudhir Kakar, *The Colors of Violence: Cultural Identities, Religion, and Conflict*, (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 193.

achieve goals? I will not focus on this question specifically in my thesis, but rather, build up to potential future discussions that may arise from such queries. My arguments are based heavily on the empirical material presented, and will center around my hypothesis that the BJP utilizes violence in different ways over the course of its rise to and fall from power.

One final note on the case studies at hand: the direct involvement of the party in both of these cases is widely disputed, particularly in the media. My treatment of coverage of these cases will rely heavily on a balance of pro- and anti-fundamentalist literature in the media. All of this is not to say that the events at Ayodhya or Gujarat themselves are isolated incidents in India, but rather representative of a greater framework of nationalist-incited violence in the country. They will not be the sole focus of my thesis, nor will they be used in a way that might imply that BJP-related violence can be reduced to a series of incidents. Rather, I intend to utilize the violence at Ayodhya and Gujarat as a model for comprehending a greater model of political and religious violence in Indian politics as a whole, while still building on a theoretical approach with nationalist-inspired religious violence at its center.

Finally, I will explore the ways in which violence becomes an intrinsic part of democratic politics. Under what conditions does such violence arise? Here I will pay particular attention to the destruction at Ayodhya in the early 1990s as the start of religious violence for the achievement of the nationalist political goals of the BJP. From here I will look at the growth, success, and relative stability of the BJP during its years in power so that I am able to examine the ways such violence became inherent to democratic politics in India. Following my treatment of Ayodhya in this respect, I will move onto the case of Gujarat in 2002 to examine the in-office politics of violence utilized by the BJP.

My path here began as a twofold approach to the BJP: to first examine the historical background of the Bharatiya Janata Party with particular emphasis on its connection to the *Ramayana* epic, and how it used the Hindu religion to bolster its claims to legitimacy and win political ground in India. Next I intended to focus on the question of whether political violence was an essential and fundamental tool for the achievement of BJP political success, and why such violence seemingly became an inherent part of democratic politics in India. In doing this, I hoped that my thesis would aim at offering a more nuanced approach to the study of religious nationalism in India, with particular regard to the changing ways violence has manifested itself in the actions of the Bharatiya Janata Party. However, as my research progressed, I shifted my focus as the different forms of violence became clearer through my analysis of the riots at Ayodhya and Gujarat. The final product is a theoretical approach to communal violence, with specific reference to the Bharatiya Janata Party's involvement in two distinct contemporary cases, while building on the argument that the party utilizes violence in different ways to suit different needs.

## Chapter I

### A theoretical approach to communal violence

*“Violence is by nature instrumental.” –Hannah Arendt<sup>2</sup>*

The purpose of this chapter will be to offer a more theoretical approach to the idea of violence, and qualify the term for the purposes of this research. Before moving onto the specifics of the Bharatiya Janata Party, Indian democratic politics, and the cases of Ayodhya and Gujarat, I will illustrate what I mean by the term ‘violence’ in my research. The purpose of this chapter will be to qualify what I mean by this term—how it works, what it is, what is the nature of violence, and how this violence can be seen in the light of BJP practices. I will focus on ethno-religious communal violence, taking into account briefly the relation between power and violence, and conclude with a small treatment of the function of Othering in ethnic conflict.

Taking into account the difficulties associated with documenting and researching communal violence, I will begin by offering a working definition for this thesis, and move onto a brief treatment of the ‘Other’ and the ‘Self’ in Hindu religious nationalism as purported by the BJP. Difficulties in gathering evidence are other part of the problem when researching extreme violence, so prior to moving onto the party and the cases themselves, I will begin with a more theoretical approach to violence by confronting the problems associated with reconstructing histories of violence.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Hannah Arendt, *On Violence*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, Inc., 1970), 51.

<sup>3</sup> Gyanendra Pandey, *Routine Violence: Nations, Fragments, Histories*. Stanford, C.A.: Stanford University Press (2006), 29.

*Working definition*

First and foremost, a working definition must be determined before continuing to any sort of specificity with regards to violence. Considering the fact that this thesis is a combination of examining not only religious violence, but also nationalist violence incited by a particular political party in a particular state during a particular time period, such a definition must be somewhat specific in its scope. Therefore I will focus on violence as patterns of religious extremism and forces of nationalist politics, and attempt to combat the vast amount of literature focused on presenting Hindu religious nationalism (and the violence associated with it) as a result of a colonial history and partition.

The first argument of this thesis concerns violence, generally speaking, and will therefore play a crucial role in this early chapter. My argument is that the account of violence on the Indian subcontinent has been as a result not of the Hindu faith or the inherent violence of the people of India; rather, it has come about through an unusual and unfortunate history. It is this prominent notion that violence goes against the basic fundamentals of the Hindu faith that I will argue against later in this chapter. Through my research I have come to understand the changing patterns of violence in India are quite at odds with the generally held perception that such violence has arisen through an unusual, fragmented, colonial past, and have very little to do with the Hindu faith. On the contrary, I will argue the opposite: that violence on the South Asian subcontinent has manifested itself as a result of a distinctly Hindu nationalism that has very little to do with a colonial past as much as it has to do with an inherent acceptance of routine Other-ing and ritual patterns of ethno-religious violence.

Yet first I will begin by qualifying what is meant by violence in this thesis. When I refer to the changing patterns of violence as used by the Bharatiya Janata Party, I am referring

to patterns of ethno-religious violence, incited in a context of political nationalism. More specifically, the violence I will be analyzing in my thesis will be that of collective group action, which, in the cases to be highlighted, ranges from riots to murder. This is indeed a rather broad scope of understanding for the term ‘violence,’ to be sure, but one that will be qualified in this chapter for a more nuanced understanding of what is meant by the term violence in this research. An understanding of two points will be expanded upon for a working definition and comprehension of what I mean by violence: that the violence in this thesis refers to collective action on a nation-wide scale, and that such violence is the result of ethno-religious tension incited by a specific political party.

Three distinct conceptions of social action have emerged in the social sciences, and I will briefly address the three here by placing them in the greater framework of national ethnic violence as utilized by the BJP. The first point of view holds that the analyzing of collective action may be done in the same manner as the analyzing of normal human behavior on an individual level. The second view posits the opposite: that collective action signals a break from conventional behavior. Finally, the third view holds that collective action as understood through the actions of crowds can only be properly understood when one focuses on the feelings of injustice by which the members of the crowd feel their action is attempting to redress.<sup>4</sup>

Yet all of this is but a detail in the building of a working definition and available comprehension of communal violence for the purposes of this thesis. Prior to moving on to the changing patterns of violence as used by the Bharatiya Janata Party and before analyzing

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<sup>4</sup> Veena Das, “Introduction: Communities, Riots, Survivors—The South Asian Experience,” *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots, and Survivors in South Asia*, ed. by Veena Das, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), 2-3.

the cases of Ayodhya and Gujarat, I would like to spend this chapter fleshing out the dynamics of communal violence, and offering something of a theoretical approach.

Scholars such as Paul Brass have argued that the political makeup of post-Independence India has been characterized by the implication of and incitation of Hindu-Muslim riots. Such riots indeed offer benefits for certain political parties, notably the Bharatiya Janata Party and its fellow Sangh Parivar parties. Brass's argument holds true for my own arguments concerning communal violence in India:

These riots have had concrete benefits for particular political organizations whose core as well as larger political uses. Hindu-Muslim opposition, tensions, and violence have provided the principal justification and the primary source of strength for the political existence of some local political organizations...<sup>5</sup>

Brass goes on to argue that the BJP, along with other parties associated with the Sangh Parivar family, thrives through the perpetuation of anti-Muslim sentiment by subscribing to a broad ideology of *Hindutva*, which characterizes its dealings with the larger Indian public.

Emphasizing communal Hindu ideology amongst the Indian population has indeed served the BJP well, and it is this practice of Othering the Islamic community of India that has won elections. Muslims have come to be portrayed as the direct opposition to *Hindutva*, and, with it, the opposition of Indian growth and success. My thesis will focus on the ways in which a particular Hindu religious nationalist party, the Bharatiya Janata Party, has altered its use of violence to promote its ideology and political agenda, and how the use of communal violence functions in Indian politics. In this portion of the chapter I will explain how I will use the term 'violence' and dissect the ways communal violence has manifested itself in India.

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<sup>5</sup> Paul R. Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India*, (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2003), 6.



Hindu-Muslim violence is generally thought to arise as a result of an ancient group-on-group antagonism. I am arguing that it is neither a result of India's peculiar colonial history, nor its partition into India and Pakistan, nor is it even a result of an ancient hatred between Hindus and Muslims that can fully account for the waves of antagonism that have manifested themselves throughout India's history. One function of my thesis will be to combat such a belief that communal violence in India has come about through deep-seated hatreds. Scholars and historians have rarely agreed on whether or not such Hindu-Muslim violence occurred prior to the nineteenth century, and if it did, whether or not it was as prevalent as it has been in contemporary times.<sup>6</sup>

The communal violence I refer to is a combination of riots, such as the rioting that occurred at Ayodhya leading up to and immediately following the destruction of the Islamic mosque on the site of the birthplace of Ram, as well as physical violence, such as the murders of the Hindu pilgrims in the Gujarat province in 2002. Such communal violence that I will expand upon in this thesis is often perceived as being a result of spontaneous action, when in actuality, it is most often carefully orchestrated.

The type of violence that I speak about in this thesis is that which has become an extension of communal politics. This is certainly not to say that the rioters, the murderers, the destroyers of the temples, and so forth are themselves political people involved in a grand political scheme (at least to their knowledge). At times, political actors are present during times of such rioting and violence, but generally speaking, their role is far removed—physically speaking—from the events. This kind of communal violence in India is cyclical in its nature. It is perpetuated by political actors like BJP leaders and carried out by militant

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<sup>6</sup> Paul R. Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India*, (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2003), 25.

Hindus. The notion that there is some sort of ancient hatred underlying all Hindu-Muslim sentiment holds only a small kernel of truth in it.

Political parties indeed benefit directly from such violence, and it is in their interest to perpetuate such notions of age-old antagonism between Hindus and Muslims. Examining such cases as Ayodhya and Gujarat only taps the surface of studying communal violence in India. Furthermore, connecting the incitation of a particular political party to an event often proves difficult, as interviews with those involved become muddled with time and emotion. The extent to which such events are planned ahead of time and carried out (or at least spurred on) by political actors is difficult to prove. However, their involvement can be viewed as forming a direct connection between religious differences and the violence of the ensuing riots. On top of all of this, the politicians involved understand that this is the case, and work to utilize these differences to their advantage.<sup>7</sup>

I would like to point out that I will not be making a correlation between power and violence. My argument in this thesis is that violence and power are indeed related concepts as far as the BJP and Indian politics are concerned. However, the focus here is on communal violence, the sort which gives rise to political power. As Hannah Arendt makes clear, “Violence appears where power is in jeopardy.”<sup>8</sup> She points out that it is not enough to say that violence and power are polar opposites. Here I will focus on violence, specifically at Ayodhya and Gujarat, as a tool for gleaning power in the political sector. Rule by violence comes into play when power is being lost, as I will illustrate in the case studies I have chosen

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<sup>7</sup> Paul R. Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India*, (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2003), 242.

<sup>8</sup> Hannah Arendt, *On Violence*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, Inc., 1970), 56.

for this thesis. It is only in the absence of power that the BJP utilizes such ethno-religious violence to gain power.

The politicization of violence is a crucial element of the definition I will be using in this thesis. The communal violence I am referring to stems from an acceptance of communal differences between Hindus and Muslims—the subsequent emphasizing of such differences, and the mobilization of communities in support of such ideals, is where the violence in essence begins. Parties like the BJP use such differences to drum up support for their own party platforms and in turn use these differences to discredit other parties. The consolidation of votes by the BJP has relied heavily on the support of concrete communities, and the acceptance of communal differences and violence.

*The function of Othering in ethnic conflict*

An important aspect of ethnic conflict, and of violence in India in general, is the Other. With regards to the BJP and proponents of Hindu religious nationalism, that Other is the Muslim community at large. Such anti-Islamic sentiments go deep, and manifest themselves in curious ways at times. As Sudhir Kakar observed in rural north India in the early 1980s, when a Hindu man or woman was possessed by a *bhuta*, or evil spirit, the majority of times the tormenting spirit was that of a Muslim. Part of the healing ritual of such possessions necessitates the evil spirit to declare his or her wishes, and it is during this time that the identity could be determined. For example, Kakar observed a Brahmin priest during

the healing process. The identity of his tormentor was indeed Muslim for he insisted on consuming kebabs, much to the lamentations of the surrounding Hindus.<sup>9</sup>

My point in referencing such an event which may seem a bit isolated and irrelevant in its curiosity, is that it illustrates quite clearly and simply how deep anti-Muslim sentiment goes in the Hindu faith, particularly in rural India. As Kakar points out:

Possession by a Muslim *bhuta*, then, seemed to reflect the afflicted person's desperate efforts to convince himself and others that his hunger for forbidden foods and uncontrolled rage towards those who should be loved and respected, as well as all other imagined transgressions and sins of the heart, belonged to the Muslim destroyer of taboos and were furthest away from his 'good Hindu self'.<sup>10</sup>

It is in this way, incorporated into the psyche and religion of Hindus that the Muslim came to represent the violent Other, the evil tormentor of the good Hindu nation. I reference this incident observed by Kakar for it underlines the unconscious—the prefix 'un' here may be debatable, but for the sake of not going into another argument I will acknowledge its possible consciousness—*Othering* of the Muslim population of India.

Such *Othering* serves a dual purpose in most instances, and India is no exception. It heightens the sense of superiority over the separate group, tribe, caste, religion, or what have you. Such a superiority places one's own group at the center of the proverbial universe, increasing a certain level of narcissism and promoting one's own group ideals above all others.

The second effect of *Othering* is the act of dividing the Other into ethnic groups. Such a division promotes one's own group, and leaves the "Other" as the keeper of the

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<sup>9</sup> Sudhir Kakar. "Some Unconscious Aspects of Ethnic Violence in India," from *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots, and Survivors in South Asia*, ed. by Veena Das, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), 136.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 136-137.

unappealing, evil, and often rejected aspects of character. It is this second effect that manifested itself in Kakar's observations of the *bhuta* spirits possessing Hindu men and women in rural north India. The Muslim demon possessing the Hindu body became the container for all things evil and undesirable in the Hindu psyche.

I segued into this brief and not in-depth discussion on the Hindu psyche because it is necessary in grasping a basic sense of the underlying forces at work in India. To properly understand the violence used by a particular Hindu religious nationalist political party, one must first comprehend the depth to which these forces are already at work in the minds of Hindus.

## Chapter II

### Bharatiya Janata Party

*“One people, one culture.” –BJP motto*

Perhaps the first place to begin the treatment of a political party is to identify its self-definition and self-proclaimed history. The official website of the Bharatiya Janata Party offers a rather extensive history of the party, and begins said epic by stating that the party is “wedded to national unity, national integrity, national identity and national strength through individual character and national character” and ends with the question: *What is the story of this national epic?*<sup>11</sup>

As I stated in the introduction to this research, I do not intend to apply a blanket definition to the Bharatiya Janata Party. Its history and many factions within the party must be taken into account prior to the examination of its actions during the 1990s and 2000s. Such a general treatment of an oft-divided and prolific organization would not do justice to any sort of research examining its actions over the past twenty years.

With this in mind, I will move forward by beginning with a brief historical sketch of the BJP’s party origins, and move onto its time while campaigning, its time in office, and ultimately its time out of office. This chapter will be devoted entirely to understanding the dialectic of the party. Later chapters will dissect the thrust of this thesis, which is to understand how the BJP’s changing patterns of violence have become an inherent part of the party’s strategy, but Chapter II will merely serve as the basis for later discussions.

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<sup>11</sup> Bharatiya Janata Party website, “BJP History: Its Birth and Early Growth,” from <http://www.bjp.org/content/view/432/284/>.

The BJP was founded and bases its entire political ideology on a nationalist platform. The party invests in the idea that India was and will always remain a fundamentally Hindu nation, built upon by the idea of *Hindutva*. In this sense, the party (and Hindu nationalism overall) view non-Hindus, particularly Muslims, as marginal members of the Indian nation. This notion of a single Hindu culture is the basis of the BJP's overall ideology, and the modus operandi of the party in general. The world is understood in cultural, civilization terms, and the overall imagining of India is that of a "Hindu nation." This chapter will be a primarily historical and political science portion of the thesis, but an understanding of the BJP as a Hindu nationalist party is imperative before continuing. Hindu nationalism views the world in regards to "cultural essentials," such as food or societal practices like marriage. The BJP operates within the confines of such ideas about culture, and its actions over the past twenty years must be viewed in lieu of this ideology.<sup>12</sup>

### *Party origins*

The question may be asked as to why a country that is dominated by the Hindu faith lasted until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century before electing a dominantly Hindu nationalist political party. This section of Chapter II will serve to outline the background of the BJP's origins, but by beginning with this question, a very broad understanding of the Hindu faith is necessary. Lacking in central leadership or any sort of hierarchical form of religion, Hinduism is united not by a central text, differing from religions of the "book" such as Judaism, Christianity, or

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<sup>12</sup> Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), 11.

Islam. Rather, Hinduism is a very private and individually-interpreted faith, the practice of which is not necessarily conducive to the mobilization *en masse* of its followers.<sup>13</sup>

It is therefore interesting to take note of the fact that the cleavages that exist in the faith of the party members of the Bharatiya Janata Party are particularly similar to the cleavages within their party itself. A divisive religion in a multi-religious, multi-cultural (not in the Kymlickan sense of the term), and multi-linguistic state produced yet an even more divisive party. My point in emphasizing this aspect of the Hindu faith is to make clear the fact that despite a Hindu dominance in India, such Hindu religious nationalism should not be an expected inevitability. Thus, the BJP's successful emergence on the Indian political scene was not a foreseeable result of independence from British colonial rule, and heralded an altogether surprising turn of events for India.

As with most political parties, to truly understand the growth and formation of the BJP, one must step back prior to its official inception and glean a comprehension for the dialectic of Indian politics as a whole leading up to the official formation of the political party in question. To do this, a brief glance at the emergence of democracy in the modern Indian state following the end of British colonialism will be necessary.

The first few decades following independence, the Indian National Congress dominated the political scene of India. Though espousing a secular approach to democracy and politics as a whole, the party was not unified in this approach. There did exist those within the Congress who favored a more Hindu-centric approach to rule, but the Muslim vote and commitment to secular politics gave the INC the secular front it needed to secure votes.

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<sup>13</sup> Shaila Seshia, "Divide and Rule in Indian Party Politics: The Rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party," from *Asian Survey*, Vol. 38, No. 11 (November 1998), 1037.



The predecessor to the BJP, the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, never posed any real electoral threat to the Indian National Congress, mostly due to its strong favoring of *Hindutva* and connection to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The RSS was linked heavily to the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi in 1948 in that a former member of the RSS, Nathuram Godse, was the assassin. The main thrust of the RSS political stance was that a revitalization of the Hindu value system would be necessary for the building of a strong Indian state. In short, the Bharatiya Jana Sangh's association with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh was ultimately detrimental to its growth and prosperity as a political party.

The 1960s saw the decline of the Indian National Congress at the polls, and with it, the waning of a push for secularism in Indian politics as a whole. The election of Indira Gandhi to the office of Prime Minister in 1967 was a curious case of the daughter of one of secularism's most prominent proponents, Jawaharlal Nehru himself, bringing about the crumbling of her and her father's party. The reasons for this are complex and not entirely relevant for the purposes of this research, but suffice it to say that Indira Gandhi orchestrated the beginning of the end for the Indian National Congress's decline in popularity. With the decline of the major secular party in India already taking place under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, the space became open for a non-secular party to rise.

The Jana Sangh, with its background reaching as far back as the 1920s, was in the optimum position to benefit from the decline of the Indian National Party. Its social base lay with the upper caste Hindus to the north, and it held a strongly anti-Muslim and anti-Pakistan stance. In 1977, when Indira Gandhi was voted out of power after the seizing of political control and the complete and utter disarray of the Congress, the Janata Party emerged from the ranks of the Jana Sangh and other nationalist parties, and ruled until 1980. Indira Gandhi

was restored to power in 1980, and the Bharatiya Janata Party emerged with the old Jana Sangh leaders as its central power base. With Indira Gandhi back in power, the BJP's position in Indian politics was clear: it was the anti-secular answer to Gandhi's secular rule.<sup>14</sup>

### *Rise to power and campaigning*

The emergence of the Bharatiya Janata Party as a serious contender for office in the 1980s signaled a shift in Indian politics as a whole, namely a shift towards the end of Indian National Congress dominance. It also heralded the emergence of a multiparty system, the first of which had been seen in India.<sup>15</sup> However, despite the emergence of such a multiparty system, the dawn of the BJP's rise to power also heralded something entirely different: the consistency with which the BJP and its predecessor, the Jana Sangh, held onto voters during election periods in India. From the time between 1957 and 1985, the BJP was able to rely heavily on a support base of militant Hindus that has, though wavering at times, remained mostly constant throughout the years.

The Sangh parivar and its various branches diverged in the early 1980s, with the BJP adopting a more secular approach to party politics, and other organizations like the VHP pushing pro-Hindu majoritarian ideals. The BJP was able to construct a secular front by attracting a number of Muslim faces in the general elections, and thus securing an idea of Hindu-Muslim togetherness in the minds of voters. This simultaneously brought about contention between the BJP and other member groups of the Sangh parivar, particularly the RSS. The BJP party policies in the mid-1980s were characterized by a somewhat peculiar

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<sup>14</sup> Sumit Ganguly, "The Crisis of Indian Secularism," from *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (2003), 14-15.

<sup>15</sup> Shaila Seshia, "Divide and Rule in Indian Party Politics: The Rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party," from *Asian Survey*, Vol. 38, No. 11 (November 1998), 1036.

approach to government: a moderate Hindu nationalist ideology in conjunction with a moral critique of the Congress were the ideals guiding the party during this time.<sup>16</sup>

In 1989, the Indian National Congress was officially defeated by a coalition of non-Congress parties, but by the next elections in 1991, that coalition had dissolved. If it had not been for cracks in the surface of the INC's general platform, the BJP would not have been able to rise up. However, its three-pronged approach to combating INC dominance in Indian politics allowed for a growth in support from the public, and a viable opponent to the INC. The BJP posited that:

1. The INC was responsible for the economic decline in India, and the economic system set in place by the Congress was threatening to Indian (Hindu) culture;
2. the INC was responsible for the subversion of Indian democracy and general political corruption; and
3. the INC corrupted the idea of state secularism, and a new party was needed to recall a fresh definition of the principle.<sup>17</sup>

The BJP therefore emerged as the direct opposition to the INC, basing its campaign on a return to "value-based" politics and an answer to the long-standing dominance of the INC in national politics.

In the midst of election season, the leader of the Congress, Rajiv Gandhi, was assassinated, but the Congress still managed to win the election and remain in power until 1996. It was during this term that the BJP was gaining momentum with events like Ayodhya in 1992, which will be analyzed in the next chapter.

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<sup>16</sup> Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), 157.

<sup>17</sup> Shaila Seshia, "Divide and Rule in Indian Party Politics: The Rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party," from *Asian Survey*, Vol. 38, No. 11 (November 1998), 1039.

*Years in office*

The BJP's involvement in the Ayodhya controversy effectively secured it the votes needed to win the 1996 elections. It appealed to the sort of Hindu nationalism that was not nearly as prevalent during INC rule, and offered the distinct opposition that brought about the downfall of the INC in the elections that year. It was after this win that the party adopted a more moderate approach to politics. However, the BJP remained in power for a mere thirteen days during its first government. Prime Minister Vajpayee was appointed on May 16, 1996 by the President of India at the time, Dr. Shankar Dayal Sharma. However, support for Vajpayee was not unanimous by any means, and he was voted out of his position by a coalition of non-BJP, non-Congress party members in the Lok Sabha. It is these such divisions that I would like to emphasize in this chapter, for they clearly illustrate the prolific nature of the party itself, and the deep divisions that run through it.

Following Vajpayee's embarrassing run as prime minister for less than two weeks, the BJP committed itself to coming to power again. Its chance came again in March of 1998 during the next Lok Sabha elections when it allied itself with other political parties to gain a majority. Yet this too was a short-lived government, for new elections were called in October of 1999. The coalition government was dissolved by the announcement of new elections, and the BJP bolstered enough support to win yet again.

The BJP's longest run in office to date came during these elections in October 1999, remaining in power until May of 2004. Once again, Vajpayee was named prime minister of India, and the results of the election actually ran their entire term, all five years. The

following table illustrates the gradual shift over the years towards a pro-BJP general public electorate:

**Chart I.** Seats Won by the BJP and Percentage of Vote, National Elections, 1984-99.

<i>Year</i>	<i>BJP Seats Won</i>	<i>BJP Votes (%)</i>
1984	2	7.4
1989	86	11.5
1991	120	20.1
1996	180	20.3
1998	176	25.5
1999	182	23.7

*Source:* Robin Jeffrey, “Grand Canyon, Shaky Bridge: Media Revolution and the Rise of ‘Hindu’ Politics,” from John McGuire and Ian Copeland, eds., *Hindu Nationalism and Governance*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 339.

Chart I simply shows the general shift towards a more pro-BJP electorate in regards to India as a whole. Chart II, on the other hand, clearly shows the gradual shift from a literal interest of zero to a growing favoritism for the BJP in the north Indian province of Uttar Pradesh:

**Chart II.** Seats Won by the BJP and Percentage of Vote, Uttar Pradesh (General Elections), 1984-99.

<i>Year</i>	<i>BJP Seats (Total: 85)</i>	<i>BJP Votes (%)</i>
1984	0	6.4
1989	8	7.6
1991	51	32.8
1996	52	33.4
1998	58	36.4
1999	29	27.6

*Source:* Robin Jeffrey, “Grand Canyon, Shaky Bridge: Media Revolution and the Rise of ‘Hindu’ Politics,” from John McGuire and Ian Copeland, eds., *Hindu Nationalism and Governance*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2007). 342.

I have chosen to include both charts, for the growing popularity of the BJP—at least in terms of voter turnout—is an interesting and relevant point to make in this thesis, but more important than that is the shift towards BJP support in Uttar Pradesh in the early 1990s. Between the years of 1989 and 1991, the BJP jumped from having a mere eight seats to fifty-

one. It is astounding to think that in a mere two years a party's political fortune could change so quickly and continue to grow throughout most of the 1990s. The rise of the BJP's popularity in Uttar Pradesh does indeed seem to suggest a connection with its use of violence, most specifically during the Ayodhya (located in Uttar Pradesh) ordeal in 1992 which will be analyzed in depth in the next chapter.

### *Out of office*

The BJP did not, however, win reelection in the 2004 elections. Since my thesis focuses on the changing patterns of violence used by the BJP, I will not go into a great amount of detail concerning BJP practice since 2004. The two case studies by which I will argue my point, Ayodhya and Gujarat, take place prior to 2004. Ayodhya, in 1992, occurred as the BJP was drumming up support from its electoral base. Gujarat, in 2002, occurred in the midst of a BJP-dominated government. Both of these cases will be used to illustrate how the party altered its use of the incitation of communal violence to suit its needs for various times throughout the past two decades.

### Chapter III

#### The Case of Ayodhya (1992)

“I am prepared to state that almost every individual among the five hundred millions living in India is aware of the story of the Ramayana in some measure or another.” –R. K. Narayan<sup>18</sup>

The first case of BJP-incited violence in India that I will examine is the case of Ayodhya in the Uttar Pradesh province of north India in 1992. The site of a massive demolition of an Islamic mosque and subsequent Hindu-Muslim communal violence that followed is not only an appropriate starting point for my own research, but also a discussion which could easily fit into Chapter I’s treatment of communal violence in general. Neither Ayodhya nor Gujarat, nor any other case of Hindu-Muslim rioting and violence in contemporary India will suffice in comprehending the level or waves of violence. Nor will my treatment of the case of Ayodhya or Gujarat be an attempt to explain the causes of communal violence in India. Rather, Chapters III and IV will be devoted entirely to understanding the two cases chosen—the buildup, the event itself, and the results of the event—so that later discussions can focus on the involvement of the Bharatiya Janata Party, and how the party orchestrated such events to gain political power and win elections in India.

#### *The Hindu History of Ayodhya*

The history of Ram Janmabhumi, the Hindu-proclaimed birthplace of Rama, is a history that cannot be understood objectively for there is no objective truth, per se, to comprehend. In short, Ayodhya is a metaphor, as Ram is a metaphor, for a greater Hindu

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<sup>18</sup> R. K. Narayan, “Introduction,” from *The Ramayana: A Shortened Modern Prose Version of the Indian Epic*, (New York: Penguin Books: 1972), xi.



ideology. The events which happened at Ayodhya in 1992 must be understood in this light. To begin the analysis of the case of Ayodhya, a brief history viewed through a larger framework of Hindu ideology will be necessary before proceeding to the event itself.

The Ramayana is not a fixed text, a unified epic scribed as a solid unit of reference. Rather, the Ramayana has been told and retold so many times throughout the course of Hindu history that it has become, like most religious epics, a text that everyone is familiar with. Therefore when I speak about the Ramayana, I am not just referring to the original epic poem by Valmiki from around the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. Instead I will utilize a more broad understanding of the Ramayana: an epic as the foundational version of the Hindu avatar<sup>19</sup> of the god Vishnu, Rama, the king of Ayodhya. The various translations and interpretations of the epic will not be necessary for the purposes of this research. What is imperative to the understanding of my argument is that the story of the Ramayana is indelibly marked on the minds of each and every Hindu, and that the tale begins and ends in Ayodhya.

Generally speaking, the Ramayana tracks the dialectic of the avatar of Vishnu, Rama, and his wife, Sita, avatar of the Hindu goddess Lakshmi. What will be relevant for this research is the legendary birthplace of Rama, Ayodhya, in the present-day Faizabad district of Uttar Pradesh in north India. Valmiki's Ramayana, the origin of which is Ayodhya itself, begins under the rule of the earthly father of Rama, Dararastha. Ayodhya was thus depicted as an ideal city, the earthly counterpart of the heavenly city of Indra. The city's god-like qualities grew as Valmiki's Ramayana draws to a close and Rama and Sita return triumphantly to claim their rightful places at the throne of Ayodhya. The Ram Rajya, or reign of Ram, brings utopian prosperity to not only the city of Ayodhya but the Hindu faith as a

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<sup>19</sup> An avatar in the Hindu faith is believed to be the earthly manifestation of a god or goddess. The god Vishnu is believed to have made his seventh earthly appearance in the form of Rama.

whole.<sup>20</sup> My point in emphasizing these portions of the legend of Ram is to highlight the ways in which the city and site of Ayodhya is intrinsically wrapped up in one of the most—if not *the* most—prolific legends in the Hindu faith and all of India for that matter.

It was not until the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE that Ayodhya, under the Gupta dynasty, was declared to be the exact birthplace of Rama. Beginning with the Gupta rule in this century, Ayodhya became a powerful center of Hindu trade, politics, and religion.<sup>21</sup> Yet the significance of Ayodhya does not lie solely in the faith of the Hindus. To fully appreciate the significance of the site and the buildup of violence in the early 1990s, an examination of Ayodhya beyond its Hindu-ness, or *Hindutva*, will be necessary.

#### *Ayodhya beyond Hindutva*

A rather curious irony of the locale is the fact that the word *ayodhya* in Sanskrit translates to “not to be warred against.”<sup>22</sup> And yet it has become the site of not only Hindu and Muslim coexistence, but antagonism between the two faiths, a site where myth, metaphor, and (very rarely) historical truth intersect. Therefore the irony of the translation of the name of such a place is particularly relevant when one considers the fact that Ayodhya is an exemplary city, celebrating the beginning of the Hindu Ramayan epic and the birthplace of an avatar and a legend. The movement incited by the BJP in 1992 was making use of a Muslim structure, which represented a religion particularly disdainful to militant Hindus. Yet more than that, the mosque at Ayodhya was destroyed in 1992, just five years short of the fiftieth

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<sup>20</sup> R. K. Narayan, *The Ramayana: A Shortened Modern Prose Version of the Indian Epic*, (New York: Penguin Books: 1972).

<sup>21</sup> Christopher Rollason, “To build or to destroy’: History and the individual in Manju Kapur’s *A Married Woman*,” paper given at the 20<sup>th</sup> ECMSAS (European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies) held at the University of Manchester, England (July 2008), 3.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

anniversary of independence from British foreign rule. The mosque in this sense represented an even earlier form of “slavery,” that of enslavement under Muslim rule.

Clearly Ayodhya is not alone in its predicament, that being the intersection of significant faith pathways. Similarly, it is not only Hindus and Muslims who claim to have particular claims to the site. Many leaders of the Jain religion are said to have been born there as well, and it remains a religious site for Jainism to this day. In 1194 the city was conquered by the Muslims under Mohammed Ghor and renamed Awad, thus becoming a highly significant religious site for Islam in India. The Babri Masjid mosque was constructed in 1528 under the first Mughal emperor, Babur. From the construction of the Babri Masjid mosque and onwards, the history of Ayodhya becomes harder to decipher: picking apart historical fact from religious claims often causes such problems. However, the history of the mosque and the Hindu-Muslim antagonism will be explored in the next section of this chapter.

For now I would like to expand upon the Hindu claims concerning the Babri Masjid mosque beginning with its construction, for it is imperative to understand the claims before continuing onto the events of 1992. The mosque was constructed on a hill overlooking the city; a hill which Hindus claimed was the exact birthplace of Rama. Not only was it the birthplace of their avatar, it was also the original site of the Ram Janmabhumi, the ancient temple to Rama. By the 18<sup>th</sup> century the city was no longer under Mughal rule (but still subject to a Muslim ruler), then fell under British rule between 1856 and the declaration of independence by India from British colonial rule.

Not long after independence, the mosque was ritually cleaned and a judge ordered its re-opening as a place of Hindu worship. However, it remained closed until 1986 until it was

reopened with the intention of serving as a Hindu temple. Public outcry from the Muslim community faltered this step in the direction of Hindu dominance of Ayodhya, and in 1990, the government brought the two faith communities together to negotiate an agreement. The negotiations wavered between two questions, both relevant to this research. The first was whether or not Babur had built the mosque on the site of the original temple to Ram. The second issue was whether or not he had destroyed the temple to Ram in the process. Predictably the negotiations resulted in going nowhere for either side.<sup>23</sup>

It is sometimes argued, and though difficult to comprehend considering the events of 1992, that Hindus and Muslims worshipped side-by-side at the Babri Masjid site during British colonial rule. Whether or not this is historically factual is irrelevant, really. What is important to take away from the Ayodhya-Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhumi narrative is that the history of the site is not clearly defined in terms of religious or political claims. It instead represents a rather colorful past, less defined by homogenous religious claims, but rather a heterogeneous conception of history.

Yet, to reiterate, there is no objective history or truth to Ayodhya. As I have illustrated, the Hindu history is not the only history of the site, to be sure. As Christopher Rollason points out:

The Hindutva Ayodhya is *not* the only Ayodhya: Rama's city is also, across time, a space of multiple identities, Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Muslim and British,

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<sup>23</sup> Reinhard Bernbeck and Susan Pollock, "Ayodhya, Identity, and Archaeology," from *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 37, No. 1, Supplement: Special Issue: Anthropology in Public (February 1996), S138-S142.

and can thus *also* be seen as a microcosm of an India that is not monolithic but multiple, complex and eluding all one-dimensional definitions.<sup>24</sup>

Author Salman Rushdie has even gone so far as to say that present-day Ayodhya may very well not be the exact site of the birthplace of Rama. Perhaps relevant, perhaps not; the fact is, Ayodhya is *believed* to be the birthplace of Ram, and when it comes to religiously-incited national political uproar, the facts are not always relevant. Instead, it is what the people believe that matters. Ayodhya was believed to be the birthplace of Rama, and therefore understood to be a site of holy significance for Hindus everywhere. All of these things must be understood before delving into the events of 1992.

### *Events of 1992*

It may go without saying, but the conflict in Ayodhya did not just *happen*. It was a well-orchestrated, heavily engineered event led by the Bharatiya Janata Party, among other Hindu religious nationalist groups. I might even be thought of as an event that lay dormant for many years, perhaps even hundreds, waiting for just the right moment. That moment began to take shape in 1985 when Hindu militant nationalists began to react to the case of Shah Bano<sup>25</sup> and subsequent Muslim mobilization in India. From the mobilization surrounding the Shah Bano case, the BJP began to incite rhetoric of the nationalist variety

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<sup>24</sup> Christopher Rollason, "To build or to destroy': History and the individual in Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman*," paper given at the 20<sup>th</sup> ECMSAS (European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies) held at the University of Manchester, England (July 2008), 4.

<sup>25</sup> The Shah Bano divorce case refers to an extraordinarily controversial lawsuit in India between an aging Muslim woman and her husband, who refused to give her alimony. In short, the case was infamous for its raising of the question of having different civil codes for different religions, specifically for the Muslim community in India.

surrounding the site of the Babri Masjid mosque, and the Hindu nationalist campaign for Ayodhya grew.

The BJP began pressing Hindus to send bricks to Ayodhya with the intention of having them there for the purposes of building the Ram Janmabhumi temple again, once the mosque had been razed to the ground. Also in the mid-1980s, the state-sponsored broadcast of the television serial *Ramayan* was utilized by Hindu nationalist parties (namely the BJP) to rouse pro-Hindu sentiment among the people.<sup>26</sup>

For a moment, allow me to expand upon the significance of the broadcast of such a program, for it ties in heavily to the events of 1992 at Ayodhya. The television serial of *Ramayan* was far more than an ordinary television serial in India. One must first take care to understand that any performance or viewing of the legend of the Ramayana is a sacred event for Hindu practitioners, giving special blessings and holiness to the viewer. Therefore the viewing of *Ramayan* on Indian national television for every Sunday for two years became an intrinsic part of daily life for Hindus in India. Never before had the population of South Asia been united in such a way. The incredible impact of the *Ramayan* on television can best be summed up by Lavina Melwani in 1988:

Sunday mornings will probably never be the same...most of the nation comes to a grinding halt at 9:30 am as multitudes drop whatever they are doing to watch Ramanand Sagar's "Ramayan"...timings of social gatherings, political meetings, and religious functions are changed to suit "Ramayan" timings.<sup>27</sup>

Public squares in villages were devoted entirely to the viewing of the program on Sunday mornings; television sets were adorned with flower garlands, sandalwood paste, and other

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<sup>26</sup> Sumit Ganguly, "The Crisis of Indian Secularism," from *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (2003), 17-19.

<sup>27</sup> Lavina Melwani, "Ramanand Sagar's *Ramayan* Serial Re-Ignites Epic's Values," *India Worldwide*, (February 1988), 56-57.

Hindu motifs. It was certainly a testament to modernity and the capabilities of contemporary broadcasting, but it was also evidence of the immense power that was now in the hands of Hindu religious nationalist leaders, namely the BJP. During the years of the broadcast of *Ramayan*, the bricks being sent to Ayodhya began to pile up ominously close to the mosque.

During these years, support for the BJP began to grow, and the party itself grew in concrete political power as the number of seats held in Congress grew from two to eighty-eight between the years of 1984 and 1989. The BJP had to sacrifice a bit of its hyper-nationalist rhetoric in order to win votes, and some strange bedfellows were formed between itself and other political parties at the time. However, once the BJP had established a stronghold within Congress and the time was ripening for its action at Ayodhya, it emerged triumphant as the Hindu religious nationalist party it had been from its very inception.

The BJP from this point moved towards a more Hindu nationalist approach, but lost the 1991 elections to the National Congress due to voter sympathy for the untimely death of Rajiv Gandhi in May of that year. However, the BJP government in Uttar Pradesh prevailed, and the pressure for the building of a temple in Ayodhya mounted. The BJP in Uttar Pradesh continued to push for the destruction of the mosque and the rebuilding of the temple to Ram, and the outcry of support from militant Hindu supporters grew as the months passed. VHP and RSS backers congregated in Ayodhya as time went by and the BJP-backed government of the state of Uttar Pradesh looked aside as extremists called for the razing of the mosque. Few forces were deployed as protection for the mosque, and BJP leaders began reciting inflammatory speeches aimed at inciting Hindu nationalist sentiment among the people of Ayodhya. And it seemed to be making a huge impact by late 1992.

On December 6<sup>th</sup>, 1992, through months of BJP-incited agitation, militant Hindu nationalists stormed the Babri Masjid mosque at Ayodhya. The day began as the symbolic construction of the Hindu temple to Ram led by a coalition of the BJP and other organizations of the Sangh parivar. The promise of the BJP was that no destruction would be done to the mosque. Yet as BJP and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) leaders recited speeches to the gathering crowd of over 150,000 Hindus, a group of young men wearing saffron-colored headbands broke through the crowd.

**Figure II.** Babri Masjid, December 1992.



Source: "Ayodhya confrontation," BBC World News, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in\\_depth/photo\\_gallery/3200208.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_depth/photo_gallery/3200208.stm).

The thin line of a police force was not nearly enough to stop the rioters, and in truth, it was never expected to be a combating force. The crowd surged onto the mosque and tore it apart with their bare hands as the police stood by. Present in the riot were LK Avadni and Murli Manohar Joshi, two members of the BJP who

would later hold leadership positions in the party in the early 2000s.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Mark Tully, "Tearing Down the Babri Masjid," BBC News World Edition (South Asia), 05 December 2002, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/2528025.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/2528025.stm).



After less than five hours, the mosque was completely demolished. Manju Parikh highlights the intense level of organization of the rioters:

...the kar sevaks (volunteers in charge of the movement) had not only “pounded the masjid (mosque) to a rubble,” but also built a makeshift Ram temple in its place. Their well-coordinated effort involved clearing out the rubble and constructing a concrete platform, complete with a canopy and crude concrete steps and implanted with the Ram Lalla images. An eight-foot brick wall was built around the “temple” to protect it.<sup>29</sup>

I reference this particular quote for a reason, and that is to emphasize the amount of planning that went into the destruction of the mosque. As I will discuss in later chapters as well, the BJP’s direct involvement in acts of communal violence and rioting, which center around Hindu-Muslim antagonism, is to such an extent that it is neither accepted by the general public nor reported to any high degree.

#### *After Ayodhya*

The movement at Ayodhya, as I mentioned earlier in Chapter I on violence, was representative of Hindus throwing off the shackles of Muslim enslavement by destroying a major symbol of Islam in the name of Hinduism. Ayodhya created martyrs for the Hindu faith, as well as provoking direct conflict with Muslims across India. Between the years of 1989 and 1993, deliberate violence against Muslims was incited in an ideology that was entrenched with ideals of Hindutva and the “freedom” of Ayodhya. The BJP won strongholds in Uttar Pradesh in the 1991 and 1996 elections, which can be seen in Charts I and II in Chapter II, and essentially became an entirely new political force to be reckoned with in India. In short, the type of violence and rioting that began with Ayodhya has been extremely

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<sup>29</sup> Manju Pirakh, “The Debacle at Ayodhya: Why Militant Hinduism Met With a Weak Response,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 33, No. 7, South Asia: Responses to the Ayodhya Crisis (July 1993), 673.

beneficial to the fortunes of the Bharatiya Janata Party in that the party came to power. The correlation between its electoral success and the Hindu-Muslim violence associated with the destruction of the Babri Masjid mosque cannot be denied.

## Chapter IV

### The case of Gujarat (2002)

"We shall replicate the Gujarat experience everywhere... It was a mandate for the [Hindutva] ideology..."

–Venkaiah Naidu, BJP party president, December 2002<sup>30</sup>

The decade following the destruction of the Babri Masjid mosque in Ayodhya was characterized by the intensely negative global reaction, and a consequential decline in communal violence in India. While the BJP and the Sangh Parivar in general strove to incite violence at Ayodhya to gain political momentum and win votes outside of the Uttar Pradesh region of north India, its voice quieted to almost a whisper following Ayodhya. Facing global disapproval and a desire to maintain the strides won as a result of Ayodhya, the BJP opted for a more accommodating stance when it came to Hindu-Muslim relations. However, as the ebb and flow of political opinion affects political parties, so too does it have an effect on the levels of communal violence incited in India. A direct correlation between support for the BJP and times of placid communal relations can be seen between the years following Ayodhya and preceding Gujarat.

The significance of the site of such violence, the details of which I will explore in the following section, should not go unmentioned. The Indian province of Gujarat symbolizes exactly the type of authoritarianism that manifested itself in 2002 but has been an ongoing process for decades prior.

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<sup>30</sup> As quoted in "We shall replicate 'Gujarat experience:' BJP chief," by Neena Vyas *The Hindu: Online Edition of India's National Newspaper*, <http://www.hinduonnet.com/2002/12/24/stories/2002122404900100.html>.

Such laws as the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities Prevention Act (TADA) and Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) mirror the salience of anti-Islamic sentiment in the laws of the province. During the 1980s and 1990s, TADA and POTA specifically targeted the Muslim community of Gujarat, portraying them as criminals and terrorists and a general threat to the Hindu population at large. Not only was anti-Muslim sentiment stirred up with the creation of such Acts, but the Islamic community was essentially left out of political and bureaucratic processes by way of alienating them from everyday Indian life. Yet it is not solely the local government of Gujarat that has been affected, or rather, been the perpetrators of such sentiments. The Sangh Parivar has also played a key role in nurturing such anti-Muslim feelings in the province, which has become known for its increasingly shrinking movements for women's and individual rights, without even mentioning the level of civil and human liberties that have been brushed to the wayside in recent decades.<sup>31</sup> All of this is to emphasize the level of importance the Gujarat province plays in the politics of the BJP and the Sangh Parivar as a whole.

Events like Gujarat are often labeled as "Hindu-Muslim violence" and a large portion of this chapter will be devoted to not only illustrating the nature of and aftermath of the events in the Gujarat province in 2002, but also addressing the issue of such labels. Paul Brass argues that such violence manifests itself in three main phases: preparation/rehearsal, activation/enactment, and explanation/interpretation.<sup>32</sup> In the case of Gujarat, as in other examples throughout India over the past fifty years or more, the preparation and rehearsal phase is not nearly as salient as the activation and enactment phase. Unlike Ayodhya, Gujarat

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<sup>31</sup> Riaz Ahmad, "Gujarat Violence: Meaning and Implications," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 37, No. 20 (May 18-24, 2004), 1871.

<sup>32</sup> Paul R. Brass, *Theft of an Idol* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), 17.

was an event that sparked more violence. Where Ayodhya was antagonism built *up to* an event, Gujarat, in contrast, was an event which trickled *down from* an event which commanded the start of communal violence and rioting across India. It is for this reason that I have chosen to highlight these two cases, for they are indicators of two distinctly different patterns of violence utilized by the BJP.

Before continuing, I would like to reiterate my argument, an argument shared by most scholars covering contemporary Indian political violence: that is that the attacks in Gujarat in 2002 were not spontaneous reactions in retaliation against an act of terrorism in Godhra. They were carefully planned, well-orchestrated acts of violence against a particular religious group. It was not a series of riots, but rather, a state-organized mass attack on the Islamic community of the province, heavily supported by the Bharatiya Janata Party, culminating in the gaining of political ground for the party and the further promotion of *Hindutva* ideals at the expense of non-Hindus. The BJP and other key political actors in the government at the time were not merely sitting by idly, watching the Gujarat riots.

What I mean is that the BJP and other political actors from the time are not guilty of complacency or lack of action. Their involvement was both direct and indirect, and the government worked to actively perpetuate the violence against Muslims. When it could have spent its time and energy attempting to control the violence wreaking havoc in the province, the government instead issues literature and promoted speeches placing the blame on the initial Godhra attacks on the Pakistani ISI. The pattern of finger-pointing did nothing to quell the riots; it had, as its perpetrators intended, the opposite effect.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Riaz Ahmad, "Gujarat Violence: Meaning and Implications," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 37, No. 20 (May 18-24, 2004), 1872.

*The Gujarat pogrom*

Between February and May of 2002, the Indian state of Gujarat was plagued by Hindu-Muslim communal rioting and violence. Yet before continuing to an in-depth discussion of the BJP's involvement in the incident, a brief overview of the event itself will be necessary.

'Gujarat,' as it were, began in the town of Godhra on a train returning from Ayodhya. A group of Hindu pilgrims known as Kar Sevaks were aboard the train on February 27, 2002 when a mob of fifty to one hundred attacked the coach of the pilgrims, set fire to it, and burned the passengers alive. Fifty-eight Hindus—men, women, and children—were killed in the attack when they were unable to escape the train. The Godhra train burning was the catalyst for over four months of Hindu-Muslim violence throughout the state of Gujarat and elsewhere.<sup>34</sup> The accounts of what exactly happened on the platform of the Godhra train station vary, but as I mentioned earlier in this thesis, when dealing with matters of communal violence, the objective truth is not always available. Even the Indian newspaper *The Hindu* had only this to say with regards to what could be verifiably proven concerning the burning at Godhra: "By now all narratives agree that a fracas broke out on the platform between aggressive karsevaks and Muslim vendors."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Dionne Bunsha, "The mystery of the Godhra fire," *Frontline*, India's National magazine, Vol. 20, Issue 06, (March 15-28, 2003).

<sup>35</sup> Siddharth Varadarajan, "The truth about Godhra," *The Hindu: Online Edition of India's National Newspaper*, 23 January 2005, <http://www.hindu.com/2005/01/23/stories/2005012303901400.html>.

**Figure III.** Godhra train burning, March 2002

As is often the case, the Godhra train burning and subsequent months-long rioting in the Gujarat province were portrayed as Hindu-Muslim communal violence. The perpetuation of the belief that the age-old hatred of Hindus and



Source: Meri Baat Aur hai, <http://anshulg.wordpress.com/>.

Muslims causes sudden and spontaneous riots, the sort prevalent following the burning at Godhra, is an issue that plagues the Indian and global media. What are often labeled as Hindu-Muslim riots are actually well-planned attacks on Muslims by militant Hindus. The various ways in which this violence is incited by not only political actors, but non-political persons as well, is an issue that I will expand upon in this chapter. It is this highly orchestrated violence against Muslims that the BJP utilizes to its advantage, and the case of Gujarat is a salient example of the amount of detail that can be put into the planning of such widespread endemic violence.

Involvement in such communal violence ranges from those partaking in the incitation, the riots and violence themselves, and the interpretation of what actually happened.<sup>36</sup> It is my argument that the political actors involved, particularly those associated with the Bharatiya

<sup>36</sup> Paul R. Brass, "The Gujarat Pogrom of 2002," from *Contemporary Conflicts*, 26 March 2004, <http://conconflicts.ssrc.org/archives/gujarat/brass/>.

Janata Party, who benefit directly from such acts of violence. I will use the case of Gujarat to illustrate this point. The widespread massacre of Muslims across the state of Gujarat in early 2002 is a clear example of the ways in which top-down riot incitation functioned for the benefit of the BJP.

Unlike Ayodhya, which was the buildup to an act of communal rioting, the violence in Gujarat began with an event and was followed up by months of continuous violence. Public speeches and statements made in the media allow for the public to become directly involved in the violence, and the literature produced by those involved serves as fuel for the proverbial fire of rioting.<sup>37</sup> Also prevalent in such mass rioting are those who act as signalers of violence, utilized from the top down by political party leaders. The party leaders, too, can often be directly involved, as the riots in Gujarat proved. Further still, such political actors and the media work together in a curious way to twist the blame from those involved, by crafting a legend of an uprising en masse. The *bête noir* of communal violence becomes a faceless, nameless, identity-less crowd of hate.<sup>38</sup>

Yet this is clearly not the case, as an examination of Gujarat would indicate. It is evident that the BJP and the Sangh Parivar as a whole played a key role, if not the only major role, in orchestrating the mass murders of Muslims across Gujarat. As is evident by the contradicting newspaper reports, unclear media messages, and questions surrounding what actually happened at the Godhra train burning, the details become muddled when dealing with acts of mass violence. Prior to there being any sort of clear-cut facts surrounding the issue at hand, blame was already being passed around. Immediately following the burning, the BJP

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<sup>37</sup> Anthony Spaeth, "Mourning in India: Killing Thy Neighbor," Time Asia Online, [http://www.time.com/time/asia/features/india\\_ayodhya/cover.html](http://www.time.com/time/asia/features/india_ayodhya/cover.html).

<sup>38</sup> Paul R. Brass, "The Gujarat Pogrom of 2002," from Contemporary Conflicts, 26 March 2004, <http://conconflicts.ssrc.org/archives/gujarat/brass/>.



jumped to blame the Pakistan organization of the Inter Services Intelligence Unit, yet this is just one example of the BJP pointing fingers before credible facts could emerge.

The more important thing to take into account concerning the violence surrounding Gujarat is that the BJP, along with its fellow Sangh Parivar parties such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), began a mass pogrom of violence on the day immediately following the Godhra attack. The institutionalized riot system described above was carefully enacted by the BJP. I will not go into details of the mass murders, but a brief sketch of the number of Muslims killed during the time between February and May 2002 will suffice in showing the extreme to which Muslims were targeted, and to illustrate the falsity of the perpetuation of the notion that it was an equal part Hindu-Muslim period of rioting and violence.

Somewhere between one thousand and two thousand Muslims and Hindus were murdered during the period following Godhra, yet an analysis of these numbers is crucial in making my point. Even taking into account the number of Hindus killed in the train at Godhra, the ratio of Hindus to Muslims who lost their lives was five Muslims to every one Hindu during the rioting. However, in the period following the rioting, the numbers skyrocketed to fifteen Muslims killed to every one Hindu killed. It was not only loss of life that characterized the riots. An estimate of over five hundred mosques were destroyed during the riots as well.<sup>39</sup> A clear-cut example of the government's involvement in the murders is evident in the fact that murderers obtained copies of voter registration forms on file in political offices, and were thus able to identify the homes of Muslims from their address records.

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<sup>39</sup> Praveen Swami, "An Unquiet Peace," *Frontline*, India's National magazine, Vol. 19, Issue 11 (May 25-June 7, 2002).

*Electoral effects*

As should be clear by now, the riots in the Gujarat province in 2002, much like the events at Ayodhya ten years before it, were carefully orchestrated attacks on the Muslim community by the militant Hindu population, led by the BJP. What I will illustrate now is how this planned communal violence and murder of the Islamic community at large was also utilized as an electoral tool for the Bharatiya Janata Party.

Following the riots in Gujarat, the party moved the legislative assembly elections up to October after dissolving the assembly in July. The idea here was that Hindu sentiment would be sympathetic towards the retaliation on the Muslim community in Gujarat, and would therefore support the BJP in its campaign for reelection. The Chief Election Commissioner, however, disagreed with the action and forbade the party from rushing the elections, pointing out that they could not be free and fair under the circumstances. Furthermore, the Islamic community, particular Muslims living in the Gujarat province, would most likely avoid the polls out of fear. The elections were again pushed back to December.<sup>40</sup>

Nevertheless, the BJP won the elections with the support of the general Hindu community, signaling not only a BJP victory but the unsaid support for the actions committed against Muslims in Gujarat. The consolidation of a dominant party based on and promoting the oft-violent ideology of *Hindutva* would not have been as possible without its pogrom in Gujarat following the Godhra train burning. The use of violence won the BJP the election, and, in essence, solidified anti-Muslim control in the Indian state. It is painfully clear that the Gujarat killings were utilized as a political tool by the party to win ground in the election campaign, the effect of which was a clear victory.

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<sup>40</sup> Dionne Bunsha, "Boast and Bluff," *Frontline*, India's National magazine, Volume 19, Issue 18 (August 31 – September 13, 2002).

*The Self and Other*

To reflect back on the portion of Chapter I dedicated to the Othering in ethnic conflict, I would now like to move forward in my treatment of the case of Gujarat and place such Othering within the context of the events of early 2002. By analyzing the use of Othering through an idea of the Self, shaped by the Hindutva ideology, the BJP was able to effectively win later elections and vilify the Islamic community in India. Its use of violence in this case grew out of a campaign to “Other” Muslims.

Any narrative concerning communal violence brings up questions of verifiability, objectiveness, and the quality of the dissemination of knowledge. In this way, Gujarat is no exception. The construction of the narrative surrounding the Godhra train burning and the subsequent violence across the entire Gujarat province is mostly an exercise in representation of facts in a particular context, the validity or “truth” of which is largely unclear.<sup>41</sup> What I will argue is that the central role-players in the construction of narratives, particularly those surrounding mass, nation-affecting acts of violence such as that in Gujarat in 2002, is done mainly by political actors. The large percentage of Indians—Hindus and Muslims alike—living outside the political center and having no direct involvement with government politics, have very little (if anything) to do with the construction of such narratives.

As in the acts of violence themselves, not all role-players are directly involved in the political schema of the party, in this case the BJP, perpetrating such actions. However, there are indeed plenty of individuals who play key roles in the carrying of information and the dissemination of narratives concerning the events. However, the construction of the narratives themselves remains the task of the political elite. The BJP in the case of Gujarat

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<sup>41</sup> Riaz Ahmad, “Gujarat Violence: Meaning and Implications,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 37, No. 20 (May 18-24, 2004), 1870.

constructed a narrative, but did not have to expend its energy in the dissemination of such a narrative, for it utilized the masses in this task. The BJP, in effect, perpetuated the idea of an “Other” and a “Self” following the Godhra train burning, and built upon preexisting ideas of ‘them’ and ‘us’ in striking up dissidence throughout the province.

The perpetuation of a belief in the Islamic “Other” characterized the BJP narrative surrounding the Godhra train burning, thus legitimizing the use of violence in Gujarat, and solidifying its political stand. The train burning became a grossly exaggerated, disproportionately misunderstood event, the narrative of which grew out of the maintenance of a militant Hindu belief that places all Islamic fundamentalism—and in this case, I will also include Islamic terrorism, particularly in the case of September 11<sup>th</sup> in the U.S., for it was a particularly salient, globally recognized event in early 2002, when the Godhra train burning occurred—within the confines of a Muslim “Other.” The BJP placed blame on Pakistan’s ISI and Islam as a whole, and crafted the ensuing violence as an organic response to an evil opponent. The crafting of the narrative of the Gujarat violence was imperative in creating a justification for the mass murder of Muslims, and relied heavily on the continuation of an oft-inherent, underlying fear of Islam.

The treatment of Othering in this case would not be complete without a basic understanding of the response by the Muslim elite, and an alternative narrative to combat the dominant Hindu *Hindutva*-influenced narrative being purported by the BJP. In some ways, the Islamic community responded in effect as the “Other,” placing itself outside of the Gujarat province, and seeing the attacks as part of a greater problem: that of the vilification of the Muslim. Similarly, the Ayodhya events ten years earlier in 1992 were portrayed in this light by the Islamic elite. The Hindu narrative posits that the Godhra train burning was an act of

Islamic violence against Hindus, and the ensuing violence throughout the Gujarat province was a natural and organic response to such attacks. The Muslim narrative, contrastingly, holds that militant Hindu forces would have found a reason to justify attacks on Muslims whether or not any train had ever burned at the Godhra train station. It is in this way that the “Othering” on both sides continues to fuel separate narratives, and distinct constructions of events involving the clash of Hindus and Muslims.

Raiz Ahmad argues that there are not just two narratives being presented, however. A third narrative, coming from a group of Indian elites from various religious backgrounds, is constructing a different account of the violence in Gujarat. It heightens the involvement of national political organizations (like the BJP) in framing this debate in an ‘us’ and ‘them’ way. It views Indian Muslims as first and foremost citizens of the state of India, and conflates human rights violations with the role played by the state, both on a national level and a state level. The narrative presented here is also congruous with the thrust of my thesis: that the violence in Gujarat was a consequence of ethno-religious identity politics within a framework of nationalist ideology (here, *Hindutva*), and which poses an enormous threat to the democracy, secular makeup, and well-being of the citizens—both Hindu and Muslim alike—of India.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Riaz Ahmad, “Gujarat Violence: Meaning and Implications,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 37, No. 20 (May 18-24, 2004), 1871.

## Chapter V

### Conclusion

My thesis has aimed at constructing a basis for dialogue conflating the Indian democratic experience through the influence of the Bharatiya Janata Party with the party's changing use of violence over the years. Yet in this final concluding chapter, I would also like to outline the difficulties faced by the BJP in addition to summing up my arguments. A reflection on Hindu nationalist politics will be necessary, as well as a minor commentary on the complex task of inciting communal ethno-religious violence for political purposes. Finally, I want to briefly touch on the current Indian political scene with the emergence of the Indian National Congress as the dominant political party and the decline of the BJP.

Up until very recent history, the dominance of Hindu nationalism in India has been a puzzling phenomenon, explainable within a variety of different fields of academia. Whether or not it has been a result of intense organization and decades of imaginative political schemes, as Christophe Jaffrelot<sup>43</sup> would argue, or, rather, an outcome of a rekindling of an ancient idea of religious nationalism in India, as Peter van der Veer<sup>44</sup> might conclude, is not part of the larger argument I am making in this thesis. What I have hoped to construct is a narrative of the BJP with an emphasis on its utilization of communal violence, with an

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<sup>43</sup> Thomas Blom Hansen and Christophe Jaffrelot, eds., *The BJP and the Compulsions of Politics in India*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>44</sup> Peter van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

understanding that the growth of the BJP is one in the same with the growth of Hindu religious nationalism in India.<sup>45</sup>

The production of Hindu-Muslim violence as perpetuated by the Bharatiya Janata Party has grown out of what Thomas Blom Hansen refers to as “public culture,” and although it is based on the religiously (and culturally) conservative doctrine of *Hindutva*, it is not an India-only phenomenon. The construction of communal violence within Hindu religious nationalism is the puzzling trend that resonates with the global population, and seems to set it apart from other democracies. This too contributes to the phenomenon of relegating the “blame,” so to speak, for such violence on India’s uniquely torrid history as a colonial power and divided democracy. Yet this is one of the issues I have hoped to address in this thesis—that being the dilemma of the construction of narratives—and how a better understanding of the way in which Indian politics fits into a greater framework of global democracies is necessary in comprehending the success of Hindu nationalism.. Its success in India is a product of fierce elections, religiously-incited conflict over sites and spaces, and antagonism over the meaning of what it means to be Indian.<sup>46</sup>

### *Hindu-violence paradox*

Returning to the original discussion of Hinduism and its relation to the Bharatiya Janata Party, I would like to emphasize and expand upon the difficulties faced by the BJP in inciting collective action, and the ways in which violence has been used as a political tool by the party. The issues with such a multi-faceted religion such as Hinduism, its lack of a central

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<sup>45</sup> Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), 3-4.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

base, text, or religious hierarchy, makes it an unlikely candidate for violent religious nationalism on a statewide scale. Shaila Seshia's reflections on the BJP-Hindu paradox offer a particularly salient argument:

In the case of the BJP, the problem of collective action is one of mobilizing individuals who belong to a large religious group to support a party that proposes to advance the interests of both the group and the individuals in it. The sheer size of the Hindu population and the presence of cross-cutting cleavages undercut the existence of a collective [...] Cultivating a politically unified Hindu constituency is at odds with the logic of cross-pressures.<sup>47</sup>

So is, as Seshia argues, "the strength of numbers alone insufficient to catalyze political mobilization"<sup>48</sup>? My argument is that yes, the Bharatiya Janata Party had to rely on more than just a dominant Hindu population on the Indian subcontinent to sway support for the patterns of violence used to promote the party goals.

Ayodhya was not the first example of Hindu-Muslim conflict on the South Asian subcontinent, and Gujarat was obviously not the last, as any glance at a newspaper would indicate. Hindu-Muslim conflict does indeed seem to occur in great waves of intensity, particularly during the collapse of the Khilafat movement against British rule during 1923-27 when Hindus and Muslims worked together with a common goal. Another great wave occurred during the late-1940s before, during, and after the partition of India and the formation of modern India and Pakistan. In this sense, the communal violence following events like Ayodhya and Gujarat are just, yet again, more waves of Hindu-Muslim conflict in India. Yet it would be erroneous to suggest that the most important waves, or even the most influential waves, occurred in the years surrounding Ayodhya and Gujarat.

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<sup>47</sup> Shaila Seshia, "Divide and Rule in Indian Party Politics: The Rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party," from *Asian Survey*, Vol. 38, No. 11 (November 1998), 1038.

<sup>48</sup> Shaila Seshia, "Divide and Rule in Indian Party Politics: The Rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party," from *Asian Survey*, Vol. 38, No. 11 (November 1998), 1038.



It is an imperative part of my overall argument in this thesis that the perpetuation of communal violence by the Bharatiya Janata Party is necessary for the maintenance of its party successes over the years. The ebb and flow of Hindu-Muslim conflict in India, as I have argued, can be seen as a direct result of the incitation of the BJP. The fact that the large-scale murder of Muslims during such “riots” does not get labeled as political violence that has been incited, perpetuated, and spurred on by particular actors (namely the BJP) is an effect of the acceptance that such violence is inherent in Hindu-Muslim relations.

Party politics saw the destruction of the Babri Masjid mosque at Ayodhya as an opportunity to incite pro-Hindu and anti-Islamic sentiment at a key time in the election campaign. Similarly, the elections of 2002 were a contentious event, for the mass murders and violence associated with the Godhra train burning and subsequent attacks throughout the Gujarat province promoted an ideal of Hindutva throughout India, and silenced a fearful Muslim minority.

### *Production of communal violence*

The routine-ness of communal violence and riots in India has been a major contributing factor to the success of the Bharatiya Janata Party. The perception that riots are an inherent part of Hindu-Muslim relations has not been misunderstood by the major Hindu nationalist party, and has indeed been utilized in such a way as to perpetuate violence and win political ground. By highlighting Ayodhya and Gujarat as exemplary cases of Hindu-Muslim violence, I have not wished to pinpoint the solitary events which characterize Hindu-Muslim relations, but rather to illustrate the commonality of such events.

The platform of the BJP would like to continue to perpetuate the notion that such events are unfortunate and extraordinary in their scope; yet this is simply not the case. To continue feeding an idea that such Hindu-Muslim relations can be characterized by the spontaneous and unavoidable, extraordinarily unique events like Ayodhya and Gujarat is erroneous and merely serves as a beneficiary for the BJP to win elections. The commonality of such events is all too difficult to prove, for they are portrayed by political parties in power as “expressions of a disease that occasionally afflicts the polity, acts committed by the dregs of society drawn from the slums they inhabit.”<sup>49</sup>

Perhaps not so curiously, this idea that communal violence is anomalous to regular Indian relations is also supported by the elite, the newspapers, and the educated of India. Again, the notion that India’s peculiar background as a former colony of Britain and its divisions in religion will undoubtedly create communal tension from time to time has pervaded the Indian psyche. My argument is that this is simply not the case. The endemic nature of communal violence in India is a direct result, though not the only result to be sure, of the promulgation of such riots and murders by the Bharatiya Janata Party.

By May 2009, at the time of the writing of this thesis, the Indian National Congress was slated to win India’s parliamentary elections, with newspapers heralding the new age of Indian politics as the coming of “the possibility of a strong and stable government in the face of stiff challenges: a sharp slowdown in economic growth, abiding poverty and instability in the region, including in Pakistan.”<sup>50</sup> The INC’s appeal to the rural poor contributed heavily to

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<sup>49</sup> Paul R. Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India*, (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2003), 355.

<sup>50</sup> Somini Sengupta, “India’s Ruling Party Set for Decisive Victory,” *New York Times*, 16 May 2009, Global Edition: Asia Pacific.

its success in the elections, offering an enormous public works program in the countryside and loan waivers for indebted farmers. As India heads into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, perhaps the question remains: what will become of the Bharatiya Janata Party?

Only time can tell. With the memories of the 2008 terrorist attacks in Mumbai fresh in the minds of the citizens of India, and events like Ayodhya and Gujarat not quite in the distant past, the possibility for parties such as the BJP to drum up anti-Muslim fervor in its support base is an all too probable scenario in future elections. Yet the success of the INC in 2009 signals something new for the country. The elections forced the parties to take into account the global economic downturn and call into question the politics of parties like BJP.

**Figure IV.** 2009 Parliamentary Elections.



Patron of the National Conference party, Farooq Abdullah, won a seat in the parliamentary elections. Source: "Election Celebration in India," *New York Times: Global Edition online*, photo by Raminder Pal Singh, European Pressphoto Agency, [http://www.nytimes.com/slideshow/2009/05/16/world/20090516-INDIA\\_2.html](http://www.nytimes.com/slideshow/2009/05/16/world/20090516-INDIA_2.html).

As the Bharatiya Janata Party has continued to wane in popularity across India, one need only to look back less than a decade to see the patterns of violence associated with the party. As the global press is proclaiming, much to the astonishment of the world and India at large, "This was a new, largely young (60 percent of the electorate is under 35 years) and forward-looking India

sending out an unmistakable message: We want stability and good governance, not the politics of caste and religion."<sup>51</sup> The politics of violence and communal rioting cannot be forgotten, for the BJP is still a major force in Indian politics, despite the loss of votes. If one

<sup>51</sup> Rahul Singh, "Election Defines a New India," *New York Times*, 19 May 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/20/opinion/20iht-edsingh.html>.

thing can be gleaned from this research as it is applicable to the future of Indian democracy, it is that the cyclical nature of the Hindu faith and the practices of the leading Hindu nationalist parties most always leads to violence.

The Bharatiya Janata Party has utilized two main concepts to win elections. The first is the common perception that there is an ancient Hindu-Muslim antagonism that cannot be avoided, and the commonality of such ethno-religious clashes between the two groups is merely an expectation in India. The second is that communal violence between the two groups is an occurrence which has little to nothing to do with political manipulation, but is instead an organic product of the aforementioned “ancient” antagonism. My thesis has constructed a historical dialectic of the party, while building on two case studies in the past two decades, to craft my argument that the BJP has changed its use of violence to suit its political needs, and has indeed risen to power by the utilization of violence. In the case of Ayodhya in 1992, the party was able to build up enough fervor surrounding a particular site to not only solidify Hindu dominance over the Babri Masjid, but also secure the BJP’s place in the electoral scene of Uttar Pradesh and elsewhere. Ten years later, while in power, the BJP proved once again that the utilization of communal rioting between Hindus and Muslims would be beneficial to the party. After the Godhra train burning, the rioting and violence across the Gujarat province was often spurred on by the BJP, and, unlike at Ayodhya, the event itself was not the culmination of the BJP fanning the flames of religious differences. Instead, the BJP was able to manage an initial event of violence and incite weeks of more riots between Hindus and Muslims.

The rise of Hindu nationalism through the Bharatiya Janata Party builds on ideals of one nation and one people: a Hindu nation, a Hindu people. Hindu nationalism in India is not

just the basis for the party and its actions, but has become a product of the BJP over the years. As the party needed to rise to power, it altered its use of violence, and with it, altered ideas about what it means to be a part of the Indian—Hindu—nation.

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